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 the 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—such as 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. 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. 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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Since the southern primary in 1980 was "Super Tuesday," media commentators have tried to surpass this with a catchy phrase for the 1988 southern primary: "Super Tuesday," "Mega Tuesday," "Super Tuesday," "Mega-Super Tuesday," "Super-Duper Tuesday," "Super-Grande," and "Titanic Tuesday." (One critic labeled it "Me-Toe 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 hold a caucus. When our argument involves the other states voting that same day, the clause makes clear the greater than regional focus. "Rhode Cook, "Delegate Selection: Change Goes On For 1976," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 16 August 1975, p. 1815.

Source: The Journal of Southern History 71 (Summer 1985)
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 stages. All of these primary reform bills failed, rarely reaching the hearing stage.

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 the nomination, 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, made recommendations 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 better-funded 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 role 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 money, time, energy, and money or increase voter turnout. 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." The Commission emphasized the advantage of the present 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" and evaluation is often seen as a positive feature of the present system that it educates the public.

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.

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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. 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 hurt the South's delegation and 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 would favor well known and pay off politically because it is mathematically almost impossible for a Democratic presidential candidate to win in November without strong support from the South.

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 and the Hunt Candidates, 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 "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 Committee 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 as even spread of events throughout the entire delegate allocation." This caution aside, five non-1980: Congress Quarterly Weekly Report, 17 June 1978, pp. 1571-1572.


Remains, President Jimmy Carter, Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 November 1986. He noted his efforts to establish a southern regional primary in 1860 by bringing party leaders and executives together from Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee for that purpose.

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. 1

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 Trager. 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 repeated 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 state hold primaries on the second Tuesday of March or regional caucuses on the following Saturday. At the meeting, Jay E. Maken noted that "Governor Graham of Florida [Chairman Southern Governors' Association] had discussed the regional primary with each of the southern governors... and none are publicly opposed." 2

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. 3

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." 4 The liberal南方的 more moderate political priorities. Speaking of the national Democratic

party and the need for the southern regional primary movement, Trager noted: "We think our voice is not being heard." 5 Dick Lodge, the Democratic state chairman in Tennessee, went on 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." 6 The reformers' rhetoric revealed Secession. Senator Trager: "We're getting more cooperation on this regional primary than in any movement since the Confederacy. More ever, because we've picked up some border states." 7 If we'd got this much action in the Civil War, we'd have won it." 8 A State Senator Bill Harpole of Mississippi said: "You can go back home and gather up your Conference money, 'cause the South is going to rise again!" 9 Mississippi State Representative Charlie Capers 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 Conference money is about to become worth a whole lot more." 10

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—wait, 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." 11 The early date had added appeal because early results influence later ones. But early did not mean earliest. Dismaying 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." 12 Southerners had agreed on a resolution calling on the Democratic National Committee to make the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary go within

1Quoted in Dickenson, "South Moving.


5David Treadwell, "Iowa State Plan Same Day Primary." Los Angeles Times, 19 April 1986, part 1, p. 2.

6Quoted in Dickenson, "South Moving.


8Quoted 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. 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 nonissue capable of retaining the White House for the Democrats, at least a nonissue 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 southerner were to favor a suitable southerner, so much the better. 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 textile, 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 (potentially a blessing). As noted by President Carter, a southern primary is also expected to bring campaign efficiencies—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, "spreads like kudzu." 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 prefixed the necessary legislation and guided it through both houses to their respective signatures. In each state, the Southern Legislative Conference issued press releases with appropriate quotations from state legislators, heralded the primary’s enactment by yet another member of Congress, and uniformly, in short, the southern regional primary was kept in the public eye as so to maintain momentum. In March 1987, Arkansas became the fourteenth of the Southern Legislative Conference.

**TABLE 1**

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
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<td>37</td>
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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 in Congress.

Official approval of party plans in South Carolina is likely in early April for Democrat and June for the Republicans. Beginning in 1980, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia held a "southern primary" on the second Tuesday in March.

The "Percent" figures for the delegate sums as a percentage of the national convention total.
licans have been strongest in the presidential elections. 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 intense 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 campaign before a captive audience in the South. Most southern voters will be selected by southern candidates in either party because most states holding primaries have no party registration. Individuals select—or 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. 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 primary from state and local primaries. As of late March 1987, only six southern states had scheduled voting for state and local offices on the same day as the presidential primary.

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 candidates and primaries provide an indication that the individual southern voter is less likely to support the Southern strategy of the Democratic party than in 1968 need not climb the political and psychological hurdles that existed a few years back. The results 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 these voters will participate in the Democratic nomination process. They can always sit it out. The composition of previous Democratic presidential primary and

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**Possible Consequences**

What will be the effects of implementing the southern primary? Even as the reformers expected, 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 producing new goals: 1) Republicans, not Democrats, could benefit; 2) the importance of earlier primaries and caucuses—lowa and New Hampshire in particular—could grow dramatically; 3) the desired moderating influence on Democratic primary is not really southern or regional but nearly national. Each criticism will be examined below.

Democrat Reform, Republican Gain?

Democrats pushed the southern primary. Republicans were typically interested in their reactions to hostile sentiment to delight. Since Democrats control the South, they could solidify support, keep the lengthly process of a primary, and characterize the southern primary as "synonymous with the majority meddling in intraparty affairs." Backers of the southern primary attributed such Republican opposition to partisan fears that the southern primary would revive the Democratic party in the South, not replicable 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 what the state legislature is doing in the primary."

"As the integration of the primary will not be an exclusively Democratic affair. Across the South, the Republican

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"Primary,'" "The Southern Primary," p. 223.

"This city is estimated to make the Southern one for Arkansas, 3.2 million in Mississippi, 1.9 million in Missouri ("St. Louis Post Dispatch," 18 March 1987, p. 1, 10)."

"The last November 1983, before most states adopted the southern primary, only four of fifteen states in the Southern Legislative Conference had primaries for state and local offices scheduled on presidential primaries (Edward Freidman, "Regional Primaries," CSG Backgrounds, States Information Council, The Council of State Governments, November 1983, p. 7)."
caucus participants, particularly in 1984, indicates that moderates and conservatives have been conspicuous by their relative absence. 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." By focusing 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 in the context of the continuity, perhaps enhanced, importance of Iowa and New Hampshire.

The potential Republican benefits of a southern primary could be checked if unity characterizes the moderates. Elites in the Democratic party may sense that the southern primary means reality is going to have to keep cooperating to make the primary work as they intend. The candidate need not be from the region but a southerner might engender broader support. The appeal of a glitzy show stopping the southern primary to advantage any particular candidate may be significant. Several reformers have already committed to different candidates, and opinions differed as to whom the primary would help. 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

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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 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 gives 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 bulk of black voter support he enjoyed in 1984, he needs few white voters to earn about one-third 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 32 percent, owed much to the splitting of the four-center candidate. 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 other side, some observers see a part of this potential for Pat Robertson, with ascent backing from fundamentalist voters, to gain plurality wins in highly contested Republican contests. 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 the southern primary's role in regional prevalence, results have 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 region muddled than meaningful. The fifteen southern and border states that have already convened on March 5th through 12th by 12th may be joined by ten non-southern states, making the southern candidate 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

*For example, in Florida in 1984, the ABC News [last] Poll reported one votes in the Democratic presidential primary described themselves as: conservative, 17 percent; moderate, 30 percent; and liberal, 33 percent. Florida general election voters in 1984 proved far more conservative, 34 percent; moderate, 46 percent; and liberal, 10 percent (The '84 Vote, ABC News, l.d., p. 260, 293.)


Georgia where Hart had seldom appeared—was sufficient to indicate that Hart's momentum had been checked. 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. Southern primary reformers had hoped that candidates would avoid these early events, choosing instead to go after the larger delegate stakes in the South. Despite the sizable share of delegates at stake on March 14th 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 "sticking" 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 appeal to master support and gain momentum, not to mention meeting and assessing the momentum another candidate might enjoy by winning as a result of Iowa and New Hampshire. As David Broder reported:

None of the advice to 1988 hopefuls with whom I have talked thi's 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. In the initial stages, increased publicity and greater public support are mutually reinforcing. The timing of the southern primaries—within two or three weeks of New Hampshire—may mean that momentum will still be swinging and that voters will not have time to entertain second thoughts about the leading candidates. Given advertising costs in the media markets required to penetrate southern states, "free" media generated by news


13From Dornion in Campaign for President, pp. 77-78.

14"Friedewald, "0 Days States," pp. 1, 44.


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 (punctuated principality 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 campaign in the South of Gary Hart and John Glenn. Hart's electoral fortunes soured 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 for whom he stood. He was a conservative to the 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." 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. 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. 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 candidates must be seen as viable—viability tested and found promising in previous campaign showings.

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, surveyed the 1988 nomination process altered by the southern primary, said
multistate vote encourages candidates to consider using national media to reach voters in these states. 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 can-

didates with considerable war chests to spend them has also enlarged. 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 cycle of the truncated calendar with the southern primary following New Hampshire by caucuses. As this is written state plans are not yet final, but several other nonsouthern states have given serious con-
sideration to scheduling their 1988 primary or caucus early. Some have considered establishing a "Super Tuesday" on the following Saturday, Delaware, Alabama, and Michigan held primaries in February or March.

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 participating states have gained such aims. However, the number and spread of states voting on March 5th through 12th raise questions as to whether rationality or economy being well served. The
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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 impact of special interest groups, 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 sources 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, pluralities 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. 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." 5

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..."
Sun Belt gain 17 electoral votes. That's like moving the state of New Jersey to the South."44

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.45 Later delegate selection by southern states added to Mondale's margin of victory.

Whether the South's 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.46


46"Many Republicans strategists contend Super Tuesday is a typically misguided Democratic attempt to shape the outcome by altering party rules. "It's pretty obvious that the living goose of conservatives in the Democratic party," said George Strake, the Texas Republican state chairman." Quoted in Andrew C. Miller, "Super Tuesday" Hot Ace in Hole for Dixie," Kansas City Star, 6 April 1986, 13:17.