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Challengers to Duopoly:

Why Third Parties Matter in American Two-Party Politics

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he scholarly literature on third parties and independent campaigns has become considerably more abundant over the last two decades than in the years preceding Ross Perot's remarkable 1992 presidential bid. Works of high quality are among those new topical offerings; but many of them have been encyclopedic or multi-volume in scope and depth, or they have been monographs focused upon particular parties, movements, or leaders. Challengers to Duopoly provides in one manageable volume a reasonably comprehensive glimpse at third-party and independent movements, past and present. It also features for the reader a point of view: third parties matter. They always have, and they continue to matter, despite the crippling disabilities imposed upon them.

Over the last 100 years, America's party system, for which formerly there were plausible claims that it was "natural" or organic, has been transformed into duopoly, an engineered and enforced two-party system. Theodore Lowi describes it as "brain-dead," system which "would collapse in an instant if the tubes were pulled and the IV's...cut." Opinion research reveals a remarkable loss of popular support for the party system in its contemporary form. The conventional wisdom that the system of two major parties rationalizes voter decision-making and facilitates the consensusbuilding needed for effective democratic government has been undermined of late by toxic rhetoric, the clear evidence of zero-sum thinking, and the reality of partisan gridlock in policy-making bodies. It would be a reasonable conclusion that little is left of bipartisanship except the devotion both of Democrats and Republicans to duopoly, to keeping the ladder pulled up against all real or potential outside challengers.

Political scientists generally are aware of the barriers and impediments. Insofar as the two-party system (actually a sequence of them) prevailed in the nineteenth century, its institutional reinforcements—single-member district plurality elections, among others—guarded the gates as they do today, but their advent preceded PR and other practices known to be friendly to the evolution of multi-party systems.

Going far beyond these early "natural" two-major-parties buttresses, Republican and Democratic legislators eventually effected policies which were *intended* to promote, protect, and sustain partisan duopoly. Contemporary ballot-access requirements are so costly to surmount and bewilderingly diverse from state to state that they stop many third-party challengers right in their tracks. A new party seeking ballot access for its presidential candidate everywhere today would have to produce nearly two-thirds of a million validated petition signatures.

Anti-fusion and sore-loser policies in force in most states protect the primacy of Democrats and Republicans. The bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates sets the bar for access to the fall

presidential debates so forbiddingly high that a minor-party nominee or independent candidate almost never gets invited to take part. Federal policy on public funding of presidential campaigns distinctly favors major parties and their nominees. The same is true in Connecticut and some of the other states which have instituted public funding of their statewide and legislative elections. Other factors compound the problems faced by duopoly's challengers and underscore that indeed "them that has, gets." The partisan gerrymander is designed to stymie even two-party competition. The winner takes all practice employed by forty-eight states typically locks out even popular third-party or independent presidential candidates from any share of electoral votes. And there is the perennial problem of media neglect. In 2008, the leading national newspapers devoted a hundred times more news stories, opinion pieces, letters and photos to the Obama and McCain campaigns than to those of the four leading minor-party and independent candidates combined. Meeting in Copenhagen in 1990, the United States, Canada, and thirtythree European nations committed themselves to a comprehensive set of democratic goals. Contemporary policies in the United States evidently clash with two of the benchmarks in the Copenhagen document. These are the obligations to "respect the rights of citizens to seek political or public office...without discrimination" and "...of individuals and groups to establish, in full freedom, their own political parties...and provide them with legal guarantees to enable them to compete on the basis of equal treatment.'

Ways Third Parties Matter

The world tuned in to history-making events in the 2008 presidential campaign: election of the first African-American president, 18 million cracks left in the glass ceiling by the woman he

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defeated for the Democratic nomination and the first Republican woman ever nominated for the vice-presidency. Beyond media or public gaze in 2008, the Green Party nominated Cynthia McKinney and Rosa Clemente, *two African-American women*, for the nation's two highest offices. If there is a lesson this illustrates, it is this: whatever one's definition of *there* is, one minor party or another almost always gets there long before either major party arrives.

Years preceding the Civil War, Frederick Douglass and other African-American men joined whites in leading the Liberty Party. More than a half century before women's suffrage became national law, women took their seats as full voting delegates at the convention which gave birth to the Prohibition Party. Selected by the Socialist Party in 1980, David McReynolds thus became the first openly-gay presidential nominee ever.

It was a third party that first nominated a woman for the presidency (Equal Rights, 1872), selected a woman who cast an electoral vote (Bull Moose, Washington state, 1912), and selected a woman who received an electoral vote (Libertarian vice-presidential nominee, 1972).

Lenora Fulani, the 1988 New Alliance Party presidential nominee, was the nation's first woman and first African-American whose name appeared on the ballot of every constituency with electoral votes to cast. Third parties were first to nominate an African American for the vice-presidency (Communist, 1932), an African-American woman for the vice-presidency (Progressive, 1952), an African American for the presidency (Socialist Workers, 1964), and an African-American woman for the presidency (Communist, 1968).

Third parties also have been on the front lines of policy innovation and democratic reform. The Anti-Masonic Party was the first to hold a national convention and to draft and present a party platform. That party tendered the remarkable notion that transparency is an important value in democratic politics. The Liberty and Free Soil parties staked out positions sharply at odds with the defenders of slavery; likewise, the Republicans, who began as a third party before arriving in the ranks of the majors. Neither major party endorsed women's suffrage until 1916, a scant four years before the Nineteenth Amendment entered the Constitution. Long before that, a half-dozen parties had embraced and worked toward that goal.

Federal merit-based civil service, the direct election of U.S. Senators, initiative and referendum, the income tax, universal health care, wages and hours legislation, anti-child labor policy, public works for jobs and infrastructure development, Social Security, sustainability and green economy—all these and others appeared as planks in third-party platforms before either major party took up their cause. It was from the third-party periphery that the heinous costs and dangers of an emerging Cold War were raised, term limits pushed, and economic globalization challenged.

Minor-party representatives rarely sit in decision-making bodies in numbers large enough to put their own imprimatur on policy enactments. Interest group lobbies often have been the most powerful agents in pushing a proposal toward the mainstream. Recognizing the popularity of some of the ideas third parties advance, a major party (or both) may appropriate a proposal, incorporating it into its own policy program. Sometimes, when decades intervene between proposal and enactment, no more may be confirmed than that a minor party played a role in positioning the matter on the public agenda.

The strictures of duopoly now weaken third parties' influence as policy innovators, but these parties continue to matter for their potential to challenge electorally the two major parties. Some evidence today supports the longstanding precept that if oxygen is found for a substantial challenger to draw first breath, that would be either to the left or the right of where both major parties position themselves. Vermont Progressives thrive today as the most successful contemporary non-national third party in America. Nominated for Colorado governor by the Constitution Party in 2010, Tom Tancredo ran a strong second to the victorious Democrat. And there is the Tea Party, a new movement positioned neither entirely in nor completely outside the GOP.

But with the widening ideological space separating the major parties, the conviction has grown that a movement of the "angry middle," a third party appealing to disaffected centrists, would be the most likely to succeed. Ross Perot was one of the first to reach this conclusion.

Six campaigns were won by non-major-party gubernatorial candidates in five states between 1990 and 2010. Most of these new governors were centrists. Recent opinion pieces in leading newspapers predict a formidable new centrist party ready to take on the Republicans and Democrats in 2012. Presidential trial balloons were going up at the end of 2010 for both Michael Bloomberg and Donald Trump. Each was a presidential candidate, arguably centrist, who would be wealthy enough to skirt the discriminatory provisions of federal law by bankrolling his own 2012 campaign.

Organization of the Book

Chapter One makes the core premises about duopoly and its impact upon American politics. It also offers poll and electoral data suggesting that some opportunities have opened for third-party and independent challengers over the last twenty-five years.

The many barriers third parties face are presented in Chapter Two. Some of these are existential: they are because they are. Others are the invidious arrangements Republicans and Democrats have made for closure and their mutual self-protection. Minor parties are certainly among the losers; so too are the voters and their democratic freedom to choose.

Chapter Three focuses upon a variety of themes: the nation's party systems and their transformation over time; third-party types; and, most significantly, why third parties matter. The chapter carries the story of the Prohibition Party, the nation's most ancient living minor party. The Constitution, Green, and Libertarian parties—the leading contemporary national third-party challengers—are featured in Chapter Four.

Chapters Five through Eight present histories of America's national short-lived parties—one of the most important third-party types. Chapter Nine covers a related theme: the "independent" movements launched by John Anderson and Ross Perot, and the later initiatives by Perot and others to institutionalize their movement.

Chapter Ten examines the involvement of women, African Americans, and Latinos in third-party movements. It also bears historical case studies of their party-building activities: the National Woman's, Black Panther, and Raza Unida parties.

Continuing doctrinal parties—the Socialists and Communists and the Neo-Nazis—are featured in Chapters Eleven and Twelve.

Chapter Thirteen glimpses state/local significant others: third parties important within the domain of their communities or states but unwilling or unable to extend beyond those territorial bounds.

The concluding Chapter Fourteen bears a reprise on the book's central premise: that despite the barriers imposed upon them, third parties matter. The chapter provides a brief retrospective of the third-party past, along with some commentary and projection about present and future.

The book also carries six appendices. Appendix One presents the name and website addresses of nearly 100 contemporary American third parties as well as access information for blogs and websites which provide pertinent information on minor parties. Appendix Two offers the popular tallies and electoral votes of all minor presidential candidates since 1832 who received at least one percent of the popular vote, and Appendix Three provides the complete 2008 election returns for all major and minor presidential candidates.

Appendix Four features by name, state, and date the victories of all successful minor-party and independent gubernatorial candidates since 1831. Appendix Five presents by party the numerical size of all third-party delegations at opening sessions of the U.S. House and Senate from 1829 on. Appendix Six lists all third-party and independent members of Congress since World War II.

FROM HEADQUARTERS

Letter from the President February 2011

Dear Colleagues,

As I write, the new Congress has been in session for about six weeks, and President Obama, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, and the Democratic-controlled Senate are posturing in anticipation of a showdown over the federal budget. Republican aspirants to the presidency are raising money and jockeying for position in the 2012 GOP primaries, and President Obama is looking to chart a course to a second term. Similar budget showdowns and preparations for elections are playing out throughout the states, particularly those where significant shifts in power have occurred. Internationally, there also have been important developments, including some that have taken place outside the realm of mainstream democratic politics, such as President Hosni Mubarak's resignation in the face of widespread unrest in Egypt. Combined, these events remind us of the benefits of living in a democracy.

Current events also serve to highlight the importance of what we study and teach. They demonstrate the importance of campaigns and elections, the abilities of political parties to absorb new political movements, such as the Tea Party, and the impact of parties and interest groups on elections and policymaking. They also show what happens in political systems where democratic institutions are either lacking or not functioning well.

We have been very busy at POP Headquarters. Committees have been appointed and are working to select our new leadership and the winners of our various awards. Quin Monson and Kelly Patterson of Brigham Young University are organizing panels from the nearly 200 outstanding paper proposals submitted for this year's American Political Science Association meeting. Marjorie Randon Hershey of Indiana University has taken on the responsibility of collecting current syllabi on political parties, interest groups, and related courses for posting on our website. Please send your latest syllabi to her at hershey@indiana.edu.

This spring POP will be undertaking a self-study to learn more about how our organization can better serve its members. Headed by John Green of the University of Akron, Robin Kolodny of Temple University, and Kelly Patterson, the project features a broad-ranging satisfaction survey of current section members as well as lapsed members. We want to learn your opinions about the activities, services, and opportunities POP offers and about new directions you think POP ought to pursue. More information about the survey will arrive via email fairly soon. Your participation is important. I hope you will take the few minutes required to complete the survey.

With Best wishes.

Paul Herrnson University of Maryland pherrnson@capc.umd.edu.

Syllabus Collections Maintained by APSA's Organized Sections

Syllabus collections are extremely useful to new faculty and grad students who are developing courses in a particular field. The APSA is asking each of the Organized Sections to create and post a collection of syllabi in the section's subfield. So please send us your syllabi for courses on political parties, comparative parties, parties and elections, organized interests, and closely related topics! Feel free to include supporting materials such as reading lists, descriptions of paper topics and other assignments, and other resources.

Please send your syllabi to:

Margie Hershey at: hershey@indiana.edu

SCHOLARLY PRECINCTS

Nomination for Awards Organized Section on Political Organizations and Parties Awards

Leon D. Epstein Outstanding Book Award

This award "honors a book published in the last two calendar years that makes an outstanding contribution to research and scholarship on political organizations and parties."

Chair: Byron Shafer

Department of Political Science University of Wisconsin-Madison

Madison, WI 53706 bshafer@polisci.wisc.edu

Jack L. Walker, Jr. Outstanding Article Award

This award "honors an article published in the last two calendar years that makes an outstanding contribution to research and scholarship on political organizations and parties."

Chair: Duane Swank

Department of Political Science

Marquette University Milwaukee, WI 53201 duane.swank@marquette.edu

Emerging Scholar Award

This honor is awarded to a scholar who has received his or her Ph.D. within the last five years and whose career to date demonstrates unusual promise.

Chair: Beth Leech

Department of Political Science

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POP Best Paper Award

This award honors the best paper presented on a POP panel at the preceding APSA annual meeting.

Chair: Dara Strolovitch

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FROM THE FIELD

Papers of Interest
2010 American Political Science Association
Annual Meeting
September 2-5, 2010

'A Typology of Interest Group Competition and Legislative Success in the U.S. House of Representatives.' Holly Brasher, University of Alabama, Birmingham.

'Interest Groups, Political Institutions, and Strategic Choices: What Influences Institutional Lobbying Strategies?' Bryan McQuide, University of Idaho.

'Advocates and Interest Representation in Policy Debates.'
Marie Hojnacki, Penn State University; Kathleen Marchetti,
Penn State University; Frank R. Baumgartner, University of
North Carolina - Chapel Hill; Jeffrey M. Berry, Tufts
University; David C. Kimball, University of Missouri - St.
Louis; and Beth L. Leech, Rutgers University.

'Economics, Politics, and the Macromobilization of Interest Groups in the U.S.' Holly Brasher, University of Alabama, Birmingham.



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