

Beyond two-party America

By [James F. McGrath](#)

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I felt both proud and ashamed as I listened to Butler University students share their feelings about the upcoming election yesterday evening. In a fantastic panel discussion, religion majors (joined by a political science professor for this panel, moderated by a religion professor) expressed the enthusiasm which they brought to this first time they will have the right to vote, and how the options available to them have succeeded in robbing them of that enthusiasm.

I felt incredibly proud as they articulated their viewpoints eloquently and insightfully. And I felt ashamed that my own and other generations that have gone before them have bequeathed to them an electoral system, parties, and candidates that these first-time voters are appropriately disappointed with and frustrated by.

Data was shared at the event indicating that an enormous number of Americans do not identify in a simple and straightforward way with a particular religion or political party. They may consistently vote one way. But it is because they feel that they only have two options. And it is that sense of having to choose the lesser of two evils that makes the election process disappointing. One of the evils may be *much, much* less evil than the other. But that is not the same thing as having a candidate that you can be entirely enthusiastic about.

I was happy that students in the audience asked questions and joined in the discussion. But I wanted very much to ask a question myself, and was sorry that time ran out before I could. If the two main American parties were placed in Europe, they would not be viewed as “polar opposites” in the way they are by Americans. They would be the center right and slightly further right parties that form a coalition to keep the Nazis and Communists further towards the extremes out of power.

And so my question was whether there is any indication that the shift in outlook among younger Americans might finally move us away from the two-party system that we currently treat as a given.

I had hoped that the divisions over Bernie Sanders on the one side and Donald Trump on the other might lead to breaking ranks and some individuals running as independent candidates.

It doesn't seem like it will happen this time. But I hope that one day soon it will. Because the mistaken view that the American parties and their candidates are polar opposites is contributing to the way political discourse is becoming increasingly toxic.

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