



# CIVICS IN REAL LIFE Presidential Nominating Conventions

**Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.**

Once the dust has settled from the nation's presidential caucuses and primaries, the focus of attention shifts to the major parties' **nominating conventions**. It is at these conventions where the major party candidates will officially become the Democratic and Republican nominees for president of the United States.



During the primary and caucus season (January-June), voters cast their ballot for pledged delegates to officially support a presidential candidate at the nominating convention. The candidate who receives at least 50% of the vote from their party's delegates earns their party's nomination. In addition to pledged delegates, each major party also has automatic delegates, more commonly known in the Democratic Party as 'super delegates'. It used to be that automatic delegates did not pledge their support until the convention, but since 2012, the Republican Party requires its automatic delegates to vote for the presidential candidate who wins their state's

primary or caucus. Since 2016, the Democratic Party no longer allows the automatic delegates to vote unless the convention is contested.

A contested convention occurs when a candidate does not receive a majority of the pledged delegates during the primaries and caucuses. This means that after the first round of voting for a nominee, the pledged delegates are no longer pledged to a specific candidate. Under a "**contested**" convention, delegates may support whomever they want as the party's presidential nominee, and the nominee is usually selected through one or more rounds of voting from the convention floor. Contested conventions are rare. The last contested convention occurred in 1952 when the Democrats nominated Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson.

Nominees typically address the convention delegates, broadcast on television, once they receive the majority of the delegate vote. This is the nominee's opportunity to formally accept the nomination and share their vision for their campaign and their administration, if elected.



When the Democratic and Republican Parties gather for their 2020 presidential nominating conventions, they will be following a tradition that has lasted nearly 180 years. They are often large celebrations of a candidate and a political party, held in giant convention halls filled with happy members of the party listening to their candidate accept the nomination for president. Like many other aspects of daily life by COVID-19, however, these celebrations of the party and its candidate will be far more scaled down, with the candidate acceptance speeches likely done remotely. Despite this change, however, these conventions remain a highlight of the campaign season, and the platforms and the passions they inspire will likely carry through to Election Day, despite the existence of a pandemic.



**To Think and To Do:** If you were serving as a delegate at the Democratic or Republican convention, what would you like to hear in the party nominee's acceptance speech? Watch the **2020 candidate acceptance speeches** and compare what you hear to what you identified.

**Learn MORE** about Presidential Nominating Conventions. Free registration may be required.

- [Presidential Election Process](#), from USA.gov
- [Brokered and Contested Conventions](#), from Brookings
- [What Are Superdelegates?](#), from PBS



**Take Part in the 2020 Mock Election!**  
If you are in Florida, join us with [KidsVotingFlorida!](#)

Somewhere else?  
Check out [DoubleClick Democracy](#) for a program near you.



**Lou Frey Institute**