

Analyse the claim that ‘the process for electing the president is flawed and in need of reform’.

The president is seen by most as the American leader, someone who is American through and through, from this position, and the constitution, the president has few powers.

Presidential candidates are chosen in the Primaries, used for both congressional and presidential elections.

Primaries themselves actually begin in January of the election year, with the aim of helping the two major parties choose their presidential candidate by competing like candidates against others e.g. Democrat candidate against another Democrat candidate.

The primary season then ends with the parties each holding a national convention with aim set out of choosing a presidential candidate. For the selection of presidential candidates, the choice is left entirely to the public and, unlike the British System, not to the party itself. The candidates chosen also arrange their own funding and run their own campaigns.

The presidential primaries have four sub-divisions; Open, Closed, Advisory and Binding.

Closed primaries are applicable to party members and affiliated voters only e.g. in the states of New Hampshire and California.

In **Open** primaries all registered voters can vote in either the Democrat or Republican primary. This has shown to draw a very strong cross-party appeal from some voters which can be used to the advantage of both candidates.

In **Advisory** primaries the voters vote for a candidate and thereby advise their state party delegates to the national convention on this basis.

Lastly, state party delegates, regarding **Binding** primaries, to the convention are obliged to vote for their preferred candidate. However this was seen as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court as in *Lafollette Vs Democrat Party* 1982.

Primaries themselves have a number of points both for and against them.

Primaries help voters to get to know the candidate on a personal basis as well as their policies. More policies can develop in answer to local and national issues. Some candidates can also become known heads at both national and international level, such as Clinton in 1992.

Primaries have a substantial number of points against them however, as will be shown by the following examples.

The process itself of primaries can be very long and extensive and is shown to be exhausting for the candidates. The media, which observably leads to extensive public exposure, can draw off the point of issues and start to target personalities of the candidates. Primaries are also proven to be expensive, with the potential cost running into the millions, possibly billions, of American dollars (\$) such as in the 2000 general elections.

Due to the constitution, the formal election must take place through the Electoral College. Every state is allocated a certain number of Electoral College Votes (ECV), this is drawn upon from its stature in congress. There are 538 ECV in its entire. One example is the state of California which has fifty-four (54) ECV, and, Alaska which has three (3), these two states are one of the most and least populated states in the USA. The candidate who wins the state also wins all the ECV on a simple winner takes all system. The eventual president must win an absolute majority in the college, considered to be a minimum of 270 ECV. In theory, at least, the campaign can be won from seven (7) states.

There are, however, problems with the Electoral College; the first reason is that as the winner takes all the ECV, regardless of the result, showing that the result can become distorted.

Another reason is that unless third and independent parties concentrate their vote into a particular area they will have no representation in the electoral college, this, for example, can be shown by Ross Perot, who in 1992 gained nineteen (19) % of the popular vote but received no ECV in return as his vote was geographically dispersed. The third problem is that the Electoral College can allow a candidate with less ECV than another to win amongst the electors. An example of this is when G Cleveland (Dem) had over 90,000 more votes than B Harrison (Rep) who somehow took the electoral college 233 ECV to 168.

The fourth flaw that has been noticed of the Electoral College is that it allows a possible breach of the separation of powers, this came about due to the House of Representatives having to decide the election if there is no absolute majority. This has only happened twice, both times in the 19th century.

The Electoral College is in great need of reform, it has been said, but highly unlikely. The first idea proposed is the express election of the president, the second idea is change each state's ECV so that it is divided equally on the basis of the popular vote. As it is unlikely that reform will happen two problems have arisen, the first, is that there is simply no agreement on alternatives. The second problem is that not many people or bodies are calling for change.

Elections are expensive to run to say the least, so, as Jesse Unruh used to say 'Money is the mother's milk of politics'.

Candidates rely upon donations handed out to them from both organizations and individuals, this, can affect policy and attitudes. An example of this is Clinton and Gore for re-election in 1996.

In the 2000 presidential election \$1 billion dollars were spent.

I think that finance for elections and campaigns is in great need of reform, although the campaign is spread across the entire country, a large one at that, far too much money is spent as I think the candidates should be aiming to spend as little as possible. This could come from setting a lower bracket for donations by PACs (Political Action Committees) this could be achieved by dropping the limit from \$5000 to \$2000. PACs spending has increased, in twenty years, from \$12.5 million to \$189.4 million, this is spent on negative campaigning for opposing candidates. If less money was given or spent by

PACs they would not play such a big role in presidential elections, also, the media would not attack candidates as much as private information could be sparse.

Political Action Committees are private groups which try to influence the political progress by raising funds from members, this financial resource is used to aid parties and elections although not directly. The primary intention of using PACs, in 1971, was to curb the inflation of expenditure on elections, however, in this era they have become one of the biggest sources of money in American politics to date. PACs can have a ruinous effect on opposing candidates, for example, the National Security PAC spent over \$8.5 million on certain adverts in 1988 that had a substantial effect on Michael Dukakis's presidential campaign.

Possibly, a new law could be passed limiting the amount candidates may accept from private donations, this would have curbed such events as in 1994 when more than 100 congressmen donated more than \$100,000 each.

Another possibility could be to match the money raised by presidential candidates through public funding, this would only apply to an extent.

Another reform could be the introduction of free air time, as in the United Kingdom, this again would limit the influence of PACs and at the same time save money whether it being spent or raised.

Ultimately, as one lobbyist stated, 'Trying to cleanse the political system from the evils of money is like writing a law ordering teenagers not to think about sex... You don't need a law, you need a lobotomy'.

Any reform regarding money would be difficult, to say the least, to implement and may not actually be possible due to the cost of technology.