

Why do we sign our ballots? Why isn't there a secret ballot?

Our primary is not a general election. It is a party process to choose our nominee to stand later in the general election.

Under Democratic Party rules of long standing, all 'party' contests must be conducted with signed ballots. In the States, party primaries now are generally conducted by the State, not the party, and are subject to the state requirement of a secret ballot.

That, of course, does not apply to caucus states where the procedure is still a 'party' function and where one's vote is registered very publicly by personally standing in the preferred candidate's corner. Nor does it apply to Democrats Abroad, since we are not a state, so we are directly subject to the party rule that party elections must not be conducted by secret ballot.

You should be reassured that every step will be taken to insure that you may cast your vote without oversight. But under party rules it must be a signed ballot, which may be used to ensure that there is no double voting by mail, fax, or scanned ballot attached to an email.

⌘ Historical Note ⌘

For the first hundred years of American history, "secret ballots," produced by the state with all candidates listed and distributed at the polling place were not used in the United States.

Rather ballots were produced by the respective parties (for general elections and then later when party primaries came along replacing state conventions, for primaries as well). Those ballots were often of different colors or bore the image of that party's animal incarnation and were widely distributed throughout the general population. Indeed, a small number of jurisdictions used verbal voting until late in the 19th century. There was no "secret ballot" as we know it today.

Although France had a secret ballot dating from revolutionary times and the Chartists in England demanded secret ballots in the 1830s, Britain did not begin to adopt a secret ballot in elections until late in the 19th century.

In the 1870s, a number of Australian states adopted the secret ballot. For some reason, it was the Australian example that caught popular attention in the US, and the secret ballot became known as 'the Australian ballot.'

Although there are a few earlier instances, the 'secret ballot' became wide-spread after the Presidential election of 1884. For those areas that had not adopted the Australian ballot early on, it became part of the reform ferment that bubbled up in the 1890s and in the Progressive era early in the 20th century.