



The Tyranny of the Two-Party System

Lisa J. Disch

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The closely contested presidential election of 2000, which many analysts felt was decided by voters for the Green Party, cast a spotlight on a structural contradiction of American politics. Critics charged that Green Party voters inadvertently contributed to the election of a conservative Republican president because they chose to "vote their conscience" rather than "choose between two evils." But why this choice of two? Is the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans an immutable and indispensable aspect of our democracy? Lisa Disch maintains that it is not. There is no constitutional warrant for two parties, and winner-take-all elections need not set third parties up to fail. She argues that the two-party system as we know it dates only to the twentieth century and that it thwarts democracy by wasting the votes and silencing the voices of dissenters.

The Tyranny of the Two-Party System reexamines a once popular nineteenth-century strategy called fusion, in which a dominant-party candidate ran on the ballots of both the established party and a third party. In the nineteenth century fusion made possible something that many citizens wish were possible today: to register a protest vote that counts and that will not throw the election to the establishment candidate they least prefer. The book concludes by analyzing the 2000 presidential election as an object lesson in the tyranny of the two-party system and with suggestions for voting experiments to stimulate participation and make American democracy responsive to a broader range of citizens.

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