

# The Advocacy Center for Equality & Democracy

# ACED

[Advocacy Center for Equality and Democracy](#) Equality Democracy Politics American Government United States Voting

Home  
About ACED  
Citizen Action  
Taxes  
Elections  
Blog

## Is Americans Elect a Mirage or an Oasis?

by [admin](#) on March 26, 2012 in [Uncategorized](#)

Ezra Klein's article [Kill the American Primary to Save American Politics](#), on which [we commented last week](#), is only one of several pieces discussing Americans Elect to appear recently. With its first caucus approaching soon, it is about time ACED, too, weighed in on Americans Elect ("AE").

First, what is Americans Elect? To answer that, the best thing to do is thoroughly go through [its website](#). But roughly, it is a platform *in which any registered voter may participate* as a "delegate" to directly select a presidential ticket. The Americans Elect candidate will purportedly appeal on the ballots of all 50 states. The selection of the ticket is primarily subject to two conditions: (1) The ticket must consist of two individuals of different political parties and ideological views; and (2) The selection of candidates by delegates is to some degree subject to the discretion of the Candidates Certification Committee.

These and other aspects of AE have drawn a lot of criticism. For example, [Michael Cohen of the Guardian](#) says that Americans Elect's fundamental belief "that the political system is riven by dysfunction and can only be saved by a non-partisan political movement" rests on false assumptions of American politics. [Paul Krugman thinks the idea of a centrist third-party is "nonsense"](#) in part because we already have a centrist President in Barack Obama. And [election law expert Rick Hasen contends](#) that there is a significant danger of corruption in AE's processes that give its Board various "levers," one being the Certification Committee, to manipulate the selection of the candidate.

Let's give each of the above criticisms full credit. Does it follow that voters who are dissatisfied with the Democrat and Republican candidates for President should not participate? No. Even if the idea behind AE to run a non-partisan, centrist President is dumb and the AE Board has given itself the ability to manipulate the candidates' selection with the intent to do so, *presently* there remains the potential for an individual non-centrist candidate to win the Americans Elect nomination.

Rick Hasen actually [wrote about this in Politico](#), although the apparent goal of the article is to scare off potential AE voters. Hasen discusses the possibility of Stephen Colbert entering the AE fray and rallying his viewers behind his candidacy. According to Hasen, the AE board could reject him as a candidate. But he also describes the result of that:

"It is far from clear that the Americans Elect board would not overrule the choice of Colbert. But doing so would run the risk that any alternative candidate would lack whatever legitimacy would be created by the project. What does it say about the legitimacy of a process that could be first overtaken by a faux candidate, then overruled by an unelected board?"

If a non-centrist candidate—for instance the [lefty Justice Party and declared Americans Elect candidate Rocky Anderson](#)—won the nomination and the AE board vetoed him, it would expose AE as a sham. Is it a bad thing to expose AE for what it is *IF* it is in fact a sham? Of course, all of the time his supporters would have invested in clicking his name a few times would be wasted. However, since AE requires very little time or effort to participate, it is probably worth it.

The board is likely very reluctant to contradict itself in the most extreme manner by overruling the delegates' choice when since its inception it has sold itself as a merely a platform for direct voter choice. Again, even if you do not accept that, supporting an AE candidate is worth it (if you are dissatisfied with the Democrat and Republican options) if there is any chance the Board will not reject him or her because s/he would immediately gain the enormous advantages that only Americans Elect can provide a non-major-party candidacy. As Hasen put it, "Americans Elect presents a rare opportunity for such a candidate to gain immediate credibility — as well as an ability to focus on the race itself and not the battles over ballot access."

As merely the candidate of the Justice Party, Rocky Anderson is losing the ballot access battle. The Justice Party itself was founded in December 2011. It will not be on the ballot in California because [the state required 103,000 people to register as Justice Party voters by January 3, 2012](#). The timing and procedural hurdle made getting on California's ballot practically impossible. Thus, the only way for Rocky Anderson to get on its ballot is through Americans Elect. In turn, this gives any supporter of Mr. Anderson great impetus to participate.

Ballot access is a perennial problem for candidates on the left – probably the most under-represented political side of the spectrum in the United States. [The Green Party failed to gain ballot access](#) in all 50 states in 2008 and 2004. Ralph Nader in 2000 [only appeared on 44 ballots](#). Getting nationwide ballot access is a very expensive, time-consuming endeavor that most alternative parties simply cannot accomplish. As a well-organized and very well-funded “platform” or “[vessel](#),” AE probably will gain nationwide access, and they are making it available to the candidate who can gather the most support to take advantage of it.

Speaking of funding, many “liberal” pundits argue that AE is just a means for [corrupt Wall Street types](#) to [continue pushing](#) their [elitist agenda on regular Americans](#) at least in part because hedge funders are known to have provided some of the funding, and other funders are unknown (legally, Americans Elect does not have to disclose them). It is possible that the funders behind AE formed the organization exactly for this reason – perhaps [funding both major parties](#) as [they do now](#) is becoming so expensive that they hope to establish a single “center” party to make controlling the government cheaper and easier.

However, if you are already dissatisfied with [the Democrats](#) and [Republicans](#) because they serve the elite instead of the public interest, this is not a reason to reject AE *in favor of* the major parties. It is also probably unrealistic to expect any major political movement to lack funding from very rich people. Accordingly, Ralph Nader has not only [advocated getting involved in Americans Elect](#) (in the video), he wrote a novel three years ago entitled [Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!](#) because the super-rich “[are probably all we have left](#)” to hope for real progressive reform. Moreover, the funding for Americans Elect [is different](#) than the elite funding that undeniably exists for Republicans and Democrats. Professor [Lawrence Lessig has clearly made this point](#) consistently with his support of AE in the hopes that it serves as a platform for a reform candidate, and *until* it shows itself to be a sham or the delegates simply choose someone he does not want to support.

At bottom, Republican and Democratic politicians serve the elite and have [governed to increase economic and social inequality](#). It is no wonder that [dissatisfaction with government is so high](#). Every person who desires a more equal and just society should be looking for political alternatives; and likewise, it is no surprise that so [many Americans now say they will at least consider a third-party or independent candidate](#) this November. In turn, one should also expect the spate of articles and blog posts in favor of status quo politics to continue and, indeed, increase as the election approaches. And one should note that most of these are/will be written by privileged people who have found success under the two-party system.

Humans, as very intelligent beings, excel at thinking. It is easy for us to rationalize almost anything. Rather than take personal responsibility for changing our political system (something that would take much more effort, stands a good chance of failing, and could lead to some personal sacrifices of energy, time, and money), we tend to take the easy way out and generate reasons why alternatives will not work. This is probably especially true if things are going well for us – even if the fact that things are going so poorly for so many others conflicts with our morals and sensibilities.

It is true that there is a lot to criticize about Americans Elect. But it is also true that Americans have very few choices in presidential elections. Expanding those choices is prohibitively expensive and time-consuming in almost every case. Yet when the very rare chance to not only expand the range of choices but to actually participate in choosing the candidate arises, many people refuse to participate because of a chance that it might not be what it seems.

If I were lost and walking alone in a desert without water and saw just a few yards to my left what looked like a water fountain, I would think it very odd. I might ask myself, “What would a water fountain be doing in the middle of a desert? Could there possibly be water pipes out here?” Nevertheless, I would try to use it even though it might be a mirage or it might not work. It seems to me like the right decision, but then again I would consider supporting an Americans Elect candidate. Would others walk on by, dying of thirst in the desert?

**UPDATE:** Here are two additional points: (1) People do not just have a tendency to look for easy solutions. For hard problems—like governance and citizen action—they tend to look for impossible solutions (like [a labor party headed by Al Gore](#)). By self-limiting solutions to sets of impossibilities, one can sit back and rest assured that there is nothing one can do about the problem.

(2) Assuming the Americans Elect founders and directors have bad motives because they are associated with Wall Street does not explain the popular appeal of the group. Granted, it remains to be seen how popular it is, but it certainly has attracted a significant number of presumably “everyday people” as supporters. The more important question to ask, I think, is not “who funds AE” (the one most seem to be asking) so that one can attribute motives to them, but “why would the average voter support a centrist party?”

As we mentioned, the people of the U.S. are very dissatisfied with their government, so wanting some form of change is natural. In our opinion, the desire for change has centered around a centrist party because Americans Elect is so well funded, it is about the most

conventional and establishmentarian alternative imaginable, and, most importantly, the two-party mentality has created the notion of a Left and Right party in the United States (the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively). Hence, when one thinks of an alternative, the immediate assumption for many people is that the empty political space for a challenger is in the middle. Thus, dissatisfaction with both parties turns into support for a hybrid of the two.

In fact, the most obvious place for a challenger is on the left. Democrats and Republicans in Congress may refuse to agree with each other on particulars, but overall they are pushing a very similar agenda of hierarchy and inequality. There is substantial demand for more leftist, populist policies. Unfortunately, almost no elected official voices them. This is not for lack of real demand; it is for lack of choice and lack of voice and two-party tunnel vision.

[← Last Week's News Part II: Ezra Klein's Two-Party Propaganda](#)

- [View Comments \(0\)](#)
- [Submit A Comment](#)

No comments yet.

### Leave a Reply

Name (Required)

Email (Required)

Website

Comment

### ACED Tweets

- Quick update to #americansselect post on keeping an open mind <http://t.co/6CX2WRm5> about 8 hours ago
- On Americans Elect and its potential to be co-opted by the left <http://t.co/6CX2WRm5> about 10 hours ago
- @speechboy71 WHYcall AmElct "quadrennial inev'y" when u also note only Unity08 similar & give reasons AE is diff than othr prior 3d parties? [2 days ago](#)

Follow [@Equal and Democ](#) on Twitter

Recommend this on

### Pages

- [About ACED](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Citizen Action](#)
- [Elections](#)
- [Taxes](#)

Search...

### Archives

- [March 2012](#)
- [February 2012](#)

Follow ACED



Pages

- [About ACED](#)
- [Citizen Action](#)
- [Taxes](#)
- [Elections](#)
- [Blog](#)

March 2012

**S M T W T F S**

			<a href="#">1</a>	<a href="#">2</a>	<a href="#">3</a>	
4	5	6	<a href="#">7</a>	8	<a href="#">9</a>	10
11	12	<a href="#">13</a>	14	15	16	17
<a href="#">18</a>	19	<a href="#">20</a>	21	22	23	24
25	<a href="#">26</a>	27	28	29	30	31

[« Feb](#)

Follow ACED



Contact ACED

ACED would love to hear from you. Please e-mail us with any questions, concerns, or support at [nick.vitolo@equalityanddemocracy.org](mailto:nick.vitolo@equalityanddemocracy.org).

Advocacy Center for Equality and Democracy © 2012. All Rights Reserved.

Powered by [WordPress](#). Designed by **WOOTHEMES**