

Deliberation Topic: Should the order of presidential primaries and caucuses be changed?

TEACHER NOTE: to use this resource in your classroom - click 'file' and then click 'make a copy' to create your own Google Doc version to edit as needed and share with your students.

Introduction

The modern process for determining party nominees for president was established in the second half of the 20th century. Since this time, Iowa and New Hampshire have played a significant role in candidates' campaign strategies and selecting the eventual nominees from each party. These early contests in Iowa and New Hampshire have been criticized for their oversized influence in this process and their lack of diversity. This lesson explores the history of the modern system of primaries and caucuses, the reasons for this structure and various proposals to change the order of these contests. This deliberation has students hear from journalists, experts and candidates in order to answer the question: **Should the order of presidential primaries and caucuses be changed?** *This deliberation has also been modified to include an analysis of the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) decision to change its primary and caucus schedule for the 2024 presidential election.*

Objectives and Outcomes

- Students will be able to identify the factors and events that led to the current system of nominating presidential candidates.
- Students will describe the current process in which parties select their nominees using primaries and caucuses.
- Students will evaluate the arguments for and against changing the current order of presidential primaries and caucuses.

Lesson Plans

Pick and choose from the following strategies to engage your students in the issue.

1. **Warm-Up Activity.** Choose from one of the following strategies to activate prior knowledge and engage your students.
 - a. **A/B writing.** Write the following statements on the board. Instruct students to choose the statement with which they most agree and then free write for two minutes explaining why they support that statement. Allow several students, at least one for each statement, to share their thinking with the class.
 - i. The presidential nominating process should focus more on states that are representative of the nation.
 - ii. The presidential nominating process should make it easier for lesser known candidates to gain support.
 - b. **Think-Pair-Share.** Write the prompt on the board: **"Should the order of presidential primaries and caucuses be changed?"** Have students silently write down their thoughts and then discuss them with a partner. Give several pairs an opportunity to share their examples.

- c. **Take a Stand.** Ask the students: “**The current process for which parties choose their nominee is unfair**” Have students line up on a continuum based on their opinion from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Ask several students from different points on the line to share their reasoning and defend their position.
2. **Vocabulary Preview.** Before watching the videos, reading the background articles, and using the additional resources, have students define the terms on the [Vocabulary Preview Chart](#). This could be done as a jigsaw or individually, and depending on available time it may be completed for homework or in class.
3. **Background knowledge.** Have students read the [background articles](#), watch the [background videos](#), and complete the accompanying background questions and/or use the [note-taking chart](#). Depending on available time, this may be done in class or for homework. Additionally, students should look for references to the vocabulary terms, and write quotes of the terms being used on the [Vocabulary Preview Chart](#).
4. **Deliberate.** Have students watch the videos calling for or against changing the order of presidential primaries and caucuses. While watching the videos, students should complete the [note-taking chart](#) for each side’s argument. Then, choose one of the activities from the [Deliberations website](#) to engage your students.
5. **Assess.** In addition to engaging in the Deliberation activity above, you may choose to have students complete an independent assignment to assess their mastery of the topic.
 - a. Have students provide a written response to the following prompt:
 - i. *Should the order of presidential primaries and caucuses be changed?*
 - b. Based on their research, have the students create a list arguments for and against changing the order of presidential primaries and caucuses. Students should rank these arguments from strongest/most convincing to weakest/least convincing. For the strongest and weakest arguments, students should explain why they feel this way.
6. **Follow Up Activity.** In advance of the 2024 presidential election, the Democratic National Committee revised its primary election schedule. Have your students view [this clip](#) announcing the changes and then review [this article from Ballotpedia](#) explaining what changed. Have your students respond to the following questions:
 - a. What change did the Democratic National Committee (DNC) make to its primary and caucus schedule for the 2024 presidential election?
 - b. Does this change mirror your findings from the deliberation?
 - c. Do you agree with the changes? Why or why not?
7. **Extension.**
 - a. **Research Your State Primary/Caucus-** Using the [270towin website](#) research your state’s primary or caucus for each party. Determine when it is and what type of contest it is. Based on the information from the video clip, determine if your state should change the date or type of nominating contest. Explain your rationale.
 - b. **Primary Poll Comparisons-** Using the [RealClear Politics website](#), choose a state and a national poll to compare. Provide the following information based on your polls.
 - i. Describe the two polls (dates and results)
 - ii. How does the state poll compare to the national poll?
 - iii. What assumptions can you make based on this information?

- iv. When this poll was taken what might have contributed to the results of this poll?
- v. Which is more important during the primary process: state or national polling? Defend your answer.

a. **Additional Prompts:**

- In your opinion, would a nation-wide primary be successful? Provide support for your answer based on the video clips.
- Can it be a wise strategy for candidates to skip the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primaries? Explain your answer.
- How has technology impacted how candidates campaign during the party nomination process?
- What factors have led to the current system for nominating candidates becoming more nationalized?
- Is it important for early primary states to be representative of the nation? Explain your arguments.