

Delegates and superdelegates, primaries and caucuses

Concerned readers want to know: How does the election process really work? We put our crack research team, the Googlamaniacs, to the task and they slaved for nanoseconds to find the answers. After sifting through 501,000 alleged explanations on the Internet, the consensus is: Nobody really knows.



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

According to an expert from "Your Guide to U. S. Government Info," presidential candidates are selected in the following manner: "In the summer of every presidential election year, political parties in the United States typically conduct national conventions to choose their presidential candidates. At the conventions, the presidential candidates are selected by groups of delegates from each state. The first candidate to receive a preset majority number of delegate votes becomes the party's presidential candidate. The candidate selected to run for president then selects a vice presidential candidate."

Interesting concept, wouldn't you say? However, the explanation appears to have conveniently left out information on the delegates, apparently an important part of the process. I would think voters would like to know who they are and how they are chosen. Further along in the document the questions were answered, sort of.

Again, according to "Your Guide to U.S. Government Info": "Delegates to the national conventions are selected at the state level according to rules and formulas determined by each political party's state committee. These rules and formulas can change from state to state and from year to year."

How comforting. There are no real rules.

Undaunted, the Googlamaniacs pressed on and asked the obvious, really simple question: What is a delegate? The U. S. Government answer is: "Delegates are individuals chosen to represent their states at their party conventions prior to a presidential election. The rules for selecting delegates, which are

dictated by the parties, can be dizzying—the guidelines vary not only by party, but by state, and sometimes by congressional district. A party might grant additional delegates as a reward if a state has a recent history of supporting that party, for example. In other cases, delegates might simply be allocated to a state based on the percentage of votes that state is granted in the Electoral College."

I'm certainly glad they made that clear. Now we know: They have a vague idea of what a delegate is, but they have no idea of how they are chosen or exactly how many there really are.

The Googlamaniacs determined that information on delegates is highly classified and the political parties will make getting that information more difficult than getting a direct answer to "What exactly do you want to accomplish if elected to office?"

The next question that needed addressing was about a recent term added to the mix to further confuse voters: What is a superdelegate? Are these delegates that are larger than regular delegates? Are they smarter? Do they have special powers? Inquiring voters want to know.

The answer is: "The Democratic Party has superdelegates, which include elected officials, like members of Congress, and party officials. At the Democratic convention, superdelegates account for twenty percent of overall delegates and are "uncommitted and are not bound in any fashion" to any one candidate. In other words, they can throw their support to whomever they want.

Does this mean they can throw their mother's hat in the ring and give her their undying support? That's a frightening thought.

The Googlamaniacs decided to change course and concentrate on the difference between primaries and caucuses. Surely, they could come up with a definitive answer to such a simple question about two mainstays of our election process.

According to U. S. Government Info, "In states holding them, presidential primary elections are open to all registered voters. Primary elections also vary in what names appear on their ballots. Most states hold presidential preference primaries, in which the actual presidential candidates' names appear on the ballot. In other states, only the names of convention delegates appear on the ballot. Delegates may state their support for a candidate or declare themselves to be uncommitted."

Huh? Did I miss something? Am I the only person who is confused? Let's take a look at the definition of a caucus.

According to the same source, "Caucuses are simply meetings open to all registered voters of the party, at which delegates to the party's national convention are selected. Voters in attendance divide themselves into groups according to the candidate they support. The undecided voters congregate into their own group and prepare to be "courted" by supporters of other candidates. At the end of the caucus, party organizers count the voters in each candidate's group and calculate how many delegates to the county convention each candidate has won.

"As in the primaries, the caucus process can produce both pledged and unpledged convention delegates, depending on the party rules of the various states."

There's that "calculate" thing again. They won't tell us how the number of delegates is actually calculated. Could it be that each party in every state and congressional district makes up the rules as they go along? It appears that could be the case.

Now you know. This is how a president is elected in a system we can't understand.

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LEGAL TIP

A claim for negligent failure to maintain or repair a stop sign falls within the waiver of sovereign immunity for injuries resulting from dangerous conditions of public property, the Missouri Supreme Court has ruled.

The plaintiff was injured when the car he was riding in struck another vehicle at an intersection where a stop sign had fallen down. He sued, claiming the county failed to maintain the sign.

Nearby residents testified the sign had been leaning at a 45 degree angle for at least a month, and that it had fallen down at least two days before the accident.

The county claimed sovereign immunity barred the claim. A trial court disagreed, and a jury returned a \$150,000 verdict for plaintiff.

The supreme court upheld the verdict.

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