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New Research Exposes Why Competition in U.S. Politics Industry is Failing America

Katherine M. Gehl, former CEO and political innovation activist, and Harvard’s Michael E. Porter reveal how the U.S. political system is no longer designed to serve the public interest, and how it has been reconfigured over time to benefit our major political parties and their industry allies. Report lays out a strategy for reinvigorating our democracy.

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WHY COMPETITION IN THE POLITICS INDUSTRY IS FAILING AMERICA

A strategy for reinvigorating our democracy

Katherine M. Gehl and Michael E. Porter



BOSTON— At a time of high dissatisfaction and distrust with the U.S. political system, Katherine M. Gehl and Michael E. Porter today released new research that illuminates the root causes of why competition in politics is failing to serve the public interest. It is delivering gridlock and partisan divisions, not solutions to the nation’s problems. The authors bring a new analytical lens to understand the performance of our political system--the

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lens of industry competition, which has been used for decades to understand competition and performance in other industries. [Click here to read full report.](#)

“The politics industry is a classic duopoly with two dominant competitors. The parties focus on serving their partisan supporters and special interests, not the average voter,” said Katherine Gehl, a former CEO, who has also worked in government and is now dedicated to driving political innovation and reform. “This report is not about adding to the depressing national dialog about politics, but about how to understand how the political system actually works and change it through reforms that will matter.”

“I was drawn to analyze the U.S. political system as an industry when our research found that our political system is the biggest impediment to U.S. competitiveness,” said Harvard’s Porter, who is based at Harvard Business School and co-chair of the School’s U.S. Competitiveness Project. “Our dysfunctional political outcomes are a competition problem. Politics is an industry that sets its own rules. Over time, it has shaped the nature of competition to advance the interests of political parties and their industry allies rather than serve the public interest.”

Porter and Gehl apply Professor Porter’s renowned Five Forces analysis to diagnose the fundamental structural issues ailing the U.S. political system and how it has evolved. The duopoly is protected by huge barriers to entry that have not only blocked major new parties but also independents and moderates. The research provides a litmus test to judge which powerful and achievable political reforms should be pursued. Our political system will not be self-correcting. Gehl and Porter lay out a strategy, with specific, actionable reforms, for reinvigorating our democracy by shifting the very nature of competition.

For nearly six years, the U.S. Competitiveness Project has conducted in-depth research to identify the necessary steps policymakers and the business community must take to improve U.S. competitiveness. Based on research and surveys of global business leaders, Porter and others in a report last fall identified the U.S. political system as the biggest barrier to improving U.S. competitiveness, a finding that heightens the importance of the research released today.

[Click here to read full report.](#)

About Katherine M. Gehl:

Katherine M. Gehl, a business leader and former CEO with experience in government, began, in the last decade, to participate actively in politics—first in traditional partisan politics. As she deepened her understanding of how politics actually worked—and didn’t work—for the public interest, she realized that even the best candidates and elected officials were severely limited in a dysfunctional system, and that the political system was the single greatest challenge facing our country. She turned her focus to political system reform and innovation and has made this her mission.

About Michael E. Porter:

Michael E. Porter, an expert on competition and strategy in industries and nations, encountered politics in trying to advise governments and advocate sensible and proven reforms. As co-chair of the multiyear, non-partisan U.S. Competitiveness Project at Harvard Business School over the past five years, it became clear to him that the political system was actually the major constraint in America's inability to restore economic prosperity and address many of the other problems our nation faces. Working with Katherine to understand the root causes of the failure of political competition, and what to do about it, has become an obsession.

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ABOUT HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

Founded in 1908 as part of Harvard University, Harvard Business School is located on a 40-acre campus in Boston. Its faculty of more than 200 offers full-time programs leading to the MBA and doctoral degrees, as well as more than 70 open enrollment Executive Education programs and 55 custom programs, and HBX, the School's digital learning platform. For more than a century, HBS faculty have drawn on their research, their experience in working with organizations worldwide, and their passion for teaching to educate leaders who make a difference in the world, shaping the practice of business and entrepreneurship around the globe.



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