

Primaries and caucuses

Primary An election to decide a party's candidate for an elected office. In Pres elections, support from voters in each state translates into pledged delegates for successful cand at the National Party Conventions.

Caucus A meeting for the selection of a party's candidate for an elected office. For Pres elections, also produces pledged delegates to Conv.
- Alt to primary mostly in large, sparsely pop states (e.g. Iowa, Nevada) - used in 2008 by 14 states for Dem nomination, 10 for Repub nom; in 2012 in 13 states for Repub nom.
- Need to particip in meeting means turnout lower than prims, only more ctted attend (= unrep) so caucuses usually favour more ideol cand (e.g. Ron Paul in Republ caucs in 2012)

Both prims and caucs run under state law, so much variation:

Closed Primary Only voters registered for that party can vote

vs

Open Primary Any registered voter can vote in either primary
In 2008 many registered Republs & independents chose to vote in the Dem primary, mostly for Obama – made signif diff to his margin over Clinton.
In 2012, with no serious action in the Democratic primaries, interested independents were likely to vote in Open Republican primaries.

also

Modified Primary As closed primaries, but registered indeps can vote in either primary

Proportional Primaries Delegates awarded proportionally to the votes cast, subject to a min level of support – All Dem and some Republ prims are prop (e.g. New Hampshire, Texas in 2012)

vs

Winner Takes All Primaries Cand with most votes wins all delegates from that state
– in 2008 16 Republ state prims used this, incl Ca, NY & Ohio – 3 of the largest (all 3 backed McCain)

- But in **2012 GOP rule changes** meant that only 5 states (Florida, New Jersey, Utah, Idaho, Arizona) were truly winner-take-all.
- 14 others (e.g. S Carolina, Michigan, Ohio, California) chose a variant where several delegates were allocated to each Congressional district - whichever candidate won that district would get all its delegates; often the candidate who won the state overall would get additional delegates.
- This was in response to RNC requirements that delegate allocation be “more proportionate”, but in practice often one candidate still swept up all (Romney in Maryland on 49% of the vote) or nearly all the delegates (Gingrich in South Carolina on 40% of the vote).

vs

“Beauty Contests”

- In some Republican contests (Iowa caucus, Missouri Primary) the public vote does not actually determine the

delegate allocation, it is purely indicative. This is instead decided by a process of county and state conventions that can be dominated by activists and so favour the candidate with the most committed supporters who can work the system. In 2012 this allowed Ron Paul to gain nearly all (20/21) of the convention delegates from Iowa (where he finished 3rd in the caucus vote) and all from Maine (where he was 2nd).

- Having said that, winning the popular vote in such contests is still worthwhile, as it helps a candidate generate momentum and signal their viability to voters in other states. Very few voters, even in beauty contest states, appreciate that the delegate selection is divorced from these votes.

Timing

- Early in election yr - up to states within rules laid down by parties. States want infl on process, so comp to hold primary/cauc early -> *Front loading* . Primaries have got earlier over time: 55% of delegates were chosen by 5th Feb in 2008 - but GOP efforts to roll back frontloading meant that only 5% of delegates had been chosen by 5th Feb in 2012.

- In 2008 Dem National Cttee said only Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and S Carolina cd go before 5th Feb. Michigan & Florida ignored this and went early anyway – DNC removed their rt to send delegates to Dem Conv as a result (later compromise -> Fla/Mich delegates attending with ½ a vote each). Republs had similar issue with Fla, Mich + N Hamp, Wyoming, S Carolina.

- In 2012 the RNC worked to prevent the contest starting as early and to ensure that it lasted longer, limiting early states to Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and S Carolina, with an aim to have Iowa start in early February. They also brought in a rule that any contests before April could not award delegates purely by winner-take-all to incentivise some states to go later. This only partially worked, as Florida and some other states were still prepared to break the rules in order to influence the early shape of the race, even if they were penalised delegates for doing so. In the end the race still started in early January, but the primary schedule was more spread out than in 2012, with 7 states not voting until June.

- Some states ensure theirs is the only prim/caucus that day, so they get more attention.
- Other states group together to create a regional primary – boosts their collective infl.

Southern States started “Super Tuesday” in early March 1988 – by 2008 22 Dem/21 Republ contests held on Super Tuesday on 5th Feb, but in 2012 it dropped back to 6th March and only involved 10 states.