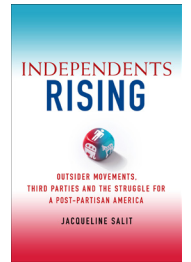




LET'S KEEP NEW YORK CITY INDEPENDENT AND MOVING FORWARD

An interview with Jacqueline Salit, President, IndependentVoting.org and author of *Independents Rising*



The mayoral election is 10 months away. How is the race shaping up? The candidates are busy competing with one another to become the nominees of their parties. The Democratic and Republican parties will hold their primaries, but the city's one million independent voters will not be allowed to participate in them. For more than a decade we've had nonpartisan government—made possible by the NYC Independence Party and the leadership of Mayor Mike Bloomberg. But our City could be thrown back to old-style politics, with all the divisions of partisanship and special interests.



What happens then? It will be difficult, if not impossible, to take on the city's many challenges. Not only did Hurricane Sandy devastate many families and weaken our infrastructure, but poverty, under-performing schools, lack of job opportunities, and tense relations between police and young black and Latino males will become even more serious, especially in an economy that still resists substantial growth.

NYC has had an independent mayor for 12 years. What's been the impact of that? Many were free to work to address problems in a uniquely non-partisan environment. Innovators like Dr. Lenora Fulani and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly partnered in "Operation Conversation: Cops and Kids," and created new ways of bringing these polarized groups together.



Education innovators at the Eagle Academy and in charter schools across the city, and afterschool groundbreakers like the privately funded All Stars Project brought new approaches in youth development to tens of thousands of poor kids. Social innovation has flourished. Like lots of people, I'm afraid that a resurgence of partisan politics will slow innovation at a time new approaches and new partnerships are needed more than ever.

You mention the NYC Independence Party. What's its role in all this? The Independence Party gave Mike Bloomberg his winning margin in 2001, drew 47% of black voters and 35% of Latino voters towards political independence in 2005, and then polled 150,000 votes in the 2009 mayoral for Bloomberg. It has been an engine for political culture change during these years, a champion of non-partisan elections and other reforms that dramatically reduce partisanship. Everyone wants the party's line, even though they don't really want its political independence. That's why, for example, the *Daily News* recently ran a sensationalized four-part series attacking the party and its leaders, myself included. But, look, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to see through this one. It's all about trying to keep independents under the thumb of the parties.

Is there an independent running for mayor? The IP is now working with a popular community leader, Adolfo Carrion, who recently left the Democratic Party to become an independent candidate for mayor. Carrion, who was the Bronx Borough President, believes the Latino and black communities need more political power than is currently offered by the Democrats. No sooner did he declare his independence than Democratic Party operatives at the White House, where he served in the first Obama administration, tried to tear him down in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. When you become an independent—as 40 percent of the country has—the insiders get worried. When you're from the communities of color and you become an independent, they become even more worried. The parties want to control their core constituencies. They want the independent vote, but don't want independents to become organized. It's pretty simple, really. They don't want to have to compete with a new "up-from-the-bottom" progressive coalition that is outside of their control.



What's your message to New Yorkers? Join with me to make sure that we will go forward, not backward, in 2013. We need to roll up our sleeves and keep working on new policy approaches for the development of all of our communities—inner city, outer borough, rich and poor. We need political reforms that keep partisanship at bay. I want to invite everyone to join me at a National Conference of Independent Voters on Saturday February 16th here in New York City. I invite all New Yorkers to attend, to learn more about nonpartisan reform and political independence, and to become a part of this new movement for a new politic. We need to keep New York City independent!

For more information go to www.conferenceofindependents.org and call us at 212 609-2800.