

Vermont Public **ELECTION 2026**

The Vermont Public 2026 Debates will cover the primary and general election races for the U.S. House, governor, lieutenant governor, and other statewide elected offices as needed. The goal is to give our audience a comprehensive look at where viable candidates stand on the issues. **Below are answers to some frequently asked questions about our debate policies and guidelines.**

How many primary debates will be held?

Vermont Public will hold two primary debates prior to the Aug. 11 primary. The debates will be approximately one hour, and broadcast live on Vermont Public's radio frequencies, streams and YouTube channel at 12 p.m., and rebroadcast on Vermont Public's main TV channel and main radio station at 7 p.m.

- Tuesday, July 21: Democrats for Lieutenant Governor
- Thursday, July 23: Democrats for Governor

How many general election debates will be held?

Vermont Public will hold three general election debates prior to the Aug. 11 primary. The debates will be approximately one hour.

- **Tuesday, Oct. 6: Lieutenant Governor** | Broadcast live on Vermont Public's radio frequencies, streams and YouTube channel at 12 p.m., and rebroadcast on Vermont Public's main TV channel and main radio station at 7 p.m.
- **Thursday, Oct. 8: U.S. House** | Broadcast live on Vermont Public's radio frequencies, streams and YouTube channel at 12 p.m., and rebroadcast on Vermont Public's main TV channel and main radio station at 7 p.m.
- **Wednesday, Oct. 21: Governor** | Broadcast live on Vermont Public's radio frequencies, main TV channel, streams and YouTube channel at 7 p.m. Rebroadcast on Thursday, Oct. 22 on Vermont Public's main radio station at noon and main TV channel at 4:30 p.m.

Where will the debates be held?

All primary election debates will be held live and in-person at the Vermont Public Colchester studios.

All general election debates will be held live and in-person at the Vermont Public Winooski studios.

Who's invited?

The goal is to provide voters with the best opportunity to draw clear distinctions between viable candidates so that voters are informed by Election Day. Given the limited time for each debate, it would be impractical and not serve our audience well to have all candidates participate. Therefore, Vermont Public has established the following objective criteria to determine the debate lineup:

For primary election debates:

Each candidate must be listed by the Vermont Secretary of State as a qualified candidate for the office and party that is the subject of a scheduled Vermont Public debate, and must agree to Vermont Public's code of conduct and abide by on-site safety measures.

Candidates may bring up to two guests; those guests must also agree to Vermont Public's code of conduct and abide by on-site safety measures.

For general election debates:

Each candidate must be listed by the Vermont Secretary of State as a qualified candidate for the office and party that is the subject of a scheduled Vermont Public debate, and must agree to Vermont Public's code of conduct and abide by on-site safety measures. Additionally, candidates must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Candidate has been nominated for the current office sought by a major political party, as defined by [Vermont state statute](#) (see below); or
- Candidate is currently the incumbent office-holder of (1) a Vermont state office subject to a statewide election or (2) a federal office (House or Senate representing Vermont); or

- Candidate is an independent or minor party candidate who received 5% or more of the vote in the most-recent general election for (1) a Vermont state office subject to a statewide election or (2) a federal office (House or Senate representing Vermont); OR candidate has been nominated for the current office sought by a minor party and that party received 5% or more in the most-recent general election for (a) a Vermont state office subject to a statewide election or (b) a federal office (House or Senate representing Vermont); OR is an independent or minor party candidate who received 10% or more in a Vermont Public public opinion poll or a statewide independently conducted scientific nonpartisan public opinion poll, conducted after the most recent Vermont primary.

What is a major political party?

Pursuant to Vermont state statute, a “major political party” is a political party whose candidate for any State office in the most recent general election polled at least five percent of the vote cast for that office.

Currently, the major political parties in Vermont are the Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the Progressive Party.

How does Vermont Public cover candidates who do not qualify for a debate?

Debates are just one part of Vermont Public’s election coverage, and we are committed to covering all candidates on the ballot for statewide and federal offices. Vermont Public interviews all qualified candidates for statewide office (if they agree to be interviewed) throughout the campaign season on *Vermont Edition*, *Morning Edition* and/or *All Things Considered*. Candidates also are covered through our daily news coverage both online and on-air. You can find all of Vermont Public’s campaign coverage [here](#).

Don’t you have a responsibility to let all candidates have an equal voice in the debates? Our civic responsibility is public service, and to ensure our audience has the information they need to make decisions when voting. Although we cover qualified candidates throughout the campaign season, the purpose of a debate is to provide voters the chance to draw clear distinctions between viable candidates. Too many candidates in a debate would be impractical and not serve our audience well.

How does your policy comply with the FCC's equal opportunities rule? The equal opportunities rule does not apply to debates and regularly scheduled news and news interview programs, such as *Vermont Edition*. In order to encourage broadcast stations to cover political campaigns, the FCC exempts debates and a variety of news programming from its "equal opportunities" requirements.

How does your policy affect your nonprofit status? The IRS allows nonprofit media organizations to choose which candidates are invited to debates, as long as pre-established objective selection criteria are used.

This document was updated on Sept. 11, 2026 to reflect Vermont Public's slate of general election debates.