

A. Explain the significance of the New Hampshire Primary and the Iowa Caucus in the presidential nomination process.

New Hampshire state law states that the New Hampshire Primary is to be the first Primary in the nation, a tradition since the early 1920s. In an attempt to do this, the date has been moved back and back from the 2nd Tuesday in March in the 1950s, to the 2nd Tuesday in January in the 2008 election period. This trend is shifted in accordance with the changing dates of primaries in other states. Before Carter brought the Iowa Caucus to national 'limelight' in 1976, the New Hampshire primary was the first proper indication of which candidate would receive a party nomination. The people of New Hampshire strongly defend their Primary as being the 'real deal', with Governor John Sununu saying in 1988 that "the people of Iowa pick corn, the people of New Hampshire pick presidents". Since this, it has been generally accepted that the New Hampshire primary is an early gauge of national sentiment towards the candidates for nomination. The primary has the advantage of determining the number of votes each candidate receives, rather than in a Caucus, which measures support through precinct delegates. The popular vote of the people gives a chance for the lesser known candidates to voice their appeal to the electorate en masse.

Another key significance of the New Hampshire Primary is that the voters are not required to join an official party to vote in the party's primary. This is slightly controversial, as voters can change their official status back to 'undeclared' immediately after voting, thus, they only need to be a party member for a matter of minutes, in order to vote. More controversially, the primary in New Hampshire has been brought into question by the more leftist members of the Democrats, who claim that, the ethnic demography of the state is not diverse enough, and therefore not representative of the nation.

The New Hampshire primary of 1968 was of particular significance, especially for Johnson. He fell behind McCarthy by seven points, and as a result, withdrew from the campaign, announcing that "I shall not seek, and will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president". Similarly, the 2008 New Hampshire primary was significant in so far as Clinton had a 3% lead on Obama, with a total of 39% of the vote, with the lack of momentum eventually causing her to fall behind Obama at Super Tuesday, who had a 64% stake, with Clinton only holding 36%. This was a gap that Clinton was unable to close.

Iowa's caucus draws a lot of attention to an otherwise quiet, largely agricultural state, this is because Iowa is the first state in the nation to have a chance to show its support for candidates. Sen. George McGovern, the Democratic contender in the 1972 election, explained the significance of Iowa like this: "Iowa is terribly important. It's the first test in the nation, where we get any test at all". That test comes from 'average' voters. The level of support a candidate receives in Iowa gives a reasonable indication of how they will perform with the rest of American voters. If middle-American Iowans support a candidate, then that candidate has a chance with the rest of the nation. The results from the Iowa caucus tell a candidate whether his or her platform is desirable or not, it is the first chance for a campaign to find out if its message is affecting voters.

As previously mentioned, New Hampshire state law says that New Hampshire must be the first state to hold a primary. Iowa however, holds a Caucus and not a Primary, meaning that Iowa has remained the first state to hold any kind of vote on candidates for both parties since 1976. As such, Iowa has been consistently important in presidential campaigns since the 1970s. Many point to the media as the true creator of the prominent political role that Iowa enjoys. Since 1972, where McGovern received a better than expected result in the Iowa Caucus, the media have kept a close eye on the Iowa Caucuses.

Iowa's status as the first presidential test in the nation is constantly under attack. In 2003, the District of Columbia lobbied unsuccessfully to be allowed to move its primary before Iowa's caucus. In the 2008 election, states have shuffled their primary schedules, all in order to attract more attention to their state. And a group of 40 states met in Washington, D.C., in February 2007 to discuss a rotating primary schedule to begin in 2012, so states can share the importance of being the first in the presidential nominating process. As long as Iowa is able to hang onto its status as first in the nation, it appears that it will keep its prominent place in the nation's political climate.

**B. The national party conventions no longer serve any significant purpose.
Discuss.**

An important function of the party conventions is to decide upon a party platform. The platform is a document containing the policies which a candidate intends to follow through if elected, very similar to a party manifesto in the UK. The party platform document is put together by the platform committee under the guidance and direction of the party's National Committee. The platform committee will hold meetings between January and June of the presidential election year and then the draft version of the document is presented to delegates during the National Party Convention. Traditionally, there may have been debates at the conferences about topical matters for the platform, but nowadays these are discouraged so as to avoid portraying disunity. It can be argued that the party platform provides little more than supporting US political clichés such as the "American Dream".

The party conventions primary aim is, however, to choose their presidential candidate. On paper, this is done by a roll call vote whereby each state delegates announce which candidate they are going to back. The majority of the delegates today attend the convention as "committed delegates", and because the number of delegates from each state is already known, it can be argued that the result of the roll call election is known beforehand. As a result, it is not reasonably accurate to say that the convention confirms rather than chooses the final candidate. At no convention, since the 1976 Ford/Regan campaign, has the choice of the presidential candidate been in doubt for both parties' convention. The 2008 Democrat Convention was the first since 1976 where there was an element of doubt as to who would be the candidate for the party.

Another main purpose of the party convention is to promote unity within the party. Primaries often develop into personal conflicts, and the convention inherits the job to bring all people back under a unified front before the presidential election campaign begins. Parties which are divided often struggle to succeed in a campaign. In 2004, rivalry between Gore and Kerry created problems. In 2008, Palin's acceptance speech

went a long way to revitalise a slacking campaign, and instilled unity. When reconciliation fails, such as Carter and Kennedy, 1980 and Bush and Buchanan, 1992, the party rarely succeeds in the election.

Another important function of a party is to grab the attention and support of ordinary voters. Though the convention needs to capture the support of the party members, the electorate are the people who will provide them with their mandate, so they need to be 'appeased'. Much of this is done via television. A large number of people do not vote, and do not pay attention to the primaries or the political proceedings. Opinion polls register the impact of acceptance speeches and are displayed across the media. Any increase in a candidate's poll is compared to the last pre convention poll. In 2004, Bush achieved a bounce of 4% while Kerry underperformed with just 1%.

Compared to the UK, the party convention is much grander than in the UK, and it is more formal as they have specific tasks to perform, such as elect the candidate. While this is the tradition role of the Labour Party Conference, it is, in practice, no longer so. Party conferences in the UK are an annual thing, compared to every 4 years in America, and in the UK, they serve more as a ceremonial address to the party to keep things ticking over.

To conclude, the current party conventions are little more than a scripted, choreographed, sanitised convention for the masses. They are almost completely devoid of political content, debate or indeed anything else of importance. They simply exist to serve as a façade to the people of America, to showcase to the world how devoted and committed they are. Sadly, the people of America see this entire baboon exhibition as a real factor to consider when voting. In the reality, a party with a poor convention, has poor electoral success, as seen by the 1992 Republican convention – Buchanan's speech was seen to be abrasive and went a long way to assisting in the defeat of the party at the ballot.