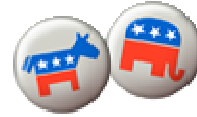


# The Caucus

The New York Times Politics Blog



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## The Results: It's All in the Details

By [Katharine O. Seelye](#)

Among the mounds of data we're sifting through from Super Tuesday, fun facts keep emerging.

We're writing about three of them here: the closeness of the popular vote; why Senator Barack Obama keeps winning caucuses; and the record turnout in several states.

\* First, the popular vote. If you add up the Democratic votes from 21 of the 22 states that voted yesterday, you'd see that Senator Hillary Clinton won by a hair. In fact, if this had been a national election, we might be in recount-ville right now.

These numbers, tallied by The New York Times, cover the top three vote-getters. They are based on incomplete returns and do not include Alaska because its results did not reflect the preferences of voters but of delegates elected to the state convention:

Mrs. Clinton: 7,427,700, or 48.83 percent;

Mr. Obama: 7,369,798, or 48.45 percent;

John Edwards: 411,740, or 2.70 percent.

Without Mr. Edwards, who has dropped out, the percentages would be:

Mrs. Clinton: 50.19 percent;

Mr. Obama: 49.80 percent.

Either way, it's hard to imagine an electorate more evenly divided, or how this race gets decided anytime soon. (That's why there are delegates, but that's another story.)

\* Second, Mr. Obama seems to have a knack for winning caucuses.

In the eight states that held caucuses on Super Tuesday, Mr. Obama clearly won seven. The eighth, American Samoa, has not fully reported its results.

In addition to those seven, Mr. Obama won Iowa. Mrs. Clinton has won just one caucus, in Nevada, which was unusual for a variety of reasons, including the large numbers of Latino voters, many of whom supported Mrs. Clinton.

We called up Christopher C. **Hull**, an adjunct professor at Georgetown and author of “Grassroots Rules,” which is about the Iowa caucuses, and asked him why Mr. Obama has won so many caucuses.

Mr. **Hull** said the Obama campaign is just really good at organizing. “It’s about pounding the phone, building your lists, having an exact, hard count and moving supporters to the meetings,” he said.

Plus, Mr. Obama is “a movement,” he said. “A movement is about filling supporters with adrenaline, and that’s exactly what it takes to win a caucus \_ motivated activists who care deeply about their party or a candidate or an issue. He’s winning caucuses because they’re good organizers and because the activists are inspired.”

Charles Cook, author of the Cook Political Report, agreed that Mr. Obama’s strong suit is inspiration, whether it is motivating people to go to a rally (remember the 30,000 who showed up for him and Oprah in South Carolina?) or a caucus.

“Where he really excels is at getting a smaller number of people energized enough to go out and do something,” Mr. Cook said. “The drawback is that that intensity is harder to leverage across a larger universe of a primary electorate. If there were more caucuses, he would be doing even better.”

Because caucuses are lower-turnout events, Mr. Cook said it was “impressive” that he was running so close to Mrs. Clinton in the overall popular vote.

Bill Burton, a spokesman for the Obama campaign, attributed Mr. Obama’s success in caucuses to “strong grassroots organizations, smart committed staff and a candidate who’s running his campaign like he’s a community organizer.”

At the same time, Mrs. Clinton has expressed reservations about the whole idea of caucuses, suggesting, for one thing, that they disenfranchise voters.

Today during a news conference, she made her bluntest comments to date when she was asked whether Mr. Obama had an organizational advantage that proved itself in the caucuses.

“Well, you know, caucuses historically draw the most activist members of a party,” Mrs. Clinton said. “And that’s fine. But they aren’t the most democratic way of letting people express their preferences. Primaries are far more democratic, small ‘d’ democratic.”

She said she thought her husband, the former president, had never won a caucus. “I am more interested in what happens when a large number of people get to vote,” she said. “They get to vote all day. They don’t have to show up for two hours between \_ or they can’t if they’re

working. I prefer primaries. I'll just be really honest with you. I think a primary gives people a much better idea of what we have in a general election. And very often, caucuses have driven candidates to one side or the other.”

\* Third, voters are continuing to turn out in record numbers.

Turnout yesterday of 27 percent of eligible citizens broke the previous record turnout of 25.9 percent set during the 1972 primaries, according to American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate.

The numbers do not include the eight caucus states or California, which has not finished counting its absentee ballots.

New Hampshire takes the prize for the highest turnout in both parties. It had the highest turnout of citizens voting Democratic, with 28.5 percent, and the highest turnout to vote Republican, with 23.3 percent.

What's astounding to see is what constitutes a record turnout, and how few voters have turned out in earlier years. In Utah, for example, where eligible citizens who voted Democrat had a “record” turnout this year of 7.8 percent, just 2.8 percent went to the polls in 1992.

Republicans in Utah did a bit better, with a record 18 percent of eligible citizens voting Republican there compared with a record 6.4 percent in 2000.

And some set records, but by the slimmest of margins. In New York, for example, a record 13.6 percent of eligible citizens voted Democrat, but the previous record, set in 1988, was 12.8 percent.

**CORRECTION:** An earlier version of this post incorrectly described the percentages of turnout in New Hampshire, Utah and New York. The figures were correct, however they referred to the percentage of all eligible citizens who voted Democratic or Republican in those primaries, not all Democratic or Republican voters.