

Extra Feature Story

Upcoming Primaries Gain Importance as Candidates Vie for Delegates

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All five Democratic and Republican presidential candidates vowed to fight for each state in upcoming primary elections, following inconclusive results from 24 states on Super Tuesday.

Among the Republicans, Senator John McCain from Arizona appeared to solidify his role as the front-runner, but still faces competition from resurgent former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney.

The picture on the Democratic side remained far murkier. New York Sen. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote in major states like California and New York, while Illinois Sen. Barack Obama won more states.

But the real fight was for delegates to this summer's national convention.

As of Wednesday afternoon, nearly a third of the delegates up on Super Tuesday had yet to be awarded, meaning the race for the nomination remains wide open.

"The Republican and Democratic presidential contests began diverging Tuesday, leaving the Democrats facing a long and potentially divisive nomination battle and the Republicans closer to an opportunity to put aside deep internal divisions and rally around a nominee," Adam Nagourney wrote in a news analysis for The New York Times.

John McCain and the Republicans

The three leading Republican candidates split votes in different regions of the country.

McCain's best showing was in the Northeast and along Route 66 from Illinois to California.

"We still have a ways to go, but we're much closer to the victory we've worked so hard to achieve," McCain said in his home state of Arizona with his family by his side.

Romney did well in his home state of Massachusetts as well as in Western states and among voters who identified themselves as conservatives.

Finally, Huckabee, scored a series of surprisingly strong wins in the South, doing well in the so-called "Bible Belt."

Neck to neck for the Democrats

Democrats are in a tight competition for delegates to the national convention this summer. Each state gets a certain number of delegates based on their population and how much they supported Democrats in the past.

Each state party decides how to choose those delegates. Many are assigned in primaries while others are selected in state conventions and caucuses.

Delegates then travel to Denver on August 25 to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate.

Senator Barack Obama won more states than rival Senator Hillary Clinton, but her campaign won a significant victory in California -- by far the nation's most populous state and the crown jewel of every national political race.

It remained to be seen who would get the larger delegate boost coming out of Super Tuesday but as of Wednesday, Clinton had earned 582 delegates, giving her a total of 843, and Obama won 562, for a total of 752. A Democratic candidate needs 2,025 to win the nomination.

Some Democratic watchers say it's possible that the party could get to the national convention without a clear nominee.

"Because of party reforms in the past and a close race for delegates this year, a nightmare scenario is building for the Democratic National Convention in August: It is easy to imagine that Barack Obama could get to Denver with more pledged delegates than Hillary Clinton, but that she could get the nomination based on the votes of the super delegates," Politico reported.

Super delegates are party officials, members of Congress and other high-ranking Democrats who are not selected in a primary or caucus and can vote for whomever they want at the convention.

Exit polls

Exit polls that ask voters to explain who they voted for and why revealed some trends across the nation.

Black and young voters overwhelmingly supported Obama, while women went for Clinton by large margins, the New York Times reported.

But white men -- who had largely voted for former Senator John Edwards before -- appeared to be heading to Obama's camp after his departure from the race.

On candidate qualities, Republicans who voted for McCain valued experience, leadership and the ability to beat Democrats in a general election. He was widely considered the best Republican to be commander in chief.

Romney dominated among people looking for a candidate who shared their conservative values and wanted a hard line against illegal immigrants.

In California, Democrats and Republicans reported the economy was the most important issue facing the country, with about 90 percent of Democrats characterizing it as not so good or poor; about 70 percent of Republicans said the same.

-- Compiled from wire reports and other media sources

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