Voters in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories are not permitted to vote in the presidential election under the provisions set forth in the Electoral College. But that doesn't mean they don't have a say in who gets to the White House.

That's because voters in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa are permitted to participate in the presidential primary and are granted delegates by the two major political parties.

In other words, Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories get to help nominate the presidential candidates. But voters there cannot actually participate in the election because of the Electoral College system.

**Puerto Rico and the Electoral College**

Why can't voters in Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories help elect the president of the United States? Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution makes it clear that only states can participate in the electoral process.

"Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress," the U.S. Constitution reads.

The Office of the Federal Register, which oversees the Electoral College, states: "The Electoral College system does not provide for residents of U.S. Territories, such as Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa to vote for President."

The only way citizens of the U.S. territories can participate in the presidential elections is if...
they have official residency in the United States and vote by absentee ballot or travel to their
state to vote.

This “disenfranchisement” or denial of the right to vote in national elections—including
presidential elections—also applies to U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico or any of the other
U.S. unincorporated territories. Although the committees of both the [Republican Party] and
Democratic Party in Puerto Rico select voting delegates to the parties’ national presidential
nominating conventions and state presidential primaries or caucuses, U.S. citizens living in
Puerto Rico or the other territories cannot vote in federal elections unless they also maintain a
legal voting residence in one of the 50 states or in the District of Columbia.

**Puerto Rico and the Primary**

Even though voters in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories can't vote in the November
election, the Democratic and Republican parties allow them to select delegates to represent
them at the nominating conventions.

The national Democratic Party's charter, enacted in 1974, states that Puerto Rico "shall be
treated as a state containing the appropriate number of Congressional Districts." The
Republican Party also allows voters in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories to participate in
the nomination process.

In the 2008 Democratic presidential primary, Puerto Rico had 55 delegates -- more than
Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota,
Vermont, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Wyoming and several other states with
populations lesser than the U.S. territory’s 4 million.

Four Democratic delegates went to Guam, 3 went to the Virgin Islands and American Samoa
each.

In the Republican presidential primary of 2008, Puerto Rico had 20 delegates, and Guam,
American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands each had 6.

**What are the US Territories?**

A territory is an area of land that is administered by the United States government but not
officially claimed by any of the 50 states or any other world nation. Most depend on the United
States for defense and economic support.

Puerto Rico, for example, is a commonwealth -- a self-governed, unincorporated territory of
the United States. Its residents are subject to U.S. laws and pay income taxes to the U.S.
government.

The United States currently has 16 territories, of which only five are permanently inhabited:
Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa. Classified as unincorporated territories, they are organized, self-governing territories with governors and territorial legislatures elected by the people. Each of the five permanently inhabited territories may also elect a non-voting “delegate” or “resident commissioner” to the U.S. House of Representatives.

The territorial resident commissioners or delegates function in the same way as members of Congress from the 50 states except not being allowed to vote on the final disposition of legislation on the House floor. They are allowed to serve on congressional committees and receive the same annual salary as other rank-and-file members of Congress.