

14. REFORMING THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES:

SMALL STATES FIRST; LARGE STATES LAST; WITH A SPORTS PLAYOFF SYSTEM

The calendar of presidential primary elections currently in use in the United States is a most unusual democratic institution. In no other country is nomination for a major national office determined by a series of **regional primary elections** conducted in no particular order and under no form of centralized control. With two exceptions, individual states are given a set time period in which to schedule a presidential primary, presidential caucuses, or hold a state convention to select delegates to the party national convention. The two exceptions are Iowa and New Hampshire, which are assigned preferred presidential caucuses and presidential primary dates by the Democratic Party.

State law governs certain aspects of presidential primaries and caucuses in the United States, but other aspects are controlled by rules passed by the two principal political parties in the United States, the Republicans and the Democrats. In addition, rules for raising and spending money by presidential candidates, as they run in primaries and caucuses, have been passed into law by the United States Congress.

The calendar of presidential primary elections in the United States undergoes changes every four years. Periodically these changes have a major effect on how the nominating system operates and which particular candidates receive a major political party nomination for president. But these changes are undertaken haphazardly, sometimes by individual states and sometimes by one or both national political parties, with no single body coordinating the overall effects of one particular change upon another. The presidential nominating process is thus a totally random process in which significant changes are made but no single governmental body or political party is structuring and regulating the overall operation of the system.

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The year 2000 presidential primaries and caucuses illustrated once again the many inadequacies of the presidential nominating system currently in use in the United States. The prospective presidential nominee of the Republican Party, Governor George W. Bush of Texas, was decided after only 20 of the 50 states had held a presidential primary or caucuses. State participation was even lower on the Democratic Party side. Vice President Albert Gore wrapped up the Democratic nomination following presidential primaries and caucuses in only 14 of the 50 states.

Most disturbing was the significant number of populous states which did not participate at all, in a meaningful way, in the year 2000 presidential primaries and caucuses. Left out of the process completely, for all intents and purposes, were hundreds of thousands of Democratic and Republican party members in such populous states as Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

RELEVANCE AND IRRELEVANCE

One way of analyzing presidential primaries and caucuses is to determine the **relevance** or **irrelevance** of a particular state to the presidential nominating process.¹

* A state is deemed **relevant** if it conducts a presidential primary or holds presidential caucuses that receive attention from the major candidates and the news media. The results of the primary or caucuses must have a significant effect on determining who receives the party nomination for president of the United States.

* A state is deemed **irrelevant** if it conducts its presidential primary or holds presidential caucuses after the nominee has already been determined in earlier primaries and caucuses in

other states. Caucuses and state conventions also fall into the **irrelevant** category when they fail to generate any significant news coverage. This often happens when caucuses or conventions fail to produce a clearly identifiable "winner" the same day the caucuses or convention is held.

The following 20 states were **relevant** in the year 2000 presidential primaries and caucuses. The states are listed in the order in which the primaries and caucuses were held. States which held both a Republican and a Democratic primary are printed in **bold**. All other states held only a Republican primary:

RELEVANT STATES - YEAR 2000 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES

Iowa
New Hampshire
Delaware
South Carolina
Arizona
Michigan
North Dakota
Virginia
Washington
California
Connecticut
Georgia
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Missouri
New York
Ohio
Rhode Island
Vermont

The list of **irrelevant** states for 2000 includes 30 states plus the District of Columbia. These states are listed alphabetically:

IRRELEVANT STATES - YEAR 2000 PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES

Alabama
Alaska
Arkansas
Colorado
District of Columbia
Florida
Hawaii
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Minnesota
Mississippi
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Jersey
New Mexico
North Carolina
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

RELEVANCE/IRRELEVANCE OVER TIME

The year 2000 presidential election is only one historical example of the relationship of **relevant** and **irrelevant** states to presidential primaries and caucuses. A more interesting question is: "Which states have achieved **relevance** in a series of presidential elections over time?" A study of the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential primaries and caucuses revealed a measure of consistency. Ten states were **relevant** to the nominating process in all three presidential elections. Nineteen states were **relevant** in one or two of the three presidential election years studied. But most alarming was the fact that 22 states were totally **irrelevant** to the presidential nominating process in all three elections:

RELEVANCE/IRRELEVANCE OF STATE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES IN THE 1992, 1996, AND 2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

RELEVANT IN ALL THREE ELECTIONS

Connecticut

Georgia

Iowa

Maine

Maryland

Massachusetts

New Hampshire

Rhode Island

South Carolina

Vermont

TOTAL = 10 states

RELEVANCE/IRRELEVANCE OF STATE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES IN THE 1992, 1996, AND 2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

RELEVANT IN ONE OR TWO ELECTIONS

Arizona (1996, 2000)
California (2000)
Colorado (1992, 1996)
Delaware (1996, 2000)
Florida (1992)
Illinois (1992)
Louisiana (1992, 1996)
Michigan (1992, 2000)
Mississippi (1992)
Missouri (1992, 2000)
New York (1992, 2000)
North Dakota (1996, 2000)
Ohio (2000)
Oklahoma (1992)
South Dakota (1992, 1996)
Tennessee (1992)
Texas (1992)
Virginia (2000)
Washington (2000)

TOTAL = 19 states

RELEVANCE/IRRELEVANCE OF STATE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES IN THE 1992, 1996, AND 2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

IRRELEVANT IN ALL THREE ELECTIONS

Alabama
Alaska
Arkansas
District of Columbia
Hawaii
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Minnesota
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Jersey
New Mexico
North Carolina
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Utah
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

TOTAL = 22 states

It is interesting to note that all of the states that were **relevant** in all three presidential elections are small-sized or middle-sized in terms of population. No large state in terms of population, such as California or New York, succeeded in being **relevant** in all three presidential elections. And a number of the more populous states, such as New Jersey, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, were not **relevant** even one time out of three.

This study illustrates the point that eternal vigilance is the price of keeping a state **relevant** in all presidential elections. The 19 states that were **relevant** in only one or two presidential elections demonstrated that states can shift from **relevant** status to **irrelevant** very quickly. Also on the **irrelevant** list are the names of states of historical importance, such as Oregon, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, which in the distant past held very important presidential primaries but, from 1992 to 2000, had faded into total insignificance.

A close look at the ten states that were **relevant** in all three presidential elections suggests that a very small number of United States voters, from one presidential cycle to another, are playing a leading role in nominating major party candidates for president. Only two southern states, Georgia and South Carolina, have gained recurring influence over the nominating process. New Hampshire and the other New England states, a part of the nation known for a more liberal and progressive political outlook, have achieved enduring power within the nominating system. Iowa, with its famous first caucuses, and Maryland complete the list of states that are "three-time winners" when it comes to nominating American presidents.

It is a mystery as to why 22 states, for whatever reason, have relegated themselves, from 1992 to 2000, to a position of having no influence whatsoever over the nominating process. The governors and state legislators of these **three-times irrelevant** states have truly been delinquent

in their duty to make their state voters **relevant** to the presidential nominating process.

REFORMING THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING SYSTEM

A workable and effective plan for reforming the presidential nominating process would seek to achieve the following goals:

1. Shrinking the present lengthy primary and caucus calendar into a more workable period of time.

The 2000 nominating calendar began with the Iowa caucuses on February 1 and was not scheduled to end until the Alabama, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, and South Dakota primaries on June 6. The 2000 primary and caucuses calendar thus stretched out for more than four months, one-third of a calendar year.

This long nominating calendar is absurd in view of the fact that the major party nominations for President are usually decided during the first one or two months of the primary and caucuses season. It makes sense to design a shorter calendar in which party members in more states can participate in the process in a more relevant way.

Ideally, the presidential caucus and primary season should be limited to 8 weeks, less than half the length of the present 16-weeks-plus schedule.

2. Creating a nominating system that does not overly favor or overly neglect any particular state or any particular region of the country.

The present primary and caucus system tends to favor states that vote early and penalize states that vote late. New Hampshire has long enjoyed a favorable position, and more recently so has Iowa. In 2000 a number of states - most notably Michigan, Virginia, and Washington state - increased their clout by adopting early dates for their Republican presidential primaries

and caucuses.

Under an ideal nominating system, states voting late in the process should have as much influence as states that vote early.

Does this mean New Hampshire will have to give up its position as the first presidential primary, and Iowa will have to give up holding the first presidential caucuses? Yes. The nomination of major party candidates for the office of president of the United States is too important a process to be dominated by one state or another. New Hampshire and Iowa can be expected to resist this change, but it must be made.

3. Allowing two weeks between primary and caucuses dates.

Under the present lengthy and haphazard primary and caucuses schedule, often there is as little as three days from one important primary and caucus date to another. In 2000, for instance, South Carolina held its Republican primary on February 19. Only three days later, on February 22, Michigan and Arizona held Republican primaries, thereby greatly reducing the impact and significance of the South Carolina results.

The close scheduling of these primaries had an effect on the nominating campaign. George W. Bush won the South Carolina Republican primary, but the impact and significance of Bush's victory were greatly reduced when Michigan and Arizona voted for John McCain three days later.

Such a crowded schedule is unfair to candidates and voters alike. Candidates campaign hard up to one primary or caucuses date and then have to rush on to the next set of primaries and caucuses. No time is given to rest after an important primary or caucuses day, catch one's breath, and carefully and rationally plan campaign strategies for the next series of primaries and

caucuses.

The same kind of pressure is applied to the voters. The citizens of one particular state often have little time to consider what happened on the previous caucuses and primary day before they are voting in a primary or attending a caucus themselves.

An ideal nominating system would concentrate primaries and caucuses on particular days, preferably Tuesdays for the sake of tradition, and leave at least **two weeks** before the next day of caucuses and primaries takes place.

4. Mitigate One Winner News Coverage. The news media report the results of primaries and caucuses as if there is only one winner. Even when as many as eight or ten candidates are running for a party nomination for President, the news media will concentrate almost all news coverage on the one person who received the most votes in the particular primary or caucuses. The result is to generate overly strong momentum for the one winner of the primary or caucuses and severely downgrade the competitive chances of highly qualified candidates who finish second or third. **One Winner News Coverage** is one of the major causes of **early closure**.

A reformed presidential nominating system should be structured so as to mitigate the tendency of the press to declare just one winner in each presidential primary and caucuses.

5. Automatically eliminating losing candidates, thereby making all candidates who survive to the next "round" of primaries and caucuses appear as winners.

Under the present nominating system, candidates decide for themselves when they have been defeated by another candidate. They decide for themselves when to withdraw from the race, and they often wait too long before withdrawing. An ideal nominating system would

automatically eliminate the losing candidates following each set of primaries and caucuses. Those candidates who are winning delegates would move on to the next "round" of primaries and caucuses. The candidates who move on would be regarded as winners by the voters and the news media, even though they might rank in some place other than first place in the delegate count. Those who "win" and move on would receive the customary bounce in voter support and campaign contributions.

This might best be described as a **Sports Playoff System**. Candidates would be automatically eliminated, and winners would survive to play in the next round, exactly as is done in "playoff" competition in sports.

5. Requiring proportional allocation of delegates according to the percentages of the vote received in the particular state.

Under the present nominating system, a number of states have "winner-take-all" primaries in which the candidate who finishes first receives all of that particular state's delegates. Winner-take-all primaries often enable one candidate to build up a strong early lead in the delegate race, thus contributing to early closure and helping to make late-scheduled primaries and caucuses **irrelevant**.

One way to help spread the nominating race out over the entire primary and caucus calendar is to require that the delegates be apportioned to the candidates in the same rough percentages as the vote received in the particular state. Thus all of the better candidates would win some votes in each state, and this would make the race more competitive over a longer period of time.

6. Require closed presidential primaries and caucuses in which only registered

Republicans can vote in the Republican primary or caucuses, only registered Democrats can vote in the Democratic primary or caucuses.

One reason to reform and strengthen the presidential nominating system is to simultaneously strengthen the two major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Allowing only registered party members to vote in a particular party's presidential primary or caucuses will encourage "undeclared" or "independent" voters to register in one of the two major political parties. A salutary collateral effect will be to strengthen the role of the political parties in state elections as well as presidential primaries and caucuses. Closed primaries will also prevent opposition party voters from "crossing over" to vote for the party candidate for President they believe will be easiest to defeat in the general election in November.

THE SMALL STATES FIRST; LARGE STATES LAST NOMINATING SYSTEM

A **Small States First; Large States Last** reform should be applied to the presidential nominating system. This reform will concentrate the state caucuses and primaries on only five dates. These five primary and caucus dates are all two weeks apart, therefore the entire caucus and primary season should last only eight weeks.

The most important characteristic of this **Small States First; Large States Last** reform is that it concentrates the most populous states, with the largest numbers of delegate votes, on the last of the five primary and caucuses days. With so many delegate votes at stake on the final day of the caucuses and primary season, no candidate will be able to "lock up" a party nomination for president prior to the last primary and caucuses day. Thus, voters in states voting on the last primary and caucuses day will be more likely to be participating in a meaningful primary or caucus.

This **Small States First; Large States Last** reform therefore is **back-loading** the presidential nominating system with the larger-population states. Smaller and medium-sized-population states, which will be voting and caucusing on the four earlier primary and caucus days, will make the "first cut." They will narrow the presidential field in each party from a large number of contenders until, on the final primary day, there will be just two. The larger-population states will make the "final cut," choosing between the last two surviving candidates on the fifth, final primary and caucuses day.

When the **Small States First; Large States Last** reform is combined with a **Sports Playoff System**, early presidential primaries and caucuses produce **multiple winners** on the first four primary and caucuses days rather than just one winner. This will increase interest in the candidacies of second and third place finishers, etc., because they will automatically be advancing to the next "round" of primaries and caucuses. This will strongly mitigate the **one winner news coverage** that currently leads so swiftly to **early closure**.

**SMALL STATES FIRST; LARGE STATES LAST
PLUS A SPORTS PLAYOFF SYSTEM OF
STATE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES
AND CAUCUSES FOR THE REPUBLICAN PARTY*
FOR THE YEAR 2000**

FIRST DAY - TUESDAY, MAY 2, 2000

<u>STATE</u>	<u>DELEGATES**</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>1996 DATE</u>
DELAWARE	12	PRIMARY	2-24-96
DIST. OF COL.	14	PRIMARY	5-7-96
MONTANA	14	PRIMARY	6-4-96
NEVADA	14	PRIMARY	3-26-96
NEW HAMPSHIRE	16	PRIMARY	2-20-96
NORTH DAKOTA	18	PRIMARY	2-27-96
SOUTH DAKOTA	18	PRIMARY	2-27-96
ALASKA	19	CONVENTION	4-27-96
ARKANSAS	20	PRIMARY	5-21-96
WYOMING	20	CONVENTION	3-2-96
S. CAROLINA	37	PRIMARY	3-2-96

TOTAL DELEGATES FIRST DAY = 202 CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 202

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = UNLIMITED

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 8

*** The number of Democratic delegates for each state would be larger but in roughly the same proportions as the number of Republican delegates.**

**** Number of delegates to the 1996 Republican National Convention.**

SECOND DAY - TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2000

<u>STATE</u>	<u>DELEGATES</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>1996 DATE</u>
VERMONT	12	PRIMARY	3-5-96
HAWAII	14	CONVENTION	6-2-96
RHODE ISLAND	16	PRIMARY	3-5-96
NEW MEXICO	18	PRIMARY	6-4-96
IDAHO	23	PRIMARY	5-28-96
NEBRASKA	24	PRIMARY	5-14-96
IOWA	25	CAUCUSES	2-20-96
UTAH	28	CONVENTION	5-4-96
MISSISSIPPI	33	PRIMARY	3-12-96
OKLAHOMA	38	PRIMARY	3-12-96

TOTAL DELEGATES SECOND DAY = 231

CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 433

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 8

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 6

THIRD DAY - TUESDAY, MAY 30, 2000

<u>STATE</u>	<u>DELEGATES</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>1996 DATE</u>
MAINE	15	PRIMARY	3-5-96
WEST VIRGINIA	18	PRIMARY	5-14-96
OREGON	23	PRIMARY	3-12-96
KENTUCKY	26	PRIMARY	5-28-96
COLORADO	27	PRIMARY	3-5-96
LOUISIANA	30	CAUCUSES	2-6-96
KANSAS	31	PRIMARY	4-2-96
TENNESSEE	38	PRIMARY	3-12-96
ARIZONA	39	PRIMARY	2-27-96

TOTAL DELEGATES THIRD DAY = 247 CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 680

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 6

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 4

FOURTH DAY - TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2000

<u>STATE</u>	<u>DELEGATES</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>1996 DATE</u>
CONNECTICUT	27	PRIMARY	3-5-96
MARYLAND	32	PRIMARY	3-5-96
MINNESOTA	33	CAUCUSES	3-5-96
MISSOURI	36	CONVENTION	4-13-96
WASHINGTON	36	CAUCUSES	3-5-96
WISCONSIN	36	PRIMARY	3-19-96
MASS.	37	PRIMARY	3-5-96
ALABAMA	40	PRIMARY	6-4-96
GEORGIA	42	PRIMARY	3-5-96

TOTAL DELEGATES FOURTH DAY = 319

CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 999

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 4

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES SURVIVING = 2

FIFTH DAY - TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 2000

<u>STATE</u>	<u>DELEGATES</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>1996 DATE</u>
NEW JERSEY	48	PRIMARY	6-4-96
INDIANA	52	PRIMARY	5-7-96
VIRGINIA	53	CONVENTION	5-30-96
MICHIGAN	57	PRIMARY	3-19-96
N. CAROLINA	58	PRIMARY	5-7-96
OHIO	67	PRIMARY	3-19-96
ILLINOIS	69	PRIMARY	3-19-96
PENN.	73	PRIMARY	4-23-96
FLORIDA	98	PRIMARY	3-12-96
NEW YORK	102	PRIMARY	3-7-96
TEXAS	123	PRIMARY	3-12-96
CALIFORNIA	165	PRIMARY	3-26-96

TOTAL DELEGATES FIFTH DAY = 965 CUMULATIVE TOTAL = 1964

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES RUNNING = 2

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES NOMINATED = 1

RULES

1. All states must select all their delegates on **one** presidential primary, caucuses, or state convention day.
2. All state must hold **closed** presidential primaries, caucuses, or state conventions. Only registered members of the particular political party can participate in that political party's presidential primary, caucuses, or state convention.
2. All delegates in each state must be **committed** to a particular presidential candidate.
3. All delegates in each state will be allotted to candidates in **proportion** to the percentage of the vote each candidate received. Candidates who receive less than five percent of the vote will not be allotted any delegates.
4. The selection of presidential candidates to move on to the next round of primaries, caucuses, and state conventions will be determined by the **total** number of delegates a candidate has won in all primaries, caucuses, and state conventions held to date.
5. If, at the end of the fifth round of primaries and caucuses, no candidate has a majority of the total number of delegates, the nomination shall be decided at the political party **national convention**. Delegates committed to a particular candidate in a presidential primary, caucuses, or state convention will be required to vote for that candidate only on the **first ballot** at the national convention.

Endnotes - Chapter 14:

1. The data for this study of **relevance/irrelevance** was developed in "Relevance And Irrelevance In State Presidential Primaries And Caucuses," a paper presented by the author at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, San Jose, California, March 24, 2000.