

# Is The Two-Party System Making U.S. Ungovernable?

by NPR STAFF



Enlarge

Chris Vultaggio

Zev Chafets (left) and P.J. O'Rourke argued against the motion "The Two-Party System Is Making America Ungovernable" at New York University's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts on Feb. 15.

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text size **A A A**

As observers bemoan what they see as increasing polarization and a lack of civility in politics, some have wondered if we've hit a point where the two-party system has made America ungovernable.

Some argue that Americans are locked into evaluating every issue through a prism of left and right. They say the country needs to break out of a system that has led to stagnation and a difficulty finding common ground.

Others counter that, while the two-party system has its faults, it arose organically and has a long history of getting things done in the United States. And, they say, the system is broad-based and does allow room for independents and third-party

candidates.

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## Listen To The Debate

Broadcast Version

Full Audio

[1 hr 38 min 58 sec]

[Read A Transcript \(PDF\)](#)

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A team of experts recently faced off, two against two, in an Oxford-style debate on the motion "The Two-Party System Is Making America Ungovernable."

Before the debate, the audience at New York University's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts voted 46 percent in favor of the motion and 24 percent against, with 30 percent undecided. After the debate, 50 percent supported the motion — an increase of 4 percentage points — and 40 percent opposed it — up 16 points — making the two-party supporters the winners of the debate. Ten percent remained undecided.

## Coming Up

On March 8, a group of experts will debate the motion [Clean Energy Can Drive America's Economic Recovery](#).

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John Donvan, correspondent for ABC News' *Nightline*, moderated the Feb. 15 debate. Those debating:

## FOR THE MOTION

**David Brooks** became an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times* in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, and he is currently a commentator on *PBS NewsHour*. He is the author of *Bobos In Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* and *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (And Always Have) in the Future Tense*.

**Arianna Huffington** is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of the online news and opinion hub The Huffington Post; a nationally syndicated columnist; and the author of 13 books. She is also co-host of *Left, Right & Center*, a political roundtable program on public radio. In 2006, she was named to the Time 100, *Time* magazine's list of the world's 100 most influential people.



Enlarge

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David Brooks (left) and Arianna Huffington argued in favor of the motion that the two-party system is making America ungovernable.

*Vote: It Just Encourages the Bastards, Parliament of Whores and Give War a Chance.* Both *Time* and *The Wall Street Journal* have labeled O'Rourke "the funniest writer in America." He has written for such diverse publications as *Car & Driver*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Rolling Stone*, where he was foreign affairs desk chief for 15 years. In the 1970s, he was editor-in-chief of the *National Lampoon*.

## AGAINST THE MOTION

**Zev Chafets** is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times Magazine* and a former columnist for the *New York Daily News*. He was the founding editor of the Jerusalem Report and is the author of 12 books, including *Rush Limbaugh: An Army of One*. Chafets spent 30 years living in Israel with its multi-party system, during which he was an active participant in the Egyptian-Israeli peace process and a delegate to the first Israeli-Egyptian peace negotiations.

**P.J. O'Rourke** is a political satirist, the H.L. Mencken research fellow at the Cato Institute, and the bestselling author of 13 books, including *Don't*