

1 ***Politics: America's Missing Constitutional Link***

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4
5 It's manifestly obvious. The last thing the United States needs is more politics. Or
6 so the American people, who hate politics, believe. And on this point, alas, they
7 are very wrong. One reason citizens dislike politics is that the political system
8 doesn't work terribly well, but it doesn't work well because we have neglected to
9 create wise rules to govern it. We can place the blame for this deficiency squarely
10 on the shoulders of the Founders.

11
12 In so many respects, today's political system is broken, and there is currently no
13 reasonable prospect of fixing it. Our schedule of presidential primaries and
14 caucuses is a front-loaded mess, and the Congress, the parties, and the states refuse
15 seriously to tackle its reform. ... Our scheme of campaign financing incorporates
16 the worst of several worlds, and with each election cycle the process deteriorates
17 further. Our partisan procedure for drawing legislative districts enforces vicious
18 polarization rather than encouraging moderation and compromise. Are these
19 calamities our fault? Certainly. But all these disasters can be traced back to the
20 writing of the Constitution—not so much what was included in the text, but some
21 items foolishly or thoughtlessly excluded from it.

22
23 The Founders preferred to think of themselves as statesmen, not politicians, and in
24 the statecraft of their times there was remarkably little *formal* role for politics.
25 Even more than in the current day, politics was viewed as a disreputable business,
26 and the perfidies of "factions" (the Founders' name for political parties) were
27 detested and dreaded. George Washington famously warned the new nation against
28 them in his Farewell Address:

29
30 *However combinations or associations of the above description may now and then*
31 *answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become*
32 *potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be*
33 *enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of*
34 *government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to*
35 *unjust dominion.*

36 ...
37 The fundamental problem, though, has never been corrected. The Constitution was
38 written by the Founders when they had not yet realized the vital necessity of
39 politics and parties in the process of our elections. Further, the enormous
40 transformation of politics from the part-time avocation of public-spirited
41 gentlemen to the multibillion-dollar enterprise of electoral institutions in a rich,
42 diverse, continental Republic has not been matched by constitutional adaptation.
43 The absence of modern politics in the Constitution—from the structure of
44 presidential selection to the manner of congressional elections to some critical
45 aspects of electioneering, such as redistricting and campaign finance—has caused
46 no end of difficulties, which can only be corrected by the inclusion of thoughtful
47 provisions in a new twenty-first-century Constitution. It is long past time to do so.

48
49 Critics of this constitutional approach may insist that the political inadequacies of

disasters

untrustworthiness

seize

authority

hobby

50 our system are best handled through statutory means, the better to make
51 adjustments as needed from time to time. And partly, this point of view has merit.
52 The constitutional provisions on the political system should be kept only as
53 specific as absolutely required to cure the ills discussed here. Congressional and
54 state statutes—the regular lawmaking process in the various legislatures—can
55 supplement mandates in the Constitution.

56
57 However, the chances for serious, widespread political reform at this late date are
58 virtually nil without constitutional prodding. Yes, a state here or there may enact a
59 useful reform plan for a piece of the puzzle. But the nation is desperately in need
60 of widespread change to and dramatic updating of the political system. ... The
61 United States now has a massive superstructure of essentially untouchable
62 procedures and traditions with powerful beneficiaries—incumbents, wealthy
63 groups and individuals, even specific states (think Iowa and New Hampshire in the
64 presidential selection process).

65
66 It will take a new revolution to modernize America's ossified politics. It will take a
67 revolution generated by an engrossing national debate—the kind of debate that can
68 only be engendered by the writing of a new Constitution. Enough with the Band-
69 Aids! An end to feeble efforts at reform in one state or region! So much for the
70 occasional initiative or referendum that usually fails due to campaign spending by
71 special interests that would be damaged by change in the national interest. We the
72 people need to confront all the problems at once, to seek a comprehensive solution
73 that will be as permanent as a Constitution can promise.

74
75 Let's start by overhauling the insane methods we employ for picking a president.

76
77 In the twenty-first century we the people need to do what the Founders didn't even
78 consider doing in their pre-party, pre-popular-democracy age. The guiding
79 principle should be one that all citizens, in theory, can readily embrace: Every state
80 and region ought to have essentially an equal chance, over time, to influence the
81 outcome of the parties' presidential nominations, and thus the selection of
82 presidents. ...

83
84 Beyond the equal-influence-over-time rule, the presidential selection process also
85 ought to enable the states to spread out the contests over several months, thereby
86 reducing front-loading and the low voter turnout that comes with it. In most recent
87 cycles, the nominations have been all but decided by the first few weeks of voting,
88 leaving large majorities of voters and states effectively disenfranchised. In 2000,
89 for example, both Vice President Al Gore and Governor George W. Bush had all
90 but cinched his party's nomination *before thirty-three states, including many of the*
91 *largest, had even voted*. Understandably, this fact led an alienated public to tune
92 out the process before they could become engaged and learn about all the men and
93 women who would be president. ... The majority of the public that is gathered
94 around the ideological center has been the first to become discouraged and
95 disconnected in the past few decades, furthering the polarization that bedevils
96 American politics. The construction of a nominating process that is inclusive and
97 rational may contribute a great deal to broadening the level of participation in the
98 primaries and caucuses.

law making

hardened/unchanged

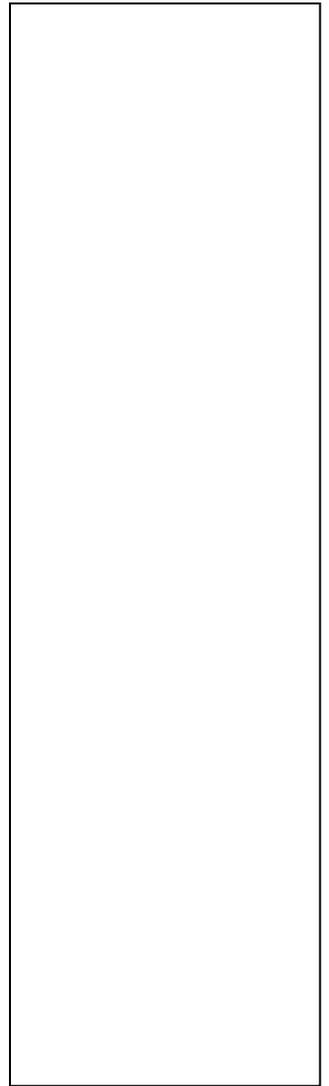
caused

torments

99 That nominating process ought also to be focused, and compressed into the four
100 months leading up to the party conventions. Presidential politics now takes fully
101 one-fourth of a president's four-year term, and with the acceleration of front-
102 loading, it soon may consume even more of it. Not only is this bad for the
103 presidency as an institution, it causes the electorate to tire of the never-ending
104 political campaign. It should be possible to create a system that flows from the first
105 primaries and caucuses in April directly into August party conventions, and then
106 into the Labor Day kickoff for the autumn general election. Not only is this not
107 rocket science, it doesn't even qualify as elementary mathematics. It is easy, if the
108 will and the means are present. The electorate must supply the will, and the
109 Constitution should outline the means.

110
111 There have been dozens of proposals to revamp the primary scheme, though none
112 has been offered as a constitutional fix. Clearly, that is because the Constitution
113 currently ignores the politics of the system almost entirely *and* because a
114 constitutional insertion—virtually written in stone—would have to be as fair and
115 foolproof as possible.

116



Teacher's Guide

Name of Text: *Politics: America's Missing Constitutional Link* (Larry J Sabato)

Question Composers: John Linton, Tierney Cahill, Phillip Kaiser, Regina Mann, Christine Hull

Related Standards:

- NV State Social Studies, 2008 [9-12]: C15.1, C15.2
- Common Core History/Social Science Reading: RH.1, RH.2, RH.4, RH.10
- Common Core History/Social Science Writing: WHST.1, WHST.2, WHST.4, WHST.9, WHST.10
- Common Core Speaking and Listening: SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.4

Text Dependent Questions	Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence for Student Answers
<p>According to the first two paragraphs, why does the author believe the American political system is broken?</p>	<p>Rationale: This question is asked to ensure students see the underlying argument in the article that by not having the nomination process outlined in the constitution, the political system is flawed. Possible Answer: Lines 5-21 The nomination process is not in the constitution</p>
<p>Using lines 23-28 how did George Washington and the other Founding Fathers view politics and political parties?</p>	<p>Rationale: This question will help students to understand why the process was not included in the constitution. Possible Answer: Lines 23-29 They viewed themselves as statesmen, not politicians, and politics was a disreputable business. Factions were detested and dreaded.</p>

Text Dependent Questions	Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence for Student Answers
<p>How does the author define the “fundamental problem”?</p>	<p>Rationale: This is the beginning of the author’s argument and students should be able to explain why the author believes our system is broken. Possible Answer: Lines 37-47 The founding fathers didn’t foresee the necessities of politics and parties in the nomination process and therefore left it out of the constitution. No constitutional amendment has been added to rectify this problem.</p>
<p>Using evidence from the text, why can the broken political system not be fixed at the state level?</p>	<p>Rationale: This question is asked because constitutionally elections are typically left to the states but the author is arguing that this situation needs a federal solution because so many states would oppose the change. Possible Answer: Lines 57-64 There is a massive superstructure of procedures and tradition with beneficiaries including incumbents, wealthy individuals and states (including Iowa & New Hampshire), that would oppose change.</p>
<p>The word “disenfranchise” legally means losing the right to vote. In line 88, the author uses the phrase “<u>effectively</u> disenfranchised”. What does he mean? What evidence supports his claim?</p>	<p>Rationale: The author is defending his claim that the solution needs to be a federal/national solution because states are being left out based on the current system. Possible Answer: in the 2000 election, 17 states picked the nominees effectively disenfranchising 33 states.</p>
<p>In line 75, the author states, “Let’s start by overhauling the insane methods we employ for picking a president. Using lines 77-109, explain the author’s proposal for a comprehensive solution.</p>	<p>Rationale: The synthesis of the argument. Possible Answer: Compress the nominations process to 4 months and give every state and region an equal chance to influence the process and establish it through the constitution.</p>

Text Dependent Questions	Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence for Student Answers
According to the title, there is something missing. What is the missing constitutional link?	Rationale: This is the author's argument; he believes a constitutional fix (not just a law, but an amendment to the constitution). Possible Answer: The constitutional nomination process

Writing Prompt:

The author argues that many Americans are disenfranchised in the political process. What are some of the fundamental problems with the current political process and how does the author suggest it be fixed? Use evidence from the text to support your claims.

Checklist identifying key points that will assist in measuring student success and/or difficulty with the close reading and/or writing prompt.

Problems

- Constitution excluded politics and parties
 - A hobby turned into an enterprise
 - state level puzzle piece solutions
- massive superstructure of untouchable procedures & traditions
 - incumbents, wealthy groups, individuals, and specific states have more power
- large majorities of voters and state effectively disenfranchised
 - alienated public and/or polarization

Solutions

- mandates in the constitution
- national solution -> not states
- dramatic updates/widespread change
 - overhauling insane methods
- every state & region should essentially have an equal chance
 - nominating process focused and condensed
 - constitutional amendment/fix
 - electoral determine that means