



# Unit 16: The New Hampshire Primary

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## Section 1: Introduction

The New Hampshire presidential primary is one of the state's most cherished traditions. In fact, across the United States, New Hampshire is best known as the state where anyone who wants to be president needs to impress ordinary voters. Because of the New Hampshire primary, Granite Staters take very seriously their civic duty to become informed voters.

As you learn more about the New Hampshire primary, ask yourself the following questions:

- Why does New Hampshire hold the first presidential primary?
- How do the traditions of the New Hampshire primary encourage voting?
- What impact does the New Hampshire primary have on U.S. presidential elections?
- What role does the average person play in the New Hampshire primary?



## Section 2: What Is a Primary?

If you've lived in New Hampshire during a presidential election, it seems like it goes on for months and months—and it does! That's because the people running for president need to run in not one election but two.

The first election in the presidential race is called a primary election. A primary election helps each political party decide who will represent them in the general election. The general election is when Americans actually vote for who will become president.

*Video: Mason Explains: How a Primary Works*

Electing a President! Every four years, the United States chooses a president. But how do the different political parties pick who gets to run? A primary, of course! This video explains what a primary is, why primaries are important, and New Hampshire's extra-special job as the very first primary for each presidential election.

*Why is New Hampshire so important to the presidential primary?*

New Hampshire is important because it is the first state to hold its primary election at the beginning of each presidential campaign, which happens every four years. It's the first test to see what voters think of all the candidates and who might be the best person to win the general election.

Before each New Hampshire primary, there are usually lots of people running for president. But after the New Hampshire primary, the people who didn't get very many votes start to drop out of the race. Those who stay in the race move onto the next state primary. Some of the people who don't do well in that next state primary will drop out of the race and so on through each



state primary. Eventually, each political party will end up with just one candidate who will become the nominee for that party.

The people of New Hampshire play an important role in the New Hampshire primary because it's their votes that determine who wins the primary election. That's what it means to live in a democracy! The people decide who will run the government. And since New Hampshire has the first-in-the-nation primary, the voters in this state have a civic duty to vet the candidates carefully. The rest of the country is counting on Granite Staters to practice good citizenship and to make the right decision at the polls.

### **Let's Review!**

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. Electing a President: Every four years, America elects a president. That process starts in New Hampshire.
2. Two Parties in American Politics: There are two major parties in American politics, and each party nominates one person to represent them in the presidential election.
3. Choosing Presidential Nominees: The parties choose their nominee by holding a series of elections in each of the states. These state elections are called primary elections. Whoever wins the primary elections for each party becomes that party's presidential nominee.
4. New Hampshire's Role in Choosing a President: New Hampshire holds the first primary in the nation, so people pay a lot of attention to who is running for president here. Who wins and who loses in New Hampshire has a big impact on choosing each party's nominee.



## **Section 3: The 1952 Primary**

*Why was the 1952 presidential primary important to New Hampshire?*

The first time New Hampshire held what we think of as a modern presidential primary was in 1952. Before that, the men who led each party chose who their party's nominee would be without hearing much from the people. Instead of voting for who they wanted to be president, people voted for the men who would decide who would become president, which isn't the same thing at all! Since people didn't get to vote directly for their candidate, a lot of them didn't vote at all.

### **New Hampshire Comes First**

But in 1952, the election was different. New Hampshire's government changed the state law to allow people to vote directly for the person they wanted to be their party's nominee. The state government made this change because they wanted to increase voter participation in the primary process. That change in the law made all the difference in how Granite Staters would see their role in electing presidents.

*What happened in the 1952 election?*

In the 1952 primary election, there were four main candidates: two for each of the major political parties (including the Democrats and the Republicans). There was a front-runner for each party, but these front-runners would be surprised when the votes were counted in the New Hampshire primary. A lot of other people were surprised by the votes too!



## **On the Democratic Side**

The president of the United States in 1952 was named Harry Truman, and he was a Democrat. Everyone thought he would run for a second term and be the Democratic Party's nominee. He had competition, though, from a U.S. senator named Estes Kefauver.

Kefauver was from Tennessee, but he spent months in New Hampshire, meeting the people of the Granite State. He visited towns all over the state. He talked to people in local restaurants and at the grocery store—anywhere he could find groups of people together! People recognized him because he had a coonskin hat, which is made out of fur from a raccoon. Many times he traveled by sled because it was winter and there was a lot of snow on the ground. Sleds were sometimes easier to get around in than cars in those days!

The people of New Hampshire liked that Kefauver took the time to answer their questions and get to know them. Traveling around the state, meeting people, and talking with them became known as retail politics, which would become very important if a candidate wanted to win the New Hampshire primary.

President Truman did not visit New Hampshire at all during the primary campaign. In fact, he called it "the beauty pageant" and thought it was a waste of time. When primary election day came in New Hampshire, the people voted for Kefauver instead of President Truman!

After President Truman lost the New Hampshire primary, he changed his mind about running for president again and dropped out of the race.



## **On the Republican Side**

The front-runner for the Republican Party was a U.S. senator from Ohio named Robert Taft. He campaigned some in New Hampshire, but a lot of people thought he would win the New Hampshire primary without having to work too hard. But then he was challenged in the primary for the Republican nomination.

Several well-known people in America wanted to see if they could convince General Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower to run for president of the United States. Ike was a famous American general who led U.S. armed forces in World War II about 10 years earlier. He was still in Europe with the American troops in 1952, helping Europe rebuild after the war ended. His friends all thought he would be a terrific president.

In New Hampshire, two important politicians named Sherman Adams and Hugh Gregg decided to campaign for Ike in the New Hampshire primary to see how he would do in a presidential race. Sherman Adams was governor of New Hampshire at the time, and Hugh Gregg would become governor of the state after him. They organized a whole campaign for Ike in the Granite State, even though Ike himself stayed in Europe and didn't even visit New Hampshire once during the primary election.

Ike's campaign held all sorts of events, like rallies and meetings, to explain why Ike would be a good president, and it worked! When the votes were counted after the primary election, Ike had won without ever setting a foot in New Hampshire. His victory convinced Ike to come back to America and run for president. When he was campaigning in the general election later that year, he came to New Hampshire and held several events. In November he won the presidency and became the 34th president of the United States.



*What was the lasting impact of the 1952 primary?*

With so much going on in New Hampshire in 1952, the national media paid a lot of attention to the primary that year and broadcast their reports to the entire country. People started to realize that what happened in the New Hampshire primary could change the presidential election for everyone in the United States.

### **Let's Review!**

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. **The First NH Primary—1952:** The first time the New Hampshire primary made a big impact on the presidential race was in 1952.
2. **1952 Results Surprised People:** In both the Democrat and Republican parties, the front runner going into the primary was not the eventual winner. This surprised people, and helped everyone realize that the New Hampshire primary was an important election to compete in.
3. **NH Traditions Start in 1952:** Many traditions of the New Hampshire primary started in the 1952 primary campaign. Retail politics, which is the candidate talking directly to voters to get their ideas and votes, is an important part of campaigning in the New Hampshire primary today.
4. **Media Attention on NH:** The media paid a lot of attention to what happened in the New Hampshire primary in 1952, which meant everyone else in the country started paying attention to New Hampshire too!



## **Section 4: New Hampshire Primary Traditions**

*Why are traditions important to the New Hampshire presidential primary?*

Since 1952, a lot of traditions have grown up around the New Hampshire primary. Some of them started in 1952, and some of them started later. Some of them are fun and quirky, and some of them are important to preserving American democracy. All of them show the power of the individual voter in New Hampshire.

### **Retail Politics**

Retail politics is when candidates meet with voters in small groups at local events. The candidate tries to convince everyone to give them their votes by answering people's questions and talking about their concerns. It is important that voters have a chance to ask these questions, listen to the candidates' answers, and ask follow-up questions.

Candidates have to feel comfortable talking about a lot of different topics, which allows them to show how much they know about the lives of ordinary Americans. Do the candidates understand the problems Americans face in their everyday lives or the things average Americans are worried about?

Voters are also interested to see how candidates respond when a person doesn't agree with them. Can the candidate try to understand someone else's point of view? Does the candidate suggest a compromise or try to solve the disagreement? These are the types of things voters look at when deciding who to vote for.





What is unique about New Hampshire is how well retail politics work here. It works because New Hampshire is a small state with people who care about their civic duty. Candidates can easily travel around the state to talk to people. Sometimes the candidates go to local events, like festivals or fairs, to meet local voters.

Many of the candidates hold town hall meetings where they invite people to come to hear them speak and ask them questions. Many Granite Staters take the time to learn about the candidates at these types of events because they are civic-minded, which means they take their responsibility to become informed voters seriously.

### **Civic-minded Voters**

New Hampshire voters are known across the country for being well-informed about the people running for president and the political issues that many Americans are worried about. That's because many Granite Staters try to educate themselves about the candidates so they can be good citizens.

Voters in New Hampshire usually feel they have a responsibility to vet the candidates during the primary. They want to make good choices for who should be president of the United States. Being a responsible, informed voter is an important example of civic engagement in the Granite State. For this same reason, voter turnout, meaning the percentage of New Hampshire voters who actually cast a ballot in the primary election, is very high, usually around 80 percent.



## **Independent Voters**

Because the people of New Hampshire are open to listening to what the candidates have to say, they are also known for being independent-minded. That means that they think for themselves about who should be president and don't always vote for who the party leaders think they should vote for.

Many voters in New Hampshire are neither Democrats nor Republicans. Instead, they consider themselves independents who vote for whichever party's candidate they like best. These kinds of voters are called "undeclared" because they haven't declared themselves to be in either major political party. New Hampshire has more undeclared voters than most states.

## **Underdogs**

Front-runners are often surprised when they come to New Hampshire that they have to convince Granite Staters to vote for them. But since the people in New Hampshire are willing to listen to all the candidates, voters sometimes choose to support someone who is not expected to do well in the presidential primary. These candidates are called underdogs because they are not expected to win.

In the history of the New Hampshire primary, voters have often supported the underdog over the front-runner, which surprises everyone! In fact, two presidents who thought they would win second terms as president changed their minds after doing poorly in the New Hampshire primary: President Harry Truman in 1952 and President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968. New Hampshire's primary can help someone who is a good candidate but not as popular get their ideas heard.



## **Midnight Voting**

Another New Hampshire tradition that occurs in only a few, tiny New Hampshire towns is called midnight voting. People living in these towns are allowed to vote at the stroke of midnight at the beginning of primary day. They are the first voters in the state to cast their ballots. Once everyone in town votes, town officials close the polls and announce the results to the world. The results in these small towns give everyone a preview of how voters in New Hampshire might be feeling and the way the primary election may go in the Granite State.

## **Unique Characters**

Anyone can run for president in New Hampshire, even if they are not a serious candidate. A person can be in the New Hampshire primary if they pay \$1,000 and submit the paperwork to the secretary of state's office at the New Hampshire State House. With such an open primary, anyone could become president!

Lots of candidates run for president in the Granite State, and some of them have been unique characters. Sometimes people dress up in costumes, pretending to be either famous people, like Abraham Lincoln, or animals, like the Lobsterman. Many comedians have run for the presidency as well, such as Pat Paulson, who ran for president in the NH primary from 1968 to 1996. He had become famous in America for his appearances on a tv show called "The Smothers Brothers," and his presidential campaign used funny slogans like, "We can't stand Pat!"

Some of these colorful characters didn't formally file for the New Hampshire primary but just announced to the media that they were running. If people wanted to vote for them, then they needed to write in their names on the ballot. Others were official candidates.



They all provided some light-hearted fun during primary season and show how open to the New Hampshire primary is to anyone who wants to run for the presidency. Voters feel that if unique characters can run for president, so can they.

## **Let's Review!**

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. **Traditions Focus on Individual Voters:** There are many traditions associated with the New Hampshire primary, and all of them celebrate the importance of individual voters in electing a president.
2. **Importance of Retail Politics:** Retail politics is the most important New Hampshire primary tradition. It's the idea that candidates meet voters in every day places—like restaurants, grocery stores, town halls—and answer voters' questions directly.
3. **NH Traditions Preserve Democracy:** NH primary traditions include being civic-minded, independent voters who make up their own minds about candidates, which helps protect democracy. Underdogs get a chance in the state because the voters listen to every candidate.
4. **NH Traditions Can Be Fun, Too!** Tiny towns in NH get to be the first to vote at midnight on primary day, providing a small look at how voters think. Plus, interesting and quirky characters are included in the New Hampshire primary.



## **Section 5: The Future of the New Hampshire Primary**

*Will New Hampshire keep the first-in-the-nation presidential primary in the future?*

Some officials from other states argue that New Hampshire should not always get to vote first in the presidential primary, in part because the state is so small. Can you understand why they think other states should have a turn being first? These officials have tried to move their states' primary earlier than New Hampshire's, but they have always been stopped by New Hampshire's Secretary of State Bill Gardner.

Gardner argues that there are lots of reasons for New Hampshire to go first, including the state's small size. Why do you think being a small state would be an advantage in a presidential primary? Can you think of other reasons why New Hampshire should keep its primary first out of all the states?

When people talk about the first primary, they often mention both New Hampshire and Iowa. It's true that every four years, Iowa holds a contest for presidential candidates in each party about a week before New Hampshire does. But Iowa's contest isn't really an election. Instead, they have something called a caucus.

A caucus is when groups of people get together from each party and discuss which candidate should be their party's nominee. Each person gets to vote within the caucus, but once the caucus settles on one candidate or another, individual votes don't matter anymore.



## **Let's Review!**

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. Should NH Be First? Although some in the nation disagree, Secretary of State Bill Gardner and many others think that New Hampshire has done a great job with the primary, in part because of its small size. They argue New Hampshire should stay first.
2. New Hampshire's Long Tradition of Picking Presidents: New Hampshire has a long tradition of helping America pick its president. No other state has such a connection to the presidential election.
3. Iowa vs. New Hampshire: Iowa's caucus is usually about a week before New Hampshire's primary. However, in a caucus, it is more difficult for individual voters to make their voices heard in the results.
4. The Importance of Individual Voters: Voters in New Hampshire know their vote counts. Their experience and interest in presidential politics has led national politicians to come to the state even when it's not primary season.