

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

IN A DEMOCRACY there exists an unwritten contract between the people and their political leaders. Citizens support the political system because politicians provide certain benefits: peace, prosperity, government responsiveness, and competent, trustworthy leadership. As long as elected officials uphold their end of the bargain, citizens lend them their support and agree to work within the political order rather than circumvent it.

The two-party system in the United States embodies this unspoken pact, and the arrangement has rarely been challenged. A major party candidate wins nearly every election. The leaders of the two major parties organize both houses of the U.S. Congress and all but one state legislature. For well over a century the president has been either a Democrat or a Republican.

To the American voter, the two parties are as legitimate as any institution formally prescribed in the U.S. Constitution. Children grow up learning about the president, the Congress, and the Democrats and Republicans. Most have never even heard about Libertymen, Greenbacks, or Prohibitionists. Voters are socialized into a two-party norm that is constantly reinforced by the common portrayal of elections as contests between Democrats and Republicans.

It is an extraordinary act for Americans to vote for a third party candidate. Loyalty to the two-party system is a central feature of their political being. To vote for a third party, citizens must repudiate much of what they have learned and grown to accept as appropriate political behavior, they must often endure ridicule and harassment from neighbors and friends, they must pay steep costs to gather information on more obscure candidates, and they must accept that their candidate has no hope of winning.

But third party voting occurs nonetheless. In every presidential election, some portion of the American electorate abandons the major parties to support third party alternatives. Minor parties have managed to capture over 5 percent of the popular vote in a third of the presidential elections since 1840; they have won over 10 percent of the vote in one out of five contests. Because of third party strength, 14 of the last 36 presidents (40 percent) have entered the White House without a popular vote majority. Through the years, third parties have controlled enough votes in the right states to have theoretically changed one-third of the Electoral College results.

The level of third party support varies considerably from one election to the next. On several occasions—1856, 1860, and 1912—over a fifth of the electorate deserted the major parties. Yet in other presidential contests—1868, 1940, and 1960 among them—minor parties were unable to lure even one-half of one percent to their causes. (See figure 1.1.)

Periods of third party strength indicate that the major parties are not representing citizens' political demands. What specifically prompts citizens to seek a third party alternative?

When is this defection from the major parties likely to occur? What causes the two-party system to fail? What kinds of conditions, events, or conflicts is the American two-party system incapable of managing? What factors produce third party strength? What persuades voters that they should give up trying to change the policies of the major parties and opt instead for a new alternative? Are certain types of people consistently more likely to vote for third party candidates? What prompts politicians to mount third party campaigns? By focusing on periods of major party weakness, we can identify deficiencies in the two-party system. As Samuel Lubell noted, third parties shed "penetrating light on the inner torments of the major parties]" (1965, p. 205).

There has, of course, been no shortage of historical accounts of third party activity. The problem, though, is that scholars generally have examined only one minor party movement at a time. As a result, we are left with a different explanation (or sometimes more than one) for each third party. There is no general theory of third party voting that can be applied across instances or can be used to predict when the two-party system is likely to deteriorate and third parties flourish. This book develops such a theory.

At first it may seem unlikely that any single explanation can account for more than a few bursts of minor party activity. Third parties, after all, have represented nearly every political point of view, from the Communist Party on the left to the American Independent Party on the right. In some years, as in 1968, voters support a conservative party; at other times, like 1912, a progressive party captures their votes. Third parties have pushed for abolition (Liberty Party), Prohibition, Right-to-Life, States' Rights, even "Down with Lawyers." The candidates have included three ex-presidents, two former vice-presidents, governors, senators and congressmen, housewives, steelworkers, university professors, a convict, and a comedian.

But these apparent differences are insignificant compared to the characteristics the movements have in common. Most importantly, third parties are expressions of discontent with

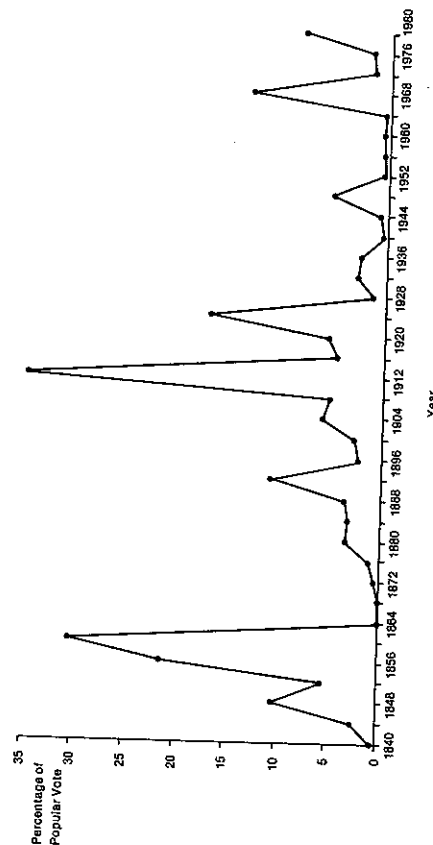


FIGURE 1.1
Third Party Vote for President, 1840-1980

the major parties and their candidates. They are an explicit and deliberate rejection of the two dominant parties. Hence it is possible to formulate a general theory of third party voting that explains why John Anderson netted 6.6 percent of the vote in 1980, George Wallace 13.5 percent in 1968, and James Weaver 3.3 percent in 1880, as well as why minor parties performed so dismally in years like 1868, 1940, and 1960.

Historically, there have been distinct eras of third party strength: good years for third parties appear together, as do bad ones. Between 1864 and 1872, for instance, minor parties never polled as much as 1 percent of the presidential popular vote. Third parties also barely averaged 1 percent in the five elections immediately following World War II. Yet, in all but one presidential election from 1848 to 1860 and 1904 to 1924, third parties lured over 5 percent of the popular vote away from the major parties; during these years an average of 8.1 percent of the electorate joined third party causes.¹ These periods of major party vitality and frailty suggest that it is more than the peculiarities of a particular election that prompt voters to abandon the major parties; more systemic forces are at work.

In recent years the United States seems to have entered another period of major party breakdown and third party strength. Whereas minor parties averaged only .6 percent of the presidential vote in the 1952 to 1964 elections, 5.1 percent of the electorate deserted the major parties between 1968 and 1980.² At the same time, there has also been a significant increase in the number of presidential candidates running. Prior to 1968, only once (in 1932) did as many as seven minor party candidates poll votes in more than one state. Between 1900 and 1964 only five candidates, on average, did so. However, in 1968, eight third party candidates attracted votes in more than one state, nine emerged in 1972, and eleven in both 1976 and 1980. (The candidates and their vote totals are listed in Appendix A.) Never before have so many third party

¹ This is the median.

² These are also medians.

presidential candidates run and polled votes; not since the 1920s has third party voting been, on average, as high as in recent years. What explains this recent upswing in the number of candidates and voters abandoning the major parties? Why have they not stayed on to do battle within the Democratic or Republican parties?

Is third party voting primarily a reaction to one's political, social, and economic environment, or are changes in support for minor parties related to shifts in the composition of the electorate? The first alternative implies that citizens are deliberative—they respond to real world conditions. Changes (either accidental or intentional) in the electoral setting affect outcomes. On the other hand, if swings away from the major parties stem from shifts in the kinds of voters who comprise the electorate, the implication is that people are relatively steadfast in their decisions, and that election results vary (as do their political consequences) not so much because citizens act differently under different circumstances as because the composition of the electorate has changed. Major parties are relatively powerless to stem this sort of defection.

Although the factors that influence voting for major party candidates have been extensively explored, the standard theories of American voting behavior have had little to say about third party support. Most focus on how voters choose between the Democrat and the Republican, or between the incumbent and his challenger. These theories may be less applicable in a multi-candidate election in which voters must choose among three or more names. Moreover, the standard theories may not provide very powerful empirical explanations of third party support. For example, since less than one-tenth of one percent of the 1980 electorate identified with a minor party,³ partisanship—a central variable in many theories of voting—is of little help in accounting for the size of John Anderson's backing (Campbell et al. 1960). Similarly, theories of voting that see elections as referenda on the performance of the party

³ Center for Political Studies (hereafter abbreviated CFS) 1980 National Election Study.

in power cannot explain why unhappy voters defect to the second party in some years, but to a third or fourth in others (Fiorina 1981).

The impact of third parties on American politics extends far beyond their capacity to attract votes. Minor parties, historically, have been a source of important policy innovations. Women's suffrage, the graduated income tax, and the direct election of senators, to name a few, were all issues that third parties espoused first. As Fred Haynes has argued, third parties in the nineteenth century "were pioneers in the conversion of American politics from almost exclusive attention to constitutional and governmental matters to the vital needs of the people" (1916, p. 470). Why do some policy innovations originate outside the two-party system? What is implied here about the ability of the major parties to cope with new political issues?

Once a third party attracts substantial backing, one or both of the major parties, anxious to win over those supporters, seize the minor party's ideas as their own. Observed historian John Hicks:

Let a third party once demonstrate that votes are to be made by adopting a certain demand, then one or the other of the older parties can be trusted to absorb the new doctrine. Ultimately, if the demand has merit, it will probably be translated into law or practice by the major party that has taken it up. . . . The chronic supporter of third party tickets need not worry, therefore, when he is told, as he surely will be told, that he is "throwing away his vote." [A] glance through American history would seem to indicate that his kind of vote is after all probably the most powerful vote that has ever been cast. (1933, pp. 26-27)

Thus the power of third parties lies in their capacity to affect the content and range of political discourse, and ultimately public policy, by raising issues and options that the two major parties have ignored. In so doing, they not only promote their cause but affect the very character of the two-party system.

When a third party compels a major party to adopt policies it otherwise may not have, it stimulates a redrawing of the political battle lines and a reshuffling of the major party coalitions (Burnham 1970, ch. 1). To the extent that the third parties are able to alter the political agenda and the distribution of major party support, they are an important political force. Understanding this source of change in the major parties and in American public policy requires that one discern the causes of third party voting.

In short, minor parties perform many of the same functions in American politics that parties and other political institutions more generally do: they "link people to government" (Sartori 1976, p. 25). Third parties are one of many vehicles people use to express their concerns. Like the major parties, third parties aggregate citizens' preferences into a political force and try to influence what governmental leaders do.

Finally, third parties are an important outlet for political discontent. When the major parties fail to do their jobs, voters can register their disapproval by throwing their support to a minor party. Although regarded as an extreme step in the American context, it is nevertheless a rather mild form of protest that does little to threaten the political regime. As such, third parties have been thought of as "safety valves for discontent" (Ranney and Kendall 1951, p. 455). People who feel ignored by the major parties but are unwilling to abandon their goals can, through an independent campaign, pursue their cause yet still retain their allegiance to the political system.

Before proceeding, we should clarify what we mean by a "major party" and a "minor party." In a given election, we shall call a political party "major" if it runs candidates for local, state, and federal offices in a majority of the states and if prior to the contest the party holds one of the two largest blocs of seats in the House of Representatives. A party's label in a specific year obviously cannot be based on its performance in that election, for what is important is how the voters perceived the party *before* they went to the polls. Thus, even if the Progressive Party had captured both the presidency and

the House in 1912, it would not have altered the fact that on election day the voters did not regard it as one of the major parties.

By this definition, the Democrats became a major party in 1832; the Whigs attained that status in 1836 and were replaced in 1854 by the Republicans, who captured a plurality of the seats in the House of Representatives in that year's elections. Since then the Democrats and the Republicans have retained their major party standing.

We shall call all other presidential contenders "third party" candidates. We use this term interchangeably with "minor party," "independent," and "non-major party" candidates. There are admittedly differences between minor parties that run candidates for other offices and persist for several elections and independent candidacies that rise and fall in a single race for the presidency. As we discuss later in more detail, important third parties of the nineteenth century were largely of the first type, whereas those of the twentieth century have been predominantly of the independent genre. Nevertheless, these differences, like others mentioned previously, are dwarfed by the commonalities the movements share. Most prominently, they are all expressions of dissatisfaction with the major parties.⁴

Our analysis of the causes of third party voting in presidential elections relies on several kinds of data. We draw heavily upon historical accounts of each movement. We also analyze aggregate political, economic, and demographic data for presidential contests from 1840 on to explain fluctuations in third party support since then. Finally, we turn to survey data from presidential elections beginning in 1952 to isolate better what motivates people to abandon the major parties.

We start with the 1840 election because it was not until that year that the two-party system, as we would recognize it today, had taken final form. As McCormick noted, by the 1840s "two party alignments had been established throughout

⁴ We also have found little that consistently and clearly distinguishes candidates who do not adopt a party label (like John Anderson in 1980) from those who do (like George Wallace in 1968).

the nation and . . . within each region—and in most states—these parties were balanced and competitive" (1966, p. 342). By 1840 the Whig and Democratic parties were contesting both state and national elections. "There was a nationalization of political identities. Voters everywhere thought of themselves as either Whigs or Democrats" (p. 342). National issues dominated presidential politics by 1840, and many "modern" characteristics of a campaign—nominating conventions, formal party platforms, party organizations, rallies, banners, and slogans—had appeared (Chambers 1967, pp. 11-14; Shade 1981). In addition, white male suffrage was nearly universal, and all states, except South Carolina, chose presidential electors by popular vote. Finally, because printed ballots had replaced voice voting, election records became more complete in 1840.

The first question that we address is why American voters have remained so loyal to the two major parties. In chapter 2 we identify three types of constraints—barriers, handicaps, and major party strategies—that inhibit third party voting. The major parties intentionally erect some of these hurdles; others are a by-product of the formal structure of the electoral system and two centuries of tradition. These constraints are so formidable that only the most serious breakdowns of the two major parties produce significant levels of third party support. We illustrate how these forces have worked against third parties by examining in chapters 3 and 4 some of the more important third party movements to emerge since 1840. As we shall see, politicians have always viewed third parties as a path of last resort. Although many parties at first seem as though they might displace one of the major parties, or at least establish themselves as permanent forces, only one—the Republican Party—has actually been able to do so.

A case-by-case analysis reveals that near the turn of the century third parties changed in fundamental ways. These changes parallel transformations that occurred within the major parties as well. Third parties of the nineteenth century were, as a rule, true political parties. They held conventions, had contested nominations, ran candidates for local offices, won elections, and had relatively long lives. Important third

parties of the twentieth century, in contrast, have generally been little more than candidacies of individuals. These movements, described in chapter 4, have rarely survived without their founders. Voters were attracted to the magnetic personalities of these men at least as much as to the causes they represented.

Examination of the more successful movements suggests a number of common determinants of third party support. We develop a general theory in chapter 5 arguing that third party voting is motivated by three factors: major party deterioration, attractive third party candidates who present a viable alternative to the major party nominees, and an influx of voters with no loyalty to the two major parties. Third party voting is also constrained by citizen allegiance to the political system and by structural barriers that make it difficult for people to cast a third party ballot. We test the theory in chapter 6.

As will become apparent, a third party's relative success depends in part on who heads its ticket. In general, the greater the third party candidate's political prestige, the more votes he will attract. Since prominent candidates have a large impact on the level of minor party support, we must explain why they abandon the major parties. This is the focus of chapter 7.

We conclude by reflecting on what our findings indicate about major party vitality. Is the occasional breakdown of the two-party system unavoidable? Are there limits to the ability of the major parties to prevent defections? What do our findings imply about the strengths and weaknesses of the American two-party system?

PART I

CONSTRAINTS ON THIRD PARTIES

TO UNDERSTAND the significance of a third party vote, one must first recognize how difficult an act it is to undertake. A host of barriers, disadvantages, and strategies block the path of would-be third party supporters. So formidable are these hurdles that third party voting occurs only under the most extreme conditions. The constraints we describe in this chapter ensure that third parties will never be on equal footing with the two major parties and help explain why a third party vote signifies something very different from a vote for either the Democrats or Republicans.

The two major parties, in Schattschneider's words, "monopolize power" (1942, p. 68). They are able to do so via three routes. First, barriers—powerful constitutional, legal, and administrative provisions—bias the electoral system against minor party challenges and discourage candidates and voters from abandoning the major parties. Third party movements are further handicapped because they have fewer resources, suffer from poorer press coverage, usually run weaker, less qualified candidates, and do not share the legitimacy of the major parties. Citizens do not accord minor party candidates the same status as the Democratic and Republican nominees; they see third party challengers as standing outside the American two-party system. These handicaps, by and large a side-effect of the way the electoral system is set up, raise the cost of third party voting. A third party vote, therefore, does not merely signify the selection of one of three equally attractive options; it is an extraordinary act that requires the voter to reject explicitly the major parties.

Finally, just as the Democrats and Republicans try to win votes from each other, they also pursue minor party sup-

porters. By coopting third party issue positions, and pursuing other more devious political strategies, the major parties win over third party voters and delegitimize third party candidates. Although the United States Constitution does not even mention political parties, through these barriers, handicaps, and political strategies the Democrats and Republicans have attained a privileged position in American politics.

BARRIERS

The rules that govern elections in the United States are far from neutral. They form barriers that block the emergence and discourage the growth of more than two parties. These biases help ensure that the Democrats and Republicans retain their position of dominance. The founding fathers created some of these barriers; the two major parties have helped erect others.

Constitutional Biases

The single-member-district plurality system governing most American elections discourages the emergence, growth, and survival of third parties. Under this arrangement, parties compete for an individual office—say, a Senate seat—and the candidate who obtains the most votes wins. The only way for a party to receive any immediate rewards (other than psychic ones) is for it to gain a plurality of the votes. Unlike a proportional representation system where 20 percent of the votes usually yields some seats in the legislature, in a single-member-district plurality system a party can receive 20 percent of the votes in every state and yet not win a single seat. Because citizens know third parties have very little chance of winning, they prefer not to waste their votes on them. Small parties become discouraged and either drop out or join with another party. At the same time, the system encourages the two major parties to try to absorb minor parties or prevent them from flourishing in the first place.¹

¹ See Schattschneider 1942, p. 75; Duverger 1954, p. 217; Downs 1957, p. 124; Key 1964, p. 208; and Riker 1982, pp. 753-66. Of the 107 nations Rae

The presidential selection system is a peculiar variant of the single-member-district plurality method and hence poses similar problems for third parties. The Electoral College tallies the number of times each candidate wins one of the fifty-one single-member-district plurality contests held in the fifty states and the District of Columbia, weighting each outcome by the state's electoral votes. A candidate who comes in second or third in a particular state does not win a single electoral vote regardless of his percentage of the popular vote. Short of winning the election, the only way a minor party can hope to gain any power is to secure enough electoral votes to throw the election into the House of Representatives.²

The Electoral College system is particularly harsh in its discrimination against nationally based third parties that fall short of a popular vote plurality in every state. John Anderson, for instance, did not capture a single electoral vote in 1980, though he polled 6.6 percent of the popular vote. The Electoral College does favor regionally based third party candidates who are strong enough in particular states to gain pluralities. For example, in 1948, States' Rights nominee Strom Thurmond obtained 7.3 percent of the Electoral College vote with only 2.4 percent of the national popular vote.

Contrary to popular belief, most current proposals for eliminating the Electoral College would not benefit third parties. The most widely supported plan calls for the direct popular election of the president with a runoff if no candidate receives 40 percent of the votes cast. But as long as a president can be elected with less than an absolute majority of the popular vote, the plan would, for all practical purposes, work like a single-member-district plurality system. To prevent either the Democrats or Republicans from collecting 40 percent of the vote, minor parties would obviously have to poll at least 20 percent. This has happened only three times since 1840. Any

studies, 90 percent fit the maxim: "plurality formulae cause two-party systems" (1971, p. 93). The exceptions are countries where a minor party's strength is concentrated in a single region (Schattschneider 1942, p. 75; Rae 1971, p. 95).

² Only twice in nearly two hundred years (1800 and 1824) has the House decided an election, and in neither instance were policy concessions granted to the third place candidate, nor was he included in a coalition government.

direct vote system that allows a party to win with less than a full majority of the popular vote would hinder third parties, though the larger the plurality required to elect a president, the lower the barrier becomes.³

The single-member-district plurality system not only explains two-party dominance, it also ensures short lives for third parties that do appear. If they are to survive, political parties must offer tangible benefits to their supporters. Of the forty-five different minor parties or independent candidates that have received presidential popular votes in more than one state since 1840, 58 percent ran just once; 87 percent ran in three or fewer elections (table 2.1).⁴ Even George Wallace—who as an independent in 1968 won 13.5 percent of the popular vote, 46 electoral votes, and had a relatively well-oiled organization in place—ran for the Democratic Party nomination in 1972 and vowed, both before he was shot in May and again at the July Convention, to work within that party.

Third party voters must be willing to support candidates who they know have no chance of winning. Moreover, because third parties wither so quickly, there is little opportunity for voters to grow accustomed to backing them or for this cycle of discouragement to be broken. The single-member-district plurality system is the single largest barrier to third party vitality.

³ Other systems would be more generous to third parties. A direct popular election system with a runoff if no candidate received a *majority* of the votes cast would provide minor parties an opportunity, between rounds, to trade support for concessions. Under this arrangement, in a close election, a minor party might maneuver into a position of influence with relatively few votes. Alternatively, if the U.S. Congress elected the president by a majority vote, minor parties able to obtain seats in the House could bargain with other parties to form a majority coalition. On only five occasions since 1840 has over 10 percent of the House had minor party affiliations.

⁴ All five parties (11 percent) that ran five or more times are, with the exception of the Prohibition Party, ideological parties of the left—Socialist Labor, Socialist, Communist, and Socialist Workers—that seem to live on benefits unrelated to electoral outcomes. Additionally, all five seem to be concerned chiefly with education—a goal substantially different from that of other minor parties. Able to satisfy this more limited ambition, they find it easier to survive (Olson 1965, ch. 1; Wilson 1973, ch. 3).

TABLE 2.1
Longevity of Third Parties in Presidential Elections, 1840-1980

Number of Elections in Which the Same Third Party (or Independent Candidate) Has Run for President	Percentage of Parties ^a (N = 45)	Cumulative Percentage
1 Election	58	58
2 Elections	16	74
3 Elections	13	87
4 Elections	2	89
5 or More Elections	11	100

SOURCE: Congressional Quarterly, *Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1976); *Guide to 1976 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1977); Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 4, 1980* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981).

^a Only parties or candidates receiving popular votes in more than one state appear in this table.

Ballot Access Restrictions

The Democrats and Republicans have constructed a maze of cumbersome regulations and procedures that make it difficult for minor parties and independent candidates to gain a spot on the general election ballot. Whereas major party candidates automatically appear on the ballot, third parties must petition state election officials to be listed. A candidate whose name does not appear is obviously disadvantaged: voters are not cued when they enter the polling booth; it is difficult and at times embarrassing for a voter to cast a write-in ballot.

Ballot access was not a problem for third parties in the nineteenth century, because there were no ballots as we now know them. Prior to about 1890, the political parties, not the states, prepared and distributed election ballots (or "tickets," as they were called), listing only their own candidates. Party workers peddled their ballots, usually of a distinct color and shape, at polling stations on election day. The voter would choose one of the tickets and drop it in the ballot box—an act

not commonly performed in secret. Poll watchers, of course, could easily identify how the citizen voted. The voter, unless he scratched names off the party slate and substituted new ones, or combined portions of two or more ballots, was forced to support a party's entire ticket.

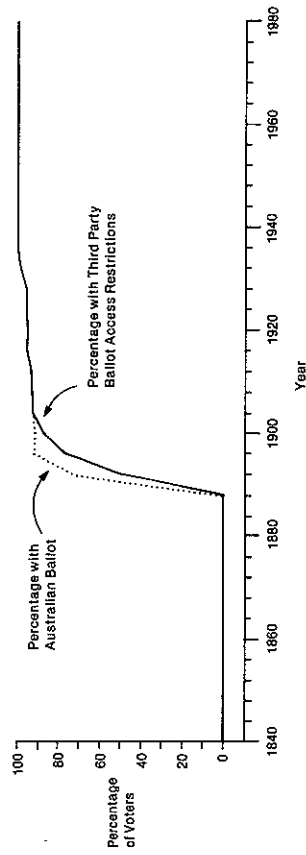
This all changed when states adopted the Australian ballot. Under the new system, each state now prepared an "official" ballot listing all the party slates, and voters could mark it secretly. It was both more difficult for parties to intimidate citizens and easier for voters to split their tickets (Rusk 1970).

However, this shift to the Australian method generated an obvious question: which parties should be listed on the official ballot? To keep the list of candidates relatively short, states had to restrict some candidates' access to the new ballot. Laws soon emerged making it difficult for non-major parties to appear. Half the ballots cast in 1892 were governed by these access laws; by 1900 nearly 90 percent of the votes cast were subject to such restrictions (figure 2.1).⁵

Because the states determine their own ballot access laws, minor party candidates wishing to place their names before the voters must overcome fifty-one different sets of bureaucratic hurdles. This is an arduous task for third party contenders, even well-financed ones. Petitions must be circulated within a specific time period that varies from state to state. They can be distributed only between early June and early August in California, for instance, and between August 1 and September 1 in Indiana. Filing deadlines also vary by state, and many occur relatively early in the election cycle—before the major parties have held their conventions. Five deadlines

⁵ Although most states instituted access limitations when they changed to the Australian ballot, eighteen states postponed adopting these rules. Six were 1892 strongholds of Populist candidate James Weaver (Alabama, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming), where presumably the motivation for the delay was to maintain easy ballot access for him. The remaining states had no need for formal ballot access restrictions because they had strong party organizations that could deter third party voting (Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) or were one-party states where third party activity would have been of little threat (Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Oklahoma).

FIGURE 2.1
Adoption of Australian Ballot and Third Party Ballot Access Restrictions, 1840-1980



SOURCE: Arthur C. Ludington, *American Ballot Laws: 1888-1910* (Albany: New York State Library, 1911), and state election codes.

had already passed by the time John Anderson announced his candidacy on April 24, 1980 (Ohio, Maryland, New Mexico, Maine, and Kentucky). The remaining deadlines were scattered between May and late September. This lack of a uniform petition period or filing deadline means that a third party or independent candidate cannot mount a nationwide effort; instead, he must hold fifty-one different drives at different times during the campaign.

The number of signatures a candidate must gather varies from 25 people (Tennessee) to 5 percent of the state's registered voters (Montana, Oklahoma, and others). A candidate needed over 100,000 signers to qualify in California in 1980 and 57,500 to make the Georgia ballot. To qualify for all fifty-one ballots in 1980, each third party presidential challenger had to gather over 1.2 million signatures (Cook 1980a, p. 1315).

Other provisions define which voters are eligible to sign a candidate's petition. West Virginia forbids petitioners from voting in its primary; New York and Nebraska disqualify signatures of citizens who have already participated in a primary. Some states also have onerous provisions for validating signatures. Citizens in South Carolina must record both their

precinct and voter registration numbers—exotic bits of information that few people know. New Hampshire requires that signatures be certified. Some states also impose complicated procedures on the distribution of signatures. Petitions must be collected by magisterial districts in West Virginia—a designation with which even most politicians are unfamiliar. New York requires candidates to obtain a specified number of signatures in each county.

Nine states in 1980 had either a sore loser law prohibiting a candidate who ran in the state's primary (but lost the nomination) from running in the general election or a disaffiliation statute forbidding independent candidates from belonging to a political party.

Since their introduction, every state has made at least one change in its ballot access laws.⁶ Because nearly all third parties are short-lived, the requirements governing initial access are the pertinent ones. The hostile and suspicious political climate surrounding the two world wars prompted many restrictions on ballot access (American Civil Liberties Union 1943; Bone 1943, p. 524; Schmidt 1960, pp. 31, 125). Between Theodore Roosevelt's run in 1912 and Robert LaFollette's 1924 candidacy, ten states significantly increased the number of signatures required to qualify a candidate; some of these instituted restrictions for the first time. Only one state, Nevada, reduced the number of signatures needed. Although in the years preceding World War II states did not further boost the number of signatures required for a candidate to appear on

⁶ Some states made it easier for minor parties, once they secured a ballot spot, to remain on the ballot in subsequent elections. Fifteen states added provisions allowing votes cast for a party in a previous election to qualify it for a ballot position: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming (Ludington 1911; Durbin 1980). Four states reduced the number of votes needed: Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, and Washington. Eleven increased the requirement: Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Vermont. This provision can help the smallest of parties: Ellen McCormack's Right-to-Life Party polled over 50,000 votes in the 1978 New York gubernatorial election, so it automatically gained a spot on the state's 1980 general election ballot.

the ballot, they instituted filing fees, changed filing deadlines, and shortened the length of the petitioning period (*Columbia Law Review* 1937; *Yale Law Journal* 1948). The laws were more strictly enforced. In addition, by 1942, nineteen states had barred from their ballots (by legislation or election officials' rulings) Communists or parties that advocated the overthrow of the government by force or violence (Bone 1943, p. 526).

Recent court decisions have reversed this trend. As a result of the lawsuits initiated by George Wallace in 1968, Eugene McCarthy in 1976, and John Anderson in 1980, ballot access laws are now as lenient as they have ever been in this century. Even Libertarian Ed Clark was able to gain a spot on all fifty-one ballots in 1980.⁷

Despite these changes, which for the most part have been at the margins, it is still no easy task for third party candidates to win access to the ballot. All twentieth-century third party presidential candidates have had to struggle to obtain positions on the ballot. LaFollette found in 1924 that the laws were "almost unsurpassable obstacles to a new party" (MacKay 1947, p. 179). He was forced to run under a variety of labels: "Progressive," "Independent," "Independent-Progressive," and "Socialist." Such a predicament can only contribute to voter

⁷ Relaxation began with *William v. Rhodes* (393 U.S. 23 [1968]). Here the Supreme Court struck down Ohio's requirement that George Wallace both gather 433,100 signatures (10 percent of the votes cast in its last gubernatorial election) by February 7, 1968, some nine months before the general election, and be nominated by a political party that met Ohio's elaborate organizational requirements (Wiseheart 1969).

As a result of the eighteen suits the McCarthy campaign filed in 1976, the courts ruled more access laws unconstitutional. Laws that required petitioners to gather signatures in excess of 5 percent of the eligible electorate tended to be invalidated (Neuborne and Eisenberg 1980, p. 57). Other rulings struck down petition periods and filing deadlines that "a reasonably diligent candidate" could not meet.

The Anderson campaign's 1980 litigation successfully overturned additional requirements. (*Anderson v. Babb* [E.D. N.C. August 21, 1980]; *Anderson v. Celebrezze* [S.D. Ohio July 18, 1980]; *Anderson v. Hooper* [D. N.M. July 8, 1980]; *Anderson v. Mills* [E.D. Ky. August 14, 1980]; *Anderson v. Morris* [D. Md. August 6, 1980]; and *Anderson v. Quinn* [D. Maine August 11, 1980].) The Supreme Court again invalidated Ohio's statute, this time because of its March 20 filing deadline; Anderson won similar victories in Maryland, New Mexico, Maine, and Kentucky.

confusion and the general perception that third parties are temporary and makeshift, not deserving of equal consideration. William Lemke succeeded in getting his Union Party on the ballot in only thirty-four states in 1936 (Tull 1965, p. 167; Bennett 1969, p. 212). He failed to secure a spot in populous states like New York, where Father Charles Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice had a large following; California, home of Townsendism; and Louisiana, stronghold of the Share Our Wealth movement (Leuchtenburg 1971, p. 2843). Like LaFollette, Lemke could not always run under his own party name: he was forced to run as the "Royal Oak Party" candidate in Ohio and Pennsylvania, the "Third Party" challenger in Michigan, and the "Union Progressive Party" nominee in Illinois. In 1948 Henry Wallace not only confronted provisions that denied Communists a spot on the ballot but encountered capricious administration of other access laws as well (Schmidt 1960, pp. 124-52). George Wallace qualified for every ballot except the one in the predominantly black District of Columbia, but he was forced to run under six different party labels. Eugene McCarthy secured a spot on only twenty-nine state ballots; fifteen of these required court battles to win his position. (He won three additional suits after the election.) McCarthy did not appear on the ballot in crucial states like New York and California. John Anderson won positions on all fifty-one November ballots but only after a costly effort. The campaign spent more than half of the \$7.3 million it raised between April and September on petition drives and legal fees (Whittle 1980, p. 2834). While the major parties prepare media ads, buy television time, and plan campaign strategy, third party candidates devote their scarce resources to getting on the ballot.

Although it is clear that, relative to the Democrats and Republicans, ballot access laws discriminate against independent challengers, we are less certain whether this bias is greater than the one that existed prior to the 1890s when the parties themselves prepared the ballots. Obviously, in one sense, the earlier arrangement was less onerous for third parties. They simply printed their own tickets; there was no maze

of legal procedures. But, at the same time, the unofficial ballot system disadvantaged third parties in ways that were ameliorated with the adoption of the Australian ballot. First, under the old system, it was difficult for citizens to vote a split ticket since each ballot listed only a single party's slate of candidates. This in effect required voters to abandon their party for every office at stake in the election, even if they were attracted to only the third party's presidential nominee. Compared to an arrangement where split-ticket voting is easier, this probably reduced the likelihood of third party voting. Second, since a bolt to a third party was a public act, the cost of betraying longstanding loyalties was high (Woodward 1951, p. 244; Rusk 1968, pp. 128-30). Moreover, under the unofficial ballot system, a party needed organization and resources to print its tickets and distribute them on election day. But organization and resources are two commodities that third parties have always lacked. The shift to the official ballot eliminated these costs; the ballots were now printed and distributed at public expense. It is not clear that the official ballot adversely affected third parties more than the system it replaced. Nonetheless, these new restrictions still constitute a bias.

Campaign Finance Laws

The 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) is the most recent instance of the major parties adopting a "reform" that freezes out third party challengers. Under the law, the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) provides the major party presidential nominees a lump sum (\$29.4 million in 1980) for their campaigns. On top of this, the Democratic and Republican National Committees can raise and spend as much as they need to pay for legal and accounting expenses incurred in complying with the act. State and local party committees can raise and spend an unlimited amount on voter registration, get-out-the-vote drives, and other volunteer activities. "Independent" committees can also spend freely on behalf of the major parties.

Third parties, on the other hand, are eligible to receive

public funds only *after* the November election, and then only if they appear on the ballot in at least ten states and obtain at least 5 percent of the national popular vote. The exact amount a candidate receives increases with his total vote (assuming the initial ten state provision is met).⁸ Given these requirements, only 10 of the 148 minor party candidates (7 percent) that have emerged in more than one state since 1840 would have qualified for retroactive public financing. Although third party candidates are denied the benefits of the pre-election subsidy, they must still comply with the FECA rules on disclosure of campaign contributions and are bound by the ceilings of \$1,000 per election from individuals and \$5,000 from political action committees.

Because the FECA mentioned only "minor party" candidates, "independent" Eugene McCarthy had to petition the FEC in 1976 to extend its coverage to him. Had a favorable ruling been received, and had McCarthy stayed above 5 percent in the polls, he may have had an easier time attracting contributions and securing loans. But the FEC took six long weeks, until mid-October, to rule against McCarthy on a straight party vote: Republican commissioners supported McCarthy, Democrats opposed him. (It was widely believed at the time that McCarthy would have taken more votes from Carter than from Ford.) John Anderson succeeded in 1980 where McCarthy failed. In early September, by a 5-1 vote, the FEC ruled that Anderson was the functional equivalent of a third party and that he would receive post-election funding if he cleared the appropriate vote and ballot hurdles.⁹

The FECA is a major party protection act. Democrats and Republicans receive their funds before the election, minor parties after. During the primaries, when name recognition is built and legitimacy established, contenders for a major

⁸ In 1980, 5 percent of the vote would have yielded a \$3.1 million post-election subsidy, 10 percent a \$6.5 million subsidy, and 15 percent \$10.4 million.

⁹ Although Anderson had hoped to borrow against his anticipated federal funding, banks, fearing that their loans would be declared illegal campaign contributions if Anderson defaulted, were not forthcoming.

party's nomination receive matching federal funds; minor parties, which do not hold primaries, receive none. During the general election, major party candidates are freed from time-consuming and costly fund-raising activities; minor parties are not. National party committees may accept individual contributions of up to \$20,000; independent candidates cannot. In short, this law ensures a large gap between the financial resources available to major and minor parties.

HANDICAPS

Most of the other constraints that third parties confront are consequences of the structure of the electoral system. Independent candidates are disadvantaged: they have fewer resources, receive poorer press coverage, are usually less qualified, and are not seen as legitimate contenders. Although these handicaps do not result from formal rules that discriminate against minor parties, they have a similar impact: they make voting for a third party an act requiring unusual energy, persistence, or desperation.

Campaign Resources

Without resources, an American political party's struggle is grim indeed. And, as a rule, third party candidates have had fewer resources than the major parties. This was true long before the Federal Election Campaign Act. The major parties grossly outspent Abolitionists in 1840, Free Soilers in 1848, and Populists in 1892 (Morgan 1971, p. 1728; Sewell 1976, pp. 75, 167). Even the most successful minor party challengers amass only a fraction of the resources available to their Democratic and Republican opponents. Former President Theodore Roosevelt, the best financed third party candidate on record, spent only 60 percent of the average major party total in 1912; George Wallace spent 39 percent and John Anderson only 49 percent when they ran (table 2.2).¹⁰ Few minor party

¹⁰ Even Teddy Roosevelt would have been no better off than other third party contenders were it not for George W. Perkins (a partner in the banking

TABLE 2.2
Campaign Expenditures by Minor Presidential Parties, 1908-1980

Year	Minor Party	Minor Party Expenditures	Average of Major Party Expenditures	Minor Party as Percentage of Major Party
1908	Socialist	\$ 95,504	\$ 1,147,430	8.3
1912	Progressive	665,420	1,103,199	60.3
	Socialist	71,598		6.5
1924	Progressive	236,963	2,564,659	9.2
1948	Progressive	1,133,863	2,431,815	46.6
	States' Rights	163,442		6.7
1952	Socialist Labor	88,018	5,820,775	1.5
1956	Socialist Labor	22,727	6,442,677	.4
1960	Socialist Labor	66,170	9,962,500	.7
	National States' Rights	4,269		.1
1964	Socialist Labor	59,344	12,391,500	.5
	National States' Rights	41,964		.3
	Socialist Workers	2,570		.1
1968	American Independent	7,223,000	18,498,000	39.0
	National States' Rights	24,727		.1
	Socialist Labor	80,130		.1
	Socialist Workers	40,481		.1
1972	American Independent	710,000	41,289,000	1.7
	Communist	173,600		.4
	Socialist Workers	118,000		.3
	Socialist Labor	114,000		.3
	Christian National Crusade	93,000		.2
	People's	40,539		.1
	Prohibition	37,000		.1
	Libertarian	17,000		.1
	Conservative	6,000		.1
	Flying Tigers	977		.1
1976	Communist	504,710	21,973,856	2.3
	Eugene McCarthy	442,491		2.0
	Libertarian	387,429		1.8
	American	187,815		.9
	U.S. Labor	180,653		.8

CONSTRAINTS

TABLE 2.2 (cont.)

Year	Minor Party	Minor Party Expenditures	Average of Major Party Expenditures	Minor Party as Percentage of Major Party
	Socialist Workers	151,648		.7
	Socialist Labor	59,820		.3
	American Independent	44,488		.2
1980	John B. Anderson	15,040,669	29,040,183	48.7
	Libertarian	3,210,758		10.4
	Communist	194,774		.6
	Socialist Workers	186,252		.6
	Right to Life	83,412		.3
	Workers' World	40,310		.1
	Socialist	36,059		.1
	Citizens	23,408		.1
	American Independent	13,931		.1
	American	13,716		.1
	Statesman	812		.1

SOURCE: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, p. 1081; Alexander Heard, *The Costs of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), p. 54; Herbert Alexander, *Financing the 1960 Election; Financing the 1964 Election; Financing the 1968 Election; Financing the 1972 Election; Financing the 1976 Election*. The 1980 statistics are provided by the Federal Elections Commission.

^a Less than .1 percent.

candidates achieve anything near even these levels of spending: LaFollette in 1924 only spent 9 percent of the average major party total, and Thurmond only 7 percent in 1948. Almost every other minor party candidate was outspent by at least 50 to 1.

This disparity in resources means that third parties are significantly disadvantaged, if not crippled. Their ability to rent technical expertise, gather political intelligence, and campaign—especially through the media—is obviously restricted.

firm of J. P. Morgan), Frank Munsey (owner of five newspapers), and a few other wealthy benefactors who contributed the lion's share of his campaign chest (Mowry 1946, p. 288).

Moreover, because major parties do not have to allocate a huge proportion of their campaign chest to ballot access drives the way third parties do, the disparity in real available resources is greater than the simple proportions reported in table 2.2. After the ballot drives and court battles, Eugene McCarthy had only \$100,000 left for media advertising in 1976 (\$137,651 in 1980 dollars) (Cook 1980a, p. 1316). The 1980 Anderson campaign could not even afford to conduct polls—an essential weapon in a modern political arsenal. Staff were let go or went unpaid, little media time could be purchased, and campaign trips were cancelled (Weaver 1980a, p. B12; Weaver 1980b, p. D22; Peterson 1980a, pp. A1, A4).

The McCarthy and Anderson experiences are not unique: all third party and independent candidates have been strapped for campaign funds. The 1936 Lemke campaign, despite the backing of the National Union for Social Justice and Townsend Movement, was constantly plagued by financial problems. By mid-summer the Union Party had raised only \$20,000 (\$121,462 in 1980 dollars) (Bennett 1969, p. 211). LaFollette experienced similar problems, raising most of his money in one-dollar contributions (LaFollette and LaFollette 1953, p. 124). The campaign was in such dismal financial shape that it could not afford to send its cross-country rail campaign farther west than St. Louis (MacKay 1947, p. 156).

This scarcity of resources means that third parties are able to purchase only a fraction of the political advertising bought by the Democrats and Republicans (table 2.3). Even in 1968, George Wallace, the best financed of recent third party contenders, was able to secure only one-sixth of the radio and television time the major parties bought. In most years the situation is much worse: minor parties, on average, acquire one-twentieth of the television and radio time the major parties do.

Money, although certainly the most important campaign resource, is obviously not the only one. Elite support and a well-oiled, experienced party or candidate organization have always been essential. Here too the major parties are advantaged. As Haynes noted in 1924: "Party machinery has be-

TABLE 2.3
Media Expenditures by Minor Parties, 1956-1972

Year	Radio			Television		
	Minor Party Expenditures	Major Party Expenditures	as Percentage of Major Parties	Minor Party Expenditures	Major Party Expenditures	as Percentage of Major Parties
1956	\$ 164,000	\$ 3,019,000	5.4	\$ 6,484,000	\$ 152,000	2.3
1960	225,000	3,918,000	5.7	9,846,000	206,000	2.1
1964	209,000	6,899,000	3.0	17,146,000	350,000	2.0
1968	970,000	12,346,000	7.9	25,607,000	1,480,000	5.8
1972	1,577,000	11,933,000	13.2	23,052,000	1,515,000	6.6

Source: U.S. Federal Communications Commission, Report on Political Broadcasting April 1961, July 1965, August 1969, March 1971, March 1973; U.S. Clerk of the House, 1956 General Election Campaigns (85th Congress, 1st Session).

come so complex and requires so much technical skill in its manipulation that there seems less and less chance of its overthrow or seizure by inexperienced workers. It almost seems as though the Republican and Democratic parties must go on indefinitely" (p. 156).

It is easy to see why Haynes reached this conclusion. Few minor parties can compete with the major party organizations. The Liberty Party was "hopelessly outmatched by Whigs and Democrats in organization, experience, financial resources and political savvy," as was the "haphazard" Free Soil campaign eight years later (Sewell 1976, pp. 75, 166). William Lemke's total lack of a regular political organization contributed to his poor showing in 1936 (Tull 1965, p. 167; Bennett 1969, p. 241). Similar problems gripped Henry Wallace in 1948 (Schmidt 1960, pp. 92-123).

There are several reasons why these organizations flounder. Because third parties are short-lived, they have little time to build an electoral apparatus. Moreover, unlike the major parties, most presidential third parties do not run slates of congressional, state, and local candidates, so they have no other campaign organizations to draw upon. And since few third parties win federal, state, or local elections, the party lacks patronage—an important political resource through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Some of these organizational problems would be alleviated if minor parties were able to persuade elected officials to join their independent cause. But they rarely can. Even strong Progressives like Senators William Borah and George Norris did not campaign for LaFollette, fearing Republican reprisals. Former President Theodore Roosevelt, who had the best opportunity for victory of any third party candidate, was unable to maintain his elite support. Most officials who had rallied behind his selection as the Republican nominee, including seven of the eight governors who originally advocated his candidacy, did not abandon the Republican Party (Mowry 1971, p. 2151). William Lemke could not attract the support of progressive or farm state politicians from either side of the aisle (Bennett 1969, p. 205), and few liberal politicians backed

Henry Wallace in 1948 (Schmidt 1960, pp. 37-39, 64-67). Only a handful of officeholders came out on behalf of George Wallace's 1968 presidential bid. Even when John Anderson's level of support in the polls stood at 20 percent, he had trouble finding a running mate, finally settling on former Wisconsin Governor Patrick Lucey.

Despite the many changes in presidential campaigns over the years, the need for superior resources and a strong and effective grassroots organization remains. Few if any major party candidates have won without them. Few if any minor party candidates have had them.

Media Coverage

Media coverage is also an essential component of a successful modern campaign. It supplies legitimacy and generates name recognition, both indispensable in attracting votes. But there is a huge disparity between the amount of coverage the media give minor parties and the attention they devote to the Democrats and Republicans. In 1980 the leading newspapers and weekly news magazines gave Reagan and Carter about ten times more coverage than *all eleven* third party and independent candidates combined.¹¹ This disparity showed up in network television news as well: between January and September the CBS Evening News devoted 6 hours, 10 minutes of coverage to Carter, 3 hours, 9 minutes to Reagan, and 1 hour, 46 minutes to Anderson (Leiser 1980).

Despite this imbalance, the media did treat Anderson relatively favorably in the opening months of his independent campaign. *Time* praised Anderson's intellect, his skills, and

¹¹ From the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* we collected 18.01 pounds of clippings on Carter and Reagan and 1.77 pounds on all the other 1980 presidential candidates.

This imbalance in media coverage is not new. Newspapers in 1840 barely mentioned that an abolitionist party had been formed (Nash 1959, p. 30). The press also devoted little attention to LaFollette in 1924 or to Henry Wallace in 1948 (Mackay 1947, p. 213; Schmidt 1960, pp. 90-91, 229-31; Yarnell 1974, pp. 47-49).

his willingness to confront issues. *Newsweek* pointed out that Anderson's intellectual and oratorical skills had long been acknowledged "even by House foes." They called his 26 percent support in the California Poll a "close third" and his 22 percent standing in New York a "competitive third" (Goldman 1980, pp. 28-38). *Time's* headline read: "Despite Problems, Anderson's Campaign is Starting to Move" (Warner 1980, p. 21). The reports were upbeat.

But the media's tendency to focus on the horserace soon brought stories highlighting the hopelessness of Anderson's cause. They no longer viewed Anderson as a serious challenger, but a "certain loser" (Lewis 1980). On the front page of the September 26 *Washington Star*, Jack Germond and Jules Witcover (1980) concluded: "With some exceptions, Anderson's leading supporters and advisors have abandoned their dream of winning the election. . . . This does not suggest that Anderson's backers are throwing in their cards, but only that they now see the rest of the campaign as a case of playing out their hands against essentially hopeless odds." A similar obituary appeared in the following day's *New York Times* where Warren Weaver, Jr., pronounced: "The independent candidate no longer has a serious chance of winning." The same day CBS reported that the Anderson campaign was "sputtering," and on September 28 David Broder, in the *Washington Post*, tossed in the final spade of dirt when he called the candidacy a fiasco and concluded it was going nowhere. From that point on, the press focused almost exclusively on Anderson's decline in the polls, his money problems, and his inability to gain endorsements. By the end of the campaign Anderson was no longer the star orator he was in June, but "fuzzy," "too preachy," "humorless," and "highflown" (Stacks 1980, p. 52).

This sort of coverage is understandable. We doubt that the media intentionally tried to undermine Anderson's cause. Nonetheless, the media can affect voters' perceptions by concentrating on who will win instead of what the candidates are saying. The de facto result benefits the major parties. We cannot unravel how much the media's treatment of Anderson

caused his drop in standing or merely reflected it. But the fact remains that in the final crucial weeks of the campaign, voters saw little of Anderson in the press (not to mention Ed Clark, Barry Commoner, or John Rarick), and what little they did see was about Anderson the loser.

Televised presidential debates also exclude third party candidates. Only Nixon and Kennedy debated in 1960; only Ford and Carter appeared in 1976.¹² Although Anderson did debate Reagan in September 1980, Carter's unwillingness to participate delegitimized Anderson's candidacy and, along with ABC's simultaneous airing of the film "The Orient Express," contributed to a much smaller viewing audience than in 1960, 1976, or in the Carter-Reagan confrontation a week before the 1980 election.¹³

The primary reason third party candidates receive so little coverage is that broadcasters and publishers do not think they warrant attention. Nearly two out of three newspaper editors thought that their readers had little interest in third party candidates in 1980 (Bass 1982, p. 12). As James M. Perry of the *Wall Street Journal* put it:

We base [our decision] on the simple proposition that readers don't want to waste their time on someone who won't have a role in the campaign. We're not going to run a page-one spread on a fringe candidate. We don't have a multiparty system. Until we do, nobody's going to cover these candidates. (Bass 1982, p. 11)

¹² Congress allowed broadcasters to freeze the minor party candidates out of the 1960 debates by temporarily suspending the "equal-time requirement" (Section 315a) of the Federal Communications Act that requires broadcasters who provide time to a legally qualified candidate for any public office to "afford equal opportunities" to all other candidates for the same office. The networks, to avoid the equal-time provision entirely, covered the 1976 and 1980 League of Women Voters debates as "news events." The FCC and the courts sustained this action, which minor parties naturally challenged (Alexander 1979, p. 441).

¹³ Forty-four percent of the electorate viewed the Anderson-Reagan debate compared to 79 percent who saw the debates in 1960, 72 percent in 1976, and 83 percent who watched Reagan and Carter do battle in 1980 (CPS 1960 National Election Study; CBS/*New York Times* Poll, September 23-25, 1980, and October 25-27, 1980).

Marshall Field, publisher of the *Chicago Sun Times*, echoed this sentiment: "The country is run by a two-party system and those candidates 'chosen by the people' are the ones who deserve serious consideration" (McCarthy 1980, p. 149).¹⁴

The press does more than simply ignore minor party candidates; at times they are overtly hostile towards them. Metropolitan newspapers routinely attacked the Populists (Goodwyn 1978, p. 210). The press committed two sins against the Progressives of 1924: one of omission (lack of coverage), and the other of commission (the distorted reporting of Progressive issues and activities, sometimes accidental, sometimes intentional) (MacKay 1947, p. 211). The same scenario unfolded in 1948. The few stories that did appear on Henry Wallace focused on his Communist affiliations (Schmidt 1960, pp. 90-91, 229-31; Yarnell 1974, pp. 47-49; *Time*, 1948a, p. 16). To discourage support for Henry Wallace, newspapers in New Haven, Pittsburgh, Boston, Milwaukee, and Cleveland published the names, addresses, and occupations of people who signed his ballot petitions (Schmidt 1960, pp. 133-34).

In the past, minor parties have tried to overcome the media's neglect and abuse by relying on their own tabloids to get their messages across. The Union Party had the *Townsend National Weekly* with a circulation of 300,000; the Prohibitionists had several periodicals such as the *Voice*, which began in 1884 and rose to a circulation of 700,000 by 1888. In addition to his own publishing house, Socialist candidate Eugene Debs could rely on over three hundred English and foreign language newspapers and magazines with a combined circulation exceeding two million (Greer 1949, p. 271; Bennett 1969, p. 171; Storms 1972, p. 13; Weinstein, 1967, pp. 84-102). But unlike television, radio, or non-party newspapers, party publications allow a candidate to communicate only with the already faithful; they are ineffective at reaching non-supporters.

¹⁴ The slim coverage the press gives to third party candidates may also be due to minor parties' inability to get their messages out as effectively as the Democrats and Republicans can. Three out of four daily newspaper editors claim that they received fewer press releases from third party candidates in 1980 than from the Reagan and Carter camps. Third party press releases were also less complete (Bass 1982, pp. 16-17).

Although the media are the voter's primary source of information about politics, neither print nor electronic journalists do much to alleviate the voters' dearth of information about third party candidates. The little that voters do learn about these candidates helps convince them that their cause is hopeless. When voters support third party candidates, they do so in spite of, not because of, the media's coverage of their campaigns.

Unqualified, Unknown Candidates

In every presidential election, a portion of the electorate makes their voting decision on the basis, not of issues or parties, but on who the candidates are. Thus another reason third parties generally do so poorly is that they run weak candidates who lack political experience and the credentials to be credible historical contenders. While it is difficult, particularly in a presidential perspective, to assess how voters perceive a candidate's capacity to perform as president, we may reasonably assume that one cue voters rely on is whether the candidate has had prior experience in an important office (like governor, U.S. senator, or member of the House of Representatives). All other things being equal, voters probably view candidates without these credentials as less qualified.

There is a striking difference between the political backgrounds of major and minor party candidates (table 2.4). Nearly all (97.2 percent) of the 72 major party presidential nominees between 1840 and 1980 had held the post of president, vice-president, U.S. senator, congressman, governor, military general, or cabinet secretary. Less than 20 percent of the minor party candidates had attained these positions.

By now the reason for this disparity should be clear. The biases against third parties created by the single-member-district plurality system and ballot access restrictions, as well as their disadvantages in organization, resources, and media coverage, all effectively discourage qualified candidates from running under a third party label. Well-known, prestigious candidates know that a third party effort will be hopeless and

TABLE 2.4
Political Experience of Major and Minor Party Candidates, 1840-1980

Highest Position Attained	Major Party Candidates	Minor Party Candidates ^a
Governor, U.S. Congressman, U.S. Senator, Vice-President, President	88.8%	17.6%
Military General	5.6	1.4
Cabinet Secretary	2.8	0
None of the above	2.8 ^b	81.1
Total (N)	100.0% (72)	100.1% (148)

^a Minor party and independent candidates who ran for president and received popular votes in more than one state.

^b Alton Parker, Democratic candidate for President in 1904, was Chief Justice of the New York Court of Appeals; Wendell Wilkie, Republican candidate in 1940, was a utility executive.

can end their political careers. Only extraordinary circumstances will push established politicians (and voters) into a third party camp.

The political obscurity of most minor party candidates, their inability to publicize themselves as major party contenders can, and their neglect by the media mean that many voters simply do not have information on these candidates. An unknown candidate is obviously unlikely to win many votes. Only 3 percent of the 1980 electorate claimed they did not know enough about Jimmy Carter to have an opinion about him; 18 percent said the same about Ronald Reagan. Yet 28 percent of the electorate had no information about John Anderson, 77 percent knew nothing about Ed Clark, and 85 percent knew nothing about Barry Commoner (CBS/*New York Times* Poll, October 1980). This disparity is even more striking among vice-presidential candidates: 15 percent of the elec-

torate had not heard of Walter Mondale, 28 percent had never heard of George Bush, but 78 percent had never heard of Anderson's running mate Patrick Lucey (*Los Angeles Times* Poll, no. 35, September 2-7, 1980).¹⁵

Negative Attitudes Toward Third Parties

Third party candidates also do poorly because most people think they will do poorly. The prophecy that a candidate cannot win is self-fulfilling: money is harder to raise, political support becomes more difficult to attract, media attention dwindles, and people are unwilling to waste their votes. Few citizens ever think that third party candidates—even strong ones—can win. Only 4.3 percent of the electorate believed George Wallace stood a chance in 1968 (CPS 1968 National Election Study). At the height of John Anderson's standing in the polls, fewer than one in five citizens thought he had a "good chance" to win the presidency; in October less than 1 percent of the electorate believed he would be the winner (NBC/AP Poll, May 1980; CPS 1980 National Election Study). Not only was it clear that Anderson would lose, but two-thirds of the electorate thought he would lose big, trailing far behind Reagan and Carter.

Being perceived as a sure loser costs a candidate votes, though it is hard to say exactly how many. Anderson's 1980 pre-election support was 9 points higher when pollsters asked people how they would vote if Anderson had a "real chance of winning" (*Los Angeles Times* Poll, no. 35, September 2-7, 1980; ABC/Harris Poll, October 3-6, 1980). Of voters who at one point considered casting ballots for Anderson, 45 percent cited as a reason for their switch his inability to win (CPS 1980 National Election Study).¹⁶

¹⁵ This asymmetry has existed in other years. In 1976, 27 percent of the electorate did not have enough information to form an opinion of Eugene McCarthy, compared to 2 percent for Gerald Ford and 4 percent for Jimmy Carter (CPS 1976 National Election Study).

¹⁶ Shanks and Palmquist (1981) note that primary voters are more likely to support a candidate who appears to be viable.

The electorate's pessimistic prognosis for Anderson stemmed, in part, from

One consequence of a pessimistic prognosis is that citizens will abandon third party candidates for strategic reasons (Brams, 1978, ch. 1; Riker 1982, pp. 762-64). As one Anderson supporter put it, "If at the time of the election a vote for Anderson would cut into Carter's lead, and let Reagan win, I'd probably vote for Carter" (Roberts 1980, p. D22). Of the voters who considered casting ballots for Anderson but did not, over half feared that if they voted for him it would help elect their least preferred choice (CPS 1980 National Election Study). Major parties, of course, play on this fear.

A second prevalent belief is that the two-party system is a sacred arrangement—as American an institution as the Congress, the Super Bowl, or M*A*S*H. Third party candidates are seen as disrupters of the *American* two-party system. Thus minor parties do not start out on an equal footing with the Democrats and Republicans; they must first establish their legitimacy—something the voters do not demand of the major parties. This two-party sentiment, of course, reinforces itself: minor parties do poorly because they lack legitimacy, their poor showing further legitimates the two-party norm, causing third parties to do poorly, and so on.

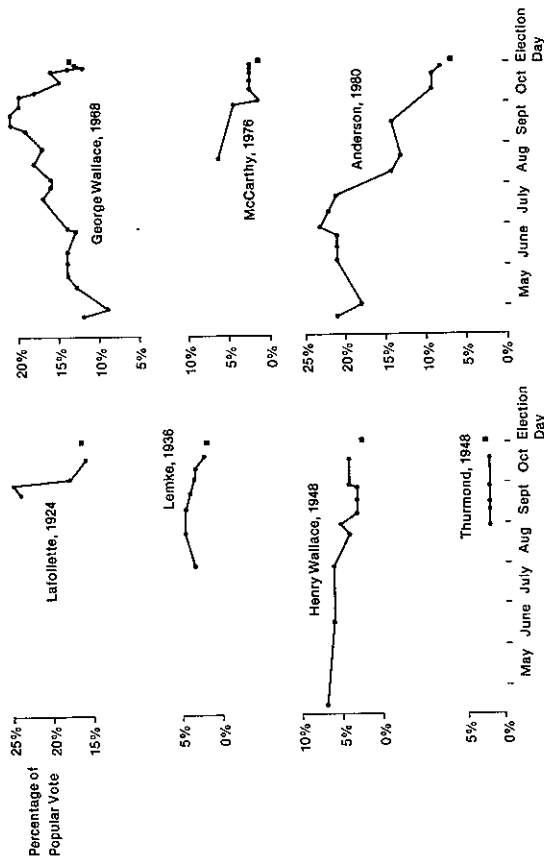
Few citizens want to modify the electoral system to aid third parties. A mere 2 percent of the 1976 electorate suggested that the conduct of political campaigns should be changed to give more attention to third parties; just 2 percent thought that the presidential debates should be changed to include third party contenders (American Institute of Public Opinion [AIPO], no. 962, November 8, 1976). Only 3 percent of the 1980 electorate were in favor of more attention being paid to third parties; less than 1 percent expressed this opinion in 1972 (*Gallup Opinion Index*, no. 183, p. 60).

his low poll standing widely reported by the press. Of those who claimed to know Anderson's position in the polls, 99 percent correctly identified him as being in third place in the trial heats (CPS 1980 National Election Study). Yet even the 41 percent of the electorate that did not know where Anderson stood in the trial heats overwhelmingly predicted that he would lose. There are two possible explanations: either voters learned of Anderson's likely fate from the media—in particular, from non-poll related stories—or there is a standing belief that third party candidates cannot win. Both are probably correct.

While nearly all Americans (85 percent) have leanings or outright allegiance to one of the two major parties, less than one in a hundred identify with a minor party (the rest being independent or apolitical) (CPS 1980 National Election Study). If partisanship is a lens through which people interpret politics and evaluate candidates (Campbell et al. 1960), then few voters see the world in ways supportive of minor parties. Even though early in the campaign citizens may flirt with minor party candidates, by election day the pull of partisanship, the inevitable "he can't win—it's a wasted vote" argument, and the wearing off of the third party novelty bring voters home to the major parties. Third party support fades as the election approaches. This pattern of declining support has been apparent since the advent of survey data (figure 2.2). Strom Thurmond, whose regionally concentrated support in 1948 gave him a clear chance of carrying states in the deep South, is the only exception.

FIGURE 2.2

Decline in Voter Support for Third Party Candidates, 1924-1980



Major party loyalties and hostile community reactions often make it tough for voters to support a third party (Gaither 1977, pp. 26-29; Sombart 1976, p. 40). C. Vann Woodward described the difficulties Southern Populists faced:

Changing one's party in the South of the nineties involved more than changing one's mind. It might involve a falling-off of clients, the loss of a job, of credit at the store, or of one's welcome at church. It could split families, and it might even call into question one's loyalty to his race and his people. An Alabamian who had "voted for Democratic candidates for forty years" wrote after breaking with the old party that he had "never performed a more painful duty." A Virginian declared after taking the same step that "It is like cutting off the right hand or putting out the right eye." (1951, p. 244)

The Lynds observed a similar phenomenon in *Middletown*:

In 1924 it was considered such "bad business" to vote for the third party that no one of the business group confessed publicly either before or after the election to adherence to this ticket. "If we could discover the three people who disgraced our district by voting for La-Follette," declared one business-class woman vehemently, "we'd certainly make it hot for them!" (Schmidt 1960, p. 243)

Parties of the left suffered still harsher repression in the first half of this century. The Socialist Party's opposition to U.S. entry into World War I brought it endless abuse that continued through the postwar Red Scare. The mass hysteria was fueled by memories of Socialist Party opposition to the war, fear of a spreading Bolshevik Revolution, and the belief that Germany (and hence German-Americans) controlled the Bolshevik movement (because of the separate peace the Soviet Union reached with Germany in 1918). Labor unrest and riots spread, the newly formed American Communist Party became more visible, and as war prosperity waned, "the assumption that the country was under serious attack by the

Reds found wide acceptance" (Murray 1955, p. 16). Socialist leaders were prosecuted under the Espionage and the Sedition Acts of 1918. Local chambers of commerce maintained "their fight for 'Americanism' breaking up radical meetings, terrorizing Party members and supporters" (Weinstein 1967, p. 235).

The Red Scare helped neutralize parties of the left. Eugene Debs, who in 1912 had polled 6.0 percent of the presidential vote, drew only 3.4 percent in 1920 when he ran from the Atlanta cell where he had been imprisoned for sedition. The party organization survived in only seven states (Weinstein 1967, p. 235).

MAJOR PARTY STRATEGIES

The American presidential election system not only discourages third party candidates from running but provides an incentive for the major parties to squelch third party competition. The strategies the Democrats and Republicans employ are, of course, the same ones they use against each other, but because minor parties are handicapped, they are less able to fend off these attacks.

Cooptation

Minor parties often advocate policies not embraced by the major parties. Frequently, the major parties respond rationally to this signal that there are disgruntled voters and adopt the third parties' positions as their own. Often these new positions can be accommodated with relatively little discomfort to the party. Indeed, a major party's very survival depends on its ability to build a broad, heterogeneous coalition. Only third parties with the most extreme beliefs or narrowest of constituencies are immune from these raids.¹⁷

As we shall see in detail in the next two chapters, the major

¹⁷ The longevity of the five ideological parties—Prohibition, Socialist, Socialist Labor, Socialist Workers, and Communist—can be attributed in part to their extreme stands and narrow bases of support.

parties successfully coopt third party votes through a variety of methods—campaign rhetoric, policy proposals and actions, political appointments and patronage. It is ironic that third parties bring about their own demise by the very support they attract. Although adopting their issue clearly steals the thunder from third parties, this is how minor parties have their impact on public policy. Third parties usually lose the battle but, through cooptation, often win the war.

Delegitimizing Tactics

The major parties also undermine third parties by delegitimizing them. It is common for major party candidates to argue that a third party vote is wasted, or that third party challengers are "fringe" candidates who stand outside the bounds of acceptable political discourse. As President Truman argued before a Los Angeles audience in 1948: "The simple fact is that the [Progressive] third party cannot achieve peace, because it is powerless. It cannot achieve better conditions at home, because it is powerless. . . . I say to those disturbed liberals who have been sitting uncertainly on the outskirts of the third party: think again. Don't waste your vote" (Ross 1968, p. 189). The major parties also try to undermine third party challengers by raising fear that a "constitutional crisis" would result from an Electoral College deadlock. This cry is heard whenever it looks as if a third party will capture some electoral votes, as in 1912, 1924, 1948, and 1968 (Hicks 1960, p. 101; Burner 1971, pp. 2485-86).

The major parties have employed a full array of dirty tricks against independent challengers. Populist speakers in 1892 spent a good part of the campaign contending with hecklers and dodging rocks, rotten eggs, and tomatoes, all courtesy of the major parties (Morgan 1971, p. 1727). The Omaha *Tribune*, which endorsed LaFollette in 1924, changed its mind and threw its support to Coolidge after receiving \$10,000 in advertising from the Republican National Committee (MacKay 1947, p. 191).

The Nixon White House employed a host of devious tactics to sabotage George Wallace. As Watergate confessions later

revealed, Nixon strategists contributed \$400,000 to Wallace's 1970 gubernatorial primary opponent (Hersh 1973, p. 1; Rosenbaum, 1973, p. 1). They also leaked a story about an IRS investigation of Wallace's brother (Shanahan 1974, p. 1) and sent federal registrars into Alabama to sign up blacks. The Committee to Reelect the President paid a California Republican official \$10,000 in 1971 to purge names from the state's American Independent Party rolls (Franklin 1973, p. 27).

On several occasions John Anderson's 1980 campaign was subjected to Democratic pranks. Carter forces tried to disrupt Anderson advance men (Peterson 1980b, p. A2), and administration officials distributed anonymous derogatory campaign literature to discredit Anderson's independent challenge (Associated Press 1980, p. 30).

The major parties also do not sit idly by as third party candidates battle state election laws. Instead, they actively fight to prevent minor parties from securing spots on the ballot. As Robert Neumann of the Democratic National Committee candidly boasted in June 1980: "We don't know how much it's going to cost [to keep Anderson off November ballots] but we'll probably spend what it takes" (Associated Press 1980, p. 30).¹⁸

Anderson's treatment was not unique. The major parties mounted comparable assaults against William Lemke in 1936, Henry Wallace in 1948, and Eugene McCarthy in 1976 (Tull 1965, p. 131; Schmidt 1960, pp. 151-52; Schram 1977, p. 286). The New York Democratic Committee alone spent over \$50,000 successfully battling to keep McCarthy off its state ballot (Alexander 1976, p. 440). Lemke was unable to run under his Union Party label in Pennsylvania in 1936 because the state Democratic chairman had already registered that name to undercut Lemke support. As a result, Lemke was forced to run on the "Royal Oak" ticket (Tull, 1965, p. 131).

¹⁸ Although on the June 10, 1980, MacNeil/Lehrer Report Neumann denied the charge, it was widely reported that the DNC had put aside \$250,000 for this effort. The strategy centered on DNC-backed challenges to Anderson in fifteen states and help from friendly state election officials. For example, see Roberts 1980; Cook 1980b, p. 2378; Schram 1980, p. A1.

CONCLUSIONS

There are powerful constraints against third party voting in America. Barriers like the single-member-district plurality electoral system discourage minor parties from running and encourage major parties to coopt their policy positions and supporters. Ballot access restrictions make it difficult for third parties to get their names before voters and require candidates to devote huge sums to signature drives and court battles.

Limited resources, poor campaign organization, and a lack of elite support further handicap third parties. They are able to purchase only a small fraction of the advertising bought by the major parties, and to make matters worse, the media pay little attention to them. Minor party presidential candidates are likely to be inexperienced and less well known than their major party counterparts. The belief that a third party cannot win and that the two-party system is a sacred arrangement delegitimizes minor parties and discourages voters from supporting them. The two major parties play on these beliefs to subvert third party challengers.

All of these constraints, of course, are interrelated. The single-member-district plurality system discourages high caliber candidates from running outside a major party; if a weak candidate runs, he will attract few campaign resources, ensuring that most citizens will learn very little about him. This in turn reinforces the belief that the third party candidate cannot win, so citizens will not waste their votes on him. The weak electoral performance is self-perpetuating. People expect third parties to do poorly because they have always done poorly, so only weak candidates run—and the cycle continues.

Together these barriers, handicaps, and major party strategies raise the level of effort required for a voter to cast his ballot for an independent candidate. A citizen can vote for a major party candidate with scarcely a moment's thought or energy. But to support a third party challenger, a voter must awaken from the political slumber in which he ordinarily lies, actively seek out information on a contest whose outcome he

cannot affect, reject the socialization of his political system, ignore the ridicule and abuse of his friends and neighbors, and accept the fact that when the ballots are counted, his vote will never be in the winner's column. Such levels of energy are witnessed only rarely in American politics.

Foreword

As this book goes to press in December of 2000, the presidential race between Al Gore and George W. Bush has apparently been decided in Governor Bush's favor. The final outcome of the election became apparent 36 days after votes were cast on November 7, and was made final by a 5-4 decision of the United States Supreme Court, which halted manual recounts in the state of Florida. The results of the 2000 presidential election will be examined and re-examined by practicing politicians, journalists, and academics alike for years to come. My purpose in this foreword is to place the 2000 election in the theoretical context which motivates this book: the aftermath of the Perot phenomenon of 1992 and 1996, and, more generally, the role of third parties in U.S. electoral politics. Despite the fact that minor party candidates, either individually or collectively, did not do as well as Perot did in either 1992 or 1996 should not obscure the revealing, and perhaps important, nature of contemporary electoral politics outside the two party system.

As I argue in the opening chapter of this collection, the main purpose of minor party candidacies is not to gain office, but to advance a policy agenda. Third parties in American politics typically measure their success by the extent to which the major parties adopt their issues positions. In this sense of altering the course of public policy, the Perot campaign in 1992 was partially successful in the sense of achieving at least one of its policy objectives: deficit reduction. In his 1992 campaign for president, Ross Perot characterized a large budget deficit as being similar to "a crazy old aunt in the attic" whose presence no one wished to acknowledge. In the presidential campaign of 2000, candidates Gore and Bush debated the question of what to do with an ever-increasing budget surplus. Partially in response to Perot's strong showing in 1992, and his somewhat weaker but still impressive importance in 1996, both parties advanced programs to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the federal budget deficit. It is at least arguable that voters who voted for Perot out of concern for the federal deficit cast extraordinarily influential votes in 1992 and 1996.

The rest of Perot's agenda did not fare as well. Perot's concern with protecting American jobs from foreign competition did not qualify for the political agenda of 2000. No serious candidate for president from either party (George Bush and John McCain for the Republicans, Al Gore and Bill Bradley for the

Democrats) opposed free trade either in principle or in policy detail. Similarly, Perot's efforts to reform the political process did not bear fruit in 2000. As I write this in the aftermath of Governor Bush's narrow and contested victory, campaign finance reform remains a mere aspiration for members of both major parties. Further, while legislative term limits have been enacted in several states (perhaps most notably, Florida), the momentum of the term limits movement appears to have abated, as many recently elected citizen legislators have belatedly discovered the benefits of experience and incumbency.

The successes and shortcomings of the Perot movement provide a backdrop for the two most highly visible minor party candidacies of the 2000 election: those of Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader. Each of these political insurgents added a central component of the Perot platform to his issue agenda: economic nationalism in the case of Buchanan, political reform in the case of Nader.

As the nominee of the Reform Party, which was Ross Perot's most enduring legacy, Buchanan did a great deal to destroy the Reform Party as a formal organization in U.S. politics. Based on Perot's 9 per cent showing in the 1996 election, the Reform Party qualified for nearly \$13 million in federal funds. Buchanan's paltry showing of just under 1 per cent in 2000 ensures that the Reform Party will not qualify for federal campaign funds in 2004.

Could Buchanan have done better? After all, he advanced a view of economic nationalism, which was a crucial part of the Perot program, and, as noted earlier, was not adopted by any candidate of the major parties. Moreover, as the chapter in this volume by Simmons and Simmons shows, there still exists a constituency for this approach to international trade. However, it seems clear that Buchanan himself was an ineffective spokesman for this issue. I have conducted some preliminary analyses of exit polls of Republican primaries in 1992 and 1996, and the results of these studies suggest that Buchanan was perceived by the electorate primarily in terms of conservatism on social issues. Indeed, in the GOP primary contests of 1992 and 1996, the best predictor of a Buchanan vote was the respondent's attitude toward abortion. By contrast, in the 1996 primaries, Buchanan split the votes of Republican economic protectionists almost evenly with Bob Dole.

In 2000, Buchanan ran a number of commercials on television and (especially) radio, in which he emphasized the importance of closing America's borders to unfair foreign competition, illegal immigrants, and illicit drugs. However, most of these spots had a strong cultural component (one radio spot has a sound background of men laughing and speaking staccato Spanish) and did not directly address the economic concerns of many blue-collar workers. To the (limited) extent that such advertisements penetrated public consciousness, they may well have reinforced Buchanan's image as a cultural conservative, which stands in contrast to Perot's own social liberalism on such issues as abortion.

Conceivably, Buchanan could have made an impact with a strong, focused

Conceivably, Buchanan could have made an impact with a strong, focused campaign from the cultural right, with a particular emphasis on the abortion issue. At a minimum, such a campaign would have posed a strategic nightmare for Governor Bush, who sought to de-emphasize the salience of divisive social issues. Buchanan might well have drawn substantial support from voters who identify with the Christian Right, some of whom may have felt abandoned by Governor Bush. However, having won the nomination of the Reform Party after a divisive convention, and having accepted the federal funding which Perot had earned in the 1996 campaign, Buchanan apparently felt honor-bound to respect the platform and constituency of his newly acquired party affiliation.

In a very general way, the presidential candidacy of Green Party candidate Ralph Nader in 2000 reflected the populist message of political reform advanced by Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996. Nader also expressed deep concerns about the effects of "globalism" in economic affairs, but appears to have based these reservations on political, rather than economic, considerations. While Nader was clearly concerned about protecting American jobs, his principal objection to economic globalism seems to have been an opposition to making decision-making structures even more remote from the influence or understanding of the average citizen. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organization are not directly accountable to American voters and represented to Ralph Nader a further concentration of economic and political power.

Despite a rather dismal 2 per cent showing in the presidential election, it seems likely that Ralph Nader did influence the outcome. While conclusive evidence for this claim must await more systematic inquiry, the circumstantial case that Nader cost Gore the presidency is rather impressive. If one makes the conservative assumption that only half of Nader's vote would have gone to Al Gore if Nader had not been running, Nader seems to have cost Gore the states (and electoral votes) of New Hampshire (four electoral votes) and Florida (twenty-five electoral votes). Either of these states would have given Gore an Electoral College majority, and therefore the presidency. Florida is a particularly egregious example. At this writing, Bush's winning margin in Florida is listed at 193 votes, out of over six million cast. In Florida, Nader received over 92,000 votes for President. Even a small fraction of these votes would have permitted Gore to win Florida's electoral votes.

Thus, if one assumes that even a plurality of Nader voters preferred Al Gore to George W. Bush, the Nader candidacy seems a classic instance of the "wasted vote" thesis. By voting for a minor party, a voter is effectively casting a vote for her worst alternative. As many Democratic leaders put it in the closing days of the 2000 campaign, "A vote for Nader is a vote for Bush."

Of course, rational choice theories of electoral behavior (discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this volume) suggest that such an outcome may be desirable for supporters of a minor party candidate, if the strategy of such voters is

future-oriented. That is, a Nader voter whose preference ordering was Nader-Gore-Bush may have intentionally advantaged Governor Bush, in an effort to persuade the Democratic Party to offer a more palatable candidate in 2004. However, such an outcome in 2004 seems unlikely. While in principle Nader's appeal could coax a more "populist" candidate into the race for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, it seems probable that strategic actors in the Democratic Party (such as potential financial contributors, state and local party leaders, and members of Congress) will understand that Nader's impact on the 2000 election was the result of the preposterous closeness of the race between the major party candidates, and cannot be attributed to any mass appeal on the part of Ralph Nader. Unlike Perot, who received nearly one vote in five in 1992, a repeat of Nader's performance in 2004 is only likely to effect the outcome under highly unusual (indeed, perhaps unique) circumstances which will almost certainly not be repeated. It thus seems improbable that the electoral or governing strategies of either major party will be affected by Nader's performance in the 2000 Presidential election.

In summary, minor party candidates occasionally perform an important agenda-setting function in American politics. In the presidential elections of 1992 and 1996, the candidacy of H. Ross Perot was formidable indeed, and threatened to affect the outcome of the race on both occasions. To a limited extent, Perot was successful in forcing his issues on the national political agenda, and achieved some success in persuading the major parties to adopt policies favored by his supporters. By contrast, although echoes of the Perot agenda were discernable in the 2000 candidacies of Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader, it seems unlikely that either will affect the political agenda of the early twenty-first century. Despite the fact that Nader may have altered the outcome of the 2000 election, it seems improbable that the Nader candidacy will have any long-term impact on the Democratic Party. To this degree, then, the Perot phenomena of 1992 and 1996 represents another instance of a recurring feature of electoral politics in the United States, rather than a permanent change in the shape of the contemporary party system.

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December 15, 2000*

The Perot Campaigns in Theoretical Perspective

Ted G. Jelen

The recent presidential campaigns of H. Ross Perot, and the subsequent events surrounding Perot's Reform Party, have posed political scientists with a fascinating set of intellectual issues. In 1992, nearly one vote in five in the presidential election was cast for Perot, making his showing the strongest for a candidate from outside the two party system since 1912. Four years later, Perot's support was cut nearly in half, but he was still able to attract about 9 percent of the popular vote for president. Moreover, the Reform Party (the vehicle for Perot's candidacy in 1996) appears to have an enduring role in contemporary American politics. In 1998, Reform candidate Jesse "The Body" Ventura (a former professional wrestler) was elected governor of Minnesota, and has since become a highly visible player in Reform Party politics. Further, the Reform Party presidential nomination for the 2000 election has become the object of vigorous competition. As I write this in the autumn of 1999, both former Republican presidential contender Pat Buchanan and financier Donald Trump are publicly considering seeking the Reform Party nomination. Thus, unlike other third party movements in the twentieth century (Rosenstone et al. 1996), the Perot movement, institutionalized in the Reform Party, may well survive the political viability of its original candidate. Thus, several years after the fact, political scientists and political pundits alike have not arrived at satisfactory accounts of the Perot phenomenon, nor is there an appreciation of the long-term potential of the movement Ross Perot appears to have put into motion.

This volume is intended to help explain Perot's meteoric rise and precipitous decline in contemporary American electoral politics, as well as the apparent

persistence of the Reform movement into the twenty-first century. Perot's unusual success, and indeed, the very existence of Perot campaigns for the presidency, is difficult to explain. Almost uniquely among Western democratic systems, the United States is highly inhospitable to political challenges by movements that originate from outside the two-party system. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to review some of the formidable obstacles to American third-party movements, and to attempt preliminary explanations for Perot's ability to overcome some (but not all) of these barriers.

Institutional Barriers

Among the most well-known and well-established generalizations in the social sciences is "Duverger's Law," which states that two party systems are likely to develop in polities that use a single-member district, plurality system, such as that found in the United States (Duverger 1963). Most political offices in the United States are contested under plurality rules, in which the candidate receiving the largest share of the popular vote is declared elected, even if that share falls below a majority (50 percent).

It is not difficult to see why such an electoral system discourages third party candidates. Presumably, a voter who is contemplating a vote for a candidate from outside the two party system is likely to have a preference between the major party candidates. As the chapters by Simmons and Simmons, Koch, and Mayer and Wilcox show, Perot drew votes from both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates in 1992 and 1996. A voter whose first choice for president was Ross Perot, but who preferred George Bush (in 1992) or Bob Dole (in 1996) to Bill Clinton, was posed with something of a strategic dilemma: Does one cast a vote for her first choice (Perot), if that vote would advantage this voter's last choice (Clinton)? Would it not make more sense to vote for the Republican candidate, in an effort to deny the presidency to Bill Clinton? This dilemma, often termed the "wasted vote" thesis, has been an extremely formidable obstacle to minor party and independent candidates for most of American history.

The Electoral College, of course, magnifies the disadvantage under which third parties must compete. Under the Electoral College system, a successful candidate for president must garner a majority of the electoral votes (currently 270 of a possible 538). While, in principle, such a majority system might provide a minor party candidate with an opportunity to create an Electoral College deadlock (thereby requiring the president to be selected by the House of Representatives), such leverage can only exist if the minor party candidate in question actually received electoral votes. In most states (Maine and Nebraska are the exceptions),

the state's electoral votes are assigned on a "winner take all" basis to the candidate receiving a plurality of the popular vote. Thus, in order to have any impact on the electoral vote, a minor party candidate typically must finish first in at least one state.

This sort of Electoral College deadlock has not occurred in the twentieth century. However, minor party candidates who have received electoral votes include Robert LaFollette (1924), Strom Thurmond (1948), and George Wallace (1968).¹ What these candidates have had in common is the fact that their popular support was geographically concentrated (in Wisconsin for LaFollette, and in the South for Thurmond and Wallace). Despite the fact that he ran better than any of these three former third-party candidates in 1992, and ran better than either LaFollette and Thurmond in 1996, Ross Perot received no electoral votes in either election. While Perot was able to finish second in several states in 1992, in no state did he obtain a popular vote plurality.

Thus, the practice of American elections tends to discourage both candidates and supporters of third parties quite strongly. Given the winner take all nature of elections in the United States, it is impossible for competitors from outside the two party system to make gains that are both gradual and tangible. While it is possible in principle for third parties to increase their popular support over a series of elections, the lack of tangible rewards (in terms of the election of public officials) has tended to reduce the lifespan of third party movements in the twentieth century.

Aside from the impact of electoral laws themselves, there are other institutional barriers to third party success in American elections. One of these is differential ballot access. The mechanics of conducting elections in the United States are generally regulated by state law, and no state or territory permits candidates to have unrestricted access to the ballot. Typically, most states impose some combination of petition signatures and filing fees, which vary substantially across states (Winger 1997; Dwyre and Kolodny 1997). While restrictions on ballot access have generally become less burdensome since the Wallace campaign of 1968, the existence of fifty-one (fifty states plus the District of Columbia) separate sets of regulations poses potential third party movements with a very high initial hurdle. Candidates and parties from outside the two party system must commit substantial resources to gaining admission to the electoral contest; something that is granted automatically to the Democratic and Republican parties.

The chapter in this volume by Martin and Spang, which describes the mobilization of the Virginia chapter of United We Stand, illustrates both the potential and limitations of such grass-roots movements. On the plus side, gaining ballot access did provide volunteers with an immediate, attainable goal in the early stages of the 1992 electoral cycle. This sort of activity may have created a psychological investment in the Perot campaigns, which could have sustained the commitment of Perot supporters during difficult times (such as Perot's untimely withdrawal in

July 1992). Conversely, movements such as United We Stand are unlikely to be popular with politically active citizens, who may have strong attachments to the existing parties. Third parties are often required to recruit from the ranks of people who are socially and politically isolated. The chapter by Gilbert, Johnson, Djupe, and Peterson on the impact of religion on the Perot campaigns suggests that third-party movements generally will lack the organizational support and political skills that often characterize active church members (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). This point can be generalized. The most fertile recruiting ground for third party supporters is likely to exist within those segments of the population that are not strongly politically or socially engaged. However, such people are also likely to lack the interest and skills necessary to participate in political activity.

Thus, the costs of admission to the electoral arena (in terms of time, money, and energy) are higher for the supporters of third party candidates than for those who support one of the two major parties. Moreover, these increased costs must often be borne by people whose ability to incur them is rather limited.

Attempts to "reform" campaign finance in the post-Watergate era have also limited the potential of some third-party movements. Under the regulations that have been in place since 1976, presidential candidates affiliated with the major parties are entitled to matching funds from the federal treasury during the primary season, and are entitled to federal financing during the general election. By contrast, the campaigns of John Anderson (in 1980) and Ross Perot in 1992 had to be financed privately (albeit under the same restrictions on fund raising imposed on major party candidates) with the possibility of reimbursement by the Federal Election Commission after the election. Further, the amount of such post hoc support for relatively successful third party candidates (e.g., those who qualify at all) is contingent on the level of electoral support such candidates receive. Again, third-party candidates typically have fewer resources with which to gain financial support, and must submit to more stringent requirements than those imposed on the major parties (Dwyre and Kolodny 1997).

Finally, certain federal regulations have often limited the media coverage available to third party candidates. Most conspicuously, third party candidates bear a substantial burden in order to be included in presidential debates. For the 2000 electoral cycle, for example, presidential candidates must achieve support of 15 percent or greater in one of the major national polls to be included in televised debates between presidential candidates (Clines 1999). Since these debates have become pivotal events in the conduct of general election campaigns since 1976, exclusion from debates can be a huge handicap for candidates from outside the two party system. A candidate such as Ross Perot in 1996 is faced with something of a Catch-22: In order to gain popular support, the candidate must participate in debates; in order to participate in televised debates, the candidate must demonstrate popular support.

Given these barriers to third party success, how did Ross Perot manage to fare as well as he did? It can easily be discerned that, despite the support of nearly one voter in five in 1992, Perot was unable to overcome in any way the bias imposed by the Electoral College. Despite a high expenditure of resources in two consecutive elections, Perot did not obtain a single electoral vote. Nevertheless, Perot was able to attract a very high level of support in 1992, and managed a fairly respectable showing in 1996. It has been argued (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996) that, in 1992, Perot was able to overcome many of the traditional obstacles to third-party success by using some of his substantial personal wealth. As the chapter by Kenneth Nordin illustrates, Perot was able to purchase large segments of television time for his "informercials" with his own personal fortune. Under the Supreme Court's 1976 decision in *Buckley v. Valeo*, personal expenditures by candidates on their own behalf cannot constitutionally be limited. Perot was apparently able to parlay the investment of his own money into adroit use of "free" media (most notably, frequent appearances on the Larry King show), which in turn generated sufficient popular support to allow Perot to be included in the presidential debates. The preceding discussion has suggested that third party candidates and movements face formidable start-up costs in order to enter the electoral competition. Billionaire Perot was able to bear these costs more easily than most other third party candidates, and was thus able to attract a relatively large popular following.

In 1996, and perhaps in 2000 as well, Perot was able to take advantage of some of the institutional provisions that have traditionally benefited the major parties. While 1996 witnessed another extended struggle for ballot access for the newly formed Reform Party, Perot himself qualified for (and accepted) \$29 million in federal funds, based on his 1992 showing (Green and Binning 1997). Based on Perot's more limited demonstration of support in 1996, the Reform Party candidate for president in 2000 will be eligible for approximately \$12.6 million in federal subsidies, which will be available during the campaign (Clines 1999). While this total will be dwarfed by the subsidies available to the Democratic and Republican candidates for president, the \$12.6 million may provide a basis for garnering the popular support necessary to gain entrance to televised presidential debates. Thus, in 2000, the Presidential nomination of the Reform Party may well be worth having, since Perot's previous efforts have paid some of the start-up costs of third party activity in advance.

Strategic Considerations

Despite the impressive limitations on third party activity in the United States, the presentation of alternatives to the two major parties is a frequently occurring

feature of American politics (Rosenstone et al 1996). Indeed, to suggest that Perot simply bought his way into contention in 1992 is to ignore features of the political environment in the late twentieth century that made Perot's approach particularly appealing to an important and politically consequential segment of the American electorate. While Perot's personal resources were perhaps *necessary* to his performance in the 1992 and 1996 elections, such resources would not have been sufficient under different circumstances. Thus, important questions for analysts of contemporary American electoral politics might be "Why Perot?" and "Why now?"

William Riker (1976) has proposed a dynamic theory, which can account for both the occurrence and decline of third parties in the United States. According to Anthony Downs (1956), parties in two party systems tend to converge toward the center of the left-right (or liberal-conservative continuum). As the major parties (such as the Republicans and the Democrats) come to resemble one another, voters on the extreme right or extreme left are likely to feel abandoned by the party closest to them, and increasingly indifferent to the differences between the two major parties. Thus, voters and candidates might well engage in a rational "future-oriented" strategy, in which votes in a present election are "wasted," in order to bring one or both parties closer to the optimal position on the extremes. As one of the major parties adapts to the challenge posed by the third party, by moving closer to the third party's positions, the rationale for the existence of the third party becomes weaker, and fewer voters are likely to be indifferent to the difference between the two major parties. Thus, in subsequent elections, the third party is increasingly unlikely to attract electoral support, even as its issue positions are adopted to some extent by the major parties.

At first glance, Riker's theory seems unlikely to apply to the Perot movement, since many accounts (including the Mayer and Wilcox piece in this volume) have suggested that Perot voters were "zealots of the center," who rejected the more strident issue positions of both major parties (see especially Miller and Shanks 1996). However, it does seem possible that, in the context of the 1992 election, it is the center of the liberal-conservative continuum that has been vacated by the major parties. Downsian analysis suggests that the logic of two party competition mandates that parties interested in electoral success will converge toward the center of the political spectrum. However, if the ideological movement of the Democrats and Republicans is constrained (perhaps by the internal dynamics of each party), the parties may leave vacant the center.

A recent analysis by Shafer and Claggett (1995) suggests that this is precisely what has happened in recent American politics. Shafer and Claggett have argued that public opinion in the United States is characterized by "two majorities": a conservative majority on "cultural/moral issues" involving personal morality and foreign affairs, and a liberal majority on issues pertaining to matters of economics.

The analysis further suggests that the former set of issues provide a context in which Republicans are likely to prevail, while Democrats have an advantage when the agenda concerns economic issues. However, both parties are, in a Downsian sense, acting irrationally in two distinct ways. In the first instance, each party in the late twentieth century has chosen to respond to internal constituencies that advantage the competition. Thus, the Republican Party has emphasized its economic conservatism, despite the fact that this set of issues tends to favor Democrats. Conversely, Democratic candidates have tended to focus on issues of personal morality (such as gay rights, feminism, and civil liberties for unpopular expression) even though these issues tend to advantage Republicans. For reasons that have yet to be explained adequately, each party has tended to compete in the opposition's ballpark. Secondly, Shafer and Claggett argue that each party has wasted its potential majority, by taking more extreme positions than the majority will bear. Thus, the commitment of some Democratic candidates to "hard" versions of affirmative action and income redistribution has alienated the moderate economic liberalism of many former supporters (e.g., "Reagan Democrats"), while the stridency of some Republican candidates on issues such as abortion and gay rights has prevented the mobilization of many potential supporters (Wilcox 1992; Jelen 1991).

It is not entirely clear why political candidates in contemporary American politics behave "irrationally" in this narrow Downsian sense. Some analysts have suggested that party "reforms" begun after 1968 have made political parties more responsive to relatively extreme activists (Crotty and Jackson 1985; Ladd 1978; Lengle 1981; and Polsby 1983), but recent research (Wilcox 1995; Norrander 1989) has shown that primary electorates are no more extreme than general election voters. What does seem clear is that candidates of both major parties, whether as the result of conviction or miscalculation, have frequently acted in a manner that does not permit them to maximize their share of the vote.

If elites in the major parties regard themselves to some extent as captives of their extremist wings, it may follow that the "vital center" has been the area of the political spectrum that has been vacated. Analyses of the issue positions of Perot voters have shown that they are generally more liberal than those who supported Bush or Dole, and more conservative than those who supported Clinton, in 1992 and 1996. Moreover, Perot may be regarded as an aggressive centrist in other respects as well. As the essays in this volume by Nordin and by Martin and Spang make clear, two of Perot's major issue positions were opposition to the federal deficit and support for term limits. Moreover, Perot's "can-do" approach suggested that problems in U.S. politics are not about ends but means. For example, Perot's promise to "get under the hood" and fix the economy suggests that there exists general agreement on what "fixing the economy" might mean. Perot thus campaigned in part against the *idea* of partisanship, and indeed, against the idea that politics is a profession.

Seen in this light, Perot's campaign thus may fit Riker's account rather nicely. Perot, as do most relatively successful third party candidates, gained a measure of electoral support by occupying a portion of the political spectrum not held by the major parties. Paradoxically, the vacant space in U.S. politics may have been in the center.

Was Perot Successful?

Traditionally, third parties in the United States are rarely "successful" in the traditional sense of winning elections. Duverger's Law suggests that it is highly unlikely that the United States will ever sustain a stable multiparty system, and, in only one instance in American history—the ascendancy of the Republican Party in 1860—has a minor party succeeded in displacing one of the two major parties in the electoral system. Rather, the success or failure of third parties has generally been assessed in terms of their agenda-setting function (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). That is, minor parties in the United States have often raised issues ignored by the two major parties, and the positions initially taken by minor parties on these issues are occasionally adopted by one or both of the major parties.

Given this policy-based criterion, how has the Perot movement fared? As the next chapter by Kenneth Nordin shows, Perot based his candidacies on three major themes: the need to reduce the federal budget deficit, reform of the political process itself, and the protection of American jobs from foreign competition. Specifically, the need for political reform was manifested in the term limits movement, which was endorsed by Perot, and an attack on NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) was the most visible aspect of Perot's economic nationalism.

In 1992, Perot characterized the federal budget deficit as being comparable to "a crazy old aunt in the attic," which neither party cared to discuss. By the end of the decade, both parties had endorsed plans to reduce the budget deficit, and, by 1998, the Federal Government was believed to be operating at a surplus. The Republican Party (the majority party in Congress since 1994) passed a series of budget reduction measures, and the Clinton administration has taken credit for a long period of economic prosperity which increased government revenues and lowered certain public expenditures. As this is being written in the final year of the Clinton administration, a major issue in public debate is the disposition of the budget surplus. Should government revenues that exceed expenditures be applied to the national debt, or does the surplus provide an opportunity for a major cut in federal taxes? The nature of the debate on a surplus in the federal budget suggests that both parties have responded to Perot's focus on the deficit as an important

problem. For voters who placed a high priority on deficit reduction in 1992 and 1996, a vote cast for H. Ross Perot was as influential a vote as has ever been cast in an American election. Rather than being "wasted," as Duverger's Law would suggest, votes cast for Perot in 1992 and 1996 had a profound effect on the direction of American politics, and, ultimately, on policies adopted by both major parties.

The record on political reform generally, and on the specific issue of term limits, has been mixed. The idea that the number of terms to which public officials (particularly members of Congress) should be limited has come to symbolize opposition to the existence of a supposed "political class" of nearly permanent, electorally secure legislators. Such a class has been regarded as "out of touch" with the concerns of ordinary citizens, and Perot was a proponent of efforts to replace such entrenched officials with frequently changing "citizen legislators." Limiting an individual representative or senator's term to two or three terms is an idea that has gained widespread support toward this goal.

A promise to consider the issue of term limits was an explicit item on the GOP's "Contract With America," a statement of principles produced by Congressional Republicans for the 1994 off-year elections. The question was quite prominent as a campaign issue in the 1994 elections, and several long-term members of Congress (including House Speaker Thomas Foley) were defeated in part because of their opposition to formal term limits. Thus, proponents of term limits were quite successful in placing the issue on the public agenda, and it seems likely that Perot's high level of public support in 1992 was instrumental in achieving a high level of visibility for this issue.

However, the movement to limit the terms of elected legislators has, to date, been unsuccessful. Despite several attempts by several Republicans in the House of Representatives to enact legal term limits, measures that would mandate such limits have never been passed by either house of Congress. Moreover, several members of the House "Class of '94," who had promised to limit the number of terms for which they would run voluntarily have begun to reconsider their positions. Apparently, the experience of serving in the House of Representatives has introduced some recently elected members to the advantages of seniority and continuity of leadership.

Finally, Perot's efforts to protect American jobs through protectionist policies has not been particularly successful. As noted in the chapter by Kenneth Nordin, Perot debated Vice President Al Gore on the question of NAFTA in November 1993 on the *Larry King Live* show. Despite Perot's history and experience in using the medium of television, as well as his familiarity with the particular format of the King program, Perot was considered to have "lost" the NAFTA debate to Gore. Subsequently, NAFTA was ratified by the United States Senate, and the general issue of protectionism has generally disappeared from the public agenda of American politics. As this is written in the fall of 1999, it is perhaps noteworthy

that no candidate for the presidential nomination of either major party has taken a position against free trade. The decision of House minority leader Richard Gephardt (a long time supporter of protective tariffs) not to seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2000 meant that there would be no Democratic candidate for president not committed to the importance of free trade. Perennial Republican candidate and economic nationalist Pat Buchanan is, at this writing, considering leaving the Republican Party to seek the presidential nomination of the Reform Party. If the analysis presented in this volume by Simmons and Simmons is substantially correct, there may well be a constituency for such a message, which will apparently be unrepresented by either major party in 2000. While Buchanan's conservatism on social issues may not be attractive to many potential supporters of the Reform Party, the fact that the major parties appear to have left the issue of economic nationalism to the Reform candidate may provide a basis of support for a Buchanan candidacy.²

Thus, the consequences of the Perot candidacies for public policy appear substantial, but limited. While the major parties have responded promptly and profoundly to Perot's treatment of the issue of the budget deficit, the same cannot be said of the issues of political reform or economic nationalism.

Plan of the Book

This volume had its origins at a panel on "Third-Party Movements in American Politics," held at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago in April of 1994. Versions of four of the papers included in this collection (those by Martin and Spang, Koch, Simmons and Simmons, and Gilbert et al.) were initially presented at that meeting. The idea of an edited volume emerged at a Dutch Treat lunch which immediately followed the panel session. As the project evolved (surviving a long delay during which the editor moved from suburban Chicago to Las Vegas) and as both Ross Perot and the Reform Party added to their respective histories, chapters were revised and added to describe and explain more recent developments. As this is being written, the Reform Party is being considered by several potential presidential candidates as a vehicle for articulating issue positions that may not be receiving much attention from the Democratic and Republican parties. The existence and persistence of the movement begun by Ross Perot in 1992 provides the rationale for this collection of studies.

The essays that comprise this volume provide sophisticated analyses of the Perot movement in 1992 and 1996, and may provide a basis for evaluating the potential of the Perot movement in the immediate future. The first two pieces deal

with the Perot phenomenon. In large extent, Perot's rise to the medium of television was the arena. Perot's some control over "the show" by Martin and Spang is a rhetorical device in itself (Putnam 1995), with the use of a lesson originally emphasized by the majority. The election of a strong political candidate like Ross Perot was able to

The next four chapters deal with Perot on the part of the major parties. They have been able to discuss other candidates. They have support from a coherent set of grievances to a large extent. Perot's decline in support is a grievance that he has an important consequence. Johnson, Peterson, and religiously uncommitted. A piece raises the issue of social capital in the context of Mayer suggest that the decline is uniform across various regions. Perot's decline in support is a behavior.

A final chapter discusses support in Minnesota and discusses the independent tradition of national vision.

We hope that this study will stand as a contribution to the understanding of the electoral politics of the twenty-first century. It is a study of the opportunity to observe elite-level activity and an attempt to explain