The No Party System: Combining Democracy and Meritocracy

by

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Abstract

The US Founding Fathers were against factionalism which is the institution of political parties, yet the system they devised with the help of later Congresses almost guaranteed the rise of political parties. As a result, the US is basically a two party political system with one member districts in the House of Representatives. China, on the other hand, is a one party system, the National People's Congress, comprised of scholar bureaucrats who for most of China's 5000 year history have had to pass a strict examination based on Confucian ethics. Whereas the US is a democracy based on 'one person, one vote', China is a meritocracy based on an Imperial exam system and local experience requirements in order to get the best and brightest into the Chinese bureaucracy. We devise a hypothetical political system which combines these two ideals - democracy and meritocracy - in the form of a no party system.

Introduction

Berggruen and Gardels (2013) have made the case for combining democracy with meritocracy: "The question we pose is what balanced combination of meritocracy and democracy, of authority and freedom, of community and the individual, can create the healthiest body politic and the most intelligent form of governance for the 21st century."

We propose a hybrid system making use of the elements of self nomination, sortition and voting to create a bicameral legislature, one house of which is meritocratic and the other democratic. We start by considering the disadvantages of political parties.

George Washington warned in his farewell address of 1796 about the emergence of political parties. (Wikipedia) "These warnings are given in the context of the recent rise of two opposing parties within the government—the Democratic-Republican Party led

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by Jefferson, and Hamilton's Federalist Party. Washington had striven to remain neutral during a conflict between Britain and France brought about by the French Revolution, while the Democratic-Republicans had made efforts to align with France, and the Federalists had made efforts to align with Great Britain." Washington thought that loyalty to principles or one's country should take precedence over a person's loyalty to a political party, yet the Founders set up a voting system that almost guaranteed that there would be two political parties. In addition, the U.S. Congress mandated single-member districts for electing members to the House of Representatives by means of the Uniform Congressional District Act of 1967. First-past-the-post voting plus single member districting made it difficult for third parties to gain a foothold in the American House of Representatives. Duverger's law (Wikipedia) holds that in political systems with single-member districts and first-past-the-post voting only two powerful political parties tend to emerge. Citizens concerned about taking votes away from a major party usually won't vote for minor parties. Similar considerations hold for the election of Senators and the US President although mainly legislative bodies such as the US House of Representatives and the Chinese National People's Congress will be considered here. Daniel A. Bell (2015) has written "America's founding fathers saw a no-party system as the best for the democracy they envisioned, and the nineteenth-century British liberal theorist John Stuart Mill simply argued against political parties as expressions of partial interests rather than the common good."

The Two Party System

The U.S. Constitution states that the president must:

> 1) Be a natural-born citizen of the United States
>
> 2) Be at least 35 years old
>
> 3) Have been a resident of the United States for 14 years

There is no requirement for competency or ability of any sort opening the door for any idiot to become President. A U.S. Senator must be at least 30 years old, a U.S. citizen for at least nine years, and a resident of the state they represent at the time of their election There is no requirement for competency or ability of any kind. To become a U.S. Representative, a person must be at least 25 years old, a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and a resident of the state they represent at the time of election. There is no requirement for competency or ability. In short to become a US Representative, Senator or even President, one does not have to prove one's ability in any way. One does not have to be a college graduate or even a high school graduate. He or she could be (Jacobs, Casey, 1971) a beauty school dropout.

An elected leader without any political experience could appeal to a voter's worst instincts. Such a leader might also give more consideration to short-term electoral interests than to long term planning for the good of the political community and the world. They may also lack the skills or the diplomatic instincts to deal with the complexities of the modern world. They may be more concerned with their party winning and their own well being than for the good of the country or the world.

The voting system itself can almost predetermine who gets elected. Let's compare first-past-the-post voting, which is used in the US, to approval voting which will play a major role in the hybrid system we discuss later. In a race for a single seat in a district, first-past-the-post voting (one person, one vote) creates the spoiler effect in which a vote for a third party makes it less likely that the major party candidate will win. With approval voting, voters can vote for every candidate they approve of (one person, multiple votes) which means they will vote for candidates whom they deem to be mainly on their side of the political spectrum. The result is that, if there are three candidates running with two of them representing major political parties and one representing a minor party, approval voting for the minor party candidate as well as the majority party candidate does not

take votes away from the major party candidate.

With a multi-member district and first-past-the-post voting, each voter will have as many votes as members in the district. For instance, if there are two major parties and four seats available, the tendency would be for each voter to vote for the four candidates of the major party he or she identifies with. Voting for a minor party with even one of their votes would be a wasted vote. In contrast, with approval voting again the major parties would probably capture all four seats, but voting for a minority party would not have the spoiler effect. Multi-member districts might not make it more likely that candidates from minority parties would be elected since, if the major party voters voted strictly for their candidates, then the major party's candidates would all be elected.

Proportional representation is a system that does make it more likely that minority political parties will gain representation. A voter votes for a political party rather than a candidate. In a multi-member district, for example, if a party gets 50% of the votes, that party will get 50% of the seats. Likewise, if a party gets 10% of the votes, they will get 10% of the seats. The problem with proportional representation is similar to the problem with first-past-the-post in that a dominant political party can gain 100% of the seats in an extreme case or two parties can split 50-50. The only way to put a constraint on this situation is to devise a system in which no party is allowed to have more than a certain percentage of seats. Practically any democratic voting system that can be devised can be dominated by a single political party or two major parties so that wide spread political representation cannot be guaranteed.

The One Party System
The Chinese Communist Party is the sole ruling party of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese constitution states that "The defining feature of socialism with Chinese

characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China". Despite lapses in China's 5000 year history, China has had a ruling bureaucracy, membership in which has been determined by the Confucian exam system, so that only scholar bureaucrats with the highest intelligence and ethical principals, supposedly, were selected. Long before the advent of communism, China has had a one party system for the most part throughout its history. According to Daniel Bell (2015) "Imperial China's great contribution to the debate on political meritocracy is the public service examination system: for more than thirteen hundred years, public officials were selected largely by means of competitive examinations."

The lapses have been the Yuan dynasty during which China was ruled by the Mongol Kublai Khan and also the Cultural Revolution period under Mao Zedong. Some scholars (Mahbubani, 2020) have argued that the name "Chinese Communist Party" should be changed to just the "Chinese Party" or the "Chinese Civilization Party" as China's rapid economic growth period of the last 45 years has been mainly due to private enterprise. (Keyu Jin, 2023) "Over the past four decades, more than eight hundred million people in China have been lifted out of dire poverty - the largest global reduction in inequality in modern times." Capitalism has played a major part in China's economic success. (Keyu Jin, 2023) "Today it is the *private sector* that accounts for more than 60 percent of national output, 70 percent of the nation's wealth, and 80 percent of urban employment". China also has many state owned enterprises (SOEs) as well. However, western governments also have SOEs. For instance, the Swedish government owns and operates a state-run alcohol retail monopoly called Systembolaget. This means that Systembolaget is the only retail outlet in Sweden authorized to sell alcoholic beverages with more than 3.5% alcohol by volume. Most modern economies, including China, are mixed in terms of private and public ownership and enterprise.

In recent years, China has realized that it's not enough to only have scholar bureaucrats with high IQs. Social skills and emotional intelligence (EQ) are also important and so China has promoted people to the highest positions only if they have proved themselves at lower levels. For instance, Xi Jingping served as deputy party secretary of Zhending County, vice-mayor of Xiamen, member of the Municipal Committee of Fuzhou City, Governor of Fujian, provincial Party Committee secretary of Zhejiang and party secretary of Shanghai before being promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee at the national level.

The ideal of political meritocracy has a long history in China. More than 2,500 years ago Confucius defended the view that exemplary persons (*junzi*) should have superior ability and virtue as opposed to the earlier view that *junzi* only have aristocratic family backgrounds. Since then Chinese intellectuals have argued over which abilities and virtues matter for government, how to assess those abilities and virtues, and how to institutionalize a political system that aims to select and promote public officials with superior abilities and virtues.

Xi has ruled out a multi-party system for China, saying that (Reuters, 2014) "constitutional monarchy, imperial restoration, parliamentarism, a multi-party system and a presidential system, we considered them, tried them, but none worked." However, Xi considers China to be a democracy, saying that "China's socialist democracy is the most comprehensive, genuine and effective democracy." In any event the Chinese system could be described as a one party meritocracy, in which there are very strict membership requirements, as opposed to a democracy which is based on 'one person, one vote' like the US which has practically no requirements in terms of knowledge, experience or moral ethics.

What the Chinese government does oppose is the system of electoral democracy as a way of selecting political leaders at higher levels of government. Obviously, there is the possibility of corruption if the Chinese Communist Party selects the bureaucracy from among those who have done well on the exams as opposed to an impersonal system like sortition or even voting used in the selection process. This has been a problem when there are many more qualified people than posts available. Then favoritism can play a part.

The No Party System

The US Founding fathers abhorred factionalism because they thought that a citizen voter's allegiance should be to the nation itself and not to a political party. Yet they set up a voting and eventually a districting system that virtually guaranteed the emergence of a two party system. The American system relies on the intelligence and understanding of the American voter to select the best and most competent people to be government leaders. However, this is not guaranteed by the system itself. There are no competency requirements in order to be a US voter. You must be 18 years of age by election day and meet your state's residency and registration requirements. Although some felons are not allowed to vote, one is not required to have any knowledge of how the US government works nor does one have to pass an exam in civics or US history. Just as any idiot can be elected, pretty much any idiot can vote, which is a cherished tradition.

Part of my proposal is that voters should be required to take and pass a four year high school course in civics and US history. Naturalized U.S. citizens are required to pass a civics test as part of the naturalization process. This test assesses knowledge of U.S. history and government, and applicants must demonstrate sufficient understanding to pass. So why should the US require anything less of natural-born citizens?

One of the most powerful functions of US political parties is the ability to nominate their

candidates. In order to create a no party system this function must be eliminated inherently within the system. Therefore, I advocate a system in which candidates can self nominate. But in order to do so and to insure candidates are well qualified, they must excel by first taking a Confucian style examination or have higher level educational degrees, and there should be experience requirements as well. My proposal for a US or Chinese legislative body similar to the House of Representatives or the National People's Congress is a system in which aspirants can self nominate after passing examination and experience requirements at the highest level. Then the citizens would select among these nominees by voting. Thus a system combining democracy and meritocracy would be created. Such a system would *sui generis* take the money out of politics and corruption out of the selection process since political parties would lose their ability to choose the candidates.

At the US national level, there would be no districts. Voters would vote on all candidates, and, therefore, every elected person would represent all voters and not just some in a district. A national representative ought not be exclusively concerned about people in his or her own local district. That should be the business of regional and local officials. Of course the average voter wouldn't be able to familiarize his or herself with all the nominees. We discuss how this could work later.

One of the problems both in China and the US is that those in the national government are viewed as representing the elite and not the *hoi polloi*. Even though US democracy has minimal requirements for elected office, it is considered elite by many US citizens. This meritocratic ethic, promoted by among others, Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton is that if you work hard and play by the rules, you'll get ahead - especially if you go to college. However, those who promote this meritocratic ideal ignore the morally unattractive attitudes that it promotes. In The Tyranny of Merit, Michael Sandel (2020) states: "Among the winners, it generates hubris; among the

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losers, humiliation and resentment. These moral sentiments are at the the heart of the populist uprising against elites." After all Hillary Clinton called the losers "deplorables". One of the deepest divides in American politics are those with and without a college degree. Sandel states (2020): "In the 2016 election, Trump won two-thirds of white voters without a college degree, while Hillary Clinton won decisively among voters with advanced degrees." This came to a head on January 6, 2021 when the US Capitol was attacked by Trump supporters.

China has had a similar problem among many Chinese who consider the *junzi* to be elitists. The civil service examination in imperial China was a grueling process. (World History Encyclopedia) Candidates would arrive with their own supplies, including food, water, and sleeping bag, as they were expected to remain locked in their exam cells for three days. The cells were basic, often with just a wooden board for a desk and a bucket for a toilet. From the Song dynasty onward, the examinations played the primary role in selecting scholar-officials, who formed the *literati elite* of society. Many aspirants could not reach the highest level and were denied admission to the Chinese bureaucracy despite taking the exam several times. Those who failed the examinations some times rebelled against the system. Huang Chao led a massive rebellion in the late Tang dynasty after repeated failures to become a *junzi*. Among Huang Chao's cohorts were other failed candidates such as Li Zhen, who targeted government officials, killed them and threw their bodies into the Yellow River.

In my proposal, while the national legislature or bureaucracy would be chosen based on merit, a second representative body in a bicameral legislature would be chosen by *sortition*, random selection, to represent all the people in the most democratic and representative way possible. According to Baogang He (2025), "One promising way forward is to combine sortition, voting, and deliberation to create a mixed or hybrid

democratic system." David Van Reybrouck (2013) asserts that elections by means of 'one person, one vote' are flawed "Electoral fundamentalists refuse to regard elections as a *means* (emphasis added) of taking part in democracy, seeing them instead as an *end* in themselves, as a holy doctrine with an intrinsic, inalienable value." On the other hand (Bell, 2013) states: "In the popular mind, the word meritocracy has become code for elitism of the kind that focuses on winning and maximizing rewards for the winners, while downplaying factors that limit opportunities for the disadvantaged." This phenomenon of rebelling against elites is happening in many other places, for instance, in France where far right Front National Marine LePen defeated an ENA (an elite school) graduate in a cantonal election. Sortition, on the other hand, guarantees representation by a cross section of the public in an unbiased way *sans* voting due to random selection.

Combining Democracy and Meritocracy

In this paper a bicameral legislature is proposed that combines the values of meritocracy and democracy. It is proposed that one body of the legislature be democratic and the other be meritocratic. The ultimate democratic legislative body is one which exactly reflects the composition of the citizenry. That would be a body chosen by sortition or random selection. A completely random selection, rather than one voted upon, is arguably a more democratic representation of the people than a body selected by voting within a two party system. It would be similar to the Council of 500 (Wikipedia) in ancient Athens that was chosen by sortition and functioned as the lower House of the legislature which was responsible for the agenda-setting of the legislative body of the upper House, the Assembly, as well as the formal execution of the political decisions taken in the Assembly. The other branch of the bicameral legislature would represent a meritocratic body similar to the Chinese *junzi*. the Confucian ideal of a body composed of people with the highest moral character and intellect.

Since one chamber of the bicameral Congress would be chosen by sortition, this eliminates voting, campaign money and many other undesirable aspects of democratic politics by means of electing this chamber in a way that is most representative and hence most democratic. Since the other chamber would be selected by voting, there is much more hypothetically to consider. First, if we assume that this chamber consists of a large number (say, for example, 500) of representatives each of which are self nominated, how would voters make intelligent decisions regarding who to vote for? We assume approval voting so that each voter could vote for as many nominees as they cared to. Let's assume for the sake of discussion that there are 1000 nominees who all have passed strict examinations and have proven records of experience. Each nominee can put their own individualized "platform" online which is accessible to each voter. In addition a very sophisticated search function can find those nominees whose platforms align with individual voters. There could also be a series of bullet points covering the main issues of the day which all nominees would be required to post which again would be searchable. Furthermore, there would be a provision for online searchable endorsers. For instance, if voter A trusted endorser B, he or she could search for all the candidates that endorser B has endorsed and then vote accordingly. By all these means, a seemingly incomprehensible volume of information could be made relatively easy to navigate for the individual voter.

It is important to also consider how laws would be passed especially in light of the gridlock currently experienced by the US Congress. The two party system leads to gridlock when one party controls one chamber and the other party controls the other. Since both chambers are required to pass any legislation, one party effectively has a veto over the other. The situation is even worse when one party controls both chambers. Then any law can be passed regardless of the opposition.

In our hypothetical Congress, laws might be passed in a number of ways. For instance, let's suppose that neither chamber would have a veto over the other. However, if a majority of each Chamber voted to pass a law, it would be passed. Also, if there is a super majority of votes in one House combined with less than a majority in the other, a measure might also be passed. For instance, let us assume that each Chamber was composed of 500 people. Then 250 + 1 in both Chambers would result in passage similarly to the way things work today. We make the further proposal that a total combination of votes from both Chambers could result in passage even though one Chamber's total was less than a majority. The rule might be that at least 40% of the votes of one Chamber would be necessary to pass a law. That would mean that 60% of the votes of the other Chamber would be required in order to have a majority of both Chambers taken together. For instance, that might consist of 200 votes in one Chamber and 301 votes in the other. So a measure might pass with 501 votes as long as there were at least 40% of the votes from one Chamber. There would have to be at least minority support in one Chamber and a super majority in the other so that the combination of the two would be required to pass a certain threshold in order for the measure to be passed by both Chambers and hence to become law. However, neither chamber would have a veto over the other. It might be considered best to give deference to the meritocratic chamber in that a super majority in that chamber could pass a law but not vice versa.

Summary and Conclusions

Political representatives chosen by parties whether in a two party or in a one party system inevitably leads to corruption either in terms of campaign money in the two party system or favoritism in a one party system. Therefore, it is proposed that the impersonal methods of self nomination, sortition and approval voting be used in the political process

of selecting political officials. In China the unicameral National People's Congress is a meritocracy, membership in which is gained only by having passed what amounts to an IQ test and by accomplishment at local levels. In the US both Houses of the bicameral legislature represent democratic values in that they are both elected by the people, 'one person, one vote'. However, there are no qualifications in terms of intellect or ethics for either chamber plus the first-past-the-post voting system is flawed. A bicameral legislature is proposed that combines the values of meritocracy and democracy. It is proposed that one House of the Legislature be democratic and the other House be meritocratic. The ultimate democratic legislative body is one which exactly reflects the composition of the citizenry. That would be a legislative chamber chosen by sortition. A completely random selection process is arguably more representative than a body selected by voting on nominees chosen by political parties. There would be minimal qualifications for a legislative body so chosen. Therefore, the problem of elitism experienced both in China and the US would be ameliorated. The other branch of the bicameral legislature would represent a meritocratic body chosen similarly to the Chinese *junzi* which represents the Confucian ideal of a body composed of people with the highest moral character and intellect. In China's 5000 year history these people took an exam with those getting the highest grades becoming members of the political bureaucracy with decision making capability but only after being approved by the one party controlling the system. My proposal is that only those with the highest educational and moral credentials be acceptable for membership in this body. This pool would be self nominated after having passed stringent intellectual and ethical requirements. The nominees would then be voted upon by the people. This eliminates the possibility of corruption that exists when membership in a legislative body is chosen by a party in a one party system. The only role for political parties if any would be to endorse, but not to nominate or select candidates. As political parties lose power in both the Chinese and American systems, the role of money and arbitrariness in the political process would be

greatly diminished.

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