State Influence in the Presidential Selection Process: Assessing Pennsylvania's Non-Participation in the Frontloading Trend

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The frontloading trend in the presidential primary system has been widely criticized for creating disparities among states in their level of influence over the presidential selection process. This article examines the general motivations, benefits, and consequences of state participation in frontloading. It focuses upon Pennsylvania, which has not joined the trend. Presidential primaries in Pennsylvania have become increasingly uncompetitive due to frontloading in other states. Comparative analysis with Ohio and forecasting analysis based on Pennsylvania voting history suggest that an earlier presidential primary in Pennsylvania in 2000 would have resulted in not only more candidate competitiveness and campaign activity, but also more voter choice and voter turnout. Yet, fear of increased administrative burdens and disruption to the electoral status quo stopped Pennsylvania's legislators from adopting the change.

Since the 1968 presidential election cycle, direct primaries have been the dominant means by which the major political parties select their presidential nominees. Following the successful momentum-driven campaign of Jimmy Carter in 1976, the nomination stage of this process has additionally been dominated by precipitous frontloading of the primary calendar. States seeking more influence in the selection process have moved up the dates of their presidential preference primaries in a seemingly endless race to the front of the primary season. Although this trend was visible throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the compression of state primary dates at the start of the primary calendar escalated dramatically prior to the 1996 and 2000 election cycles.

The frontloading trend has been widely criticized for contributing negatively to the presidential selection process. Chief among the criticisms is the charge that the system creates vast disparities among states depending upon their placement on the primary season calendar (Bartels 1988; Jackson and Crotty 2001; Mayer 2001). Critics contend that states with early primary dates benefit from substantially increased levels of campaign activity, political competitiveness, voter choice, voter attentiveness, and voter participation over states with later primary dates. The overall effect is to create an imbalance among the states, whereby some states have inordinately high influence on the selection process while the majority of states exact only moderate influence or none at all.

The states with the most significant influence on the selection process also have been tagged as unrepresentative of the political party rank and file and the overall electorate (Jackson and Crotty 2001; Morton and Williams 2001; Wayne 2001).

In addition to creating a disparity in influence among the states, the frontloaded primary system is criticized for weakening the candidate pool and creating inequities among the candidates. Many scholars contend that the length and hazards of the process discourage participation among qualified candidates and establish distinct advantages for well-known and well-financed candidates over unconnected outsiders or candidates relying upon a non-front runner strategy (Buell 2000; Busch 1997; Ceasar and Busch 2001; Polsby and Wildavsky 2000; Wayne 2001). Others argue that the system stifles the development of voter knowledge. The continued frontloading of the primary season, they claim, erodes the levels of citizen education and candidate empathy that naturally arise from a serial election arrangement (Haskell 2000; Morton and Williams 2001).

The frontloaded primary process lengthens the overall campaign season, but it actually shortens the period of competitiveness between aspiring nominees.[1] The compressed period of competitiveness offers voters insufficient time to digest information or make informed decisions, and the lengthened campaign season tires candidates and voters, increases campaign finance demands, and contributes to increasingly negative news coverage of the campaign (Busch 2000; Ceasar and Busch 2001; Patterson 1994; Wayne 2001).

Although it is descriptively and empirically more efficient to examine the cumulative characteristics and drawbacks of this frontloading trend, fully understanding its impact is difficult because frontloading is not a collective endeavor. Frontloading behavior is the product of many individual states making independent calendar placement decisions based upon individualized motivations. When one state chooses to frontload its primary date in pursuit of influence and electoral choice, it typically does so without considering the potentially detrimental effects of its decision on other states or its collective impact on the selection process. Pennsylvania is one of several states detrimentally affected by these frontloading decisions. The frontloading trend has uniformly eroded Pennsylvania's potential position of influence at the primary stage, even though it ranks among the top five states in Electoral College power and consistently serves as an important battleground state in the general election. Pennsylvania's refusal to participate in the frontloading trend has caused its primary date to occur comparatively later in the delegate selection sequence each four-year cycle, resulting in primary elections that are increasingly plagued by limited voter choices, low levels of competitiveness, and poor voter participation.

This article focuses on the impact of the frontloading trend on the presidential selection process in general and Pennsylvania in particular. It examines the implications of this trend by measuring both the extent to which the aspirations of frontloading states were realized during the 2000 primary season and the extent to which these decisions detrimentally affected non-frontloaded states such as Pennsylvania. Assessment of the impact of Pennsylvania's decision to retain its relatively late position in 2000 includes a comparative analysis and forecast of the likely changes if Pennsylvania had participated in the frontloading trend by moving its primary date up to early March of 2000.

Understanding Frontloading in 1996 and 2000

The substantial frontloading in 1996 and 2000 significantly altered the pace and sequence of the primary season by placing a much larger number of delegates up for grabs in the earlier stages of the primary season than had occurred in prior years. The effect of the compressed delegate accumulation process is exhibited in Table 1.[2] The escalated pace of primaries and the rapid process of delegate accumulation in 1996 can be seen in the dramatic increase between 1992 and 1996 in the percentage of delegates selected by the end of March. The 30% increase in accumulated

Table 1
Delegate Selection Patterns in Presidential Primary Seasons, 1976-2000

	Percentage of Delegates Selected by Second Week in March		Percentage of Delegates Selected by End of March	
	Democratic	Republican	Democratic	Republican
1976	9	9	19	19
1980	14	14	36	30
1984	18	18	29	26
1988	42	49	51	54
1992	31	36	43	46
1996	44	51	73	77
2000	65	68	71	72

Source: Adapted from Mayer (2001) and Morton and Williams

Democratic and Republican delegates by the end of March is explained by 22 states moving up on the primary calendar from where they had been in 1992. The large percentage increase for the end of March 1996, when compared with the smaller percentage increases by the second week of March 1996, shows that most frontloading states selected dates in middle or late March, and only a few states (such as Arizona and South Carolina) established very early primary dates. Despite the dramatic increases in delegate accumulation in the latter weeks of March 1996, the winnowing process in the Republican Party was complete by the second week of that month, leaving significant numbers of voters without choices and half of the Republican delegates yet to be distributed.

The compressed primary season trend continued for 2000 when 14 states held GOP primaries and caucuses and 12 states held Democratic primaries on an earlier date than they had scheduled in 1996. The 21% increase in Democratic delegate totals and 17% increase in Republican delegate totals by the second week of March 2000 indicate that many states discovered that an early March date was essential to assure some modicum of influence over the winnowing process. The lack of significant change in percentages at the end of March shows that most frontloading states were moving up from dates previously established in middle or late-March. That fully two-thirds of the Republican and Democratic delegates were determined by the end of the second week of March 2000 indicates the presence of more populous states in the early stages of 2000 and highlights the shorter period of competitiveness.

Frontloading Decision Factors

Several motivations drove particular states to move up on the primary season calendar in 1996 and 2000. The main reason was the desire to increase the state's influence in determining the outcome of the nomination process. When the winnowing process concludes prior to a state's election date, state voters are given no choice and are excluded from any role in determining the party's nominee (Jackson and Crotty 2001; Lengle 1997). The lack of voter choice or influence contributes to citizen apathy and alienation from the political system. These burgeoning levels of alienation are strongly linked to diminished interest in political participation (Nye, King, and Zelikow 1997). From the perspective of the individual state, the lack of choice and influence can be remedied only by a move forward on the primary calendar. Consistent with this reasoning is the suggestion that an earlier primary date is likely to increase voter turnout as candidates spend more time campaigning in the state and voters believe they will have an impact on determining the party nominee (Ceasar and Busch 1997; Geer 1989; Lengle 1997). Another motivating factor in the decision to move forward on the primary calendar was the belief that

an earlier primary or caucus date would bring greater candidate attention to and media coverage of state interests and issues (Cook 1992; Jackson and Crotty 2001; Lengle 1997; Mayer 1997). The key to this rationale is the understanding that candidate campaign strategies and media attention during the primary season tend to be frontloaded as well.

A successful campaign strategy must involve a keen focus on the early stage of the primary season (Cook 1992; Jackson and Crotty 2001; Mayer 1997; Wayne 2001). Candidates engage in a retail style of campaigning in the earliest contests by spending considerable time face-to-face with potential supporters. As the campaign proceeds, candidates must convert to a wholesale approach in order to reach potential supporters in upcoming primary states that are spread all across the nation (Haskell 2000; Wayne 2001). Given the speed with which the winnowing process occurs, candidates must expend resources in early states because there is little to be gained from hoarding money or building organizational support in later states when continued survival is not assured.

Late primaries and caucuses also receive little media coverage, if any, and there is rarely any attention paid to issues distinct or relevant to these state. The lack of attention is highlighted by the common media practice of discontinuing extensive reports of election results from the later states once the nomination has been determined (Lichter 1992; Mayer 1997). The frontloading effort, as it relates to a desire for increased campaign activity and media coverage, is also linked to hopes that an earlier primary date would provide substantial economic benefits as candidates and the media poured dollars into the state (Mayer 1997).

Individual states considering moving up on the primary calendar must also weigh the negative potential consequences. If the state or party alters the presidential preference primary date, some uncertainty and upheaval will inevitably result. Particularly important is the upheaval caused by disruption to the established electoral calendar and processes in the state. The intensity of the upheaval depends on the date of the relocation and the extent to which the primary date was institutionalized in the minds of voters and election officials.[3] The upheaval occurs through alterations to electoral procedures and timelines; the uncertainty emerges from the unknown impact on turnout and outcomes that may arise from separating or pushing forward primary election events.

There can also be substantial administrative costs associated with a significant step forward on the calendar. Most states with early presidential preference primaries separate them from statewide office primary elections. For example, of the first 21 GOP presidential preference primaries held in 2000, only three supported joint congressional primary elections. This separation mandates additional spending to support multiple primary events. Separating the primaries and frontloading the presi-

dential event can also cause capacity problems for elections officials because of the shorter time spans for attracting workers, the increased burden on volunteers, and greater conflict with end of the year obligations during filing and recruitment periods (McCarthy 1999; Race 1999).

Apart from administrative costs, some states choose to forgo a move to the top of the presidential primary calendar because moving up does not guarantee influence and might even produce an undesirable outcome. Just because a state moves to a well-positioned calendar date does not mean that the state will attract a full range of candidates. The actual influence of early states is vulnerable to manipulation by campaign strategists, who can direct their candidates to bypass a state featuring a ìfavorite sonî or popular candidate in pursuit of a more appealing future confrontation (Polsby and Wildavsky 2001). In other cases, decision makers may resist a move forward because they fear significant increases in participation from non-traditional and less partisan voters, which may produce an election outcome far different from what the move's supporters had in mind (Beck and Hershey 2000).

The major political parties also weighed into the decision making process by offering incentives and issuing restrictions to discourage continued frontloading for the 2000 primary season. The Democratic Party protected the early positions of Iowa and New Hampshire by restricting states from scheduling binding primaries prior to March 7. The GOP took a less restrictive approach. It tried to discourage frontloading by adding bonus delegate options to states that scheduled later primary dates (Bibby 1999; Busch 2000; Edwards and Wayne 2000; Hargen and Mayer 2000; Jackson and Crotty 2001).

Assessing Pennsylvania's Decision to Stay Late

To understand fully the frontloading considerations in Pennsylvania prior to the 2000 election, it is important to examine Pennsylvania presidential primaries in a historical context. Pennsylvania has held presidential primary elections for both major political parties since 1968. An examination of primary election outcomes since the early 1980s shows different trends between the parties but consistency in the general lack of competitiveness. Republican Party primaries exhibited one-candidate domination in most years since the introduction of primaries.[4] The only close election occurred in 1980 when the race between Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush was decided by an eight-point margin of victory. The narrowest win since 1980 was the 45 point spread for Bob Dole in 1996. The recent lack of competitiveness is noteworthy because each primary season after 1984 included several serious candidates.

The Democratic Party, on the other hand, routinely sponsored moderately close elections through 1984. These elections were moderately

competitive because they featured relatively narrow margins of victory, winners that attained only a plurality of the popular vote, and several serious candidates actively campaigning for the party nomination. The closest Democratic primary election occurred in 1980, when the race between Jimmy Carter and Edward Kennedy was decided by less that 1%. Although Kennedy beat Carter in the popular vote, Carter gained a narrow advantage in state delegates. The close outcome in Pennsylvania indicated significant competitiveness in the state, but it was of little consequence nationally because Carter's earlier electoral successes had placed him well ahead on the path to the nomination.

The Democratic primaries in 1972, 1976, and 1984 were also moderately competitive. Each election featured multiple active campaigns, plurality victories, and margins of victory under 14%. Hubert Humphrey won the 1972 Democratic primary election with a 13.8% margin of victory. Despite his relatively decisive victory, the enhanced voter choice and competitiveness of the race is most evident in that four candidates each received more than 20% of the vote. Jimmy Carter's 12% margin of victory over Henry Jackson in 1976 was another moderately decisive victory. Voters again were offered greater choice, as shown by four candidates each receiving at least 12% of the vote. Pennsylvania additionally contributed to the winnowing process in 1976 because Humphrey decided not to enter the primary and Jackson bowed out of the race following his loss in Pennsylvania. The 1984 primary featured active campaigns by Walter Mondale, Gary Hart, and Jesse Jackson. Mondale's 12% margin of victory was moderately decisive, yet the nomination was still in doubt at the time of the primary. The outcome bolstered the Mondale campaign, which had lost seven of the initial 11 primaries (Bartels 1988).

Election Day competitiveness and voter choice experienced a dramatic decay following the 1984 primary. Despite multiple candidates appearing on the ballot, the Democratic primaries in 1988 and 1992 featured one-candidate dominance. The dominance was exhibited by majority vote victories, minimal campaigning from other candidates, and margins of victory in excess of 30%.

The relative competitiveness and enhanced voter choice in early Democratic party races and the 1980 GOP race is not surprising, given that Pennsylvania used to have a relatively early primary date. Pennsylvania was the seventh of only 27 states to hold a presidential preference primary in 1976 and thirteenth of 32 primary states in 1980. As a result, when a nomination actually was contested, Pennsylvania voters were given the opportunity to influence the selection process. Reduced competitiveness in more recent election years is expected because the presidential candidate winnowing process was complete prior to each election date. Frontloading activity since the 1980s eroded Pennsylvania's

relative calendar position, to the point that it was twenty-third of 39 GOP primary states in 1992 and thirty-first of 43 GOP states in 1996.

Hoping to reverse the non-competitive primary trend, while establishing an influential position in the presidential selection process that might spark voter interest, numerous sponsors introduced legislation in the Pennsylvania House and Senate in early 1999 to alter the 2000 state primary date (Cattabiani 1999). Each of the bills called for frontloading by making a permanent change forward from the legally mandated primary date of the fourth Tuesday in April. The bills varied only in exact placement on the calendar and whether or not the presidential preference primary was to be separated from the general primary election. Preferred primary dates in the bills included the first, second, and third Tuesdays in March.5

None of these bills was reported out of committee in either chamber of the state legislature. They all failed to attract sufficient support from committee chairs, committee members, and the rank and file to compel even a vote at the committee level (Associated Press State and Local Wire 1999a). Although no single alternative sparked overwhelming support, some interest in examining a date change persisted among lawmakers. The legislature finally established a task force charged with examining the implications of moving Pennsylvania's annual primary date to September, and examining the cost and consequences of holding separate primaries during presidential election years (Durantine 1999a, 1999b; Race 1999).

In October 1999, a bill was introduced calling for a one-time calendar shift of the 2000 primary from the fourth Tuesday in April to May 2. Sponsors introduced the bill in response to pleas from religious leaders and local election boards to change the date because it conflicted with a religious holiday (Hartzell 1999). The change was widely supported. Following a floor amendment changing the primary date from May 2 to April 4, the bill was unanimously approved in both chambers and signed into law.

Although Pennsylvania's legislators refused to act on numerous frontloading alternatives, two questions make further scrutiny of the impact of this decision worthwhile: what was the impact of staying late in 2000, and what might have happened if Pennsylvania had moved forward to the first Tuesday of March during the 2000 primary season?

The initial answer to the first question is straightforward and predictable. The results of the 2000 presidential primary indicate a continuation of the recent non-competitive trend for both parties. Even though the official primary date was moved forward three weeks, Pennsylvania remained near the end of the primary season and did not leapfrog a single state in that jump forward. The 54% margin of victory in the Democratic primary and 51% margin of victory in the Republican primary were understandably high because Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush each had secured a sufficient number of delegates to

win his party's nomination three weeks prior to the election. Further consideration of the first question and initial probing into the second require a comparison of voter choice and campaign activity in Pennsylvania with that in other states facing similar frontloading decisions in 2000.

Assessing the Impact of State Frontloading Decisions in 2000

To identify variations in individual state influence on the presidential selection process, I examine a range of variables measuring the actual value of individual state decisions to adjust their position on the 2000 primary calendar. In measuring the impact of these state decisions, I focus on a systematic comparison between states that moved their election date from an earlier position in 1996 and states that rejected frontloading proposals in favor of retaining their position at the later stages of the primary season. Specific measurement variables include voter participation rates by state,[6] active candidates on Election Day, candidate campaign stops by state, voter attentiveness at the time of the primary,[7] competitiveness of elections, and debates by state.

Table 2 displays the Republican Party campaign activity and election outcome results for selected states that moved to an earlier primary date and states that resisted the frontloading trend for 2000.[8] I refer to the former set of states as early mover (EM) states and to the latter set as move resistant (MR) states. Early mover states are those states that moved forward on the calendar in search of an exclusive early date or to join a bloc primary with other states. In some instances the bloc primary takes on a regional character, whereas in other instances the bloc is just a union of participating states (Polsby and Wildavsky 2001). Move resistant states are those states that rejected pleas to move up in the 2000 primary season, knowing that they were retaining a calendar date that was very likely to follow the completion of the nomination stage winnowing process.

The most visible distinguishing characteristic of the early mover states in 2000 was size. Compared with other years when smaller states strategically moved forward in search of a unique date, the influential movers in 2000 were mostly large states seeking proportional influence over the nomination process similar to what they wielded in the general election. The most prominent early mover states in 2000 were Michigan, Washington, California, and Ohio. Michigan and Washington each moved up four weeks to establish distinctive early date Republican Party primaries. California and Ohio moved their unified statewide primaries up three weeks and two weeks, respectively, to join the nationwide March 7 bloc primary. The big four newcomers to the early primary season combined for a hefty 16% of the total GOP delegates in 2000, which goes a long way toward explaining the dramatic increase in the early March delegate counts mentioned previously.

Table 2
State Influence on the Republican Presidential Selection Process, 2000*

Primary	State Type	Campaign Visits	Debates	Active Campaigns at Primary	Turnout Change from 1996	Voter Involvement Index	Margin of Victory	Margin Change from 1996
California	EM	11	1	3	24%	46	24%	-24%
Michigan	EM	15	1	3	143%	37	8%	-9%
Ohio	EM	4	0	3	47%	46	21%	-23%
Washington	EM	5	0	3	307%	38	19%	-23%
Illinois	MR	1	0	1	-10%	27	45%	+3%
New Jersey	MR	2	0	1	10%	20	66%	-5%
Pennsylvania	MR	3	0	1	-4%	22	50%	+4%

* EM refers to early mover states and MR refers to move resistant states. Campaign visits were tabulated by the author for the year 2000 only, with the count beginning on January 3, 2000 and ending on the date of the state's primary. Debate totals are talied from December 1999 to the date of the state's primary. Voter turnout and margin of victory data were obtained from state election bureaus.

The data relating to the big four early mover states clearly exhibit significant beneficial consequences for states moving up on the primary calendar. Each state moved up in search of greater voter choice and candidate attentiveness, which is exactly what each state received. The states offered voters greater candidate choice and potential for influence, while also attracting greater attention from the candidates and the media during a period when voter attentiveness was at or near its peak.[9] Michigan (143%) and Washington (307%) experienced exceptionally strong increases in voter participation, and California (24%) and Ohio (47%) saw sizeable increases as well.[10] The frontloading decisions by these states produced competitive elections in 2000, which was a substantial improvement over 1996 when the winnowing process ended prior to each state's primary.

Table 2 also contains data regarding campaign activity and election outcomes in Pennsylvania and two other prominent states that rejected appeals to move up significantly their 2000 primary date. The two other move resistant states are Illinois, which dismissed legislation to move its date from the third Tuesday in March, and New Jersey, which rejected legislation to move its date from the first Tuesday in June. Data in Table 2 indicate that these states had no impact on the winnowing process and attracted little campaign attention prior to the election. Low levels of voter turnout, uncompetitive elections, and poor voter attentiveness scores are all due to nominations having been secured prior to these primaries.

On the surface, the data from Table 2 indicate that the frontloading decision for the early mover states generated substantial rewards for state voters and the states as a whole. When directly compared to competitiveness and participation levels in move resistant states, the participatory value of frontloading decisions is obvious. The final outcome of the Michigan election, however, highlights the problem of uncertainty that can be associated with a date shift. Despite the record primary turnout, candidate attentiveness to the state, substantial advertising, and media presence, John McCain's victory was in direct contrast with the desired intent of the principal supporters of the legislation to move the primary date forward.[11]

In addition to the basic disparity between early mover states and move resistant states, an examination of aggregate election data from the 2000 GOP primary season further supports the contention that extreme frontloading creates vast disparities among states in regard to candidate attention and the competitiveness of elections. The relative competitiveness of the early presidential preference primaries is indicated by an average 18.6% margin of victory for GOP primaries, up to and including the March 7 super primary. This average margin is especially noteworthy when compared with the average 60% margin of victory in GOP primaries held after the March 7 primary bloc and the suspension of

McCain's campaign.[12] The absence of candidate attention to the voters or issues in these later states is additionally remarkable because only one of the 28 states that held primaries on dates after March 7, or did not schedule a primary or caucus, had an official candidate visit prior to March 7.

Comparing Pennsylvania and Ohio

Examining the impact that a decision to move the primary date forward might have had in Pennsylvania requires comparative analysis. Ohio is the ideal state for comparison with Pennsylvania on election matters because of its similar size, voting history, and cycle for senatorial and gubernatorial elections. Table 3 displays the long-standing similarities between the two states in population and presidential voting preferences. The two states rank among the largest states in the Union, and their diminishing influence in the Electoral College is indicated at nearly identical rates. They also produced identical general election outcomes in presidential elections from 1972 through 1996.

Table 3
Pennsylvania and Ohio:
Electoral Size and Presidential Election Winners

	Pennsylvania		Ohio	
	Electoral Votes and Rank	Election Winner	Electoral Votes and Rank	Election Winner
1968	29 (3)	Humphrey	26 (4)	Nixon
1972	27 (3)	Nixon	25 (6)	Nixon
1976	27 (3)	Carter	25 (6)	Carter
1980	27 (3)	Reagan	25 (6)	Reagan
1984	25 (4)	Reagan	23 (6)	Reagan
1988	25 (4)	Bush	23 (6)	Bush
1992	23 (5)	Clinton	21 (7)	Clinton
1996	23 (5)	Clinton	21 (7)	Clinton
2000	23 (5)	Gore	21 (7)	Bush

Figure 1: Pennsylvania and Ohio General Election Turnouts in Presidential and Gubernatorial Years, 1968

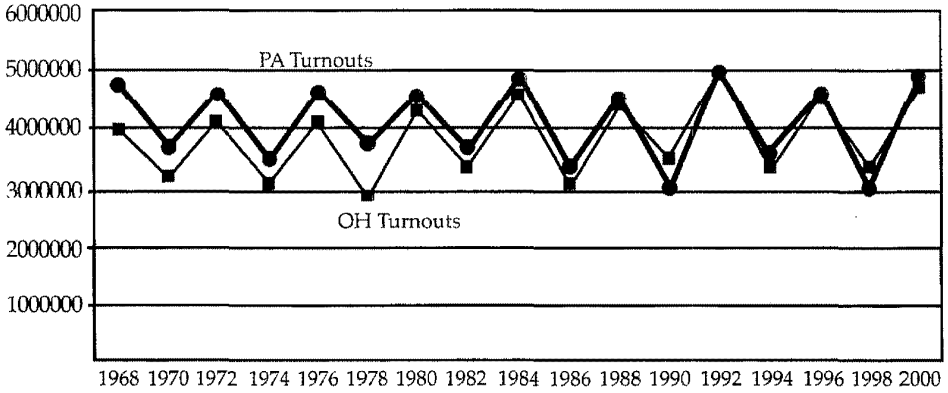
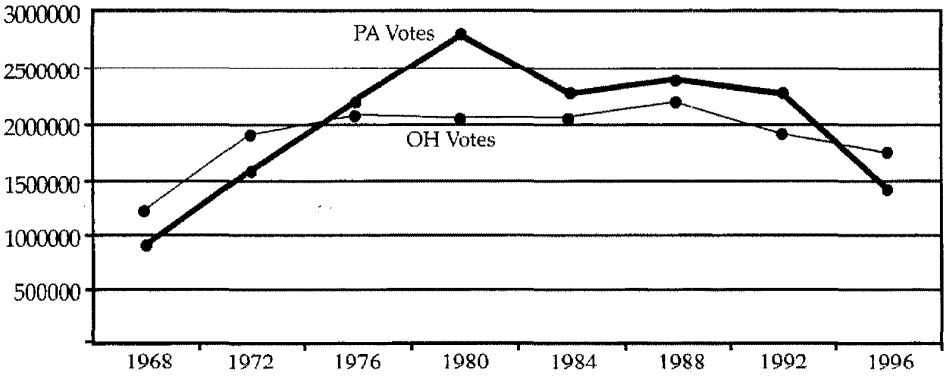


Figure 2: Pennsylvania and Ohio Presidential Primary Turnout, 1968



More than size and electoral preferences, the voting patterns and turnout data for the two states show high correlations for voter behavior over time at the general election and primary levels. Figure 1 shows general election voter participation in presidential and gubernatorial years.[13] The correlation between the two states from 1968 to 1998 is a statistically significant Pearson's r-value of .861 over 16 election cycles. This represents a strong association between the two time series, showing substantially similar patterns in historical voter participation. Figure 2 shows an equally strong association between Pennsylvania and Ohio voter participation in presidential primaries from 1968 to 1996. The correlation between the two states is a statistically significant Pearson's r-value of .862 over eight elections. Both correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 4
Pennsylvania and Ohio: 2000 Primary Election Impact

	Pennsylvania			Ohio		
	Dem	Rep	Total	Dem	Rep	Total
Active Campaigns at Primary	1	1	2	2	3	5
Margin of Victory	53.8%	50.0%	-	48.9%	21.0%	-
Pre-March 7 Visits	0	0	0	4	4	8
Total Campaign Visits	7	3	10	7	8	15
Turnout Change from 1996	-2.8%	-6.0%	-4.3%	26.0%	45.1%	36.6%
Voter Involvement Index	-	22	-	-	46	

In addition to the similarities between the two states in size, electoral preferences, and voter participation rates, Ohio is particularly useful for comparison with Pennsylvania because Ohio approved legislation in 1999 to move the state primary date from the third Tuesday in March to the first Tuesday in March. This legislation followed similar legislation in 1993 moving the state primary date forward from a long-standing early May date. The 1999 frontloading legislation was supported by Republican Party leaders in the state legislature and by Republican Governor Robert Taft (Associated Press State and Local Wire 1999b). Many Democrats in the state opposed the move as an attempt to boost the presidential prospects of Ohio Congressman John Kasich, a Republican (Columbus Dispatch 1999).

That Ohio moved its primary to an earlier date in the 2000 presidential nomination cycle, one considered but rejected by Pennsylvania legislators, invites further comparison. Table 4 shows several comparative indicators of electoral choice, competitiveness, participation, and campaign activity for Ohio and Pennsylvania primaries in 2000. Electoral choice and competitiveness differences can be seen in the multiplicity of active campaigns in Ohio and lower margins of victory in the Democratic and GOP primaries. Dramatic differences in voter turnout, candidate visits (especially those coming before victory was assured for both major party nominees), and voter involvement are additionally evident and can easily be attributed to state position on the primary calendar.

The most dramatic difference in Table 4 is in voter participation. Pennsylvania voter turnout in 2000 declined for both parties and declined statewide by 4.3% from 1996 turnout. The 2000 Pennsylvania turnout figure represents a 40.8% decline from statewide presidential primary participation in 1992, and it was 52.1% under the high participation point set during the 1980 primary. Ohio primary turnout in 2000 improved 36.6% statewide from 1996 and was almost 25% higher than turnout in 1992. The 2000 Ohio participation rate was a 9.1% increase over the record statewide primary participation level set in 1988.

Candidate visits and campaign advertising expenditures also highlight differences in statewide influence in the selection process and candidate attention to state issues and concerns. Although Al Gore and George W. Bush made several trips to Pennsylvania during the official time period of the 2000 primary season, no official candidates visited the state in 2000 before Bush and Gore had already attained presumptive nominee status. Campaign advertising was additionally telling. Bush and McCain each spent aggressively on campaign ads in Ohio in the two weeks preceding the Super Tuesday primary. Bush spent over $800,000 and McCain spent over $650,000 (Columbus Dispatch 2000). In contrast, no official campaign ads ran in major Pennsylvania markets before the winnowing process was completely over.

Although the data in Table 4 show significant differences between the two states in competitiveness and participation, the comparison requires additional empirical analysis. I employ forecasting analysis to determine the impact that a first Tuesday in March primary date may have had on Pennsylvania voter participation in 2000. The process involves modeling historical voter participation rates in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and then projecting voter turnout rates for 2000 by using forecasting applications provided in Autobox version 4.0.[14]

Figure 3 depicts 2000 presidential primary forecasts derived after modeling participation rates in Pennsylvania from 1968 through 1996. The 2000 forecast called for a 16% increase over 1996 turnout. The actual 2000 vote came in 4.3% under 1996 and 286,341 votes, or 17.5%, under the forecast. The actual 2000 vote was within the parameters of the lower limit of the forecast. Figure 4 depicts the 2000 presidential primary forecast derived after modeling participation rates in Ohio from 1968 through 1996. The 2000 forecast called for a 15.9% increase over the actual 1996 turnout. The actual 2000 Ohio vote came in 36.6% over 1996 and 360,151 votes, or 17.9%, over the 2000 forecast. The actual participation figures from 2000 were 12.4% over the upper limit forecast.

Because the dramatic increase over forecast participation in Ohio was due to the frontloaded date change and the resulting improvements in voter choice, competitiveness, interest, and attention, it is logical to ex-

Figure 3: Pennsylvania Presidential Primary Voting 1968-2000: with 2000 Forecasts

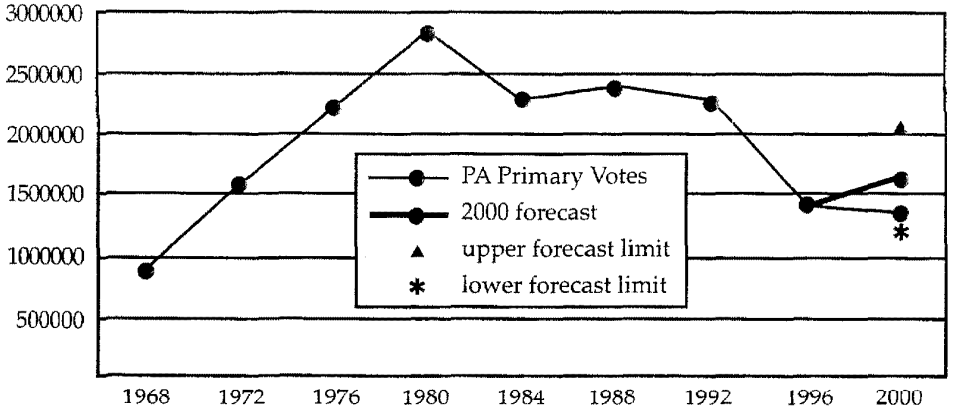
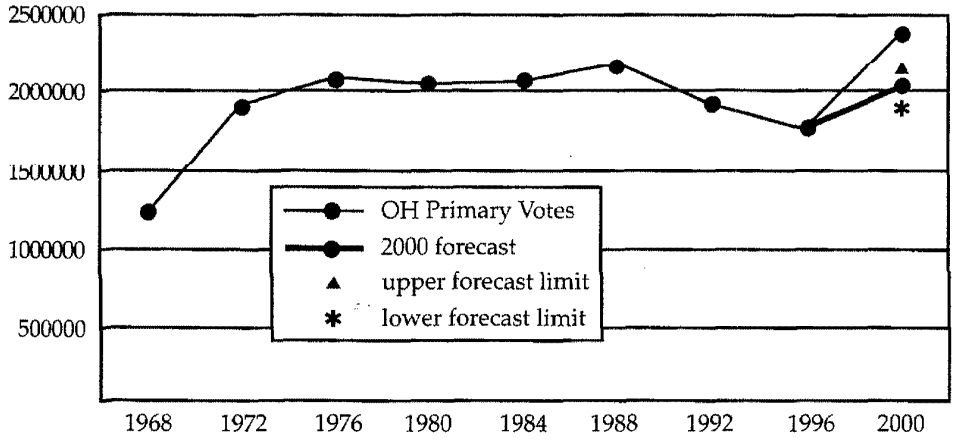


Figure 4: Ohio Presidential Primary Voting 1968-2000 with 2000 Forecasts



pect that a similar increase would have resulted from such a change in Pennsylvania. By applying the 12.4% increase over the upper limit forecast in Ohio to the Pennsylvania forecast, I project that 2.3 million Pennsylvanians would have participated in the hypothetical first Tuesday in March contest. This figure represents a dramatic 63.9% increase over actual voter participation in the 1996 Pennsylvania presidential primary and suggests that 961,000 more voters would have participated in 2000 than actually did. Although this predicted participation is a dramatic increase from 1996, it is only a 1.5% increase over 1992 turnout and is less than actual voter turnout in 1988.

One difference between Pennsylvania and Ohio is that Pennsylvania's primaries are closed, whereas Ohio's are open. The early date in Ohio might have encouraged a larger number of non-affiliated voters to go to

the polls than Pennsylvania's closed primary would have allowed. Although the format difference may have contributed to some variation between the states in turnout, closed primaries in Pennsylvania would not have prevented an upsurge in overall turnout similar to Ohio's. Historically, a strong similarity in primary election participation rates has existed between the two states (see Figure 2). Despite the difference in primary formats, the states exhibited very similar voter participation patterns in prior events. Pennsylvania's political culture and registration rules also encourage major partisan affiliation. Over 90% of registered voters were enrolled as Democrats or Republicans at the time of the 2000 primary, indicating a high level of party affiliation. This high rate of party affiliation, along with state law allowing voters to declare or change party affiliation up to thirty days prior to the election, left few potential voters excluded from participation on primary day if they were inclined to support one of the major candidates.

Increased participation rates in the Republican and Democratic primaries in Ohio fell short of the Secretary of State's projections (Brazaitis 2000). Unlike claims from election officials and pundits in New Hampshire and Michigan, the post-election analysis of voter turnout rates in Ohio was devoid of references to dramatic increases in participation due to John McCain's appeal to non-traditional primary voters. A range of states holding early primaries in 2000 experienced increases in voter participation. The turnout increases were not exclusive to open primary states but included equally dramatic increases in participation from closed primary states such as Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

Potential Impact on Other Statewide Primaries

Although a decision to frontload the 2000 Pennsylvania presidential primary date likely would have led to enhanced competitiveness and substantially increased actual voter turnout, it prompts another question. What effect would dramatically improved participation rates have had on other races in the state if Pennsylvania had held an early unified primary in 2000? Critics of the various legislative proposals in Pennsylvania cited concerns about cost, uncertainty, and disruption to the status quo when speaking out against frontloading and splitting the primaries (Durantine 1999a; McCarthy 1999; Race 1999; Rubinkam 1999). Many Pennsylvania legislators and party officials were willing to consider future changes to the primary date, but they feared the impact that changes to the primary date might have on state legislative races. Concerns over potential disruption and uncertainty were compelling in 2000 given the very narrow partisan distribution in the House and the looming specter of redistricting following the 2000 census. The prospect of significant increases in voter participation during the 2000 primary, particularly among

non-traditional primary voters, did not arouse support from the statewide political community.

My analysis of the potential disruption to the status quo due to increased turnout and an earlier primary date involves scrutiny of Ohio and Pennsylvania state senate and state house election results in 2000. To assess the potential impact of a frontloaded primary, I first determine the extent to which state legislative seats were competitive and contested in 2000. I then examine election outcomes in the context of voter participation rates in both states. Potential impact calculations in Ohio assess the potential for change in electoral outcomes if turnout had not increased significantly in 2000, while potential impact calculations in Pennsylvania evaluate the potential for change in electoral outcomes if turnout had increased significantly in 2000. I operationalize potential impact for narrow margins of victory (less than 20%) and close races (less than 10%). Potential impact for narrow margins is determined by counting the number of candidates from narrow margin of victory primaries who won or were defeated by less than 15% of the vote on general election day. Potential impact for close margins is determined by counting the number of candidates from close margin of victory primaries who either won or were defeated by less than 10% of the vote on general election day.

The post-election analysis detailed in Table 5 shows that the frontloaded primary date and the increased turnout in Ohio had a sizeable potential impact on the outcome of races for the state House of Representatives. The analysis for narrow margins of victory shows that 28 of the 99 Ohio State House races conceivably could have ended with a different victor on general election day if voter turnout had been significantly diminished on the date of the primary. The calculations still show a dramatic potential impact of 21 seats out of 99 when the close margin of victory standard is applied. The high rate of challenged races and multitude of competitive elections in Ohio is partly attributable to the high number of open seat races in the Ohio House. Because of state imposed term limits and attrition, only 57 of the 99 races featured incumbents in 2000.

The potential impact on the Ohio House of Representatives was restricted to the individual candidate level and did not show significant prospects for impact in the partisan make-up or control in the state legislature. The pre- and post-election partisan distribution figures showed identical levels of GOP domination in each chamber of the legislature. Although the close race analysis shows that 21 seats conceivably could have had a different winner, only six of the 21 would have resulted in a different party holding the office. Similar analysis of the Ohio Senate races shows significantly diminished potential impact. When the close margin of victory standard is applied, only one of the 16 Ohio Senate races would qualify as potentially affected if voter turnout were significantly depressed.

Table 5
Contested Primaries and Close Elections
in Pennsylvania and Ohio, 2000

	State Senate		State House		U.S. Congress	
	PA	OH	PA	OH	PA	OH
Total Seats Up for Election	25	16	203	99	21	19
Total Potential Primaries	50	32	406	198	42	38
Total Contested Primaries	4 (8.0%)	5 (15.6%)	32 (7.9%)	56 (28.3%)	7 (16.7%)	10 (26.3%)
Primaries with Narrow Margins (<20%)	3 (6.0%)	3 (9.4%)	12 (3.0%)	36 (18.2%)	4 (9.5%)	5 (13.2%)
Primaries with Close Margins (< 10%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (3.1%)	5 (1.2%)	25 (12.6%)	3 (7.1%)	3 (9.4%)
Potential Impact on General Election Outcomes for Narrow Margins	1 of 25 seats affected (4.0%)	2 of 16 seats affected (12.5%)	8 of 203 seats affected (3.9%)	28 of 99 seats affected (28.3%)	2 of 21 seats affected (9.5%)	1 of 19 seats affected (5.3%)

The analysis of the impact on Pennsylvania state legislature races contained in Table 5 shows an entirely different story. Although partisan control of the House of Representatives was up in the air going into the 2000 election, the limited number of contested primary races and the widespread absence of competitiveness were staggering. Of the 406 potentially contested primaries for the 203 seats in the House of Representatives, only 32 races involved multiple candidates for the party designation. Of the 32 contested races, only 12 had narrow margins of victory and only five involved close races. Potential impact calculations based upon the narrow margin of victory standard show that substantial increases in voter participation may have led to a different candidate prevailing in eight of the 203 races. The close margin of victory standard shows that only two seats may have had a different outcome if voter participation were significantly increased from a frontloaded primary date. Table 5 also displays a similar absence of challenges at the primary level for the Pennsylvania Senate races, and it shows very limited potential impact. Even when the narrow margin standard is applied, only one

of the 25 Pennsylvania Senate races would qualify as potentially affected if voter turnout significantly increased. Given the pre-election partisan distribution of 30 Republicans and 20 Democrats, there is no chance that increased turnout would have threatened partisan control of the Pennsylvania Senate.

The absence of challenges and the limited competitiveness of Pennsylvania legislative races highlight the importance of incumbency in determining election competitiveness and outcomes. The entrenchment of incumbents in the Pennsylvania political system (only 11 of the 203 House districts featured open seat races) makes voter participation rates somewhat irrelevant, for incumbents are afforded advantages that discourage serious challengers and create significant imbalances in campaign resources. It is also unlikely that a legislative change to the 2000 primary date would have produced any significant increase in competitive challenges for House and Senate seats in Pennsylvania. A late decision to frontload the primary to early March would most likely have had the opposite effect by creating a shorter candidate recruitment period, a narrower fundraising window, and compressed petition drive deadlines that would have further discouraged challengers and disfavored outsider candidates.

Table 5 also includes data regarding the competitiveness and potential impact of turnout changes on congressional races in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Analysis of the primary outcomes in Ohio shows that significant reductions in voter participation would not have affected the outcome of any of the 19 races for the U.S. House of Representatives. Contested primaries were few and competitiveness was limited because incumbents were seeking reelection in 18 of the 19 districts. Scrutiny of the congressional primary races in Pennsylvania shows that significant increases in voter participation potentially would have affected only one of the 21 campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives. The absence of competitiveness in Pennsylvania is attributable to incumbents seeking reelection in 19 of the 21 districts.15 Additional scrutiny of the U.S. Senate races in Pennsylvania and Ohio shows that dramatic changes in voter participation rates would not have affected the ultimate election outcome in either state.

Increased voter turnout from a frontloaded primary date in Pennsylvania would have had a little impact on the outcome of elections across the state. The paucity of contested primaries and competitive races offered little chance for upheaval from a significant increase in voter turnout. Thus, legislators' fears of the potential impact on non-presidential races in the state were largely unfounded. Despite the limited potential impact, the closeness of the partisan make-up in the House (deadlocked at 100 to 100 with three vacancies at the time of the general election) made the possibility of disruption to even one campaign worthy of concern to both political parties.

Conclusion

A review of multiple comparisons between states that participated in the frontloading trend for 2000 and states that resisted frontloading clearly shows that individual state decisions to select an early date offer greater prospects for enhanced voter choice, competitiveness of elections, and higher voter participation. Despite this potential, legislators considering a move forward on the primary calendar should be aware that frontloading does not guarantee successful early influence. The effectiveness of date selection decisions are subject to minimizing influence by other frontloading states and avoidance strategies by savvy campaign managers. The recent frontloading trend has compressed the early section of the primary season so greatly that frontloading states must either separate their statewide primaries or hold early unified primaries. When they separate their primaries they incur greater administrative and fiscal costs and potentially diminished voter turnout for non-presidential primaries. When they hold unified primaries they create greater administrative burdens and face the perceived risk that large increases in voter turnout would disrupt the status quo of expected outcomes in non-presidential races.

Comparative analysis and forecasting analysis between Ohio and Pennsylvania show that a significant move forward on the 2000 primary calendar by Pennsylvania would have generated significant increases in voter participation. Non-participation in the frontloading trend in 2000 assured that Pennsylvania would miss out on an opportunity for greater voter choice, competitiveness, and campaign activity. The politically pragmatic decision to retain the state's late primary date was a risk aversive action that displayed a clear preference for avoiding uncertainty and upheaval over pleas for greater political influence and participation. Given the limited nature of competitiveness in Pennsylvania primary elections, a concern with uncertainty and upheaval is unwarranted.

Notes

1. In response to encroachment from states establishing early GOP primaries or non-binding caucuses, New Hampshire and Iowa moved their dates forward on the calendar prior to the 1992 and 2000 primaries. The February 1, 2000 New Hampshire primary date was a full three weeks earlier than the traditional fourth Tuesday of February date of the 1970s and 1980s. Since the official 2000 primary season still ran into June, the jump forward had the effect of lengthening the overall primary season.

2. I use this format rather than the weekly tally format of Mayer (2001) and Morton and Williams (2001) because the movement forward by New Hampshire in 1996 and 2000 disrupts the weekly tally comparison between primary seasons. This format more effectively highlights the compressed nature of the delegate selection process in the early weeks and months of the primary season.

3. For example, local elections officials in Pennsylvania and Ohio expressed opposition to frontloading proposals for 2000. They criticized the proposals because the early calendar dates would disrupt established filing deadlines, hinder campaign worker recruitment, and place additional stress on election officials seeking to complete administrative tasks in a shorter time frame and during the holiday season. Pennsylvania election officials were additionally opposed to proposals that would split the primaries. They stated that running two primaries would increase costs by over 50% and would minimize essential preparation time for the general election (Durantine 1999a; McCarthy 1999; Race 1999).

4. The lack of competitiveness in the 1970s and 1980s was mostly due to an absence of challengers, as the GOP selection process was routinely ceded to incumbent presidents running for reelection or incumbent vice-presidents seeking the party nod.

5. HB 1610 PN 1965 and SB 233 PN 242 each proposed to move the presidential preference primary to the first Tuesday in March. The Senate version of the bill proposed to move the rest of the primaries to September, whereas the House bill left the remaining primaries in April. These two bills attracted more co-sponsors than any other frontloading bills considered in 1999. SB 91 PN 86 proposed moving all primaries up to the second Tuesday in March and SB 258 PN 259 proposed moving only the presidential primary to the second Tuesday. Finally, HB 653 PN 691 proposed moving the presidential primary to the third Tuesday in March but holding all others in September.

6. My decision to focus on changes in aggregate vote totals between election years is predicated on the understanding that determinations of voter turnout vary substantially across states and even across elections within a single state. Using simple vote counts for GOP candidates provides a helpful and basic summary of the number of individuals taking part in the election while avoiding issues of asymmetry created by using non-uniform measures of voter turnout rates. See Beck and Hershey (2001) for an informative discussion of the problems inherent in creating uniform determinations of voter turnout across states.

7. I determine voter attentiveness by the value of the voter involvement index at the time of the primary (Vanishing Voter Project 2000). The index represents a compilation of responses to survey questions measuring nationwide voter attentiveness and involvement. The index was updated weekly throughout the campaign and began the new year at a low of 12% voter involvement.

8. Since President Clinton competed in the 1996 Democratic primary without opposition, the Democratic turnout and competitiveness numbers are misleading. I use only GOP data in this table to produce more reliable comparisons.

9. Republican campaign activity in these states pales in comparison to candidate activity in Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina. These states moved up their early primary dates from 1996 in an attempt to preserve their early influence. Iowa had 46 candidate visits and two debates, New Hampshire had 74 visits and three debates, and South Carolina benefited from 44 candidate visits and two debates.

10. Despite Democratic Party rules restricting states from holding binding primary elections prior to March 7, the Democratic party of Washington state scheduled a non-binding primary for the same day as the GOP primary. This drew the attention of the event-starved Democratic candidates (who scheduled 10 visits to the state prior to the non-binding primary) and increased statewide and national attention to the primary.

11. Michigan Act 71, of the Public Acts of 1999, was supported by the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, and the Michigan Secretary of State. Each of these officials endorsed - Bush for the Republican nomination, as did numerous official sponsors of the legislation. Mid-1999 polling reported overwhelming support for Bush among likely Michigan voters (Ceasar and Busch 2001).

12. Even after a candidate withdraws from the race, in most cases his name remains on subsequent ballots. Non-active candidates still attract a measurable, and at times substantial, number of votes, thus preventing unanimous election results.

13. Total votes cast is superior to voter turnout as a measurement of comparison between Pennsylvania and Ohio for this time period. Although both states experienced modest population increases between 1960 and 2000, the population swings are similar and are much less substantial than changes in numbers of registered voters. Voter registration numbers in both states varied dramatically over time, causing the turnout calculation as a percentage of registered voters to be unstable and less reliable than actual participation. That Ohio did not require registration or maintain voter registration statistics prior to 1978 further impedes a turnout-based comparison.

14. Autobox Version 4.0 is distributed by Automated Forecasting Systems, Inc. of Hatboro, Pennsylvania.

15. All the incumbents seeking reelection in Ohio and Pennsylvania retained their seats in the 2000 general election. For a thorough breakdown of incumbency advantages that discourage serious challengers and promote high reelection rates in the U.S. Congress and in state legislatures see Jacobson (2001) and Maisel (1999).

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