Problems With Current U.S. Two-Party System

Gregory F. Rehmke
grehmke@gmail.com

Fall 2016 UIL Texas LD Debate Topic: RESOLVED: The dominance of two major political parties in the U.S. presidential elections undermines democracy.

Overview of Resolution

- History of:
  - political parties,
  - U.S. presidential elections,
  - democracy

- Values for topic?
- Democracy?
- Justice?
- Consent of the governed?

Debate over Democracy in U.S.

After declaring independence on July 4, 1776, each former English colony wrote a state constitution. About half the states attempted to reform their voting procedures. The trend in these states was to do away with the freehold requirement in favor of granting all taxpaying, free, adult males the right to vote....

What is the proper role of the federal government?
(Constitution lists powers, Bill of Rights lists restrictions on federal power.)

Political parties disagreed on: government (National) bank, internal improvements (should government build roads, canals, lighthouses?)

Founders were skeptical of democracy. U.S. was Republic. Senators appointed by State govt., Courts, Electoral College.

History of Political Parties in U.S.

- Federalists vs. Anti-Federalist
- Parties not in Constitution.
- Early 1800s Jeffersonians vs. Federalists. National Republics (J.Q. Adams vs. Democratic Republicans (Andrew Jackson)
- By February 1854, anti-slavery Whigs [National Republicans] had begun meeting in the upper midwestern states to discuss the formation of a new party. One such meeting, in Wisconsin on March 20, 1854, is generally remembered as the founding meeting of the Republican Party.
History of Presidential Elections

- National Conventions, lots of ballots and cigars.
- Chicago Democratic Primary during Vietnam War.
- Democratic Party Reform, more voting.
- Democrats lose so reform again to Super Delegates
- Republican follow first Dem. reforms, no Super Delegates.
- Competing narratives for slow recovery since Great Recession

U.S. turnout in the 2012 presidential election was 53.6%, based on 129.1 million votes cast and an estimated voting-age population of just under 241 million people.

Mr Orellana argues that in two-party systems, politicians tend to "pander", promising voters easy material gains without corresponding costs. ...

Because, in a two-party system, all political questions end up ranged on a left-right axis...

each side spends its time trying make more and more extremist claims in order to shift the Overton window.

Multi-party systems have much less tendency to turn issues into these sorts of Manichaean contests.
Not Invited to the Party synthesizes political science, economics, and history to demonstrate how the two-party system is the artificial creation of a network of laws, restrictions, and subsidies that favor the Democrats and Republicans and cripple potential challengers...

Presidential Primaries & Debates

- Problems with polls and media. Face time matters. Trump received way more time on TV because he was a media personality.
- Republican primary: one Trump, lots of other Republicans.
- Lead Republican candidates spent tens of millions attacking each other. But didn’t attacked Trump.
- Third party needs 15% support via polls. But poll numbers turn on media exposure anr talk show publicity (which goes almost entirely to main parties).
To a certain extent, Congress already operates as though it's made up of coalitions of various parties.

In both the Republican and Democratic there are various Congressional caucuses which subdivide both parties into smaller factions.

Negotiations between the caucuses take place, but it's less visible to voters.

If the US were to switch to proportional representation, these caucuses could potentially split off as their own party, but still work together in congress.