

Caucuses & Primaries



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POLS 302: The American Presidency

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OXY Occidental
College

Outline

1. Discussion: the invisible primary
2. Why parties?
3. A brief history
4. Discussion: Ordering (and re-ordering?) the primaries

Discussion: The Invisible Primary

Reviewing the Invisibly Primary

- This is an unofficial part of the presidential candidate nominating process that starts long *before* voting begins
- This process determines which candidates are “viable” and which will likely fizzle out
- In order to compete in the invisible primary, candidates must win over:
 - Members of Congress
 - Party activists
 - Donors
 - Party elites
 - Media figures

What Do You Think?

- Is the *Party Decides* theory correct?
- What are the pros and cons of the party “deciding” presidential nominations?
- The stakes of the invisible primary are **very** high, as evidenced by soaring fundraising totals
 - Should the stakes be lowered?
 - How?
- Should presidential nominations be *more* “open”? Or more elite-driven?

Why Parties?

Why Have Party-nominated Candidates?

- In order to explore how we got to the system we have today, let's review some of the history of the primaries
- But first, let's start by taking a step back – why do presidential candidates even need to be nominated by parties?
- In theory, presidential candidates could just run as independents – no need to bother with an exhausting (and expensive!) nominating process

Some Do!



Billionaire Ross Perot

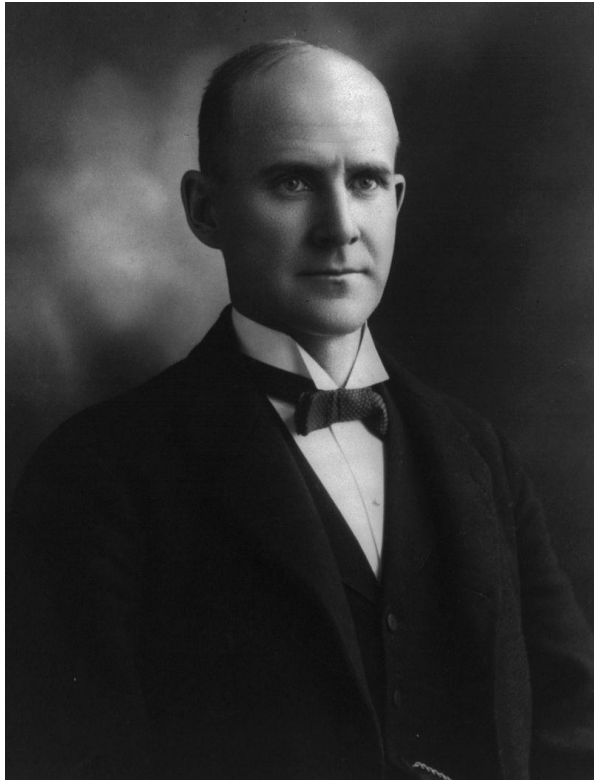


AL Governor George Wallace

More Third-Party Candidates

- There are plenty more examples
 - Socialist Eugene V. Debs ran multiple times (including from jail)
 - Progressive Robert La Follette also ran an insurgent leftist campaign in 1924
 - Teddy Roosevelt 1912 run is the best performance by a 3rd party presidential candidate
- What's something they all have in common?
- They all lost (and it wasn't particularly close)

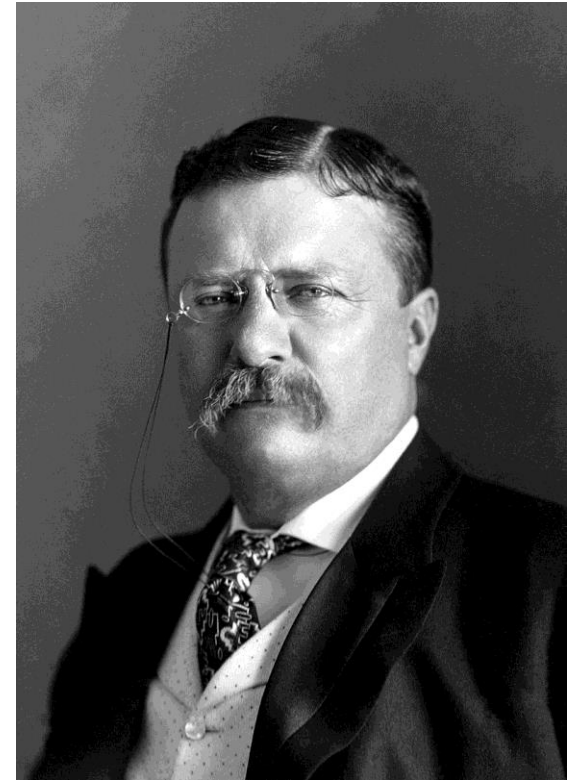
Some Nice Mugshots



Eugene Debs
(Socialist)



Robert La Follette
(Progressive)



Teddy Roosevelt
(Progressive)

Why Do Third Party Candidates Lose?

- The short answer: the electoral college
 - We are going to talk a lot about this next week!
- To preview: rather than use a popular vote, candidates must win a majority of electoral votes
- These EVs are earned by a candidate when they win a *plurality* of the popular vote in a state*
- This means that a candidate who does well in the popular vote, but does not come in first in many states stands little chance of becoming the president
- We'll break this down next week!

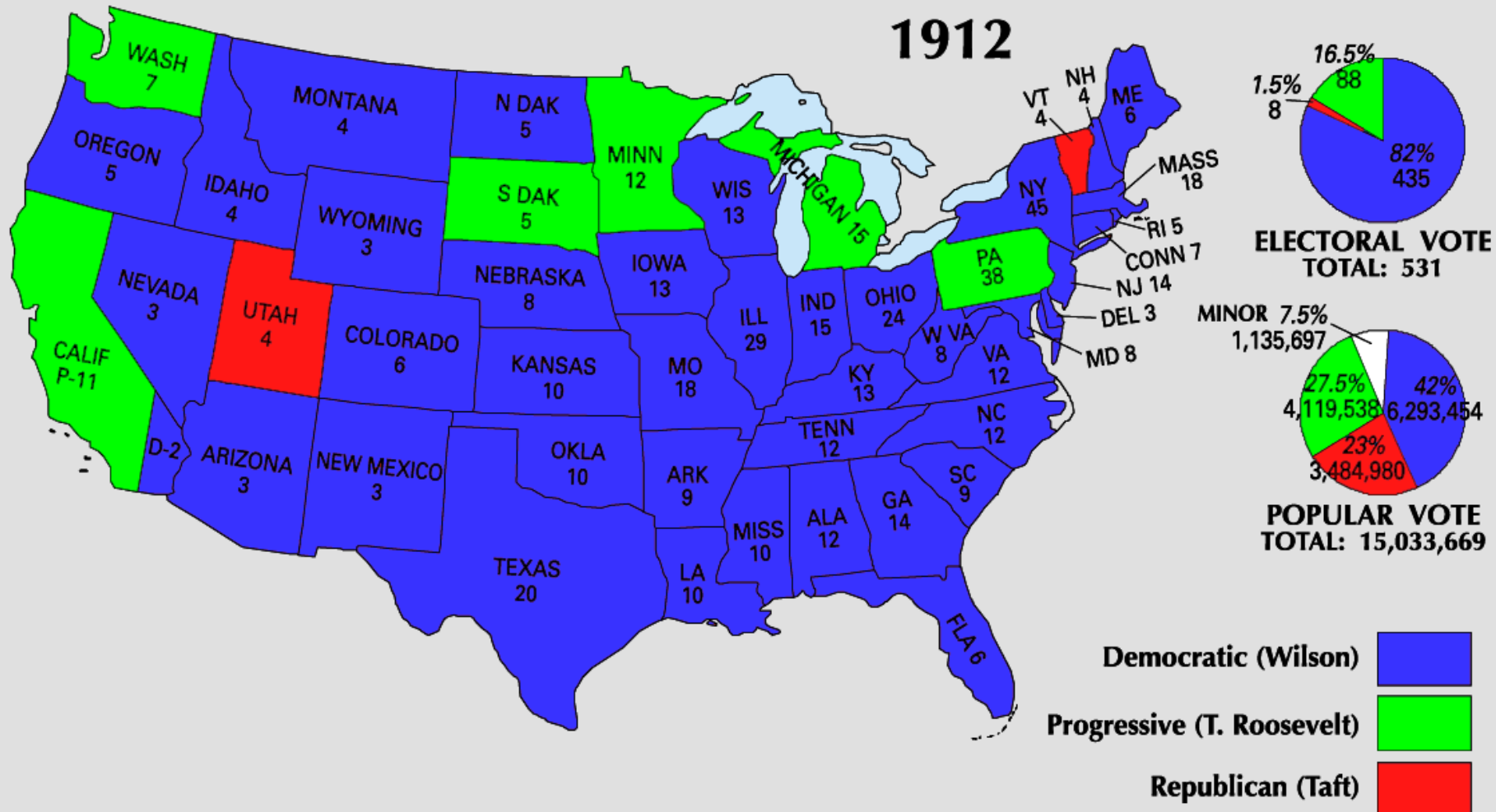
Why Do Candidates Seek Party Nominations?

- What's one way to be competitive at the state-level in presidential elections?
- Have the support of a major party
- Parties bring:
 - Organization
 - Endorsements
 - Donor networks
 - Loyal partisan voters
 - Media coverage & attention

Why Do Parties Nominate Candidates?

- What do parties get out of the deal?
- The nomination process allows them to consolidate their voters support behind a single candidate
 - For this to work, the process must be perceived as legitimate
- This maximizes the odds that a candidate close to the party's ideological position wins the presidency
- What happens when a party “splits” because it is unable to unify support behind a candidate?

Roosevelt and Taft Split Republican Voters



A Brief History of Party Nominations

The Changing Primary System

- How does one get a party nomination? Turns out, the answer is in flux!
- Until the **McGovern-Fraser Commission**, candidates were chosen at party conventions – individual voters had little say
 - There were a few primaries, but they mostly were a way for candidates to demonstrate popular support
- The commission formed after the 1968 Democratic nomination of Hubert Humphrey over Eugene McCarthy
- This nomination came at the height of the Vietnam War. McCarthy opposed the war, Humphrey did not.
 - The result was DNC riots and a landslide Humphrey defeat

The Origins of the Primary



The Modern Primary System

- What changes under this new system?
- The previous system of “smoke-filled” strongly favored *party insiders*
 - In a sense, the invisible primary was the entire primary!
- Under the new system, who is favored?
 - Strong campaigners who commit early
 - E.g. Jimmy Carter in 1976
 - Candidates with existing popular bases of support
 - E.g. Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, John McCain, etc.
 - Still: candidates acceptable to party insiders (but less so)

Primaries & Caucuses

- Under the new system, all states hold **primaries** or **caucuses** for each party to determine their nominees
- **Caucuses** are run by state parties
 - The state government is **not** involved
 - Following reform, caucuses were the norm
- **Primaries** are run by states.
 - State parties are **not** involved
 - Over time, primaries have slowly replaced caucuses
- Primaries and caucuses can be either **open**, **closed**, or **semi-closed**

How Do Caucuses Work?



The Decline of Caucuses

- Why are parties shifting from caucuses to primaries?
- Caucuses disenfranchise a lot of voters:
 - Those who have to care for children
 - Those who can't get time off work
 - Those with disabilities
 - Those that can't spend hours voting
- Caucuses are expensive and a lot of work for parties, but primaries are administered and paid for by states
- The primaries are a chance to advertise the party and its candidates
 - Caucuses are complicated, and potentially embarrassing

These Are Not the Headlines A Party Wants!





TUESDAY
February 4, 2020

StarTribune

20°  5°

Seems Mr. Groundhog
was right – so far. **B6**

2019 LOCAL NEWS



PULITZER FINALIST

Iowa delivers caucus chaos

Results delayed by data review; party says vote not compromised

By STEVE PEOPLES, THOMAS
BEAUMONT and ALEXANDRA
JAFJE • Associated Press

DES MOINES – The Iowa Democratic Party said Monday night that results from the state's first-in-the-nation caucus were indefinitely delayed due to "quality checks" and "inconsistencies" in some reporting, an embarrassing complication that added a new layer of doubt to an already uncertain presidential primary season.

The party said the problem was not a result of a "hack or an intrusion."

The statement came after Iowa voters packed caucus sites across the state with at least four leading candidates battling to win the opening contest of the 2020 campaign, and ultimately, the opportunity to take on President Donald Trump this fall.

The confusion allowed every candidate to claim many



NEWS



ATHS
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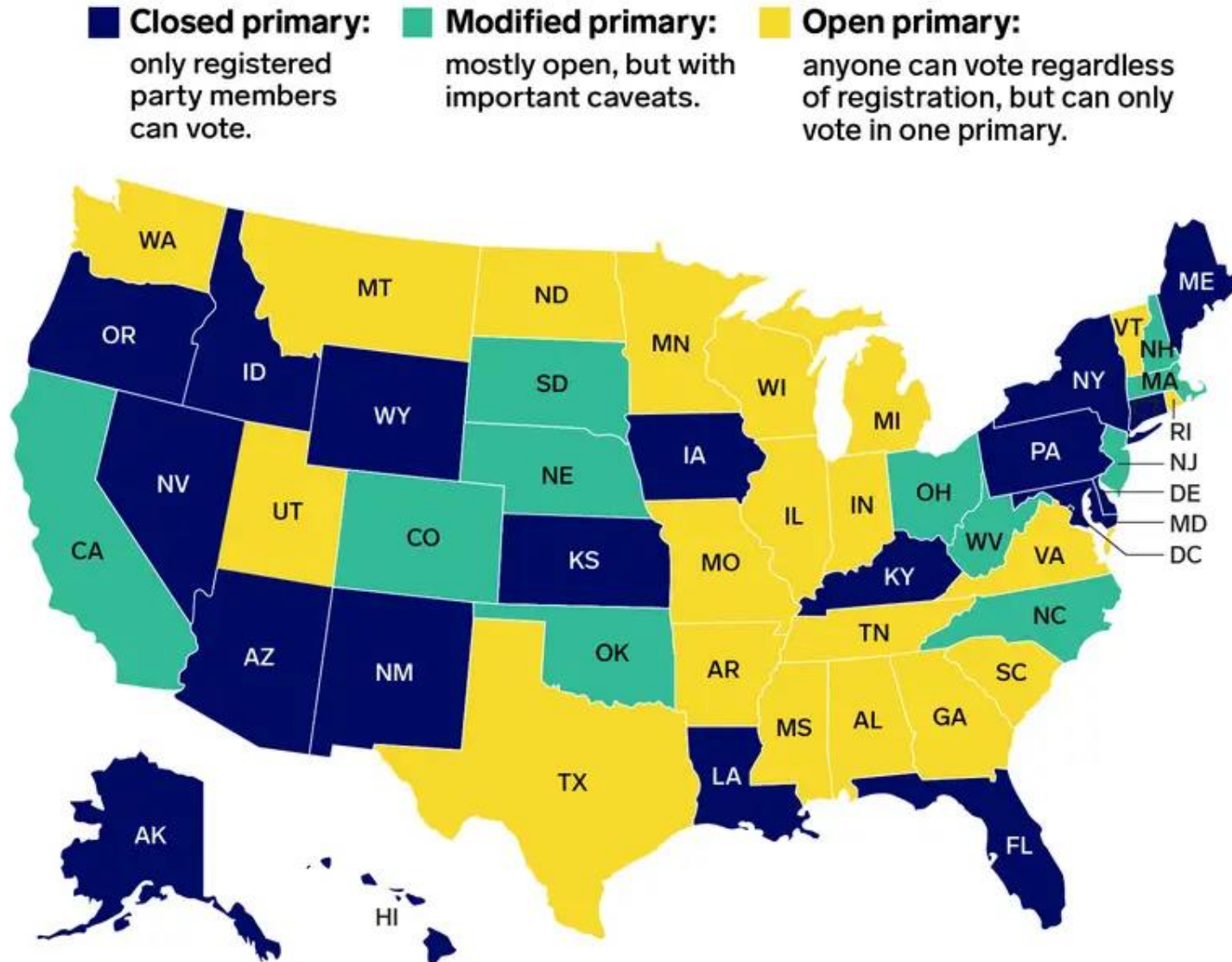
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Open vs. Closed Primaries

- **Open** primaries: anyone can vote in a party's primary/caucus
 - Dem examples: Washington, Texas, Illinois, Virginia, Georgia
- **Closed** primaries: only registered members of the party can vote in a party's primary/caucus
 - Dem examples: Iowa, Nevada, Florida, Oregon, New York
- **Semi-closed** primaries: registered members of the party can vote, and so can some others – but not all voters!
 - Dem examples: California, Colorado, Ohio, New Hampshire
 - In California, independents can vote in the Democratic primary, but Republicans (and most 3rd parties) can't
- Who decides these rules? State parties!

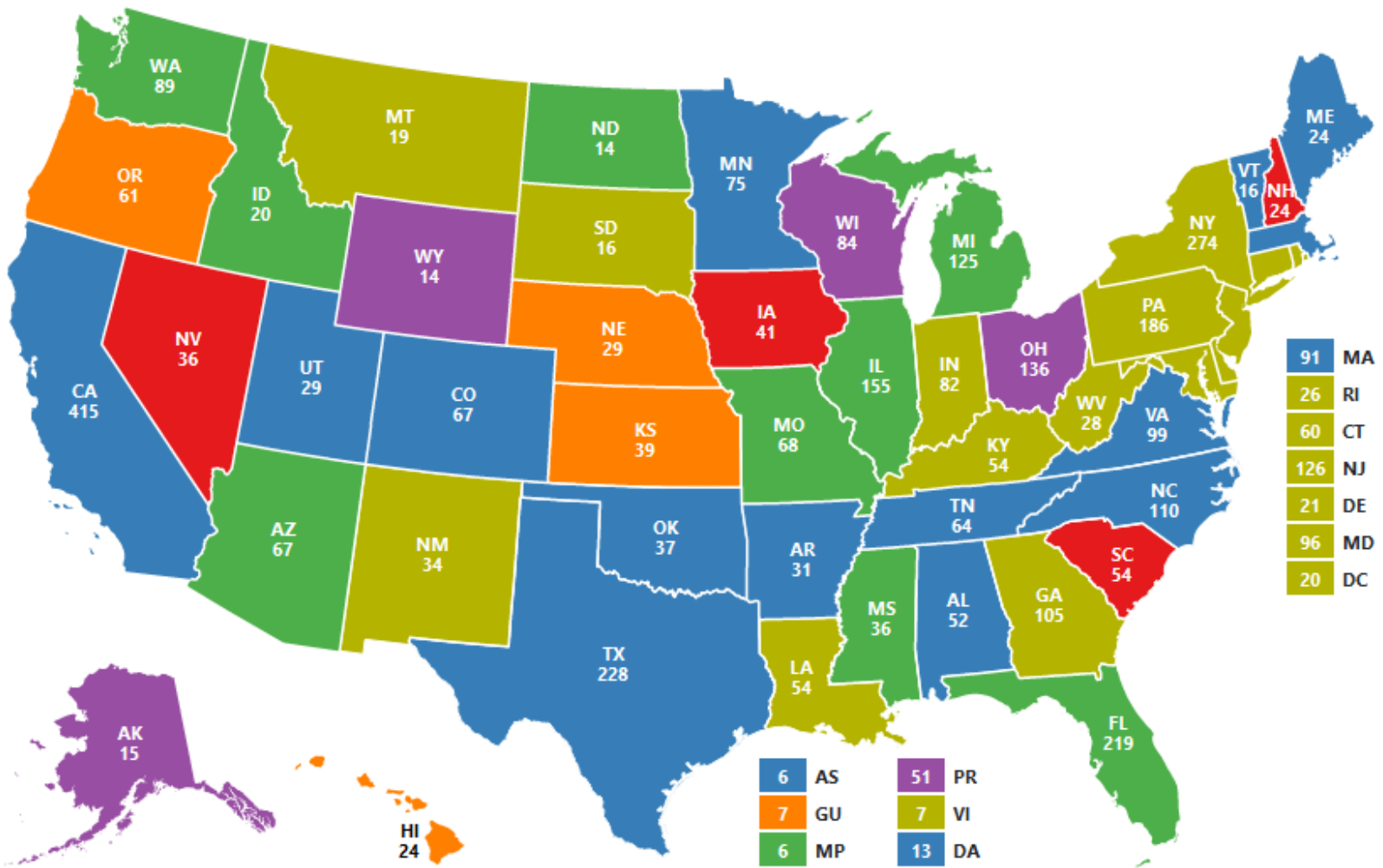


Delegate Allocation

- In each state primary/caucus, delegates are allocated and sent to the national convention
- Democratic delegates are allocated **semi-proportionally**
 - This means that the percent of a states delegates that each candidate gets *roughly* corresponds to their statewide vote
 - The reality is more complicated
- Republican delegates are allocated either **semi-proportionally** or **winner-take-all**
 - Early contests (e.g. IA and NH) award their delegates proportionally
 - Later contests give all their delegates to the *plurality* winner
 - This favors frontrunners – even weak ones!

How Many Delegates?

- To get the nomination, a candidate needs a majority of delegates at their party's convention
- Each party uses a different number of **pledged delegates**:
 - The Democrats (2020): 3,979
 - The Republicans (2020): 2,441
- Both parties also have **unpledged delegates**
 - The Democrats (2020): 771 “superdelegates”
 - The Republicans (2020): 110 unbound delegate
 - Idiosyncratic, with only a few states having them (PA, ND, CO, WY, American Samoa, Guam, and The Virgin Islands)



February	Super Tues	March 4-31	April	May	June
155	1,357	799	300	160	1,082

2016 vs. 2020: Superdelegate Reform

- Parties set their own rules for delegate allocation
- The runner-up often gets a say in changing the rules – especially when the nominee loses the general election
 - Recall the McGovern-Fraser Commission
- The Sanders campaign complained that Clinton's overwhelming lead among superdelegates in 2016 gave the false impression that she was dominating the primaries
- Sanders loyalists worked with the DNC to change the rules:
 - Now, superdelegates do not get to vote unless the nomination “deadlocks” among the pledged delegates (i.e. no candidate can get a majority)

The Complicated Democratic Delegate Allocation System

- The method used by Democrats in the 2020 primaries to allocate pledged delegates is (unnecessarily!) complicated
- There are *statewide* delegates, allocated based on each candidate's statewide % of the vote
 - BUT: a candidate gets ZERO statewide delegates unless they get at least 15% of the statewide vote
- There are *district* delegates, awarded at the congressional district level
 - To get delegates in a district, a candidate needs at least 15% of the vote in that district
- This is arbitrary, and helps the frontrunning candidates

The Democratic Primary

- For a good read on the faults of this system, check out this blog post from UC Davis Distinguished Professor Matthew Shugart: <https://fruitsandvotes.wordpress.com/2020/02/20/the-strategic-voters-nightmare-that-is-us-democrats-proportional-system/>
- Consider the polling average in California two weeks before the primary: 27% Sanders, 16% Bloomberg, 14% Biden, 11% Warren, 10% Buttigieg
- If you don't support Sanders, who do you vote for?
 - How do you know who might hit 15% in your district?
- This system makes it very hard for voters to be strategic

Reading Brief Time: Ordering & Reordering the Primaries

Q&A