



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 26, 2012

Can Ron Paul's Delegate Strategy Confound Conventional Wisdom?

Even among Paul's most ardent supporters, few would now argue that the 76-year-old physician is anything but a long shot for the nomination. Long shots, however, occasionally [pay off](#). And Paul has a strategy that he believes just might produce one of the most unexpected come-from-behind victories in U.S. political history.



The Paul campaign understands what few observers of the political scene — and even many players within it — realize: A significant number of the state primaries and caucuses covered by the national media as if they determined the Republican nominee are, as the Paul campaign likes to put it, “beauty contests” that make for an exciting horse race but may have little to do with who ultimately gets the nomination. The media report the popular vote results from a particular state and, unless it is a winner-take-all state, assume that each candidate will receive delegates to the RNC in roughly equal proportion to his share of the popular vote. Thus, reports typically state that Paul has only a tiny fraction of the delegates that former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has and that therefore he has no chance of being the GOP nominee.

In fact, says [Thomas Mullen](#) of the *Washington Times*' Communities website, “no one knows” how many delegates any of the candidates has — not even the Republican Party itself. We know that the delegates from winner-take-all states such as Florida will be bound to vote for the winners of their respective states' primaries during the first round of voting at the convention. Likewise, in some states (Nevada, for instance), during the first round delegates will be bound to certain candidates on the basis of the popular vote. Beyond that, Mullen writes, very little is certain:

In other states, the process is not that simple. A popular vote is held, but it's really no more than a preference poll or “straw poll.” After the straw poll is closed, a series of meetings commence in which delegates are elected from a precinct, district or county, which then elect delegates to a state convention, which then elect the delegates to represent that state at the RNC. This process typically takes months after the straw poll is over and the resulting delegates for each candidate may bear little resemblance to the vote percentage that candidate won in the straw poll.



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Paul's campaign believes that his supporters, typically more enthusiastic and devoted to his candidacy, are more likely to remain after the straw poll and participate in the delegate selection process. There is some evidence that they are correct. For example, the Iowa Republican Party [confirms](#) that delegate assignment has nothing to do with the straw poll and that Paul may secure the most delegates from Iowa.

Missouri provides additional evidence that Paul's delegate strategy could succeed. While former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum swept the state in the nonbinding presidential primary in February, he did not perform as well during the later caucuses.

The local caucuses chose over 2,000 delegates to regional conventions, which will then send people on to the state convention, where delegates to the RNC will be bound to vote for certain candidates. In several local caucuses Paul and Romney supporters teamed up to deny most or all of the delegates to Santorum. In at least three counties Santorum didn't get a single delegate while Paul got a majority of the delegates. In Greene County Paul got 65 delegates; Romney, 40; and Santorum, just six.

"We are focusing on caucus states, just like we always have," Paul Campaign Chairman Jesse Benton told [U.S. News & World Report](#). "It puts us in the driver's seat to easily win many. There is still work to be done, and we understand that we are going to have to stay on our game to maintain our position."

The campaign believes that it may very well walk away with a majority or plurality of the delegates in several states.

"We are training people to go, show up and go through the delegate process," Benton added.

The campaign is also "hoarding cash" in order to make a good showing in California and Texas, Benton told [MSNBC](#). Doing well in the popular vote in those big states would almost certainly secure some bound delegates from them. It could also provide a boost to fundraising and encourage more people to sign on as Paul delegates in the belief that he could win the nomination after all.

How he could win it is another matter. He is still highly unlikely to overtake Romney in the quest for a majority of the delegates to the RNC. However, if at least 1,144 delegates do not vote for Romney on the first ballot at the convention, there will be a "brokered convention." Delegates will vote a second time (and successive times if necessary); but after the first vote they are no longer committed to any particular candidate. "Then they can vote their conscience," Paul told Jay Leno last week. "Then I believe we'll get a lot of their votes."

Of course, one's conscience does not always win out over one's desire for partisan victory. People often vote for the candidate they think can win the general election even if they agree more with another candidate. In the event of a brokered convention, Paul will need to convince the now-unbound delegates that he is the one candidate who can defeat Barack Obama in November.

To that end, the Paul campaign has repeatedly highlighted polls showing that Paul is indeed a contender in a head-to-head matchup with the sitting President. Most recently, the campaign issued a [press release](#) trumpeting the results of a recent survey from Public Policy Polling that showed Romney losing to Obama 48 percent to 44 percent, but Paul leading him 46 percent to 43 percent. With the poll's margin of error being +/- 3.3 percentage points, that means Obama would defeat Romney, while he and Paul would be statistically tied. The poll also showed that Paul would perform better among independent voters, Hispanic voters, and 18-to-29-year-old voters than any of the other Republican candidates.



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“The media may find an inevitability about Romney becoming nominee, but it is clear that with anyone other than Ron Paul as nominee a second term for Obama is the inevitability,” Benton said in the press release.

With a brokered convention still a distinct possibility, the campaign will need to continue to drive home the message that Paul can become the next President of the United States if the Congressman hopes to win the nomination on a second or later ballot. Otherwise, the delegates previously committed to candidates other than Romney may very well hold their noses and cast their votes for the ex-Governor they think will return the White House to Republican hands.



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