

THE ELECTION PROCESS

Voting is one of the most valuable rights and privileges of an American citizen. Under the provisions of the 1970 Illinois Constitution, to be a qualified voter in the State of Illinois, you must be age 18 or older and have lived in the state and the voting district 30 days. Voter registration is governed by state and federal laws and was most recently modified by the National Voter Registration Act of October 1993. Prospective voters must be registered to vote no later than 30 days before any election. However, federal law allows a voter who has moved within the jurisdiction of their city or county election authority and failed to re-register at their new address to vote only for candidates for federal offices on the ballot.

How Candidates are Nominated

In Illinois, there are several ways names of candidates may be placed on the ballot. The **primary election** is the most widely used method of nominating candidates and is a party election. This is the means by which a political party selects its candidates. The voters of each party have the opportunity to express their choice of the various candidates seeking the nomination. Each candidate must be affiliated with a political party.

Any qualified citizen who desires to run for office may have his or her name placed on his or her party's primary ballot by filing a petition signed by a determined number of qualified voters of the party. The primary ballot will, as a rule, carry the names of several candidates for each office.

All judges — Circuit, Appellate and Illinois Supreme Court — must be licensed attorneys at law, as must the Attorney General and the county state's attorney. A superintendent of an educational service region also must meet specific requirements.

One additional requirement is placed on the candidate and the voter in a primary election in that both must affiliate with a particular party. The voter must declare himself or herself a member of a party to receive a ballot. Each party is listed on a separate ballot, and the voter may only request one ballot to indicate his or her choice of candidates. This is known as a closed primary. Even though a person must vote on a one-party ballot at the primary, this in no way controls his or her freedom of choice in voting for candidates of all parties in the general election.

The **party caucus** is another way a political party nominates candidates. The leaders of the party call a meeting to determine whom they desire as candidates for the various offices. According to state law, only the regularly elected party officers may call such a meeting, and it must be held at a convenient place and time, although the date is set by statute. The names of persons chosen as candidates are then sent to the proper election officials, who place them on the ballot.

The third method of nominating candidates is through **party conventions**. The County Central Committee of each party holds a county convention, at which time delegates to a state convention are chosen. State conventions have the power to select delegates and alternate delegates at large to the National Nominating Convention of the party.

Candidates for judges for the Circuit, Appellate and Illinois Supreme Courts are nominated at the primary election. Once elected, judges run on a "retention" question without opposition.

State law also makes provisions for the nomination of persons seeking office who are not affiliated with any recognized party.

Presidential Electors

The President and Vice President of the United States are not elected by the direct vote of the people. Instead, they are elected by presidential electors. Each state has the number of electors equal to the number of U.S. Senators and Representatives to which the state is entitled. Every year in which a President and Vice President of the United States are chosen, each political party nominates its candidates for presidential electors at state conventions.

The names of candidates for electors are not printed on the official ballot. Instead, the names of candidates for President and Vice President are printed on the ballot as a “team.” A vote for the presidential and vice presidential “team” not only is a vote for the candidates but also a vote for the entire list of that party’s presidential electors. After the votes have been canvassed, the Governor proclaims the persons elected as electors of President and Vice President.

The Illinois electors meet the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December at the State Capitol in Springfield and give their votes for President and Vice President. This vote is certified by the electors to the president of the U.S. Senate (the sitting Vice President of the United States).

The electoral votes of all the states are counted at a joint session of Congress in Washington, D.C., on the sixth day of January. The result of the vote is announced by the President of the Senate, and this announcement is deemed a sufficient declaration of the persons elected President and Vice President of the United States.