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Republican Conventions

It's my understanding that the Republicans have never held their national convention in New York City. Given that it's historically a northern-based party, that surprises me. Where have they typically met?

It does seem surprising that the Republicans have never before selected the Big Apple to be the site of their national convention. But since 9/11 everything has changed; we Americans live in a different era. Most obviously the GOP chose the city for their 2004 convention because it was the scene of the greatest terrorist attack ever on U.S. soil; the city serves as a powerful backdrop for George W. Bush, and the GOP party faithful hope that that backdrop will elicit patriotic feelings associated with the war president. Indeed, Madison Square Garden, where the Republicans are gathering, is less than four miles from the World Trade Center site.



No one believes that President Bush will capture New York's electoral votes on November 2nd. Most of the residents of New York City wouldn't vote for him. It's Hillary Rodham Clinton country.

Still, there were several reasons Republicans chose New York City in 2004: (1) former mayor Rudy Giuliani, a Republican, became a national hero in the aftermath of 9/11 and is sure to be a crowd pleaser; (2) current mayor Michael Bloomberg is also a Republican; (3) the governor of the state, George Pataki, is likewise a Republican who had a strong presence following 9/11. So the GOP pow-wow has relatively friendly political hosts. However, New York City is also the home of, and magnet for, legions of protesters who seek to capture media attention during the four-day affair. They will be vying with Madison Square Garden for the spotlight during the four-day affair, which runs from August 30 through September 2.

Now for a little of the historical background. Republicans have held 38 national conventions since 1856. Listed below is information about each convention: (1) the convention year, beginning with the party's origins in the decade prior to the Civil War; (2) the host city; (3) the nominee; and (4) an asterisk, which indicates that the nominee was elected president the following November.

1856: Philadelphia -- explorer John C. Fremont
1860: Chicago -- former Congressman Abraham Lincoln*
1864: Baltimore -- President Abraham Lincoln*
1868: Chicago -- General Ulysses S. Grant*
1872: Philadelphia -- President U. S. Grant* (an offshoot, the Liberal Republicans, met in Cincinnati)
1876: Cincinnati -- Governor Rutherford B. Hayes*
1880: Chicago -- Representative James A. Garfield*
1884: Chicago -- Senator James G. Blaine
1888: Chicago -- Senator Benjamin Harrison*
1892: Minneapolis -- President Benjamin Harrison
1896: St. Louis -- Governor William McKinley*
1900: Philadelphia -- President William McKinley*
1904: Chicago -- President Theodore Roosevelt*
1908: Chicago -- Secretary of War William Howard Taft*
1912: Chicago -- President William Howard Taft (By the way, Taft lost, which was the only time in U.S. history that the incumbent came in 3rd in the general election)
1916: Chicago -- Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes
1920: Chicago -- Senator Warren G. Harding*
1924: Cleveland -- President Calvin Coolidge*
1928: Kansas City -- Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover*
1932: Chicago -- President Herbert Hoover
1936: Cleveland -- Governor Alf Landon
1940: Philadelphia -- Wendell L. Willkie
1944: Chicago -- Thomas E. Dewey
1948: Philadelphia -- Thomas E. Dewey
1952: Chicago -- General Dwight D. Eisenhower*
1956: San Francisco -- President Dwight D. Eisenhower*
1960: Chicago -- Vice President Richard M. Nixon
1964: San Francisco -- Barry Goldwater
1968: Miami Beach -- former Vice President Richard M. Nixon*
1972: Miami Beach -- President Richard M. Nixon*
1976: Kansas City -- President Gerald R. Ford
1980: Detroit -- Governor Ronald Reagan*
1984: Dallas -- President Ronald Reagan*
1988: New Orleans -- Vice President George H. W. Bush*
1992: Houston -- President George H. W. Bush
1996: San Diego -- Senator Bob Dole
2000: Philadelphia -- Governor George W. Bush*
2004: New York -- President George W. Bush (result?)

Note several things. After 22 of the 38 GOP conventions, the party's nominee went on to win the presidency -- the "bounce" that counts. That's almost a 60 percent success rate.

George W. Bush is the 14th Republican incumbent to be renominated. Of 13 previous incumbents who were renominated, 8 were returned to the White House (Lincoln, Grant, McKinley, Roosevelt, Coolidge, Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan).

Also, you are correct about the Republicans having their origins in the North and thus preferring Northern cities in which to meet. For many decades, Chicago was the favored site; the city in the Land of Lincoln hosted 14 conventions between 1860 and 1960. Philadelphia is the next favorite venue, having hosted 6 conventions, including the first one back in 1856, and the previous gathering that nominated George W. Bush in 2000.

Republicans, in fact, did not venture to assemble in one of the former Confederate States of America until 1968, when they met in Miami Beach (which hardly feels Southern). They met again in Miami Beach in 1972. The venue reinforced Richard Nixon's touted "Southern strategy," designed to capture disaffected Southern Democrats following the civil rights legislation spearheaded and signed by Lyndon Johnson in the mid 1960s.

Republicans got on a positively Southern roll when they met in Dallas (1984), New Orleans (1988) and Houston (1992).

Interestingly, three times the nominee came from the state in which the convention was held: Abraham Lincoln, of Springfield, Illinois, was nominated in the Windy City. Rutherford B. Hayes, an Ohioan, was nominated in Cincinnati; and George H. W. Bush, of Houston, was nominated in the city's Astrodome.

(Question from Karen C, of McLean, VA)