

STATE LEGISLATURES AS THE MOTIVATING FORCE BEHIND FRONTLOADING

by

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(Under the Direction of Paul-Henri Gurian)

ABSTRACT

Political science literature has done much to point out the presence of frontloading, but has failed to sufficiently explain why it is that states have decided to move their presidential primaries to earlier dates. Previously, Mayer and Busch (2004) attempted to answer this question indirectly, using as evidence the correlation between candidate spending and the date on which a state's primary is held. In contrast however, this paper observes the actual decision makers in this process—the state legislatures—and examines how several factors—candidate spending, media coverage, split primaries, when a primary was and whether the primary was the only event on a date—influence their decision to move their state's primary to an earlier date. To examine the relationships between the state legislatures' decisions and these factors, a time series cross-sectional logit model is utilized for a 28 state sample over the course of the elections from 1976-1996.

INDEX WORDS: Frontloading, Presidential elections, Presidential nominations, Presidential primaries, Split primaries, State legislatures

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1. Introduction

Over the last thirty years, the playing field on which presidential nominations are contested has changed dramatically. The movement of individual state primaries and caucuses to earlier dates on the nomination calendar has not only altered where and how many states in which the candidates have to campaign, but also the time period in which they are required to compete. This window of time in which primaries are contested has inched ever closer to the beginning of the election year during this period, while still ending consistently during the first week of June. As the beginning of the nomination process has expanded from late February in 1976 to the latter weeks of January in 2004, the number of states clustering their primaries and caucuses at the beginning of the process has increased as well in a phenomenon known as frontloading. The impetus for frontloading is that the earlier a state's primary is, the greater the opportunity is to gain the attention of the candidates and media and/or influence the nomination process. During the 1988 nomination cycle, the entire South coordinated their primaries on the same early March date, and in so doing, massively frontloaded that year's primary season, legitimating the frontloading concept.¹

¹ The southern Super Tuesday in 1988 not only ushered in the frontloading era, but it also brought to bear the idea of the regional primary. This holds that states of a region with similar constituencies and issues would align their primaries on the same date to draw attention to those regional issues and also to affect the nomination. If planned early enough in the primary season, the regional primary could impact the nomination. This would in turn impact the success of such a candidate in that region during the general election and, if elected, that candidate could propose legislation beneficial to the region. This assumes much, but has been an idea considered in several regions since 1988. Frontloading though, is a vicious cycle that has created an every-man-for-himself environment in nomination politics. As a result, many of these regional primaries are ruined by the movement of other state primaries. It takes only one delegate-rich state moving to an earlier date to spoil the plans of an entire region. For example, the proposed "Mountain Primary"—a primary for a collection of several Rocky Mountain states—fell apart in 2000 when California made permanent its 1996 move into March (Busch 2000). In other words, coordinating a regional primary is more difficult in a frontloaded environment that is likely to become increasingly frontloaded in subsequent years. While the South has been the only region to successfully pull off the regional primary, the results of that action were not what was anticipated (Hadley & Stanley 1989, Gurian 1992). Most notably, the states of the region received less media coverage and candidate attention than they had four years earlier.

So, while the regional primary is an idea that persists in nomination politics today, it is much less likely to occur than frontloading. The idea only survives now as an alternative to the frontloading trend, where regions would rotate calendar positions from one election to the next. That would require federal action that has been absent

The 1988 manifestation of the Super Tuesday primary day differentiated the that primary season from any other year previous for two reasons: 1) The campaigns had to adjust from a typical calendar with primaries nearly evenly dispersed throughout the cycle to a calendar that demanded a regional presence in order to compete in all the southern states in the course of one week, and 2) the candidates had to be prepared for this onslaught on the heels of the crucial first contests in Iowa and New Hampshire. In other words, the candidates were forced to cast their nets farther much quicker than ever before.

Frontloading was not as severe during the 1992 campaign because several southern states moved back to their original, pre-1988 positions, but it came back with a vengeance in 1996 when California moved its primary from almost the last possible week on the calendar to a late March date.² In true California fashion, this was an earthquake that upset the balance of the nominating process not only because the awarding of the most delegate-rich prize was earlier than usual, but because other states were making decisions on whether to move their primaries and caucuses based on what the Golden State did (Busch, 2000). The 1996 move along with the subsequent move to and institutionalization of an early March date for 2000 in California did what the 1988 southern Super Tuesday could not: It signaled that the race to the beginning of the nomination calendar was here to stay. The nomination races of 2000 and 2004, unlike the 1992 campaign, saw no lessening of frontloading, but rather continued increase. While New Hampshire historically had been the singular primary to routinely hold its contest prior to March, the 21st century has seen the replaced with a new norm, that of multiple primaries held before and during the earliest days of March. The two most recent campaigns were years in which the month of February came into play more and more, with a sprinkling of mostly Republican

to this point because the national government traditionally takes a back seat to the parties in the state legislatures on this matter.

² Only the caucuses in North Dakota were later than California in selecting delegates in 1992.

primaries in 2000 and multiple primaries and caucuses held every week during the month in 2004. Whereas March was the frontier of frontloading in late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, February is now the promised land of nomination influence for activist state legislatures.

This notion of state legislatures being active in this process intimates that there is a distinction between those states where primary and caucus dates are more fluid and those that remain in traditional calendar placements, seemingly satisfied with when the primary or caucus for that state is held. Why is it then that some states move their respective selection processes forward and others do not? That is the question that obviously underlies the frontloading phenomenon, and more importantly has not been completely examined. Mayer and Busch (2004), for example, suggest that the dates on which presidential primaries and caucuses are held is highly correlated with the money spent by candidates in those states during the 1980, 1984 and 1988 primary seasons—controlling for the number of delegates, the presence of Iowa and New Hampshire, and whether the state held a primary or a caucus. The resulting regression shows that moving the date of a primary or caucus translates into an increase of \$4000 to \$12,000 for every day the selection event is moved up the calendar.³ While this study is important in highlighting that the earlier a state holds a delegate selection event, the more money candidates spend, it is a model that is underspecified when attempting to determine the motivation of all the moves and non-moves from one election cycle to the next. While a governor may propose the idea of moving a state's primary to an earlier date, the ultimate decision makers in this process are the state legislatures operating under the guidelines the parties set for primary sequencing. Given these party guidelines, the state legislatures then decide whether to move their state's delegate selection event based upon a costs/benefits analysis. Stated differently, when the

³ Mayer and Busch (2004). Table 3-4 *Effects of Primary or Caucus Date on Total Campaign Spending per State, 1980-1988*, pp. 32-3.

benefits of moving outweigh the costs of moving, a state will move its primary and when the costs of moving are greater than the benefits of moving, a state will hold its primary in place. The decisions of the various state legislatures are paramount when considering when primaries are held during the presidential primary season, but is something that is only cursorily dealt with in previous literature. In this study, I hope to better specify and enhance the model that Busch and Mayer (2004) offered.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the frontloading of presidential primaries has not, to this point, been fully explored. However, the literature thus far has scratched more than just the surface in trying to answer the questions surrounding this recent phenomenon. Frontloading emerged following the upheaval caused by both the 1968 McGovern-Fraser reforms and the Federal Elections Campaign Act of 1974, and can only be viewed through the lens of these two landmark rules changes. The alterations created required adjustments nationally by the candidates and the national parties, and on the state level by state parties and legislatures. Even then, it took two election cycles following the initial reforms for the environment to solidify enough for the various players to understand the ways in which the new rules mattered (Mayer 1996; Norrander 1996). This is the environment in which frontloading developed. In the subsequent sections, I will examine in more detail the preceding conditions that allowed frontloading to materialize.

Frontloading within the Nomination Environment

To say that the McGovern-Fraser reforms changed presidential nomination politics is an understatement; they revolutionized how presidential nominees are chosen. The reforms were intended to take the nomination decision out of the smoke filled rooms of convention halls and put it directly into the hands of the rank-in-file members of the party. The goal was to achieve this openness through a caucus/state convention system, but that was not the requirement of the commission. As such, most states took the pragmatic approach in instituting primary elections as either the easiest way to comply with the complex new rules or to deter activists and extremists from overwhelming caucuses and state conventions (Ranney 1974; Polsby 1983). Regardless, the outcome was the proliferation of presidential primaries in subsequent election cycles.

Hagen and Mayer (2000), in addition to the growing number of primaries, cite three other consequences—the latter two of which are unintended—of reform: 1) a plebiscitary system of nomination; 2) a prolonged quest for the nomination that stretches into the year preceding the election year; and 3) an increase in the speed with which the voters in these primaries decide the outcome. The primaries may have been an inadvertent side effect of the reforms, but they nonetheless fulfilled the wishes of the commission: a plebiscitary system. Delegate selection, and thus influence over the nomination, was open to those party members inclined to participate and not just party elites as in the past. Of the latter two unintended consequences, the former points to the rise in candidate-centered campaigning that has arisen concomitantly with the reforms, but not necessarily because of them, and the latter speaks to the compressed nature of the decision making environment. I will deal first with the former.

While candidates have supplanted parties as the focal point of presidential elections, the burdens have shifted to them as well. The various candidates now have to organize their efforts well in advance of the primary season, prolonging a process that before McGovern-Fraser did not require building a consensus among the public but among the elites making the decision at the national convention. Goldwater's rise to the 1964 Republican nomination was more about an elite level struggle for the direction of the party at the convention than it was about raising money to campaign and win over the public in primary elections. That was the nature of the times though: primaries were not, for the most part, binding. When the allocation of delegates was bound to the results of primaries in the wake of McGovern-Fraser, this invisible primary became an increasingly necessary time in which to organize, especially when the reforms were coupled with the fundraising limits imposed by the 1974 Federal Elections Campaign Act.⁴ As

⁴ "Invisible primary" was a phrase coined by Authur T. Hadley (1976) to refer to the period after the previous presidential election but prior to the first delegate selection events of the next presidential election year.

Norrander (1993) observes, this extension into the invisible primary has become more problematic as the primary season has become more frontloaded over the last quarter century. The increased number of contests during the initial period of the primary season forces the candidates to begin their fundraising and organizing efforts much sooner. Just as states desire to move to the beginning of the calendar to attract candidate attention and influence the nomination choice, candidates want to get the jump on their competition and organize first. This corresponds nicely with the zero-sum fundraising theory advanced in other literature (Aldrich 1980). It posits that there is a finite amount of resources from which candidates can pull. As a result one candidate cannot tap a fundraising source without hampering the chances of his fellow competitors to do likewise.⁵

This is the environment in which the invisible primary battle is waged with one conceptual exception: the media. The media represents an area of unintended consequences of reform that overlaps well with Hagen and Mayer's third consequence of reform above: the speed with which the nominee is chosen in the frontloaded environment. During the invisible primary for example, the focus of the media is the leader in the polls in the lead up to Iowa and New Hampshire (Buell 1996). As the primary seasons have begun—following the McGovern-Fraser reforms—though, the media have shown a proclivity to gravitate more toward primaries than caucuses, but also covered earlier delegate selection events rather than later ones and delegate-rich events over delegate-poor ones (Castle 1991). That the media favors these conditions could be a reflection of the fact that they view these as the important events and/or that is where the candidates are and thus, where the story is. The idea that the media follow the candidates highlights the importance of candidate strategy as a variable also. Like the media though, the

⁵ While the zero-sum fundraising theory is true to some extent, I should note that the pool from which funds are raised is a deep one. Candidates can also opt to receive matching funds from the federal government. Both a deep pool of resources and matching funds make it difficult for a candidate to run out of funds.

candidates also focus on primaries instead of caucuses, earlier over later contests and pursue states with more available delegates (Aldrich 1980; Gurian 1990). It is the intersection of the media and candidate strategy in the frontloaded environment that leads to the increase in how quickly nominees are chosen. These factors combine to create a vicious cycle where the candidates and media pay attention to the earlier primaries. In turn, this motivates the decision makers in states holding later delegate selection events to consider a move to an earlier date for the next cycle. While this creates a more frontloaded calendar, it also compresses the time in which it takes one candidate to win a majority of delegates and thus the nomination. Whereas in 1984, the Democratic race was competitive throughout the first six months of the year, the 2004 Democratic nomination was effectively wrapped up during the first week in March. A frontrunner like Mondale could not shake a challenger like Hart in the spread out calendar of 1984, but John Kerry could build up enough of a head of steam after a shocking win in the Iowa caucuses to overtake the presumptive frontrunner, Howard Dean. The difference in the two cycles was that the dispersed calendar of 1984 allowed a challenger to change the flow of momentum in the race and rebound in a later event. The 2004 calendar, however, was compact enough to reward the Kerry campaign's wins in Iowa and New Hampshire sufficient momentum to warrant an air of invincibility in the eyes of the voters in subsequent primaries. Challengers like Dean and John Edwards had little or no opportunity to mount a comeback that would shift the momentum their way.

At this juncture, I will shift my focus to the development of a causal cycle across all the primary seasons since the reforms.⁶ In the previous sections I outlined the basic conceptual

⁶ I should note that one other unintended consequence of the McGovern-Fraser reforms was additional reform throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. These reforms had the effect of changing the nomination process, but not on nearly the level of the McGovern-Fraser reforms. The Mikulski Commission (1972-73) banned the winner-take-all system of delegate allocation in primaries for the Democratic Party following the 1972 election (Ceasar 1979). This

components related to the phenomenon of frontloading: the invisible primary, fundraising/organization and the media. Here I will present a more detailed account of the vicious cycle alluded to above, but also include context by linking frontloading and the rest of the nomination campaign. The first iteration of the cycle begins with the invisible primary and frontloading. To some extent the invisible primary is affected by the level to which any primary season is frontloaded; the more frontloaded a primary season is, the more necessary it is for candidates to get an earlier start organizing. However, resources are finite and a resource gap can potentially develop in fundraising between the frontrunner (depending upon how strong the candidate is), the other viable candidates and the advocacy candidates (Aldrich 1980). As Buell (1996) noted, the media will follow the frontrunner from the invisible primary into the beginning of the official primary season when votes are cast and the choice of nominees solidifies. Mayer's (1996) forecasting model of presidential nominations further contends that the candidate with the highest poll numbers and the most money raised will win the nomination.

As the candidates jockey for funds and media attention, the states do as well. The states—where the benefits of moving outweigh the costs—move in order to win the attention of

left the proportional and districted methods, the latter of which was later dropped. This had the effect of altering the speed with which a winning candidate could obtain delegates. The Winograd Commission (1975-80) ultimately closed the window of time in which primaries could be held within the Democratic Party; cutting it from six months down to three (Morton & Williams 2001). The authors argue that this made media effects and momentum greater factors on the nomination landscape. Finally, the Hunt Commission (1980-82) recognized frontloading but did nothing to correct it. The commission tinkered with the delegation sizes, adding ten percent to each state to include more party and public officials (Reiter 1985). These “superdelegates”, as they came to be known, made up twenty-two percent of the 1984 delegates and as party elites overwhelmingly backed the establishment candidate (Southwell 1986). Pomper (1979) details the “bonus delegate” system that developed in the Democratic Party. These extra delegates were added to any state's delegation that had voted for the Democratic nominee in previous years. Those states that had been loyal over several elections won more of a bonus than those that had only voted for the Democrat in the last election.

Though outside of the national party apparatus, the 1988 southern Super Tuesday effort was another unintended consequence of reform and is the most extreme example of frontloading. The Southern Legislative Conference managed to push this through all the state legislatures necessary to make the event happen. While the intention was to have the candidates lavish attention on the South and also to influence the Democratic nomination process, the opposite occurred. Super Tuesday 1988 was a failure mainly because it helped solidify George H.W. Bush's victory in the Republican primaries and meanwhile split between three candidates on the Democratic side (Hadley and Stanley 1989). And while the legislative leaders in the South hoped to win more attention from the candidates and media, they actually got less than in 1984 (Gurian 1992).

the candidates and the media. This fits the continual cycle of frontloading from one election year to the next. Some states move forward, making the invisible primary even more important to the candidates, who in the newly frontloaded environment have to compete immediately upon the start of the formal primary season. The states outside the frontloaded portion of the nomination campaign—the portion that actually decides who the parties' nominees are—face a dilemma in this broader context. In order to be on the radar of the candidates as they emerge from the invisible primary, these states must move their primaries if they value influencing the nominations over saving money by staying put and being an afterthought.

Before the nomination though, some candidate must first survive the primary sequence. The frontrunner is the candidate best positioned to exploit the aforementioned funding and media advantages should he face a bump in the road along the way (Gurian 1986). This gives him a decided advantage in the early contests like Iowa and New Hampshire. Victory there creates a scenario where the poll, fundraising and media advantages all increase for the frontrunner. The frontrunner, in turn, spends his money and time in states meeting the above criteria: early, delegate-rich primaries (Gurian 1986, 1993b). This carries with it increased media attention for that state (Aldrich 1980). More than anything else, this iteration of the cycle changes the perceptions as to how the process works. States which fall outside of these criteria see the advantages of moving ahead on the primary calendar and those states where the benefits of moving are greater than the costs follow suit in the next iteration of the cycle.

This next iteration—and those thereafter—draws into this review Hagen and Mayer's (2000) final unintended consequence: the rush with which the nomination choice is made in a compressed primary season. The more frontloaded a primary calendar is, the greater the chance that the winner of the invisible primary will win the nomination (Mayer 1996). That the

frontrunner will take the nomination is a fact exacerbated by the compressed nature of the frontloaded system. A winner other than the frontrunner only gets favorable treatment in the media, the polls, and in fundraising if he or she can repeat the win. The goal of the challenger is to become the new frontrunner by winning and gaining more in the above three areas. Until that point though, the goal is to gain the media's attention (Gurian 1993). In the frontloaded system, this goal is made even more difficult because, in cases where there is an overwhelming favorite going into the primary season, the public is only likely to hear about that frontrunning candidate. Even in cases where there is no apparent frontrunner, winning early gives one candidate a decided advantage and they become the *de facto* frontrunner.

Again, being the frontrunner means gaining more media attention, increased fundraising ability and potentially higher poll numbers. When the primaries were evenly dispersed throughout the calendar and there was time between events, the disadvantages of being the challenger could be overcome; not easily, but it could have happened. In the 2004 system, delegate selection events are not only close together, but several events can occur in one day. Whereas in the 1970s, candidates could pick and choose where they ran, in the 2004 system candidates have to run everywhere just to try and keep up, and if a candidate is behind, a compressed system is not one in which underdogs can easily catch up. Hagen and Mayer (2000) show that the threshold candidates must cross to become the party's nominee (fifty percent plus one delegate) is a point that has gradually inched up the calendar as the system has become more frontloaded.⁷ When things begin to happen progressively quicker after Iowa and New Hampshire and candidates begin to drop out following early failure, the nominations can be

⁷ Norrander (2000) argues that this threshold can actually be quite lower than the fifty percent plus one delegate barrier, forcing other candidates out much quicker. Her argument depends on the candidates weighing the delegate margins between themselves and the frontrunner and recognizing the potential for catching up considering the number of delegates there are remaining to be won. When combined with an extremely frontloaded system, this barrier speeds up the winnowing process.

wrapped up by the first week in March as they were in both 2000 and 2004. The public, in these situations, has no opportunity to get any useful information about either the process or the candidates other than who is winning the horse race (Geer 1989). By the time the calendar reaches the middle primaries, if the frontrunner—and eventual nominee at this point—is not the only candidate left, then the choices have been winnowed enough to offer no choice at all. The early primaries and the candidates who claim victory in them, as a result, have enormous power during the remainder of the nomination process.

Motivation for Frontloading

The above discussion puts frontloading in the context of the environment in which it developed, but what has ultimately motivated the trend? Mayer and Busch (2004) devise a model that shows a correlation between the date on which states hold delegate selection events and the money spent by the candidates in those states during earlier primaries (specifically for the 1980-1988 elections). Since candidates are spending most of their time and money in early, delegate-rich primaries—with the exception of the lead off caucus in Iowa—states, who want the attention, influence and revenue generated from being a critical primary, must be positioned to fulfill those criteria. This means the movement of a state's primary to the beginning of the calendar regardless of size. Even small states can find a niche in the system. For the last few cycles, for example, South Carolina has held a primary in the week or two following the New Hampshire primary. South Carolina cannot be considered delegate-rich, but what it could boast in those instances was that it held a gateway southern primary and thus served as an indication as to how the rest of the region would vote. Regardless of size however, the goal is to win not only candidate spending and attention, but the attendant media coverage as well. The fact that the

candidates and media have these criteria indicates the importance of a state's positioning within this process.

Mayer and Busch (2004), however, argue that candidate spending is dependent on where a primary is placed on the calendar. While this is an important point to make, it ultimately fails to reveal a direct, causal explanation for the motivation behind frontloading. Yes, candidates spend more time and money in the states that meet the criteria alluded to above, but Mayer and Busch only imply something similar to the endless cycle of repositioning detailed above, while failing to directly explain why frontloading is occurring. I agree with Mayer and Busch that this is the relationship to examine, but to explain the motivation behind frontloading requires that the date of the delegate selection event or whether the event moved from one cycle to the next be used as the dependent variable. Furthermore, I agree with what the authors have controlled for—delegation size, selection mode, and the presence of Iowa and New Hampshire—but feel that this model is oversimplified and underspecified.

3. Research Question & Theory

Why is it that states are moving their various delegate selection events to earlier dates on the nomination calendar? The consensus is that states move in order to subsequently influence the nomination outcome and to gain the attention of both the candidates and the media.⁸ If a state votes after all but one candidate has been winnowed from the process, then the voters of that state have, in effect, no influence on the outcome of the parties' nominations. Furthermore, states obviously seek the economic and intangible benefits that candidates and the media bring to an earlier and/or competitive primary.⁹ In both cases though, states, both delegate-rich and delegate-poor, have moved to earlier dates since the reforms. However, not all states have moved up or moved up and stayed. Why is this?

I argue that the various state legislatures have to go through a costs/benefits analysis in order to decide whether to move a primary to an earlier date.¹⁰ However, the state legislature is only part of a much more complex environment in which the nomination campaign is played. As Aldrich (1980) states, "the institution of party nominations—the rules, laws, procedures and norms that describe how presidential hopefuls become presidential nominees—plays a major role in structuring the politics of nominations and, consequently, in the behavior of candidates and the outcome of their campaigns." Thus a state legislature both helps shape these rules and makes

⁸ It is instructive at this point to make one distinction in this paper. Mayer and Busch (2004) use the candidate and his staff as the decision makers in their model because candidate spending is dependent upon the date of a state's delegate selection event. In this paper, I treat the state legislatures as the ultimate decision makers. However, the argument can be made that the candidates move first in the game by spending more time and money in earlier rather than later primaries and that those states not already positioned early then move their primaries to earlier dates in response. In that scenario however, it is the states movement that is dependent on the candidate's spending. This implies that the state legislatures are the real decision makers in the frontloading process and that their motivation should be more closely examined.

⁹ In the frontloaded system, early and competitive primaries are virtually the same. Whereas in the 1972-1984 period nominations contests were competitive into May and June, those contests of the frontloaded era are only competitive early. However, the compression of frontloading causes only those delegate-rich and niche/gateway states to be attractive the candidates/media, and thus competitive.

¹⁰ Only primaries are being examined in this paper because, as the literature has shown, they take precedence over caucuses and state convention methods of delegate selection in the eyes of both the candidates and the media with the exception of Iowa's caucuses.

decisions based on the rules outside their realm. The norms of the nomination campaign give the states a window in which to hold delegate selection events for the parties' national conventions and that typically means between the end of February and the beginning of June. The nomination calendars of the two elections during the 1970s set the stage for the back and forth between the candidates/media and the states because these two elections proved to be the acclimation period for all sides as they learned how the nomination game was played in the post-reform era. Iowa and New Hampshire established that being first was decidedly advantageous. They traditionally served as the first states to filter the pool of candidates for the nomination and thus have the first opportunity to shape the outcome. Obviously those states with the last opportunity in this filtration process stand a good chance of having very little to filter. In other words, the voters of those states have little or no choice in the nomination as it has been decided in the primaries and caucuses near the beginning of the calendar. For example the last time that a nomination battle stayed competitive into May was the Democratic nomination struggle of 1984 between Mondale and Hart.

None of this was lost on the candidates or the media. The strategy of the candidates was to succeed early on and, if not win, avoid being winnowed out. If a candidate was not the frontrunner—and thus most at risk of being winnowed—it was imperative to finish equivalent to the level of expectations prior to the event, if not do better than expected, in order to survive to the next round. All the frontrunner had to do was keep winning and coast to the nomination. Of course not many candidates did coast to the nomination, but as the system became more frontloaded, it became clear that frontrunners could more quickly and easily wrap up the nomination.¹¹ The momentum of so many successive early victories overwhelmed not only the

¹¹ I should, at this stage, mention the contrast between the nomination battles of 1976-1984 and those of 1988-present. The 1976-1984, non-frontloaded period, witnessed intense nomination fights that lasted deep into May if

competition but the voters as well. In the compressed environment frontloading created, the voters got little more information from the media than the horse race coverage. As a result, voters had little opportunity to learn about the candidates and make informed decisions. Frontloading not only progressively limits voters' choices by more quickly winnowing the challengers, but also has the potential to limit their decision to a choice between the candidate who is the seemingly inevitable nominee and the challengers who increasingly seem to have no chance. The electorate also has less opportunity to vet the frontrunner prior to the nomination. Anything that failed to come to light during the increasingly quick nomination campaign that surfaces in the lead up to the general election could also harm the candidate and the party's chances in the general election. These is a scenarios that place unbelievable pressure on the candidates to win early, but also, by limiting the voters' choices, runs contrary to the intentions of the McGovern-Fraser reforms.

Both the candidates and the media knew early in the post-reform period that the early contests were where the real battle was being waged. In the years after reform, more and more states also came to recognize the fact that being earlier was better than later in the nomination

not into June. Carter outlasted the first wave of Harris, Udall and Jackson in the 1976 campaign and Brown (once he entered) in a second wave that lasted into June. Likewise, in that same year Ford and Reagan went all the way to the Republican convention before that nomination was settled. 1980 saw a prolonged and bitter battle between incumbent Carter and challenger Ted Kennedy on the Democratic side and a multi-candidate race on the Republican side that ended up being a battle lasting into May between Reagan and Bush. Similarly, in 1984 Mondale and Hart waged a battle for the Democratic nomination that like the one in 1980 lasted into May before being resolved. The picture here is of a system that nurtures at least a two man race into the waning weeks of the nomination season.

In 1988 and beyond however, the picture begins to change. The dramatic frontloading that the southern Super Tuesday created, began to distort what had been established in the election years since reform. Vice President Bush effectively solidified his claim to the 1988 Republican nomination in March after sweeping Super Tuesday, while Dukakis pulled away from the Democratic field in April. In 1992, like 1984, only the Democratic nomination was at stake. Clinton like his predecessor became the presumptive nominee in April. 1996 was more frontloaded than 1992 and, with California offering so many delegates so early in one event, Dole finished off his competition and took the nomination at the end of March. California moved up again in 2000, placing its primary on the first Tuesday in March alongside a host of other events. The nominations of both parties were wrapped up after this broadside of contests. 2004 was only slightly different from 2000 in that it had more contests in February, leading up to a less crowded Super Tuesday during the first week in March. What we learn from this is that once the massive frontloading of 1988 was introduced, the nomination game was altered significantly. Nominations battles were shorter, but also more intense.

process. The Democratic-dominated state legislatures of the south had talked about coordinating an effort to hold a simultaneous southern primary since the mid-1970s. Though nothing came of this until later, the legislatures of Georgia and Alabama moved their primaries up to align them with Florida's second Tuesday in March primary for the 1980 season—a move intended to potentially aid incumbent president Carter by counteracting any advantage his challenger, Ted Kennedy, would have in the early contests in the northeast. While this move created a slightly more frontloaded calendar in 1980 than in 1976, it only served to alleviate some of the crowding during May. However, it did send a message to the rest of the southern states: moving primaries can be done and can have some influence on the nomination. After watching 1984 pass, ending in another crushing presidential defeat for the Democrats, the Southern Legislative Conference (still dominated by Democratic state legislators) decided to go through with the plan to coordinate their states' primaries in 1988. The goals were to influence the Democratic nomination—hopefully resulting in a more moderate to conservative nominee who could appeal to the voters of the south—, bring more attention to regionally specific issues through increased media coverage and to increase the economic benefits of holding a primary. Though most of this plan backfired, instead helping the Republican Party, it changed the landscape of nomination politics through increased frontloading.

Perception is everything and the southern states' synchronized move in 1988 signaled to the rest of the state legislatures that states could coordinate their efforts by moving their primary dates in an attempt to have more influence in the process—even, if in fact, Super Tuesday 1988 did not live up to its purpose. As Gurian (1992) has shown, media coverage actually decreased for many of the southern states between 1984 and 1988. And the data in Table 1 indicate only a four percent increase in the percentage of total candidate spending in the region. This is a

remarkably small increase considering 1) four of the eleven southern states that appear in this dataset moved to earlier primary dates, 2) five of the eleven southern states in this dataset switched from caucuses to primaries, and 3) the fact that the Republican nomination was being contested in 1988. As I have stated previously, there has typically been more spending by the

Table 1
Percentage of Total Candidate Spending in Southern States (1984-1988)¹²

State	1984	1988	Difference
AL	3.024	1.519	-1.505
AR*	0.807	0.925	0.118
FL	5.857	5.331	-0.526
GA	4.125	2.247	-1.878
KY*	0.188	0.821	0.633
LA	0.804	1.272	0.468
MS*	0.742	0.821	0.079
NC	0.748	3.03	2.282
OK*	1.18	1.521	0.341
TN	1.049	0.946	-0.103
TX*	2.262	6.897	4.271
Total	21.15	25.33	4.18

Source: Federal Election Commission, FEC Reports on Financial Activity 1983-84/1987-88: Final Report Presidential Pre-Nomination Campaigns (Washington, 1985; 1989)

* indicates states which had caucuses in 1984

candidates in the primaries than in the caucuses. So, for nearly half of the southern states in this dataset to change delegate selection mode and see little change in the percentage of total candidate spending from four years earlier is somewhat counterintuitive. Texas, by switching from a caucus to a primary and moving up in 1988 received a percentage increase in candidate spending of more than the total change across these eleven states. The rest cancel each other out with relatively minor increases and decreases. Also strange is the fact that the burgeoning bastion of Republicanism in the south could not produce a significantly greater percentage of total candidate spending than it did four years prior when the nomination was uncontested.

Despite the less than stellar results of the southern Super Tuesday and the fact that four of those

¹² The 1984 percentages only include the money spent by the candidates in the race for the Democratic nomination. Reagan's spending was differently motivated because he ran as an uncontested incumbent with his eye on the general election. The 1988 figures reflect both Democratic and Republican spending.

states—Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky and North Carolina—returned to later dates in 1992, the overwhelming consensus was that frontloading of presidential primaries would continue unabated in future nomination cycles.

If it was a given after 1988 that frontloading was to be a future component of nomination campaigns, what were the factors that influenced the decision makers to actually move their states' presidential primaries? The five election cycles from 1988 to the present offer an opportunity to observe the period when the frontloading trend greatly expanded, and further allows for an examination of the variables that figured into the state legislatures' decisions to move or not move presidential primaries. The three elections prior to 1988 will serve as the baseline of what the calendar was like prior to the full scale introduction of frontloading. Again, the state legislatures are the ultimate decision makers in this process and if one is trying to find out why frontloading has occurred, no study can be complete without taking into account the environment in which they make this decision. To this point however, legislatures have not been considered in the literature, and without contemplating their decision making processes, political science can only claim that it knows part of the motivating force behind the frontloading trend. I argue that the legislatures in the United States go through a costs/benefits analysis to determine whether the presidential primary in that state should be moved. Is it beneficial to the state to move the primary or are the costs too high? To answer this, the legislatures must look at several things, first among which, is where the state primary was on the calendar—early or late—in the previous cycle. If the state primary is already early, should it be earlier, or if it is in the middle or late, is it worth it to move into competition with all the other early states and risk being ignored by the candidates and the media? Are the state's presidential primaries and primaries for other state and local offices together or separate, and does that affect movement? Is a state

moving away from being the only event on a date or is it moving from being bundled with other states' primaries during a late date to being bundled with other states' primaries on an early date? Finally, how much media attention and candidate spending did a state receive in the previous election and could that be improved by moving to an earlier date? If the improvement is markedly greater, the move may be appropriate, but if it is only moderately altered for the better, the change may not be worth it.

Splitting Presidential and State/Local Primaries

Much of what guides the decision making—before even the monetary costs and benefits are considered—is whether the state's presidential primary and the primaries for state and local offices are held simultaneously. This is another important distinction to make and one that has not been dealt with at any great length in the extant literature. Whether these state/local and presidential primaries are divided or not has significant implications on the state's ability to move its primary forward. The act of splitting the two has some ramifications as well. Those states which have split presidential and state/local primaries have a greater ability to move this separate presidential primary to an earlier date than those states which hold the two simultaneously and face the task of either having to move both to an earlier date or having to break with tradition and split the two.

The monetary aspects begin to have some impact on the legislature's decision making at this point. If a state falls in the category of having separate primaries, the costs of moving the presidential primary to an earlier date is minimal. Georgia, for example, fits this description. Since 1980, Georgia has held an early March presidential primary while typically having a July primary for state and local offices. The legislature in Georgia moved the state's presidential

primary from May in to March in 1980 and in 1992 moved it from the second week in March to the first week in March. Having separate primaries grants states a greater ability to move without incurring much of financial cost. Contrast that with states like New Jersey and California. These two states hold both types of primaries together and until 1996 actually held these primaries on the same first week in June—final week of the primary season—date. In 1996, California’s legislature had had enough of being used as a center of fundraising for the candidates and not seeing much of the money when the state’s presidential primary finally rolled around (Busch 2000). The solution was to move all the state’s primaries to the final Tuesday in March. New Jersey, meanwhile, has stayed with its early June primary date, electing to avoid the substantial costs associated with either splitting the primaries or moving them all to an earlier date.

Table 2
Split Primaries vs. Moving to Earlier Dates

	No Split	Split
Move	CA MD TX OH WV	MA GA RI CT WI OK MS TN NY SD CO LA
No Move	PA IL IN NJ NM AR NC OR AL KY	FL

Source: thegreenpapers.com and Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report

This creates four categories of states (as shown in the **Table 2**): 1) those with split primaries and have moved their presidential primaries to earlier dates; 2) those that are split and have not moved; 3) those that hold simultaneous primaries and have moved them; and 4) those that are not split yet moved earlier on the calendar. The expectation is that the all the states would fall into the split/move or no split/no move categories and only six of the twenty-eight states in the sample run counter to that expectation. It is interesting that three of the four most delegate-rich states—California, Texas and Florida—fall outside of this expectation. Florida has

been in the same second week in March position since the 1972 election, but California and Texas both opted to move all their primaries into their current first and second week in March dates respectively. The laws in both states prevented them from splitting the tradition of holding these primaries simultaneously.

Only Event on a Date

Another factor the state legislatures have to consider is whether, by moving the state's primary, they are abandoning the luxury of being the only event on a particular date during the previous election cycle. To have the only event on a certain date translates into being the only game in town during a particular week and, thus, the only recipient of all the media and candidate attention for that week. However, the further back this date is, the less significant being the only event on that date is. Then again, the earlier a state holds its delegate selection event, the less likely it is to have that date all to itself. Pennsylvania, for example, has in every year of this sample been the only event on its traditional fourth Tuesday in April date. As was mentioned previously in the footnote discussing the length of competition in nomination battles throughout the sample years, however, primaries late in the month of April were typically outside of this realm after 1988 or 1992. In other words, though Pennsylvania had the only event on that date throughout the post-1976 elections, it was beginning to fall out of the realm of competition. Even in 2000 when the Pennsylvania legislature moved the presidential primary to the first Tuesday in April, it was still a month outside of being part of the competitive aspect of either nomination. One would expect to see the value of having the only event on a date decrease over the course of the 1976 to 1996 elections. In Pennsylvania the value was low enough heading into the 2004 primary season that Governor Ed Rendell has made known his

intention to propose moving the state's 2008 presidential primary, aligning it with New Hampshire in late January or early February (Barnes, 18 Jan. 2004). This implies an interaction between when the primary was held and whether said primary was the only event on the date it was held. Also an important consideration in this discussion is the delegate-richness of a state. The less delegate-rich a state is, the more valuable it is to be the only event on a particular date. Again, this implies an interaction between these two variables.

Candidate Spending and Media Attention

Finally, state legislatures have to consider past candidate spending and media coverage in their state when determining whether moving the state's presidential primary is prudent. I discuss both in the same section because they are both so closely linked in the nomination campaign. As I stated earlier, there is a natural tendency for the media to follow the candidates and, oppositely, for the candidates to appear where the media will be. Whether one or the other is the way the relationship actually occurs is not as important as the fact that spending and coverage work hand in hand to shape not only the nomination outcomes, but the sequencing of presidential primaries in subsequent election years.

First, as for candidate spending, I argue that the legislatures look at how much candidates have spent in the state's primary in the past and try to ascertain if, by moving the state's primary to an earlier date, they can get the candidates to spend more money in that primary. Further, I would speculate that the legislators are not concerned with the number of candidates or the number of parties with contested nominations in future campaigns. These are factors that are out of the control of the legislatures and change from election to election. What they are interested in is the total amount of spending in their state, and more precisely, the percentage of total

nationwide candidate spending in their state. Can moving the state's primary to an earlier date net the state more money or a lot more money? In the case of the latter, the decision might already be made. Legislators are also interested in getting the candidates to address issues important to the state that, in turn, could help them in their own electoral pursuits; riding on the coattails of successful primary contestants. This is a byproduct of candidate spending, but one that figures into the legislature's costs/benefits analysis all the same.

Table 3
Percentage of Total Nationwide Candidate Spending (1976-1992)

State	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
FL	11.75	8.462	5.857	5.331	5.123
IL	6.787	11.118	5.171	5.793	3.721
MA	8.069	7.741	7.675	5.657	3.776
OH	4.654	2.322	3.756	1.319	0.897

Sources: Federal Elections Commission, Aldrich (1980), Gurian

Most of the moves made by states to earlier dates on the nomination calendar occur when the percentage of total candidate spending continually decreases over several campaigns, dipping to a point lower than what the legislature deems appropriate for their state. This point is different for each state, but states like Florida, Illinois and Massachusetts are all states that appear to be headed for change soon. All have had March primaries since the 1976 election and all have gotten progressively lower candidate spending percentages in each of the elections since (see **Table 3**). Frontloading has largely passed these states by as competition for the early primary dates has increased. All three states have dropped over fifty percent from their 1976 share of percentage of total candidate spending to their equivalents for the 1992 nomination cycle. The case of Ohio is more illustrative because, while it follows a similar downward trajectory, after the state's percentage bottomed out in 1992, the state decided to move its primary from the last possible week to a mid-March date in 1996. Ohio had been an important bellwether state during all the elections since 1976 and was not only electoral vote-rich, but delegate-rich as well. On

average states would expect to get two percent of the total candidate spending each. However, because the population is not evenly distributed throughout all fifty states these numbers vary. For a state like Ohio—one in the top fifth in terms of number of electoral college votes and delegates—getting less than one percent of total candidate spending in 1992 warranted a change for the 1996 nomination season.

Some of the same above factors are applicable to the discussion of media coverage as well. State legislatures want not just more coverage, but a lot more coverage to make moving the state's primary worthwhile. In order to get the desired effect several things have to fall into place. The primary obviously has to be early enough that the nomination is still competitive and the outcome does not appear inevitable. Early though may not be enough. The media will only cover what is perceived to be a big prize on any early date. Most of the time, but not always the winning combination is being both early and delegate-rich. This is why California's decision to move in time for the 1996 primary season seemed like a no-brainer. The most delegate-rich state would obviously want to be early in order to get the attention the legislature felt it deserved. New Hampshire and Iowa are not delegate-rich but they have an advantage because they are the first delegate selection events.¹³ Even if a state is not delegate-rich, it can find a niche in the calendar to exploit. Being delegate-rich is important for media coverage but often not unique. South Carolina, as mentioned in a previous section, has, for the last several nomination cycles, held the first delegate selection event in the south. It is a unique story because it indicates how the rest of the region may vote and further whether the winning candidate may have enough appeal to win a region that, for the most part, votes as a bloc in the general election.

Again, frontloading has altered the way that information is filtered through the media. When the primaries were more dispersed across the calendar, the competition lasted longer, but

¹³ The other states, by state law, cannot be earlier than either of these two events.

so too did the media's interest. Thus the media was able to provide more valuable information over a much greater time span. As the calendars became more compressed in subsequent elections though media interest in the primaries waned in correspondence to the progressively, more quickly resolved nomination battle. To state legislatures, increasing frontloading meant that holding late presidential primaries resulted in decreasing media coverage over the five election cycles between 1976 and 1992. I will again refer to the situations faced by three fourths of the states in the above candidate spending example.¹⁴ Florida, Massachusetts and Ohio all witnessed declining proportions of media coverage during this period (see **Table 4**). The fluctuations in the media coverage data over time—as compared to the candidate spending numbers—is evident in the table and reflect the media's desire to follow only what is competitive and unique during the nomination campaign. Media coverage is more dependent on the intricacies of each individual race than candidate spending. What the media cover and what the candidates spend in each of the states does not overlap perfectly, and what the data show most often is an increase in the percentage of media coverage where there is a continued decline in the proportion of total candidate spending. For example, Florida saw increased media coverage, but decreased candidate spending in 1992 when compared with 1988. In 1992 Florida was still holding its presidential primary on the second Tuesday in March—the same date on which the 1988 Super Tuesday was held. However, in 1992, several Super Tuesday participants had either returned to traditional primary dates or had moved forward. The decreased competition on that date got Florida more media time following southerner Bill Clinton's victory in the Georgia primary in the week before Florida's primary, but did not net the state an equivalent boost in candidate spending because Clinton's advantage in the region negatively affected competition there.

¹⁴ Illinois is missing data for this variable in 1988, and it is excluded from this discussion as a result.

While there is more fluctuation in the media numbers, there is a visible trend. Massachusetts' percentage of media coverage declines each election year and both Ohio and Florida lost over fifty percent of their 1976 percentage by 1984 before rebounding in 1988 and 1992 respectively. Ohio, like in the candidate spending analysis, bottomed out in 1992 prompting its move up in 1996.

Table 4
Percentage of Total Media Coverage (1976-1992)

State	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
FL	4.436	1.994	1.874	1.752	4.142
MA	3.152	3.039	1.719	0.812	0.239
OH	4.669	1.994	1.684	2.095	0.839

Source: Aldrich (1980), Robinson & Sheehan (1983), Gurian & Haynes (1993)

Other Factors to Consider

While the above are factors that figure into the state legislatures' costs/benefits analysis and can be manipulated by moving a state's presidential primary, there are other factors that have important implications for the decision, yet are not as easily manipulated by the movement of a primary. For instance, I, like Mayer and Busch (2004), will examine the effects of a state's delegation size on the state legislature's decision to move the state's primary. Delegate-rich states would have the most incentive to move forward, but delegate-poor states are motivated to move forward as well. Though, the chance of impacting the process does decrease for these delegate-poor states.

Secondly, and more important to my consideration of state legislatures in this study, the majority control in those legislatures is another important factor to bear in mind.¹⁵ If the party in

¹⁵ Again, it should be noted that despite the facts that a governor can propose the idea of moving a primary and that a strong governor can actually usher it through the state legislature, it is the state legislature that has the ultimate decision making power. The example of Governor Zell Miller of Georgia pushing through the state legislature the plan to move the state's primary from the second Tuesday in March—as it was in 1988—to the first Tuesday in March for the 1992 cycle—and thus one week ahead of that year's Super Tuesday—is the exception rather than the

control of the state legislature is Democratic then it would find no use in moving a primary to an earlier date if there is only a Republican primary that year. The Democratic-dominated legislatures of the south sought to influence the Democratic nomination in 1988 by moving up and coordinating the states' presidential primaries. The plan backfired however, because the Republican nomination was at stake as well. The result was that the increasingly Republican electorate in the south opted to participate in the Republican primaries instead of the Democratic ones. This maneuvering is all possible if one party is in control of both houses of the state legislature, but what if control is split between the parties? Split control between the houses makes moving primaries forward difficult because the party of the incumbent would not want to help the challenging party if victory in the state's primary gave momentum to a candidate who could threaten that incumbent. In that scenario, compromise could only be reached when both parties' nominations are at stake and thus there is no incumbent involved. The separate parties in control of the houses of the legislature could agree to move up to the potential benefit of both parties.

Finally, there are two somewhat related factors at which I will look. The first, alluded to above, is presidential incumbency. The presence of an incumbent changes the outlook of a nomination campaign, and, as was discussed in section concerning party control of the state legislatures, this may have an effect on what certain legislatures decide to do about moving their state's primary. The underlying principle is the same: Republican legislatures seek to help Republican challengers and Democratic-controlled legislatures attempt to give their party's presidential aspirants an advantage against a Republican incumbent. Secondly, if, as I argue, state legislatures figure incumbency into their presidential primary movement analysis, then the

rule. This was a variable that was considered at the outset of this project, but was dropped once the states' Boards/Divisions of Elections acknowledged that it was the state legislature which had the final say.

party in control of the White House becomes another aspect which they must consider. As became clear in discussing the control of state legislatures, the party in control of the presidency is important. Only the party out of power in the White House would seek to tweak the rules and sequencing of the nomination process to bring about a change in power (Klinkner 1994). Thus state legislatures controlled by the party outside of the White House would seek to alter the sequencing of primaries more often than those legislatures dominated by the incumbent president's party.

4. Hypotheses

- 1) If a state's presidential and other primaries are split then that state is more likely to move to an earlier date, but if they are held together, the state is less likely to move.
- 2) If a state's primary was the only event on a date, it will be less likely to move to an earlier date in the next nomination cycle. In other words, the state places greater value on being the only event on a date even if it is after the nomination has been decided. The earlier a state sets itself up as the only event on a date however, the less likely it will remain the only event on that date in subsequent elections.
- 3) A state legislature will decide to move the state's primary to an earlier date based on the percentage of total candidate spending in that state in the previous election. The more this percentage decreases, the more likely that state is to move a primary ahead.
- 4) The larger a state's percentage of delegate-richness in the previous election, the more likely the state legislature is to move the primary forward to an earlier date on the calendar for the next cycle.
- 5) The later a state holds a primary in a previous election year, the more likely that state legislature is to move that state's primary to an earlier date in the subsequent cycle.
- 6) The lower the percentage of media coverage in the previous primary, the more likely the state legislature is to move the primary to an earlier date for the next election.
- 7) Those state legislatures which are not controlled by the party controlling the White House are more likely to move their state primaries to earlier dates.
- 8) Those state legislatures which split control between the two major parties are most like to move the state's primary forward on the nomination calendar when there is no incumbent president running for re-election.

5. Data & Methods¹⁶

As I detailed in the sections above, many factors figure into a state legislature's decision on whether to move the state's presidential primary forward. Outside of this however, there are other considerations. States obviously have to meet several criteria to be considered for this analysis. For instance, states had to have held at least two consecutive primaries during the 1976-1996 election periods. Change could not be ascertained otherwise. In addition, only those states with state-run—state-financed—primaries appear. States like South Carolina and Utah are excluded because the presidential primaries in those states are party-run. Thus the parties and not the state legislatures are making the decision as to whether to move the primary. This is out of line with what I am trying to examine. Similarly, those states, like Nebraska, which have nonpartisan, unicameral legislatures making the presidential primary decisions, are withheld. The dynamic between the controlling party/ies in the state legislature and presidential incumbency/party-in-control of the White House is absent, warranting the state's exclusion.

Having set those parameters, 28 states remain.¹⁷ The state legislatures in these 28 states, as I hypothesized previously, go through a cost/benefit analysis to determine the prudence of moving the state's presidential primary. In doing so, these legislatures are required to look at the state's statistics from previous elections and, most importantly, at the election directly prior to the future primary they are trying to set. In other words, if the state legislature of North Carolina, for example, is looking at potentially moving the state's presidential primary forward in 1988, they will look at the 1984 numbers for the date on which the primary was held, candidate spending, media coverage, percentage of delegates and whether the state's primary

¹⁶ See Appendix (p. 42) for operationalizations of the variables included in this analysis.

¹⁷ Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky and Wisconsin all held caucuses in 1984. The data that correspond with those states in that year are included to fill in the gaps in the time series. The states that started holding primaries instead of caucuses during this period are also included. The retrospective data for Mississippi and Oklahoma in 1988 and Colorado in 1992 reflect the caucus numbers from four years prior.

was the only event on its particular date. Based on that data, the state legislature will determine whether the state can improve by moving its primary.

For the purposes of this analysis, I am examining the motivation of state legislatures to move their presidential primaries to earlier dates in subsequent nomination cycles. As such, this decision—whether to move the presidential primary—is the dependent variable. It is operationalized as a dummy variable, coded 1 for moving forward, and 0 otherwise. The primary movement decisions of the 28 state legislatures in this sample are dependent upon the cost/benefits analysis they use as well as the aforementioned factors outside their control. The first of the main independent variables they look at are the dates on which the primaries were held in the previous election. Here that is defined by the week in which the primary occurred. First, the number of weeks in the previous election’s nomination season was determined. Each state’s primary was then assigned a number depending upon when in the season it occurred. Those states with primaries at the end of the process were assigned low values and as the state’s primaries get progressively earlier, they receive increasingly higher values.¹⁸ New Jersey, for example, a state whose primary has traditionally been held during the last week of the season (the first week in June) consistently receives a value of one, while the Super Tuesday states of 1988 (primaries held on the second week in March), have a value of fourteen.

The candidate spending variable is derived from Federal Elections Commission reports either directly for the 1980-1988 cycles or indirectly through Aldrich (1980) for the 1976 Republicans and Gurian for the 1976 Democrats and the 1992 cycle.¹⁹ The totals were adjusted to 2004 values to control for inflation, and the spending discrepancies between the parties were

¹⁸ These values were assigned in reverse order in order to show a positive relationship between this variable and dependent variable.

¹⁹ This data was provided by Paul-Henri Gurian, associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Georgia.

accounted for as well by weighting the party with the least spending to bring its value in line with the party with the most spending.²⁰ With the candidate spending variable operationalized as the percentage of adjusted total candidate spending in each of these 28 states during this time span, this analysis avoids findings that may simply be the result of the effects of either inflation or the spending differences between the parties. By using the percentage of these totals, I also avoid questions concerning the number of candidates contesting the nominations and the possible effect that has on the results. Obviously, if there are more candidates in the race, there is a potential for greater spending. However, utilizing the percentage in this case allows for a glimpse at candidate spending regardless of the number of candidates. State legislatures, when looking at a state's past performance in this area, are looking not at how much was spent and by how many candidates, but at what their state's share of the nation's total was. Total national spending and the number of candidates may vary from election to election, but are out of the control of the state legislatures. Both are, nonetheless, important factors that can be controlled for by using the percentage of total candidate spending.

One issue relevant to candidate spending that has been addressed elsewhere—and should be addressed within this context—is the change the FEC made prior to the 1992 election. Essentially, the FEC exempted several categories of spending from the state expenditure limits, including advertising (Corrado and Gouvea 2004). While Corrado and Gouvea contend that this

²⁰ The Republican Party is typically the big spender in all the elections in which its nomination was seriously contested. However, in 1976 the Republican spending total was exceeded by the Democrats. In that case the Republican total was weighted by a factor of 1.145. For 1980 and 1988 the Democratic totals were weighted by factors of 1.8583 and 1.1066 respectively to align them with the Republican totals. There are no adjustments for the 1984 and 1992 primaries because the Democrats were the only ones spending for the nominations in those years. Reagan ran uncontested for the Republican nomination in 1984 and though Bush had opponents running against him for the Republican nomination in 1992, he had no serious competition overall because he did not lose a primary or caucus that year.

The above adjustments were adopted to adjust the spending figures so that they are nearly even between the two parties in the 1976, 1980 and 1988 elections. An alternative would have been to make an overall adjustment based on the parties' spending differences over the entire period. However, because the Democrats spent contrary to the expectation—spending more in 1976 than Republicans—the data for Democrats during that year would have been over-inflated, potentially skewing the results.

made the candidate spending per state figure less reliable for 1992 and thereafter, I argue that those spending categories not exempted, while obviously less than the totals from previous elections, still reflect the same basic spending differences between early and late primaries as the previous figures that include advertising.

The media coverage variable is operationalized as the percentage of total national media coverage in each state during the elections between 1976 and 1992. The data for 1984-1992 are based on the number of square inches of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* front page news coverage multiplied by the number of times the state was mentioned in any campaign-related stories (1 January through 15 June) (Gurian 1993, Gurian and Haynes 1993). As Gurian and Haynes conclude:

“[This] figure...represents the magnitude of coverage across states in each newspaper. Giving equal value to the *Post* and the *Times*, these figures were aggregated. To avoid local bias, values were assigned to New York, New Jersey and Connecticut based solely on coverage in the *Post*, and to Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia based solely on the coverage in the *Times* (see Aldrich 1980). ...to make these data more consistent across campaigns, each state was expressed as a percentage of the total coverage devoted to that campaign.”

For 1976 nomination campaign, Aldrich's (1980) media coverage numbers were utilized. Aldrich arrives at his operationalization by separately dividing the number of stories in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* by the number of active candidates. In transforming this data for my use, I totaled all the states' numbers of stories for both papers to come up with a total number of stories from each paper. I then took the proportions of this total in each state for both papers and averaged them to get the percentage of total news coverage per state in the 1976 nomination campaign. The data for 1980 primary season are derived from Robinson and

Sheehan's (1983) data concerning the relative number of UPI wire service column inches devoted to each state. The number of inches in each state was divided by the total number of inches nationally to get the percentage of total national news coverage in each state for 1980.

There are problems associated with the use of different data sources, but they are offset somewhat by the fact that national newspapers are being used in all these cases. While this is helpful to some degree, the different operationalizations the authors develop give rise to some concerns about the comparability. Graber (1984) and Patterson (1980) established that campaign coverage is uniform across types of media and over time. This, coupled with the fact that the media data are somewhat standardized through the transformation into percentages of total national coverage, minimizes the concerns expressed above.

Other factors that directly influence the cost/benefit analysis the state legislatures are whether the states' presidential primaries and primaries for state and local offices are held simultaneously and whether a state is moving away from being the only delegate selection event on a particular date. In this analysis the former will be operationalized as a binary variable, coded one for split primaries and zero for those states that hold all their primaries at once. The latter, like the split primaries variable, is also a dummy variable. Those states that moved up and, in the process, moved away from being the only delegate selection event on a particular date are assigned a value of one, whereas those states which share their primary date with other states or move away from a crowded date in one election cycle to another crowded date in the next are given a value of zero. Described differently, those states with stand alone primaries in the previous election are coded one, whereas those states which held primaries bundled together with other state primaries on a single date are coded zero.²¹

²¹ There are only two cases out of 129 in this sample and during this time period where a state moved its primary from being bundled with other primaries on one date to being the only event on a date. In 1988 New York moved

Whereas the above five variables can be manipulated by the state legislatures, the following four variables are important but cannot be controlled by the legislatures. First, I will argue that the intersection of three factors weighs heavily on any state legislature's ability and/or willingness to move the state's presidential primary to an earlier date. Obviously, which party or parties control/s the houses of the legislature has some bearing on what the legislature is able or willing to do. That is dependent upon whether there is an incumbent president running for re-election and which party that incumbent represents.

As I argued in an earlier section, if a party controls the both houses of a legislature, that legislature will aid its party's challengers to the presidency if it can by changing its primary date. If the legislature has split control between its houses, the ideal time to move a primary is when there is no incumbent running. In that case, moving the state's primary does not necessarily help just one party's candidates. These three variables create twelve possible combinations that can be divided into three categories ranging from "ideal for a move" to "not ideal".²² The combinations in the *ideal* category are dominated by situations where, regardless of incumbency, the party in the White House and the party in the state legislature are in direct contrast. It also contains situations where there is no incumbent and a state has split control in the legislature. The next category, *complacency*, is represented by situations where one party controls both the White House and the state legislature when there is no incumbent running. These situations occur mostly after a party has held the presidency for two terms and a combination of

back two weeks from its first week in April position in 1984, and South Dakota moved from its traditional first week in June position in 1984 to the week after New Hampshire in late February of 1988. In other words, most of the movement in this sample is from one crowded week in one cycle to another in the next or from being the only event during one week during one cycle to a crowded date in the following one. In any event, the two cases described here are considered part of the zero category in this analysis because this movement from being bundled to being a stand alone primary has occurred so infrequently during the time period examined.

²² The three categories of this variable are *ideal* (NDS, NRS, IDR, IRD, NDR and NRD), *complacency* (NRR and NDD) and *not ideal* (IDS, IRS, IDD and IRR). The breakdown of the abbreviations is the following: incumbency (N = no incumbent, I = incumbent), party in the White House (D = Democrat, R = Republican) and party in the state legislature (D = Democrat, R = Republican and S = split control).

incumbency fatigue and overconfidence on the part of the party/state legislature may have prevented the legislature from moving its primary to an earlier date to help a frontrunner who may not have needed it. Finally, the *not ideal* category is a step further down from *complacency*. Combinations here include those where incumbents face legislatures of face legislature of the same party or face split legislatures. The four combinations in this category present the legislatures with the least ideal situations for moving their states' primaries. Operationalized as a trichotomous, this variable is coded 0 for *not ideal*, 1 for *complacency* and 2 for *ideal*.

Secondly, the legislatures cannot control how many delegates the parties distribute to their states. The operationalization for a state's delegation size is seemingly straightforward, but to get a true measure of the delegate-richness of any state in a given election year, an adjustment has to be made to account for the discrepancy in the numbers of delegates each party grants the states. The importance lies not in the equation the parties use to determine the numbers, but that there is an almost two to one difference between the delegate totals of Democrats and Republicans. To overcome this problem, I, as I did with candidate spending and media coverage variables, took the percentage of the total number of delegates in each state for each party. I then took the two percentages and averaged them to create an average percentage of delegate-richness in each state. This pseudo-standardization controls for the differences in the parties' totals and allows for a proper examination of the effects of this variable on the state legislatures' decisions to move their states' presidential primaries.

6. Findings

Given that the dependent variable in this analysis—whether a state’s primary has moved to an earlier date—is binary, and that I am attempting to explain why the state legislatures in the 28 sample states decided in the way they did concerning primary movement during this period, the appropriate model is a time series cross-sectional logit analysis. The results (see **Table 5**) are revealing as to the relationship these variables have with state legislatures’ decisions to move their state’s primaries to earlier dates. Of the variables that are a part of the hypothesized costs/benefits analysis, both the *when* and *split* variables are significant and in the correct directions in relation to the dependent variable. If a state holds its presidential primaries and the primaries for state and local offices on separate days, the odds of that state’s legislature moving its presidential primary to an earlier date increase by a factor of nearly five and half. Likewise, the odds of a state frontloading its primary increase by a factor of 0.81 for every one week decrease. In other words, in a situation in which two states hold their presidential primaries one week apart, the odds of the state with the later primary moving increase by the above factor.

Table 5
Model 1: Impact on Legislatures’ Movement Decisions (1976-1996)

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Z	Significance
When	-0.2072	0.0682	0.8128	-3.04	0.002
Split	1.6553	0.6384	5.2346	2.59	0.010
Spending	-0.2300	0.1593	0.7945	-1.44	0.149
Media	0.2919	0.1706	1.3390	1.71	0.087
Only					
Event	0.0907	0.6175	1.0949	0.15	0.883
Delegates	-0.0170	0.1945	0.9832	-0.09	0.930
Ideal	-0.1732	0.2303	0.8410	-0.75	0.452

Log likelihood = -61.576993; Wald chi square = 16.19; significant at 0.0234 level; N = 129

Of the other variables that are a part of the state legislatures’ hypothesized costs/benefits analysis—*spending*, *media*, and *only event*—none are statistically significant, though *spending*

and *media* approach statistical significance. Furthermore, *media* and *only event* have relationships to the dependent variable that run contrary to those hypothesized. The control variables—*delegates* and *ideal*—were, as was the case with *media* and *only event*, neither statistically significant nor in the right direction.²³ The significance of these variables is not as important as it is for the main independent variables within the costs/benefits analysis. Among those variables only the *only event* variable is of any great concern. The value of a stand alone primary to the state legislatures attempting to determine whether to move their presidential primaries is one that is fixed to the week in which it is held. This implies an interaction between the *when* and *only event* variables. However, as you can see below (**Table 6**), the introduction of this interactive variable into the equation has no effect on the model other than to bring the relationship between the interaction and the dependent variable in line with the original hypothesis. This interaction however does not approach significance.

Table 6
Model 2: Impact on Legislatures' Movement Decisions (1976-1996)
Including *Only Event* and *When* Interaction

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Z	Significance
When	-0.2019	0.0696	0.8172	-2.90	0.004
Split	1.6439	0.6384	5.1755	2.58	0.010
Spending	-0.2267	0.1615	0.7972	-1.40	0.160
Media	0.2952	0.1707	1.3434	1.73	0.084
Only Event	0.6192	1.6197	1.8574	0.38	0.702
Delegates	-0.0247	0.1966	0.9756	-0.13	0.900
Ideal	-0.1741	0.2305	0.8402	-0.76	0.450
Interaction	-0.0624	0.1783	0.9395	-0.35	0.727

Log likelihood = -61.513898; Wald chi squared = 16.15; significant at 0.0402 level; N = 129

Introducing an interaction to account for the relationship between the combined effect of delegate-richness of a state and whether that state's presidential primary was the only delegate

²³ The lack of significance in the case of *delegates* and *only event* does not appear to be attributable to multicollinearity with media coverage. The correlations are 0.5856 and 0.2425 respectively.

selection event on a particular date in the previous cycle and the dependent variable is also important. It is more important for smaller, delegate-poor states to have stand alone primaries than larger, delegate-rich states because the latter would gain the attention of the candidates and media regardless. Again though, the differences are minimal (see **Table 7**). Even though the *delegatelonly event* interaction is in the right direction relative to the dependent variable, it is far from significant (just as the above interaction in Table 6 was).

Table 7
Model 3: Impact on Legislatures' Movement Decisions
(1976-1996)
Including Only Event and Delegates Interaction

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	Z	Significance
When	-0.2060	0.0692	0.8138	-2.98	0.003
Split	1.6318	0.6804	5.1133	2.40	0.016
Spending	-0.2291	0.1597	0.7952	-1.43	0.151
Media	0.2936	0.1716	1.3413	1.71	0.087
Only Event	0.1827	1.1248	1.2004	0.16	0.871
Delegates	-0.0157	0.1948	0.9844	-0.08	0.936
Ideal	-0.1732	0.2303	0.8409	-0.75	0.452
Interaction	-0.0396	0.4064	0.9612	-0.10	0.922

Log likelihood = -61.572223; Wald chi squared = 16.21; significant at 0.0395 level; N = 129

7. Conclusions

The contributions this study has added to the literature have been twofold. First of all, I was able to look more closely at the motivating factors behind the frontloaded presidential nomination system. To this end, I observed the actual decision makers in this process—the state legislatures—and what motivated them. Past studies have made this connection indirectly by arguing that the candidates' spending decisions in a state's primary is driven by where the state's primary is on the calendar (Mayer and Busch 2004). This highlights the importance an early primary date and indirectly points out the motivation to move, but fails to make a solid case. State legislatures are motivated not only by candidate spending but several other things. Secondly, by looking at the state legislatures I have been required to account for other relevant variables and, in the process, developed a better specified model. This better specified model included the variable for split primaries, which is another valuable contribution to this literature. Within this sample of states and over the course of this time period, the presence of split primaries has had a major impact on these states' abilities to shift their primaries to earlier dates. This is a factor that had, to this point, not been considered within this context. It is an important indicator of why some states have moved and others have not.

This is just the tip of the iceberg for the study of state legislatures within this context though. Future research is warranted in several areas concerning state legislatures' effects on several aspects of presidential primaries. The decisions on whether a state's presidential primary is open or closed to independents and members of the other party, the system of delegate allocation in Republican primaries, and the mode of delegate selection—primary or caucus—are all areas in which more attention should be paid.

In closing, some have made the argument that the invisible primary is where the nomination decision is made because the leader in the polls and in fundraising enters a frontloaded system with a huge advantage (Mayer 1996). If that is the case, why is this research important? State legislatures are still moving primaries in a race to the beginning, and as long as that is still happening there is still something to research. In fact, 2008 should see even more frontloading than 2004. February 2004 had at least one delegate selection event every week and could be packed full in 2008. The month is now open to both parties and is the new promise land for influencing the nomination. The bad economy in 2004 prevented several states like Washington from holding primaries, much less moving them ahead at some extra cost (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 31 Oct. 2003). If the economy turns around and eliminates the cost restraints on holding primaries and potentially moving them, then 2008 could see increased February frontloading.

Another possibility is that given a Bush re-election, there will be no incumbent running in 2008. Both parties will then be jockeying for earlier positions on the primary calendar. The implications for this are a near national primary in February or earlier with even quicker winnowing of candidates and a longer general election campaign. The primary season has compressed and could shrink even more in 2008. While it has gotten smaller, the invisible primary and general election campaign have both grown. The implications are that the criteria for running for president become increasingly difficult to attain, thus limiting the number of potentially viable candidates. Those who are viable, remain so for an ever shrinking amount of time. In that scenario, voters have their choices limited, thus further exacerbating the problem of voters lacking in-depth knowledge about the candidates and forcing their “rush to judgment”.

The system for choosing the leader of the United States is unique, but as frontloading increases, the election of the leader of the free world becomes less democratic as well.

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Appendix A--Operationalizations

Dependent Variable

Movement of primaries: a dummy variable (1 = the state's presidential primary was moved to an earlier date; 0 = no forward move)

Main Independent Variables

Costs & Benefits of Moving:

splitting primaries—a dummy variable (1 = a state holds presidential primaries separately from those primaries for other offices; 0 = those primaries are not split)

only event on date—a dummy variable (1 = the state's presidential primary was the only event on a date in the previous election; 0 = the state held its presidential primary on the same date as the presidential primaries in other states)

candidate spending—the percentage of total candidate spending in a state during the previous nomination cycle (adjusted for both inflation and the difference in spending between the two parties).

media coverage—the percentage of total national media coverage a state garners in the previous primary season.

when an event is—This is a variable that has been coded according to the week in which the primary has held. The number of weeks within the nomination season will be coded in reverse order (from June to February) so that the relationship will be positive. In other words, those primary weeks during the first week in June will be assigned a value of 1. The earlier the week is in the process, the more these assigned values grow.

Control Variables

Delegate-richness: This variable is operationalized as the percentage of total delegates a state has in the previous election year. This percentage is arrived at by determining first the percentage of total delegates for both parties and then averaging the two party percentages.

Ideal: a trichotomous variable (2 = the ideal combinations of party in the White House, party control of state legislatures and whether there is an incumbent president running for re-election; 1 = complacency; 0 = not ideal). To clarify more, the three categories of this variable are *ideal* (NDS, NRS, IDR, IRD, NDR and NRD), *complacency* (NRR and NDD) and *not ideal* (IDS, IRS, IDD and IRR). The breakdown of the abbreviations is the following: incumbency (N = no incumbent, I = incumbent), party in the White House (D = Democrat, R = Republican) and party in the state legislature (D = Democrat, R = Republican and S = split control).