Photo of the Day |



Students relax and pass through Downtown Storrs on a sunny day, Oct. 20, 2026. Downtown has many seating areas where people can relax, drink coffee, and sunbathe. PHOTO BY, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

POINT–COUNTERPOINT:

Should people vote third-party?

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As our nation approaches midterms, voters are once again given the choice of which party they should support. While many may opt to vote for either a Republican or Democratic ticket, third parties –– such as the Libertarian Party, Green Party or Working Families Party –– offer an alternative to the binary political establishment. Although often derided as wasting votes, some argue that third parties, also known as protest parties or minor parties, should be taken more seriously. This point-counterpoint is dedicated to debating the merits of both of these positions.

Nathan Fikadu's point:

A third-party vote made more sense when the two parties overlapped in regard to their opinions, so whoever won changed less about people's daily lives. They aren't close anymore, and the people who pay for that are rarely the ones making the choice. In 2016 we saw a spike in third party voting. At the same point in that campaign, Pew polling found 14% of registered voters planned to vote third party which is nearly triple the 5% in 2020 and about 6% of voters ultimately voted third party. By 2020, third party supporters looked less committed. Pew found that only 31% of them were extremely motivated to vote, compared with 71% of Donald Trump and Joe Biden supporters, and just three in ten were certain of their choice. For many third-party voters, the vote carries less weight than it does for minorities, immigrants and women. I'd argue that being able to vote third party is an often privileged position to take. A voter who isn't relying on asylum, federal diversity programs or abortion access can treat an election as a statement of principle. Because of this, it's easier to vote on principle when the consequences of said principle failing aren't your own.

Since returning to office in 2025, Trump has ended federal DEI programs and tried to shut down asylum access at the southern border, though a federal appeals court ruled it unlawful in April. In his first term, he appointed three conservative Supreme Court justices who later joined the majority in Dobbs, ending the constitutional right to abortion. These changes ultimately fall the hardest on minorities, immigrants and women in the United States.

Hillary Clinton lost Michigan by 0.23 points and Pennsylvania by 0.72, and — although these margins are not any one voter's fault — when the margins are that small, a single vote carries a heavy weight. Both Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton were imperfect candidates, and nobody owes a candidate their vote. However, the cost of withholding one's vote often lands on people who didn't make that choice. With midterms two weeks away, it's important to keep this in mind. In a system where only two candidates can win, the realistic alternative to one major party winning is the other major party winning, so a vote that goes elsewhere leaves the decision to everyone else.

Colin Hamilton's Point:

Our lack of faith in third-party voting is the symptom of a self-fulfilling prophecy: By refusing to lend faith to third-party candidates, we fail to generate the collective votes needed to boost them to power.

Third-party success is not theoretical as many assume. On the national level, third parties have been able to compete with the established two-party system, such as Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party run in 1912 and Ross Perot's 1992 and 1996 independent and Reform Party runs. At the local level, third parties have found success by appealing to specific community needs. The Connecticut Working Families Party, formed to support working class communities by focusing on economic and racial justice, has won five primary victories in September and has over 83 candidates on the ballot for November's elections.

For those who worry a third-party vote is wasted, many third parties benefit from cross-endorsements. Cross-endorsement is a process where two or more political parties nominate the same candidate for the same office during the same general election. Voting for a mainstream candidate running under a third-party platform allows third parties to gain national representation and recognition. In Connecticut, incumbent Ned Lamont has been cross-endorsed by the Connecticut Working Families party and voters are given the option of voting "Row C" to support the party. The Independent Party similarly cross-endorsed Republican Ryan Fazio, as well as several Democrats and Republicans for cabinet positions.

Even if considered a symbolic vote, third-party voting still matters in the context of non-electoral victories. Their mere presence on the ballot can pressure major parties to address issues they might otherwise neglect. The Green Party, for instance, emerged in the 1980s as an alternative for voters concerned about the environment and the emerging threat of climate change. Although it has never seen federal success, it has consistently drawn away enough voters to give major parties reason for worry. To accommodate, the Democratic platform has embraced environmental messaging to appeal to a constituency otherwise tempted to vote against it. Without the threat of an environmentally-minded opposition, it is easy to doubt that pro-climate policies would be so readily endorsed by Democratic candidates.

Ultimately, when searching for a candidate to represent them, voters should not be held back by assuming the political binary is the only "rational" choice. Instead, it is far more important that they find the candidate and party that they feel best represents them.

Nathan Fidaku's Counterpoint:

Colin argues that doubting third parties is a self-fulfilling prophecy and that voters need to lend them more faith. But in a winner-take-all system, a third party can win a huge share of the vote and still come away with nothing. In 1992, Ross Perot won 18.9% of the popular vote and not a single electoral vote. In 1996, the Reform party he founded won 8.4% and, again, none, and no Reform nominee has reached 1% ever since. Nearly one in five voters picked Perot, and in a winner-take-all system it brought them nothing.

Colin's best local example, Ned Lamont, works against him in this regard. In Connecticut, cross-endorsement put Lamont on the ballot twice, once as a Democrat and once on the Working Families line. The votes from both lines were then added together. In 2024, all of the 81 legislative candidates the party endorsed were Democrats. When Colin says that a Row C vote matters, he's ultimately describing a vote for a Democrat. A third-party vote in this regard is attached to a candidate who can win, which is the dogma argued for prior. In 2022, the 4,020 votes Jahana Hayes got on the Working Families line were double her margin of victory.

He later credits the Green Party for the Democrats' climate messaging without showing a clear cause. The Green's best-known moment is during the 2000 presidential election, when Ralph Nader got 97,488 votes in Florida and George W. Bush won the state by 537. Analysts still argue about whether that changed the outcome, but it highlights what is at stake when a race is close.

Colin Hamilton's Counterpoint:

Nathan's argument perpetuates the myth that third-party voting led to Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton losing their presidential bids. Even if all third-party voters (which includes a number of conservative interests) voted for a straight democratic ticket, it is unlikely either candidate could have won their elections. At most, the margins of a few battleground states may have changed. This is not a case of a winning candidate struck down by self-interested or ignorant voters, but rather two imperfect candidates struck down because they were just that: imperfect.

With this falsehood in mind, it's important to recognize why breaking out of the established norm is vital. Nathan presumes that only a Democrat has a chance at undoing the destruction that Trump has wrought on civil rights. Joe Biden's 2020 presidency, however, showed the limitations of this approach; although his presidency was able to reverse some Trump-era policy, he was unable to prevent his predecessor's return to office. No other major democracy in the world is so entrenched in a two-party system –– the vast majority have a complex network of parties that contribute to specific voter needs. America's resulting partisanship has caused its political pendulum to swing faster and faster, with any gains from one administration quickly erased by the next. Third parties offer a chance for change.

The dangers of our hyper-fixation on party loyalty were laid out by President George Washington, who argued in his 1796 Farewell Address that "the alternate domination of one faction over another," would lead only a "despotism" focused more on combatting itself than building real change. Nathan argues that voting third-party is a privileged position to take but similar to Washington's point, is it not more privileged to opt-in to this binary factionalism and believe that certain policies can be compromised or ignored?

Nathan points to Trump, a member of the Republican Party, ending DEI and the constitutional right to abortion. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Kamala Harris was criticized by many for protecting fracking –– an oil-and-gas extraction practice associated with environmental and public health risks that disproportionately targets minority communities. Should the disadvantaged pick a candidate that would harm them just because they belong to a more "winnable" party? Or should they, and the rest of America, back a candidate who represents their needs? To disregard the promise of the third party is to disregard the spirit of democracy.