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## Government 101: What Makes Kentucky's Off-Year Election Unique

*\*Kentucky's Primary is tomorrow– see below for more information\**

Depending on who you ask, an “off-year” election usually means a general election in the U.S. that’s held in an odd-numbered year without a presidential election or a midterm election. Off-year elections are typically focused on local offices and issues at the county and municipal levels and can sometimes feature a special election to fill a vacancy in a federal, state, or local office.

With that said, five U.S. states elect their respective governors to four-year terms during off-year elections: Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Virginia. Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi hold their gubernatorial elections in the off-year before the presidential election (like this year), while New Jersey and Virginia hold theirs in the off-year after the presidential election (like 2025). What makes Kentucky even more unique? The other four states also hold off-year state legislative elections. Kentucky does not.

According to [Louisville Public Media's Ryland Barton](#), the practice of holding elections in odd-numbered years in Kentucky dates back to the 1850 Kentucky Constitution when delegates expressed a desire to keep state elections separate from federal ones. The custom continued in the current constitution, adopted in 1891. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to change the election schedule to even-numbered years; most recently a bill in the Kentucky General Assembly was considered in 2019.

Supporters of moving Kentucky's statewide election to even-numbered years argue that it would increase voter turnout and save money by consolidating state and federal elections. Opponents argue the move would give state candidates less attention and make it harder to raise money, as they would be competing with federal candidates for attention and resources. For now, Kentucky's off-year elections for governor and other statewide executive offices remain, and tomorrow is the day!

### **Kentucky's Primary Election Day is Tuesday, May 16**

Voters will narrow down their parties' options for major statewide offices, most notably a 12-way race to be the Republican nominee in the governor's race. Kentucky voters can see a sample ballot from their county on the Secretary of State's [website](#).

Kentucky has closed primaries, so if you're a registered Republican, you will only see Republican candidates on your ballot and vice versa for Democrats:

- **Democrat primary ballots** will have two contested statewide races: Governor and Commissioner of Agriculture; and,
- **Republican primary ballots** will include Governor, Secretary of State, Auditor, State Treasurer, and Commissioner of Agriculture.

Note that some places in Kentucky may have additional local races and/or special elections on the ballot. Kentucky voters can check their voter registration [here](#) and find their polling location via [this link](#).

**However, whenever, and wherever you choose to do it, make sure you don't forget to VOTE!**