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THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

When Parties Controlled Nominations and Primaries Were to Be Avoided at All Costs

Imagine for a moment that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy were among us once again. Then imagine that they found themselves in the middle of a presidential campaign. Despite all the new technologies now in use, especially the Internet, the campaign strategy for the general election campaign would look quite familiar to them. The goal would be to win the majority of electoral votes. States would be categorized as safe for one party or the other, hopeless for one party or the other, and battleground. Candidates would move around the country giving speeches and holding rallies in an attempt to win the electoral votes of the crucial battleground states. The goal of winning a majority of electoral votes and the strategy of winning a critical combination of states would be very much the same as it had been in their day.

Suppose, however, that our three returned presidents found themselves in the midst of a campaign for a party's nomination. The object today would be the same as it had been in their day, to accumulate a majority of the delegates at the party's nominating convention. There, however, the similarities would end. The strategy for winning the nomination today bears little resemblance to the strategy of days gone by because the system is so different.

For example, imagine FDR's confusion to hear people talking about momentum in February of the year before the convention. In his day *momentum* was a term used to describe behavior at the convention itself. Imagine Eisenhower's reaction to the news that Senator Howard Baker had

given up his job as majority leader of the Senate as well as his Senate seat *four years before* the presidential election in order to campaign full-time. Eisenhower spent the years before the 1952 convention in Europe with NATO, arriving home in June to campaign for his nomination at the convention in July. Imagine JFK's reaction to the fact that Walter Mondale, a former vice president and favorite of the Democratic Party establishment, had to enter every single primary election held in 1984. Kennedy had to run in primaries, but only because he was viewed as a young upstart by party leaders and needed to prove his vote-getting ability before he could deal seriously for delegates. And imagine how all three men would react to a Democratic primary race in which two senior Democratic senators, Joseph Biden and Christopher Dodd, who between them had logged seventy years in the United States Congress, were never seriously considered for their party's nomination because all the attention and energy were consumed by a former first lady and a first-term African American senator!

What our three returned presidents would soon realize is that winning the presidential nomination of one of America's major political parties in the twenty-first century is a whole new ballgame. Changes in the structure of the nominating system have driven fundamental changes in strategy. The structural changes originated with a reform movement that began in the Democratic Party in 1968 in response to its failure to deal with and incorporate the movement against the war in Vietnam into party politics. This reform movement had the effect of changing not only the Democratic nomination process, but (mostly inadvertently) the Republican nomination process as well. But before we look at the current nomination process and its evolution since the late 1960s, it might make sense to look back at the process it replaced.

The Pre-Reform Nominating System

For much of American history, beginning in the Jacksonian era and up until the catalytic turmoil of 1968, the presidential nominating system was controlled almost exclusively by political parties. The system had some public features, but it was primarily a private, intraparty affair. For most of this time, getting the nomination meant winning the allegiance of enough major party leaders—who controlled delegates—to accumulate a majority of the delegates at the nominating convention. Presidential primaries, the most

visible and public part of the campaign, were not an important part of this process. The real race for the nomination was conducted either totally in private or in the semi-public arena of local caucuses and state conventions.

While the process differed from state to state and from party to party, the outlines of the nominating system were similar. Every four years, local party officials, precinct leaders, ward leaders, county chairmen, and others would participate in a series of meetings throughout their state that usually culminated in a state convention. At that point the assembled party leaders would choose a group of (mostly) men to attend the national nominating convention. If the state party happened to be controlled by a particularly powerful party "boss," often a big-city mayor, a governor, or a senator, he would have sole discretion in the selection of delegates. If there was no dominant party leader, the selection of delegates would be privately negotiated by party officials and elected officials.

Presidential primaries were invented as part of the Progressive Era reforms that took place in the early decades of the twentieth century. They were meant to bring the nomination process at all levels, not just presidential, out of the backrooms of political parties. It was the invention of primaries that caused, for the first time ever, state legislatures and state laws to be involved in the process of nominating candidates for office, since some states enacted legislation requiring primaries and then provided public money to pay for them.

Thus from the Progressive Era through 1968 the presidential nominating process had two stages. The first stage involved competition in a small number of presidential primaries. However, such common practices as electing delegates pledged to favorite-son candidates (whose only goal was to wield influence at the convention) and electing delegates who were pledged to no candidate at all, meant that party leaders maintained firm control over the convention delegates. More often than not, presidential candidates didn't even put their name on the ballots of primaries. In some states delegates were identified by their presidential preference but in many states they were not.[1] The primaries were thus largely irrelevant to the outcome of the old-fashioned nominating contest. They were sometimes used strategically—to demonstrate a presidential hopeful's vote-getting ability, for instance; but as two famous scholars of presidential elections point out, this meant that in the pre-reform era, running in presidential primaries was often a sign of weakness, not strength. Writing in the 1971 edition of

Presidential Elections, Nelson Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky sum up the role of primary elections in the pre-reform era as follows: "Primary activity is often (although by no means always) a sign that a candidate has great obstacles to overcome and must win many primaries in order to be considered for the nomination at all."[2]

The second, and more important, stage of the old-fashioned nomination system involved intense negotiation between the serious national candidates and powerful party leaders. Decisionmaking power rested firmly with the party leaders in stage two. In 1960, W. H. Lawrence, a political reporter for the *New York Times,* used the image of the proverbial smoke-filled room to describe the nomination race: "With the end of the contested presidential preference primaries, the struggle for the nomination has moved from Main Street to the back rooms of individual party leaders and state conventions dense with the smoke of cheap cigars."[3] Eight years later, in the last of the old-fashioned nomination races, James Reston described the fight for the nomination as follows: "This presidential election is being fought out on several levels. The most important of these, so far as nominating candidates is concerned, is the least obvious . . . the underground battle for delegates."[4]

To understand just how different the modern nomination system is, consider the case of Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. Kefauver was an unusual senator for the 1950s. A liberal from Tennessee, he defeated the famous political machine of sometime U.S. representative and Memphis mayor Edward Crump—an achievement few Tennessee Democrats could claim—to win his 1948 bid for the United States Senate. In 1951, just as thousands of Americans were buying their first televisions, Senator Kefauver conducted a series of hearings on organized crime. The Kefauver hearings made for gripping television. They introduced midcentury Americans to the Italian mafia and a world of colorful and violent gangsters, the real ancestors of the fictional Tony Soprano. The hearings turned Kefauver into a household name. In 1952 he decided to run for the Democratic nomination for president.

Kefauver beat the sitting Democratic president, Harry Truman, in the New Hampshire primary. All in all, he entered and won twelve of the fifteen primaries held that year, campaigning across the country in a coonskin cap. By the time the Democratic convention began in July 1952, Kefauver had received over 3 million votes, compared to about 78,000 votes for his chief opponent, Adlai Stevenson.

But Kefauver's national fame did not translate into the affection of his peers, and in the old-fashioned nominating process, that was what mattered. Delegates were controlled by powerful politicians, not primary voters. Kefauver's hearings had ended up taking down some fellow Democrats, such as the Senate majority leader from Illinois, Scott Lucas; former governor Harold G. Hoffman of New Jersey; and Mayor William O'Dwyer of New York City. In addition Kefauver was one of only three senators who refused to sign the so-called Southern Manifesto in 1956.[5] (The others were Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas and fellow Tennessee senator Albert Gore Sr.) Despite his national fame, Estes Kefauver was too much of a maverick for the party. Blocked by party bosses and opposed by President Truman (who did not run), Kefauver lost the nomination to Adlai Stevenson on the third ballot. Four years later, he failed in his second bid to become the Democrats' nominee, but was awarded the second spot on the ticket as a consolation prize.

In 1960, in contrast, Senator John Kennedy of Massachusetts used stage one of the nominating system, the presidential primaries, to convince the party bosses who ruled stage two that he could win a general election despite his Catholic faith. This was his sole purpose in filing for a series of primaries, and the investment took time to pay off. The "Political Notes" columns in *Congressional Quarterly* for the summer of 1959 report on a very active John Kennedy and his lieutenants traveling from state to state trying to block favorite-son candidacies that could deprive Kennedy of his chance to prove his vote-getting ability in the primaries.[6]

On April 5, 1960, Kennedy won the Wisconsin primary, but not in a way that would convince the people who mattered that he could overcome anti-Catholic prejudice. As Theodore White tells it in his famous book, *The Making of the President, 1960,* "The break of the popular vote would convince none of the bosses who controlled the delegates of the East that he was a winner. He had lost all four predominantly Protestant districts. . . . His popular margin had come entirely from four heavily Catholic areas. . . . They would be read, he knew, wherever men read politics, as a Catholic-Protestant split."[7] Kennedy's loss in Wisconsin's Protestant districts meant he had to look for another opportunity to put the Catholic question behind him and convince the powerful bosses who could deny him the nomination that it would not be a problem in November. A month later he found his opportunity in West Virginia, where his decisive victory over Hubert Humphrey effectively ended

Humphrey's presidential ambitions and gave Kennedy and his people the ammunition they needed to convince party leaders that a Catholic could win in a non-Catholic state. Thus for Kennedy the primaries were important to his negotiations in stage two.

Yet four years later, the success of Barry Goldwater's insurgent campaign for the Republican nomination demonstrated once again the irrelevance of primaries. Rather than appeal to primary voters, Goldwater's campaign focused on capturing the party machinery from the grass roots on up. In his book on Goldwater, Stephen Shadegg points out that Goldwater had been effectively cultivating the loyalties of the precinct committeemen and county chairmen who chose delegates for more than six years before 1964.[8] Similarly, John Kessel recounts an October 1961 meeting in Chicago at which a group of conservatives, led by Republican strategist Cliff White, decided to encourage other conservatives to "run for precinct, county and state party positions of little visibility which would allow them to select conservative delegates in 1964."[9] As journalist Robert Novak pointed out, "The new Goldwater style of pre-convention politics did not waste time on winning over county and state organizations, but concentrated on actually taking over the county and state organizations by an inundation of Goldwater volunteers."[10]

In contrast to today's highly visible process of electing delegates in primaries and open caucus systems, Barry Goldwater's chief strategist, Cliff White, pursued a nearly invisible nomination strategy aimed at the low- and mid-level party elites who would eventually control the delegate selection process. This process largely escaped the scrutiny of the press, and what was observed was anecdotal and sketchy at best. Theodore White's comments about Goldwater's nomination are most instructive in retrospect: "All over the country, in the spring and summer months, such precinct, county and state conventions gathered without national notice. . . . Like the Kerensky government, they [the Republican establishment] were unaware of revolution until the Red Guards were already ringing the Winter Palace."[11]

In circumstances almost impossible to imagine today, Barry Goldwater was able to wrap up a delegate victory by early May 1964 while losing primaries and sliding downhill in the polls. The May 18, 1964, issue of *Newsweek* concluded that the fight for the Republican nomination was all but over because Goldwater already had the delegates he needed—even though his support among Republican voters was down to 14 percent and he had just suffered his second major loss in a primary.[12]

Fast Forward to the 21st Century

Twenty-first-century voters, accustomed to the importance of presidential primaries, find the old-fashioned nomination system very undemocratic. The strength of this sentiment was dramatically illustrated in the spring of 2008, when a new generation of voters discovered the existence of superdelegates—that is, unpledged party leaders and elected officials. New voters, especially, were appalled to discover that superdelegates could potentially overturn the will of the voters. Fearing that Hillary Clinton's institutional advantages and early lead among these delegates could lead her to victory at the convention, Barack Obama's campaign fed the notion that superdelegates should reflect the will of the voters. "The superdelegate spin," recalled Obama campaign manager David Plouffe, "was directed at superdelegates," in an effort to make sure that as Obama held a lead among district-level delegates, the superdelegates would follow suit.[13]

It wasn't a hard sell. In the modern nomination system the notion that party leaders would exercise their judgment, independent of the preferences of primary voters, was so abhorrent that many superdelegates found themselves rejecting their own role. Donna Brazile, a superdelegate and party strategist, told the *Los Angeles Times,* "My one vote shouldn't matter more than a voter who stood in a long line in the rain in St. Louis to vote," and threatened to quit her post at the Democratic National Committee if superdelegates decided the nomination race.[14] U.S. Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin called for scrapping the entire superdelegate system, saying that perplexed constituents had been asking him about the process: "I've always believed you've got to make participatory democracy as simple as possible. . . . The whole concept of superdelegate leaves people scratching their heads. It smacks them as possibly going against the wishes of the voters."[15] Other superdelegates sat tight and hoped that the primaries would produce a clear winner so that they wouldn't have to choose.

As we will see in chapter 6, the creation of superdelegates was an attempt to restore a role for party leaders following the reforms of the early 1970s, which some felt put too much power in the voters' hands. But for the first six nomination contests following their reinstatement, party leaders played no independent role in stage two; instead they merely ratified the results of the primaries. And when it looked as if they might play such a role in the close nomination race of 2008, large parts of the public screamed in protest and

treated the very existence of superdelegates as illegitimate, insisting that they follow the will of the voters.

Explaining the Reforms

How did this happen? What accounts for the transformation of the presidential nomination system? The story starts with the Vietnam War and the protest movement it sparked. That movement found a forum in the 1968 presidential primaries when protest candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota challenged President Lyndon Johnson in the New Hampshire primary and nearly beat him. (This was not the first time that the actual "winner" of the New Hampshire primary was deemed the "loser," owing to his failure to meet public expectations; nor would it be the last.) McCarthy's run prompted Robert Kennedy, the slain president's brother, to enter the race for the Democratic nomination. President Johnson saw the writing on the wall and on March 31, 1968, just over three weeks after the New Hampshire primary, went on national television to declare that he would not seek reelection.

Johnson's decision not to run opened the door for his vice president, Hubert Humphrey, to declare his candidacy. Thus began a tumultuous nomination race run against the backdrop of an unpopular war, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., riots in the streets of major American cities, and the eventual assassination of Robert Kennedy. By the time the 1968 Democratic Convention met in Chicago, anger was boiling over inside and outside the hall. Mayor Richard Daley's police force clubbed the youthful protesters who had gathered outside the hall to protest Lyndon Johnson's war in Vietnam while antiwar activists inside the hall cried foul as Hubert Humphrey (who did not enter and thus did not win *one single primary)* coasted to the nomination.

Humphrey was the last candidate to be nominated in the old-fashioned way. As the sitting vice president and therefore heir apparent, he inherited delegates that had been chosen as far back as 1967 to support Lyndon Johnson. Humphrey's attitude toward primaries was shaped in part by his own losing experience in 1960, but it also represented the view held by most party leaders at the time: "Any man who goes into a primary isn't fit to be president. You have to be crazy to go into a primary. A primary now is worse than the torture of the rack."[16] As the vice president, Humphrey saw no reason to enter *any* 1968 primaries. Despite the chaos in and around the convention, he easily won the nomination on the first ballot.

Antiwar sentiment, to the extent that it had been expressed in primary voting for both McCarthy and Kennedy, had little impact on the distribution of power inside the convention hall. In fact, 25 percent of the delegates to the 1968 Democratic convention had been chosen in 1967—long before the New Hampshire primary crystallized antiwar sentiment against President Johnson. And of the nine primaries that even listed the presidential candidates on the ballot, only three had been in states where the primary results were binding when it came to delegate selection.

To the young antiwar activists inside and outside the hall, the deck seemed stacked against them. On Tuesday of convention week, the party regulars who were in charge sought to buy a modicum of peace by promising that a reform commission would look at the nomination process. That reform commission, formally known as the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, but called the McGovern-Fraser Commission for its two chairmen, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota and Mayor Donald Fraser of Minneapolis, would ultimately transform the presidential nomination system for Democrats and Republicans alike. Political scientist Byron Shafer tells the story of this commission in great detail in *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics.* He concludes that the reforms enacted in the years between 1968 and 1972 resulted in "the diminution, the constriction, at times the elimination, of the regular party in the politics of presidential selection."[17]

The McGovern-Fraser Commission, which set out the basic parameters of the modern nominating system, was heavily dominated by antiwar party reformers. It conducted hearings and meetings throughout 1969, and its recommendations were adopted by the Democratic National Committee in time to affect the 1972 nomination contest. The cumulative effect of the McGovern-Fraser reforms was to transform the modern nominating system into a system where mass persuasion replaced elite persuasion.[18] Two developments played a central role in this process: the transformation of party caucuses from closed to open events and the related increase in the number of binding presidential primaries.[19] Along the way, the traditional closed-party caucus essentially disappeared. According to Shafer, this outcome was largely unanticipated by the Democratic National Committee: "Despite its status as the device by which the largest share of delegates to national party conventions in all of American history had been selected, the party caucus was abolished by rules which were not assembled in any one guideline, which

were not presented in the order in which they had to be assembled, and which did not at any point claim to be making their actual, aggregate, institutional impact."[20]

The extent of this change is frequently misunderstood since many caucuses still have old-fashioned trappings and continue to conduct routine party business.[21] In most states, however, caucuses have become the "functional equivalent of a primary," in Senator Howard Baker's words.[22] Three new requirements bear primary responsibility for this shift: first, that first-tier caucuses (usually party meetings held at the precinct level) be open to anyone who wished to be known as a Democrat (implicit in the McGovern-Fraser Commission's Guidelines A-2, A-5, and C-5); second, that every participant as well as every candidate delegate declare his or her presidential preference (Guidelines B-2 and C-1); and third, that first-tier caucuses be held at the same time on the same day (Guideline A-5). Together these reforms transformed a semi-public process into a completely public and transparent system.

The post-reform history of caucus systems shows just how friendly the reformed caucuses have been to nonestablishment candidates and how far caucuses have moved from control by the regular party. In the pre-reform era caucuses were often closed to those who did not hold party office, and if they weren't formally closed the lack of publicity surrounding them made it difficult for all but the most intrepid and well organized to attend them, let alone dominate their business. In 1972 most states still had some form of party-run caucus and convention, but by then the caucuses were open and publicized. In many of these states McGovern activists turned out for their first caucus upset and dominated the party regulars, who remained faithful to the 1968 nominee, Hubert Humphrey. Over the weekend of June 17–18, McGovern won a majority or a plurality of delegates in party conventions in Colorado, Montana, Utah, Idaho, Connecticut, North Dakota, and Puerto Rico. His wins were substantial enough that aides to rivals Humphrey and Senator Edmund Muskie admitted that the race for the nomination was all but over.[23]

In 1984 the Mondale campaign spent over $500,000 organizing for caucuses in Maine and had the endorsement of every major Democratic politician in the state. Yet Senator Gary Hart of Colorado, a young challenger with momentum coming off his surprise victory in New Hampshire, but no organization, beat Mondale as hundreds of new participants turned out for the party caucuses. When Maine governor Joseph Brennan accompanied

Vice President Mondale to several Portland caucuses, he remarked to a friend that he could tell that Mondale was in trouble the moment he walked into the room and saw it filled with people he had never seen at a party function before.[24]

And most recently, in 2008, the new kid on the block, Senator Barack Obama, beat the establishment candidate, Senator Hillary Clinton, in the all-important Iowa caucuses and in every subsequent caucus state with the exception of Nevada.

Growing turnout among first-time caucus-goers has played an important part in the success of outsider candidates. Turnout for the Iowa caucuses, for example, has increased over its previous level in almost every year in which there has been a competitive contest for the nomination (see table 1-1). (Although 1992 was a competitive year for the Democrats, the presence of favorite son Senator Tom Harkin in the race made that year's Iowa caucuses all but irrelevant.) By 2016 turnout had increased by a factor of 8 for the Democrats since 1972. In the Republican Party Iowa turnout increased by a factor of 9 since 1976. Iowa caucuses today are a far cry from the informal living room affairs they had been just a few decades earlier.

A dramatic increase in press coverage—amounting to a frenzy at times—both reflected and helped bring about this change. This development was jump-started by the requirement that all of a state's caucuses take place simultaneously. This measure had the intended effect of making it impossible for one group of candidate supporters to pack several caucuses on several different days. It had the unintended effect of transforming first-tier caucuses into a discrete, newsworthy event. Traditionally, precinct caucuses, county conventions, and other party meetings had been scheduled by local party leaders, sometimes within a period of time mandated by state statute or party rule and sometimes at a convenient time before the next-level convention. Unless the state statute or party rules mandated a uniform starting date, party meetings could be spread out over a period of weeks or even months. Once the caucuses were required to be held on the same day (and once participants were required to state a presidential preference), it became possible for the press to observe and report the outcome of first-tier caucuses in much the same way they would report the outcome of a statewide primary.

In 1972 most of the press misunderstood the importance of the Iowa caucuses and therefore missed the early signals of McGovern's strength and

Table 1-1. *Turnout in the Iowa Caucuses, 1972–2016*

Year	*Democrats*	*Republicans*
1972	20,000	Incumbent
1976	38,500	20,000
1980	100,000	106,051
1984	75,000	Incumbent
1988	126,000	108,838
1992	30,000	Incumbent
1996	50,000	96,451
2000	60,800	87,000
2004	124,000	Incumbent
2008	227,000	120,000
2012	Incumbent	122,255
2016	171,517	186,874

Source: Rhodes Cook, *United States Presidential Primary Elections 1968–1996* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 2000), p. 258. Mark Blumenthal, "Iowa Caucus: Only the Beginning" (www.pollster.com/blogs/iowa_caucus_polling_only_the_b.php [April 28, 2009]). "Iowa Caucus Turnout Shatters Record," CNN, January 3, 2008 (http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2008/01/03/democratic-caucus-turnout-shatters-record/ [November 25, 2008]). "Caucus Turnout Robust, Nearing All-Time Record," *Des Moines Register*, January 4, 2012 (http://caucuses.desmoinesregister.com/2012/01/04/caucus-turnout-robust-nearing-all-time-record/ [July 2, 2015]). Source for Republicans: *New York Times* accessed at: https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/primaries/iowa. Source for Democrats, Iowa Democratic Party, accessed at: http://iowademocrats.org/statement-fr-idp-chair-on-tonights-historically-close-caucus-results/

Muskie's weakness in the new system. In his book on that campaign, Jules Witcover explains the explosion in press coverage of the 1976 Iowa caucuses as follows: "For their romance with Muskie the press and television paid heavy alimony after 1972 in terms of their reputation for clairvoyance, let alone clear thinking and evidence at hand. In 1976, if there were going to be early signals, the fourth estate was going to be on the scene en masse to catch them."[25]

Since then, interest in the Iowa caucuses has only increased. Yet the importance of caucuses as a whole has declined as the number of primaries has grown (table 1-2). This trend can also be traced in part to the McGovern-Fraser Commission. Guidelines issued by the commission were intended to make caucuses not only more open but also more representative of the electorate. Representativeness in those days had two meanings: the reformers wanted convention delegates to represent minorities and women; but they also wanted delegates to represent the presidential preferences of those

Table 1-2. *Number of Presidential Primaries: Pre-Reform Era and Post-Reform Era*

Year	*Number of primaries*	*Year*	*Number of primaries*
1932	17	Reform Movement	Reform
Movement			
1936	14	1972	21
1940	14	1976	27
1944	15	1980	37
1948	14	1984	31
1952	16	1988	35
1956	19	1992	35
1960	16	1996	33
1964	17	2000	35
1968	15	2004	32
		2008	42
		2012	38
		2016	40

Source: Congressional Quarterly, *Presidential Elections since 1789,* 4th ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1987); Office of the Secretary, Democratic National Committee, Washington, D.C.; 2012 Presidential Primary Dates and Candidate Filing Deadlines for Ballot Access, Federal Elections Commission, June 18, 2012 (www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/2012pdates.pdf).

Notes: In many of the pre-reform years, a presidential primary was held to elect delegates, but this did not necessarily mean that the presidential candidate's name appeared on the ballot; often it was only the names of those running for convention delegate. Texas is counted as a primary even though it has a caucus attached to it as well. In some years one party uses a primary to select delegates and the other party does not; thus these numbers may differ slightly from one party to the other. In 2008, Florida and Michigan were initially beauty contests; eventually the Democratic Rules Committee seated those delegations with half votes. In 2012, a few states had either only Democratic or only Republican primaries.

In 2016, the Republican Party had primaries in three states, Idaho, Nebraska, and Washington, where the Democrats had caucuses. The Democrats had primaries in two states, West Virginia and the District of Colombia, where the Republicans had caucuses. Democrats had 39 primaries and Republicans had 40 primaries.

who turned out. Hence the mandate that participants in first-tier caucuses declare a presidential preference. This forced local politicos to jump into presidential politics much earlier than they had been accustomed to doing and made the new caucus procedures complicated to administer and even more complicated to control. Thus many party leaders decided that holding a primary was safer than trying to comply with the complex new caucus procedures. Burned by the record number of credentials challenges brought in 1972 as a result of rules that were new and not fully understood, in the

following years some state party chairmen turned to the presidential primary as a system that would be easier to implement.[26] Other states adopted a primary because they believed it would generate more media attention than a caucus. Still others adopted primaries in order to become part of a de facto regional primary. Two state chairs encouraged their states to adopt a presidential primary because George McGovern's people had taken over their states' caucuses in 1972 and they did not want that to happen again.[27]

Primaries have not only grown numerous, but they have also seen a sharp increase in their importance as a result of McGovern-Fraser reforms that made primaries binding on the selection of delegates. The few modern "beauty contests" (primaries that don't count for purposes of delegate selection) that exist today often do so because state primaries conflicted with national party rules or because of a strong preference among party activists for a caucus system with its party building opportunities (see table 1-3).

Reluctant Reformers

While Democrats were transforming their nomination system into a public system easily observed and covered by the press and others, the Republicans were undergoing their own less comprehensive transformation. However, theirs was far more inadvertent. Republican politics in the 1960s did not lead to internal calls for reform. First, as we have seen, the insurgent element in the Republican Party, the Goldwater conservatives who captured the party in 1964, were able to accomplish this takeover within the framework of the rules as they existed at the time, unlike the antiwar insurgents who were foiled at the 1968 Democratic Convention. Second, the Republicans won the 1968 and 1972 presidential elections, and winning always reduces a party's inclination to change the rules. But finally and perhaps most important, until 2008 the Republicans retained a system that preserves final authority over the nomination system to the quadrennial nominating system itself. This means that changes in the Republican rules could not happen as a result of party actions *between* nominating conventions; they could only happen once every four years at the nominating convention. This system has made it impossible for Republicans to appoint the kinds of commissions and committees that the Democrats have used to adjust their rules after every presidential election.

Nonetheless, the Republican National Committee did appoint, in 1968, a sixteen-member Committee on Delegates and Organization, the "DO"

Table 1-3. *Number of Binding versus "Beauty Contest" Primaries: Pre-Reform and Post-Reform Era*

Year	*Presidential preference poll is binding*	*Presidential preference poll is advisory only (a beauty contest)*
1952	3	7
1956	3	7
1960	3	8
1964	3	9
1968	3	6
Reform Movement	Reform Movement	Reform Movement
1972	12	6
1976	17	8
1980	33	2
1984	19	6
1988	34	1
1992	35	0
1996	32	1
2000	30	5
2004	31	1
2008	40	2[a]
2012	38	8[b]
2016	40	3[c]

Notes: The presidential preference poll is a fairly recent innovation in American elections. Thus many primaries in the pre-reform era and some primaries in the post-reform era took place without a separate preference poll on the ballot. This accounts for the disparities between this table and the previous table.

a. In 2008, the Michigan and Florida primaries on the Democratic side were initially beauty contests only; eventually those delegates were seated with half votes.

b. The Democrats held non-binding primaries in Florida, South Carolina, Arizona, and Michigan in 2012. The Republicans held non-binding primaries in Idaho, Missouri, Nebraska, and Washington State in 2012.

c. In 2016 Democratic primaries in Washington State, Nebraska, and Idaho were beauty contests only. Hillary Clinton won the primaries while Bernie Sanders won the delegates, since caucuses determined the delegate allocation.

committee, which banned automatic delegates (people who became convention delegates as a result of their party or elected office) and required that the meetings at the first stage of the delegate selection process (usually the caucuses held at the precinct level) be open to all party members.[28] These provisions, adopted by the 1972 convention, initiated a transformation in the Republican Party that paralleled the changes taking place in the Democratic Party. The party caucus and convention system, long a private or at most

semi-public process, became, by law in both parties, a fully public system. While the Republican Party rejected other attempts to mimic the Democratic reforms, especially efforts by the so-called Rule 29 Committee to adopt a system similar to the affirmative action recommendations of the Democrats, the opening up of the caucus/convention system effectively transformed the nominating system.[29] The end of the old-fashioned caucus/convention system led many Republican state parties to decide that a primary was the easiest path to follow. In many states where Democrats controlled the legislature, they passed legislation that created a primary for *both* political parties. In addition, as the process became public it attracted the kind of attention and voter interest that was unheard of in prior days. Republican Party leaders envied the attention that the Democrats were receiving and began a competition for attention in the nomination process that continues to this day.

Consider the case of Iowa in 1976. On caucus night in Iowa that year, traditionally the same night for both parties, Democrats, as a result of the reform rules, were required to state their presidential or uncommitted preference upon attendance at the caucus; Republicans were not. The preferences of those Democrats elected to county conventions were reported, along with their names, to the Iowa Democratic State Committee that very night, making it possible for the press to report on the outcome of the night's events almost as if a primary had been held. No such reports were made on the Republican side; thus their contest went unnoticed. For example, in Jules Witcover's 656-page book on the 1976 presidential campaign, the Republican precinct caucuses in Iowa are never mentioned, while the Democratic caucuses receive a full chapter, even though the nomination race between Governor Ronald Reagan and President Gerald Ford was every bit as interesting and close as the race on the Democratic side.[30]

Between 1976 and 1980 Iowa's Republican State Committee, eager to share in the media limelight and to increase caucus attendance, decided to hold a nonbinding straw poll at each precinct caucus and to have the results reported to the Republican State Central Committee at a central location in Des Moines. In the words of Marge Askew, a national committeewoman active in Republican politics at the time: "People kind of realized that we had to do something. We decided to go along with the media and poll delegates at the caucuses and use it as a real media affair because they (the media) were going to do their own polling if we didn't."[31]

Frontloading and Mandatory Attendance

The transformation of the nomination process from a semi-public to a public process dramatically increased the ability of the press to cover and interpret the early stages of the nomination race. As a result, the early Iowa precinct caucuses and the first-in-the-nation New Hampshire primary assumed disproportionate importance in the nomination race. As presidential candidates poured resources into early states, attracting the lion's share of media attention, other states, envious of the attention, began to look for ways to hold delegate selection contests earlier.[32] This interaction or vicious circle created the phenomenon known as "frontloading," the move by more and more states to schedule their nominating contests earlier in the year of the convention.[33] Table 1-4 looks at the timing of presidential primaries in recent presidential elections.

Victory (however defined), or at least a decent showing in these early, highly influential contests, is increasingly critical for would-be nominees. A former mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, learned this lesson the hard way in 2008. As we will see in chapter 2, Giuliani's decision to skip the early contests and start his campaign in Florida left him on the sidelines of the race. By the time he got to Florida he had spent nearly a month out of the story and out of the limelight. He did poorly in the Florida primary and was out of the race shortly thereafter.

But it's not just the early caucuses and primaries that matter. In the old-fashioned system primaries were, by and large, not binding. In contrast, in the modern nomination system serious candidates for president cannot pick and choose which contests they will and will not enter. If they do, they risk being left out of the delegate count, and equally important, out of the very public chronicle of the race. To some analysts' surprise, Hillary Clinton failed to understand this dynamic in 2008. Unlike Giuliani, Hillary Clinton was not a rookie. She had, after all, been through two nomination races with her husband. However, she and her advisers were spooked by their loss in the first caucus state, Iowa, and the campaign, short on money, decided to devote less time and resources to the remaining caucus states. Barack Obama ended up accumulating large delegate leads in those states, and the ability of caucus states to report first-tier results as if they had held primaries meant that Clinton suffered serious momentum losses as well.

Clinton did not make that mistake in 2016.

Table 1-4. *Frontloading of the Presidential Nomination Process: Percentage of Convention Delegates Elected by Month for Contested Nomination Years, 1964–2016*

Percent

Year and party	*Pre–calendar year of the convention*	*Before March*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*
1964 Republicans	9	9	13	22	21	16
1968 Democrats	25	2	6	12	23	26
1972 Democrats	0	7	14	18	33	24
1976 Democrats	0	9	17	25	29	20
1980 Democrats	0	5	35	19	20	21
1980 Republicans	2	13	25	14	24	21
1984 Democrats	0	6	26	17	21	13
1988 Republicans	0	2	51	15	14	17
1988 Democrats	0	5	53	19	10	13
1992 Democrats	0	3	47	19	11	20
1996 Republicans	0	6	57	7	20	9
2000 Democrats		2	72	9	10	6
2000 Republicans	0	17	54	6	16	8
2004 Democrats		25	52	8	7	7
2008 Republicans	0	80	6	4	6	4
2008 Democrats	0	70	13	5	10	3
2012 Republicans	0	13	38	14	19	15
2016 Republicans	0	6	58	16	8	12
2016 Democrats	0	5	52	18	6	19

Sources: Republican data from Rhodes Cook, *United States Presidential Primary Elections 1968–1996,* chaps. entitled "Race for the Presidency: Winning the 2000 Nomination," "Winning the 2004 Nomination," and "Winning the 2008 Nomination" (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000, 2004, 2008). Democratic data from Office of the Secretary, Democratic National Committee.

Source: For 2016 Democrats "Allocation Calendar—2016 Democratic Delegate Selection." Prepared by the Office of Party Affairs and Delegate Selection—Democratic National Committee, May 3, 2017. The calculations are based on pledged delegates only and excludes superdelegates since they may make their preferences known at any time up until the convention.

Source: For 2016 Republicans "Delegate Selection and Allocation." Prepared by the RNC Counsel's Office based on the Rule No. 16 (f) filing as submitted and certified by the states and territories to the Secretary of the RNC.

Note: The data do not include Democratic superdelegates; they do include Republican National Committee members. For the 2012 Republican race many of the GOP caucus systems elected unpledged delegates at the first level. Also, in most GOP delegations the three national committeepersons are unpledged. This table shows total delegates per time period. Percentages are based on delegate totals after the penalty to states for going early has been applied. Thus the denominator is 2,286, not 2,429.

By 2016 the system was still frontloaded, with a majority of delegates in both parties allocated (if not elected) by the end of March.[34]

Critiquing the Reforms

The post-reform-era pattern of frontloading seems to have slowed considerably in 2012, as states moved later in the season. In contrast to much of the action in previous years, changes in the system in 2012 were mostly due to Republican action since the Democratic incumbent, President Obama, did not face a primary challenge. Thus following the 2008 election, Republican activists took a page from what had been primarily a Democratic playbook and concluded that John McCain had locked up the nomination too quickly in 2008. Had the nomination season gone on longer, they reasoned, they might have found a stronger candidate. For the first time ever, a rule adopted at the 2008 convention allowed the full Republican National Committee to write rules for the 2012 primary season. Thus Republican activists could (for the first time ever) try to adjust the nomination system. The result was adoption of a plan designed to lure states away from March. States holding their contests before April 1, 2012, had to allocate delegates to presidential candidates proportionally. States wishing to use winner-take-all systems (preferred by a plurality of Republican state parties in 2008) had to go later in the system. As table 1-4 shows, the incentive plan worked.

On the Democratic side a rule that gave bonus delegates to states that moved later in the season also contributed to the decline in frontloading seen in 2012. Having failed to use sticks to prevent frontloading, by 2012 the parties had moved to carrots, which worked better. Nonetheless, being early is still sought after.

One might have expected changes in the nomination system as fundamental as those that occurred between 1968 and 1976 to cause a considerable amount of grief among the party leaders who abruptly lost so much power. In fact, that did not happen. While the Democrats and occasionally the Republicans have continued to create reform commissions to try to solve this or another real or perceived problem with the nomination system, the fundamental premise of the modern nominating system—that voters, not political elites, should choose party nominees—has never been fundamentally challenged. Having made a very public show of their party's superior virtue due to its more open processes, the Democrats have not dared,

in more than a quarter of a century, to retreat from their widely promoted participatory ethics.

It has fallen to academics to assert the virtues of the old-fashioned nomination system. Perhaps the most comprehensive critique can be found in *Consequences of Party Reform* by Nelson Polsby.[35] Polsby looked not only at the ways in which the reforms have weakened political parties, but more important, at the consequences of weakened parties for governance. Polsby maintained that the ascendance of numerical participation as the chief value by which a nominating system should be judged was flawed. He argued that it displaced the values of peer review and peer deliberation in the process. This was not simply an old-fashioned point of view. Today most parliamentary democracies in the world—democracies that are every bit as healthy as our own—nominate their major party leaders through a party-run process in which peer review is a major consideration.

Peer review loomed so large in Polsby's analysis because *Consequences of Party Reform* was written in the aftermath of Jimmy Carter's failed presidency. Polsby was clearly concerned that the reformed system produced inadequate presidents by encouraging and rewarding candidates who employed strategies geared toward mobilizing factions of primary voters, rather than forming coalitions of governing elites. For Polsby, the Carter administration was a case in point of a strategy that succeeded in the nominating system but was a massive failure in the governing process.

The defense of the old system was not without merit. And as we shall see, more recent party reform commissions have sought to enhance, albeit modestly, the role of elected and party officials. As late as 1992, scholars such as Andrew E. Busch defended the merits of the old-fashioned "mixed system," arguing that it successfully accommodated both insider expertise and, contrary to the conventional wisdom, radical grass-roots change.[36] Nonetheless, by the last decade of the twentieth century the debate over the nominating process had fizzled, even among academics.

To explain this quiescence, we reach back to the long history of American ambivalence toward political parties, an ambivalence that originates with James Madison's warning in *Federalist* No. 10 that we must "cure the mischiefs of faction." After all, as Austin Ranney pointed out, Americans have always regarded political parties as, at best, unavoidable evils whose propensities for "divisiveness, oligarchy and corruption must be closely watched and sternly controlled."[37] Since choice in the general election has been limited, for all

practical purposes, to two major parties for most of American history, there has been periodic pressure to make the nominating system more "fair" and to allow for changes in the balance of political power within parties. As Ranney and others trace the history of the presidential nominating process, one is struck by the ever-widening circle of participation produced by successions of reformers.[38] The shift in nominating power from congressional caucuses to national conventions and from local party elites to primary electorates is all part of a process in which direct participation in presidential nomination has been extended to larger and larger numbers of people.

The culmination of this pattern would be the adoption of a national primary, the ultimate in public participation. The fact that for the past thirty years polls have shown substantially more than 50 percent of the American public in favor of a national primary is in keeping with the strain in American political thought that favors the simplest and most direct form of democracy and that distrusts the role of parties as intermediaries in public choice. Most recently, Ken Baer, writing in the journal *Democracy,* has suggested that it is about time to get rid of delegates altogether and proceed to direct election of the presidential nominees.[39]

Conclusion

Thus, by the turn of the twenty-first century, the old-fashioned nomination system had been relegated to history, with large numbers of voters, young and old, believing that even the last remnants of the old system—the superdelegates—were somehow illegitimate. But while some political scientists have, from time to time, tried to keep alive the values inherent in the old-fashioned peer review system, politicians have looked at this very differently. What they understood was that once participation was broadened to include the voters there could be no turning back the clock. As the passions aroused by the Vietnam War and the other protests of the 1960s faded, the party reform movement came to be dominated by the interaction of presidential candidates and their interests with political parties. A series of rules, governing such issues as the timing of contests, the allocation of delegates, and the conduct of the delegates, became the fodder of intricate negotiations among presidential candidates, party leaders, and sometimes the party's rank and file. These negotiations have fundamentally changed the political strategy of candidates for each party's presidential nomination. It is to that story that we now turn.