



# Spoiling for a Fight: Third-Party Politics in America

*Micah L. Sifry*

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More Americans now identify as political independents than as either Democrats or Republicans. Tired of the two-party gridlock, the pandering, and the lack of vision, they've turned in increasing numbers to independent and third-party candidates. In 1998, for the first time in decades, a third-party candidate who was not a refugee from one of the two major parties, Jesse Ventura, won election to state-wide office, as the governor of Minnesota. In 2000, the public was riveted by the Reform Party's implosion over Patrick Buchanan's presidential candidacy and by Ralph Nader's Green Party run, which infuriated many Democrats but energized hundreds of thousands of disaffected voters in stadium-sized super-rallies. What are the prospects for new third-party efforts? Combining the close-in, personal reporting and learned analysis one can only get by covering this beat for years, Micah L. Sifry's *Spoiling for a Fight* exposes both the unfair obstacles and the viable opportunities facing today's leading independent parties. Third-party candidates continue to be denied a fighting chance by discriminatory ballot access, unequal campaign financing, winner-take-all races, and derisive media coverage. Yet, after years of grassroots organizing, third parties are making major inroads. At the local level, efforts like Chicago's New Party and New York's Working Families Party have upset urban political machines while gaining positions on county councils and school boards. Third-party activists are true believers in democracy, and if America's closed two-party system is ever to be reformed, it will be thanks to their efforts

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