

The Making of the Republican Candidate Looking back on primaries

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For the Republicans, the 2012 presidential primary race was expected to lay bare the fabric of the Republican party. How to deal with the Tea Party surge and the voter realignment apparent since December 2010? In answering this question, ideological shifts have played a part—but also the rules of this very complex game: the American presidential primary.

The 2012 presidential primary race for the Republicans turned out to be a fairly lengthy and suspenseful campaign. Not until mid-April 2012—more than three months after the beginning of the primary season—could Mitt Romney safely rest on a clear majority that would make him the uncontested nominee at the Republican Convention in Tampa (Florida) at the end of August. The initial uncertainty on the winner of the primaries was, early on, seen as a consequence of the divided nature of the Republican Party especially since the surge of the Tea Party faction in the mid-term elections of 2010. The 2012 race was to be a test of the *national* stamina of the Tea Party. In this respect, presidential primary elections, because of their local nature were considered as an asset for currents within the party—including the Tea Party—to find a national sounding board while weakening a more moderate, consensual and, hence, necessarily milder candidate.

Presidential primaries and caucuses¹ have existed in the USA for a hundred years, exactly since the election of 1912. They are essentially state elections but with a national appeal. A string of primary elections (or caucuses) are held during the Spring of the presidential year in order to identify a party candidate who will be officially nominated during the national party conventions which usually take place at the end of the summer. The link between the result in the primary election or caucus and the actual nomination of the candidate of the party for the general election has been a matter of political and legal debate over the last one hundred years. Some recurrent themes inevitably emerge every four years, in particular the geography of the primaries— i.e. which state goes first—and the date and order of the primaries. The geography of presidential primaries has also been a fleeting question, rehashed every four years. The state parties are free to decide whether they want to hold a primary, a caucus or none and if one looks at the evolution of the number of presidential

¹ Caucuses usually take place in local voting precincts in a state where caucuses are organized. They usually consist in a gathering of supporters of various presidential candidates. The meetings take place in a common room where preferences are expressed according to various methods, such as “groupings”. In this case, supporters of different candidates move into different corners of the room in different groups, to show their preferences. The contest then moves on to the next level which is the district convention where, again, preferences can be expressed in a great variety of ways (secret ballots, straw polls etc...),

primary elections over the last century, one realizes that their number has greatly varied over time. But, notwithstanding overall variations in their number, two patterns, or cycles, can be singled out.

The institutionalization of the presidential primary as a stepping stone in the presidential campaign for any serious political contender is a fairly recent matter. But over the last century, presidential primaries have gone from a possibility—or choice—to a necessary contest. From 1912 to 1968, the number of primary elections and caucuses went from 12 to 19, which means that half or more of the 50 states did *not* hold a primary contest. In the states where primaries or caucuses did take place, less than half of the delegates at the national convention were chosen. Since 1968 the number of primaries or caucuses has gradually increased and their proceedings have also become more transparent. A second major turnaround in the history of presidential primary elections has been the organization, since 1988, of a semi national presidential primary day which is commonly called “Super Tuesday” as it is traditionally held on a Tuesday in early Spring. In 2012 almost all the States held either a presidential primary or a caucus.

In the process, the question of the geography of presidential primaries—which state is holding an election and which state is not—has shifted to that of the calendar of the election. The calendar of the 2012 primaries shows several clear trends in party affiliations and strengths, or weaknesses, on the American territory. It helps crystallize several issues which have been plaguing the very significance of presidential primaries in the American political process ever since 1912. In question, in particular, are the order in which primaries are held and the reasons why two “small” states—Iowa and New Hampshire—have traditionally been the first states to open the primary season which leads to a “front loading” of the winning candidates who gain—sometimes—undeserved “momentum” in the campaign. Also at stake are the rules presiding over the primary elections and the way the primary results are translated into a specific number of delegates at the National Convention of the Party at the end of the summer. After the eventful Democratic convention of 1968, which was held in Chicago, the Democratic Party embarked on a round of internal reforms to make the primary process more transparent, more open to minorities and more democratic. In 1972, they also started elaborating rules to make presidential primary results more binding on the number of delegates as well as their vote during the convention. The Republican Party has followed in the Democratic Party footsteps. The presidential primaries race has now technically become a race for delegates who will vote for a nominee at the National Convention. It is very important for candidates to master all the rules of each state primary election in order to improve their chances to gather the maximum amount of delegates as early as possible in the season. Often hidden behind catchier issues of personality or ideology, this technical question has proved decisive in the process that led to the selection of Mitt Romney as the Republican presidential candidate for 2012. It has been made more complex yet by the emergence of new actors in the race, the Super PACs.

The Candidate Lineup

When the presidential primary season started in January 2012, the mid-term upset inflicted to the Democratic Party just a year before cast a long shadow. In November 2010, Republicans had won 7 new seats in the Senate, and 63 districts had changed hands in the House of Representatives in their favor—the biggest swing since 1932. A clear national setback for the Democrats and President Barack Obama, this national Republican surge was

also seen a potential factional threat for the Republican Party on the eve of the primary season, as pockets of more extreme and very vocal Republican Tea party sympathizers gained national recognition while helping to propel the Republican Party to a very comfortable majority in the House of Representatives. This caused concern among the leaders of the Republican Party who saw a situation rife with potential splits and factional divisions.

The “Tea Party” faction was still extremely visible in the lineup of candidates at the beginning of 2012. Eight candidates were on the ballot in the Iowa caucus (January 3, 2012). By alphabetical order Michelle Bachmann (a Representative from Minnesota since 1997 and a Tea Party activist), Herman Cain (CEO of Godfather Pizza and Tea Party activist), Newt Gingrich (former Representative from Georgia, 1979-1999 and Speaker of the House of Representatives, 1995-1999), John Hunstman (former governor of Utah, 2005-2009 and ambassador to China, 2009-11), Ron Paul (US Representative from Texas since 1997 and a libertarian), Rick Perry (Governor of Texas since 2000 when he replaced G. W. Bush), Mitt Romney (former governor of Massachusetts 2003-07) and Rick Santorum (former Senator from Pennsylvania, 1995-2007).

As the candidates prepared to run the presidential race, they kept their eyes on the electoral horizon (in this case aiming at beating the Democrats in November), but their immediate goal was to confront their fellow Republican candidates/opponents. This fratricide battle was compounded at times by the statewide and local idiosyncrasies of electoral representation in the United States.

The Rules of the Game

The primary season was scheduled to start in early January and officially ended on June 26, 2012 with the state of Utah. Super Tuesday was held on March 6, 2012 when 10 states held their primaries (Alaska, Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Vermont and Virginia) for a total of 1/5 of the total delegates (437 delegates out of a total of 2286 delegates at the National Convention).

In 2012, a candidate needed 1144 delegates in order to secure his party’s nomination at the Convention out of the total 2286 delegates. These rules, according to which delegates are allocated to a candidate, need to be approved by the Committee on Rules (currently headed by John Sununu, former governor of New Hampshire 1983-89) of the Republican National Committee. They fall into seven major categories, which in 2012 included seven categories: non-binding delegate allocation² (9 states), proportional delegate allocation³ (22 states), winner-take-all delegate allocation⁴ (12 states), hybrid proportional delegate allocation⁵ (5 states), direct election delegate allocation⁶ (4 states), hybrid winner take all delegate allocation⁷ (1 state), advisory delegate allocation⁸ (1 state).

² « Non Binding » means that the delegates of the state are not bound by the results in their state as to how they will vote at the national convention.

³ A candidate receives a number of delegates which is proportional to the number of votes that he received in the primary.

⁴ All delegates go the candidate who gets the most votes in the primary.

⁵ Some delegates are allocated on a proportional basis and the rest on a winner-take-all basis.

⁶ In this case, delegates are elected directly in the statewide (or district) ballot.

⁷ See footnote 5.

⁸ The statewide primary results are used as an advisory basis for the election of the delegates

Within those broad rules, each state has extra sub-rules in order to allocate the delegates. New Hampshire has a proportional allocating rule according to which the 12 delegates of the state are indeed allocated proportionally by statewide vote with a minimum of 10% for candidates to earn delegates. Hence, Mitt Romney who gathered 39,3% of the vote received 8 delegates, Ron Paul with 22, 9% of the vote received 3 delegates, John Huntsman with 16,9% of the vote received 1 delegate and Newt Gingrich as well as Rick Santorum who both scored 9,4% of the vote did not receive any delegate as they were under the 10% threshold.

If one considers the state of Georgia, which has a proportional allocation rule, the sub-rules are fairly different from those in New Hampshire. In Georgia, out of a total of 76 delegates, 31 delegates are allocated according to the order in which they finish statewide if they receive over 20% of the vote; 42 delegates are allocated proportionally by congressional district (3 per district) unless a candidate receives a majority of the vote, in which case they receive all of that district's 3 delegates. The remaining 3 delegates (31+42+3=76) are Super Delegates and are the State's Republican National Committee officials. In practical terms, the Georgia rules translated as follows. The primary election was held on March 6, 2012 (Super Tuesday). Newt Gingrich won 47,2% of the vote and received 52 delegates and Mitt Romney with 25,9% of the vote received 21 delegates. Rick Santorum who gathered "only" 19,6% of the vote (below the 20% mark) received only 3 delegates, and Ron Paul with 6,6% received no delegate.

One final example, the state of Arkansas will provide another inkling into the intricate ways in which a proportional rule can be applied in order to allocate delegates. Out of a total delegation of 36, 21 delegates are allocated statewide in this way: each candidate who received at least 15% of the vote gets 1 delegate, and the remaining delegates are awarded proportionally to the top three candidates with most votes on a winner-take-all basis if one candidate gets a majority of the statewide vote. 12 delegates are awarded proportionally by congressional district (3 per district) or on a winner-take-all basis if one candidate takes a majority of the district's vote. 3 delegates are Super Delegates (Republican National Committee officials). On primary election day, May 22, 2012, Mitt Romney gathered a clear majority of the vote with 68,3% and thus was allocated all the 33 (+3 Super Delegates who are not pledged) delegates of the state. Ron Paul received 13, 4% of the vote, Rick Santorum, 13,3% and Newt Gingrich, 4,9%, which put them below -- and for Gingrich well below -- the 15% threshold so that they were not allocated any delegate at the National Convention.

State "Advantage"

The Committee on Rules of the RNC (Republican National Committee) clearly mapped out the potential sequence in the unfolding of the primary calendar. Rule 15 paragraphs b1 and b2 stipulate that:

b. 1 No primary, caucus, or convention to elect, select, allocate, or bind delegates to the national convention shall occur prior to the first Tuesday in March in the year in which a national convention is held. Except Iowa, new Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada may begin their processes at any time on or after February 1 in the year in which a national convention is held and shall not be subject to the provisions if paragraph b2 of this rule.

b.2 Any presidential primary, caucus, convention, or other meeting held for the purpose of selecting delegates to the national convention which occurs prior to the first day of April in

*the year in which the national convention is held, shall provide for the allocation of delegates on a proportional basis*⁹.

This rule shows that there is great concern on the part of members of the RNC about the risks of “front-loading” (scheduling state party caucuses and state primary elections earlier and earlier in advance of the general election). Indeed the party has been split on the issue of the early identification of a winner in the primary race. On the one hand a packed early race with several contests organized over a few weeks which leads to a winner quickly would be a way to limit the exposure of intra-party debate or even strife. The idiosyncrasy of the 2012 primary race with the “Tea Party factor” was a matter of concern as it raised fears of a fierce battle within the Republican Party ranks which might prove damaging in the upcoming presidential race fanning the fear that a factional candidate may not be able to win the general election in November. On the other hand, a more protracted race with primaries scattered over a longer period could provide more clout to different states and also ensure a longer debate among candidates over issues.

The historical precedence of Iowa and New Hampshire in the primary season has once again been the focus of debate. Their role as “first-movers,” which confers them a preeminent role as party test-tubes in the nomination contest, is seen as unfair, as neither state is considered as “representative” of the country. But their closeness to the cherished “grassroots” political constituency of choice nonetheless makes them more attuned to the American democratic model or what can survive of it in primary elections¹⁰. A decision made by the RNC Rules Committee during the Republican Convention will impose strict penalties for states deciding to organize its primary before the last Tuesday in February, except for Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Nevada. This restriction was devised in order to avoid the “Florida scenario” of 2012 when Florida decided to hold its primary on January 31. As a result of this party rule violation, the state was divested of half of its pool of 100 delegates at the national convention which weakened the Florida delegation in Tampa.

The whole question of the rules presiding over delegate selection as laid out by the RNC also raises the fundamental question of the distribution of power in the organization of primary elections between the States and a central governing body such as the RNC. A fierce floor debate took place at the national convention in Tampa over the methods of delegate selection as laid out by the rules and also over the timeliness of rules changes between two national conventions. A change to Rule 16 institutes stronger enforcement mechanisms in order to force delegates to vote as they are bound by their states. Rule 12 which also came under attack at the convention proposed to allow for rule changes *between* conventions and not only every four years when the national convention convenes. Some grassroots activists and more conservative leaning Republicans rebuffed this rule change as a sign of centralization of the decision-making process at the expense of more local, state-level decisions. Sarah Palin wrote, as reported by ABC News, that:

Without the energy and wisdom of the grassroots, the GOP would not have had the historic 2010 electoral victories. That’s why the controversial rule change being debated at the RNC

⁹ See *The Rules of the Republican Party*; as adopted by the 2008 National Convention (1 September 2008) and amended by the Republican National Committee on 6 August 2010.

¹⁰ See Heather K. Gerken & Douglas B. Rand, “Creating Better Heuristics for the Presidential Primary: The Citizen Assembly”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 125(2), 2010, 233-53. And Christopher C. Hull, *Grassroots Rules: How the Iowa Caucus Helps Elect American Presidents*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

*convention right now is so very disappointing. It's a direct attack on grassroots activists by the GOP establishment, and it must be rejected*¹¹.

At the root of this reaction is a long standing belief that centralized, elitist, Washington based decisions are no longer in tune with what “real America” believes and cherishes. As it turned out, in 2012, the primary election race for the Republicans proved to be a protracted and long race before a clear winner could emerge. Some structural reasons can be invoked, but also a new source of funding provided by the emergence of Super PACs which enabled a few candidates to “survive” for a longer period in the race.

First, a few big states which could carry a significant number of delegates had been scattered over the whole Spring: Florida carrying 50 delegates was held on January 30, Georgia with 76 delegates was held on Super Tuesday, March 6; Illinois which carried 69 delegates was scheduled on March 20 and Wisconsin, with 42 delegates on April 3. New York (95 delegates), Pennsylvania (72 delegates), Texas (155 delegates) and California (172 delegates) were all scheduled between April 24 and June 5 so clearly towards the end of the Spring. Furthermore, the early contests showed a blurred picture with a mix of close results and unclear trends. On January 3, 2012 Mitt Romney was said to have won the Iowa caucuses by 8 votes over Rick Santorum¹². But a few days later on January 19, 2012, after recounts and certification of votes, in a reversal of the initial situation, Rick Santorum was recognized with an edge of 34 votes (29 839 votes) over Mitt Romney (29805 votes) and declared a winner in Iowa¹³. Santorum’s showing in Iowa was not followed by a similar result in New Hampshire where he finished fifth with 9,4% of the vote and Romney carried the state with 39,3% of the vote. Ten days later, on January 21, the third primary of the season, South Carolina, led to a surprise win by Newt Gingrich (40,4%) over a fairly distant Romney (27,8%) and Santorum finished third (17%). The leading pair was reversed again in Florida on January 31, with Romney beating Gingrich (46,4% to 31,9%). The following primaries showed a slight edge for Romney but clearly not a decisive one:

Feb Nevada -	4:	Romney 50.1%	Gingrich 21.1%	
Feb Colorado-	7:	Santorum 40.3%	Romney 34.9%	
Feb Minnesota	7:	Santorum 44.9%	Paul 27.1%	Romney 16.9%
Feb Maine	11 :	Romney 39.2%	Paul 35.1%	
Feb Arizona	28 :	Romney 47.3%	Santorum 26.6%	
Feb Michigan	28:	Romney 41.1%	Santorum 37.9%	

In the March 6 *Super Tuesday* Romney did carry 7 states out of 11 but in Ohio which is one of the decisive swing states for the November general election, Romney only scored one percentage point lead over Santorum (38% against 37%). Ohio seems to be one of the very critical swing states in the presidential race. Out of the eight battle states which could

¹¹<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/08/sarah-palin-some-rnc-members-push-for-convention-floor-fight/>. Accessed August 28, 2012.

¹² <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/us/politics/santorum-and-romney-fight-to-a-draw.html?pagewanted=all>

¹³ <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/19/the-iowa-caucuses-will-have-no-official-winner/>

lean either Democrat or Republican in November: Virginia, Florida, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nevada, Colorado and New Hampshire, Ohio is seen as a major asset since “it has accurately picked winning presidential candidates in the last 12 elections.”¹⁴ Hence, on March 6, two months in the primary race and with a mediocre showing in key Ohio, although Romney had an advantage, it was not decisive enough to safely declare him a comfortable leader for the Republican nomination. Romney was to drag on for another month through the beginning of April ahead of Santorum but with still a few upsets in Kansas on March 10, in Alabama on March 13, and in Louisiana on March 24. At the beginning of April two states decisively helped tip the scale in favour of Romney. Maryland which Romney won easily over Santorum (49.2% against 28.9%) and especially Wisconsin where Romney was endorsed by US Representative Paul Ryan who was subsequently chosen as his running mate on the Republican ticket (Romney 44.1%, Santorum 36.9%). Rick Santorum subsequently announced that he was suspending his campaign on April 11, 2012.

Super PACs

The second reason why the race allowed for two candidates in particular to prolong their presence in the race (Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum) is due to the financial possibilities offered by Super PACs. Indeed, the Republican primary campaign of 2012 re-awakened the stealth question of campaign finance. Super PACs is an expression which was coined during the primary campaign. Super PACs are a “2.0 version” of PACs (*Political Action Committees*), which were created in the mid-1970s in the post-Watergate era, to limit the amount of money that any individual could contribute directly to a political campaign. Under the “PAC system” any individual could contribute a maximum of \$5000 per year to the PAC. Super PACs is thus an expression which is used as a practical substitute for “independent expenditure-only committees” which were created in 2010 following a Washington D.C. Circuit decision,¹⁵ which itself followed on the heels of the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling.¹⁶ A recent study had shown that there were 220 active Super PACs as of June 30, 2012 and the two major sources of funding for those committees come essentially from either wealthy individuals or for-profit businesses who need to report their spending regularly to the Federal Election Commission.¹⁷ Newt Gingrich’s campaign was nurtured, in part, by contributions from Sheldon Adelson, the casino mogul¹⁸, who donated to Gingrich’s Super PAC Winning our Future.¹⁹

The influence of Super PACs since 2010 and in the latest presidential primary race has prompted the US Senate to hold hearings on the effects of this phenomenon on American democracy.²⁰ The panellists who voiced their views during the Hearings explained that the

¹⁴ <http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/electoral-map>

¹⁵ *SpeechNow.org v. FEC*, 599 F.3d 686 (D.C. Cir 2010)

¹⁶ See *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 50 (2010). In this 5-4 decision the Supreme Court held that under the First Amendment the government could not restrict independent political expenditure from unions and corporations.

¹⁷ Blair Bowie & Adam Lioz, “Million-Dollar Megaphones. Super PACs and Unlimited Outside Spending in the 2012 Elections”, Demos/US PIRG Education Fund, 2012.

¹⁸ James Grimaldi, Casino Mogul Sheldon Adelson’s Family is Bankrolling Gingrich Super PAC, *Washington Post*, 1 February 2012.

¹⁹ www.winningourfuture.com

²⁰ US Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, « Taking Back Our Democracy: Responding to Citizens United and the Rise of Super PACs », Hearings, 24 July 2012.

broader issue of money and politics could not be limited and blamed on Citizens United. Ilyan Shapiro from the conservative Cato Institute claimed that “political money is a moving target that, like water, will flow somewhere. If it’s not to candidates, it’s to parties, and if not there, then to independent groups or unincorporated individuals acting together.” The solution would not be, according to him, to “reduce the money, but to reduce the scope of political activity the money tries to influence. Shrink the size of government and its intrusions in people’s lives and you’ll shrink the amount people will spend trying to get their piece of pie or, more likely, trying to avert ruinous public policies.” According to this view, a freer system and a better democracy would imply removing any limitation to any spending for political purposes and require public reporting of the amounts contributed and spent.

In his testimony, Lawrence Lessig from the Harvard Law School, notes that “in the current presidential election cycle 0.000063% of America—that is 196 citizens—have funded 80% of Super PAC spending. 22 Americans—that’s 7 on-millionths of 1%—account for 50% of that funding.” Hence fewer and fewer Americans, through Super PACs, could have a direct impact on political choices and eventually political decisions. This compounds the profound distrust that Americans have in Congress²¹ and more generally in some political institutions and prompts Lessig to suggest that a way out of the political stalemate could be to convene a “series of citizen conventions to advise Congress about the best means of reform” in order to address the burning issue, not so much of the amount of money raised and spent, but the origin of that money²². The emergence of “netroots” during the 2004 presidential campaign under the impetus of Howard Dean on the Democratic side, which gained national recognition during the 2008 Democratic campaign bears witness to the wish that each citizen, as a member of grassroots organizations, can express himself and contribute to electoral campaigns even with a small sum. Obviously, the internet has helped catalyse this wish and turn it into reality. In other words, the very meaning of “representation” is at stake in the process of campaign funding.

Issues Matter Yet

Faced with this money surge channelled by Super PACs, Romney’s success has implied a personal ideological realignment. Indeed, the Republican nominee’s political pedigree for 2012 is interesting in this respect: he has gone from a rather conservative candidate in the 2008 presidential race against a more progressive John McCain and then veered to more moderate positions which led to his being nicknamed a RINO (*Republican In Name Only*)²³ and then adjusting to an in-between position during the Republican Convention where he needed to tie-in more conservative streams in his party and in his presidential platform. Paul Ryan’s nomination as Vice Presidential candidate was, in this respect, a very clear message. It is a clear sign of both the importance that the Republican Party wants to weigh in the fall presidential campaign on irresponsible runaway federal spending on the part of the Democratic Administration. US Representative and House Budget Committee

²¹ “The approval rate for Congress hasn’t passed 20 percent in more than a year, according to Gallup (...). Prior to 2007, it sank below 20 percent only twice,” *Huffington Post*, 14 August 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/14/congress-approval-rating-all-time-low-gallup-poll_n_1777207.html

²² See Sunlight Foundation, www.sunlightfoundation.org

²³ See Peter Ferrara, “RINO Romney Is the Least Electable”, *The American Spectator*, 11 January 2012, <http://spectator.org/archives/2012/01/11/rino-romney-is-the-least-elect>; or “Romney is the White Obama”, <http://commieblaster.com/RINO/index.html>

Chairman Paul Ryan (Wisconsin) issued his *Path to Prosperity. Blueprint for America Renewal* now called “Ryan’s budget plan”²⁴ in March 2012. Under his plan, which has now become Mitt Romney’s plan as well, several items are listed as key to contain budget growth and debt increase over the next years:

Effective government is impossible without limits. It is no surprise that trust in government has reached all-time lows as the size of government has reached all-time highs. The Founders put limits on government because they understood the limits of government. In James Madison’s formulation, ‘if men were angels, no government would be necessary. And if angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.’ As Madison reminded us, men are no angels, and government is ‘administered by men over men’. [...] This budget serves as a blueprint for American renewal. Its principled reforms empower individuals with greater control over their futures. It places great faith in the wisdom of the Founders and promises to renew confidence in the superiority of human freedom. The choice of two futures presented in this budget is premised on the wisdom of the American people to build a prosperous future for themselves and for generations of Americans to come.”²⁵

In its present form, the Republican Party has been called by David Bromwich “a Party led by a movement”²⁶, that is the Tea Party movement. This description shows that the Republican Party has been shaken by the emergence of this “movement” which is vigorous and vocal but not necessarily compatible with a victory in the general election in November. In choosing Paul Ryan as his running mate, one can safely say that Romney’s victory in the primary contests is not the victory of a moderate over a more conservative wing of the Party but, rather, that what could be considered moderate about Mitt Romney has been shifted towards a more conservative right-wing barycentre in order to secure the nomination. Ryan’s choice is a natural consequence of Romney’s endorsement by Jim DeMint and Marco Rubio during the Spring of 2012. Jim DeMint, a Senator from South Carolina, and a notable leader of the Tea Party movement, tongue-in-cheek declaration on 22 March 2012 that “I’m not only comfortable with Romney, I’m excited about the possibility of him being our nominee”²⁷ was soon followed by Marco Rubio’s endorsement. Barely a week after DeMint’s statement, on 28 March 2012, Rubio announced that “It’s increasingly clear that Mitt Romney’s gonna be the Republican nominee. We’ve got to come together behind who I think has earned this nomination and that’s Mitt Romney.”²⁸ Marco Rubio came into the spotlight in the 2010 midterm elections in which he was elected US Senator of Florida and defeated Florida’s incumbent, Governor Charlie Crist, who had decided to enter the race as an independent. In this clearly “moderate” vs. “conservative” inner Republican battle, Rubio’s victory helped the Tea Party record a valued victory. Not surprisingly, Charlie Crist declared on August 25, 2012 that he was endorsing President Obama for the upcoming presidential election²⁹. Florida, once again a reminder of the traumatic 2000 election, will be a swing and decisive state in November 2012. Crist explains his endorsement of Obama as a reaction against the conservative drift of the Republican Party on what has now come to be called “cultural issues” —issues other than the economy. He writes that:

²⁴ <http://budget.house.gov/uploadedfiles/pathtoprosperity2013.pdf>; 20 March 2012

²⁵ Paul Ryan, *Ibid.*, p. 7 & 9.

²⁶ David Bromwich, “The Historic Election: Four Views”, *New York Review of Books*, 9 December 2010, pp. 56-59.

²⁷ http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/jim-demint-excited-about-mitt-romney/2012/03/22/gIQAA85DUS_blog.html

²⁸ http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/marco-rubio-endorses-mitt-romney/2012/03/29/gIQAtdVijS_story.html

²⁹ <http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/article1247631.ece>

As Republicans gather in Tampa to nominate Mitt Romney, Americans can expect to hear tales of how President Obama has failed to work with their party or turn the economy around. But an element of their party has pitched so far to the extreme right on issues important to women, immigrants, seniors and students that they've proven incapable of governing for the people. Look no further than the inclusion of the Akin amendment in the Republican Party platform, which bans abortion, even for rape victims. The truth is that the party has failed to demonstrate the kind of leadership or seriousness voters deserve.³⁰

Crist helps us underline here a collusion of geographical and gradual voter realignment in American politics whose emblem is the increasing Republicanisation of the South. Indeed, Southern states, which had long voted Democrat, have been realigned towards a “potent mix of evangelism, strong support for the military and visceral opposition to taxes and social programs”³¹ as championed by the conservative wing of the Republican Party, which Romney needs to cater to. Voter realignment in the South in favor of the Republican Party go back to 1948 (or earlier) and it was even stronger in the elections after the mid-1960s as a result of Johnson’s Civil Rights Act of 1964. White voters, in particular, have tended to vote more decisively for Republicans since then. That “secular realignment” to use V. O. Key’s well-known concept seemed to have reached an apex and was, maybe, on the verge of reverting the pattern after the results of the 2008 presidential election. In 2008, the Democrats carried Virginia, North Carolina and Florida. In the 2012 race, those three states (among others) are swing states whose vote will be decisive for either presidential candidate to win the election.

Conclusion

If one looks at the mechanics of the nomination process as it has existed in the United States for the last one hundred years, it certainly still appears as an odd system. Plagued by “unfair” practices, such as a season which starts with “small” states attracting an unfair share of attention, but also a lengthy process that lasts several months—and 2012 was no exception. The very intricate system of delegate selection and party rules that preside over the state elections and the unfolding of the national convention have also been a matter of both internal partisan strife and academic questioning.

But, the nominating process in its current form is also a good example of democratic practices *in the making*, of local idiosyncrasies, of partisan debate and citizen participation at the national convention where floor debates have erupted. The length of the 2012 Republican nomination process cannot simply be blamed on the “mechanics” of the process, but also on the consequences of the rise of Super PACs in the wake of the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision which fuelled some candidates beyond their political stamina.

The national convention nominated the winner of the Republican primaries, Mitt Romney—this unobtrusive, obvious, observation helps anchor the nominating system in its present form and will help support the continuation of an “all-states” primary contest in 2016. The issues which seem, so far, to have pulled the Republican ticket and platform hinge around the future of Obamacare, the limits of Keynesian economics and the corresponding debt ceiling and fiscal “responsibility”, the abolition of Dodd-Frank and a new round of deregulation of the financial services industry, as well as unsurprising pro-life and anti same-sex marriage positions. These are the issues that the incumbent Democrats will have to come

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Alec McGillis, “Is The South Too Republican for Republicans?”, *The New Republic*, 12 March 2012.

up against in the post-primary campaign which has just started on the road to November 6, 2012.

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