

**OPEN/CLOSED PRIMARIES PROS & CONS PLUS CONSENSUS QUESTIONS**

The LWVTN study of open vs. closed primaries will be wrapped up next spring, with a response deadline of March 15. Some pros and cons are listed below and more data as well as pros and cons about the issue will be provided to local Leagues and posted on our website by the end of the year. Listed below are the consensus questions that you, as members, need to answer. If you have specific questions about the study, please contact study chair Leslie Collum, [lesliecollum@bellsouth.net](mailto:lesliecollum@bellsouth.net).

**Definitions:**

- **Closed:** only members of the party can vote
- **Semi-closed:** non-aligned voters may participate but not members of other parties
- **Semi-open:** any registered voter can participate, but voter must declare to election officials which party primary he/she wishes to participate in
- **Open:** any registered voter can participate without declaring a party preference to election officials, but only in one party primary per election
- Closed and semi-closed primaries are the only primaries that require a state to track party affiliation

**Primaries: Open or Closed? Opinion and Debate from the Internet**

<b>Voter choice: Do open primaries improve voter choice?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> Open primaries favor voter wishes over party establishment's * Open primaries advance two most-favored candidates to general * Open primaries produce competitive, substantive general elections * Open primaries are similar to how local leaders are elected * Open primaries foster nuance and choice within a party	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries allow nominations inconsistent with party member views * Open primaries reduce distinctive ideological choices * Open primaries push third parties out of general (reduce choice)
<b>Voter participation: Do open primaries improve voter participation?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> * Primaries can decide elections; they need to be inclusive/open * Open primaries let independents/-third-party-voters participate * Open primaries increase Independents' participation in general election * Independent voter base is growing, favoring open primaries * Open primaries demand more from voters in assessing candidates	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries undermine party affiliation and voter participation * Open primaries disincentivize engagement by core party activists * Open primaries lower turnout by eliminating clear choices
<b>Moderation: Do open primaries promote moderates over extremes?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> * Open primaries favor moderate/pragmatic candidates * Closed primaries have political extremes determine nominees * Open primaries can spur new, moderate coalitions * Open primaries end "us vs them" partisanship voting * Open primaries increase bipartisanship/productivity in govt	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries produce moderate candidates that lack core beliefs * Closed primaries check centrism in general election * Open primaries will make politics more bland
<b>Third parties: Do open primaries help/hurt third parties?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> * Open primaries let independents/third-party-voters participate * Open primaries lend cred to third-party candidates	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries push third parties out of general elections * If people want "choice" in a party, they should join it

<b>Free association: Are open primaries consistent with right of free association?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> * Primaries are too important in democracy to be internal to parties * Open primaries preserve right of parties to endorse nominees * Closed primaries can also violate free assoc.	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries violate right of free association * Primaries are internal matters for party to choose best candidate * General election are open; primaries are OK to be closed.
<b>Manipulation: Are open primaries at risk of voter manipulation?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> * Voter manipulation risk too small to outweigh open primary pros * Manipulative tactics in open primaries rarely materialize * Prospect of open primary manipulation incentivizes engaging voters	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries allow tactical manipulation * Open primaries abused to oust sitting politicians
<b>Party power: Do open primaries increase/decrease party power?</b>	
<b>Pro:</b> * Parties like closed primaries because extremes help fundraising * Open primaries favor best candidate over party affiliation * Open primaries free candidates from party affiliations * Open primaries favor new candidates over establishment	<b>Con:</b> * Open primaries allow nominations inconsistent with party views * Open primaries diminish value of party influence * Open primary cost barrier diminishes prospects for outsider candidates

Source: <http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate: Open primaries>

“How closed primaries further polarize our politics”

“By excluding independent voters, who generally are ideological moderates, the (closed primary) restrictions narrowed the internal debate within both parties and accelerated the radicalization of American politics... Closed primaries affect politics and public policy. They are empirically skewed to the parties’ base constituencies, exaggerating their role and impact... The hybrid model used in New Hampshire allows registered independents, who often determine general election outcomes, to participate in the Democratic or Republican primary while protecting each major party from crossover by the other.”

Source: Mark Siegel, former executive director of the Democratic National Party, writing in *The Washington Post*, 9/4/2011

Primary Election Systems and Representation, a study by Gerber and Morton

Strategic voting: Voting in the other party’s primary for the more radical candidate so your party’s candidate has a better chance to win

Sincere voting: voting for the candidate you most hope will win the general election

Theory: Strategic voting is costly in closed primaries since you have to join the other party to do it; it is not costly enough in open primaries.

Semi-closed primaries seem to have the best balance between incentives for sincere and strategic voting.

Findings:

States with closed primaries end up with the most extreme representatives in Congress

Open and semi-closed primaries are about the same

Source: [http://wikisum.com/w/Gerber\\_and\\_Morton:\\_Primary\\_election\\_systems](http://wikisum.com/w/Gerber_and_Morton:_Primary_election_systems)

Political science researchers from the University of Arizona and New York University found that when candidates must compete in open primaries, they are less likely to hold extreme positions that would not appeal to moderate voters.

Challengers to incumbent politicians are also more likely to win an open-party primary, and third-party candidates throw their hats in the ring more often when parties offer open primaries.

Source: [www.ehow.com/about\\_6367990\\_closed-vs\\_open-primary...](http://www.ehow.com/about_6367990_closed-vs_open-primary...)

Why Open Primaries Are a Really Bad Idea

“The open primary system is a leftover from the bad old days of the Solid Dixie-er-Democratic South where, at the time, the Republicans had so small a chance of being elected to anything that the primary was essentially the November election... What the open primary does now is offer an open invitation to mischief... The open primary is also an invitation for one party to see to it that the weakest possible candidate of other party wins to ensure that their real candidate has a better chance in the general election... Primaries are (or should be) an internal function of the political parties... If you want to participate, register to vote with a party affiliation. Doing that doesn’t mean that you have to vote for the candidates of the party exclusively and forever, it just allows you to help pick their candidates.”

Source: James Frye’s 6/9/2010 opinion column, quoted on Alan Colmes’ *Liberaland*, [www.alan.com/2010/06/09/why-open-primaries-are-a-really-bad-idea/](http://www.alan.com/2010/06/09/why-open-primaries-are-a-really-bad-idea/)