

## FROM DELEGATED TO TRULY REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

People who live under a parliamentary system of government have expressed surprise and (to some degree) alarm at the election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States.

How, one might wonder, could such a person without any experience in government and with such a checkered record of personal conduct rise to the highest office in the U.S.?

The answer is found in the laws that govern the operation of political parties in the United States. It is worth noting that the U.S. Constitution is silent on the process by which primary elections and caucuses are to be conducted. The major parties have established a system of *indirect* elections, meaning that the votes received by a candidate determine the number of delegates to the party's convention who favor a particular candidate. The delegates are only bound to that candidate for so many ballots.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, state legislatures began to pass new laws that reduced the power of party insiders to select the party's candidates. The only general requirement is for one to fill out a form that indicates party affiliation. Most of those who register as a Democrat or a Republican neither make a financial contribution to the party nor volunteer to work for the party in any meaningful way. What then, does it mean to self-describe oneself as a Democrat or a Republican?

The principles upon which the two major parties were established have changed over time, as have the policies advanced by the parties' leaders. For most of U.S. history both parties were by any reasonable definition *conservative*. Neither party thought the national government should be very involved in the private affairs of individuals.

Only incidentally, did the Republican Party under Abraham Lincoln bring an end to slavery in the United States. Lincoln fought to keep the Union together, not as part of any moral campaign for emancipation. Once the period of Reconstruction ended, so did any commitment to equality of opportunity for African-Americans until the mid-1960s.

One might arguably conclude that little changed in any country until women obtained the rights to vote and to hold public office. The process was led by Finland, Iceland, Sweden and parts of Australia in the late nineteenth century. Only after the end of the First World War did the women of Britain and the United States obtain the right to vote. A few were soon elected to the national legislative bodies. Jeannette Rankin, a Republican from Montana was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1919 Nancy Astor became the first woman to take her seat in Britain's House of Commons.

The presence of women in the legislative halls has certainly had an enormous influence on the scope and direction of public policies in many countries. However, even now women hold only one seat in five in national-level legislatures around the globe. The United States ranks ninety-eighth, behind Kenya and Indonesia. Britain's ratio, at 22 percent, is a bit above the world's average. And, of course, women are far from being of one mind on fundamentally important issues.

Perhaps it is time to rethink how we select our public servants. Our histories suggest (to me at least) that the citizens of every society would be better served by replacing elections and campaigns for office with the selection of legislators by lottery. Citizens who are willing to serve would be required to take and pass an examination that demonstrates competency.

One way to broaden competency would be to mandate that all secondary schools offer multi-year programs in civics to prepare all young adults for the responsibilities of citizenship.

As terms of office in the legislatures expire, individuals would be chosen at random from those who have passed their examinations. They would serve one four-year term in office, then return to their private lives to be replaced by another qualified citizen. Gone would be the enormous financial cost of electing legislators. Gone would be the influence of special interests over public policy. Gone would be the power of the political parties to dominate the political system for their own benefit at the expense of the common good. Delegated democracy would be replaced by a truly participative form of representative democracy. ■

