

## **Fusion Voting worth consideration in hyperpartisan climate**

Most people are not familiar with fusion voting even though it has an active political history in the United States. Fusion voting enables a third-party organization to nominate a candidate who is also a candidate of one of the two major political parties. The fusion voting process encourages the political parties to work together on major policy issues. It played a major role in national politics, before and after the Civil War. It was used extensively on ballots up to the turn of the 20th century. And then the two major political parties took legislative steps to discontinue the practice. With a few exceptions nationally, fusion voting has become dormant...until now.

Unless you've been living in a cave the past several years you're keenly aware of the rancor, hostility, and growing polarization dominating political discourse. These conditions break down trust. In this polarized environment, it's not unusual for Americans to consume completely separate media sources giving vastly different "news" about the same people, places, and events. [A recent study by the Pew Research Center](#) reports that "Americans' views of politics and elected officials are unrelentingly negative, with little hope for improvement on the horizon". The voices of independent third-party candidates are lost in the shuffle.

It's time to look more closely at how our own election system allows and encourages the more extreme partisan candidates to win elections, while ignoring the voice of the majority of Americans. There are other ways to elect leaders who represent their constituents in our own nation's history. Fusion voting might be one way of countering the rise of extremists to top slots on the ballot.

Fusion voting has a rich tradition in the United States. It was in common use during our nation's first century. For example, in 1854, Free Soilers, anti-slavery groups and other fringe parties fused their efforts in Ripon, Wisconsin to create the national Republican Party. Fusion voting was also credited with enabling poor farmers and blacks in post-Civil War North Carolina to politically work together. As a result, [John Adams Hyman](#), enslaved until 1865, was the first Black American to represent North Carolina in the U.S. House of Representatives. There are numerous examples in U.S. history where fusion voting was used to promote third-party policy initiatives and keep the major political parties in check.

Not surprisingly, Democratic and Republican Party leaders viewed fusion voting as a threat. By the turn of the 20th century, the both the Democratic and Republican parties sought to limit the influence of third parties through legislation. State by state, they passed legislation prohibiting fusion voting. In 1895, Wisconsin joined four other states to pass legislation barring candidates from being listed more than once on the ballot. Soon most of the states passed similar laws. Although fusion voting is still allowed today in Connecticut and New York, over the years, the concept has in large part, fallen into disuse...until recently, that is.

Within the last decade, efforts have been growing to revive fusion voting. Several states, including Wisconsin, are studying the concept. Proponents in the states of Kansas and New Jersey are advancing litigation, seeking to allow fusion voting to be restored to practice.

How does fusion voting work? Fusion voting allows the same candidate to be nominated by more than one political party. Voters still vote only once in each election, but they can choose their preferred candidate without supporting a party they may disagree with. Essentially, some candidates

would appear more than once on a ballot. All votes cast for an individual candidate — whether nominated by a major political party or a third party — would then “fuse” together to create a final vote tally.

Let’s look at a hypothetical example. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), campaign finance reform is rated as a top three bipartisan concern for Americans. If a third party adopts campaign finance reform in their platform, they also could reach out to endorse candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties who have a strong position in support of campaign finance reform. Under the fusion voting model, voters are given the option of supporting a key policy measure, without declaring support for the entire platform of the major parties. Meanwhile, candidates under the two major parties have the freedom to declare support for policy issues like campaign finance reform. In this case, the third-party votes are desirable, not spoiler votes.

In April 2025, a new cross-partisan organization, [United Wisconsin](#), announced their plans to reestablish fusion voting in Wisconsin. David Mahoney, a former Democratic Dane County Sheriff and Dale Schultz, former Republican State Senator are co-chairing the efforts. United Wisconsin executive director Kristine Andrews said the organization believes fusion voting should be permissible in Wisconsin because voters have a constitutional right to nominate any candidate they want. Though they recognize the challenges faced, United Wisconsin leaders are determined to advance their effort.

The efforts of United Wisconsin warrant our attention. The overwhelming majority of Americans are frustrated with the political divisiveness. Fusion voting shows promise in countering this. And if successful in a purple state like Wisconsin, it could open the door for other states as well. Fusion voting just might be a solution.

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