

“It’s the Delegates, Stupid.”  
February 5<sup>th</sup> Primaries Are Historic First

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The 2008 presidential elections are making history. They have already dismantled a generation of conventional wisdom about contemporary taboos against candidates who were divorced, Mormon, African American, over 70 years of age, and a woman.

The 2008 presidential elections are also a first for creating a truly national race. The defining feature is that delegates chosen in competitive contests matter. Gone are the old days when momentum in the first 3 states telescoped the battle into small and relatively homogenous parts of the country.

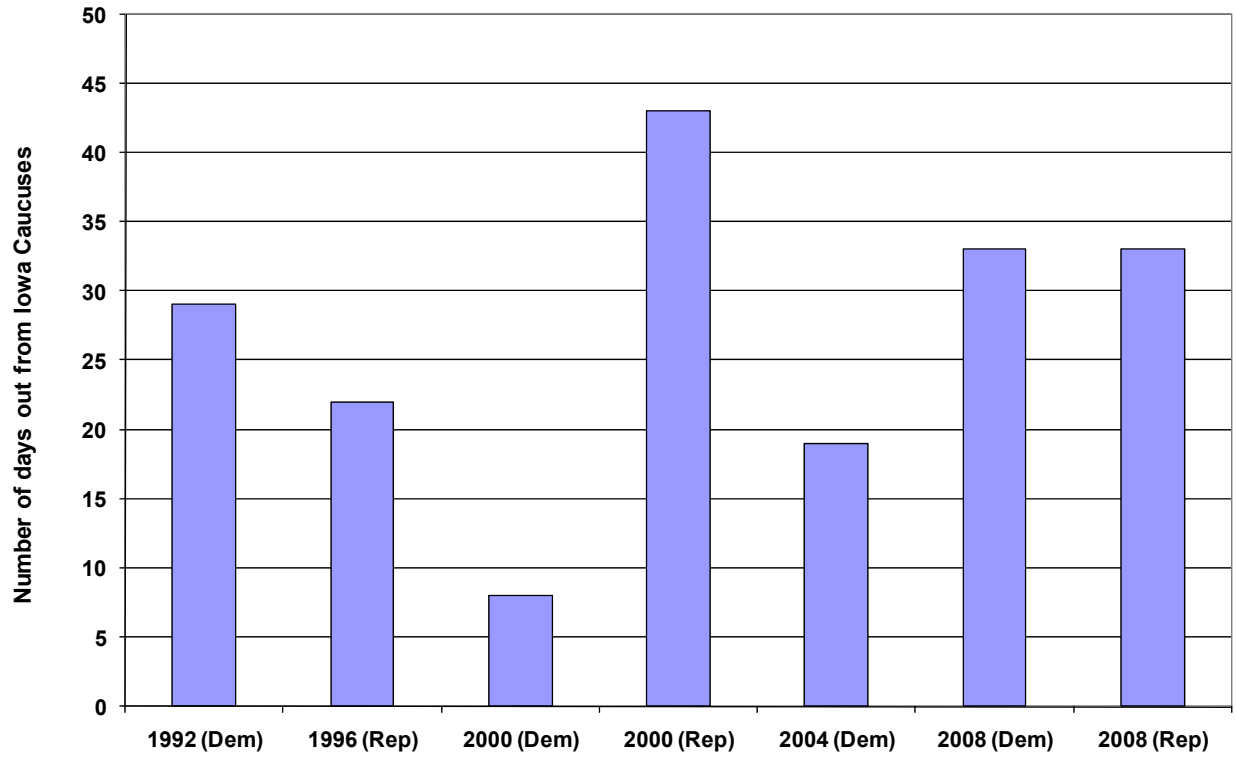
Three critical features stand out compared to the four previous competitive party nomination races from 1992 through 2004:

1. The 2008 elections will require more time after the Iowa caucuses to select a clear Democratic and Republican nominee (see Figure 1).
2. For the first time, the presidential elections include the most populous states. Although Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina played a role, the nomination battle will now be shaped by primaries and caucuses throughout the country. Even if February 5<sup>th</sup> is the major showdown, 4 of the 5 most populated states will have weighed in before the nomination is "sown up" (see Figure 2). There is a good chance that the nomination battle may extend further.
3. The 2008 elections encompass the diversity of America (see Figure 3). For the first time since 1992, 6 states are in play whose populations are approximately a third or more non-white.

The 2008 presidential elections will go into the history books as a major step toward achieving the original purpose of the primary and caucus system -- opening up the selection of political nominees from the control of party bosses to the wishes of American citizens.

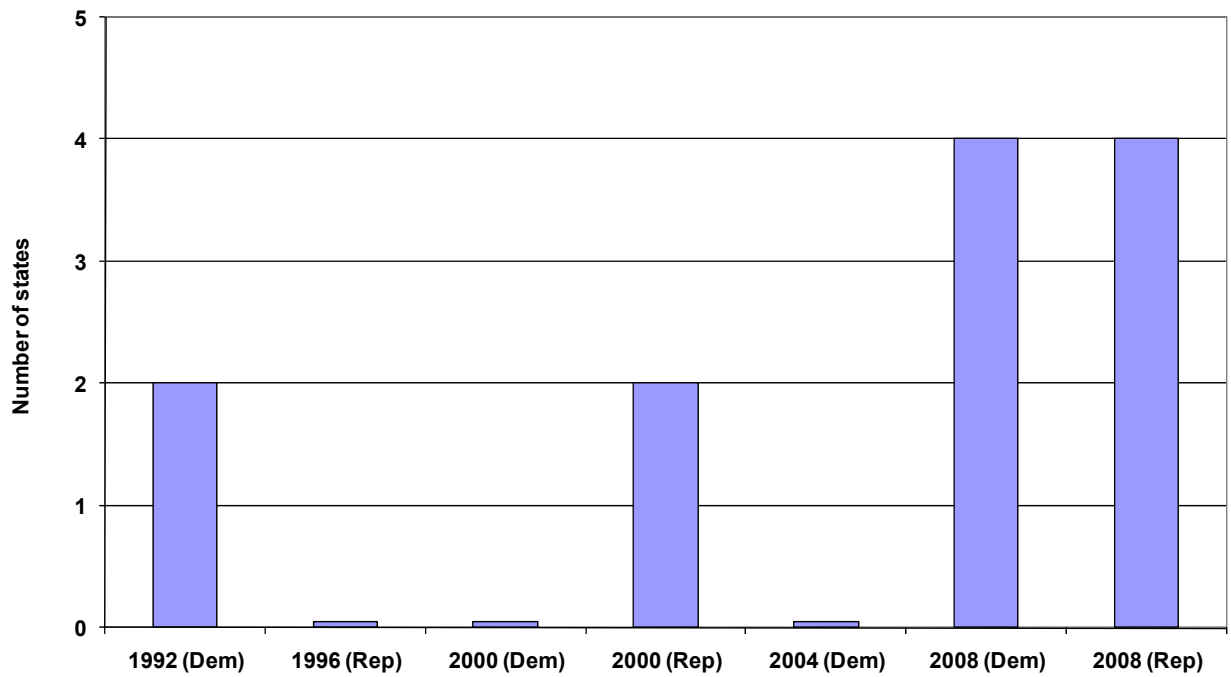
For more information and discussion of the primaries and other election news, visit Smart Politics at <http://www.smartpoliticsblog.org/>

**Figure 1. Length of Competitive Presidential Primary Period, 1992-2008**



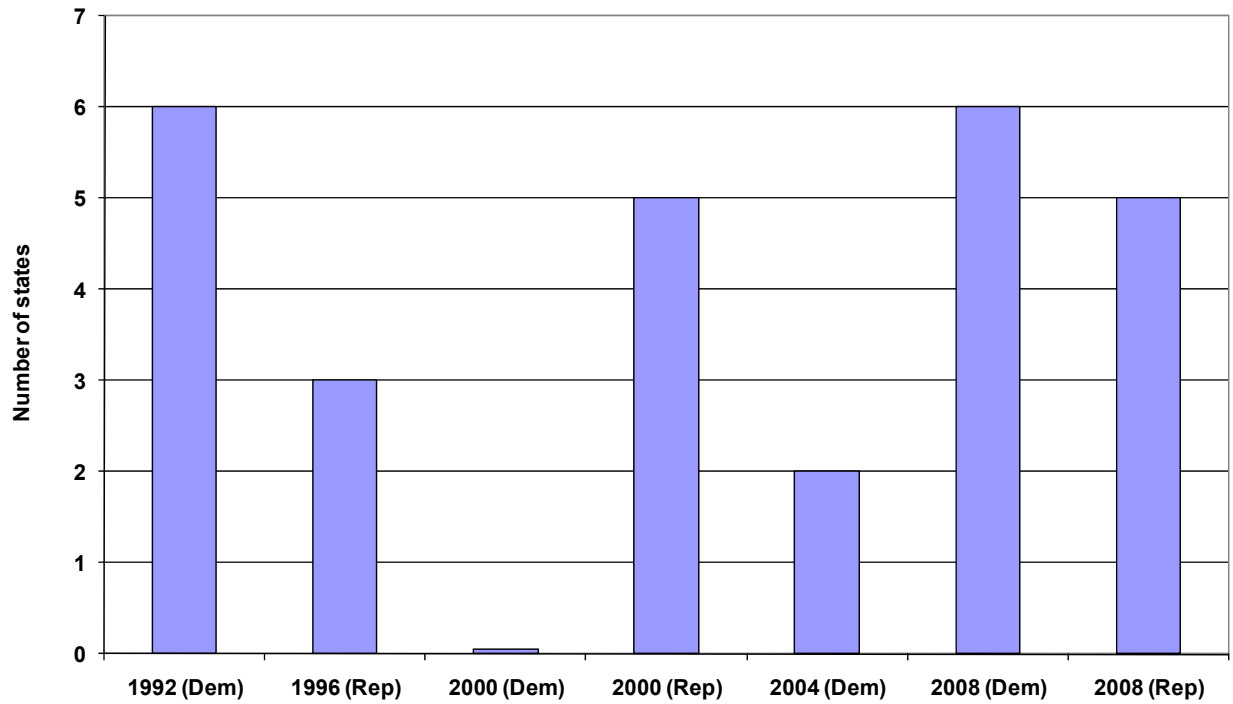
Note: The 2008 Democratic and Republican presidential primary election period may remain competitive for both parties beyond February 5<sup>th</sup>, which is 33 days after the Iowa Caucuses.

**Figure 2. Number of Top 5 Most Populous States To Hold Presidential Primaries With Uncertain Party Nominee, 1992-2008**



Note: The following of the five largest states played meanings roles in selecting the presidential nominees: 1992 Democratic (Florida, Texas); 2000 Republican (California, New York); and 2008 Democratic (Florida, California, New York, Illinois) and 2008 Republican (Florida, California, New York, Illinois).

**Figure 3. Number of States with Large Non-White Populations To Hold Primaries While Party Nominee Is In Doubt, 1992-2008**



Note: By February 5, 2008 South Carolina (33 percent non-white), Alaska (31 percent), California (37 percent), Georgia (35 percent), New York (32 percent), and New Mexico (33 percent; Democrats only) will have held their contests with the party nominees still in doubt.