

Gallup: 58% of Americans Want a Third Party. Maybe Senator Sanders?

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On September 24th, Gallup reported that, "A majority of U.S. adults, 58%, say a third U.S. political party is needed because the Republican and Democratic parties 'do such a poor job' representing the American people." Furthermore, "The first time the question was asked, in 2003, a majority of Americans believed the two major parties were adequately representing the U.S. public, which is the only time this has been the case. Since 2007, a majority has said a third party is needed, with two exceptions occurring in the fall of the 2008 and 2012 presidential election years."

In other words: Ever since the American public started to learn in 2003 that George W. Bush had been lying about his being in possession of conclusive evidence that Saddam Hussein was building a new stockpile of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), American public sentiment switched drastically from belief that the two major "Parties do an adequate job," to belief that "A third party is needed." (Both Parties supported the invasion of Iraq, which was Bush's policy; it became bipartisan, though it was based on frauds and turned out to be predicatably disastrous.) Whereas back in 2003, Americans held, by 56% to 40%, that the existing "Parties do an adequate job," that sentiment plunged till 2007, when Americans held, by 58% to 33%, that "A third party is needed"; and, today, that sentiment is virtually the same as it was then: 58% to 35% now saying that "A third party is needed."

The closest American public sentiment has come to 2003's 56% satisfaction-level with the two existing parties was in late 2008, when 47% were satisfied and 47% were dissatisfied, tied; but, the support at all other times, for creation of a new third party to compete seriously for the U.S. Presidency, has constituted a majority of the U.S. electorate. The only other time when the level of satisfaction reached near to the level of dissatisfaction was in late 2012, when 45% were satisfied, and 46% were dissatisfied, regarding the present two-party system.

Both of those times when majority satisfaction was nearly reached, both in 2008 and in 2012, reflected the public's rising faith in the two-party system, which resulted from the billions of dollars that were then being spent during the Presidential election-year campaigns, emphasizing the (seemingly) stark ideological differences between the two Presidential candidates. However, both of those times, this near-restoration of faith turned out to have been only fleeting; and, so, between 2012 and today, the level of dissatisfaction has risen from 46% up to its present 58%, and the level of dissatisfaction has sunk from 45% then, to the present level of only 35%.

Another Gallup result was published later the same day, and it reported that the public's answer to the question about whether they're "satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the nation is being governed" plunged from the question's all-time (since 1972) high of 59% in

2002, to its all-time low of 19% in 2011, and then 27% today, so that it seems clear that post-9/11 disenchantment with George Bush's policies started the plunge, and that disappointment with Obama's continuing Bush's policies extended it. When Obama came into office in 2009, the satisfaction figure soared from the pre-Obama, 2008, figure of 26%, up to 43% in 2009, only to plunge again back down, to its all-time low of 19% in 2011, and arrive now at 27%, which is virtually the same level that it was right before Obama became President. So, yet again: Americans are deeply disturbed at the disappointing performance of our Government, and they don't trust either Party to restore our democracy.

WHAT ABOUT BERNIE SANDERS?

This raises the question of whether the only possible third party candidate who might actually stand a chance to establish a long-term-viable competitive third political party in the United States, who is Vermont's independent U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, might actually be able to compete seriously in 2015 and 2016 for the U.S. Presidency, if he runs as an independent (as he has said he might do).

There are only two historical precedents that can provide strong historical guidance toward a fair estimation of the likelihoods that he might succeed on this:

The positive side for such a possible viable new third party is Abraham Lincoln's successful campaign for the Presidency in 1860 under the banner of the new Republican Party, which had been founded only 6 years earlier, in 1854, so as to overcome the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which had ended the Missouri Compromise of 1820 by allowing new western states to permit slavery. The issue that this new political party, the Republicans, posed, was clear and fundamentally moral, and it concerned both the economy and the body-politic: Should this nation continue half-slave and half-free? So, Abraham Lincoln won: More Americans said no to that question than said yes to it.

However, on the negative side regarding the possibility of a successful political party being able to be formed today, is the example of Teddy Roosevelt's 1912 campaign for the Presidency under the banner of his own then newly formed Progressive Party. This might be a closer analogy to the present situation. Roosevelt formed that new Party by himself, after he became disillusioned with his own Republican Party's conservatism, its support for Wall Street at the expense of Main Street. But he confused the public about what precisely was the problem: Teddy Roosevelt formed his Progressive Party specifically because the current Republican President William Howard Taft tried to break up U.S. Steel Corporation as violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act: Taft was trying to enforce a progressive law, applying it to a case in which Roosevelt believed it shouldn't be applied. This disagreement culminated an ideologically confusing sequence of policy-differences with Taft. All that Roosevelt achieved then, from such confusion, was to draw off enough Republican voters to his own candidacy, so as to enable the Democratic candidate, Woodrow Wilson, to become elected as President.

Precisely what "progressivism" was, and what "conservatism" was, weren't sufficiently clear to voters, and especially were not nearly so clear to them as, in 1860, had been at issue during that time, which was the moral unacceptability of slavery. Abraham Lincoln's speeches about that issue were profound, and clear. Teddy Roosevelt's speeches about what his new party stood for were shallow and superficial. The basic issue was not clear at all. And, without any clear separation of his new party from both of the then-existing ones,

Roosevelt's new party failed to do what it needed to do and what Lincoln's Republican Party had done, which was to produce for the voters a clear choice between his party and both of the then-dominant ones. (Lincoln's Republicans defeated both the Democrats and the reconstituted Whig Party — the latter running under the name of the Constitutional Union Party, and winning only Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.)

Do we have an issue today that is moral, and comprehensive, and clear, such as existed in 1860? Yes, we actually do, and it has been building in the public's mind for decades, just as the issue of slavery had been building for decades prior to 1860 (and Lincoln's speeches brought it forth with volcanic force, and no ambiguity). Google-search the following sequence of characters, and you will immediately see plenty of discussions of this current analogue to the slavery issue: "climate change" slavery. One of those commentaries is this, which argues that the climate-change issue just cannot be politically resolved. Josh Barro says there,

"I have trouble imagining a less popular policy proposal than the United States borrowing a huge amount of money to pay Saudi Arabia not to extract oil — even if that policy actually would make Americans better off. Even when the beneficiary of buyout payments isn't a foreign government of questionable repute, the barriers would be huge. It would call for international cooperation."

Only if Senator Sanders can clearly overcome arguments like that, would he possess even a chance to win the U.S. Presidency as a new form of Progressive Party candidate, because, otherwise, the moral and the practical issues will be just as unclear from him as they had been from Theodore Roosevelt in 2012. Furthermore, if Sanders runs as an independent without having first at least tried to win the Democratic Presidential nomination, then he will antagonize Democratic voters as an enemy and a "spoiler," much as Ralph Nader did; and, so, antagonizing both Democrats and Republicans, he probably won't get much more than the 2.74% of the Presidential vote that Nader did in 2000.

Thus, if Senator Sanders doesn't first at least contest for the Democratic Party's Presidential nomination, then it's unlikely that he would be a serious candidate at all for the Presidency; but, if he does try, and if Democratic voters reject him, then what would be the impact if he at that time starts a new Progressive Party, and contests against both the Democratic and the Republican candidates? It would probably be a repeat of what Teddy Roosevelt did in 2012: throwing the election to the opposite established Party, which in this case would be to the Republican nominee, whomever that would be. Sanders says he doesn't want to do that. So: if he is serious at all about running for the Presidency, and if he's honest, he will need to run for the Democratic nomination. Only if he fails to receive that nomination will a subsequent new-party run by him for the Presidency make any sense at all — and, even then, it won't make any sense unless he clearly and convincingly articulates why his new party should become the new and better version of what today's Democratic Party is. That case can be made. Bill Clinton ended Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Glass-Steagall Act and other regulations of Wall Street; and Barack Obama has been working since even before he first entered the White House to weaken Social Security, and even to expand the use of fossil fuels. FDR would be appalled at both recent 'Democratic' Presidents.

So, today's 'Democratic' Party isn't FDR's, and certainly isn't progressive on some core issues. It's conceivable that Sanders could end up replacing the Democratic Party with FDR's

progressive Democratic Party, but only if Sanders makes the case for doing that, just as Lincoln made the case for replacing the reconstituted Whig Party (Constitutional Union Party) by the Republican Party, as he did in 1860.

However, in order for Sanders to do this, he first needs to run within the existing Democratic Party, to reform it via taking it over as its Presidential nominee. Because, otherwise, he'll be seen only as an enemy by Democratic voters; and this would surely defeat (doom) his candidacy. He won't be able to win the White House unless he gets strong support from Democratic voters all the way. He won't win the White House unless he either reforms the Democratic Party, or else replaces the Democratic Party. And that's a clear fact.

The Gallup Poll findings suggest that the 2016 Presidential contest could be very interesting, even more so than is normally the case. Bernie Sanders might restore FDR's Democratic Party. But if he doesn't do that, then 2016 will almost certainly be just more of America's continuing decline into plutocracy — into the very thing that FDR warred against, both here at home, and abroad, when plutocracy was then commonly called "fascism." Sanders would need to make the case against it, and would need to bring the global-warming issue integrally into that anti-plutocratic case. He would win all progressives, plus the few conservatives who care about the environment.

Such a case would be entirely true, and it might win. But who would finance the presentation of it? Only a new political movement could do that. First, he would have to build its core within the Democratic Party. Then, he would need to take that core with him into the general-election campaign. It might happen. Practically any other 2016 outcome would be no better than what currently exists.

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