

Introduction:
Special Edition on the Presidential Nomination Process

Wayne P. Steger

Understanding why certain candidates get nominated is an important aspect of political scientists. This topic is a narrow one and influences a wider variety of subjects such as the political parties, general elections, and even the extent to which the United States is a democratic country. Presidential nominees matter—they become the foremost spokesperson and the personified image of the party (Miller and Gronbeck 1994), the main selectors of issues and policies for their party's general election campaign (Petrocik 1996; Tedesco 2001), a major force in defining the ideological direction of a political party (Herrera 1995), and candidates that voters select among in the general election. This volume is devoted to presidential nominations and the 2008 nomination specifically.

Who or what processes determine the nominees is an important part of the subject. James Ceaser's (1982) theoretical approach to presidential nomination systems holds that periods of reform and democratization of the process, such as occurred during the early 1970s, is followed by a period of retrenchment by the political party forces that held sway during the era before the reforms. The period following the 1970s certainly appears to have been a period of retrenchment in which political party elites regained influence in the selection of political party nominees. Wayne Steger's article addresses the role and influence of presidential party elites in the 2008 nomination, helping us assess the extent to which party elites can collude to tilt the playing field in favor of candidates preferred by the party establishment.

Money is commonly viewed by scholars, the media and practitioners alike as the mother's milk of campaigns and elections. Candidates who have or raise money get attention and are among those considered seriously by voters. Candidates who are unable to raise money generally are ignored and discounted, even before the voting begins. Randall Adkins and Andrew Dowdle's article on the money primary in the nomination campaigns of the last quarter century provides insights into which candidates are going to have a chance at the nomination and those who are not. To the extent that

WAYNE P. STEGER is the guest editor of the Winter 2007-2008 issue of the *American Review of Politics* and an associate professor of political science at DePaul University.

money tilts the playing field in favor of candidates who have money or who appeal to well-heeled party activists, then the appeal of candidates to party activists becomes a major determinant of presidential nominations.

Aside from party elites and money, the media have been argued to be a central factor determining which candidate will become the nominee. Candidates have to become known to millions of prospective primary voters if they are to have a remote chance of becoming the nominee of either political party. Further, the scale of a national nominating electorate is so large that candidates cannot afford to buy their way to a nomination. The media thus play a central role in providing information to prospective caucus and primary voters. How the media function in this role is the subject of Audrey Haynes essay on presidential nominations. How the news media cover candidates, how coverage patterns have changed, and how and what voters learn about the candidates affects who gets nominated. What we know and what we have yet to figure out is the central question driving this article.

In addition to the roles, influence and interactions of candidates, party elites, party activists/contributors and the media, the earliest caucuses and primaries matter. Ultimately, caucus and primary voters select the delegates who select the nominees at the national nominating conventions. Of all the people who vote in the caucuses and primaries, the privileged voters in the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary play the most influential roles in the nomination process. As John Aldrich (1980) and Larry Bartels (1988) demonstrated nearly a quarter century ago, one of the defining characteristics of the current presidential nomination system is role and impact of campaign momentum in the earliest nominating elections. Chris Hull discusses the role and impact of the Iowa caucus in the contemporary system. Hull argues that voters in the Iowa caucus play an incredibly potent role in the nomination. Candidates who fail to attract support in Iowa soon end their bid for the nomination of their political party. Those who attract the most support gain the ability to continue in the race. Dante Scala and Christopher Smith focus on the New Hampshire primary, and specifically on the leading role that New Hampshire voters usually play as a bellwether nominating election. Their article analyzes the extent to which public preferences for candidates in New Hampshire lead national patterns of support for candidates.

The articles in this volume recognize that party elites, party activist/contributors, the media and voters in the earliest nominating elections play powerful roles in the selection of the presidential nominees of the major political parties. Some might argue that the roles and impacts of these actors, small subsets of the broader polity, is undemocratic and needs reforming. The authors in this volume tend to recognize and appreciate the advantages of the present nomination system. Though party elites, party activists, and the voters in Iowa and New Hampshire do affect the options of voters in

subsequent primaries, the present system does provide several advantages for the parties and the country at large. These sets of party actors are highly attentive to politics and therefore are much more informed of the candidates, and their strengths and their weaknesses with respect to the political parties and the general election. One consequence is that the people make decisions about which candidates are best suited to represent the political parties, are well informed. Further, the system forces candidates to interact with and learn about the experiences of real people with real concerns rather than relying on paid advisors, pollsters, and statisticians to inform them about the state of the country.

REFERENCES

- Aldrich, John H. 1980. *Before the Convention: Strategies and Choices in PNCs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bartels, Larry. 1988. *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ceaser, James W. 1982. *Reforming the Reforms: A Critical Analysis of the Presidential Selection Process*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co.
- Herrera, Richard. 1995. The Crosswinds of Change: Sources of Change in Democratic and Republican Parties. *Political Research Quarterly* 48:291-312.
- Miller, Arthur H., and Bruce E. Gronbeck. 1994. *Presidential Campaigns and American Self Images*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Petrocik, John R. 1995. Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study. *American Journal of Political Science* 40:825-850.
- Tedesco, John C. 2001. Issue and Strategy Agenda-Setting in the 2000 Presidential Primaries. *American Behavioral Scientist* 44:2048-2067.

