

4.3 Participation and democracy in US politics Elections in the US. Aspect: The influence of money in US elections.

Introduction

This unit covers the specification elements related to “Presidential election and money”. It also covers some aspects of Congressional elections, as a part of a reflection and linking back to previous taught elements of the specification. It is designed to provide a background to the topic but is not inclusive of all potential material required for examination purposes. It concentrates on both the knowledge and analytical skills required for A2. It DOES NOT seek to prepare students directly in the skills and processes required for answering the end of year examinations.

Both teachers and students will also need to undertake their own research/reading in order to provide a fully comprehensive coverage of Presidential Elections and Money. This additional research is especially important in updating current material on the topic, which was not known or available when this unit was prepared.

If all of the exercises are undertaken this unit will take between 3-4.5 hours. Timing can be reduced by shortening the discussion time or missing out some of the exercises such as the debate – exercise 7a. Therefore it is important that teachers read through this unit and explore the exercises prior to commencing it. The unit can therefore be shaped best to the timings of the teacher and class concerned.

Aims and objectives

Aim:

The critical analysis of the influence of money in US presidential elections

Objectives:

1. To examine the importance of money in US presidential elections
2. To illustrate the rise in US presidential spending
3. To determine why money is so important in US campaigns
4. To identify where candidates get their money from for their elections

WJEC Government and Politics Assessment Objectives

The following WJEC learning objectives areas are addressed:

A01 – The processes of raising money, the key terms applied

A02 - The determination of why raising money is important in presidential elections, the connection between money raised and success in elections

A03 - To seek to order the importance of central reasons and arguments with respect to determining the importance of money as an over lying factor in presidential elections

Further guidance

The session commences with a general introduction.

The teacher should let the students know that this study session provides an introduction to one of the central factors in winning US presidential elections.

Without mentioning 'money' specifically, the teacher should introduce the session by indicating that 'we are today considering a factor that is so central to successful campaigning that no US presidential candidate can ever win without it". What is this factor?

IMPORTANT Exercise 1 needs to be undertaken before the unit title is shown to the students because this has the answer in it.

Conclusion

Session concludes by the teacher reminding the students that money is only one of the factors in Presidential or Congressional election success or failure. It is, however, the one that can be said to have more impact than any other on winning an election. The teacher may wish to finish the session by getting each student to provide a fact or new point that they did not know when starting the unit. For more detailed and up-to-date information the teacher and students may wish to visit:

<http://www.opensecrets.org>

Note: This unit was prepared before the full results and financial campaign expenditure of the 2016 US presidential elections were available.

Exercise 1: A factor that is so central that no candidate can ever win without it



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs **before commencing the lesson**. They should then agree an answer. It is only important that money is at the top of the pyramid – the other answers can be in any order depending on how the student argues their case.

The teacher should also let the students know that by arguing the order of the pyramid they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions*.

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by prioritising each of the tops and providing a rationale (reason) for doing so. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included. The solution can then be discussed and plotted directly on a whiteboard or screen using the interactive activity. Students should record the agreed outcome at the end of the discussion on the worksheet.



Activity – Success Factors Diamond

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 1

In a diamond shaped design students should plot and rate the following with the most important factor at the top and what they regard as the least important at the bottom:

- Being a Democrat or a Republican at least five years before the election
- Having held an elected government office previously
- Having a name that is instantly recognised by the majority of the US population prior to the

campaign starting

- Employing the largest campaign team
- Raising more campaign money than your opponent
- Being well respected by America's allies across the world
- Having a candidate that is a Washington insider
- Having a candidate that is a Washington outsider
- Writing a book which sets out their vision for America before the nation



Notes

At the end of the exercise the teacher should note that it is agreed by most academics and political commentators that 'raising more campaign money than your opponent can be seen to be the most important factor in determining which candidate will win the presidential race'. The same factor is also true of other US elections such as to Congress or in US direct democracy –such as referendums and initiatives. As a result US elections have been referred to as “the best democracy money can buy”.

In 2012, for instance, over \$2bn* was spent on the US Presidential elections, which dwarfs election spending anywhere else in the world. It is more than was spent on ever UK general election over the whole of the twentieth century, combined.

* Teacher's may wish to update this figure with those available from the 2016 presidential election.

Exercise 2: Key terms revision



Guidance

This is not fully related to lesson on campaign money. It is designed also to enable the student to reflect back on previous study on US elections and keep some of the key terms fresh in their minds. The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or the teacher could simply ask the students the questions.

The interactive activity allows students to attempt an answer themselves by typing into the box before revealing a suggested answer and comparing with their own.

This could be completed as a whole class activity led by the teacher where the pen tool may be useful to note down in brief answers offered by the students before comparing with the suggested answer.

This exercise revises some key terms that students will have already covered.



Activity – Key Terms Test Yourself

[Click to open activity](#)

Question 1 - Can you remember what a Primary is?

Answer: They are intra-state (multi state) elections to select the Democrat or Republican candidate for the presidential election. The rules for these contests are decided by the individual States themselves.

Question 2 - If a State does not hold a primary how does it select its presidential nominee?

Answer: Through a caucus

Question 3 - You have described the visible primary but what is the 'Invisible primary'?

Answer: It is the period before the official primaries start in New Hampshire or Caucus in Iowa. It is where potential candidates test the political waters, through public appearances, opinion polling

and fund raising and seeking to gain an advantage over potential rivals by getting an early start.



Notes

Money raising starts in both the Primary and Invisible Primary. But can students remember what these terms mean?

Exercise 3: Plotting expenditure



Guidance

1. The exercise can be undertaken without the winner of the election being shown in the last column. Students could state this themselves, either through their own knowledge, by research or just by guessing.
2. Money plotting. Students should be asked to plot the expenditure on a graph for both candidates in each year from 1980 onwards. The scale will need to be marked at intervals of \$50 million. The Y axis will be the amount spent and X axis the year of the election.
3. Money plotting. Students could use a spreadsheet to do this. The tabs within the Excel file provided include;
 - a. Original data – the data shown in the table above.
 - b. Data for graph - how the data is refined before producing the graph.
 - c. Graph – the raw graph produced.
 - d. Final graph – includes heading, axis labels and improved layout

Students could be provided with a file including the original data and asked to provide a graph to interpret the results which could be compared to the final graph shown.

4. From their chart work students should be asked to draw relevant factual points.

This exercise covers elements of numeracy and also digital literacy if a spreadsheet is used.



Activity – Expenditure

See Expenditure Spreadsheet

How can we show that money is regarded as the major factor in US elections?

We need to consider if we can match two factors together which are, the amount of money raised and the winner of the election - see table below.

From the figures what can we determine about who wins US Presidential elections?

Election Year	Election Year	Party	Spend \$ millions	Who won
1960	Nixon	Republican	10.1	
1960	Kennedy	Democrat	9.8	X
1964	Goldwater	Republican	10	
1964	Johnson	Democrat	8.8	X
1968	Nixon	Republican	29.4	X
1968	Humphrey	Democrat	11.6	
1972	Nixon	Republican	61.4	X
1972	McGovern	Democrat	30	
1976	Ford	Republican	33.9	
1976	Carter	Democrat	33.4	X
1980	Reagan	Republican	57.7	X
1980	Carter	Democrat	49	
1984	Reagan	Republican	67.5	X
1984	Mondale	Democrat	66.7	
1988	Bush Sr	Republican	80	X
1988	Dukakis	Democrat	77.3	
1992	Bush Sr	Republican	97.4	
1992	Clinton	Democrat	107.9	X
1996	Dole	Republican	66.8	
1996	Clinton	Democrat	115.4	X
2000	Bush Jr	Republican	180.5	X
2000	Gore	Democrat	120.3	
2004	Bush Jr	Republican	355	X
2004	Kerry	Democrat	332.7	
2008	McCain	Republican	239.7	
2008	Obama	Democrat	760.4	X
2012	Romney	Republican	483.1	
2012	Obama	Democrat	737.1	X
2016	Trump	Republican		
2016	Clinton H	Democrat		



Notes

The teacher needs to state that the figures have not been adjusted for inflation which means that earlier figures in the chart would be a bit higher if they were adjusted to today's prices.

The students should note one major point – since 1968 the candidate who raises the most money normally wins the election. The teacher can note that other factors may also account for the winning candidate but this a good indicator of whom will win.

One of the most relevant facts is that expenditure is now more than ten times what it was in 1980. That Obama's spending was far more than his opponents and broke through the chart ceiling. The teacher should also discuss other points raised.

Exercise 4: Why is raising the most money important?



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that once the candidate decides to contest a presidential election they need to raise money so they can undertake a number of campaigning tasks.

There are two exercises here to determine what these may be and why raising money early is important to a candidate's fortunes.



Guidance

This activity can be delivered as a whole class activity led by the teacher on a whiteboard or screen where statements are located either in the true or false areas of the screen.

Students should be urged to justify their decisions. When complete the check button can be clicked to reveal how many answers are correct. Some may need to be relocated to achieve the correct answer, which should generate further discussion.

Alternately students can complete the task individually or in pairs on a computer, tablet or smartphone. This would also be useful when revising.

A printed worksheet is also provided that could be completed by students prior to a classroom discussion and any further amendments or corrections required to the worksheet could then be made appropriately. It may be possible that students can provide a strong argument that one answer does indeed belong in another box. Teachers can therefore indicate that ask the rest of the class if they agree. If there is a consensus then, although the exercise does not allow it, they can mark up their own copies as having it in the other box.

Teachers should note that some of these same arguments apply to overall campaign funding in the rest of the campaign.

The teacher should then undertake an exercise, which determines how campaign money may be spent.



Activity 4a – Financial True or False

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 4a

In the primaries it is important that candidates gather a large financial war chest.

Consider if these statements are true or false in terms of the main advantages of raising the most money in the primary elections for a candidate?

True statements

This will give them a major advantage over both candidates who are unable to raise as much money.

It will put off new entrants (challengers) to the presidential race, who are squeezed out by the other candidates fund raising abilities.

It will enable them to spend some of the money on projecting their message and at the same time discrediting those of their opponent (negative campaigning).

If they can't raise sufficient finance at this stage they are unlikely to do so later on. This will then determine whether they are able to continue to the presidential election.

False statements

If they lose they will have still made themselves a multi-millionaire.

They will be able to put the money towards writing a book about their life and ensure that copies of this can be widely circulated.

It gives them the business experience that they may have lacked because they have previously only been paid as an elected official and not worked in the private sector.

If the money is not all spent it can be used to help their own party in elections elsewhere.



Activity 4b – What do candidates need to spend their campaign money on? (PowerPoint Memory test)

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 4b

The teacher will ask students to list three reasons that indicate where money needs to be spent and then go through the answers below which appear on the second screen of the presentation. Click **View** to see each reason in turn.

The answers are shown below but they students **SHOULD NOT** take notes from the screen. This is because they undertake a memory board exercise as part of this exercise.

Possible answers are:

1. The political party structures and identities are not as strong as in other nations. Therefore presidential candidates need to project their own image far more strongly. This needs substantial spending.
2. It is expensive to advertise on television, especially during the prime TV slots. Despite, this being the age of the internet, TV is still the main form of spreading the campaigning messages.
3. Messaging to target key voter groups or swing states needs to be undertaken with precision and extensive polling, which is an expensive science.
4. Specialist campaign staff need to be employed and the latest specialist technologies, web site and social media methods used
5. Political campaigns extend over longer and longer periods, presidential campaigns start now, almost two years before the actual election. At the same time congressional, state and other elections mean that election campaigning is on an almost permanent nature.

These words in bold and underlined below are shown on the screen and students must use these to provide an answer to the question themselves. Once they have done this the full answers can be revealed again. The worksheet may be used for students to attempt their answers.

1. The political party structures and identities are **not as strong** as in other nations. Therefore presidential candidates need to project their own image far more strongly. This needs

substantial spending.

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5. Political campaigns extend over longer and longer periods, presidential campaigns start now almost two years before the actual election. At the same time congressional, state and other elections mean that election campaigning is on an almost **permanent** nature.

Exercise 5: Origins of campaign money



Guidance

The teacher should ask “If you were running for president of the United States where do you think you would get your money from? “

Teacher should seek to get answers from the group.

Teacher should note that in some ways it is similar to any business raising finance but in others it is uniquely American or political.



Activity – Where do you think candidates get their campaign money from?

Suggested answers are:

1. *from the candidates own personal finances* – therefore it helps to be a billionaire – like Donald Trump – many other US federal politicians, however, are also wealthy. In the 2016 US Congress over half (50.8%) were millionaires. In fact there were some 10 Congress members with personal fortunes of over \$100 m. In 2015 the group Open Secrets calculated the average network of House members as being \$850,000 and in the Senate at \$2.8m.
2. *party political money* - either the Democrat or Republican national and congressional party committees supply money to their candidate.
3. *Federal funding* - if the candidate agrees to the set spending limit. This was introduced to try and stop election spending spiraling ever higher. Up until 2008 all presidential candidates did this because federal money was match funded. Thus for every \$1 raised the federal government would match this. In 2008, however, Obama correctly believed that he could raise far more than the federal funding limit and therefore rejected federal funding. This rejection has now become more standard for presidential candidates.
4. *Political Action Committees (PACs)* - which have been organized for the purpose of raising and spending money to elect or defeat a candidate. They are registered with the Federal

Election Committee (FEC) but have limits placed on them, with respect to the amount they can raise or spend on any one individual. The most common type of PACs are those related to business.

5. *501/527 groups* – these are known as advocacy groups because they normally work on behalf of a cause group or someone else to promote a candidate (advocating). They are tax exempt and can collect and spend unlimited amounts. This spending is also sometimes referred to as ‘Dark Money’ because money is spent with the purpose of influencing the voter but we do not know where the money comes from.
6. *Super PACs*– are independent expenditure-only committees who can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money but unlike ordinary PACS they cannot co-ordinate their activities with candidates or give them money directly.
7. *Fund raising through the internet or social media* - this can generate large amounts of money from many millions of small donations. In recent years all of the presidential candidates have raised considerable sums in this way. In 2008 Obama was able to raise some \$186 m from donors of \$200 or less. Just over half of Obama’s total fundraising came from donations of \$1,000 or less.

Exercise 6: Super PAC



Notes

In 2010 a decision by the Supreme Court in the case known as *Citizens United* ruled that political funding could not be restricted because it breached the First Amendment of the US Constitution on Freedom of Speech. This led to the creation of so-called super PACs which had no limit to what they could raise or spend. By the end of August 2016, there were 2,327 groups organized as Super PACs in the USA. They had declared reported total receipts of \$992,284,832 and total 'independent' expenditures of \$529,622,999. The highest spending was for pro Democrat PAC *Priorities USA*. This had raised \$110 million and spent \$51 million on supporting Hillary Clinton whilst the highest spending Republican Super Pac, *Rebuilding America Now* had raised \$21 million and spent some \$13 million on supporting Donald Trump.



Guidance

Before revealing the possible answers the teacher should encourage the group to provide some answers of their own. The answers offered may be similar to those in the list or there could be valid reasons that are not provided.

Reasons then need to be ranked in order of how correct they are and the ranking then justified.

The printable worksheet allows students to place a ranking number besides each answer and to include one answer of their own. New answers provided by the class could be discussed and one then selected to be included in the empty box to be ranked with the others. The teacher may wish to note that in this instance raising more money did not result in the highest fund raiser winning. Although Hillary Clinton won the popular vote she did not win the Electoral College vote.



Activity – Financial Ordering

[Click to open activity](#)

See **Worksheet 6**

Why do you think that the top Super PAC for Hillary Clinton was able to raise five times more money than the top Republican Super PAC could for Donald Trump?

Arrange these possible answers in order according to how correct they are in your opinion.

Possible answers;

Early starter/front runner – Hillary Clinton started campaigning almost 10 years before Donald Trump. She had been a prospective presidential candidate in 2008 but lost to Barack Obama. Clinton was also the Democratic front runner from the start of the 2016 contest, whereas this was not fully apparent for Donald Trump until mid-way through the Republican Primaries.

Crowded field – Donald Trump started as one of 16 possible Republican candidates in the Presidential primaries. Hillary Clinton was one of three. Therefore the potential Super Pac raising monies were spread around far more candidates for Trump.

Alienation of key Republican groups by Donald Trump during his campaign made it more difficult to gain support. Many key Republicans, including key fundraisers, distanced themselves from Trump during the contest.

Billionaire wealth - Being a billionaire and having his own deep pockets meant that Trump did not need the money of PACs. Whereas as Hillary Clinton's relatively poorer financial resource meant that her supporters needed to use Super PACS money more frequently.

Free publicity – Donald Trump's controversial style meant that his often 'outrageous' statements, he generated news headlines, stories and publicity that avoided the need to spend large sums of money on advertising his message to the electorate.

Exercise 7: Hard and Soft Money



Guidance

The teacher should remind students that there are some key political terms that come up in US politics that aren't used anywhere else. Two of these refer to campaign finance and are referred to as Hard money and Soft money.

For this exercise students determine which sentence applies to which category. They could write the key words 'soft' and 'hard' money in the middle of a piece of paper and 'brainstorm' before seeing any definitions.

They then could complete the worksheet noting 'Soft' or 'Hard' in the column on the right.



Activity – Definitions of Hard Money and Soft Money

See Worksheet 7

Hard money is;

Called the traditional type of political spending.

For this kind of spending the name of the donors must be disclosed. In addition there are limits applied to the amount that can be given.

The organisations are allowed to coordinate their efforts to help elect a presidential candidate.

The groups that are involved are candidate committees, political parties, and traditional Political Action Committees (PAC).

Soft money is;

Also called 'outside political spending or 'independent or non-coordinated' spending.

It is expenditure not made by the candidate themselves but by other individuals and organisations. These outsider groups can accept unlimited sums of money from individuals, corporations, or unions.

It doesn't include traditional PACs (Soft money) or political parties. With these donations the groups can then engage in direct political activities such as buying negative or positive campaigning advertising for or against a candidate or running a phone bank designed to promote one candidate or another.

Unlike PACs, however, they cannot coordinate their activity or spending with the political parties or candidates. Super PACs must also disclose their donors.

Exercise 8: Do American's spend too much on their elections?



Notes

The Centre for Responsive Politics calculated that some \$2.6bn was spent on the 2012 US Presidential elections and \$3.7bn on that year's congressional elections. Does this seem too much money to spend on an election?

In the previous year, however, the *Washington Post* reported that the tobacco industry had spent \$8.4bn in advertising, and Americans overall had spent \$16bn on buying chocolate, \$11bn on bottled water, \$10bn on romance novels and \$18bn in credit card late fees. So are American presidential elections actually under spending on their campaigns compared to other spending?



Guidance

Students should be divided into for and against groups. 10 minutes should be set aside to discuss their arguments. Both for and against groups should then list their arguments one by one either verbally or by writing it on the board. The other group should then be able to give a response to this point and then bring forward their own point. The other group then responds to this and so on. Every member of the group should make a point in this exercise.



Activity – Election Spending Debate

Debate point: The US Presidential elections are the most important event in Americans lives. Therefore election spending should reflect this and be higher?

Exercise 9: Beat the teacher



Guidance

Beat the teacher involves students being shown a series of statements, which may be true or false. If they are true or false the student must give a reason why. The students must provide answers for all eight statements. The teacher can then go through each one with the group, getting students to discuss their answers.

The interactive activity allows students to attempt an answer themselves by selecting true or false and also having to justify their answer by typing into the box before revealing a suggested answer and comparing with their own. This can be done on a computer or a tablet.

This could be completed as a whole class activity led by the teacher where the pen tool may be useful to note down in brief answers offered by the students before comparing with the suggested answer.

Students could also use the worksheet included to prepare their answers individually or in pairs before the classroom discussion takes place via the interactive activity on the board or screen.



Activity – Beat the teacher

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 9

Here are a series of statements about money and presidential elections. State which is correct and which is false and attempt to justify your answer.

1. There is a spending limit on US elections set by the Federal Election Commission, which candidates must abide by?
2. American's spend more on their Presidential elections than they do on chocolate? Gelwir arian caled hefyd yn wario gwleidyddol allanol.
3. Hard money is also called outside political spending.
4. Super PACs cannot give money directly to a candidate.

5. In 2016 Super PACs raised far more money for Donald Trump than they were able to raise for Hillary Clinton.
6. Members of the US Congress and US Presidential candidates are more likely to be millionaires than other US citizens of the US population were millionaires, in the UK the figure was 4.9%
7. Small donations only make up a tiny fraction of presidential campaign fundraising.
8. Being able to fund raise large sums early in the campaign can put off other rival candidates.

Answers

1. There is a spending limit on US elections set by the Federal Election Commission, which candidates must abide by? – **False** – the FEC does set a limit if the candidates want matched funding but candidates can ignore this and raise the money directly themselves. This is what Obama did in 2008 and 2012.
2. American's spend more on their Presidential elections than they do on chocolate? – **False** in 2012 it was \$2.6bn to around \$16bn on chocolate.
3. Hard money is also called outside political spending – **True** - This is expenditure not made by the candidate themselves but by other individuals and organisations.
4. Super PACs cannot give money directly to a candidate – **True** FEC rules prohibit this.
5. In 2016 Super PACs raised far more money for Donald Trump than they were able to raise for Hillary Clinton – **False** - the situation was the other way around.
6. Members of the US Congress and US Presidential candidates are more likely to be millionaires than other US citizens – **True** over half are millionaires, in 2015 Credit Suisse estimated that in contrast just 6.4 per cent of the US population were millionaires, in the UK the figure was 4.9%.
7. Small donations only make up a tiny fraction of presidential campaign fundraising – **False** - In 2012 almost half of Obama's fundraising was from amounts of \$1,000 or less.
8. Being able to fund raise large sums early in the campaign can put off other rival candidates – **True** – early fundraising can squeeze out a candidate's opponents.