POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS, FALL 2012

**AMERICAN THIRD PARTIES: A CLOSER EXAMINATION**

[Posted reading](http://homepages.gac.edu/~cgilbert/p215/s10read.pdf) from *Third Parties in America* (“Introduction,” “Constraints on Third Parties”) and from *Ross for Boss* (“Foreward” and “The Perot Campaigns in Theoretical Perspective”)

Monday, September 10

KEY TERMS

what third parties do – policy innovations, help to cause realignments, link people to government, outlet for political discontent; barriers to third parties – constitutional, ballot access laws, campaign finance laws, lack of campaign resources and media coverage, candidate quality and lack of name recognition, negative attitudes toward third parties; anti-third party political strategies: cooptation of issues, delegitimizing tactics; outcomes of Perot’s agenda items; campaigns of Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader; Reform Party; dynamic theory of William Riker, and its relationship to Perot; “two majorities” thesis and its relationship to Perot; conceptions of “success” for Perot and his political movement

**Note**: Except for the Perot-specific questions below (Perot is only discussed in “Foreward” and “The Perot Campaigns in Theoretical Perspective” at the end of today’s reading), these questions are meant to be answered using **all** of today’s readings.

1. How does ballot access work against third candidates/third parties? What would be a reasonable standard in terms of allowing minor political parties a place on the ballot – should they show some public support (through petitions and/or past voting totals), or should any party willing to run a candidate and/or meet some simple requirements have a spot on the ballot?

2. How do the campaign finance laws work against third parties and candidates? Should federal law be more generous to third parties? Should it be less generous to all parties, so as not to favor Republicans and Democrats?

3. How does media coverage affect third parties/candidates negatively? What standard should a news organization use in determining how much to cover the candidates in a major election?

4. How could a third party attract more qualified candidates (in the eyes of voters) to run under the third party banner? Are there risks to the third party in doing this?

5. Are there any reasons why Democrats and Republicans might WANT third parties to do better in an election?

6. What did Ross Perot accomplish in his 1992 and 1996 presidential bids, and specifically how did Perot’s earlier bids affect the 2000 campaigns of candidates Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader?

7. Have Ross Perot’s presidential bids had any long-term impact on U.S. politics? Ponder and discuss.

8. Considering these readings, define what it means for a true third party/candidate (not a former Republican/Democrat who runs independently) to be **successful**. Jesse Ventura offers one obvious (and very rare) answer – he won an election; think of other answers, and determine whether any third parties/candidates have actually been successful under your definition.

9. The first two selections were written in 1984, and the last pieces in late 1999 and late 2000. What conclusions from these readings might be different today in 2012? Put another way, why is there no visible minor party or independent candidate in the 2012 presidential election?

10. As always, record your own question(s) here, and ask!