

Types of Elections

Learn more about the 3 types of elections:

General elections

General elections are always held the first Tuesday, after the first Monday, in November. In a general election, Pennsylvanians vote for federal, state, and local officials, including:

- U.S. senators and U.S. representatives to Congress
- Pennsylvania governor, lieutenant governor, general assembly, attorney general, auditor general, state treasurer
- County and city officials (only elected in odd-numbered years)
- Judges and magisterial district judges (only elected in odd-numbered years)

In odd-numbered years, like 2021, these November elections are also called municipal elections because there are no federal or state office on the ballot.

Every four years, the General Election is also a [presidential election](#).

Primary elections

Primary elections in Pennsylvania are held on the third Tuesday of May in most years.

In presidential years, the primary election is held on the fourth Tuesday of April.

In a primary election, each political party selects its candidates to run for office **during the general election**. The candidates who get the highest number of votes in the primary election go on to run in **the general election**. Voters also vote for their party's officers during a primary election.

In Pennsylvania, you can only vote for the candidates in the same political party you have named in your voter registration. For example, if you registered to vote as a member of the Republican Party then you can vote in the Republican primary, but not the Democratic primary.

All voters can vote on:

- **constitutional amendments,**
- ballot questions, and
- any special election contests held at the same time as a primary election.

Source: <https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/State-details.aspx?newsid=529>
Official Website of the Pennsylvania Department of State

Special elections

Pennsylvania holds special elections when someone in office can no longer serve. This may happen when someone resigns, dies, or gets removed from office. Voters must select someone to replace that person.

Special elections may be held:

- during a general election
- during a primary election
- on a different day designated by the elections office

The county or counties running the special election must advertise the date and locations for the special election, as well as the candidates running for office.

Everyone who lives in the district the candidates will represent can vote in the special election.

Presidential elections and the Electoral College

In presidential elections, each political party holds a national convention where they choose their nominee for president. The results of the primary election determine how votes from Pennsylvania are cast at the convention.

The nominees from each party run against each other in the general election in November.

The president is officially elected by the Electoral College, and not the popular vote. But the popular vote – including your vote – helps decide which candidate receives Pennsylvania's electoral votes.

What is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College is a group of citizens known as electors. Electors get appointed by each state to cast votes for the president and vice president of the United States on behalf of the state's citizens.

Pennsylvania has 20 electoral votes. All 20 of Pennsylvania's electoral votes go to the person who won the popular vote in Pennsylvania.

When you cast your vote for president, you tell your state's electors to cast their votes for the candidate you chose. In Pennsylvania, each candidate for president chooses a list of electors. The electors for the candidate who wins Pennsylvania's popular vote get to cast their vote for president and vice president.

The Constitution created the Electoral College to ensure that each state had a role in selecting the president, no matter its population. Each state has the same number of electoral votes as it has members of Congress. There are a total of 538 votes in the Electoral College. A candidate must win a simple majority - 270 - of those votes to win the election.