

TEXAS VS LOUISIANA

The nonpartisan blanket primary system used in Louisiana often seems attractive to voters from outside the state. The system differs from the closed primary by allowing independent and third-party voters to participate in the primary election because voters do not need to register a political party affiliation. In addition, the nonpartisan blanket primary differs from the traditional open primary in that voters do not have to choose a specific political party's primary in which to participate. Instead, a registered voter simply arrives at the polling place on Election Day and receives a ballot with all of the candidates from all of the political parties with all offices to be chosen listed. Here, voters can maximize cross-party voting by, for example, choosing a Republican for president, a Democrat for U.S. senator, a Libertarian for U.S. House of Representatives, and so forth. This ability to cross-party vote by office, which is impossible in other types of primaries because the ballot contains only candidates from a specific political party, is attractive to many voters. Since all registered voters may participate in the primary, proponents maintain that the system should produce more centrist or moderate candidates. This ability to produce such candidates was important in the California campaign to adopt the nonpartisan blanket primary.ⁱ After all, by restricting the ballot to registered party supporters, the closed primary essentially limits participation to conservative or right-of-center voters in the Republican primary and liberal or left-of-center voters in the Democratic primary. Independent voters are forced to choose a side or stay at home.

Does the nonpartisan blanket primary in Louisiana produce centrist or moderate candidates that reflect the views of the entire electorate rather than those of a smaller number of partisan voters? Fortunately, evidence is readily available in the form of elections results from Louisiana. In fact, results from Louisiana's elections for governor suggest that Louisiana's primary system does not necessarily produce centrist or moderate officeholders. For example, in 1991, the centrist incumbent governor Buddy Roemer, a one-time Democrat who became a Republican, received 27 percent of the vote to finish third in a twelve-candidate field. Roemer's third-place finish meant he was eliminated. In second place, with 32 percent of the vote, was David Duke.ⁱⁱ Duke, a former member of the state legislature and once grand wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, was clearly more extremist than Roemer. Edwin Edwards, a former state governor who had been indicted and tried several times for a variety of violations of federal racketeering laws, finished in first place with 34 percent of the vote. Edwards and Duke moved on to the general election in November. Edwards defeated Duke with 61 percent of the vote.

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTER

Read the following before marking your ballot:

1. Use ONLY a pencil containing black lead to mark your ballot.

2. Completely fill in oval to the right of each of your selections. Any other type of marking may void your ballot.

CORRECTLY MARKED BALLOT:

John Doe

INCORRECTLY MARKED BALLOT:

DO NOT vote for more than the number to be elected for each office.

If you incorrectly mark this ballot, erase the incorrect mark completely and make a new mark.

ABSENTEE BALLOT

November 04, 2014

Acadia Parish

SAMPLE

01-016A

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Official Ballot

Prepared and Certified by

Tom Schedler

Secretary of State

STATE OF LOUISIANA

United States Senator (Vote for ONE)		District Judge 15th Judicial District Court Election Section 4, Division F (Vote for ONE)	
Wayne Ables Democrat	1 <input type="radio"/>	Burleigh Doga Democrat	59 <input type="radio"/>
Raymond Brown Democrat	2 <input type="radio"/>	"Mike" Goss Democrat	60 <input type="radio"/>
"Bill" Cassidy Republican	3 <input type="radio"/>	Jack Nickel Democrat	61 <input type="radio"/>
Thomas Clements Republican	4 <input type="radio"/>	David M. Smith Democrat	62 <input type="radio"/>
Mary L. Landrieu Democrat	5 <input type="radio"/>		
"Rob" Maness Republican	6 <input type="radio"/>	District Attorney 15th Judicial District Court (Vote for ONE)	
Brandon Lee McMorris Libertarian	7 <input type="radio"/>	"Mike" Hanson Democrat	198 <input type="radio"/>

Another example is the 1987 gubernatorial election. In that race, Edwin Edwards received 28 percent of the primary vote, and Buddy Roemer, then a Democrat, received 33 percent. While Roemer went on to become governor, third place in the primary went to Robert Livingston, the only Republican candidate, who received 18 percent of the vote.ⁱⁱⁱ The fourth-place finish of W. J. "Billy" Tauzin, at the time a conservative Democrat and now a moderate Republican, is interesting because Tauzin was arguably more centrist than either Edwards or Livingston. The evidence suggests that centrist candidates are often crowded out in Louisiana's primary system by more extreme candidates. Simply put, centrist and moderate candidates, if sufficient in number, can split the middle vote, which has the effect of allowing more extreme candidates to get just enough votes to move on to the general election.

Note in both of the above cases the top two candidates did not receive a majority of the votes within their political party. What mattered was finishing in one of the top two positions. Hypothetically, a six-candidate race in which the candidates evenly split the votes could produce a result in which the top two candidates move on to the general election having received no more than 16 or 17 percent of the vote. Compare this with Texas's semi-open system in which the Republican and Democratic candidates moving on to the general election must have received a majority of the votes in their respective political party's primary.

The 2007 election of Louisiana's current governor, Bobby Jindal, illustrates another interesting feature of the state's primary system. (A sample ballot from the 2007 blanket primary election for governor