

“Competition among political organizations and leaders is what provides people with the opportunity to make a meaningful choice in elections.” Because my partner and I agree with E.E. Schattsneider and believe that the competition derived from the primary season benefits and supports democratic values, we stand in firm negation of the resolution *Resolved: The US system of presidential primaries is contrary to democratic values.*

Contention One: Primaries help inform the public

Perhaps the most important democratic value is that of ensuring that the people know whom they are voting for and what those candidates support. Presidential primaries force candidates into what is called an “issue cue,” when a specific region is facing a particular issue, which forces politicians campaigning in that state to take a position on that issue. Because different states hold their primaries at different points throughout the campaign, candidates must travel around and appeal to various regions on issues relevant to them. Barbara Norrande of San Jose State University writes, “The current presidential primary system encourages candidates to develop their platforms with issues that truly matter to the American people.” For example, the economic situation in Michigan recently forced Republican candidates Mitt Romney and John McCain to publicize their beliefs about the economy. Recently, Democratic contenders Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were forced to talk about their stance on immigration in the southwestern US. In addition, the primary system allows for more debates, which help inform the public. In 2000, 22 primary debates helped inform the voters about each candidate. By comparison, the general election later that year had only 3. Primaries provide more opportunities for candidates to debate and reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. Simply put, primaries force candidates to reveal their platform to the public.

Contention Two: Lower Entry Requirements for Candidates

The current system of presidential primaries allows for a candidate to stage a national campaign without large amounts of financing to begin with. Consider Mike Huckabee, who began his campaign with 10% as much money as McCain and Guiliani, and 5% as much as Romney. However, due to his early success in Iowa, Huckabee was able to wage a campaign across the US and garner support. In 1976, Jimmy Carter was relatively unknown outside his home state of Georgia. However, he waged an effective campaign by concentrating on winning the early primaries. His success provided him with the momentum needed to gain media attention; effectively, he campaigned without needing finances. According to Henry E. Brady of the Society for Political Methodology, the “momentum” gained in early elections can enable lesser-funded candidates to compete with wealthier ones. Imagine if the current system used a national primary day: momentum would be nonexistent and candidates would need vast amounts of finances to campaign effectively. However, the current system allows candidates to gain momentum through media coverage, reducing the “entry requirement” of finances. This supports the democratic value of equal opportunity.

Contention Three: Voter Participation

The primary system increases voter participation. Richard W. Boyd of Wesleyan University writes that “Competition between candidates in the primaries tends to increase voter turnout and public participation in the candidate selection process.” Also, the current system gives the American public more of a say in selecting presidential candidates. Through the primaries, voters can choose who runs in future presidential elections. In addition, when the American public votes more frequently, it creates a sort of “democratic paradise” where citizen participation is more common. Compare this to the old system of selecting candidates, in which *only* high-ranking party officials selected candidates. Now, the American public has a say.

Primary elections support the democratic value of popular sovereignty not only by creating more opportunities to vote, but by giving the people a more significant voice in choosing their candidates.

Democracy and competition go hand-in-hand. The competition provided by the primary season helps inform the public about the candidates and issues, gives lesser-funded candidates a fighting chance, and increases voter participation.