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Convention Cities

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Convention Cities

How many times has Boston hosted the Democrats? What are the other top convention cities?*

The Democrats have held 43 national conventions. Their first meeting was in a saloon in Baltimore in 1832; the shindig in Boston will be the 44th. That first national convention back in 1832 occurred in the heyday of the Age of Jackson, when American politics was lurching toward a more democratic process of selecting candidates. (Before 1832, candidates were selected by the party elite -- by "King Caucus" -- not by broadly representative conventions.) It surprises people to learn that historic Boston is experiencing a first: Beantown has never before been the host city of the Democratic National Convention.



That may seem odd when you consider how many times some cities have been tapped to host political conventions. Democrats have met most often in Chicago; the Windy City has hosted the Democrats 11 times. (Chicago is also the top choice for Republicans, who have met in Chicago 14 times. In fact, in 1896 and 1932, *both* Republicans *and* Democrats held their national conventions in Chicagoland.) Baltimore has hosted the Democrats 9 times; New York, 5 times; St. Louis, 4 times; Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, a couple of times each. A dozen other cities -- Houston, Denver, Atlantic City, Miami Beach, Kansas City -- have earned the distinction once.

Listed below and in chronological order are the cities that have hosted the Democrats, as well as the nominee who emerged victorious from the convention. An asterisk indicates that the nominee went on to be elected president:

1832: Baltimore - President Andrew Jackson*
1835: Baltimore - Vice President Martin Van Buren*
1840: Baltimore - President Martin Van Buren
1844: Baltimore - Rep. James K. Polk of Tennessee*
1848: Baltimore - Sen. Lewis Cass of Michigan
1852: Baltimore - Former Sen. Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire*
1856: Cincinnati - Former Sen. James Buchanan of Pennsylvania*
1860: Charleston / Baltimore - Sen. Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois / Vice President John Breckinridge of Kentucky (Southern Democrat nominee)
1864: Chicago - General George McClellan of New Jersey
1868: New York - Gov. Horatio Seymour of New York
1872: Baltimore - Horace Greeley of New York
1876: St. Louis - Former Gov. Samuel Tilden of New York
1880: Cincinnati - Gen. Winfield Hancock
1884: Chicago - Gov. Grover Cleveland of New York*
1888: St. Louis - President Grover Cleveland renominated
1892: Chicago - President Grover Cleveland renominated*
1896: Chicago - William Jennings Bryan
1900: Kansas City - William Jennings Bryan
1904: St. Louis - Former Sen. Henry Davis of West Virginia
1908: Denver - William Jennings Bryan
1912: Baltimore - Gov. Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey*
1916: St. Louis - President Woodrow Wilson renominated*
1920: San Francisco - Gov. James M. Cox of Ohio
1924: New York - John W. Davis
1928: Houston - Gov. Al Smith of New York
1932: Chicago - Gov. Franklin Delano Roosevelt of New York*
1936: Philadelphia - President Franklin Delano Roosevelt renominated*
1940: Chicago - President Franklin Delano Roosevelt renominated*
1944: Chicago - President Franklin Delano Roosevelt renominated*
1948: Philadelphia - President Harry S. Truman*
1952: Chicago - Gov. Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois
1956: Chicago - Gov. Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois
1960: Los Angeles - Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts*
1964: Atlantic City - President Lyndon B. Johnson*
1968: Chicago - Vice President Hubert Humphrey
1972: Miami Beach - Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota
1976: New York - Gov. Jimmy Carter of Georgia*
1980: New York - President Jimmy Carter renominated
1984: San Francisco - Vice President Walter Mondale
1988: Atlanta - Gov. Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts
1992: New York - Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas*
1996: Chicago - President Bill Clinton renominated*
2000: Los Angeles - Vice President Al Gore
2004: Boston - stay tuned...

How are the host cities selected, you ask? By doughty souls who are persuasive and willing to work hard. The Democrats, in the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and the Republicans, in the Republican National Committee (RNC), canvass the cities that are competing against one another for the honor of hosting a convention. In any given year, a number of factors go into the selection of the host city -- geographic, historic, electoral, political, financial, personal. Sometimes the site is chosen because of its historical symbolism; in 2004 the GOP is meeting in New York City in 2004 to provide a dramatic background to their renomination of George W. Bush as a war president, and to connect with the spirit of that city after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Sometimes the site is chosen because of the financial contributions of certain party leaders; in 1928 Democrats met in Houston in part because of the deep pockets of Jesse Jones, a Texas mogul.

(Question from Dena M. of Wilmington, Delaware)

* Full question: My question is prompted by the Democratic National Convention being held in Boston: How many times has Boston hosted the Democrats? What are the other top convention cities? How are the host cities chosen?