



## CHAPTER 15: POLITICAL PARTIES<sup>1</sup>

### Section 15.01 Political Parties, Introduction

This chapter helps boards track party affiliations, process minor party petitions, and handle party nominations in Ohio elections. It explains major and minor party differences and shows boards how to verify petitions, manage party committees, and follow key deadlines. The chapter also guides boards through their duties when parties fill committee vacancies.

### Section 15.02 Party Affiliation

#### PRIMARY ELECTION

In primary elections, voters decide which candidates will serve as their party's nominee to run for specific offices in the general election. Voters also elect members of the political party's controlling committees, convention delegates, and convention alternates.<sup>2</sup> Some local or state issues may also appear on primary ballots.

In Ohio, voters join a political party by voting in its primary.<sup>3</sup> They don't pick a party when they register to vote. If issues are on the ballot in their area, voters who don't want to join a party can ask for an issues-only ballot.<sup>4</sup>

Boards must record each voter's party's primary choice.

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<sup>1</sup>[Directive 2026-42](#).

<sup>2</sup>[R.C. 3501.01\(E\)\(1\)-\(2\)](#).

<sup>3</sup>[R.C. 3513.05](#); [R.C. 3513.19\(A\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>4</sup>[R.C. 3505.06](#).

## DETERMINING PARTY AFFILIATION

For purposes of signing or circulating a petition of candidacy for party nomination or election, a voter is a party member if they:

- Voted in that party's primary in the past two years.
- Didn't vote in any other party's primary in the past two years.<sup>5</sup>

Boards must update voting records and party affiliations after each primary. See [Chapter 4, Voter Registration](#), for more details.

## ELECTED OFFICIALS CHANGING PARTY AFFILIATION

Elected officials can run in a different party's primary by filing [Form 10-Y](#).<sup>6</sup> Their form must:

- Be filed by 4 p.m., 30 days before the primary election filing deadline<sup>7</sup>.
- Be filed with the same office where they'll file to run.
- State which party's nomination they seek.<sup>8</sup>

After filing [Form 10-Y](#), a person can't file another one for 10 years.<sup>9</sup>

## Section 15.03 Major versus Minor Political Parties

Ohio has two types of parties: major and minor.

### MAJOR PARTIES

A **major** party is one whose candidate for governor or nominees for presidential electors got at least 20 percent of the votes in the last regular state election.<sup>10</sup> Ohio currently has two major parties: Democratic and Republican.

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<sup>5</sup>[R.C. 3513.05 17](#); [R.C. 3513.19\(A\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>6</sup>[R.C. 3513.191\(C\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>7</sup>[R.C. 3513.05](#).

<sup>8</sup>[R.C. 3513.191\(C\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>9</sup>[R.C. 3513.191\(C\)\(3\)](#).

<sup>10</sup>[R.C. 3501.01\(F\)\(1\)](#).

## MINOR PARTIES

A **minor** political party is one that formed when voters filed a valid petition with the Secretary of State that satisfied the requirements of [R.C. 3517.01](#).<sup>11</sup>

A minor political party retains its status when it receives at least 3 percent but less than 20 percent of votes for its candidate for governor or its nominees for presidential electors in the last regular state election.<sup>12</sup>

### Section 15.04 Minor Political Parties

#### ESTABLISHING A MINOR POLITICAL PARTY

Groups can become minor parties:

- **Through the Petition Process**

A group files a party creation petition ([Form 4-A](#)) if they:

- ☐ Received less than three percent of the votes for their candidate for governor or nominee for presidential elector, or
- ☐ Didn't run a candidate for governor or nominees for a presidential election in the most recent regular state election.<sup>13</sup>

The party formation petition filed with the Secretary of State must:

- ☐ Have voter signatures equal to at least one percent of the total vote for governor or presidential electors from the last election.
- ☐ Include 500+ voter signatures from each of at least half of Ohio's congressional districts.
- ☐ State the group's plan to form a political party and join the next even-numbered year general election that is at least 125 days after the filing date.
- ☐ Name a committee of three to five petitioners who will speak for the group.<sup>14</sup>
- ☐ Name the new party (which can't be similar to any existing party name).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>[R.C. 3501.01\(F\)\(2\)\(b\)](#).

<sup>12</sup>[R.C. 3501.01\(F\)\(2\)\(a\)](#).

<sup>13</sup>[R.C. 3517.01\(A\)\(1\)\(b\)](#).

<sup>14</sup>[R.C. 3517.01\(A\)\(1\)\(b\)](#).

<sup>15</sup>[R.C. 3517.01\(A\)\(2\)](#).

Once the petition is filed, the new political party exists by law. It can now nominate candidates to appear on the ballot in the next general election that is more than 125 days away.<sup>16</sup>

- After the party petition is filed, the Secretary of State sends the petition papers to county boards.<sup>17</sup> The board must check the signatures from your county and return the papers to the Secretary of State no later than 118 days before the general election.<sup>18</sup> The board must also certify whether the signatures are valid or invalid.<sup>19</sup>
- Any voter may file a written protest against the petition with the Secretary of State no later than 114 days before the general election.<sup>20</sup>
- The Secretary of State decides if the petition is valid and tells the committee no later than 95 days before the general election.<sup>21</sup>

Groups can retain minor party status:

- **Through Election Results**

A group whose candidate for governor or nominees for presidential electors receive at least 3 percent but less than 20 percent will remain a minor party for four years.<sup>22</sup>

## NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

Each person who wants to run as a new party's candidate must file a nominating petition both:

- After the party petition is filed.
- No later than 110 days before the general election.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(1\).](#)

<sup>17</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(2\)\(a\).](#)

<sup>18</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(2\)\(b\).](#)

<sup>19</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(2\)\(b\).](#)

<sup>20</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(2\)\(c\).](#) The protest will be resolved in the same manner as specified under [R.C. 3501.39](#), but only after the Secretary of State has determined the sufficiency of the petition. [R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(2\)\(c\); R.C. 3501.39\(A\)\(1\).](#)

<sup>21</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(A\)\(2\)\(d\).](#)

<sup>22</sup>[R.C. 3501.01\(F\)\(2\)\(a\).](#)

<sup>23</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(1\).](#)

Each candidate must use a nominating petition prescribed by the Secretary of State ([Forms 4-C through 4-G](#)). The candidate must include the new party's name on the petition.<sup>24</sup>

For state offices, candidates need at least 50 signatures from voters who haven't voted in other party primaries in the current year or the past two years.<sup>25</sup> The nominating petition for the state candidate must be filed with the Secretary of State's office.<sup>26</sup>

For district or local offices, candidates need at least five signatures from voters who haven't voted in a different party's primary in the current year or past two calendar years.<sup>27</sup>

For multicounty races, candidates must file petitions at the board of elections in the county with the largest population in the district, according to the last federal census.<sup>28</sup> In single-county races, candidates file petitions with that county's board.<sup>29</sup>

Each board must check all signatures no later than 105 days before the general election.<sup>30</sup> Protests may be filed up to 100 days before the general election.<sup>31</sup>

The Secretary of State or the county board of elections must decide if the nominating petitions are valid and notify the candidate and the committee designated in the party formation petition 95 days before the general election.<sup>32</sup>

The party committee must send the Secretary of State a valid list of its candidates no later than 75 days before the general election.<sup>33</sup> These names will be on the general election ballot as the party's choices.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(1\)](#). With the exception of [R.C. 3505.03](#), [R.C. 3505.08](#), [R.C. 3506.11](#), [R.C. 3513.31](#), [R.C. 3513.311](#), and [R.C. 3513.312](#), the provisions of the Revised Code concerning independent candidates who file nominating petitions also apply to candidates who file nominating petitions under [R.C. 3517.012](#), [R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>25</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(2\)\(a\)](#). This requirement applies to petitions for joint candidates for the offices of governor and lieutenant governor. [R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(2\)\(a\)](#).

<sup>26</sup>[R.C. 3513.257](#).

<sup>27</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(2\)\(b\)](#).

<sup>28</sup>[R.C. 3513.257](#).

<sup>29</sup>[R.C. 3513.257](#).

<sup>30</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(3\)\(a\)](#).

<sup>31</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(3\)\(b\)](#). The protest must be filed in the same manner as specified in [R.C. 3513.263](#), [R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(3\)\(b\)](#).

<sup>32</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(B\)\(3\)\(c\)](#).

<sup>33</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(C\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>34</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(C\)\(1\)](#).

If a candidate's nominating petition isn't valid, or if the committee doesn't certify the candidate, they won't be on the general election ballot.<sup>35</sup>

The slate certification must:

- ☐ Use [Form 4-B Minor Political Party Slate of Certified Candidates](#) from the Secretary of State.
- ☐ Be signed by all committee members named in the party formation petition.
- ☐ List only one person per office (or one set of joint candidates for governor/lieutenant governor).<sup>36</sup>

If the party formation petition fails, none of the party's candidates will be on the ballot.<sup>37</sup>

## **PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES OF A RECOGNIZED PARTY**

Minor parties must certify their picks for President and Vice President to the Secretary of State 90 days before the election and should use [Form 4-C](#).<sup>38</sup> The certification must include a list of 17 electors who would vote in the Electoral College if the candidates win.<sup>39</sup>

## **NEW PARTY'S FIRST PRIMARY ELECTION**

At a new party's first primary election, any voter can join that party regardless of their prior party affiliation.<sup>40</sup>

## **CONTROLLING COMMITTEE OF A MINOR POLITICAL PARTY**

Minor parties pick committee members by their own rules.<sup>41</sup> A party must file a list of its controlling committee members and other party officials with the Secretary of State's Office within 30 days of their election or appointment.<sup>42</sup>

A minor party can elect controlling committees in a primary election in the even-numbered year by filing a plan for party organization with the Secretary of State's office

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<sup>35</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(C\)\(2\).](#)

<sup>36</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(C\)\(1\).](#)

<sup>37</sup>[R.C. 3517.012\(C\)\(3\).](#)

<sup>38</sup>[R.C. 3505.10\(B\)\(3\).](#)

<sup>39</sup>[R.C. 3505.10\(B\)\(3\).](#)

<sup>40</sup>[R.C. 3517.016.](#)

<sup>41</sup>[R.C. 3517.02.](#)

<sup>42</sup>[R.C. 3517.02.](#)

90 days before the primary.<sup>43</sup> The plan must state which offices will be elected and how candidates qualify for those offices.<sup>44</sup> Candidates must qualify at least 19 days before the election.<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, minor parties may choose committee members according to party rules instead of through elections. In that case, the party must file the names and addresses of all committee members and officers with the Secretary of State's office.<sup>46</sup>

## BYLAWS OF MINOR POLITICAL PARTIES

Each political party must file a copy of its constitution and bylaws with the Secretary of State's office within 30 days of adopting or changing them.<sup>47</sup> These are filed via email at [PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov](mailto:PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov).

## Section 15.05 Major Political Parties

### CONTROLLING COMMITTEE OF A MAJOR POLITICAL PARTY

The controlling committees of each major political party must include:

- ☐ A state central committee consisting of two members (one man and one woman) from each congressional or state senate district in the state, as the outgoing committee determines.
- ☐ A county central committee with one member from each precinct or ward/township in the county.
- ☐ Other committees as needed by party rules.<sup>48</sup>

Both major political parties elect their state central committees by state senate district.

All committee members must belong to the party and are elected by direct vote in even-year primaries.<sup>49</sup> Committee members serve either two-year or four-year terms, as decided by party rules.<sup>50</sup> Currently, Republicans and Democrats serve four-year terms.

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<sup>43</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>44</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>45</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>46</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>47</sup>[R.C. 3517.02.](#)

<sup>48</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>49</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>50</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

Each major party's controlling committee elects an executive committee with powers set by the party's controlling committee and by law.<sup>51</sup> For multicounty judicial, state senatorial, or congressional districts, the chair and secretary of each county central committee constitute the district committee.<sup>52</sup> For single-county judicial, senatorial, or congressional districts, the county central committee constitutes the district committee.<sup>53</sup>

## COUNTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE MAY WAIVE THE PETITION REQUIREMENT

A county central committee may decide, 120+ days before a primary, that its candidates don't need to file petitions.<sup>54</sup> If this happens, candidates must file a declaration of candidacy instead of collecting signatures.<sup>55</sup>

If a county central committee has waived the petition rule, it can reinstate the petition requirement for later elections.<sup>56</sup> This must be done 120+ days before the next primary election at which candidates for the county central committee are elected.<sup>57</sup> After that, candidates must file petitions again and meet all other requirements.<sup>58</sup>

Use [Form 2-L](#) for county central committee candidates who need petitions, and [Form 2-M](#) for those who don't.

## WRITE-IN CANDIDATES

Special rules exist for write-in candidates for party controlling committees:

- Boards can't accept declarations of intent to be a write-in candidate for state central committee spots.<sup>59</sup> If no one files to run, the office does not appear on the ballot.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>52</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>53</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>54</sup>[R.C. 3513.051\(A\).](#)

<sup>55</sup>[R.C. 3513.051\(A\).](#)

<sup>56</sup>[R.C. 3513.051\(B\).](#)

<sup>57</sup>[R.C. 3513.051\(B\).](#)

<sup>58</sup>[R.C. 3513.051\(B\).](#)

<sup>59</sup>[R.C. 3513.14.](#)

<sup>60</sup>[R.C. 3513.14.](#)

- Boards can accept valid declarations of intent for write-in candidates for county central committee spots.<sup>61</sup> The boards must add a write-in space on the ballot.<sup>62</sup>

## ELECTED, NOT NOMINATED

Party central committee members are elected, not just nominated, during a primary election.<sup>63</sup>

- **17-year-old Voters**

Voters who are 17 at the primary can't vote for:

- State Party Central Committee.
- County Party Central Committee.
- Questions and Issues.

However, in presidential primaries, 17-year-olds can vote for delegates.<sup>64</sup>

- **Party Loyalty Rule**

A person can't run for a party committee if they voted in a different political party's primary in the last two years.<sup>65</sup>

Since committee members are elected, not nominated, at the primary, the exceptions to this rule don't apply.<sup>66</sup>

## ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS OF MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

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<sup>61</sup>[1970 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 1970-11, at 2-22.](#)

<sup>62</sup>[1970 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 1970-11, at 2-22.](#)

<sup>63</sup>[R.C. 3517.03.](#)

<sup>64</sup>*State ex rel. Schwerdtfeger v. Husted*, Franklin Co. C.P. No. 16CV-2346, 2016 Ohio Misc. LEXIS 18, at \*23-24 (March 11, 2016).

<sup>65</sup>[R.C. 3513.191\(A\).](#)

<sup>66</sup>[R.C. 3513.191\(B\)-\(C\).](#)

- **Meeting Requirement**

Ohio law requires members-elect of county central committees to meet between six and 15 days after the board certifies election results, including any recounts in county central committee races.<sup>67</sup>

To be recognized as the party central committee, the committee must verify for the board of elections that proper procedure has been followed for all meeting, notice, and roster requirements.

- **Notice**

The committee's secretary must mail a notice to each new member about the time and place of the organizational meeting.<sup>68</sup> The county central committee must give a copy to the board at least five days before the meeting, and the board must publicly post the notice.<sup>69</sup>

- **Roster**

Each county political party must file the names and addresses of all members and officers of its central and executive committees with its board and the Secretary of State promptly after the organization of the committees.<sup>70</sup> The roster can be in any format, as long as it has names, addresses, districts, and titles (such as chair, secretary, etc.). The roster is emailed to [PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov](mailto:PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov).

## PARTY CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

Each party must file its rules (constitution and by-laws) with the Secretary of State's office within 30 days after making or changing them.<sup>71</sup> These are sent to [PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov](mailto:PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov).

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<sup>67</sup>[R.C. 3517.04.](#)

<sup>68</sup>[R.C. 3517.04.](#)

<sup>69</sup>[R.C. 3517.04.](#)

<sup>70</sup>[R.C. 3517.06.](#)

<sup>71</sup>[R.C. 3517.02.](#)

## FILLING VACANCIES<sup>72</sup>

### In a Controlling Committee

When a vacancy is created due to death, resignation, moving away, or other reasons, the controlling committee (or executive committee, if authorized) fills the vacancy by majority vote of the members of such committee.<sup>73</sup>

When a county central or executive committee fills a vacancy after its organizational meeting, it must promptly report the new member's name to the board and the Secretary of State.<sup>74</sup> Changes are emailed to [PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov](mailto:PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov).

### In Elected Office

Various laws set rules for filling vacancies in elective offices. County party central committees fill some county and city vacancies.

When a county office is vacant, the board's director must notify the central committee of the party that nominated the person who left about the central committee's right to appoint someone to fill the vacancy. Boards can use [Form 292](#) for this.

The group with the right to appoint must know which laws apply and take appropriate action. The county party central committee should consult with their legal counsel about the process. Note that when filling a vacancy in public office, the county party central committee may be acting as a public body and be subject to Ohio's Sunshine Laws.<sup>75</sup>

When an elective office is filled, the appointing group must certify it to the board and Secretary of State within seven days. Use [Form 291](#) for this. The form may be mailed to the Secretary of State's office at the address on the form or emailed to [PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov](mailto:PartyCommittees@OhioSoS.gov).

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<sup>72</sup>For a more comprehensive breakdown of filling vacancies in elective office, see [Filling Vacancies in Public Elective Office](#), found in [Appendix A, Resources](#).

<sup>73</sup>[R.C. 3517.05](#).

<sup>74</sup>[R.C. 3517.06](#).

<sup>75</sup>[1980 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 1980-083, at 2-2-328](#).

## Chapter 15 Checklist: Political Parties

### After Primary Elections

- ☐ Update voter party affiliation records based on primary participation.
- ☐ Certify election results for party central committee members.
- ☐ Ensure party committee organizational meetings occur within the required timeframe.
- ☐ Publicly post notice of organizational meetings (when provided by the party).
- ☐ Receive and maintain a roster of committee members and officers.

### Minor Party Formation

- ☐ Verify signatures on petition papers from your county.
- ☐ Return certified petition papers to the Secretary of State by the 118th day before the general election.
- ☐ Process candidate nominating petitions.
- ☐ Verify signatures are from qualified electors who haven't voted in another party's primary.
- ☐ Certify nominating petitions no later than 105 days before the general election.
- ☐ Process any protests filed against petitions.

### Vacancies in Office

- ☐ Notify the appropriate party's central committee of a vacancy in the county office ([Form 292](#)).
- ☐ Receive a completed certificate of appointment to fill vacancy from the party central committee ([Form 291](#)).
- ☐ Issue a certificate of appointment to the appointee ([Form 155-B](#)).
- ☐ Forward the required documentation, including a copy of the certificate of appointment, to the Secretary of State.

### Form Maintenance

- ❑ Keep current copies of these required forms:
  - [Form 10-Y](#) (Declaration of intent to run in a different party primary)
  - [Forms 2-L](#) and [2-M](#) (County central committee petitions)
  - [Forms 4-B](#) through [4-G](#) (Minor party nominating petitions)
  - [Form 291](#) (Certificate to fill vacancy)
  - [Form 292](#) (Certificate of political party affiliation)

## Special Notes

- ❑ 17-year-old voters cannot vote for central committee members or issues.
- ❑ Write-in candidates are not permitted for state central committee.
- ❑ Write-in candidates are permitted for county central committee.