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Two Party System

America's two party system has been around since the start of the country. There have been many other third parties that have tried to catch hold and be with the two dominant parties, but they never lasted. Many other countries have multi party systems and work great. There is a lot of dispute in the United States whether the two party system is healthy, or if we should have a multi-party system. Would it be best to have a multi-party system, or should it be as is?

The making of the two party system began during the start of the country. The making of the constitution had two sides arguing for two opposing things. These two sides were the federalists and the anti-federalists. The federalists were looking for a stronger federal role. In contrast, the anti-federalists did not want a strong federal role and were worried that it might overpower the states and take away some individual rights. These two viewpoints played an important role in the shaping of the two party system. The two people who officially started the two party system was John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Adams was a federalist and Jefferson challenged him with the Democratic - Republican Party. From 1800 to 1828, Democratic-Republicans controlled the presidency. In 1828, the Democrats, a true party of the people were introduced, and they were challenged by the Whigs (who replaced the Democrat-Republicans) until 1860. Finally, in 1856, the Republicans were introduced. The Republicans were anti-slavery and pro-business, and held the White House from 1860 through 1912. 1864 was the beginning of the two party system of Republicans and Democrats, and is what is still here to this day.

Throughout the history of the United States, parties have changed, but there is always the two main parties. Third parties have continually struggled gaining a foothold in electoral politics throughout history. One reason for this is the two parties are so well established and solid. At a young age, people become familiar with Republicans and Democrats, and identify themselves with which political party they associate themselves with. A lot of times people take on the same party their parents are and what they grew up with, because they were taught that is the way things should be done.

Another reason for this is because the Democratic and Republican parties are so well organized and have so much more funds compared to third parties. Every election year, both parties have conventions and rallies in every state to promote their party and gain support in order to get the state's electoral votes. During last year’s elections alone, the Democratic Party raised a total of 855 million dollars and spent a total of 807 million dollars (Center for Responsive Politics 1). The Republican Party raised and spent a little less than the Democrats, raising 666 million and spending 673 million (1). None of the other parties trying to get in office get nearly as much support as the Republicans and Democrats to be able to have huge conventions in every state and have nice television advertisements like them.

A third reason third parties have not been able to gain a foothold in elections is because people feel like they are wasting their vote voting for a third party. Again, there is just not enough support for third party electors and the two party system is so strong. Voters know that it is most likely going to be a Republican or Democrat in office, so they vote for a person on those sides. All of these examples show why it is hard for third parties to gain a foothold in elections.

Over the years, there have been many third parties that have tried to catch hold, and there has only been a few that have been somewhat successful. Some of the most notable presidential candidates to come from third parties were Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and fairly recently, Ross Perot. Abraham Lincoln has been one of our most popular presidents of all time, and believe it or not he came from the Republican Party, a third party during that time. During 1860 when he ran for president, the Whigs and Democrats were the two main parties. Lincoln gathered 39.8 percent of the popular vote, mostly coming from the northern states (How Stuff Works 1). Theodore Roosevelt represented the Bull Moose Party in 1912 after William Howard Taft won the Republican side. Roosevelt won 29 percent of the popular vote(1), but lost the election to the Democrat nominee Woodrow Wilson. The most recent successful third party presidential candidate was Ross Perot, a billionaire from Texas who represented the Independent party. Perot ran in the 1992 election against Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush. Clinton won by a rather wide margin, but Perot won 18.6 percent of the popular vote (1), a great showing for a third party.

There are a few reasons why these third parties had so much success. One reason is because they had a lot more money to campaign and gather support. Perot was a billionaire, Roosevelt was already well established, and Lincoln came at a time when the Republicans had a lot of support from the north. Another reason these third parties had success is because they focused on an important topic to really campaign hard for, and the people wanted to send a message to the main parties that this is important. For example, Perot promised to balance the budget and spend wisely, and voters wanted to see more of that from the government.

Third parties have a hard time gaining traction to overcome the two entrenched parties. Again, a lot of it comes down to not being able to gather enough support. Generally, most Americans are happy being either a Democrat or a Republican, and do not feel like it has to be changed. The Republican and Democratic parties are very established and known. Another reason it is so hard for third parties to gain traction is because the two party system is locked into voters’ minds, and their mindset is that it is going to be either a Republican or a Democrat. All of these reasons make it hard for third parties to gain traction to overcome the two entrenched parties.

Today, we are at a place where the two main parties control the government, and most of America is content with it. The president is a Democrat and both the House of Representatives and Senate are controlled by Republicans. Our government is continually growing, making more laws and coming up with new ideas. Since the president is a Democrat and has more liberal beliefs, some conservatives are getting frustrated over the increasing control the government is getting on the American people. On the other hand, liberals are more pleased when the government puts things in place that allows for more government control. For now I think that people are not demanding for a third party and are content with the system that is in place for now.

The two party system can make it hard to get some things accomplished in Washington. However, I do not think the two parties are so polarized that nothing can be accomplished in Washington. For certain things like different social matters or welfare, the two parties can get polarized at times with it because they each have two different sides on the matters. Those kinds of things are important, but the two sides can agree to disagree on it. When it comes to foreign affairs like national security and the national well-being of the country, I think both parties know what is best for the country as a whole usually and make the best decision. An example of this is the government decided to put sanctions on North Korea and Iran, meaning we will not trade or work with them. Both of these countries are trying to make nuclear bombs, which could be a huge threat to us, so the government acted because of it.

I do not believe that the United States needs a third party currently. I think that most people overall are pretty happy with either the Democrats and Republicans running things, and if it ever got out of control and people were fed up with them, then a third party could be established. I also believe that if we were to get a third party in the United States, it would be a party with more traditional beliefs to try to go back to our roots. The Democrats and even Republicans now both want more government control, and a lot of conservatives and traditionalists could see this and want to start up a third party. For now though the Democrats and Republicans are fine where they are.

The two party system is very solid and established in the United States. The system has been around since almost the start of the country. It has been very hard for third parties to gain traction on the two main parties over the years. There has been a few third parties that have been somewhat successful, but they never had much of a lasting effect. Good or bad, the people in the two main parties control much of our country.

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