

Presidential Nomination Process in the United States of America

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Primary elections and caucuses are the political mechanisms that select the nominees for the Executive Office of the President of the United States. Both the Democratic and Republican Parties primarily use the primary system, but individual states still choose to use the caucus system (Berggren, 2007; Anderson & Cost, 2013). These early elections and caucuses are a complex system that forces candidates to have extended and lengthy campaigns, which, when paired with other factors, results in an inefficient nomination process. The nomination process in the United States is elitist and problematic, and it should be revised to allow for more members of each respective party to have an opportunity to run a campaign, and so that it is fairer across the board.

Party Nomination Processes

Reforms that took place during the 1960s and through the 1970s established the modern practices for the nomination process of the Republican Party (Anderson & Cost, 2013). Even though there have been serious reforms to the Republican nomination process, there is still no uniform national standard for the nomination system (Berggren, 2009). Instead, according to Berggren (2009), the Republican Party provides great flexibility to the states regarding the nomination process and how states award their allotted delegates. Officially the party has adopted a “primary-centered nomination process” (Berggren, 2009), but there are still caucuses depending on the state (Berggren, 2009).

As stated, the Republican Party has adopted a “primary-centered nomination process” (Berggren, 2009), and ergo a majority of the states use this system. Primary elections precede the General Election and begin in January, running through June of the election year (U.S. General

Services Administration's Technology Transformation Service [USGSATTS], 2019). The primary election is a secret-ballot election and can either be an open semi-open, semi-closed, or closed primary (Anderson & Cost, 2013). The other, less common form of nomination, is the caucus. In this system, party members will gather in a public space, and people will form groups based upon whom they wish to nominate, and the number of people per group dictates delegate allocation (USGATTS, 2019). Caucuses can also be open, semi-open, semi-closed, or closed (Anderson & Cost, 2013).

At the end of all the primaries and caucuses, the Republican Party will host the Republican National Convention (RNC) sometime between July and early September (USGATTS, 2019). At the RNC, the Republican Party will formalize what was determined by the primaries and caucuses (USGATTS, 2019). Delegates, which are party-members chosen to represent the results of the primaries and caucuses, will cast their votes, formalizing the results of the primary elections (USGATTS, 2019). After this convention, the official nominee for the party candidate commences their campaign for the presidency (USGATTS, 2019).

The nomination process for the Democratic Party is nearly identical to the Republican Party minus a few aspects. The identical nature of the nomination process is primarily due to the Republican Party basing its reformed nominations process off of the reforms that the Democratic Party underwent in 1968 (Berggren, 2009). Firstly, the Democratic Party, unlike the Republican Party, has adopted a more uniform nomination process (Berggren, 2009). The Democratic Party has a proportional representation system, while the Republican Party generally uses a winner-take-all system (Berggren, 2009). The Democratic Party also uses superdelegates as well as unpledged delegates (USGATTS, 2019). These superdelegates and unpledged delegates can

vote regardless of the results of the primary votes (USGATTS 2019). Also, unlike the Republican Party, the Democratic Party requires a universal threshold system for delegate allocation (Berggren, 2009). After the primaries and caucuses are over, the Democratic Party, just as the Republican Party, holds the Democratic National Convention sometime between early July and September, formalizing the results of the primary elections. Beyond these differences, the timeline, as well as primaries and caucuses themselves, do not vary too much between the Republican and Democratic parties.

Evaluation of the Nomination Process

Overall, the nomination process is neither an efficient or an easy process. The process takes up an exorbitant amount of time, making it very hard for potential poorer candidates or even potential candidates currently holding office to have a chance at securing the nomination (Anderson & Cost, 2013). Historically the Secretary of State was an exemplary candidate for the presidency; in the twenty-first century, it would be near impossible for the Secretary of State to fulfill his or her duties while also running a constant year-long campaign (Anderson & Cost, 2013). Money is also a massive issue, as realistically, it is only easy for an extremely wealthy individual to attempt to secure the nomination, leaving millions of Americans without any chance to get involved. The average cost of a primary campaign is in the upper millions, meaning that a complex system of Political Actions Committees (PACs), Super PACs, independent groups, and personal contributions must be raised and coordinated to fund the campaign (Narayanswamy, Cameron, & Gold, 2019). This complex process leaves millions of Americans without a chance at the nomination and excludes candidates with years of expertise and experience.

Another issue with the modern nomination process is the lack of uniformity across all aspects of the process. Not only does the nomination process differ between the two major parties, but there are also differences within the parties themselves. This lack of uniformity has led to various issues, the main of which is the differences between attendance in the two different methods of the nomination. Attendance is already meager for primary elections, and the differences between primaries and caucuses make this worse (Jewitt, 2014). While primaries typically have a decent turnout, turnout for caucuses is abysmal (Jewitt, 2014). In the 2008 primary elections, 27.7% of Republican party-members and 41% of Democratic party-members participated in their primary elections (Jewitt, 2014). Meanwhile, caucuses that occurred during the same time as these primary elections had a turnout of 3.7% for the Republican Party, and 12% for the Democratic Party (Jewitt, 2014). This low attendance means that potential nominees do not have to sway even a large portion of their parties electorate; they only have to sway a small selection of the voters. The small electorate pool is especially bad for the Republican Party, which generally employs the winner-take-all system (Berggren, 2009). This low attendance and delegate allocation system means that nominees may not correctly represent the people of the party they are nominated to represent.

The next issue with the current nomination process is only an issue if one considers the political party to be the most important aspect of the American government. Formerly, in the pre-1968 nomination process, the selection of candidates was made almost entirely behind closed doors (Anderson & Cost, 2013). Since the reforms of 1968, the nomination process is far more open to the public, which is not necessarily a good thing (Anderson & Cost, 2013). As of 2018, only nine states have closed primaries, meaning that in the remaining forty-one states unaffiliated

voters, and in the case of the eleven open primary states any voter can vote in any parties primary (“State Primaries”, 2018). This is an issue as the nominee for each party should reflect the will of the party, not unaffiliated or non-party members.

Frontloading is another issue that plagues the nomination process. Frontloading is where states will schedule their primary election or their caucus as close to the start of the primary season in order to gain greater influence in the grand-scheme of the nomination process (Tolbert, & Squire, 2009). States such as Iowa, New Hampshire, Michigan, and Florida have placed their primary so close to the beginning of the primary elections that the results of these primaries and caucuses, paired with the ensuing media coverage, often determine who receives the nomination (MacDonald, & Levy, 2019; Tolbert, & Squire, 2009). In 1998 “Super Tuesday” was formed when 16 states moved their primary elections to the same day in early March, which due to the extensive media coverage, has a massive effect on the outcome of the election (MacDonald, & Levy, 2019). Frontloading has no positive outcomes, and all it does is elevate the status of certain state’s election results while discrediting others (Tolbert, & Squire, 2009).

Reforms to the Nomination Process

The current nomination process is broken and is in desperate need of massive reforms. As previously stated, most of the problems stem from the reforms that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. These issues include the extended campaign process, the exorbitant amount of money spent on only the primary campaign alone, the lack of uniformity, the lack of party representation, and the issue of frontloading. There are, of course, many solutions to this issue, two of which will be discussed in this section. One of these solutions would be to return the

nomination process completely over to party officials; the other would be to have the federal government step in to regulate the elections.

One possible recourse is returning the nomination process entirely to party officials and doing away with the idea of a primary election. In this scenario, party officials retain total control over the nomination process. While this may conjure images of smoke-filled back rooms, it does address many of the issues that the current nomination process faces. It entirely does away with frontloading, removes the issue of non-party members being involved in the nomination process, and is an entirely uniform process. However, this revised system does present various issues. This system completely removes non-party officials from the nomination process, and in almost every aspect is a far more elitist system. In the end, though, the result would be a faster nomination and a nominee who is entirely in line with the will of the party.

Another potential solution would be for the Federal Government of the United States to intervene and to set regulatory measures to make the process fairer across the nation. The federal government would define strict regulations to the nomination process, the date it occurs, who can participate in each party's election, how lengthy the campaign process is, and other regulatory measures to ensure a more fair nomination process. This system also poses some issues. It takes power away from the states and puts it in the hands of the federal government; it also takes power away from the political parties themselves. Overall though, this system is an improvement, and regulations, such as setting a date for the elections while allowing the party to retain all other aspects of the nomination process, would make the process far fairer and far more efficient.

Conclusion

As a whole, the current presidential nomination process is inefficient and plagued with problems. These issues make the nomination process unfair and slow, and it should be reformed. There are various solutions to the problems faced by the current nomination process, but as it stands now, the process is exclusionary, not uniform, overly expensive, unable to reflect the will of the party accurately, and unfair due to frontloading. Until these issues are addressed, the nomination process will continue to be elitist and incompetent.

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