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Part 2. Working Within the Constraints

Consider the case of an untrained chess player, one who has spend many hours playing chess with other untrained players. Such a player may be very good at seeing what moves are on the board, designing combinations to take an opponent's pieces, looking ahead several moves and so forth. Yet such a player can be easily crushed by an otherwise inferior player who understands the theory of chess openings.

The untrained player may open a game with rook pawn moves or moving knights to the rook rows. Or he may deploy one piece and move it about the board. Meanwhile, our trained player knows the importance of controlling center, and of getting as many pieces in play as possible before advancing to the next tactical stages. Within a dozen moves, our untrained amateur is outgunned and hemmed in, having few, if any, good moves to choose from while our trained inferior player has many good options. Barring outright sloppy play, it is hard for the trained player to lose in this situation.

On the other hand, the untrained amateur could be taught the theory of chess openings *in a few hours*, which would then allow him to use his tactical skills productively.

The same is true for third party politics. A third party can gain a great deal of hard won institutional experience with FEC rules, getting ballot access, writing press releases, crafting sound bites, etc. and still be trounced on a regular basis. Meanwhile, there are a few fairly simple rules, which can be learned in a few hours or less, which could allow that same party to get on the path of massive growth of both votes and support base.

The basic rules of strategy and positioning are easy to learn. The nitty-gritty details of running a political party or a political campaign are difficult. Yet, given the choice, I will take the former. You can apply the basic strategic rules in a sloppy fashion and grow a party faster and bigger than by masterfully implementing the nitty-gritty while the underlying strategy is flawed.

So, without further ado, here are three easy to learn (but possibly hard to accept) rules of success in American Politics.

Observation 1: You have to *win!*

Libertarians fantasize about having a presidential candidate garner 5% of the vote. Actually, they would be thrilled to break 1%. *LP News* boosts morale after

November by pointing out the total number of people who voted Libertarian. We have had major pushes in the past to contest as many Congressional elections as possible. Should the day come that Libertarians garner 5% of the total Congressional vote there would be great celebration.

Yet, all these goals are *utterly worthless!*

The United States does not elect its legislatures using proportional representation. It has district elections, and most of these districts are single-member. This means that is possible to win 20% of the vote overall and not win a single seat. This means that a party that wins only 5% of the vote overall is extremely unlikely to win a single seat.

The Green, Libertarian, and Constitution parties operate as if the U.S. had proportional representation. It does not. To obtain a seat at the table, you have to *win* somewhere. In a single-member district race there is no prize for second or third place. It's win or be irrelevant.

This is a very simple observation, trivial to verify. Yet time and time again, activists and strategists within third parties go into denial and try to rationalize around this fact. While this is an easy to understand fact, it can be hard to accept. It is an inconvenient truth.

(There are some proportional representation races in this country, especially at the local level. Third parties have done better there. But most of these races are non-partisan, so why have third parties for such races?)

Theorem 1: Extremism Loses

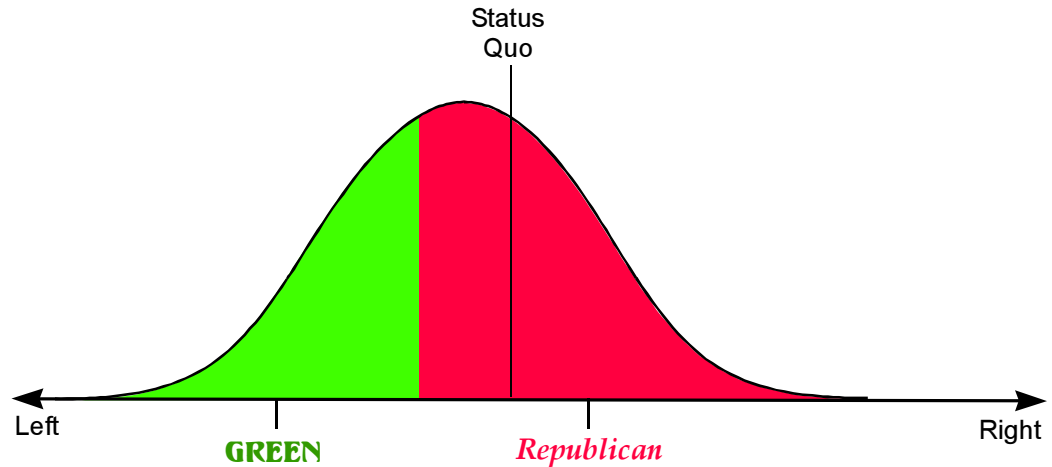
Passion is powerful. The more passionate your activists, the harder they work.

Passion is correlated to radicalism. Radical party members tend to be more passionate.

Put the two together and you have a strong case for a radical political party. For this reason and others, third parties in the U.S. tend to be radical. Unfortunately for them, this is a near guarantee for failure.

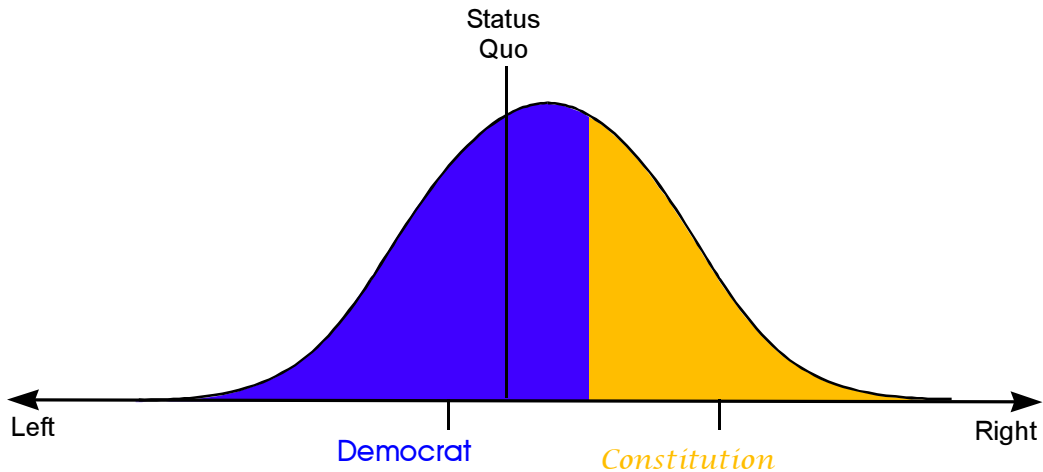
Voters tend to vote for the candidates with whom they agree. A candidate near the center will have more voters in agreement than a candidate off in the radical fringe.

Consider congressional race in a liberal district. Suppose the radical liberal elements decide to run a radical socialistic Green candidate. Meanwhile, the conservative minority gets behind a barely conservative Republican. And let us suppose there is no Democrat in the race (because the liberal activists got behind the radical Green). If the voters vote for the candidate closest to their views, the Republican wins!



Even though the Republican is to the right of the center of this district, the Green is so far to the left that moderate leftists end up voting for the Republican.

We have the converse scenario with a hard-right Constitution Party candidate vs. a moderately liberal Democrat in a conservative district.



In either case, going with the radical party produces election results in the *opposite* direction of the radical party's goals! For this reason (and others) most radical liberals hold their noses to support moderate Democrats and most radical conservatives hold their noses to support moderate Republicans.

This leads us to our first rule:

Rule 1: a successful third party must be moderate enough to win somewhere.

This is actually one of the beauties of the American political system: it keeps out the wackos. Commies and fascists can get elected in a system of proportional representation. With district based elections you have to be close enough to the center to be in the mainstream somewhere. This is a Good Thing. Please don't hurt our relatively successful system in order to give the fringe a seat at the table. The result would be rancor in the legislatures, Third World style politics. (Reforming district-based elections to use approval or range voting is worth pursuing, however.)

That said, we will have quite a bit of room for passion and principle in our system. Districts vary. A politician who would be considered a radical leftist by most can still be considered mainstream in places like Berkely California. Furthermore, the model I used in the figures above is approximate.

Even in two-way races, people do not purely by ideological agreement. Some liberals in the liberal scenario above may well vote for the radical Green candidate in order to offset the conservatives in other districts. The converse holds for conservatives in the second scenario for the radical Constitution Party candidate. But do note that such sophistication nowhere close to universal. My observation in the field is that voters in the middle generally go with the closer candidate with much less regard to the total legislature. I have tried the bathtub metaphor with moderate libertarians with little success. (If the tub is too cold, you add unpleasantly hot water in order to bring the overall mixture to the desired temperature. A radical is like the hot water.)

Some votes are won for reasons other than ideology. People vote for experience, good morals, good looks, pork, special privileges and/or simple name recognition.

And many people don't bother to vote. Passion makes voting worthwhile. It is easier to get out the votes of your radicals than your swing voters.

For these reasons it is possible to get away with being a bit more radical than the ideology diagrams above would indicate. Combine this with district variance and you have room for a party with ideas and a platform with teeth.

But don't get carried away! In my conversations with many Libertarian activists, I have encountered many who would deny that Rule 1 has much of any importance. They tell me that platforms don't matter, that people don't read platforms, that it's just about money, publicity, name recognition and getting out the vote.

To this I shout "Balderdash!" We do have many informed voters. News programs have traditionally been among the most popular of the major network offerings. Throw in CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, talk radio and weblogs and then tell me that only a tiny elite cares about political platforms. Yes, there are many people who are ignorant of the issues, and some of them vote. But even among the ignorant, the platform messages get through; many rely on the advice of those who are not ignorant. (See *The Tipping Point* by Malcombe Gladwell.)

So, while I do not think that a new party needs to appeal to 50% of the voters overall, it does need to appeal to well over 5%. As a rough first guess, I would suggest that a new party should position itself at around the 80th percentile along its scale of values; that is, 20% of the voters are more radical than the party's position.

This should provide at least 5-10% of the voters who are less radical but are still closer to the new party's position than they are to the major party positions. Throw in district variance and you have a majority position somewhere.

You might be able to get away with being a bit further out, possibly out to the 90% percentile overall. Doing so can increase passion, which is useful for acquiring early adopters, but this also loses mainstream votes.

For comparison, look at the percentile scores of the existing third parties. Prior to the 2006 reforms, I would say that the Libertarian Party had positioned itself *above the 99th* percentile on the small government scale. That is, fewer than 1% of the U.S. population was more radically libertarian than the Libertarian Party. With the new reforms, the party *might* be down as far as the 95th percentile. However there are still some pretty radical positions in the platform, deal-killers for most people.

I leave it as an exercise for Green and Constitution Party members to determine what percentiles their parties are positioned at.

Moderation is not Enough

So why not have a moderate party?

One answer: why bother? You can achieve moderate goals by simply electing a mix of Democrats and Republicans.

Another answer: moderate parties fail as well, partly for the reason in the previous paragraph. However, moderate parties *do* often come much closer to succeeding. Indeed, candidates have been elected to offices as high as governor under the banner of various moderate parties. And moderate parties have done much better than at the presidential level than the ideological parties – at least during the last half-century.

Despite these successes, moderate parties have a tough time; such parties generally collapse *faster* than the radical ideological parties who experience less success. The Reform Party is a tiny ghost of its former self. And even with millions of federal dollars and plenty of name recognition, Pat Buchanan barely squeaked past the Libertarian candidate who was an under funded unknown.

Part of the explanation for this phenomenon can be found by asking, “what is a moderate?” Consider the following table of Democratic and Republican associated positions:

Democratic Positions	Republican Positions
National Health Care	Private Health Care
Gun Control	Second Amendment Rights
Higher Taxes on the Rich	Lower Taxes on the Rich
Cut Defense Spending	Increase Defense Spending
Be sensitive to the rights of the accused.	Be tough on crime, whatever it takes.

Sign the Kyoto Protocol	Who cares about global warming?
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A moderate would be one who takes a mix of Democratic and Republican positions, right? Well, which mix?

Moderate 1	Moderate 2
National Health Care	Private Health Care
Gun Control	Second Amendment Rights
Higher Taxes on the Rich	Lower Taxes on the Rich
Increase Defense Spending	Cut Defense Spending
Be tough on crime, whatever it takes.	Be sensitive to the rights of the accused.
Who cares about global warming?	Sign the Kyoto Protocol

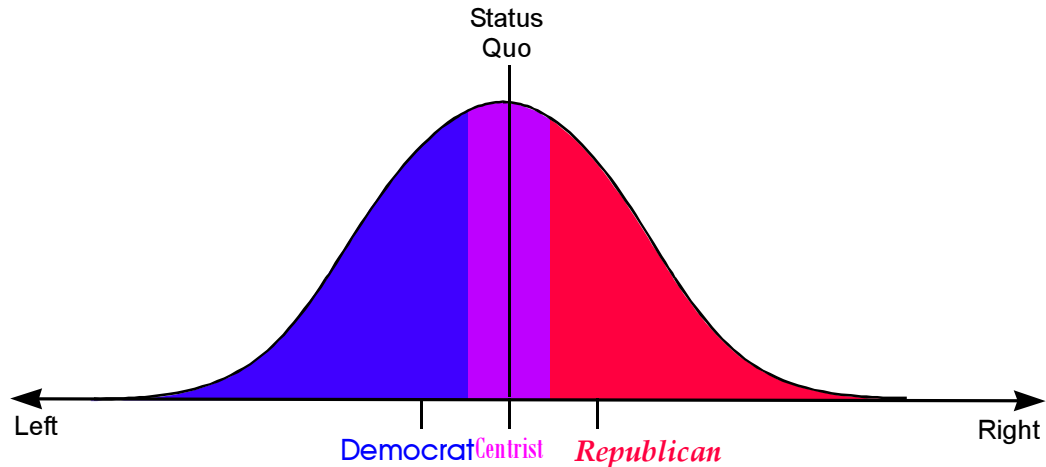
We have two moderates. They both take an equal number of Democratic and Republican positions. Yet than have *nothing* in common! There is just as much difference between these two moderates as between the Democrats and Republicans!

This leads us two our second rule for third parties:

Rule 2: a third party needs *some* principles.

No, a third party need not be a “Party of Principle,” as the LP strives to be. An overly strict ideology results in a party that is too small to win. But a party does need to have enough organizing principles do determine who is invited to join. Party members can disagree on many things, but there must be more agreement within the party than between the parties.

In practice, moderate parties tend to coalesce around celebrity candidates and collapse soon thereafter. The celebrity candidate’s mix of positions provides the temporary cohesion to keep the moderate party alive long enough to win an election or few. This works, but not that often. To see why, look at the figure below.

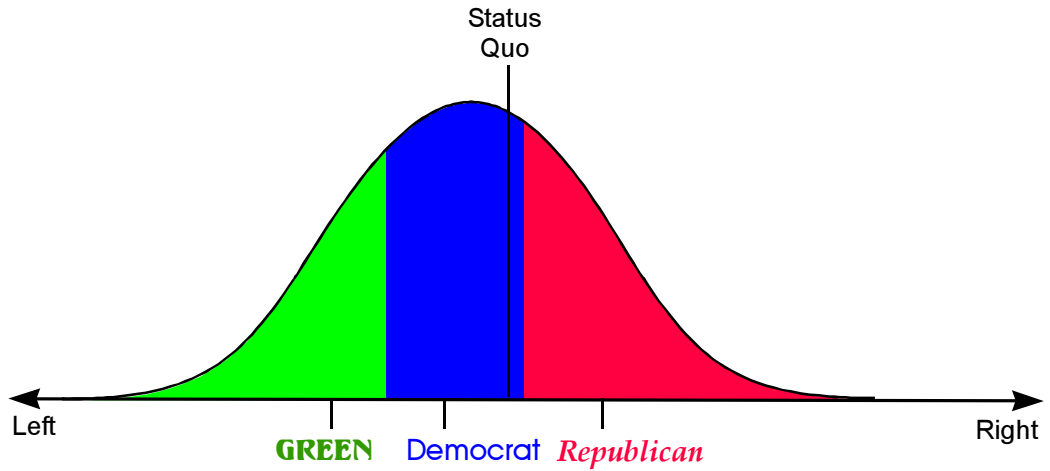


Here, we have a moderate candidate running against a Democrat on the left and a Republican on the right. If the Democratic and Republican candidates are sufficiently radical, then the moderate candidate has a shot at winning. If the major party candidates move toward the center, the moderate party candidate gets squeezed from both sides. This is a likely scenario! The Democrat has a base locked up on the left. She loses no votes by moving to the center while gaining votes from the moderate. Similarly, the Republican gains centrists by moving to the center while holding on to his conservative base. True, if the major party candidates move too close to the center, they lose the passion of their respective activist bases. But this is *less* of a concern in a three way race with a moderate! A candidate need not win a majority in this scenario. A bit over 1/3 is all it takes. The Democrat and Republican can locate closer to their respective bases than if they were in a two way contest!

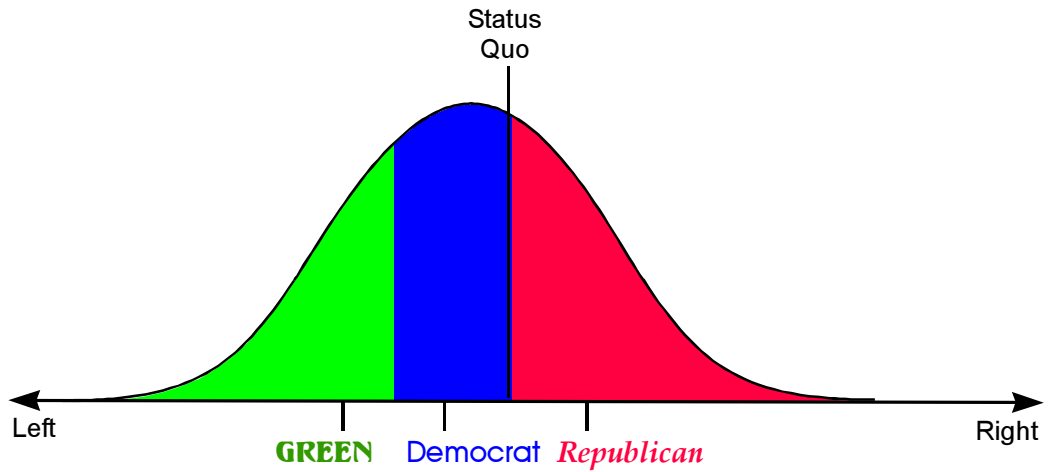
As bad as conditions are for a moderate in a three-way race, they are even worse for a radical – at least as long as we are looking at politics in one dimension.

The Lesser of Two Evils

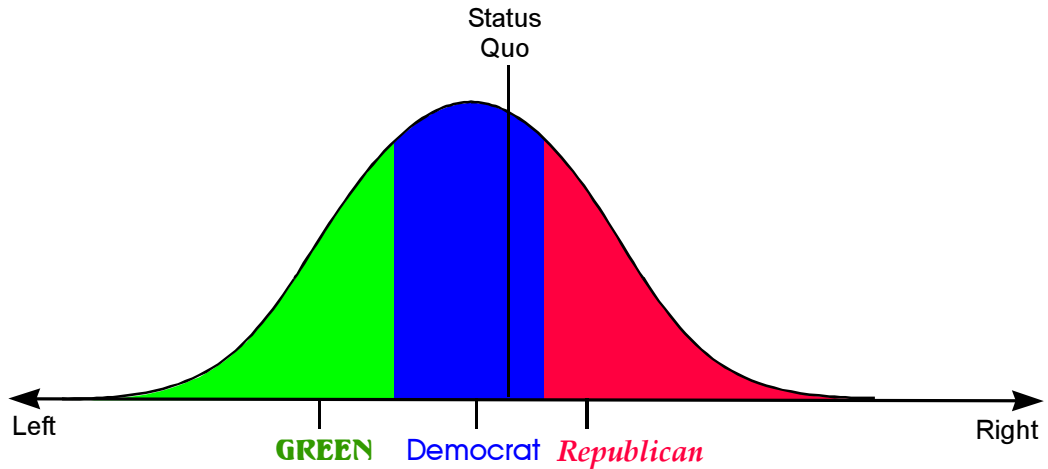
When we first looked at radical parties, we made the game easy by considering two-way races. Things become grimmer when we look at three way races. Consider a far left Green, a liberal Democrat and a conservative Republican in a three way race in a *liberal* district.



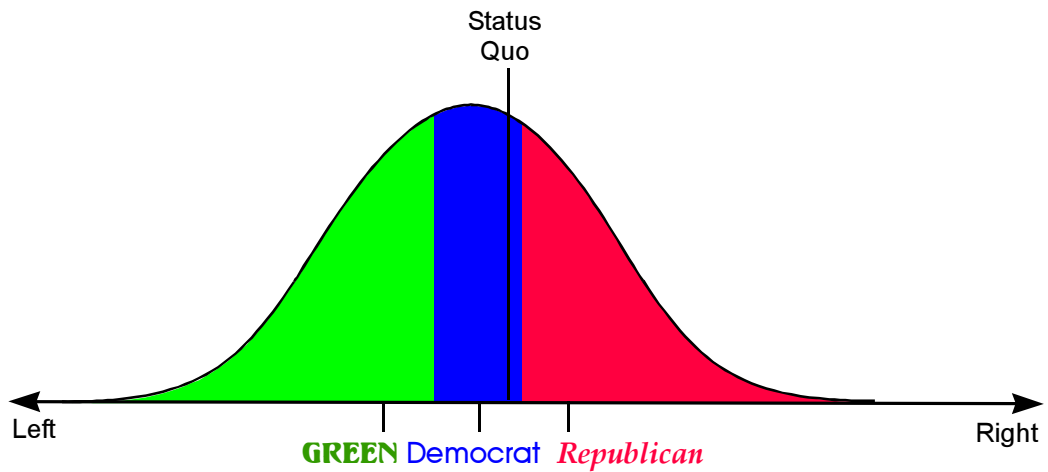
The Green candidate takes away votes from the Democrat, making life easier for the Republican. This leads to four possible scenarios:



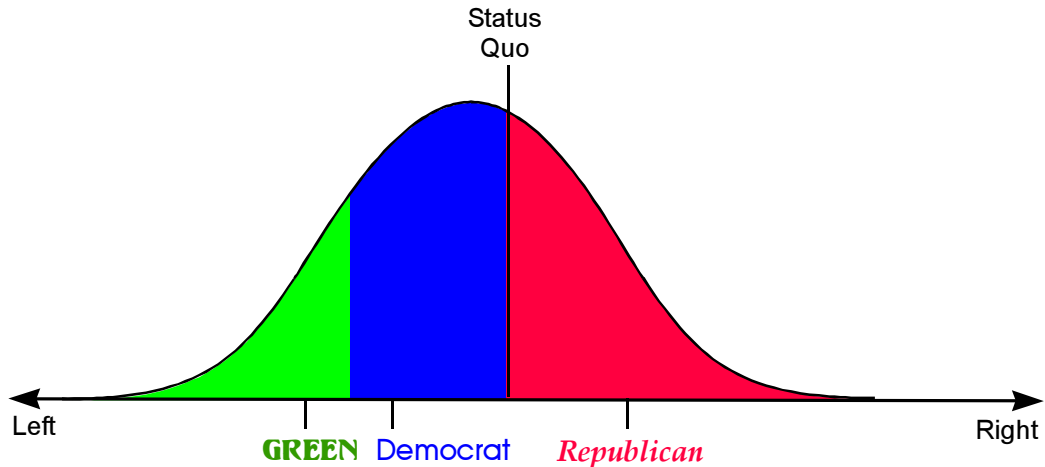
1. **Democrat gets squeezed/Republican wins.** This has happened. Without Ralph Nader, Al Gore would have been president in 2000.



2. **Democrat moves to the right to make up for lost Green votes.** With a bell shaped vote distribution, there are more votes to be won to the right of the Democrat than the left.



3. **Green wins.** This could happen *if* the Democrat moves too far to the right, the Green candidate isn't too radical *and* the Green candidate has the money, celebrity and volunteers to get the votes the chart above indicates.



4. **Democrat returns to her base.** If the Republican is sufficiently conservative, the existence of a Green candidate could cause the Democrat to move to the Left to preserve her base.

The first two outcomes are detrimental to the Green cause. The third outcome is unlikely. The fourth outcome is beneficial to the Green cause but detrimental to the Green Party.

The Green Party is small and weak, which means that the third outcome is extremely unlikely. Therefore, the only positive outcome for supporting the Green Party in this scenario is for the Green candidate to be a suicide gadfly to move the Democrat back to the left.

For this reason, most ideological greens (and other leftists/near-socialists) generally stay within the Democratic Party fold. The same goes for other left wing parties. Similarly, most conservatives continue to support the Republican Party, even those who are more ideologically attuned to the Constitution Party. Thus, in actual practice, the third party candidate gets fewer votes than the above diagrams would indicate. People vote not just for the closest candidate ideologically, but also take into account “winnability.”

The “lesser of two evils dilemma” presents the steepest barrier to third party success. This leads us to the third rule for third party politics:

Rule 3: A third party must have a base of voters/activists that is indifferent to the difference between the Democrats and Republicans.

If you don’t see a dime’s worth of difference between the Democrats and Republicans, and you like the Greens, then it is in your interests to support the Green Party. Ditto for the Libertarian or Constitution parties. But who fits this criterion?

Radicals for one!

Politics in Two Dimensions

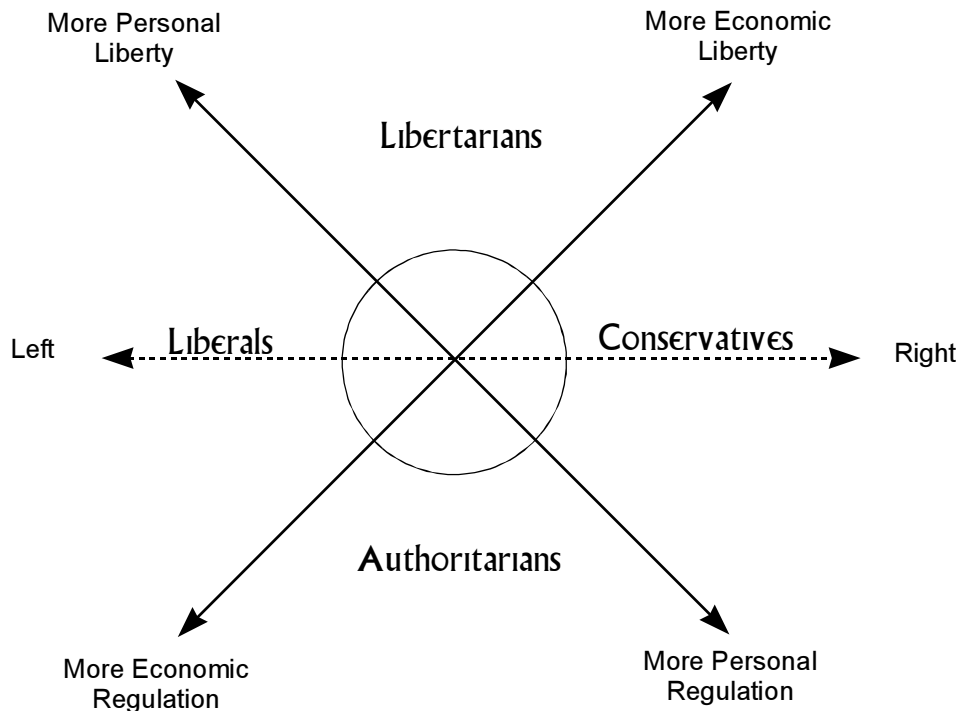
We have three rules for third party politics in the U.S. A party that follows all three has a chance. A party that breaks one of them is doomed to irrelevance.

- Rule 1: A successful third party must be moderate enough to *win* somewhere.
- Rule 2: A third party needs *some* principles.
- Rule 3: A third party must have a base of voters/activists that is indifferent to the difference between the Democrats and Republicans.

As long as we look at politics in terms of a left-right political spectrum, these rules are contradictory! A centrist party can obey Rules 1 and 3 but breaks Rule 2. A semi-radical conservative or liberal party violates Rule 3. An extremely radical liberal or conservative party can fulfill Rules 2 and 3 while violating Rule 1.

A party can survive with meager success by obeying Rules 2 and 3 while breaking Rule 1. Consider the membership dynamics of a new conservative party. Such a party could be appealing to many activists. However, many of those activists will continue to support the Republicans due to the lesser of two evils dilemma. The activists most likely to join/stay in are those who see little difference between the Democrats and Republicans. Yes, the Democrats are worse (from this perspective), but the difference is tiny to one far out on the right fringe. Thus, over time we can expect a party like the Constitution Party to radicalize. The same holds for the Greens, only in the other direction.

The Libertarian Party has also radicalized because of this mechanism, but its radicalism also stems from other factors: its ideological origins in axiomatic philosophy and its membership pledge. In theory a libertarian party could survive closer to the center, because libertarianism is not on the left-right axis. Libertarianism is about politics in more than one dimension.



From the beginning libertarianism has been about breaking away from left-right politics. Eventually, this became formalized by David Nolan with his famous Nolan Chart. According to this chart, liberalism is about increasing government control of the economy while reducing government control over personal behavior. Conversely, conservatism is about decreasing government control of the economy while increasing government control over personal behavior. Libertarianism is about decreasing government control of the economy and over personal behavior.

From a left-right perspective, the Libertarian Party is in the center; it is a moderate party of sorts. Thus, in theory it could fulfill Rule 1. Moreover, it is a coherent subset of moderates, thus fulfilling Rule 2. (An authoritarian party could also meet both of these criteria, for the same reasons.) Finally, the Libertarian Party supports a mix of liberal and conservative positions. There should be those that ascribe to such a mix who are equally dissatisfied with both the Republican and Democratic parties. Thus, the Libertarian Party should be able to fulfill Rule 3.

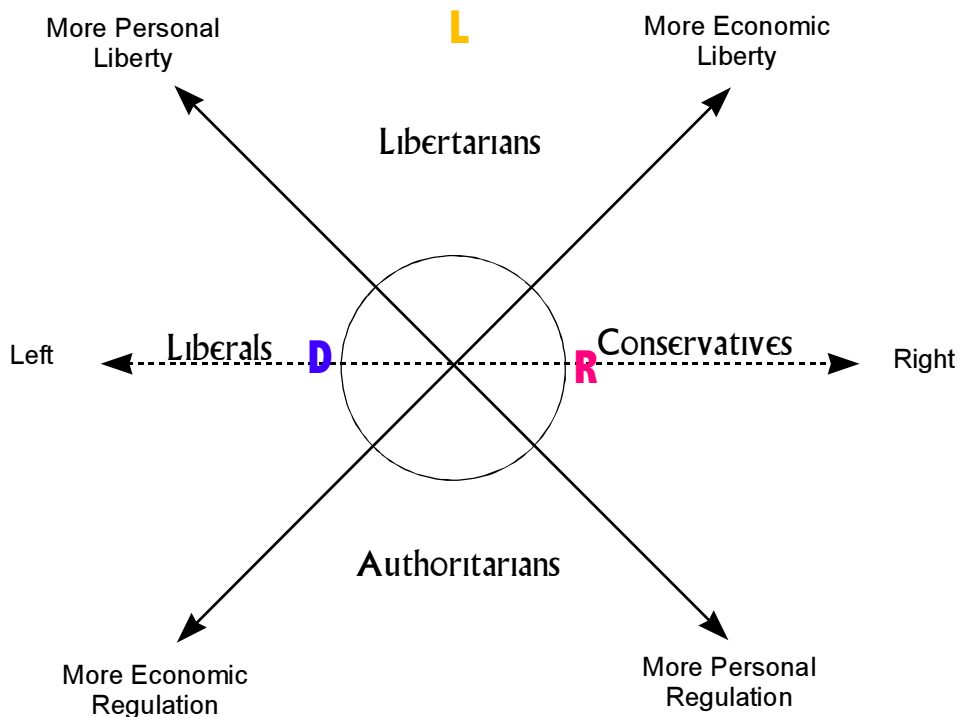
So, according to the previous paragraph, the LP fulfills all three rules. Thus, according to my theory, the LP should be much bigger than it is. So, is the theory wrong? Incomplete?

No. The analysis above is incomplete. If we use the Nolan Chart definition of “libertarian,” there are indeed many Americans who qualify as such. The Advocates for Self-Government have demonstrated such through the World’s Smallest Political Quiz. However, the Libertarian Party has historically defined the word “libertarian” otherwise. Membership in the LP requires that one “have certified in writing that they oppose the initiation of force to achieve political or social goals.” This can and has been read to mean that one opposes all use of force other than for self defense. This can mean:

- No gun restrictions whatsoever – including personal nukes.

- Unlimited immigration rights.
- No taxes other than user fees.
- Legalization of all drugs.
- Legalization of prostitution.
- Elimination of all pre-emptive regulation. Punishment for harm cannot proceed until after harm has occurred. Thus no meat inspections, consumer safety regulations, etc. Torts only.
- No foreign aid or foreign intervention unless the U.S. has already been attacked.

Whatever the merits of these positions, they are not moderate. The LP has historically adopted a mix of *extreme* liberal and conservative positions. While such a mix may average out to be moderate using one-dimensional politics, few moderates accept such a mix. If we use the Nolan Chart and look at the positions of the Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties from around the mid 1980s, we get:



The Libertarian Party is *not* a moderate party. It is near the extreme top of the Nolan Chart.

That said, the LP has run some moderate candidates at various levels. Some of them have won. (So have some extreme candidates.) One reason why the LP has been able to field moderate, mainstream candidates is that the party does attract a fair number of moderates. The Libertarian octant has room for people close enough to the mainstream to be able win elections. When the LP recruits using the World's Smallest Political Quiz, it declares many moderately libertarian takers to be "libertarians." Some of them join the party and become active, because they are

otherwise politically homeless. That is, they are dissatisfied by both the Democratic and Republican party messages (Rule 3).

Alas, there are purists among the radicals in the party who work diligently to drive out the moderates. The membership oath gives them a weapon to do so and they use it. For this reason, the Libertarian Party has floundered despite having the potential to become big.

Recently, the Libertarian Reform Caucus has partially succeeded in getting the LP to adopt more moderate stands in its platform. This was accomplished through a combination of hard work, superior organization and a set of fortuitous circumstances: a parliamentary rule that allows a simple majority to get rid of an old plank, a recently rearranged platform that was in desperate need of rewording, a Portland Oregon convention location which made it very expensive for east coast Libertarians to attend, and a cruise ship California LP convention that made it very expensive for California Libertarians to attend their state convention. (Money correlates with moderation.)

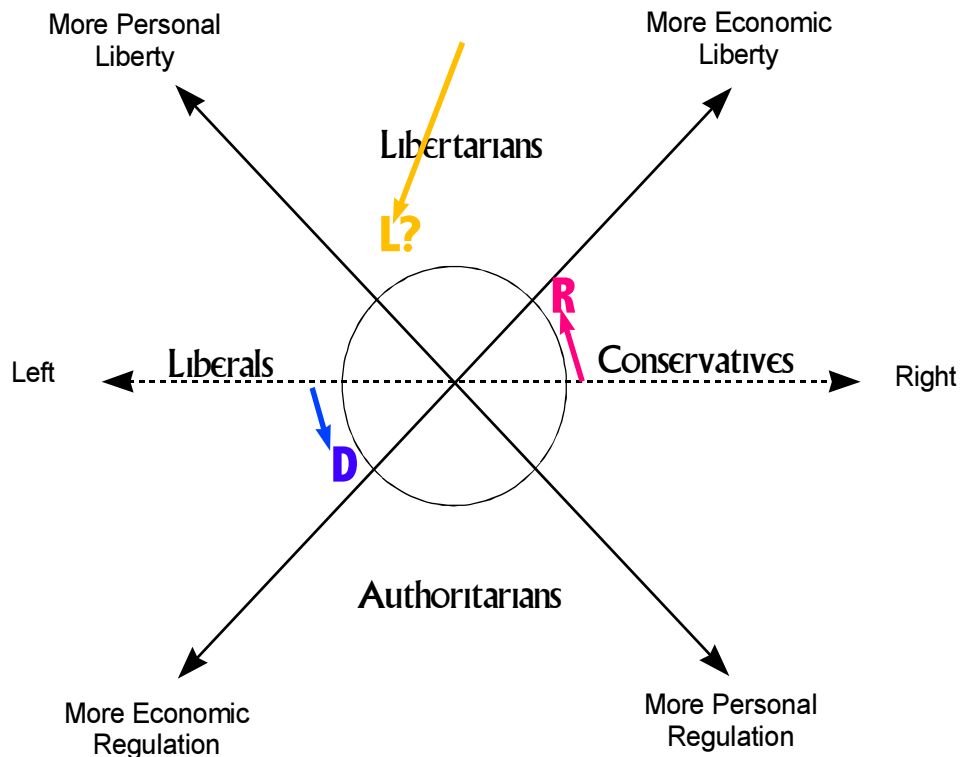
However, the membership oath remains in the bylaws. So it is not clear if this victory by the moderates will be permanent. The radicals have historically been better organized and they may come out in force in 2008. Or, the moderates may be able to recruit more of their own into the LP to be able to finish the job in 2008. If the moderates succeed, then the LP does have the potential to start winning some serious races.

But they may not have the maximum potential available to a third party. The Libertarian Party still suffers from the lesser of two evils dilemma (Rule 3). There are at least two reasons for this problem, despite the fact the Libertarians practice politics in two dimensions. First, the political landscape shifted between the time the Nolan Chart was created and the 1990s when the LP got its act together. During this time the Republicans became more tolerant on social issues while the Democrats became less so.

When I was a teenager in the late 70s early 80s, the main source of broadcast news from a conservative perspective was Pat Robertson's *700 Club*. (The only other source I can recall was *Wall St. Week*.) This was the era of the Moral Majority and "Just Say No." Towards the end of the decade we got the talk radio phenomenon, dominated by Rush Limbaugh, who featured rock and roll and naughty jokes. By the 90s the voice of the Republican Party was Newt Gingrich, a baby boomer with a less than stellar sexual record. Somewhere in this interval, William F. Buckley Jr. and *The National Review* came out in favor of ending the War on Drugs.

Meanwhile, Bill Clinton continued and extended the police state tactics instituted under Reagan. Tipper Gore was known for wanting to censor rock lyrics. On campus, the Left went from being free-spirited to being politically correct.

The mainstream party positions rotated counterclockwise.



The Republicans had moved to the upper right while the Democrats had moved toward the lower left. To run as a moderate Libertarian in a three way race was to rob votes from the Republican and help the Democrat to win. This was not helpful to the libertarian cause; so many moderate libertarians opted to support Republican candidates.

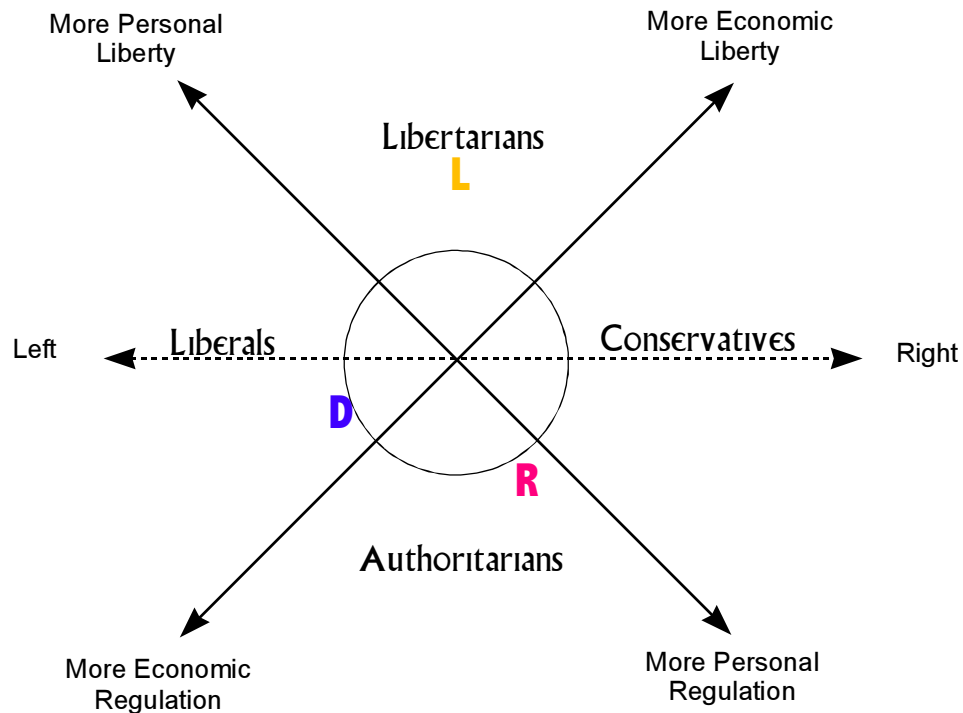
One possible solution would have been for the LP to not only moderate, but also position itself more to the left, emphasizing peace and personal freedom over low taxes and legal machine guns. This would achieve triangulation. I counseled some LP candidates to do just this. And I focused my own recruitment efforts in this area of the Nolan Chart.

Alas, the results were disappointing. No flood of votes or activists ensued. The results were non-zero, however. This approach did result in getting volunteer hours from some very committed activists on the campaigns I worked. And during much of this era the LP was ably led by an activist who was recruited from the left. But this was not enough.

And I now know why. And that why is the reason I believe that a properly positioned third party could become a *major* party, possibly eclipsing one of the two legacy parties. I will get to this opportunity in the next section, but first a conclusion to this section.

Before leaving the subject of triangulating using the Nolan Chart, let me note that the prospects for the LP are now greatly improved over the 1990s. With the Bush Administration the Republican Party has launched an all-out attack on the Bill of Rights, played international bully looking for wars to fight, and have dropped the pretense of economic conservatism. Meanwhile, the Libertarian Party has

moderated its platform, due in large part to the efforts of the Libertarian Reform Caucus. The political landscape has become:



If the LP can contain its penchant for infighting, and spend its resources wisely, it could grow much larger under the current political conditions. The party has a more moderate platform than in the past, and it has a triangulated position on the Nolan Chart (at least as long as the neocons control the Republican Party).

But there is a better opportunity for a third party, one which is more stable vs. a shift in Republican leadership, one which achieves better triangulation, one which does a better job of solving this nation's current problems.

The Real Sweet Spot

The year was 2002 (thereabouts). The day and the city were beautiful. City-County plaza was a small collection of artistic small skyscrapers built in the 1920s. In front was a lawn, suitable for civic events. Lying placidly on the lawn were assorted groups of hippies, smoking their favorite herb. Before them played assorted mediocre bands, singing the praises of said herb. Between songs, legalization advocates took to the microphone. Such was the Hempstock Festival, Asheville, North Carolina.

Into this environ this author went about, voter registration forms in hand, attempting to find new Libertarians. Keep in mind that this was North Carolina, a very difficult ballot access state. The Libertarian Party was the *only* third party on the ballot. We were *the* Party of Pot. This was a pot legalization rally.

No takers.

I got plenty of people to register to vote, but none would check the “Libertarian” box. Many wanted to register as Green. When told this was not an option, they chose Unaffiliated. When asked why, they voiced concern over corporate power, concentration of wealth, and the environment.

They agreed with the LP on social issues, and on peace issues, but that was not enough. Such positioning wins few hearts.

Why take the heat for being in favor of drug legalization when the druggies won’t support you?

And is it politically viable to *focus* on the social issues in order to win the Left? Perhaps the LP slogan could be, “Yes, we favor drugs and prostitution, but at least we’re unpatriotic.”

That evening, I had an epiphany. I realized that the LP needed to do something different in order to win the hearts of the libertarian-leaning Left.

“I’m worried about big corporations and the environment.”

Or, as Bill Clinton said, “It’s the economy, stupid.”

Economic issues trump social issues.

“Big corporations, the rich, the environment...”

I finally listened. They didn’t say “I want more government programs.” They didn’t say, “I want more government control of the economy.” Those are but proposed solutions by the social democrats. The stated values were economic equality and a cleaner environment.

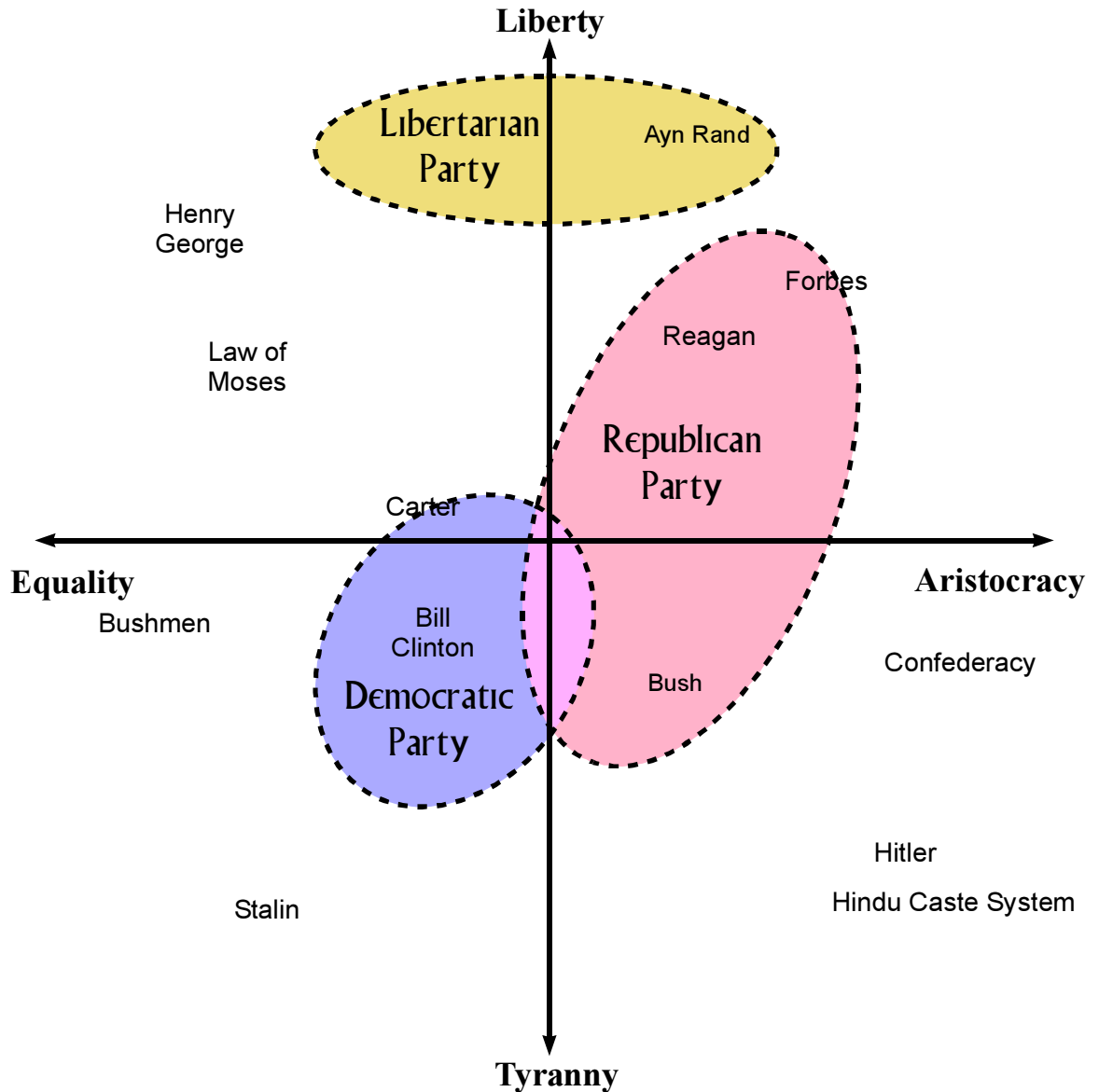
The Nolan Chart does an excellent job of describing conservatism, and the difference between conservatism and libertarianism. It does a much poorer job of describing liberals. In fact, the Nolan Chart is not really two-dimensional. Both dimensions are different aspects of a value of concern to libertarians: the *amount* of government. It says little about what government should do with its power in the various domains.

Once upon a time it was the *Left* that called for smaller government. The classical liberals were *liberals*. Even Murray Rothbard understood this—mostly.

Listen to the Left. What do they think of themselves? What do they accuse the Right of being?



This is the way the Left views the Left-Right spectrum. It is also the way the mainstream generally views the spectrum. It is historically correct as well; the original Right sat on the right of the king. Size of government has nothing to do with this spectrum. For that, we need another axis.



The amount of government is a separate issue from egalitarianism vs. elitism. Locally, at least, the two axes can be treated as orthogonal.

Globally, there is coupling. There are some combinations of freedom/equality or lack thereof that are impossible to attain. Put too much power in a big central government and you create an environment for *inequality* as the Stalin regime proved. It's good to be the king—or commissar. Even the more successful attempts at complete equality lead to constraints, as anyone who has lived in a commune has experienced. Such constraints can be by the group as a whole, vs. a leader, but it is constraint nonetheless.

Meanwhile, the condition of maximal liberty is also at odds with a large wealth gap! The greater the wealth gap, the greater the calls for socialism. Small government with a large wealth gap requires constraints on the democratic process (which the U.S. had in the past through such mechanisms as property requirements and poll taxes). And with such restraints on democracy, you have a pull towards

police state conditions from the rich, in order to protect such wealth from the envious masses. Such was Europe before the modern era. The U.S. had elements of such as well. Prison conditions have been brutal throughout much of U.S. history, despite the existence of the Bill of Rights. Throw in the conditions on the slave ships and treatment of the Indians and the Bush Administration doesn't look so bad by comparison.

Methinks that conditions for minimal government/maximal liberty are somewhere to the left of our current economic situation. Despite this, many libertarians place themselves on the right, economically. The result is political failure.

Look at the upper left quadrant on the chart above. The area close to the center (the U.S. status quo) is nearly empty. There is a market niche waiting to be filled. And until that niche is filled, the U.S. will continue to move towards bigger government and a bigger gap between rich and poor.

The Libertarian Party could move down and to the left and fill this niche.

Or, the Green Party could move up and a tad to the right and fill this niche. Ecology and economics are similar disciplines. They borrow from each other. Darwin drew much inspiration from Adam Smith, and many modern economists draw much inspiration from nature. Free market economics and efficiency go hand in hand. It is possible to put together a very green small government agenda by getting the government to tax certain externalities, get rid of various wasteful subsidies, and then step back and let the market do its thing.

Similarly, libertarians could create a very lefty agenda by getting rid of the many subsidies for investors (deficit spending, the Social Security payroll tax, etc.), corporate executives (restrictions on the capital market which squeeze smalltime entrepreneurs), and natural resource hoarders/exploiters (implement Henry George's tax theories). Many libertarians end up on the Right because they overlook the differences between land (and other natural resources) vs. capital. A more complete view of economics and natural rights moves a libertarian to the left, with a generous dollop of environmentalism thrown in.

I have already done focus group testing. A program of smaller government coupled with a smaller wealth gap is very appealing. It passes the friends and family test. It passes the stranger test. There is a huge market; it thus passes Rule 1. Such a party could also pass Rule 2; while we are talking about two or more values, we still have a definition for our new party. We also pass Rule 3, since the upper left agenda is equally different from both the Democratic and Republican agendas. Finally, the hardcore activists running the major parties do not like the upper-left agenda. We can expect to continue to pass Rule 3; we need not worry about a major party stealing our agenda.

The upper-left market is potentially *bigger* than either the Democratic or Republican markets! It isn't there yet; most voters don't even realize that such an agenda is possible. But once informed, there is great interest. It is simply a matter of voter *education*. (Not voter indoctrination. There is a difference, as I will cover in Part IV.) The situation is similar to the introduction of movies or radio. There was

no great demand for such products at first, because people didn't know such were possible. But once introduced to the market, these products were incredibly popular.

The question is which party will seize the opportunity: Libertarian? Green? Free State? Constitution?

Or do I have to start a new party?

Bypassing Rule 3

In Part One I promised a large market niche in which a third party could become a major party. You just finished reading about it in the previous section. I also promised several smaller niches. We shall cover this subject now.

Rule 3 applies mainly to three-way races. When only two candidates are trying to fill a seat, money, activism, and positioning close to the local center win the race. In a conservative district it is possible for a Constitution, Free State or right-leaning Libertarian Party candidate to beat a Republican in a head-to-head contest. In a liberal district it is possible for an unreconstructed Green Party candidate to beat a Democrat.

To do so still requires some moderation. It still requires organization, money, and a credible candidate. But it is possible. The lesser of two evils dilemma does not apply. You get the votes of those who like your candidate. The press either covers your candidate or has no race to cover.

Here's the unspoken fact of American politics: we do *not* have a two-party system; we have a 1.5-party system! State legislatures gerrymander the districts. A Democratic legislature will try to cram the conservatives into a small number of ultraconservative districts. A Republican legislature will try to cram the liberals into a small number of ultraliberal districts. For this reason the Republicans supported minority dominated districts – until they were chided for their ideological inconsistency.

Such lopsided districts create opportunities for third parties. I did a study of a dozen states back in 2001. I found that of the states I sampled, most had at least 1/3 of their lower state house races uncontested by the major parties. Libertarians who ran in these districts fared four times better on average than those who ran in three-way races. I suspect the same would hold for other third parties, but I didn't tally such at the time.

As long as gerrymandering continues, there will be opportunities for third parties willing to focus their efforts on two-way contests. Triangulation is not necessary, though it can still be useful. A Green candidate who advocates market based solutions to environmental problems and inequality can pick up a big chunk of the Republican minority in a left-leaning district. A Libertarian can pick up some of the Democratic minority in a right-leaning district via positions on social issues (and more if said candidate uses some of the egalitarian ideas at holisticpolitics.org.)

To make this strategy work requires discipline. Among other factors, it requires:

- A focus on state and local issues. While U.S. Congressional districts are gerrymandered, they are nearly always contested by the major parties. Unless your third party can outspend one of the two candidates, you will be clobbered by the lesser of two evils dilemma.
- A willingness to drop out of three-way races. If your party is conservative, drop out if your candidacy would cause a liberal Democrat to beat a [semi-] conservative Republican. Playing the spoiler will only irritate a large portion of your base.
- Anticipation of which districts will be uncontested. Districts shift. Focus your recruitment on areas which are liable to stay within lopsided districts. Recruit heavily after redistricting. Ease up on recruitment and focus on winning where strong during the end of the ten year cycle.
- Staying away from running serious presidential campaigns. This is a corollary of the first three bullets.

Summary

There are three rules which *must* be followed for a third party to have a chance in general.

- Rule 1: A successful third party must be moderate enough to *win* somewhere.
- Rule 2: A third party needs *some* principles.
- Rule 3: A third party must have a base of voters/activists that is indifferent to the difference between the Democrats and Republicans.

It is difficult to follow all three rules at the same time. For a left or right wing party, following Rule 1 results in violating Rule 3. Attempts at building a centrist party usually result in violating Rule 2.

To follow all three rules, a party needs to do politics in more than one dimension and triangulate. The Libertarian Party does this to an extent by using the Nolan Chart as its political map. However, this triangulation is imperfect as one of the axes is more heavily weighted than the other. I propose a different political map with equality being one dimension and freedom being the other. Using such a map we can see a large unoccupied market niche that extends nearly to the center. (I centered the graph based on where government is; the demographic center of where people want government to be is likely offset.)

A party which occupies this market niche has the potential to become a new major party. Doing so could end a systemic bias in our political system that leads to government growing bigger while the wealth gap grows.

Both the Libertarian and Green parties have the potential to occupy this niche. If neither goes for it, I intend to launch a new party specifically tailored to fit there. If you want to act, act soon!

Smaller niches can be found for one or more third parties by focusing geographically on those areas where Rule 3 does not apply: gerrymandered districts where one of the major parties is so weak as to not bother running candidates. Such a strategy could lead to a third party holding the balance of power in one or more state legislatures. Applied over time, it could even lead to a few U.S. Congressional seats being held by third parties that apply this strategy.