

# **The Deciders: State Legislatures, Secretaries of State, Governors, State Parties and Frontloading**

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**Abstract:** The extant presidential campaigns and elections literature has done much to point out the presence of frontloading across presidential nomination cycles, but has ultimately failed to sufficiently explain why it is that states have decided to move their primaries to earlier dates. Carman and Barker (2005) shifted the focus of the literature in the direction of the states themselves; looking at the influence of political culture on the decision to frontload. The focus here is on the states as well, with particular attention paid to the actual frontloading decision makers; the state legislatures, governors, state parties and secretaries of state. The decisions of these bodies or individuals from 1976-1996 to move their presidential nominating events to earlier dates or keep them in place are the basis for the dependent variable. The focus of the research then shifts to an analysis of the relationship between the decision to frontload and factors such as campaign spending, media coverage, voter turnout and type of delegate selection event. Ultimately, it is found that both the type of decision maker and mode of delegate selection used have a significant effect on a state's ability to move its nominating contest.

The frontloading of presidential nominating contests took on a decidedly chaotic tone for the 2008 cycle. Whereas in the past several presidential election years a handful of states repositioned their delegate selection events, 2008 was marked by a free-for-all movement to dates on or around the February 5 date both national parties mandated as the earliest date on which such contests could be held. The result was what has been dubbed “Super Duper Tuesday,” or alternately, “the closest thing we’ve had to a national primary.” With more than twenty states weighing in on who the nominees for both parties would be in the November general election, February 5, 2008 became both the busiest and earliest primary/caucus date in the post-reform era.

What has motivated states to move forward though? And perhaps more importantly, what has kept some states from moving at all? Mayer and Busch (2004) have shown that media coverage of the various early states' contests and candidate spending there as well, are significant factors in motivating the actors responsible for positioning those contests to consider repositioning them. In other words, these state actors are enticed by the attention that being early affords them. To a large degree that answers the first question, but the second—why others states stay put—remains largely unaddressed. Political culture within each state (Carman and Barker 2005) explains some of the variation in the states' decisions to move or not move as does whether a state holds its presidential primary simultaneously with its primaries for state and local offices (Putnam 2007). The idea though, is one that remains understudied. What are the differences between states—and even within states over time—that cause some states to frontload their presidential primaries and caucuses while others remain in their traditional positions?

The goal of this research is to examine several additional factors in an effort to augment the understanding of why some states move and others do not. In particular, two fundamental

questions will be addressed: Are there any differences across states in the ability to reposition a delegate selection event based on the type of event—primary or caucus—used? Which format is chosen is typically affected by who the decision maker(s) is/are. Caucuses tend to be within the domain of state parties. The dates on which those events fall then are entirely up to those entities. On the other hand, the dates on which presidential primaries are held is a decision made by a wider range of individuals. More often than not, these decisions find their origin within state legislatures and must then be ratified by the state's executive. However, some primary dates are settled upon by state parties while others are moved under the sole authority of either the state's governor or secretary of state. The question that arises from this is whether the difference in actors—those in charge of setting the date on which a state's delegate selection event is held—has an effect on that state's ability to reposition said delegate selection event.

This article will proceed as follows: After a more thorough look at the frontloading literature in the following two sections—focusing first on the importance of rules in the presidential nomination process and then on frontloading more directly—the next section will place the above questions into that extant theoretical framework and enumerate the hypotheses attendant to those questions. A fourth section will then discuss the methodological model employed with resultant sections detailing the findings and implications. The final section will contain some concluding remarks and look forward to what research can be done next.

### **The Rules of the Game**

The presence of frontloading is but one of the many consequences of the reforms undertaken in the McGovern-Fraser round of reforms within the Democratic Party in the late 1960s. The intention was to remove the party's presidential nominating process from the

proverbial smoke-filled rooms of national conventions, instead attaching the decision to the results of a series of delegate selection events within the states. The decision of who that party's nominee would be then was shifted away from the party elites and toward the rank-and-file party members. As this new system progressed through the two transitional presidential nominating cycles of the 1970s, several things happened. First there was a proliferation of primaries, as that became the preferred method for allocating national convention delegates within a majority of states. Beyond that, the actors—state legislatures, state parties, governors and secretaries of state—within states began to better understand the new system; a system in which the national parties set the rules under which delegates would be selected and thus who would ultimately become the presidential nominee.

Under those rules the actors within states could, as has already been discussed, choose which format in which the state would allocate delegates. Additionally though, those same actors could construct the rules by which these nominating events were conducted. Since the 2008 cycle has been so closely competitive on the Democratic side, many of these differences have been brought into sharper contrast. Again, the type of contest matters. Caucuses padded the pledged delegate count of Barack Obama while states with primaries tended to have more competitive races. In past cycles this distinction between contests mattered less simply because most of the attention was paid to primaries (Gurian 19??). The fact remains though, that the type of contest mattered then and matters now, but for different reasons.

Another, related factor that is consequential to delegate selection is the method of delegate allocation. Format is one thing, but the rules for actually distributing the delegates at stake in a contest are another. In other words, is the system for allocation winner-take-all, proportional or

some combination of the two (Cavala 1974)? Again, the 2008 example is illustrative. John McCain was able to put himself in the driver's seat to the Republican nomination on Super Tuesday because his campaign had done so well in the big, winner-take-all contests. While McCain was able to build a big delegate lead, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were prevented from doing likewise because their contests were so close and the delegates awarded based on those contests were allocated proportionally. Tinkering with this rule applies more on the Republican side because the National Republican Committee leaves it up to the states to decide upon which method to use. The Democratic National Committee—through its Rules and Bylaws Committee—mandates that all states distribute delegates proportionally, based on the outcome of the primary or caucus. The implication is that the quickness with which a nomination is decided can be affected depending upon what rules of delegate allocation are chosen.

Who can participate matters also. Are primaries and caucuses open to independents or are registered party members the only ones included? This rule has implications for the type of candidate chosen by the party. Delegate selection events typically pull those vying for the nomination to the extremes of their party to win votes. As a result of that and whether the contest is open, a dichotomy develops based on candidate type: establishment candidates versus those candidates representing an alternative to the establishment (Steger 2000). In 2008, Hillary Clinton has been that establishment candidate in the same way that Walter Mondale was for the Democrats in 1984 or George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole were for the Republicans in 1988 and 1996, respectively. Barack Obama falls in the latter category, similar to Gary Hart in 1984 for the Democrats or John McCain for the Republicans in 2000. Those in the latter category are the candidates who are hypothesized to require some assistance from the contests that open the process

up to independents.

Finally, the calendar position of a delegate selection event is within the purview of the decision making entities within each state. The boundaries—both beginning and end—are set by the national parties, but those that make the decisions on the positioning of the delegate selection event in a state have free reign to place the state's contest anywhere within that window. In the post-reform era, that has meant a trend toward the front of the calendar. Since 1988, when the states of the former confederacy and others moved to the second Tuesday in March, the pace of the frontloading of presidential nominating contests has only quickened. Mayer and Busch (2004) have tracked this as the cumulative percentage of delegates allocated week by week during the primary seasons since 1952. The tipping point then becomes the point at which fifty percent (plus one) delegates have been awarded; the earliest point at which a nomination can be settled (Norrande 2000). As more states have moved up, that point has crept ever closer to the beginning of the process.

The questions that arise from this then are which states are decisive and how quickly was the nomination determined? The latter has implications for who and what type of candidate is nominated. Front runners have been advantaged by the compressed calendar created by frontloading; having the money and resources necessary to compete in so many places so early (Gurian 1986, Mayer and Busch 2004). It is the former question though that has bearing on this research. States are motivated to be on the “right” side of that decisive/not decisive breaking point; to potentially gain the attention of the candidates and the media before the nomination is settled and the focus shifts toward relevant battleground states in the general election. The catch there is that some states are more able to move than others.

## **The Frontloading of Presidential Nominating Contests**

Ultimately, one thing is clear: rules matter in the nomination game (Aldrich 1980, Geer 1986, Norrander 1996). The rules that developed out of the McGovern-Fraser reforms affect the course of the campaigns that are conducted within their framework. Little though, is fully understood about the efforts within the states to operate under those rules; especially the decisions to frontload delegate selection events. Those decisions make a difference in how the campaigns play out and who gains nomination in each of the parties.

What emerges is a twofold picture of what is at stake for state actors when making the frontloading decision. On the one hand, the movement of delegate selection events to ever earlier dates from nomination cycle to nomination cycle is motivated by a series of perceived perquisites. However, motivated as these actors may be, they are confronted with varying degrees of resistance (from state to state) to actually moving the contest. In answer to the first part of that decision making process, Mayer and Busch (2004) set the stage by laying out the motivating factors influencing that process. Initially, they demonstrate that the date on which a delegate selection event is held affects both the amount of candidate spending in that state and media coverage of the contest. The earlier a state holds a contest, the greater both spending and coverage are. By extension, states are motivated to move up to get a piece of that pie.

Of course, Mayer and Busch use anecdotal evidence to note that states are motivated to move by other factors as well. The frontloading decision makers from state to state may be motivated to give the voters of their states a say in which candidate is chosen as each party's nominee. To ensure that, a state has to position its primary or caucus on a date early enough for it to be consequential to the nomination. The earliest point a nomination can be decided is the point

at which fifty percent of the delegates at stake (plus one) have been allocated. Positioning a contest ahead of that point then becomes essential to any state attempting to be amongst the faction of states decisive to the nominations. Given that this point is a moving target because of other states moving as well, the default position to move to in recent cycles has become the earliest point on which the national parties allow for a delegate selection contest to be held. Coincidentally, that is the week that is typically the one dubbed Super Tuesday for that cycle.

Another consideration that Mayer and Busch highlight is policy-related; the policy concessions a winning presidential candidate can bestow on a state for early support in a nominating contest. The path to this benefit is more difficult to divine simply because it is reliant on victory. First, a candidate not only has to win the nomination but the presidency as well. Otherwise the scenario involves a sitting president being challenged in the primaries, which may not, in turn, bode well for ultimately getting those benefits.

The literature, then provides a solid picture of what is motivating states to move. What is not as clearly understood though is why some states move their nominating contests and others choose not to. This requires a shift in focus from candidate and media attention within each state to an examination of the contextual factors that differ across states. Carman and Barker (2005) began this shift in focus by exploring the impact political culture within a state has on the decision to move that state's nominating contest. Using Elazar's (1966) trichotomous measure of political culture—dividing states into traditionalistic, moralistic or individualistic—they find that the more moralistic states are the ones apt to move their delegate selection events. In other words, those states where the government is traditionally viewed as a positive force are the ones most likely to reposition their nominating contests (as compared to states that view limited government as the

goal as typified by the individualistic approach). On its face that hypothesis jibes well with the idea that government is the vehicle of change and that altering the date on which delegates are selected by the state is a means of achieving that.

Falling back on the Elazar measure paints the actions within states with a broad stroke though. The nuances of state activity are lost in the process. While states can maneuver within the rules established since the McGovern-Fraser reforms, all states are not created equal in their ability to tinker with these rules, especially in regards to the repositioning of delegate selection events. Those are the specifics that are lost with Carman and Barker's use of the Elazar measure.

One variation across those states holding primaries is whether the presidential primaries are held simultaneously with the primaries for state and local offices. If those two sets of primaries are bound by law then it becomes more difficult for a state to move. Either both sets of primaries need to be repositioned or an entirely new election (presidential primary) needs to be conducted. Both come at a cost. The latter is easier to understand: a new election equals a new expenditure. In addition, two laws would have to be changed, not one; the law on timing and the law binding the primaries. That opens the door to the potential disagreement—whether inter-chamber or intra-chamber—within a legislature that could prevent either or both measures from being changed.

The former, on the other hand, requires further explanation. The costs of moving both sets of primaries becomes less a question of changing laws and more a matter of the ambition and motivation of the legislators themselves. If those two sets of primaries are held simultaneously, that implies that state legislators are involved in primary elections of their own. The question then shifts from one of what the state's role in the presidential nomination is to one of how the date change affects each legislator. Atkeson and Maestas (2004) have found a significant difference in

levels of turnout based on whether a state holds its primary before the point at which the nomination has been decided. Is the higher turnout that is associated with an earlier contest good or bad for state legislators and would it affect down ballot races like the ones in which state legislators are involved? Those are additional considerations factored into the frontloading decision making calculus of each member of a state legislature.

Upward ambition of state legislators also works its way into the decision making calculus when moving the two sets of primaries together. In Texas, for example, office holders are required to vacate their current positions to run for a higher office if the filing deadline for the election is in the calendar year prior to the general election. That type of scenario would mean a couple of things: 1) if the primaries were moved early enough it would trigger an even earlier filing deadline, which would mean 2) a state legislator aiming to move up to a congressional seat, for instance, would not have a state legislative seat to return to if the congressional bid is unsuccessful. It is exactly these sorts of state-level nuances that can stand in the way of a state legislature moving its presidential primary to an earlier date within the nominating calendar.

While those examples carry with them a certain level of specificity, they do underscore the importance of this idea of split primaries. From 1976-1996, those states that already had severed the link—or for that matter never had a link to begin with—between presidential primaries and primaries for state and local offices were nearly seven and a half times more likely to move their contests to earlier dates than those where the binds were still on the books (Putnam 2007). These types of factors may collectively fit under the rubric of political culture, but that begs for a more thorough examination. The idea then that those states which have pre-existent setups where the bond between presidential primaries and those for state and local offices has been severed, are

advantaged over those where the events are held together is important. That then indicates that there is something to the notion that state-level factors influence a state's ability to move their delegate selection events on the nominating calendar.

### **Caucuses and the Differences in Frontloading Decision Makers**

This question then is ultimately best couched in terms of the obstacles that stand in the way of a state moving its delegate selection event to an earlier date. Political culture matters. The presence of split primaries matters. Other factors that affect a wide swath of states on this issue come to the fore as well, but have yet to receive the necessary attention within the literature. One of the goals of this paper is to examine contest type within the context of frontloading; to begin to pull caucuses into the understanding of the frontloading process. The subsequent goal is to, by extension, analyze the effect that different decision makers—they largely differ across contest types—have on a state's ability to move their delegate selection event to an earlier date.

Inherent in this discussion is the question concerning whether caucuses are more or less likely to move to earlier dates than primaries. There are a couple of factors to weigh in considering that question though. First, caucuses are functions of the state party apparatus . Whereas the bulk of decisions to move primaries are made based on the interactions within state legislatures and then between the legislature and the governor, caucus positioning on the nomination calendar is a decision at the discretion of the state party. Since the intra-chamber and inter-chamber relationships in a legislature and the legislature's relationship with the governor are rife with the potential for partisan division, primaries, it is hypothesized here, encounter more difficulty on the road to being moved. Caucuses, on the other hand, offer a scenario where where that type of partisanship is absent; making for an easier repositioning on the nominating calendar. The Kansas

example from the lead up to the 2008 cycle is instructive here. Unable to establish—or re-establish—a presidential primary and move it to an earlier date (February 2, 2008), the Kansas legislature yielded to the state parties to determine the date on and method by which delegates would be selected. Unlike the legislature, neither Kansas party found much difficulty in placing their caucuses on February 5 (Democrats) and February 9 (Republicans).

There is however, an added layer that complicates this simple hypothesis. Caucuses typically receive less attention from the candidates and the media (Gurian 1986, 1993a, 1993b). A caucus ignored in April could be just as equally ignored in an earlier calendar position and/or among a group of more delegate-rich primary states. For example, was it worth it to Nebraska Democrats to abandon the state's traditional mid-May primary in favor of a February 9 caucus during the 2008 cycle or was it beneficial for Colorado Democrats to move from an early May caucus date in 1984 to an early April caucus date in 1988? In other words, while it might be easier for a state party to move a caucus than for a state legislature and governor to move a primary, are the state parties motivated to move?

What arises from these questions is a pair of competing hypotheses. First, based on the extant decision making apparatus in each state, the ease with which a state can move varies. This hypothesis entails something of a hierarchy of decision makers. State legislatures and governors are vulnerable to partisan division. That type of division is lacking in the caucuses which have their dates solidified by individual state parties. Simply because inter-party division is absent however, does not translate into a delegate selection event date decision that is devoid of division. Intra-party rancor could stand in the way of a state party moving its caucus to an earlier position on the nominating calendar as well. These types of obstacles are more easily overcome when the

decision making process is simplified; when it is in the hands of one individual. Several states leave it up to either the secretary of state or the governor to make the decision to move a primary or caucus to a more advantageous date. This has been the case in New Hampshire since 1976, when the state legislature ceded the decision making power on this issue to the secretary of state. The Granite state has been insulated as a result from attacks on its “first in the nation” status by other opportunistic states seeking influence in the nomination battle(s). Three categories then emerge from this hierarchy: legislatures/governors potentially divided by partisanship, state parties susceptible to internal division and individuals free of the fetters of either type of division.

The counter to this is that the state parties controlling the frontloading decision for their caucuses are not motivated to move. The members of the state party, acting rationally, would see such a move—to an earlier date—as a hollow one; one that only moves the state into the “decisiveness zone,” the period containing the contests that ultimately decide who a party's nominee will be. Caucuses, it is hypothesized then, are less likely to be moved to early dates because there is a lack of perceived benefits to be had from such a move.

## **Data and Methods**

In order to fully examine these competing hypotheses, a two-pronged approach will be taken. Since the goal is to look at the effects of contest type and decision making apparatus on a state's ability to move its delegate selection event to an earlier date, the same dependent variable used in Putnam (2007) will be used; the binary choice between moving a delegate selection event to an earlier and either moving back or staying put. The hypotheses that emerge from this are as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Caucuses are more likely to be moved to earlier dates on the nominating calendar than primaries.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Delegate selection events are more likely to be moved to earlier dates if the decision makers are not a combination of state legislatures and governors.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Caucuses are less likely to move because the advantages of moving are lacking.

### *Dependent and Main Independent Variables*

The first approach then, will examine the effect that holding either a caucus or primary has on a state decision maker's decision to move the delegate selection event forward. To further differentiate between the two contest types, the second approach will factor in the differing frontloading decision makers across states. Is it more advantageous then to remove the fetters of partisanship, placing the event positioning decision in the hands of, not the state legislatures, but state parties or some individual acting alone instead? This model will parse out the differences in the “hierarchy of decision makers” outlined above.<sup>1</sup> Finally, attention will be paid toward the trade off that caucus date decision makers face. The intention of any frontloading move is to either have some influence on the nomination or to gain the benefits of being early (Mayer and Busch 2004). However, do caucuses, the diminutive cousins of primaries, get lost in the shuffle, lessening their potential for winning influence or other benefits? The focus in that examination shifts from contest type to an interaction between the mode of delegate selection and a state's delegate-richness.<sup>2</sup>

### *Other Factors*

State decisions to frontload delegate selection events are affected by other influences as well. Several factors involving the timing of a nominating contest factor in for example. The

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1 This is an ordered categorical variable ranging from state legislature/governor (0) to state parties (1) to individuals (2). As the numbers associated with each category increase, the number of obstacles in the way of a frontloading decision are hypothesized to decrease.

2 The caucus half of the interaction is dichotomous while the delegate-richness is measured as the percentage of delegates available in the state in the previous nomination cycle.

previous position of a delegate selection event has a bearing on the likelihood that a contest would be moved in a subsequent cycle.<sup>3</sup> The later, then, that a contest was held in the immediately previous cycle, the greater the chances are that a state will move in the next cycle all else being equal. California, for instance, sat on the first or second Tuesday in June for every post-reform cycle until 1996. The Golden state's likelihood of moving was greater than that of a state like Georgia, which had moved up to the earliest date allowed by the national parties for the 1992 cycle.

The timing calculus involves two other considerations though. If a state was the only event on the date it went on in the previous cycle, the decision makers within a state may be less likely to shed the “only game in town” label in favor of being lost in the shuffle among several other (potentially bigger) states on an earlier date. Wisconsin is a primary state that has stood alone on an early April date for all but a couple of cycles in the post-reform period. As the window within which delegate selection contests could be held crept toward the beginning of the calendar year, that date increasingly fell outside of the zone within which the nominations were typically decided. It is under those conditions that a state like Wisconsin is more likely to give up its status as the only event on that date in favor of being among the decisive number of states.

Additionally, if a state has shown the propensity to move with a move in a previous cycle, the decision makers there would be apt to protect their newly acquired benefits.<sup>4</sup> This example is most clearly illustrated by New Hampshire and Iowa. Both states have shown the willingness to move if their traditional “first in the nation” status is threatened. It is hypothesized that that movement then is a function of the past movement. The willingness to move in one cycle affects

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3 When a delegate selection event was in the previous cycle is operationalized as the week it fell on in that previous cycle. The weeks are numbered from the latest dates to the earliest dates with the earliest dates being valued more. All delegate selection dates are from *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*.

4 This also serves as a lag of the dependent variable for the time series portion of the model below.

the willingness to move in subsequent cycles. The movement of states during the 2008 cycle is indicative of this phenomenon as well. Many of the states that had moved to the first Tuesday in March date of Super Tuesdays past were among the more than twenty states that clustered on the February 5 date (the earliest possible date without incurring sanctions from the national parties) that served as Super Tuesday in 2008.

In keeping in line with the relationships Mayer and Busch (2004) described, measures of candidate spending and media attention head a second cluster of factors that are considered.<sup>5</sup> Assuming that these decision makers are acting rationally, the motivation is to maximize the amount of both received in any given cycle. Both measures offer retrospective looks. The rational decision maker(s) would look at how much media attention and/or candidate spending was received in the previous cycle and determine if a move to an earlier date would bolster the percentage of each compared to other states. In a similar vein, state decision makers could temper their expectations of what would be received from a move to an earlier date based on their size. More delegate-rich states would have an advantage over states their delegate-poor brethren if a contest in each were held on the same day. Every Super Tuesday since 1988 has borne this out as candidates have opted to focus on the larger states at the expense of smaller, less delegate-rich states.

There also exist obstacles beyond those accounting for contest type or different decision makers that warrant consideration in the context of the frontloading of delegate selection events. Partisanship and incumbency also influence that decision. There are layers to how partisanship

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5 In the case of both media coverage and candidate spending, percentages of the totals from the previous cycle are used. The candidate spending numbers originate from Aldrich (1980) for the 1976 cycle, the FEC Reports on Financial Activity for the 1980-1988 cycles and Dr. Paul Gurian (associate professor University of Georgia) for the 1992 cycle. Data for media coverage is based on Aldrich (1980) for the Republicans in 1976 and Gurian and Haynes (1993) for the Democrats in 1976 and the remaining cycles.

intervenes in the model. A state government can be divided by partisanship between chambers in a legislature or between a united legislature and a governor of the opposite party. Either type of division stands in the path of a state moving its, in this case, primary to an earlier date.<sup>6</sup>

Presidential incumbency also affects this positioning decision and can overlap with partisanship as well. On the surface, any decision maker(s) from a party other than the incumbent president's party is more likely to tinker with the rules to swing the electoral advantages in their party's direction (Klinkner 1994). The frontloading decision is in among those rules tinkering possibilities. Those states then which have the out party in unified control of a state government or have a state party or individual (also of the out party) charged with the task of setting the date of nominating contest are the states abler to move their events to earlier dates (similar to Meinke, et al. 2006). It was just this sort of situation that confronted the Democratic controlled state governments in the South in the lead up to the 1988 election (Hadley and Stanley 1989). Most of the states had unified Democratic support of a regional frontloading of events to affect the type of nominee chosen; one that would play well in the South during the general election.

Finally, given Carman and Barker's (2005) examination of political culture in relation to which states move their primaries to earlier dates, some measure of culture or region should be considered as well. While the measure had some explanatory value in that study, much of that was explained away when a contextual factor like split primaries was included in a previous model examining the frontloading decision (Putnam 2007). Both census region and Elazar's political culture measure performed equally as well in that model and because of their high level of

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6 This is one of the major reasons why it is hypothesized that caucuses and primaries controlled by either the state parties or individuals have an easier time moving than those primaries positioned by state legislatures and governors. As such, dichotomous variables are included to account for both inter-chamber division as well as legislative/executive division.

correlation can be (and are in this study) used interchangeably.<sup>7</sup> A similar scenario could play out here as well. A contextual factor such as the difference in contest type or decision maker could explain away the effects of culture or region on the decision to reposition a delegate selection event.

### *Analysis*

The theoretical argument here is that caucuses are more likely to be repositioned than primaries. Beyond that if the authority making that decision is not a state legislature, but instead a state party or an individual, that decision is easier as well. As such, all such decisions made in every state from 1976 to 1996 will be examined here. Given the calendar in 1976, decisions were made that affected the calendar in 1980 and so on. While 1972 corresponds with the beginning of the McGovern-Fraser reform era, both that cycle and the 1976 cycle were both transitional. The 1980 presidential nomination cycle saw the first real efforts on the part of states to position themselves to have an effect on the nomination. The frontloading moves made for the 1980 cycle then are the beginning point of the analysis. Ultimately, that includes five election cycles through 1996. Data limitations because of a change in FEC requirements affected the candidate spending variable and cut the analysis off there (Corrado 2000). The data set includes an observation for each competitive contest that was waged during those five election cycles, yielding a state-year unit of analysis.<sup>8</sup> Since the dependent variable is binary and the question posed includes a time component, a time series cross-sectional logit model will be employed to consider the variation across each quadrennial cycle.

### **Findings**

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<sup>7</sup> Dummy variables for each census region or each political culture distinction are used in the models to follow.

<sup>8</sup> In this case competitive means seriously contested. As a result Republican contests from 1984 and 1992 and the Democratic contests from 1996—all when incumbents were running—are withheld from consideration.

To empirically examine the effects of contest type and type of decision makers on the frontloading decisions during this period, a two-layered approach is necessary.<sup>9</sup> In the first model, contest type is taken into account and the results from Table 1 back up the argument that caucuses are the more likely contests to be repositioned from one presidential nomination cycle to the next. Caucuses are a factor of .296 more likely to move to earlier dates than the alternate mode of delegate selection. When a delegate selection event was scheduled in the previous cycle also has a significant bearing on the likelihood of a frontloading decision being triggered. Those states positioned later in the process are more inclined to reposition their nominating contests than those ahead of them on the calendar in the previous cycle. In other words, if two contests were held a week apart in the previous cycle, the state holding the later contest would be more likely to move to an earlier date than the state holding its contest a week earlier by a factor of .842. The other interesting finding is that states standing alone on a particular date in a previous cycle are nearly two and a half times as likely to abandon that distinction in favor of an earlier (and potentially more crowded) date in the next cycle.

**[Insert Table 1 around here]**

Caucuses then, increasingly appear be the type of delegate selection contests that move to earlier dates from one presidential election to another. That implies that there may be something to the idea that the types of decision makers matter as well. The results in Table 2 reflect the

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<sup>9</sup> The contest type and type of decision maker variables are highly correlated because of the overlap between the two concepts. Most primary dates are set by state legislatures/governors and most caucus dates are determined by state parties. Party run primaries like those in South Carolina fall in the state party category in the decision maker variable while the New Hampshire primary—set by the secretary of state—falls in the category devoted to individuals who make those decisions. So while the two variables are not perfectly correlated they are correlated at a .78 level; making multicollinearity a concern. Included in a model together, neither variable is statistically significant, though the contest variable is just shy of the .05 mark (results available upon request). The solution here then, is to construct two models to deal with the two concepts.

inclusion of the decision maker type into the model. That variable is ordered and categorical to capture the “hierarchy of decision makers,” ranging from state legislature/governor to state parties to individuals. It is hypothesized that as those values increase, so too does a state's ability to move a its delegate selection event; or the fewer the number of obstructions blocking such a move. What the findings reveal is that that hypothesis proves true during the period covered. As the value of the hierarchy increases by one unit the likelihood of a delegate selection event (regardless of type) being moved to an earlier date increases nearly two and a half times. It is easier for an individual to reposition a nominating contest than it is for a state party, and a state party, in turn, has a less difficult time shifting the contest date than a state legislature/governor combination. Similar to the previous model, both the previous contest position and “only event” variables are significant and carry similar impacts in this model as well. Both later states and stand-alone states from the immediately prior cycle are more likely to change their nominating contests' dates to alter those distinctions. It is also important to note that the delegate-richness of a state does not affect a state's decision to move its nominating contest to an earlier date with all other factors being held equal.

**[Insert Table 2 around here]**

Finally, a third model was run to determine the effect that such an interaction between caucus states and delegate-richness had on the decision to frontload. The model performs similarly to the previous two, but with the exception that the independent variable of interest fails to achieve statistical significance. Again, that underscores the point that state's reposition their delegate selection events regardless of delegate-richness. And while a state's position in relation to other states in terms of delegate-richness may be a factor in the frontloading decision making calculus, it is a factor that is further down on the list of priorities for the various decision makers.

## Conclusions

The argument throughout this study has been that there has been a void in the literature on the frontloading of caucuses and that furthermore, beyond which mode of selection is used, who is making the decision to move holds implications as well. Rules matter in the post-reform era of presidential nominations and the rules on the state level concerning who is making that decision and which method of delegate selection is used have a significant impact on the likelihood of a state moving its nominating contest from a later date in one cycle to an earlier date in the future.

One factor that could affect the results here is the extension of the data set to include nomination cycles since 1996. As it is now, 1988 is the only cycle in the set in which an incumbent president is not involved. That incumbency variable approached in all the models run and with the inclusion of event movement from both the 2000 2008 cycles that variable may prove a significant factor. California moved up to what was in 2000 Super Tuesday on the first Tuesday in March. That in turn, triggered several other moves that cycle. The 2008 cycle also bore witness to a massive migration of events to the earliest date allowed by the national parties. In both cases, no incumbent president was seeking re-election. That means that both parties members would have potentially been interested in altering their rules to give an advantage to their party's candidates/nominees.

In that case the constraints of partisanship are removed from the frontloading decision making process, just as it is when state parties or individuals are the decision makers instead of state legislatures/governors. Partisan division then wreaks havoc on the rules altering process. It has been shown here that when it is lessened due to who the frontloading decision maker is, the likelihood of an event being repositioned increases. That is a conclusion that dovetails well with

the findings on split primaries in the previous study (Putnam 2007). The idea there is that by adding another legislative layer to the process—having to change more than one law to move the state's delegate selection event—adds fuel to the fire possibly igniting partisan division in the process. And in that process, the obstacles to moving a delegate selection event increase.

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## Tables

**Table 1: Determinants of Frontloading, 1976-1996 (Contest Type)**

	$\beta$	Std. Err. [p]	Odds Ratio
Previous Position	-.172	.034 [<0.001]	.842
Contest Type	-1.217	.384 [.002]	.296
Only Event	.894	.325 [.009]	2.349
Previous Move (lag)	-.633	.376 [.093]	.531
% Delegates	.000	.003 [.926]	1.000
% Media Attention	.119	.081 [.144]	1.113
% Spending	-.143	.102 [.163]	.867
Presidential Incumbency	-.595	.318 [.062]	.552
Unified Out Party	.417	.343 [.224]	1.518
Exec./Leg. Division	.347	.491 [.479]	1.415
Legislative Division	.291	.591 [.623]	1.337
South	.398	.473 [.400]	1.489
Midwest	.171	.481 [.772]	1.187
West	-.485	.485 [.317]	.615
Constant	1.532	.653 [.019]	--
	N = 289	$\chi^2 = 43.14$	[p = 0.0001]

**Table 2: Determinants of Frontloading, 1976-1996 (Type of Decision Maker)**

	$\beta$	Std. Err. [p]	Odds Ratio
Previous Position	-.165	.034 [<0.001]	.848
Decision Maker	.877	.354 [.013]	2.403
Only Event	.838	.324 [.010]	2.311
Previous Move (lag)	-.628	.392 [.109]	.534
% Delegates	.000	.002 [.907]	1.000
% Media Attention	.049	.080 [.545]	1.050
% Spending	-.126	.103 [.218]	.881
Presidential Incumbency	-.603	.317 [.057]	.547
Unified Out Party	.368	.342 [.282]	1.445
Exec./Leg. Division	.120	.470 [.798]	1.128
Legislative Division	.412	.593 [.487]	1.510
South	.367	.471 [.436]	1.443
Midwest	.264	.482 [.584]	1.303
West	-.394	.484 [.415]	.674
Constant	.503	.607 [.407]	--
	N = 289	$\chi^2 = 38.07$	[p = 0.0005]