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The Arena

Are convention TV cuts a bad idea?

David Boaz | August 23, 2012

Are you kidding? Why should the networks provide hours of coverage for lavishly produced infomercials for the two government-supported parties?

Conventions used to be news events. I'd love to see the television coverage of the 103-ballot 1924 Democratic convention. Or of Everett Dirksen pointing his finger in 1952 at Eisenhower's floor lieutenant, Thomas Dewey and shouting, "We followed you before and you took us down the road to defeat." But the last time there was any news or suspense at a convention was probably 1976, when Ronald Reagan's supporters thought - probably wrongly - that the nomination was still barely within their grasp, and there was a real floor fight over a motion designed to flush out hidden Reagan supporters in Ford delegations. Let Ron Paul be nominated, and let his supporters do a traditional floor demonstration. The networks would cover that, because it would be news. But if there's no news, then the networks are just providing the two old parties with free publicity.

And speaking of "government-supported parties" - this year the taxpayers will give each party \$18 million to produce these infomercials. That should stop. The parties both have plenty of money. And in a year when 57 percent of Americans tell Pew that there should be a third major party, why are those people being taxed to shore up the existing parties with which people are dissatisfied?