

CENTER FOR BALLOT FREEDOM

Fusion voting is a practice in which a candidate can appear on a ballot as the nominee of more than one party. It's a common-sense solution to counter the extremism and polarization ingrained in our political system and cultivate a healthy, multiparty democracy. Read more about fusion and how it can be a solution to our polarization problem [here](#).

How Fusion Voting Works

This sample ballot shows how a minor party (here, the Fusion Party) “fuses” with a major party (Party A) in support of the same candidate (Mary Bristow). Candidates nominated by major parties “A” and “B” are listed on the first two lines. On the third line, Bristow is listed for a second time, as the nominee for the Fusion Party.

Ballot Instructions:

1. Please vote for your preferred candidate under the party label you wish to support.
2. Please note that votes count the same regardless of which party label the vote is cast under.

MARY BRISTOW Party A	→ <input type="radio"/>
DAVID WILKS Party B	→ <input type="radio"/>
MARY BRISTOW Fusion Party	→ <input type="radio"/>

To determine the results of an election, votes are tallied by party and then combined to produce the final result. In our example, the votes Bristow receives on the Party A line and Fusion Party line are each tallied, and then added together. Votes count the same regardless of which line they are cast on.

Why would a minor party use fusion and decide to run a major party candidate on their ballot line? Because it provides a minor party with a valuable opportunity to endorse a candidate with a shot of winning, advance a particular issue or focus, and to gain influence over the political agenda should its candidates be elected. In a close race, votes cast for candidates cross-endorsed by a minor party can make the difference between a win and a loss – something a candidate elected because of the support of a new party won't soon forget. And voters may find in a new party a political home that more closely matches their values.

The below graphic of a hypothetical race shows how fusion can make that difference when votes are tallied:

New party “fuses” w/ Democrats

SMITH Democratic Party	→	42%
JONES Republican Party	→	46%
SMITH Fusion Party	→	11%
HUGHES Greens	→	0.5%
MCCORMACK Libertarians	→	0.5%

New party “fuses” w/ Republicans

WILLIAMS Democratic Party	→	44%
ROBERTS Republican Party	→	43%
ROBERTS Fusion Party	→	13%

Votes are tallied by party, and then added together to produce the final result. Votes count the same regardless of which line they are cast on.

In the first scenario, a minor party – the Fusion Party – fuses with the Democratic Party and it determines the outcome of an election. Smith, the Democratic candidate, receives 42% of the Democratic vote, while Jones receives 46% of the Republican vote. But when fused with the Moderate Party votes, where Smith received 11% of the vote, Smith comes out ahead with 53% of the vote.

Fusion voting can equally help either or both major parties. In the second scenario, the Fusion Party fused with the Republican Party on Roberts. On the Republican Party line, Roberts received 43% of the vote compared to the 44% of the vote garnered by the Democratic candidate, Williams. With fusion, the 13% of the vote that Roberts receives on the Moderate Party line is combined with his votes from the Republican Party to give Roberts 56% of the vote – and fusion once again makes the difference in the outcome of an election.

How Fusion Can Decide Elections

The difference fusion can make in election outcomes is not theoretical – it’s been borne out over decades of elections in the two states where fusion voting is alive and well, Connecticut and New York.

In New York’s 1994 gubernatorial election, the Republican and Conservative parties fused on George Pataki, then a Republican State Senator, and the Democrat and Liberal parties fused on then-Governor Mario Cuomo. When votes were ultimately tallied, Pataki won an upset victory over the 12-year incumbent Democratic Governor.

New York Gubernatorial, 1994

PATAKI Republican Party	→	2,156,057
CUOMO Democratic Party	→	2,272,903
PATAKI Conservative	→	328,605
CUOMO Liberal	→	92,001

Winner: Pataki, Republican-Conservative

Connecticut Gubernatorial 2010

MALLOY Democratic Party	→	540,970
FOLEY Republican Party	→	560,874
MALLOY Wkg Families	→	26,308
MARSH Independent	→	17,629

Winner: Malloy, Democrat-Working Families

Similarly in Connecticut, in 2010, amid the state’s first open-seat Gubernatorial election in nearly two decades, fusion voting made the difference. The Democratic and Working Families parties fused on former Stamford Mayor Dan Malloy, whereas Thomas Foley received the Republican party nomination. In a head-to-head race between Democratic and Republican votes, Foley received nearly 20,000 more votes. But when Malloy’s votes from the Working Families Party line were combined with those he received from the Democratic Party, he won the election. With hyper-partisanship and extremism on the rise, it’s likely that center parties would emerge if fusion were relegalized in states across the nation. Those parties would be even more likely than parties on the left and right to pull in independent and undecided voters, making them powerful players positioned well to pressure both parties to appeal more to voters in the center.

The impact that fusion voting can have is not limited to Gubernatorial elections. It can impact races at the highest level—including for the White House. If not for New York’s fusion voting rules, then-Senator **John F. Kennedy** may have lost his 1960 race for the White House to then-Vice President **Richard Nixon**, who beat him by more than 20,000 votes on a strict Democratic to Republican vote. But when Kennedy’s Democratic votes were combined with 400,000 votes from the minor Liberal party line, he won New York and its 45 electoral votes. Similarly, fusion helped then-Governor **Ronald Reagan** secure the presidency in 1980—despite then-President **Jimmy Carter** receiving more Democratic votes than Ronald Reagan had Republican ones, the Conservative Party’s more than 250,000 votes for Reagan gave him New York.

How to Learn More

The Center for Ballot Freedom is working to reinstate fusion voting across the country using legislation, litigation, and ballot initiatives. The Center unites unlikely allies across the political spectrum in this effort because fusion voting is an urgent, winnable, and impactful political reform that can strengthen democracy, increase voter choice, promote compromise, and reduce extremism. For more information and to join the effort, visit www.centerforballotfreedom.org.