

O Other, Where Art Thou? Support for Multiparty Politics in the US*

Todd Donovan*
Western Washington University

Janine A. Parry
University of Arkansas

Shaun Bowler
University of California, Riverside

ABSTRACT

Objective: We test hypotheses about support for multi-party politics in the US. We expect that individual-level attitudes and state-level partisan context determine who supports having more parties.

Methods: Survey data are used to model attitudes about having additional parties to challenge Democrats and Republicans.

Results: Self-identified partisans are opposed to additional parties, but independents who "lean" toward a major party are most supportive. Independents who say they are closer to Democrats, as well as independents who say they are closer to Republicans, tend to support having new parties. The latter effect is contingent upon a state's partisan context. Independents closer to Republicans are most receptive to additional parties in states where fewer conservative representatives are elected.

Conclusions: Support for multipartyism among "leaning" independents challenges our understanding of how they may be similar to partisan identifiers, and illustrate that a base for new parties may exist in the "mainstream" public if electoral rules were changed.

. *Direct correspondence to Todd Donovan, Department of Political Science, MS 9082, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225, donovan@cc.wvu.edu. An earlier version of this paper was awarded the Allan Saxe Award for best paper on state and local politics presented at the 2002 Southwestern Political Science Association meeting.