

## Small District Democracy

April 7, 2023

Virtually every election-related reform one could imagine was discussed this week at INC '23 in Austin, Texas. INC stands for Independent National Convention, a [gathering](#) of non-partisan pro-democracy activists with Tulsi Gabbard and Dennis Kucinich, two former congresspeople and presidential candidates, headlining the event.

Speaking on a panel on Election Systems Reform, I highlighted the rhetoric of *expanding voting rights*. For example, the New



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York City Council [decided](#) to swell those rights by giving non-citizens the vote — even while a solid majority of New Yorkers were [opposed](#). Recently Washington, D.C.'s Council [bestowed](#) local voting rights to people in the city (and country) illegally, as well as to foreign nationals working for foreign governments at the city's many foreign embassies.

Allowing the staff at the Chinese and Russian embassies to cast ballots is clearly an *expansion* of voting rights. But does it make sense?

I also pointed out that making it easier to vote by having,

say, six weeks of early voting (as we do in my home state of Virginia) comes with a cost: more expensive campaigns. And anything that increases the price tag of running for office decidedly benefits incumbents.

My key message, however, was this: In a representative democracy, even if the rules and mechanics of the election process are spectacular, we still need someone to vote for, someone to actually represent us.

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The change that would best overcome big money political influence and provide real representation to citizens — improving both elections and governance — is simple: a far smaller ratio of citizens to elected representatives.

Stephen Erickson, executive director of [Citizens Rising](#), specifies “small political districts of 30,000 inhabitants or less, at all levels of government throughout the United States.” Compare that to the average of over 700,000 people in today's congressional districts.

The audience seemed to think this “Small District Democracy” made common sense.

I'm Paul Jacob. And I think it is the very best reform we could make.