

THIRD PARTY VOTERS

Despite their inability to win presidential elections, third party candidates still garner support from thousands of millennials.

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In an election season where both major party candidates were embroiled in scandal and controversy, it's not too difficult to imagine why over a third of millennials say they've turned to third party candidates.

From the establishment of the United States as an independent nation after the Revolutionary War, partisan lines were being drawn in the legislature. The Constitution makes no mention of political parties, and even George Washington denounced them as harmful to the republic, but the first presidential election between what were known as the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans almost immediately established the two-party system as one that would endure for the next two centuries.

Ever since the current two-party format between Democrats and Republicans was solidified with Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860, Bloomberg reports that third parties have participated in numerous elections, hardly getting above 5 percent of the popular vote. Even relatively popular third party candidates like Ralph Nader in 2000 and Ross Perot in 1992 and '96 failed to win the electoral votes of a single state. In

fact, George Wallace, an Independent who ran in 1968, was the last third party candidate to win electoral votes.

Since President Barack Obama took the White House in 2008 with a record turnout among millennial voters, this past election cycle ended with an enthusiastic push toward a younger demographic. This occurred most notably during Hillary Clinton's campaign, in which she tried to re-energize that core 18-34 age group that was feeling the Bern all the way through the Democratic National Convention.

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But instead of turning to Clinton, it appears many former Sanders supporters instead looked to Gary Johnson or Jill Stein to fulfill their politi-

cal needs. Even with polls showing a significant gap in support for the major parties and third parties, and the fact that a third party has never been invited to share a national debate stage during prime time coverage, the numbers seem to show that millennials cannot be dissuaded.

David Courard-Hauri, an environmental policy professor at Drake University, sees this as a good thing. Courard-Hauri ran for the Iowa House in District 41, Polk County, as a member of the Green Party in 2014. While his run was ultimately unsuccessful, he notes that one of the most important roles of third parties is to introduce new ideas into the political discussion, and to provide people who may be feeling disenfranchised with another option.

"There's probably a fair amount of people out there who probably wouldn't vote if there weren't third party options," Courard-Hauri said. "I think people are really upset with the government's failure to govern and so they're looking for other options."

In August, USA Today reported that 60 percent of millennials considered voting for a third party in the recent election. When it comes to who they actually voted for, howev-

er, both Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson and Green Party candidate Jill Stein both polled at under 10 percent. But as Election Day revealed, even a small percentage of votes that could have been given to a major party candidate have the capacity to change the outcome of an election.

In the 2016 election, the overwhelming amount of third party support in the voting booth translated to key votes being taken away from Clinton. In battleground states like Florida and Michigan, the over 200,000 votes for both Libertarian Gary Johnson and Green Party candidate Jill Stein may have been critical pieces to Trump's success. In Utah, Independent Evan McMullin achieved 21 percent of votes, just 7 percent less than Clinton.

Sometimes considered a "protest vote," third-party voters were criticized for wasting their votes or contributing to a negative election result.

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"I feel like it's very difficult to vote for third parties in most elections - you worry that you're throwing your vote away," Courard-Hauri said. "But I think they have the right ideas. If the playing field was more even they would have a very good chance of winning in smaller elections where they have a chance to be part of the conversation and move the needle."

In the history of the United States, third party candidates have not been

successful in seizing the presidency. Instead, they work to introduce new ways of governing and attempt to alter the narrative that has allowed major parties to dominate the national government for over 200 years.

Third party candidates find that their strengths exist in local elections and in independent voters who aren't loyal to one of the major parties. Of over two million registered voters in Iowa, 763,423 were registered as no party and 10,072 were registered other as of November 1. And according to NPR, many of those not affiliated with a major party may be millennials who feel disassociated with the whole political process. Where older generations may have established firm voting patterns, Keith Laube, chairman of Iowa's Libertarian Party, says millennials aren't as willing to wait to activate change in the current political gridlock.

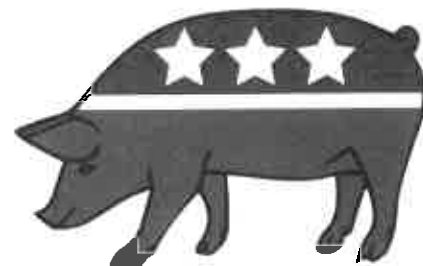
"Millennials don't want to sit around and wait 10 years to do something," Laube said. "They want to do something now."

Where the major parties have been established for hundreds of years, the history of third parties seems to be more flexible. Millennials are also viewing standard modes of advertising, like TV or print, less, and social media ads more. This could lead them to explore other avenues, namely nontraditional parties or candidates who have latched on to the digital age more effectively than the major parties.

"We're more progressive with social media, and that probably attracts people under 35 years old," Laube said.

In Iowa, the Libertarian party wasn't even recognized as a political party for several years until Nov. 8 because it didn't gain at least 2 percent of the votes for either governor or president in the previous major election. On Election Night,

Johnson's 4 percent allowed them to regain this status. However, voices in third parties, like Laube, argue that this number is usually hard to reach because of preexisting stigmas against the viability of non-major party candidates and because the voting system is geared toward ensuring the success of just one of two parties. By suppressing the possibility of a third party candidate to win a national office, Laube says the



nation may be condemning itself to a recurring cycle of covering the same ideas every four years.

"We're a country of choices and we should have four or five parties," Laube said. "With only two, and you can see this in the last 10 years in any national debate, they don't really talk about the issues."

If the American legislature switched to a proportional representation system, Courard-Hauri argues, third parties might have a chance to invoke real change at the national level. Until then, the role of third parties in the American political system may be clearest in smaller, city government, where they are more able to garner localized support.

Where Democrats and Republicans have massive fundraising and campaigning resources established over hundreds of years, third parties are more reliant on individuals looking to change the status quo. In their mission to invoke change, however, they encounter several obstacles, most notably lack of widespread recognition, money and a voting system

stacked against them.

For Courard-Hauri, his challenges of running on a Green ticket were realized in his inability to garner media coverage, which in turn made it difficult for people to make an informed decision when they headed to the polls. Without name-recognition, he was confronted with people who voted for one of the major party candidates because they were unaware of his platform. And when it comes to door knocking and canvassing, a lack of coverage may cause people to hesitate, especially if major-party candidates are projected as leading the race.

"If you're going to invest in a candidate because you expect some kind of return, you're going to invest in a candidate that has a chance of winning," Courard-Hauri said. "If you don't think the third party candidates are going to have a chance of winning, then you're not going to invest in them and they won't have then money to fight the system."

In national elections, fundraising becomes even more difficult without the wealth of SuperPACs, which garner millions for major-party candidates every election cycle. While Sanders' campaign prided itself on only taking individual donations, it was repeatedly attacked in ads funded by Republican billionaires, Politico reports.

Though Sanders didn't clinch the Democratic nomination, he did succeed in mobilizing thousands of millennials that may have otherwise felt disempowered or disenfranchised. But instead of moving to Clinton when Sanders became unviable, many turned to third parties to express their discontent with what they viewed as the rigged two-party system. Often portrayed as an election between the lesser of two evils, millennials eager for change put their hopes in a third party who would be

able to win enough votes that their concerns would be thrust into the national spotlight and maybe even see some widespread recognition.

After Clinton's nomination, she attempted to wrangle the excitement that the Sanders campaign capitalized on. In voicing support for policies like a \$15 minimum wage and taxpayer-funded health care, her campaign moved to persuade Sanders supporters, many of whom were millennials, to back her presidential run like they did for Obama in 2008, CNN reports. With millennials moving off the mainstream, 2020 may cause major party candidates to rethink aligning with the establishment and instead turn to hot topics like social issues to draw substantial support.

There are 54 political parties in the United States, PBS reports, yet only two are recognized as legitimate choices in American democracy. Among the most popular are the Green Party, the Reform Party, Libertarians and the Constitution Party, which have all launched presidential candidates in the past several



decades to no avail. So why do third parties continuously generate coverage every election cycle?

A core responsibility of third parties is to introduce movements that are seen as resting on the fringes of society. According to PBS, in the early 1900s, it was the Socialists who popularized women's suffrage. The Populist Party advocated for

the 40-hour work week that was realized with the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. With the nature of the two-party system already in full effect, however, these parties never got the opportunity to actually implement their ideas, only watched from the sidelines.

There were 10 candidates on the ballot in Iowa for president of the United States. Only four of those generated media coverage, and only two were projected to win. And according to Vox, it's likely that almost 100 million people of voting age didn't even vote. While millennials turned out to vote, their votes didn't contribute to the unprecedented success for Clinton that Obama experienced in 2008 and 2012.

People registered as independents are most likely to sway toward third parties, and according to Politico, half of millennials identify as not belonging toward either major party. And while most hold liberal views on political and social issues, this doesn't necessarily mean they'll all vote Democratic. In the 2016 election, a significant portion of votes that may have led to Clinton's win were directed at third party candidates.

Third party candidates have played a significant role in altering presidential elections. While they have not been successful in winning the executive office, their triumphs are made evident in their strides for smaller, more efficient government on behalf of the Libertarian Party, moves toward progress in social justice and environmental sustainability for the Green Party and a chance to resist the polarized structure of the two-party system by voting Independent.