

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING A MULTIPARTY SYSTEM IN THE U.S.

This study of how to create a multiparty democracy was intended to be an exhaustive review that left out no proposed method of reform. The critiques of each proposed strategy can stand on their own as information to be used by readers who would like to pursue the reforms they deem most promising. The evidence for some potential strategies, however, has likely been more convincing than the evidence for others. The following list of proposed strategies is, therefore, one interpretation of the implications of the evidence presented. Multiparty system advocates should, at a minimum, pursue the following strategies for reform:

First, it is best to seek policies at the local and state level that are in the interest of the major party in power. Any jurisdiction with a sizable third party that is influencing the outcome of elections is a potential target for electoral reform. If the largest third party primarily hurts the major party in control of the local law-making body, activists should work for Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). If the Greens are threatening to cost the dominant Democrats several city council seats, for instance, the Democrats have a strong interest in ensuring that Green voters can voice their second preference for Democratic candidates. They may also have an incentive to allow fusion with the hope that they could convince the Greens to lend their ballot line to the Democrats. If the largest third party primarily helps the major party in power by taking votes away from their largest

competitor, activists should pursue other reforms that would help the minor party. If the Republicans are in power because the Greens have cost Democrats several seats, for instance, it is in the interest of the Republican leaders to remove the barriers to Green success. In these situations, activists should pursue ballot access reform, public financing for ballot-qualified candidates, and third-party debate inclusion.

Second, activists need to convince more opinion leaders in the interest group community to support electoral reform. A group of academics, interest group leaders, and former politicians that support multiparty democracy should issue a report recommending electoral reform and distribute it to interest groups and legislators nationwide. There are several commissions already investigating electoral reform for state governments and interest groups. Any research committee considering electoral reform of any kind should be targeted with a specific proposal to include reforms such as IRV, fusion, same day voter registration, public financing, Electoral College reform, ballot access reform, and proportional representation in their recommendations. Public interest groups such as the League of Women Voters should be lobbied along with religious groups, campaign finance reform advocates, and ethnic organizations. Columnists, editorial boards, and radio commentators could also be informed via a media outreach campaign by several interest groups.

Third, ethnically based third parties should be created to pursue voting rights cases. The primary area of court precedent for electoral reforms is in cases reviewing minority voting rights. Redistricting after the 2000 census will set the stage for a new round of voting rights cases over race-based gerrymandering. Proportional representation and ballot access reform could be proposed as remedies to voting rights cases either in

court or in public discussion but they will be more effective if minority political parties have been created in the region. Particularly in congressional or state legislative districts that Republicans control, local black-led parties could produce a large protest vote with the explicit purpose of pursuing representation through the courts. Even if the courts were not willing to enact electoral reform, the presence of proportional representation as a proposed remedy would increase the salience of the issue in both the media and ethnic social movements. The strategy would be particularly helpful in states such as Illinois, Florida, Michigan, and California that offer an initiative process in addition to a history of redistricting challenges. The initiative process might be used to propose multimember districts for congressional representatives in response to a Court-ordered redistricting.

Fourth, activists should work at the state level to build third parties when opportunities present themselves and be sure that independents enact electoral reform when elected. Instead of attempting to build a national third party in a presidential election, activists should work to develop regional third parties. Gubernatorial campaigns in off-year elections have been the most successful. Activists should work to convince current state officeholders or prominent officials to build third parties. If several legislators in a particular state could be convinced to form a new party and run candidates for statewide office, they could build a foundation for congressional representation. Once in office at the state level, independents and third parties must make electoral reform an important part of their agenda. Candidates can create an ideology of reform to gain support or campaign on other issues; either way, implementing institutional reforms that would ensure the longevity of the new party should be a legislative priority.

Fifth, activists must convince the foundation community that electoral reform deserves their support. There is a significant pool of resources available for legal challenges, interest group organizing, initiatives, and legislative lobbying available in grant-making accounts dedicated to the generic idea of improving American democracy. The financiers have already been convinced to support public financing and those efforts should be supported. Obtaining money to challenge ballot access laws through the Courts, legislatures, and the initiative process should be a priority. Ballot access laws should be challenged by interest groups as part of a long-term strategy rather than by candidates for the short-term needs of a campaign. Financial support is also required for projects to enact IRV at the local and state level. If activists focus on the most promising targets and propose workable strategies by viable interest groups, they are likely to gain support. Several foundation leaders who may have an interest in building multiparty democracy, such as George Soros, have the money and influence to pursue a major campaign if convinced that there is a high likelihood of success.

Sixth, multiparty system activists should work toward an eventual California statewide initiative to implement IRV. A California initiative can put an issue on the national political agenda and lead to parallel reforms throughout the country. If activists are able to pass the Alaska IRV initiative, they may convince donors and interest group leaders that a California initiative is possible. From within California, activists will have to build support for IRV at the local level. If IRV was implemented in many local jurisdictions, it could provide successful examples for a statewide campaign. Activists must also pursue voting equipment modernization as soon as possible, using a broader coalition of interests and legislators, so that an eventual IRV initiative would not require

a costly upgrade of the voting system. Building grassroots organizations is important, but efforts to convince key interest groups, legislators, and the media may be more important in California. If California did pass IRV for statewide offices and presidential elector selection, it would allow several third parties to use the state as their base of support from which to build.

Seventh, proportional representation should be advanced via an argument for state control over voting systems. Activists have been attempting to overturn a 1967 law that outlawed the use of multi-member districts for congressional elections. This approach is the most likely route to proportional representation in the long term but probably will not be enacted without a state-level campaign. In order to gain support from Republicans and additional interest groups, it might be possible to combine the States' Choice of Voting Systems Act with a bill to allow states to enact term limits. The arguments made in *U.S. Term Limits v. Thornton*, though distinct legally, are roughly consistent: states should regulate the election of U.S. representatives. Because there is even less constitutional basis for the abolition of multi-member districts, the 1967 law might be overruled if a state actually ever implemented proportional representation. The argument for the legislative proposal would certainly be stronger if a state were to ask to switch to multi-member districts, either as a remedy in a voting rights case or as an alteration to match state-level elections. Enacting proportional representation in any state, even for only the state legislature, might therefore be the best precursor to national proposals for electoral reform. A switch back to cumulative voting in Illinois probably represents the most plausible initial reform.

Eighth, activists should use the aftermath of the 2000 election to build an electoral reform movement. The opportunity to move away from punch-card voting systems has never been greater. Moves toward voting equipment modernization all over America will make alternative voting systems more plausible and could also open the political debate to electoral reform. The Florida fiasco spurred electoral reform activity of all kinds by many different groups. By coordinating current efforts and bringing together likeminded reformers at conventions, protests, and conferences, activists could better exploit the potential organizing power of the 2000 election. Using the Internet and the organizational networks of independent groups, the electoral reform movement could consciously spread its ideas virally, reaching out to key people via communication trees. The movement could also create links to the anti-globalization movement that organized the convention protests and the civil rights protest movement that was angered by *Bush v. Gore*.

Ninth, prospective independent presidential candidates should be advised to create long-term strategies for third-party viability. Independent presidential candidates with notoriety or unlimited finances can play a viable role in bringing about a multiparty system, particularly if campaigns are pursued in concert with electoral reform and state-level party-building efforts. Experienced candidates who might break away from one of the major parties, such as John McCain, could draw a high level of initial support from the electorate. If a candidacy is pursued without careful planning, however, it could be another in the long series of one-time presidential campaigns with no permanent results. If prospective candidates, or those who wish to draft them, prepare to build a major third party, they could have better results. Prospective candidates need to connect with current

state third parties or other legislators willing to switch parties, develop an infrastructure for fundraising and ballot access, and study the mistakes made by independents of the past. If a campaign by a charismatic leader was forged under the premise that it was part of a long-term strategy for building a third major party with links to current elected officials, it could gain support.

Finally, activists should build a varied movement for electoral reform rather than a new third party. To build a multiparty system, members of current third parties and their sympathizers will have to come to the realization that expanding a current third-party organization or starting over is unlikely to yield positive results given the enormous institutional constraints. An electoral reform movement should include everyone willing to participate, including people from all ideological perspectives. There may be room for coalitions among third parties, but the electoral reform movement will need to include members of the major parties and independents as well. It should not, therefore, attempt to enact reform through a giant umbrella party or by organizing the left or the right. Instead, the movement must be organized as a loose group of activists and interest groups working for the same changes. In the model of the Progressive movement, they might eventually combine to support a particular candidate or party. In order to begin the reform process, however, they must act as a coordinated movement rather than a party.