

Chapter 7 The Election Cycle

The standard “election year” occurs in even-numbered years. It begins with campaigning at the end of the first business day in January when the official candidate filling period closes. Following campaigning, the Democratic Primary Election is held and a Run-off Election where needed. Campaigning begins for the November General Election.

The full election cycle includes the odd-numbered years, sometimes referred to as the “off-years,” with the Texas Democratic Party (TDP) strengthening activities at all levels.

Party Registration in Texas

Voter registration and elections in Texas are dictated by state and federal law. With the exception of special elections, Primary and General Elections occur in even-numbered years. To participate in any election, a person must be registered. Registered voters are mailed voter registration cards. These cards should be signed and protected, as they are helpful when you go to vote.

One “registers” as a Democrat by voting in the Democratic primary. Unlike many other states, one does not register with a particular party nor does a voter have to pre-register with a particular party to vote in its primary.

Any qualified Texas voter 18 years of age or older who supports the “Statement of Principles” listed in Article I of the *Rules of the Texas Democratic Party (TDP Rules)* may participate fully in any Party meetings. These qualified voters may be elected to any Party Office, except where specifically prohibited by law or by *TDP Rules*.

To run for precinct chair, county chair, Senate District Executive Committeeperson, county or senate district delegate or alternate, state or national convention delegate or alternate, one must have voted in the most recent Democratic Party Primary (not including any run-off), or have signed an oath of affiliation in the voting year (see TDP Rules and Chapter 162, Texas Election Code).

Primary Election

Texas currently holds its Primary Elections in March of even-numbered years. The Democratic Primary of the TDP is open to any registered Texas voter who did not vote in another party's primary and who did not attend another party's political convention in that election cycle.

Special Note: Signing a petition to put a candidate on the ballot of a party counts as a declaration of party affiliation. Therefore, you may not sign a petition to put a Democrat on the ballot and vote in the Republican primary.

For a candidate to run as a Democrat in the General Election, the candidate must first register and run in the Democratic Primary. Registration dates and the dates of the Primary and run-off election are set by law. If there are no changes by the legislature, the Primary is held on the second Tuesday in March. If an opposed candidate does not receive more than 50% of the vote in the Primary, a Run-off Primary is held in April. As with the General Election, voting occurs on Election Day and during early voting, which typically begins approximately two weeks before Election Day.

To vote in the Primary and/or run-off, you must be a resident of your voting precinct and register to vote 30 days before the election. You may only vote in one political party's Primary. You may vote in a run-off election even if you did not vote in the Primary.

Your voting location may not be the same as for the general or local elections, because of the cost and complexity of the election. Locations and times of the Primary election are typically listed in the newspaper. You may also check with local Party officials or the county clerk's office. During early voting you can usually vote anywhere in your county, while on Election Day you must vote at your precinct's specified location. Precincts may be combined to save on personnel and money.

General Election

The General Election occurs on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

To participate in the General Election a voter must be a resident of the voting precinct and register 30 days before the election. Early voting begins approximately two weeks prior to Election Day.

Locations and times for early voting and the General Election are typically listed in the newspaper. For early voting a voter can usually vote anywhere in the county, while on Election Day a voter must vote at the location specified for the precinct.

Non-Partisan Elections

There are multitudes of nonpartisan elections across Texas, including, but not limited to, city, school board, MUD district, water district, navigation district, park board, library board, and port authority elections. It is important that Democrats run for and serve in these various capacities.

Running for and serving in these offices provides excellent training for those with future political aspirations.

It is important that every Democrat participate in each of these elections, supporting candidates who support our causes and points of view. In some cases, it is equally important to work against those running for office who are against our causes and points of view.

It is important to know that voting locations for each election are selected by the entity putting on the election. This typically means that voting places move around, depending on who is putting on the election. There seems to be a perception on the part of voters that polling locations are or should be the same for any and all elections. This causes a great deal of discontent. It is important to explain voting location selection to voters if they ask.

Voter Registration

To vote in Texas a person must register with the voter registrar in the county in which the person lives. Unless the county government designates a different person, the county tax assessor-collector is the voter registrar. In some counties, the county clerk is the designated voter registrar, while some hire an election administrator.

Deputy Registrar

The voter registrar is authorized to deputize citizens to register voters. This practice allows the voter registrar to cover every section of the county more effectively. The voter registrar must deputize any bona fide resident of a county who wishes to register voters. The TDP encourages active Democrats to become deputy registrars.

Once sworn in, the deputy registrar cannot refuse to register a person on the basis of sex, race, creed, color, national origin, or political affiliation. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** When registering voters, a deputy registrar must NOT be attired in political clothing or regalia.

Although this process actually registers the voter, the application must then be forwarded to the voter registrar for the voter to be included in the county voting rolls.

How a Voter Registers

A person may apply in person or by mail. It is more effective to register people to vote in person and collect the voter registration information at the time, than to leave it up to them to mail in their registration cards. Therefore, it is highly recommended that anyone registering voters become a deputy registrar. When a voter registers with a deputy registrar, the voter is given a receipt. The receipt may be used to vote, should the voter's registration card not be received in time and the voter meets the registration deadline.

Applicants must supply their complete names, residence addresses in the county, birth dates, places of birth, and last four (4) digits of their Social Security or Texas Drivers License numbers. Although the phone number is optional, people should be encouraged to provide that information so that they can be called if there is a problem with the application or the information is not clear.

For registration by mail, a business reply postcard-like envelope with postage paid by the state is available. Applications are available to individuals, organizations, businesses, and political subdivisions in reasonable numbers. No fee can be charged for voter application forms.

Students who are living away from home should be careful. Students are accustomed to filling in their permanent home addresses on forms; they should register under the address where they intend to vote. If they fill in their permanent home addresses and it is in another precinct or county, those are the locations where they will be registered and required to vote. The husband, wife, father, mother, son, or daughter of a person entitled to register may fill out a card for that person.

A voter may register to vote at any time, but his or her application must be received by the voter registrar 30 days before an election in order to vote in that election. Mail-in registrations must be postmarked by the 30-day deadline; if the deadline falls on a weekend or a state or federal holiday, the postmark deadline is extended to the next regular workday.

Persons Eligible to Register to Vote

Persons eligible to register to vote must have the following characteristics:

- Be citizens of the United States
- Be at least 18 years of age on the day of the election
- Be residents of the county

Persons Not Eligible to Register to Vote

These people are not eligible to register to vote:

- Persons convicted of a felony who have not completed time served, parole and probation. Once a convicted felon is “off papers,” however, he or she is eligible to vote and needs to register to vote again.
- Persons found to be mentally incompetent by a court of law.

Penalties and Fees

Any person giving false information to secure voter registration for himself or any other person is guilty of a third degree felony. There is no fee or poll tax for registering to vote.

Voter Registration Certificate

Within four weeks after the voter registrar receives the application, the voter should receive a voter registration certificate (card). The voter should notify the voter registrar, if he or she does not receive a voter registration card.

The voter should examine the certificate closely. If it is correct, the voter signs it and should carry it in his or her wallet. If the information is wrong, the voter should make corrections in the spaces provided and return it to the voter registrar.

Voter Registration Purge

In August of each election year, thousands of people are "purged" from the voter rolls. While the purpose of the purge is to remove the dead and former residents, this purge occasionally targets lower income, potential Democratic voters who have moved and have not re-registered. This is the reason continual voter registration is important in all potentially Democratic vote-rich areas. Democrats are opposed to targeted purging.

It is important that every precinct chair and county chair remain vigilant for voter purging in their precinct or county.

Nonpartisan Voter Registration Groups

In many areas of Texas, voter registration projects are conducted by nonpartisan, tax-exempt groups. These programs, while nonpartisan, are often targeted at populations that traditionally “under-vote.” Many in the targeted communities are likely Democratic voters—if they will register and vote.

Nonpartisan voter registration groups have certain fundraising advantages over partisan groups: Donations to these groups may be tax-deductible for the giver, while contributions to political parties and candidates are not. Corporate and union funds can be contributed for this kind of voter registration activity, but not to a partisan election campaign.

Many of these groups also provide excellent training and resources for voter registration efforts. County parties and their officers, however, have to be careful not to coordinate directly with these organizations, or to give or raise money for their efforts. (This is a new restriction on parties in the McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Law.)

Voter Protection: Voter Bill of Rights of Texas

Voter Protection is an important issue and therefore it is necessary that voters know their rights. It is also important that we inform our volunteers who work at the polls, so that they can help assure all citizens are able to exercise their right to vote. The rights noted below are from the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, as listed in the *Texas Election Code* found at www.lawyerscomm.org.

- If you are inside or are in line at your polling place any time between 7 AM and 7 PM on Election Day, you have the right to vote.
- You have the right to vote without presenting your voter registration certificate. If your name **is** on the voter registration roll you must do both of the following:
 - Sign an affidavit stating that you do not have your voter registration certificate with you
 - Present proof of identification
- If your name is **not** on the voter registration roll, you must do both of the following:
 - Sign an affidavit attesting to your eligibility to vote
 - Present proof of identification.
- If your name does not appear on the voter registration roll when you arrive at the polls, you have the right to vote a provisional ballot. However, you must cast your ballot in the correct precinct for it to count.
- If you make a mistake or “spoil” your paper ballot, you have the right to receive a “replacement ballot” and vote. You may receive a total of three replacement ballots.
- If you cannot read, do not speak English, or you are blind or otherwise physically disabled, you have the right to be assisted with voting. Assistance can be given by election officials or any other person except your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your union. Any interpreter or translator must be a registered voter of your county.
- If you are physically unable to enter the polling place, you have a right to vote without entering the polling place upon request.
- If you have been convicted of a felony, but have served the full length of your criminal sentence, including parole, and have registered to vote since then, you have the right to vote.
- When you are within 100 feet of a polling place entrance (or you are inside the polling place or room), you have the right to wait to vote (or to vote) without anyone electioneering or trying to influence your vote in any other way.
- If you have moved within the same county, you have the right to vote at the polling place of your former residence, upon filling out a statement of residence.
- You have the right to take time off from work to vote, unless the polls are open for two consecutive hours outside of working hours.
- You have the right to bring a child under 18 years of age into the voting station with you.
- You have the right to receive non-English ballots, instructions, and other voting materials throughout the state.