Subject: **Political Parties, Democratic Stability, and Ballot Fusion**
To: **Counsel**
From: Jack Santucci, Ph.D.
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1.   I have been asked to share some thoughts on political parties, democratic stability, and the relationship of each to ballot fusion (understood here to mean cross-endorsement). What follows is based on my doctoral education and ongoing research into so-called 'multiparty reforms.' A key theme will be that *the number of parties matters less than whether the electoral rules facilitate coalition, then make such coalitions unambiguously known to voters.* Cross-endorsement fusion has desirable properties on both fronts: promoting coalition, then telling voters *on the ballot* what coalition they aim to place in control of government.

2.   I have not been paid to write this. I am an Assistant Teaching Professor of Politics at Drexel University. I earned my doctorate in Government at Georgetown University in 2017. My forthcoming book, *More Parties or No Parties: The Politics of Electoral Reform in America,* proposes a general theory of electoral reform, puts the U.S. Progressive Era into comparative perspective, then suggests we may be repeating some negative features of that history. One such feature is an effort to satisfy demand for "voter choice" with reforms that make it difficult for parties to do their jobs (see just below). My full curriculum vitae is appended at the end of this essay.

A system of strong parties makes democracy possible

3.   Many political scientists would say that a *system of strong parties* is constitutive of democracy. By "strong," I mean a party that can nominate one candidate (or slate), get voters to support that candidate (or slate), and then discipline its deputies in government.[1] By "system," I mean a set of at least two such parties that can broker coalition deals. Hence the importance of party discipline. Finally, I mean "constitutive" in two senses. In the first sense, voters can hold government accountable because they can point to the party — or coalition of parties — that controls government.[2] Another way to say all of this is that a system of strong parties organizes civil society — voters, parties, and intermediary groups — in competition for control of government.[3] A system of strong parties makes majority rule possible.

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[1] For a comprehensive statement, see Kathleen Bawn et al., "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Nominations, and Policy Demands in American Politics" (2012), *Perspectives on Politics 10* (3): 571-97. Online at https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712001624.

[2] On the number being less important than the existence of a system, see John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? A Second Look* (2011), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[3] Russell J. Dalton, David M. Farrell, and Ian McAllister, *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage: How Parties Organize Democracy* (2011), London: Oxford University Press.

4.	There is a second sense in which parties are constitutive of democracy: in organizing competition over the rules of democracy itself. Periods in which parties have been weak — such as the Progressive Era — also have been periods in which the franchise was restricted.[4] Sometimes the connection has not been by accident.[5]

The case against multiparty politics is historically suspect

5.	What about the number of parties and democratic stability? A generation or two ago, it was common to think that the two-party system contained radicalism. This perspective owes much to the political scientist Ferdinand Hermens. In the years around World War II, he argued that the fragmentation of the Weimar-German multiparty system made it difficult to form coalitions that excluded fascists.[6]

6.	Hermens' etiology of German fascism was reductive.[7] Later analysts have pointed to other factors: dissolution of the Weimar coalition over economic policy,[8] *ex ante* rejection of democracy by a large part of the political elite, and short-sightedness by business leaders who thought (wrongly) that they might control Hitler. Also, some suggest that this group abrogated democracy precisely to avoid losing the next election (i.e., to avoid democratic alternation).[9] More generally, interwar difficulties at

[4] Richard Valelly, "How Suffrage Politics Made—and Makes— America," pp. 445-72 in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development* (2016), edited by Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, and Robert C. Lieberman, New York: Oxford University Press.

[5] For application to anti-party reforms of the Progressive Era, see Amy Bridges and Richard Kronick, "Writing the Rules to Win the Game: The Middle-class Regimes of Municipal Reformers" (1999), *Urban Affairs Review 34* (5): 691-706.

[6] Ferdinand A. Hermens, "Proportional Representation and the Breakdown of German Democracy" (1936), *Social Research 3* (4): 411-33. Online at https://www.jstor.org/stable/40981519.

[7] See, e.g., Harold Gosnell's 1941 review of Hermens' 1941 book, *Democracy or Anarchy? A Study of Proportional Representation*: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev/vol9/iss1/27/.

[8] Martin Ejnar Hansen and Marc Debus, "The Behavior of Political Parties and MPs in the Parliaments of the Weimar Republic" (2012), *Party Politics 18* (5): 709-26. Online at https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354068810389645.

[9] M. Rainer Lepsius, "From Fragmented Party Democracy to Government by Emergency Decree and National Socialist Takeover: Germany," pp. 34-79 in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (1978), edited by Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

forming coalitions seem to have been a 'growing pain' in the development of party government across Western democracies.[10]

Electoral rules can facilitate or frustrate coalition formation

7.   Yet Hermens' critique of proportional representation — which he saw as synonymous with multiparty politics — begins to highlight the importance of electoral systems. His insistence on the value of "majority voting," by which he meant two-round runoff in districts of relatively few seats, was grounded in the desirability of coalition formation. Two-round elections might encourage parties to negotiate joint candidacies in round two, then pool their electioneering efforts — just as a single "strong" party might in the conventional political-science view above.

8.   Another important feature of the electoral system is that it be permissive enough to make *many different coalitions* possible. For example, if there are just two parties, one of those parties must include the faction that opposes voting rights. Or, if there are just two parties, and if voting rights define that *party system*, it is difficult to get a party system *not defined* by voting rights.

9.   Technically, an electoral system is defined by four or five key variables: assembly size, district magnitude (the number of seats per district), ballot type (e.g., choose-one vs. ranked), and allocation rule (e.g., proportional vs. plurality vs. majority). The first two determine the number of seat-winning parties,[11] and this insight probably extends to the number of *factions* that can win representation. Others have begun to add rules about nominations to the list. So far, American-style fusion (again taken to mean cross-endorsement) has not systematically entered the literature on electoral systems.[12]

10.   The key features of an electoral system can be configured to *facilitate or hinder coalition formation*. For example, a system that *discourages* parties from nominating just one candidate (or slate) each is set up explicitly to prevent stable coalition.[13]

Fusion has desirable properties

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[10] Henk te Velde, "Parliamentary Obstruction and the 'Crisis' of European Parliamentary Politics Around 1900" (2013), *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory 16* (1): 125-47. Online at http://doi.org/10.7227/R.16.1.7.

[11] Matthew S. Shugart and Rein Taagepera, *Votes from Seats: Logical Models of Electoral Systems* (2017), New York: Cambridge University Press.

[12] The closest one gets is *apparentement*, i.e., when two or more parties combine lists in a system of proportional representation.

[13] Katherine M. Gehl and Michael E. Porter, *The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy* (2020), Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

11.   I have further thoughts on fusion vis-a-vis other reforms, and in view of the United States' presidential system of government. Those thoughts are reserved for later writing.

12.   For now, compare fusion to the runoff systems Hermens favored. The former asks two or more parties to *nominate the same candidate* (or slate)*.* The latter invites said parties to run separate candidates (or slates). Then, if they have done so, it asks them in the second round to unite behind just one of the candidates (or slates). That negotiation may run afoul of various actors' motives, e.g., the minor-party candidate's interest in 'spoiling' to 'make a point.' Fusion obviates such negotiation.[14]

13.   I am not claiming that fusion is a perfect system. Other factors matter. One potentially important issue is 'aggregated' versus 'disaggregated' fusion, i.e., whether Candidate X appears on a single ballot line versus on one line for each party endorsement. Another potential issue, which I have heard about in conversation, is potential for 'misuse' by major-party actors seeking to disadvantage the opposing major party. Others may be more qualified to speak to these issues — particularly the allegation of 'misuse.'[15]

14.   Rather, my point is that a system of cross-endorsement fusion seems a reasonable way to channel multiparty competition. It promotes coalition among parties, then makes those coalition deals unambiguously known to voters.[16]

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[14] For practical examples from New York State, see Benjamin R. Kantack, "Fusion and Electoral Performance in New York Congressional Elections" (2017), *Party Politics 70* (2): 291-300. Online at https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1065912916689823.

[15] Scholars who come to mind include: Craig Burnett, Benjamin Kantack, Melissa Michelson, and Scott Susin.

[16] An obvious alternative is to restrict ballot access, but this may demobilize the set of voters that turns out for minor parties. See Melissa R. Michelson and Scott J. Susin, "What's in a Name? The Power of Fusion Politics in a Local Election" (2004), *Polity 36* (2): 301-21. Online at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3235483. Also, if party-system conflict is defined by democracy itself, removing minor parties from the ballot may make it difficult to change the substance of that conflict. See the section above on a "system of strong parties."