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# Who Votes Third Party and Why?

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## **Abstract**

Who votes for third party candidates? Can third party presidential candidates be “spoiler” candidates, ones who swing the election? I use the 2016 election to investigate this phenomenon. By examining datasets that asked participants who they would vote for in a two-way presidential race (between only Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump), versus who they would support in a four-way race (when Green Party candidate Jill Stein and Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson were added to the list of potential candidates), I can examine which voters change their support between the two-way and four-way races. In particular, I look at voters who support Clinton in a two-way race, but not in a four-way race; I label such individuals “Clinton switchers.” While this is only a modest fraction of the electorate, given Clinton’s razor narrow loss to Trump in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, such shifts could have potentially altered the outcome.

I hypothesized that different demographic and attitudinal groups of individuals would be more likely to switch their votes away from Clinton. In particular, I expected that younger, male, less educated, poorer, and non-swing state residents would be more likely to switch away from Clinton (as would Independent voters). Using both nationally-represented survey data (from CNN), and a survey of New York residents (from Siena Research Institute), I find support for all of the hypotheses mentioned above. This is important because it tells us what categorizes and defines the group of voters who ultimately caused the 2016 election outcome as well who are the people with a natural affinity for “spoiler” candidates in general.

## **Disciplines**

American Politics | Models and Methods

# **Who Votes Third Party and Why?**

Taylor Nefussy

*Submitted to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program at the University of  
Pennsylvania in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors.*

Thesis Advisor: Professor Matthew Levendusky

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**I. Abstract**

Who votes for third party candidates? Can third party presidential candidates be “spoiler” candidates, ones who swing the election? I use the 2016 election to investigate this phenomenon. By examining datasets that asked participants who they would vote for in a two-way presidential race (between only Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump), versus who they would support in a four-way race (when Green Party candidate Jill Stein and Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson were added to the list of potential candidates), I can examine which voters change their support between the two-way and four-way races. In particular, I look at voters who support Clinton in a two-way race, but not in a four-way race; I label such individuals “Clinton switchers.” While this is only a modest fraction of the electorate, given Clinton’s razor narrow loss to Trump in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, such shifts could have potentially altered the outcome.

I hypothesized that different demographic and attitudinal groups of individuals would be more likely to switch their votes away from Clinton. In particular, I expected that younger, male, less educated, poorer, and non-swing state residents would be more likely to switch away from Clinton (as would Independent voters). Using both nationally-represented survey data (from CNN), and a survey of New York residents (from Siena Research Institute), I find support for all of the hypotheses mentioned above. This is important because it tells us what categorizes and defines the group of voters who ultimately caused the 2016 election outcome as well who are the people with a natural affinity for “spoiler” candidates in general.

## **II. Why We Care- What's At Stake?**

We tend to think about third party candidates as not mattering much in elections. They often center around one major issue and seem irrelevant in the grand scheme of the election. However, they might end up affecting the election when the difference in votes in certain important states is extremely close. This is because, even if a state's vote total is close, in 48 states the majority vote getter receives all the electoral votes from that state. When this happens, the third party candidates can turn into spoiler candidates as happened in the 2000 and 2016 election. Who are these people who vote for a spoiler candidate and why do they choose to do so? This is what I plan to investigate through this paper and my research.

A spoiler candidate is defined as a candidate whose presence in an election draws votes from a major candidate with similar political views causing an opponent of both to win (King & Hale, 2016). Due to the Electoral College in this country, it is almost impossible for third party candidates to win. This causes them to occasionally become spoiler candidates. A famous example of this is Ralph Nader in 2000. His ideology matched up closest to Al Gore's and studies have shown that the majority (60%) of Nader voters, if Nader had not run, would have voted for Gore (Herron & Lewis, 2006). Most analyses focus on Gore's razor-thin loss to George W. Bush in Florida, where the official tally had Bush winning by only 537 votes. But Gore also lost New Hampshire and Tennessee by less than 1 percent, and had he won either state, he would have captured the presidency. If Nader had even a

modest effect in any of these states, then he potentially swung the outcome from Gore to Bush.

In the 2016 Election the two major party candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were the only possible two who could garner enough electoral votes to actually win the election. With this said, Jill Stein and Gary Johnson, the third party candidates, did have an affect on the outcome. Some could argue the third party candidates in this election served as spoiler candidates for Hillary Clinton by taking votes away from Clinton in important swing states. Although Secretary Clinton won the popular vote by just under 3 million votes, Trump was able to win the Electoral College with 306 electoral votes, which is the constitutionally mandated process of selecting the president. There is a potential for third party candidates to strongly impact the election outcomes.

So why do people, knowing they can have a negative impact, choose to vote third party anyway? It is seen by many as a statement of discontent with the two major political parties, or an effort to change the narrative about what the election means (Campus Election Engagement Project, 2016). If third party candidates are getting enough support and stand for a major issue, then the major political party candidate will have to discuss this widespread problem and perhaps even adopt it into their platform in order to garner support. An example of this in the 2016 election was Hillary Clinton adopting some of Bernie Sanders' strategic themes into her platform when she earned the Democratic nomination, such as free college tuition to public institutions (Saul & Flegenheimer, 2016). Although Bernie Sanders was not a third party candidate, he served a similar role since he was elected as an Independent

Senator before running for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Voting third party for some is a way to express their values, show where they stand on major issues, and demonstrate their unhappiness with the current two options.

Such votes matter not only because they potentially reveal unhappiness with the political system, but they also potentially change the story of the election. If third party candidates receive substantial support, it cannot only affect the outcome, but also the lessons people draw from it. If someone for the Green Party, for example, is to garner a great deal of support than the major candidates are forced to take strong stances on environmental issues and discuss it perhaps more heavily than they initially would have. Third party candidates bring new topics or highlight topics not receiving a great deal of attention into the narrative of the election. Additionally, depending on who wins the election different policies are put in place and the future of this country is forever altered. Spoiler candidates determine or affect these results and thus need to be studied.

I examine the 2016 election to grapple with these issues. Hillary Clinton lost the election due to a small difference in votes in 3 key swing states: Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan. In these states, if we just look at the total votes Stein received, it is less than the Trump/Clinton difference. If we were to reapportion the Stein votes to Clinton, these state outcomes would change. If these states changed, Secretary Clinton would have won the Electoral College and would have become the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. This led me to investigate the following question: Who or what characterizes those who voted third party in the 2016 election?

Because if these people stayed the course, voted for a candidate from a major



political party (i.e. Trump or Clinton) there would have been a different outcome to this election.

As mentioned above, the difference in votes between Clinton and Trump in important states was extremely minimal. For example, in the state of Pennsylvania, Trump won with 48.6% of the vote and Clinton took 47.9% making the difference 0.7% ("Presidential", 2016). Jill Stein, a third party candidate whose voters would likely vote for Clinton when forced to choose between Clinton and Trump, garnered 0.8%, which is greater than the difference between Clinton/Trump. Further, in Michigan, Trump beat Hillary Clinton by 0.2% of the vote while Jill Stein received 1.1%. This 0.2% equals to just over 10,000 votes. To put this into perspective, that is the size of the undergraduate population of University of Pennsylvania. Lastly, we can look at Wisconsin. In this swing state, just fewer than 3 million votes were cast and Trump edged out Hillary Clinton by a mere 0.8% ("Presidential", 2016). Jill Stein, the Green Party's candidate, won 1.1% of the total vote. If Stein's voters, in these three states, moved their votes to Secretary Clinton it would have changed the outcome of the state. In this hypothetical situation Clinton would now have received 278 Electoral votes, win the election and become the next President of the United States. This clearly demonstrated that Jill Stein had the potential to be a spoiler candidate.

This can continue for several other close states but the 3 mentioned above had the narrowest victory for Trump and it only took Jill Stein's votes to change the outcome. In other states, besides these three, one might need to include both Johnson and Stein's votes to Clinton's to make it a victory for the Secretary.

However, it is unclear if all or most of Johnson's voters would pick Secretary Clinton if forced to choose between Trump and Clinton, thus it is safer to use the states in which just Stein's votes are needed to win.

The salience of this research is in the closeness of the recent election. As the Weekly Standard describes, if we look at the loss Clinton received in these 3 states, "The 2016 presidential election was decided by about 77,000 votes of the 136 million ballots cast" (McCormack, 2016). A shocking statistic, the Washington Post article goes on further to explain, is that this number of votes is roughly the same number of people that can fit into Michigan's "Big House" stadium (Meko, Lu & Gamio, 2016). Since such few voters changed the greater outcome, it is imperative to look at these people. What do they have in common? What qualities apply to the majority of this population? Perhaps in the future, campaigns can focus on these voters with a targeted strategy and have more success than the Clinton campaign did.

### **III. Variables**

From comparing the "Clinton switchers" to the non-switchers, those who chose Clinton in a two- and four- way presidential race, I noticed several variables that differed greatly amongst the two. The variables believed to be the most interesting and compelling included the age of those who switched to third party candidates, their gender, their education, income, what state they are from and their political

affiliation. My hypothesis for why and how these variables affected their voting patterns and the results of this research are explained below.

#### **IV. Hypothesis**

##### **a. Age**

Before examining the results it is important to indicate how one thinks the age of the voters would affect whom they chose to vote for. In this case, I hypothesized people are more likely to vote third party if they are younger. This is for several reasons.

One, if an individual is younger, perhaps a Millennial, the 2016 Presidential Election might be the first presidential election they are partaking in. If this is the case, they have yet to create an identity or allegiance to a certain party through their voting record so instead young voters are more swayed by the current popular political attitudes (Campbell, 1960). For example, if someone has voted for the Democratic nominee for the past four election cycles, it is likely they feel a tie to that political coalition and will continue to vote for that party's nominee. Studies by Campbell have been conducted to demonstrate that once people establish their identity as being attached to a certain political party it is not easily changed. He demonstrates that over 90% of people who identify as strong Democrats and over 80% of people who identify as strong Republicans have never voted against their party in a presidential election (Campbell, 1960). These extremely high numbers indicate that once people create their ties or connection to a party they rarely change, thus the people most likely to switch are those without those connections,

often younger voters. Also the longer an individual sees herself as belonging to a certain political party, the stronger her sense of faithfulness to that party becomes (Campbell, 1960). Young people have not formed that pattern or that strong party affiliation yet. Because of this they may feel less of or no tie to a certain party, allowing them to more freely vote for a third party candidate.

This lack of connection to a political party may also indicate why “young people, just entering the electorate, are more likely than any of the older age groups to call themselves Independents” (Campbell, 1960). Young voters have always been more likely to identify as Independents than older voting blocs but the current share of millennial voters who see themselves as Independents is up eight points from the 2008 election (Pew, 2016). Of the 18-35 year olds, 41% identify as Independents (Pew, 2016). If a young person has a higher probability of being an Independent she may also be more likely to switch her vote. Stringent Democrats would stick with Hillary Clinton in both a two and four party race but someone not feeling fully connected to either party could be more willing to vote for Clinton in a two-way race but change their allegiance to a third party candidate in a four-way race.

Another possibility is that because one is younger they do not understand how voting third party is similar to throwing your vote away. Due to our election processes and how the Electoral College works, a third party candidate has almost no chance of winning enough votes to garner the majority of votes in a state. Without any state majority, the third party candidate cannot attain any electoral votes, making it impossible to win the presidency. *The New York Times* depicts this issue, “And, in what is one of the most difficult barriers for Mrs. Clinton to break

through, young people often display little understanding of how a protest vote for a third-party candidate, or not voting at all, can alter the outcome of a close election” (Peters & Alcindor, 2016). Additionally, many millennial voters could not vote and do not remember the upset Ralph Nadar caused Al Gore in 2000 exacerbating the issue (Peters & Alcindor, 2016). If a younger person does not understand this, or further, does not care, they are more inclined to “throw away their vote” to a third party candidate.

Youth voters tend to have fewer responsibilities but also may not realize what is at stake. Because of this, they may take the presidential election less seriously even though the election results will directly affect them in the future, ie. what the job market will look like, what healthcare will be available, the state of the environment, etc. If a person does not have serious concerns, they might be more inclined to vote for a third party candidate. Without a mortgage or a job, one might feel the election results do not directly impact them or their future. Even if this is misguided, it is a possible reason to vote third party. As Campbell explains in *The American Voter*, “As the young adult passes through the early egocentric years, however, the salience that political matters have on his life gradually increases” (Campbell, 1960). This means that people see the importance and direct relation politics has on their life more as they grow older. Because of this, younger people may not see the clear correlation or effect elections can have on them and are thus less inclined to vote or vote for a serious candidate.

In this particular election it was deemed “cool” to vote for Bernie. He sparked a mass movement and a great deal of excitement among young people on his team.

This excitement did not carry over to Hillary Clinton. With this lack of excitement and mobilization, young people may have felt less inclined to vote for her over a third party option. To be a part of the Bernie Bro movement or wanting to appear alternative/cool a young person perhaps instead voted for third party or wrote in a candidate than vote for one of the major two party presidential candidates. As Heller writes in *The New Yorker*, "Sanders's tinge of hippiedom, his seeming lack of calculation, lets members of the smartphone generation embrace the political sixties trip they never had" (Heller, 2016). Youth supporters widely cite Sanders' sincerity as the reason for his support (Chozick & Alcindor, 2016). This is in stark contrast with Clinton who many deem not trustworthy and too cozy with Wall Street (Chozick & Alcindor, 2016).

Furthermore, if there was a lack of excitement for either of the major two party candidates a young person could be attempting to make a statement by voting third party. To express their frustration with the two clear options, he/she may have instead chosen to vote for a third party candidate with a slim chance of winning. This was simply because the two other options were so repugnant, in their eyes, that they would rather vote for Stein or Johnson.

### **b. Gender**

My hypothesis is that men would be more likely to switch and vote for a third party candidate than women. In general, women are probably more often to vote for Hillary or the Democratic candidate in the first place, but of the men who say they would choose her over Trump in a two-way race they would be more likely to vote

for a third party candidate when asked in a four-way race. There are numerous theories that support this argument.

The concept of having the first female presidential candidate of a major party is novel in it of itself. Also, the possibility of having the first female president could be a cause for women to choose to stay more loyal to Hillary Clinton. As seen in 2008, it was expected prominent women would support Clinton, and when they did not “the onus was on them either to explain or apologize for their ‘deviation’” (Lawless, 2009). Further, the strongest predictor for preferring the female candidate in a race is the respondent’s gender, in that women tend to prefer female candidates (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Kira Sanbonmatsu studied this in 2002 when she conducted an experiment. She gave participants the profile of two candidates; one was new to politics and represented change, the other an establishment candidate with many years of experience. Women more often chose the change candidate when they were told both were male. However, when the respondents were told the establishment candidate was a woman, females would seem to switch their preferences and vote for the female candidate at a higher rate. Even though, before they seemed to value a change agent over an establishment candidate, once they were told the veteran candidate was a women they instead voted for the women seeming to value gender over ideology (Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

Being the “first” can be a draw for people to vote for a candidate. For example, in 2008, African American voters across the political spectrum voted for Barack Obama at extremely high rates. Specifically, 96% of African American voters supported Obama in the 2008 Election (Kuhn, Politico). This could be because he

was to become the first black president and ties in with Michael Dawson's concept of linked fate in his book *Behind the Mule*. Linked fate is the idea that African Americans believe their own self-interests, to a degree, are connected to the interests of their race as a whole (Dawson, 1995). This means that because blacks were put at a disadvantage after slavery, their ability to achieve success is tied up in the success on their entire race. Therefore, someone might vote against his or her own economic or best interests for the betterment of the race as a whole and historically Democrats have been the party to support blacks the best. Even the most educated or wealthy believe, according to Dawson, that their success was an effect of the movement (Dawson, 1995). This could translate into overarching support for Obama since his rise to power could mean increased opportunities for all blacks, through their linked fate. The thought being this same excitement for a historical and memorable candidate could influence women to vote for Clinton no matter their political affiliation, like blacks did for Obama in 2008.

Additionally, Trump's rhetoric about women during the 2016 campaign and really throughout his life, may have turned many women off to his candidacy. For example, Trump commented on Megyn Kelly's role as moderator in an early debate, saying she "really bombed" and implied rude commentary about her possibly being on her menstrual cycle (Chavez, 2016). This kind of sexist remark may have rubbed many female voters the wrong way. Another major point in the election cycle was when the video leaked of an off the record but recorded discussion between Access Hollywood's Billy Bush and Donald Trump from 2005. In the video, Trump mentions how he would kiss or touch a woman without her consent and how his fame allows



him to “grab them [women] by the pussy” (“Transcript”, 2016). This remark sparked a lot of debate and rallied many women who were sitting this election out to take note. Because of this and Trump’s other controversial language surrounding women, it is clear that women would be more likely to stick to Hillary Clinton in their voting preferences.

We can look at Trump versus Clinton in relation to the gender stereotypes they represent. In the abstract, Trump is playing the role of the strong fiery man and this leaves Hillary Clinton, the first female candidate of a major political party to appear weak in many people’s eyes. Jennifer Lawless’ research into male and female candidates demonstrates this principle. She explains how people implicitly connect female candidates to “feminine” traits such as compassion or the ability to compromise while men, regardless if this is true, are seen to have “masculine” traits such as assertiveness, self-confidence, and the ability to be tough (Lawless, 2004). This research was conducted after 9/11 and demonstrated in the post-9/11 era, when war is always looming and we feel a need to seem strong to our enemies, women, who are seen as less competent in an atmosphere of war will be negatively affected in the polls (Lawless, 2004). The gender stereotypes we implicitly hold can have a strong impact in who we vote for and our voting preferences. While we may think we are beyond this type of gender inequality, it consistently has shown to be ever present.

After looking at the race from the abstract point of view we must dig deeper to examine people’s voting motivations with the two candidates they actually had: Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Trump and Clinton were not new names to many

American voters. Many people had heard of Trump as the brash New York businessman with his own reality show but never thought he would actually seriously enter politics. Hillary Clinton was also no regular female candidate. As Jennifer Lawless describes in her 2009 article “Sexism and Gender Bias in Election 2008: A More Complex Path for Women in Politics”, “Not only did Clinton begin the race with levels of name recognition that many candidates never achieve, but she also entered the electoral arena with 17 years of public accomplishments and 17 years of well-publicized baggage” (Lawless, 2009). While any woman candidate receives often wide spread media coverage that discusses their appearance and family life, topics not as thoroughly covered for male candidates, Clinton received a storm of scrutiny on a level all its own. She faced an additional hurdle for not only being a woman but a woman who had been in the public eye for so many years, with a husband whose infidelity made national news, and a woman who was often perceived as “cold” to many for being highly educated and not shy of her ambition.

Next, women may feel their rights were more under attack or would be more negatively affected by a Trump presidency. As a Republican nominee for President, Trump mentioned wanting to appoint a conservative Supreme Court judge that would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, he wanted to repeal the Affordable Care Act that allows women free contraception, and wanted to cut all funding to Planned Parenthood who for free offers medical services to women such as mammograms and abortions. If a woman were to benefit from any of these services, she may feel more personally affected by this election outcome and feel a stronger allegiance to Hillary Clinton. Additionally, there is a general sentiment that women are more connected to the

Democratic Party. Since Democrats value liberal Supreme Court judges, Planned Parenthood, and universal healthcare, these concerns are in line with what many women believe. A female voter may see the clear and real consequences to their choices over their body and medical treatment from a Trump presidency. This could explain why it was more likely for men, instead of women, to be willing to vote for a third party candidate.

### **c. Education**

My hypothesis was that the more educated would be less likely to vote for a third party candidate. The theory behind this, was that if someone had more education like a bachelor's or graduate degree, they would better understand what was to come of a third party vote. If one was to pursue a higher degree, they are more likely to understand the importance of presidential elections and the crucial results they produce. Because of this, they would be more inclined to make sure their vote counted. If they wanted their vote to be of value and matter, they should thus be more inclined to vote for a major party candidate since in the US's two-party system it is basically impossible to win as a third party candidate. Also, in this year's current political climate, it was clear that a third party candidate would have little to no chance of victory but that it was going to be both an important and close presidential election year. To make your vote "count" you would choose to vote for a major party's candidate such as Hillary Clinton.

Additionally, the more educated tend to be more liberal. Because Clinton was the Democratic nominee, the more liberal party, it is likely the more educated would be more committed to consistently supporting Secretary Clinton.

#### **d. Income**

My hypothesis was that those with a higher income would be less likely to switch away from Hillary Clinton. This was mostly grounded on the concept of how other variables play into income. For example, it is likely a younger person does not make much money since they may be a student or just starting their career. Younger people tend to vote for a third party candidate at a higher rate thus I believed that the richer a person is, they are also likely older, and would thus not switch their vote.

Similar to the thought process expressed above, people with more money often have more education. This is because those with money can afford to send their children to better and higher levels of schooling. If we look to the education variable it is believed more education leads to stronger Clinton support and not switching. Thus, if I believe richer people have more education they would also be less likely to switch their vote. These two outside variables combined led me to believe that those with a higher income are more likely to stay with Clinton and not switch.

**e. Swing State**

The hypothesis is that people who live in a swing state would be less likely to vote for a third party candidate. This is what I would hope to be the case since swing states were/are so important to the outcome of an election. In these states every vote counts and thus a vote for a third party candidate in states like North Carolina, Florida or New Hampshire is a waste of a valued vote. When candidates in these states win by less than a percentage point, voting for a person who will never win the state's electoral votes is equivalent to throwing away your vote.

For this research I combined a couple lists of what constitutes a swing state. I ultimately included 12 states: Florida, Virginia, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Michigan, North Carolina, Nevada, Ohio, Arizona, and Iowa (Mahtesian, 2016). These lists identified what constituted as a swing state in the 2016 election since this may switch depending on the year.

**f. Party Affiliation**

In the CNN dataset people were asked what party they affiliated with: Republican, Democrat, or Independent. Of those who said they were Independent, they were further asked which Party they more often vote for: Democrat, Republican or neither. This essentially is getting at the true party a person affiliates with even if they do not personally identify with said group. From this data I would expect that people are more likely to truly associate with Democrats, even if they do not seem to or admit to this grouping. This is because for this part of the research we are solely looking at the Clinton switch group and this group voted for Clinton in

a two-way race so it is likely that they are feeling a connection to the Democratic Party even if they do not admit it. This could be because people do not like to be tied to one party. In some states, there are primaries where you only can vote for a person in the party you are registered with. So, in states with open primaries, if a person is registered as Independent, they can vote in either the Democratic or the Republican primary. With this said, there are some states with closed primaries where if you are a registered Independent you cannot vote in the primary at all. However, there is more freedom in identifying as an Independent and many people in America feel in the middle of the two major parties and thus register as Independent.

Further, if we had to predict if Independents, would be more or less likely to make up a larger percentage of the “switching population” I would hypothesize they would make up more. As mentioned above, the Clinton switch group voted for Clinton in a two-person race but switched in a four. Because of this, I would believe Republicans would not be highly represented, since they would likely not vote for Clinton in the first place. Democrats would hopefully be more likely to stay with Clinton in both two- or four- way race scenarios. Therefore, it is most probable that the switch contingency is made up largely of Independents. This is understandable because when many Independents are forced to choose between Clinton and Trump, Clinton may appear more towards the middle of the political spectrum thus Independents would choose her. However, when offered third party candidates like Johnson or Stein, the Independents may then change their vote to one of these individuals that are even closer to the centric point of view. Because of this, it is

clear that Independents would be those most likely to make up the Clinton switch group at higher rates.

## **V. Data Used**

### **a. Roper**

The datasets used for this research were taken from Cornell University's Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. This is a free and public website with a range of public opinion surveys. For this paper I was looking for datasets that asked certain questions about how people would vote in the 2016 Election. However, since this research was taking place in January/February 2017 a great deal of the research was still embargoed by companies so only two datasets asked the questions necessary for this research. With this said, all results will need to be put into perspective since the conclusions were drawn from such a small sample size. Ideally, I would have been able to examine more datasets but this was impossible with the timeline necessary for this thesis paper.

There were two main questions the dataset had to ask to be deemed relevant for this research. One needed to ask whom a person would vote for when asked to decide between Donald J. Trump and Hillary Rodham Clinton. The second question needed was who would one vote for if their options were between Donald J. Trump, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Gary Johnson, Jill Stein or other. From here I looked at who I deemed "Clinton switchers." These were the people who voted for Hillary Clinton when their only other option was Donald Trump but when offered third party or

other candidates, that same person chose someone other than Clinton. The examined people chose a third party candidate but if a third party candidate was not an option, would likely vote for Hillary Clinton. These are the people who determined the outcome of the election in many swing states. Therefore, this data is important in examining the election outcome.

**b. CNN**

ORC International on behalf of CNN ran a poll in 2016 to examine peoples' views on the election, gun control, and acts of terrorism. The poll was taken from June 16-19, 2016 and had a sample size of 1001 people. This study contained people who were interviewed by both cellular and landline phones. In addition to asking opinions on the topic mentioned above, people were asked questioned about their age, gender, income, state they are from, religious affiliation, employment situation and several other biographical questions.

People interviewed had to be at least 18 years of age or older and were from the United States. Besides biographical questions, people were asked 25 questions about their political opinions. This data was compiled and the Roper Center put a copy of the data in their database. From here, I put the data in Stata to run some tests for the research. The findings are explained throughout this paper.

For this data set there were 34 people who switched from Hillary Clinton to another candidate. This means that of those who supported Clinton in a two-way race, 8.72% switched their vote to another candidate in a four-way race. Of those 34, one person switched to Trump, which means that person was probably confused by



the question since Trump was an option in the two-person race (between Clinton and Trump). 13 people switched to Johnson, 18 to Jill Stein, and 2 people said none meaning perhaps they would vote for a more fringe, lesser-known third party candidate or perhaps would not vote at all.

**c. Siena**

The second data source I used was also in Roper but was conducted by the Siena Research Institute. This data was taken from August 7-10, 2016 and it asked participants about their opinions on the upcoming 2016 Election. There were 717 people interviewed and this was done by both landline and cellular telephones. It is important to note this sample consisted of only registered voters from New York State. Because of this, there were more questions targeting participants' thoughts on the state elections such as for State Assembly, State Senate, and specifically people running for the US Senate in New York.

In total 42 questions were asked of participants. In addition to the political questions, inquiries about age, political affiliation, race, religion, income and other personal questions were asked. In both the Siena and CNN study the leading question to our research was about if people gave different answers to the question who you would vote for if it is a two-person versus a four-person race.

From this, there were 46 people considered "Clinton switchers." This is 11.62% of the overall Clinton support, or of those who supported Clinton in a two-way race 11.62% switched to a different candidate in a four-way race. Of these 46, when asked who they would vote for in a four-person race two people chose Trump.

Similar to above, these people were likely confused by the question since it is odd they would pick Hillary Clinton when their options were Clinton or Trump but then pick Trump when their options included Clinton, Trump, Johnson, and Stein.

Additionally, 21 switched to Johnson, 13 to Stein, 2 to someone else, 1 would not vote and 7 said “Don’t know or no opinion.”

#### **d. Stata**

The research was conducted in Stata, which is a statistical software. Once the data was loaded into Stata I created a new variable called “Clinton switch.” As explained above, this population was the main focus of the research. These were the people when asked who they would vote for between Trump and Clinton chose Clinton but when asked who they would vote between Trump, Clinton, Johnson, Stein or other, chose someone besides Clinton essentially “switching” their vote. The majority of the time this population switched to voting for a third party candidate. “Non-switchers” were those people who voted for Clinton both when asked in the two-person race (Clinton vs. Trump) and when asked in a four-person race (Clinton, Trump, Johnson, and Stein).

Once the new variable, “Clinton switch” was created I examined several variables comparing this group to those who stuck with Clinton, no matter if it was asked in a two- or four- person race. Between these comparisons it allowed me to look at what differentiates the Clinton switch group from the steady or “Clinton non-switch” group. This was done to allow me to find variables or demographics that categorize or describe those who voted third party instead of for Clinton. Since this

unit of voters essentially determined the outcome of the election, it is a relevant group to study and perhaps may allow us to draw some lessons to use in future elections.

## **VI. Results**

### **a. Age**

The largest indicator or descriptor for those who chose to switch from Hillary Clinton to a third party candidate was their age. The hypothesis expressed above was proven to be correct. Based off the CNN data, when I strictly just took the mean age of Clinton switchers versus those who stuck with Clinton in both scenarios, those who switched were on average younger than those who did not switch. The average age of non-switchers was 56 years while the average age of Clinton switchers was 45 years old, a difference of 11 years. Here one can clearly see a stark difference between the two groups. Additionally, I looked at what percentage of each group was under 30 years of age. Of the non-switchers or dedicated Clinton supporters, just over 9% were under 30. However, of those who switched, 29.45% were under 30.

This trend of younger people being more likely to switch to third party candidates was replicated in the Siena data as well. When I solely looked at the mean age, Clinton switchers were 53.7 versus non-switchers were 58.9. This difference was less striking than the CNN data but still clearly shows a younger population as more likely to switch. Further I looked at what percentage of each

group was under 35 years old. Based on the way this study denoted or put age in buckets, it was easier to separate as under 35, opposed to the CNN study where I marked young as under 30. With this said, only 10.6% of the people who were strong, non-switching Clinton supporters were under 35 years of age but of those who did switch, 19.6% were under 35. This is a 9% difference, which is certainly significant.

Additionally I looked at some compound variables in relation to age. I looked at young women and young men. Young was determined as under 35 on the Siena data. The results showed the “switch” group often had double the percentage of young people. For young women, 4.86% of non-switchers fell into this category but 8.70% of switchers did. Further, I did the same measure with young men. Only 5.71% of non-switchers were considered young men but 10.87% of the switchers consisted of young men. In both cases there is just under double the percentage of young men/women in the “switch camp” than the non-switch one.

In all the cases, the switch group contained more young people, whether if that is defined by exact age, under 30, or under 35 years old. This indicates that the hypothesis is in fact true. Young people tend to vote for third party candidates at a higher rate than older people.

The strongest indicator for “switching” one’s vote away from Clinton is their age. Younger individuals are more likely to defect from Clinton to a third party candidate, as the hypothesis suggested. With the changing times, campaigns need to make more of an effort to target Millennials in fresh new ways. The old means of television media and radio are not effective with this voting bloc. Instead campaigns

must be creative to reach this ever-increasing group of voters. Additionally campaigns could work to make young people feel more indebted or tied to a political party. Since many have not voted in numerous elections, they do not feel a default attachment to any one party. To change this, campaigns could perhaps have youths sign a pledge to vote for their candidate or encourage them to register with a certain political party to create a habit of supporting one such group. Once one has created a habit of support, they are more likely to continue said support.

#### **b. Gender**

The hypothesis, that men would be more likely to switch to a third party candidate, was proven to be true. This is most clearly visible in in the Siena research. For Siena there were 46 people who switched their vote from Clinton to another candidate when asked in a two versus four-person race and there were 350 participants who said they would vote for Clinton in either scenario. Of those who switched 24 of 46 or 52.17% were male. Of those who did not switch, 144 of 350 were male or 41.14%. This is over 10% difference demonstrating more men were willing to switch from Hillary Clinton to some other candidate.

Gender seems to play a large role in whom people vote for. While men were okay with voting for Clinton when Trump was the only other option, they are more likely to protest vote by supporting a third party candidate when given the choice. This could be attributed to their implicit bias against female candidates or their often unconscious belief that women cannot lead effectively in times of war or terrorism. Additionally, men may be more likely to protest vote, where they vote for

a third party candidate to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the two major political parties' candidates available. In this day in age, to achieve true equality between the sexes we need to force men to be confronted and made aware of their biases against female candidates and face them head on. If people are made more aware of these prejudices they may more easily be combated.

### **c. Education**

The hypothesis, that more educated people would be less likely to vote for third party candidates, was demonstrated to be correct. This is most clearly seen in the Siena data source. First I strictly looked at which group (those who switched or did not switch) had a higher percentage of people with a bachelor's degree or more. Of those who switched only 48.9% held a bachelor's Degree or more but 56.4% of the non-switch group held a bachelor's degree or more, showing more of the non-switch group completed higher education.

This is further seen with the population of both groups that holds a graduate degree or more. For the Clinton switch 22.22% completed a graduate degree or higher but, of those who stuck with Clinton and did not switch their vote, 33.33% received a graduate degree or higher. This is a difference of 11%, signifying a clear increase in higher education for those who did not switch their vote.

To investigate even more, I created a compound variable of "educated men" and "educated women". This was determined by people's gender and if they had a graduate degree or more. For those who did not switch 15.43% of their population consisted of "educated men" while only 8.70% of the switchers are educated men.

There are almost twice as many educated men in the steady non-switch group than in the switch group. This is also interesting since I mentioned there are actually a higher percentage of men in the switch group so this means that the men who did switch happened to have less of an education than the men who chose to stay with Clinton. Looking at the “educated women” variable one can see that 17.14% of those who stuck with Clinton are educated women and only 13.04% of those who switched are educated women. However, for this variable one needs to be careful to not jump to conclusions. This is because there was a higher percentage of women in the non-switch group thus there was a higher probability since there are more females that there would also be more educated women. Because I compounded variables like educated men and women one needs to be sure to see if it is representative or if one of the variables differences is so strong it is driving the discrepancy we see between the switch and non-switch group.

Similarly I compounded the variables of young (which meant under 35) and educated but with educated here meaning a bachelor’s degree or more. This is because when I tried a graduate degree or more there was zero people who were Clinton switchers, under 35 and had a graduate degree. When I looked at who had a bachelor’s or more and was under 35 I once again saw a large difference between those who switched and those who did not. Of the Clinton switchers 2.17% fell under the “young and educated” umbrella while of those who did not switch 5.71% were considered young and educated. Once again these numbers are doubled demonstrating there are more young and educated people who did not switch. Also like above I need to look at both variables separately to see how they would affect

the data when put together. Since one knows the Clinton switch group tended to be younger yet there is more young and educated people in the non-switch group one can see that the education variable was the driving factor. This means there is a well-defined gap in education between the two sets: the non-switch group is often more educated than the switch group.

The data indicates that in general, people who have less education are more likely to switch their vote to a third party candidate, as was predicted. People with less education may not understand the concept of a spoiler candidate, how voting third party is a wasted vote and ultimately hurts Hillary Clinton. As a country we need to better educate people in high school, the highest level of mandated education, as to how the Electoral College works and the effects of third party voting. If the electorate is better informed when going into the voting booth they will make more educated decisions better reflecting their personal interests and eventually the interests of the country. The road to stronger voter education is two-ways: voters need to take a greater interest in the candidates and the political process but society also needs to enable and empower people to have the ability to digest said information.

#### **d. Income**

The hypothesis was generally proven to be correct but not by a strong degree. This was drawn from the Siena research. Here, I examined what percent of the Clinton switchers and non-switchers make over \$50,000 a year. As expected the group that had a higher percentage of people making over \$50,000 a year was those



who did not switch. Specifically 73.43% of the non-switchers make over \$50,000 but only 67.40% of the switchers make over \$50,000. This is only a difference of about 6% but is still noticeable and reportable.

Further I used income as a part of several compound variables to examine another angle of how income affects voting. One way I did so was by creating “rich men” and “rich women” variables. Rich meant making over \$50,000 a year and then I simply used the gender variable. If we first look just at the men, the results were a bit counterintuitive. 34.00% of the non-switch group consisted of rich men while a greater, 41.30% of those who switched included rich men. Based on earlier results, one would think the group with more rich people would be the non-switch group. I believe the reason for this discrepancy was the male gender variable. As we saw earlier, a much higher percent of men switched so they just make up more of the switch group. Because they make up a larger percentage of the switch group there is an increased chance that some of them would be rich.

After examining the rich men variable I looked at the rich women one. Similarly, this consisted of women who make over \$50,000 a year. Here 39.43% of the non-switch group while only 26.01% of the switch group is “rich women.” This is a large difference of over 13%. However, it should also be noted that the non-switch group had a higher percent of women to start so this could add to some of this difference but I do not think it would account for all of it. This demonstrates that richer people are often sticking with Hillary Clinton.

Lastly, I created a variable “rich and educated.” This consisted of people who make over \$50,000 a year and have a graduate degree or more. Here, 30.57% of the

non-switch group is made of rich and educated voters while only 21.74% of the switch group is made of rich and educated people. Once again, I should caveat that educated people often were non-switchers so it is unclear how much this difference comes from the education or the income variable.

Overall the data indicates that those who have a lower income are more likely to switch their vote to a third party candidate or away from Hillary Clinton, as the hypothesis predicted. The implications of this are that many people are voting against their economic interests. By failing to vote for Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee, that person is voting for a spoiler candidate, Stein or Johnson, which essentially gave the election to Trump. Trump, a Republican, is more likely to cut federal programs that benefit those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, such as Medicaid, Social Security, and welfare. Perhaps in the future, campaigns can do a better job of educating voters of how a) their Democratic candidate can help people from lower social classes, b) how voting third party is essentially a vote for the other candidate, and c) how the Republican candidate will ultimately hurt these voters. If these three statements are clearly portrayed to voters, it is possible they will be better informed and vote in a different matter.

#### **e. Swing State**

This could only be tested on the CNN data set because the Siena research only interviewed people from New York State. From here I inputted the swing states to see which group, switch or non-switch, had a higher percentage of people from swing states. Once again, my hypothesis was demonstrated to be true. Of those that

switched their vote, only 23.53% were from swing states but 32% of the non-switchers were from swing states. This intuitively makes sense since in states where one's vote can really make a difference there is a higher percentage of people who stayed with a major party's candidate, Hillary Clinton.

The hypothesis that less people who switched their votes would be from swing states than those who did not switch was proven correct. This is positive because it means that when people knew their vote really counted, like in a swing state, they were less inclined to switch their vote to a third party candidate that could have had a spoiler effect on the election. While there was less switching in swing states it did still occur so going forward one should focus on how to decrease third party votes in such crucial swing states.

#### **f. Party Affiliation**

The results were as expected. Of the 34 Clinton switchers from the CNN data, when first asked to say which party they affiliated with, one person said Republican, 9 Democrat, 1 person said other, and 23 said Independents. From there, if we look at the 23 who identified as Independent, 2 said they often vote Republican, 3 neither, and 18 said Democrat. This instinctively makes sense. Because those who are Clinton switchers said they would vote for Clinton in a two-way race and then switched their votes to a third party candidate meaning they do or may support a Democrat candidate. Therefore, it intuitively makes sense that those who switched and said at first they were Independent, are in their voting patterns really more Democrats.

To the second hypothesis here, I confirmed that Independents would be more largely represented in the Clinton switch camp than the steady, non-switch group. Using the CNN data I calculated the percentage of self-politically identified Independents in the non-switch group and the switch group. In the non-switch group 110/362 or roughly 30% were Independents. But, of the switch group 23/34 or just over 67% were considered Independents. That is about 1/3 of the non-switch group and 2/3 of the switch group demonstrating the significant difference. This possibly indicates that Independents choice to switch their vote to a third party candidate could have cost Hillary Clinton the presidency.

This demonstrates that more Independents were likely to support Clinton in a two-way race but changed their vote in a four-way race. Going forward, this could mean that the Democratic Party can capture Independents at higher rates than they currently are, if the campaigns make a more targeted effort to attract them. This could also have been a special case since Clinton's challenger in the primary was Senator Bernie Sanders, who before running to be the Democratic nominee was an Independent Senator. Because Clinton faced Sanders in the primary, when she garnered the nomination, her policies had to shift to attract Bernie's supporters making her platform more open to Independent values that were put forth by Sanders in the primary.

#### **g. Votes Affected**

The table in Appendix A demonstrates the difference in votes Hillary Clinton would have attained if those Clinton switchers had not switched their vote. It is

calculated using data from CNN exit polls to understand what percentage of the vote Clinton did receive and what percentage of the electorate that voting cleavage constitutes. For example, the top row represents those who are under 30 years of age. I calculated the amount of votes Clinton received using the percent of the electorate that is under 30, percent votes Clinton received from this group and knowing the total amount of votes cast, roughly 130 million. After that I solved for the percent switched. This was the number of people who switched their vote who were under the age of 30 in the data set compared to the total number of people who were under the age of 30. Finally, using this new percentage I could solve for the total number of votes lost due to those who switched their vote. This data is located in the last column.

From the table we can see the variables that would have the largest effect in difference of votes for Hillary Clinton. It should be noted; however, we do not know the breakdown of which states these votes would be located in so we do not know how this would affect the outcome of the Electoral College. One can clearly see that the first variable, age, has the strongest effect on the number of votes Clinton could have received, at just under 2,200,000. This is a substantial portion of the voting population. We can also see what percent of this population changed or switched their vote. Here, once again, age is the largest variable with slightly less than 9% of under 30 year olds changing their vote from Clinton to another candidate. This demonstrates that age, being young, is the largest predictor if someone is going to switch his or her vote, possibly to a third party.

After age, the next largest predictor is party identification. These people were those who identified as Independents. Of those who identified as Independents, 5.4% switched their vote from Hillary Clinton to another candidate costing Secretary Clinton roughly 2,176,200 votes.

Following party identification, one's education level was the next greatest predictor. Income and gender followed closely behind and had almost the same difference in votes after that with 1,965,600 and 1,955,200; respectively.

There are some caveats to the above numbers. For one, the Independent variable only captures one of the hypotheses tested. For this data, one test was to see if the Clinton switchers who first identified as Independent would more align with Democrats when further asked who they tend to vote for. However, the table only looks at people who identify as Independents sans a follow up question like in the data so this number should be taken with a grain of salt. The data that created the table in Appendix A is also more heterogeneous and cannot be disaggregated to see if the voters who identified as Independents would further say they voted more with Democrats or Republicans. Secondly, the numbers of the amount of votes affected should be taken to be large approximates. This is because a person could hypothetically fall into more than one category. For example, a voter who "switched" their vote may be under 30, male, and make less than \$50,000 a year. This demonstrates one cannot add up all the votes affected to a total since there may be people who fall into multiple camps. Also, these numbers may not have a large effect on the outcome since we do not know which states these votes would apply to. For example, if the difference would have affected two million votes in California, the

Electoral College would not have shifted. However, since the difference in votes that determined the election was less than 100,000 it is likely that since the values for all the variables are around the two million mark, some amount of these voters would have affected some states in a meaningful way. But, as previously mentioned, this is all hypotheticals and approximates.

## **VII. Conclusion**

This research investigates the role of “spoiler candidates,” especially Green Party candidate Jill Stein, in the 2016 election. While some may deem the term “spoiler candidate” inflammatory or claim that their vote for a third party candidate had little to no effect on the election outcome, given Trump’s extremely narrow margin of victory, and Stein’s support in all three states, Stein’s role in the election could well have changed the outcome. My results demonstrate the concrete and tangible votes that may have shifted if voters were to stay the course and vote for a candidate of a major political party. Had even some fraction of these voters stayed with Clinton, and not moved to Stein, Clinton—rather than Trump—would have become the nation’s 45<sup>th</sup> president. In 2016, protest votes did truly make a difference.

Which voters were most likely to move from Clinton to Stein (or someone else)? My results suggest that age was the key factor: younger voters were much more likely to move away from Clinton. Youth voters are less attached to political parties as older voters and thus feel less of an allegiance to a major party candidate. This affects how to reach this group of voters and what policies attract them. With more

Millennial voters identifying as Independents than ever before, less partisan politics but more centric policies should be enacted to appeal to this voting bloc.

Besides age, people earning a lower income, having less of an education, identifying as a male, politically identifying as Independent, and voting in a non-swing state were the factors indicating a higher probability of defecting from voting for Hillary Clinton to another candidate. This demonstrated all of my hypotheses proved to be accurate. This presents many lessons and areas for future study.

Looking at this data from a political perspective, campaigns could better target these communities. These groups are important because at one point they did in fact support Clinton but for some reason changed their vote, per se. This initial affinity for Clinton could be built upon and supported by a campaign to turn that original support into an actual vote. To do so, campaigns need to question why people like/liked Clinton in the first place and what caused people to switch. Once campaigns tap into the cause of the initial support, they should build upon that attribute or policy that was deemed favorable. This could be highlighting said policy through the media, phone calls or canvassing and emphasizing this trait. Additionally campaigns can try to decipher what caused these voters to lose support. By addressing these concerns, many tepid supporters could be turned into full-fledged advocates.

In a future study it would be beneficial to implement these strategies to determine their effectiveness at persuading waver voters. Additionally the 2016 Election was unique in the fact it had two of the most unlikeable candidates in history. Many people were dissatisfied with their two major choices and thus



defected to a third party candidate. It is possible that this election was the exception, not the rule. Because of this, it is important to look at these trends in future elections to see if they still hold true.

We can also look at this data from a concerned voter perspective. While occasionally third party candidates can seem like the more enticing option, if one at all thinks the election is going to be close he/she should not vote for a third party candidate. This will inevitably cause that third party candidate to become a spoiler candidate. As a concerned citizen, people need to understand, and explain to others how our Electoral College works. Once that is made clear, people can better understand the fact that third party voting is wasteful of a vote and can only harm major party candidates. Further, they should instead vote/look to one of the major party candidates that most closely align with the third party candidate of their choosing. For example, while Clinton was clearly different than Jill Stein, Clinton's environmental policies would have come the closest to Stein's and would have been the best major party candidate to support sustainable activity. Looking at how Trump has dealt with the EPA, clearly Trump and Clinton did not have the same approach to the environment and thus a supporter of Stein's would have been wise to vote for Clinton instead of Stein. While not all policy goals may be the same, voters should be smart and realistic in their choices. If you know your third party candidate is not going to win, which they won't while the Electoral College is still in place, voters should instead look for the next best alternative out of the two major party candidates. It is possible that if the electorate is better educated on the

intricacies of the United States two-party system and the way the Electoral College functions, people would choose to vote differently, and more wisely.

In conclusion, elections matter. They are a way to take the pulse of America at the time and reflect the public dialogue of the moment. While we as a country have taken great strides in electing the first African American president and nominating the first female president of a major political party, there is still a great deal of work to be done. We are a country constantly evolving and our evolution is evident in our election processes, what issues rise to importance, and who becomes the face of this country. After the 2016 Election being the fifth where a President wins the electoral vote but loses the popular vote, it will be interesting going forward to see if any tangible change in this realm is done and if so how that will change people's voting preferences. My prediction is we will eventually move away from the Electoral College to a solely popular vote system. Finally, one must pay attention to what is happening in the world because when major events occur they often affect what people value or see as important when they go into the voting booth. Overall, this research has taught me the power of voting and the fact one vote truly can make a difference.

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**IX. Appendix A**

Variable	Votes Received (HRC)	Percent of Electorate	Percent Votes Received	Percent Switched	Votes Lost (HRC)
Age (under 30)	13,585,000	19%	55%	8.9%	2,198,300
Gender (male)	25,000,000	47%	41%	3.2%	1,955,200
Education (HS or less)	28,600,000	50%	44%	3.2%	2,080,000
Income (under \$50k)	23,804,000	36%	53%	4.2%	1,965,600
Party ID (Independent)	16,926,000	31%	42%	5.4%	2,176,200