

States at stake



» What is Super Tuesday?

Voters in 24 of the 50 states and American Samoa select delegates for the two parties' national conventions, where their presidential candidates will be officially chosen. The Democrats will choose 2,075 delegates from a total of 4,049 and the Republicans will choose 1,081 delegates from a total of 2,380.

» What is its significance?

It is the most important indicator of public opinion before the presidential election itself in November. A decisive victory can win the nomination for a candidate.

» What are the rules?

They vary by state and between the parties. The primaries and caucuses will determine a number of delegates who will then vote for their preferred candidate at the national convention.

Primaries: All registered voters in a state directly vote for their preferred candidate. The Democrats divide a state into districts and award delegates on a proportional basis – if a candidate gets 40 per cent of the vote, he or she gets 40 per cent of the delegates. The Republicans mostly use a winner-takes-all-delegates system.

Caucuses: Participants have to travel to a location that may not be their usual polling place at an appointed hour, listen to speeches and, in the Democrats' case, stand up publicly for one candidate or another.

Super delegates: These are prominent elected officials and other party activists who are not obliged to reflect the will of voters at the national convention and could prove crucial in the final vote.

» Which are the key battlegrounds?

■ NEW YORK

Democrats

Mrs Hillary Clinton's home state, which she has represented as a senator since 2001. A defeat here would be a severe embarrassment, but she looks safe, leading most opinion polls by around 20 points.

Republicans

Republican pace-setter John McCain has been boosted in New York by the endorsement of former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who dropped out of the presidential race last week.

■ ILLINOIS

Democrats

Mr Barack Obama's home state, where the Clinton campaign says it has little intention of competing, and latest opinion polls show him with at least a 25 point lead.

Republicans

One of the states where former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney must do well to slow the McCain surge.

■ CALIFORNIA

Democrats

The biggest prize with 370 pledged Democratic delegates, California is "Clinton Country" but the former first lady has seen an 11 point margin in polls over her chief rival narrowed to a statistically insignificant number

Republicans

Mr McCain has the endorsement of Republican state Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who he hopes will help him capture the 170 Republican delegates available in this winner-take-all state.

■ NEW JERSEY

Democrats

Mrs Clinton has about a 10 point lead in most recent polls in a state which is in her extended backyard as a New York senator.

Republicans

Mr McCain has a solid lead over Mr Romney here, and should be further boosted by Mr Giuliani's endorsement as he chases 52 Republican delegates.

» OTHER STATES

Democrats

Both campaigns acknowledge that Mr Obama has an edge in six states holding caucuses – Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Georgia and North Dakota. Obama strategists have also expressed confidence in their chances in Alabama, a state with a large black population. Mrs Clinton is counting on a victory in Arkansas, where her husband once served as governor, and she is also strong in neighbouring Oklahoma and Massachusetts.

Republicans

Utah is essentially a second home for Mr Romney; its large Mormon population is likely to give him a win. He also will look to win in states that hold caucuses – Alaska, Colorado, Minnesota, North Dakota – and one that holds a state convention, West Virginia, as well as Massachusetts, where he was once governor. Mr McCain could do well in Oklahoma, as well as moderate north-eastern states such as Connecticut and Delaware.

» What happens after Super Tuesday?

Remaining states will hold late primaries and caucuses, the last three being held on June 3. Even though a candidate comes out tops on Super Tuesday, he or she may still face campaigns to thwart them, something that happened to Democrat Jimmy Carter twice in 1976 as well as in 1980 and Republican Gerald Ford in 1976.



Mr Barack Obama
Democrat

Mrs Hillary Clinton
Democrat

Mr John McCain
Republican

Mr Mitt Romney
Republican