



Executive Summary

The Problem: A Rush to Judgment: Determining the nominee early hurts the parties.

- **A short campaign does not fully vet nominees or issues.**
- **Writing a check is more important than casting a vote. Since 1980, 13 of the 14 presidential nominees--in both parties--were those who raised the most money by December 31 of the previous year.**
- **There are 4 months of dead air until the national convention. Voters take a break from the campaign and from debate about the issues.**

The American Plan: Good for all states, good for America.

- **Accomplishes what the Vanishing Voter Project, Kennedy School of Government, recommends:**
 - **“A nominating process that remains competitive for a longer period of time in order to give the public a greater opportunity to engage the campaign and to become informed about the candidates.”**
 - **“A briefer interval between the decisive contests and the conventions in order to help people sustain the levels of public engagement and information they had attained when the nominating campaign peaked.”**
 - **“A system that increases the likelihood that voters in all states will have an effective voice in the selection of the nominees.”**
- **Preserves “retail politicking” in small states early in the season. Gives an under-funded grass-roots campaign a chance to catch fire and take off. Gives candidates a chance to bounce back from early defeats.**
- **Has the merits of the “Delaware Plan” nearly approved by the Republican Party in 2000, but gives all states a chance to be among the early primary dates.**
- **Published in peer-reviewed journal: *PS: Political Science and Politics*, January 2004.**

The Graduated Random Presidential Primary System, or American Plan, is designed to begin with contests in small-population states, where candidates do not need tens of millions of dollars in order to compete. A wide field of presidential hopefuls will be competitive in the early going. A “minor candidate’s” surprise successes in the early rounds, based more on the merit of the message than on massive amounts of money, will tend to attract money from larger numbers of small contributors for the

campaign to spend in later rounds of primaries. Thus there should be more longevity of candidacy, and more credible challengers to the “front-runners.” However, as the campaign proceeds, the aggregate value of contested states becomes successively larger, requiring the expenditure of larger amounts of money in order to campaign effectively. A gradual weeding-out process occurs, as less-successful candidates drop out of the race. The goal is for the process to produce a clear winner in the end, but only after all voices have had a chance to be heard.

The system features a schedule consisting of ten intervals, generally of two weeks, during which randomly selected states may hold their primaries. In the first interval, states with a combined total of eight congressional districts would hold their primaries, caucuses, or conventions. This is approximately equal to the total number of congressional districts in Iowa (5) and New Hampshire (2), thus preserving the door-to-door “retail politicking.” Any state or combination of states amounting to a total of eight congressional districts could be in the first round of primaries and caucuses, including areas that large proportions of people of color. The District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, which also send delegates to both national conventions, are each counted as one district in this system.

In the second period--two weeks later--the eligibility number would increase to 16 (8 x 2). In the baseline design of the American Plan, every two weeks, the combined size of the contests would grow by eight congressional districts, until a combination of states totaling 80 congressional seats (8 x 10)--nearly one-fifth of the total--would be up for grabs in the tenth and last interval toward the end of June.

Because our biggest states are much more populous than the other states, this baseline design would allow California, which has 53 districts, to vote no earlier than the seventh interval, in which the eligibility number is 56 (8 x 7). To put California on equal footing with the other populous states, the order of Rounds 4 through 10 is staggered: 8, 16, 24, 56, 32, 64, 40, 72, 48, 80. With this adjustment, the four most populous states are all eligible to vote by the fourth of ten rounds. Since only eleven percent of the American electorate votes in the first three intervals, these large states can figure early enough in the delegate selection process to have as meaningful an input as any state. The American Plan treats all states even-handedly,; on average, the smallest states are scheduled at random to vote after 32.5% of the country has voted, but for the largest states this figure is no higher than 45.5%, a spread of only 13 points.

The Graduated Random Presidential Primary System, or American Plan, is at the same time both random in composition, yet predictable in structure. The composition of the schedule favors no one state or one region. Meanwhile, the structure of the system enables the widest possible political debate in the early stages of the presidential primary schedule, yet provides a gradual winnowing process as the price of staying in the game increases with each successive round. A successful candidate need not start out well-heeled, but will cross the finish line fully vetted. He or she need not hail from any particular region of the country, but must appeal to the whole nation. America deserves such a president, and America deserves a rational, systematic presidential nomination process for the 21st century.

For more information, visit www.americanplan.org

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