

Reforming Presidential Nominations: A National Primary, Rotating State Primaries or Both?

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(With David Redlawsk and Daniel Bowen¹)

2008: Frontloading Fever Continues

As part of their ongoing efforts to address frontloading and other perceived problems, both the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Republican National Committee (RNC) proposed revised schedules and rules for 2008. The major changes for the Democrats were that two new states were allowed to join Iowa and New Hampshire in violating the official February 5 start date. The idea was that these states—Nevada from the West and South Carolina from the South—would enhance participation by more diverse populations (Latinos and African Americans). While the Republican rules called for states to lose half of their delegate vote if they violated the timing rules, the Democrats implemented a “death penalty” requiring any state violating the timing rules to lose all of its delegates. The *New York Times* called these changes the biggest shift in the way Democrats have nominated their presidential candidates in 30 years. Yet in the end these changes did little to lessen frontloading, as 70% of all delegates were chosen by the beginning of March. Two large states (Michigan and Florida) defied both national parties and voted before February 5. The presidential nomination process is increasingly distorted by massive state frontloading and a condensed timeline where nearly three-quarters of the state delegates are selected in just two months (January 3–March 5, 2008).

Events in 2008 (and previous elections) have led to a developing sense among policymakers, elected officials, political scientists and the general public that the system for nominating presidential candidates in the United States is in need of reform (Mayer and Busch 2003; Donovan and Bowler 2004). Some attribute Barack Obama’s surprising win against

national frontrunner Hillary Clinton in the Iowa Democratic caucuses as a continuation of a new pattern where Iowa has become significantly more important in the nomination process. Richard Hull in *Grassroots Rules* (2007) shows that since 2000 (and especially 2004) Iowa has grown in importance in the nomination process, arguing that this has happened in tandem with the rise of campaigning online. Hull finds there are few clear effects of Iowa in the 1980s and 1990s but this changes in 2000 and 2004. The elusive Iowa momentum seems to be connected with the rise of electronic communications, as early successes or losses in Iowa are projected to future voters nationwide. Previous research has made the argument that with a frontloaded presidential nomination schedule, early events become more important. If Iowa is the starting gun to a 400-meter sprint instead of 1600 meter run, the candidates first off the blocks in a sprint are more likely to win the race (Redlawsk, Bowen and Tolbert 2008).

In response, there is a growing concern among political scientists and policy makers that there is no rational reason to grant Iowa and New Hampshire special status. The conventional wisdom is hostile to Iowa and the impact its privileged position has on the selection process (Squire 1989; Polsby and Wildavsky 1991; Winebrenner 1998). These critics contend the Iowa caucuses are a questionable way to start the process. Why should one small and homogeneous state always vote first? One of the most salient problems is simply that turnout in Iowa is astoundingly low. By one estimate only 6.1 percent of the voting eligible population (VEP) showed up to caucus Iowa in 2004, down slightly from 6.8 percent in 2000 (McDonald, 2008a).² The 2008 caucus saw a dramatic change, as McDonald's calculations show a turnout of 16.3 percent of the VEP (McDonald, 2008b.) Even so, this turnout rate is significantly lower than that of early primaries in 2008, including New Hampshire (52.5 percent) and South Carolina (30.4 percent), according to McDonald (2008b). See Redlawsk, Bowen and Tolbert (2008) for more discussion of turnout in the Iowa caucuses. Some critics of caucuses go further highlighting the

time-consuming in-person meetings that present substantial barriers to the right to vote (Wang 2007).

Because turnout is low, the Iowa caucuses are also considered unrepresentative of Iowa's registered voter population, and Iowa is in turn unrepresentative of the nation not just because it is 96 percent white non-Hispanic in 2008, but also because it has no urban areas and has an agricultural economy (Squire 1989; Winebrenner 1998; Hull 2007). The problem with low turnout is the distinct possibility that those who do turn out will be highly unrepresentative of the larger population, and since Iowa is the first nominating event, its impact is much greater than later state primaries and caucuses. Scholars examining earlier competitive Iowa caucuses have found that participants are not typical of the larger populations they may be presumed to act for; "They are better educated, older and have higher incomes" (Stone, Abramowitz and Rapoport 1989, pg 44). They are also more committed to and active in their party than the average citizen (Stone, Abramowitz and Rapoport 1989; See Geer 1988; Norrander 1989). However, some research suggests participation in the relatively higher turnout 2008 caucuses may not have been biased in terms of partisanship and socio-economic factors, as a large percent were first time participants (Redlawsk, Bowen and Tolbert 2008). Others argue Iowa is in fact a highly representative state in terms of the economy, even if demographically it is not (Squire and Lewis-Beck 2009).

Regardless of the validity of these criticisms, a system in which one state stands at front of the line (votes first) on its face may violate procedural fairness. If one is not in favor of Iowa voting first, or the caucuses in general, there is disagreement on the type of reform. It may be unrealistic to discuss Iowa and New Hampshire not holding the first caucus and primary, respectively, but in this paper we briefly explore the history of political reforms that resulted in the current nominating process. We discuss the goals for reform and briefly summarize some of

the most salient reform proposals. We then analyze unique national and state public opinion data drawn from Iowa caucus voters, registered voters nationally, and in Pennsylvania (a late voting state) to explore what factors shape mass support for reforming American's method of selecting presidential candidates. We focus on state-based electoral losers and winners in understanding support for reform of the nomination process. The paper concludes by recommending a reform proposal grounded in the empirical analysis: rotating state primaries and caucuses in small population states followed by a national primary.

Lessons Learned from Past Presidential Nomination Reform

Institutionally, nominating U.S. presidential candidates was never rationally designed.

In the twentieth century, “the American presidency became the single most powerful political institution in the United States” (Donovan and Bowler 2004, 102) as it is the only elected office to represent a national constituency. Surprisingly, the framers of the Constitution were silent on the issue of presidential nominations, for they did not see the rise of political parties. Once parties developed and began nominating candidates, processes were needed to determine the nominees. The result was a hodgepodge of rules and processes guided largely by the self-interest of individual state legislatures, secretary of states, and state parties who determine the timing of caucuses or primary elections and whether independents can participate in these party events (closed versus open primaries). Institutionally, nominating U.S. presidential candidates was never rationally designed. Instead a number of reform efforts were made; each determined to make the nomination process more democratic. By 2008 the system that existed had been largely structured by three historical reform movements that took place over nearly 200 years.

The presidential candidacy of Andrew Jackson in 1824 and his election in 1828 marked the first mass political movement and popular-vote contest in the United States. The first national

convention was held in 1832 to choose a new running mate for Jackson, nominating Martin Van Buren for vice president and endorsing the re-election of Jackson. By 1832 the two-major-party system was in place, and the mass public participated indirectly in nominations through national conventions that chose party candidates for president. The Progressive Era (1896–1920) marked a second reform movement ushering in a wave of anti-corruption laws and democratizing electoral procedures including the secret (Australian) ballot, direct election of U.S. senators, direct democracy (initiative, referendum, and recall), and women’s suffrage (Tolbert 2003). Hoping to create a more democratic nominating system, reformers in the early twentieth century pressed states to hold presidential primaries. By 1916 20 states had adopted primaries allowing all members of a party to vote directly for their nominees, taking control away from the political-party bosses and elites and giving it to rank-and-file members (Donovan and Bowler 2004).

Iowa and New Hampshire draw massive attention from presidential candidates and the media every four years because they hold the first caucus and primary election, respectively, and are perceived to provide needed momentum. But it was not always that way. The third major reform of the nomination process was the result of both new state laws and rule changes by the national parties in the 1970s. These rules changed how delegates to the nominating conventions were selected, for the most part opening up the process even further. After 1972, most delegates were elected directly by voters in primary elections or caucuses rather than being hand picked by state party leaders and elected officials. A dramatic increase in state primaries resulted, from 16 choosing 38% of the delegates in 1968 to 23 choosing over 60% in 1972 to 30 state primaries choosing 72.6% in 1976. In 2008, 37 states plus the District of Columbia (and for the Democrats Guam and Puerto Rico) held some form of primary, while the remaining states used caucuses and conventions to select their delegates, or some combination of both (e.g., Texas).

As direct primaries proliferated, participation in presidential nominating events increased

significantly. Estimated turnout grew from 12 million in 1968 to 22 million in 1972 to over 35 million in 1988 (Altschuler 2008). These turnout numbers were shattered by 2008 nominating contests in which over 55 million votes were cast in primary elections alone (not counting caucuses).³ The Democrats set turnout records in 23 states while the Republicans set records in 10 states. Turnout was higher in most states in 2008 than in 2004 (McDonald 2008).

The 1970s also mark the era when Iowa became important in the process, due largely to decisions by the state parties and the state legislature (Squire 1989). In 1972 Iowa Democrats moved their caucus to late January to accommodate rules changes that required at least 30 days between official party events in order to foster participation. The end of January was the last day the precinct caucuses could be held given the new 30-day rule because electing delegates in Iowa requires four steps—caucuses, county conventions, district conventions, and finally the state convention. The rules were not adopted so that Iowa could be the first nominating event, ahead of even the New Hampshire primary, but that is exactly what happened in 1972 (Squire 1989, 2). While the McGovern campaign noted the new potential of Iowa, it was Jimmy Carter's successful drive to be the 1976 Democratic nominee that made the Iowa caucuses important. Carter emerged as the winner of the Iowa Democratic caucuses (defying expectations) and went on to win the White House, making the Iowa caucuses significant to campaigns and media. Over the years caucuses have gained in importance in selecting candidates (Hull 2007), including Obama's successful nomination in 2008.

As it became clearer that early states received the most candidate and media attention, more states decided to hold nominating events earlier rather than later. One result was the development of Super Tuesday, a single date when a large number of states hold nominating events (Norrande 1992). A group of southern states decided in 1988 to create a regional primary, and Super Tuesday was born. By 2008 it had reached a zenith, approaching a national

primary with primaries or caucuses in 23 states on the first officially sanctioned primary date, February 5. This dramatically frontloaded 2008 nominating schedule gave many states—including large ones like California, Florida, New York, and Illinois—an unprecedented opportunity to vote in the early weeks of the primary season. Given the competitive nature of the nominations in 2008, Super Tuesday gave much of the nation a chance to have a meaningful voice in the process that had not been possible before.

Without constitutional guidance or the wisdom of the founding fathers the presidential nominating has evolved over nearly 200 years expanding participation through national party conventions, direct primary elections, and Super Tuesday, while simultaneously enhancing the influence of a few key states with the earliest nominating events. It is a hybrid process that combines elements of a national primary (Super Tuesday) with sequential state primaries and caucuses that is increasingly distorted by state frontloading (Atkeson and Maestas 2009). This largely unregulated nomination process is the result of unintended consequences from reforms layered upon one another over time (Tolbert, Bowen and Redlawsk 2009).

Reform Goals

Reform of the presidential nominating process has been discussed in some form or another since the process began. Yet systematic empirical analysis has often been missing from these discussions. A common theme is that “something” must be done to restore order and fairness in state primary elections and caucuses. Scholars have discussed reform in terms of its ability to promote four goals: candidate quality, voter information, participation, and voter equality. A presidential nomination system should elect *quality candidates*, not simply those who are the most well known or the best financed. A sequential election system can allow voters in early nominating events to create *information* for voters in later states. A nomination system should encourage voter *participation* so that the electorate is representative of the eligible voter

population. Finally, a nomination system should strive for *equality* among the states in terms of allowing all Americans to cast a meaningful vote (Tolbert, Bowen and Redlawsk 2009).

Policy Options

A major criticism of the current presidential nomination schedule is that it gives undue weight to the few states with early primaries or caucuses, as those states often build momentum for leading candidates while ruling out trailing candidates long before the rest of the country has a chance to vote (Winebrenner 1998). Residents in many states voting after Super Tuesday are denied a meaningful vote. In 2008 the Republican nomination was decided soon after Super Tuesday, leaving Republicans voting in later states no meaningful choice, while Democrats were limited to either Obama or Clinton.

While a large number of proposals have been advanced for reforming the presidential nomination process (Donovan and Bowler 2004), including regional primaries (Norrande 1992)⁴ in which groups of states from different regions vote together, the most salient proposals involve (1) rotating which states vote first, starting with the least populous states and (2) a national primary. The American plan, or graduated random presidential primary system, begins with contests in small population states where candidates do not need extensive financial resources to compete (see www.Fairvote.org). An unknown candidate's surprise successes in the early rounds may attract money from many small contributors for the campaign to spend in later rounds of primaries. Ten election dates would be scheduled, spaced two weeks apart, during which *randomly* selected states would hold their primaries. Early contests would be held in small states, while larger states would have to wait until later. Every four years the order in which the states vote would change, potentially giving every American a chance for a meaningful vote in selecting presidential candidates. Proponents argue the structure would be non-biased in that the schedule would favor no particular region or state, and yet would bring order to the process. The

claim is also made that the process would increase the likelihood that voters in all states would have an effective voice in the selection of the nominees as rotating states would extend the competitiveness of the nominating process for a longer period of time. Most importantly, unlike a national primary, the process preserves grassroots politics in small states early in the season.

Opponents argue changing the sequence every four years might be confusing and complicating and that large-population states would be prevented from having a real voice in the outcome as they must vote in later rounds (Altschuler 2008). In addition, a major change to the existing primary schedule would be the elimination of the tradition of Super Tuesday. Such a reform might face resistance from small states that currently have privileged positions, but also large states who would be required to vote in later rounds.

Another popular reform option is a single national primary where all states would vote on the same day, similar to simultaneous elections for midterm and presidential elections. Such a process is used in most European nations. Theodore Roosevelt offered to use a national primary in the 1912 Republican nomination but incumbent president William Howard Taft declined (Altschuler 2008). Despite many years of polls indicating overwhelming support for a national primary, it has never been seriously considered by Congress or the parties. Proponents argue a national primary would eliminate many of the serious flaws of the current system, including frontloading and would increase turnout and representation (Altschuler 2008). There is some evidence of higher turnout with the onset of Super Tuesday. A national primary would be simple and make all votes equally meaningful. Opponents argue a national primary would restrict the presidential nomination to candidates who were already well known or well financed (Mayer and Busch 2003). It would also eliminate the possibility of dark horse candidates building momentum on early successes in small states and could increase the influence of money needed to purchase mass media. Candidates with the most name recognition and resources early on would likely

win. It could also weaken state political parties who use caucuses and primaries for party-building activities (Stone, Atkeson, and Rapoport 1992). Simulating outcomes from the 2004 nomination process, economists have found both a national primary or rotating which states vote first would produce different party nominees, so we know these rules matter (Knight and Schiff 2008).

Strategic Voters and Support for Reform

How might we expect Americans to respond to proposals for reforming presidential nominations? While partisanship is one of the strongest predictors of vote choice in candidate elections it is unlikely to explain support for reforming America's presidential nomination process. Rather, nominations are focused on a series of sequential state elections, and we suspect state context should matter more in shaping mass evaluations. Perceptions of living in a state that is either a loser or winner may provide a rich account of why citizens support or oppose various proposals to change the primary schedule.

Electoral losers are often defined in the literature as out-of-power politicians, but here we define *citizens* who vote late in the nomination process or are from small states as potential losers. As with recent cross-national research examining the relationship between winners and losers and their attitudes toward political institutions at the elite level (Anderson et al. 2005; Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2002; 2006), we are interested in whether winners and losers at the mass level are more or less likely to support changing institutions. Recent studies drawing on national opinion data find that citizens who are partisan losers under a current set of institutional rules are more likely to support overhauling those procedures (Anderson et al. 2005; Anderson and LoTempio 2002; Bowler and Donovan 2007). Following Tolbert, Smith, and Green (2009), we examine losers at the state level.

We begin by assuming that individuals base their attitudes about potential reforms in rational self-interest. In other words, individuals prefer reforms that maximize their own power in determining the major party nominees. Voter self-interest during the primary process may be dominated by *state* self-interest. Voters residing in states with “influence,” as determined by the relative timing of the primary compared to other states, proportion of total party delegates to be assigned to a state (proxied by the population size of the state), and the importance of the state to the party’s ability to win in the general election, we predict, should be less likely to support changing the process than those residing in states with little influence. Individual perceptions of the importance of their state, separate from actual importance, may also drive attitudes about election reform.

There are two, potentially contradictory, intervening factors that reduce the role of self-interest on support for presidential nomination process reforms: perceptions of fairness and support for political tradition. We suggest Americans do care about the perceived fairness of a system, particularly when it comes to the “one person, one vote” democratic ideal (Mansbridge 1986). Even if one state benefits an extraordinary amount from existing rules (for example, in the current system Iowa and New Hampshire), not all respondents from that state would necessarily support such a system since the system may be perceived as being unfair to voters from other states. We expect fairness to play a moderating role on state self-interest.

Tradition also certainly plays a role, with some respondents supporting status quo processes, even when doing so reduces their state’s role in determining nominees vis-à-vis other states. Tradition may manifest itself by reducing support for changing the electoral system that rejects traditional roles certain states play, particularly the role of Iowa and New Hampshire as first-in-the-nation nominating contests.

Data

To answer the question of who supports reforming the presidential nomination process, we begin by drawing on national opinion data, 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Panel (CCAP), conducted by Polimetrix.⁵ The CCAP is a collaborative effort that brings together over 60 political scientists from 25 institutions to produce a six wave panel study conducted on the internet during the 2008 Presidential campaign. The survey sampled more than 18,000 respondents in six panel waves (December 2007, January, March, September, October and post-election in November 2008) elections with an extensive battery of questions. A matched sample technique is used to weight the sample so it is representative of the population. Questions on support for a national primary ran on the October wave of the survey administered to roughly 1000 respondents. Respondents were asked “There are proposals to change the presidential nomination process. One would rotate states so a different state goes first each time. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose such a plan?”

We also draw on three University of Iowa Hawkeye Polls conducted during the 2008 nominations containing identical survey-question wording. Each random-digit-dialed telephone survey has a different sample population providing snapshots of attitudes about political reform at different times in the nomination process. The first is a survey of 533 Iowa caucus attendees conducted immediately after the Iowa caucuses from January 5–10, 2008. The second is a national survey conducted pre and post February 5 (Super Tuesday); it included responses from voters in 40 states (respondents from states that had already voted were omitted, as were Alaska and Hawaii) and yielded a sample of 1,285 registered voters. The final survey of registered Pennsylvania Democrats was conducted just before the Pennsylvania primary (April 15–20, 2008). The analysis draws largely on the national survey, using the Iowa and Pennsylvania data only for contextual leverage.⁶

Respondents in the national February 5 and Pennsylvania surveys were asked about support for a national primary: “Other have proposed a national primary, similar to Super Tuesday, where every state would hold their caucuses or primaries on the same day. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose such a plan?” Respondents in the three Hawkeye surveys were asked if they supported rotating the order of primaries: “There are proposals to change the presidential nomination process. One would rotate states so a different state goes first each time. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose such a plan?”⁷ The next question specifically prompted respondents about the role of Iowa and New Hampshire: “How about if such a plan eliminated Iowa and New Hampshire’s traditional first in the nation status?” Taken together, these opinion data provide a unique window into presidential nomination reform across very different states, and at different times of the nominating process.

Findings

The 2008 CCAP survey data indicates that nationwide 68.5% of Americans favors a national primary. The national Hawkeye poll reveals almost the same level of support with 73% of Americans favoring a national primary. These numbers parallel those from earlier surveys (Altschuler 2008). Table 1 displays support for a national primary among the three sample populations using the Hawkeye poll data: Iowans, national sample, and Pennsylvania Democrats. Paralleling the CCAP data, almost three quarters of Americans support a national primary and 70% support a reform to rotate the primary order (see column 2). Reforming the presidential nomination process appears to have wide support across the United States using two different 2008 surveys; one conducted during the general election and one during the presidential nomination.

There is some evidence that Americans have come to view the role of Iowa and New Hampshire as at least partly legitimate, given the drop in support for rotating primary order when

Iowa and New Hampshire lose their first-in-the-nation primary and caucus. Over 8% fewer respondents nationally support rotating state primaries if Iowa and New Hampshire lose their traditional position. However, a majority of Americans support reform, even if Iowa and New Hampshire don't go first (see Table 1, column 2).

It is also immediately clear that Iowans recognize their own self-interest as shown in Table 1, column 1. Support for rotating the primary order is approximately 50 percentage points lower among Iowans than voters nationally. Iowans clearly do not want to rotate primary order (only 26% favored this reform) compared to 72% nationally and 67% of Pennsylvania-registered Democratic voters. While a question on support for a national primary was unfortunately not asked of Iowa voters, close to three-quarters of respondents nationally and from Pennsylvania support a national primary. Iowa caucus goers know that their unique position is of value to the state, and their political attitudes appear to be shaped by state self-interest. These survey data suggest opinions about presidential nomination reform are colored by individual self-interest about one's state.

How do individuals from large and small population states view reform of the presidential nomination process? Using the 2008 CCAP survey data and dividing the states into small (3-10 electoral college votes), median (11-12 electoral college votes) and large population states (21-55 electoral college votes), we see the highest support for reform among small population states. This may be expected; if you don't vote early in the process and you live in a small state, chances are no presidential candidates will visit your state. Among respondents from small population states, support for a national primary is 73%. This drops to 65% for those living in medium size states and 63% in large states.

We see a related pattern with the national Hawkeye poll data. The percentage of respondents either strongly favoring or favoring the reforms, split into small and large states, is

presented in Figure 1.⁸ There is little difference between support for rotating primary order among respondents from small states and large states. Support for rotating primary order drops among both small states and large states when the question specifically mentions that Iowa and New Hampshire will lose their first-in-the-nation status, although the drop is greater for voters in large states. In fact, respondents from small states are actually *more* likely to favor rotation when Iowa and New Hampshire lose their position than are respondents from large states. This suggests small-state respondents might prefer Iowa and New Hampshire not go first.

There is little difference between respondents from small states and those from large states support for a national primary. This result, however, appears to mask the true relationship between population size and support for a national primary. The last two columns of Figure 1 show support for a national primary by small and large states *and* by whether the state's election was held on or after Super Tuesday. The effect of population size is conditional on timing. Small Super Tuesday states, clearly "losers" since they are easily overshadowed by large Super Tuesday states, want reform. Three-quarters of respondents from small Super Tuesday states express support for it. Respondents from large Super Tuesday states, on the other hand, are over 5% less likely to support a national primary (only 69% favor it). The inverse of this relationship can be found among respondents from states holding their nomination contests after Super Tuesday: those from large states have over a 4% greater probability of supporting a national primary than those from small states.

Beyond objective measures, we are interested in support for a national primary and rotating state primaries by individual *perceptions* of their state's influence in choosing presidential nominees. Respondents in both the CCAP and national Hawkeye poll were asked: "I'd like to ask you to think about the role that *your* state plays in determining who the presidential candidates will be." In the CCAP survey, among those who thinks their state is "not

very important” in selecting presidential nominees, 74% support a national primary. Support drops to 70% among those who think their state is “somewhat important” and drops further to only 64% among those who think their state is “very important” in the current process. Thus winners under the current system have a strategic incentive to protect the status quo, while losers prefer to change the rules.

Using the national Hawkeye poll data we see a similar pattern (see Figure 2). Eighty of respondents who think their state is “not important” in the nomination process support rotating which states go first in the nomination process. This compares to 70% among those who think their state is “somewhat important” in the process (a 10% drop) and only 66% who want reform if they think their state is “very important” in the process.

Yet support for a national primary using the Hawkeye poll data indicates assessments of state influence make no difference in support for the reform. Almost identical percentages (73%) of respondents from states that think their state is not important, somewhat important, and very important in the process favor a national primary. We believe this result is capturing perceptions of fairness. A national primary would certainly decrease the role of some states that are privileged under the current system, but may do so in a way that is perceived as fair, compared to rotation of primaries.

These data suggest citizens can reason rationally not only about their state self-interest, but about election reform. Notable is that a majority of American support a national primary or rotating state primaries regardless of their perceptions of state influence. To a large extent support for a national primary and rotating state primaries appears interchangeable. The parallel findings between the two national surveys conducted six months apart and using a different interview mode (internet versus telephone) is notable.

Multivariate Analysis

Descriptive statistics are suggestive of relationship, but do these results remain when other demographic and attitudinal factors are taken into account and when state population and state sequence is analyzed together? To answer this question we turn to logistic regression analysis of support for a national primary reported (DV coded 1 = yes, 0 = no national primary) using the CCAP, which includes respondents from all 50 states and is more generalizable than the Hawkeye poll data (which only sampled respondents voting on Super Tuesday or later and included 40 states). Since both individual-level and state-level effects are considered, we cluster the model coefficients' standard errors by state to account for spatial autocorrelation. To test the hypotheses presented earlier, three primary explanatory variables are used. To measure the impact of population size we use the log of the respondents' state population.⁹ Sequence is measured with a dichotomous variable, where respondents are coded 1 if they are from Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico or South Carolina or 0 if they vote on February 5th or later. Perceptions of the importance of the respondent's state is measured by the variable *state winner*, which is coded 1 if the respondent thought his or her state was very or somewhat important in the nomination process and 0 if not important. Several political (binary variables for Republican and Democratic partisans with independents as the reference category) and demographic variables (age, income, education, gender and race) are included in the models as control variables.

In Table 2 we see two simple logistic regression models predicting support for a national primary in October of 2008. Holding other factors constant, respondents from large population states are actually more likely to favor a national primary (see column 1), even if the descriptive data (presented above) suggests individuals from small population states may slightly prefer reform. This make sense, as presumably they would have more influence than under the current system where small population states such as Iowa and New Hampshire [joined by New Mexico

and South Carolina] have disproportionate influence. Similarly, older respondents favor a national primary and those who are white non-Hispanic. Perceptions of state influence are not statistically significant. In column 2 this variable is omitted and instead a binary variable for residents of early nominating event state is included. Individuals from early nominating event states are significantly less likely to favor a national primary, as expected. Again, older respondents and non-minorities favor reform.

From the multivariate analysis two conclusions are apparent. Individuals who vote early in the current process oppose reform and those from states voting later favor reform. Residents from large population states may be favorably disposed towards a national primary. We use this analysis to craft a policy recommendation.

Policy Recommendations

We find empirical evidence that large proportions of Americans favor reforming the presidential nomination process; the overall high levels of support for change is noteworthy. Support for changing the presidential nomination process remains high, even when question-wording experiments are used to frame the reform in terms of risk (Karp and Tolbert 2009; c.f. Bowler and Donovan 2007). There is, however, significant variation in support for reform based on an individual's state context and whether the state wins or loses in the current process. Nationally, roughly the same proportion of respondents favor rotating state primaries versus a national primary. However, there are clear advantages to a sequential process (at least in part) that allows retail or grassroots campaigning in small population states so candidates with less financial resources can compete and potentially gain momentum from early victories (Hull 2007). A national primary is viewed as the most "fair" as every state votes at the same time. The empirical data suggest individuals from large population states may favor a national primary over those from smaller population states, and we know opposition to a national primary is the

strongest among individuals from states with early nominating events. How can both small and large population states, and states voting early and late in the process win?

A potential reform is to combine rotating state primaries and caucuses in small or median size population states, followed by a national primary. This reform builds on the current system, as 23 states voted on Super Tuesday in the 2008 nomination cycle. Super Tuesday functions as a partial national primary in the current nomination schedule. The difference would be that no primaries or caucuses could be held after Super Tuesday or after the national primary [a national primary could be held later than February 5th, for example]. This would mean no citizens could be denied a meaningful vote by participating in a primary or caucus after the party nominees have been effectively determined. Small or median population states wishing to hold primaries or caucuses early would need to do so before Super Tuesday/national primary. A system of random rotation would be used to select the order that small or medium size states would hold their primaries and caucuses before Super Tuesday. This number of early voting states would be limited to only those from small states (3-10 delegates) and a handful of medium size states. The number of delegates allocated by these early nominating events would not be sufficient to determine the party candidates; determination of party nominees would not be made until after the national primary (ala Super Tuesday). Such a system could be implemented retaining Iowa and New Hampshire's privileged position, or these two states could be treated like any other small population state and be allowed to hold their nominating event in the early primary window, but not be the first events. This combination of reforms may protect the best of both systems—a sequential voting system with a simultaneous national election, a system where retail politics rules, to one driven by the mass media. Decisions about whether to hold open or closed primaries, or use primaries versus caucuses would be left to the states. This reform

recommendation is consistent with public opinion on the process and should gain public approval.

Conclusion

Unlike much of the existing literature on this topic, this paper provides empirical evidence that winning and losing under different reform proposals shapes public opinion about reform of presidential nominations. These opinion data can be best understood by viewing voters as rational decision makers who seek to influence the presidential nomination. Their influence is tied to the role their state plays in the process, thus defining their interest by the interest of their state. Population size, sequences of primaries and caucuses relative to other states, and individual perceptions of state importance play a role in determining support for reforms of the presidential nomination process. The data show Americans are willing to adopt a different nomination process. Consistent with the public opinion data, we propose a reform that begins by rotating state primaries and caucuses in small and medium size population states followed by a national primary. No state primaries or caucuses could be held after the national primary. The national parties could implement this reform with or without Congressional approval.

Table 1. Support for a National Primary or Rotating State Primaries: Comparing Iowa, National Sample, and Pennsylvania (Percents, 2008 Hawkeye Polls)

	Iowa (Early Voting State)		National (Vote on or After Super Tuesday)		Diff. between National and Iowa		Pennsylvania (Late Voting State)	
National Primary								
Strongly Agree	n.a.		39.31	73.42	n.a.		35.96	71.35
Agree	n.a.		34.11		n.a.		35.39	
Disagree	n.a.		19.57	26.58	n.a.		17.42	28.66
Strongly Disagree	n.a.		7.01		n.a.		11.24	
			(N = 1,155)				(N = 178)	
Rotate Primary State Order								
Strongly Agree	3.59	25.95	22.12	71.64	18.53	+45.68	18.63	67.08
Agree	22.36		49.51		27.15		48.45	
Disagree	42.41	74.05	21.44	28.36	-20.97	-45.7	21.74	32.92
Strongly Disagree	31.65		6.92		-24.73		11.18	
	(N = 474)		(N = 1,026)				(N = 161)	
Rotate Order (No IA or NH first)								
Strongly Agree	1.69	15.82	15.76	63.56	14.07	+47.73	15.03	61.44
Agree	14.14		47.8		33.66		46.41	
Disagree	50.63	84.18	29.68	36.44	-20.95	-47.73	29.41	38.56
Strongly Disagree	33.54		6.76		-26.78		9.15	
	(N=474)		(N=977)				(N=153)	

Figure 1. Support for a National Primary or Rotating State Primaries by State Population Size and Super Tuesday Voting State or Later (Percents, 2008 National Hawkeye Poll)

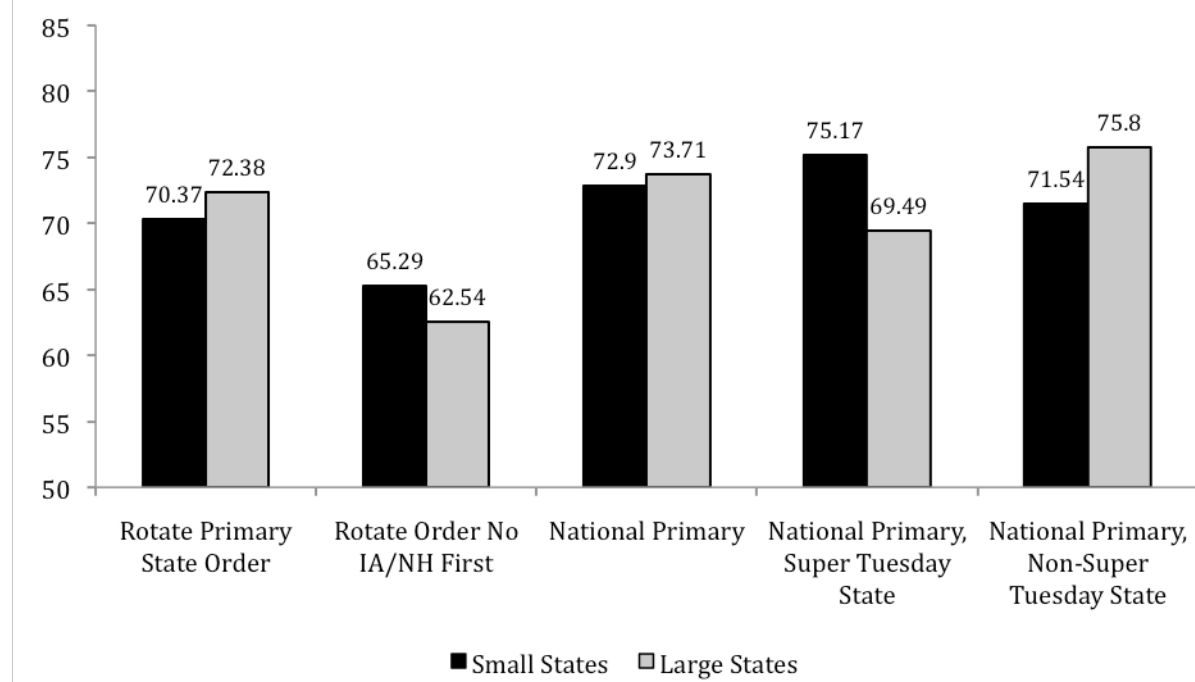


Figure 2. Support for a National Primary or Rotating State Primaries by Individual Perceptions of State Influence in Selecting Candidates—“My State is . . .” (Percents, 2008 National Hawkeye Poll)

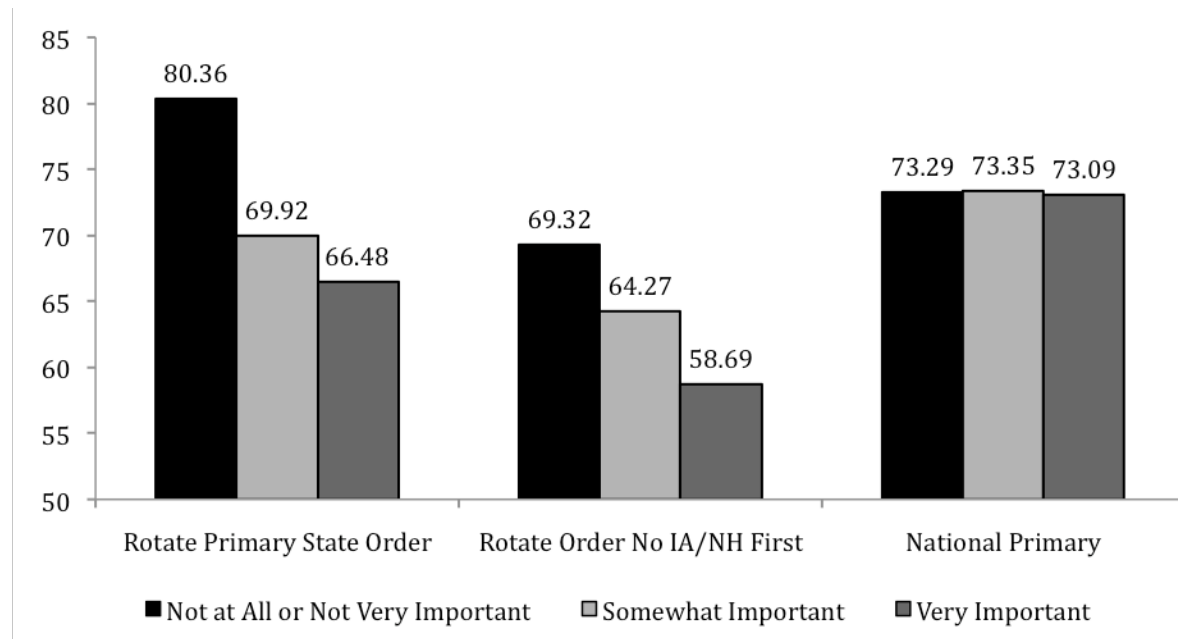


Table 2: Support for a National Primary in 2008 (October, CCAP Survey)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	b/se	p	b/se	p
State Population (log)	.1807 (.102)	.078	.1213 (.102)	.235
Perceive State has Influence	-.0583 (.081)	.470		
Resides in a State with Nominating Event before Feb 5 th (IA, NH, NM, SC)			-.6186 (.329)	.060
Democrat	.0543 (.189)	.774	.0090 (.193)	.963
Republican	-.1118 (.186)	.548	-.1244 (.185)	.502
Age	.0126 (.005)	.018	.0124 (.005)	.016
Education	-.0196 (.079)	.805	-.0130 (.080)	.871
Income	.0060 (.028)	.832	.0054 (.028)	.850
Female	.0207 (.170)	.903	.0042 (.168)	.980
White Non-Hispanic	.7957 (.214)	.000	.7913 (.219)	.000
Constant	-3.6777 (1.741)	.035	-2.883 (1.820)	.113
N	959		961	
Log Likelihood	-638.5355		-639.0206	

The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent favors a national primary and 0 if otherwise. Unstandardized logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses and probabilities based on two-tailed tests. Since both individual and state level effects are considered, we cluster the model coefficients' standard errors by state to account for spatial autocorrelation. *Source*: 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Panel (CCAP).

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¹ Parts of this paper were adapted from Tolbert, Caroline, David Redlawsk, and Daniel Bowen. 2009. "Reforming Presidential Primaries: Rotating State Primaries or a National Primary?" appearing in *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42 (1): 71-79. This paper, however, did not include analysis of the 2008 Cooperative Comparative Analysis Panel (CCAP), which is the basis for the empirical analysis presented here. Nor did it include policy recommendations.

² McDonald and Popkin (2001) argue that the correct base for calculation of voter turnout is not the typical "voting age population" or even registered voters, instead it is an estimate of those who are potentially eligible voters, whether registered or not. This voting eligible population essentially takes the census estimates of the voting age population and adjusts for resident aliens and others who are barred from voting (convicted felons, in a number of states.)

³ The Democrats generally do not report voter turnout in their caucuses, and what numbers they do produce cannot be independently verified. This occurs because the results the Democrats report from caucuses are not votes, but shares of delegates. The Republicans, on the other hand, do report actual votes in caucus, and therefore turnout numbers as well, but as party-run events again there is no independent verification of the results.

⁴ Regional primaries would give a large advantage to candidates popular in whatever region went first.

⁵ This sample is constructed using a technique called sample matching. The researchers create a list of all U.S. consumers to generate a set of demographic characteristics that should be mirrored in the survey sample. Then, using a matching algorithm, the researchers select respondents who most closely resemble the consumer data from a pool of opt-in participants. The sample is stratified to ensure large samples within states. More information regarding sample matching is available at http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/material/sample_matching.pdf. The models are estimated using Polimetrix survey weights. Using this same technique, the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) produced more precise estimates than more conventional probability designs such as random digit dialed (RDD) phone surveys (Vavreck and Rivers 2008).

⁶ Since the sample populations differ, comparisons between the surveys can only be suggestive of trends and not conclusive proof of causal arguments.

⁷ This question was worded slightly differently in the Iowa post-caucus survey, but the question is substantively the same. Iowa respondents were asked: “Some people have proposed a plan that would rotate the states going first in the presidential nomination process. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose such a plan?”

⁸ The threshold between small and large states is a population of six million, approximately the mean population of the 40 states included in the survey; 55% of survey respondents reside in states thus categorized as small.

⁹ Population size is logged for theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, population size will likely have a diminishing effect on support for reform, with the effect of a unit change in population on the probability of supporting reform decreasing as size gets larger. This is born out in the data: descriptive analysis show the strongest relationship between aggregate levels of support for reform and state population when logged population is used.