# *Presidential Primaries and Frontloading: An Empirical Polemic*

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*Frontloading* is a decision to move a primary date to the beginning ("front") of the presidential nomination season.[1] State party leaders have moved their primary dates to the front so that their partisans may have more influence in the selection process. Over time, more and more primaries have been moved to the front ("loaded"), creating nomination seasons with more and more delegates awarded in multi-state ("Super Tuesday") primaries. A consequence of frontloading is a *front-loaded* nomination season.

This paper reviews empirical evidence that relates to a variety of concerns about frontloading. It first describes the rise and underlying political dynamics of frontloading, and then considers the effect of frontloading on the outcome of nomination contests. Critics prefer a "back-loaded" process that would last longer. A longer race, if competitive, could provide candidates more opportunities to espouse their policy positions, journalists more opportunities to cover the issues, and citizens more opportunities to learn the candidates' issue positions. Citizens residing in states at the "back" would have a more compelling reason to vote. To what extent do studies of back-loaded and front-loaded contests support these alleged effects? Does frontloading matter to citizens who vote in presidential primaries? What motivates state party leaders to move their delegate-selection activities to the front?

## ***The Rise of Frontloading***

Frontloading is a consequence of decisions made by state party leaders and permitted by party rules and traditions (Mayer, Busch, and Busch 2004; Carman and Barker 2002; Heard 1991). The United States has a de-centralized party system with a long tradition of giving state party leaders discretion on matters of party business (Bibby 2003; Schattschneider 1942). National party rules give state party leaders the authority to decide how and when convention delegates are selected. These delegates cast votes on the party's rules, its platform, and the nominees for president and vice president (Crotty and Jackson 1985).

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[1] Party leaders front load other kinds of nomination activities—fundraising events (e.g., dinners and picnics), straw polls, and party caucuses, to name a few.

National party leaders establish and enforce delegate-selection rules.[2] They decide the date and location of the national convention and how many delegates each jurisdiction may send. Among these rules is a time period (i.e., window or nomination season) in which convention delegates should be selected. Delegates should be selected in the year of the national convention. As a practical matter this process must end in June because the national conventions usually are held in July and August. In 2000 Democrats permitted delegate selection to begin as early as the first Tuesday in March; Republicans, as early as the first Tuesday in February (Cook 2000). In 2004 both parties permitted delegate selection to begin on the first Tuesday in February (Cook 2004). Both parties routinely grant exemptions for Iowa and New Hampshire to begin earlier.[3]

How delegates are selected affects *when* delegates are selected. If delegates are selected by a caucus-convention method, then dates for meetings at different levels of the party organization (i.e., precincts, counties, districts, etc.) must be set and sequenced. If delegates are selected by a primary-election method, then a single date must be selected.[4] Before 1972 most delegates in the Democratic and Republican parties were selected by the caucus-convention method. Since 1972 more delegates have been awarded by the primary-election method, and, as Cook (2000, 8) has noted, "more states [are] holding primaries earlier and earlier in the presidential election year."[5]

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[2] Most of these rules are on their web sites: www.democrats.org and www.rnc.org.

[3] Other states have applied for the same exemption but few have been granted. The parties may punish jurisdictions that violate the window rule by reducing their number of delegates or by denying their delegates credentials (i.e., not recognizing them as official delegates). Holding primaries that do not award delegates (i.e., advisory primaries or mere “beauty contests”) is a way state leaders have tried to obey the letter, but not the spirit, of the window rule.

A useful way of describing frontloading is the number of weeks into the nomination season when 50 percent of the delegates have been awarded (Cook 2000, 2004; Goldstein 2000; Mayer 2001). The weeks-to-50-percent standard indicates the earliest possible point a candidate could legitimately claim victory, assuming, of course, that no other candidates had won delegates. Figure 1 displays this standard for the nomination contests from 1968 to 2004. It took 12 weeks to reach the 50 percent standard in the 1968 nomination contests. It took only five weeks for both major parties in the 2000 contests; in the 2004 contests, five weeks for the Republicans and six weeks for the Democrats. The nomination season, which was once a three-month "marathon," has become a month-long "sprint." Frontloading has shortened the nomination race.

Evident in Figure 1 is a large "frontloading shift" from 1984 to 1988. This shift actually began before the 1980 Democratic nomination contest when President Jimmy Carter persuaded leaders in Alabama, his home state of Georgia, and Florida to hold their primaries together (11 March). The political objective was to help Carter defend his re-nomination against a challenge by Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy. President

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[4] Both major parties may use a primary or both may use a caucus. One may use a primary and the other a caucus. These delegate-selection activities may not be held on the same date.

[5] The reforms of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, which were put into effect for the 1972 Democratic Convention, contributed to the shift from caucuses to primaries (Bibby 2003, 215-217).

Carter wanted a southern buffer to offset possible losses in New Hampshire (26 February) and Massachusetts (4 March).[6]

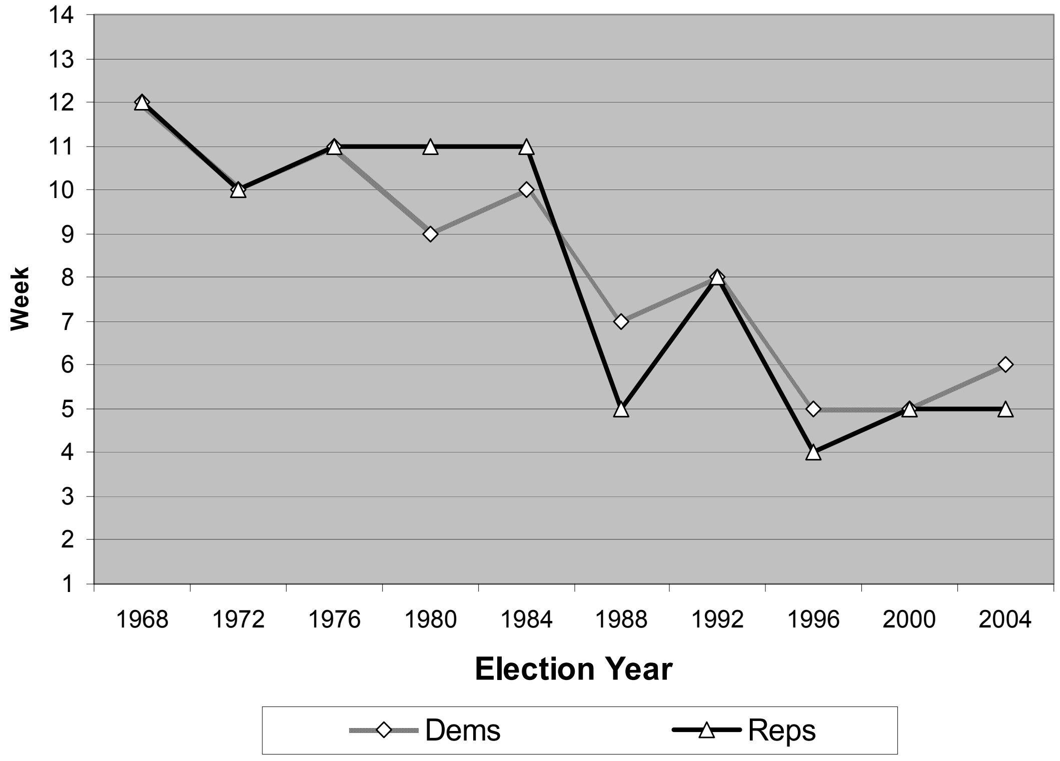

Figure 1. The Rise of Front Loading, 1968-2004

Before 1984 Massachusetts and Rhode Island moved their primary dates (13 March) to coincide with Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, thereby creating a multi-state primary dubbed "Super Tuesday" (Norrander 1992; Stanley and Hadley 1987). By 1988 Super Tuesday had grown to 16 states. On 8 March Democrats awarded 1,283 delegates (30.8 percent of total) and Republicans, 731 delegates (32.7 percent of total). The objective for southern Democrats was to nominate a "moderate" who could perform better than Walter F. "Fritz" Mondale, the liberal Democrat defeated soundly by President Ronald Reagan in the 1984 general election.[7]

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[6] Carter scored a plurality victory in New Hampshire, lost in Massachusetts, and won comfortably in Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.

By 1996 the practice of frontloading had resumed as seven more states moved ahead of the Super Tuesday states (12 March) and two delegate-rich states, Ohio (19 March) and California (26 March), moved from their traditional positions (the first Tuesday in June) to just behind the Super Tuesday states. A "Titanic Tuesday" emerged in 2000 as California, Ohio, and New York—all together 21 percent of the Democratic delegates and 16 percent of the Republican delegates—moved ahead of the Super Tuesday states (14 March) to the first Tuesday in March (7 March). These states were joined by eight states with primaries and by several caucuses (Cook 2000). On Titanic Tuesday Democrats awarded 1,183 pledged delegates, about one third of all pledged delegates; Republicans, 554 delegates or about 27 percent of the total. In 2004 the primaries on the first Tuesday in March (2 March) awarded 1,151 Democratic delegates and 628 Republican delegates--about one-fourth of all pledged delegates in each party (Cook 2004).[8]

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[7] Before 1992 eight states left Super Tuesday: two states (Georgia and Maryland) moved up, four states (Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Washington) moved back, and two states (Missouri and Virginia) dropped their primaries. The Super Tuesday of 1988 failed to achieve its goal—Democrats nominated a liberal (Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis) and the only southern Democrat who ran had a liberal voting record (Tennessee Senator Al Gore). The smaller Super Tuesday of 1992 achieved the goal of helping a moderate southern Democrat, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, capture the nomination.

[8] The change from 2000 to 2004 in the relative proportion of delegates awarded on the first Tuesday in March occurred because Missouri moved its primary up (3 February), three caucus states moved up, and Maine changed its March primary to a February caucus (cf., Cook 2000, 2004). The total number of delegates awarded and the number of delegates awarded to each state were roughly equivalent. It seems likely that the proportion of delegates awarded in early March will decline in 2008 because California has moved back to its traditional June date (Murphy 2004).

### *Frontloading and the Electoral Process*

How has frontloading affected the outcome of the nomination contest? Although contests have been more or less frontloaded, as illustrated in Figure 1, the outcome has been relatively constant—*the front runner has won all but one contest from 1980 to 2004* (Adkins, Dowdle, and Steger 2002). Between 1980 and 2004 frontloading did not seem to affect the outcome of the contest. The dynamics associated with becoming the front runner seemed to matter most. The 2004 Democratic contest emerged as the only exception to the front-runner-wins pattern. Different Democratic candidates at different stages could legitimately claim front-runner status.[9] Vermont Governor Howard Dean emerged as the front runner in December 2003. But Massachusetts Senator John F. Kerry ultimately won the 2004 Democratic Party nomination (Alexander 2004; Shapiro 2004).

Front runners are not born, they are made in the pre-nomination season—variously termed the "invisible primary" (Hadley 1976), the "exhibition season" (Barilleaux and Adkins 1992), or the "early days" (Kessel 1992).[10] Front runners wage aggressive nomination campaigns, raise a great deal of money, gain endorsements of party and group leaders, discourage rivals from running, lead in the early public opinion polls, attract more news coverage, and receive the Fourth Estate's imprimatur, "front runner" (Crotty and Jackson 1985; Gurian and Haynes 1993; Heard 1991; Keech and

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[9] Al Gore, the 2000 nominee, was the presumptive front runner until he bowed out of the race in December, 2002. Gore's withdrawal opened up the contest and for several months (April-August, 2003) his 2000 vice-presidential running mate, Joe Lieberman, led the Gallup preference poll. Dick Gephardt held a small lead in mid-September, which shifted to Wesley Clark in late-September and early October. In late October, Clark and Howard Dean were tied. In December Gore endorsed Dean, the Gallup poll leader. In January, 2004, the Gallup organization predicted a Dean-Clark contest.

[10] See ABC News's web site on the 2004 Invisible Primary at: http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/.

Matthews 1977; Norrander 2000; Witcover 1999).[11] A combination of factors affects the outcome, the least of which is frontloading. Why, therefore, is frontloading such a concern?

The main concern is whether frontloading makes it difficult, if not impossible, for a momentum candidate to win (Aldrich 1980). A momentum campaign relies on at least three assumptions: (1) enough resources can be generated to campaign effectively in the Iowa caucuses, the New Hampshire primary, and the other early contests; (2) early successes will generate new resources sufficient to campaign in the next primaries; and (3) as the momentum campaign wins more primaries, the other candidates (including the front runner) will drop out and any new candidates would have neither the resources nor the time to accumulate the necessary resources.[12]

Why does frontloading make momentum campaigns ineffective? There simply is not enough time between the early events and the first "Super Tuesday" to generate resources and campaign effectively. As Norrander (2000, 1010) has argued: "With the compact schedule early wins cannot be translated into subsequent victories if a candidate does not have sufficient prior resources to compete on [multi-state] primary days." Early losses doom momentum candidates. Front runners, on the other hand, can easily survive early losses because they already have the resources to continue (Steger 2000).

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[11] Research prior to the 2004 cycle indicated that the Democratic nominee has been the candidate who had the most money at the end of January. In Republican races the winner has been the candidate who had the most support among party identifiers in the Gallup poll before the Iowa caucuses (Adkins, Dowdle, and Stegar 2002). In 2004 the "money primary" failed to predict the Democratic nominee, John Kerry, who reported having $32.9 million compared to Howard Dean's $47.6 million.

[12] The Democratic Party has experienced three relatively successful momentum campaigns prior to the advent of frontloading: George McGovern in 1972, Jimmy Carter in 1976, and Gary Hart in 1984.

Senator Kerry’s successful bid for the Democratic Party nomination in 2004 occurred at the high water mark of frontloading. Scholars will no doubt debate whether Senator Kerry’s successful effort was really a momentum campaign. That he could finance the campaign from his family’s fortune seems inconsistent with a momentum candidacy. To reiterate Norrander’s point: Senator Kerry had “sufficient prior resources” to compete in a front-loaded nomination process. Kerry’s impressive, early victories in Iowa and New Hampshire fit the momentum pattern well. Another aspect of this puzzle, deserving further study, is whether Dean’s front runner status was a “false positive.”[13] These concerns notwithstanding, the Kerry case clearly suggests that a well financed, *non*-front runner can win a front-loaded race.

Frontloading seems to affect how long a race lasts and the relatively short duration of front-loaded contests may adversely affect what citizens know about candidates.[14] Consider the duration of front-loaded contests. In 1980 and in 1984 the Democratic contests lasted until the conventions. Since then all credible challengers, or office-seeking candidates (Norrander 2000), have exited the race well before the convention (see Table 1). Since 1992 the nomination contest has been effectively over in March. The 2004 Democratic contest ended on March 2 with the withdrawal of the last office-seeking candidate, North Carolina Senator John Edwards.[15] The 2004 Republican contest ended before it began; no credible candidate emerged to challenge President George W. Bush for the nomination.

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[13] See, for example, Joe Trippi’s discussion of the Dean candidacy in *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at 2004* (Institute of Politics 2006).

[14] As Heard (1991, 42) has argued, “Whatever else may be said of the sequential, drawn out, media-permeated nomination process, it offers both voters and contenders more opportunity to gain political information and insight than would a drastically shortened official nominating season.”

[15] Alexander (2004, 194) has suggested that the 2004 Democratic nomination contest was “virtually over” on 3 February.

Table 1: Frontloading and Exiting

| Southern Super Tuesday Primaries | When Last Office-Seeking Candidate Exited | |
|---|---|---|
| | Democrat | Republican |
| 8 March 1988 | 21 April | 29 March |
| 10 March 1992 | 19 March | No office seeker |
| 12 March 1996 | No office seeker | 14 March |
| 14 March 2000 | 9 March | 9 March |
| 9 March 2004 | 2 March | No office seeker |

Sources: Norrander (2000) and Alexander (2004).

Critics of frontloading seem to prefer a "back-loaded" process that would be longer. A longer race, if competitive, could provide candidates more opportunities to espouse their policy positions, journalists more opportunities to cover the issues, and citizens more opportunities to learn the candidates' issue positions (Patterson 2002; Witcover 1999). Citizens residing in states at the "back" would have a more compelling reason to vote.[16] To what extent are these alleged effects supported by studies of back-loaded (pre-1988) and front-loaded (post-1988) contests?

Patterson's study of the 1976 election—a panel study in Erie, Pennsylvania, and Los Angeles, California—found that interest increased over the course of the nomination campaign and remained at a moderately high level into the summer and fall (Patterson 1980). "With the primaries," observed Patterson, "there came a surge in voters' interest" (68). As interest in the campaign increased, citizens were more likely to seek information about the candidates from the news media. Patterson's national panel study of the 2000 election found that interest “rose during the period of the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, and it continued to grow through early March’s decisive Super Tuesday primaries” (Patterson 2002, 17). Interest levels decreased dramatically after the March primaries.

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[16] For the major reform proposals, visit the online version of the Symposium on Presidential Selection sponsored by the Center for Governmental Studies at The University of Virginia, available at: http://www.centerforpolitics.org/reform/report_nominating.htm.

Citizens are more likely to remain interested when the race is competitive. Because a front-loaded schedule makes an early victory more likely, interest levels may decline as the competition ends. This decline in interest does not appear to be permanent. Patterson (2002, 124) found that campaign interest rebounded during the national conventions and continued increasing into the fall. Other studies of the 2000 contest have reported that political discussions increased among citizens in Iowa, New Hampshire, and the Super Tuesday states (Waldman 2000) and that awareness and knowledge of the candidates also increased (Dutwin 2000). Awareness and knowledge of the candidates also increased among citizens in other regions (Jamieson, Johnston, and Hagen 2000).

Figures 2 and 3 display participation rates (i.e., turnout) of *registered* citizens for the 1980 and 2000 presidential primaries.[17] Although there are some differences due to unique state-level factors (e.g., political culture, region, party system, etc.), the turnout trend does not vary over the 1980 nomination contest. This was probably a function of how long both nomination contests remained competitive. Senator Kennedy took his challenge of President Carter all the way to the floor of the Democratic convention. George H. W. Bush conceded only after former California Governor Ronald Reagan secured enough delegates to claim the nomination. The turnout trend does vary over the

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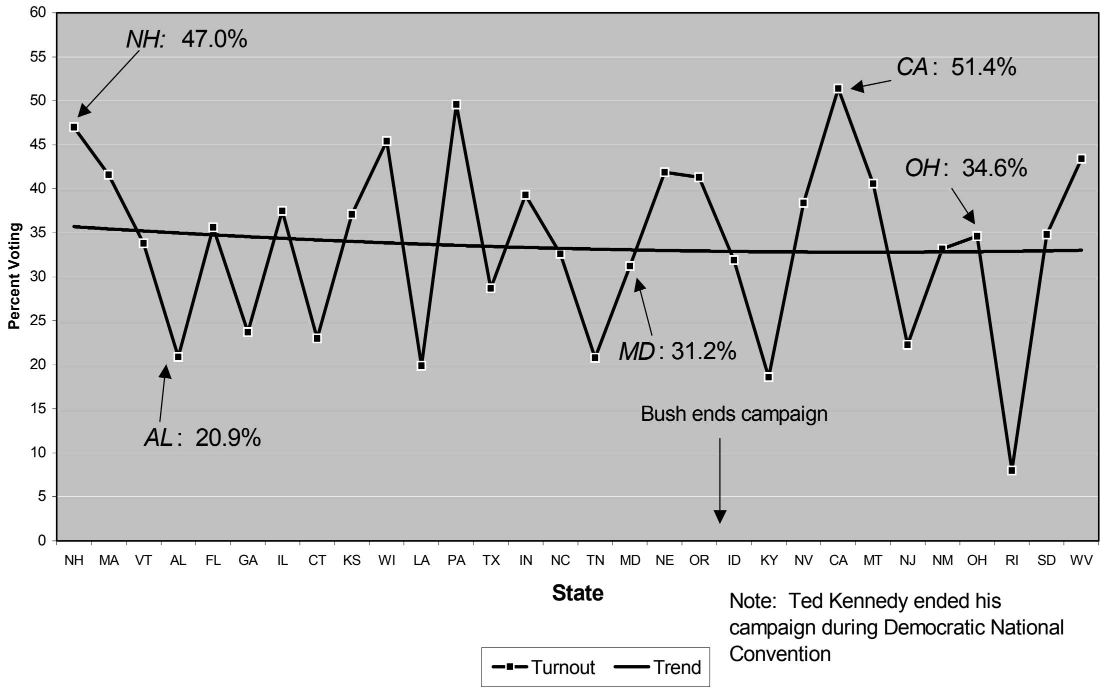
[17] The 2004 cycle was not selected because a genuine contest did not occur for the Republican nomination.

2000 nomination contest: the U-shape of the trend line shows that turnout dropped below 20 percent just after former New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley and Arizona Senator McCain, respectively, ended their campaigns against Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush. Turnout increased toward the end of the 2000 nomination season primarily because those states still had competitive state-level races (e.g., legislative primaries) and issues (e.g., referenda) to decide. Our fellow citizens are not fools—they will not vote in meaningless elections unless required or otherwise forced to do so. As the critics of frontloading have argued, a longer, competitive nomination contest probably would increase voter participation.

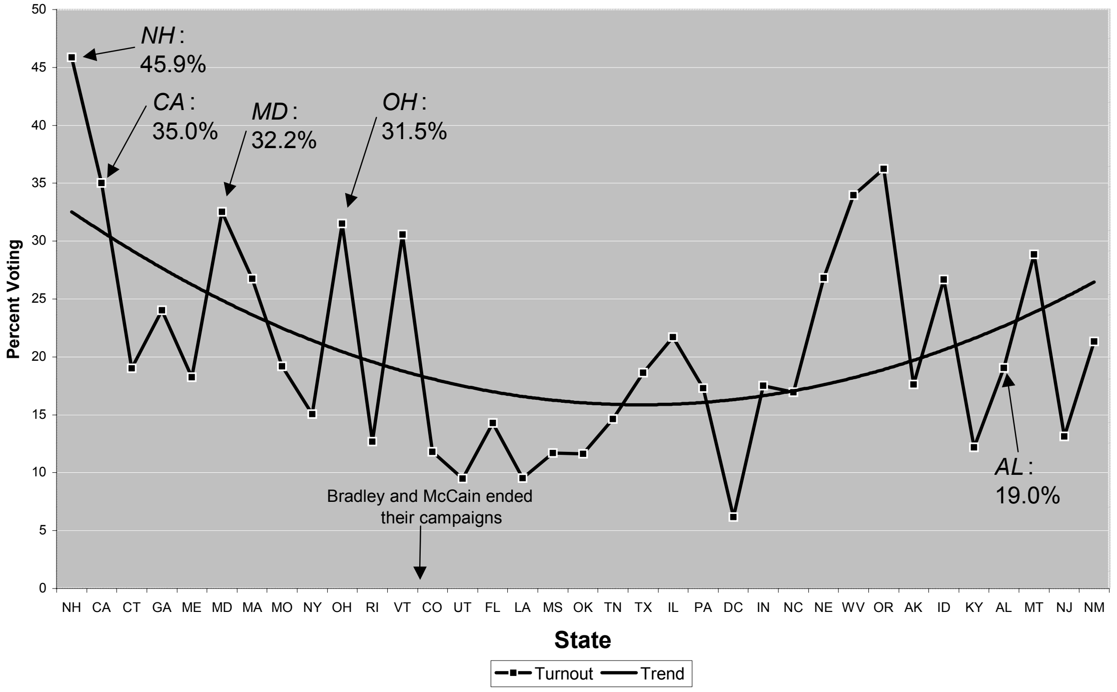
Compare the turnout rates of the states that have moved their primary dates. California moved to the front for 2000, but its participation rate was only 35 percent compared to 51 percent in 1980. Ohio also moved to the front, and its participation rate (31.5 percent) in 2000 was somewhat lower than its 1980 rate (34.6 percent). The participation rates for Maryland and Alabama, which moved back, were about the same in both years. These results suggest that frontloading alone does not increase participation in presidential primaries (Ranney 1977).

Figure 2. Participation in 1980 Presidential Primaries



Note: Ted Kennedy ended his campaign during Democratic National Convention

Figure 3. Participation in 2000 Presidential Primaries



Does frontloading matter to citizens who vote in presidential primaries? Does the sequence or order of a primary influence why presidential primary voters support candidates? Each nomination contest is naturally rooted in a particular historical context, which makes some choice criteria more important than others. The context influences the criteria of candidate choice in a more or less uniform manner. The context in which a particular nomination contest occurs also influences, in a profound way, the criteria citizens use to evaluate candidates. This overarching context is, arguably, more important than the mere sequence or temporal order of a particular primary.

The context sometimes dictates that candidates play defense—incumbents seeking re-nomination must defend their records in office. Incumbent office holders typically are voted out of office only when there is widespread dissatisfaction with their performance (Fiorina 1981; Key 1966). If the incumbent is popular, the party usually will re-nominate that office holder with little if any opposition (e.g., Reagan in 1984, Clinton in 1996, and Bush in 2004). However, if the incumbent is unpopular, seriously jeopardizing the party's chance to keep the office, a viable challenger may emerge to compete for the nomination. In 1976 former California Governor Reagan challenged President Ford, whose November 1975 approval rating in the Gallup poll was 41 percent. In 1980 Senator Kennedy challenged President Carter, whose November 1979 approval rating was only 29 percent. Studies of these nomination contests found that primary voters cast retrospective votes—they based their choice of the incumbent or challenger on evaluations of the incumbent's performance (Monardi 1994; Wattier 1990). In 1980 evaluations of Carter's job performance were the best predictor in New Hampshire (26 February), Florida (11 March), Wisconsin (1 April), and California (3 June). The mere sequence or temporal order of a particular primary did not affect the dynamics of the 1980 Democratic nomination contest. The question, raised again and again by Senator Kennedy, was whether Democrats should re-nominate an office holder who had performed so badly and stood a good chance of losing in the general election (White 1982).

The context sometimes lets candidates concentrate on offense—why they can win in November. While the party in power wishes to keep the office, the party out of power wishes to retake it. The longer a party has been out of power the harder it tries to find a "sure winner," a candidate widely perceived as possessing the mythical quality of electability. Primary voters in the out-party nomination contest may support the candidate they perceive as having the best chance of winning the November general election (Abramowitz 1989; Abramson et al. 1992; Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988; Norrander 1986; Wattier and Jackson 2001; Wattier and Tatalovich 2004; Wattier 2004).

In the 2000 Republican nomination contest an early favorite, Governor Bush, faced an opposition candidate, Senator McCain, who could have won, but the early favorite eventually won with a modest degree of difficulty. A study by Wattier and Jackson (2001) found that electability was the most important voting criteria in every contested Republican primary. The effects of electability were enhanced by the contextual imperative every out party faces, and by the relative political positions of Republican candidates at the end of the invisible primary. At the end of 1999 Bush was reported to have more than $31 million in cash-on-hand; his nearest rival, McCain, approximately $1.5 million. For every dollar McCain had to spend, Bush had approximately $20.[18] From August 1999 to January 2000, Bush was the first choice of at least 60 percent of registered Republicans surveyed by the Gallup Organization (Newport 2000). Bush received endorsements from key party leaders, a resource unavailable to a "maverick" like McCain. The Bush campaign offered a consistent and persuasive message: "Vote for George W. Bush in 2000 because he can win" (DiStaso 1999). The responsiveness of Republican primary voters to this message and the united support of the party establishment decided the 2000 Republican nomination contest.

### ***Valence Issues and Nomination Campaigns***

The primary context, an intramural contest among candidates of the same political party, is seldom well suited to an issue-based campaign. Issues in primary campaigns are predominantly *valence* issues, not *position* issues (Salmore and Salmore 1989; Stokes 1966). A position issue is a question on which candidates may take different positions (e.g., pro choice v. pro life on abortion). A valence issue is a question or problem on which the candidates fundamentally agree (e.g., all pro life in Republican races or all pro choice in Democratic contests), but they will disagree on which candidate can mobilize the support needed to realize the policy goal or outcome. Valence issues tend to focus the debate, not on the merits of the substantive policy issue, but on candidate qualities and qualifications (e.g., leadership and experience). Valence issues tend to have indirect effects. "When elections revolve around valence issues," contend Salmore and Salmore (1989, 113), the focus is which "candidate is more effective in demonstrating the desirable [traits]."

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[18] These figures are from Kent Cooper, Tony Raymond, and Kirk Ervin's *Political Money Line* web site at http://www.tray.com.

Would more position issues emerge if only nomination contests were longer? Would primary voters also cast issue votes? Studies of nomination contests suggest that candidates are not likely to campaign on position issues (Kendall 2000) and that primary voters are not likely to cast votes on *position issues* (Abramowitz 1989; Geer 1989; Gopoian 1982; Keeter and Zukin 1983; Williams et al. 1976). The 1980 nomination contests were competitive to the end and the schedules were relatively back loaded (see Figure 1). Studies of the 1980 Democratic and Republican contests found that position issues had a minimal effect on whom primary voters supported (Keeter and Zukin 1983; Marshall 1984; Norrander 1986; Wattier 1983a; Wattier 1983b). It, therefore, seems very unlikely that a back-loaded nomination season, favored by critics of frontloading (Patterson 2002; Witcover 1999), would alter the primary context enough to make policy issues the decisive factors in nomination contests.

Do primary voters use *valence issues*? According to Wattier and Tatalovich (2004), a valence issue had a significant indirect effect in the 2000 Republican primary in South Carolina (19 February). These authors studied the Republican candidates' statements on whether the Confederate battle flag should continue to be flown over the statehouse in South Carolina and concluded that it was essentially a valence issue. Texas Governor George W. Bush and Arizona Senator John McCain advanced the same position, namely, that the flag issue was a local matter. The authors performed a secondary analysis of survey data gathered as part of the 2000 National Annenberg Election Study (NAES). The 2000 NAES included numerous issue questions framed in a valence format (Romer, Kenski, Waldman, Adasiewicz, and Jamieson 2004).

The question stem stated a policy goal, and respondents could answer that one or *more* candidates wished to purse that goal. The question stem for the Confederate flag issue was:

> Thinking about Republicans George W. Bush and John McCain, to the best of your knowledge, which [one] of these candidates, if any, [says] South Carolina should decide for itself whether the Confederate flag should fly over the state capitol?

Wattier and Tatalovich (2004) proposed a causal model incorporating other candidate-choice variables from the literature (see Figure 4). The results for South Carolina, displayed in Figure 4, affirmed the hypothesis that valence issues have indirect effects.[19] The path coefficient from the Confederate flag issue to candidate image traits was significant, a *beta weight* (correlation) of .16. The path coefficient from candidate image traits to candidate evaluation (i.e., a net feeling thermometer index) was also significant, a *beta weight* of .72. Voting on "valence issues" early in a nomination contest is, therefore, possible. A longer, back-loaded process would not necessarily bring out more position issues; rather, a longer process would only provide candidates more opportunities to re-state their leadership qualifications on valence issues.

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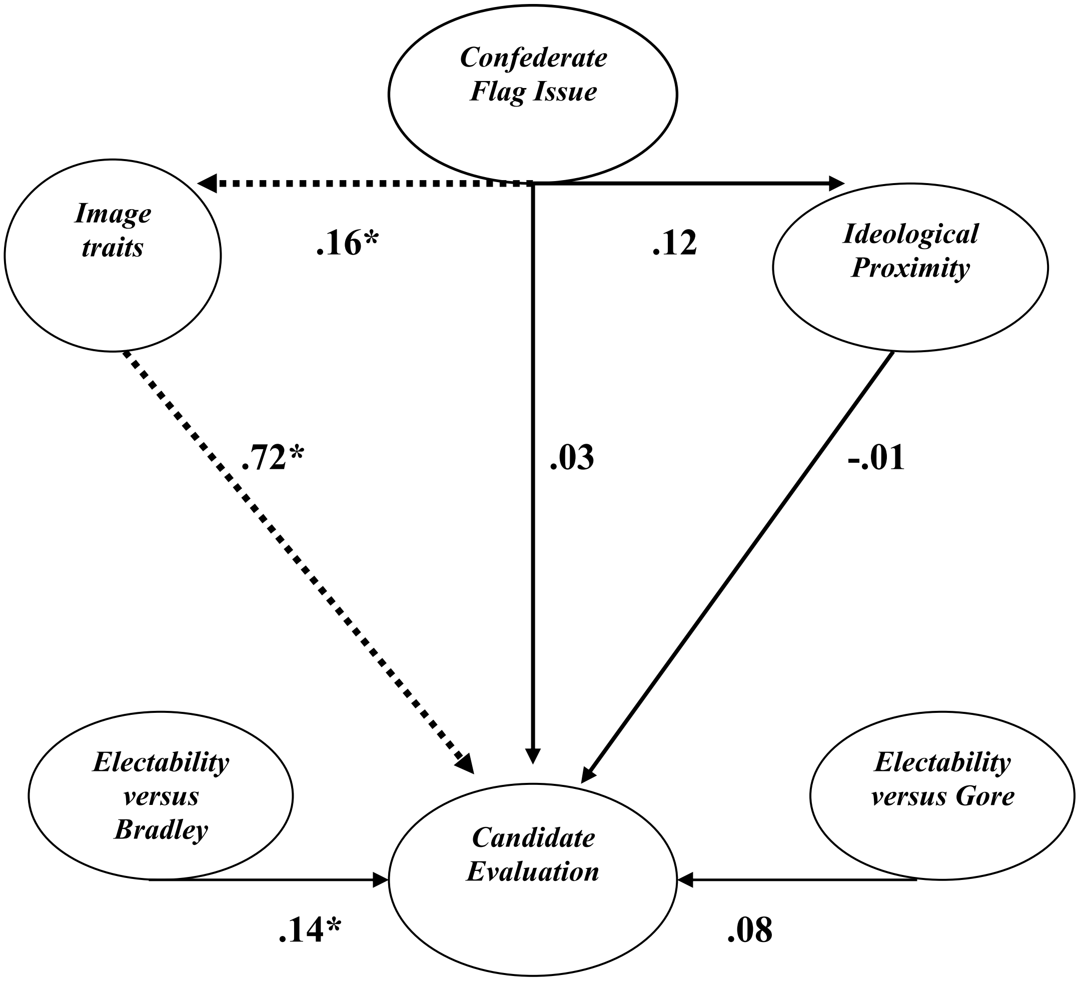
[19] Wattier and Tatalovich (2004) also reported significant direct and indirect effects for the Confederate flag issue in the Titanic Tuesday primaries (7 March). Results in New Hampshire were not statistically significant.

Figure 4: Candidate Choice in the South Carolina Primary on February 19, 2000


Confederate Flag Issue
Image traits
.16*
.12
Ideological Proximity
.72*
.03
-.01
Electability versus Bradley
Candidate Evaluation
Electability versus Gore
.14*
.08

Source: Wattier and Tatalovich (2004)

### *Frontloading and Political Motivations*

The debate over frontloading tends to focus on its consequences for party members (i.e., primary voters). This focus seems obvious. A presidential primary is a *direct* primary, an election that gives every party member an opportunity to participate in the nomination process (Jewell 1974; Overacker 1926). The direct primary, observed Schattschneider (1942, 57), "is based on the mental image of the party as an association of which the partisans are members." But a political party also includes its leaders and activists.

State party leaders—namely, governors and state legislators—decide when to begin their delegate selection activities. They not only have the authority to move those activities, but they also have ways to protect their right to decide such matters. State party leaders have substantial influence over national leaders who might propose reforms; they have even more influence over their state's convention delegates who must ultimately approve all reforms. Because a major reform of a party's delegate selection rules requires the approval of state party leaders, it is important to consider the political motivations that underlie frontloading. Why would state party leaders move their delegate-selection activities to the front? What reasons do they have to front load?[20]

First, state party leaders may front load to *encourage presidential candidates to campaign in their states*. The larger, relatively delegate-rich states naturally attract candidates who must go campaigning (hunting) where the delegates (ducks) are.[21] Some smaller, relatively delegate-poor states attract candidates by strategically scheduling their nomination activities early. Iowa has traditionally held its precinct-level caucuses at the beginning of the nomination season.[22] As Michael Dukakis, former Democratic presidential nominee, has remarked:

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[20] This essay examines several reasons for party leaders to front load but it does not discuss two motivations: (1) to provide party members a meaningful choice and (2) to avoid a divisive nomination contest. While the former is too obvious to merit much discussion, the empirical evidence regarding the latter is too complex to discuss briefly.

[21] In 2000 California had 434 Democratic delegates (10.0 percent of the total) and 162 Republican delegates (7.8 percent of the total).

[22] For additional information visit: CyberCaucus: Iowa's First-in-the-Nation Caucus at http://www.drake.edu/public/caucus.html and Iowa Political Hotline, Iowa Caucus 2000 http://www.iowapoliticalhotline.com/Caucus2000.htm.

> I spent 85 campaign days in the state of Iowa alone [in the 1988 presidential campaign]. Now, Iowa is a great state and I mean that. And they did very well by Mike Dukakis. But, 85 full campaign days in one state . . . really doesn't make a . . . lot of sense, does it?[23]

The question is whether Dukakis would have spent as much time in Iowa, competing for only 61 delegates (1.5 percent of the total), if the caucuses were *not* the first delegate-selection event of the season. Should party leaders in Iowa move their caucuses to the middle or end of the nomination season to avoid criticisms by former presidential nominees and to encourage all future candidates to spend less time in Iowa?

Second, state party leaders may front load to *affect the policy agenda*. Getting presidential candidates to visit the states is a necessary condition for creating a policy agenda that includes state-level problems that require federal assistance. When candidates campaign, there is an agenda-setting exchange between candidates and party leaders, activists, and other party members. Candidates have an opportunity to explore how receptive fellow partisans are to their policy proposals. Party leaders, activists, and other party members also have an opportunity to inform candidates of their policy concerns. A policy agenda based on the “needs of the people” may emerge from these exchanges. Party members in the smaller states have a better chance to influence a president’s policy agenda during the nomination process. In the general election presidential candidates tend to be preoccupied with the policy concerns of citizens in the larger states because “victories” in those states are *always* crucial to winning in the Electoral College.

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[23] For the source of this quotation, visit: http://www.centerforpolitics.org/reform/report_nominating.htm

Third, state party leaders may front load to *secure economic benefits for their states*. Campaigns not only bring candidates into a state, but also bring other campaign resources, not to mention news reporters and their organizations. Candidates, staffers, and reporters need food and lodging as they travel the campaign trail. More visits put more dollars into a state's economy, as if state economic development plans include "political tourism." A recent study estimated that the total economic impact of the 2000 New Hampshire presidential primary as $264 million.[24] When candidates campaign, they make promises: "if nominated and elected president, I promise [some benefit]." Studies confirm that presidents attempt to deliver on these promises (Fishel 1985; Pomper 1968), and when they campaign for re-nomination they tend to emphasize which "promises" they kept.[25] Evidence also demonstrates that *states that front load actually receive more federal grant monies* (Mixon and Hobson 2001). If a state moves its delegate-selection activities 10 days closer to the front, then it could receive $362 million to $1.2 billion in additional federal grants.

Fourth, state party leaders may front load to *minimize the effects of the early contests*. New Hampshire has conducted the first-in-the-nation primary since it moved to the front in 1952. The Iowa caucuses moved ahead of New Hampshire in 1972. These two early contests regularly receive a disproportionate share of news coverage (Adams

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[24] *The New Hampshire Primary: What It Means to the State and the Nation,* available at http://www.politicallibrary.org/EconomicReport/econreport.pdf. New Hampshire gains these economic benefits because its primary is first. New Hampshire has a special provision designed to keep its position. The Secretary of State has the power to move the primary to a date seven days before any other primary (for the text of this provision, visit: http://gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/lxiii/653/653-9.htm).

[25] Incumbent presidents also like to announce "new" federal grants as they campaign from state to state, implying that the flow of federal monies will continue if only they were re-nominated and re-elected (e.g., President Carter in 1980).

1987).[26] Candidates assume that "momentum" gained from early victories in Iowa and New Hampshire will propel them to victories in subsequent contests. Reporters try to discover, before anyone else, who has the "Big Mo." All the attention the candidates and reporters give Iowa and New Hampshire has created some ill will among party leaders, causing some to question why Iowa and New Hampshire deserve to be first (Rothenberg 2001).[27] Since the national parties continue to allow Iowa and New Hampshire to go first, the only option available to leaders in other states, if they wish to grab some of the spotlight, is to move their delegate selection activities closer to the front. News coverage of the "winners" in Iowa and New Hampshire indicates not only which candidates should be taken seriously, but also which ones can be ignored (Broder 1987; Matthews 1978). Candidates who perform poorly in Iowa and New Hampshire tend to drop out of the race, reducing the field of candidates (i.e., the winnowing effect). Some candidates might stay in the race longer if their prospects seemed brighter in the next round of primaries. Victories in some Super Tuesday states, if those victories came soon enough, might offset losses in Iowa and New Hampshire. Frontloading may reduce, to some extent, the winnowing effect of the early contests.

Fifth, state party leaders may front load to *give themselves more influence over the nomination process*. Frontloading makes what happens before the nomination season begins especially important. During the pre-nomination season party leaders and activists engage with the possible candidates. If party leaders and activists concentrate their resources—endorsements and campaign contributions, respectively—they may create a front runner (Cohen et al. 2001; DiClerico 2000; Kessel 1992; Steger 2000). When the in-party nomination contest looks as if it will be uncontested because a popular incumbent is running, the out party has a powerful incentive to create a front runner imbued with all the advantages the party may bestow. The party establishment gets behind a front runner before the nomination season begins, rallies to the campaign if it falters, denies to potential challengers the resources to wage a successful campaign, and creates a frontloaded nomination season so that the contest will end with plenty of time for the nominee to unite the party. Party leaders seem to understand what Schattschneider (1942, 64) argued in *Party Government*:

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[26] New Hampshire receives more attention because of its proximity to the national news media--ABC, CBS, NBC, and the *New York Times*--headquartered in New York City.

> In an election the *united front* of the party is expressed in terms of a nomination. For this reason nominations have become the distinguishing mark of modern political parties; if a party cannot make nominations it ceases to be a party.

Finally, state party leaders may front load because *national party leaders have encouraged them to do so*. Going into the 2004 cycle Democratic Party leaders anticipated a cake walk to the nomination for the Republican incumbent. Democratic Party Chair Terry McAuliffe, according to Broder (2003), "argued that Democrats should finish their nominating process as early as possible so that the party could rally around the winner." The device used to accomplish this end was a change in the window rule. Whereas in 2000 Democratic delegate-selection activities could not begin before 7 March, in 2004 these activities could begin as early as 3 February.[28] State party leaders could now front load so that the 2004 nomination contest could be decided earlier. Eleven states with primaries and eight with caucuses moved into this new time period

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[27] Michigan Senator Carl Levin tried unsuccessfully to get the Democratic National Committee to end Iowa's and New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation status for the 2004 nomination contest.

[28] The Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary were granted exemptions from this rule.

(cf., Cook 2000, 2004). These 19 jurisdictions brought 828 delegates to the front, about 20 percent of the total Democratic delegates but, more importantly, nearly one-fourth of the number needed to win the nomination. Senator Kerry won all but two of these state-level contests, winning about 60 percent of these 828 newly front-loaded convention votes. By 2 March 2004, or perhaps as early as 3 February (Alexander 2004, 194), the 2004 Democratic nomination contest had concluded, unofficially, and the 2004 general-election campaign had begun, unofficially.[29]

### ***The Silent Supporter of Frontloading***

A review of the literature revealed no arguments supporting frontloading.[30] DiClerico (2000, 52), in an essay defending the nomination process, asserted that frontloading had "virtually no redeeming features." Why, then, has frontloading continued, unabated? This essay has offered three general answers. First, state party leaders have powerful political incentives to move their nomination activities to the front. Second, party members do not seem alarmed by frontloading perhaps because when delegates are selected does not profoundly affect whether party members participate or why party members support candidates. And, third, party rules and traditions permit frontloading.

To stop or reverse frontloading would require a fundamental change in party rules. The parties would have to exchange their flexible nomination seasons, with only beginning and ending dates, for a rigid nomination calendar that assigned each jurisdiction a specific date.[31] State party leaders might be justified in paraphrasing Madison's words from the Tenth Federalist paper: the proposed "cure" (rigid calendar) would be much worse than the disease (frontloading). Various national solutions have been proposed, including a national primary first proposed in 1911. Although numerous bills have been introduced in Congress, no bills have made it out of committee.[32]

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[29] According to Alexander (2004, 208), President Bush called Senator Kerry on the night of 2 March 2004 to "congratulate him on his victories" and to say that he was looking forwarded to "spirited" race in the fall.

[30] This essay may actually constitute the only extant defense of frontloading.

To change party rules or to enact federal legislation would require the support of the main, albeit silent, proponent of frontloading—the presidential nominee, if the change were to occur at a national convention, or the president, if the change were to be attempted by federal legislation. The construction is awkward, but the point is abundantly clear: frontloading benefits front runners, the two front runners usually become the nominees of the two major parties, and one of the two major party nominees wins the presidential election. No nominees and no presidents, in recent memory, have publicly attacked frontloading. The nominee and the president are widely recognized as the leader of the out party and in party, respectively. These party leaders would have to support reform to make any fundamental changes in party rules.

Schattschneider (1942, 64) has noted: "The nature of the nominating procedure determines the nature of the party; he who can make the nominations is the owner of the party." Who makes the nominations today? The general consensus is that each element has some influence (Crotty and Jackson 1985). During the pre-nomination stage party leaders and activists help make a front runner. During the primaries party members collectively decide whether to accept the front runner. At the convention "activists" (i.e., delegates) ratify the winner of the primaries as they make the official party nomination.

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[31] Please visit http://www.centerforpolitics.org/reform/report_nominating.htm for an introduction to the major reform proposals.

[32] The Delaware Plan, which would have created four regional "pods" based on population, was almost adopted at the 2000 Republican National Convention. The presidential nominee stopped it (Patterson

A great deal of recent research supports a different interpretation. The power to make the nomination, to paraphrase Neustadt (1960), is the power of a campaign to persuade party leaders, activists, and citizens of the electability of its candidate. The candidate who demonstrates, or otherwise acquires, these persuasive powers emerges as the front runner. Jewell (1974) was perhaps the first to recognize how candidates might dominate the nomination process. In 1974, as states began to adopt presidential primaries, Jewell opined:

> The structure of the presidential primary system makes it possible for a candidate to win primaries if he has a strong organization, plenty of funds, shrewd advisers, an appealing campaign style, and a good image on television. (282)

Some reformers wish to simplify and streamline the nomination process. They believe, with some justification, that the current nomination process is too complicated and too hard on our candidates (Witcover 1999). I respectfully disagree. To what school do presidents go to learn how to be president? On top of their previous experience, our presidents attend the "nomination" school. They pass by demonstrating, or by developing, the power to persuade leaders, activists, and other party members to nominate them. If they fail in the "nomination" school, we know that they lack an essential skill of presidential leadership.

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2002). Why would George W. Bush question the legitimacy of his own nomination by advocating a reform that suggested that the process used to nominate him was seriously flawed?

## ***Conclusion***

Frontloading is a consequence of decisions made by state party leaders and permitted by national party rules. State party leaders have good reasons to move their selection of convention delegates to the start of the nomination season. Stopping and reversing this movement would require a major change in national party rules. Instead of a flexible nomination season, party rules would have to include a rigid nomination calendar. To make a major rule change during a national convention would require both the leadership of the party's presidential nominee and the support of the nominee's coalition. Why would a presidential nominee wish to make an issue out of the way the party had made its nomination? A party's presidential nominee might be inclined to advocate a major rule change if many party members were alarmed by frontloading. This alarm has not been sounded perhaps because the timing of delegate selection does not profoundly affect whether party members participate or why party members support candidates (Wattier 2004).

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