

The Democratic Party's Role in Primary Elections

The Democratic Party, at all levels, should work to ensure that its primary elections are fair, competitive, and give voters a genuine choice between candidates. To do so, it should:

1. **Broaden participation:** The Party must encourage electoral participation in primaries and pursue reforms such as early voting and easier registration to increase access.
2. **Provide impartial forums:** State and County Democratic Party Committees must make a reasonable effort to provide impartial forums, such as debates or unbiased voting guides, for party members to learn about all candidates, and for candidates to communicate with party members.
3. **Offer no special support:** State and County Democratic Party Committees, their leaders and staff, must not endorse a primary candidate, or offer support, financial or in-kind, to a candidate without offering the same support to other Democrats competing for the same office.

There are times, however, when it is appropriate for the party committees to act as gatekeepers, warning the electorate against candidates who are unfit to hold office. To make this determination, the party should perform a standard vetting process for all candidates (including incumbents), examining financial records, public statements, and personal conduct. Developing a set of standards that apply equally to all candidates, such as a Code of Conduct and a clearly written summary of the party's Code of Ethics¹, will help the party earn the trust of voters and root out some of the corruption that has plagued our state.

State or County Democratic Party Committees should withhold their support from, or actively campaign against, a primary candidate deemed unfit, due to any of the following criteria:

1. **Ethically compromised:** a candidate who has engaged in harassment or discriminatory actions, been convicted of fraud, misuse of office, or other serious crime that relates to public office, or censured by any government body for ethics violations.
2. **Campaign violations:** any candidate whose campaign or their surrogates violate Party rules or laws governing campaign materials, spending, or electioneering, or who allow demonstrably false messages to be disseminated on their behalf.
3. **Anti-democratic:** a candidate who rejects our Constitutional, democratic system and norms. Examples of this include: refusing to accept credible election results, calling for restrictions on voting rights or civil liberties, making baseless allegations of criminality or unfitness against rivals, encouraging political violence, or praising repressive governments.
4. **Allied with opposition party:** a candidate who runs as a Democrat but consistently undermines Democratic legislation and policy goals by caucusing with another party.

The determination of fitness should be made through an transparent, democratic process.

¹ The New York State Democratic Party has a [Code of Ethics](#) in its rules, but it is difficult for a non-lawyer to understand. Michigan provides an example of a party [Code of Conduct](#) written in plain language.

The State and local Democratic Party should be an impartial referee in primary elections, ensuring everyone plays by the same rules and meets the same basic standards, but otherwise not attempting to influence the outcome in any way other than encouraging more voter participation