



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 27, 2011

## After the GOP Primaries ... a Brokered Convention?

Specifically, this year most Republican primaries will be using a proportional system for their delegate processes, rather than a “winner take all” system that was more prominent in 2008 and allowed John McCain to take an early lead and secure the nomination rather quickly. Some observers contend that with the Republican pool of candidates remaining rather large, and a number of states utilizing a proportional system of allocating delegates, no candidate will have more than 50 percent of the delegates by the time of the Republican National Convention.



Should that happen, a “brokered” convention will occur. And such a convention would presumably give the party elites a lot more clout to decide the GOP nominee and also work against a candidate such as Ron Paul who is viewed with disfavor by the elites.

In August 2010, the Republican Party [adopted](#) the following new rule:

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.

The only state to be exempted from that rule was Florida, which was granted permission to be a “winner take all” state, giving Florida even greater significance.

Republicans opted for the new rule after they witnessed the protracted battle between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in 2008. The *Huffington Post* [reported](#) at the time:

Don’t look for a quick winner in the race for the Republican presidential nomination. After watching Democrats successfully ride their historic primary battle between Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama all the way to the White House in 2008, the Republicans quietly adopted a new rule designed to extend their nominating process this time around.

The rule limits the ability of candidates to win large numbers of delegates in early primaries and caucuses — those held before April — because delegates must be awarded in proportion to the votes a candidate receives.

A proportional system likely would have made it more difficult for McCain to secure the nomination in 2008. Fairvote.org [notes](#):

Consider the 2008 Republican nomination contest. John McCain secured an essentially insurmountable lead on February 5, Super Tuesday. Sen. McCain had become the frontrunner heading into Super Tuesday by winning three key primaries: South Carolina, Florida and New Hampshire. His average percentage share in those contests was just 34.5%, and he never even broke the 40% threshold. Even on February 5, he won only 3 states with a majority of the vote.



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Although McCain on Super Tuesday did not capture a majority of the popular vote (and did not, in fact, ever reach a majority of 50% of votes cast in primaries), McCain's disproportionately large delegate count forced his leading opponents to drop out of the race.

*Daily Kos* contends that had the new rule been adopted before the 2008 Republican primary, there may have been a three-way race between McCain, Mitt Romney, and Mike Huckabee, and a so-called "brokered convention" — when a political candidate has not secured enough delegates to officially "win" a primary, prompting a process in which there are a series of votes and delegates are able to switch to a different candidate, eventually leading to a majority of delegates for one candidate. *Daily Kos* asserts:

In 2008, the Republican primary contest was decided quickly and relatively painlessly only because there were winner-take-all rules at the time. Those rules have been changed. If you take the current proportional delegate rules and apply them to the results of the 2008 race through Feb 5th, when the race was still heavily contested, something very surprising happens. John McCain, who took a commanding lead under the winner-take-all rules in effect in most states, instead ends up behind Mitt Romney by eight delegates (with a confidence factor of plus or minus 5 delegates). The standings, with more than half the delegates decided, would have been as follows.

Romney 439

McCain 431

Huckabee 247

Other 114

With significantly few "winner takes all" primaries this time around, candidates will be encouraged to stay in the race longer, and with more delegates to their name, they will have more leverage at the convention.

It also increases the likelihood that no candidate will earn at least 50 percent of the delegates. And of course, if more candidates enter the race, there would be an even greater likelihood of a brokered convention — giving party elites an opportunity to wheel and deal to get the candidate of their choice, who of course may not be the candidate who finishes the primary season with a plurality of delegates.

But how likely is it that more candidates will enter the race at this late stage? Is this something that party elites are even contemplating? According to the *Wall Street Journal*:

Efforts are underway by some wealthy Republican donors and a group of conservative leaders to investigate whether a new Republican candidate could still get into the presidential race. The talk is still preliminary and somewhat wishful, but it reflects dissatisfaction with the two leading candidates, Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney.

The chatter about potential new entrants includes former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, businessman Donald Trump, Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, and South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint.

A candidate who does well in the primaries but is not well-liked by the establishment should be cautious of the lengths to which Republican elites may go in order to bring about a brokered convention that they could then use to their advantage. As of now, the candidate who would seem to be the most likely victim of such a scheme is Ron Paul.



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