

# **AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF AMERICAN VOTING AND POLITICS**

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**September 6 2019**

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## Summary

The current political system is based on a model proposed by privileged white propertied male (some slave-owners) more than 200 years ago. The earmark of our system is corruption by the infiltration of vast sums of unaccounted non-transparent money.

I am suggesting a much better alternative than traditional voting that retains the (limited) benefits of voting, and potentially eliminates the drawbacks:

This alternative is *election by random selection* from a suitable pool of people. That is, we would no longer vote.

We would no longer be subject to ambitious men and women who are seeking to be elected for their own advancement. Instead, an ordinary individual who is lucky enough to be randomly selected is much more likely to be inspired and motivated by a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to truly make a positive impact on their own society.

## Motivation

### *Overview*

The current political system is based on a model proposed by privileged white propertied male (many of whom were slave-owners) more than 200 years ago [1]. It is entirely inappropriate in the age of technology and instant communication. Ill-intentioned demagogues flood the social media with distortions and misinformation [2]-[3]. It is difficult for the average person to distinguish valid information from the constant barrage of weaponized industrial-scale misinformation. The earmark of our system is corruption by the infiltration of vast sums of unaccounted non-transparent money [4]-[7].

Even in the time period before the age of technology and instant communication, political candidates were often ambitious men who (1) happened to have a certain dominating personality type and (2) were more interested in personal gain/ego/agenda rather than the common good. We have ended up with a large number of political leaders in key positions who are (1) entrenched and (2) little more than puppets of self-serving lobbyists/billionaires.

## *A Brief Conceptual History of Democratic Elections*

There is an immediate appeal to the concept of whoever gets the most votes being the winner of an election. It is “self-evident” that the most popular idea should be the one that is implemented. Not to mention that the side with a lot more supporters is just physically stronger than the other side, and so they could impose their will by force if the system did not make them the winners. So, to avoid armed conflict to settle every issue, it is better to make the majority the winner.

However, the bulk of people may not be all that well educated or perceptive, and perhaps an elite minority would have a better grasp of nuanced reality? Be that as it may, woe be to this enlightened minority if democracy were such as to elect whoever got the smallest number of votes. It is hard to imagine making whoever gets the least votes the winner. That would mean that whoever gets just one vote (or possibly zero votes) would be the winner. This would be similar to the old joke about a horse race where the slowest horse is the winner.

To diverge momentarily in order to make a point, in the field of education, we now hear about the evils of “teaching to the test.” That is, ideally the students should be going along learning this and that in the normal course of things, and an eventual standardized test should measure the general level of what the student has retained. If the student

is trained specifically to take this test, then the whole point of the test as a general measure of learning is lost.

Another analogy that comes to mind is your annual physical/medical exam. This is supposed to measure the general quality of your life-style during the last year. It is not supposed to give you a good result if you do whatever you want all year, and then avoid ice-cream for the week before your exam.

So too with voting in a democracy. If potential candidates just go about their business, and from time to time there is an election based on who has accomplished what, that might be fine. Unfortunately, elections very quickly became like “teaching to the test.” That is, just before an election, an enormous effort is made, and a huge amount of money is spent, to convince people who to vote for. This is turning what might have been a reasonable idea upside down.

Rather than (silently) being judged by what they have accomplished, the candidates need to (vociferously) attack one another and (vociferously) make unreasonable and unrealistic promises. If you do not tell the voters what they want to hear (regardless of the intelligence or the truth), you can never get a majority of the votes. So, the rules themselves select for manipulators and liars as our political leaders.

*Assumptions Underlying a Functional Democratic Electoral Process, and the Unfortunate Reality of Major Deviations Thereof*

In order to have a functional democratic election, we need a thoughtful, well-informed and well-intentioned electorate. At a minimum, this means we need reliable sources of information, and a populace that is thoughtfully informed by this information.

In fact, what we have are news sources that are either (1) designed to be hopelessly biased (such as Fox News [2]) or (2) themselves imbedded in the capitalist system that puts immense pressure to be financially profitable. There is always the risk that these considerations might be – well, considerations - in choosing what is presented and how it is presented. Even such a reliable source as NPR has been infested with support by the Koch brothers, which could subject their reporting to subtle and nuanced bias [8]-[10]. Such bias could be manifested by selection or omission of what is presented, as well as the content of presentations.

The general American public watches a lot of television. These programs do not generally help to educate or to train the mind for critical thinking or evaluating the quality of someone's ideas or character. It would be foolish to think that we can watch television for 364 days, but then on election day we are able to switch off this idiot mode of

thinking [2] and momentarily switch on an intelligent mode of thinking in order to be able to vote properly.

An unscrupulous candidate can mercilessly exploit these deficiencies. According to an article in *politicususa* [11]:

“Trump successfully learned about targeting the audience’s lowest common denominator, how scare-propaganda works, and how to structure an emotional speech for effect and to incite rage.

...

Note that Trump uses his audience’s racial animus and rage to attack Hispanics, African Americans and Middle Eastern Americans, and “mocks women and disabled people” with impunity. He also threatens to obliterate whatever enemies “he names or decides are enemies without regard for facts or inconsistency in his statements because he plays to his supporters’ fears and prejudices.

...

The reason Trump is leading Republicans is due to the hate, lack of intelligence and sheer terror of any and everything among his followers. According to a profile of Trump supporters, *One half of his voters have a high school education or less*

...

As the New York Times reported, Trump's words are carefully crafted to appeal to angry, frightened, and ignorant racists.”

## *The Myth of the Electoral College*

As described in [12]:

“The Electoral College was created for two reasons. The first purpose was to create a buffer between the population and the selection of a President. The second as part of the structure of the government that gave extra power to the smaller states.

...

Hamilton and the other founders believed that the electors would be able to ensure that only a qualified person becomes President. They thought that with the Electoral College no one would be able to manipulate the citizenry. It would act as a check on an electorate that might be duped. Hamilton and the other founders did not trust the population to make the right choice.”

The Electoral College plays a role when a Presidential candidate is elected who did not receive the majority of the popular vote, *i.e.*, when the election is taken away from the person who really won.

Unfortunately, we have seen, in our lifetime, at least one example of the Electoral College ironically doing *exactly the opposite* of its stated intention: The Electoral College served to ensure that an extremely *unqualified* person

became President. The Electoral College served to ensure that the President was the one who most egregiously manipulated the citizenry. The Electoral College served to ensure the President was the one who most egregiously duped the electorate. The Electoral College served to ensure the President was the one who most egregiously was not the right choice. I could not make this identification any clearer, without naming Trump explicitly.

### *The Myth of Checks and Balances*

The President has too much power. This might be okay when the President is basically well-intentioned and is a good sportsman. However, given enough time, there will eventually be an ambitious President who is entirely self-serving and seeks to exploit and leverage all of the flaws (and there are many) in our constitutional system. Then it becomes painfully clear that the President has too much power.

The fundamental problem is that much of the so-called checks and balances depends on the President being a good sportsman. It is all too easy for the President to do away with effective checks and balances if the President is so inclined. Unfortunately, it is just this sort of President for whom effective checks and balances would be most necessary.

To be a bit more specific:

- The Office of Government Ethics can advise the President, and a good President will honor that advice. However, there is no mechanism to enforce that advice [13].
- The Supreme Court and Congress are obviously not politically independent of the President, and just when they are most urgently needed to provide strong checks and balances, they can silently vanish into thin air.
- Officials in the Department of Justice, Special Prosecutors, *etc.*, can be appointed by the President, with the express purpose of cronyism.
- Congressional hearings are often carried out by Congressmen who are cronies, or if not cronies, then the counter-charge of political motivation is levied as a defense.

## A Better Alternative

### *Overview*

Let's face it, voting does not always produce very good leaders. However, voting does have two benefits along with huge drawbacks (as hinted in the **Motivation** section). The main benefits of are:

- It is better than a dictatorship
- Eventually the term ends and there is a chance for a new winner

I am suggesting a much better alternative than traditional voting that retains these two benefits, and potentially eliminates the drawbacks:

This alternative is ***election by random selection*** from a suitable pool of people. That is, we would no longer vote.

We would no longer be subject to ambitious men and women who are seeking to be elected for their own advancement. Instead, an ordinary individual who is lucky enough to be randomly selected is much more likely to be inspired and motivated by a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to truly make a positive impact on their own society.

### *Criteria for a Pool of Eligible Candidates*

The pool would consist of those people who are deemed to be eligible according to a set of definite quantifiable reasonable criteria, tailored for the demands of each office. For most criteria, we would like to set an upper and/or lower cutoff. These cutoffs could be adjusted from time to time, as dictated by experience and common sense.

The official publicly-available tabulation of the criteria and cutoffs would provide a very objective view of the overall system, as well as immediate transparency readily accessible to all people. This system would be robust, while also being responsive to needed adjustments from time to time.

There should be on-going re-evaluation and fine-tuning as required. This should be a common everyday occurrence, not something as dramatic as what we now think of as a constitutional amendment.

There are likely to be dozens, or perhaps hundreds, of criteria, but to make the basic idea comprehensible, let us consider a highly simplified scenario with just five criteria, say age, literacy, knowledge base, psychological state, religious tolerance. Here is a table of these criteria (Table 1)

Table 1. Ridiculously Extremely Simplified Example of Criteria and Cutoffs

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Lower Cutoff</b>	<b>Upper Cutoff</b>
Age	35	65
Literacy	Designated minimal acceptable score on standardized literacy test	NA
Knowledge base relevant to the particular office	Designated minimal acceptable score on standardized knowledge base tests	
Psychological/ Psychiatric stability	Designated minimal acceptable score on standardized psychological/psychiatric tests	
Overly literal, rigid, overbearing, or intolerant religious belief	Designated minimal acceptable score on standardized religious attitude tests	

### *Age Criterion*

The age criterion is pretty straightforward. We would like someone who is old enough to have a degree of experience of the world, but not so old as to be at elevated risk of contracting a disease or dying in office. While it might seem unfair to discriminate against, say, a 34-year-old, this person will eventually be eligible for a period of 30 years, not permanently disqualified. Likewise, a 66-year-old had an equal chance of being selected during a 30-year period.

### *Literacy Criterion*

Literacy tests will be designed by expert panels of educators. The content and lower cutoff will be determined to be suitable for the office in question. This is a general literacy test; a separate test will evaluate specific knowledge of the subject matter needed for the particular office. Anyone who does not pass these tests can have the opportunity for additional training and study to meet the standards in the future (except for *i.e.*, psychological impairment).

### *Psychological/Psychiatric Stability Criterion*

Psychological/psychiatric stability should include screening for any number of disabilities. A few that come to mind immediately include narcissism [14], sociopathy [14], and low tolerance of ambiguity [15]-[18]. The online version of DSM-5 [19] can be consulted for a more complete list of diagnosable disorders and diagnostic criteria.

### *Religious Criterion*

Religious belief is a problematic area for screening. Although a fundamental right is freedom of religion, it is not known whether God exists. I am not talking about someone's personal subjective faith-based belief, I am talking about demonstrable existence in external objective reality. Since God may very well not exist in this sense, it would be potentially harmful to overly rely on someone who has too rigid or literal a belief in some specific religious doctrine, or who would seek to impose their beliefs. In my view, a moderate belief in some form of religion as a metaphor, as a "working hypothesis," or as a philosophical musing is ok, but a rigid belief and religion-based life-style and set of values would be problematic in an office-holder such as a President.

### *Empowerment of the Traditionally Disenfranchised*

We would like to keep the technical standards at a fairly accessible level, at least for the more local offices, so as to empower many people, who are currently disenfranchised, to participate, and thereby pursue important issues that are now systematically ignored. Standards like psychological/psychiatric stability and religious tolerance would still need to be high).

### *Making our Representatives More Representative*

Many of our elected officials are very wealthy and powerful men. This is not at all representative of our population at large, and may create a dichotomy between the needs of the common welfare, and the needs as perceived by the representatives.

In order to make our representatives more representative, we have the option of adding some tailored criteria to Table 1. For instance, we can set a lower and upper threshold for individual wealth. These thresholds can be chosen so as to reflect a statistically appropriate range that encompasses the median range of wealth that is truly representative of our population. That way, a nation of middle-income people would not be governed by billionaires. This is just one example of a potential set of tailored criteria that could make our representatives more representative. If our representatives are more representative, then they are more likely to in fact represent us.

### *Term Limits*

One of the deadly aspects of our current political system is the ambition of each politician for re-election. For instance, regardless of what is said in public, it is obvious that Trump is totally inappropriate as President. Yet, fearing an adverse effect on re-election prospects, the vast majority of Republican politicians will not publicly say what they express privately [20]-[22]. Witness what many of these Republican politicians (correctly) said about Trump not so long ago, during the time of the 2016 Republican primary debates [23]-[24]. This failure to speak up enables Trump to remain in power, and he is inflicted upon all of us, not just upon those who choose to keep quiet.

To overcome this devastating problem, I suggest a simple solution: no one can hold a political office (either the same office or a different office) for more than one term.

### *Apprenticeship*

Because the pool of elected officials will be inexperienced, and the term limitation precludes an important way to gain more experience, each selected office-holder will first serve one term as an apprentice under the current office-holder. The goal will be for the apprentice to gradually reach fully independent functionality by the end of the apprenticeship term. The newly-elected office-holder will be apprenticed to the last office-holder who had been voted in.

### *Professional Expertise*

The office-holders will be able to draw from the expertise of long-term professional staffs. These experts will provide the continuity that may be compromised by the proposed restrictive term limits. After all, although we can expect the office-holders to have a sufficient knowledge base, they cannot be as knowledgeable as a team of highly trained and educated professionals who have dedicated their careers to a specialized area of focus.

### *Retirement*

So that the office-holder will not be disadvantaged by his or her public service, the previous employer will be obligated to re-hire the office-holder upon retirement from public service. In fact, the retired office holder will be required to return to their prior employment (for a period of at least one year), so that they will not benefit from career advancement through experience gained at public expense, or through undue influence gained through connections while in public office.

If it is not possible to return to the prior employment (*e.g.*, that business no longer exists), then the local government will assist in placement with a similar position.

## *Corruption*

In any human enterprise, it is not possible to perfectly eliminate all forms of corruption. It is hoped that the present proposal that does away with voting and additional terms will address the major forms of corruption. However, there still remain the possibilities of blackmail, extortion (*i.e.*, obtaining benefit through coercion [25]), or bribery of public officials.

We cannot expect the NRA or Koch Industries to disappear; they will try to find other loopholes from which to exert their corrupting influence. In particular, we need to have laws in place to prevent *quid pro quo* cash payments (*e.g.*, from the NRA or Koch Industries to Republican Congressmen) for a promise to vote a certain way *ad infinitum* [26]. After all, a basic function of congressmen is to consider a proposed bill on its own merits, and to cast a proper unbiased vote on the particular issue. You are not supposed to have your mind made up about how to vote on a bill, before you have read the bill. In that case, you are not doing your job. If you do not do your job, there should be consequences: (1) you do not get paid, (2) you do not get to keep your job, and (3) you get prosecuted, convicted, and thrown in jail for defrauding the public and violating the public trust.

To address these to the extent possible, we require a maximal degree of transparency for all office-holders, and

strict adherence to ethics rules. A major form of transparency would be that all tax returns are made publicly available. Additional control would require all ownerships, deeds, bank accounts, *etc.* to be made publicly available. No exceptions for “executive privilege” or the like.

Another potential source of corruption would be conflict of interest (or the appearance of such) that could arise from major holdings in domestic or foreign businesses or properties. Rather than dealing with this after the fact, it is probably best to simply eliminate such candidates from consideration by adding an appropriate criterion to those in Table 1.

The apprenticeship aspect of the current proposal would add another layer of protection, in that it would be harder for a public official to make private deals when the mentors and apprentices are working together so intimately.

Any individual (who would otherwise be in a pool of possible candidates) should recuse themselves immediately if they are worried about being vulnerable to blackmail or extortion. They need not give a reason for recusal, and this could be done in private and without negative consequence, so as to make it as easy as possible for the recusal to take place.

### *Gradual Phasing in*

This new model could be phased in gradually, so that adjustments to the criteria and cutoff values can be adjusted. The initial implementation should occur in a small number of local governments, with a gradual increase in number and scope if deemed appropriate. There should be on-going re-evaluation and fine-tuning as required. This should be a common everyday occurrence, not something as dramatic as what we now think of as a constitutional amendment.

## *Benefits*

- Increases the number and broadens the pool of people who can participate in governing, leading to greater general interest and knowledge about what is going on
- Eliminates the corrupting influence of money in politics
- Eliminates the corrupting influence of running for re-election
- Levels the playing field for those currently disenfranchised
- Issues will be dealt with that are currently squelched
- Increases the security of elections by eliminating the effect of disinformation campaigns
- Increases the security of elections by eliminating the possibility of voting fraud
- Increases the security of elections by eliminating the possibility of tampering with counting votes

## *References*

[1]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founding\\_Fathers\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founding_Fathers_of_the_United_States)

[2] <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510051/here-x26-now>

Brian Rosenwald, author of "Talk Radio's America: How an Industry Took Over a Political Party That Took Over the United States." Start listening to audio at 11:40

[3] <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/381444908/fresh-air>

Christopher Wylie, author of "Mindf\*ck: Cambridge Analytica and the Plot to Break America." Start listening to audio especially at 11:45 and at 34:00.

Wylie exposed Cambridge Analytica's role in Brexit and the Trump presidential campaign. Cambridge Analytica collected personal data from millions of Facebook users, and used it to target people susceptible to conspiracy theories and disinformation. Wylie was the research director at Cambridge Analytica, before leaving in protest over the direction it had taken.

[4] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6zSy5lAxd0>

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zp4BXnVm-YA>

[6] <https://www.npr.org/2016/01/19/463551038/dark-money-delves-into-how-koch-brothers-donations-push-their-political-agenda>

[7] <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/08/30/covert-operations>

[8] <https://www.opb.org/news/article/npr-gop-donor-questions-his-support-for-koch-network-after-trump-criticism/>

“Koch Industries, the multinational company controlled by the brothers, is among NPR’s financial supporters”

[9] <https://www.change.org/p/marketplace-tell-marketplace-npr-ratings-fall-on-koch-brothers-sponsored-shows>

“The Kochs used their giving **to stifle free speech at PBS** and deflect the media from probing into their doings. There is no reason to believe that their giving to Marketplace, one of the top shows on America's NPR stations, is any less of an investment in controlling speech.

...

That APM would take this money speaks poorly of their understanding of their role in a free press, because the Kochs' faux philanthropy, giving to influence, is no great secret.”

[10] Personal email to me from Lucile Horn (WAMU 88.5 American University Radio Member Services) October 19 2017

“The recent underwriting spots by Koch Industries on Marketplace in no way reflect or reference a political point of view or a call to action: “Marketplace Morning Report is supported by Koch Industries. Koch employs over sixty thousand people nationwide. Learn more at KOCHIND dot com.”

[11] <https://www.politicususa.com/2015/12/13/donald-trump-sounds-acts-adolf-hitler-running-fuhrer.html>

[12] <https://www.historycentral.com/elections/Electoralcollegewhy.html>

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[20]

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[21] <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/01/opinion/trump-impeachment-2020.html>

[22] <https://www.yahoo.com/news/colin-powell-republicans-terrified-of-speaking-out-need-to-get-a-grip-195747765.html>

[23] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz44wKKQJh0>

[24] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3SkvXyCoYc>

[25] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extortion>

[26] <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/koch-pledge-tied-to-congressional-climate-inaction>

“Starting in 2008, a year after the Supreme Court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency could regulate greenhouse gasses as a form of pollution, accelerating possible Congressional action on climate change, the Koch-funded nonprofit group, Americans for Prosperity, devised the “No Climate Tax” pledge. It has been, according to the study, a component of a remarkably successful campaign to prevent lawmakers from addressing climate change. Two successive efforts to control greenhouse-gas emissions by implementing cap-and-trade energy bills died in the Senate, the latter of which was specifically targeted by A.F.P.’s pledge. By now, four hundred and eleven current office holders nationwide have signed the pledge. Signatories include the entire Republican leadership in the House of Representatives, a third of the members of the House of Representatives as a whole, and a quarter of U.S. senators.

The 2010 mid-term elections were a high watermark for the pledge. The Kochs, like many other conservative benefactors, gave generously to efforts to help shift the

majority in the House of Representatives from Democratic to Republican. Koch Industries's political action committee spent \$1.3 million on congressional campaigns that year. When Republicans did take control of the House, a huge block of climate-change opponents was empowered. Fully one hundred and fifty-six members of the House of Representatives that year had signed the "No Climate Tax Pledge." Of the eighty-five freshmen Republican congressmen elected to the House of Representatives in 2010, seventy-six had signed the No Climate Tax pledge. Fifty-seven of those received campaign contributions from Koch Industries's political action committee. The study notes that more than half of the House members who signed the pledge in the 112th Congress made statements doubting climate-change science, despite the fact that there is overwhelming scientific consensus on the subject."