

Why is the US Presidential election such a long process (15m)

The process of electing a president of the United States is certainly a long one. The formal process takes nearly a year but in reality starts before it's even begun. The first point to make is that of the importance of the campaign trail. Presidential elections take place in November but before this a significant countrywide election campaign is launched. The Presidential election specifically is as much about character and personality as it is politics, and so it is seen as vital that the chosen candidate of each party effectively "tours" the country fist hand to deliver their message in person. Naturally, The US having 50 states can make this process a long one, but not only does it add a personal aspect to each of the states votes, but also can act as a good test of stamina. The job of president can be long, gruelling and both physically and mentally demanding and the campaign trail can act as a final test before people cast their votes. For example in 2008 Barack Obama showed himself to not only be more in touch with the modern electorate but also to have more of a physical resilience for such as job, especially compared to 74 year old John McCain, who many commented looked especially tired and stressed throughout the final weeks of the campaign, not a good sign for a potential president.

Before the final party campaign trail however, is the first of the official election processes', the primary season. In order to allow time for the final big push before the election, the primary season is usually towards the begging of the year, kicking off in late January. It is during this process that each party chooses its candidate through a series of primaries and caucuses. Like the final campaign trail, candidates have to travel around the country to try and whip up support amongst their own party to secure their own position as an official candidate for president before turning on the opposition parties. It is usually the earlier primaries that are the most important, attracting the most media attention and often providing a sign of things to come later on. As a result states attempt to hold their primaries as

early as possible, resulting in a situation of “front loading”. Iowa and New Hampshire are usually first but in 2008 Michigan and Florida attempted to hold theirs on the 15th and 29th January respectively resulting in the Democratic National Committee (DNC) being forced to take action to spread the primaries out.

▲ As a result of the primary season combined with the final campaigns of the 2 eventual party candidates, the “official” election season is nearly a year long, from January to November. However, the battle between candidates attempting to gain their parties backing is not confined to the primary season alone. In fact an “invisible primary” may begin months if not years before hand. ▲ An “invisible primary” is the time between when a candidate announces they are to run for president and the first contests of the primary season. It is often critical for candidates to use this time to build up an early support base, organise their campaign and gather much needed funds for the coming campaigns. Relatively unknown candidates will hope to be picked up by the media giving them the initial boost needed to get their campaign underway. This was certainly true for Obama in 2008 who’s early backing by magazines such as “the rolling stone” helped him establish his name around the country. ▲ Announcing your intention to run early can give a distinct advantage over those who enter the competition late. ▲ As a result in the 2008 election the first candidate to announce their intention to run was Democrat Dennis Kucinich on 11th December 2006, a full 388 days before the Iowa caucus and nearly 2 years before the actual election. ▲ A year before the primary season had started 5 democrats and 4 republicans had announced their intention to run, with Obama making his entrance on February 10th and McCain on ▲ April 25th 2007. In essence, from the first candidate announcing they wish to run for president to the day the eventual winner is confirmed, nearly 2 years had passed. On top of this, the winning Presidential candidate does not take office until the next year.

However in conclusion, we could argue that the final point of the invisible primaries isn’t really part of the election,

rather is simply just "politics". The official start is the primary season and the official finish is the election of the president, taking less than a year. The outside campaigning and political point scoring continues almost indefinitely and parties and candidates always have the next election in mind. While the election may have a specific date, the overall process never really finishes. From the instant a president is elected, people will already be thinking "what's next."