Rules for Resistors: A Comparative Analysis of the Working Families Party and Tea Party

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Abstract

This paper will examine how third party efforts can gain influence in politics to make American democracy more representative. It will answer the question: how can third party efforts build political power at the federal, state, and local level? Data was collected through interviews with current staff of the Working Families Party and former staff of a Tea Party organization, FreedomWorks. The two organizations share many striking similarities despite their political differences. These similarities include: cultivating organizational and individual membership, budgets in the tens of millions of dollars, organizing around issue and electoral campaigns, focusing on economic issues, training members, and the goal of pushing the mainstream parties they operate within to represent the values they claim to represent by electing their own candidates. The analysis found that these two groups both represent a renewal in making government accountable to the people through active democratic participation and that they utilize populist resentment of the two mainstream political parties. It is recommended that third party efforts seek to reform policies that create obstacles for their participation, while mostly working within and around the existing two party system. It is also recommended that third party efforts take active steps to maintain their political independence, continue to utilize public opinion in their favor, cultivate individual grassroots members and create leadership structures around them, and seek new funding sources.

Introduction

This paper will examine how third party efforts can gain influence in politics to make American democracy more representative. It will answer the question: how can third parties build political power at the federal, state, and local level? While the Presidency is the most coveted public office in this country, it will not be the focus of this paper because of the insurmountable obstacles that third parties face in presidential elections. An explanation and history of the two-party system of the US, as well as historical and contemporary third party efforts will be examined. The primary research consists of a comparative analysis of a Tea Party organization, FreedomWorks, and the Working Families Party. These two groups were chosen because of their respective roles, on both sides of the political spectrum, of effectively pushing a third-party agenda while finding ways around the challenges that third parties typically face. The data yielded an analysis of effective strategies for the development of a third party and recommendations on how third party efforts can successfully create change.

While the 2016 Presidential election was momentous and historic for many reasons, the insurgent anti-establishment campaigns of both Senator Bernie Sanders and President Donald Trump illustrated the widely felt dissatisfaction Americans have with the political status quo. Senator Sanders (I- VT) ran for the first time as a Democrat, Donald Trump ran with no prior experience in public office, both ran campaigns based on populism. These campaigns revealed the crisis of legitimacy of the establishment political system. While these issues surfaced this election, the problems are not new. Public resentment towards the Republican Party, Democratic Party, and the two-party system in general has been growing for decades (Black & Black, 1994,

p. 154). Despite the promise of the two-party system to represent wide and varied segments of the American electorate, it fails to represent many Americans across the political spectrum.

Background

Historically third parties in the United States have played the role of representing interests outside of the two parties with influence applying outside pressure to the mainstream political parties. While the two-party system results in mainstream parties that are centrist in order to draw the most voters, third parties have more freedom to embrace extreme positions and to advocate issues not currently on the agenda on the two parties (Hazlett 1987, 3). A third party, like any political party, has leaders, members, and supporters, considers itself a party, has distinct and articulated policies, pushes for those policies through political and electoral means, and "either never attains or is unable to sustain the primary or secondary share of loyalties of people making up the national electorate" (Gillespie 2012, 42). Sometimes third parties come and go without much impact, but many rights and policies Americans now take for granted, such as the abolition of slavery, social security, and the 8-hour work day originated in the platforms of third parties. In fact, the Republican Party even began as a third party in response to the two existing mainstream parties' positions on slavery.

Defining Duopoly and its Protectors

The American political system is a two-party system, or a duopoly. A system of duopoly is one in which the political system is overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, contained within two political parties (Gillespie 2012, 1). As David Gillespie put it, our duopoly is "undergirded by discriminatory systemic measures designed to burden, disadvantage, or entirely shut out challenges to the major parties' lock on electoral politics" (2012, 2). The two party system has

remained dominant for so long because of historic electoral structures, and has ensured its continued power through a number of electoral policies. These policies and structures include the single-member district plurality system, the "spoiler effect" on voting behavior, fundraising, and media coverage, as well as gerrymandering, ballot access laws, sore loser laws, anti-fusion policies, and public financing laws (Bouricius 2016; Martin 2016; Amato 2016; Gillespie 2012; Ackerman 2016; Iftekhar Ahmed 2016; Argersinger 1980).

Perhaps the largest structure that ensures the existing power of the Democrats and Republicans is the single-member district plurality system. This system is also known as the "winner-take-all" or "first past the post" system in which elections are won by the candidate who receives the most votes, even if it is not a majority (Bouricius 2016, 63). Most federal and state election systems use this for their legislatures, where candidates run in a geographically specified area-- a district-- and only the candidate who receives the most votes wins the seat (63). This system differs from other Western democracies who have proportional representation systems, meaning political parties earn seats in the legislature based on the number of votes cast for them, not based on their ability to win the most votes (Martin 2016, 2).

The immediate result of a single-member district system is the victory of a candidate from a party whom the majority of voters did not necessarily vote for, thus decreasing the representativeness of the government. The second result is a discouragement of voting for third-party candidates because it takes votes away from the major party candidate that most aligns with their views, sometimes resulting in the election of the least liked candidate. This result, known as the "spoiler effect" is the most pervasive idea preventing third party candidates from garnering more votes (Amato 2016). This idea often convinces people to not vote third-party,

even if that candidate and/or party is preferred because of the perception that that candidate will lose. Instead, they vote for the electable mainstream party candidate who most closely aligns with their views (Gillespie 2012, 21). Because of this phenomenon, the perception that third party candidates are doomed to lose becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The self-fulfilling prophecy that third party candidates are destined to lose can be found in another aspect of U.S. electoral politics. Much of the competitiveness of races is based on the amount of money raised by candidates, which has grown enormously over time. Donors will often only donate to a campaign they believe has a legitimate chance of winning (Iftekhar Ahmed 2016, 154). Thus, candidates that are perceived to not be serious contenders cannot raise the money necessary to run a winning campaign. Additionally, there are many fundraising structures of mainstream parties (such as national and state party organizations and political action committees) built into the campaigns of those candidates that provide them with funding that outside candidates do not have access to (Willon 2016). The self-fulfilling prophecy continues in media coverage, where third party candidates are not covered because they are perceived as doomed to lose, so news outlets deem them irrelevant and unworthy of covering (Gillespie 2012, 20). Thus, third party candidates that are already at a disadvantage because of their marginal party status in terms of name recognition have a hard time catching up using the media.

In addition to obstacles that emerge from the fundamental structure of U.S. elections, there are many policy hurdles that third parties and their candidates must overcome. Gerrymandering, the process by which election districts are drawn by those in power to make them easier to win, is perhaps the strongest force (Gillespie 2012, 23). While the Democrats or

Republicans in power of their state's government use it to benefit their own party, it is in the interest of both main parties to make districts less competitive to disadvantage third party candidacies. Additionally, ballot access laws, while different in each state, act overwhelming to prevent minor parties from gaining access (Ackerman 2016). These laws originated in the 1880s-- when states began to take it upon themselves to provide and print ballots, they also created regulations of how and who could get on them (Gillespie 2012, 26). Gradually, over time, these regulations became harder and harder to meet to protect the dominance of the two parties, usually by raising the number of petition signatures required, with strict inspections of such signatures (27). As a result, many third parties candidates are discouraged by the impossibility of the task at hand, while others who do pursue ballot access spend time and money meeting those requirements that their competitors spend on actually campaigning (28).

Another policy preventing third party candidates is "sore loser" laws. These policies, present in 46 states in some form, prevent candidates who lost a primary election earlier in the year from running as a third party candidate in the general election (Gillespie 2012, 28). There are also anti-fusion policies that prohibit candidates from running on more than one party line (29). This practice was common in the late 19th and early 20th century, but now only exists in eight states (New York, Connecticut, Vermont, Delaware, South Carolina, Mississippi, Idaho, Oregon) (Argersinger 1980, 288; Gillespie 2012, 28). By prohibiting fusion voting, states discourage the potential for minor and major parties to cross-endorse candidates, which would result in a healthier democracy and a larger voice for third parties. Public financing of elections also act to disadvantage minor party candidates. The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), passed in 1971, provides public financing for candidates in lieu of private donations as a ratio of

their share of votes to those of the major party candidates of the previous election, if they received at least 5% of the vote (Gillespie 2012, 33). As a result, those candidates end up with substantially less public money to spend on their campaign than their major party counterparts. At least 12 other states have public financing of elections laws on some scale that similarly disadvantage third party candidates (34).

A Brief History of the Two Parties

While political parties are mentioned nowhere in the Constitution and the nation's first President strongly warned against them, they are nonetheless present and have been prevailing since immediately after George Washington declined to run for a third term. The first two political parties to exist in the United States were the Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties (Gillespie 2012, 39). The Federalists were founded by Alexander Hamilton as a proponent of a strong federal government, while the Democratic-Republicans were founded by Thomas Jefferson opposing that idea. The Federalist Party ran its last Presidential candidate in 1816, and ceased to exist by 1820.

After the single-party Presidential election of 1820, the Democratic-Republicans splintered into two different parties, the National Republicans and the Democrats, however both parties were modeled in liberal Jeffersonian democracy. In 1832, one of the parties of Jeffersonian democracy transformed into the party of Andrew Jackson, and in 1833, the Whig party formed in response to the Jacksonian take over of the Democrats (Reichley 1992, 84). This party system remained for about 20 years until 1854 when the Republican Party replaced the Whigs, mostly in response to their view of slavery (Maisel 2007, 35). At that time, the Republican and Democratic party system that we have now was born.

While the two major parties have remained dominant for over 150 years, they have not been stagnant. In this time, there have been three major realignments of the parties. During realignment, political parties "define or redefine themselves ideologically, programmatically, or even geographically, and both the size and demographic makeup of their electoral coalitions are recast, sometimes radically" (Gillespie 2012, 41). The first realignment was in 1896, when William Jennings Bryan, the Presidential candidate for the Democrats, co-opted much of the Populist Party (to be discussed later) platform and advocated against big business, and on behalf of rural farmers (Maisel 2007, 36). While he lost the election, the result was a Republican Party that represented cities, workers, and industrialists, while the Democrats dominated the Southern and border states (37).

The next realignment was in 1929, as a result of the two parties' response to the Great Depression (37). The parties essentially switched and then transformed based on the elected officials' preferred response to the Depression. Democrats remained dominant in the South because of their role in the Civil War, but also became the party of workers, farmers, minorities, and the poor, while the Republicans represented the rich and big businesses (38). This alignment remained stable for about 30 years, but between 1948 and 1964, the Republicans gradually gained control of the South as their party loyalties were challenged by Republican policies and stances that they aligned with more than their cultural allegiance (38). The orientation of the Democratic and Republican parties has remained this way for the past half a century.

A Brief History of Third Parties

The Liberty Party was formed in 1840 dedicated to the abolition of slavery, dissatisfied with the power that slaveholding interests had on both parties (Bibby & Maisel 2002, 25). It is an

example of a "new party," a party that forms "from those concerned with political issues other than the traditional economic issues that have dominated politics" (116). Despite its moderate platform of the elimination of slavery in federally administered areas, an end to the interstate slave trade, and a modest but respectable showing in certain Northeastern state elections, the party never received more than 1% of the vote and disappeared by 1848 (26). Despite its short tenure, the Liberty Party was important for a number of reasons. It was the first minor political party to act as the conscience of the political system when the two major parties preferred to ignore the issue, and was also the first political party to bring the idea of abolition to politics (Richardson 2004, 109). Additionally, it resulted in the creation of the Free Soil Party after its demise in 1848.

The Free Soil Party was founded by previous leaders of the Liberty Party with an even more moderate stance on slavery to gain a broader base of support (Bibby & Maisel 2002, 26). It supported ending the expansion of slavery in new territories, in addition to other issues such as cheap postage and a homestead act for settlers. In doing so, it expanded to include the interests of free white labor, and attracted former Democratic President Martin Van Buren as their Presidential candidate in the 1848 election where he received 10% of the vote. In the 1850s, they elected members to both the House and the Senate, and eventually made an alliance with anti-slavery Democrats, which strengthened them in Washington but decreased their independent power. When the Whigs fell to the Republicans in 1854 because of their pro-slavery stance (likely due to the growing prominence of the Free Soil Party), the new Republican Party absorbed what remained of the Free Soilers (Richardson 2004, 114). In leading to the creation of the Republican Party, which would nominate and then elect Abraham Lincoln to the presidency

who went on to play a pivotal role in ending slavery, the Free Soil Party's impact on history is clear.

The Populist Party (also known as the People's Party), an agrarian reform party, was founded in the 1890s, sparked by deteriorating conditions on farms in the South and West, radicalized farmers proposed nationalizing the railroads, a progressive income tax, an eight-hour work day and the direct election of senators (Bibby & Maisel 2002, 31). Their presidential candidate received almost 9% of the vote and carried five states in 1892 and elected six senators and seven representatives in 1894. In 1896, as discussed earlier, William Jennings Bryan ran as a Democrat on many of the Populists policies. The Populist Party cross-endorsed him, and integrated themselves into the Democratic Party. However, their appeal was limited to the South, the Midwest and certain Western states, and after the realignment of that election, the Democratic Party was only able to elect one president between 1896 and 1928 (and only because of a split vote at that) (32). The Populist Party resulted in the realignment of the political parties in 1896 and set a precedent of the national electoral unpopularity of populist policies.

In the early 20th century, the Socialist Party emerged on the political scene. It is an example of a doctrinaire/doctrinal party, as they were known for "their strict adherence to certain philosophies or policy positions on which they will not compromise regardless of electoral consequences" (Bibby & Maisel 2002, 115). While the Party existed for many decades, the early 1910s were its prime, as "[t]wenty Socialists sat in the legislatures of New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and California. Socialists held 79 mayoralties and 1,200 local offices in 340 cities in 1912. In the fourth of five presidential campaigns he waged, [Eugene] Debs took 6 percent of the vote that year" (Gillespie 2012, 175). However, their

growing popularity came to a halt with World War I due to their anti-war stance, member base of immigrants from nations considered enemies, and of course, the Red Scare (a period of the Cold War in which fear of Communists and their infiltration of the US government was high). However, they continued to run candidates and maintained power in some states and localities for many decades. Finally, when Franklin Roosevelt was elected in 1932, many of their policy platforms, such as "social security, public works programs, union rights and collective bargaining, public housing, and public ownership of electric power" were enacted (179). In 1934, internal divides split the party beyond repair and they ceased being the force they once were.

In 1948, the Democratic Party became divided regionally because of President Truman's civil rights program (Bibby & Maisel 2002, 35). Southern Democrats, led by South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond, created the State's Rights, or Dixiecrat Party for only that year's election. This is an example of a splinter party, in which the party "break[s] from one of the major parties and take[s] some of that party's natural constituency with them" (117). The party only ran candidates for President and Vice President, and carried the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina, shattering the perception of the Democratic Party's stronghold on the South (35). It was illustrative of the divide between Northern and Southern Democrats that would come to realign the parties over the next 20 years. The American Independence Party, led by Democratic Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1968, was another splinter party that ran a Presidential candidate, signaling regional divides in the Democratic Party. He captured almost 14% of the vote and carried five states (37). While the party faltered after the 1968 election, it helped shift the South further into the Republican Party.

Contemporary Third Parties

The Vermont Progressive Party is a state-wide party that was founded in 1981 and officially obtained ballot status in 1999 (Bouricius 2016, 75). It has mostly found success in Burlington, the largest city in Vermont, with the Party holding the mayoralty at multiple times and almost 40 city council seats over the past three decades (62). They have also had success at the state level, with 14 members elected to the State House between 1991 and 2012 and three to the State Senate, in addition to election victories at various local and municipal levels throughout the state. The Party's growing power made it such that the Democratic Party feared running a spoiler candidate, so Burlington passed instant runoff voting for mayoral elections in Vermont (75). Instant runoff voting (IRV) is a form of voting that has voters rank their preferred candidates, so that "[i]f no candidate gets an initial majority, the candidates with the fewest votes are eliminated sequentially until just two remain. The candidate who is elected is which ever finalist is ranked higher by a majority of voters who have indicated a preference" (76). This policy allows elections to result in an outcome that more accurately represents the constituency by allowing voters to vote by preference instead of strategically.

Perhaps the greatest victory of the Vermont Progressives is Bernie Sanders who, while in Vermont elections, always ran as an independent, served as the de-facto leader of the party. He was elected as Mayor of Burlington, then Governor of Vermont, then congressman, and now U.S. Senator. The Vermont Progressives have maintained a small but present progressive force in state and local politics in Vermont for over 30 years, filling a void in the electorate of voters who are to the left of the Democratic Party.

The Green Party is also a progressive third party that is focused on environmental issues and was founded in the 1990s (Iftekhar Ahmed 2016, 144). They are perhaps best known for their Presidential candidates, and most famously for their 2000 campaign in which many blamed their candidate, Ralph Nader, for causing Democrat Al Gore to lose the state of Florida and thus the entire election (145). Their Presidential candidate in 2016, Jill Stein, has also carried some blame for Hillary Clinton's loss in the Electoral College (Jaffe 2016). However, they are active at the state and local level as well, sometimes with stunning victories such as electing Gayle McLaughlin as Mayor of Richmond, California and electing members to the city council in Portland, Maine (Feinstein 2016, 27; Quinlan 2016, 31). The Green Party is a doctrinal party, meaning they see success not just in electing people to office, but in using elections to shift the conversation of public policy and attract people to their platform (Iftekhar Ahmed 2016, 149). As a doctrinal party, they do not believe in fusion voting.

The Working Families Party (WFP) is another progressive third party, but plays a distinctly different role than other third parties in states politics since its founding in 1998 (Cantor 2016, 204). The WFP is a state-wide party that currently operates in 10 states (NY, CT, RI, OR, NJ, PA, MD, WI, NV, NM, IL) and Washington D.C., and runs candidates mostly at the state, municipal, and local level. Unlike the Vermont Progressives and the Green Party, the WFP uses fusion voting with Democratic candidates, and offers themselves partially as an alternative to the Democrats, but mostly as a political force pulling them to the left. It has successfully used its electoral coalition to win increases in the minimum wage and paid family and sick leave (Ball 2016). They endorsed Bernie Sanders in the Democratic presidential primary, and later Hillary

Clinton in the general election. They work closely with, and are funded by, labor and community groups. They will be featured as a case study in this paper.

The Libertarian Party was formed in 1971 and is the third largest political party in the United States. The Libertarians act much like the Green Party, but on the opposite end of the political spectrum (Winter 2001). It is also a doctrinal party, adhering strictly to the ideology of libertarianism. The Libertarian Party elected its first state representative in 1978 in Alaska (Harkinson 2008). Currently, there are 144 Libertarians in elected office in 34 states including three state legislators in Nevada, Utah and Nebraska (Libertarian Party 2016). Arguably, the Tea Party has had more influence on creating libertarian change than the Libertarians themselves.

The Tea Party, while not officially a political party, will also be a case study for its third-party-like impact on the Republican Party in the last seven years. The Tea Party acts similarly to the Working Families Party, (as somewhere in between the Green Party and the Democratic Party), acting somewhere in between the Libertarian Party and the Republican Party, as a conservative libertarian faction of the Republican party. They have often challenged incumbent Republicans in primaries, either winning outright or pushing the establishment candidate to the right (Fisher 2015). They were very successful during the 2010 midterm elections, and acted as an obstructionist force in the House of Representatives during the Obama administration. While their influence has somewhat declined since then, their short-lived phenomena remains highly instructive to many frustrated with the two-party electoral system.

While the Tea Party movement itself is a nebulous network of unofficial local groups and well-established multi-million dollar political organizations, this paper will focus on FreedomWorks (Connolly 2010). FreedomWorks is a right-wing advocacy organization based in

Washington, D.C and founded in 2004. It was formerly Americans for a Sound Economy, formed

in 1983 by the Koch brothers, before the organization broke up into FreedomWorks and

Americans for Prosperity (Skocpol & Williamson 2012, 10). It was led by former House

Majority Leader (1995-2003) Dick Armey from 2004 until 2012 after he dramatically attempted

and failed a coup to takeover the organization (Gardner 2012). FreedomWorks facilitated protests

when the Tea Party first emerged in 2009 and has supported Tea Party candidates and local

activism (Zernike 2010). They have been widely credited with aiding the Tea Party movement

more than any other organization (Good 2009).

Literature Review

Keys for Successful Third Party Candidates

While there are many obstacles in the way of success for third parties and their

candidates, there are also many examples of third party victories. The literature shows that the

keys for successful third party candidates are often very similar to those for successful

candidacies of mainstream parties. "How a Socialist Won" by Ramy Khalil details the stunning

victory of Socialist Kshama Sawant to the Seattle City Council and attributes her win to a well-

run campaign that connected the populist atmosphere with everyday people who supported it.

Her campaign featured the hallmarks of a well-run campaign, including mass fundraising,

outreach, a robust volunteer workforce, and a supporting organization (from the Socialist

Alternative). From the Occupy Wall Street and Fight for 15 movements, there was a growing

energy and anger around the current political establishment that refused to adequately address

income inequality. Sawant's campaign was able to transform that energy into electoral politics.

They called this the "transitional method: we connect with the consciousness of everyday people,

meet them where they are, and then point a way forward to help social justice movements win victory" (2016, 19). In using this method, they were able to connect with a wide range of people, from other socialists to traditional Democrats who resonated with issues of economic equality and wanted to support a candidate that was so different from the standard establishment Democrats.

The literature also shows that the political context in which a third party operates is equally, if not more important to their chances of success (Bouricius 2016; Quinlan 2016). What Ramy Khalil does not mention is that the political landscape of Seattle was already one of the most progressive cities in the country and had a Democratic hegemony over the city's politics. Many other states and cities with successful histories of alternative and third-party candidates share this characteristic of hegemonic partisanship. As is explored in "The Rise of the Portland Greens" by Patrick Quinlan and "Lessons of the Vermont Progressive Party" by Terry Bouricius, the pre-existing politics of a state or city is a defining factor for third parties. In Portland, Maine and Burlington, Vermont (and eventually to some degree other parts of the states), the political landscape at the time of their successes was similar. Both places were dominated by progressive ideals and the Democratic Party, which were vital for two reasons. One is that there was no fear of the "spoiler effect" and two, the Democratic candidates were overly confident. They were also subpar candidates, making them easy targets to be challenged. Both places had less policy restrictions around ballot access and/or public financing than most places, meaning there were less institutional barriers. Their districts were also quite small, making it easy to reach out to voters, not a lot of money was needed to run a good campaign, and media coverage was given to the campaigns.

The studies show that because of the marginal status of third parties and their candidates, a defining factor in their victories is the sheer amount of effort put into their campaigns and the constant door-knocking that was done. A large volunteer team is needed to accomplish this and people who have not traditionally been involved in politics need to be brought into the fold by exciting candidates that speak to their issues (Bouricius 2016; Khalil 2016). However, the literature also shows that no matter how much time and effort is put into a campaign, the strongest predictor of campaign outcomes in statewide third-party candidacies is the degree of connection to the community (Martin 2016). Jonathan Martin in "Community Connections," lists two indicators: social ties (long-time residency, community engagement with the general public) and social similarity (living in an area with a large share of the total district, similar identities). As a result, in order for third parties to win elections, they must constantly be recruiting and training people with community connections to run for office. Additionally, third parties must be aware of these factors so that they do not waste time running campaigns that are doomed. He notes that some third parties know when they will lose a campaign but still run it for the sake of education, shifting public discourse, recruiting new members, forming new local chapters, and building base for future, stronger campaigns.

Relationships to the Political Establishment

The literature on the relationship between third parties and the political establishment is divided along views of effective ways to make change. There is a spectrum of views in the literature, from completely independent doctrinal parties, to third parties that act more like factions of one of the mainstream parties (Bouricius 2016; Cantor 2016). Fusion voting is one of the tensions in this literature because it directly highlights whether or not third parties believe in

diluting their electoral independence in order to gain political power through alliances with other parties.

Terry Bouricius, and many others, do not believe in fusion voting because they fear hostile takeovers by one of the mainstream parties and a diluting of party distinctiveness and independence (2016, 77). Some of the literature has said that the Working Families Party endorsement of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2014 is indicative of this dynamic (Harrison 2016). However, the truth of that depends on what the goals of the third party are. Daniel Cantor elaborates on this in "A New Progressive Party," in describing how the Working Families Party is "constantly trying to to walk that tightrope between independence and relevance, finding our way to the left wing of the possible" (2016, 205). For the WFP, the party is a vehicle to build power and push the Democratic Party to the left in order to win real, tangible policy victories for working families. To achieve this end, they are willing to make compromises, like endorsing Governor Cuomo for re-election.

Other third parties are more concerned with maintaining ideological purity and political independence than building political power, which is why they are opposed to fusion voting. This adherence to political and ideological purity is illustrated in literature about the Green Party. Sayeed Iftekhar Ahmed explains in "The U.S. Greens in Presidential Elections" that the Green Party is mainly focused on establishing a "counter hegemony within an established hegemony" and not winning electoral campaigns (2016, 156). Due to their position as a doctrinal party, they use elections as an opportunity to promote their policies and programs. Theresa Amato argues in "Beyond the Spoiler Myth" that Ralph Nader's 2000 presidential campaign, while losing, had

many important victories. The victories she lists are educational, organizational, and cultural--not concrete policy changes.

The literature is also divided on whether or not leftist policies can ever make their way into the Democratic Party. Thomas Harrison in "Breaking Through By Breaking Free" makes the argument that the populist energy that has been growing cannot be contained within the Democratic Party and only an independent political effort can fully take it on. He says that the Democrats are just as committed to capitalism as Republicans, and despite dreaming of a "Tea Party of the left," the Democratic Party is fundamentally less accessible to the left than the Republicans were to the Tea Party because of that. He believes that the Democrats can be "forced to make such concessions to their popular constituencies, but only under….the pressure of mass upheaval…. or the palpable threat of a working-class breakaway represented by a third party" (2016, 217). He goes on to argue for an independent political force in and of itself to achieve that. A third party can be used as a way to create leverage over the mainstream parties to win policy commitments, stronger platforms, and better leadership-- however he and others view that strategy as failing the working class. Mark Dudzic and Adolph Reed agree with Harrison in "No Easy Solutions," in arguing that a "new politics must start from the understanding that the Democrats are ultimately unreformable and that a party of our own remains the great unresolved challenge of the US working class" (2016). They use the Democrats' connectedness to capitalism to prove their point, in addition to other historical working-class political movements that were squashed by having their issues co-opted by a mainstream party.

While much of the literature on third parties is about efforts on either the left or the right, Gordon and Benjamin Black argue in *The Politics of American Discontent* that an outsider

centrist third party should arise to address reform issues that the two establishment parties are unwilling to do on their own (1994). They see this as the only effective means of getting reform issues solved because citizens' lobbying and organizing are too narrowly focused to achieve their goals. Additionally, they believe that a "political party achieves its goals by the accumulation of enough political power to force the institution to make the changes desired. A party does not depend on the acquiescence of those in power because it is an equal or at least a seriously competitive power, not a supplicant like the petitioner" (1994, 170). This centrist third party would be able to garner a competitive amount of power by challenging incumbents in the many one-party districts all over the country, and would bring into the fold people who have previously been turned off by electoral politics because of the mainstream parties. It would challenge mainstream incumbents using the centrist political party as a vehicle to organize alienated voters in numbers larger enough to build serious political power.

Relationships to the Organizational Establishment

Aside from the party establishment, another tension for third party efforts is the relationship to organizational establishments. The literature considers leftist third parties' relationships to the labor movement. While many left third party efforts see labor and its scale and resources as indispensable to their efforts, others see their cumbersome bureaucracy, weakened state, and reactionary tendencies as a setback to third party efforts. The Working Families Party has a long-standing relationship with labor and get a considerable amount of their funding from them. Other third party efforts have struggled with the labor establishment because of their entrenched ties with the Democratic Party. Rarely, labor has broken away from the

Democratic Party and become independent politically as seen in Loraine County, Ohio (Halle 2016).

Thomas Harrison, as well as Mark Dudzic and Katherine Isaac in "Labor Party Time? Not Yet" point to the failure of the attempted Labor Party in the 1990's as an example of how union bureaucracy is an obstacle, not as asset to third parties (2016). John Halle agrees in "Don't Wait for Labor" in saying that "union intransigence does not have a pragmatic basis. It does not follow either logically or empirically that crisis conditions should necessarily mandate the closing down or scaling back of strategic visions. In many instances, crises demand that new ideas, including radical ones, be seriously considered." (2016, 192). He claims that the crisis of our current political situation necessitates a departure from the Democratic Party because it is clear that labor's commitment to them has not been reciprocated in a way that claims absolute loyalty. The literature makes clear that those on the left should pressure labor to distance themselves from the current version of the Democratic Party, but the literatures also shows that as things stand now, third parties generally must make-do without the support of labor unions. Third parties that do work with labor probably owe some of their success (relative to other third parties) to that relationship.

Steve Ackerman, in "A Blueprint for a New Party," argues for the involvement of labor in some form of independent political effort rooted in the working class because of their "scale, experience, resources, and connections with millions of workers needed to mount a permanent, nationwide electoral project" (2016). However, he sidesteps the problems that the WFP deals with (of acting almost like a faction of the Democratic Party) and the Labor Party dealt with (of not wanting to run candidates because of fear of the spoiler effect without a critical mass of

support) by proposing to forego a ballot line as the central identity of the party. The process of getting ballot access and the political hurdles that third parties must go through are so restrictive and oppressive that they are actually more akin to opposition parties operating in soft-authoritarian governments than other Western-style democracies.

Ackerman proposes an "externally mobilized" party that is "organized by ordinary people, standing outside the system, who come together around a cause and then go about recruiting their own representatives to contest elections, for the purpose of gaining power they don't already have" (2016). This kind of party is in contrast to the internally mobilized parties that currently exist, which are organized by incumbent politicians within the system who use the party to further their own power. The externally mobilized party would be very much within the same vein of Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign, with volunteers coming together around a cause and democratically making decisions about the party through a national political organization with state and local chapters. It will forgo the requirement of a ballot line and would act on a case-by-case basis depending on the state's election laws and the local political context. The new party "would base its legal right to exist not on the repressive ballot laws, but on the fundamental rights of freedom of association." He also explains that they would be able to fundraise using the relaxed campaign finance laws that resulted from the Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. the Federal Election Commission* that would make it possible for them to raise and spend money without a ballot line.

In response to Steve Ackerman's article, Mark Dudzic and Adolph Reed argue in "No Easy Solutions," that from their experience with the Labor Party, while the labor movement is absolutely indispensable to any kind of working-class independent political party, it is in such a

diminished state that the party Ackerman dreams of could not be achieved unless the movement is revitalized. They predict that any kind of truly independent working-class political effort without labor at its core is "doomed to the status quo: marginalization or 'second best' efforts like the WFP. These political challenges must be met. Once that happens, Ackerman's tools, suggestions, and insights may prove highly valuable in developing the techniques to breath life into a 'party of our own.'" (2016). While Ackerman's article makes considerable headway into thinking through what achieving this new party would actually entail, he misses the larger, institutional problem of a labor movement that is essential but too weak to support the effort. Dudzic and Reed agree with Ackerman, but see his analysis as too narrow and perhaps short-sighted. The "external mobilization" of the new party he described is only possible with a labor movement that is strong enough to do that external mobilization.

Do We Even Need a Third Party?: Counterarguments

While most of the literature debates the nuances of third party politics, others argue on behalf of the two-party system. In *Two Parties- Or More?* By John F. Bibby and L. Sandy Maisel, they argue that because of the overwhelming institutional barriers to third parties, the two party-system is not likely to change. They only see two kinds of changes that could possibly occur. The first is that our two-party system remains, but one of the major parties is replaced by another, like in the 1850s. Still they see this as unlikely because the mainstream parties are so concerned with self-preservation and therefore are good at adaptation to remain relevant by adopting the views of those who might support an alternative party.

They recognize another kind of change that could occur, a transition from a two-party system to a multiparty system. However, in order for that to happen it would require removing

aspects of our political system that Americans consider to be too fundamental to our political culture to remove, including separation of powers and single-member geographic representation (Bibby & Maisel 2002). While other necessary things to get rid of to form a multiparty system are less widely valued, like direct presidential primaries, the Electoral College, the Federal Election Campaign Act, and ballot access laws, it is still wildly unlikely. They also see problems arising from a multiparty system that are worse than the problems faced by our current two-party system. These problems include less accountability because voters would vote based on party policy platforms not past performance, worse gridlock because of greater political polarization, and less legitimacy of leadership because of a split electorate and non-majority election victories. Therefore, having a two-party system is for the best because it forces the parties to unite people and issues and not divide in order to represent as many people as possible, resulting in better government.

Methodology

The data collected was used to answer the question: how can third party efforts build political power at the federal, state, and local level? Participants in this study included five staff from the Working Families Party and two former staff from FreedomWorks. All participants in this study were volunteers. A list of participants and their affiliation is in included in appendix 1.1. Informed consent forms were used containing information about the purpose of the study, procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality, the risks and benefits of participation and contact information of the researchers. Participants were emailed the consent form prior to the interview and informed consent was obtained the day of the interview. Participants were interviewed for 25-45 minutes about their roles at their respective organizations, the nature of

their work, achievements and failures and the goals and strategies of their organizations. The participants were then asked if they had any questions. A list of interview questions is included in appendix 1.2.

Findings

Data was collected through interviews with current staff of the Working Families Party and former staff of FreedomWorks. The purpose of the interviews was to develop a comparative analysis of the two organizations in order to answer the question of how third party efforts can build political power at the local, state and federal levels. These organizations were chosen for their efforts and leadership in electing public officials and pushing policies within, but at the margins of, the Democratic and Republican parties. The data from these interviews are organized into themes: structure, organizing, and elections.

Structure

FreedomWorks maintains individual membership with a dramatic increase from about 200,000 members prior to the Tea Party to around 4 million members currently (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). FreedomWorks coordinates and organizes with local Tea Party groups and other conservative groups such as the Senate Conservatives Fund (Ibid). The Working Families Party currently has a limited individual membership structure but they are in the process and expanding and altering it. While they have party registrants and voters/ supporters, they lack a well-established individual membership program outside of their home base of New York (interview with Nelini Stamp, 2016). However, as they work to expand the party to new states and localities using a volunteer-driven model, their membership numbers and model are set to change (Ibid). The WFP has group membership of labor unions and community

organizations who are members of their leadership structure and participate in decision-making at the state and local level (interview with Ari Kamen, 2016).

FreedomWorks had an annual budget of around $40 million as of 2012, an increase from the $6-7 million they started out with (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). They were able to increase their funding so much by making a name for themselves within the Tea Party donor community (Ibid). FreedomWorks is a 501(c)(4), a designation given by the IRS to advocacy groups that can engage in lobbying and political activity and accept unlimited donations from unions and businesses, however donations are not tax exempt, and donors do not have to be disclosed (O'Connor 2013). They also have a foundation and a political action committee (PAC). A PAC can be connected to a 501(c)(4) and is organized to raise and spend money to elect or defeat a candidate ("What is a PAC?"). They are based in Washington, D.C. but are engaged all over the country and in electoral politics at all levels of government.

The Working Families Party has an annual budget of $10 million (interview with Daniel Cantor, 2016). All staff members of the WFP indicated money as one of the biggest challenges in their work. As they work to expand their membership base, they also hope to expand their base of individual donors as they are currently dependent on (and consequently sometimes dictated by) money from foundations and labor unions (Ibid). The WFP is a political party, and also has a 501(c)(4), the Working Families Organization. They are based out of New York City and their activity is heavily concentrated in the Northeast, and on the local and state level.

Organizing

Both groups have their roots in fiscal/economic issues. The FreedomWorks staff lamented that the Tea Party movement strayed away from their core of fiscal conservatism of advocating

for lower taxes and reduced government spending and had strayed into social issues such as immigration and abortion (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). They also regretted the perception of the Tea Party as racist and admitted that while there were a few bad apples, the majority of people were not racist (Ibid). The WFP has been trying to expand beyond just economic justice issues and a white working class base to a multiracial base that pushes racial and social justice issues such as immigrant rights and criminal justice reform as well (interview with Amanda Johnson, 2017). They are also aware of that challenges that the inherent racial and class obstacles running for office presents in their efforts to have candidates that match their base racially and socio-economically (interview with Nelini Stamp, 2016).

FreedomWorks credits their success within the Tea Party movement to becoming involved early on and "providing good customer service to activists" through coaching, teaching, and morale boosting that made them unique among Tea Party groups (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). Nan Swift, a former campaign manager at FreedomWorks at the time of the Tea Party, also emphasized that "to really run a sustainable movement you need to build relationships, and you need time and resources to travel and meet people" (2017). Many of their members got involved in politics for the first time during the Tea Party movement. FreedomWorks provided those members new to politics with trainings to coach them on campaigning, phone banking, talking to the media and voters, and using technology (Ibid). FreedomWorks made sure to always have many different activities for local activists to get involved in to keep them engaged and gaining new skills (Ibid). They also made sure to get involved in local and county level battles that they knew could be won to keep up the morale of

the activists and prevent them from becoming discouraged, especially for those members new to politics (Ibid).

The Working Families Party and FreedomWorks both engage in organizing around elections and issues. Nan Swift said, "as a grassroots organization, we are always in the process of recruiting and activating members on legislative issues and then they are often eager to take action during election time" (2017). The focus of FreedomWorks members tends to initially be on issue campaigns, previously engaging in fights against President Obama's stimulus package, the Affordable Care Act, and cap and trade legislation. They then encouraged their members who participated in those fights during election season to volunteer for political campaigns and they are often eager and excited to do so despite not initially becoming involved for electoral reasons (Ibid).

The WFP focuses primarily on electoral organizing, and is constantly in the process of recruiting and training candidates to build the bench of progressive leadership to run for local office through their candidate pipeline program (interviews with Ari Kamen and Nelini Stamp, 2016). They engage in a lot of coalition-based organizing around issues with labor and community organizations who do grassroots organizing that the WFP supports by exercising their electoral power with elected officials (Ibid, interview with Reuben Hayslett, 2016). For example, Nelini Stamp mentioned calling elected officials that the WFP had endorsed during Occupy Wall Street to make sure that they were supporting the encampment. Their niche within the progressive community is electoral organizing, so while they assist and support issue campaigns around economic justice issues, they often do not initiate or lead them (interview with Nelini Stamp, 2016). They recruit, endorse, and champion candidates who have strong economic

and social justice platforms. If those candidates get elected, they usually end up leading the fight to see that those policies become reality. Some policy victories that staff are proud of include minimum wage increases, paid sick days, and clean energy.

Both groups provide training and resources to activists on the ground who want to get involved but lack the skills or knowledge necessary to do so (interviews with Nan Swift and Amanda Johnson, 2017). The WFP and FreedomWorks use digital organizing to identify such activists and translate online action into offline action (Ibid). While the WFP is of the left and works alongside community organizations that do grassroots organizing, FreedomWorks is a student of the of the left and has studied and adopted the strategies of Saul Alinsky and the Civil Rights Movement (interviews with Brendan Steinhauser and Nan Swift, 2017). Among the lessons they have learned from the left and employed during the Tea Party movement is to think globally but act locally, find battles that can be won to keep up the morale of activists, have lots of different activities for people to plug into, and never go outside the experience of the people that you are organizing (Ibid).

Elections

The Working Families Party and the Tea Party, despite their issues with the establishment political parties, work within them to push them to adhere to the values they claim to represent. Nelini Stamp and Brendan Steinhauser both validated this method by questioning the need to reinvent the wheel. The Working Families Party is officially a third party, however they cross-endorse Democrats in states that allow fusion voting and simply run candidates as Democrats in states that do not (interview with Daniel Cantor, 2016). The Tea Party on the other hand, is not a political party and through a number of organizations such as FreedomWorks, runs and endorses

Republican candidates. In states where the Working Families Party does not have a ballot line, they operate just like the Tea Party-- endorsing candidates, recruiting and training campaign volunteers, fundraising, and establishing the candidate's identity within the brand of the party (Ibid).

They both chose to stay within the general confines of the two-party system because of the insurmountable obstacles that third parties face in this country and an interest in actually winning elections (Ibid, interviews with Brendan Steinhauser and Nan Swift, 2017). FreedomWorks viewed the goal of the Tea Party as a way to take over the GOP, recommit them to fiscal issues, and bring their ideas to the mainstream to such an extent that they become the establishment Republican Party (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). The WFP views their efforts as a way to bring the Democratic Party and its members more to the left, but also to establish an independent progressive political identity within electoral politics (interview with Amanda Johnson, 2017). Both view their efforts as ways to bring government closer to the people.

Their political calculus differs in terms of which races to enter. The WFP prefers to run candidates in open seats and rarely runs candidates challenging incumbents (interview with Daniel Cantor, 2016). The Tea Party however has taken on incumbents, most famously voting out U.S. Senator Bob Bennett of Utah and replacing him with the much more conservative Mike Lee (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). Both groups go through similar vetting processes to determine which candidates to endorse. The WFP and FreedomWorks review the candidate's voting records if they previously held elected office, interview them, find out their level of support from within the local community and community groups, research the district

and its demographics, determine the strength of the incumbent and/or other candidates, and identify the capacity for the candidate to raise money (Ibid, interview with Daniel Cantor, 2016). They use all of these factors taken together, not simply a candidate's politics and willingness to run, to decide endorsements and allocation of resources to races. Both organizations often do not have a hard time recruiting or finding principled people who want to run for office, but finding people who could run and have a good chance of winning is more difficult (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017).

Comparative Analysis

Strategy

The Working Families Party and FreedomWorks have striking similarities despite their position on opposite sides of the political spectrum. They both use electoral methods to push the agenda of their grassroots constituencies. They act as conduits between grassroots social movements that use unofficial political channels and electoral political action that utilize formal political channels. In this way, they both represent a renewal in making government accountable to the people through active democratic participation. Nan Swift mentioned that FreedomWorks' work was largely driven by the saying "government goes to those who show up" (2017). Meanwhile, Nelini Stamp of the WFP said she views their work as a way to "hand electoral politics back to the people" and hopes to "create a model that enables a lot of individuals to be involved and find folks across the country who would be party builders, like old school democratic clubs" (2016). Even though they both represent what could be considered the fringes of American public opinion, their work is truly populist in nature.

The WFP and FreedomWorks have tapped into a commonly held sentiments that government does not represent what the people really want and the mainstream parties have betrayed the values they are meant to uphold. The two groups define themselves not only in opposition to politicians on the other side of the aisle, but also to many of the politicians supposedly on their side. They provide a clear and compelling vision of the future that they hope to deliver through electoral politics-- for FreedomWorks it is liberty through smaller government, lower taxes, and free markets, for the WFP it is social and economic justice through social democracy. The issues they champion, the candidates they endorse, and the people they oppose all attempt to embody this vision.

Elections

Both organizations place a large emphasis on the importance of their members, supporters, and candidates to be associated with and known within their brand and politics that acts as a unifying force within their respective movements. Since they define themselves in opposition to other members of the mainstream party they operate within, this branding is imperative to establishing an independent political identity. As a result, the primary elections in which they run candidates are especially important since they are often up against establishment politicians or mainstream party-backed candidates. Both groups have many examples of how important primaries are to their reputation and power. The Tea Party defeat of Republican Senator Bob Bennett in Utah with a more conservative Republican candidate earned the Tea Party the reputation of a powerful electoral force. The WFP endorsement of centrist New York Governor Andrew Cuomo for re-election instead of progressive anti-corruption lawyer Zephyr Teachout earned them scorn and disappointment from their supporters. On the other hand, their

endorsement of and campaigning for Senator Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic presidential primary was hailed by all staff members interviewed as one of the best decisions they ever made, cementing their reputation as a progressive political force and catalyzing the rapid expansion they are currently undergoing.

Ultimately these two groups are trying to run candidates that can actually win and successfully govern with their politics, so even if a candidate has perfectly aligned politics and values, if they lack the other factors necessary to be competitive then they will not be given an endorsement. For this reason, neither group will run candidates where the odds are stacked against them. They will focus on districts that are competitive or heavily partisan in their favor. Winning, and a perception of being winners, is very important. Two Tea Party candidates for U.S. Senate who famously lost their general elections in 2010, Sharron Angle in Nevada and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware, were actually not endorsed nor supported by FreedomWorks because of the calculation of the slim chances of the candidates winning (interview with Brendan Steinhauser, 2017). FreedomWorks was proud of the fact that they won more Senate races than they lost in 2010 because it showed that not only were they principled, but that their principles can, and did, win elections (Ibid).

Another example of this is the 2012 endorsement of Governor Andrew Cuomo for re-election by the WFP. Despite the fact that his challenger Zephyr Teachout was actually much more aligned with the politics and values that the WFP stands for, they opted not to endorse her partially because they did not feel she was competitive enough to have a good chance of winning. Because the WFP is not just about running candidates they like but also building political power and governing, the political calculus was to support a less progressive but more

competitive candidate because of the political concessions that were made in exchange for support (Governor Cuomo agreed to raise the minimum wage to $15 if endorsed and he followed through on that promise [interview with Amanda Johnson, 2017]).

Ultimately, the policy hurdles that third parties face are so large and unlikely to change (as John F. Bibby and L. Sandy Maisel argue) that third parties would be wise to work within the mainstream parties like the Working Families Party and Tea Party have done. Policy reforms to lessen the obstacles that third parties encounter face dim prospects. For example, even if cities or states were to pass instant runoff voting (IRV) legislation like Terry Bouricius suggests, the implementation of IRV depends on the states' constitutions, as many prohibit IRV because of clauses mandating primary elections and/or traditionally defined majority vote-getters (Langam 2005). In states where this is the case, courts are likely to find IRV illegal. Similarly, the expansion of fusion voting was tested in the Supreme Court case *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party* in 1997 and found fusion voting to not be a constitutionally protected civil right under the 1st Amendment (Timmons, Acting Director, Ramsey County Department of Property Records and Revenue, Et Al. v. Twin Cities Area New Party, U.S. 1997). The Working Families Party and the Tea Party show that even without a ballot line, third party efforts can elect candidates and build political power as an independent force that can challenge the power of both mainstream Democrats and Republicans.

Organizing

FreedomWorks and their members tend to place more of a priority on organizing around policy issues. For example, their first engagement in the Tea Party was in opposition to President Obama's stimulus package, and only later did they get involved in electoral politics (interview

with Nan Swift, 2017). The WFP always has and continues to be focused on electoral politics although they have spent great energy in 2017 organizing weekly protests against the Trump administration, flooding Congress-members' healthcare town halls, and starting local resistance groups across the country. This is a smart way to build their membership base to then later energize and mobilize around election season if FreedomWorks' strategy is any indication.

The candidacy of Senator Bernie Sanders and subsequent election of Donald Trump has invigorated the WFP and their supporters in a way that is very similar to the Tea Party movement's origins after the election of Barack Obama. Both were in response to a president and his policies they were fundamentally opposed to and a mass base of everyday people who were inspired to fight against them. The success of the Tea Party was credited by the two former FreedomWorks staff to the genuine grassroots energy that emerged against President Obama and the stimulus package which FreedomWorks was able to harness and guide using their staff, resources, and political expertise. If the WFP continues positions themselves similarly to how FreedomWorks did in 2009, they can expect to be at the helm of a similarly large and impactful movement that can affect national politics.

Power

At the end of the day, what concerns the Working Families Party and FreedomWorks is whether or not they have been able to build their political power to change on politics at various levels of government. It is easy to look back at the height of the Tea Party movement in 2010 with awe and respect for how much they were able to achieve so quickly. Beyond winning representation, are they, a stronger yet still minority voice, able to create change? For the WFP, it seems they are destined to follow a trajectory similar to that of the Tea Party. If that is true, how

have their efforts thus far primed them for this moment? This can be analyzed from two perspectives, from the smaller electoral and policy battles as a micro lens, and from the larger political and cultural changes as a macro lens.

On a smaller scale, the Tea Party was able to become a household name— something that third parties often fail to achieve. This was in large part due to their relationships with the conservative media, namely Fox News, and their huge rallies in D.C. on both Tax Day and 9/12 in 2009. They have a membership, and presumably an email list, of over four million people, whose power they can harness at the drop of an email blast or robocall. The Tea Party elected enough of their members to Congress to form the Freedom Caucus and a number of people they elected to the U.S. Senate went on to run for president in their first terms.

Despite this feat, the Affordable Care Act became law and withstood the scrutiny of the Supreme Court, and for all they rallied against it for over half a decade, the Freedom Caucus caused the repeal and replace effort to fail in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives. While two Tea Party Senators, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, were part of the top three candidates running for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, their loses may point to the end of the reign of the Tea Party in the GOP. However, for a movement that was seen as a fringe outsider to the GOP, the elevation of their candidates to such a high level is remarkable. It is especially so considering the fact that the choice candidates of the elite Republican Party such as Governors Jeb Bush and Chris Christie failed to break through during the primaries.

On a macro level, the Tea Party used its minority influence in Congress to transform the Republican Party from a minority party to an opposition party aimed directly at resisting the

Obama Administration. Their refusal to collaborate or compromise with the President or the Democrats caused the Democrats to heavily rely on the only branch of the federal government they controlled, the executive. This action only resulted in more anger from Tea Party politicians and supporters as an overreaching and excessive use of the executive branch. The apex of their oppositional position was their successful effort to deny President Obama a Supreme Court Justice with almost a full year of his term left despite his compromise of nominating centrist Judge Merrick Garland. As a result, they have pushed the federal government to levels of polarization never before seen.

While FreedomWorks explains that their opposition to the Obama Administration was based purely on policy, it is hard to believe that their members, or supporters of the Tea Party movement more broadly, were not motivated by racism toward the first black president of the United States (as Ta-Nehisi Coates argues in his piece "My President Was Black" [2017]). The elevation of this sentiment through the national platform of the Tea Party movement engendered an ethos in which someone like Donald Trump, the primary pusher of the birther conspiracy theory, could rise to political relevance. Despite FreedomWorks disappointment in the Tea Party movement's drift from strictly fiscal issues to social issues like immigration, this shift gave rise to growing xenophobic, nativist, racist sentiment that resulted in the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, someone who models the very opposite of the limited government and balanced budget approach to government that FreedomWorks advocates for.

The Working Families Party has a much longer history and track record than the Tea Party, but they are decidedly on the rise in the last few years. On the micro level, they have seen policy victories on the state and local level. In a post-Occupy Wall Street world, the WFP has

experienced great success in movements across the country for $15 minimum wages, paid sick leave, and affordable higher education. Despite the criticism they endured for endorsing New York Governor Cuomo for re-election in 2014, they have learned their lessons, or "won the failure" as one staffer put it (interview with Reuben Hayslett, 2016). Even though he lost the Democratic presidential primary, their decision to endorse and campaign on behalf of Senator Bernie Sanders has increased their name recognition, support, and reach at an unprecedented rate. Similarly, their role in the resistance efforts since Donald Trump's election with other progressive groups like MoveOn and People's Action have pushed them to greater prominence. While they are not a household name, a survey shows that within their home base of New York, half of the state's electorate knows of and favorably views the WFP (interview with Ari Kamen, 2016).

In the past year, they have had a large influence on politics and culture overall. Their role in the presidential primaries pushed Hillary Clinton farther to the left. Senator Bernie Sanders is one of, if not the most popular politician in the nation (Blake 2016). Despite the devastating blow provided by the results of the 2016 election, the work of WFP is transforming the Democratic Party into an opposition party. They were able to push all Democratic Senators except for three (Heidi Heitkamp- ND, Joe Manchin- WV, Joe Donnelly- IN) to vote against President Trump's Supreme Court nominee, forcing the Republicans to change Senate rules to a simple majority vote to confirm him (Andrews & Carlsen 2017). They were also successful in using grassroots pressure to kill the American HealthCare Act even before House Democrats settled on messaging (Weigel 2017). They are utilizing the polarization that the Tea Party has created to push Democrats and the Democratic Party farther to the left. So far, though, some of their efforts have

faced resistance. They, and the progressive Democrat movement that emerged out of the primaries more generally, failed to make the Democratic Party's national platform as progressive as they would have liked and establishment choice Tom Perez won the Democratic National Committee Chairmanship over progressive Representative Keith Ellison (Gautney 2016; Gambino 2017).

Recommendations

Pass Instant Runoff Voting

Third party efforts and their candidates face many structural policy obstacles that hinder their equal participation in the political process. With Burlington, Vermont as an example, third parties should push for instant runoff voting (IRV) so as to eliminate the "spoiler effect" so common in elections that third parties participate in. IRV has voters rank their preferred candidates, so that "[i]f no candidate gets an initial majority, the candidates with the fewest votes are eliminated sequentially until just two remain. The candidate who is elected is whichever finalist is ranked higher by a majority of voters who have indicated a preference" (Bouricius 2016, 76). This system will put third parties on more of a level playing field in addition to eliminating the spoiler effect by incentivizing mainstream parties to campaign for the second choice of voters, resulting in a friendlier campaign environment, and greater opportunities for third parties to fundraise and get media coverage.

Reform Ballot Access, Sore Loser, & Fusion Voting Laws

There also must be less strict ballot access laws that do not place undue burdens on third parties attempting to have their own ballot line in elections. These laws are set at the state level and vary in the number of signatures required and in what timeframe third party candidates are

given to get on the ballot. Those that attempt to reach the often high petition threshold spend time and money that their opponents spend campaigning, further disadvantaging them. Efforts to change ballot access laws may be easier than IRV because they are not embedded in states' constitutions. However, they are likely to face major opposition from the legislative branches of government that retain their power in these restrictive ballot access laws.

Sore loser laws face similarly dim prospects of being repealed, which would allow losing primary candidates the opportunity to run in the general election as a third party or independent candidate. However, "only three states permit a losing primary election candidate subsequently to file to appear on the ballot in the general election as the nominee of another party or as an independent candidate" (Kang 2011, 1042). Repealing these laws would allow for candidates who originally saw a mainstream party and a better path to take but could not earn the nomination to pursue a third party candidacy in the general election.

Expanding fusion voting would also remove barriers, namely the spoiler effect, to third parties that are willing to cross-endorse candidates. It is currently only allowed by law in eight states, and only commonly used in New York. Third parties who believe in fusion voting would be smart to begin their work in those eight states (Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Mississippi, New York, Oregon, South Carolina, and Vermont).

Reform Districting and Public Financing

Two policy hurdles very much worth reforming with greater chances of success include gerrymandering and the public financing of elections. Gerrymandering has been challenged in various court cases across the country with varying results. Most recently, a Federal court in Texas invalidated three congressional districts in Austin due to extreme gerrymandering to

reduce the influence of Latino voters (Barnes 2017). While the Supreme Court has come out against racist gerrymandering, it has yet to tackle partisan gerrymandering in a coherent way but is scheduled to take on a partisan gerrymandering case later this year (Grofman 2017). If they find partisan gerrymandering unconstitutional, it could lead to states redrawing their congressional and state district maps, increasing their competitiveness for not only the Republicans and Democrats, but third party candidates as well. The judicial branch will be key in helping third parties and their allies in defeating partisan gerrymandering. The public financing of elections, while hailed as a progressive and democratic step, often acts to prevent third party candidates from taking advantage of public funds like their mainstream counterparts, especially in presidential elections. Third parties, which are also often challenged by lack of funds, should pursue more inclusive public financing of elections that include them meaningfully.

Forgo the Ballot Line but Maintain Political Independence

Due to the policy hurdles that exist for ballot access and fusion voting in addition to the success of the Tea Party movement without a distinct ballot line, third parties should forgo the idea that a ballot line is the end-all-be-all of their work and instead focus their efforts on electing their own candidates on the ballot lines of one of the two mainstream parties. If the goal of a third party is to win elections, build political power, and become a true force to be reckoned with in politics, pursuing this path where the obstacles are so much smaller, and the chances of winning are so much greater despite the perception of losing political independence or distinctiveness is preferable.

Political independence and distinctiveness do not have to be lost, however, if third parties do two things. The first is to establish a specific brand and political niche that is adhered to in

their actions and marketed to all supporters, donors, and media. A brand, or a narrative of who they are and what they fight for, is absolutely vital in distinguishing themselves from other parties and/or candidates. They must make it known what they define the problem to be in politics and how they are the solution to it. If they do this, they can create powerful coalitions of people and groups, like Kshama Sawant did in her campaign (Khalil 2016).

The second thing they must do to establish their brand and political independence is to challenge mainstream candidates and incumbents not only in general elections, but in primary elections, too. Primary election participation is especially important if third parties lack a ballot line as they would be unable to run a general election candidate without participating in one of the mainstream parties' primary elections first. In primary elections, it is not as difficult for third party efforts to challenge the mainstream candidate(s) when it is an open seat, but challenging an incumbent in a primary election is much more difficult. There is a tough challenge in balancing the need to only run campaigns that will win--which is why the WFP has opted to overwhelming run and endorse candidates in open-seat elections, and seriously challenging the political status quo by primarying incumbents. While third parties should rarely (if ever) run campaigns that have no serious chance of winning, they must be willing to take risks by challenging incumbents with really solid, well-established, community-connected candidates. Running campaigns that are doomed to lose only re-enforces the perception that third parties are losers and a waste of time. But, as the WFP endorsement of Bernie Sanders shows, even if your candidate loses, a really strong showing can invigorate the base and grow the membership far beyond what the safer, less riskier option possibly could have.

Ride the Wave of Public Sentiment

In some ways, the success of third party efforts is out of their control, as their big moment to grow and expand tends to come not because of the work that they do, but because of political moments that thrust them into the spotlight and attract new supporters and donors like never before. What they can control, however, is how they respond to such political moments. Third parties must have their finger on the pulse of the moods in the electorate to changing political conditions. Like FreedomWorks did, they must engage with the sections of the electorate that become activated in those moments and provide an infrastructure for involvement in their local communities. Digital organizing has, and should continue to play the role of connecting the gap between staff of third parties and newly politicized activists looking to get involved.

Develop Grassroots Activism

Similarly, staff of third parties should create space for individual activists and grassroots members to be involved in a meaningful way and have a stake in the work. In the case of FreedomWorks, local Tea Party activists were key in identifying and deciding potential candidates to represent them in office. Third party staff should be sure to follow the lead of their grassroots members so that their efforts go beyond just electoral politics to an actual grassroots movement. However, training and coaching should always be a part of the work so as to ensure that the membership and the party staff remain on the same page. Doing this also allows for an expansion of the party to exist beyond where there is a staff infrastructure put in place. Where grassroots members are empowered to take on leadership, they take on much of the work that

would be done by staff. This, combined with coaching and training, can allow for a much more

expansive and inclusive reach of the party.

Additionally, as was seen with the Tea Party, grassroots activists who initially got

involved for specific issues should be encouraged and groomed to volunteer for political

campaigns when the opportunity arises. Consequently, there will already be a local connection to

the candidate and the vetting of the candidates for their connection to the community will be very

easy to evaluate. If local volunteer infrastructure is built, strengthened, and maintained year-

round, when elections roll around, the volunteer energy and efforts can simply be transferred to

the campaign instead of the campaign staff putting in the effort to recruit local volunteers. In

terms of the current political moment, party staff should identify key districts and states they

hope to have candidates run in the 2018 midterm congressional and state elections and begin

cultivating local activist leadership and grassroots volunteers now, instead of parachuting in next

year.

Build a Volunteer-based Organizational Structure

Key to building a grassroots political party is putting in effort building and expanding the

individual and organizational membership base. In building, recruiting, and developing

individual members and local leaders, the party can expand in a less resource-intensive way by

relying less on staff labor and more on volunteer labor. The presidential campaign of Bernie

Sanders showed how this type of volunteer leadership structure can be effective and efficient and

should be used as a model for third parties looking to expand their grassroots membership. Third

party efforts should work to not only recruit individual members, but local organizations, unions

and community and political groups. Third parties should act as a unifying electoral voice and

brand for like-minded groups who are not currently involved in politics or not seriously involved in elections to come together and use their power strategically. Doing so would also create a pool of potential candidates to run for local office and enter candidate pipeline programs.

Expand to New Funding Sources

In expanding their grassroots membership, parties should consider having members be dues-paying as a way to grow their individual donor base in order to be less reliant on grants and foundation money. The Sanders campaign again is a model for how many small donations can raise unprecedented amounts of funding. Additionally, they should court political donors and donor communities for larger donations. By establishing their specific brand, political niche, and a few key victories, third party efforts should be in a good place to convince donors of the importance and success of their work. Industries with positive stake in the kinds of policies parties pursue should be courted as well.

Conclusion

Despite widespread dissatisfaction with the two-party political system, its embeddedness makes it unlikely to change anytime dramatically soon, if ever. However, third party efforts can and should challenge the political status quo and build electoral power by working creatively within and around the two-party system. The Working Families Party and the Tea Party via FreedomWorks are two successful examples of how this can be accomplished. They used a specific brand and political niche, grassroots membership, energized local activists, trainings and coaching, smart political calculus, exciting issue campaigns, and a focus on primary elections. As a result, they have been able to build political power, win legislative victories, and push the mainstream parties closer to their own ideologies. They have not only showed that third party

agendas can be advanced and achieved while working at the margins of a major political party, but that there are vast amounts of previously non-political people ready and excited to get involved in politics if they find the right political home. In these current times when major parts of the electorate feel a sense of alienation and disappointment in politics, third party efforts can bridge this gap and make democracy feel democratic once again. If they are successful, third parties can can be the electoral arm of social movements and win important policy victories that their membership will benefit from. While it is an uphill battle, third parties can use the political winds of the moment to push them further and create meaningful change.

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Appendices
1.1 Interviewees
Ari Kamen, New York Political Director of the Working Families Party
Daniel Cantor, National Director of the Working Families Party
Reuben Haylsett, National Online Campaigner of the Working Families Party
Nelini Stamp, National Membership Coordinator of the Working Families Party
Amanda Johnson, National Digital Director of the Working Families Party
Brendan Steinhauser, Former Federal and State Campaign Director for FreedomWorks
Nan Swift, Former Campaign Manager for FreedomWorks

1.2 Interview Questions
What is/was your role within the party/organization?
How does/did your role relate to the party/organization as a whole?
How does/did your role further the goals of the party/organization?
What are/were the current goals of the party/organization?
What are/were the future goals of the party/organization?
What strategies are/did the party/organization using/use to achieve those goals?
What do/did you see as the party's/organization's biggest successes?
What do/did you see as the party'/organizations biggest failures?
What do/did you see as the biggest obstacles to the party's/organization's work?
How do/did you see the party/organization in the national/statewide/citywide political landscape?
What do you hope the party will accomplish in the next few years?