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### US politics

# Essay on electing US presidents

This article should be used alongside 'The US primary elections 2024' (pp. 12–15). It shows how to plan and write an answer to the following question:

**Evaluate the view that the procedures for electing US presidents and members of Congress remains fit for purpose.**

## Planning

### What is your line of argument?

**Either:** The procedures for electing US presidents and members of Congress remain fit for purpose. The primaries and caucuses give autonomy to the states regarding how they are held, in line with the principle of federalism. They are often competitive, meaning incumbents must fulfil their representative role effectively. Following this, the election campaign itself is a stern test for a candidate who must prove their broad popularity through their ability to raise funds. The Electoral College allows the public control over its government, while still acting as a safety mechanism that protects the interests of smaller states. It also protects against the masses, in accordance with the wishes of the Founding Fathers.

**Or:** The procedures for electing US presidents and members of Congress are no longer fit for purpose. The primaries and caucuses vary considerably by state, meaning they often have low turnout, and the incumbency factor often means the process becomes redundant. The campaign itself typically becomes a measure of style over substance, where the candidate who raises the most money often wins. It has also been undermined in the House, where races have become uncompetitive due to gerrymandering by both parties. The Electoral College has led to a narrowing of presidential campaigns, with a focus on swing states. It has created a situation where, twice in the last six elections, the loser of the popular vote has won the election, undermining their legitimacy and creating division.

## Writing the essay

It is essential to have a clear line of argument (AO3) running through your essay, which should be evident in every paragraph. There also needs to be a debate (point/counterpoint) within each paragraph. Aim for three paragraphs, plus the introduction and conclusion.

### Sample introduction

The procedures for electing US presidents and members of Congress are lengthy, from the primaries and caucuses for selecting candidates – which begin at the start of an election year before the campaign begins – to the certification of the result for the presidency in the Electoral College in January of the following year. Arguably, primaries and caucuses provide voters with a real say, the

election campaign itself is a stern test, and the Electoral College protects the interests of smaller states.

The stronger argument, however, is that the procedures are no longer fit for purpose. Primaries and caucuses vary considerably, have low turnout and an incumbent often means the process becomes redundant. The campaign itself typically becomes a measure of who raises the most money and the Electoral College has led to narrowing of presidential campaigns and a situation where the winner can lose the popular vote.

### Plan for paragraph 1

**Argument:** Primaries and caucuses give autonomy to the states with regard to how they are held. These can be open, closed or hybrid primaries, or in some states caucuses are held. This is in line with the principle of federalism. Primaries give voters a real say and are often competitive, meaning that incumbents must fulfil their representative role effectively, or face losing the opportunity to contest their seat in the election.

**Supporting evidence:** In 2024, many congressional primary elections were extremely competitive, especially in key Senate races such as Ohio and West Virginia.

**Counter-argument:** The stronger argument is that primaries are often an uncompetitive and unnecessary (and expensive) layer of the process. In many presidential elections they are redundant or not even held, particularly if there is an incumbent which leads to few challengers, or challengers decide to step down early in the contest. Primaries and caucuses tend to have low levels of participation due to the differences in how they are conducted, and therefore they can result in weaker, more ideological candidates being selected to contest the election.

**Supporting evidence:** 2024 saw the least competitive primaries in recent years: by the end of Super Tuesday, Joe Biden had secured 86% of the Democratic votes available and Donald Trump 64% of the Republican votes. Even where there was not an incumbent, Trump's most significant challenge came from Nikki Haley, and she withdrew from the contest after Super Tuesday. The 2022 midterms saw a range of hard-right candidates selected in the primaries, meaning the predictions of an anticipated 'Red Wave' in the House did not materialise. Spending exceeded \$41.2 million in the Republican Ohio Senate primary, and the Californian Senate primary became the most expensive in the state's history.

**AO3 judgement:** Primaries and caucuses are no longer fit for purpose as they are typically an expensive additional part of the process which is often redundant when accounting for incumbency, reinforcing the view that the procedure has become a measure of style over substance.

### Plan for paragraph 2

**Argument:** The election campaign itself is a stern and competitive test for a candidate who must prove their broad popularity and their ability to raise funds. In the House, this is even more acute for Congress-people, who face election every 2 years.

**Counter-argument:** The campaign typically becomes a measure of style over substance, where the candidate who raises the most money often wins. This has been undermined in the House, where races have become uncompetitive due to gerrymandering by both parties.

### Plan for paragraph 3

**Argument:** The Electoral College in the presidential election allows the public control over its government, while still acting as a safety mechanism that protects the interests of smaller states.

Moreover, it provides a check against the masses, in accordance with the wishes of the Founding Fathers.

**Counter-argument:** The Electoral College has led to narrowing of presidential campaigns to focus on swing states and has created a situation where the loser of the popular vote has won the election twice in the last six elections. This undermines a president's legitimacy and creates division.

### *Student task*

Complete this essay by

- adding supporting evidence to paragraphs 2 and 3
- adding an AO3 judgement to paragraphs 2 and 3
- writing a conclusion, bringing the three judgements together.

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