

Introduction

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In our nation's constitutional history, since 1789, there have been fifty-two presidential elections—three in the eighteenth century, twenty-five in the nineteenth century, and twenty-four so far in this century. These elections are among the most studied events in the American political system. Yet important questions concerning presidential elections remain, and older questions need fresh answers.

The studies in this book are guided by three basic questions. These are as follows:

- Are presidential elections a set of fifty-two discrete events, or are there patterns among them?
- Are these elections equal in importance, or are some contests more crucial than others?
- What are the relationships of presidential elections to the political parties, public policy, and society?

The authors of this book approach these questions from the perspective of an extended time dimension. Unlike many electoral studies, this book is concerned with the “population of elections,” rather than the “population of individual voters.”¹ This book compares and contrasts presidential elections in order to increase our understanding of their individual dynamics, sequences, and impact.

To carry out these goals, I have had the good fortune to collaborate with four leading scholars in the field of United States political parties and elections—Milton Cummings, Everett Carl Ladd, David Mayhew, and Gerald Pomper. Along with myself, each of the contributors answers this book's central questions from his own scholarly perspective. In other words, the contributors to this volume were given the opportunity to write from their own vantage point, to do what they do best. I think the result is a book that is useful to political scientists, grad-

uate students, and upper-division undergraduates, as well as accessible to the general reader.

As the subtitle of this book suggests, the subject matter clusters around process, policy, and political change. In the real world of presidential elections, these three are inextricably tied together, thus every chapter touches upon each of them in one way or another. For example, policy is not only a possible aftereffect of an election, but it is also a concern of voters, a strategic tool for parties and candidates, a checklist by which to gauge party effectiveness, and a reflection of societal need.

This said, however, there are decided emphases among the chapters. The presidential selection process is described in basic detail in chapter 1 by Harvey Schantz, and much of chapter 2 by Milton Cummings is devoted to the unfolding and outcome of this process in 1992. The substance of major waves of congressional policy making is highlighted in chapter 5 by David Mayhew, who also attempts to account for their causes.

Political change is perhaps the most touched-upon cluster of topics in this book. In 1960, E. E. Schattschneider asked in a chapter title, "What Does Change Look Like?"² His answer was that change had largely to do with new policy agendas, new lines of partisan conflict, and new electoral patterns. These are, in different ways, the concerns of chapter 3 by Harvey Schantz and chapter 6 by Everett Carl Ladd. Gerald Pomper devotes much attention to changing electoral patterns, but is mostly concerned with changes in the organizational effectiveness of the political parties.

The chapters in this book are loosely ordered from those focused on the election process and election outcomes, to those mostly concerned with the relationship among presidential elections, the political system, and society. Furthermore, the first two chapters provide much of the basic material necessary for a complete understanding of the chapters that follow. Let us now discuss each chapter in turn.

SCHANTZ ON THE PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION PROCESS

The first chapter of this book is a primer on the contemporary presidential selection process, including discussion of how it has evolved through the years. The first four parts of this chapter follow the quadrennial sequence of events: the pool of candidates; the nomination process; the general election campaign; and voting. The fifth part of this chapter attempts to place electoral outcomes in historical perspective by examining partisan and electoral trends since 1789. Chapter 1 details for the student and general reader how presidents are selected.

CUMMINGS ON POLITICAL CHANGE SINCE THE NEW DEAL

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1932 presidential election inaugurated the New Deal political era. For the next twenty years the Democrats controlled the White House and almost always elected majorities to the U. S. House and Senate. This Democratic success was reflected in public opinion surveys of party identification. A key component of Democratic strength was solid support from the southern states. The Democratic coalition of support also included solid electoral majorities from Catholics, Blacks, Jews, labor union households, and those with lower incomes.

In his chapter, Milton Cummings examines political change since the New Deal era. He details presidential and U. S. House election results in order to document the movement of the South from the Democrats to the Republicans. Cummings traces trends in party identification for the last one-half century. He also comments upon changes in the Democratic voting coalition evident in the 1992 presidential results.

Cummings also provides singular coverage of our last presidential election. According to Cummings, the 1992 election was one of those relatively infrequent election years when a new leadership team and party was returned to power—the ninth time this has happened in the twentieth century. In his chapter, Cummings describes the dynamics of the campaign and the pattern of the vote. He contrasts the 1992 outcome with the election results in 1984 and 1988. Cummings finds that in 1992 many short-term situational and strategic factors favored the Democrats. A long-time observer of national elections, Cummings classifies the 1992 election as, fundamentally, a vote of lack of confidence in the incumbent party.³

SCHANTZ ON SECTIONALISM

The actual votes cast in an election are extremely useful data for analyzing a single election and comparing a set of elections. Election results allow us to analyze presidential elections for the totality of U.S. history, whereas voter surveys extend back only as far as the 1930s. Election returns, which are often termed “aggregate data” by analysts since they add up the votes of many people, do not allow us, however, to study the motivations of individual voters.

In any one presidential election the partisan percentage of the vote is not uniform throughout the United States. It varies from county to county, state to state, and section to section. One might usefully study the pattern of the vote—the degree of uniformity or variance in the par-

tisan percentage—in a single election. Such a study is termed a cross-sectional analysis. In presidential election studies, the unit of analysis is usually the county, state, or section. An election in which there are great differences in the partisan percentages across the regions is said to be sectional. A vote pattern in which partisan percentages are fairly uniform across the country is called a national vote pattern.

Another type of study compares sequential or select presidential elections. Such over time examinations are termed longitudinal studies. These studies look at vote totals over time for a political unit, be it section, state, or county. These examinations seek stability or change in vote totals.

Research designs frequently combine the features of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. That is to say, they seek stability or change in the cross-sectional pattern of the vote in two or more presidential elections. In this book, the electoral analyses by Harvey Schantz and Gerald Pomper are examples of such studies.

Harvey Schantz examines sectional electoral patterns in presidential elections from 1824 to 1992, building on his earlier work.⁴ He chronicles sectional diversity in the presidential vote and vote swing throughout American history, documenting an important perspective on U.S. political parties and elections. Schantz records periods of high sectionalism, such as before the Civil War and at the turn of the twentieth century, along with periods of national vote patterns, especially in contests between the Whigs and Democrats from 1840 to 1852 and between the Republicans and Democrats since the New Deal era of the 1930s.

POMPER ON THE STATE OF THE PARTIES

In his chapter, Gerald Pomper combines two of his long-standing research concerns, analysis of state-level presidential election results and evaluations of the effectiveness of U.S. political parties in the democratic process.⁵ Pomper examines election returns since 1956 through a variety of now standard statistical techniques that he helped to popularize for these purposes in 1967. In particular, these include the correlation of successive and nonsuccessive elections to measure electoral coalition continuity and to identify clusters of elections with similar vote patterns. His findings lead Pomper to conclude that there has indeed been a realignment of electoral patterns since 1968 and that voters have now settled into a new stable alignment.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s numerous commentators portrayed U.S. political parties as being in a state of organizational and functional decline. In the past, Pomper has subscribed to these arguments and

findings, and has long been an advocate of a more effective party system. In this book, though, he argues that the premise of the decline of party thesis is, in part, based on a mistaken view of political parties that sees them as "collections of voters," rather than competing organizations. He also concludes that the parties are now more vital organizationally and functionally than they were at their nadir in the late 1960s and early 1970s, gaining power over the presidential nomination and finance processes, as well as cohering ideologically.

MAYHEW ON POLICY CHANGE

One of the major premises held by many political scientists, politicians, and members of the general public is that there is a strong causal link between presidential elections and public policy initiatives. Major policy change, as opposed to incremental movement, is believed to depend upon realigning elections or elections that confer a mandate upon government leaders. Policy change is facilitated by the processes of leadership turnover and the conversion of incumbent leaders who interpret the election returns.

In his chapter, David Mayhew sets out to test the link between elections and major policy change, extending and borrowing from his path-breaking and controversial study about the impact of divided government on politics and policy making in Washington, D.C.⁶ To accomplish his goals, Mayhew isolates four preeminent legislative surges in U.S. history. These occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction, the Progressive Era, the time of the New Deal, and the 1960s–1970s. He then investigates the extent to which this activity may be explained by elections, political parties, the economy, and public moods and movements.

Mayhew finds moods and movements to be a particularly powerful explanation. "As for presidential elections—the chief concern of this essay—they play a role but not as consequentially or frequently as we imagine," writes Mayhew.

LADD ON POSTINDUSTRIALISM

In his writings, Everett Carll Ladd has frequently been interested in the relationship between society and the political system, which primarily involves accommodations of the parties and elections system to major changes in the wider society.⁷

Over the "sweep" of U.S. history the parties have been nested in four different socioeconomic eras: the rural Republic, stretching roughly from independence to the Civil War; the industrializing nation, dating

from the Civil War to the Great Depression; the industrial state, from 1929 to approximately 1970; and postindustrial society, our current era.

A postindustrial society is one in which there is general affluence, widespread access to higher education, and instantaneous means of national communication. In a postindustrial society a shrinking percentage of the workforce is devoted to manufacturing and agriculture. High technology fuels economic development, and the growing middle class is largely involved in "technical and professional" occupations. The nature of service industries changes, with growth in human services, research, and data analysis. There are growing employment opportunities for women.⁸

In his chapter, Ladd offers a current summary statement and extension of his analyses concerning the impact of postindustrial society on the parties and elections system. While Ladd takes into account the latest developments, such as "Ross Perot and 'Perotism'," he is primarily concerned with underlying trends. These include the communications revolution and increased education levels that have combined to weaken the role of the parties in elections and to instigate independent voting habits among the electorate. Affluence, Ladd argues, has undermined a class-based politics and has accentuated cultural differences. Increased female participation in the workforce is an antecedent of the well-known gender gap in elections, whereby women are more prone than men to vote Democratic. In all, Ladd portrays a political system that is markedly different than it was before 1970, the approximate advent of the postindustrial era.

NOTES

1. V. O. Key, Jr., "The Politically Relevant in Surveys," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1960): 54-61, quotation, p. 55.
2. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1960), p. 114.
3. See, for example, Milton C. Cummings, Jr., *Congressmen and the Electorate: Elections for the U.S. House and the President, 1920-1964* (New York: The Free Press, 1966); and Cummings, ed., *The National Election of 1964* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1966).
4. Harvey L. Schantz, "The Erosion of Sectionalism in Presidential Elections," *Polity* 24 (Spring 1992): 355-377. This article, which is included in chapter 3, is reprinted with permission of *Polity*.
5. Gerald M. Pomper, "Classification of Presidential Elections," *Journal of Politics* 29 (August 1967): 535-566; "The Decline of Partisan Politics," in *The Impact of the Electoral Process*, ed., Louis Maisel and

- Joseph Cooper (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1977), pp. 13–38; and Pomper, ed., *Party Renewal in America: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1980).
6. David R. Mayhew, *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations, 1946–1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
 7. Ladd's writings on this topic have appeared in numerous forums, but he has most fully developed his thoughts in two major books, Everett Carl Ladd, *American Political Parties: Social Change and Political Response* (New York: Norton, 1970); and, with Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978).
 8. This paragraph is partly based on Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1976; originally published 1973), esp. pp. xvi–xix.

The Presidential Selection Process

HARVEY L. SCHANTZ

Presidential elections are at the core of representative democracy in the United States. In these contests, voters, through the electoral vote system, choose our nation's chief executive for the subsequent four years. The election results also signal victory for a particular political party and leadership team, the ascendancy of a voting coalition and, most likely, a shift of public policy in one direction or another.¹

Presidential elections have a number of indirect effects: they facilitate a legitimate and stable government, offer protection for individuals from their leaders, and provide an opportunity for citizen growth and education.² Elections are a central mechanism by which our society resolves conflicts. More cynically, presidential elections are a process of regime renewal, as voters once again grant legitimate authority to their leaders in this most central of state-sponsored democratic rituals.³

Presidents of the United States are selected in a two-step process: a major political party nomination and a general election. Although only the general election is called for in the Constitution, all presidents, aside from George Washington, have won the presidential general election as the nominee of a major political party. The Constitution, which specifies eligibility for the presidency, combines with extra-constitutional norms to set the amorphous boundaries of the pool of candidates. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the basics of the presidential selection process. Our discussion follows the quadrennial sequence of events: political prominence; the nomination process; the general election campaign; and voting.

“POLITICAL PROMINENCE”: THE POOL OF CANDIDATES

“Political prominence” defines the set of individuals considered seriously for the presidency.⁴ “A prominent individual, in these terms,” according to Gerald Pomper, “is one who has caught the attention of voters and political leaders by his traits of personality, his performance in some task of public significance, or his identification with important issues and interests.” The criterion of prominence superseded presidential availability, which emphasizes conformity, during the middle of the twentieth century. Political prominence combines at least four elements: constitutional eligibility; career positions; personal and social characteristics; and “winnowing.”

Constitutional Eligibility

From our nation’s beginning there have been few constitutional limitations on citizen eligibility for the presidency.⁵ Article II, Section 1 says that a president must be a natural born citizen of the United States, be thirty-five years of age, and have resided in the United States for fourteen years. The Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1804, separates the electoral vote balloting for president and vice president and applies the rules of presidential eligibility to the vice president.

Members of the legislative branch may not serve as president according to Article I, Section 6. Presumably, this prohibition also applies to judicial branch members. These officials may run for the presidency, though they must resign their positions prior to taking office. A Texas state law, in fact, allowed Lyndon Johnson in 1960 and Lloyd Bentsen in 1988, to simultaneously run for the U.S. Senate and the vice presidency.

The Twenty-second Amendment, ratified in 1951, limits presidents to two full terms or a maximum of ten years in office over a lifetime.⁶ It was added to the Constitution partly as a reaction to Franklin Roosevelt, who was elected president four times, in 1932, 1936, 1940, and 1944—the only person to be elected more than twice. The only two presidents restrained from running for a third term so far have been Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan.

Career Positions

Prominent positions in the government or military have been a staple of the careers of presidents and presidential candidates throughout our

nation's history. The last public office held prior to election to the presidency has most often been a state governorship (nine presidents), the vice presidency (five), a U.S. Senate seat (five), a cabinet position (five), or a military generalship (four).⁷ An additional nine vice presidents succeeded to the presidency during a term of office. Early in U.S. history, the position of secretary of state was a crucial pathway to the presidency. Since 1932, governors and former governors have most often been elected president.

These numbers do not reflect the large numbers of U.S. senators that bid for the presidency. Between 1868 and 1972, presidential contenders were most often senators.⁸ But only five senators won party nominations, as compared to fourteen governors. Fifteen senators did, however, win vice presidential nominations in these years.

In short, to be considered presidential material today, a person has to be or have been a vice president, a governor, or a U.S. senator. Cabinet secretaries do not have the popular appeal of yesteryear. Colin Powell, in 1995, was the first general since Dwight Eisenhower to be considered presidential material.

Personal and Social Characteristics

There are, in addition to the constitutional requirements and expected career positions, informal widely-held expectations concerning the personal and social characteristics of presidential nominees. These evolving standards include a potential nominee's gender, race, religion, family life, and aspects of personal behavior.

In his classic treatment of the subject, Clinton Rossiter wrote that a person who aspires to the presidency "must be, according to unwritten law: a man, white, a Christian. . . . He cannot be, according to unwritten law: a Negro, a Jew, an Oriental, a woman, an atheist. . . ."⁹ Nothing that has happened since Rossiter wrote about the subject nearly forty years ago has completely contradicted these unwritten laws. All major party nominees for president have been male, White, and Christian. Among Christians, John F. Kennedy, elected in 1960, is the only Roman Catholic ever to be president. Governor Al Smith of New York, a Roman Catholic, had been nominated by the Democrats in 1928, but lost the general election.

Voter acceptance of presidential candidates of diverse backgrounds, as expressed in opinion polls, has, however, increased greatly since the late 1950s. Today, overwhelming majorities of voters say they would vote for a qualified Jewish (89 percent), woman (82 percent), or African American (79 percent) candidate.¹⁰ Furthermore, opinion

polls throughout 1995 found General Colin Powell, an African American, quite popular among adult Americans.¹¹ Powell had risen to national prominence during the 1991 war with Iraq, which he helped direct in his position as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Rossiter also included less severe rules for presidential hopefuls. They "ought not to be: . . . divorced, a bachelor. . . ." They "ought to be: . . . a veteran."¹² Two of these requirements have been broken by recent presidents. Ronald Reagan was divorced and remarried. Bill Clinton was not a veteran of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Marital infidelity marked the denouement for candidate Gary Hart in his quest for the 1988 Democratic nomination. But Clinton's similar activity, along with his possible drug use, was overlooked by voters in the 1992 nominating contests and general election.

"Winnowing"

Constitutional eligibility, career positions, and personal and social characteristics delimit the pool of viable presidential candidates. "Pre-election-year winnowing" according to Erwin Hargrove and Michael Nelson, "sifts out from this pool a relatively small number of ambitious and 'serious' candidates."¹³ Thomas Cronin reckons that at any given time the potential candidate pool is made up of about fifty individuals, but that there are only a "score or so of activist politicians who inevitably become the serious candidates."¹⁴ In election year polls from 1936 to 1980, on average, about twenty-three candidates received 1 percent or more support in Gallup polls and about half that number achieved at least a 5 percent rating.¹⁵

A number of factors limit the size of the candidate pool. One of these is the press. In order to be considered a "presidential possibility" by the public, a candidate must be portrayed in that role by the press. The elite news organizations decide which of the candidates deserve such coverage, thereby heightening the chances of the so anointed.¹⁶ The role of the press is greatest in this early stage of the selection process, when the candidates are less well-known.

The ability to attract large amounts of campaign money has traditionally been a sign of a candidate's seriousness.¹⁷ In early 1995, Senator Phil Gramm proudly emphasized his fund-raising ability. And many pundits speculated that former Vice President Dan Quayle declined to run because of funding difficulties.

But for the most part, since the beginning of government finance in 1976, a crucial rite of passage has been a candidate's ability to raise enough money (\$100,000 in contributions of \$250 or less, with no more

than \$5,000 from any state) to qualify for matching government funds. The ability to so qualify is interpreted to mean widespread support among voters and also enhances the finances of the candidate.¹⁸

The winnowing process is crucially furthered by candidates' presidential ambition and risk-taking propensity. According to Stephen Hess, the characteristic that sets "the contours" of the candidate pool is presidential ambition, a deep desire to be president.¹⁹ "The only common denominator," wrote Hess, "for those who would be president is the depth of their ambition . . . the serious candidates are a self-anointed breed. . . ."

John Aldrich, in contrast to Hess, feels that presidential ambition, or progressive ambition, is a given for all vice presidents, senators, and governors.²⁰ "The calculus of candidacy," however, "includes the costs of running for office, the probability of winning it, and the risks associated with the race." Given the same cost-benefit analysis, not all politicians are equally likely to enter the presidential race. According to Aldrich, "a demonstrated willingness to enter high-risk situations further differentiates presidential candidates from those who start with similar opportunities."

In conclusion, the group of individuals that is "politically prominent" at any one election is very small, limited by constitutional, professional, social, and psychological barriers. To those who do "throw their hat into the ring" and seek the presidency, the first hurdle is winning the nomination of their party.

NOMINATION PROCESS

In a number of important ways the nomination process is the most crucial step in the presidential selection process.²¹ Once the nominations have been made only the two major party candidates have a realistic opportunity of winning the presidency. More potential presidents are eliminated at the nomination stage than in November. Nominations also determine the quality of the November choice and greatly affect the November outcome.

In order to formally gain their presidential nomination, both major political parties require a candidate to win a majority of the delegate support at the party's national convention. The delegates to the convention are mostly selected in a local caucus-state convention process or by presidential primaries in each of the states, the District of Columbia, and those territories allocated delegates by the national party committees.

Delegate Selection

In 1996, there will be 4,295 delegate positions for the Democratic National Convention and 1,984 delegate slots for the Republican National Convention.²² The delegates selected to participate in a national party convention formally choose the presidential candidate of their party. They also collectively decide the vice presidential nominee, the party platform, and the party rules. The methods used to select delegates affect which delegates are chosen and therefore have an impact on a party's presidential ticket and its policy direction.

Historical Development. Political parties have held presidential nominating conventions since the 1830s. From 1832 to 1908, according to Leon Epstein, "virtually all delegates were chosen within each state by party caucus, district convention, state convention, executive committee, leadership, or some combination of such organizational agencies."²³ Between the years 1912 and 1968, with the exception of 1912 and 1916, when primaries temporarily peaked in use, the state caucus and conventions dominated delegate selection but a substantial minority of states selected delegates by a presidential primary. Since 1972, the presidential primary has been the method by which most convention delegates have been chosen.

National party conventions prior to 1972 were generally under the control of state party leaders. But the caucus-convention delegate selection process did afford an opportunity for "popular participation" and held out the possibility of "takeovers by new groups outside the established party leadership."²⁴ An example of this is the conservative movement and the nomination of Barry Goldwater by the Republicans in 1964.²⁵ This caveat notwithstanding, political party textbooks tell us that power and control over delegates were historically held by state party leaders.²⁶ In 1968, when Hubert Humphrey won the Democratic party nomination for president, his major strategy was the courtship of party leaders. He did not even enter a single primary.²⁷

The increase in primaries in 1972 and in subsequent election cycles grew out of discontent over the process that nominated Humphrey.²⁸ In response to the divisive Chicago national party convention the Democratic National Committee adopted changes, suggested by the McGovern-Fraser Commission, designed to make state presidential caucuses more accessible to the party rank-and-file. In so doing, the party hoped to open up the nominating system while avoiding the demands for more presidential primaries. But rather than conduct party business under the new, more stringent rules prescribed by the national party, Demo-

cratic state parties opted for holding presidential primaries. In addition, newly adopted campaign finance legislation, the growing influence of television, and the atrophy of state and local party organizations contributed to the growth of primaries. In some instances, Republicans were pulled along by newly adopted state statutes.

Since 1972, all presidential nominations have been won by those candidates able to successfully negotiate the primary election gauntlet. Presidential nominations are decided by voters and candidates. Party leaders have relatively little influence. The new process has also increased the influence of the mass media, especially television, in nomination politics. In today's presidential nominating campaigns, candidates have to endure a year or more of intensive campaigning throughout the nation.

In 1992, Governor Bill Clinton and President George Bush had to succeed in an obstacle course of state presidential primaries to win their party nominations. Bill Clinton did very well. He won thirty-two of thirty-nine Democratic primaries, garnering 10,471,965 total votes, or 51.9 percent of the ballots cast. This percentage of the total primary vote made Clinton "the strongest vote-getter the Democrats have had since the primary-oriented nominating system came into being two decades ago."²⁹

In 1992, George Bush swept all thirty-nine Republican primaries, receiving 9,512,142 total votes, or 73.0 percent of all the ballots cast. Although Bush ran strongly, his showing was not up to the standards attained by Richard M. Nixon or Ronald Reagan. Gerald R. Ford obtained a bare majority of the primary vote, but lost in November 1976. In essence, then, Bush's showing in the 1992 presidential primaries was a harbinger of the results of the November election, a point that pundits made as soon as the New Hampshire results were counted in February.³⁰

The Mechanics. Today, the delegate selection process is, as it has always been, a state-based procedure that operates within the context of a national party. National parties allocate delegate positions to each of the states, the District of Columbia, and territories. Each state then determines how its delegates will be selected. Since 1972, the national parties, especially the Democrats, have placed some guidelines on states' nominating options.³¹

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Republican National Committee (RNC) allocate delegate slots to the states based on a state's population and its partisan support.³² In the Democratic party, the size of a state's electoral vote and its average Democratic percentage in the three preceding presidential elections are weighted equally. Republican delegations reflect statehood, House districts, and state suc-

cess in electing Republican officials. In both parties, there is some controversy over the allocation formula.

Each state, through its legislative process, chooses a method and date for delegate selection.³³ In some states the parties have an option regarding their nominating method. Basically, the states and state parties choose one of two methods: either a local caucus-state convention process or a presidential primary. In practice, however, this basic distinction covers a wide variety of state nominating methods. In addition to conventions and primaries, Democrats send selected party and elected officials as delegates to their convention.

Primaries. Presidential primaries vary along a number of dimensions. Chief among these are the rules governing who may participate; the translation of popular votes into delegates; and the area covered by a primary. Voter eligibility is determined by state law. For the Democrats, voter access requirements must also be consistent with national party guidelines. In an open primary system, registered voters may participate in the party primary of their choice. In states with a closed primary, voters may only participate in the primary of their own registration. In practice, the distinction between the states is not as simple as open or closed. There is variation as to how long before primary day a voter must be registered with a political party in order to be eligible for a primary. In some closed primary states, a voter may switch registration on primary day.

The Democratic national party prohibits use of an open primary for delegate selection.³⁴ In a challenge to the national party, Wisconsin Democrats insisted on selecting delegates in an open primary in 1980. The United States Supreme Court, in a 1981 case, *Democratic Party of the United States v. Wisconsin ex rel La Follette*, held that national party rules are superior to state laws. In 1984, Wisconsin used a caucus nomination system, as the state legislature refused to alter the traditionally open Wisconsin primary. In 1988, the national party granted an exception to Wisconsin and Montana.

The translation of popular votes into delegates takes two basic forms. In a winner-take-all system, the candidate with a plurality of the popular vote receives all the delegates at stake. In a proportional system, candidates receive delegates in rough proportion to their popular vote percentage. National Democratic party rules, which were newly strengthened for 1992, require that delegates be divided up proportionally among all candidates receiving at least 15 percent of the vote.

Republican party rules allow states to adopt either a winner-take-all or a proportional system. State Republican parties also have discretion

to determine the threshold, or the percentage of the vote necessary, for a candidate to qualify for delegates.

A third basic facet of the primary election system is whether the primary is a statewide contest or is broken down by congressional districts. Democratic party rules require that 75 percent of a state's delegates be chosen at the congressional district level or lower and that 25 percent of the delegates be elected at-large. Republicans allow this decision to be made by the states.³⁵

Caucus-State Convention System. In many of the smaller states presidential convention delegates are selected in a series of party meetings. This multitiered process begins with precinct caucuses, includes county and congressional district level caucuses, and culminates in a state convention. The delegates chosen at the state party convention and, in some instances, at other levels, attend the national party convention. The state meetings are held approximately six weeks apart, stretching over a few months between February and June. Like the primaries, precinct-level caucuses may be open or closed, although they are almost always closed.

In a party precinct caucus, local voters meet and discuss issues of public policy and candidate preference. Those attending the meeting split up into groups according to their candidate preference. Delegates to the county conventions from each precinct are allocated to the candidate support groups in approximate proportion to that group's percentage of attendees at the precinct caucus. This process of discussion, allocation, and selection of delegates continues at the county, congressional district, and state levels.

One of the impacts frequently attributed to the rise of presidential primaries is the weakening of the role played by state party leaders in the presidential nomination process. But the local caucus-state convention system has by no means remained a tool of the party establishment, either. Presidential candidates capable of mobilizing large numbers of activists are able to dominate precinct caucuses. George McGovern in 1972 demonstrated the permeability of party caucuses to candidate activists. The Iowa caucuses were the cornerstone of Jimmy Carter's 1976 campaign. The successes of Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson in 1988 showed that these low turnout affairs are particularly amenable to ideological candidates.³⁶ In truth, as Everett Carl Ladd has said, "Party caucuses in the modern sense are nothing more than restrictive primaries."³⁷

The Calendar. Each of the states must also determine the date for delegate selection. Primaries and caucuses-state conventions run from

February until June. Democratic party rules allow these events to be held from the first Tuesday in March to the second Tuesday in June. A few states are granted exceptions to this rule, most notably Iowa and New Hampshire. The RNC does not prescribe the delegate selection calendar, leaving the scheduling of primaries and caucuses to the states and state parties.

Traditionally, nomination struggles begin in the snows of New Hampshire in February and finish in June as candidates campaign in California and New Jersey. Since 1976, the Iowa caucus has joined the New Hampshire primary as an early focus of attention. These early states, because of the momentum picked up by the winning candidates, have a disproportionate level of influence in the nominating process. Only if the nomination is undecided will the June California primary have any significance.

After the nomination of Walter Mondale in 1984, many southern Democratic party leaders felt that the nominating process was weighted in favor of northern liberal states. To counter this, many southern and border states brought their nominating event forward, a process called frontloading, to an early Tuesday in March. This Tuesday, commonly called Super Tuesday, was instrumental in the 1992 Clinton nomination, validating the strategy of southern Democratic leaders.

Frontloading continues for 1996. The New York primary will be held on March 7, the California primary on March 26. Super Tuesday is set for March 12. Most of the delegates will be selected by the end of March. This means the crucial primary election season has been compressed into February and March.³⁸

The Media. The role of the media, particularly television, is greater in the nomination process than during the general election campaign.³⁹ The nomination process is more complex, and generally, there is less information available. Also, the nomination process is an intraparty struggle, so voters are unable to rely on partisan cues.

According to Nelson Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, "Television news coverage plays a significant role in determining who wins the nomination. . . ." As we noted in our discussion of "winnowing," the media decide which candidates are worthy of attention. They also emphasize one nomination contest or another. The media also set the public's expectations for the various candidates and interpret victory or defeat. A losing candidate is deemed a winner if he or she exceeds the media's expectations. Likewise, a winner is tarred with defeat if he or she does not meet the standards set by the media.

Presidential candidates, of course, try to influence media coverage.⁴⁰ A favorite tactic is to downplay one's prospects, so that expectations are not heightened. This increases the likelihood of meeting expectations. Candidates choose to emphasize one nomination contest or another.

Professional Delegates. To increase the influence of elected officials at their convention, the Democrats require that each state party add delegate slots, equal to 15 percent of their basic allocation, for party and elected officials.⁴¹ Additional delegate positions, called superdelegates, are allotted by formula to holders of high office, such as senators and representatives. The Republican party has no equivalent to these. However, "a rule change in 1988 allowed all GOP governors and members of Congress access to the floor and permission to be seated with their state delegations—even if they are not delegates."

National Party Conventions

In the summer of a presidential election year each of the major political parties holds a convention to formally choose the party's presidential and vice presidential nominee and to amend and approve the party rules and platform. Presidential nominating conventions originated in the 1830s, and 1840 was the first year that they were held by both major parties (which were then the Democrats and the Whigs).

Before Conventions. Prior to the national convention there was a variety of short-lived presidential nominating methods. Chief among these was the congressional caucus, a meeting of a party's legislative contingent. This method was used for nominating Democratic-Republican candidates from 1800 to 1824, and the Federalists used it from 1800 to 1808. In 1796, congressional party leaders had nominated presidential candidates. The last two Federalist nominations, in 1812 and 1816, were made in closed meetings of leading party officials. The 1824 Democratic-Republican congressional caucus was not effective, as party factions ignored the caucus decision and a total of four party candidates entered the November race. In 1828, there were no congressional caucuses, and presidential candidates were nominated by state legislatures.⁴²

Date and Site Selection. During the presidential election year the party that is not in the White House holds its convention in July and the party of the president assembles in August.⁴³ This tradition is an attempt to afford each party an exclusive month of public and media

attention. The party professionals believe the president's party will generally be more unified than the "out" party. The challenging party, therefore, holds its convention earlier and the president's party later in the summer. This gives the challenging party increased opportunity to unify after a possibly bruising nominating contest. This calendar may sometimes have disastrous results for the incumbent party. In 1968, for example, Democratic presidential candidate Hubert H. Humphrey was nominated at a divided and rancorous convention and was unable to unify the party and get his campaign strongly underway until late September. In 1992, George Bush delayed his campaign when he went fishing during the Democratic National Convention; he waited until his own formal nomination to begin campaigning in earnest.

The location of the national convention is determined by the site selection committee of each party's national committee. Potential cities must have a large modern arena, many first-class hotel rooms, a secure environment, and adequate transportation and dining facilities. Potential city governments, along with local corporate sponsors, compete for the conventions by offering financial packages that include setting up the convention hall, hosting parties, and providing security. Since 1976, national conventions have been financed by the national government, as provided in the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, so that the symbolic significance of a city has become more important than its financial package. Thus, between 1968 and 1992, five of seven Republican conventions were held in the South, though previously none had ever been held there. Recently, the Democrats have frequently found themselves in New York City, in 1976, 1980, and 1992.

In 1996, the conventions will be held later than usual—after the completion of the summer Olympic Games in Atlanta. The Republicans will meet in San Diego, on August 12–16, with an eye toward California's fifty-four electoral votes. The Democrats will assemble two weeks later in Chicago, the first party convention in the "windy city" since the highly divisive Democratic gathering in 1968.⁴⁴

Schedule of Events. Party conventions are four-day affairs, stretching from Monday until Thursday.⁴⁵ Most of the highlights are staged during prime-time hours for maximum television coverage. The three major networks no longer provide gavel to gavel coverage, leaving this task to CNN (Cable News Network) and C-SPAN (Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network).

The highlight of the first night is the keynote address, which is designed to get the convention off to a rousing start. In 1992, the Democrats had three keynoters, "each with a different constituency."⁴⁶ In