

Caucus vs. Primary: Know The Difference For 2024 Election

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
January 15 2024 3:36 PM



SPRINGFIELD - As the Iowa caucuses draw closer each election season, there's usually lots of talk about caucuses and primaries - but what exactly are they, and what's the difference between them? CJ Nasello, host of [Our Daily Show! on Riverbender.com](https://www.riverbender.com/shows/our-daily-show), recently sat down to clarify these terms for viewers and voters ahead of the 2024 election.

“Caucus season and all that starts today,” Nasello said. “It kind of amazes me, because some of us - I’m not picking on you - just don’t know what the difference is. So what’s the difference between a primary and a caucus?”

According to [usa.gov](https://www.usa.gov), primaries and caucuses use different methods to accomplish the same goal - help states and political parties choose their presidential nominees.

In a presidential primary, voters cast secret ballots to anonymously vote for their preferred candidate. Those votes are then taken into account by the state they were cast in before the state awards delegates to the winners. Primaries are usually held six to nine months before an election.

Caucuses are “meetings run by political parties” held at the county, district, or precinct level. They can also be held by casting secret ballots, or by requiring participants to divide themselves into groups based on their preferred candidate (as well as those “undecided”). According to [usa.gov](https://www.usa.gov), the process typically goes like this:

“Some caucuses choose candidates by secret ballot. Others require participants to divide themselves into groups according to the candidate they support. Undecided participants form their own group. Each candidate’s group gives speeches and tries to get others to join their group. At the end, the number of delegates given to each candidate is based on the number of caucus votes they received.”

Nasello went on to explain that both primaries and caucuses can be “open,” “closed,” or some variation of the two (known as “semi-open” or “semi-closed”). During an “open” primary/caucus, voters can vote in any party’s caucus whether or not they’re registered with that party. “Closed” primaries/caucuses only allow voters to vote within their registered parties.

According to the National Council of State Legislatures, Illinois currently holds “partially open” primaries, whereas Missouri holds fully “open” primaries. To find out more about which states hold which types of primaries/caucuses, [visit this link](#).

To learn more about the similarities and differences between caucuses and primaries, check out the full explanation from CJ on [Our Daily Show! on Riverbender.com](#) at the top of this story or on [Riverbender.com/video](https://www.riverbender.com/video).