



From the editorial advisory board

This week's question: The third and final debate between two presidential candidates, Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama, is this week. National polls track voters' preference between the two men, with Obama currently in the lead. Yet when Colorado voters head to the polls, there will be 16 candidates to choose from. What is your opinion about the current, de facto, two-party system?

That question was posed this week to the Camera's editorial advisory board and virtual editorial board.

Our two-party system can frustrate voters. If three candidates are running, voters may have to make difficult choices. If they prefer the candidate who they think has the least chance of winning, they can risk voting for that person, knowing that they are probably throwing away their vote simply to express their views. Or they can vote for their second choice, knowing that this candidate has a better chance.

Preference voting (or variations, like instant runoff) could change all that. It allows citizens to prioritize the candidates, so that if their favorite receives the fewest votes in the initial count, their votes are shifted to their next choice and the votes recounted. This way, their votes still affect the outcome.

The recent three-way 2nd CD primary race between Shafroth, Polis and Fitzgerald could have turned out differently if preference voting had been in place. And more importantly, if preference voting had been used in 2000, many Nader voters would have selected Al Gore as their second choice, and the last eight years would likely have been very, very different.

Steve Pomerance

A multi-political party system would certainly expand political discourse in this country. One way to make that happen would be to institute instant runoff voting (IRV), which is how hiring committees work. It keeps voters from feeling they're throwing their votes away on their first choice instead of supporting a more realistic frontrunner, who would be the lesser of two evils. Several countries already use it.

Unfortunately, it deprives voters from seeing runoff results before choosing their final pick. Thus many countries such as France, Finland, and Argentina have chosen the more traditional "non-instant" solution: The two-round voting system, where everyone gets to vote their heart the first round. Then the two candidates with the most votes make it to the second round.

A flaw with this system was recently exemplified when France saw its presumed first-round winner and Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin (France has an appointed Prime Minister and an elected President) defeated by a leftist vote splintered into myriad smaller parties. France was so shocked that 80 percent of voters turned out the second round to deny radical rightist LePen victory — or even near victory.

Since then, voter participation in France has been high at both first and second round.

Voting is a civic duty — part of the social contract. So regardless of whether the United States ever gains the political will to adopt either IRV or a two-round-system, we might simply oblige citizens to vote, as they do in Belgium. And if you don't show up, you get a ticket in the mail — like with speeding.

Julian Friedland

Although not likely to happen anytime soon, a viable third-party candidate in national elections would be ideal. Too often, though, neither of the candidates offered by our two-party system seems like the best or right choice to lead. We could be in the midst of one such election.

Historically, third-party candidates have mainly served as spoilers. Recall Ross Perot who in 1992 captured the nation's attention, but only 19 percent of our votes. In the end, he denied George H. W. Bush a second term. Similarly, Ralph Nader and his Green Party robbed Gore of the keys to the White House in 2000.

Only self-funded billionaires have a realistic chance of running as a third-party candidate and winning the Oval Office. I wouldn't be surprised if Michael Bloomberg, who turned Independent last year, runs for president in 2012. He may be the first independent candidate to have a fighting chance. But without his \$20 billion — not to mention his lifelong Democratic roots and his seven-year Republican stint — his chances would be nil. If Bloomberg throws his hat in the ring and wins, his victory could inspire widespread support for future non-GOP and non-Dem contenders.

Jimmy Calano

No one likes to hold their nose and vote for a candidate they perceive as the "lesser of two evils." But voting for your favorite minor-party candidate can help elect the "greater of two evils." The preferential voting systems mentioned above could remedy this. Another benefit is that if minor parties had a chance to win, media gatekeepers would report on them more. This would help publicize worthwhile policy proposals that major parties don't men-

tion.

But it's wrong to claim, as some do, that voting should be mandatory or that it's a "civic duty." Our obligations as citizens is to abstain from violating the rights of others.

To vote is to express a political opinion or preference. Just as government should not prohibit such expression, nor should government mandate it. Who benefits when you're forced to express a preference for a politician you consider to be "the lesser of two evils?" The politician, of course.

Brian Schwartz

When it comes to electing a president of the United States, the Electoral College is at the heart of the American electoral system. Yet, many Americans lack an understanding of how it works.

The number of electors depends on a state's population and that governs its representation in the U.S. House of Representatives. There are 435 representatives, to which one adds the 100 U.S. senators — two per state — plus three for the District of Columbia. For this purpose, D.C. is considered the 51st state. Total: 538 electors.

The candidate who receives 270 electoral votes (269 plus 1) becomes the elected president.

Should Obama and McCain tie with 269 electoral votes each, it will be up to the House of Representatives to choose the winner. Under these circumstances, each state delegation is entitled to one vote.

Forty-eight states have adopted a "winner-take-all" approach to nominating electors. This distorts the popular vote.

Those who favor the Electoral College system argue that if the election was by direct popular vote, candidates would not bother to campaign in states like Colorado (9 Electoral Votes) or Wyoming (3 Electoral votes), but would spend all their time in the larger states.

With this system, third parties haven't fared well in the Electoral College. Perot in 1992 gained 19 percent of the vote but no Electoral College vote.

Marc Raizman

I fault the media for the public not knowing much, if anything, about third-party candidates. I also fault the candidates for not using TV and print media to get their messages out to enrich the public discussions.

Nevertheless, I like the current two-party system. It gets legislation passed by a simple or two-thirds majority, though that is no small feat. When legislation doesn't get produced or passed, leadership on a course of action is lacking, not the number of parties involved. Third parties have to build coalitions with one or both major parties anyway.

To clarify this point, consider a simple scenario of two children sharing a bedroom. At bedtime, one wants the door open. The other, one it closed. They work out an agreement that will work for them. Now, add one or more children to the bedroom with their choices. Coalitions and lobbying ensues. Coming to one of two conclusions simply takes more time and effort.

Obviously, many issues addressed by Congress or the President aren't either-or questions. However, after discussions and debates, the choices come down to two — for or against.

Shirley Scoville

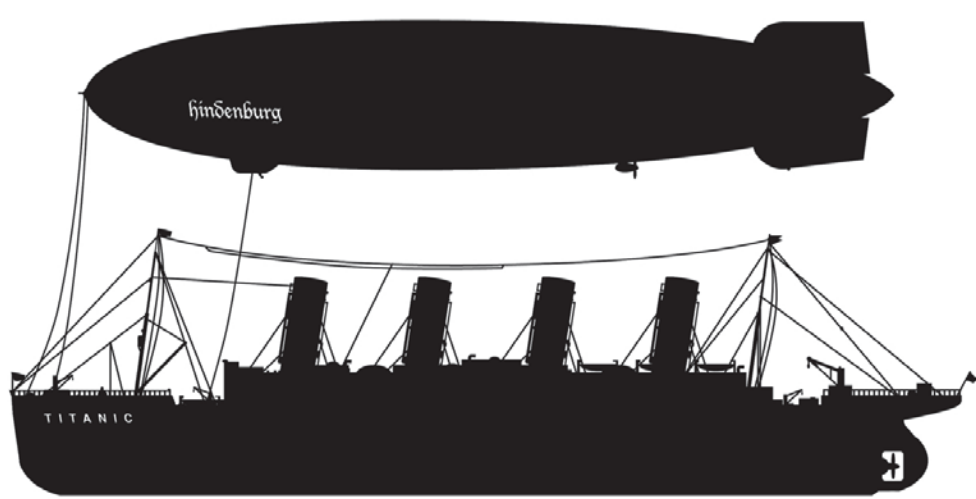
Having been in Boulder County for 14 years, I know what it means to be a disenfranchised voter. The only candidates that ever get elected are from the Democratic Party. The only issues that get approved are the ones that rely on more government intervention and strip away individual responsibility. The only tolerable discussions are the ones that align themselves with the Democratic Party platform.

It would be nice if there were more openness in Boulder County about who we elect to represent us and solutions to the problems we face. I hope for a day when the electorate are more deliberate, the dialogue more reasoned, and we find the best to represent us regardless of which party they come from. Maybe then, we can take a baby step towards a two-party system and then a giant step toward a multi-party system here in this county and be a model for the rest of the nation.

Brian C. Lewis

(The Camera's editorial advisory board members are: Rick Beaufait, Anne B. Butterfield, Adam Bliwas, Jimmy Calano, Ed Byrne, Clay Evans, Julian Friedland, Brian Lewis, Steve Pomerance, Marc Raizman, Brian T. Schwartz and Shirley Scoville.)

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A GM-Chrysler merger

Open forum

County Commissioners Current leaders violate our rights

Why do Boulder County Commissioners Toor, Pearlman, and Domenico have to go? Because they don't listen to the people, and they violate our rights.

They routinely ignore the legal doctrine of "strict scrutiny." This principle holds that any regulation or law, which significantly curtails a fundamental right, must be "narrowly tailored" to serve a "compelling public interest."

One example is their ruling which forces us to buy development rights to build large homes on our own land! The goal of this program is "to preserve the rural character" of county lands. Far from serving the public interest, the current regime caters to the wishes of an elite minority to seize your property rights.

Another example is the "worthy cause" fund, which allows them to reward well-connected supporters with up to \$4 million dollars annually. No elected official can be trusted with dispensing this kind of charity — let alone a political machine with monopoly power.

After adding expensive "build smart" mandates to new construction, they are currently pushing new restrictions on people who rent their mountain cabins.

If you want to change the status quo, then join me in voting Pat Brophy, Aaron Hobbs, and Randy Luallin for Boulder County Commissioner.

RUSSELL JOSEPHSON
Longmont

Elections

Amendments would threaten economy

At a moment when our economy is in crisis and hundreds of thousands of Americans are losing their jobs, the last thing we should do in Colorado is upset the balance that has been maintained for decades and has helped us to have a prosperous economy.

Yet three measures on the November ballot, Amendments 47, 49, and 54, threaten to do just that — undermine the healthy business climate in Colorado — if they pass. We are working together with business, labor and individuals from across the state to defeat these amendments. We hope that all Coloradans will join us in this effort.

Sponsored by a small group of narrow special interests, Amendment 47 would undermine the balance that has served Colorado well for 65 years. Amendment 47 will let government interfere in the conversation between employers and employees, instead of allowing them to negotiate what's best for them in the workplace. As the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce points out: "Colorado's competitiveness and job growth is equal or better than 'right to work' states."

Amendment 49 targets public employees and will interfere with the personal choice of working Coloradans over how they want to spend their hard-earned paychecks. Private companies let employees deduct portions of their pay, like health insurance premium payments and contributions to non-profit charities such as the United Way, and our firefighters, nurses, teachers and law enforcement should be no different.

Amendment 54 is a solution in search of a problem. While it is being sold as an amendment to promote "clean government," it is badly constructed and potentially violates court rulings that protect free speech.

Amendment 54 will prohibit any person, or family member, of anyone who works on a single-source government contract from contributing to a candidate or advocating for an issue at any level for the extent of the contract and for two years after. Amendment 54 will effectively silence the voice of the individual in the political process. This measure goes too far, is unnecessary, and potentially violates the U.S. Constitution.

Taken together, Amendments 47, 49, and 54 would undermine the balance that has worked in Colorado for decades. The current structure provides economic stability and allows for the greatest flexibility for the entrepreneurial spirit of Colorado.

KEN SALAZAR
United States Senator

Fourth CD

Give Marilyn Musgrave the boot

As a resident of Fort Collins I ask the people of the 4th congressional district to reject Musgrave. She is a deeply divisive politician who has worked on fringe social issues rather than real and substantive issues that affect our area.

In every election cycle, Marilyn Musgrave resorts to the same old tactics of trying to destroy her opponents with misleading ads, and frankly, just LIES. This election cycle is no exception. She is trying to take a small business owner, Betsy Markey, and insinuate she is somehow unethical or corrupt.

Why is Marilyn Musgrave doing this? She is doing this because she was named one of the most corrupt members of Congress (by an independent group). She is doing this because she has no legislative accomplishments. She is doing this because she has consistently ignored Fort Collins and the Front Range. I say it is time we send Marilyn a message. This time just smearing and lying about your opponent is not going work. This time the truth wins, and just maybe, we can have a moderate and sensible voice in the congress that will represent the ENTIRE fourth congressional district.

IRENE MANION
Fort Collins

Financial markets

Trickle that money down to us

Wow! The Europeans take "lightning" action and markets soar. The Dow sets a record for a single-day point gain. Meanwhile the United States, after more than a month, continues to dither about what to do, after having largely caused this global fiasco.

The Europeans made specific financial conditions about how to treat the executives who presided over this mess, yet I have heard little but idle chat about who will be held accountable for looting my carefully planned retirement savings and attempting to bankrupt our economy for their personal gain. When these guys are flying high they say, "Let the free market work! Get the government off our backs!" As soon as their greedy, crooked, corrupt schemes go wrong, to the tune of trillions of dollars (that is a number with 12 zeros after it), they show up with their hands out asking for help from the government, which is us, the taxpayers, and we go deeper into debt to China.

It's the same story every time. Even if the "bailout plan" appears to include some sort of personal accountability for these thieves and scoundrels in the short term, they will still jet off to their homes in the Cayman Islands and enjoy tropical drinks and play golf or go yachting. If these guys were big-time drug dealers they would have all their property confiscated and go to prison for life, over way less money and societal impact than we are talking about here. Laissez-faire capitalism, deregulation, and a system with little or no oversight are not working and never have, except for the very rich. Thanks Ronny, thanks W. Please trickle some down here. It's time for a change.

FRED HAWKINS
Boulder

More online

Most of the letters we receive are available on our letter-to-the-editor blog: www.dailycamera.com/blogs/letters-editor-blog

To Write the Forum

The Camera welcomes readers' letters. Timely topics of local letters are given first preference. All letters are subject to editing.

Our guidelines:

- Letters of 300 words or fewer will receive preference
- Open Forum, 1048 Pearl St., Boulder, CO 80302
- Fax to 303-449-9358
- Phone us at 303-473-1354
- e-mail to openforum@dailycamera.com

To reach us:

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