

Testimony to the Presidential Commission on Election Administration  
by Jonathan R. Lippincott  
Resident of Hamilton County, OH

Good afternoon Chairpersons Bauer and Ginsberg and Commissioners. My name is Jonathan Lippincott and I am an independent voter, registered in Hamilton County, Ohio. It's an honor for our county to host this Commission.

I have read your mission statement and of course accept that as your focus. But I want to add my voice to those who urge you to take into consideration the fundamental barriers to full voting participation faced by millions of independent voters in Ohio and nationally.

Yes, independent voters can vote in general elections. But, as you know, in close to half the states ([fairvote.org](http://fairvote.org)), independent voters have no voice in selecting the candidates who appear on the general election ballot. Further, we are marginalized by partisan redistricting that in most districts (Nate Silver, *New York Times*, December 27, 2012) predetermines the outcome of the general election.

In other words, the rules of the electoral game are stacked in favor of strong partisans of both parties. This is true in Ohio, where redistricting is under total partisan control. And it is true in Ohio primary elections. If I ask for a primary ballot, I am automatically registered as a member of a party and cannot register as an independent. When I have asked for a candidate ballot for a party different from the previous election, I have been asked to sign in effect an oath of loyalty to that party, a deterrent to voting at all.

Nationally, according to voter registration statistics cited by USA Today, 2.5 million Americans have left the two parties in the past five years. At the same time, the number of independents has grown to all time highs. The rising, independent-minded Millennial generation, 95 million strong, will accelerate these trends (Ron Fournier, *The Atlantic*, August, 2013).

Discrimination against full electoral participation by independent voters is first of all a voting rights issue. Closed primaries, party-controlled redistricting, and party control of electoral machinery are fundamental barriers to independent voters' inclusion and access.

Discrimination against independent voters is also a root cause of much of our governmental dysfunction, as the voices of strong partisans are amplified by the electoral process and those of independents are muffled.

It is telling that as the number of independents grows, and party affiliation declines, the partisan divide in Congress is at historic highs. This disconnect must be addressed if American democracy is to regain its health.

I urge you to include the testimony of independents and the issues they raise in the report that you will produce.

Thank you for your commitment to improving the electoral process, the foundation of our democracy.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan R. Lippincott