

Most Americans yearn for a third party. Don't hold your breath.
Adapted from an article by Paul Waldman, *The Washington Post*, October 9th, 2023.

Sixty-three percent of Americans want a third party because Democrats and Republicans do “such a poor job” representing voters, a new Gallup poll found. It's the highest number the polling firm has recorded in the 20 years it has asked that question.

5 This should be unsurprising: The country narrowly averted a government shutdown (but for just a few weeks), and last week, Republican rebels ousted the House speaker. Meanwhile, voters are bracing for a Biden-Trump rematch next year. But if you're part of that dissatisfied 63 percent, you won't be getting what you want anytime soon.

10 That's not only because our system is built to make it hard for third parties to take hold, especially the fact that Congress and state legislatures use single-member, winner-take-all districts. (...)

15 We do have alternatives to the Democrats and Republicans. There's the Green Party and the Libertarian Party, for instance, and a few more to boot. But they're not what most people think of when they're asked about a third-party alternative. They're small, and they have defined ideologies and agendas, usually to the right or left of the two major parties. (...) “In highly nationalized politics with relatively restrictive ballot access, it's not surprising that the only folks who go into third-party activity are the people who tend to be on the political fringes,” says Lee Drutman, author of *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America*. (...)

20 Then you have elite-driven enterprises such as No Labels, which is moving toward a presidential run in 2024, perhaps with a well-known figure such as Sen. Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.) leading its ticket. Its conceit is that there are “common sense” solutions to nearly all our problems, and if we just get past the partisan squabbling, politics will be efficient and effective. That idea has no more appeal than the parties on the far right and far left. “People want more parties, but not that many people want a party of mushy centrism,” Drutman told me. (...)

25 But there is another opening. Right now, much of the Democratic Party is liberal on both social and economic issues, and the Republican Party is mostly conservative on both. A significant portion of the population is economically liberal and socially conservative, yet no third party has emerged to occupy that space. (...) In the end, we're left with fringe parties on one hand, and on the other, donor-driven projects such as No Labels that pretend they can take the politics out of politics. Neither has any kind of broad appeal. (...)

30 Drutman's solution is to change the system by allowing fusion voting, in which voters can choose the same candidate on multiple party ballots. He also supports creating multi-member districts in which seats are allocated proportionally, so if a party gets one-third of the votes, it would get one-third of the seats. That would allow parties other than Democrats and Republicans to win representation and force the major parties to assemble coalitions to govern effectively. (...)

35 Unfortunately, third parties are too often seduced by the siren song of the presidential race, where the best they can hope for is to act as spoilers, which wins them nothing but resentment. That means that even if almost two-thirds of Americans say they want a real alternative to the two parties, they're not going to get it.

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