

9-23-1990

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Recommended Citation

Fraser, Douglas A. and Bluestone, Irving (1990) "The Presidential Primary: A Faulty Process," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 4.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol6/iss2/4>

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The Presidential Primary

A Faulty Process

Douglas A. Fraser and Irving Bluestone

The system of presidential primary elections has in effect created a nonsystem for selecting party candidates for the highest office in the nation. Personality has become the substitute for program content, and campaign spending coupled with the influence of the media counts for more than the candidates' experience, knowledge, expertise, administrative ability, and attachment to the policies and programs of their respective political party. In large measure the current presidential primary system has failed in its objective to advance the democratic process within the political parties while undermining the effectiveness of the parties and the importance of activists, the party regulars. It is altogether fair to allege that the democratic values we cherish as a nation are not being reinforced by the primary system. This article proposes that we reexamine the process for selecting each party's presidential candidate in search of a better way.

It is altogether timely to reexamine the primary election process in the selection of political party presidential candidates and to pose the question, Does the current presidential primary system truly represent the essence of democracy and its values, or is it a procedure that is claimed to be valid in theory but is actually defective in practice? Our judgment holds that it is, indeed, defective in practice. We must either design revisions and reforms that will make it a more effective and efficient system or perhaps find a substitute for it altogether.

The ostensible purpose of a primary election is to ensure that each party's candidate for president is selected by popular vote of the party's adherents among the citizenry at large. However, the election campaign, inevitably, emerges as a popularity contest among individuals rather than the selection of candidates based on a comprehensive examination by the voters of a broad range of salient socioeconomic issues. The contest tends to be more a matter of charismatic personality than of program content. It appears to be more a matter of which candidates can raise the most money for their respective campaign than it is the value of each individual's experience, knowledge, expertise, creative thinking, adminis-

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trative ability, and attachment to the policies and programs of his or her political party. And the influence of the media, particularly television, seems to accentuate the allure of the candidates' appearance far more than the substance of the issues they advocate. In some considerable measure, moreover, the primary referendum has tended to undermine the significance of the political party as the standard-bearer of its political platform and advocate in behalf of its committed members. Add to these distractions the extended duration of the presidential primary campaign, the strain and stress of demands on one's endurance on the campaign trail, the inequities of influence on the voters arising from the calendar of state primaries, the low state of voter participation, and the need for candidates already holding public office to neglect their duties during the long months of campaigning.

The question properly arises: Are the democratic values we cherish as a nation being reinforced by the use of the current system of presidential primaries or is it time to review the process, revise it, or even find an appropriate substitute that will correct its defects? Let us first examine the past record of facts and figures surrounding the presidential primary in order to highlight the arguments concerning its inadequacies.

The Money Problem

In a March 10, 1988, editorial, the *New York Times* commented on the result of the Super Tuesday, March 8, 1988, primary for presidential candidates with the caption "The Shock of Super Tuesday."¹ The Super Tuesday primary elections gained that title because of the large number of states which scheduled their primary election to be held on that one day. Why did the editorial describe the result as "shocking"?

Because it brought us face to face with the beast: a sudden quantum jump in the need for money. No disrespect for the candidates' other qualities, but please notice that those who had lots of money to spend, like Bush, Gore and Dukakis, won on Tuesday; those who didn't, like Dole and Gephardt, lost.

Well, that's right, but where's the shock? Everyone knows "money is the mother's milk of politics."

It is indeed rare that the candidate with the most money to spend during the primary campaign is the one who loses. It is rarer still that the candidate who has the least amount of money to spend is the one who wins, regardless of capability and qualifications to lead the nation.

The number of dollars collected and spent has reached proportions that probably require more time and effort during the campaign than do study and research of the key issues and preparation by the candidate and staff to define a vision for the nation's future well-being and formulate an action program to solve the nation's problems.

In the presidential primary campaign of 1983–1984, eleven candidates entered the race.² A total of \$105 million was collected, of which \$24.6 million were federal matching funds, and \$103.6 million were actually disbursed.³ It may be assumed that the rest of the money remained unexpended in that campaign. Since President Reagan was the only Republican Party candidate in the race, the outlay of \$25.9 million for his campaign was comparatively small. Obviously, had Reagan not been an incumbent and unchallenged, the expenditures would have been dramatically higher. For instance, in the 1979–1980 presidential primary campaign, there was a total of ten candidates, four for the Democratic Party and six for the Republican Party, and while the total outlay of campaign funds

amounted to \$92.3 million, the Republican candidates received \$56.7 million, more than double the \$25.9 million spent when Reagan ran unopposed.

The 1987–1988 presidential primary saw an explosion of spending in behalf of the candidates. As compared with the \$103.6 million disbursed in 1983–1984 and the \$92.3 million spent in 1979–1980, the net disbursements in the 1987–1988 race totaled \$250,361,270.⁴ This represents an increase of more than 100 percent in expenditures over the preceding presidential primary. One might speculate how much higher the figure will be in future such primaries. In other words, how high is up?

It is also of interest to note that the candidates who received the most in contributions and spent the most for the campaign in contested elections were the winners: Dukakis and Bush in 1987–1988 and Mondale in 1983–1984; Reagan and Carter in 1979–1980.

In a Senate race a William Proxmire, as an admittedly rare exception, may be the victor, yet not spend gobs of money in the campaign. It is extremely doubtful, even impossible, that a candidate without substantial financing would be able to make any kind of showing, let alone win, in a presidential primary contest.

It is evident that money talks and is heard. Does it also mean that the most qualified, capable, and experienced is selected? Good question.

The Voter Turnout Problem

The United States has become infamous among industrial democracies for its low voter participation, both in the so-called off-year elections and in presidential election years as well. In the 1960 presidential election, 62.8 percent of the voting-age population went to the polls; that year stands as the high-water mark of voter turnout over the past thirty years. Thereafter, a rather steady decline has taken place (except for a minimal upturn of one-half a percentage point to 53.1 percent in 1984) so that in the 1988 election participation fell to a low of 50.2 percent. George Bush was elected president by 53.4 percent of those who went to the polls. He received 48.8 million votes — a mere 26.8 percent of the 182.6 million total number of eligible voters. And this election was for the presidency, not just to choose a candidate for the office!

Voter participation in the presidential primaries is, of course, considerably lower than that in the presidential election itself. In the 1988 primaries, not a single state came anywhere near a 50 percent total turnout. In fact Montana, with 35.5 percent of its eligible voters going to the polls, enjoyed the highest voter turnout. In most of the states that held a primary, the voter turnout was below 30 percent; in Rhode Island it was a bare 8.5 percent.⁵

Thus, in a primary with five or six contestants, a candidate may garner sufficient convention votes to win the presidential nomination yet his or her actual vote from among the eligible citizens may represent a minuscule percentage of the voting-age population who support his or her party. Consider, for example, that in 1988 Rhode Island had 764,000 eligible voters for the primary election. Only 16,000 participated in the Republican primary, representing 2.1 percent of the voting-age population. This may be democracy in theory, but there must be a better way to make it more meaningful.

It is of more than passing interest to note that the steady decline in the percentage of eligible voters who actually exercise their franchise in *presidential* elections coincides with the proliferation of presidential *primary* elections. It may not be possible objectively to attribute this phenomenon to the increase in the use of primaries to select nominees for the presidency. It would appear, however, that the almost permanent presidential campaigning with its constant beat of media coverage generates more voter apathy than it

does voter participation. Perhaps the voters are so weary of such uninterrupted primary campaigning that they are “turned off” by what they rapidly come to consider a more or less vapid performance. No less a political guru than Lee Atwater, the brain behind the 1988 Bush campaign, expressed the opinion that many voters simply “don’t feel that voting is a rational use of their time.”

The Crossover Problem

Another factor that compounds the problem of choosing a party’s candidate in a primary is the “crossover” vote. It is possible for supporters of the Republican Party to vote in the Democratic Party primary, and vice versa. Thus, it is not mere speculation to project a situation in which adherents of one party pose as supporters of the opposing party in the primary and cast ballots for an admittedly weak candidate in an effort to thwart the campaign of a strong one. Such a deliberate action has the earmarks of a “dirty tricks” campaign, but dirty tricks are certainly not outside the pale of political morality. Just consider the nature of some recent campaign tactics.

Yet another area of concern might be considered. Apparently nothing prevents anyone from running for office as a Democrat or a Republican — or as an independent. All that is necessary is to declare one’s candidacy and enter the primary of either party. One would expect that the sincerity of declared party adherence might be subject to scrutiny by the party itself. In the 1990 Massachusetts primary election, John Silber, who admitted to having voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984 and for George Bush in 1988, was the winning candidate for governor in the Democratic Party primary. There are strong indications that his victory was attributable to voters who registered as independents but cast Democratic ballots for Silber in the primary election. It therefore appears that the adherents to the Democratic Party did not determine who would be the standard-bearer for their own political party.

Or consider the senatorial candidate in Louisiana, David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader. It is scandalous that he ran as a Republican even though GOP officials disavowed him and his campaign, which was strikingly, unabashedly, and explicitly racist. Should there be a procedure that enables the official political party to exercise some measure of control in determining the eligibility of a potential candidate? Should a person whose pronouncements and stated positions are diametrically opposed to the principles, policies, and programs of the party he or she wishes to represent be prevented from entering a primary race? In all fairness, should not those who are registered as supporters of their chosen party decide who should be the candidate of their party? It is perhaps easier to raise the questions than to determine the answers. The questions themselves, however, are certainly pertinent.

The Calendar Problem

For some years political scientists, officials of the two major parties, and elected officials have been mulling over developments related to the scheduling of primaries in the various states. The early timing of primary voting in Iowa and New Hampshire has been a matter of considerable debate. Although these are comparatively small states in terms of population (and their people are not demographically typical of the broad culture of the nation as a whole), their scheduled primaries appear to have carried lopsided weight in influencing subsequent primary elections in other states. Thus, the winners in these two states have a

psychological advantage as the campaign presses on into other areas of the nation. It is a reflection of the advantage attached to being a winner without necessarily evaluating the significance or lack of significance of these early contests within the context of the national scene of all the fifty states. New Hampshire sends only eighteen delegates to the Democratic Party national convention. For the candidates, the importance of that primary rests mainly on the opportunity to gain national publicity. It helps to win these delegates, but they are a tiny fraction of the several thousand who attend the convention.

In 1984, and even more notably in 1988, with a view toward pressing the full weight of the southern region of the nation onto the selection of candidates, the southern and border states agreed to schedule their primaries on the same day chosen by six states outside the South, creating Super Tuesday. The purpose, ostensibly, was to consolidate the South's voting strength and diminish the influence of the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries.

Holding a multiple-state primary on one day makes it virtually impossible for candidates personally to cover all the areas in the short period of time allotted. Under the strain and stress of campaigning, how can any candidate possibly visit twenty states on a hop, skip, and jump basis to bring his or her message to the electorate? Reliance on TV commercials and newspaper advertisements, therefore, becomes the substitute for in-person, hands-on appearances. Money again becomes the key. In any event, prospective voters receive a fleeting thirty-second TV commercial that carries little of substance and relies perceptibly on unadorned deception to influence the audience.

On the one hand, then, is the issue of undue influence generated by a couple of early primaries. On the other is the problem of a simultaneous date for several primaries that makes personal campaigning impossible. The pros and cons of the debate over scheduling of primaries remain a hot issue. Should the primaries be staggered over a longer period of time? Should one day be singled out for a super national primary? The discussion continues, with no finite answer in sight.

The Media Problem

How much or how little influence the media have on the voters' selection of a presidential candidate has been a subject of considerable interest to political scientists, politicians, and the media themselves. On one side are those who insist that the election results prove that media hype for an early front-runner in the primary elections has negligible effect on the ultimate choice of the candidates. An examination of Ted Kennedy's defeat by Jimmy Carter in 1980 and Ronald Reagan's victory over George Bush after Bush's early Iowa win have been cited, as has the poor showing of John Glenn in 1984 despite a heavy barrage of early favorable media coverage.⁶ The other side of the argument is that the media dominate and fashion the character of the campaign. So it is not unusual to find this conclusion from a research study of the subject:

In the absence of strong party machines that inform and mobilize the electorate, the news media have become increasingly important in the prenomination phase of the presidential selection process. From one perspective — applying the criteria of newsworthiness to large, multicandidate fields — it can be argued that they are now the essential institutional force in the process. Through both the quantity and the quality of press coverage the candidates receive, critical judgments are fashioned by political elites, likely voters, and other less active members of the electorate. These include decisions about contributing time and money as well as about whether to vote and for whom.⁷

In fact, it is argued that candidates will increasingly cater to the needs of the media, recognizing the overriding importance of utilizing them to further campaigns. Thus:

Candidates who understand the ways of the press and the institutional and personal needs of media professionals can increase the probability of receiving coverage by facilitating the job of reporters. Implementation of such a strategy frequently depends on the campaign's ability to organize and schedule activities to fit the deadlines of the press. This is increasingly done with an eye toward the production needs or demands of the evening news, and it frequently includes production of "pseudo-events" or "medialities." This means attempting to schedule major events no later than lunch or early afternoon, arranging for good crowds, and distributing prepared copies of the text, if there is one, in advance. For television, it means arranging a setting with appropriate visuals that will generate videotape with good pictures that can be used on the air.⁸

In this modern age of telecommunication, the TV screen "has become the central medium of communication in modern politics" and even facial expressions and postural habits of the candidates as their image comes on screen influence viewers' attitudes and opinions.⁹ Little surprise, therefore, that the public relations and communications experts have come to play an increasingly dominant role in fashioning the candidates' campaigns. Issues per se tend to receive less attention than the candidates' expressive displays, carefully rehearsed in advance of TV appearances.

Willy-nilly, the media, in print, and even more so in TV, play a notable role in the election process, but that role has less to do with the major issues on the national and international scene than with the thirty-second-spot portrayal of personality and the cleverly manipulated use of the media by the candidate. The political party, its policies and program, the party leaders, and the party activists have a diminishing role in the final choice of the presidential candidate, the potential standard-bearer for the party. Put more bluntly, as one observer of the primary election process concluded, "The problem is that television created a process that has weakened the parties and created one of the least well-organized systems for choosing party leaders in the world."¹⁰

The Wear-and-Tear Problem

It is a wonder that a presidential candidate who campaigns from the beginning of the contest for nomination and sticks it out to the final decision does not collapse from exhaustion. No other nation in the world in which democratic and contested elections are held makes the stamina demands upon the candidates that the United States does. For almost two years — and in some cases longer — the candidate is on the run, rushing from one geographic location to another, meeting with staff, meeting with small groups of the politically or financially powerful, appearing before audiences of supporters, shaking hands, engaging in the proverbial kissing of babies, fencing with the press, and looking fresh and engaging for the news and television cameras. Grabbing a sandwich or a brief nap while on the run between appearances is common practice, in the tradition of Harry Truman, whose advice was never to pass up a "facility" because one never knows when the next one will be available.

Most presidential primary candidates already hold elective office. The demands of campaigning make it difficult — almost impossible — to perform one's functions and

fulfill one's responsibilities as a "job holder" while pursuing the campaign trail. There is no leave of absence with or without pay for a senator or a member of Congress or a governor. A governor is still responsible for governing and should not neglect his or her ongoing duties. A senator or congressman should still serve actively on congressional committees, study the bills to be voted on, and be present to cast a vote. The balancing act between trying to win the nomination for president and resisting neglect of their job functions places further strain on an already taut string. One need only reflect on the problems that Governor Dukakis and the citizens of Massachusetts have faced since the November 1988 election to realize how difficult it is to manage an extended presidential primary campaign and a governor's duties simultaneously.

Such months-long campaigning is a grueling exercise that, often enough, leads to the use of a quick quip rather than intensive presentation of salient issues. And the stretched-out primary process is only the beginning for the candidate who captures the nomination at the party's national convention. After an all too brief rest comes preparation for TV debates and the fifty-state rush-rush pace of the presidential campaign itself. When one considers the strains and stresses of extended campaigning on the candidate, the family, and the staff, compounded by the humiliating need constantly to beg for money to finance the operation, it is little wonder that otherwise viable, even outstanding, candidates are inhibited from taking the plunge. And little wonder that, for those who do make the run, "Read my lips" becomes the campaign substitute for a careful, studied exposition of the issues and solutions to the nation's problems! Dreaming up gimmickry and calling up charisma are all too often becoming the essence of presidential campaigning.

Is There a Satisfactory Answer?

Inherent in the debate concerning the presidential primary election system lies the fundamental issue of democracy and democratic values. Until the end of the nineteenth century the national party conventions comprised delegates selected directly by state party leaders or by activists voting in state party caucuses. The reaction to "boss control" of the process, which entered internal party procedures in the early years of the twentieth century, led to the introduction of state primaries. In fact, in 1916 both the national Democratic and Republican parties used the primary in twenty states to select delegates to their respective national conventions. It was not long, however, before the use of the presidential primary fell into disrepute and the caucus method was essentially reinstated.

The upheaval of the 1960s, and particularly the debacle of the 1968 Democratic national convention in Chicago, saw the rise of internal party reform movements. The primary election process inherited new vigor with the cry of democracy and direct participation aimed at wresting party control from "party bosses." Today only sixteen states, plus Washington, D.C., do not hold presidential primaries. However, just as the primary election process again came under review in the 1920s, so today is soul-searching taking place concerning the current system of presidential primaries.

The basic issue remains: Is the present presidential primary system fulfilling its promise of true political democracy or has it simply become a "nonsystem"? Should the parties revert to the preprimary election system for selecting delegates to their respective national conventions? Or should they put in place carefully directed reforms of the present system aimed at correcting deficiencies and ensuring the protection of democratic values within our free society?

The Role of Activists in National Party Conventions

Throughout the nation as a whole, tens of thousands of rank-and-file citizens are activists within their respective parties. They attend party meetings in their communities, pay dues to help maintain party apparatus, become precinct delegates, perform volunteer duties in party offices, involve themselves in congressional district races, and so forth. There is every reason for them to play a meaningful role in the selection of their party's candidate for president. In the present primary selection system, however, that role, while not totally obliterated, is largely devitalized. Inevitably this leads to a weakening of the party apparatus and the decline of the party as a political force.

Yet the candidate who wins the nomination through the primary process runs under the banner of his or her party. The reaction in past years to party "bossism," with a handful of powerful leaders within the party ruling the roost in selecting presidential candidates in the confines of the traditional smoke-filled room, was aimed at democratizing the process. As some critics have noted, the result has become a nonsystem. And it has tended to eviscerate the influence of the broad base of regulars whose devotion to its principles is evidenced by their consistent involvement in the ongoing activities of the party of their choice.

A political party, after all, should be comprised of political activists rallying around common policy goals. It should be representative of a strong association of people whose combined commitment and force are aimed at convincing the electorate at large that their cause is just and deserves the support of the voters.

Why not, then, create a presidential nominating system that reflects the significant contribution of party activists and provides them with the opportunity to select their leader? After all, they are better acquainted with the qualities and capabilities of prospective candidates. They represent, by and large, the core of party support and influence party policy. There is no reason why a process should not be established that would avoid authoritarian total party boss control and recognize the democratizing value of the broad-based rank-and-file activist role in choosing the party's presidential nominee. Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson were the nominees — and ultimately the successful candidates — for their respective parties. And their selection was, in the greatest measure, the decision by party activists in open convention.

The deficiencies in the current system of presidential primaries appear increasingly obvious. It is desirable, even necessary, therefore, to effect a deserved major role for party activists with an appropriate voting opportunity of the electorate in the ultimate selection of the respective party's presidential nominee at each party's national convention.

This is not to advocate a reversion to pure party bossism. It is to say, however, that a fitting substitute for a disjointed primary presidential election system would be a carefully designed process to ensure the democratizing input in the nominee selection procedure by those whose serious and consistent attachment to the party of their choice earns for them the status of knowledgeable delegates to their party's national convention. The fulfillment of democracy rests upon the implementation of democratic processes. It is not undemocratic to establish a system of decision making in which those who have devoted their time, energy, and active participation in the affairs of their chosen political party attend the "caucus" — the national convention — in which, after due and ample debate, their vote designates their representative.

This requires a process which assures that such party adherents become convention delegates with voting rights. An appropriate process to achieve this goal becomes readily apparent. The practice of electing precinct captains within the two major political parties is one of long standing. It affords the opportunity for those who wish to represent their chosen party to solicit the votes of the citizens in their precinct who are registered in their respective party to become the party's representatives at the neighborhood level of the thousands of the nation's apportioned precincts.

These precinct delegates, the grassroots activists, comprise the core of each party's congressional district meetings. It is altogether reasonable that this group select the people to represent their congressional district at the party's national convention. Moreover, at each of the party's state conventions the same group would confirm the congressional district selections of national convention delegates and select a designated number of at-large delegates. These latter would be chosen from among the state party leaders and the party's elected public officials. It is of course a given that the members of the national committee of the party and members of Congress would also be confirmed as delegates. The number of delegates to the national convention from each state would be apportioned on the basis of the census population in the state. Thus, the voting strength of each state at the convention would reflect the precise proportion of its population to the total population of the nation.

These delegates, because of their interest and involvement in their party's affairs and the time, energy, and commitment they devote to party activities, are in a position to assess the qualifications of possible presidential candidates and to evaluate the likely chances of each potential nominee to win the election.

It stands to reason that such a selection process would gain the advantage for each party of more or less guaranteeing that the chosen candidate is carefully scrutinized as to qualities of required leadership appropriately reflecting the policies and programs of the party. The choice by the voting public is, as a consequence, far more apt to be based on an assessment of the nominees' stand on the key national and international issues than on catch phrases and negative election campaigning.

There is still, however, the question of the self-starter who "catches fire" prior to the nominating convention itself. A convention that totally ignores such a new political star does so at its and its party's peril. Assuredly, an individual who is affiliated with a party and wishes to be considered for the presidential nomination, whether well known or a veritable newcomer, should have the opportunity to "sell" his or her "wares," so to speak, and attempt to prove that he or she can generate the support needed to win. This was the case in 1960, when John F. Kennedy swept the presidential primary in West Virginia and ran in the other fifteen primaries held that year. He captured the imagination of the voters, overcame what many considered a drawback in the national political scene, his Catholicism, and lit the torch that carried him to his party's nomination and his election to the presidency.

To prevent foreclosure of such a possibility and to cause serious consideration to be given to such a candidate, it would be reasonable to retain the primary election but to adjust it so as to minimize to the greatest degree the faults and failings of the current system. It might be sensible for each party to schedule a limited number of state primaries — perhaps ten in all — determined to be generally representative of the various geographic and demographic sectors of the nation. There would have to be severe time constraints on the primary election schedule effectively to avoid the drawn-out, exhausting process.

Moreover, in each succeeding presidential election year a different grouping of states would be designated to comprise the primary population so that the results of early primaries would not unduly or unfairly influence the outcome in other states.

Some candidates may, at their own risk, decide not to enter the primaries. They would nevertheless be entitled to seek their party's nomination. Recall, for instance, the success of Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and 1956. Even though Estes Kefauver won the primaries, which Stevenson chose not to enter, the Democratic convention delegates selected Stevenson as their nominee, convinced that his were the superior qualifications.

With a combination of activist delegates selected from within the party structure and delegates reflecting the results of a limited number of primaries, all the prospective candidates would have a chance to air their views, a dark horse candidates would have his or her moment in the spotlight, and the candidate of choice would be one whose carefully weighed credentials make that person a potential winner for the party.

Political Party Rules

There is every reason for the political parties, within the confines of their structure and responsive to their policies, to establish rules, regulations, and procedures governing the campaigns undertaken by their respective candidates. For example, rules might be established concerning "dirty tricks" campaigning, with the precautionary note that candidates who violate those rules will be publicly chastised by party officials. More precisely, all thirty-second TV commercials would require the candidate in whose behalf the message is delivered to take full responsibility for its content by either personally introducing it or confirming it at the close.

It certainly would be helpful for the media to publicize untruths or falsifications by or in behalf of any candidate. It may not be feasible to compel the media to present such analyses, but sound reporting surely calls for objective, factual correction of false statements or innuendo. The Willie Horton commercials of the 1988 Bush campaign come readily to mind.

It would also be necessary to guard against the "crossover" vote in any primary. It is fair and fitting that only those registered as Republicans be permitted to vote in the Republican Party primary and only those registered as Democrats to vote in the Democratic Party primary. It would be altogether fitting if a national law were enacted requiring the declaration of political party preference as a prerequisite to vote in a particular primary. After all, the primary is the business of the political party, and its results should reflect the will only of those who are declared party supporters. A Michigan law enacted in 1988 required voters in that state to declare a party preference in order to be eligible to vote in the presidential primary. Its admitted purpose was to prevent the crossover vote. In May 1990 a circuit court judge declared that the law was a violation of the state constitution. The basis for the decision was that the law violated the provision requiring only state residency as a license to vote. Surely it makes eminent good sense that only those who are declared adherents of a particular party be eligible to vote in the party's primary. In fact, in a 1981 Wisconsin case, the court held that each political party has the right to decide how delegates to its national nominating convention are selected.¹¹

The thesis presented here is to give preference to a system in which party activists have the major role in selecting the nominee in national party conventions yet not totally abandoning the role of a limited number of primary elections in providing the opening for a

self-starter to prove his or her electability. There is much to be argued in favor of having those most committed to and knowledgeable concerning the party and its possible presidential candidates as the decision makers. Admittedly, times and circumstances may make this change difficult to achieve, for the transition from the current presidential primary election process would not be easy. It is urgent, nonetheless, that party activists and the parties themselves play the vital and weighty role in the nominee selection process. After all, it is they who have devoted the time, effort, energy, and financial investment to keep their organizations healthy and vibrant. Perhaps it is stretching a point, but if only shareholders may vote to determine the management of corporate enterprises, why should not the stakeholder activists in political parties have the significant and influential voice in selecting their presidential nominees?

The approach advocated does not entirely lay to rest some of the problems troubling the current system, such as undue media influence. It does, however, argue for sharp change in the current nonsystem of the presidential primary election process. The time is ripe. The will to change must be strongly nurtured so that a more rational system can become a reality. 🐼

Notes

1. "The Shock of Super Tuesday," *New York Times*, March 10, 1988, A-30.
2. The candidates in the 1983–1984 presidential primary race were, for the Democratic Party, Reubin Askew, Alan Cranston, John Glenn, Gary Hart, Ernest Hollings, Jesse Jackson, Lyndon La Rouché, George McGovern, Walter Mondale; for the Republican Party, Ronald Reagan; for the Citizens Party, Sonia Johnson.
3. *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1989, 109th ed., 262.
4. Federal Election Commission, press release, August 25, 1989.
5. See note 3 above, 258.
6. Cited in "Politics-Rules Seem Made to Be Rewritten," *New York Times*, May 3, 1985.
7. Alfred B. Hunt, "The Media and Presidential Campaigns," in *Elections American Style*, ed. A. James Reichley (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), chapter 3.
8. Michael W. Traugott, "The Media and the Nominating Process," in *Before Nomination: Our Primary Problem*, ed. George Grassmuck, American Enterprise, 1985, 112.
9. *Ibid.*, 104–105.
10. Roger Masters and Denis G. Sullivan, "Voters Take Cues from Leaders' Facial Expressions on TV," in *Public Affairs Report of the Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California at Berkeley* 31, no. 2 (March 1990).
11. *Democratic Party of the U.S. vs. State of Wisconsin* 450 U.S. 107, 1081.

