

Pro Case

Resolved: The US system of presidential primaries is contrary to democratic values.

Morris Udall, former candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, once compared the primary system to a football game: “You say to the first team that makes a first down with 10 yards, ‘Hereafter your team has a special rule. Your first downs are five yards. And if you make three of those you get a two-yard first down. And we’re going to let your first touchdown count 21 points. Now the rest of [the candidates] get to play catch-up under the regular rules.’” Because my partner and I agree with Udall in saying that the primaries create unfair advantages, we stand in firm affirmation of the resolution Resolved: The US system of presidential primaries is contrary to democratic values.

Contention 1: Primaries create unequal and disproportionate advantages.

A democracy is based on the concept that, “all men are created equal.” However, the staggered schedule of the presidential primaries gives unequal influence to states. Early primary states, such as New Hampshire and South Carolina, are unrepresentative of the diverse US population. Their ratio of minority residents is six times smaller than the national average. Based on the National Bureau of Economic Research, early voters in New Hampshire and South Carolina have up to 20 times the influence of late voters in the selection of candidates. This demonstrates a significant departure from the ideal of "one person, one vote." (National Bureau of Economic Research. Nov 2007). Many states, such as MT or SD who appear late into the primary scene, do not gather the influence or the attention of the early small states like NH in the primary process.

Contention 2: Primaries cause frontloading and prolong the election process.

Favoring some states above others creates an unnecessary need for states to jump the gun and move their primaries earlier and earlier into the year. This hurts the democratic process in two ways. First, the earlier the elections, the longer and more funds a campaign necessitates. This causes under-funded, but fitting candidates to drop out of elections before later voting states get a chance voice their support. According to Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, It was "money, and only money," that led him to drop out of the 2008 presidential race. The "invisible primary" is the early jockeying for money, top campaign staff, and high-profile endorsements that winnow the presidential field long before any caucuses or primaries are held. Because of the long primary process, campaign-finance experts say that, to remain viable, a candidate needs to raise upwards of \$20 million by June of the year preceding the election. This is undemocratic, because by the actual election, the people do not have a say in who is their voice because the money raising eliminates many options.

Contention 3: Primary delegates are unrepresentative of the people.

Primaries distort the voice of the people. The delegate allocation system is filled with unfair exceptions and rules. For example, because Florida and Michigan held their primaries before February 5th, their delegates not longer count in the election process. Also, delegates are not entirely proportional to population. States like Georgia and North Carolina have similar populations; yet, North Carolina receives 31 more democratic delegates than Georgia. These unfair allocations hurt the American system of equal representation. Even at the Republican and Democratic party conventions, at least 20% of the delegates present are unpledged, or unbound delegates. These "Superdelegates" ultimately hinder the whole point of the primary process: to have a pool of delegates representative of the opinions of the people in the presidential elections.

The primary system works against valued democratic ideals. It creates disproportionate advantages, prolongs and skews the priorities of the election process, and is unrepresentative of the people. The primary system is a distorted game that is far from democratic ideals.