

Presidential election chaos unearths flaws in US political system

By Wu Xinbo Source: People's Daily

The 2016 US presidential election, a choice between two undesirable candidates, has now devolved into a confrontation between supporters of the current political status quo and dissidents, as well as a reality show-like race challenging the culture of political correctness and the limits of social morality. The chaos of the election also unearthed the malpractices of the US political system.

The chaos that has ensued from this race, first of all, has revealed the drawbacks to the Republican Party's presidential primary elections. In the Democratic Party primaries, besides ordinary "pledged" delegates, there are unpledged delegates who are appointed by the Party independently of the primaries' electoral process.

These elite unpledged delegates, or "superdelegates," are usually made up of members of the two houses of Congress, as well as federal and state government officials. The Democratic Party included this process with the aim to prevent the selection of extreme nominees who make it more difficult to attract middle-of-the-road voters in their fight against the Republican Party.

However, the Republican does not have such a mechanism. As a result, the nation's increasingly severe political polarization and dissatisfaction among US citizens towards the current political status quo was able to lead to the emergence of extreme nominees such as Donald Trump.

Though core Republicans understood that Trump was not a good choice, and some of them even suggested a substitution, the Republican Party had to accept him as the final nominee to the lack of an effective mechanism to replace him.

The presidential primary process adopted by the Republican Party ignores the importance of counterbalance, and so was finally kidnapped by this so-called intra-party democracy. Trump has taught the party a valuable lesson this time.

Election chaos has also exposed the flaws of the US two-party system. Though Uncle Sam labels itself as a multi-party country, it is actually running a two-party system that benefits Democrats and Republicans while marginalizing other political powers.

Though a two-party system is more stable, it bears the risks of political confrontation and polarization. In addition, under such a system, political powers outside the two parties are barely able to play a role when it comes to improving the political environment.

When the political environment in such a system is favorable, the two parties are able to compete in a fair and healthy way through compromise for the sake of the overall national interest and there ensuring that the entire political system continues to function.

But if the environment is not ideal, the two parties may push past boundaries, causing competition to become direct confrontation. What's worse, the whole political ecosystem will end up deteriorating as the country cannot look to a third-party for further reform.

The fierce confrontation seen during the 2016 election can be seen as an extension of the political polarization that has arisen in the US in recent years. What's worse, no one can do anything to change this situation even though many are not satisfied with either candidate. This is because other candidates, either Gary Johnson from the Libertarian Party or Jill Stein from the Green Party, are not someone they can bet on.

In the end though, US citizens should put more blame on the two-party system rather than these undesirable candidates.

The chaos of this election has also revealed the defects in the US electoral process itself.

For a long time now, the US presidential election has been criticized for the influence of money in politics.

In today's presidential election, the huge amount of cash has been spent to advertise, campaign, and win votes, and as a result, cash usually ends up equaling votes, leading what is supposed to be a democratic political system to become a "monetary" political system.

In such a system, candidates have to raise capital and then reward their investors after winning an election. This violates the basic principles of democracy.

The US Supreme Court removed limits on corporate donations to campaigns in 2010, leading to \$2 billion being spent in the 2012 elections - the most expensive presidential race ever. It is estimated that more money will be spent on this year's election, which suggests that money is gaining even bigger influence in politics.

Congressional elections are not doing well either. The redistricting of congressional districts in 2011 carried out by the Republican-controlled congress enabled both parties to monopolize certain congressional districts, making it so supporters of other parties and independents could not elect representatives. To put it simply, the democratic rights of a certain portion of the public were sacrificed.

What's more, this gerrymandered congressional district system will give more extremist lawmakers from the two dominant parties more opportunities to be elected. These members, once elected, will further intensify party confrontation and political polarization.

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