

It's Time for a New Political System

Danielle Wicklund

Danielle Wicklund is an undergraduate student at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is majoring in business administration with a concentration in accounting. She plans to attend law school upon her graduation in 2020. She wrote this article for Odyssey, an online content-sharing website for college students.

I am an American. I believe in democracy and I love my country. But I am sad that it is deeply divided. I am appalled that the divisiveness continues to grow with every passing day.

On this July 4th amidst the ongoing political turmoil, citizens of this great country should be reminded that a great president, John F. Kennedy, once said: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

Now more than ever, it is important that country should come first before party. Change is imperative because a United country can do more than a divided one. I believe America has a flawed two party system.

Ever since the very beginning, America has been known as a free country where anyone can start from the bottom and end at the top or even become President of the United States. As a matter of fact, the United States sparked the love of democracy in the modern world.

Thus, the following questions can be asked: How has American politics evolved? What is the influence of political parties, bosses, and primaries? Have they strengthened or weakened the system? Political parties have played a crucial role in American society, but they have their downfalls too. In fact, political parties were not included in the Constitution (Clark).

The Founding Fathers wanted us to be unified because a united country can achieve so much more than a divided country. This

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is clearly evidenced in the Preamble of the Constitution, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America” (US Const. Preamble).

Even George Washington was wary of political parties (Holt 53). He highlighted his concerns in his farewell address, “The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism” (“The First Political Parties”).

George Washington was right because the American party system has slowly deteriorated over time and turned out to be a faulty structure. America’s two party system is flawed because it impairs the constitutional guarantees of one person and vote, has a negative impact on the exercise of voting rights, weakens the major and third parties, and strengthens the influence of others on elections.

The Bill of Rights, Constitution, and Declaration of Independence give us basic human rights like the freedom of speech. Sadly, the American winner-take-all system impairs the constitutional guarantees of one person and vote.

First of all, Americans do not have a variety of choices. The two major parties have so many similarities, which narrows down the options voters have (“The American Two-Party System”). Additionally, this is an undemocratic system because, “A percentage of people will always feel marginalized by the system” (“The American Two-Party System”).

This is evidenced by the fact that this system favors business interests more than popular participation (Des Chenes 22). Constitutional guarantees as well as voting rights are negatively impacted.

Voting rights are an essential human right that everyone deserves to have. It also at the core of America’s fiber and what

the Founding Fathers envisioned all Americans to have. If people's voting rights are revoked or limited in any way, their voice and freedom of expression is taken away from them.

As John F. Kennedy said, "The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened."

Even though the Constitution is a big proponent of voting rights, the exercises of these freedoms are affected by the two-party system. In the past, minority groups, poor white men, women, African Americans, and many others were not given this basic right.

For example, "At the time the Articles of Confederation were created, women had few property rights and poor white men had more limited civil rights" (Holt 42). It was not until many years later that poor white men were given their civil rights and the campaign for women's suffrage was a success.

Another example is the Missouri Compromise of 1820 resulted from the US Congress's, two party system's, and country's pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions ("Missouri Compromise"). The South wanted to keep slavery while the North wanted to abolish it. To resolve this issue, a compromise bill was created and ruled that, "Maine would be a free state while Missouri would be a slave state. Slavery was to be excluded from the Louisiana Purchase lands north of latitude 36°30'" ("Missouri Compromise").

This would allow the Confederacy to restrict the rights of slaves and their voting rights later on.

Although the Constitution was revised in 1870 to include voting rights for all men, southern state governments had laws that tried to prevent African Americans and some whites from voting. These laws would require voters to pay poll taxes and pass literacy tests. Since freed slaves and poor white men were frequently impecunious and illiterate, these laws were effective in restraining their voting privileges (Burgan 43).

At last, in 1965, the United States outlawed these ludicrous stipulations (Burgan 43).

The law that abolished poll taxes and literacy tests was the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was

created to prevent the use of prejudicial voting techniques against minority groups (Krieger 52). Even though this helped to grant voters their rights, it is still a hot button issue in the United States. Not only does the lack of the exercise of voting rights weaken the two major political parties; bosses and parties can also be blamed.

As George Washington feared, political parties were born and brought factional conflicts with them. The irony of it all was that these conflicts began shortly after Washington ended his presidency and gave his memorable farewell speech. The tension between the two major parties began with the Federalists and Anti-Federalists (“The First Political Parties”). The Federalists, like Alexander Hamilton, believed in the power of the national government while the Anti-Federalists, like Thomas Jefferson, fought for the rights of states. This feud resulted in conflicts with the Jay Treaty, National Bank, Implied Powers, and more (“The First Political Parties”). These clashes persisted throughout our nation’s history and can still be seen today.

For example, part of our legislative branch is called, “Divided,” and, “Do-Nothing Congress,” since the only thing Congress members do is fight (Clark). Jeffery E. Schwarz says, “Surveys indicated that the American public blames Congress for the dysfunctional state of the federal government” (Schwarz 2). The two major parties are not the only ones to be affected; the minority parties feel the pain too.

Majority parties can only offer so much to its followers. On the other hand, third parties allow voters to have a diverse variety of opinions, choices, and candidates. Yet, they are often relegated, weakened, or marginalized by the two party system’s sheer dominance (Clark).

According to *Does the U.S. Two-Party System Still Work*, “Ideological third parties are in a pretty inescapable trap in our current electoral system—no coincidence, as the rules are written by and for, the benefit of, the two major parties” (Des Chenes 47).

For instance, third party candidates running in an election are not given national attention and must pass a plethora of state and

federal requirements just to get on the ballot. Federal financial aid will not be given to them unless ten states feature his/her name on the ballot or a candidate from their party has a popular vote of five percent or more in a previous presidential election.

Not only do they have these problems to deal with, but they also have the struggle of winning over an average American voter. According to the book *America's Third-Party Presidential Candidates*, "Americans have grown so accustomed to voting for either a Republican or a Democrat that they continue to do so even when they are not satisfied with these parties. Many voters who believe a third-party candidate is better qualified than the Democratic or Republican opponent are reluctant to 'Waste' their vote on someone who has virtually no chance to win" (Aaseng 8–9).

This is further evidenced by the statement, "The two-party system has generated self-perpetuating laws and traditions. As a result, it is very difficult for a minority party to become a major force in American politics" (Krieger 60).

The chances of a third party candidate winning a presidential election are slimmed down even further due to the fact only a handful of eligible American voters go to the polls. As an illustration, in the 2016 presidential election, merely sixty percent of the US Electorate actually voted (Hubby).

In addition to the general American public, the Electoral College hardly and rarely votes for third party candidates. ("The American Two-Party System"). This was seen in the case of Gary Johnson, the 2016 Libertarian Party presidential candidate. Results have shown Johnson received only 4% of the popular vote and no electoral college votes (Berenson).

The Electoral College is comprised of electors from all fifty states. Each state has a certain amount of points that is based on how many representatives it has in the American Congress. For example, the top states are the ones who will determine the outcome of an election. The reason is that whoever wins that state will be rewarded with a plethora of electoral votes.

The “Top eight,” are: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania (Clark). In order for a candidate to win, he/she needs electoral votes from just eight to twelve states. Even though a candidate may not receive electoral votes from other states, the candidate will win as long as the eight to twelve states are associated with high electoral points (Clark).

Since the electors are predominantly Democrats or Republicans, they will vote for their own political parties. This means that minority presidential candidates have little or no chance of getting a single electoral vote (Clark).

Also, just because a majority party candidate wins the popular vote does not mean that he/she will win the presidency. In fact, third party candidates can tip the scale for leading majority party candidates (Clark). For example, in 1968, fifteen percent of Americans gave their vote to George Wallace.

This gave Dick Nixon the election advantage over Hubert Humphrey. The same thing happened in the 1992 election where Ross Perot won nineteen percent of the vote, which resulted in Bill Clinton’s victory (Clark).

Another example is when Al Gore won the popular vote, but George W. Bush won the Electoral College with 271 Electoral Votes. Thus, this shows how unfair the two party system is to minority and even majority presidential candidates (Clark). Another reason why the two party system causes so much trouble is that it increases the influence of others on elections.

“The Bill of Rights protected both individuals and states against what people feared might be too much government power. The first eight amendments dealt with individual civil rights. The Ninth Amendment stated that listing certain rights given to the people did not mean that others did not exist” (Holt 49).

The Tenth Amendment stated that the three branches of government had delegated powers. There are also implied powers, but the most important is the reserved powers. The reserved powers are granted to the people and those powers that are not stated are given to the citizens. (US Const. Bill of Rights. Amend. X).

Should There Be a Third Political Party in the United States?

Nowhere in the official documents transcribed by the Founding Fathers is there mention of the influence of others. If they saw what type of system the American democracy is tolerating, they would be extremely vexed. George Washington must be rolling in his grave right now.

Regrettably, besides the American government and citizens, outside sources such as businesses have can have an enormous influence in political campaigns, contracts, and elections. Because the flow of the federal dollar is controlled by legislative and executive branch leaders, several industries, corporations, professions, and unions have representative interest groups to get a hand in the distribution in the American capital (Krieger 66).

In 1959, there were only six thousand interest groups. Alas, that number only skyrocketed to twenty-two thousand in 2010 (Krieger 66). So, how did the influence of outside sources rapidly increase? Despite laws getting enacted and various other measures being implemented, these groups either found a loophole or were just plain lucky.

Before, candidates were given large sums of money from the political parties, interest groups, and various outside sources. Campaign donations were limited in the 1970s with the use of soft money, which allowed people to donate a maximum amount of one thousand dollars to campaigns while individual donors could donate an unlimited sum.

The parties used this soft money to help candidates by sponsoring it on issue ads and voter registration and GOTV Drives. This was an on-going process until 2002 when Congress passed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act. This act, also known as the McCain-Feingold Bill, enacted a soft money ban ("The American Two-Party System"). Nevertheless, this did not discourage political donors from achieving their goals.

As stated in Voting and Elections, "In 2010, the US Supreme Court gave a huge legal victory to large companies with its ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee*. The Court said the government could not limit how much companies spend during

political campaigns. It said that donations to support a candidate are a form of free speech, and companies have the same rights to free speech as a person.

This decision did upset some Americans. They believed that the largest companies could spend more than citizens to influence an election” (Burgan 35).

Unfortunately, the ruling increased the influence of Political Action Committees, commonly referred to as PACS, on campaign financing (Burgan 36). The ones who form PACS are business, labor, and other interest groups. The purpose of this creation is to give and raise money to favored politicians and campaigns (Krieger 10).

As evidenced in the definition of a PAC, what increases their power even more is that they are a source of large donations. Because of this, politicians who receive PAC Money will be willing to pass the PAC’s desired law(s), which widens the division between the two major parties (Burgan 34).

For example, in 2011, Congress members who supported the ideas of American oil companies’ PACs received more than one million dollars (Burgan 34). To conclude, the winner-take-all system is weakened by the influence of large political donors, corporations, unions, and PACs.

Clearly, the American two party system is flawed in plenty of ways. The winner-take-all system does the following: A person’s constitutional rights are diminished, voting rights are limited in its exercise, involvement of things such as parties and primaries enfeeble the two main parties and third parties, and the influence of organizations such as PACs are fortified.

As the days pass by, the system keeps deteriorating like the water supply in an arid, horrendous drought. The worse part of it all is that the system tears the political parties, citizens, and country apart and turns us against each other. In fact, there is a passage in *Does the US Two-Party System Still Work* states that, “The Republican and Democratic parties have divided the American people over fundamental moral values, they have failed to rectify

longstanding national problems, and their existence benefits special interest groups, politicians, and mega-corporate executives” (Des Chenes 9).

How can we be united when our country is divided on every level? So, what can we do to fix America’s flawed two party system and turn it into America’s flourishing political system? Do we want to change America for the better? Or do we want to leave it in its diversionary, divided state? That choice is up to us, the American people.