

Parties, Primaries, and the Presidential Election

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The process through which the president of the United States of America is elected is a complex and lengthy one. Have you ever wondered how the candidates were chosen? In this article I will explain the three key parts of the process. The first part is the primary process; this takes place within each party. It is followed by general election campaigning, which then culminates in the election and the Electoral College.



Each presidential election, there are multiple candidates on the ballot. These candidates go through a rigorous process known as the primaries. If a person would like to be their party's nominee for President, they get their name on the ballot. The two main parties are Republican and Democrat. During this process each state sets a primary election date. These elections begin in the January the year of the general election and normally finish by July. Candidates seeking the nomination for their respective party campaign in these states trying to win the votes of the citizens. When the state's election is held, the winner picks up delegates. Delegates are representatives of the state who will attend the convention of their party and cast their vote for the candidate who won their state (Ellis, 2011). Some states are winner--take--all states (Ellis, 2011). All other states that are not winner--take--all states divide their delegates based on the proportion of the vote that each candidate won in their state (Ellis, 2011). Candidates are trying to win a majority of delegates. These delegates from all fifty states gather together at the party convention and cast their votes to nominate their party's candidate for president (Longley). Whoever wins the majority of delegates will become the general election nominee for their party. If no primary candidate is able to win a majority of the delegates after the primaries have happened in each state, then the respective parties will decide on the party's nominee at the convention (Ellis, 2011).

Once a candidate is able to win the primary process, they then begin general election campaigning and fundraising. This

generally begins in June or July and goes through the election which is always held on the first Tuesday in November (U.S. Electoral College, Official). During this time the candidates will campaign in states that they feel they need to win in order to win the general election. Often times, the states that are truly up for grabs, otherwise known as battleground states, are few. This is because the candidates realize that the Republican nominee is almost certain to win states like Idaho and Texas. The Democratic candidate is almost always guaranteed to win states like New York and New Jersey. Candidates normally don't spend much time campaigning in these states; instead they choose to focus on states like Ohio, Virginia, and Florida where the electorate can be swayed (U. S. Electoral College, Official). The candidates also spend this time raising money in order to fund their campaigns. These funds come from donations and are used for advertisement, travel and promotions.

On the day of the General Election, people cast their ballots. They vote in order to determine which candidate their state will support. Each state has a certain number of electors, often called electoral votes, who are responsible for electing the president (Hallowell, 2012). Each state gets electors based on the number of representatives they have in congress (Hallowell, 2012). For example, since each state has two senators, they get two electoral votes, one for each senator (Hallowell, 2012). Each state also gets an elector for each member of the House of Representatives from their state (Hallowell, 2012). So Idaho, which has two Senators and two Representatives in the House, gets 4 electoral votes. Each candidate is trying to win a majority of the electoral votes, which is 270 or more. These electors will gather together in December after the election to formally elect the president (Hallowell, 2012). After all this time and effort, the candidate who gets a majority wins the election and is the next president of the United States and takes office the following January.





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Independent Politics

Emily Kempton



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).

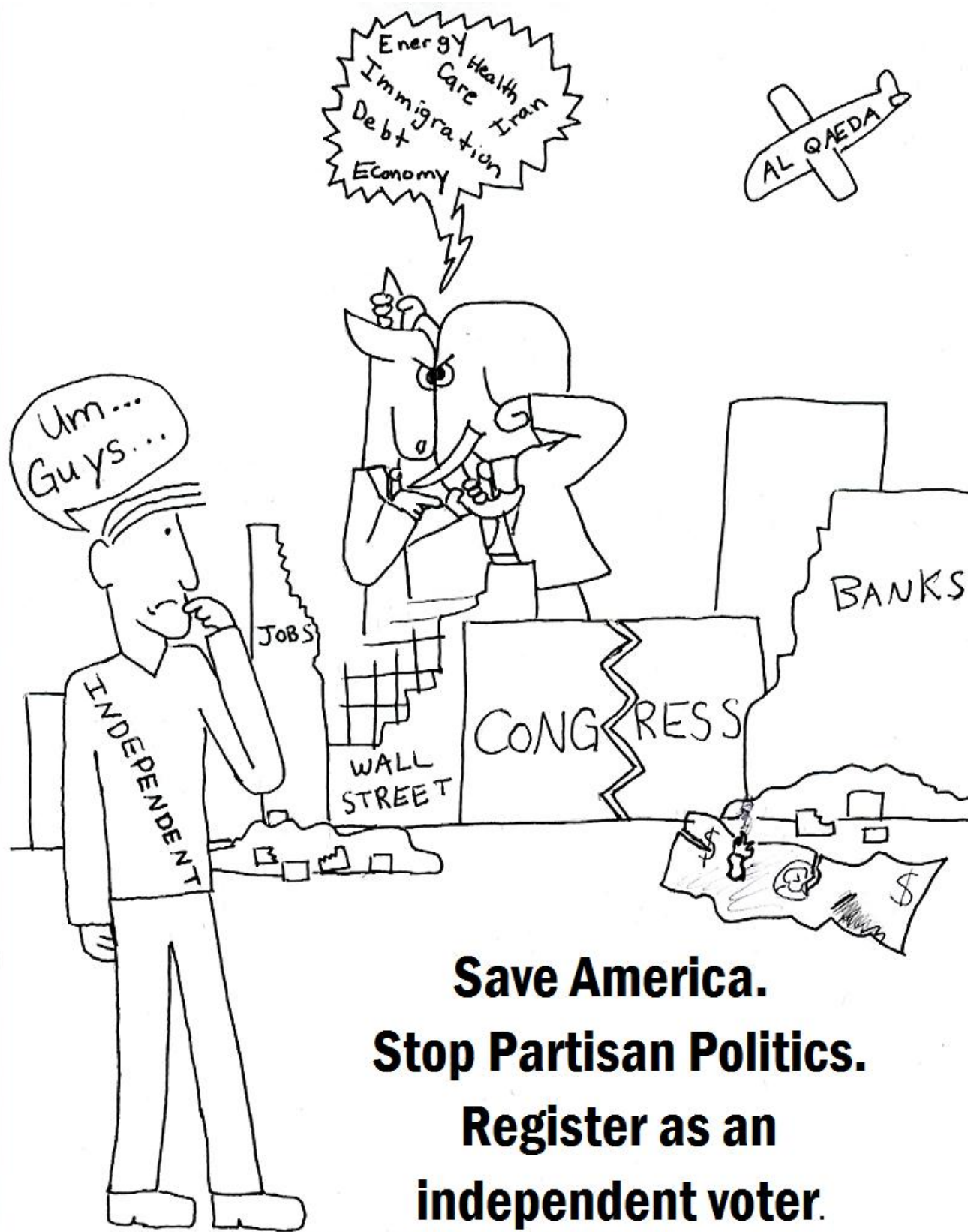
Other obstacles Independents face are closed primaries. That first round in every election is crucial, and Independents lose precious votes since they are excluded. Other ballots are heavily discriminatory towards Independents (as well as third-party candidates). Independent candidates are excluded from 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).

Independents are a way to guard against what Washington refers to as "a frightful despotism."

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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The Greens

Joe-Bob Chavez



Many people don't know much about the Green Party. Many suppose them to be a big group of hippies or radical activists. The first thing to know about The Greens is that they're more than just a party. The Greens are a world-wide political movement with roots in democratic, social, and ecological principles. The Green Party is affirmative on the manner in which they focus their vision, platform, and policies.

The Green Party believes that our rights as individuals are intimately connected with our responsibility to our neighbors, our community, and the Earth. This should be inherent in politics. The political actions of the party are based upon this overarching value. Other important values of the Green Party include social justice and equal opportunity, nonviolence, gender equity, ecological wisdom, and the sustainability of the

quality of life.

In the political arena, the Green Party has been branded as a group of "tree-huggers." But The Green Party doesn't only care about the environment; they care about the people who live in it. The party's political movement strives to preserve the quality of life which can largely be achieved by preserving the world. So, rather than think the party is just saving trees, know that they are cleaning the air, cleaning the water, reducing the toxins, solving waste management issues, and preserving the future.

The Green Party in many ways is considered to be a party for minorities. Their political values champion the end sexism, racism, ageism, and prejudice against the disabled. In a sense, they don't uphold conservative values. If you are conservative, you may find yourself disagreeing with their views on same-sex marriage and abortion, and you will probably not like the party. If you are pro-choice and support same-sex marriage, you will find yourself very happy among The Green Party.

With this description about what The Green Party believes in, consider one more tidbit about the party that people often wonder: What is the mascot of The Green Party? Google won't help you. Search and search as you might—you won't find one definitive answer. This is because The Green Party does not have one official mascot. However, it does have multiple official mascots or symbols. Each state or country has its own mascot or symbol. The reason is unknown, but that's the way it is.

It's odd that a global party is so little known. Maybe people have been scared away by the negative media. The Green Party is not scary or outlandish. It's new. It's different.



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