



Minor and Major Political Parties

How does a party become a minor political party statewide?

A party becomes a minor political party statewide by having a state constitution and party chair, holding a state convention within the past two years, and certifying these facts to the secretary of state. It also must do one of the following:

- Present at least one candidate for (1) governor-lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state auditor, or attorney general at the last general election for these offices, or (2) presidential elector or U.S. senator at the last presidential election. This candidate must get votes in each county that in the aggregate equal at least 1 percent of the total number of individuals who voted.
- File with the secretary by the close of state primary filings a nominating petition containing signatures of party members in a number equal to at least 1 percent of the total vote at the last state general election. Minn. Stat. § 200.02, subd. 23.

A party may also become a minor political party in a legislative district by satisfying the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 200.02, subdivision 23, paragraph (e).

When does minor party status take effect?

This status starts on January 1 after the election in which the requirements above are met. A party remains a minor party for at least two state general elections. At that time if it has not moved up to major party status, it must satisfy the above requirements again in order to stay a minor party. Minn. Stat. § 200.02, subd. 23.

What's the significance of being a minor party?

A minor party qualifies for campaign subsidies under the state income tax checkoff and can issue political contribution refund receipts. Minn. Stat. §§ 10A.31, subds. 3 and 3a; 290.06, subd. 23. A minor party does not have any of the other rights and privileges of major parties.

How does a party lose minor party status?

A party stops being a minor party if it gains major party status at a general election. Alternatively, a party can lose minor party status and be merely a political party if:

- at the second general election after it initially gains minor party status, none of its statewide candidates get 1 percent of the vote cast at that election; or
- by the close of filings for the second general election after it gains major party status, it fails to file a petition with the secretary containing signatures in a number equal to 1 percent of the total vote at the last state general election. Minn. Stat. § 200.02, subd. 23.

How does a party become a major party?

A party can achieve major party status by maintaining a party organization in the state, political subdivision, or precinct in question, and satisfying one of these additional requirements:

- Present at least one candidate for (1) governor-lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state auditor, or attorney general at the last state general election, or

(2) presidential elector or U.S. senator at the last presidential election. At least one such candidate must get votes in each county in that election and get votes from not less than 5 percent of the total number of individuals who voted in that election.

- Present at least 45 candidates for state representative, 23 for state senator, four for representative in Congress, and one each for the constitutional offices, with no minimum vote requirement for any of these candidates.
- File with the secretary by the close of state primary filings a nominating petition containing the signatures of party members in a number equal to at least 5 percent of the total vote at the last state general election. Minn. Stat. § 200.02, subd. 7.

When does major party status take effect?

This status starts on January 1 after the election in which the requirements above are met. A party remains a major party for at least two state general elections; at that time it again would need to satisfy the requirements above in order to stay a major party. Minn. Stat. § 200.02, subd. 7.

What's the significance of being a major party?

A major party's name is protected by law from being used by another party. Minn. Stat. § 202A.11, subd. 2. Its candidates are chosen at the state partisan primary. Minn. Stat. § 204B.03. It gets to have election judges appointed from its members. Minn. Stat. § 204B.21, subd. 1. It may place challengers in the polling place. Minn. Stat. § 204C.07, subd. 1. A major party qualifies to receive campaign subsidies under the state income tax checkoff and may issue political contribution refund receipts. Minn. Stats. §§ 10A.31, subs. 3 and 3a; 290.06, subd. 23.

How does a party lose major status?

A party loses major party status if all the following happen:

- At the second general election after it gains major party status, it fails either to (a) get 5 percent of the vote cast at that election, or (b) present the slate of candidates described above; and
- Before filings close for the second general election after it gains major party status, it fails to file a petition with the secretary containing signatures of party members in a number equal to at least 5 percent of the total vote at the last state general election. Minn. Stat. § 200.02, subd. 7.

Does a party's major or minor status affect candidate signature requirements?

The option for a party to establish itself as major or minor by filing a petition is separate from the requirement that some candidates file nominating petitions in order to get on the general election ballot. Major party candidates do not file nominating petitions. Minor party candidates always must gather signatures and file nominating petitions as their alternative to the state partisan primary. This is true even if their party chooses to submit petitions to establish the party's status.

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