

Presidential Nomination Reform

2014 POLICY GUIDE



State and Party Policy

August 2014

An improved presidential nominating process would allow voters in all states, not just those in states with primaries or caucuses scheduled first, to participate in the process.

The Problem: The presidential nomination process keeps starting earlier and earlier as states “front-load” their contests. Front-loading can cause an election to be decided too quickly – nine months before the general election and before a majority of states have even held their primaries or caucuses. Candidates who do well, or better than expected, in the first two states to hold primary contests – with Iowa and New Hampshire maintaining their stranglehold on that role – experience a surge of momentum and free media exposure in the rapid-fire series of primaries that soon follow. This slingshot effect reduces opportunities for deliberation and meaningful participation in states with later primaries. Because every state party, usually in conjunction with its state legislature, is free to schedule their own contests, any semblance of a cohesive national schedule rapidly falls into disarray.

The Solution: States can work with parties and reformers to coordinate on one of several solutions to our broken system. The National Association of Secretaries of State supports a rotating regional primary. In 2000, Republicans nearly adopted the Delaware Plan that would have had small states vote first, followed by groups of states steadily increasing in size.

The American Plan – also known as the graduated random system – adapts the Delaware plan to be more inclusive. Contests would take place on 10 dates, with states randomly selected each election: the first primary day with states totaling 8 House districts, then 16, then 24 and so on. The order of the 4th primary day would be adjusted to allow big states a chance to vote.

These plans would make nominations more inclusive and diverse. They could be adapted to end with a national primary among the top two contenders (or more than two contenders if using ranked choice voting).

Key Facts

There may be no single part of our political process where barriers to change are so low and support for change is so widespread – including past leaders of both parties, the National Association of Secretaries of State and the Carter-Baker electoral reform commission – as the presidential nomination system. Backers of either the American Plan or the Delaware plan include:

- *Philadelphia Inquirer*
- Young Democrats of America
- California Democratic Party and California Young Democrats
- Bill Brock, Former U.S. Senator and chair of Republican National Committee

Related Reforms

- Fair Debate Access
- Open Primaries
- Ranked Choice Ballots for Military and Overseas Voters: Presidential Nominating Contests

Part Two Resources

- American Plan Interstate Compact
- National Primary Plan Interstate Compact
- Government Study Bill Presidential Nomination Process