



Join the Party

Many Americans reject party labels, yet absence from party processes leaves activists shaping ballots and platforms.

By [Dallin Bundy](#)

POLITICS

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In today's fraught political landscape, it's hard not to feel like both sides are dominated by extremes. And people are noticing. Registered independents have hit an [all-time high](#) and continue to increase. While academic [research](#) shows that most independent voters still hold ideological leanings, more people than ever are hesitant to officially align themselves with either political party.

This is problematic. Political parties have served as important organizing institutions in American politics for over two hundred years. Their primary goal is to elect candidates to office. Parties accomplish this by attracting voters and building broad coalitions.

With America's two-party system, as soon as one party knocks the other out of the arena, there is an incentive to broaden political appeal to win back voters.

But the surge of voters registering as independent shows that neither party is following that incentive, at least not officially. In recent decades, electoral wins have not come from large coalitions but increasingly energized base supporters. Parties aren't courting average Americans but rather their most engaged believers. From Rah-Rah Republicans to Die-Hard Democrats, we see this playing out in real time.

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The past three presidential elections have been decided on **thin margins**, and Congress has had the **narrowest majorities** over the past three cycles than at any point in nearly a century. If large, diverse coalitions are no longer necessary to win elections and mobilized ideologues can instead emerge victorious, then the founding idea of a democratic republic reliant on a pluralistic society is bankrupt.

The solution? Join a party. The medicine might seem counterintuitive to the diagnosis. How can increased partisanship help a polarized America? Because civic engagement, including partisan activity, allows citizens to steer the course of the political parties and, by extension, the nation.

Too often, people relegate political engagement to Election Day, unaware that half the battle was already fought months earlier in caucus nights and committee meetings. It's powerful to cast a ballot, but even more powerful to shape the ballot itself. In politically homogeneous states, which are **becoming more common**, congressional elections are often decided at the primary level, or even earlier through party maneuvering (see both **Democrat** and **Republican** examples) that determines who appears on the ballot. Registered independent voters are often left out of these decisions, limiting their ability to select candidates and party platforms they most support.

When a closed primary system is used, independents lose political influence, especially in homogenous states, because they cannot determine who is selected as the party's candidate. Take Utah as an example. Only registered Republicans are allowed to vote in

the Republican primary, and GOP candidates are almost always elected for federal and statewide office. While we can bemoan party operations, I am personally irked when someone claims, almost righteously, that they registered as an independent voter. To me, it means they have willfully given up political influence.

I learned the importance of partisan civic engagement through my own experience. In 2024, I attended my local Republican caucus night. After discussion with the people in my precinct, it became clear that none of the likely state delegate candidates for our precinct matched my views of the party. I then decided to run as a delegate to the state convention. The small gathering quickly became divided and resulted in a tied vote between another candidate and me.

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Surprised at the significant support I garnered for running on a different agenda than the national fervor at the time, I again offered my vision of a different direction for the party. I called for a broader coalition of support and identified the shortcomings of relying upon divisive figures. After a second round of voting, and with one person shifting support, I was elected as my precinct's state delegate.

My experience did not teach me to have a holier-than-thou attitude toward people with a differing vision of politics than myself. Instead, it taught me that one vote in a caucus can matter, and that involvement with parties can be effective in changing their direction.

I urge readers to become more involved in their local parties. We should seek to be more engaged within our communities, especially through civic and partisan means. A political party may not accurately represent all your views; indeed, it probably will not and should not. Dallin H. Oaks, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, [said](#) as much in 2021, emphasizing that "no party, platform, or individual candidate can satisfy all personal preferences."

This is just more reason to be involved. Who do you think decides a party platform? Too often, we forget that parties

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are beholden to the people and not the other way around. Criticizing your own party in pursuit of its overall improvement can even be considered patriotic.

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Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre theorized that patriotism should mean holding the nation as the primary object of regard. However, he asserted that while the nation as an ideal and project should be exempt from criticism, the makeup of its government and policies should never be exempt from critiques.

While I do not place the Republican or Democratic parties on the same pedestal as the American democratic project, I do believe MacIntyre's point offers a helpful model for the partisan. Being an avid supporter of a political party still allows for healthy disagreement with the party's platform or structure.

I leave with this: joining a mainstream political party opens up avenues for political power that are closed to many independent voters, and joining does not mean you agree with every aspect of the party. If anything, the greatest impact you can have is changing the institution itself and moving the party forward in its quest to serve the people.

In the past, Republicans and Democrats were not so polarized, and I believe more partisan involvement would actually increase mutual understanding and respect if done thoughtfully. So why wait? Join the party.

About the author

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Dallin Bundy is a senior at BYU studying political science and preparing to enter law school. Dallin is originally from St. George, Utah, and is the former president of BYU College Republicans and an active member in his community.