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## Do Iowa and New Hampshire deserve their pivotal role in the primaries? Track record says 'No'

by JOSHUA SPIVAK

With a month to go before the elections, the kick-off states of Iowa and New Hampshire loom large in the press and the popular imagination. By virtue of being the first real votes, the two states receive an enormous amount of attention. With the exception of Bill Clinton in 1992, every major party candidate since 1976 has won at least one of the two states before capturing the nomination. But their track record leads to questions as to how much weight the Democrats and Republicans should give to the lead-off states.

The two states have faced a good deal of criticism over their lack of diversity and how these mainly white, more rural states do not resemble the overall electorate. But a larger question may be a possible history of boosting poor candidates and, especially in the case of Iowa, repeatedly botching the actual technical work of running its election.

Iowa has gained fame for its caucus system. Rather than using the intuitive system of primaries, whereby the voters go in and choose their favorite candidate, Iowa works with a confusing caucus system, which generally rewards party activists. The larger issue is that caucuses don't just confuse voters and the media, they also appear to confuse Iowa's own leaders. There are still questions about the results of the 1988 Democratic caucus, where Congressman Dick Gephardt (D-Mo) was declared the winner on election night, though it may be that Senator Paul Simon (D-Ill) actually should have won the vote. In 2012, Mitt Romney came out as the reported winner on election night, but almost three weeks later, it was revealed that Rick Santorum ended up with the most votes and most delegates. Since Iowa provides momentum more than actual delegates, this failure to have an accurate result on election night can prove devastating to a campaign.

For Republicans, Iowa has proven more of a stumbling block than a launching pad for their most successful candidates. Three of their last four presidential winners, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Donald Trump, lost in Iowa before winning the nomination. The only Republican to win both the Caucus and the presidency has been George W. Bush.

Democratic presidential winners have done better — Carter and Obama were viewed as the winners in Iowa (Clinton didn't really have a contestable Iowa caucus: In 1992, Iowa Senator Tom Harkin ran and received 76 percent of the vote) and, at least from that standpoint, has proven to be a good jumping-off point. The same cannot be said for the Democrats in the second state, New Hampshire.

Only one Democrat won a contested New Hampshire primary and proceeded to victory in November — Jimmy Carter. Barack Obama and Bill Clinton both lost the primaries in the Granite State, though Bill Clinton successfully treated his second place finish as a comeback.

New Hampshire has a long history of using its primary to upset a leading contender, especially a sitting president. Both Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson bowed out of running for reelection after a surprising strong showing from challengers in New Hampshire. Pat Buchanan's insurgent campaign in 1992 didn't win the race, but it pointed out serious problems for George H.W. Bush.

The two states have managed to keep their hammerlock on the nomination process despite the fact that they have a relatively paltry historical claim to be path breakers in starting primaries and caucuses. The first state to adopt a presidential primary was Florida in 1904. New Hampshire's first presidential primary was in 1916, which itself missed the first real primary fight in US history when Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft faced off for the nomination in 1912. New Hampshire's first contested primary had to wait until 1912. Iowa is an even more recent player on the stage — its first seriously contested caucus only came in 1972.

Iowa and New Hampshire will both receive a good deal of attention thanks to their place at the front of the aisle in the nomination process and the fact that candidates almost always seem to need to win one of the two states in order to capture the nomination. But at this point, both parties should be questioning whether the track record suggests that these two states deserve their lead-off roles.

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