

# The Southern Presidential Primary: Regional Intentions With National Implications

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*Fifteen southern and border states have decided to hold presidential primaries around the second Tuesday in March 1988. Democratic party reformers have backed this regional primary in hopes that it will advantage politically moderate candidates for the presidency. This article discusses how enactment of the southern primary came about and why this reform seems unlikely to achieve the intentions of the reformers. Four major criticisms of the reforms are discussed: 1) Republicans, not Democrats, could benefit; 2) the importance of earlier primaries and caucuses—Iowa and New Hampshire in particular—could grow dramatically; 3) the desired moderating influence on Democratic candidates could be frustrated by plurality wins; and 4) the southern regional primary is not southern or regional but national.*

The idea of a southern presidential primary is not new.<sup>1</sup> Then-Governor Jimmy Carter suggested it in September 1973 at the Southern Governors' Conference. At the time, however, the governors, like the nation, were preoccupied with the national energy crisis and the Watergate hearings, and no action was taken on the proposal.<sup>2</sup>

States in New England, the Northwest, and the Midwest had considered regional primaries of their own in the early 1970s. In 1971–1972, thirty-five

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<sup>1</sup>Since the southern primary in 1984 was "Super Tuesday," media commentators have tried to surpass this with a catchy phrase for the 1988 southern primary: "Hyper Tuesday," "Mega Tuesday," "Mega-Super Tuesday," "Super-Duper Tuesday," "Super-Grits," and "Titanic Tuesday." (One critic labeled it "Me-Too Tuesday.") In this article, we will use the simple phrase "southern primary." However, more than the southern states will be selecting convention delegates on 8 March 1988, and within the region South Carolina Democrats will use a caucus. When our argument involves the other states voting that same day, the context makes clear the greater than regional focus.

<sup>2</sup>Rhodes Cook, "Delegate Selection: Change Goes On For 1976," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 16 August 1975, p. 1815.

primary reform bills were introduced in the Congress. Among the bills were proposals to establish a national presidential primary, five regional presidential primaries, and voluntary presidential primaries to be held on three specific dates. All of these primary reform bills failed, rarely reaching the hearing stage.<sup>3</sup>

### TOWARD A SOUTHERN REGIONAL PRIMARY

In 1976, Carter's election to the presidency showed that a centrist could be nominated by the Democratic party without the benefit of a southern primary. Carter's quest for renomination in 1980, however, carried the regional primary idea closer to realization. The Democratic National Committee's Commission on Presidential Nomination and Party Structure, called the Winograd Commission, considered rules reform for the 1980 convention. In its report, the Winograd Commission criticized national and regional presidential primary proposals. The Commission believed that a national primary would favor well known and well financed candidates. The Commission also argued that "the most important objection to a national primary is that it would drastically change and possibly disrupt the institutional roles in the arena of national politics. . . . [A national primary] would probably spell the end of the national party system as we know it." The Winograd Commission rejected the notion that holding national or regional primaries would save presidential candidates time, energy, and money or increase voter turnout.<sup>4</sup> The Winograd Commission concluded that: "Even if the length, expense, and wear on candidates is seen to be a problem, there is no guarantee that national or regional primary proposals would yield better results."<sup>5</sup> The then current nomination system enjoyed a relative advantage: "While some think that the current hodgepodge system turns off and confuses the voters, others point out that an advantage of the present primary system is that it allows many voters to look at the candidates over time and in many different contexts. The exposure to a 'constant barrage of information, speculation and evaluation' . . . is seen by many as a positive feature of the present system in that it educates the public."<sup>6</sup>

With a possible challenge to Carter's renomination from Senator Edward M. Kennedy, aides and supporters of the two candidates worked within the Winograd Commission to have the rules serve each candidate's interests.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 1816.

<sup>4</sup>Morley A. Winograd, Chair, Commission on Presidential Nomination and Party Structure, "Openness, Participation and Party Building: Reforms For A Stronger Democratic Party," Part I, Democratic National Committee, 9 June 1978, pp. 31-35.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., quoted in Rhodes Cook, "Democrats to Adopt Final Rules for 1980," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 3 June 1978, p. 1396.

<sup>7</sup>Patrick Caddell, U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration, *Hearings on the Presidential Nominating Process*, 99th Cong., 2nd sess., 1986, pp. 107-108; Rhodes Cook, "Democrats to Adopt Final Rules for 1980," pp. 1392-1394; and Rhodes Cook, "Helpful to Carter: Democrats Adopt New Rules for Picking Nominee in

The delegate selection period, the "window," was shortened from six to three months, and various rules were modified by the Commission. The shortened window did not prevent any state from changing a primary or caucus date so long as the date remained within the three-month period.

Carter supporters, seeking a sizable southern setting to allow Carter to win immediately after an expected Kennedy victory in New Hampshire, persuaded several southern party leaders to establish uniform delegate selection dates for their states. Thus, a southeastern regional primary first took place on 11 March 1980, when Alabama, Georgia, and Florida held primaries at the opening of the window.<sup>8</sup> While this small-scale regional primary aided President Carter's renomination, an additional justification was that it drew attention to the region. Carter later claimed that a southern regional primary, especially a larger one like the 1988 version, "will not hurt the South; it will focus a great deal of attention on the region." He went on to note that a southern primary would improve campaign efficiency because television markets cross state borders. More attention to the South might also pay off politically because it is mathematically almost impossible for a Democratic presidential candidate to win in November without strong support from the South.<sup>9</sup>

For 1984, the second Tuesday in March through the second Tuesday in June was left open as a window by the Democratic National Committee's Commission on Presidential Nomination, the Hunt Commission, though concern was expressed about "front-loading," namely the movement to select delegates toward the opening of the window. The Hunt Commission thought that front-loading threatened "the pacing and responsiveness of the process." Undue influence went to primaries or caucuses in early states like Iowa and New Hampshire which, by special dispensation, preceded the opening of the window. Moreover, well known candidates could prematurely "lock-up" the nomination process. The Hunt Commission reacted to this problem by creating a large bloc of delegates composed of party and elected officials (Rule 8) who were formally uncommitted to any candidate. The Commission urged the "national and state party leadership to keep the front-loading problem uppermost in their minds as they schedule primaries and caucuses for 1984 and to do all within their power to maintain an even spread of events throughout the entire delegate season."<sup>10</sup> This caution aside, five non-

1980," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 17 June 1978, pp. 1571-1572.

<sup>8</sup>Rhodes Cook, "Delegate Selection: Democratic Commission Approves Leadoff Spots For Iowa, New Hampshire," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 1 September 1979, p. 1898; James R. Dickenson, "Spare Us Primary Reform: Tinkering With the System Is a Prescription for More Mischief," *The Washington Post*, 12 May 1985, p. B5; Dave Doubrava and Bill King, "Southern Democrats Pushing for 'Super-Grits' Primary," *The Washington Times*, 14 January 1986.

<sup>9</sup>Remarks, President Jimmy Carter, Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 November 1986. He noted his effort to establish a southern regional primary in 1980 by bringing party leaders and executives together from Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee for that purpose.

<sup>10</sup>James B. Hunt, Chair, Report of the Commission on Presidential Nomination, Democratic National Committee, 26 March 1982, pp. 11-12, 19-20.

southern states joined Alabama, Florida, and Georgia at the opening of the window in what the news media dubbed "Super Tuesday." Other groups of state primaries clustered around 8 May and 5 June, but not around distinct regional divisions.<sup>11</sup>

### A Southern Regional Reality

While the Southern Governors' Association has had an interest in a southern regional primary, the recent successful push to establish the primary came from the Southern Legislative Conference, especially its chairman, Texas State Senator, John Traeger.<sup>12</sup> In September 1982 the organization had adopted a resolution urging member states to establish a southern regional primary for 1984. Given state legislative timetables, however, there was insufficient time to bring the proposal to fruition. The effort by the Southern Legislative Conference to establish a regional primary was renewed at its September 1985 Executive Committee meeting when it created a Regional Primary/Caucus Task Force with each member state represented by one of its senate and house members. On 31 October 1985, the task force adopted a recommendation that member states hold presidential primaries on the second Tuesday of March or presidential caucuses on the following Saturday. At the meeting, Jay E. Hakes noted that "Governor Graham of Florida [Chair, Southern Governors' Association] had discussed the regional primary with each of the southern governors . . . 'and none are publicly opposed.'" It was also reported that the region's secretaries of state "could be counted on to assist in the implementation of a common primary or caucus date in their states." Subsequently, the Executive Committee of the Southern Legislative Conference received and endorsed the task force recommendation on 4 December 1985.<sup>13</sup>

The driving force behind the southern primary was the rout of the Democratic Mondale-Ferraro ticket in the region and in the nation at the hands of Ronald Reagan. One anonymous southerner dubbed it "the Fritz Mondale Memorial Southern Regional Super Tuesday."<sup>14</sup> The liberal Democratic nominees in 1984 were perceived to be out of step with the South's more moderate political proclivities.<sup>15</sup> Speaking of the national Democratic

<sup>11</sup>Rhodes Cook, "Strong in the Frost Belt: Mondale's Primary Weakness Bodes Ill for November Hopes," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 16 June 1984, pp. 1141-1143.

<sup>12</sup>The Southern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments includes fifteen southern and border states as well as Puerto Rico.

<sup>13</sup>"Policy Position: Southern Presidential Preference Primary/Caucus," Southern Legislative Conference, release SO-85-PR45, no date; "Key Southern Legislators Voice Overwhelming Support of Early Regional Primary/Caucus Day in 1988," Southern Legislative Conference, press release, 31 October 1985.

<sup>14</sup>James R. Dickenson, "South Moving to '88 'Super Tuesday': 12-State Regional Primary Could Transform Presidential Race," *The Washington Post*, 24 December 1985, p. A1.

<sup>15</sup>For example, Dan Balz, "Democrats Sift '84 Rubble, Assess Rebuilding in South," *The Washington Post*, 20 January 1985, p. A31; Dickenson, "South Moving," p. A1; Eugene Carlson, "Southern States Have a Plan for Choosing Next President," *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 December 1985, p. 35.

party and the need for the southern regional primary movement, Traeger noted: "We think our voice is not being heard."<sup>16</sup> Dick Lodge, the Democratic state chairman in Tennessee, resorted to metaphor: "When your dog bites you four or five times, it's time to get a new dog. We've been bitten and it's time for the South to get a new dog."<sup>17</sup> The reformers' rhetoric recalled Secession. Senator Traeger: "We're getting more cooperation on this regional primary than in any movement since the Confederacy. More even, because we've picked up some border states."<sup>18</sup> "If we'd got this much action in the Civil War, we'd have won it."<sup>19</sup> State Senator Bill Harpole of Mississippi said: "You can go back home and gather up your Confederate money, 'cause the South is going to rise again!"<sup>20</sup> Mississippi State Representative Charlie Capps declared: "We're excited that we can have more impact on presidential and vice-presidential nominations than any time since the War of Northern Aggression. Our Confederate money is about to become worth a whole lot more."<sup>21</sup>

With about one-third of the total Democratic National Convention delegates at stake in the South and border states (Table 1), reformers expected the southern primary to diminish the kingmaker role of Iowa and New Hampshire. Rather than hang back in the nomination schedule—waiting to choose among the surviving candidates after more favorable ones had fallen by the wayside—advocates sought an early date to allow selection from a broader field. As then Texas Governor Mark White complained, "Many candidates who would have done well in Texas were already out. We are tired of getting leftovers."<sup>22</sup> The early date had added appeal because early results influence later ones. But early did not mean earliest. Dislodging New Hampshire or Iowa from the start of the nomination process was deemed impossible, although desirable in the eyes of some. As Robert Slagle, the Democratic chairman in Texas, put it, "Texas is damn tired of Iowa and New Hampshire exercising a disproportionate impact on the outcome."<sup>23</sup> Southerners had agreed on a resolution calling on the Democratic National Committee to make the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary go within

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Dickenson, "South Moving."

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Phil Gailey, "Southern Democrats Press Plan for a Regional Primary," *The New York Times*, 8 March 1986, p. 9. Lodge had tried and failed to get the Democratic National Committee to approve regional primaries for 1988—Mary Deibel, "Vote Plan May Gain Foothold," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8 February 1986, 4:E7. (Page references such as 13:F4 are to Newsbank (Microform), Political Development, fiche.)

<sup>18</sup>Bob Dart, "Southern States Seem to Be Lining Up for 'Mega-Super' Primary," *Atlanta Journal*, 8 February 1986, 4:E5.

<sup>19</sup>Richard Cohen, "A Southern Illusion," *The Washington Post*, 2 September 1986, p. A19.

<sup>20</sup>David Treadwell, "8 Dixie States Plan Same-Day Primary," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 1986, part 1, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Dickenson, "South Moving."

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Maralee Schwartz, "Simultaneous Primaries Being Urged for South: Governor Graham Leads Democratic Effort," *The Washington Post*, 11 September 1985, p. A6.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Paul Taylor, "Regional Primary a Political Wild Card: Prospective Change is Beyond the DNC's Control," *The Washington Post*, 6 March 1986, p. A13.

the "window" rather than before it.<sup>24</sup> Simultaneous scheduling of a southern regional primary with New Hampshire and Iowa would have dramatically altered the nomination calendar and the implications of the southern primary. (But other states—California, New Jersey, and Ohio, for instance—who considered moving up in the calendar for 1988 but did not, might have done so, thereby diverting attention from the South.)

Southern primary advocates sought to maximize southern clout in the Democratic presidential nomination, not for its own sake, but to facilitate the selection of a Democratic presidential nominee palatable to moderate and conservative southern voters—at best a nominee capable of retaking the White House for the Democrats, at least a nominee comfortable for southern Democrats to be associated with in the general election campaign. The nominee need not be a southerner but, in the eyes of the regional primary reformers, if a southern primary were to favor a suitable southerner, so much the better.<sup>25</sup> By coordinating the dates for the region's caucuses and primaries, the reformers hope to make candidates campaign longer in the South, making them address regional concerns, such as textiles, farming, and energy, to a greater extent than they would have otherwise. Moreover, the campaign coverage for weeks before the primary date is expected to produce extensive free publicity for the region (presumably a blessing). As noted by President Carter, a southern primary is also expected to bring campaign efficiency—consolidation of campaign schedules, reduction of physical demands on candidates, and reduction of campaign costs through more efficient media coverage.

The southern primary idea, as David Broder put it, "spread like kudzu."<sup>26</sup> Given the institutional barriers that stopped previous attempts to set up regional primaries, achieving the unity and coordination required to enact the southern primary was a major accomplishment. With the Democratic national party closely monitoring the progress of the southern primary, the Southern Legislative Conference systematically shepherded the 8 March 1988 primary date and 12 March 1988 caucus date through the legislatures of member states. Task force members prefiled the necessary legislation and guided it through both houses to their governor for signature. In each instance, the Southern Legislative Conference issued press releases with appropriate quotations from state legislators, heralded the primary's enactment by yet another member state, and summed up the progress to date. In short, the southern regional primary was kept in the public eye so as to maintain momentum. In March 1987, Arkansas became the fourteenth of the Southern

<sup>24</sup>Phil Gailey, "Democratic Leaders in South Favor Regional Primary Idea," *The New York Times*, 12 May 1985, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup>Dart, "Southern States," 4:E5.

<sup>26</sup>David S. Broder, "The Southern Primary: Another Mistake," *The Washington Post*, 12 March 1986, p. A23. Kudzu, imported from the Orient to help halt soil erosion in the South, has proven to be a pesky plant. Its phenomenally rapid rate of growth meant this "solution" caused problems of its own.

TABLE 1  
Presidential Nomination Process: Date and Delegate Distribution for the South and Border States, 1984 and 1988

State	'88 Plan adopted	Date	1988		1984			
			Delegates at stake		Delegates at stake			
			Dems	Reps <sup>a</sup>	Date	Dems	Reps	
S. Carolina [R]	b	3-5		37	3-17		35	
Alabama	c	3-8	61	38	3-13	62	38	
Arkansas	3/9/87	3-8	43	27	3-17	42	29	
Florida	c	3-8	146	82	3-13	143	82	
Georgia	c	3-8	85	48	3-13	84	37	
Kentucky	2/25/86	3-8	60	38	3-17	63	37	
Louisiana	6/17/86	3-8	70	41	5-5	69	41	
Maryland	5/27/86	3-8	78	41	5-8	74	31	
Mississippi	4/16/86	3-8	45	31	3-17	43	30	
Missouri <sup>d</sup>	3/18/86	3-8	83	47	4-18	86	47	
N. Carolina	7/7/86	3-8	89	54	5-8	88	53	
Oklahoma	3/14/86	3-8	50	36	3-13	53	35	
Tennessee	3/24/86	3-8	77	45	5-1	76	46	
Texas	10/15/86	3-8	196	111	5-5	200	109	
Virginia	3/26/87	3-8	85	50	3-24	78	50	
S. Carolina [D]	b	3-12		49	3-17		48	
Subtotal			1,174	726		1,167	671	
Percent <sup>e</sup>			28.2	31.9		29.7	30.0	
W. Virginia		5-10		44	28	6-5	44	19
Total			1,261	754		1,253	719	
Percent <sup>e</sup>			30.3	33.1		31.9	32.2	

SOURCES: "Southern Regional Primary Update," Southern Legislative Conference, 30 September 1986; "Southern Regional Primary—'Delegate Power'," Southern Legislative Conference, July 1986; "Presidential Nominating Process," Southern Legislative Conference, June 1986; Rhodes Cook, "Democratic Party Sets Count For Largest-Ever Convention," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 29 November 1986, p. 2987; "Democratic Campaign Calendar," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 11 February 1984, p. 252; Republican National Committee, "Tentative Allocation of Delegates to the 1988 Republican National Convention as of March 11, 1987."

NOTES: In 1984 both parties in Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia held caucuses as did the Texas Democrats. The rest held primaries. For 1988, caucuses are planned only for Democrats in South Carolina.

<sup>a</sup>The number of Republican delegates for 1988 may change as a result of 1987 elections for governor in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi and possible special elections to Congress.

<sup>b</sup>Official approval of party plans in South Carolina is likely in early April for Democrats and June for the Republicans.

<sup>c</sup>Beginning in 1980, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia held a "southern primary" on the second Tuesday in March.

<sup>d</sup>Missouri, not a member of the Southern Legislative Conference, is included in the list above as a border South state.

<sup>e</sup>The "Percent" figures are the delegate sums as a percentage of the national convention total.

Legislative Conference's fifteen members to change its primary date.<sup>27</sup> (For each state's adoption date, see Table 1).

### POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

What will be the effects of implementing the southern primary? Even as the reformers enacted the southern primary, critics saw this solution as yet another reform likely to produce unanticipated consequences—consequences capable of not only thwarting realization of the reformers' goals but also of making the southern primary backfire. Criticisms clustered around four notions: 1) Republicans, not Democrats, could benefit; 2) the importance of earlier primaries and caucuses—Iowa and New Hampshire in particular—could grow dramatically; 3) the desired moderating influence on Democratic candidates could be frustrated by a plurality win; and 4) the southern regional primary is not really southern or regional but nearly national. Each criticism will be examined below.

#### *Democratic Reform, Republican Gain?*

Democrats pushed the southern primary. Republicans were typically interested bystanders whose reactions ranged from hostile resentment to delight. Since Democrats controlled the legislative chambers, even solid Republican opposition could not stop united Democrats. Virginia Republicans, anxious to keep their lengthy caucus process, threatened a lawsuit, and characterized the southern primary as "tyranny by the majority meddling in intraparty affairs."<sup>28</sup> Backers of the southern primary attributed such Republican opposition to partisan fears that the southern primary will revitalize the Democratic party in the South. Inexplicable on these grounds, therefore, was active support for the southern primary by some Republicans. Republican governors Lamar Alexander (Tennessee) and Jim Martin (North Carolina) were among the supporters. As Martin stated, "I'm almost afraid to talk about it too much in public for fear they [the Democrats] won't do it. I feel like Brer Rabbit in the briar patch."<sup>29</sup> South Carolina Republicans jumped ahead of the pack, scheduling a primary on 5 March, the Saturday before the southern primary, in order to increase attention and impact.

Republican optimism serves as a potent reminder that the southern primary will not be an exclusively Democratic affair. Across the South, the Repub-

<sup>27</sup>"Arkansas Joins Super Tuesday List as Senate Bill 4 is Signed by Clinton," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 10 March 1987, p. B2. West Virginia, the only Southern Legislative Conference member to consider and reject the southern primary, is reconsidering it in the 1987 session, but prospects for passage appear dim. Some West Virginia legislators object to the high cost of an early presidential primary date. Other legislators contend West Virginia is not a southern state (*The Washington Post*, 27 February 1986).

<sup>28</sup>Tom Sherwood, "Virginia Passes 'Super Southern' Bill: Caucuses Would Coincide with Primaries of Other States in Region," *The Washington Post*, 17 April 1986, p. A1. Dale Eisman, "'88 Primary Battle Already Developing," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 27 February 1986, 8:G5.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Broder, "The Southern Primary," p. A23.

licans have been strongest in the presidential elections.<sup>30</sup> The southern primary will focus voter attention on presidential politics, and southern voters may find that not all Democratic presidential contenders spring from the same mold as Hubert Humphrey, George McGovern, or Walter Mondale. Nevertheless, the moderate or even conservative candidates among the Democrats are likely to be mirrored by similarly appealing candidates among the Republicans. Any benefits more intensive campaigning in the South could secure for the Democrats can also accrue to the Republicans. Candidates, both Democratic and Republican, with special appeal in the South will be advantaged. Showcasing the presidential candidates of the two parties might advantage the Republican party.

Democratic candidates will not campaign before a captive audience in the South. Most southern voters will be able to select from candidates in either party because most states holding primaries have no party registration. Individuals select—on the spot—the party in whose primary they wish to vote. Eight southern states without party registration are Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.<sup>31</sup>

The separation of the presidential nomination contest from balloting on state and local nominations will further free the southern voter to choose a Republican rather than a Democratic ballot. Most southern states, despite increased costs of \$1 to \$2 million or more, separated the presidential primary from state and local primaries.<sup>32</sup> As of late March 1987, only six southern and border states had scheduled voting for state and local offices on the same day as the presidential primary.<sup>33</sup>

The increasingly greater strength of southern Republicans—in some polls the proportion of white southerners thinking of themselves as Republicans has approached parity with Democrats—and the growing frequency of Republican candidacies and primaries combine to suggest that an individual southerner choosing to vote in the Republican contest in 1988 need not climb the political and psychological hurdles that existed a few years back. Because of the Republican alternative, moderate and conservative voters may not dominate the Democratic primaries and caucuses.

Even if the Republican primaries and caucuses do not entice southern moderates and conservatives to take part there, one cannot presume that they will participate in the Democratic nomination process. They can always sit it out. The composition of previous Democratic presidential primary and

<sup>30</sup>Harold W. Stanley, "Southern Partisan Changes: Dealignment, Realignment or Both?" *Journal of Politics*, forthcoming 1988.

<sup>31</sup>Broder, "The Southern Primary," p. A23.

<sup>32</sup>The cost was estimated to reach \$1 million in Arkansas, \$1.2 million in Mississippi [*Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8 February 1986, 4:E7], and \$2 million in Missouri [*Jefferson City Post Tribune*, 18 March 1986, 13:F4].

<sup>33</sup>In late November 1985, before most states adopted the southern primary date, only four of fifteen member states of the Southern Legislative Conference had primaries for state and local offices scheduled on presidential primary day (Edward Feigenbaum, "Regional Primaries," CSG Background, States Information Center, the Council of State Governments, November 1985, p. 7).



caucus participants, particularly in 1984, indicates that moderates and conservatives have been conspicuous by their relative absence.<sup>34</sup> As Don Fowler, former South Carolina Democratic party chairman, observed: "The people who participate in the delegate selection process in the South are substantially liberal-moderates, a constituency which mirrors reasonably well those people who participate in the delegate selection process in the rest of the country."<sup>35</sup> Banking on the return to dominance of the moderate, conservative voter risks disappointment.

Of course, the recent past may be an uncertain guide. The existence of the southern primary, its designers hope, will encourage some candidates to enter the fray or to moderate their message, and to remain in the race, whatever their early showings in Iowa and New Hampshire. A broader spectrum of choice than Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, and Walter Mondale may encourage more mainstream southern voters to participate in the Democratic primaries. Even so, the field of choice was broader in 1984, but moderate white voters largely sat out the Democratic presidential primaries, a point discussed later in connection with the continuing, perhaps enhanced, importance of Iowa and New Hampshire.

The potential Republican benefits of a southern primary could be checked if unity characterizes southern Democrats in 1988. If many southern Democratic leaders actively support a single candidate, this should boost the endorsed candidate's nomination prospects. "The same political forces that cooperated so successfully to translate the idea of a southwide primary into reality are going to have to keep cooperating to make the primary work as they intend."<sup>36</sup> The candidate need not be from the region but a southerner might engender broader support. However, Sam Nunn, Charles Robb, and other southerners with some appeal for 1988 have chosen not to run for president. The likelihood that most Democratic leaders will fall in line behind one candidate is remote. The reformers stressed that they were not supporting the southern primary to advantage any particular candidate.<sup>37</sup> Several reformers have already committed to different candidates, and opinions differed as to whom the southern primary would help.<sup>38</sup> Endorsing a single candidate in the South poses practical problems of political engineering. The major question is how effective such an endorsement would be. Specifically

<sup>34</sup>For example, in Florida in 1984, the ABC News [Exit] Poll reported that voters in the Democratic presidential primary described themselves as follows: conservative, 37 percent; moderate, 30 percent; and liberal, 33 percent. Florida general election voters in 1984 proved far more conservative and much less liberal: 46 percent conservative, 34 percent moderate and 20 percent liberal (*The '84 Vote* (n.p., ABC News, n.d.), pp. 260, 593).

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Peter A. Brown, "Coming Up Empty," *National Journal*, 24 January 1987, p. 197.

<sup>36</sup>Hastings Wyman, Jr., "Southern Presidential Primary a Reality," *Southern Political Report*, 29 April 1986, Number 194, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Paul Bernstein, "Same Primary Date Urged for Fifteen Southern States," *Atlanta Journal*, 1 November 1985.

<sup>38</sup>David S. Broder, "Parents of Superprimary Already Boasting of '88: Region Will Elect President, Leaders Say," *The Washington Post*, 17 July 1986, p. A4.

how much would it offset the momentum generated by strong showings by some other candidate in Iowa and New Hampshire?

Even if such a focus of support in 1988 does not emerge, the southern primary may be the death-knell for some candidates from the South or those deemed to have special appeal there. A less than impressive showing will lead to questions about where the candidate can win if not in his own region. This same logic applies to Republican candidates as well as to Democratic candidates.

#### *Plurality Winners in the Region of Runoffs?*

To the extent that moderate and conservative voters stay out of the Democratic presidential primary, their absence will make more problematical the expected boost the southern primary can give to centrist Democratic candidates. Even if these southerners do vote in the Democratic primary, several centrist candidates might split the vote so as to produce a plurality winner who is not the moderate, nationally electable candidate about whom southern primary proponents have dreamed and schemed. If Jesse Jackson runs in 1988 and receives the levels of black voter support he enjoyed in 1984, he needs few white votes to earn about one-fifth to one-quarter of the Democratic primary vote in southern states. This may suffice for a plurality win in a crowded field. Carter's win in New Hampshire in 1976, by 28 percent to Udall's 23 percent, owed much to the splintering of the vote by four left-of-center candidates. If the giant share of delegates up for grabs on Super Tuesday entices several moderate candidates to seek the presidency, the same thing may happen in reverse. On the Republican side, some observers see a parallel potential for Pat Robertson, with ardent backing from fundamentalist voters, to gain plurality wins in tightly contested Republican contests.<sup>39</sup> Such strong plurality appeal need not signal electability in the presidential general election. Most southern states use a runoff to prevent congressional, state, and local candidates from gaining the nomination with only a plurality backing from party voters. Despite its regional prevalence, resort to a runoff was not pushed by the southern primary reformers. Given the lingering dispute over whether the runoff is racially discriminatory, instituting the reform with this wrinkle might have helped mobilize opposition to the southern primary.

One prospect is that the results of the southern primary will be more muddled than meaningful. The fifteen southern and border states that have already converged on March 5th through 12th may be joined by ten non-southern states, making the southern primary more than regional. Results from so many states mean several candidates may find some comfort in different states, making the interpretation of the results a contest of consequence on a par with the vote itself. For example, in 1984, Mondale's team successfully sold the interpretation that winning only two states on Super Tuesday (that is, losing seven of nine contests)—the Mondale wins coming in Alabama and

<sup>39</sup>Cohen, "A Southern Illusion," p. A19.

Georgia where Hart had seldom appeared—was sufficient to indicate that Hart's momentum had been checked.<sup>40</sup> Since results are not self-interpreting, creativity, constrained by plausibility, can sometimes compensate for votes.

#### *Iowa and New Hampshire: More or Less Important?*

One unintended consequence of the southern primary may be that the importance of earlier primaries and caucuses—Iowa, New Hampshire, and (for Republicans) Michigan—will be magnified.<sup>41</sup>

Southern primary reformers had hoped that candidates would avoid these early events, choosing instead to go after the larger delegate stakes in the South.<sup>42</sup> Despite the sizable share of delegates at stake on March 8th and 12th, bypassing earlier events is not an inviting prospect. Any candidate who does not run in states that vote before the southern primary can be expected to face many questions about his or her motivations for “ducking” the early events. Doubts would be raised about whether the candidacy was a national or only a regional one, a run for the presidency or the vice-presidency. Such concerns could reduce a candidate's ability to muster support and gain momentum, not to mention meeting and stemming the momentum another candidate might by enjoying as a result of Iowa and New Hampshire. As David Broder reported:

None of the advisers to 1988 hopefuls with whom I have talked thinks for a moment his man can skip the Iowa caucuses or the New Hampshire primary and start his campaign in the South. We know from history that the winner of New Hampshire—whether a moderate or a liberal—gets a tremendous temporary boost in publicity and public support across the country, including the South. The bigger the bloc of votes available the next Tuesday, the larger the premium for winning New Hampshire.<sup>43</sup>

In the initial stages, increased publicity and greater public support are mutually reinforcing. The timing of the southern primary—within two or three weeks of New Hampshire—may mean that momentum will still be surging and that voters will not have time to entertain second thoughts about the leading candidates.<sup>44</sup> Given advertising costs in the media markets required to penetrate southern primary states, “free” media generated by news

<sup>40</sup>Jonathan Moore, ed., *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at '84* (Dover, Mass.: Auburn House, 1986), pp. 88–89.

<sup>41</sup>William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), pp. 91–94; Nelson W. Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 173–174.

<sup>42</sup>Texas State Senator John Traeger: “The first thing I'd do is say I'm not going to . . . New Hampshire. . . I'm gonna start campaigning in the South” (CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, 13 May 1986, transcripts (microfiche), pp. 16–17).

<sup>43</sup>Broder, “The Southern Primary,” p. A23.

<sup>44</sup>The five-week period in 1980 before New Hampshire that Reagan needed to check Bush's “Big Mo” from his win in Iowa is instructive here (Jonathan Moore, ed., *The Campaign for President: 1980 in Retrospect* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1981), pp. 98, 107–110, 121–122; and Patrick Caddell, *Hearings on the Presidential Nominating Process*, p. 107).

coverage of the campaign becomes all the more important. The media have limited resources. The assignment of reporters and news coverage reflects an understanding of who is a major candidate. Once the returns start rolling in, who deserves campaign coverage is affected more by results than prospects. The instant celebrity status bestowed on those who do well in Iowa and New Hampshire, coupled with the relative oblivion for the remaining candidates (punctured principally by brief media reports about how badly things are going for them), means that candidates' performances in Iowa and New Hampshire will powerfully influence the outcome of the southern primary.

As examples of the importance of early events, consider the 1984 campaigns in the South of Gary Hart and John Glenn. Hart's electoral fortunes soared immediately after his New Hampshire win. As one Mondale aide recalled, Hart went “from 4 percent to 35 percent in Georgia in about a week. He was all things to all people but nobody knew anything about him. He was a conservative to conservatives, a liberal to liberals, a moderate to moderates. . . . Gary Hart was running only a 7 or 8 percent negative, I think, in the southern states.”<sup>45</sup> Hart did not win in Georgia, he fell short by 22,000 votes out of nearly 700,000 cast, but his showing reflected a massive two-week surge fueled by his win in New Hampshire.

Glenn's candidacy exemplified the opposite tendency. Several southern primary reformers, when asked, suggested that had the southern primary been in place in 1984, John Glenn would have been the Democratic nominee.<sup>46</sup> Yet the southern voters' choice on Super Tuesday in 1984 was not restricted to Hart, Jackson, or Mondale. Glenn was also on the ballot. In fact, Glenn won the votes of more white conservative voters in Alabama and Georgia than did Hart, Jackson, or Mondale, yet he failed to carry either state.<sup>47</sup> Glenn's previous poor showings in nonsouthern settings checked and eroded his support in the South. His vote-getting abilities overall, reflected in how he did elsewhere, as well as his hero status and relatively moderate-conservative positions, shaped his appeal in the South. The mere presence of moderate or conservative candidates on the ballot does not generate its own support in the South. Those candidacies must be seen as viable—viability tested and found promising in previous campaign showdowns.

Advocates of the southern primary sought to maximize the clout of the region in the Democratic presidential nomination but may have enhanced instead the clout of Iowa and New Hampshire. Even solid support for a single candidate by political elites across the region may dim but not eclipse the instant celebrity conferred on another candidate by strong showings in Iowa and New Hampshire. Tom Donilon, Mondale's deputy campaign manager, surveying the 1988 nomination process altered by the southern primary, said

<sup>45</sup>Tom Donilon in *Campaign for President*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>46</sup>Treadwell, “8 Dixie States,” part 1, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Peter Begans, “A Roller Coaster Ride Through the 1984 Democratic Primaries,” *The '84 Vote* (n.p., ABC News, n.d.), p. 571.

it well: "The best southern strategy is to win in Iowa and New Hampshire."<sup>48</sup>

### *A De Facto National Primary?*

As the southern primary was taking shape, several critics contended that the number of states involved, plus others that might join for the same "the earlier the better" motives, would make the regional primary a de facto national primary. Given the resulting "front-loading" of the nomination process, some critics, echoing the Hunt Commission's report, fear that the nomination will be decided shortly after the voting gets under way, leaving little opportunity for deliberation and reconsideration, as states opt not to make candidates stand the test of time.<sup>49</sup>

Southern states have no monopoly on the second Tuesday in March. On Super Tuesday in 1984, Massachusetts and Rhode Island held primaries while Hawaii, Nevada, and Washington held caucuses; on the following Saturday, Delaware, Alaska, and Michigan held caucuses. As this is written state plans are not yet final, but several other nonsouthern states have given serious consideration to scheduling their 1988 primary or caucus early.<sup>50</sup> Some have considered establishing a competing regional primary. For instance, the Indiana secretary of state, in an explicit effort to offset the significance of the southern primary, urged his counterparts in Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to target the third Tuesday in March for a regional primary.<sup>51</sup> Despite such talk, other states seemed unlikely to implement regional primaries. Terry Michael, Democratic National Committee spokesman, said: "The South had a powerful sectional motive (its desire for a moderate-to-conservative presidential candidate who could win back Southern votes from the Republicans), but I don't think that exists elsewhere." Moreover, outside the South, legislatures and governors are not so dominantly Democratic, making Democratic rules change through legislation more difficult.<sup>52</sup>

Over the years, regional primaries have attracted interest in part because of their presumed ability to help rationalize and economize the nomination process by allowing candidates to give campaigning and advertising a regional focus. Those pushing the southern primary shared such aims.<sup>53</sup> However, the number and spread of states voting on March 5th through 12th raises questions as to whether rationality or economy is being well served. The

<sup>48</sup>CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, 13 May 1986, p. 16, transcripts (microfiche).

<sup>49</sup>"On to a National Primary?" *The Washington Post*, 7 March 1986, p. A18.

<sup>50</sup>Thomas W. Ottenad, "Sectional Rivalry Shaping Up For Presidential Primaries," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 27 April 1986, 19:F13; Peter K. Mitchell, "N.J. Considering a 'Superprimary,'" [Elizabeth, New Jersey] *Daily Journal*, 15 July 1986, 23:G10.

<sup>51</sup>Patrick J. Traub, "Simcox Seeks Midwest Primary," *Indianapolis Star*, 11 April 1986, 13:F3; Howard Wilkinson, "Earlier Super Tuesday Ohio Primary Proposed," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 20 May 1985, 12:G1.

<sup>52</sup>Ottenad, "Sectional Rivalry," 19:F14.

<sup>53</sup>Marshall Ingwerson, "1988's Mega-Super Tuesday: Backers Say Southern Regional Primary Can Steer Democratic Party Farther to the Right," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28 March 1986, p. 3.

multistate vote encourages candidates to consider using national media to reach voters in these states.<sup>54</sup> This could be justified on various grounds, and economy is one. Yet the sums of money this would take represent a serious escalation of the costs of presidential nomination campaigns. Federal spending limits for Iowa and New Hampshire are relatively small, and several past campaigns have bumped up against these limits. The spending limits in states voting on March 5th through 12th dwarf those of Iowa and New Hampshire. The "playing field" has expanded and the opportunity for candidates with considerable war chests to spend them has been enlarged.<sup>55</sup> This makes it harder, if not impossible, for a relative unknown to emerge as a serious contender in the primaries.

If the eventual nomination calendar is heavily front-loaded, the funds and organization needed from the start will be much greater than in the past. The southern primary disrupts the campaign cycles of the past. A truncated calendar (with the southern primary following New Hampshire by two or three weeks) means that early victories will not generate contributions quickly enough to fuel candidates in the large number of states voting on March 8th or 12th. A candidate cannot afford to wait because more of the convention delegates will have been selected by the time reaction to early returns leads to larger campaign coffers. Hence, more campaigning and fund-raising will have to occur in 1987 to ensure adequate treasuries to field a serious presence in critical early states.<sup>56</sup>

The financial and organizational requirements for a "run-everywhere" strategy through the southern primary will be enormous. Reassigning campaign workers from state to state as the nomination process unfolds will also occur in 1988, but time is too short, the states too many, and the stakes too high to make reassignment a reliable procedure for states voting in February or early March. Manpower needs have escalated because of the piling up of primaries early in the process. The weeks immediately after the southern primary may not be slack times either because more states are considering moving up in the calendar for 1988.

This rearranging of the campaign calendar raises questions about the extent to which the southern primary will help focus attention on southern concerns and will minimize the role of special interest groups. Given the geographical spread of participating states, candidate appearances are likely to resemble what Gary Hart characterizes as a "massive flyaround" or "political surfing": daily airport hops to hold press conferences in different media markets to give the appearance of pervasiveness.<sup>57</sup> Hart's campaign manager recalled the difficulty in 1984:

<sup>54</sup>John Deardourff, in Dickenson, "South Moving," p. A1.

<sup>55</sup>James R. Dickenson, "'Mega-Tuesday': Would a regional primary be good for the South," *The Washington Post*, 17 January 1986, p. A13.

<sup>56</sup>David Price, *Bringing Back the Parties* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1984), pp. 223-228.

<sup>57</sup>Quoted in Phil Gailey, "South Unifying 1988 Primaries; Effects Debated," *The New York Times*, 8 April 1986, p. A21.



there was no time between New Hampshire on the 28th of February and March 13 for Gary to get his message out if we were going to run, in fact, a national campaign. We just had to move from tarmac to tarmac, and that's essentially what Gary did. . . . all we could do, essentially, was touch down at airports, hold a press conference, get as many supporters out there as possible, try to get on the evening news, and have a presence everywhere at once.<sup>58</sup>

Hart had two weeks between New Hampshire and Super Tuesday to campaign in nine states. Plans for 1988 make 1984 look simple. Candidates will have only two or three weeks between New Hampshire and the southern primary to attempt to campaign in twenty-three states (fifteen southern and border states and eight nonsouthern states).<sup>59</sup> Some of the smaller southern states will get less attention than they would like because candidates will target the states with more delegates.<sup>60</sup>

The time between New Hampshire and the southern primary will be a brief one for focusing on regional concerns. Candidates can go south before that, but the proper issues to emphasize in the region may not be obvious. The need to run a national campaign—to avoid advancing positions in one area that appear as liabilities elsewhere—constrains the ability to make different appeals in the South. Major issues divide the region, what “sells” in one part might not sell in another. While voters in Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas experience an economy suffering from depressed oil prices, voters in the rest of the South enjoy lower prices at the pump. Textile workers in the Carolinas can be mobilized around the issue of textile imports. Other southerners are likely to have second thoughts as they drive foreign cars to work in areas economically boosted by the presence of foreign subsidiaries, just as farmers fear “a protectionist trade policy could provoke foreign retaliation that would add to their economic pain.”<sup>61</sup>

Rather than minimize the role of special interest groups in the nomination process, the southern primary seems likely to make them more important. The delegate stakes raised by the southern primary; a run-everywhere strategy essential to amass an eventual majority of delegates; Hart's strong, early showing in 1984, enervated by the failure to field full delegate slates in some states—these considerations combine to suggest that the support of organizations capable of providing campaign workers, delegates, and funds across the states will be critical to candidate success. Political organizations channeling the influence of teachers, labor, blacks, and other groups will continue to be central to the Democratic nomination process.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Moore, *Campaign for President*, p. 84.

<sup>59</sup>As of late March 1987, twenty-three states will select convention delegates between 5 March and 13 March but state plans for 1988 delegate selection are not yet final.

<sup>60</sup>Chuck Ervin, “Oklahomans Give Primary Proposal Differing Reviews,” *Tulsa World*, 8 December 1985, 36:B14.

<sup>61</sup>Gailey, “South Unifying,” p. A21.

<sup>62</sup>Dickenson, “‘Mega-Tuesday,’” p. A13.

## DISCUSSION

Southern primary reformers held at least seven goals: 1) enhancing Democratic general election prospects, 2) securing a more moderate Democratic nominee, 3) maximizing southern clout in the nomination process, 4) increasing the likelihood of a southerner on the ticket, 5) forcing presidential candidates to focus on the South and to address issues of regional concern, 6) minimizing the importance of special interest groups in the nomination process, and 7) helping to rationalize and economize the nomination process by allowing candidates to concentrate on the region. Many possible outcomes could result from the southern primary, but several scenarios suggest that the results of the 1988 regional primary may not be as the reformers had hoped: Republicans rather than Democrats could benefit, the significance of Iowa and New Hampshire could increase, plurality winners may not be moderates, and regional concerns may be submerged in a de facto national primary. Ultimately, the southern primary may not make the eventual Democratic nominee more electable even in the South.

Whether the South will gain greater influence in Democratic presidential nomination politics is open to doubt. The South is currently far from powerless within the Democratic party. For example, southern members of Congress influence Democratic party policy through committee chairmanships.<sup>63</sup> Also, a keen appreciation has grown over the years that the Democratic nominee must carry several southern states. A recent reiteration of this view came from the current party chairman:

Democrats should nominate a southerner for president or vice president in 1988 in an effort to regain ground in that region, Democratic National Chairman Paul G. Kirk, Jr. said yesterday. . . . Calling the [Southern primary] proposal “constructive,” Kirk said, “It would be an opportunity for states that have not been supportive of the national party [in presidential elections] to have more of an impact.”<sup>64</sup>

The recent shift in electoral votes toward the South and West and the poor prospecting outside the South reinforce the Democratic tendency to look south:

“Whether we like it or not, the balance of political power is shifting to the South and West, and the electoral strategy in 1988 is going to have to involve the South in a major way,” said Richard Moe, a Washington lawyer who is involved in Democratic politics. “In the 1980 census,” he added, “we saw the

<sup>63</sup>Alan Ehrenhalt, “The New South and the Democratic Senate,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 10 January 1987, p. 99.

<sup>64</sup>Thomas B. Edsall, “Southerner Urged for Democrats: Kirk Says Victory May Hinge on Area,” *The Washington Post*, 14 January 1986, p. A4; Jack Nelson, “Democratic Chief Urges Southerner for '88 Ticket: Early Regional Primary Also Backed,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 15 January 1986, p. 1; and “Top Democrat Isn't Just Whistling Dixie,” *The New York Times*, 21 January 1986, editorial.

Sun Belt gain 17 electoral votes. That's like moving the state of New Jersey to the South."<sup>65</sup>

Even in recent nomination politics, the South has been influential. Carter in 1976 and 1980 was boosted by southern showings, effectively exploiting Iowa and New Hampshire as springboards in 1976. In 1984 Alabama and Georgia gave Mondale his only two wins (among seven losses) on Super Tuesday. These two southern states can be credited with putting the Mondale campaign back on track after a string of defeats by Hart.<sup>66</sup> Later delegate selection by southern states added to Mondale's margin of victory.

Whether the Southern primary will enhance or endanger southern influence in Democratic nomination politics will be proven by events. Either is possible, although in our judgment, the critics rather than the reformers are more likely to be proved right. If the southern primary fails to exert a moderating influence on the Democratic nomination, this will be another nail—not necessarily the last—in the coffin of Democratic presidential politics in the South.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Quoted in Phil Gailey, "Frankly, Democrats Want the South," *The New York Times*, 16 January 1986, p. B8; see also Richard Moe, "To Win in '88, We Democrats Will Have to Whistle Dixie," *The Washington Post*, 23 March 1986, p. F1.

<sup>66</sup>For instance, "Hyping Hyper Tuesday," *The New York Times*, 28 March 1986, p. A34, and Harold W. Stanley, "The 1984 Presidential Election in the South: Race and Realignment," *The 1984 Presidential Election in the South: Patterns of Southern Party Politics*, ed. Robert P. Steed, Lawrence W. Moreland, and Tod A. Baker (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 305–306.

<sup>67</sup>"Many Republican strategists contend Super Tuesday is a typically misguided Democratic attempt to shape the outcome by altering party rules. 'It's pretty obvious it's the dying gasp of conservatives in the Democratic party,' said George Strake, the Texas Republican state chairman." Quoted in Andrew C. Miller, "'Super Tuesday' Not Ace in Hole for Dole," *Kansas City Star*, 6 April 1986, 13:F7.