The Libertarian Party
and Other Minor Political Parties
in the United States

by
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To my children,
Emilee and Aimee,
this book is lovingly dedicated.
Allow your curiosity to grow,
for you will have to provide
the answers.
Minor parties decline due to external factors found in the election system and society. They also decline due to a variety of internal factors and problems, including such elements as low financial resources, difficult membership requirements, a narrow clientele, the lack of volunteers and workers, and the ideological extremism of their platform stances. The internal or organizational factors are interrelated. For example, the extreme ideological positions that minor parties sometimes present may appeal to only a small segment of the electorate, which explains the narrow clientele and the lack of resources the party may have at its disposal.

Minor party problems with the lack of resources due to the FECA have already been referred to above. The low treasuries of minor parties prevent purchasing media time and advertising, financing adequate campaigns, and initiating ballot drives in several states. Minor parties have always been outspent by the two major parties.

As mentioned earlier, the major parties already enjoy ballot status in all states, but minor parties usually have to file petitions and sometimes endure costly litigation just to get on the ballot. After Eugene McCarthy finished his ballot drives and court battles to be on thirty state ballots, his treasury was down to only $100,000 for campaign travel and advertising. This financial problem is not new. Despite massive efforts at fund-raising, the 1936 Union Party could only raise $20,000 for its campaign.\(^264\) If a party must use its war chest on ballot access drives, the amount of money remaining for media time, advertising, and polls is minimal.

Even though minor parties do not receive the millions of dollars in matching public funds that the major parties do, they still must subscribe to the limits imposed on contributions by federal law. Minor parties rely upon membership dues and small contributions to survive, and empty or near empty treasuries mean a thin campaign.\(^265\) Since most minor parties only appeal to a small segment of voters for a variety of reasons, the number and amounts of contributions are low at best.

Some minor parties go to the extreme in fund-raising attempts, even to the point of illegality. Lyndon LaRouche has run for president since 1976. In 1980, he collected 185,000 votes in fifteen Democratic Party primaries and received $526,000 in funds from the FEC. His campaign committee was forced to repay $55,751 and a fine of $15,000 after some irregularities were discovered in campaign records.\(^266\) LaRouche's National Democratic Party, as the group became named in 1976, solicited contributions from people in numerous ways, some of them fraudulent. Phony solicitations were made for funds during the 1984 presidential election. Representatives of the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) would ask for money, donations, or " oats from the voter on one of their major credit cards. Several contributors who used their credit card later discovered that instead of the pledged $15 or $20 donation, they were billed for $500, $1,000, or even more.\(^267\) The FBI and a Boston Grand Jury probe investigated and affirmed that the NDPC had indeed used "unauthorized credit-card numbers resulting in unauthorized charges apparently totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars.\(^268\) Many loans the NDPC received were in the amount of $100,000, and many of these have already been defaulted on.\(^269\)

As a result, LaRouche and several of his top aides are presently serving time in federal prison for conspiracy and fraud. The fraudulent activity of LaRouche's NDPC may have implications for other minor parties by making their electoral efforts seem likewise illegitimate. Voters may believe that if the NDPC is unscrupulous in its activities, all minor parties must be the same. Voters may be more reluctant to contribute time, money, and support to a minor party row more than ever. The level of respectability for minor party efforts may have been damaged.

The organization and structure of minor parties tends to be a drawback in their seeking electoral success. Minor parties not only have trouble in securing adequate funds to mount a reasonable campaign, but have difficulties in attracting and mobilizing committed workers over a long period of time, especially between presidential elections.\(^270\) Most national minor parties have had a national headquarters, but few have maintained a state and even fewer have had local headquarters. "Unlike the major parties they have not developed strong state and local organizations to serve as bases for their election-contesting activities, and this comparative advantage on the part of the major parties has consistently reflected itself in the election returns.\(^271\) It is obvious that if a minor party cannot achieve ballot status in a state, its organization is weak, if not nonexistent.

Whereas the two major parties make requirements for membership as simple and undemanding as possible, some minor parties almost seem to want to exclude people from joining. Minor parties, like the Socialist Workers, Communist, and the African People's Socialist Party require a formal application in order to join. Each new applicant has to promise to adhere to the party's ideology, organizational principles, and disciplinary structure. The Communist Party even goes as far as to require new members to be union members, if possible be registered voters, and pay an initiation fee and yearly dues to maintain their membership.\(^272\)

The Communist Party is a prime example of a party that has difficulty in recruiting and keeping members. It has had a very unstable membership and suffers from high turnover rate.\(^273\) The CPUSA has been plagued with an inability to lead, retain, control, and direct its membership.

Regardless of what motivates a person to join the CPUSA, whether it be the need of social companionship, ideological attraction, or an agreement with its political and social objectives, members left for many reasons. The main reasons for defections have been internal ideological or political
Chapter 2. Nature and Definitions of Minor Political Parties

and it will wither in size and impact, possibly disappearing altogether. Thus the party has failed.

Finally, the ideological base, or doctrinal position of minor parties is another organizational factor that causes these parties to decline and eventually collapse within American politics. The extremism of many parties repels voters from supporting them. The ideologically extreme parties realize they have little or no chance of inclusion in the government and reflect this in their action and ideas. If a party does not have natural support in the electorate, it must engineer support through the promotion of its policies and goals. Politically and ideologically extreme goals, whether left or right, will only appeal to a small segment of the electorate. This amount of support is hardly enough to sustain the party over long periods of time.

There are many examples of minor parties that have formed around extreme political positions. These parties express positions that are contrary to the norm of American self-conception of equality, individualism, private property, and democracy. Any attempt to revive the legitimacy founded in the American social or political institutions will be considered as extreme and will attract only a few voters to the cause.

Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab state that, "historically, extremist movements are movements of disaffection." These groups believe they have been deprived of something and believe themselves to be politically isolated from the mainstream. Sometimes these extremist groups appear during periods of party realignment. Most times, extremist parties are "preservists" in nature, hoping to halt changes in society and politics. Extremism can be defined as any political program that in a radical or reactionary fashion challenges the norms, legitimacy, and consensus of the American political system.

There are several extremist minor parties from the right of the political spectrum. The American Nazi Party, formed in 1958 by George Lincoln Rockwell, claimed it would have a president by 1972. Although the correlation between the ANP's platform and ideology and its failure at fulfilling its goal may be difficult to empirically substantiate, it is logical that this was the case. The ANP's ideology was anti-Semitic, anti-Communist and anti-Negro. The party blamed Jews for controlling the country's financial institutions and government, and for instigating black Americans to riot and march for civil rights. The party never achieved national election ballot status and has only appealed to a few extremists as supporters.

The Christian Nationalist Party ran the Rev. Gerald Lyman Kenneth Smith for president in 1944. Smith received only 1,780 votes on his anti-Semitic, anti-Negro platform. Again, whether or not the CNP's extremist platform repelled voters or not, one can only speculate.

Some extremist minor parties claim to be saving the United States from itself. One such party was the National States Rights Party (not to be confused with the Dixiecrats), which formed in 1958 from a paramilitary group. The party proposed to save the United States from internal threats of destruction by ridding the country of Jews, Negroses, Catholics, and other groups that it deemed undesirable. The party lasted only a few years.

A prime example of an extremist party was a fascist movement in the U.S. led by Father Charles E. Coughlin. During the 1930s, Coughlin had a weekly radio broadcast in which he began to talk about political matters. He was anti-Communist while at the same time denouncing American capitalism for its exploitation of workers. He called for government intervention to help the unemployed and reform the business and banking systems.

By 1934 Father Coughlin had developed a system that he labeled "social justice" that "advocated government ownership and control of the banks in order to guarantee full employment at reasonable wages, and though it approved of trade-unions, it opposed strikes and lock-out as unnecessary." The new system of social justice was to replace capitalism and democracy which, in Coughlin's view, had no hope in the United States. Coughlin's policy was extremely nationalistic, isolationist, and anti-Communist and his new Union Party entered politics in 1936.

The Union Party claimed to have over 5 million members, but only received 900,000 votes. After this disappointing show of support, Father Coughlin announced that his mistake was to believe democracy could work and his policy ideas became increasingly fascist in nature. Coughlin advocated the abolition of political parties, a corporate state, and stronger support for Mussolini and Hitler and their policies, including Hitler's persecution of Jews. Coughlin and the Union Party ended in 1942, after the Church and several government officials ordered him to cease his political activities.

Support for Coughlin and the Union Party was mainly due to economic dissatisfaction. The constant condemnation of the banking and business system by Coughlin appealed to those people who were discontented with their economic situation, especially the working class and unemployed. Coughlin's appeal and following decreased drastically as the United States entered into a war against leaders that held ideological positions similar to Coughlin's.

A more recent case of ideological extremism in a minor party can be found in Lyndon LaRouche's National Democratic Policy Committee. The NDPC's most notable achievement was having two of its members win the Illinois Democratic primary for the offices of lieutenant governor and secretary of state, forcing Adlai Stevenson to run on a minor party ticket to avoid being associated with these NDPC extremists. LaRouche, who began his political career as a Marxist-Leninist and member of the Socialist
Workers Party, espoused far-right ideals. 248 His politics bordered on the far edge of the spectrum, claiming that Jewish bankers, the Chinese, the Soviets, and the queen of England, among others, were involved in a worldwide conspiracy to deindustrialize the world and make it dependent on drugs. 249 LaRouche and the NDPC were staunchly anti-Semitic and racist in public positions. Several authors describe LaRouche and his followers as a fanatical cult, rather than a true political party. 250 Whatever term best describes LaRouche and the NDPC, they made an impact in the 1986 primaries in many states. LaRouche supporters ran in numerous primaries of both major parties in many states. One count put the number of candidates at close to 500 in as many as 29 states. 251 NDPC candidates took the opportunities of running in unopposed Democratic or Republican primary elections. Voters seemed confused about the party’s name, or did not realize that the candidate listed under a major party ticket was in actuality a LaRouche supporter. The NDPC will not be a force to be dealt with in the future because of the imprisonment of LaRouche in 1988.

Robert A. Dahl best describes the extremist groups in the United States by stating that these “oppositional groups shade off into an indeterminate collection of alienated Americans whose opposition is even more out of line with the pattern of normal opposition. There are, and probably always have been, Americans who reject some or most of the key elements in the dominant ideology and some or most of the major institutions.” 252 Usually, these groups have a difficult time expressing their extreme views through the American political process, so they resort either to other methods, or quit the political system altogether. 253 Extremist parties are usually opposed to democracy and the prevailing political and social ideals of America has ever had its candidates elected. If the party does not accommodate itself to the prevailing ideology, the voters will perceive it as being too radical and unrealistic in its goals. 254 As Dahl explains, parties that fall outside the prevailing consensus usually have a small following “made up of a disproportionate number of people low in political skills, realism and effectiveness.” 255 For these political dissenters, continued political impotence and rejection breeds frustration which causes them to withdraw from the party or politics completely. The end result is that the party fails from a lack of support, and the members become alienated, hostile, and even resentful of parties and the political system. 256 Extremism will repel voters and cause a party to collapse.

As can be observed, there are many explanations for the failure of minor parties that can be found in the internal workings of the party. Poor organization, a lack of resources, sectional rather than national support, few volunteers and workers, and the ideological extremism are all internal factors that can cause a minor party to decline over time. There are two final explanations concerning the demise of minor parties, that of fusion and or cooptation of a minor party by one of the major parties; and that of fission or splintering within a minor party. Fission is caused by a lack of unity within the party. Minor party schisms are detrimental to the party, causing it to disappear completely or form a single set of candidates. Several authors describe LaRouche and his followers as a fanatical cult, rather than a true political party. 257 Whatever term best describes LaRouche and the NDPC, they made an impact in the 1986 primaries in many states.

Finally, “to the leaders of minor parties fusion [with a major party] often seems to offer the only hope of escape from the demands of the voting public, and has probably been more often fatal to such parties than any other cause.” 258 Fusion is the process in which a minor party joins with a major party and agrees to support its candidates. It is a surrender of the party’s platform, issues, and goals to a major party through cooptation. 259 Minor parties often base their campaign on policies and issues that the major parties ignore. If there does seem to be a national response to the minor parties’ platform, the major parties will move to accommodate these issues in order to capture this support. In other words, the major parties wait for the minor parties to experiment with various issues in order to know whether or not it is feasible to absorb these issues into their platform. 260 “Minor parties bring about their demise by the very support they attract. They usually lose the battle but, through cooptation, often win the war by having their issues adapted into policy via a major party.” 261 Extremist parties are usually exposed from this threat of fusion. In fact, Rosestone, Behr, and Lazarus conclude that “the longevity of the five ideological parties—Prohibition, Socialist, Socialist Labor, Socialist Workers and Communist—can be attributed in part to their extreme stands and narrow basis of support.” 262 Mazimanian notes that “usually after a strong showing by a minor party, at least one of the major parties shifts its position, adopting the third party’s rhetoric if not the core of its program. Consequently, by the following election the third-party constituency has a choice between the ‘extremist’ third party with little hope of victory, and a major party more sympathetic to its needs.” 263 Therefore, electoral success can breed failure for a minor party through major party cooptation. Once it is demonstrated that a principle gets votes, one of the major parties adopts it and, if the demand has merit, it will probably be translated into policy by the major party. 264 Fusion, as referred to earlier, can also mean that two or more parties support a single set of candidates. This usually involves a temporary alliance between a minor party and the weaker of the two major parties. 265 The
27 Ibid., p. 83.
28 James, American Political Parties, p. 52.
31 Ibid.
32 Herbert E. Alexander, Financing Politics, p. 95; Federal Election Commission, Federal Election Campaign Law, 9004(a)(2)(B), p. 64; Rosenstone et al., Third Parties in America, p. 56; and Nelson W. Polsby, Consequences of Party Reform, p. 83.
33 Polsby and Wildavsky, Presidential Elections, p. 64.
36 Ibid., 1980 Election, p. 15.
37 Ibid. Other minor party spending, in comparison, for 1980 was: Libertarian, $3,320,678; Citizens, $1,400,171; Socialist Workers, $528,000; Communist, $316,275; Socialist, $39,000; and the American Independent, Conservative, Constitution, Freedom, Labor, Peace and Freedom, People’s Capitalist, People’s National, U.S. Labor (LaRouche), U.S. Congress, and the Worker’s World spent a total of only $228,000 (p. 116).
38 Alexander, 1980 Election, p. 15. This increased amount for 1980 could be partially attributed to the Libertarian. Party spending $3.3 million in its presidential campaign (p. 116).
40 Alexander, Financing Politics, p. 35.
41 Ibid., pp. 35–36, 95. The Court gave a per curiam decision in which Justice Stevens abstained.
42 Smallwood, The Other Candidates, p. 173. The total amount spent by the party was $3.5 million.
44 Herbert E. Alexander, Financing the 1972 Election, p. 313.
45 Polsby, Party Reform, p. 54.
47 Ibid.
48 Smallwood, The Other Candidates, p. 267. In 1959 broadcast time in the form of newscasts, interviews, and documentaries were excluded from section 315(a) equal time requirements (p. 267).
49 Polsby and Wildavsky, Presidential Elections, p. 80. For a larger discussion of free media time, although a bit outdated, see Delmer D. Dunn, Financing Presidential Campaigns. Dunn examines the question and consequences of waiving the equal time doctrine (section 315a), the amount of time by office and party, and the value of political debates.
50 Polsby and Wildavsky, Presidential Elections, p. 269.
51 Ibid., p. 276; and Alexander, 1980 Election, p. 353.
53 Alexander, 1980 Election, p. 354. However, Polsby and Wildavsky note that Anderson steadily lost ground after being excluded from debating the major party candidates at Carter’s insistence (Presidential Elections, p. 80).
55 Ibid.
57 James, American Political Parties, p. 53.
58 Woodburn, Political Parties and Party Problems, p. 525.
59 Rosenstone et al., Third Parties in America, p. 44.
60 Ibid.; and Smallwood, The Other Candidates, p. 9. Smallwood explains that 1924 Progressive candidate Robert La Follette lost hundreds of thousands of votes when the major parties used this type of strategy (p. 9).
61 Rosenstone et al., Third Parties in America, p. 46.
62 Everett Carl Ladd, Jr., American Political Parties, p. 46.
63 Rosenstone et al., Third Parties in America, p. 46.
64 Smallwood, The Other Candidates, p. 8.
65 Sindler, Political Parties in the U.S., p. 56; Haynes, Social Politics, p. 154; Rossiter, Parties and Politics, p. 8; and also see Eldersveld, Behavioral Analysis, pp. 492–501 for an expanded explanation about political consensus in the American Electorate.
66 Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People, p. 57.
67 Smallwood, The Other Candidates, p. 5.
68 Rosenstone et al., Third Parties in America, pp. 46–47.
69 Lawson, Political Parties and Democracy, p. 46.
70 Rosenstone et al., Third Parties in America, p. 30.
71 Ibid.
74 “LaRouche Followers Linked to Fraud Probe,” Knoxville News-Sentinel, 30 March 1986, p. A-5. Also see Philip Shenon, “Ten Close Associates of LaRouche Charged with Fraud, Conspiracy,” Chattanooga Times, 7 October 1985, p. A-7. It is interesting to note that when the author of this work was doing research in 1984 on various minor parties, he was contacted several times by LaRouche’s NDPCC. Several high-pressure phone calls were received, each explaining the great need for LaRouche to be in office and they all ended with a plea for contributions, and or a $500 loan on a major credit card that would be paid back, in full, after the campaign was completed.
77 Eldersveld, Political Parties, p. 40.
80 Harvey Klehr, Communist Cadre, p. 4.
81 Ibid., pp. 83–85.
Chapter 2 Notes


2. Ibid., p. 50.

3. Ibid., p. 11.

4. Ibid., p. 12.

5. Ibid.

6. Herring, The Politics of Democracy, p. 182; and Sorauf, Party Politics in America, p. 34.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., pp. 34–39. Smith was pro-Nazi during the war.


10. Ibid., pp. 168–69.

11. Ibid., p. 170.


13. Ibid., p. 177. The postmaster general had banned Coughlin's magazine, Social Justice, from the mail as seditious and the attorney general urged the archbishop to silence Coughlin (p. 171).


Chapter 3 Notes


4. Tibor R. Machan, Human Rights and Human Liberties, p. 51. Machan argues that rights are natural and are the equivalent of moral principles that must be followed. (Tibor R. Machan, "Libertarianism and Conservatives," Modern Age 54:3.


7. Ibid., p. 16.


10. Ibid., pp. 50, 51. Hospers notes that property rights are only second to the rights to life (p. 62).

11. Ibid., p. 117.

12. Ibid., p. 115.
