

Taxpayer Funding:

The Cost of Closed Primaries

The presidential primaries cost taxpayers at least \$287,806,312.9 in closed primary states and at least \$427,300,168.79 for all states. Indeed, the lack of transparency by states on the costs of American elections likely makes the true costs of our primaries much higher. While 26.3 million voters in closed primary states were excluded from casting a single vote, their tax dollars still funded the party primaries.

Methodology

The data in this spreadsheet outlining presidential primary costs comes from multiple sources, including state budgets, published news articles, and statements from state offices. The numbers may be an underestimate of the true cost of primaries, but this can be attributed to a lack of transparency among state governments in accurately publishing statistics on election costs and making them accessible to the taxpayer.

Primaries are paid for by the state's taxpayers, even if they are independent/unaligned and cannot physically vote in that presidential primary. What is the taxpayer cost for the primaries that these citizens cannot participate in? This project provides an answer to that question by providing a state-by-state analysis of primary election costs.

The first spreadsheet, Cost For Primaries Closed States, details cost breakdown of presidential primaries in the closed primary states. The research pulled data from fiscal year 2016 state budget reports, secretary of state office contacts, governor recommendations on budget expenditures, state elections commissions, and secondary media sources. Keep in mind that all of the data came from presidential election years, regardless of if it came from the 2016 primaries. The 2012 presidential primaries provided some data on costs for example. The cost of running primaries in closed primary states came out to be **\$287,806,312.91**.

The data was related to the statistic that we already knew — that 26.3 million registered voters were excluded from this primary cycle — in order to find a cost per voter. In addition, an analysis of primary costs for all 50 states was conducted. This data was compiled in the second spreadsheet, entitled Cost For Presidential Primaries All States. This was done because primaries are still conducted with state funds (which come out of the tax burden on the state). The cost of running primaries, either closed or open, in all 50 states came out to be **\$427,300,168.79**.

You'll notice that several states hold caucuses instead of primaries. As a result of this research and contact with numerous election divisions of secretaries of state, it was revealed that caucuses are paid for and operated entirely by the party leadership in that state, and likely drawing from the party's national committees. In this way caucuses cost the taxpayers of state nothing in comparison to state-run primaries.

Lastly, researching data on primary costs brings up an issue that many states have with reporting costs. In some states — such as Montana, Mississippi, Nebraska, and Maryland — counties incur election costs which are then reimbursed by the state. Instead of having an easily accessible number for the state costs of primaries, individual counties have those costs. For states like Mississippi and Montana with close to 80 counties, going to every county for information would take weeks. Instead, reaching out to offices and financial/budget officials was the only way to find this data.

****Data on Costs of Closed Primary Elections****

(Click to see breakdown by state)

Closed States

Total Voters Excluded	26,370,985.00
Total Cost of Closed Primaries	\$287,806,312.91
Cost Per Voter	\$10.91
Average Cost to Closed States	\$12,513,317.95

All States

Total Voters Excluded	26,370,985
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Total Cost to all States for Primaries	\$427,300,168.79
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Average Cost to all States	\$10,813,388.94
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Five Most Expensive State Primaries

California	\$96,000,000
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Maryland	\$27,884,000
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Illinois	\$27,282,500
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New York	\$25,000,000
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Pennsylvania	\$20,000,000
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