

Boys State (film)

Boys State is a 2020 American documentary film directed and produced by Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine. It follows a thousand teenage boys attending Boys State in Texas, coming to build a representative government from the ground up.

The film had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on January 24, 2020, where it won the U.S. Documentary Competition Grand Jury Prize. It was released on Apple TV+ on August 14, 2020, by A24 and Apple.

Cast

The film focuses on four participants in the program:^[2]

- Ben Feinstein, a crafty white boy from San Antonio and bilateral amputee with conservative views who runs for Federalist Party State Chairman^[3]
- Robert MacDougall, a jockish, jocular white boy from Austin with moderate views who runs for Nationalist Party Governor^[4]
- Steven Garza, a soft-spoken Hispanic boy from a working-class family with progressive views who runs for Nationalist Party Governor^[4]
- René Otero, a highly charismatic black boy from Chicago with progressive views who runs for Nationalist Party State Chairman^[4]

Other participants, such as Eddy Proietti Conti, who runs for Federalist Party Governor, also make appearances.^[5]

Synopsis

The film follows a thousand teenage boys attending Boys State in Austin, Texas, coming together to build a representative government from the ground up, from all different political backgrounds, navigating challenges of organizing political parties, consensus, and campaigning for the highest office at Boys State, Governor of Texas.^[6]

The boys arrive for the program, where they are randomly divided into two parties, the Nationalists and Federalists. Those wishing to run for governor seek to collect 30 signatures to get on the primary ballot. MacDougall does so easily; Garza manages to reach the threshold just before the deadline. Otero delivers a

<i>Boys State</i>	
	
Theatrical release poster	
Directed by	<u>Jesse Moss</u> <div><u>Amanda McBaine</u></div>
Produced by	<u>Amanda McBaine</u> <div><u>Jesse Moss</u></div>
Cinematography	<u>Thorsten Thielow</u>
Edited by	<u>Jeff Seymann</u> <div><u>Gilbert</u></div>
Music by	<u>T. Griffin</u>
Production companies	<u>A24</u> <div><u>Concordia Studio</u><div><u>Mile End Films</u></div></div>
Distributed by	<u>Apple TV+</u>
Release dates	<u>January 24, 2020</u> <div><u>(Sundance)</u><div><u>August 14, 2020</u><div><u>(United States)</u></div></div></div>
Running time	<u>109 minutes</u> ^[1]

powerful speech and is elected state chairman for the Nationalists; he is subject to an impeachment motion that easily fails. Feinstein is elected state chairman for the Federalists. In primary campaigning, Garza delivers a sincere speech, but questions arise among conservative voters about his past participation in March for Our Lives, as well as his views on abortion and immigration policies. MacDougall positions himself as a conservative, hiding his true beliefs, but he comes across as less passionate and loses the race to Garza.

Country	United States
Language	English

Meanwhile, the Federalists have elected Conti as their gubernatorial candidate. In the general election, the Federalists launch a humorous Instagram attack page. However, the party dissociates itself from it after it makes a racist attack on Otero. Garza appears on the verge of victory, prompting Feinstein to engineer a scandal. He tells Conti to try to conduct a Q&A during a forum moderated by Otero, a minor rule violation. When Otero disallows it, he latches onto that fact and accuses Otero of bias in later forums. As the program concludes, the boys cast their votes, and Conti is elected governor.

Release



Boys State directors and producers Jesse Moss (left) and Amanda McBaine (right) interviewed by ReasonTV about the film

The film had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on January 24, 2020.^[7] Shortly after, A24 and Apple acquired distribution rights to the film for \$12 million.^{[8][9]} The film was set to screen at South by Southwest on March 13, 2020, but the festival was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{[10][11]} It was released on Apple TV+ on August 14, 2020, after its UK release at Sundance London 2020 Online on August 9.^[12]

Reception

Critical response

On review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, the film holds an approval rating of 94% based on 144 reviews, with an average rating of 8.2/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "Startling, upsetting, and overall absorbing, *Boys State* strikingly depicts American political divisions -- and machinations -- taking root in the next generation."^[13] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 84 out of 100, based on 32 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[14]

Accolades

At the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, the film won the U.S. Documentary Competition Grand Jury Prize.^[15] At South by Southwest, the film won the Louis Black Lone Star Award Special Jury Recognition for Documentary.^[16]

Year	Award	Category	Nominee(s)	Result	Ref.
2020	<u>Critics' Choice Documentary Awards</u>	Most Compelling Living Subject of a Documentary	Steven Garza	Won	[17]
		Best Political Documentary	<i>Boys State</i>	Won	
	<u>Houston Film Critics Society Awards</u>	Best Documentary Feature	<i>Boys State</i>	Nominated	[18]
		Texas Independent Film Award	<i>Boys State</i>	Nominated	
	<u>Online Film Critics Society Awards</u>	Best Documentary	<i>Boys State</i>	Nominated	[19]
	<u>Sundance Film Festival</u>	US Grand Jury Prize – Documentary	<i>Boys State</i>	Won	[15]
2021	<u>South by Southwest</u>	Special Jury Recognition – Documentary	<i>Boys State</i>	Won	[20]
	<u>Austin Film Critics Association Awards</u>	Best Documentary	<i>Boys State</i>	Won	[21]
	<u>Cinema Eye Honors</u>	Audience Choice	<i>Boys State</i>	Won	[22]
		Outstanding Achievement in Nonfiction Feature Filmmaking	Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss	Nominated	[23]
		Outstanding Achievement in Editing	Jeff Seymann Gilbert	Nominated	
		The Unforgettables	Steven Garza	Won	
		The Unforgettables	Rene Otero	Won	
	<u>Directors Guild of America Awards</u>	Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary	Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss	Nominated	[24]
	<u>Hollywood Critics Association</u>	Best Documentary	<i>Boys State</i>	Nominated	[25]
	<u>National Board of Review</u>	Top Five Documentaries	<i>Boys State</i>	Won	[26]
	<u>Primetime Creative Arts Emmy Awards</u>	Outstanding Documentary or Nonfiction Special	Davis Guggenheim, Laurene Powell Jobs, Jonathan Silberberg, Nicole Stott, Shannon Dill, Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss	Won	[27]
		Outstanding Directing for a Documentary/Nonfiction Program	Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss	Nominated	

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External links

- Official website (<https://boysstate.movie>)
- *Boys State* (<https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/boys-state/umc.cmc.1aatz9gwjhnfpqqt8noafagg>) on *Apple TV+*
- *Boys State* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11095742/>) at *IMDb*
- *Boys State* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/boys_state) at *Rotten Tomatoes*

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