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Two Cheers for Two Parties

Guests:

Keynote: Joanne B. Freeman

For the Motion: Yascha Mounk, Norman Ornstein

Against the Motion: Lee Drutman, Katherine Gehl

Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS

Before the debate:**35% FOR****27% AGAINST****38% UNDECIDED****After the debate:****65% FOR****28% AGAINST****7% UNDECIDED**

Start Time: (00:00:00)

John Donovan:

So, we're going to have a sort of special treat before we actually begin the debate. Back when I was in eighth grade, my nun gave me a book called U.S. History Can Be Fun, and it was a series of, you know, about 30 stories, little anecdotes of things that I think legitimately happened in American history. I don't think they were all apocryphal. And I really loved it and really fired up my imagination. And the first I'm going to bring to the stage now is the embodiment at a much higher level, much more sophisticated level, the idea that U.S. history can be fun because of the things she's written about, the influence she's had on a particular Broadway show, which we'll talk about. And the things that she can bring as insight to the conversation that we're going to have now. So, please welcome to the stage, Joanne Freeman.

[applause]

Hi, Joanne.

Joanne Freeman:

Hi.

John Donovan:

Why don't you grab a seat. And just a little bit to tell people who you are. Right now you're professor of history at Yale and you have written a bunch of books that that look at history.

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Your approach is very serious. But the upshot is really fun, I have to say. And I want to start with the connection you have to the Broadway show Hamilton, which is a little bit accidental as far as you know. But it's there. It's for real.

Joanne Freeman:

It is. And I didn't really know about it till I went to see the show. And I was in the audience. And I specialize -- I'm a political historian and I write about political violence. I've written a lot about dueling. And I was in the audience and there's a dueling song in the musical and I was very happy in the audience. There's a dueling song. And then it became a rule of dueling song. And I was really happy -- the rules of dueling fun. And then a lyric came out that was from my book.

[laughter]

And I was with a friend and I said, that's my document.

[laughter]

So, in the audience, I discovered. Then I met Lin-Manuel Miranda. And indeed, he had read my book. So that was a surprise.

John Donovan:

So he fessed up immediately.

Joanne Freeman:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

John Donovan:

What was the lyric?

00:02:10

Joanne Freeman:

It's about the doctor turning his back so he has deniability.

John Donovan:

And it was borrowed verbatim?

Joanne Freeman:

The fact of it was from a document I found on the bottom of a box at the New York Historical Society.

John Donovan:

Okay. So, when I said that your approach to history reveals really interesting, fun stuff. I mean, you get to a very granular level of interactions between members of Congress prior to the civil war, a time which is very it's very hard to really know what was going on the floors of Congress. But you've discovered that some really, really radically violent stuff has been happening on the floor of Congress. There's the famous incident, which I'm sure you'll start with. But there's much more than that.

Joanne Freeman:

There's a lot more than that. Yeah. And I am interested in politics and that the humor of it. But not just because it's humorous, but because what I'm really, really interested in is, is the humanity of the people, the fact that if people engaged in politics and not just ideas battling each other in some way.

00:03:10

So sometimes there's humor when you're talking about people engaged in politics. So, I written a book about physical violence in the U.S. Congress between the 1820s and the Civil War. And everyone knows probably the most famous incident, even if you don't know the name of it. And that's the caning of abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner on the floor of the Senate. So that's the famous one.

John Donovan:

And it was within inches of his life.

Joanne Freeman:

Oh, yeah. No, he was out of commission for two years, I think. So, it was a caning. Sounds sort of tame and it isn't.

John Donovan:

Can you back up -- and what happened with that incident?

Joanne Freeman:

Sure. I mean, he gave a really rousing anti-slavery speech in which he insulted in some ways the South and South Carolina and some particular senators. And a kinsman of one of those assaulted senators decided that he needed to redeem the name of his family in his state and in the south. So, he waited until the Senate became mostly empty. Sumner was at his desk. They weren't in session. He was actually franking copies of his speech to send out. And this other fellow from South Carolina, Preston Brooks, walked in and announced that he was redeeming the name of the South and his family and just began to violently cane him.

00:04:22

And the desks were bolted to the floor. So, Sumner had a very hard time getting up, and he ultimately wrenched the desk out of the floor in his attempt to get away from Preston Brooks.

John Donovan:
So that's the famous one.

Joanne Freeman:
That's the famous one.

John Donovan:
Turns out there are like 70 others.

Joanne Freeman:
Yes, there are about, as a matter of fact, that's the number. There's a about 70 others.

John Donovan:
So, tell us first one, how did you find this?

Joanne Freeman:
Well, I knew I wanted to write about the culture of politics in this time period. And all I knew going into the project was that in 1838, one congressman killed another congressman in a duel. So, my thought was, okay, well, I'm 1838 got to be a good starting point if you're looking at violence in Congress.

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And as luck would have it, the collection I was looking at, the fellow the congressman wrote to his wife every day. And I began seeing in these daily letters to his wife so and so pushing up his sleeves to throw a punch. So, and so keening that's and such. And I kept thinking recording it. And I kept thinking, well, why don't I know about all of these things? I mean, I know in a general way there was violence, but there's a lot of violence. Is this guy entertaining his wife or is there something going on here? So, I began researching in the diaries, private papers. Letters to -- actually, letters to wives ended up being one of my most useful resources because congressmen confessed all of their fears to their wives, which is not surprising.

John Donovan:
So, these were letters to wives in which the congressmen were upset that there was violence or were they kind of bragging about?

Joanne Freeman:
No, they were scared. Yeah. I mean, there's a North Carolina congressman kind of jokingly says to his wife, maybe only big guys should get elected to Congress. I don't know how I feel in this room.

John Donovan:
So, what was going on?

00:06:08

Joanne Freeman:

Well, the short answer to that question is southerners in this time period were pretty comfortable with dueling and dueling culture. I mean, Southern society with slavery balance society and its more violent. Northerners were good at rioting, but they really, really weren't focused on dueling. So Southerners had an advantage and they knew that if they stood up and threatened or intimidated someone who opposed slavery, who was a northerner, that person would not want to tangle with a southerner and would either not stand up in the first place or would back down. And so, Southerners were using that advantage to silence anybody who opposed slavery.

John Donovan:

And didn't have that impact. Did it did it actually affects policy and legislation?

Joanne Freeman:

Yeah. Oh, no, for sure it did.

John Donovan:

So, the threat of violence and all of Congress representatives sent by their people to Washington. The threat of violence had a lot to do with the lack of progress.

Joanne Freeman:

People resign from committees because they were intimidated. There's one diary from an Ohio congressman where he talks about people not being willing to stand up to someone because he's a Southerner. You just don't do that. So it certainly did have an impact.

John Donovan:

I mean, you would think a thing like that could lead to civil war.

[laughter]

Joanne Freeman:

You think, huh?

00:07:22

John Donovan:

And any other colorful details about just how violent it had gotten? Did anything else to come up as close as the beating of Sumner?

Joanne Freeman:

Well, there's I mean, they were armed. Right. So, they had Bowie knives. They had pistols. There were fistfights. They flipped over desks. There's a big fight in 1858 in which a northerner, a northerner says something opposed to slavery, a southerner says, don't you say that here. And the northerner says he's a kind of a feisty one, says something like, I can say anything I want. It's a free house and I'm going to listen to any damn slave holder. Thank you very much. I needed the sound effect.

00:08:03

And so, the Southerner walked up to him to throw a punch. And this other congressman beat him to it and slugged him. And the southerner fell flat. And at this point, all the southerners in the house began rushing to that--

John Donovan:

Like a basketball game.

Joanne Freeman:

I will take your word for that. I know. Everyone came off the bench. Or maybe that's hockey. I don't know. Whichever one it is. I'm not a sports person.

John Donovan:

Me either. I shouldn't have --

Joanne Freeman:

But they all ran at each other. They all basically engaged in a huge brawl in the space in front of the Speakers' platform in the House of Representatives, throwing spittoons, punching each other. And it ended when one congressman grabbed someone's hair to serve a punch and his toupee came off.

[laughter]

Which shows you that slapstick is eternal because then everyone started laughing and it stopped.

John Donovan:

You know, I think we all think, you know, we're going back and maybe 30, 40 years earlier to the founders, you know, we're used to seeing them all sort of, you know, in the painting standing like this.

00:09:09

And they're gesturing like this and they're standing in rows. For some reason, I guess in the old days, legislators wore wigs and stood in rows. And there's this sense that there's a nobility and a sort of heightened sense of decency about these guys. And you were saying to me before, that's kind of a fantasy. They could be pretty venal.

Joanne Freeman:

Yeah. I mean, well, this gets back to where you started us, right? I mean, what we're looking at people and even though their capital f founders, the fact of the matter is your people and they sometimes came up with admirable ideas and sometimes they were just people who were ticked off with each other and behaving badly or behaving selfishly. So, yeah, there is no period in American history that sort of the golden, beautiful moment when there hasn't been some kind of political banging going on.

John Donovan:

So, I wanted to talk and talk a little bit from leap from that to the formation of political parties. Take us back to what the founders were thinking about political parties. And you and I talked to have found that you're not going to say anything that will influence the audience's vote on the resolution before us. But you're just going to tell us what happened at the beginning. So, we all know that at the beginning, George Washington did not have a political party. And when he left office, he said, by the way, let's not have political parties, that's a terrible idea. Was that a common thought among the founding fathers?

Joanne Freeman:

Yeah. I mean, part of the background here is, you know, it was so difficult to pull these states, which were kind of almost nation states when they were colonies, so hard to pull them together that the founders certainly never thought that they'd all somehow unite and that there would be any national anything that was capable of bringing together people throughout the nation so they assumed there'd be factions, they assumed there be partisan fighting. But they did not assume that there was going to be organized parties of any kind.

John Donovan:

And did they fear that?

Joanne Freeman:

Yes, as a matter of fact, they did.

John Donovan:

Why?

Joanne Freeman:

They assumed that an organized party is a group of people who are out to promote themselves and no one else. But that was their assumption. And so, in the 1790s –

John Donovan:

Was that intuition or was that experience from England or -- ?

00:11:25

Joanne Freeman:

That was I mean that was more than experience, but that was sort of the assumption about political parties. Why else would you want to organize. I mean the republic -- in creating a republic and not a monarchy, part of the logic of that was well it's grounded on the people and it's grounded on their will. So that's going to be the driving force rather than sort of top-down organization.

John Donovan:

So how soon did we get political parties?

Joanne Freeman:

Well, the first real parties win like organize with mascots and banners and everything else. That's Andrew Jackson. So, you get early on Federalists and Republicans. You know, Hamilton and Washington, Jefferson and Madison banging at each other. But no one is really happy about calling themselves a party. And as a matter of fact, Jefferson at one point says Hamilton dares to call us a party.

00:12:10

So they're trying to stay away from that, because that means they're not thinking of the public good, but only of themselves.

John Donovan:

So, do you have an explanation for why, given this impulse and this concern about the existence of parties, parties formed anyway? Is it human nature?

Joanne Freeman:

Well, it's partly has to do with the United States, which was so spread out and people were so spread out over a large geographic area that when parties started to organize, part of what they found was, wow, this is really effective. Right. It's a it's a national network. If you could spread the fibers of the network all throughout the nation that somehow people become more coordinated. And then there's something about a party. People at the time said this is a sort of narrator in my book, actually, like you can see and experiencing this. There's like a team dynamic which didn't exist without parties.

00:13:01

And this one fellow I write about. You could feel him, he's just swept into Jackson's party, who really does bring about the first real organized party. There's something for the people who are in it. And then strategically, you know, sort of pragmatically, it's really useful for getting things done and getting a message out.

John Donovan:

And Jackson's party was the Democratic Party. I mean, our current Democratic Party, ultimately, that's its lineage.

Joanne Freeman:

Well, so here people love to draw that straight line back.

John Donovan:

You can't do it now.

Joanne Freeman:

There are no straight lines in American politics. No. Because names start and stop and, you know, strategy shift. And this is the party of whatever. And then suddenly this becomes the party

of whatever. Certainly, you know, the Republican Party that begins in the mid-1850s and the Democrat Jacksonian Democrats are Democratic Party that begins in that era percolate forward. But you can't say that what they are today is a direct line back to what they were then.

John Dovan:

We all miss the place. How many how many elections do they do well in?

Joanne Freeman:

Well, I think they kind of coalesce as a party against Jackson. They didn't have a lot in common, but they all hated Andrew Jackson. That was what they shared.

00:14:14

John Donvan:

But parties have come and gone and that has not been the case, really, at least in name, for a very long time now.

There is a sort of apparently stability to where we are now would just say.

Joanne Freeman:

Yeah. And the parties, you know, the early part of the 19th century parties, there are a lot of parties that came and went rather quickly. And none of this stuck around, you know. So, it also could be over time as people got used to this way of conducting politics, the stability of a sort of kicked in. You know, you had the Liberty Party and the American Party and, you know, the anti-Mason party. And you probably haven't heard of some of them. And there's a reason they didn't survive very long.

John Donvan:

Were they national?

Joanne Freeman:

Yeah. I mean, effectively so, I don't know. But they were striving to be national parties.

John Donvan:

I want to go back briefly to dueling. How did dueling go away? Since you've made it clear that it was really a thing. How did it stop? And might it make a comeback?

[laughter]

Joanne Freeman:

Okay, I'll start with the second half first. I really hope not [laughs].

00:15:15

It partly went away because it became really a southern thing. For a while, northerners and southerners were engaging in it. It becomes something that southerners are proud of. It's sort of

southern culture and it's something, you know, part of the specialness of the south. It begins to fade away. No one really wants to duel, it was an effective tool of proving yourself as a leader. Over time, it begins to fade away and there's a little splurge of it after the civil war. But I think it was no longer accomplishing what it had been accomplishing before for leaders.

John Donovan:
You have a podcast?

Joanne Freeman:
I do.

John Donovan:
What's the theme of the podcast?

Joanne Freeman:
The podcast is BackStory and it's an American history podcast. And the title tells you just what it does. It looks at something current and we go back and find the backstory. Look at how the past was, the history of how did this play out in another time period. And it's for historians. There's two 20th century historians with a 19th century historian. And so, part of it is interviewing people and trying to reconstruct the backstory. A part of it is us just talking to each other and we love working together. And it's that part is not scripted. So, part of it is just the fun of historians talking to each other and learning from each other.

John Donovan:
And just very briefly, how did you when did you start getting interested in history and how did this era in American history capture your attention?

Joanne Freeman:
The short answer? The bicentennial and this period was everywhere. The founding was everywhere and everywhere. Every commercial bicentennial minutes, every newspaper and I began reading biographies of founders because they were everywhere and I wanted to know who they were, and I actually got up to Hamilton and stopped because he was such a quirky character. But that's what drew me in and then trying to figure out Hamilton. Then I became interested in dueling and then I became interested in political violence. And then, I just became interested in politics. And that's kind of how I got into what I'm doing now.

John Donovan:
Can remind us all the name of your most recent book?

00:17:18

Joanne Freeman:
It's called The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War.

John Donovan:
And you found that phrase field of blood in your research?

Joanne Freeman:

The phrase comes from a letter written to Charles Sumner. And this friend of Sumner's after the caning says, essentially, I knew that something would happen on that field of blood, the floor of Congress. That was kind of Hosanna quote for a historian. It's like, oh, my gosh. Not only is the violence not surprising, he expected it, so that was --

John Donovan:

And I've got a title for my book.

Joanne Freeman:

And I got a title for my book.

John Donovan:

Well, as I said at the beginning, my eighth grade nun told me that U.S. history can be fun and you've just proven it. So, Joanne Freeman, I want to thank you so much.

Joanne Freeman:

Thank you so much.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Here is one thing that at the start of this program of debate, we can all agree upon. We are all deeply satisfied right now with how our political system is working, right?

00:18:23

[laughter]

Oh wait. There is all that polarization and those problematic primaries and then those two parties. They're not disappointing anybody, right? But two parties, it's always been that way. In the U.S., we have a politics built around two parties, so much so that it's in our national DNA. And is that a good thing? Or is it a big part of what's not going so well right now? Well, we think in all of these questions, we have the makings of a debate. So, let's have it. Yes or no to this statement. Two cheers for two parties. I'm John Donovan. I stand between two teams of two who are experts in this topic who have thought about this deeply and who will argue for and against that resolution, Two Cheers for Two Parties. As always, our debate will go in three rounds. And then our live audience here at the Dolby Cinema at San Francisco will vote to choose the winner.

And if all goes well, civil discourse will also win. Our resolution is this: Two Cheers for Two Parties. Let's meet our debaters first, starting with, ladies and gentlemen welcome, Yascha Mounk.

00:19:21

[applause]

You are an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University. You're author of a book called *The People vs. Democracy Why Our Freedom Is In Danger and How to Save It*. You have debated with us a bunch of times that you're one of our more frequent debaters, and that's because we think you're so excellent at it. It's great to have you back again. Thanks, Yascha Mounk.

[applause]

Yascha Mounk:
Thank you so much for having me.

John Donovan:
And Yascha, your partner is Norm Ornstein. Norm, we've been trying to get you for years on our debate stage. We are delighted. Norm, you're a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. You're a contributing editor at the Atlantic and chairman of the Campaign Legal Center. Norm, thanks so much for being here.

Norman Ornstein:
What a delight to be here.

[applause]

00:20:00

John Donovan:
So that's our team arguing for the resolution *Two Cheers for Two Parties*. And we have two debaters arguing against the first. Please welcome Lee Drutman. Hi, Lee. Welcome to Intelligence Squared. You're a senior fellow at New America. You're co-host of the *Politics in Question* podcast. You're author of the new book *Breaking the Two Party Doom Loop The Case for Multi-Party Democracy in America*. You have very interesting ideas that we're very interested in hearing tonight so much. Thanks for joining us at Intelligence Squared.

Lee Drutman:
What a thrill to be here, John.

John Donovan:
It's great to have you. And let's meet your teammate. Please welcome Katherine Gehl. Katherine, you're a founder of Venn Innovations. That is a national, nonpartisan political innovation group. You are also the co-author of a forthcoming book. That title is *The Politics Industry How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy*. Again, sounds like interesting ideas. And great to have you here, Katherine.

Katherine Gehl:
I'm thrilled to be here.

John Donovan:

And those are our four debaters who will be arguing for and against the resolution Two Cheers for Two Parties.

00:21:04

So, let's move on. Excuse me. Let's move on to round one. Round one will be opening statements by each debater in turn. They will be speaking for six minutes each. Up to speak first for the resolution, Two Cheers for Two Parties, please welcome Norm Ornstein, resident scholar at American Enterprise Institute.

Ladies and gentlemen, Norm Ornstein.

[applause]

Norman Ornstein:

Thank you, John. It's great to be here on day 1119 of the Trump presidency, or as he says, longer than any other president.

[laughter]

This place is amazing. I'd ask them to put up the Avengers Endgame on the screen as we spoke. But you're just going to see us. So, let me start with what we are not going to say on our side. We're not going to say that we live in the best of all possible worlds. There's no candid here. I think we all agree that we are in dangerous, difficult, even perilous times. But the problem is not that we are in two party time. We don't have two parties right now. As my longtime friend and collaborator Tom Mann sitting right down there and I have written for more than a decade, the Republican Party has become an insurgent outlier.

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It's more of a cult than a party right now. And frankly, the biggest and most urgent thing we have to do in this country is to turn it back to being a problem solving and norm abiding party.

[applause]

We also think our problems are more cultural than they are structural. There's no question that we have polarized. No question there are parties have become more homogeneous. And as Tom and I have written, are behaving more like parliamentary parties in a system that simply won't tolerate that. But the bigger problem is that we have become trivialized in this society. We no longer view those on the other side as worthy adversaries, but as enemies trying to destroy our way of life. And people vote now more on the basis of their antipathy towards the enemy than their adherence to their own.

00:23:04

And the structures that we have and the rules have been distorted by figures like Donald Trump, Bill Barr and Mitch McConnell, who have demolished the norms. And to use the phrase of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "They have driven and defined deviancy down." Now, Lee Drutman and his terrific book wrote about the golden age that we had in American life, the period from roughly the 1930s through the 1970s when we had, as he puts it, in effect, a four party system, not a two-party system.

Democrats had roughly equal numbers of Southern conservatives and northern liberals. Republicans had northeastern and West Coast moderates joined with a lot of conservatives and they did form frequent bipartisan coalitions. But at the same time, as Lee acknowledges, they gave us Jim Crow and segregation because a minority in the party and in the country was able to have effectively a veto power over what was going on, much like what we've seen in the Israeli system, where ultra-religious parties have been able to dominate policies that have been disapproved by and that discomfort, the vast majority of Israelis.

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Now, we agree with our opponents on the need for major structural reform. We agree on the importance of bringing us ranked choice, voting for Congress and for the presidency. We believe in either eliminating or vastly changing the Electoral College. We'd like to see multi-member districts in the House of Representatives and an enlargement in the House. We want to see major voting reform that will eliminate voter suppression and make it easier to vote and changes in the money system in our politics. But we believe they have to be made within the structure of an existing system that's built around having two major parties. If you go back and look at what the framers set in place, they didn't want a parliamentary system that worked in a small, homogeneous country like Britain.

00:25:14

They believed that we needed to have something different, not one where a government could impose policy and a public and a culture would accept those decisions as legitimate, but one where in a Congress from the Latin word meaning to come together, not the French word parlay Question Time would debate and deliberate and organically reach a judgment that would get basically the legitimacy of the public.

And even when major changes were made by one party with a supermajority that it would get broad leadership acceptance and would work. Now, it's not that our opponents want to upend our system and give us a parliamentary system, which we believe if we tried to impose it on our culture would not be acceptable to people. They wouldn't accept the idea that one party could simply impose its will. Or that a prime minister or a leader instead of a president could be chosen by a small group of politicians and maybe a few activists.

00:26:12

But they want a hybrid, a system where we keep much of the structure but bring in proportional representation so that other parties cannot just join in but actually have skin in the game. Be a

part of the governing process, including, as Lee has written, extremist parties. Well, we don't want to outlaw other parties. In fact, we think that with ranked choice voting, you encourage other parties to have candidates who can run, but you eliminate the distortions that come when, say, a Jill Stein or a Pat Buchanan gets out there and allows somebody to win and gain power with a plurality of support, but not to be a part of that governing structure.

And in fact, those won't create more productive coalitions. Imagine if we had this multi-party system and the Republican Party formed a coalition with a white supremacist party, which meant that they would get a series of cabinet seats and probably some ability to have control over policies that they cared about. Those don't fit what we want. There are deep flaws here. There is no panacea. I wish we could find one. Even if these reforms could be implemented now and they won't, they'll take a long period of time. Changing our system, especially with the tribal media we have, simply isn't going to work.

00:27:24

We have more urgent needs with an existential threat to our political system. That's what we need to focus on. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Norm Ornstein. Our next debater will be making his arguments against the resolution Two Cheers for Two Parties. And while I cite that resolution, I want to ask you one last time to vote on the resolution, if you're for the resolution, two cheers means you're with the two party system, the two party structure. If you're against you mean you're arguing that you think that it needs to change and you can also declare yourself undecided. We'll put the information up on the screen again about how to register your vote.

And as I say, our next debater will be voting against the resolution Two Cheers for Two Parties, Please welcome Lee Drutman, author of Breaking the Two Party Doom Loop.

[applause]

Lee Drutman:

So, like a lot of you, I'm very worried about American democracy. And I think that American democracy cannot survive much longer with a two-party system. Now, here's our basic problem, and I think Norm and I agree on this, is that our democracy is setup to require broad compromise. But these two-party system makes that very difficult. Now, the problem is that we have two parties that are roughly equally balanced, both trying to win an elusive narrow majority.

00:28:22

And that means that they are constantly describing the other side as the enemy, as un-American, as Norm has pointed out. This is a real problem, it destroys the shared legitimacy, the shared

sense of fairness on which democracy depends. The problem is that the incentives of our political system keep pushing on that we are in this hyper partisan doom loop in which both parties fear what would happen if the other party gets into power because the two parties represent very different visions of America. And that's because the two parties are organized around very different geographic cause. We have one party, the Democrats, that is organized around urban America, cosmopolitan, multiracial, very integrated in the global economy. And we have one party, the Republicans that's based around rural America, traditionalist, white parts of the country that are not particularly well integrated into the global economy.

00:29:20

And those two parties. They really fear if the other party gets in power and because they fear that if the other party gets in power, they'll impose their vision of America on the other party. And this creates incredibly high stakes pushes compromise to the fringes.

And frankly, it's driving us all crazy, doesn't work with our institutions, which are not set up to be narrow majoritarian. And it doesn't work with our brains, which are easily tripped into black and white, us versus them binary thinking, which just destroys the ability again to have a shared sense of fairness. Now, I do believe that we did have something like a four-party system, as Norm described, my golden age is not the pre-civil rights era. It's the post-civil rights era from the mid-60s through the early 90s. And I think it wasn't perfect, but that four-party system actually worked pretty well with our institutions.

00:30:21

What's happened -- and this is the radical deviation -- is that we've actually become a genuine two-party system that used to be that the parties had tremendous overlap and it wasn't clear what the Democrats or the Republicans stood for. And that made our system okay. It wasn't perfect. But now the choice is incredibly clear. Choice is incredibly high stakes and it just doesn't work with our governing institutions. Now, Norm, say that the problem is the Republican Party. They've become an extreme party. And what needs to happen is the Democrats need to dominate force, the Republicans to moderate. And perhaps that's the solution. But I don't see how that happens. I don't see how the Democrats get enough of a majority to actually force the Republicans to moderate.

00:31:12

And even if Democrats do move towards that, I don't think the Republican Party would moderate. I think the Republican Party would turn violent because we know what happens when parties feel like they have no legitimate path to power. They turn to other nonpolitical means. Now, it's true that we're facing difficult times. All Western democracies are facing challenging winds of globalization, increasing conflict over national identity. Urban versus rural. Global versus local. These are difficult tasks to navigate, but I think the question then you all have to answer is what party system is best equipped to handle that? Is it a multi-party system in which different parties can offer different solutions and embrace the pluralism and diversity of America, which I think it's far more complex than the two-party system? A lot of people don't fit

into one party or the other. Or is it a party system that forces us to take sides and pulls us to extremes and takes a challenging conflict and makes it even more challenging because it forces us into these us versus them, good versus evil?

00:32:23

I think it's a party system that allows us some flexibility to form new coalitions and to navigate past this current moment. Now, if you vote for the resolution and give, say, we should keep with two parties, you're voting to take a tremendous risk that we can somehow navigate this path forward, even though we know what the two party system is doing to ourselves, to our brains and how it just doesn't work with our political institution. You're hoping for a miracle now, a multi-party system. It's there. It would take some big reforms to get there. But I think it would allow us to break that Zero-Sum hyper partisanship that is really destroying our democracy. We know how democracies die. They die when hyper-partisanship takes over. And when short term gains overwhelm long term stability. And that's what we see happening in Washington right now. I'm worried about what will happen in November. I'm worried about the illegitimacy of the results. And I think we are in very dangerous territory. So, I urge you all for the health of our democracy. Vote against the motion and vote for a brighter future with more parties and more paths to get to a functioning, healthy democracy. Thank you all.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Lee Drutman. And a reminder of what's going on, we are halfway through the opening round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I'm John Donovan. We have four debaters, two teams of two arguing it out over this resolution: Two Cheers for Two Parties. You've heard the first two opening statements. And now onto the third debating in support of the motion, Two Cheers for Two Parties. Please welcome Yascha Mounk, author of *The People Versus Democracy*. Ladies and gentlemen, Yascha Mounk.

00:34:12

Yascha Mounk:

It is very important to be exact about what we are debating today, what our side wants to convince you of is to give two cheers to the two-party system, no cheer, not zero cheers, but not three cheers either. These are difficult times for the United States. We have hyper polarization, we have a very dangerous Republican Party, as my partner has pointed out. This is not a moment in which we should look at a Martin scene and say, everything's great. Why would you change anything? That is why we are in favor of all kinds of sensible institutional and structural reforms in the United States that can make our political system work that. But here's the truth that every political scientist in this country knows the only way to actually break the two-party system is to change how we vote. Fundamentally, you don't have a congressman in your district. You have political parties that really control how the political system works.

00:35:18

So, you vote not for a particular candidate, but for political party. And that political party then gets seats in Congress in rough proportion to how many people voted for the party. That's called

a system of proportional representation. And it nearly always produces a multi-party system, not a two-party system like system we have here in the United States. Now, when you look at systems of proportional representation around the world, you find that unfortunately they don't work any better than our two-party system works here, United States. In fact, they work a lot worse. So, let me tell you a little bit about what proportional representation looks like in the world. And then let me say a little bit about what it would look like here in the United States. Okay, so look around the world. I study the rise of a full-time populace. That's what my book is about. That's what I spent the last few years talking about. And it is a very dangerous moment, but we do not just have Donald Trump here in the United States. We have Viktor Orban in Hungary. We have Kaczynski in Poland. We have Erdogan in Turkey. What do these countries have in common? They have systems of proportional representation. Proportional representation will not save us from the rise of talent popular. And what our countries have systems of proportional representation famous for. Think Israel. Think Italy. Italy has had its political system for 75 years, since the end of World War II. Do you know how many governments it has had? 61 governments in seventy five years, because it is very, very difficult to broker a stable government when you have lots and lots of political parties, lots of backroom dealings, lots of local potentates who control little share of the vote and can enter all kinds of corrupt deals.

00:37:15

But if chaos is famous and persistent problem of systems of proportional representation, too much stagnation and stability is a different one. I grew up in Germany, in Germany for the first 40 years of the existence of the Federal Republic, you had a big party on the right that took about 40 percent of the vote. You had a big party on the left, but took over 40 percent of the vote. We had a small party in the middle called the FCP that took 7-8 percent of the vote out of 40 years. It was in government for 33 years. What were the first two times for Germany changed governments for free and fair elections? If not because one side won more votes than the other. It's because the leaders of the FCP decided to change sides. In the middle of the electoral cycle. Voters have very little control over what goes on. Now, what would that look like in the United States? Bring proportional representation here, break the two-party.

We have a lot of parties where what parties do we have? We have. On the right. A few cratic party with 10 to 15 percent of the vote.

00:38:23

We have a white supremacist party with 10 to 15 percent of the vote. So, we have a bunch of more regional parties. We have a kind of Libertarian Party, a kind of country club party, a kind of Center-Left party. And then we have on the left a Socialist Party led by Bernie Sanders. And we have a deeply identity Korean party, perhaps a number of them, one for Latinos, one for African-Americans and so on and so forth.

How on earth are we going to broker stable governments in these six or seven parties? Lee rightly points out that the United States is much more diverse than other countries. But that precisely means that in a system of proportional representation, we would have even more parties, even more entrenched interests. And Americans are not used to this. They're not used to

coalitions being brokered in back rooms between politicians who go and, you know, I'll talk to you, I'll talk to you.

00:39:23

And two weeks after the election, we tell the voters who's going to be in government. Americans would rebel and they would have good reason to rebel against that kind of political system. So, I'm not going to give free cheers to the two-party system. It has deep problems. I mean, status problems today, but I'm not even going to give two cheers to proportional representation because it deserves a best one. That's why I hope you can vote with our side of emotion today.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Yascha Mounk. The resolution, again, Two Cheers for Two Parties and here to make her closing statement against the resolution, please welcome Katherine Gehl, founder of Venn Innovations.

[applause]

Ladies and gentlemen, Katherine Gehl.

Katherine Gehl:

Thank you, John. Thank you to all of you for being here.

00:40:15

It's actually a great honor to me to be here with these gentlemen and actually everyone on the stage because I own all of their books and I own Joanne's book as well. Who was here before. You're going to need to own my book. You can preorder on Amazon right now.

[laughter]

Now, my venerable opponents have already written bestsellers and I have not yet. But tonight, I actually feel a bit of sympathy for them because despite your opening statements, I'm still struggling to understand how you are going to defend the two party system and say that it's the best we could do in the face of what we see every day.

So, we just finish the divisive impeachment. We're in a divisive Democratic primary. We had the Federal Reserve chairman this week warned against our trillion-dollar deficits as being unsustainable. And 40 percent of Americans self-identify as independents, which is more than identify already as either Democrats or Republicans. So, I call myself politically homeless. Maybe that fits for you guys.

00:41:25

I believe the time will tell and is in fact telling now that Lee and I are on the right side of history. And in fact, that's really more important than who wins or loses tonight. But Lee and I would nonetheless like to win. So, I urge you to vote no on the motion. And I want to start with a couple of questions. So, I need audience participation and I'll fill those listening in. Raise your hands if you drink beer or wine. Yes, a very fun group. Okay, keep your hands up if you are in general quite satisfied with the choices that you have in the beer and wine marketplace. Okay, everybody's hands are still up. I'm celebrating with all of you after our win.

00:42:09

And now keep your hands up if you vote. Great, engaged people, everybody stands up and keep your hands up if you are quite satisfied with the choices that you have in the political marketplace. Okay. Oh, I see a lone dissenter out there, but otherwise those hands all went down. Which begs the question, why in America do we have 6,000 breweries and 3,000 wineries? And yet when it comes to our politics, we get to choose between what David Brooks describes as Soviet refrigerator A or Soviet refrigerator B.

I tried that once and then I discovered that everybody was younger than I was and it didn't work. So, I evaluated you looking out here and went with it.

[laughter]

Now, the answer to this important question is that unlike the wine and beer industries in the politics industry, we don't have healthy competition.

00:43:16

We don't have innovation. And we don't have results. We don't have accountability. As a result, we never get any good results. And this duopoly, which is what I call the two-party system, has a system which creates zero accountability. There's zero accountability because the customer, the voter, us. Only has two choices. So, the only thing that either the Democrats or the Republicans need to do to win is to convince the average voter to choose them as the lesser of two evils, or because at least they say therefore what that voter believes. But in this two-party system, what neither side has to do is deliver results, because no matter how disappointed you are, you still likely prefer what your side says, therefore, than what the one other choice says they're for.

00:44:16

In any other industry this large, this driving with this much customer dissatisfaction and only two players, some entrepreneur would see it as a phenomenal business opportunity and create a new competitor to respond to what the customers wanted. But that doesn't happen in politics because it turns out that the Democrats and the Republicans were very well together in one particular way, and that is to rig the rules of the game to protect themselves jointly from new competition. Said another way, politics isn't broken, it's fixed.

[laughter]

A quick example. The duopolies fundraising rules that allow any of us to donate \$855,000 every year to Democrats, Republicans or both. But if you want to support an independent candidate challenging the duopoly, you're limited to \$5,400 every two years.

00:45:19

So, it's all quite absurd. But the good news is that it's also all optional because we can change the system and change the results that the system delivers by changing how we vote. And it doesn't, you'll be glad to know, require proportional representation. And we will get to the details of what we can do about that. It is actually changes that are at the intersection of what I call powerful and achievable. And it brings me even in these difficult times an enormous degree of optimism. And it all starts with recognizing that the two-party system is broken. So, let's get rid of it and we can start tonight. Please vote no on the motion. And yes, to a democracy that works for us. Thank you.

00:46:13

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Katherine Gehl. And that concludes round one of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is Two Cheers for Two Parties.

Now we move on to round two and round two is where the debaters address one another directly. They also take questions for me and for new members of our live audience. The resolution is two cheers for two parties. We have heard the team arguing for the resolution. Norm Ornstein and Yascha Mounk make the argument, first of all, they are not saying that things are good right now. They're very hyper critical, in fact, of the present state of play within and between the two parties. A little bit tougher on the GOP than on the Democrats. But nevertheless, they're saying that they think the system has deep problems and in fact, could benefit from reforms. However, they say that the alternative of proportional representation would have enormous problems, that proportional representation has not worked very well in the countries where it has been tried, that it's a little bit of a false promise.

00:47:12

And they're also saying that the two-party system provides a sort of stability that the American psyche is used to, that it would be very, very difficult to get Americans to be willing to change horses in in terms of our system after all of these years, and that the two party system is larger than two parties would result in giving disproportionate power to potentially unsavory political movements such as white supremacy. The team arguing against the resolution, Katherine Gehl and Lee Drutman, they are arguing that the two party system, in fact, turns politics into a Zero-Sum game between the two parties that they represent choices that the vast majority of the American public, given other choices, would not gravitate towards taking note that more than 40

percent of Americans self-identify as independents. They describe the two-party system as a kind of anti-competitive duopoly where the fix is in to preserve their power and to preserve the system from other challengers.

00:48:11

But they also believe that a multi-party system is possible and they believe that it would be a more accurate representation of America's political diversity. So, there's a lot there. I found interesting that all four of you agree that there are needs for reforms. And I found it interesting that you are both you know, you're agreeing that the system, as it works right now, isn't going very well. But I think that the core disagreement is on the nature of the solution. I think it's implied when we say that the two-party system is good or bad, it's compared to what. And I think it came out that we're both talking about the two-party system versus a proportional system of proportional representation. So, I want to dig into that. But I want to start with a little bit a little bit off that point by going to you, Norm, and just taking on Katherine's point that the that the parties as they are now are effectively a duopoly, that they are cooperating to prevent, to prevent a diversity of ideas and voices from having impact in the political realm.

00:49:12

And that that, you know, obviously that this is a bad thing and it's also almost anti-American. So, what do you think of that?

Norman Ornstein:

So, you know, this as Katherine was talking about wine and beer, I was thinking, what if the wine industry governed us and governed itself and actually had to form a legislature?

What would happen likely is that the French would join with the Americans to block the Italians from selling their wine and we would have fewer choices. It's not clear to me that competition as it works in a marketplace would work the same way in the political arena. Having said that, I do believe as we talked about some of the reforms that we would embrace having ranked choice voting, enabling parties to be out there and competing, but still ending up where you're making decisions which more than likely would leave us with two parties but with a different kind of competition would work for me.

00:50:11

I think about when I think about, you know, just looking at Lee's book in an otherwise if we have a president and a separate Congress and we have multiple parties, we're going to have to make massive changes to make sure that a presidential election would actually result in somebody with a majority winning. Now, we have a real problem now with the Electoral College. But doing that and then having multiple parties and Congress forming coalitions, having a president find the ability to actually work out a coalition that would work I think would be more difficult. And as Yascha said, what you're more likely to get are corrupt bargain. And bringing extremists into the system doesn't mean that they're going to be in the tent and content with working within the system. They're going to make demands that would make governing more difficult.

John Donovan:
Lee, respond.

Lee Drutman:
Yeah. So, the question is whether presidentialism can work with a multi-party system.

00:51:10

Now, what we have now are two possible Congresses, one in which the opposing party to the president is in Congress and then we have gridlock and opposition and everything, why is it being done in the executive branch? The other option is we have a party which the government -- which is unified, in which case we have no separation of powers. We have a party that just lets the president do what he or she wants. Now, in a multi-party Congress with a president, you would have certainly you'd have to build coalitions, but it would mean that there was neither permanent gridlock nor a blank check. It might be that we have a Congress that actually might've voted to impeach Trump because not all of them depended on being aligned with Trump to get reelected.

John Donovan:
Yascha.

Yascha Mounk:
Well, you have examples of that in Latin America, you have these really weird hybrid political systems.

00:52:05

You have a president who is popularly elected and then you have a Congress which is like seven different political parties, none of which are necessarily related to the president. And what you get is chaos, because a president can never agree with Congress or the parliament. You can never actually pass any laws. And what you end up doing is you get these strongmen who are coming in and saying, none of this is working. We always have political rancor. We can never actually pass any laws. What you need to do is to give all the power to me so I can sideline Congress and do what I want. And that's why Latin American political systems have been much more prone to democratic breakdowns than political systems elsewhere. Look, the problem is that we need to essentially find a majority in one way or another. That is the big this analogy to this lovely example of a beer and wine industry. You can have one beer, you can have a beer, you can have a different one. We don't have to agree in order to pass laws, you have to broker majorities. So where do you want to do that? By giving people a choice between two parties and seeing which of them is more popular and was genuinely popular because we get rid of the Electoral College and so on, all by giving seven parties a little bit of political power, selling them all up into dark rooms and having them deal make with deals with each other that we have no control over.

00:53:20

The performance system is not great. It's a lot better than --

John Donovan:

So, Katherine, your beer wine test was used against you.

Katherine Gehl:

That's okay because he used it wrong. So, I am the only one up here who isn't a political scientist. Until four years ago I was running a food manufacturing company in Wisconsin. Yes, we made cheese and I came out of that experience with the same as all of us is deep concern about our democracy. And so, I ordered all these books, including, as I've said, books by these gentlemen. And what I would do is get the book and go right to the back to find out what was what to do about it. And it was always disappointing because I read a lot of discussion about what was wrong and a lot of discussion about how we wished things should be different.

00:54:08

We shouldn't be so polarized. We should have a different constitution that didn't include an electoral college. All kinds of things that were either not powerful or not achievable. We have no leverage. So, I said we need to think about this differently

And the point of beer and wine example is to understand the value of competition. And the value of competition is the court is that it forces innovation. The problem with our current system is not just that we have two parties, but that they are guaranteed to continue to remain the only two parties we have when 90 percent of people are not phenomenally satisfied. So, what we want to put into the industry is the threat of new competition. It is the threat of being displaced and losing power that pushes competitors' in any industry to innovate and to respond and to solve problems. And that's what we need to change in our political system. And it doesn't take proportional representation to do that.

00:55:14

John Donovan:

Norm, your opponents have made the point that the choices presented by the two parties represent choices that that many, many Americans wouldn't make if they had other choices. That the parties are at this point are so extreme and polarized that that they don't really represent the American public's diversity. What's your response to that?

Norman Ornstein:

We have a real problem. And I know I'm not going to sugarcoat where we are now. And I have sympathy for a lot of people, including many Republicans and former Republicans who don't know quite where to go right now. And there's a danger that the Democratic Party won't offer them a place to go.

John Donovan:

So, they're right? Are they making --

Norman Ornstein:

But when I when I look at alternatives, let's consider a couple of things. And we still need to push Katherine a little bit on how we can do this without any structural changes.

00:56:05

Changing the Electoral College, changing the structure of a separately elected president, a House and the Senate, the way we have them in a constitution, the way it is. This is going to take a long time. I think right now what we need to do is focus on how we can bring back a legitimate two-party system. We need to look at ways in which we can have a Republican Party that's a party again. And for a long time we did have parties. Actually, there were instances with United Government when the congressional leaders did real oversight and put some checks on corruption or on maladministration or on bad governance that we don't have now.

We need to work at it. But the problem that I see is if we could snap our fingers and bring about the kinds of structural changes that lead at least once, and maybe Katherine has a magic formula that won't require any of those. Even if we could do that, it's not going to fit within our culture. And what's also important is to realize that all these other countries that have these kinds of systems are going through the same kind of threat from right-wing populism, dangers of immigration that are bringing out racial divisions that we have had for a long time that haven't existed before.

00:57:20

There is no panacea here. And to you think that by somehow causing our culture to go through an enormous upheaval, to bring in a bunch of other parties, many of which would be, as Yascha laid out, really extreme parties, the way we are now would not work.

John Donovan:

Let me take that particular criticism to your opponents, Lee or Katherine. The argument here being made that the door would be open to quite unsavory political players to gain power.

Katherine Gehl:

Right. Let's talk about what the other option is that isn't proportional representation, although that has many benefits, which we can talk about. Here's the thing. We have two structural problems. One is we have primaries. Party primaries, and they push our elected representatives to the right and to the left, and then they can't come together in Washington, D.C. to solve any problems because they are going to get primaried in their next election.

00:58:21

John Donovan:

Can I interrupt a second? Because my question was really about their point that unsavory people could get. So rather than -- but are you feeling that you're not being given a chance to explain what you're all turned to?

Katherine Gehl:

No, because this is how you won't have unsavory people.

John Donovan:

Go for it. Okay.

Katherine Gehl:

So we how we change the system now, if we get rid of partisan primaries and instead we have a single open. Everybody runs on the same ballot and the top five vote getters advance to the general election.

So now you don't automatically lose your primary in the in our system just by voting yes on bipartisan compromise legislation. And the second thing we do is we institute ranked choice voting in the general election.

00:59:03

So, we will elect someone with the greatest appeal to the most number of voters. But most important, getting rid of the way we currently vote plurality voting first past the post voting and substituting ranked choice voting is what lowers the barrier to entry for new competition. And now you won't splinter these votes and let the extremists in. But everybody's views to be represented. And we still now elect someone who's responsive to the entire districts.

John Donovan:

I wanted to give you a chance to respond, but I feel that Lee wants to add something to that thought. Normally, I would let you go first --

Lee Drutman:

So, Yashua paints a very dark picture of some proportional representation systems that that are not doing so well. He doesn't talk about Ireland. He doesn't talk about New Zealand. He doesn't talk about Denmark, about Sweden, about a lot of country, about Netherlands, but a lot of countries that are that are that are not being overrun by populists.

01:00:10

Now, those parties do exist, but government coalitions are forming that don't include those parties. Now, there is some extremism. There's always going to be some extremism in society. We have a strange party system in which Donald Trump ran as a Republican. Probably got about 30 percent of the vote in the primary and about 40 percent of the people are Republicans. So, about Donald Trump is about 12 percent party and as many populist, far right populist parties in Western Europe are. Now, by winning the plurality of a plurality, Donald Trump becomes president, takes over an entire Republican Party. And now we have one party that, as Norman has described, has gone to a very extreme place. That is the danger of a two-party system. The two-party system is good at managing extremism, if extremism is just 5 percent or 10 percent,

but when it gets to be 15 percent and it can be a plurality of a plurality, it can gain total power. And that's a tremendous danger of a two-party system.

01:01:12

John Donovan:

Okay, before you respond, I want to tee up an audience question just in the interest of time. Ma'am, second row down, if you could stand up and be ready. I'm not going to come to the question just yet. I want to let this team respond. But if you can be ready to go. Yes.

Yascha Mounk:

So, listen, I'm happy to talk the country's assistance of proportional representation all day long. I'm happy to talk Denmark and Sweden and happy to New Zealand. I'm sorry, it's not representation, but Denmark has had over the last 20 or 30 years a party by the name of Danish People's Party, which has been part of a government for about half of that time.

Sweden has a party by the name of Sweden Democrats, an avowed neo-Nazi party. I'm not being hyperbolic. I mean, shaved had a swastika flag. Neo-Nazis. That party today is the biggest party in Sweden, according to opinion polls. So we can go toe to toe on all of those countries. It's not going to look pretty, unfortunately. But I think I want to underline before we get to the audience, tonight's point of harmony and agreement. The primary system in the United States is a problem. It allows --

John Donovan:

Since you agree with it. Can I move on or do you have a --

Male Speaker:

Let the hammer come down.

Yascha Mounk:

It allows people with 25, 30 percent of the vote within a primary to become the party's nominee and the people who participate.

01:02:30

Only about 10 percent of the EU's population. Both of those things are a problem. But in order to fix that, you simply have to do some of the things that Cameron talked about, which is, for example, to allow open primaries, to have a system of a single transferable vote, which means that if my preferred candidate doesn't isn't among the top, I can redistribute my votes towards my second preferred candidate. And that avoids the most extreme candidate winning a majority. If that's not actually what people want, but that would still give you a two-party system. The idea that some of these possibly sensible reforms would magically give us five passes is simply true. So, let's fix our two party system. Let's give it two cheers. Let's not abandon it for some kind of imaginary. Never, never, never land. Well, we have five wonderful parties that are produced by some structure that doesn't exist anywhere in the world.

01:03:26

John Donovan:

Ma'am, you can stand up and if you could tell us at least your first name.

Audience Member:

My question is, both sides have mentioned ranked choice voting as some kind of an improvement to what they're advocating. We have ranked choice voting here in San Francisco, and it has proven to be confusing. And I'm going to be kind and say that many of the results are dysfunctional. So, would you please explain how you think that ranked choice voting is going to be any kind of an improvement?

[applause]

John Donovan:

Can we be very brief and rather than all four of you responding to this? But if I have a feeling you may have shared views and I don't want to have a lot of time on it, but who would like to take it?

01:04:11

Katherine Gehl:

Okay. So, what we're proposing is ranked choice voting in general elections for Congress. And this is after a primary where you have five candidates advancing. So that gets rid of this challenge. That ranked choice voting is confusing because we're not running perhaps as they are in some of these municipal elections, 10, 12 candidates on the ballot. We've narrowed it down to the right amount to have the diversity of ideas and candidates in the race that contributes to their ability so that the candidate who's elected to their ability to deliver results once they're in Washington, D.C., because they're responding to the needs of the entire district. I don't spend time recommending ranked choice voting for municipal elections. It's going to be very effective for reducing the polarization and gridlock in Congress.

John Donovan:

Okay. Again, given that neither side is making right to the heart of your argument, do you need to respond to that?

01:05:20

Yascha Mounk:

I would like to buy I you think it illustrates a key part of my argument, which is that when I'm in the United States, people say our electoral system sucks. Let's have a different electoral system. I mean, I go to any of the countries that have that electoral system. And what do people tell me? That our electoral system sucks. Let's have an electoral system more like that of the United States. I think rank choice voting is a sensible reform in certain contexts. But the real point you're making is it's easy to sit here and say, let's get rid of a two-party system, will have an imaginary wonderful electoral system that solves all of our problems. Our problems are not due

to our specific electoral system, but too much deeper problems. And that's why it doesn't matter where you go here, Germany, anywhere, you have these problems.

[applause]

John Donovan:

I'm going to bring the microphone down to the very front row. Coming quickly, if you could stand up. Thank you. By the way, it's really perfectly phrased question, I just want to say. That's the model. What you did, we should all do.

Audience Member:

Hi, my name is Jay. And my question is, the last five elections have been wave elections where people are dissatisfied with both parties.

01:06:16

And it seems to me that there is this impatience for change in Washington. And yet our founding fathers created a government that was by design, very deliberative and slow and a government of checks and balances, and that viewed tyranny is akin -- views rapid change is akin to tyranny? You guys have talked a lot about these different reforms that go across the country, like winning twice, voting in a constitutional Congress, things like that. But those Raul take years and years, if not decades, to implement. Is there anything that could possibly be done right away to change the system?

John Donovan:

To change it from a two party system?

Audience Member:

To begin to reform it--

John Donovan:

So the reason I'm asking you for that, since the resolution is Two Cheers for Two Party system. Are you saying is there a way to quickly get away from a two-party system?

01:07:03

Audience Member:

Yeah, I guess barring revolution, is there a way to put an end to the two-party system?

John Donovan:

All right. So, I'm going to go to the side that's arguing forward. It's a question about the practicality, the pragmatism of what you're arguing. Lee, we haven't heard from you in a bit. If you want to take it and then Katherine can join you.

Lee Drutman:

So I think it is practical. Two thirds of Americans say we ought to have more than two parties.

So I think it would be widely supported and Congress could pass legislation, could pass it tomorrow. States can start taking actions on their own. They could -- so, I mean, it's up to all of us to decide what we want. I mean, there's nothing holding us back. It's just understanding that the two-party system is not working. It's breaking our democracy. It's driving us all crazy. And frankly, we ought to have more choices.

John Donovan:

You know, just because I mean, we do have more than two parties. We have libertarians. I mean, the Green Party in the economy is putting the Socialist Party democratic socialist. So, when you're saying we have only two parties. What is your point?

01:08:04

Lee Drutman:

We have we have only two effective parties because we have a winner take all plurality first past the post system that renders third parties as spoilers and pushes them to the fringes where they only attract fringes.

Katherine Gehl:

Let's give an example of how this plays out in the real world. So, earlier this spring, Howard Schultz, the former CEO of Starbucks, who was widely admired as a business leader, decided, decided that he would consider running as an independent for president. And the Democrats were livid because they believed that if Howard Schultz ran as an independent, he would take votes away from the eventual Democratic nominee and inadvertently then helped reelect Donald Trump. And in our current system, that may well be true. Now, you don't have to think that Howard Schultz would have been the greatest president to also understand that there are some things dramatically wrong with a system where having more talented, passionate, insightful competitors is bad.

01:09:06

So we need to find we need to implement the system of ranked choice voting in our general elections in order that competitors like Howard Schultz, like Jill Stein or Gary Johnson can have electoral opportunities, because even if they don't win, when you have healthy competition with more competition, you get results quickly. Perot ran in 92. He was the last third-party candidate to be on a debate stage. He only got 19 percent of the vote. But what did we get? Citizens balanced budgets out of the Clinton administration because neither the Republicans nor the Democrats wanted to cede all that 19 percent. All those people who voted for Perot's charts on the debt and deficit to a third party, having the opportunity for third parties creates this pressure to perform for the citizens.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Norman, going back to the going back to the question, how realistic is the sense that these changes could happen short of a revolution in a relatively short period of time?

01:10:11

Norman Ornstein:

There are some things that could be done and there are things that don't require constitutional amendments. And in fact, if we managed to get, for example, a Democratic president with a Senate, say, with 53 Democrats, you could pass some version of what they call H.R. 1 that would give us some campaign finance reform that could add multi-member districts, which is basically blocked by a 1967 law. You could expand the size of the house, which was capped at 435 because the racists in the South knew that if you expanded the numbers the way we'd done every 10 years, otherwise they would lose power and that would actually give us more representation. And I would just add to what Katherine said, that at the presidential level, we now have this pernicious impact of the Jill Stein's and who got a lot of support from Russia. Why? Because it was pulling votes away and distorting outcomes. If there were ranked choice voting, those candidates could run and you wouldn't have that kind of distorting effect.

01:11:14

That can be done by laws in individual states and then you can have more than two parties.

Yascha Mounk:

I just want to add one last line to that, which is if you have rank choice voting, it doesn't give you anything other than a two party system and allows people to say, hey, my first voice goes to Jill Stein, but obviously she's not going to get 30 or 40 percent of the vote. So, it's going to get eliminated and redistributed to the Democratic candidate. What rank choice voting allows you to do is to have some expression of strong preferences. If you have Millstream political views, that we would still effectively have two parties, but we are completely in favor of Ranked choice voting. But that is not abolishing the two-party system. It is fixing which you party.

Audience Member:

Hi, John. So, my question is really for Katherine. We're in San Francisco, Katherine. And when you impose your free market rules, we don't have a multitude of search engines, for example, or social media.

01:12:18

So, what I fear more than a multi-party system is a unique party system. And what is to insure against that if you impose your market rules and create this free market in politics, where you where you have a winner take all system and single Google style or Facebook style winners?

Katherine Gehl:

So, it's really interesting. What really matters to us is how many parties we have or is it what whoever is elected gets done or doesn't get done, everything that we work on in my analysis is how to change the likelihood that our elected representatives deliver results.

01:13:08

And what we'll get with this free market politics, which I do sometimes call it, is competition that delivers what the voters want. So, the voters don't want a party. We won't have one. And the voters don't want that because we're already talking about how much division there is here. But it allows that division to translate into an opportunity for the elected official to do rational things and still get reelected.

Currently, you do something rational. You're primaried out. Now that would be dramatically transformed. And we can begin to expect results. Which brings me to the question I would like to ask, which is if you see some problems with what we're proposing, which I may not totally agree with. The other question is what would you do to take this current two-party system and re-transform it other than the forces of competition into something that suddenly works.

01:14:03

John Donovan:

Rather than answer the question, I just want to give Lee a chance to -- I thought maybe you wanted to also respond to the question.

Lee Drutman:

Well, I mean, I just don't see how you would wind up with a political monopoly based on any of these reforms. I mean, they're there. If you're going to have a political monopoly, that means you're going to have an authoritarian system which none of us is proposing here.

John Donovan:

All right. There was a pretty powerful question just dropped in front of you. We don't have very much time left. I'd like to give you -- I'm sure you've thought about it enough to compress your answer to about 35 seconds. Who would like to take that on?

Norm Orstein:

So, you know, a lot of the things that we're talking about we agree on. I would like to see more competition and some form of rank choice voting. I would like to see a whole series of other reforms that could be done through legislative action. But I don't want to see, you know, a David Duke now is outside the political system. If we have a number of parties and we're getting coalitions and the David Duke party is there inside the tent able to use its leverage. I don't think that's going to be a healthy process. I don't think that's going to lead to more competition leading to better outcomes. I think it can lead, as we've seen in so many other countries, to more pernicious outcomes. So, reforms that we can do immediately we can all agree on. We just happen to believe that if you try and make a radical transformation that adds a lot more parties, the unintended consequences, the downsides that we've seen play out in so many other countries are going to lead us down a bad path.

John Donovan:

Okay. There's something I need to say. I want to remind you that we are in the question and answer section of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I'm John Donovan, your moderator. We have two teams of two arguing it out over this resolution: Two Cheers for Two Parties. And the

other thing I need to say is that concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is Two Cheers for Two Parties.

01:16:02

[applause]

Now we move on to round three. Round three will be closing statements. They will be two minutes each here to make his first here to speak first in the closing round. Arguing for the resolution, Two Cheers for Two Parties. Here is Norm Ornstein, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

[applause]

Norman Ornstein:

So, I mostly want to reiterate some of the major points that we've made. We're not in a very good place in the United States right now. But to imagine that if we somehow either could wave a magic wand or even make a series of fundamental structural changes in the way our political system operates, that if we could do it even today, that Americans would accept that kind of change. When we've had 230 years of a culture built around the way in which we do our elections and introduce a lot of additional parties in the kind of system where they're going to form coalitions inside. But it's going to mean, as Yascha said, a whole series of more extreme parties that would suddenly have a lot more leverage. That's not the direction in which we want to go. I'd like to see those structural reforms.

01:17:16

But I also think that we need to focus on something else which is more fundamental, which is the toxic culture that we have right now. We haven't talked, for example, about the tribal media, the degree to which a Fox News has had an impact on the structure of debate in the society on climate change, basically pushing us in a direction where we can't even have a debate about it, which is also, by the way, done more to bring us Brexit and to encourage the fires in Australia than anybody else. And that's spreading with talk radio and others. We have coarsened our culture where anything is in bounds now, where if you saw the stories today, bullying in schools is way up because of the example that we see with the president. We need to focus our attention not just on the kinds of reforms, most of which will take a period of time or even if we could do them by law, couldn't be done that quickly.

01:18:15

And on finding a way to repair our culture and move this back to a situation where we can actually have some reasoned debate about the important things that matter and view this as a country of people together. That's where I want to turn our focus as much as some of these other things and a pie in the sky that we're going to have a bunch of different parties that suddenly will reason together. I don't think leads us there.

[applause]

Thank you, Neil Ornstein. The resolution again Two Cheers for Two Parties, here to make his closing statement against the resolution, Lee Drutman, author of Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop.

Lee Drutman:

So, James Madison, the father of our Constitution, wrote a brilliant essay, Federalist Number 10, that lays out the thinking behind the structure of our political system. And Madison encountered this problem.

01:19:06

He said there are a lot of factions in society and to extinguish them would be the death of liberty. But how are we going to have a political system in which they can all work together?

Now, his solution was basically this that no faction should have a permanent majority and no faction should think it could dominate any other faction. And no faction should fear that it would be in the permanent minority position and would be dominated.

The framers were afraid of political parties because they thought there would only be two, and if there were two parties, one party would be trying to get a majority and oppress the minority party. The minority party would fear that the system was illegitimate and we'd have the collapse of democracy. We'd have a civil war. Now, they didn't anticipate the two-party system, but had they anticipated that parties would be inevitable, I think they would have wanted a multi-party democracy because a multi-party democracy requires compromise, negotiation, coalition building and allows the coalitions to be fluid so that no one side feels like if the other side gets into power, their side is going to be oppressed.

01:20:14

Now, we've talked a lot about the dangers of extremism. And it's true that a more proportional system might allow some more extremist parties, although I don't want to none. Neither would Katherine nor I are proposing would allow the kind of hyper-proportionality of Israel would probably wonder with maybe four or six parties.

But yeah, I think there is a danger in suppressing extremism until it builds up and it builds up and it takes over one of the two major parties. And that, I fear, is the situation that we are in now. And so, for the health of the future of democracy, let's break the two-party doom loop. Let's give people more choices and get a system in which people can actually feel enthusiastic about the options that they have rather than holding their nose, voting for the lesser of two evils and fearing that if their side loses, the fate of our country is at an end.

01:21:10

John Donvan:

Thank you, Lee Drutman. The resolution again is Two Cheers for Two Parties. Here to make his closing statement in support of the resolution, Yoscha Mounk, author of *The People vs. Democracy*.

[laughter]

[applause]

Yoscha Mounk:

For the last half an hour, I've been thinking about a friend of mine. This is a wonderful guy and he's a good person, but he's a little bit indecisive with his girlfriends. The last girlfriend he had he loved and thought she was great, but she was so tall. And sometimes he would say I wish she was a little less tall. Now he has a new girlfriend who is also lovely and she is quite short and he loves her and he's good to her. But after a year or two, he says Yascha, I sometimes wish she was a little bit taller. And that's sort of the summary of it night to day.

01:22:02

It's very easy to say our political system is so broken, if only we had one over there. And when you go to the people who have a system over there and they say, well, only we had a system of majoritarian first past the post, like perhaps in the United States, the basic truth is that electoral systems give you tradeoffs. Either you have relatively limited choice, as you do in the United States. But you know, who's going to form the government if you vote for the Democrats or to vote for Republicans? Or you have a system of proportional representation. When you vote for political party, you have more choice, you have of a choice of -- but you have no idea what government they're going to form, once you've given them your vote. And that's not an abstract question for me, because I've been thinking about what's happened in Germany last week in the state of a -- German is supposed to be one of the functional VR systems. The people there who voted for perfectly decent moderate parties like Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats found that they elected a no name politician, prime minister of a state with the support of the alternative for Germany, with the support of most extreme AFGE politician [unintelligible] who's famous for saying the Germans need to make 180 degree turn in the memory of World War II. So, yes, our system has deep problems. I don't give it three cheers, I give it two cheers.

01:23:27

But I don't think that proportional representation is going to solve those problems. Vote for our side of a mission. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Yascha Mounk. And our final speaker making her closing statement against the resolution, Katherine Gehl, founder of Venn Innovations.

[applause]

Katherine Gehl:

So in 2012. My daughter Alexander said to me, Mommy, I think I'm a Remocrat [sic] or maybe a Depublican [sic]. She knew intuitively that we needed more than two choices.

01:24:07

And she was only 6. And last election cycle during the primaries, she said a lot of interesting things, but one of them was why is this all such a mess when I'm growing up? Why does this have to happen to us now and then sort of why are you guys screwing it up? My son, who is now just two.

By the time he was born, I really understood about these dangers of two parties, and so I named him Teddy after Theodore Roosevelt, who was a great reformer of the progressive era.

And I promised him and promised my daughter that I would spend the rest of my life in the arena working for these political changes. A vote for the motion tonight is a vote for more of what we've been getting, more of what we weren't satisfied with. And it's not just a vote for more of the same for us.

01:25:05

It's a vote for more of the same for Alexandra, Teddy, and all of your children as well. It doesn't have to be like this. We can leave the doom loop of two-party politics behind, the guaranteed positions of these two parties. By these simple political innovations, which we can enact on a state by state basis, America was founded on the greatest political innovation of modern times and once again, that kind of political innovation is the key to our future. So, please join Lee and me and the two thirds of Americans who want more choices to vote against this notion. Say yes to the great American experiment and say no to the two-party system. And when tonight is over, after we've won. Please do join the movement to actually implement these changes and bring back the vibrancy of a competitive democracy. Thank you.

01:26:07

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Katherine Gehl. And that concludes closing statements. And now it's time to learn which side you feel has argued the best. I want to ask you again to go to your phones and register your second vote. Same way as before. Go to the URL that I believe will come up on the screen. And once again, vote yes, no or undecided. And we'll have the results as soon as you've all voted. We'll start to be able to calculate and we'll get the results in about two or three minutes. But while that's happening, I want to say a couple of things. One is, as I said in the beginning, the endeavor that Bob Rosenkranz set out to do was to raise the level of public discourse by showing that it's possible to have disagreements in a way that is civil and constructive and eye

opening and potentially even bridge-building if it's possible for people to see that there is a reasonable and valid position on the other side.

01:27:01

And what that takes our debaters who come to this stage in that spirit and who show respect for one another and who listen to one another and engage with one another. And on that score, all four of these debaters tonight, I think were spectacular. And I just want to thank them for the way in which you argued.

[applause]

So, as we tally the votes, as one thing I want to do, the gentleman who asked the question about Citizens United. I could see where that question was coming from and its relevance here. But I made the judgment that it wasn't strictly going to help us decide whether the two-party system was conducive or not to American democracy. However, your question, is the Citizens United conducive to American democracy? How does it play to this issue? I think it's a valid question to just to kick around while we're waiting for the vote. So, I'll kick it to you.

Norman Orstein:

First let me say justice pernicious was the Shelby County decision. And what we're now seeing, the evisceration of the Voting Rights Act is a bigger danger and threat to the fundamentals of our freedoms and our political system. But it's not just Citizens United itself. It's the McCutcheon decision. It's the speech now decision. It's all the progeny that flowed from Citizens United that include John Roberts basically saying there's no such thing really as corruption unless it's a direct bribe that, you know, you give money, you get access, maybe you even get things for it. That's just fine. And that's led us down a path that's very, very bad. That's a part of the pernicious culture that we have.

Just repealing Citizens United wouldn't do it. But getting fundamental reforms in how we deal with money and democracy, including on the lobbying side as well as on the campaign side, is very important. And we're now, I would say, also confronting the problems that can exist that go back to Buckley, where somebody can spend \$10 billion and completely distort the impact of an election, including, by the way, 5 all the television time and not allowing anybody else to speak. And the idea that speech is money and that billionaires can come in and distort the political process is something we're going to have to confront. That goes back to Buckley and we're going to have to do something fundamental to restore a balance. Speech is not money. Money is not mentioned in the First Amendment, in the Constitution. And lots of changes have to occur.

01:29:24

John Donovan:

Katherine, your thoughts on Citizens United?

Katherine Gehl:

Yeah, I look at this again from a lens of competition. And I agree with so much of what is said here and the concern over Citizens United. And yet, we would need a constitutional amendment to make a change there. So, I look instead to things that we could do. And the reason there's so much money in politics is because the ROI why on that investment is so high. You know, who came out of that primary in whatever district, that primary save for who's going to win the general. So, you know what your investment is going to get you, particularly with incumbency. And what we need to do to take down self-interested money in politics is reduce the certainty of that ROI, which elevates the risk that that investment in a candidate is made and it doesn't turn out that way.

And for that, we need dynamic competition, which makes the vote finally more important than the money. It absolutely won't solve it as much as also having, you know, Citizens United go away. But it's something we have access to now, which is to change the way we vote less than the importance of –

01:30:33

Norman Ornstein:

Let me just say, we don't need a constitutional amendment. We need a different Supreme Court. We need a Supreme Court.

That was like the one when Sandra Day O'Connor was there, and only because she left prematurely because her husband had Alzheimer's did we get a Supreme Court that overturned the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act. A different Supreme Court would be enough.

John Donvan:

Okay, sir, thank you very much for the question. I hope that satisfied some sensitive curiosity about it. All right. I have the final results. You have been asked to vote twice on the resolution. Two cheers for two parties. I want to remind you again, it's the difference between the first and the second vote that determines our winners. Here's how it played out: on the first vote on the resolution Two Cheers for Two Parties, 35 percent of you agreed.

01:31:15

Twenty seven percent of you were against the sentiments of this resolution, and 38 percent were undecided. The first results. Now let's look at the second results and the second result for the team who's arguing for the resolution. Again, their first vote was 35 percent. Their second vote was 65 percent.

They pulled up 30 percentage points, which is now the number to beat the team arguing against the resolution. They went from 27 percent to 28 percent. They pulled up one percentage point, which is not enough. The team arguing for the resolution to cheers for two parties named our winner is our congratulations to them. Thank you for me, John Donvan and Intelligence. We'll see you next time.

01:31:53

[applause]

[end of transcript]

This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.