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*Turnout and Representation: Caucuses Versus Primaries**

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Since the work of V. O. Key, several surveys have tested representation in primary elections. In many states, however, open-precinct caucuses and conventions supplement or replace primaries as a basis for "grass roots" party organization and in presidential delegate selection. Contrary to most assumptions, one state party's open-precinct caucuses were found to perform as well as equivalent primaries in representing policy, candidate or party-related attitudes, although performing somewhat worse in demographic representation.

Since the pioneering work of V. O. Key (1956), political scientists have become increasingly concerned with representation in primary elections. Following Key, other studies using survey research have investigated demographic, issue, and candidate preference similarities between voters and nonvoters, particularly in presidential primaries. Results demonstrate that primary voters are typically of a higher socioeconomic status than nonvoters, while significant candidate and issue preference differences occur less frequently (Ranney, 1968, 1972; Ranney and Epstein, 1966; DiNitto and Smithers, 1972).

Concluding one such study on presidential primaries in 1968, Ranney (1972, p. 36) has observed that little research is yet available by which to judge the *relative* merits of primaries versus non-primary strategies. Admittedly, primaries are the best-publicized of nominating procedures in American politics, particularly for presidential delegate-selection. Yet, primaries are not the *only* way of choosing delegates; in 1976 about 20 states relied on a precinct caucus-convention system to select delegates. Caucus-convention systems are also used to carry out a number of other party activities—

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such as endorsing candidates, selecting party officials, and discussing issues (National Municipal League, 1967, 1972). However, very little is yet known about representation in these nonprimary systems. To investigate the quality of representation in one specific caucus-convention system, data on Minnesota in 1972 are presented here.

The Data

Data on caucus-convention representation presented herein are based on three surveys. The first is a survey of 600 Minnesota residents in 1972 reporting actual caucus attendance; only Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) caucus attenders are available, since too few Republican caucus attenders were located to report. The second survey is of Twin Cities-area DFLers, which reports *intention* to attend the 1972 spring caucuses.

To allow a further, direct comparison with Minnesota primary voters and nonvoters, a survey of DFL voters and nonvoters for the 1972 Minnesota fall primary election is also reported here. Taken together, these permit a comparison of the quality of representation afforded in party caucuses and primaries, at least in one state for one election year.¹

Representation and Turnout

The low turnout characteristic of caucus and convention systems aggravates fears of serious misrepresentation. For example, in 1972, turnout in the presidential delegate-selecting caucuses averaged about six percent of eligible Democrats (Coalition for a Democratic Majority [CDM], 1974). Past political research has suggested that low turnout is particularly likely to involve misrepresentation (Tingsten, 1963; Key, 1956; CDM, 1974).

Minnesota's caucus-convention turnout, as elsewhere, was indeed markedly lower than nonpresidential primary turnout in Minnesota or in presidential races elsewhere. In 1972, statewide caucus turnout ranged from 8 to 11 percent of self-identified GOP or DFL supporters. By contrast, in the 1972 fall Minnesota primary, 28 percent (GOP) or 34 percent (DFL) of party identifiers voted, although only state and local races were contested. These participation rates have led

¹ Surveys are taken from the Minnesota Poll, number 301, March 1972 for the 1972 statewide sample. The Twin Cities-area survey was taken from Metro-Poll, no. 37, January 1972. Primary data were from Minnesota Poll, no. 320, September 1972. Data were made available by the Minneapolis Tribune News Research Department.

critics to suggest that party caucuses are especially likely to be controlled by dedicated but atypical party activists (CDM, 1974). Yet, as V. O. Key (1956, p. 145) has noted, low turnout is not, ipso facto, equivalent to misrepresentation. To test this argument empirically, three commonly-applied criteria for representation were investigated.

Socioeconomic and Demographic Representation

Socioeconomic and demographic differences between DFL caucus participants and nonparticipants are summarized in Table 1. Using a chi-square cutoff level of .05, 1972 Minnesota DFL attenders proved more likely to be male, younger, of a higher educational level, and to report no church affiliation. DFL caucus intenders in the Twin Cities area were better educated and hailed from higher SES families.² In short, where differences proved significant, caucus activists consistently proved of a higher status than those not participating.

How do these findings compare to primary voters and nonvoters in Minnesota or elsewhere? The fall 1972 Minnesota sample of primary voters and nonvoters showed fewer statistically significant differences than did the caucus data. Further, the average absolute percentage difference between voters and nonvoters on eight comparable questions was considerably smaller than differences between caucus activists and nonactivists. (See Table 1.) Outside Minnesota, data are less readily comparable; however, primary representativeness studies typically report statistically significant differences for about a quarter to a half of the indicators reported (Ranney and Epstein, 1966; Ranney, 1968, 1972).³ As Ranney (1972, p. 27) has suggested, such studies indicate that primary electorates are themselves "demographically quite unrepresentative of the non-participating party identifiers." While caucuses may appear to perform marginally worse than primaries, the limited data available at present do not suggest that either institution consistently represents party identifiers particularly well in this area.⁴

² Throughout this report, statistical significance is reported at the .05 level.

³ For 1966 Wisconsin Democratic primary voters, published data on six of eight categories reported in Table 1 for the Minnesota study indicate an average absolute percentage difference of 9.0 percent. Three of six comparisons were statistically significant at the .05 level. However, not all categories were comparable to those reported herein (Ranney, 1968, pp. 229-230).

⁴ The best comparisons for the Minnesota data are probably with neighboring Wisconsin. Fortunately most of the primary representation studies presently available are for that state.

TABLE 1
Demographic and Socioeconomic Comparisons of Primary Voters and Nonvoters,
And of Caucus Activists and Nonactivists, 1972

Category	Minnesota 1972		Twin Cities-area 1972		Minnesota Primary Election, 1972	
	DFL Caucus Attendees	DFL Non- Attendees	DFL Caucus Intenders	DFL Non- Intenders	DFL Primary Voters	DFL Non- Voters
Sex						
Male	79.2	48.6**	55.6	45.0	45.6	45.5
Female	20.8	51.4	44.4	55.0	54.4	54.5
Age						
18 to 29	54.2	26.0***	31.7	26.1	31.0	26.5
30 to 59	29.2	51.5	55.6	54.1	49.4	51.0
60 plus	16.7	22.6	12.7	19.7	19.6	22.5
Income ^a						
\$ 3,000 to 4,999	20.8	22.1	12.7	24.8**	29.1	28.0
5,000 to 9,999	37.5	36.6			29.7	23.8
10,000 to 19,999	37.5	35.8	62.5	66.9	32.9	41.1
20,000 +	4.2	4.0	24.9	7.9	6.3	4.2
Education						
less than High School	20.9	29.4***	17.5	32.1***	28.5	34.3
High School	16.7	45.3	34.9	46.3	30.4	29.7
High School plus	61.2	25.0	47.6	21.6	41.1	36.0

Church Affiliation						
Catholic	41.7	37.0*	34.9	43.6	36.1	34.9
Jewish	4.2	1.1	3.2	1.8	2.5	.6
Lutheran, Other Protestant	34.4	55.8	49.2	49.5	52.6	57.1
Other, None						
Own Home or Rent						
Rent	25.0	24.3	69.8	78.0	26.6	27.4
Own	75.0	73.9	30.2	21.1	72.8	71.8
Union Member?						
Yes, now	8.3	21.4	20.6	28.4	19.0	23.3
No, used to belong	29.2	23.8	33.3	23.9	26.6	22.8
No, never belonged	62.5	54.8	46.0	46.3	54.4	53.3
Chief-wage-earner member?						
Yes, now	20.8	33.5	34.9	44.0	30.4	39.2*
No, used to belong	25.0	22.8	31.7	21.6	25.9	19.9
No, never belonged	54.2	40.6	28.6	29.4	43.7	38.6
Total N	24-276		63-218		158-347	
Number of Statistical						
Significant Differences	4 of 8		2 of 8		1 of 8	
Average Absolute Value						
of Percentage Differences	13.1		8.7		3.0	

*** significant at .001 level

** significant at .01 level

* significant at .05 level

^a Income for 1972 Twin-Cities respondents was measured in three categories: under \$5000; \$5000 to \$19,999; and over \$20,000.

TABLE 2

Issue Responses Among 1972 Minnesota Democratic
Caucus Attenders and Nonattenders

	DFL Caucus Attenders	DFL Non- Attenders
Pro-environmental regulation		
Low support	20.8	20.2
Medium support	29.2	37.3
High support	50.1	42.4
Support for legal rights for youths		
Low support	12.5	29.0**
Medium support	0	19.2
High support	87.5	51.9
Support for sexual equality in job practices		
Pro-male	39	71**
Pro-sexual equality	61	29
Attitude to Taiwan takeover by mainland China		
Would be bad	54.2	47.8
Not so bad	37.5	27.2
No opinion	4.2	23.9
Other	4.2	1.1
Gun possession		
Yes, has	45.8	56.5
No, doesn't	54.2	43.1
No answer	0	.4
Groups in U.S. named as overly-powerful		
Press	0	1
Parties, Politicians	14	15
Rich, business	52	41
Labor	10	7
Youth, Hippies, Students, Blacks, Communists, Minorities	7	22
Others	17	14

(TABLE 2 Continued)

	DFL Caucus Attendees	DFL Non- Attendees
Belief that Nixon-ITT settlement was illegal		
Believe	83.3	45.3**
Don't believe	8.3	23.9
No opinion	8.3	30.4
Other	0	.4
Indian fishing claims—1st question		
Not supportive of Indian claims	50.0	53.3
Supportive	45.8	39.9
No opinion	4.2	6.2
Other	0	.7
Indian fishing claims—2nd question		
Not supportive	50.0	46.0
Supportive	37.5	40.9
No opinion	8.3	12.3
Other	4.2	.7

***significant at .001

**significant at .01

*significant at .05

Average Absolute Value of Percentage Differences 13.6

Policy Attitudes

Unlike primary voters, caucus-convention attenders may also introduce, discuss, and pass or reject policy resolutions. Considerable controversy surrounding the caucus-convention systems challenges the accuracy with which caucus activists represent the policy views of party identifiers (CDM, 1974; Kirkpatrick, 1975).

In 1972, nine policy questions were asked of the statewide sample of DFL caucus attenders and nonattending DFLers. No statistically significant differences were found on six of the nine issues—environmental regulation, feelings toward a Communist takeover on

Taiwan, groups named as overly powerful, gun possession, and Indian fishing claims. On three other issues, DFL caucus attenders differed from nonattending party identifiers—on youth rights, the Nixon-ITT settlement, and sexual equality in employment. Only on the sexual equality question, however, were DFL caucus attenders *both* more liberal than party identifiers *and* in disagreement with the party's non-attending majority.

Twin Cities DFL caucus intenders differed significantly from nonintenders on nine of 38 issues. On only four, however, were majorities reversed between the two groups. Where differences existed, caucus intenders (as in the statewide DFL group above) were generally more "liberal" than nonintending DFL rank-and-file. DFL caucus intenders were *less* willing to tolerate censorship or to feel pornography would have harmful effects, *more* accepting of suicide, *more* supportive of women's independence, and *more* likely to say that husbands and wives should share equally in family decisions. DFL caucus intenders in the Twin Cities were also *more* supportive of venereal disease education in public schools, and *more* supportive of subsidized public transit.

For the Minnesota 1972 Democratic primary voters and non-voters, responses to 12 questions were compared; on none of these issues were any significant differences found between primary voters and nonvoters. A summary of the difference between caucus or primary participants and nonparticipants is indicated in Table 3.

Results on statewide and presidential primaries outside Minnesota are more mixed, and the data often limited or not directly comparable. In most such cases, few statistically significant differences appear between party-identified primary voters and nonvoters. However, on particularly controversial issues—e.g., the Vietnam war, student unrest, and domestic welfare policies in 1968—several significant differences do appear (Ranney and Epstein, 1966; Ranney, 1968, 1972). Given these inconclusive results outside Minnesota, the argument that caucus attenders are greatly less representative of party rank-and-file than are primary voters remains as yet open for more conclusive evidence.

Candidate and Party Attitudes

A final criterion for representation involves candidate and party-related attitudes. Indeed, a strong argument may be made that while the importance of demographic or policy attitude similarity between

TABLE 3

Issue Response Differences Between Participants and
Nonparticipants for 1972 DFL Party Caucuses or Primary

	1972 DFL Caucus Attendees vs. Nonattendees	1972 DFL Twin-Cities DFL Caucus Attendees vs. Nonattendees	Minnesota 1972 Primary Election, Primary Voters vs. Nonvoters
Number of Issues Compared	9	38	12
Number of Statistically Significant Differences (at Chi-square of .05)	3 of 9	9 of 38	0 of 12
Average Absolute Value of Percentage Differences	13.6	6.7	2.8

activists and nonactivists is uncertain, both primary voters and caucus attenders *do* decide on candidates or delegates for candidates.

DFL respondents in the 1972 Minnesota statewide sample were asked attitudes toward four public officials. DFL caucus attenders did not differ significantly in attitudes toward (DFL) Senator Mondale. (See Table 4.) For incumbent (DFL) Governor Anderson and then-President Nixon, DFL attenders agreed with their party's non-attending majority, but were significantly more favorable (to Anderson) or unfavorable (to Nixon). More complicated were attitudes toward Senator Humphrey, then contesting the Democratic presidential nomination with George McGovern and others. DFL caucus attenders were less favorable to Humphrey than DFL nonattendees, but chi-square differences fell at .07, and a plurality of caucus attenders agreed with a majority of DFL nonattendees in reporting a favorable attitude to Humphrey.

For the Twin Cities-area sample, questions included presidential preference and the amount of interest in the 1972 presidential election contest. Here, DFL caucus intenders reported significant differences on presidential preference; most of this difference, however, resulted from the fewer caucus intenders reporting "no preference" among

TABLE 4
Candidate Attitude Responses for 1972 Minnesota
DFL Caucus Attenders and Nonattenders

Attitude Toward:	DFL Attenders (%)	DFL Identifying Nonattenders (%)
Governor Anderson (DFL)		
Negative	12.5	28.8
Neutral	8.3	20.6
Favorable	79.2	50.5
(Chi-square significant at .01)		
President Nixon (GOP)		
Negative	83.3	55.5
Neutral	4.2	19.2
Favorable	12.5	25.3
(Chi-square significant at .05)		
Senator Mondale (DFL)		
Negative	4.2	17.8
Neutral	20.8	24.6
Favorable	75.0	57.7
(Chi-square not significant)		
Senator Humphrey (DFL)		
Negative	41.7	22.4
Neutral	12.5	9.3
Favorable	45.8	68.3
(Chi-square not significant; Chi-square = .07)		

presidential hopefuls. No significant difference was found in the amount of interest voiced in the presidential contest. (See Table 5.)

Comparing DFL primary voters and nonvoters in 1972, significant differences were reported in six of 17 areas—intent to vote in November, perceived election importance, personal interest in the election, best presidential candidate to handle Vietnam, and in evaluations of Minnesota Governor Anderson, Senator Mondale, and GOP Senatorial candidate Hansen.

Overall, how do Minnesota caucus activists compare with pri-

TABLE 5
Presidential Preference of Twin Cities-Area
DFL Caucus Intenders and Nonintenders, 1972

Presidential Preference	DFL Caucus	
	Intenders (%)	Nonintenders (%)
None	19.0	36.2
Nixon	3.2	4.6
Muskie	28.6	17.9
McGovern	12.7	3.2
Humphrey	27.0	31.7
Kennedy	3.2	2.8
Lindsay	0	1.4
Chisholm	4.8	0
Don't Care	0	1.4
Other	1.6	.9

(Chi-square significant at .001)

mary voters, in Minnesota and elsewhere, in representing candidate preferences and party-related issues? Past studies indicate that primary voters usually reflect the preferences of nonvoters fairly closely. Nonetheless, as before with issue attitudes, some significant differences outside Minnesota have been reported, especially in presidential primaries allowing crossovers (Ranney and Epstein, 1966; Ranney, 1972; Morris, et al., 1976). While the Minnesota data may suggest that primaries may achieve a marginally more accurate degree of representation than do the state party caucuses, mixed results elsewhere again suggest the need for further research before concluding one institution performs markedly superior to the other.

Summary and Discussion

The battle over party rules and election procedures is an old and enduring one in American politics (Ranney, 1975). Recently, the increasing number of presidential primaries has spurred renewed debate over nominating procedures. Many critics complain of the proliferating numbers of primaries; others respond that only primaries

TABLE 6

Candidate and Party Response Differences Between Participants and Nonparticipants for 1972 DFL Party Primary and Caucuses

	1972 Minnesota DFL Caucus Attendees v. Nonattendees	DFL Twin Cities Caucus Intenders v. Nonintenders	DFL Primary voters v. Nonvoters
Number of issues	4	2	17
Number of statistically significant differences (Chi-square of .05)	2 of 4	1 of 2	6 of 17
Average Absolute Value of percentage differences	16.1	7.3	3.7

offer voters an effective opportunity to register their candidate preferences accurately, directly, and simply.

One alternative to presidential primaries exists in the open-precinct caucus-convention systems. These caucus-convention systems may offer other "benefits" to party organizations—in identifying potential activists and volunteers, permitting grass-roots issue debate, and allowing face-to-face meetings of party activists. Caucus-convention states also reduce presidential candidate expenses by lowering media costs, allow candidates to avoid being involuntarily listed on primary ballots, and still permit caucus participants a full range of candidate choice. As well, caucus-convention systems apparently avoid the problems of crossovers, of increasingly complicated procedures for ballot access, and of the division between the presidential preference primary (the "beauty contest") and actual delegate-selection.

Yet one major drawback to the caucus-convention alternative has been the small numbers typically attending, and accompanying fears of misrepresentation. Data from one state's caucus system suggest that low numbers of attendees apparently have *not* led to misrepresentation much greater than that typically found in primary elections—at least in policy, candidate, and party-related attitudes. In

these areas, Minnesota caucus attenders appear to do little worse a job of representing party inactives than have primary voters in Minnesota or elsewhere.

This largely negative finding may be unexpected from the vehemence of the ongoing debate on presidential selection procedures. Admittedly, data from other states and elections are yet needed to reconfirm or contradict these findings; such data would permit a more extensive evaluation of this question of representation. If no larger differences appear, however, then a preference for one institution or the other may well rest on other criteria—e.g., whether the primary's greater number of participants offsets the caucus' party-building advantages, or vice versa.

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