

States That Moved Their Primaries Earlier and Outcomes

1. California (2020)

- Change: California moved its primary from June to March in 2020 as part of a broader effort to increase its influence in the presidential nomination process. Several large states, including Texas and North Carolina, also shifted to March.
- Date: March 3, 2020 (Super Tuesday).
- Turnout: Primary turnout increased compared to prior presidential primaries, with particularly strong participation in some counties. However, the increase cannot be attributed solely to the date change; the highly competitive 2020 election cycle and heightened voter interest were major contributing factors.
- Results: The earlier date significantly increased California's relevance in the nomination process, leading to more campaign spending, advertising, and candidate engagement than when the state voted in June.

2. Michigan (2020)

- Change: Michigan's 2020 primary was held on March 10, slightly later than its March 8, 2016 primary. The change was incremental rather than a major front-loading shift.
- Date: March 10, 2020.
- Turnout: Michigan experienced high primary turnout, particularly among younger voters, driven largely by a competitive Democratic race rather than the modest date change.
- Results: Michigan played a meaningful role in the Democratic nomination process in 2020, though its influence was more closely tied to electoral competitiveness than to calendar placement alone.

3. Nevada (2016)

- Change: Nevada held its Democratic and Republican caucuses on February 23, 2016, maintaining its early-state status rather than significantly moving earlier.
- Date: February 23, 2016.
- Turnout: While caucuses generally produce lower participation than primaries, Nevada saw increased engagement relative to earlier cycles, particularly among Hispanic voters.
- Results: Nevada's early placement enhanced its influence, but the caucus format continued to limit overall turnout compared to states using primaries.

4. Florida (2012)

- Change: Florida moved its primary from March to January 31, 2012, to exert greater influence in the Republican nomination contest.
- Date: January 31, 2012.
- Turnout: Turnout did not significantly increase and was influenced by a fragmented and prolonged Republican primary race.
- Results: Florida's early primary was influential but controversial. The move violated national party rules, resulting in delegate penalties. This case illustrates both the potential influence and risks of aggressive front-loading.

5. South Carolina (2008, 2016)

- Change: South Carolina has historically protected its early-state status through party rules rather than frequent unilateral date changes.
- Dates:
 - January 2008
 - February 20, 2016
- Turnout: South Carolina saw strong turnout in competitive cycles, particularly in 2016.

- **Results:** The state's early placement allowed it to shape both Democratic and Republican nomination narratives, especially in the South.

States That Adjusted or Reconsidered Early Primary Timing

1. Colorado

- **Change:** Colorado moved to an early February primary in 2008 but canceled its presidential primary in 2012 due to cost concerns and conflicts with national party rules, reverting to caucuses.
- **Later Development:** Colorado reinstated a presidential primary in 2020, scheduled on Super Tuesday.
- **Lesson:** Administrative complexity, cost, and party rule compliance can outweigh the benefits of early timing.

2. Maine

- **Change:** Maine transitioned from a caucus system to a primary election in 2020 and scheduled it for March 3 (Super Tuesday).
- **Purpose:** The change focused on increasing voter access and turnout rather than reversing an unsuccessful early-date experiment.
- **Lesson:** Structural reforms (caucus to primary) can matter as much as timing.

Potential Benefits for Montana Moving Its Primary to March

1. Increased Political Influence

- **Higher Visibility:** A March primary would position Montana earlier in the nomination process, increasing its relevance relative to a June contest.
- **Delegate Impact:** In a competitive race, earlier delegates may carry more strategic value.

2. Boosted Voter Engagement

- **Turnout Potential:** Earlier primaries can see higher engagement when national contests remain competitive.
- **Campaign Activity:** A March primary could bring increased media attention and campaign outreach, improving voter awareness.

3. Alignment with National Trends

- **Super Tuesday Context:** Aligning with Super Tuesday could integrate Montana into a nationally significant voting day, though competition with larger states would remain a factor.

4. Potential Challenges and Considerations

- **Costs:** Earlier elections may increase administrative and operational costs, particularly during winter months.
- **Voter Fatigue:** Large Super Tuesday states can overwhelm voters and dilute attention.
- **Candidate Attention:** Montana's smaller population and delegate count may limit campaign focus compared to larger states.

Conclusion

- **Key Benefit:** Moving Montana's primary to March could increase the state's relevance in the presidential nomination process.
- **Voter Engagement:** Turnout may increase if the national race is competitive and voter education efforts are strong.

- **Long-Term Impact:** Earlier participation could enhance Montana's role in future cycles, though benefits are not guaranteed and must be weighed against logistical, fiscal, and equity concerns.

Projected National Primary Schedule

- **February:** Early-window states
- **March 7, 2028 (Super Tuesday):** Over a dozen states vote
- **March–April:** Large population and battleground states
- **June:** Remaining late-primary states

February 2028 Date States Expected to Hold Primaries:

Tue, Feb 1, 2028 Nevada, New York

Tue, Feb 22, 2028 Michigan

March 2028 Date States Expected to Hold Primaries

Tue, Mar 7, 2028 (Super Tuesday) Alabama, Arkansas, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia

Tue, Mar 14, 2028 Hawaii (R caucus), Mississippi, Washington

Tue, Mar 21, 2028 Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Ohio

Sat, Mar 25, 2028 Louisiana

April 2028 Date States Expected

Tue, Apr 4, 2028 Connecticut, Wisconsin

Tue, Apr 25, 2028 Delaware, Maryland, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania

May 2028 Date States Expected

Tue, May 2, 2028 Indiana

Tue, May 9, 2028 Nebraska, West Virginia

Tue, May 16, 2028 Kentucky, Oregon

June 2028 Date States Expected

Tue, Jun 6, 2028, Montana*, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota, Washington DC

Scenario: March 7, 2028

Candidate & Voter Registration Deadlines

- **Candidate filing period:** November 23, 2027- December 8, 2027
- **Regular voter registration deadline:** 30 days before the election
- **Late registration:** February 8, 2028
- **Deadline for the Secretary of State to receive verified new political party qualification petitions from county election administrators:** November 23, 2027
- **Deadline for governing bodies to call for a local government election to be held on the date of the primary election:** November 28, 2027
- **Deadline for the Secretary of State to certify for the ballot:** December 18, 2027
- **Election administrators must send UOCAVA ballots:** January 22, 2028
- **Ballots are mailed to electors on the absentee list:** February 11, 2028
- **Counting of provisional ballots:** March 13, 2028
- **Post-election audits are conducted by counties:** March 15-20, 2028
- **County canvass completed:** March 21, 2028

Scenario: March 21, 2028

Candidate & Voter Registration Deadlines

- Candidate filing period: December 7, 2027- December 22, 2027
- Regular voter registration deadline: 30 days before the election
- Late registration: February 20, 2028
- Deadline for the Secretary of State to receive verified new political party qualification petitions from county election administrators: December 7, 2027
- Deadline for governing bodies to call for a local government election to be held on the date of the primary election: December 12, 2027
- Deadline for the Secretary of State to certify for the ballot: January 3, 2028
- Election administrators must send UOCAVA ballots: February 6, 2028
- Ballots are mailed to electors on the absentee list: February 26, 2028
- Counting of provisional ballots: March 27, 2028
- Post-election audits are conducted by counties: March 29, 2028- April 3, 2028
- County canvass completed: April 4, 2028

Scenario: April 4, 2028

Candidate & Voter Registration Deadlines

- Candidate filing period: December 21, 2027 – January 5, 2028
- Regular voter registration deadline: 30 days before the election
- Late registration: March 5, 2028
- Deadline for the Secretary of State to receive verified new political party qualification petitions from county election administrators: December 21, 2027
- Deadline for governing bodies to call for a local government election to be held on the date of the primary election: December 26, 2027
- Deadline for the Secretary of State to certify for the ballot: January 17, 2028
- Election administrators must send UOCAVA ballots: February 20, 2028
- Ballots are mailed to electors on the absentee list: March 11, 2028
- Counting of provisional ballots: April 10, 2028
- Post-election audits are conducted by counties: April 12, 2028 – April 17, 2028
- County canvass completed: April 18, 2028

Tradeoffs for Montana

- Potential Benefits
- Earlier relevance in presidential nominations
- Increased early voter engagement
- Potential Downsides
- Compressed timelines
- Weather-related access issues
- Higher administrative burden early in election year (holiday schedule)

School Special Purpose District Election May 2, 2028

Candidate & Voter Registration Deadlines

- **Candidate filing period: December 10, 2027 – February 7, 2028**
- **Regular voter registration deadline: 30 days before the election**
- **Late registration: April 2, 2028**
- **Deadline for governing bodies to call for election: February 22, 2028**
- **Deadline to certify for the ballot: March 23, 2028**
- **Ballots available: April 12, 2028**
- **Ballots are mailed to electors: April 12-17, 2028**
- **Counting of provisional ballots: May 8, 2028**