

Independent Politics

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The American two-party system has layers of diversity underneath the seemingly simple division of Republicans and Democrats. Many of these smaller political factions are only state-wide, while others have a larger following. Some run on political ballots, others on social reform, and still others run based on community or state projects. Independent voters have been around in America since the beginning of our government in the 1700s. Not every voter in America fits comfortably into a political party, and as politics have become more complicated and controversial over time, American voters have split into hundreds of smaller factions.

Independent voters, on the other hand, do not affiliate with any political party. They vote purely non-partisan. Some people may think of Independents as their own separate party, but they do not consider themselves a distinct party at all. They seek mainly to change what they see as the restrictive, bi-partisan form of government by opening up the political process. Independents can, of course, vote for any candidate they wish, and many choose to vote for Republicans or Democrats even when an Independent candidate is on the ballot.

Historically, George Washington was technically the only president elected as an Independent, as the two-party system had not yet been established when he was elected in 1788. Since then, several presidential candidates have run as an Independent, including John Anderson in 1980, Ross Perot in 1992, and Ralph Nader in 2004 and 2008. One difficulty with running as an Independent is that without a party, the most a candidate can do is be written in. Ralph Nader gave himself a

better chance at succeeding for the presidency when he decided to run as a third-party candidate in 2008 (Nader). Ironically, running with a party seems to contradict the entire Independent movement.

On a side note, several independent factions have created their own parties in the hopes of being more accessible to the public at election times. One of the first created was the American Independent Party in California, founded in 1967 by William Shearer. The party sent its first candidate for the Presidency out that same year: Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama. Wallace failed in the candidacy, but the Party is still part of American politics today (History).

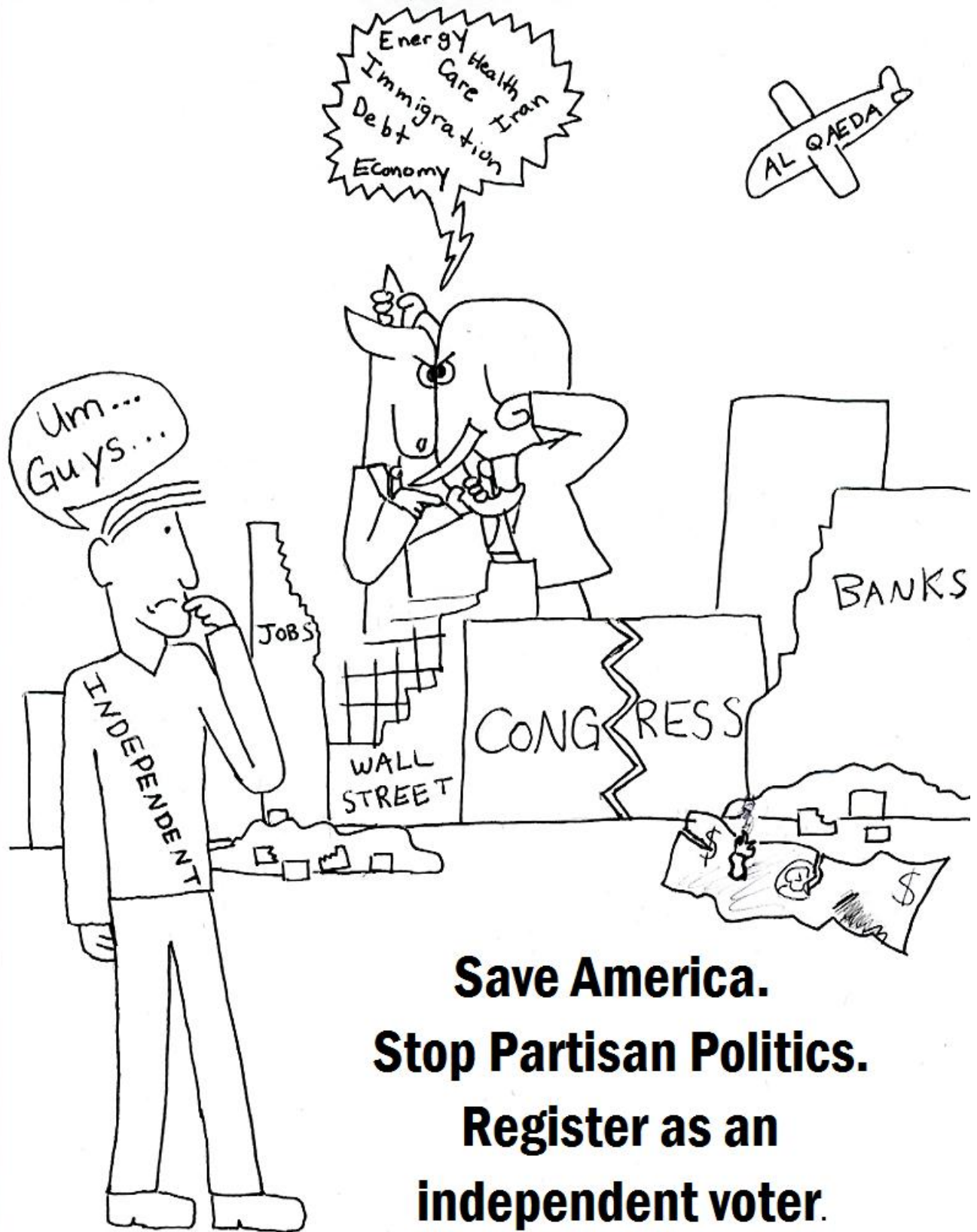
Other obstacles Independents face are closed primaries. That first round in every election is crucial, and Independents lose precious votes since they are excluded. Other ballots are heavily discriminatory towards Independents (as well as third-party candidates). Independent candidates are excluded from presidential debates, and since those debates are now so heavily televised, the lack of media support becomes a huge obstacle when confronted with Republican and Democrat candidates who are able to share their policies with a wide TV audience. Another obvious barrier is the solidity of the two-party system, which has been around since the election of 1792 when John Adams was elected on the Federal ticket (Independent).

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The permanency of the two-party system is perhaps why Independents are a part of politics in modern society. According to *independentvoting.org*, an official website for the Independent ticket, Independents are a vital part of keeping the Constitution alive. In his farewell address in 1796, George Washington warned against the dangers of political parties:

I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the State...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 common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it. (Transcript)

Independents are a way to guard against what Washington refers to as "a frightful despotism," or two parties at war with the dangerous "spirit of revenge." Independents hold no allegiances to any party, and though this means that they have no representation in elections, they still hold a significant place in American politics.



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