

Reader's Guide: A story that illustrates the powerful affect that definitions had over the process of selecting the next U.S. President, Barack Obama. Can you think of another instance where a different set of rules and definitions could have so dramatically altered everything? (1,000 words) Other definitions: ruling class, President, primary, Electoral College, laws, political party, rules, delegate, Democrat, Republican, Democratic Party, superdelegate and popular vote.

The Ruling Class

(This was first written May 22, 2008)

The Kentucky and Oregon primary votes are in. Obama declares overall victory in the Democratic Presidential race and Hillary disagrees. These results could easily have been exactly the reverse. That is, if the Democrat state delegates selections had been more in line with how presidents are elected.

Everyone knows it. So why doesn't it seem to matter more? We do *not* elect Presidents based on which candidate gets the most popular votes. It is determined by a vote of the Electoral College and in 48 of America's 50 states a winner-take-all electoral voting scheme is used to select state electors.

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Political Parties, however, set their own rules in choosing their individual candidates for President of the United States. For a family the household rules are often a good predictor of harmony and success or eventual discord. That is a rule-of-thumb that could probably apply to our political parties as well.

Rules are a form of definitions (or a series of definitions) as are descriptions, laws and social norms. Definitions, of course, are everywhere and can come in many forms. This is, using the term 'definition' in its broadest context. These include political party rules and statutory laws. Both of which are unfortunately often used to control classes of people, manage outcomes and ultimately allocate resources and at times even garner favors.

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Rules and definitions simply do matter. They also frequently reflect the tendencies and interests of the rule-makers. The Democratic Party's Presidential Primary Rules, for instance, were supposed to be designed with an eye toward fostering diversity and achieving equality for all. Democrats have long supported laws, rules, court rulings and rule making to bring their guiding principles to fruition.

If the Democrats are the “party of rules” and their opponents, the Republicans, are the political party of less government (that is, by implication fewer rules and definitions) one would therefore expect the Democratic Party to select their Presidential nominee using the better set of rules (and maybe history will say they did). It is counterintuitive, but because the Democratic Party favors rule making so much their selection process is overly rule bound, if not in disarray. Rules are simply not a guarantee of fairness. What complex and esoteric rules and definitions do, however, is guarantee that unintended consequences will occur, including inequities.

If the Democrats were, for illustration purposes, using the Republican nominating national and state rules, Hillary Clinton would have a significant and formidable lead at this stage of the race (late May, 2008). So rules and definitions really do matter. That is because Obama has beaten Hillary Clinton in only one of the ten largest states (his home state, Illinois).

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It is a fact, if only one state, California, had set up a winner-take-all delegate selection process Hillary Clinton would now have a sizable lead in delegates even under the existing Democratic Party rules. It would all but be over if any two of the remaining six large states where Hillary Clinton won also had chosen a winner-take-all electable delegate format. She would now be indisputably the nominee.

Yes, the party of rule making seems to have run rule mad. Of the top ten states in population two currently have no delegates (Florida and Michigan with the fourth and eighth largest state populations) whatsoever to the Democratic Nominating Convention while a non-state, Puerto Rico, has as many as sixty-three, about two less than Oregon and three more than Kentucky.

The National Democratic Party’s rules and definitions seem focused on expanding the power of party leaders and elected officials ranging from senators to governors to party loyalists. Maybe that makes this writer a cynic, but it seems almost self evident. How else can you explain the inclusion of 799 superdelegates – party insiders – with 795 nominating votes (not including disbarred Florida and Michigan delegates), which by themselves represent almost 40 percent of the votes needed for nomination? Superdelegates are for certain all experienced rule-makers. Their role is to ensure that the regular delegates do not choose a nominee deemed a weak candidate (and that is a loaded definition if there ever was one).

What might have made sense is a nominating process that more closely mirrors the general election for president. That, however, would award more delegates to candidates that win primaries. If you are a party centered on diversity and equality, choosing winners and losers may possibly be too gut wrenching. Or maybe that is just writer bias.

What might have been better is a nominating process that more closely mirrors the general election for president.

If, for further example, the race between Obama and Hillary Clinton were under the same rules as the November final Presidential contest, Hillary Clinton would already have the Democratic nomination locked up based on votes cast in primaries in the biggest states. It is that simple. That would also set up the very real possibility of Hillary and Bill Clinton becoming a wife-and-husband ruling class team unto themselves.

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Is there a rule or definition that the Democratic Party's nominating rules can't be changed? I suspect that it is only implied.

There is a larger point and it is that in general Democrats are historically partial to rule making. And once rules and definitions are set down they tend to stick. The Democrats are finding it very difficult to just make do with their own internal party rules. Maybe that helps explain why it is so difficult to govern the United States with all of its many complexities?

Who benefits most when more rules are created? The rule-makers themselves profit of course. They wield more power and authority. Ironic as it may seem, the Democratic leadership is poised to become the ruling class and class warfare may possibly take a new form – government versus various classes of constituencies. Rules by their very nature both classify people and group other affected parties ranging from businesses to unions.

Rules simply beget more rules and definitions unless they transparently reflect truths and that is practically impossible to do. Against rule making, truth is all too often an orphan.

Rules simply beget more rules unless they reflect truths. Against rule making, truth is unfortunately all too often an orphan.

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Footnote: The term **ruling class** refers to the social class of a given society that decides upon and sets that society's political policy. *Wikipedia*, 5/20/2008