

PRIMARY ELECTIONS IN THE USA: BETWEEN REPUBLICANISM AND DEMOCRACY

© Ralf Jeremias

Researcher and lecturer, Department of Sociology, Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany

ORCID ID: [0000-0002-5997-8877](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5997-8877)

Email: ralf.jeremias@sowi.uni-giessen.de

Abstract: The aim of this article is to highlight the ambivalences of the US primaries. With primaries citizens – and not party elites – can determine the party candidates for an election. After decades of attempting to introduce them (which will be discussed in section 2), they have now become a common practice for both parties to select candidates for presidential and other (e.g. gubernatorial) elections. While the direct influence of citizens on candidate selection has often been praised as a genuine democratic achievement, it is debatable whether all groups in society have an equal opportunity to stand in primaries (section 3). It turns out that super-rich businessmen are overrepresented, and that this is intrinsic to the campaign financing system, because they can partially finance their election campaigns with their own money if needed. Furthermore, the constitutive function of primaries also pertains to their potential capacity to enable political innovation, as they make it possible for new ideas and new actors to get into the parties and the political arena. Notably, they enable actors who were not previously active in politics to enter the republican (in Hannah Arendt's words) 'space of appearance'. In order to examine the ambivalences and contradictions of primaries, Hanna Arendt's distinction between the republican and the democratic is discussed in section 4, with the result that primaries appear as complex political institutions that combine, partly in contradictory terms, normative understandings of republicanism and democracy. The article concludes with the argument that the ambivalences and complexities inherent in the US primaries, as well as their unintended side effects, do not speak against primaries as such, but rather call for the introduction of rules regulating their implementation.

Keywords: primaries, democracy, republic, republicanism, election, USA, Trump



1. Introduction and Research Question Outline¹

This article explores the ambivalences of primaries in the United States of America (USA) with regard to tensions between their normative democratic ambition, the reality of their outcomes, and their, perhaps unintended, side effects. The normative democratic ambition of primaries can be deduced from a description of what they are and what they are supposed to be, as well as in the description of their history in the USA, which will be discussed in section 2. The history of primaries is marked by (the desire for and the fact of) increasing democratic participation. Yet, while they have become the accepted form of candidate selection in the United States, one needs to account for the empirical reality of their outcomes, also with regard to possible undesired side effects. This will be done in section 3. This applies, first and foremost, to the question whether all groups in society have an equal opportunity to stand in primaries. As it turns out, this is the case only to a limited extent, which makes apparent the contradiction between aspiration and reality, a first of the ambivalences of US primaries. This has to be seen as an unintended side effect, as the original idea for their introduction was to prevent the domination of privileged groups (especially within political parties). The second question pertains to whether primaries bring new ideas and new people to the political arena, challenging the control of political parties and/or oligarchic elites over political agenda setting, and if so, to what extent. In this respect, it will be argued that primaries have a genuine potential for triggering political variation. In order to theoretically come to terms with those ambivalences and contradictions of primaries, Hannah Arendt's distinction between the *republican* and the *democratic* is discussed in section 4. The final section 5 summarises my conclusions. Ultimately, one arrives at a very nuanced and complex finding with regard to primaries in the United States, which by no means speaks against them *per se*, but draws attention to its ambivalences and unintended side effects.

2. The Form and History of Primaries

Primaries are used to pre-select party candidates before an 'actual' election, and their main purpose is to determine who will be nominated as a party candidate. In the United States they are used for presidential elections², elections for state governors, members of Congress (House

1 I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and Andreas Langenohl for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

2 Strictly speaking, a distinction has to be made between primaries and caucuses, the two different forms of presidential primaries in the USA, which in principle have the same goal, namely selecting candidates. While primaries in the nar-

of Representative and Senate) and mayoral elections of large cities. Nowadays in most countries the party elites nominate candidates, as was the case in the USA before the primaries were gradually introduced for various elections around 1900 (Ginsberg et. al., 2011: 349). Before their introduction, the presidential candidates of parties were nominated by national party conventions (DiClerico, 2000: 4), which were originally far from democratic or transparent, as testified by various characterizations. The candidate selection process “was perceived as being subject to near total manipulation by the party bosses” (Ibid.: 5). The politician and businessman William Tweed (1823–1878) is alleged to have said: “I don’t care who does the electing, so long as I do the nominating.” (Ibid.: 3). Polsby et al. (2008: 97) conclude: “Once upon a time, presidential nominations were won by candidates who courted the support of party leaders from several states.”

At least according to the American basic idea, a “democratic society is built on equal opportunity” (Bredemeier et. al., 1949: 301). With ‘equal opportunity’ being held as an ideal in the USA, this party-centric form of candidate selection was no longer acceptable. The primaries were introduced to make the selection of candidates more democratic, fair and transparent.

After the first primaries in Florida in 1901 (DiClerico, 2000: 5), neither of the two major parties (Democrats and Republicans) immediately began to introduce primaries in all US states. It was a protracted process, but it was expedited by the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. At the time the convention took place, the Democrats had only held primary elections in 17 states (Norrander, 1992: 6 f.), in which the majority voted for candidates who opposed the Vietnam War (Gitlin, 1987: 331). Nevertheless, after the announcement by incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson that he would not be running for re-election, and the assassination of the promising candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who had not participated in the primaries, was nominated as the presidential candidate for the Democrats (Davis, 1997: 20).

This exclusion of the electorate from the candidate selection process caused much protest. In order to pacify the critics of Humphrey’s nomination, the so-called McGovern-Fraser Commission was set up, which resulted in an “increase in the number of binding presidential primaries” (Karmack, 2009: 15). Thus, while the number of primaries did not change much from 1912 to 1968, it increased significantly from this point in 1968 onwards (see Norrander 1992: 7).

In the 1990s, both parties, Democrats and Republicans, held primaries in most states. Today primaries have become a common practice

rower sense usually consist solely of an election, caucuses typically also include meetings with and exchanges amongst supporters of a party. The title of this paper refers both to primaries in the narrower sense and caucuses.

for both parties to select candidates for presidential and other (e.g. gubernatorial) elections.³

Primaries give voters the opportunity to influence political agendas. The Democratic Party primaries for the 2020 presidential election revealed that primaries are not just about the selection of candidates, but also about the selection of different political attitudes that a candidate represents. Hirano and Snyder argue that primaries are the only ‘real’ elections in regions where one party dominates (Hirano and Snyder, 2019: 1 ff.). Since the USA is one of the “only nations in the world to hold primary elections” (Ginsberg et. al, 2011: 349), some scholars consider the primary elections in the United States as “the most inclusive nomination process among political parties across democracies” (Albert and La Raja, 2020: 1): primaries are supposed to give people a voice in who is nominated, instead of party elites arguing over it in smoke-filled back rooms.⁴

At the same time, however, primaries are not an uncontroversial institution. They have emerged from struggles over participation. This underscores the complexity and ambivalences of the situation, to which we will turn now.

3. Primaries: Ambitions, Consequences and Ambivalences

3. 1. Equitable Representation in Primaries?

Investigating the participants in the 2020 presidential election primaries reveals social-structural biases in candidate selection. In the USA there are 680 billionaires (Figure for 2017, Neate, 2018) among 327 million inhabitants (Figures from 2018, Factfinder, 2019). They amount to 0.0002 percent of the American population. Among the last remaining nine possible candidates⁵ for the 2020 presidential election (eight remaining from the Democratic primaries, plus the Republican incumbent Donald Trump), at the end of February 2020, three

3 A special feature are the so-called super delegates that the Democrats have, but the Republicans do not. These are established politicians (for example, governors, senators or members of the House of Representatives), who are not elected in the primaries, but are still allowed to vote for the presidential candidates at the national convention and can decide for themselves who to vote for. Although their votes have significantly less weight than the electoral delegates determined by the voters in the primary elections, they restrict the basic democratic principle outlined here.

4 Presumably to represent this smoke symbolically, a picture of it has been put on the cover of the book “The Party Decides. Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform” (Cohen et. al., 2008).

5 This does not include the outsiders who ran against incumbent President Donald Trump in the primaries, or those who only ran in some of the primaries.

were billionaires (Bloomberg, Steyer and Trump). This corresponds to 33 percent. This immense statistical over-representation of the super-rich is not a coincidence, but a feature of the system, as the following examples illustrate.

The most prominent example is Donald Trump, whose candidacy 2016 was denied the support of the party establishment. The list of leading Republicans who spoke out against Trump before the election is long, beginning with the former president George H. W. Bush, who preferred Hillary Clinton (On Bush: Samuelsohn, 2016), up to the 2008 Republican presidential candidate John McCain (Everett, 2016). Before the first primaries for the presidency, Donald Trump ranked 10th in terms of party support, and in terms of funds raised he ranked 9th (Francia, 2018, Table I: 443). He was not supported by a single Republican governor of an American state or a Congressional Representative. In comparison, Jeb Bush, son of the 41st American president George H. W. Bush and brother of the 43rd American president George W. Bush, had support from 30 prominent Republicans (Ibid.: 442), the most any Republican candidate 2016 got (Ibid., Table I: 443).

The lack of support from the party and the modest donations would have meant the end of the race for any competitor, but Trump was able to continue his 2016 election campaign by spending 66 million US dollars of his own money (Figures from Schouten, 2016 and Open Secrets I). This expenditure accounted for nearly 20 percent of his campaign costs (Figures from Open Secrets I), and made Donald Trump the candidate who spent the largest amount of his own money on his presidential campaign in American history⁶ (Clevidence, 2019) until Michael Bloomberg overtook him. By January 2020, Bloomberg invested 464 million US dollars from his own pocket into his election campaign. (Figures from Schouten, 2020.)

Donald Trump is a remarkable example of the possible effects of primaries not only because he was the richest American president of all time, but also because he was the first president in American history with no political, governmental or military experience before he took office.

A further example is Doug Burgum, a super-rich businessman, who has a personal fortune of 1.1 billion US dollars ((2020 status) – Figures from Starsgab. Its Shiny, 2020) and is the Governor of North Dakota. Like Trump, Burgum, who was elected on the same day as Trump, had no political experience prior to being elected to office. He was soundly defeated at the North Dakota 2016 Republican State Convention, where it was to be decided which candidate should receive his party's support. He came in third place. In the second, decisive vote, he was

6 However, Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush each spent more money on their campaign than Donald Trump, donations included. In the case of Jeb Bush, the comparison with Donald Trump only relates to the spending in the primaries.

unable to secure even as little as ten percent of the party delegates' votes (Forum News Service, 2016).

For Burgum to oppose the party and to continue the campaign on his own was only possible because he was a rich businessman who could afford to spend over a million US dollars (it is not entirely clear how large the sum was) of his own money for his election campaign. He spent more out of pocket than the total amount of donations from his supporters. His opponent emphasised that he could not compete with the large sum that Burgum had invested in his campaign (Nowatzki and Springer, 2016). Burgum surprised the Republican Party establishment, by winning the primary against all expectations and despite the votes of the party delegates, leaving behind the candidate that the party convention delegates endorsed. The executive director of the Republican Party in North Dakota was compelled to admit that he was surprised by the majority of 60 percent with which Burgum had won (Ibid.).

Six of the 50 American states (November 2020), 12 percent, are ruled by a governor who was a businessman before taking office. With the exception of Kevin Stitt, all of them are super-rich and (including Stitt) have never held a political office before. This shows that we cannot speak of an isolated case, but rather of a phenomenon. Their names are J. B. Pritzker (Illinois), Doug Burgum (North Dakota), Pete Ricketts (Nebraska), Kevin Stitt (Oklahoma), Bill Lee (Tennessee) and Jim Justice (West Virginia). In one case, the wealthiest resident of the state (West Virginia) is also its governor (Jim Justice).

There are other cases of extremely rich politicians, such as Clement "Butch" Leroy Otter, former governor of Idaho, who possessed a fortune of 20.3 million US dollars at the time of his election in 2006 (Figure of his fortune in 2006 from Open Secrets V), Bruce Rauner, former governor of Illinois (personal wealth of 500 million US dollars, some estimates are as high as a billion dollars – figures from Armentrout and Dudek, 2017 and McDermott, 2018), and the above mentioned J. B. Pritzker, the current governor of Illinois (personal wealth of 3.4 billion US dollars – figures from Armentrout and Dudek, 2017 and McDermott, 2018). The 2018 election as governor of Illinois made J. B. Pritzker the richest politician in office in the United States, ahead of Donald Trump, whom he overtook (Çam, 2018).

A particularly obvious example of primaries favouring wealthy individuals is Michael Bloomberg. After several television debates among the Democratic presidential candidates, the multi-billionaire entered the competition in November 2019 and immediately spent 57 million US dollars on television advertising (Figure from Dzhanova and Schwartz, 2019). Within a short period Bloomberg reached third place in the opinion polls⁷, and overtook most of the other competitors. He

7 Opinion polls on the Democrat candidates for the 2020 presidential election.

was (as of 12 February 2020) only 1.7 percentage points behind the latter president Joe Biden in the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries polls (RealClearPolitics, 2020).

For many years (2000 to 2013) he was the mayor of New York City, as a Republican and also as an independent, although he began his political career at the Democratic Party. He is a multi-billionaire, alleged to have a fortune of 55.5 billion US dollars, and is the ninth richest person in the world (Forbes). Bloomberg was a Democratic presidential candidate hopeful in the 2020 presidential election, although he had switched to the Republicans and later became a non-partisan candidate during his time as the NYC mayor. He re-registered as a Democrat in October 2018 (Tillett, 2018). The case of Bloomberg, now a Democrat, demonstrates not only that the super-rich going into politics is a phenomenon not limited to the Republican Party, but also that it overrides the rationale of party loyalty.

That super-rich candidates are overrepresented is no accident, but rather a feature of the system. These self-funding candidates are better able to meet the high campaign costs and use their opportunities in a more efficient and effective way than those who do not have the financial means. By privileging wealthy individuals, primaries have unintended consequences that are not according to their original purpose of making the candidate selection process more fair and democratic.

Recently, the effect of wealth on primaries seems to have become more pronounced. The 2018 Congressional mid-term elections were the most expensive in US history (Open Secrets II and III). Since 2000, in fact, the candidates who had the most money won the Congressional elections in most cases. In the period from 2000 to 2018, approximately 80 percent of the Senate elections and around 90 percent of the elections for the House of Representatives were won by the top spending candidate (Open Secrets IV).

Four of the six wealthiest presidential candidates in the history of the USA ran for presidency from 2000 to the present: Donald Trump, Mitt Romney (Republican presidential candidate 2012 – wealth of 250 million US dollars), John Kerry (Democratic presidential candidate 2004 – wealth of 200 million US dollars) and Steve Forbes (defeated in the 1996 and 2000 primaries) (Abbruzzese, 2015). It should be noted that these statistics were calculated before Michael Bloomberg joined the race for the candidacy of the Democratic Party. Taking him into account would make the wealth effect even more dramatic.

It is here that the ambivalence of primaries becomes apparent. The idea of the primaries is that anyone can be elected. Yet the actual opportunity for everyone to participate, even without support from party leaders, is, in reality, unequally distributed as a consequence of the wealth effect. The election campaign must be financed, whether from donations or with the candidates' own money. Average-earning citizens must gain the support of the party apparatus and/or donors

for their campaign. In contrast, a self-funding candidate can avoid the inconvenience of having to secure party backing. This privileges super-rich candidates.

Hence, primaries in the USA have two effects. The first is a democratic one: anyone can stand in an election even without the support of a party. The second is social-structural in nature: given the high costs of an election campaign without support from a party or super-rich donors, not everyone has the same chance of being elected. Thus, the opportunity to be elected as a candidate is not equally accessible to everyone in the population. A wealthy person can more easily cope with a lack of support from a party or insufficient campaign donations because they can partially or completely finance their election campaign themselves. The contrast between the *purpose* and the *effect* of the primaries is obvious.

3. 2. Primaries as Motors of Political Innovation?

Opportunities to stand in the primaries are obviously limited for some segments of society, though not entirely out of reach. For instance, Bernie Sanders, took second place in the Democratic primaries twice with mostly small donations, even though he has never been a member of the Democratic Party and operates as an independent, non-party member in the Senate (Party affiliation in Congress, see: Congress.gov). Primaries therefore have the potential to drive political innovation and introduce new faces, since outsiders and their ideas can achieve a measure of success and influence the parties' political orientation.

If the leaderships of the two big parties (Democrats and Republicans) had had their way, a second Clinton would have run against a third Bush in the 2016 presidential election, i.e. Hillary Clinton against Jeb Bush. To many voters this confirmed the view that there was no real alternative, that everything was just a game rigged by established families, and that American politics was already showing slight aristocratic tendencies. Without primaries there would have been no Bernie Sanders as a two-time near-presidential candidate for the Democrats and no Donald Trump as president, regardless of how one sees these people politically. Both candidates were rejected by their respective party elites when they stood in the 2016 presidential election. It is possible there would have been no President Barack Obama either, as the candidacy would have been awarded to someone from the inner circle of the party, probably a member of a well-known and influential political family. It should not be overlooked that Hillary Clinton had been ahead of Obama for a long time in the polls for the 2008 primaries, and that Obama's victory in the first of the primaries in 2008, the Iowa caucuses, came as a big surprise.

In terms of political ideas and agenda, one only has to remember that both Donald Trump, a Republican, and Bernie Sanders, an

independent running on the Democratic ticket, contradicted their own parties' viewpoints on key issues. In the case of Donald Trump, the majority of the Republican Party and former Republican presidents had advocated globalization, free trade and free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico (1994) and Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) with China (2000), but Trump took a diametrically opposite stance, namely that of protectionism. He addressed the consequences of these free trade agreements – the loss and relocation of jobs, the deindustrialization in the Rust Belt states and the precarious situation of the workers in this region. Also, before Trump was elected, the Republicans endorsed the United States' role as the 'world police', and rejected it after Trump took office. In addition, the majority of the Republican Party, including former President George W. Bush, supported the Second Iraq War in 2003, which was started during his administration, whereas Trump described this war as a mistake on several occasions, and its justification as a lie.

In the case of Bernie Sanders, it was not so much the proposal to abolish tuition fees, which by American standards sounded almost revolutionary, or the support for a Green New Deal, as the fact that several of his ideas moved to the centre of the Democratic Party, which led to a partial realignment of the party. The fact that Bernie Sanders has changed the Democratic Party without ever being a member, as “[f]or most of his career, he was seen as an eccentric, fringe player, a peculiarity with his antipathy for capitalism” (Friess, 2020), underscores the politically constitutive importance of primaries in enabling political innovation.

Donald Trump's primaries and election campaign in 2016 was deliberately directed against the established politicians. In his own words, “[p]oliticians prospered, but the jobs left, and the factories closed”. He did not name any names, which implies that he also meant politicians from his own party⁸. Furthermore, both the Sanders and the Trump campaigns focused on the “forgotten men and women of our country” (in Trump's words), thus raising the issue of social participation. The primaries can therefore change the political orientation of the parties. This happened with both big parties, with the Republicans in 2016 and with the Democrats after 2016.

Two empirical findings emerge: first, primaries favour the rich because of the campaign financing system; second, primaries enable individuals to set political agendas independently from party apparatuses, thus influencing the parties' political programmes and positions.

8 It should therefore come as no surprise that several neoconservatives from the Bush era took a stand against Trump.

4. Primaries: Between Democracy and Republic(anism)

The contradiction between the ideal behind the primary elections (a basic democratic concept that anyone can be elected) and their effects (chances of successfully contending for candidacy are socially constrained) can be engaged with more analytical depth if one adopts Hannah Arendt's distinction between the *republican* and the *democratic*, which she attributes to the revolutionaries of the American Independence Movement (Arendt, 1977, first published 1963)⁹. The revolutionaries were driven by a concern about “despotism of the masses” which they wanted to prevent (Ibid.: 156)¹⁰ and which they perceived as a hallmark of ancient democracy (Ibid.: 217 ff). As a result, the checks and balances that were supposed to limit the power of individual political institutions were put in place.

In Arendt's interpretation, democracy means “majority rule” (Ibid.: 157)¹¹, whereas in a republic the “constitutionally guaranteed rule of law cannot be suspended by any majority decision” (Marchart, 2015: 159, my translation)¹². “The Republic is that form of government in which positive freedom for political action is institutionalised and constitutionally guaranteed.” (Marchart, 2005: 131, my translation, italics in the original.) Or in the words of Hannah Arendt: “[A] republic granted to every citizen the right to become ‘a participator in the government of affairs’, the right to be seen in action.” (Arendt, 1977: 121)¹³.

“If a republic [...] is based on freedom, then democracy [...] is based on equality.”¹⁴ (Marchart, 2015: 167).

Against the background of Arendt's historical reconstruction of the US political system, the crucial question is how primaries, which were becoming established during the time Arendt was writing her books, refer to ‘democratic’ and/or ‘republican’ rationalities. The primaries

9 “The American revolutionary insistence on the distinction between a republic and a democracy or majority rule” (Arendt, 1977: 157).

10 “[T]he Founding Fathers tended to equate rule based on public opinion with tyranny; democracy in this sense was to them but a newfangled form of despotism.” (Arendt, 1977: 218.)

11 Elsewhere: “democracy, or rule by the majority” (Arendt, 1977: 155).

12 “[...] a republic in the sense of ‘an empire of laws and not of men’ (Harrington)” (Arendt, 1977: 155).

13 Arendt writes, “the confusing and confused equation of republican with democratic government dates from the nineteenth century” (Arendt, 1977: 216). In fact, to differentiate between a republic and a democracy is so difficult for us nowadays because “a republic that would not also be democracy in the modern sense is no longer imaginable today”, i.e. “Republicanism is only available as *democratic republicanism*.” (Both quotations from Marchart, 2005: 163, my translation. Partly in italics in the original.)

14 Arendt writes about “the democratic mentality of an egalitarian society” (Arendt, 1977: 269).

are based on the principle of freedom, since everyone has the freedom to participate in them and use their own resources for the election campaign. Primaries thus qualify as a republican institution. However, they do not conform to the principle of equality, because not everyone actually has the same opportunities to participate successfully, hence, they are not democratic.

The primaries claim to be a democratic institution within the republican idiom, and at the same time they preclude democracy in the sense of unequal conditions of participation. Freedom and equality are mutually exclusive: If equal opportunities were created, and every participant in the primaries had the same resources available for the election campaign, the principle of freedom, i.e. that everyone could use as much money for the election campaign as they wanted and were able to raise, would be restricted. With this in mind, primaries can be either democratic or republican, but not both.

The republican expectations from the primaries are therefore different from the democratic ones. Unequal representation of various groups and subsets of population among candidates in primaries is problematic, yet I would argue that it is even more problematic if the population has no influence on the selection of candidates and can only choose among those candidates the parties offer them. Primaries give the population democratic influence at a very early stage in the election process. Anyone can participate in them, which constitutes *equality in principle* and is therefore in accordance with democratic standards. Nobody is excluded from participation from the outset. Americans are certainly very familiar with the following words from the Declaration of Independence: “[A]ll men are created equal”. Therefore, *in principle*, it is not allowed to exclude anyone. This has practical relevance – in a number of voting systems, participation is, *in principle*, excluded from the outset.

The electoral system in Germany can be taken as an example. Since the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) can no longer be considered a major party (*Volkspartei*)¹⁵ after the great loss of votes in the last elections, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union of Germany) remains the only major party in the country. Therefore, the CDU (together with their fraternal party CSU (Christian Social Union), which only competes in Bavaria, where the CDU does not compete¹⁶), should receive presumably the most votes in a federal election. In turn, the person chosen as the candidate for the chancellor by the Union Parties, an alliance of the CDU and CSU, has a very good chance of becoming Federal Chancellor.

15 A major or people’s party (German: *Volkspartei*), is open to many social groups and therefore wins a large share of votes in elections. Traditionally, the Union Parties CDU/CSU and the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) were designated as such.

16 In Bavaria, the CSU can be considered a people’s party too.

The selection of the Union Parties' candidate for the office of the chancellor for the 2021 German federal election (*Bundestagswahl*) was decided internally by the two fraternal parties in their inner circle of power. The population, even the majority of CDU and CSU party members, had no possibility to influence this decision. They could not participate in this far-reaching decision, for example by voting in a primary election. One possible consequence of this was that the more popular candidate of the Union, who had "great sympathy on the grassroots level" (Jerabek, 2021, my translation) and better poll results (Popp, 2021), was not selected as the party's candidate for the federal election.

Similar was the case of the Green Party (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*), which is now, months before the federal elections, on a par with the CDU/CSU in the polls and is on the way to become a major party in its own right.¹⁷ Here the two party leaders decided which one of them should be the candidate for the chancellorship in the German federal election 2021, but without primaries, as in the case of the CDU/CSU alliance. So it is hardly surprising that most respondents (41.9 percent) in a survey said that they did not consider either the CDU/CSU or the Green Party candidate to be suitable for the chancellorship. (About the survey: Sabin, 2021).

This means that insufficient participation in candidate selection, or none at all, restricts both *freedom* and *equality*, makes participation impossible and is therefore *neither democratic nor republican*, but simply elitist. The historical overview in chapter 2 and this comparison with Germany show one thing – if the party elites alone determine the candidates, it does not mean *more* democracy, but an exclusion from participation. Thus not holding primaries is not a solution, if the goal is popular participation in politics. Without primaries, citizens' choices are limited: they only have their say after *others* have made a pre-selection for them. Hannah Arendt also emphasises this when she writes:

"[N]either the people in general nor the political scientists in particular have left much doubt that the parties, because of their monopoly of nomination, cannot be regarded as popular organs, but that they are, on the contrary, the very efficient instruments through which the power of the people is curtailed and controlled." (Arendt, 1977: 261).

Also:

"[I]n modern party government, where the voter can only consent or refuse to ratify a choice which (with the exception of the American primaries) is made without him" (Ibid.: 268).

17 So far, the Green Party could only be considered a major party on the strength of opinion polls and surveys. It remains to be seen whether it will manage to attain the major party status in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

Because primaries make participation possible, they are not only *more republican*, but also *more democratic* than other candidate selection options. Primaries are therefore, *in principle*, both a republican and a democratic, a reasonable and good institution.

Another politically significant aspect of primaries that can be stressed with the help of Arendt's analytical distinction between a republic and a democracy is the aspect of innovative impulses given by individuals to the political parties and the political system, as described in chapter 3.2. This capacity of primaries can certainly be regarded as *democratic*; actually, hardly anything could be more democratic, as this happens through the process of elections. The question is then, how this capacity relates to *republican* ideas. According to Arendt, "a republic granted to every citizen the right to become 'a participator in the government of affairs', the right to be seen in action" (Ibid.: 121) – and this is exactly what primaries make possible. Therefore, primaries are also a republican asset.

As can be seen from the last quote, for Arendt the political is not least a 'space of appearance' for political actors¹⁸, from the town hall meetings¹⁹ to the political events of today, whilst for figures like Trump the political space is precisely a 'space of appearance' – his town hall was Twitter.

It is therefore a substantial part of a republic – and the USA claims to be one – that people can and are allowed to enter a political 'space of appearance', which is exactly what primaries make possible. And in the US primaries, Arendt's 'space of appearance' is engendered because the candidates enter into it. Even "the men of the American Revolution [...] knew that the public realm in a republic was constituted by an exchange of opinion between equals" (Ibid.: 83).

Nevertheless, this reveals a new problem and another ambivalence: this opportunity to enter the political 'space of appearance' is seized more often by wealthy individuals (mostly businessmen). Hannah Arendt herself would probably not have a solution to this problem, because her concept of 'space of appearance' does not reflect social-structural imbalances. The fact that in the contemporary USA wealthy businessmen more often use the republican opportunity to enter the 'space of appearance' can be traced back to the Founding Fathers, among whom wealthy businessmen were overrepresented. Seen from this angle, today's conditions in the USA are not surprising, but a consequence of how the USA as a state was constructed by

18 "The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action" (Arendt, 1958: 199).

19 "[T]he inhabitants of the [Thirteen British] [C]olonies [in North America] were 'formed by law into corporations, or bodies politic', and possessed 'the right to assemble... in their town halls, there to deliberate upon the public affairs'; it was 'in these assemblies of towns or districts that the sentiments of the people were formed in the first place.'" (Ibid.: 109. The quote is from Tocqueville.)

its founders, although they certainly could not have foreseen today's political and general circumstances in a time without Twitter, TV and internet, with comparably low election campaign costs. Unequal access to the republican 'space of appearance' is another incongruity of the primary elections in the USA.

5. Conclusion: Primaries as an Ambivalent yet Reasonable Institution

This paper has identified a number of ambivalences in the US primaries which amounted to a complex conclusion. First, primaries are democratic *in principle* because all can vote and all can stand for election. Second, the democratic capacity of primaries is limited, because they do not lead to a balanced representation of all strata of the population among the candidates but rather favour the rich in the existing campaign financing system. Third, they help bring new ideas into party politics. Fourth, republican as well as democratic political rationales are entangled in complex ways in the institution of the US primaries.

In conclusion, it can be said that the most significant aspect of primary elections is their constitutive function of permitting, in principle, everyone, regardless of party affiliation, to run for political office and enter the 'space of appearance', even as they privilege rich individuals who can finance their campaigns themselves under the current campaign financing system. Primaries are problematic in terms of their current effects, but their advantages outweigh the disadvantages because they combine and institutionally solidify both republican and democratic principles.

We thus arrive at a paradoxical present-day diagnosis of 'democracy in America' (Tocqueville): Primaries are on the one hand a good institution according to both democratic and republican standards, but on the other hand, they obviously cannot solve all problems. In their own specific way they even produce specific kinds of problems.

The most important of these problems is, currently, the advantage enjoyed by super-rich candidates, which was the starting point of this article. The objection to this privilege of the super-rich does not, in principle, speak against primaries, but in favour of the introduction of rules for their implementation, just as in other areas of life (e.g. sport, road traffic). This would also make selecting candidates more democratic. For instance, it would provide a legal basis for limiting the amount of own money candidates may spend on their election campaign, as well as the total campaign expenditure.

References

- Abbruzzese, J. (2015) The 6 richest candidates for President ever, including Donald Trump. [online] *Mashable*. Available from: <https://mashable.com/2015/08/06/trump-richest-candidates/?europe=true>. [Accessed 10 April 2019].
- Albert, Z. and La Raja, R. J. (2020) Who should decide the party's nominee? Understanding public attitudes toward primary elections. In: *Party Politics*, pp. 1-14.
- Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition, 349 p.
- Arendt, H. (1977, first published 1963) *On Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, 336 p.
- Armentrout, M. and Dudek, M. (2018) Battle of billionaires: Pritzker and pal of Rauner make Forbes' cut. [online] *Chicago Sun Times*. Available from: <https://chicago.suntimes.com/business/forbes-400-illinois-richest-residents/>. [Accessed 02 August 2018].
- Bredemeier, H. C., Davis, K. and Levy, Jr, M. J. (1949) *Modern American Society. Readings in the Problems of Order and Change*. New York: Rinehart & Company, INC, 734 p.
- Çam, D. (2018) Trump Isn't America's Richest Politician Anymore. Illinois' New Governor J.B. Pritzker Is. [online] *Forbes*. Available from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/denizcam/2018/11/06/illinois-new-governor-jb-pritzker-is-now-the-nations-richest-elected-official-ahead-of-trump/?sh=2e1500665749>. [Accessed 10 May 2021].
- Clevidence, C. (2019) Op-Ed. Politics & Elections. Self-Funding Candidates Represent Themselves, Not Constituents. [online] *Truthout*. Available from: <https://truthout.org/articles/self-funding-candidates-represent-themselves-not-constituents/>. [Accessed 17 June 2019].
- Cohen, M., Karol, D., Noel, H. and Zaller, J. (2008) *The Party Decides. Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 416 p.
- Congress.gov (no date) [online] Available from: <https://www.congress.gov/member/bernard-sanders/S000033?searchResultViewType=expanded>. [Accessed 29 October 2020].
- Davis, J. W. (1997) *U.S. Presidential Primaries and the Caucus-Convention System. A Sourcebook*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 312 p.
- DiClerico, R. E. (2000) Evolution of the Presidential Nominating Process. In: DiClerico, R. E. and Davis, J. W. ed. *Choosing our Choices. Debating the Presidential Nominating Process*. Lanham, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., pp 3-25.
- Dzhanova, Y. and Schwartz, B. (2019) Politics. Mike Bloomberg becomes a \$57 million ad-buying machine after first week of his 2020 campaign. [online] *CNBC*. Available from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/03/mike-bloomberg-spends-over-57-million-on-tv-ads-could-surpass-steyer.html>. [Accessed 07 December 2019].
- Everett, B. (2016) How McCain finally decided he couldn't stomach Trump anymore. [online] *Politico*. Available from: <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/10/mccain-trump-229380>. [Accessed 25 July 2018].
- Factfinder (no date) [online] Available from: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkml>. [Accessed 06 January 2019].

- Forbes (no date) The World's Billionaires. [online] Forbes. Available from: <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/list/;#version:static>. [Accessed 16 November 2019].
- Forum News Service (2016) After loss at N.D. GOP Convention, Burgum confirms plans to run against Stenehjem in Primary election. [online] *Grand Forks Herald*. Available from: <https://www.grandforksherald.com/news/government-and-politics/4000810-after-loss-nd-gop-convention-burgum-confirms-plans-run-against>. [Accessed 24 July 2018].
- Francia, P. L. (2018) Free Media and Twitter in the 2016 Presidential Election: The Unconventional Campaign of Donald Trump. *Social Science Computer Review*, Vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 440–455.
- Friess, S. (2020) Politics. How the Bernie Sanders Movement Reshaped the Democratic Party Forever [online] *Newsweek*. Available from: <https://www.newsweek.com/how-bernie-sanders-movement-reshaped-democratic-party-forever-1497065>. [Accessed 19 September 2020].
- Ginsberg, B., Lowi, T. and Weir, M. (2011) *We the People. An Introduction to American Politics*. New York, London: W. W. Norton Company, 8th edition, 453 p.
- Gitlin, T. (1987) *The Sixties. Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York, Toronto, London, Sydney, Auckland: Bantam Books, 513 p.
- Hirano, S. and Snyder, Jr, J. M. (2019) *Primary Elections in the United States*. Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, New Dehli, Singapore: The Cambridge University Press, 358 p.
- Jerabek, P. (2020) "Ohne Groll": Söder verspricht Laschet Unterstützung der CSU ["Without rancor": Söder promises CSU support for Laschet]. [online] *Bayerischer Rundfunk*. Available from: <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/markus-soeder-armin-laschet-wird-kanzlerkandidat-der-union,SV6mCDy>. [Accessed 20 April 2021].
- Karmack, E. C. (2009) *Primary Politics. How Presidential Candidates Have Shaped the Modern Nominating System*. Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, 216 p.
- Marchart, O. (2005) *Neu beginnen. Hannah Arendt, die Revolution und die Globalisierung*. [Start over. Hannah Arendt, the revolution and globalization.]. Vienna: Turia + Kant, 204 pp.
- Marchart, O. (2015) Ein revolutionärer Republikanismus – Hannah Arendt aus radikaldemokratischer Perspektive [A revolutionary republicanism – Hannah Arendt taken from a radical democratic perspective]. In: Heil, R. and Hetzel, A, ed. *Die unendliche Aufgabe. Kritik und Perspektiven der Demokratietheorie* [The never-ending task. Critique and Perspectives of Democratic Theory]. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 151–168.
- McDermott, K. (2018) 'Moneyball': The 2018 Illinois Governor's Race. [online] *NPR Illinois*. Available from: <http://www.nprillinois.org/post/money-ball-2018-illinois-governors-race#stream/0>. [Accessed 13 April 2019].
- Popp, D. (2021) Kehrtwende in Wahl-Prognosen? Söder vs. Laschet: Umfragen zeigen eindeutiges Bild – Union legt trotz K-Zoff überraschend zu [U-turn in election forecasts? Söder vs. Laschet: Polls show clear picture – Union surprisingly gains despite K-trouble]. [online] *Merkur.de*. Available from: <https://www.merkur.de/politik/soeder-laschet-umfragen-kanzlerkandidat-cdu-csu-union-wahl-ueberblick-streit-90465422.html>. [Accessed 20 April 2021].

- Neate, R. (2018) Number of billionaires worldwide surged to 2,754 in 2017. Wealth-X census finds billionaires' combined wealth increased to an all-time high of \$9.2tn. [online] *The Guardian*. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/may/15/number-of-billionaires-worldwide-wealth-x-census>. [Accessed 25 November 2019].
- Norrander, B. (1992). *Super Tuesday. Regional Politics & Presidential Primaries*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 248 p.
- Nowatzki, M. and Springer, P. (2016) Burgum comes out on top, pledges to unite Republican party. [online] INFORUM. Available from: <http://www.inforum.com/news/4054723-burgum-comes-out-top-pledges-unite-republican-party>. [Accessed 27 July 2018].
- Open Secrets (no date) Top Self Funding Candidates. [online] *OpenSecrets.org. Center for Responsive Politics*. Available from: <https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/topself.php?cycle=2016>. [Accessed 25 August 2020] [Cited as Open Secrets I].
- Open Secrets (no date) OpenSecrets News. Blue wave of money propels 2018 election to record-breaking \$5.2 billion in spending. [online] *OpenSecrets.org. Center for Responsive Politics*. Available from: <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2018/10/2018-midterm-record-breaking-5-2-billion/>. [Accessed 11 April 2019] [Cited as Open Secrets II].
- Open Secrets (no date) Election Trends. [online] *OpenSecrets.org. Center for Responsive Politics*. Available from: <https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/election-trends.php>. [Accessed 11 April 2019] [Cited as Open Secrets III].
- Open Secrets (no date) Did Money Win? [online] *OpenSecrets.org. Center for Responsive Politics*. Available from: <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/did-money-win>. [Accessed 11 April 2019] [Cited as Open Secrets IV].
- Open Secrets (no date) C L 'Butch' Otter [online] *OpenSecrets.org. Center for Responsive Politics*. Available from: <https://www.opensecrets.org/personal-finances/net-worth?cid=N00009637&year=2006>. [Accessed 11 April 2019] [Cited as Open Secrets V].
- Polsby, N. W., Wildavsky, A. and Hopkins, D. A. (2008) *Presidential Elections. Strategies and Structures of American Politics*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth/ UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 12th edition, 347 p.
- RealClearPolitics (2020). 2020 Democratic Presidential Nomination [online] *RealClearPolitics*. Available from: https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/us/2020_democratic_presidential_nomination-6730.htm. [Accessed 12 February 2020].
- Sabin, T. (2021). Union weiter im Tief, Grüne oben auf. Umfrage sieht keine Mehrheit für schwarz-grüne Bundesregierung. Laut einer repräsentativen Umfrage des Instituts Insa rutscht die Union weiter ab. Grüne, SPD, FDP und Linke gewinnen hinzu [CDU/CSU still in the doldrums, Greens on top. Survey sees no majority for black-green federal government. According to a representative survey by the Insa Institute, the CDU/CSU continues to slip. The Greens, SPD, FDP and Left are making gains]. [online] *Der Tagesspiegel*. Available from: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/union-weiter-im-tief-gruene-oben-auf-umfrage-sieht-keine-mehrheit-fuer-schwarz-gruene-bundesregierung/27127164.html>. [Accessed 24 April 2021].

- Samuelsohn, D. (2016) George H.W. Bush to vote for HillaryClinton. A Kennedy outs a Bush who favors a Clinton. [online] *Politico*. Available from: <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/exclusive-george-hw-bush-to-vote-for-hillary-228395>. [Accessed 25 July 2018].
- Schouten, F. (2016) Here's how much of his own money Trump spent on his campaign. [online] *USA Today*. Available from: <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/12/08/donald-trumps-campaign-investment-hit-66-million/95178392/>. [Accessed 23 July 2018].
- Schouten, F. (2020) Bloomberg has pumped an unprecedented \$464 million of his own fortune so far into White House bid. [online] *CNN Politics*. Available from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/02/20/politics/bloomberg-spending/index.html>. [Accessed 21 February 2020].
- Starsgab. Its Shiny (2020) Politician. Doug Burgum (Governor of North Dakota) Salary, Net Worth, Bio, Wiki, Age, Wife, Children, Career, Facts. [online] *Starsgab. Its Shiny*. Available from: <https://starsgab.com/doug-burgum-biography/>. [Accessed 12 October 2020].
- Tillett, E. (2018) Michael Bloomberg re-registers as Democrat ahead of 2018 midterm election [online] *CBS News*. Available from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/michael-bloomberg-re-registers-as-democrat-ahead-of-2018-midterm-elections/>. [Accessed 13 February 2018].
- The American Presidency Project (no date) Donald J. Trump. 45th President of the United States: 2017-2021. Inaugural Address [online] *UC Santa Barbara*. Available from: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-14>. [Accessed 18 Juni 2019]. (Cited as „Trump“.)