

Chapter 13: The Presidency

Section 4

Lecture Notes



AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Describe the role of conventions in the presidential nominating process.
2. Evaluate the importance of presidential primaries.
3. Understand the caucus-convention process.
4. Outline the events that take place during a national convention.
5. Examine the characteristics that determine who is nominated as a presidential candidate.

▶ Key Terms

- **presidential primary:** an election in which a party's voters choose state delegates to the national convention and/or express a preference for their party's presidential nomination
- **winner-take-all:** contest where the candidate who wins gets all the delegates chosen at the primary
- **proportional representation:** a system that gives a primary candidate a proportion of delegates equal to their percentage of the vote

▶ Key Terms, cont.

- **caucus:** a closed meeting of party members who select delegates to a national convention
- **national convention:** a quadrennial meeting where major parties select their presidential ticket
- **platform:** a party's formal statement of principles
- **keynote address:** the speech opening a national convention

► Introduction

- Does the nominating system allow Americans to choose the best candidates for President?
 - The widely used presidential primary system does force candidates to prove their political abilities before moving on in the nominating process.
 - Whether the current system produces the most skilled candidates remains a matter of debate.

▶ Nominating the President

- The system of nominating the President is not mentioned in the Constitution and has been created by the two major parties.
- Each party's national committee sets the time and place of its national convention.
- The committees also assign each State party a certain number of convention delegates. In 2008, the Republican convention had 2,380 delegates and the Democrats had 4,233 delegates.

▶ Selecting Delegates

- The Republican Party leaves the process of picking delegates largely up to State laws.
- The Democratic Party also enforces some national party rules to promote participation by minorities, women, and grass-roots organizations.

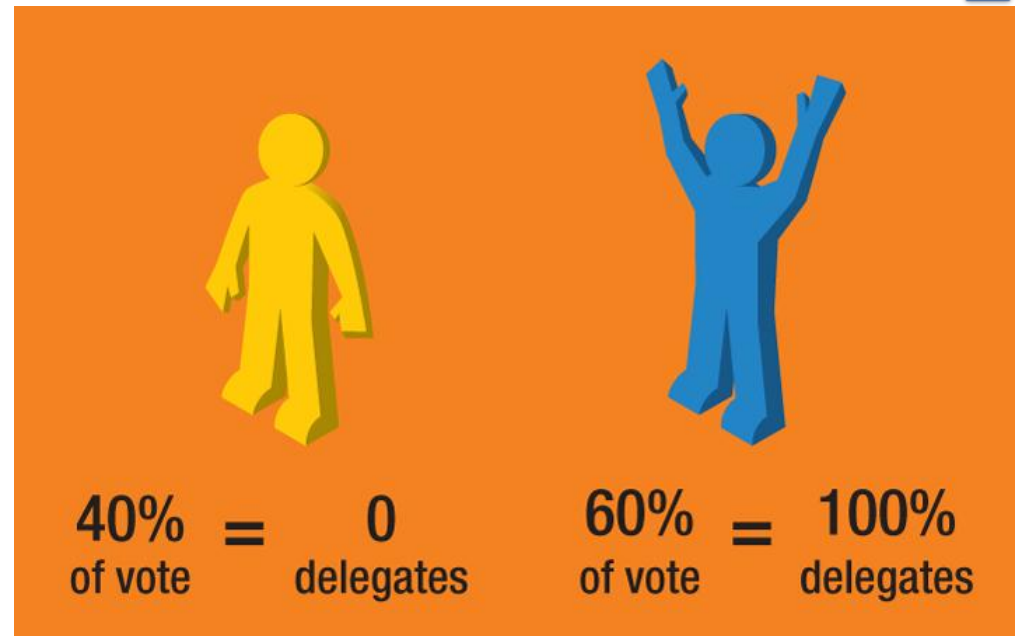


► Presidential Primaries

- Checkpoint: How do State laws affect the presidential primary system?
 - The details of delegate-selection vary from State to State.
 - In some States, the presidential primary chooses party delegates to the national convention.
 - In others it expresses a preference among presidential contenders.
 - In some States it does both.
 - Many States choose early dates for their primaries.

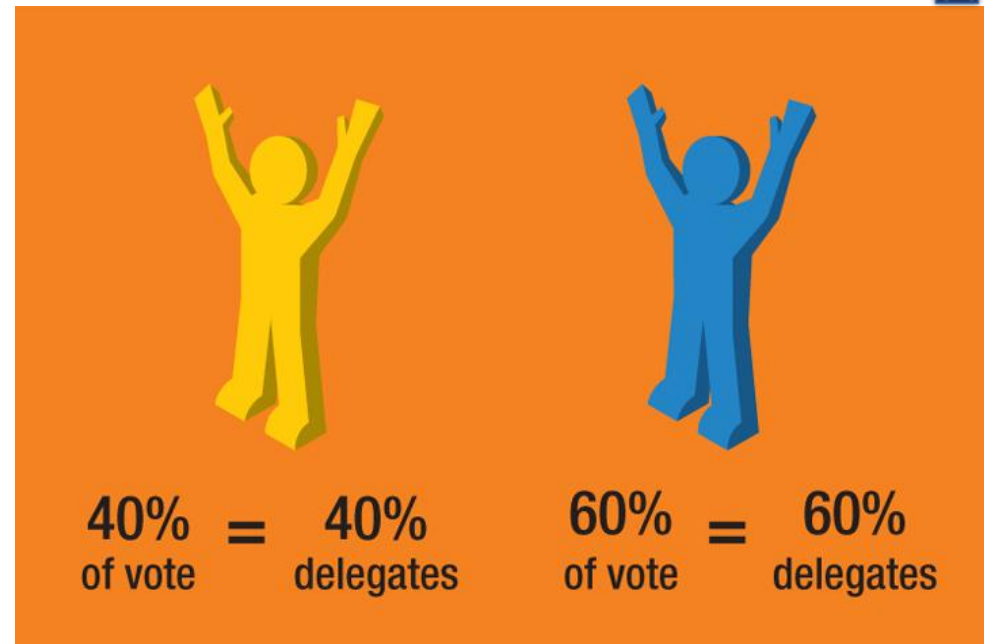
▶ Primaries Today

- State primaries were once winner-take-all affairs.
- The Democratic Party's rules now ban this method, forcing many States to change their primary laws and abandon it.



▶ Primaries Today, cont.

- Most States now use the proportional representation method.
- More than half the primary States now hold a preference primary, with the delegates being chosen at a State party convention, usually based on the preference vote.

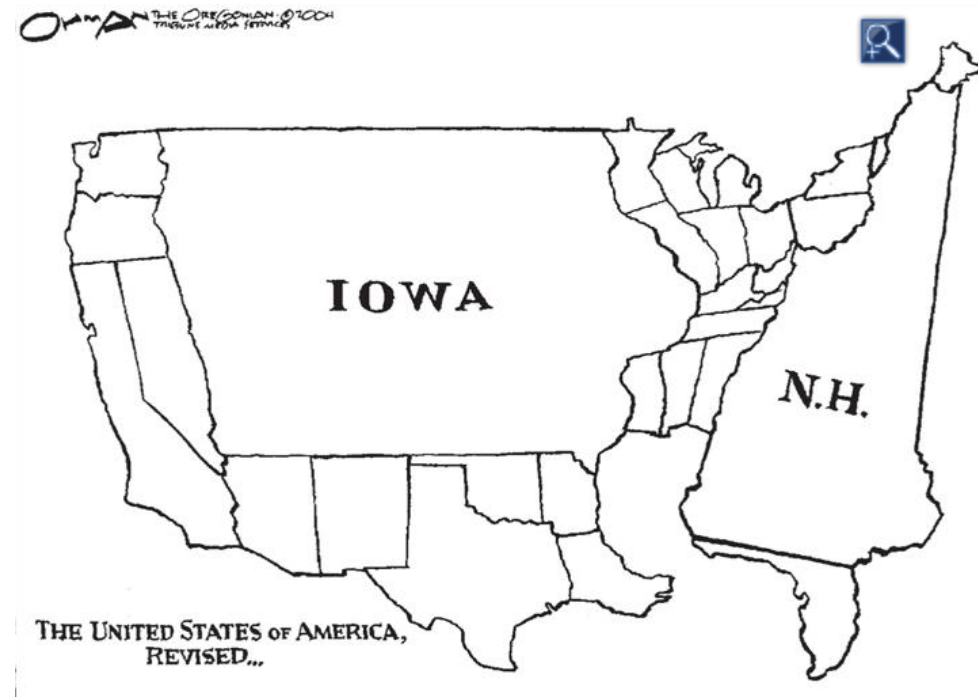


► Evaluation of the Primary

- Checkpoint: Why are primaries considered vital to the nomination process?
 - They force potential nominees to test their political strength and prove their worthiness as main contenders.
 - Primaries also make the nomination process more democratic.
 - Primaries are less important to the party in power, which typically will either nominate the sitting President or the candidate endorsed by the President.

► Primary Reform Proposals

- Critics have suggested that a series of regional primaries or a single national primary would be more efficient than the long, costly State-by-State primary system.



What does this cartoon imply about the first state primary and caucus?

▶ Caucuses

- In States that do not hold primaries, caucuses choose the delegates to the national convention.
 - Party voters attend local caucuses where they vote for delegates to attend district conventions.
 - The district conventions choose delegates to the State convention, which then selects the State delegates who will represent the party at the national convention.

▶ The National Conventions

- Today a party's nominee is usually decided before the convention.
- Conventions have three key goals:
 - Naming the party's presidential and vice presidential candidates
 - Uniting the party's factions and leaders in one place for a common purpose
 - Adopting the party platform, stating its basic principles, policy goals, and objectives for the campaign and beyond.
 - Conventions also draw media attention for the party and its candidate.

► National Conventions, cont.

- Conventions meet for 3-4 days, organized around many speeches by party leaders, adoption of the party platform, and the keynote address celebrating the party and its candidates.
- The convention closes with the State delegations voting for the presidential nominee and the nominee's acceptance speech.



▶ Race for the Presidency

- The race for the presidency begins long before the election.
 - One to four years before the election, potential candidates begin to explore their chances, organize, and raise funds.
 - From January to June of the election year, primaries and caucuses help decide the party's frontrunner.
 - In August and September, major parties hold conventions, adopt platforms, and nominate their presidential candidate.

▶ Race for the Presidency, cont.

- From September to November, the presidential candidates hold debates and give speeches.
- On the Tuesday after the first Monday in November, the voters cast their ballots and choose the president-elect.



▶ Who is Nominated?

- Sitting presidents eligible for another term are usually nominated.
- Nominees have almost always held elected office, with governors being the most common nominees.
- A long public record is common but not a necessity.



▶ Who is Nominated?, cont.

- The overwhelming majority of nominees have been white, male, Protestant, and married.
- Women and minorities had not been serious major party candidates until 2008, with Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama vying for the Democratic nomination and Obama winning the presidency.
- Republican nominee John McCain was the oldest major party presidential candidate in history.

► Review

- Now that you have learned about whether the nominating system allows Americans to choose the best candidates for President, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - Does the current electoral process result in the best candidates for President?