

Political magazine courting independents

By Steve Miller

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The 35 percent of Americans who describe themselves as political independents are not confused, but are actually more strident than most in their stance: "They're independent," asserts Jacqueline Salit, executive editor of the Neo Independent, a new quarterly magazine that caters to that bloc of voters and makes its debut this month.

The Neo Independent storms out of the publishing gates as a thumb in the eye of both the Democratic and Republican parties, challenging the hopes of the mainstream political machines.

"The major parties aren't so interested in anybody voting," said Miss Salit, a former segment producer for the ABC television network. "They are only interested in them voting if they cast ballots for their party. I mean, look at what happened when Mayor [Michael] Bloomberg wanted to have nonpartisan elections."

What happened was that Democrats scolded the New York City mayor and worked to defeat the measure.

Which is emblematic of the mountain that the Neo Independent must climb. In issue No. 1 of the magazine, which features Mr. Bloomberg on the cover, Miss Salit takes three bylines and under one she asks where the power of the independent voter is. "The independent voter, 35 percent of the electorate, can hardly be considered fringe," she writes in her keynote piece, "The Emerging Independent Minority." The piece plays on two partisan tomes: 1969's "The Emerging Republican Majority," and 2002's "The Emerging Democratic Majority."

"[Independents] see the failure of ideology -- conservative and liberal -- and the need for significant reform and restructuring that break the American political system out of strict party control. They are more populist than centrist ... there is ... a new paradigm emerging that is more about the insiders and the outsiders than about left, right and center."

Some of the first issue also spans to the politically obtuse and downright obscure. An essay on Stanford professor Richard Rorty, described as "America's most popular philosophical pragmatist," reads thickly.

"I like to offer readers a full range of voices," Miss Salit said. "Even things that are 'beyond' them. I want to challenge readers politically and intellectually, and in some way I want the magazine to broaden their horizons."

The press run for the first issue is 5,000, sent to 1,200 subscribers in 43 states. There is no advertising, no classified section and no reader profile. Just some pages, some optimism and enough money to keep the magazine running for a year on its own.

Miss Salit received the magazine as a gift from friends and a cast of nearly 300 benefactors for her 50th birthday last year, perhaps as a reward for her ceaseless toil for the politically independent.

In 1994, she was a co-founder of the Committee for a Unified Independent Party, a New York-based think tank and activist center promoting independent politics.

Miss Salit said that the magazine does not necessarily aim to convert, but "if in the process we persuade more people to become independents, that would be great. I really just hope we can bring more of an independent voice to the general political discussion."