



The Two-Party Political System

Read. Watch. Listen.

READ

Edwards, Mickey. [*The Parties Versus the People: How to Turn Republicans and Democrats into Americans.*](#) Yale University Press, 2013.

As a former congressman, Mickey Edwards witnessed firsthand how important legislative battles can devolve into struggles not over principle but over party advantage. He identifies exactly how our political and governing systems reward intransigence, discourage compromise, and undermine our democracy. He then describes exactly what must be done to banish the negative effects of partisan warfare from our political system.

Klein, Ezra. [*Why We're Polarized.*](#) New York: Avid Reader's Press, 2020.

Journalist Ezra Klein reveals how the American political system is polarizing us—and how we are polarizing it—with disastrous results. How do we overcome identity politics and keep our racial, religious, geographic, ideological, and cultural identities from tearing at the bonds that hold this country together?

[“Two-Party System.”](#) Gale Opposing Viewpoints Online Collection, Gale, 2020. Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints, Accessed 5 Dec. 2020.

This is a brief history of how the two-party system was created, how it works, and the basic pros and cons of how American elections are run.

WATCH

[*American Party Animals.*](#) Producer. Jeremy Chilnick. We, The Voters, Vulcan Productions, 2016. <https://wethevoters.com/film/american-party-animals>.

More young people than ever identify themselves as politically “independent.” This short video, narrated by Morgan Spurlock, looks at pros and cons of our two-party system and at what makes it so hard for third parties to win power.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

Opposing Viewpoints in Context

Access this resource at www.sclld.org/opposing-viewpoints.

Search “two-party system” once you are in this resource.

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[Party Systems: Crash Course Government and Politics #41](https://www.pbs.org/digitalstudios/2015/12/11/crash-course-government-and-politics-41/). Crash Course Government and Politics, PBS Digital Studios. Dec 11, 2015. https://youtu.be/PkItAI_cO5Y.

Throughout most of U.S. history, our political system has been dominated by a two-party system, but the policies and the groups that support these parties have changed drastically over time. There have been five, arguably six, party systems since the election of John Adams in 1796, so we'll look at the supporters and policies of each of the parties during these eras and look at how historical contingencies cause these policy shifts. We'll also talk a bit about the benefit of a third party, which helps to influence political debate although rarely ever wins elections.

LISTEN

"Episode 91: The Two-Party System." *Civics 101*, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, New Hampshire Public Radio, January 18, 2018. <https://www.civics101podcast.org/civics-101-episodes/ep91>.

There are many political parties in the United States—so how come we pretty much only hear about two? What is the two-party system and why does it hold sway? Is it an intentional part of governmental design, or is this simply how history shook out? In this podcast, we'll explore these questions, hear from an original member of a third party, and dig into something called Duverger's Law, which explains why two parties tend to dominate in American politics.

[The future of the two-party system](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-future-of-the-two-party-system/id1493819122?i=1000474679248)." *Wake Up to Politics*, NPR, St. Louis Public Radio, October 5, 2020. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-future-of-the-two-party-system/id1493819122?i=1000474679248>

Gabe Fleisher examines the growing number of Americans who no longer are satisfied with either political party and explains why he believes American democracy would be healthier with a few more parties thrown in. Politico's chief political correspondent, Tim Alberta, will offer insight into third-party candidates in 2020 and share how he sees the two-party system evolving in the coming years—perhaps not with more viable third parties, but with new parties forming inside the current ones.



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