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## Multiparty Politics in America (Second Edition)

Paul Herrnson

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# Multiparty Politics in America

*Prospects and Performance*

Second Edition

Edited by  
Paul S. Herrnson and John C. Green

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# Preface

This first edition of this volume originated in the sixth workshop sponsored by the Political Organizations and Parties Section (POP) of the American Political Science Association in September 1996. The workshop brought together scholars and practitioners to consider the role of minor parties in American politics. The subject was timely and important then, and it remains so now. First, the number of independent and minor-party candidates has increased in recent times, a pattern symbolized by Ross Perot, Patrick Buchanan, and Ralph Nader, the standard-bearers for the Reform and Green parties during the presidential elections held in the 1990s and 2000. Second, the possibility of multiparty politics in the United States has captured the imagination of many individuals. Some political observers and activists have advocated a wide range of reforms designed to promote minor-party and independent candidacies; others have held opposing views, championing the strengths of the current two-party system. Scholars, election officials, and representatives from across the political spectrum representing both sides of the issue have testified in state legislatures, the courts, special commissions, and other public forums on the subject

This second edition of *Multiparty Politics in America* benefited from the hard work of many people. First and foremost, we wish to thank the chapter authors, whose outstanding contributions made this volume possible. Second, we wish to thank the staff at the Center of American Politics and Citizenship at the University of Maryland and the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron for helping to prepare the manuscript. Special thanks to Nathan Bigelow, Aaron Davis, Alfeia Bell, Kim Haverkamp, and Jason Hass for correcting page proofs and preparing the index.

*Part I*

**Possibilities**

# Multiparty Politics in America: Possibilities and Performance

PAUL S. HERRNSON AND JOHN C. GREEN

The American two-party system has long been an object of fascination by scholars and politicians alike. For one thing, the major parties dominate American politics to an extraordinary degree, and at the same time, the United States has a colorful history of minor party and independent challenges. This unusual party system attracted special attention in the 1990s because of the sudden expansion of such challenges. Headlined by Ross Perot, this surge included the election of several minor-party candidates, such as Jesse Ventura of Minnesota, an upsurge in down-ticket, minor-party contestants, and Ralph Nader's 2000 campaign. These events suggested to some observers the possibility of expanded multiparty politics in the United States. This seemed plausible because of other changes in American politics, including new campaign technologies, alterations in the major parties, and a policy-making impasse in the federal government. Other observers were skeptical of such a scenario, but nonetheless noted the potential for the new minor-party activity to influence the major parties.

From the perspective of the mid-1990s, the question was this: Was the United States developing a new form of multiparty politics, or would the major parties adjust to the minor-party challenges, preserving the dominance of the two-party system? Put another way, would the upsurge in minor-party activity make history, or would the history of the two-party system repeat itself? The chapters in this book explore these questions at the beginning of the twenty-first century, considering both the prospects for multiparty politics in America and the recent performance of minor parties and other related institutions.

These chapters beg an important question, however: What constitutes a minor party? A useful perspective is offered by Leon Epstein, who defines a *political party* as "any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect



government office-holders under a given label" and then points out that "conceivably, even one man seeking office could similarly adopt a label and qualify as a party" (1980, 9). From this perspective, a minor party is any group that seeks to elect officials under a common label, but that has not been successful enough to realistically compete for power. This approach allows for genuinely independent candidacies (those who do not run under any label), but does not disqualify electoral efforts from consideration as parties on the basis of success, goals, structure, strategy, or activity level. As Epstein argues: "No matter how small the vote or how special the occasion, no minor party is so minor as not generically to be a party" (1980, 11). While not all scholars would accept this definition of a minor party (see, for instance, Sartori 1976; Smith 1991; Mair 1991), it provides the widest scope for investigating party politics. And as we will see, the variety of minor parties is extraordinary, even within the context of the American "two-party" system.

### POSSIBILITIES

The chapters in part I review the possibilities for multiparty politics, starting with Paul Herrnson's review of American party politics in chapter 2. He addresses two fundamental questions: What are the sources of the American two-party system, and what roles do minor parties play in American politics? Herrnson finds that "major-party dominance" is deeply rooted in American electoral institutions and behavioral tendencies, so much so that its basic structure has endured numerous periods of intense stress. Periodic "minor-party forays" are best thought an integral part of the two-party structure, relieving such stresses and bolstering the two-party system rather than undermining or replacing it. Herrnson describes four types of minor parties: (1) enduring comprehensive, (2) candidate-focused, (3) single-issue, and (4) fusion parties. While their effects vary and can be considerable, it is unlikely that any such parties will produce genuine multiparty politics. On the contrary, such efforts are most likely to help preserve the dominance of the two-party system.

In chapter 3, Kay Lawson makes a strong case for a multiparty system. First, she argues that such a system is more "natural." That is, in the absence of restriction, many political parties will organize and contest elections, a point supported by the experience of new European democracies. Second, she claims that most legal limits on minor parties constitute an unacceptable infringement on political rights of the citizenry. Third, she suggests that a multiparty system is more democratic, in the sense of both protecting minorities and representing majorities. Commonly cited defects in multiparty politics, she points out, can be remedied by modest

regulatory changes. Lawson then presents a number of reforms that would extend "multipartyism" in the United States. Some would abolish existing regulations, such as ballot-access laws, and others would impose new regulations, such as prohibiting private financing of campaigns. But the most important involves fundamental institutional changes: the implementation of proportional representation. In this sense, Lawson's argument supports Herrnson's findings that the two-party system is largely rooted in the structure of American elections.

In chapter 4, John Bibby offers a forthright defense of the two-party system. He admits that the American system does routinely limit the choices before the electorate, but that, on the whole, this limitation is beneficial. First, the two-party process builds legitimacy for elected officials. Second, two-party politics is an effective mechanism for achieving national unity, reconciliation, and policy moderation. And third, the two-party system fosters electoral accountability and more effective governance. Commonly cited defects in American parties, Bibby concludes, are often overstated, and reformers should focus on strengthening the system rather than replacing it. Bibby also considers the two-party system rooted in American electoral institutions. But instead of viewing such arrangements as restrictions on political freedom, Bibby points out that major party politics in the United States are among the most free and open in the world. The direct primary and other features of the system give party members and voters a great deal of influence—at the expense of party leaders. While citizens frequently voice dissatisfaction with the performance of the major parties, they are appreciative of a system that gives them numerous avenues to register their discontentment. Minor parties are just one such means; although, Bibby notes, their impact is frequently exaggerated.

In chapter 5, John Green considers public support for alternative party systems. Using survey data on public preferences in the 1990s, he finds that roughly one-quarter of the citizenry claimed to want a multiparty system (defined as one or more new parties that could compete with the Republicans and Democrats) and more than one-third wanted a candidate-focused system (where candidates run without party labels). The remaining two-fifths of the public were loyal to the two-party system—a minority position, but still the single largest group. Combining this information with standard self-identification with the major parties, Green develops a baseline against which to assess the source and impact of minor parties. After considering dissatisfaction with current party politics and the issue distinctiveness of various party groups, he concludes that there are some possibilities for expanded multiparty politics. The most likely developments are "progressive" and/or "centrist" minor parties. But neither dissatisfaction nor issue distinctiveness



are sufficient to organize and sustain such minor parties without intense efforts by minor party activists and entrepreneurial candidates.

## PERFORMANCE

Can minor parties perform well enough to expand multiparty politics on a consistent basis? The chapters in part II seek to answer this question, beginning with Peter Francia and Paul Herrnson's assessment of minor-party candidates below the presidential level. Using a survey of congressional and state legislative candidates in the late 1990s, they investigate the beliefs, motivations, resources, and strategies of such candidates and compare them to major-party candidates. Francia and Herrnson find minor-party candidates to be increasingly common but generally ineffective, lacking the experience, finances, and organization to compete effectively against their major-party competitors. Minor-party candidates are often successful at raising new issues and influencing the political agenda, and in this sense, can have an important impact on the political process. Francia and Herrnson conclude that because party performance depends mostly on the quality of candidates and campaigns, minor parties are unlikely to permanently alter the character of American politics in the near future.

This negative assessment of minor-party performance is echoed in chapter 7, where John Green and William Binning take a hard look at the development of the Reform Party, including Ross Perot's historic 1992 and 1996 campaigns, and Pat Buchanan's dismal performance in 2000. More than anything else, it was the Perot campaigns that encouraged speculation that minor parties were about to make history, but the 2000 result suggests the history of minor parties was repeating itself. Green and Binning trace Reform Party politics as Perot, his followers, and rivals struggled to develop a viable minor party that could compete with the major parties. The authors conclude that the Reform Party failed two crucial tests. First, it did not "survive Perot" by finding a replacement for their charismatic founder. Second, it did not develop a cadre of committed partisans at the grassroots, a point illustrated by surveys of Reform Party activists in Ohio. The Buchanan campaign may well represent the end of the Reform Party, having squandered the federal public financing, state ballots access, and credibility built during the 1990s.

A more positive assessment of minor-party performance is offered in chapter 8, Christian Collet and Jerrold Hansen's review of Ralph Nader's 2000 Green Party campaign. Unlike the Reform Party, the Greens did better in 2000 than in 1996. Collet and Hansen document the social and geographic characteristics of the Nader vote in considerable detail. Based on

this analysis, they conclude that the common assumption that Nader was a “spoiler” for Al Gore lacks a strong basis in fact. Most of the Nader vote probably would not have supported Gore in any event, and it was mostly located in areas where the election was not close. In fact, the largest portion of the potential Green Party vote returned to the Democratic fold on election day. However, the Greens were certainly relevant to Democratic Party strategy, and in the end, the Nader campaign probably helped the Green Party attract new members, resources, and credibility. Overall, Collet and Hansen conclude that the prospects for the Green Party appear to be bright.

Another example of positive minor-party performance comes from New York State, which has the closest thing to a multiparty system operating in the contemporary United States. In chapter 9, Robert Spitzer provides a cogent description of this unusual system, which is built on “fusion,” a system whereby candidates can be nominated by more than one party and have their names on several ballot lines. Although minor parties must earn ballot position by petition or votes for their gubernatorial candidate, they can then bestow their nominations on their own or even major-party candidates. Spitzer argues that this “near-multiparty system” offers an avenue for invigorated party politics from the right and the left, and he details the impact of this system on both election outcomes and the major parties. In fact, many advocates of multiparty politics look to fusion as a potent means to expand multiparty politics in the United States.

A constant theme of chapters 1 through 9 is the legal biases of the American system against minor parties. Diana Dwyre and Robin Kolodny describe these biases in chapter 10, identifying three kinds of barriers to the performance of minor parties: (1) cultural biases, (2) legal obstacles, and (3) institutional hurdles. Some of these barriers represent fundamental institutional structures and attitudes that support the two-party system. Other barriers are less fundamental in nature, including laws and practices that interfere with the ability of minor parties to participate in elections. Dwyre and Kolodny pay special attention to the 1997 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Timmons et al. v. Twin Cities Area New Party*, which affirmed the right of state governments to prohibit fusion ballots, and in the process, strongly supported the two-party system. But, whatever their sources and impact, Dwyre and Kolodny see little prospect for major change in the barriers to minor parties in the short run. They suggest that, at most, a few modest alterations could be enacted that would promote long-term effects. They also argue that minor-party performance is critical to such developments, noting the problems encountered by the Reform and Green parties in 2000.

The chapters in this book offer different answers to the questions we posed at the outset. Will the upsurge in minor party activity lead to an

expansion of multiparty politics in America? Or will the two-party system adjust to these pressures, as it has in the past? Will history be made or will history repeat itself? We invite the readers to develop their own answers to these questions by exploring the prospects and performance of multiparty politics in America.



# Two-Party Dominance and Minor-Party Forays in American Politics

PAUL S. HERRNSON

The United States has experienced numerous minor-party and independent candidacies over the course of its history. Minor-party candidates have run for offices ranging from city council to president. A small number, including Governor Jesse Ventura of Minnesota; the former governor of Connecticut, Lowell Weicker; and the U.S. representative from Vermont, Bernard Sanders, have been successful. Others, like Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive (or Bull Moose) Party's presidential nominee in 1912, and Ross Perot in 1992, won significant numbers of votes and influenced the outcome of an election, but failed to get elected. More common, however, was the experience of Christopher Delaney, who ran for North Carolina's first congressional district seat under the Libertarian Party label in 2000 and received less than 2 percent of the vote.

The success rates and political influence of minor parties are no better or worse than those of their candidates. The parties' limited success, and the ability of the two major parties to monopolize power, places the United States in a relatively small group of modern democracies that are classified as having two-party rather than multiparty systems. The first section of this chapter describes the historical continuity of two-party dominance and analyzes the institutional structures and behavioral norms that provide its foundations. The second section describes the major types of American minor parties, the conditions under which they garner support, and their roles in American politics. The chapter concludes with comments on the limitations and contributions of minor parties in the context of the American two-party system.

## THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

With rare exception, two major parties have dominated American politics. Major parties differ from their minor-party counterparts in a variety of ways, including the size and composition of their followings, their pragmatism in selecting issues and candidates, their locations on the ideological spectrum, the types and amounts of politically relevant resources under their control, and the number of offices their candidates contest. Perhaps the most important difference between major and minor parties concerns power. As a result of their success at the polls, the major parties have sufficient numbers of public officeholders to exercise substantial power over the nation's political agenda and the policy-making processes. Although a few minor parties have elected some of their members to public office and influenced the political agenda, they rarely have controlled enough elective offices to exercise meaningful power in the government.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The seeds for the two-party system came from the British Parliament. They were sewn during the Colonial era and firmly rooted by the time the Federalists and Anti-Federalists battled over ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Since then, the nation's political history has been largely defined by five separate party eras or systems (e.g., Burnham 1970; Bibby 1987, 21–34).

Under the first party era, the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans battled over whether the nation should develop into a commercial republic or remain a largely agrarian society. The Federalists, who were primarily supported by landowners, merchants, and other established families of the Northeast and Atlantic regions, favored a strong national government. The Democratic Republican Party, which was founded by Thomas Jefferson, attracted small farmers, workers, and other citizens of modest means. It championed the extension of suffrage, decentralized power, and other ideals of popular self-government. Although the Federalists won the nation's first contested presidential election, the party's narrow base prevented it from again capturing the White House, resulting in its eventual disintegration.

The second era of two-party competition began following a short period of one-party dominance characterized by bifactional politics within the Democratic Republican Party. Lasting from 1836 into the 1850s, this era pitted the Democratic Party of Andrew Jackson against the Whig Party, which was led by Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Both parties were broad, mass-based parties. The Democrats were primarily aligned



with the interests of frontiersmen, immigrants, and other less-privileged voters. The Whigs attracted more support from manufacturers, trading interests, and citizens of Protestant stock. Conflicts over slavery led to the second party system's demise.

The slavery issue cut across existing party cleavages and led to the formation of several short-lived minor parties, and the birth of the modern Republican Party, which faced the Democrats in the third party era. Lincoln's successful prosecution of the Civil War allowed the Republican Party to be identified with victory, patriotism, reconstruction, and the abolition of slavery. The party was also identified with a concern for mercantile and propertied interests. The Republicans drew their support from the North and West; the Democrats enjoyed strong support in the South as well as Roman Catholics and immigrants in northern cities.

The 1896 election marked the dawn of the fourth party era and continued Republican dominance in national politics. William McKinley, the Republican standard-bearer, increased support for his party in northeastern cities and among the population in general. Democratic (and Populist Party) nominee William Jennings Bryan's campaign to expand the money supply attracted support from farmers in the South and the Plains states and silver miners in the West. It failed, however, to win many votes from the industrial centers of the East and Midwest. McKinley defeated Bryan twice and the GOP won every presidential contest from 1896 through 1932, except for Woodrow Wilson's two victories, the first of which was largely the result of Theodore Roosevelt's minor-party candidacy.

The Great Depression and the election in 1932 launched the fifth party era. President Herbert Hoover and his fellow Republicans received the brunt of the blame for the nation's economic woes. In 1932 and over the course of the next decade, Franklin Roosevelt and the Democrats pieced together a majority coalition composed of blue-collar workers, urban dwellers, Southerners, ethnic minorities, and blacks. The Democratic and Republican parties battled over the federal government's role in the economy and the welfare state. During the 1960s, civil rights and a variety of social issues began to erode the original economic foundation of the New Deal coalition and contributed to the election of several Republican presidents. Whether the election of a Republican-controlled Congress in 1994 marks the beginning of a sixth party system remains a matter of debate (Beck 1997, 13–136; Aldrich and Niemi 1996).

## INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Institutional arrangements have played a major role in perpetuating the U.S. two-party system. The U.S. Constitution is inhospitable to political



parties in general, and particularly hostile to minor parties. Federalism, the separation of powers, and bicameralism provide a strong foundation for candidate-centered politics and impede party-focused election efforts, especially the efforts of parties that do not enjoy a broad constituent base.

Single-member simple-plurality elections (which are not delineated in the Constitution but are mandated by law in most states) also make it difficult for minor parties to have a major impact on elections or policy making (Duverger 1954, 217). This winner-take-all system denies any elected office to candidates or parties that do not place first in an election, even when the party takes second place or garners a significant share of the national vote. This situation is especially harmful to minor parties, which are usually considered successful if their candidates place second at the polls. By depriving minor parties of seats in Congress or state legislatures, ensuring that few of their members become presidents or governors, and depriving their supporters of judgeships, cabinet posts, and other forms of patronage, the electoral system discourages their institutional development and growth. Most minor parties survive a relatively short time because of their inability to play a significant role in governing.

The electoral college poses particular difficulties for minor parties. The contest for the nation's highest office actually consists of fifty-one separate elections—one held in each of the states and the District of Columbia. To win any electoral college votes, a presidential candidate needs to receive the most votes in at least one state or the District. Winning the election requires a candidate to secure a majority of electoral college votes.<sup>1</sup>

Nationally based minor parties, such as the Libertarian and Reform parties, may win a significant share of the popular vote, but they rarely receive enough support to capture a state's electoral college votes. Regional minor parties, such as the Dixiecrat (or States' Rights) Party, which nominated then-Democratic Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina in 1948, may win enough of the popular vote in some states to win some electoral college votes. However, because their support is concentrated, they typically win too few popular votes elsewhere to be in contention for additional electoral college votes. Their failure to capture political offices does little to help minor parties expand their bases of support or survive for long periods.

Institutional recognition also gives the two major parties ballot-access advantages over minor parties. Because they receive automatic placement on the ballot, the two major parties are able to focus most of their energies on winning the support of voters. In many states, minor-party and independent candidates can remain on the ballot only by winning a threshold of votes. Those that receive fewer are treated like new parties: to qualify for a place on the ballot they may need to pay a filing fee or submit a minimum number of signatures to local or state

election officials prior to the general election or, in some cases, the primary contest (Winger 1995, 1997).

The number of signatures required to gain access to the ballot varies widely across states. In New Jersey, a minor-party candidate needs to collect only 800 signatures to qualify as a candidate for the Senate, whereas in Florida one needs 196,788. Moreover, minor parties that wish to compete in all fifty states are often penalized at lower ends of the ballot where their chances of electing a candidate are greater. In 1996, a minor party needed to collect roughly 750,000 signatures to secure a place on the ballot for its presidential candidate in all fifty states, but had to gather more than 1.6 million signatures to place its House candidates on the ballot in all 435 congressional districts (Jost 1995, 1143).

Participatory nominations enable the major parties to absorb protest and discourage the formation of minor parties (Epstein 1986, 129–32). State-regulated caucuses and state-administered primaries give dissident groups of all sorts the opportunity to run candidates for a major-party nomination, thereby discouraging them from forming new minor parties.

The campaign finance system also penalizes minor parties. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 and its amendments (collectively referred to as the FECA) provide subsidies for major-party candidates for the presidency. During the 2000 presidential election, candidates for major-party nominations who raised \$5,000 in individual contributions of \$250 or less in at least twenty states qualified for up to \$15.4 million in federal matching funds, enabling them to spend \$40.5 million to vie for the nomination. Minor-party candidates can also qualify for matching funds, if they meet the same requirements as their major-party counterparts. As a practical matter, however, these requirements are easily met by serious major-party nomination candidates, but pose substantial barriers to minor-party contestants because of the lack of support their parties enjoy among individuals who make campaign contributions. During the 2000 nomination season, Reform Party candidate Patrick Buchanan, Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, and Natural Law Party and Reform Party candidate John Hagelin qualified for matching funds but received much less than the leading major-party contestants. They were awarded \$4.37 million, \$723,000, and \$676,000, respectively.

Major parties also automatically receive funds to help them pay for their national conventions. In 2000, the Democratic and Republican national committees each received just over \$13.1 million to help pay for their national conventions. Minor parties can also qualify for convention subsidies, but only if their presidential nominee garnered 5 percent or more of the popular vote in the previous presidential election.<sup>2</sup> The Reform Party qualified for \$2.5 million in 2000 due to its performance in 1996.



The FECA also provides substantial federal grants to major-party presidential nominees. In 2000, Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush each received \$67.6 million to wage their general election campaigns. Minor-party and independent candidates can also qualify for federal funding in the general election, but they typically receive much smaller amounts. Newly emergent minor parties and first-time presidential candidates can only qualify for federal subsidies retroactively. Candidates who receive more than 5 percent of the popular vote are rewarded with campaign subsidies, but only after the election, when it is too late to have any impact on the outcome. Minor parties that have made a good showing in a previous election automatically qualify for campaign subsidies during the current contest, but they get only a fraction of the money given to the major parties. Ross Perot's 19 percent of the popular vote in 1992 qualified him for \$29.2 million in federal funds in 1996. His 8.4 percent of the vote in 1996 qualified the Reform Party nominee for \$12.6 million in 2000.

Minor-party candidates who cannot or choose not to finance their own campaigns are severely handicapped by the legal limits on contributions they can collect from others. Ceilings of \$1,000 for individuals and \$5,000 for political action committees (PACs) prohibit minor-party candidates from underwriting their campaigns with large contributions from a small group of backers. Ceilings on party contributions and expenditures also limit the extent to which candidates can depend on a minor party for support. The modest levels of public support that most minor-party candidates enjoy make it virtually impossible for them to raise large sums in the form of small donations. Only a few extremely wealthy minor-party candidates have been able to amass the resources needed to wage campaigns that rival the efforts mounted by major-party contenders.

Candidates for Congress do not receive public subsidies, but the FECA's contribution limits disadvantage minor-party candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. These candidates can make unlimited contributions to their own campaigns, but are limited in the amounts they can accept from others. Individuals can contribute up to \$1,000 and PACs can contribute up to \$5,000 in each phase of the election—primary, runoff, and general. National, congressional, and state party campaign committees can each contribute up to \$5,000 to individual House candidates in each stage of the election. State parties can give \$5,000 to Senate candidates and a party's national organizations can contribute a combined total of \$17,500.

Parties can also spend larger sums on behalf of candidates as "coordinated expenditures" that typically are given as polls, radio advertisements, television commercials, fund-raising events, direct-mail solicitations, or issue and opposition research (Herrnson 1988, ch. 3; 2000, ch. 4).

Originally set at \$10,000 each for a state and national committee, the limits for coordinated expenditures on behalf of House candidates are adjusted for inflation and reached \$33,780 per committee in 2000.<sup>3</sup> The coordinated expenditure limits for Senate elections vary by state population and are also indexed to inflation. In 2000, they ranged from \$67,560 per committee in the smallest states to \$1.64 million per committee in California. The coordinated expenditure limits for presidential elections are also based on population; they reached a total of \$13.7 million in 2000.

Parties can also make other kinds of expenditures on behalf of their federal candidates. Since the FECA was amended in 1979, parties have been allowed to use soft money (which is raised and spent outside of the federal election system) on party-building activities, voter-mobilization drives, and generic party-focused campaign advertisements that are intended to benefit their entire ticket.<sup>4</sup> Several Supreme Court rulings handed down during the 1996 election cycle made it permissible for parties to make unlimited expenditures on behalf of their candidates so long as they did not expressly advocate a candidate's election or defeat, or they were made independently of the candidate's campaign and without its knowledge or consent.<sup>5</sup> This resulted in the parties spending record amounts on "issue advocacy" advertisements, which resemble candidate ads except they may not expressly advocate the election or defeat of a specific candidate and tend to be more negative in tone.

One of the major effects of the FECA's matching funds, contribution, and expenditure provisions is that they leave minor-party congressional and presidential candidates starved for resources. Few individuals or PACs are willing to invest in minor-party candidacies, and those willing to make such investments give only limited amounts. Moreover, most minor parties, especially new ones, lack the funds to match the expenditures made by the two major parties. Campaign finance laws make it difficult for minor parties to compete in federal elections.

The mass media, while not considered a formal political institution, are an important part of the strategic environment in which candidates campaign. Positive media coverage can improve a candidate's name recognition and credibility, whereas negative coverage or an absence of press attention can undermine a candidate's prospects. Many major-party candidates complain about the media, but virtually all of them are treated better than their minor-party counterparts. Minor-party candidates receive less coverage because the media are preoccupied with the horse-race aspects of elections, focusing most of their attention on the probable victors—usually Democrats and Republicans—and ignoring others (Clarke and Evans 1983, 60–62; Graber 1993, 262–70).

Sometimes the media are openly hostile to minor parties. The coverage afforded to the New Alliance Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and other



contemporary minor parties is often distorted and rarely favorable (e.g., Goodwyn 1978, 210; Schmidt 1960; Rosenstone et al. 1984, 90–91, 133–34, 229–33). A 1996 article in the *Washington Post's* Style section illustrates the kind of ridicule to which minor-party candidates are often subjected. The article, titled "There's the Ticket . . . A Selection of Running Mates for Ross Perot," listed Binti, the gorilla who rescued a toddler who had fallen into her cage, first. Also listed were Prince Charles of Great Britain and Jack Kevorkian, known as "Doctor Death" because of his involvement in physician-assisted suicides (*Washington Post* 1996). A 2000 *New York Times* article, although less critical, was anything but favorable. The news analysis piece ran under the headline, "For Third Parties, a Chance to Play Spoiler or Also-Ran" (Clymer 2000).

The anti-minor-party bias of the American election system stands in sharp contrast to the electoral institutions in other countries. Multimember, proportional representation systems, such as those used in most other democracies, virtually guarantee at least some legislative seats to any party—no matter how small, transient, or geographically confined—that wins a threshold of votes. Public-funding provisions and government-subsidized broadcast time ensure that minor parties have a reasonable amount of campaign resources at their disposal (Nassmacher 1993, 239–44). All these factors give the media incentive to provide significant and respectful coverage to many minor parties and their candidates. American political institutions buttress a two-party system, whereas political institutions in other democracies support multiparty systems.

## BEHAVIORAL UNDERPINNINGS

Institutional impediments are not the only hurdles that must be cleared for minor parties to survive. Although public interest in minor parties has increased in recent times, the two-party system is still preferred by most voters. Likewise, although partisan identification and voting cues may have declined in importance during the past few decades, most voters continue to identify with one of the two major parties (Keith et al. 1992, 17–23). Most voters' socialization to politics encourages them to consider minor parties outside the mainstream and unworthy of support. Some refuse to support minor-party candidates for this reason or because of the outright hostility with which their campaigns are treated by the press. Others recognize that casting a ballot for a minor-party candidate could contribute to the election of the major-party candidate that they least prefer (Brams 1978, ch. 1; Riker 1982). This lesson was driven home in the 2000 presidential election, in which Green Party candidate Ralph Nader siphoned off enough liberal, and presumably Democratic, votes in key

states such as Florida and New Hampshire to enable Bush to win those states and the election.

The relative ideological homogeneity of the electorate also deprives minor parties of bases of support that exist in more ideologically heterogeneous nations. Trying to outflank the major parties by occupying a place to the far left or the far right of the political spectrum rarely succeeds because Americans' moderate views do little to provide extremist parties with bases of support. The fact that the vast majority of Americans hold opinions that are close to the center of a fairly narrow ideological spectrum means that most elections, particularly those for the presidency, are primarily contests to capture the middle ground. At their very essence, Democratic strategies involve piecing together a coalition of moderates and voters on the left, and Republican strategies dictate holding their party's conservative base while reaching out for the support of voters at the center. Democracies whose voters have a broader array of ideological perspectives, or have higher levels of class or ethnic consciousness, generally provide more fertile ground for minor-party efforts.

The career paths of the politically ambitious are extremely important in explaining the weakness and short-term existence of most minor-party movements in the United States. Budding politicians learn early in their careers that the Democratic and Republican parties can provide them with useful contacts, expertise, financial assistance, and an orderly path of entry into electoral politics. Minor parties and independent candidacies simply do not offer most of these benefits. As a result, the two parties tend to attract the most talented among those interested in a career in public service. A large part of the parties' hegemony can be attributed to their advantages in candidate recruitment.

Voters are able to discern differences in the talents and levels of experience of minor-party and major-party candidates and, not surprisingly, they hesitate to cast votes for less-qualified minor-party contestants. As demonstrated by the fluctuations in support that minor-party candidates register in public opinion polls, even voters who declare their support for a minor-party or independent contestant early in the campaign season often balk at casting their ballot for one of these candidates on election day. Major-party candidates and their supporters prey upon Americans' desire to go with a winner—or at least affect the election outcome—when they discourage citizens from “throwing away their votes” on fringe candidates.

Mainstream politicians also respond to minor parties by trying to delegitimize their efforts. Major-party officials have subjected minor parties to court challenges to keep them off the ballot. Major-party nominees often refuse to debate minor-party candidates. The 1992 presidential debates, which featured Perot, were the exception to the rule in that they



included an independent. It is more common for minor-party and independent contestants to be denied a place on the podium, as were Perot in 1996, Buchanan and Nader in 2000, and the nominees of the Libertarian Party, the Natural Law Party, and the nearly twenty other minor-party and independent candidates who participated in the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential elections. Major-party nominees prefer to label minor-party candidates as extremists and cast them as irrelevant to minimize their influence.

When a minor-party or independent candidate introduces an issue that proves to be popular, Democratic and Republican leaders are quick to co-opt it. In 1992, Ross Perot proclaimed himself an agent of change and campaigned to cut the deficit and reform the political process. When these issues became popular, many major-party candidates, including then-President George Bush and Democratic nominee Bill Clinton, staked out similar positions. By adopting positions espoused in popular movements, party leaders are able to better represent their followers, expand their constituencies, and attract votes (Eldersveld 1982, 40–43). Strategic adjustments that rob minor-party and independent movements of their platforms are common in American history. They enable the two major parties to absorb, protest, and help maintain the dominance of the two-party system.

### MINOR-PARTY FORAYS

Despite the hurdles they must jump, a variety of minor parties have participated in the electoral process. Some have occupied an extreme position on the ideological spectrum, while others have tried to carve out a niche in the center. Some have taken stances on a wide array of issues, but others have mobilized around only one or two causes. Most minor parties have sought to elect presidential candidates, but some have focused on the state and local levels, and others have been more concerned with raising issues than electing candidates. A few have endorsed and even formally nominated candidates who had already won major-party nominations. Some minor parties have survived for decades, but many last only one election. Minor parties can be classified using a variety of schemes (e.g., Key 1964, ch. 10). The scheme that follows divides them into four groups: (1) minor parties that resemble major parties in their endurance and activities, (2) those that form largely around a single candidate, (3) those that revolve around one or a small number of related issues, and (4) those that survive largely by playing a supporting role for major-party candidates.

## Enduring Comprehensive Parties

Many of the minor parties of years past resembled the major parties of their time (Rosenstone et al. 1984, 78–80). These parties were united by issues or an ideology and put forward candidates for Congress, the presidency, and state and local offices (for this reason they are sometimes called “principled” parties). They held contested nominations and selected their presidential candidates at conventions. They also employed campaign strategies and tactics similar to those used by the two major parties: they framed issues and adopted slogans that would help them secure their base and attract new voters; they used their resources to mobilize specific voting blocs whose support was necessary for electoral success. Moreover, they lasted for several elections. A few contemporary minor parties, such as the Libertarian Party (founded in 1971), are similar to their predecessors in that they resemble the major parties of their time (Hazlett 1992; Flood and Mayer 1996, 313–16).

During the nineteenth century, several enduring comprehensive parties enjoyed significant electoral success. The American (or Know-Nothing) Party won control of the Massachusetts governorship and both chambers of the state legislature in 1854. Like its major-party counterparts, and other successful minor parties, it used its control of the government to reward supporters with patronage and government contracts (Rosenstone et al. 1984, 57). Minor parties that were in a position to distribute patronage and influence public policy usually survived for more than one election. The Greenback, Populist, and several other nineteenth-century minor parties lasted for more than a decade.

Their extended presence on the political scene and their organizational strength made these parties attractive vehicles for politicians who wished to bolt from a major party. Politicians who were denied a major-party nomination or who were unable to influence their party’s platform could advance their causes by joining an existing minor party. Former Whig President Millard Fillmore pursued this route of influence when he accepted the American Party’s presidential nomination in 1856, as did Tennessee Senator John Bell, who left the Whig Party to become the Constitutional Union Party’s standard-bearer in 1860.

Contemporary enduring comprehensive parties, most notably the Libertarian Party, rarely recruit candidates from the two dominant parties. Their weak political organizations, ideological extremism, and lack of electoral success reduce the attractiveness of these parties to successful major-party politicians. Their inability to distribute political favors and limited influence over public policy have prevented these parties from amassing large followings and caused their number to dwindle. By and



large, such parties have been replaced by minor parties focused on particular candidates.

### Candidate-Focused Parties

Many of the minor parties that left their mark on the twentieth-century political landscape were highly candidate-centered. The same legal, technological, and cultural changes that influenced the development of the two major parties helped to shape the nature of their minor-party contemporaries. The rise of the direct primary, the enactment of the FECA, the introduction of polling, the electronic media, and modern marketing techniques into the political arena, and the decline of partisanship in the electorate helped foster the emergence of candidate-centered elections (e.g., Sorauf 1980).

Under the candidate-centered system, campaigns revolve around individual candidates, not parties. Such candidates are self-recruited, and they run professionally staffed, money-driven campaigns not dependent on party workers. Democratic and Republican party committees play important supporting roles in the candidate-centered system, as do most twentieth-century minor parties (Herrnson 1988, chs. 3–4; 1995, ch. 4). However, the major parties enjoy an existence that is independent of and extends beyond their individual candidates' campaigns, whereas most candidate-focused minor-party movements are merely extensions of individual candidates (for this reason they are sometimes called "personalistic" parties). They live and die with their candidates' campaigns.

The Progressive Party (or Bull Moose Party) exemplifies modern candidate-focused minor parties. It was formed by Theodore Roosevelt to oppose his successor in the White House, William Howard Taft (Sundquist 1973, 164; Pinchot 1958, 172, 226–27). Roosevelt opposed Taft for the Republican nomination in 1912 because Taft failed to continue his battle against corporate barons and to improve the lives of ordinary workers. After losing the nomination to Taft, Roosevelt and his followers bolted from the GOP and ran against Taft in the general election campaign. Because it was a splinter group that drew its votes mainly from a faction of the GOP, the Progressive Party contributed to Taft's defeat at the hands of Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson. Following the election, the Progressives failed to maintain a permanent organization or expand their efforts. In 1916, after extensive negotiations with Republican leaders, Roosevelt returned to the Republican fold. Many Progressives followed him, leading to the party's demise (Pinchot 1958, 226–27).

The Progressive Party differed from the minor parties that preceded it in that it was little more than a vehicle for an individual politician (Rosenstone et al. 1984, 82). Previous minor parties had been built around causes,

nominated candidates, and then waged their campaigns. The Progressive Party drastically changed this pattern: it was organized for the purpose of campaigning for a preordained candidate.

A number of other minor parties were organized to promote individual candidacies in the twentieth century. They included a new Progressive Party, formed in 1924 to support the presidential candidacy of former Republican Governor and Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin; and the Union Party, organized in 1936 to promote the presidential candidacy of Republican House member William Lemke of North Dakota. These parties were all short-lived, disintegrating after their candidates lost the election (Rosenstone et al. 1984, 96, 101–2, 108–10). Similarly, the presidential bids of Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy in 1976 and Republican Representative John Anderson in 1980 were conducted without the pretense of a party organization. These individuals were self-selected candidates, who assembled their own political organizations and mounted independent campaigns. They made little effort to ally their campaigns with those of candidates for lower office and their organizations were dismantled after the election.

Wealthy businessman Ross Perot's 1992 United We Stand America (UWSA) campaign bore many similarities to McCarthy's and Anderson's efforts. However, the Perot campaign differed in that the candidate was able to spend sufficient funds—\$60 million—to mount a credible campaign. Perot's effort also differed in that after the election Perot transformed his independent candidacy into a new political party, the Reform Party.

The Reform Party's two nominating conventions indicate that it will probably fit the model of a short-lived candidate-focused party rather than become an enduring comprehensive party. The process it used in 1996 appears to have been designed to provide a coronation for Perot rather than to select a nominee from among competing aspirants. Many Reform Party members received their ballots late. Some received more than one ballot. Others, including former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm, Perot's nomination opponent, and Michael Farris, chairman of California Reform Party, never received a ballot (Greenblatt 1996). The nomination process denied Lamm the opportunity to compete on a level playing field in other ways: the party provided Perot but not Lamm its supporter list, it distributed a direct-mail piece that featured only Perot's picture, and it never gave Lamm the opportunity to participate with Perot in a public debate (Fisher 1996).

The Reform Party's 2000 presidential selection process demonstrates the difficulties that face a candidate-focused party when it is confronted with choosing among two or more competitive candidates. The nomination race pitted former Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan



against John Hagelin, also the leader of the Natural Law Party. These candidates qualified to participate in the primary by gaining ballot access in enough states to theoretically be able to win an electoral college majority. No others met this threshold. The party's nominee was to be selected in a national primary, comprising members of any state Reform Party who requested a ballot and whose names were submitted to a balloting company by their party's state chairman, and voters who both signed candidate petitions states and requested a ballot. These individuals were sent the mail ballots that were tabulated and announced at the party's convention in Long Beach, California. If two-thirds of the delegates to the national convention agreed, they could overturn the primary results (Moan 2001).

Although the Reform Party had a set of convention rules and an agenda in place, the fight for the nomination became extremely contentious even before the delegates arrived at the convention site in California. Once they arrived, each camp set up its own credentials committee and sought to control who would be allowed to cast ballots at the convention. An additional point of controversy was over whether the mail-in ballots, which favored Buchanan by 49,529 votes to 28,539 for Hagelin, should be counted. A delegate vote to stop the count failed to gain the needed supermajority. Although Buchanan held a strong lead throughout the convention, it did not stop members from either faction from shouting names at one another, fighting for control of the microphone, and threatening each other with legal action. Shortly after the convention began, Hagelin and his supporters left the convention hall to set up a rival Reform party national committee. The original convention nominated Buchanan and the rump convention nominated Hagelin. This dispute left the states in the position of having to decide which Reform Party ticket to place on the ballot. It also put the Federal Election Commission in the position of deciding which candidate would receive the Reform Party's federal funding, delaying Buchanan's receipt of this money (Edsall 2000a, 2000b; Newman and White 2000).

The events surrounding the 1996 and 2000 conventions indicate that the party has had trouble making the transition from a movement dominated by a single charismatic leader to an enduring comprehensive party. It has been unable to develop a formal governing body, an independent source of financing, and a routinized system of candidate selection. Its activists also have not succeeded in developing the norms of behavior needed to keep their disagreements from interfering with the party's ability to conduct its business and avoid becoming a media circus. It has had only limited success in nominating candidates for state, local, and congressional office, and its most visible elected official, Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura, has renounced his membership.<sup>6</sup> The party has also yet to develop a cohesive organization capable of assisting its candidates with their general election campaigns.

## Single-Issue Parties

The source of strength for most single-issue parties (sometimes called ideological or "protest" parties) is a salient, often highly charged cause or related set of causes. These parties differ from enduring comprehensive and candidate-focused minor parties, and from the two major parties, in that they are more concerned with advancing their issue positions than winning elections. Elections are typically viewed as an opportunity to raise public awareness for a party's cause, influence the political debate and the issue positions of major-party contenders, raise funds, and recruit new members. Single-issue parties are often considered successful when they are able to get one or both of the major parties to adopt their core policy positions and enact those positions into law. Ironically, it is precisely that success that usually leads to a single-issue party's demise. Deprived of the core issue that unites it, the party frequently lapses into decline.

The Green Party and New York Right-to-Life Party are examples of single-issue parties. The Green Party grew out of the environmental movement that swept through the United States and Western Europe in the 1980s and 1990s. The party focuses on a broad array of environmental concerns, including recycling, ecological economics, toxic wastes, energy, and organic farming. In addition to the environmental issues that form its doctrinal core, the party maintains positions on social justice, international, and political reform issues (Green Party of California 1996).

The Green Party has enjoyed a degree of electoral success. Following the 1994 elections, twenty-nine Green Party officials held elective office in ten states. During the 1996 election cycle, the Green Party selected renowned consumer advocate and environmentalist Ralph Nader to be its presidential nominee. Although Nader won less than 1 percent of the popular vote, the inclusion of his name on the ballot in twenty-two states helped to elevate the Greens' visibility and ensure that environmental issues would be discussed in the election. Nevertheless, his slightly improved performance in 2000 may ultimately undo some of that progress. Nader's candidacy is widely viewed as having helped Bush get elected to the White House. Bush's victory over the more "environmentally friendly" Gore is expected to lead to some major setbacks for the environmental community. As a result, environmentalists may be less willing to abandon a pro-environmental Democratic candidate in favor of a Green Party candidate in the future.

Unlike most contemporary parties, the Green Party has maintained a strong grassroots, activist agenda. It continues to carry out local projects aimed at cleaning up the environment and educating citizens about pollution control, recycling, and other environmental issues. Literature circulated by the California Green Party emphasizes that community projects and grassroots activities form one of the party's "two legs."



The Right-to-Life Party also grew out of a social movement, but it has maintained a narrower focus than the Green Party. Although the anti-abortion movement has national foundations, the Right-to-Life Party has had little impact beyond New York's borders (see chapter 9). The party ran token campaigns for the presidency in 1976 and 1980, but as the next section shows, most of its influence has been through the cross-endorsements it has given to major-party candidates running for office in New York State.

### Fusion Parties

A fourth type of minor party—the fusion (sometimes called an “alliance” party)—conducts many of the same activities as the two major parties and some of its minor-party brethren, but differs in that it actively supports other parties' candidates. Some fusion parties can be categorized as comprehensive enduring minor parties and others also fit into the single-issue category. What makes these parties unique is that they are able to engage in a practice known as “cross-endorsement,” a procedure whereby a candidate appears on more than one party's line on the ballot (Gillespie 1993, 255). Presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, for example, appeared on more than one party's ballot in 1896 when he received the nomination of both the Democratic and the Populist parties. Fusion candidacies, such as Bryan's, became rare with the introduction of the Australian ballot. When they began printing ballots, many states enacted prohibitions against a candidate's name appearing more once in the same contest. During the 1990s, ten states allowed a candidate's name to appear on more than one ballot line. Most fusion candidacies take place in New York.

New York has historically been the home of several fusion parties, most notably the Liberal, Conservative, and Right-to-Life parties (see chapter 9 for a fuller discussion of the New York party system). These parties resemble major parties and some minor parties in that they are enduring, have formal organizations, hold conventions, and attract volunteers and activists (e.g., Gillespie 1993, 258, 260). The Liberal Party was founded in 1944, the Conservative Party in 1962, and the Right-to-Life Party in 1970. New York's fusion parties also resemble the major parties in that they run local, state, and congressional candidates under their own label. They differ from major parties in that they routinely give their nominations to candidates who also have been nominated by the two major parties and occasionally endorse each other's nominees. Most of New York's state legislators are elected on fusion tickets. The same is true of the state's congressional delegation. Of the fifty-seven major-party candidates who ran for Congress in 1994, thirty-six were cross-endorsed by one of New York's

minor parties. Two of New York's former senators were also recipients of minor-party cross-endorsements: Daniel Patrick Moynihan ran on both the Democratic and Liberal Party lines and Alfonse D'Amato received the Republican, Conservative, and Right-to-Life nominations.

Fusion parties play important supporting roles to the major parties. They provide major-party candidates with endorsements and grassroots campaign assistance. More important, fusion parties provide candidates with an extra place on the ballot that can be used to capture independent-minded voters who object to casting a ballot for a major party. This extra ballot line can also function as a safeguard for candidates who are unpopular with party activists. Republican incumbent John Lindsay, for example, was able to win the 1969 New York City mayoral contest after being defeated in the GOP primary because his name also appeared on the Liberal line of the general election ballot.

New York's fusion parties receive both material and policy benefits from their efforts (e.g., Gillespie 1993, 256, 259). They extract patronage from major-party candidates in exchange for granting the candidates the opportunity to occupy their party's line on the ballot. They also influence the issue stances that are adopted by the major-party candidates who seek their endorsements. The Liberal Party pushes the candidates it endorses to the left, the Conservative Party pushes them to the right, and the Right-to-Life Party requires them to campaign on the party's antiabortion position. Ironically, a fusion party that succeeds in influencing the positions adopted by major-party candidates can undercut its own constituent base.

Fusion parties do not automatically support the parties that are closest to them on the ideological spectrum. This practice occasionally causes the parties' endorsement strategies to backfire. In 1980, the Liberal Party nominated incumbent Republican Senator Jacob Javits. After Javits lost the GOP nomination to Town of Hempstead Supervisor Alfonse D'Amato, the names of Javits, D'Amato, and Democratic nominee Elizabeth Holtzman all appeared on the general election ballot. Holtzman and Javits split the liberal vote, enabling D'Amato, the most conservative of the three candidates, to win. Given that most states ban fusion candidacies, it is likely that fusion parties, and the complications they sometimes cause, will continue to remain isolated to a few states.

### **Conditions for Strong Minor-Party Performance**

Support for minor parties ebbs and flows in response to national conditions, the performance of the two major parties, and the efforts of minor parties themselves. Minor parties usually attract more support under conditions of economic adversity, particularly when the agricultural sector is



suffering. Minor parties also do well when the two major parties fail to address salient issues or when they nominate unappealing candidates (Mazmanian 1974; Rosenstone et al. 1984, ch. 5; Abramson et al. 1995). As dissatisfaction with the major parties increases, minor parties increase in strength and number (Ranney and Kendall 1956, 458).

Minor parties can directly help their own causes by nominating popular candidates, particularly those who have previously held public office. Theodore Roosevelt, who occupied the White House as a Republican from 1901 to 1907, was the most successful of all minor-party presidential candidates when in 1912, as the Progressive Party nominee, he garnered 27.4 percent of the popular vote and 88 electoral college votes. Former Democratic President Martin Van Buren, former Republican Senator Robert La Follette, and former Democratic Governor of Alabama George Wallace each picked up more than 10 percent of the popular vote when they ran as minor-party candidates for president. La Follette and Wallace also picked up significant electoral college votes.

Of course, attractive minor-party candidacies, national conditions, major-party failures, and minor-party success are systemically related to one another. Celebrity candidates are strategic. They are most likely to run on a minor-party ticket when their prospects for success are greatest—that is, when voters are dissatisfied with the performance of government, the incumbent president is unpopular, the two major parties have difficulty containing internal dissent or fail to adequately address the major issues, and one of the major parties did poorly in the previous election. The candidacies of these individuals, in turn, add to their party's ability to win votes (Rosenstone et al. 1984, ch. 6).

Systemic factors related to the emergence of the candidate-centered system have contributed to voter support for minor parties in the latter half of the twentieth century. The unraveling of the New Deal coalition and the rise of issue-oriented voting have weakened voter identification with the Democratic and Republican parties, which has benefited their minor-party opponents. The transition from a grassroots, volunteer-based style of campaigning to a high-tech, money-driven style also may have worked to the advantage of minor parties. Parties and candidates that can afford to purchase polls, direct mail, television and radio advertisements, and the services of professional campaign consultants are no longer penalized by their lack of volunteers and party activists. These conditions, the nature of their constituencies, and their prior political records made important contributions to Lowell Weicker's successful gubernatorial campaign in Connecticut and Bernard Sanders's ability to win election to Congress from Vermont.

## THE HISTORIC ROLES OF MINOR PARTIES

Minor parties have historically performed many of the same functions as the major parties. They provide symbols for citizen identification and loyalty, educate and mobilize voters, select and campaign for candidates for office, aggregate and articulate interests, raise issues, advocate and help to formulate public policies, organize the government, provide loyal opposition, institutionalize political conflict, and foster political stability. As their relative status indicates, minor parties tend to be less adept at performing many of these roles than are their major-party counterparts.

Minor parties also play four additional roles that are important to the functioning of the political system: (1) they raise issues that have been ignored by the two major parties, (2) serve as vehicles for voters to express their discontent with the two major parties, (3) help propel the transition from one party era to another, and (4) occasionally act as laboratories for political innovation. Minor parties have raised issues that have been ignored or inadequately addressed by the major parties during many key junctures in American history (Sundquist 1983). The Free Soil and Liberty parties took important stands on slavery prior to the Civil War. The National Women's, Equal Rights, Prohibition, Greenback, Populist, and Socialist parties and the Progressive Party of 1912 advocated women's suffrage (Gillespie 1993, 284). More recently, the Green Party has raised environmental concerns to new heights. In the first example, minor parties propelled the formation of a new political party—the modern Republican Party. In the second two, they forced the major parties to confront significant issues, and in one case brought about an amendment to the Constitution. In all three examples minor parties made it possible for a variety of groups and issues to be better represented in the political process.

In providing outlets for protest, minor parties function as safety valves that channel societal frustrations into mainstream forums. Minor parties institutionalize conflict by championing the causes of alienated voters and encouraging them to express their dissatisfaction at the polls rather than in the streets. The Populist, Progressive, and Socialist Workers parties, for example, have harnessed the frustrations of some of the poorer elements of society. This anger might have otherwise been directed toward overthrowing the political system. During the 1990s, Perot's minor-party movement gave alienated and apathetic voters who were turned off by the major-party nominees a way to register their displeasure without resorting to violence.

The regularity with which minor-party forays precede political realignments indicates their role in redefining the political cleavages that divide the major parties. By raising new issues and loosening the ties that bind



voters to the major parties, minor parties promote political realignments (Freie 1982; Burnham 1970; Sundquist 1983). The efforts of the Free Soil, Liberty, and other pre-Civil War minor parties hastened the development of the modern GOP and the third party era. The Populist Party's efforts to expand the money supply helped usher in the fourth party system. The campaign waged by the La Follette Progressives helped pave the way for Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats to expand the role of the federal government. Perhaps Perot's UWSA campaign and Reform Party efforts will some day be interpreted as precursors to a sixth party system structured around deficit-related issues.

Another role that has been historically performed by minor parties is concerned more with political processes than public policy. Because minor parties are born and die with some frequency, they are important sources of political experimentation and innovation. In 1831, the National Republican Party (a predecessor to the Whigs) introduced a major innovation in the presidential selection process when it held the first national nominating convention (Ranney 1975, 16). During the 1990s, Perot's minor-party movement capitalized on modern technology and voters' desires for direct political involvement when it aired the first televised infomercial and held the first national presidential primary. If voters respond favorably, these innovations may be adopted by the major parties.

## CONCLUSION

For most of its history, the United States has maintained a two-party system. This system is based in the nation's political institutions and is fostered by the activities of voters, the media, politicians, and the two parties themselves. Nevertheless, minor parties have raised critical issues, provided outlets for frustrated voters, and helped realign the nation's politics at key points in history. They have also introduced innovations into the political process. Minor parties have played, and continue to play, important roles in the American two-party system.

## NOTES

The author thanks Scott Swenson for research assistance.

1. The U.S. Constitution provides that when no candidate wins a majority of the electoral college vote, the election is to be decided in the House of Representatives.

2. Once they qualify for federal funding, major- and minor-party candidates lose their eligibility for additional public funds if they win less than 10 percent of

the vote in two consecutive primaries in which they compete. Candidates who lose their eligibility can requalify for public funds by winning at least 20 percent of the vote in a subsequent primary.

3. Coordinated expenditure limits for states with only one House member were set at \$67,560 per committee in 2000.

4. Soft money is considered largely outside of federal law and is subject to the limits imposed by state laws (e.g., Alexander and Corrado 1995, ch. 6; Biersack 1994).

5. The most important of these are *Massachusetts Citizens for Life v. Federal Election Commission*, 479 U.S. 238 (1986) and *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission*, U.S., 64 U.S.L.2 4663 (1996).

6. The Reform Party nominated and elected a few candidates for local office in 1995 in a small number of states, it endorsed some congressional contestants in 1996, and nominated only forty-six congressional candidates in 2000. These numbers are too small to classify it as an enduring, comprehensive minor party (see chapter 7).

## The Case for a Multiparty System

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Contrary to popular myth, the United States is not a two-party system. There are always many parties that manage to get on some of the ballots some of the time. In the 1996 presidential election, minor parties took 10 percent of the popular vote (*Ballot Access News* 1997). In 2000, Green Party candidate Ralph Nader won 2.8 million votes—about 3 percent of the total—and the nearly 97,000 votes he won in the state of Florida sufficed to keep Democratic candidate and national popular vote winner Al Gore from winning the presidency. Pat Buchanan, the candidate of the Reform Party, also helped make the election the most fiercely contested in U.S. history: had he not been on the ballots of Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin, all of which went to Gore, and in all of which Buchanan's vote was more than the Democratic margin of victory, Republican candidate George Bush would almost certainly have won those states and thereby a total of 276 electoral votes—enough to win without needing Florida (Ceaser and Busch 2001). Nader and Buchanan were joined on the ballot by the presidential and congressional candidates of more than twenty-five other minor parties.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of U.S. voters voting for a minor party or independent candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2000 was 4.1 percent, the highest percentage for that office since 1938.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the United States has minor parties, and sometimes they make a difference.

But although it is therefore wrong to say the United States is a two-party system, it would also be wrong to call it a multiparty system. The U.S. party system is rather a "bi-hegemonic" one, where control of almost all the elective posts rests in the hands of the elected representatives of two major parties. There are numerous minor parties—some enduring, some not—but they normally have very minor influence indeed, and then only as "spoilers." They rarely win office at any level.



The argument of this chapter is not that multipartyism should be introduced in the United States, but rather that it should be strengthened and encouraged. Minor parties should not be hampered by laws and regulations that make it all but impossible for them to grow to major-party status. This argument is divided in three parts: (1) why true multipartyism is preferable to bi-hegemonism; (2) what changes would permit its expansion; and (3) what steps are being taken in this direction. In passing I will argue that many of the ills Americans are accustomed to blaming on multipartyism are owed to other factors, factors whose negative effects can be exacerbated by multipartyism, but need not be.

### WHY MULTIPARTYISM IS PREFERABLE

The most powerful argument for multipartyism is that it is more natural. Political parties are formed by individuals who seek to control government offices for their own purposes. Those purposes may be selfish or civic-minded, good or evil, intelligently or stupidly conceived. All we can say for sure is that in the absence of legal restraints there will be a very great number of purposes around which office-seekers will form parties. The new states of Eastern and Central Europe made this point very clear: 80 parties competed in the 1992 Czechoslovakian elections and the same year there were 131 parties in Poland (Schmidt 1992). In 1996, 47 parties and 25,000 candidates registered for the elections in Bosnia in pursuit of 42 seats in the House of Representatives and a three-member national presidency. There were thus more parties than there were offices available and among them they produced an average of 555.5 candidates per office (Bonnar 1996). Obviously, this situation was a bit too much of a good thing: the point here is simply that forming a new party is a way to take part in politics that citizens everywhere understand and, when allowed, readily practice.

If, then, it is natural to have many parties, there must be very good reasons for passing laws that discourage parties so drastically as to produce just two capable of waging effective campaigns for office, especially in so large and heterogeneous a nation as our own. There are, of course, many things that are "natural" yet are nevertheless restricted for the common good. But extreme restrictions on our basic freedoms of speech and association are always unwelcome, and are acceptable only when deemed absolutely essential for important aspects of our common good. It is often argued that restricting our political parties to two helps us achieve the reconciliation of diverse interests, moderation, and consensus. This is not in fact true (see below), but even if it were, these are not the kinds of goals for which a democracy sets aside its freedoms. Diversity of opinion is rec-

ognized not only as a normal by-product of political freedom, but also as a fruitful source of innovation and progress. Achieving moderation and consensus while reconciling diverse interests is desirable but is not worth the sacrifice of fundamental freedoms.

Besides the advantage of protecting that which is natural in a free society, encouraging multipartyism offers two more positive rewards: it offers greater protection of minority rights and it enhances majority rule. No one doubts that a multiparty system offers ideological, racial, ethnic, or other minorities a better chance than a bi-hegemonic system does of electing some representatives to legislative bodies. Elected representatives, even when constituting only a small minority in a legislature, have greater opportunity to be heard than the same people outside the government.

More controversial is the claim that a true multiparty system is also better than a bi-hegemonic system at producing majority rule. To make this point clear, it is necessary to distinguish between "producing majority rule" and "producing a governing majority." Producing majority rule means that a majority of the eligible electorate has effective say in national policy. Producing a governing majority means simply that more than 50 percent of the elected members of government have sufficient agreement to pursue a shared program. Of course, majority rule includes the formation of a governing majority. But it means more than that. It means that the members of the governing majority will normally be in agreement not only with each other, but also with majority views in the nation on most issues. This is the definition of majority rule that we commonly associate with the definition of democracy. However, a governing majority can exist merely among elected officials, and may be very different from the will of the national majority of the electorate.

To demonstrate that a multiparty system is better at producing true majority rule, we must first ask how good two-party systems are at the same task. As Maurice Duverger (1954) taught us and as others have demonstrated (Downs 1957; Lijphart 1977, 1984), the principal cause of bi-hegemonic party systems is the existence of a single-member, single-ballot plurality electoral system. Such a system gives the advantage to the two parties that are strongest and rapidly marginalizes or eliminates the others. This situation is not antimajoritarian at its inception: normally the two top parties become the strongest because they are the most likely to win a majority in any given election. Such a system, when first established, is thus a good way to move toward majority rule, as long as everyone takes part.

However, this early and no doubt deserved advantage can then be used by the two strongest parties to maintain their grip on power even when they no longer have the loyalty and support of a majority. The effect of the single-member plurality system is not the same over time. The advantage



the leading parties have can be made to outlast their own majoritarianism. This situation develops because, once in power, the elected representatives can—and do—manipulate the laws governing the electoral process to their advantage and against weaker parties. Examples include laws governing ballot access, internal party operations, and campaign finance (see chapter 10). Under these circumstances, successful minor party challenges become all but impossible.

Thus, even when the two strongest parties have declined precipitously in the voters' affections, and neither is any longer truly majoritarian, the legal regime keeps minor parties from organizing and offering alternatives to the voters. The poor showing of minor parties in such a system cannot be dismissed on the grounds that they simply do not interest the voters; the scales have been tipped against them before they ever formed and certainly before they can wage an effective campaign.

Furthermore, a bi-hegemonic system is antithetical to majoritarianism because it is not necessary for either party to win a majority of the eligible votes, but simply a majority of the votes cast. The leaders of the major parties in a bi-hegemonic system quickly learn that it is a waste of time and money to campaign for the votes of habitual nonvoters. This situation obtains in the United States today, where the major parties are not even seeking a majority of the eligible.<sup>3</sup> One or the other of the major parties will stay in power even when voting rates drop precipitously, even when the president and the ruling party in Congress are both elected by less than 25 percent of the eligible electorate (as in 1994 and 1996). All each party needs is to get more votes than the other major party.

Having no serious competition besides each other, the leaders of such parties are free to become more and more minoritarian, and do not even have to pay much attention to the wishes of a majority of their own best supporters. Bob Dole was not the first newly nominated presidential candidate to say he agreed with "some" of his own party's just-formulated program—that was Jimmy Carter, in 1976.

Thus, if democracy means rule by the majority of the eligible electorate, bi-hegemonic systems do not foster democracy. There are those who would argue that democratic majority rule is achieved whenever free elections produce a governing majority. Yet despite all the folklore to the contrary, it is far from clear that a system in which two parties dominate so heavily is better at producing even that kind of majority. There are only two significant bi-hegemonic party systems in the world: the United States and Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. system is not noted for producing a strong governing majority. It far more often produces government stalemated by the conflicts between two governing majorities, one in Congress (be it Senate or House of Representatives or both) and one in the presidency. The British parliamentary system, also with single-member dis-

tricts and election by plurality, does routinely produce a strong governing majority within Parliament. Although the ability of the majority to accomplish its announced purposes is dubious (Rose 1984), we may count the British system as a bi-hegemonic system that ensures a governing majority. That makes one.

In contrast, multiparty systems can and often do produce a strong governing majority and true majority rule. In multiparty systems everyone—or almost everyone—can find a party to support. Except for Switzerland, a special case in which multiparty rule is constitutionally guaranteed by a collective presidency, voter turnout in European multiparty systems is always well above 50 percent (and is normally in the eighties and nineties). There are, of course, other factors affecting turnout; the crucial point is that in these systems those who vote do so in support of a wide range of parties, programs, and points of view, and have reasonable hopes of electing at least a few representatives to office who share their opinions.

Furthermore, multiparty systems are better able to bring that national majority into the governing process. In a multiparty system, smaller parties that represent numerically significant minorities are likely to succeed in placing some of their members in legislative office. Such members may have views on certain issues that permit them to join and strengthen the majority in government. Or they may be in close enough agreement with other parties, major and minor, to help form a governing majority that is far more representative of the majority views of the public than would result from the mere giving over of governance to the victorious party in a two-party system. Of course, some of the parties in a multiparty system are, inevitably, "extremist." Democracy requires that such opinions be heard and considered. An expanded multiparty system in the United States would give parties representing such points of view, on the left and on the right, a greater chance of representation in legislative bodies, state and national. But so long as such opinions are considered extreme, parties representing these points of view would not gain sufficient seats to control the national agenda. When such a party threatens to develop enough power to influence the direction of policy, it then behooves those who find its point of view repugnant to develop opposing arguments and educate the electorate. Escaping the tougher challenges of democracy by denying fundamental freedoms has the result of seriously weakening democracy itself.

What about the case of a very small centrist party that can gain seemingly inordinate power by being the linchpin in successive governing coalitions with larger left- or right-wing parties (such as the Free Democratic Party in Germany)? While rare, such a situation is a sign that the national majority itself is strongly centrist; otherwise, the electorate would not continue to support both left- and right-wing parties willing to rule in



tandem with such a centrist party. Once again, the burden falls on those who find such a condition repugnant to make a stronger case to the electorate; a system that protects the freedoms of a wide range of parties (as does the German system) ensures their opportunity to do so (Lind 1992).

Do multiparty systems cause governmental instability? Parliamentary coalitions sometimes come apart, and either new elections must be called or various games of ministerial musical chairs must be played to reconstitute a majority. The fact is, however, that short of revolution or coups d'état, governments fall only when the cabinet loses the support of a majority in the lower house, or when the chief executive calls for new elections in pursuit of a new majority that is now believed to exist. The motives for forcing the fall of a government are often complex, sometimes venal, but always linked to majoritarianism. The election (or the ministerial reshuffling) either reassures the government and the nation that the former majority is sustainable or puts the government into closer fit with the national majority by establishing a new governing majority.

In any case, it is not the existence of multipartyism that causes governments to fall. Governments fall in bi-hegemonic Britain. Parliamentary government is normally multipartisan, but the whole world is "normally multipartisan," including quasipresidential France and the many developing nations that have adopted the French system of government. Furthermore, it is not necessarily an evil to have a system of government that encourages the strengthening of the link between the national and the governing majority whenever that link becomes dangerously weakened. But the key point here is that such a practice does not depend on how many parties a nation has, but rather on what kind of constitutional system it has.

It is possible for multipartyism in combination with other national conditions to produce serious fragmentation. However, there are fair and workable ways to ensure the continuing presence of a national majority behind a ruling party or coalition of parties, using methods that have been widely applied in contemporary Europe. What is required is careful tinkering with the electoral system—not to serve the interests of an entrenched minority and not to eliminate the rights of other minorities—but rather to find ways to combine the free and natural formation of parties with the engineered formation of a sufficient majority to make stable and effective government possible.

The most common way to achieve this end is to set a threshold for representation in the legislature—any and every party may get itself on the ballot, but only those receiving 3 percent to 5 percent or more of the national vote will have the right to seat a representative.<sup>5</sup> Another method is to have a certain portion of the seats of the legislature allotted to those elected in single-member constituencies (as in Germany, Spain, Italy, Rus-



sia, Japan, and Mexico), and the rest of the seats allocated by proportional representation. In Germany, half of the 664 deputies to the Bundestag are elected in direct balloting within their respective constituencies, while the other half are selected proportionally from party lists of candidates in each of the Länder (states). Similarly, the Spanish senate is elected by simple plurality, but its lower house is elected by proportional representation. Italy now chooses 75 percent of its legislature by plurality voting, and 25 percent by proportional representation (Lijphart 1994; Zimmerman 1994). Such combinations of systems ensure that smaller parties will find it worthwhile to participate—some of their candidates will almost surely be elected—while strengthening the majority of the victorious party or coalition of parties.

A third way to ensure that fragmentation does not paralyze a multiparty system is to have two ballots, allowing anyone to participate on the first ballot, but eliminating from the second ballot all candidates with less than a certain percentage of the vote (12.5 percent in French legislative elections). The second vote is then won by a simple plurality. Or the second ballot may be limited to the two top contenders, as in the case of elections for the French presidency. In either case, the first ballot protects multipartyism and majoritarian voting (there were nine candidates on the ballot in the 1995 presidential election in France), and the second reduces the field and makes a cohesive governing majority more feasible.

A final way to encourage majoritarianism within a multiparty system is to exercise fair control over the quality of the campaign, and in particular to ensure that the campaign messages of all the parties have a roughly equal chance to be heard, regardless of the wealth of the organizations, the candidates, or their supporters. No other nation allows candidates to spend as much as in the United States. The argument that the imposition of spending limits is an unconstitutional infringement on free speech, but that the imposition of limits on contributions is not, makes no sense whatsoever. Where is the individual who has written a check for a candidate without spending money? What is the basis of an argument that spending money one way to influence election results is an expression of free speech and spending it another way is not? The decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1978) and subsequent cases refusing to limit soft money spending are illogical and among the most deleterious the court has ever imposed on our political system.

Spending limits are common throughout the rest of the democratic world, as are prohibitions against certain kinds of spending; for example, France forbids all paid advertising. Combined with extensive public funding and the provision of free media time, such regulations produce a reasonably level playing field that invites all to play. Easy access to the broadcast media brings the parties into a shared arena, where debates

with each other and with journalists permit the emergence of a national agenda. Minor parties have a chance to convince others that the key issues for their electorates belong on that broader agenda. The resultant election is far more likely to produce a genuine national mandate, and thus a more meaningful governing majority even if coalition government is required, than elections in which only two parties take part—and tacitly collude to keep the more uncomfortable issues out of debate (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995).

## EXPANDING MULTIPARTYISM IN THE UNITED STATES

If a strong multiparty system is better than a bi-hegemonic one, what would it take to establish such a system in the United States? Five changes would be required. The first four would give minor parties a fairer chance in the United States.

First, all laws that discourage the formation of new parties or ballot access for minor party candidates should be abolished.

Second, public funding should be extended to all campaigns and should cover both candidate and party activities, with spending limited to that funding.

Third, private campaign donations, including a candidate's own money and that of interest groups, should be prohibited.

Fourth, access to the media should be free and generous, and commercial advertising should be prohibited.

Several of these changes represent a modest curtailment of individual freedom, but all have been accepted in other democracies as essential for the maintenance of a more important freedom: the right to take a meaningful part in one's nation's governance. None of them is designed to maintain the special privileges of an elite.

The fifth and most important change is more fundamental. The electoral system should be changed to the system used in most of the rest of the world: proportional representation (PR) with multimember districts and seats allocated according to each party's share of the vote, with a 5 percent threshold. Possibly some seats in legislatures should be reserved for representatives elected in single-member districts.

PR is clearly the electoral system most conducive to multipartyism and, as such, is an important step in moving away from a bi-hegemonic system and toward a stronger multipartyism in the United States. Adopting PR will require major changes in election law. Under this system each district chooses several representatives, and each political party offers the voters a list of candidates for its posts. In some nations, such as Belgium, the voters can vary the order of the candidates on the list; in others, as in Switzer-



land, the voters have multiple votes that they may spread around as they wish among the lists. In the simplest and most common version, each voter casts one vote for one party list and the parties are then awarded seats according to the proportion of the vote they received. The exact distribution is determined by a formula, such as the "largest remainder system" or "the highest-average system" (A wide choice 1993).

As noted earlier, in Germany, Italy, and Spain, PR is used in combination with single-member constituencies. It is used in unmixed form in Israel, Malta, most Latin American and former Soviet bloc nations, South Africa, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in most European democracies. New Zealand, Russia, Mexico, and Japan have recently adopted mixed systems with a component of proportional representation (Equalizing the vote 1996). In Britain PR is used for elections to the European Parliament. The French system offers an alternative for legislative elections that has some of the same effects as PR: single-member districts with runoff elections if no candidate wins a majority of the vote.

Whatever formula is used, minor parties with no chance of winning a plurality may well win a seat or two when PR is adopted, and do not necessarily feel pressured to drop out or to combine with other small parties just because they are not doing well—this remains true for numerous small parties even when a threshold of 5 percent of the vote is required to gain a seat (a limitation that does tend to eliminate the very smallest parties). Under such a system, the voters are given the maximum amount of choice consistent with producing a governing majority. The legislature (or council or board) is not only closely keyed to the actual vote but is also much more fully representative of all points of view.<sup>6</sup>

## PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

Are there any serious prospects that the United States will soon adopt any of these changes? The legal and cultural barriers against minor parties remain formidable, and were amply illustrated in 1996, with Ross Perot's candidacy for the presidency on the Reform Party ticket, and even more seriously in 2000, when Ralph Nader ran as the presidential candidate of the Green Party.

In the case of the Reform Party in 1996, media coverage made it clear that even when the party's leader is a billionaire, the current system works unreasonable hardships on a new party. Perot met the extremely difficult and varied criteria for ballot access in all fifty states. He made the politico-cultural judgment to use only public funds, supplemented generously by soft money expenditures on his behalf (which is, of course, what the major-party candidates did as well), and his party shaped its



convention and its nominating procedures to provide a closer fit to the national norm. Nevertheless, he was denied access to the presidential debates and was regularly denied the right to buy media time in the amounts and at the times he preferred. Although it is possible that Perot would not have done even as well as he did (8.5 percent of the vote) had he been treated better, his campaign provided new evidence of the degree of difficulty a new party faces in seeking that access—access that would have been accorded automatically to such a party in every other modern democracy.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the evidence does not suggest that Americans look favorably on minor parties, as the campaign of Ralph Nader on the Green Party ticket in 2000 made amply clear. Although a strong majority now tell opinion pollsters they would like there to be more than two parties, when a minor party takes enough votes to change the outcome of an election, as Nader did in 2000, that party is not viewed favorably. Having long accepted that their only choices are to vote for one of the two major parties, “throw away their vote,” or abstain, those who decide to vote overwhelmingly choose to vote Democratic or Republican. And although they may make their choice unenthusiastically, as the campaign hoopla proceeds and the “Big Game” mentality takes over, they become ever more committed to “winning,” ever more contemptuous of gadfly minor-party candidates, and, finally, nothing short of outraged if one of these should gain enough votes from their side to take victory away from their chosen gladiator. When this is compounded by actual popular vote victory for that hero, as in the Nader-Gore case, outrage turns to fury. “Democrats Vow to Retaliate Against Nader” was a typical headline and “his ability to raise money and to work with Democrats [is] forever damaged” a typical comment.<sup>8</sup> Even some of Nader’s own supporters expressed second thoughts, especially if they were ardent environmentalists, the kind of activists who had founded the Green Party and determined its original program. Far from impressed by Gore’s stand on their issues, and delighted by Nader’s, they could not escape the fact that their party had ensured the election of Bush, who didn’t “even believe global warming is for real.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet Nader’s ability to rob the Democrats of victory may persuade some leaders of that party to move at least slightly away from Clinton centrist complaisance, and Nader himself claims the Green Party will continue to grow and will “achieve major-party status within 12 years.”<sup>10</sup> The past history and current regulation of minor parties (Winger 1997) suggests the former is more likely than the second, and that neither is certain.

Other groups seeking to strengthen the role that minor parties play in the U.S. system have attempted to wage the battle in somewhat less quixotic forms, looking for constituencies where smaller victories may possibly be gained and when possible seeking broader change through legislation or the

courts. One such group is the Center for Voting and Democracy (CVD), led by Director Rob Richie and John Anderson, the former independent candidate for president. The CVD is not linked with any particular minor party. Although it began as a strong proponent for PR, its current goal is to spread the use of a somewhat different system, IRV (instant runoff voting, also sometimes known as alternative voting). IRV is seen as the more likely alternative in the United States. Using modern technology, it allows voters to rank candidates and then redistributes any first choice "loser" votes to those voters' second choices, repeating the process as many times as necessary until one candidate has a majority. It is a system that can be used in single-member districts and that has approximately the same effect as the French system, allowing minor parties to participate but greatly reducing the likelihood of their spoiling the chances of the "real" winner. Under IRV, Nader's votes, not sufficient to make him the winner, would have then gone to his voters' indicated second choice, presumably Gore. However, the U.S. electoral college system, enshrined in the Constitution, makes a simple IRV system unlikely for the presidency, and the CVD is seeking rather to reform elections within states and municipalities, including party primary elections and congressional district elections. It has achieved a number of advances: legislation to adopt IRV has been introduced in a dozen states and will soon be introduced in Congress and, in addition, numerous organizations have begun serious study of the possibility, especially after the 2000 election fiasco. These include the Sierra Club, Common Cause, and the League of Women Voters.

CVD has backed away from PR because it believes the adoption of a multilist system is unlikely in the United States, even at the state or local level. The group admits that IRV is more likely to provide fairer representation of diversity of race, gender, and ideology within the major parties than open the door to multiparty democracy, but insists it does allow minor parties a more significant role in the process.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Is change imminent in the rules governing the American party system? Probably not. Even when seriously dissatisfied with the choices they are given, most voting Americans still support the bi-hegemonic system, while nonvoters, marginalized by the major parties and denied meaningful alternative choices, simply grow less interested in the political game. Neither group imagines that changing the rules of that game would make an important difference.

Yet the rules of the game do matter. Rules that permit and encourage multipartyism give more interesting alternatives to all the players and



create a special invitation to those who have felt themselves forced out of the game to come back in. And the policy results are far from negligible. Strong multipartyism is the international norm, and while none of the countries that practice it are utopias, the performance of other developed nations in an array of public policy areas, including education, health care, public transportation, child care, care for the elderly, and programs combating homelessness, drug abuse, and crime, is almost always far superior to that of the United States.

None of these nations has the vast resources of natural wealth and military dominance that characterize the United States and all of them are faced with the same dilemmas of how to improve global economic competitiveness. How then do they do it? It seems reasonable to infer that the answer has something to do with the key difference between their political systems and our own. And that key difference is this: these nations protect the freedom of their citizens to form new parties and they provide an electoral arena in which all parties have an opportunity to make their case. The United States does not.

## NOTES

1. Parties running candidates in the 2000 elections included: American Independent, Conservative, Constitutional American, Concerned Citizens, Constitution, Grass Roots, Justice, Liberal, Libertarian, Liberty Union, Mountain, Natural Law, Politicians Are Crooks, Progressive, Right to Life, Socialist USA, Socialist Workers, Timesizing.com, U.S. Taxpayers, and Working Families—to name a few (see *New York Times*, 9 November 2000, B9).

2. According to Richard Winger, editor of *Ballot Access News*, in a letter to the author, 19 June 2001.

3. It is now standard procedure in the United States to campaign for the votes of the marginal voters, not wasting valuable resources on habitual nonvoters or on those with consistent voting patterns. According to Ganz (1994), the targeted population for a modern campaign will be as little as 22 percent to 27 percent of the total potential electorate and those not targeted “are far more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status. . . . They will never hear from a campaign and thus will likely stay at home on election day or vote the way they always have.”

4. Jamaica has had a two-party system for more than fifty years. However, the system has been marked by frequent periods of instability, particularly during the 1970s, and in 1993 the elected members of the opposition party refused to attend the sessions of parliament on the grounds that the election that year had been so marked by fraud and corruption as to be invalid (Wilson 1993).

5. It is sometimes argued that 5 percent is too high a figure for a new party. However, in the Netherlands, where a party needs only 0.67 percent of the total vote to gain a seat in the 150-member parliament, it can take up to six months to organize a governing majority after an election.



6. There appears to be a link between the election of women representatives and the use of PR, although this is a matter of dispute (Bleifuss 1995; Rule, Hill, and Fernandes 1996).

7. Not every other democracy would have allowed the buying of media time, but none would have permitted such a ban to be unequally applied. Of the nine candidates presented to the French in the 1995 presidential elections, all of whom received sufficient free media time to ensure the electorate's familiarity with their programs and arguments, only three could have met the standard of "electability." No one imagined this was an adequate reason for denying access. The distaste television commentators felt for the person and arguments of far right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen may have been constantly apparent on their faces, but was rigorously excluded from their language as well as from the determination of the amount of coverage such a candidate should receive.

8. Amy Isaacs, quoted in *New York Times*, 9 November 2000, 3.

9. See *New York Times*, 10 November 2000, A27; and Thomas L. Friedman in *New York Times*, 8 December 2000.

10. *New York Times*, 18 November 2000, A16.

11. Director Rob Richie provided information on the CVD and its current efforts in a letter to the author, 23 June 2001. His comments on this article in general were also very helpful. For further information, consult the CVD Web site: [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org).

## In Defense of the Two-Party System

JOHN F. BIBBY

The elections of the 1990s and 2000 have been a time of challenges to the viability of America's venerable two-party system. Indeed, the period since 1968 has been one of those eras of minor-party resurgence (e.g., 1848–60, 1904–24) that have alternated through American history with eras of minor-party weakness—for example, the five immediate postwar presidential elections when the minor-party vote averaged only .6 percent (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 6). Ross Perot's 19 percent of the popular vote for president in 1992 demonstrated the potential for well-financed minor-party candidacies as his new Reform Party qualified for Federal Election Campaign Act public funding in 1996 and 2000. Going into the 2000 campaign, the Gallup Poll (1999) reported that 67 percent of the public favored a strong "third" party to run candidates for president and 13 percent said that they would vote for former professional wrestler and Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura. Although the 2000 minor-party presidential vote was lower (3.7 percent) than had initially been anticipated, there is little doubt that Ralph Nader's Green Party candidacy had an impact on the race.

Well-regarded observers of our politics, such as David Broder (1997) of *The Washington Post*, have warned of dangers to the existing party system from a failure to deal with looming entitlement crises; and a former president of the American Political Science Association, Theodore Lowi, has gone so far as to assert that the only thing that props up the two-party system is a system of election laws favoring the Republicans and Democrats (1998, 3). Most political scientists who specialize in the study of political parties are less apocalyptic. However, even these specialists, who have a long tradition of commitment to parties as essential to the democratic process, express concern about the state of the parties as American politics becomes increasingly candidate-centered (Epstein 1986, 37–39; White and Shea 2000, 169–70).

Despite these and other indicators of stress in the two-party system, one of the hard facts of American politics has been the overwhelming dominance exercised by the Democratic and Republican parties since the realignment of 1854–60. Nowhere else in the world have the same two parties so completely and continuously dominated free elections. This suggests that two-party politics is highly compatible with American society, culture, and governmental structures. Other chapters of this book (chapters 2 and 10) clearly demonstrate how institutional arrangements (e.g., the electoral college, single-member districts) work to perpetuate a two-party system from which the Republican and Democratic parties benefit. However, it is important to keep in mind that “no electoral system can protect major political parties from the electorate” (Abramson et al. 1995, 366–67), as Canada’s Progressive Conservative Party learned to its sorrow in the parliamentary elections of 1995 and 2000. Furthermore, as the Republican Party’s displacement of the Whigs in 1854–60 demonstrated, a new party can overcome structural barriers by changing the nation’s issue agenda. It is, of course, fortunate for the country, though unfortunate for minor parties, that no issues as divisive as slavery and secession have restructured American politics since the 1850s.

As the comments in the previous paragraph indicate, the basic argument presented here is that not only is the two-party system compatible with America’s society and constitutional order, it is also a highly positive force in American politics and continues to serve the nation well. It is certainly a stretch to assert that the two-party system is somehow responsible for the government’s seeming inability to respond decisively and promptly to societal problems when the public is as divided as was demonstrated in the 2000 election and also unclear about the course it wants public policy to take on such issues as reforming entitlements and social policy.

## PROVIDING ELECTED OFFICIALS WITH LEGITIMACY

The two-party system limits the real and meaningful choices before the voters to either Republican or Democratic nominees in virtually all contests other than local and judicial elections. As a result, the election day winner is assured of having amassed either a majority or sizeable share of the vote. Admittedly, the 2000 presidential election did not result in the election of the popular vote winner, but Albert Gore’s defeat can hardly be attributed to the two-party system. Rather, it was the workings of the electoral college and a Supreme Court decision that ultimately determined the election outcome. Meaningful competition between two competitive parties normally lends an aura of legitimacy to elected officials that in the case of presidents, governors, members of Congress, and state legislators strengthens their position to lead the nation and their states.



In assessing the impact of the electoral college for electing presidents, Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky note candidly that "One of its hidden effects . . . is to restrict the number of parties contesting the presidency." But they go on to stress that this helps focus the electorate on a limited menu of choices. In turn this increases the chances that winners will have the backing of a sizable number of voters and legitimacy to lead Congress and the nation (2000, 248–49).

They further observe that one of the polity fragmenting consequences of replacing the electoral college with a direct popular vote system would be to create incentives for organized minorities to run candidates for the presidency in anticipation of a second, runoff election. A runoff would always be a possibility because advocates of direct popular vote believe that it is essential that the winner receive a substantial plurality of the popular vote (e.g., at least 40 percent of the popular vote was specified in the 1969 House-approved Constitutional amendment, which died in the Senate). Therefore, if no candidate meets the specified minimum percentage of the vote required for election, a runoff election between the top two finishers would be necessary. The 1992 election provides evidence that the need for runoff elections forced by more than two parties seriously contesting for the presidency is not just the fantasy of a creative imagination. With Ross Perot running as an unusually strong third candidate in 1992, a fourth party's candidate would have needed only 6 percent to 7 percent of the national popular vote to deny Bill Clinton (who received 43 percent) even 40 percent of the vote. With a direct popular vote system to elect presidents, a similar scenario could have been played out in 1968 when Richard Nixon won with only 43.4 percent of the popular vote. It is not hard to imagine candidates of parties representing the religious right, environmentalists, labor, African Americans, pro-choice advocates, right-to-lifers, and disarmament activists being able to muster 6 percent to 7 percent of the vote and force a runoff (see Polsby and Wildavsky 2000, 248).

It should also be noted that the electoral college is not the prime barrier preventing even stronger than normal minor-party candidates from being elected president. As Paul Abramson and his colleagues have convincingly demonstrated, neither George Wallace (1968), John Anderson (1980), nor Ross Perot (1992) could have won a head-to-head contest against either the Republican or Democratic nominees (Abramson et al. 1995, 355–56). The weak showings of Perot (Reform Party) in 1996 and noncentrist candidates such as Ralph Nader (Green Party) and Pat Buchanan (Reform Party) in 2000 constitute further evidence of the difficulty minor-party candidates have in mustering voter support.

America has many social cleavages and minorities that hold the potential for a much more divisive politics than has yet been experienced. Fortunately, the two-party system (with encouragement from devices

such as the electoral college) creates incentives for various interests to compromise and work within the existing parties instead of fragmenting the political/governmental order with an array of separate parties, each having distinctive followings and ideological doctrines to which they are committed. With just two parties having a reasonable chance of winning, compromises among groups are facilitated within the parties, and the winning Democratic or Republican president is assured a large enough share of the vote to enter the White House with a mantle of legitimacy that a system based upon the consent of the governed requires.

### ENCOURAGING NATIONAL UNITY, RECONCILIATION, AND POLICY MODERATION

Critics of the American two-party system fault the Democratic and Republican parties for failing to provide clear-cut policy alternatives to the voters and for often running "me too" campaigns. This tendency was certainly a central theme of the Wallace (1968), Perot (1992, 1996), and Nader (2000) campaigns. It is also asserted that a multiparty system would provide voters with a range of policy alternatives that is now lacking in the existing system. Instead of complaining about a system dominated by two moderate and centrist parties, we ought to be thankful that a wide variety of citizens can be accommodated within the two parties. As Austin Ranney and Willmore Kendall observed, a variety of social forces and characteristics operate to minimize the "civil war" potential of American society. But they stress that "it is the party system, more than any other American institution, that consciously, actively, and directly nurtures consensus" by drawing its leaders, workers, and candidates from all strata of society, appealing to voters broadly rather than to narrow interests, and promising most groups some but not all of what they seek (1956, 509). Given the diversity in American society, the parties cannot afford to ignore the constellation of groups in American political life if they are to have any hope of achieving elective office.

Because candidate recruitment and political advancement in the United States are primarily through the two major parties, the likelihood of demagogues and extremist candidates either winning major-party nominations or being elected is reduced. Both the Democratic and Republican parties have broad-based electoral support and draw significant levels of support from virtually every major socioeconomic group in society (African Americans are an important exception with their overwhelming support for Democrats). These parties dare not risk alienating major elements of society and must maintain their credibility with voters to remain



viable. These considerations operate against extremist candidates garnering either major-party nominations or party organizational support in primaries and general elections. In those rare instances in which demagogues have secured major-party nominations, party leaders have normally condemned these candidates, thereby preventing them from being elected and protecting the party's integrity (e.g., the GOP's abandonment of Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke when he won the Louisiana gubernatorial primary in 1991).

The inclusiveness of the Republicans and Democrats means that they tend to "occupy virtually all the political space in the political system" (Keefe 1998, 70). The minor parties are, therefore, forced into a quest for distinctiveness. This often means fashioning narrow appeals, operating on the ideological fringes, appealing to the far left or right, and adopting hopeless and even bizarre causes.

Rosenstone and his colleagues have noted that twentieth-century minor parties, in contrast to those of the nineteenth century, "have generally been little more than candidacies of individuals" (1996, 12). These are parties that have rarely survived without their founders, since voters have been attracted to magnetic personalities as well as the causes they advocated. A case in point is the steady decline of Ross Perot's Reform Party, especially after it was taken over by a right-wing renegade Republican, Pat Buchanan, in 2000. It was a party built largely on Perot's willingness to spend lavishly and free media publicity that was used as a substitute for grassroots organizing. And contrary to widely held views, Perot's showing in 1992 was not the result of declining allegiance to the major parties, surging disaffection from the major-party candidates, or increasing political alienation (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 231-73).

In today's highly charged atmosphere of twenty-four hour news cycles, confrontational television programming, talk radio, heightened ideological awareness, attack ads, and push polling, John Fisher's 1948 observation about the crucial consensus-building role of America's two major parties is perhaps more valid than ever. He noted, "The purpose of European parties is, of course, to *divide* men of different ideologies into coherent and disciplined organizations. The historic role of the American party, on the other hand, is not to divide but *unite*" (emphasis added, 1948, 32). Only once in American history has the two-party system failed in its duty to achieve national reconciliation and consensus and then "to the astonishment of each side, the North and the South found themselves at war" (Brogan 1954, 513).

Perhaps it is because the United States has operated a political system within the context of stability, consensus, and incremental policy change for so long that its advantages tend to be overlooked and taken for granted. It does, however, strike one as strange that some should be looking to replace



a two-party system that has been so successful in “trying to discover some way of bringing together into a reasonably harmonious relationship as large a proportion of the voters as possible” (Herring 1940, 102) with a multiparty system that would in all likelihood further fragment society and heighten divisiveness.

As V. O. Key Jr., the post–World War II era’s leading student of American parties, observed, the tug of each party’s durable foundation of electoral support tends to fix fundamental policy orientations of the two major parties. Yet the diverse makeup of each party restrains the zeal of the party leadership in the advocacy of the cause of any one element within the party. Thus the composition of the parties and the need to expand electoral support to independents and disaffected members of the opposition will moderate the outlook of the parties’ leadership and their candidates. Witness Bill Clinton’s race to the center in 1992 and 1996 as he adopted the New Democrat mantle while seeking to remove perceptions of his party being too far left; and George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” theme in 2000 as he worked to move the Republicans away from the more hard-edged ideology of House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Whip Tom Delay.

In truth, the existing parties—one right of center and other left of center—are well adapted to the American electorate, which has never shown much sympathy for noncentrist views or parties that contrast sharply one from the other. As a result, two centrist parties can accommodate quite well the vast majority of voters. As Key observed,

Certain patterns of political beliefs and attitudes mightily facilitate the existence of a dualism in parties. These patterns of political faith consist in part simply of the absence of groups irreconcilably attached to divisive or parochial beliefs that in other countries provide bases for multiparty systems. . . . Given . . . [the] tendency for most people to cluster fairly closely together in their attitudes, a dual division becomes possible on the issue of just how conservative or how liberal we are at the moment. Extremists exist, to be sure . . . but they never seem to be numerous enough or intransigent enough to form the bases for durable minor parties. (1964, 210)

Winning in the two-party context requires broad-based electoral support, and the desire to win leads to policy moderation and efforts to bring varied interests together. Americans may say that they want choices on election day, but they do not want losing to be a personal, group, or regional catastrophe. Witness their willingness to vote for presidential and congressional candidates of different parties (Polsby and Wildavsky 2000, 270). Few would suggest that either the Republicans or Democrats have fully satisfied the aspirations of the citizenry, but neither have their electoral victories created intolerable consequences for any significant segment of American society.

Rather than worrying about a lack of clear-cut choices on election day between the Republicans and Democrats, who in actual fact are more likely now than at any time since the end of World War II to espouse differing and internally consistent policy positions, the advocates of "multi-partyism" (see chapter 3) might better focus their efforts on coping with the divisive consequences caused by the heightened influence within the major parties of ideological activists and allied interest groups that seek to impose policy litmus tests upon party nominees.

Public opinion data demonstrate that Americans actually are more favorable to the existing party system than is generally recognized. It is true that more than 60 percent of the public in the poll cited previously said they wanted a "third party" on the presidential ballot. More revealing than voters' willingness to let more parties into the process are indicators of the public's approval for the two major parties. A 1995 poll, for example, found that only 12 percent believed that a new party should replace either one of the major parties (6 percent said it should replace the Republicans and a separate 6 percent thought it should replace the Democrats). And after the 1996 national conventions, the Gallup Poll found that 89 percent of respondents were favorable toward at least one major party, whereas only 11 percent were unfavorable, neutral, or unsure about both. Thus, if the core constituency for a minor party is voters who are at least neutral about the two parties or downright negative toward them, then it would appear that only about one voter in ten met this criterion (Moore 1996, 13). It should also be noted that the public satisfaction in 1999 with the Bush-Gore choice was 11 percentage points higher than was the case four years earlier when only 40 percent of respondents interviewed by the Gallup organization were satisfied with the Clinton-Dole choice. Satisfaction rates in 1999 were 68 percent for Republicans; 60 percent for Democrats, and 32 percent for independents (Gallup Poll 1999).

### FOSTERING ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Democracy at its root is a system in which citizens have a relatively high degree of control over their governmental leaders. Admittedly, in the American constitutional system of separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism, officeholder accountability to the voters via elections is complicated and sometimes difficult to achieve. However, accountability is enhanced by the relatively simple system in which there are only the Republicans and Democrats to hold responsible for the state of the Union.

Because elected officials want to keep their jobs and perpetuate their parties in office, they have a stake in coping with societal problems, or at



least satisfactorily explaining their actions to the voters. As election after election has demonstrated, voters may not be highly informed on all the issues of the day nor do they yearn for comprehensive plans to test rigorously one against another, but they are perfectly capable of rendering judgments on the performance of the party in power—as the Republicans learned to their sorrow in 1992 and the Democrats did in 1994.

Elections do not provide elected officials with specific policy mandates. Candidates collect voters for different and sometimes conflicting reasons. In a system where there are many issues but only one vote for president, senator, or representative, it is not possible for elections normally to be mandates on specific issues. Rather, elections provide voters with an opportunity to render judgments on performance or the general direction of policy. A dualist party system makes this task infinitely more manageable for voters than does a multiparty system.

### PROMOTING EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Just as officeholder accountability to the voters within the American system of separation of powers, bicameralism, and federalism would be vastly more difficult with a multiparty system, so too would effective governance. Policy making within our separated system requires extensive negotiation, bargaining, compromise, and cross-party alliances. Policy gridlock or at least delay is a constant threat even when the same party controls both the executive and legislative branches. It is hard to imagine how introducing a substantial number of third- or fourth-party representatives and senators into the mix would facilitate more timely and effective policy making. A multiparty system might bring more issues into public debate, but it is anything but obvious that issues would be more easily resolved. Organizing the House and Senate would become vastly more difficult and protracted, as would the negotiations required to produce legislation.

In addition, splinter and extremist elements of society could well gain influence if their parties' support was needed to organize a chamber or pass critical bills. Legislation essential to keep the government operating, such as budget resolutions, appropriations, and tax bills, not to mention crucial foreign-policy measures, could well be held hostage by minor-party legislators. How could a three- or four-party system with smaller and more cohesive parties than the existing congressional parties and with more polarized activists as their support base contribute to the policy-making process other than to inject more delay, intensified conflicts, greater divisiveness, and gridlock?



The potential for a governance breakdown would certainly not be lessened if a third- or fourth-party candidate were to emerge victorious in a presidential election (an unlikely event to be sure!) and then were required to deal with a Republican- or Democrat-controlled Congress. To say the least, the incentives for interbranch cooperation would not be great. Imagine for a moment, one of the recent minor-party or independent presidential candidates who received a larger-than-usual popular vote—George Wallace, John Anderson (who had bolted the GOP), Ross Perot, or Ralph Nader—having to lead or negotiate with a Republican- or Democrat-controlled Congress. For people knowledgeable about national policy making and concerned about the well-being of the republic, it is not an inviting prospect.

It has been asserted that the two major parties are immobilized by having to promise too many things to too many people (Lowi 1998, 8). Ironically, this claim is being made at a time when the parties have become more effective in articulating policy goals and in achieving internal policy unity. Indeed, the congressional parties are showing higher levels of intraparty unity than at any time since World War II. Furthermore, a clear-eyed review of recent history reveals that elections really do matter and that policy changes can and do flow from shifts in party control of the presidency and partisan composition of Congress. The Great Society programs of President Lyndon Johnson's administration were possible only after the Democratic landslide of 1964; governmental retrenchment and the beginning of devolution of responsibilities to the states flowed from the 1980 election of Republican Ronald Reagan and the GOP winning control of the Senate; the end of Aid to Families with Dependent Children as a federal entitlement and its becoming a largely state responsibility—a major policy change—flowed from the Republicans gaining control of Congress for the first time in forty years in the 1994 elections; and Bill Clinton's reelection in 1996 largely stymied efforts by House Republicans led by Speaker Newt Gingrich to move national policy sharply rightward. The fragmentation of policy making and the increased complexity of negotiations that would be occasioned by introducing third- and fourth-party legislators into the process would be more likely to create government inaction than constitute a remedy for it.

#### THE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES REQUIRED TO CREATE AN AMERICAN MULTIPARTY SYSTEM

As is well documented in this volume, a variety of institutional arrangements in the United States operate to encourage and perpetuate a two-party

system and discourage multipartyism (see chapters 2 and 10). A truly viable multiparty system would, therefore, require changes in some basic institutional arrangements to which, for the most part, Americans seem firmly committed. There is only the remotest chance that these institutions will be rearranged to accommodate minor parties in the foreseeable future. Hence, much of the discussion about the United States developing a multiparty system is just that—a discussion of the hypothetical.

Among the institutional arrangements that would probably have to be changed are the following widely accepted features of the political system: the single-member district-plurality system for electing the House, Senate, and state legislatures; the direct primary system for nominating state and congressional candidates; the presidential primaries; and the separation of powers system. In addition, changes would be necessary in other less popular or well understood arrangements: the electoral college, the Federal Election Campaign Act, state ballot-access laws, and rules governing participation in the presidential debates.

No aspect of American democracy is more fundamental and integral to the constitutional order than the separation of executive and legislative powers and the elaborate system of checks and balances. There is no evidence to suggest that Americans have somehow lost their faith in these core elements of the American democratic experiment. Separate election of the chief executive from that of the national legislature creates incentives to form two broad-based, centrist parties capable of winning the big prize of the electoral system. Multiparty systems are more compatible with parliamentary systems that permit and encourage cross-party coalitions to form governments. Americans, who frequently split their tickets between the GOP and the Democrats, give no signs of wanting to give up the safeguards implied by the separation of powers for whatever hypothetical benefits a multiparty system might provide.

Single-member districts with plurality winners, used to elect members of Congress and state legislatures, clearly disadvantage minor parties, which have little hope of winning under this system and scant chance of being an influential force within government. Fundamental to this electoral system is the concept of geographic and local representation with national and state legislators coming from their districts and being expected to speak for their constituents. By contrast, proportional representation systems, which foster multipartyism, are not based upon local representation because they require much larger regional or national constituencies to function. It is hard to conceive of Americans being willing to throw out their current system of local representation in favor of one that would set the stage for multiparty contests.

The uniquely American institution of the direct primary to nominate candidates deserves special attention. This nominating process has



helped to perpetuate a two-party system and contributed to the unprecedented Democratic-Republican electoral dominance for almost 150 years. This Progressive-era reform (which no realistic multiparty reformer is suggesting should or could be replaced by procedures that put party leaders in control of candidate selection) has had the effect of channeling dissent into the two major parties. In the United States, unlike other nations, dissidents and insurgents do not need to go through the difficult and often frustrating task of forming an alternative party. Instead, they can work within the existing major parties by seeking to win these parties' primary nominations as a route to elective office, which is much more likely to yield success than the minor-party candidacy route. The primary nomination system makes American parties particularly porous and susceptible to external influences. In the process, the primary system reduces the incentives to create additional parties (Epstein 1986, 244–45).

#### MULTIPARTY POLITICS AT THE STATE LEVEL HAS BEEN OVERTAKEN BY THE TIDE OF NATIONAL POLITICS

State politics in this century has seen several examples of multiparty systems in which "third" parties competed effectively with the major parties, notably in Wisconsin (Progressive party) and Minnesota (Farmer-Labor party). These were third parties that were at least temporarily successful despite the institutional arrangements that inhibit them. They won governorships, controlled state legislatures, and elected U.S. senators and representatives. The demise of these multiparty systems with their successful minor parties is testimony to the difficulties that state third parties have operating within an electoral system in which voters align themselves in national politics between the two major parties, and then are required to align themselves among three parties in state elections. The Midwest's third parties died as separate entities in the 1940s and were forced to merge into the major parties because the tide of national politics became too strong within their respective states for them to survive. With partisan attachments being forged in the fires of national politics and Republican and Democratic state leaders aligning themselves with the policies of their national parties, it became impossible for parties like the Wisconsin Progressives or the Farmer-Laborites of Minnesota to maintain their separate identities and retain a reasonable chance of electoral success. "The national electoral alignment was simply too strong a force to counter" (Epstein 1986, 124–36).

More recently, state-level third parties formed around colorful and prominent leaders who were once statewide officeholders withered after these individuals ceased to head the ticket. Thus, former Republican U.S.



Senator Lowell Weicker led his Connecticut party to victory in the 1990 gubernatorial election with 40 percent of the vote, only to see the party fade as an electoral force (19 percent of the vote) in 1994 when he was no longer its candidate. Similarly, the Alaska Independence party, with former Republican Governor Walter Hickel as its candidate, won the governorship in 1990 with 39 percent of the vote. However, without Hickel to lead the ticket in 1994, the party failed to retain the governorship and garnered only 13 percent of the vote.

The most colorful of the successful third-party gubernatorial candidates of the 1990s has been the former professional wrestler, Jesse Ventura of Minnesota. With the benefit of a generous state campaign public funding grant and a unique campaign style that captured free media coverage, he was elected on the Reform Party ticket in 1998. However, amid the turmoil within the Reform Party nationally in 2000, he left the party and formed the Independence Party of Minnesota. As of 2001, the party had not elected any state officials and its only legislator was a state senator who renounced his affiliation with the party after being reelected in 2000. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Independence party is a party in name only and is essentially a personal vehicle of Ventura. In Maine, Governor Angus King has twice been elected as an independent (1994 and 1998) and has shown no sign of seeking to create a state-level party—further evidence that even popular officeholders cannot buck the tides of national politics to create viable state third parties.

Although the once-viable midwestern third parties of the 1930s and 1940s could not survive the pull of national electoral alignments, and parties based upon the followings of prominent personalities have been unable to sustain electoral support, research of James Gimpel has shown that some ingredients for multiparty systems do still exist in selected western states. These are states in which the partisan cleavages created by national and state issues are askew, thereby creating an opening for third parties. Gimpel concludes, however, that even in these western states there is virtually no prospect for development of viable minor parties because institutional arrangements (e.g., direct primary, single-member districts) that push “would-be-third-party voters to a choice of two candidates for office running under national party labels” are not apt to be changed in the foreseeable future (1996, 207).

### **PRESERVING THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

The historic role attributed to third and minor parties has been to raise and publicize issues of societal concern, and then force one or both of the

major parties to confront these problems, as exemplified by the Free Soil party (1848), People's party (Populists of 1892), Progressive parties of 1912 and 1924, American Independent party (1968), the independent candidacy of Ross Perot in 1992, and Ralph Nader's Green Party in 2000. The fact that none of these parties achieved the presidency or majority status in a single chamber of the Congress is testimony to the ability of the major parties to adjust to these challenges and absorb many of the minor-party dissidents into their own ranks. That the same two major parties have been able to so completely dominate electoral politics for so long suggests that these institutions have the capacity and durability to adjust to the issues and problems of the early twenty-first century as well.

There is even reason to believe that the much heralded role of minor parties as agents that publicize issues and force the major parties to adopt them may be exaggerated. For example, it has been claimed that the Socialist party platform advocating a minimum wage for more than twenty years was crucial to its gaining acceptance by the major parties. However, we have no way to know whether the minimum wage would have been adopted in the 1930s had there been no Socialist party. As Paul Allen Beck has noted,

The evidence suggests . . . that the major parties grasp new programs and proposals in their "time of ripeness" when . . . such a course is therefore politically useful to the parties. In their earlier, maturing time, new issues need not depend upon major parties for their advocacy. Interest groups, the mass media, influential individuals, and factions within the major parties may perform the propagandizing role, often more effectively than a minor party. (1997, 49)

If the test of a viable party system is whether it has contributed to citizen control of their leaders, maintenance of political stability, and relatively effective policy making, then the American two-party system has met the test. Rather than concern themselves with giving greater play to third and minor parties, Americans would be better advised to pay attention to the problems being created for the two great major parties by the expanding influence within these parties of activists and allied interest groups whose views are often out of line with the preferences and concerns of party rank-and-file voters and the voting public in general.

# Public Opinion and the American Party System: Possibilities for Multiparty Politics

JOHN C. GREEN

How much public support is there for an expansion of multiparty politics in the United States? This question lies at the heart of much of the debate over American party politics as the twenty-first century begins, whether one seeks to understand the precise role of minor parties in the current system (see chapter 2), advocates the development of a multiparty alternative (see chapter 3), or defends the two-party system (see chapter 4). Of course, any assessment of the possibilities for multiparty politics in America must be highly speculative. The dominance of the two-party system colors all public evaluations of political parties, for good and ill, and most support for alternatives arises during periods of political dissatisfaction that may have little to do with political parties.

With these limitations in mind, this chapter sketches out public preferences for the two-party system and the major alternatives to it. Based on dissatisfaction with the current parties and issue distinctiveness, we find some basis for an expansion of multiparty politics in the near future. The development of "progressive" and "centrist" minor parties is most likely, while the growth of a "conservative" minor party is less so. However, the support for such minor parties may not be strong enough to overcome the dominance of the two-party system without sustained effort by minor-party activists and entrepreneurial candidates—a daunting prospect in and of itself.

## PUBLIC PREFERENCES FOR PARTY SYSTEMS

In the 1990s, there were frequent and strong expressions of public support for alternatives to the two-party system. For example, in 1992, a *Time/CNN* poll found that 58 percent of the public favored a "third political party"; in



1995, a similar survey produced 56 percent in favor. In 1996, a CBS/*NYTimes* poll found that 53 percent of the public agreed with the need for a "new political party," and in 1999, a Gallup poll found that 67 percent of the public favored a strong "third party" in the 2000 election. These attitudes mark a sharp contrast with the distant and recent past: in 1938 only 13 percent told a Roper poll that they wanted a "third party," and in 1968 only 27 percent held this opinion.<sup>1</sup> Thus, interest in a "third" party increased fivefold between the second terms of Franklin Roosevelt and Bill Clinton, and doubled from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. A variety of additional evidence supports these patterns of opinion (Collet 1996; Bibby and Maisel 1998).

On the one hand, these findings are hardly surprising given prominent "third" party presidential bids in the past three decades (Wallace in 1968; Anderson in 1980; Perot in 1992 and 1996; and Nader in 1996 and 2000), the growing number of minor-party candidates at the congressional, state, and local levels, and a few prominent minor-party victories in recent times—such as governors Jesse Ventura in Minnesota, Lowell Weicker in Connecticut, Angus King in Maine, and Walter Hickel in Alaska (Collet 1997; Collet and Hansen 1996). On the other hand, there is some doubt as to the depth of support for alternatives to the two-party system. For instance, the Democrats and Republicans are usually more popular than the two-party system in the abstract, and the public is deeply skeptical of the ability of minor-party candidates to actually govern. Although the discontent with contemporary party politics is real enough, support for particular alternatives to the two-party system is much less clear (Collet 1996, 436–37).

Whatever else such attitudes mean, observers agree that they are part of a general decline in public support for the two-party system (Dennis 1975). Central to this judgment as a phenomenon is the increase in partisan independents of the public (Wattenberg 1998). Although most independents do, in fact, have significant partisan leanings (Keith et al. 1992), their weaker ties to the major parties make them a prime source of electoral instability, from ticket splitting among major-party candidates to support for independent and minor-party campaigns (Beck 1999; Gold 1995). There are many reasons for this loosening of identification with the major parties (see Shafer 1998). Commonly recognized culprits are the expansion of candidate-centered politics, fueled by the mass media and other technological innovations. In addition, the major parties have often responded inadequately to rapid social and economic change, the rise of new issues, and the challenges of managing the public sector. The net result is a system where the major parties can be more easily challenged and where the occasions for such challenges are more common. Collet sums up the situation this way: "Ultimately, it is difficult to know whether the country is merely in the midst of a period of extreme discontent that will

eventually subside or whether public angst will persist until genuine structural change occurs" (1996, 435).

Table 5.1 reports on possible support for "genuine structural change" in the party system during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Respondents were asked which of three systems they preferred: a multiparty system ("the growth of one or more new parties that could effectively challenge the Democrats and Republicans"); a candidate-focused system ("elections in which candidates run as individuals without party labels"); or the traditional two-party system ("a continuation of the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans"). The first two options are rejections of the two-party system in the abstract, although a candidate-focused option could be accommodated by either a new multiparty or the traditional two-party systems. Indeed, many scholars would argue that candidate-centered politics now dominates both major and minor parties (Wattenberg 1991).

Not surprisingly, the high point of support for a multiparty system was in 1992, Perot's banner year, when a little less than one-third of the public preferred multiparty politics. Its low point came in 1994, the tumultuous year when the Republicans took control of the Congress for the first time in forty years. Support for candidate-focused politics also reached its high

**TABLE 5.1**  
**Public Support of Multiparty, Candidate-Focused,**  
**and the Two-Party Systems, 1992–1998**

<i>Which of the following would you prefer? (Choose only one.)</i>					
	1992	1994	1996	1998	Mean 1992–1998
The growth of one or more new parties that could effectively challenge the Democrats and Republicans.	31	23	28	25	27
Elections in which candidates run as individuals without party labels.	39	37	31	36	35
A continuation of the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans.	30	40	41	39	38
ALL	100	100	100	100	100
N	(1,256)	(1,770)	(1,714)	(1,281)	

Source: 1992 Harris Poll (7/92); 1994, 1996, and 1998 National Election Studies.



point in 1992 with almost two-fifths of the electorate, and its low point was in 1996, when President Clinton was easily reelected. The two-party option had its nadir in 1992, with only three out of ten supporters, but then increased to two-fifths of the electorate in 1994, a figure which persisted until 1998.<sup>3</sup> The average levels of support across the "volatile 1990s" usefully summarize these patterns: a little more than one-quarter of the electorate wanted to move toward a multiparty system, a little more than one-third liked candidate-focused politics, and a little less than two-fifths backed the two-party system.

Unfortunately, this question was not asked in 2000, but other evidence suggests that these patterns may have continued early in the 2000 campaign (Gallup 1999). For ease of presentation, we will explore these attitudes with data from 1996 National Elections Study; 1996 is a good year for such an exploration because it falls halfway between the 1992 Perot campaign, one of the most successful minor-party efforts ever, and the 2000 election, one of the closest and most controversial in American history.

How are these attitudes related to identification with the two major parties? Table 5.2 provides an answer by cross-tabulating the party-system preferences with the standard measure of party identification, collapsed into Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Here the Independents include respondents who leaned Democratic and Republican, for as we shall see, weak attachments to the major parties are especially relevant to the question at hand. The resultant nine categories, which we will call "party groupings," divide up the electorate fairly evenly, with no grouping as large as one-fifth of the total.

Multiparty supporters were quite diverse, with Multiparty Democrats and Multiparty Independents each making up a little more than one-third and Multiparty Republicans a little more than one-quarter of the total. It stands to reason that these groupings are the most likely to support new parties should they develop, all other things being equal. Candidate-focused respondents are also diverse, with nearly one-half Independents,

**TABLE 5.2**  
**Party Groupings: Support for Rival Party Systems**  
**and Two-Party Identification, 1996 (N = 1,714)**

	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>ALL</i>
Multiparty System	10.2	9.9	7.6	27.7
Candidate-Focused	10.1	14.6	6.7	31.4
Two-Party System	18.1	7.6	15.0	40.7
ALL	38.4	32.2	29.3	100.0

*Source:* 1996 National Election Study.

*Note:* Entries are percent of entire sample; see text and notes for definition of variables.



about one-third Democrats, and the remaining one-fifth Republicans. These groupings represent citizens who might readily support minor-party or independent candidates should they arise, all other things being equal. Not surprisingly, Two-Party Democrats (almost one-half) and Two-Party Republicans (more than one-third) are more numerous than the Two-Party Independents (less than one-fifth) among the backers of the two-party system. These groupings plausibly represent the most loyal supporters of the traditional system, even if they are not strongly connected to either major party at present.

Multiparty and Candidate-focused supporters could present serious challenges to the Democrats and Republicans if multiparty politics were to become more common. For example, each grouping represents about one-quarter of the Democratic and Republican identifiers, respectively. Or put another way, supporters of the two-party system account for only about one-half of all the major-party identifiers. The potential challenge is even greater among independents, citizens the major parties must pursue with some vigor under normal circumstances. Multiparty Independents accounted for a little less than one-third and Candidate-focused Independents made up almost one-half of all Independents in the public, with the Two-party Independents making up the remaining one-quarter. In their own way, these figures reveal the coalitional nature of the major parties in the two-party system.

It is not entirely clear, of course, how significant these preferences might be. Support for multiparty and candidate-focused politics may simply reflect the public's desire for more choices at the ballot box. There is no way of knowing if these groups would strongly support minor parties and independent candidates in the face of major-party competition. In fact, many of these respondents might readily respond to better candidates and platforms from the Democrats and Republicans (see, for example, Abramson et al. 1995). Nevertheless, the party groupings offer a useful baseline against which to assess the possibility that a significant number of citizens could abandon the two-party system if "pushed" by dissatisfaction with the parties, and "pulled" by distinctive issue positions (Partin et al. 1994, 1996).

#### **PARTY GROUPINGS AND THE "PUSH" OF DISSATISFACTION WITH PARTY POLITICS**

Could dissatisfaction with the major parties push some of these party groupings to support minor parties? A good place to begin answering this question is with table 5.3, which reports minor-party support in the 1990s, including self-reported votes for minor parties in 1992 and 1996 (the bulk

of which were Perot votes, although other minor-party ballots were also included), and then affect toward the Reform Party, the "third" party in 1996.<sup>4</sup> The patterns are quite instructive. Note first that Independents were the most supportive of minor parties on all counts: with no exceptions, the Independents were more likely to vote for minor-party candidates and support the Reform Party than were their major-party counterparts. For example, 37 percent of Multiparty Independents cast minor-party ballots in 1992, compared with 22 percent for both the Multiparty Democrats and Republicans. This pattern even holds for the Two-Party groupings. Thus, partisan independence is a critical source of weakness in the party system, as the literature suggests (Gold 1995).

In addition, supporters of multiparty and candidate-focused politics were much more likely to support minor parties than their two-party counterparts. Compare, for instance, Multiparty Democrats with the Two-Party Democrats, where the 1992 minor-party vote was four times greater (16 percent to 4 percent). In fact, there was just one exception to this pattern (Candidate-focused Republicans and their lesser support for the Reform Party). Interestingly, the Multiparty groupings tended to report

**TABLE 5.3**  
**Public Support for Minor Parties**  
**by Party Groupings, 1996 (N = 1,714)**

	<i>Minor Party Vote 1992</i>	<i>Minor Party Vote 1996</i>	<i>Reform Party Support 1996</i>	<i>Index of Maximum Support</i>
<b>Multiparty</b>				
Democrats	16	13*	20*	26
Independents	37*	22*	34*	46*
Republicans	22*	13*	15	37*
<b>Candidate-Focused</b>				
Democrats	17	8	13	22*
Independents	37*	20*	19	36*
Republicans	25*	8	8*	30*
<b>Two-Party</b>				
Democrats	4*	1*	5*	7*
Independents	18	4*	13	18*
Republicans	9*	1*	9*	8*
<b>ALL</b>	18	9	16	24

Source: 1996 National Election Study.

Note: Entries are percent within each group; see text and notes for definition of variables.

\*p > .05



more minor-party support than their counterparts among the Candidate-focused groupings, although there was little difference in many cases. Presumably some of the Candidate-focused respondents backed major-party candidates over minor-party alternatives. Thus, a preference for alternatives to the two-party system affected minor-party support in a fashion analogous to partisan independence.

The final column in table 5.3 is an "index of maximum support" for minor parties, which counts any support for minor parties reported elsewhere in the table.<sup>5</sup> This index presents the most optimistic measure of minor-party backing and neatly summarizes the results of the table. Overall, backing for minor parties extends to about one-sixth of the public. As one might expect, the Independents always had the highest relative level of minor-party support compared with their more partisan counterparts, while the Multiparty and Candidate-focused groupings always outperformed the comparable Two-Party groupings. Multiparty Independents and Republicans were the most supportive of minor parties, followed by Candidate-focused Independents and Republicans. Interestingly, Multiparty and Candidate-focused Democrats were not especially supportive of minor parties compared with the public as a whole, although they were more supportive than their Two-Party counterparts.

How dissatisfied were these party grouping with the current party system? Table 5.4 reports on four measures of dissatisfaction commonly thought to push voters to support minor parties (Guth and Green 1996). The first measure is dissatisfaction with the 1996 major-party presidential candidates, Clinton and Dole.<sup>6</sup> Overall, this measure shows relatively low levels of dissatisfaction. Republicans were the least happy with the candidates: almost one-third of the Multiparty and Candidate-focused Republicans had relatively high scores. Although the Two-Party Republicans were much less dismayed, they were more so than the Two-Party Democrats and Independents. In contrast, all the Democratic groupings reported similarly lower levels of dissatisfaction. Although the Independent groupings showed higher levels of dissatisfaction than the Democrats, the Two-Party Independents were the least troubled. These patterns may reflect the special circumstances of the 1996 race: in years with a weaker Democratic presidential candidate, the Democrats might have expressed similar dismay.

The second measure is dislike of the major parties themselves.<sup>7</sup> Here the numbers are uniformly lower than for candidates, revealing relatively little dissatisfaction with the major parties. The Independent groupings tended to express the highest levels of dissatisfaction, although the Candidate-focused Republicans were also high. As one might expect, the Multiparty and Candidate-focused groupings were more dissatisfied than their Two-Party counterparts. Overall, Democrats were once again the least unhappy.



**TABLE 5.4**  
**Public Dissatisfaction with the**  
**Two-Party System by Party Groupings, 1996 (N = 1,714)**

	<i>Dislike Presidential Candidates</i>	<i>Dislike Major Parties</i>	<i>Dissatisfied American Democracy</i>	<i>Parties Don't Care</i>	<i>Index of Maximum Dissatisfaction</i>
<b>Multiparty</b>					
Democrats	5*	9	20*	25	40
Independents	16	17*	25*	31*	46*
Republicans	32*	14	15*	36*	50*
<b>Candidate-Focused</b>					
Democrats	9*	12	20	20*	38
Independents	17*	10	26*	36*	51*
Republicans	30*	16*	29*	36*	55*
<b>Two-Party</b>					
Democrats	5*	7*	11*	14*	25*
Independents	10	10	22	20*	38
Republicans	16	8*	15*	15*	39
<b>ALL</b>	14	12	19	25	41

*Source:* 1996 National Election Study.

*Note:* Entries are percent within each group; see text and notes for definition of variables.

\* $p > .05$

The next column in table 5.4 reports the percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied with how well "American democracy works." Overall, this complaint was not particularly common, although it was greater than the dislike of candidates and the major parties. But once again, the Independent groupings tended to have higher scores (the Candidate-focused Republicans were again an exception), and the Multiparty and Candidate-focused groupings were more troubled than their Two-Party counterparts. The fourth column shows the percentage of each grouping that agreed that the "parties don't care what ordinary people think," an attitude expressed by one-quarter of the respondents.<sup>8</sup> Here the pattern is much the same as in the previous column, with Independent, Multiparty and Candidate-focused groupings showing markedly larger levels of unhappiness than the Two-Party groupings. However, another exception appears here: Multiparty Republicans match the Candidate-focused Republicans for the highest negative scores.

How do these measures of dissatisfaction fit together? The final column in table 5.4 is an "index of maximum dissatisfaction" with the current party system.<sup>9</sup> It reports the percentage of each party grouping that men-

tioned at least one of the measures presented elsewhere in the table. Overall, this measure of maximum dissatisfaction was about twice as high as the index of maximum minor-party support, encompassing two-fifths of the public. Here the previously noted GOP dismay comes to a head, with more than one-half of the Multiparty and Candidate-focused Republicans reporting at least one complaint against the system. These GOP groupings scored markedly higher than the Two-Party Republicans, but this last group scored higher than the other backers of the two-party system. Candidate-focused and Multiparty Independents were also highly dissatisfied, but marginally less so than their Republican counterparts. Once again, the Multiparty and Candidate-focused Democrats were not especially dissatisfied, although more so than the Two-Party Democrats.

One further measure is worth considering and that is voter turnout, low levels of which are often taken to be evidence of dissatisfaction with the current system. Indeed, turnout was low in the 1990s—55 percent and 49 percent of the eligible electorate in 1992 and 1996, respectively. Overall, 1996 turnout was lowest for the Independent grouping, especially the Candidate-focused and Two-Party Independents. Candidate-focused Democrats and Republicans turned out somewhat less than their Two-Party counterparts, but Multiparty groups voted at higher rates. Thus, turnout may well be linked to dissatisfaction for partisan independents and candidate-focused citizens, but not for backers of multiparty politics (data not shown).

Taken together, tables 5.3 and 5.4 suggest that our nine party groupings usefully identify potential defections from the two-party system as well as its most loyal supporters. Partisan independence and preferences for multiparty and candidate-focused politics help account for minor-party backing in the 1990s as well as common forms of dissatisfaction with the current parties. In contrast, partisan identifiers and supporters of the two-party system are the most loyal and satisfied elements of the electorate. These patterns suggest that support for multiparty and candidate-focused politics, especially among the Independents, could serve as the basis for future minor-party forays, and perhaps a more permanent challenge to the structure of the American party system.

However, such possibilities must be evaluated with great caution: the levels of minor-party support and dissatisfaction reported here may not be enough to sustain more than fleeting rebellions against the major parties. In fact, the relatively high level of dismay among Republicans in 1996 supports such a caution, since such patterns surely represent the special circumstances of a disappointing campaign. In sum, the relative lack of dissatisfaction with major-party candidates, the major parties themselves, and the performance of American democracy may not be sufficient to push key party groupings away from the major parties to any significant degree without a significant pull from ideology or issues.

**PARTY GROUPINGS AND THE "PULL"  
OF ISSUE DISTINCTIVENESS**

Are there issue differences that might pull some of these party groupings away from the major parties? Table 5.5 offers some evidence on this point, covering ideology and five issues that have played a role in recent minor-party politics: government services and spending, the federal budget deficit, trade restrictions, abortion, and environmental protection.<sup>10</sup> For ease of presentation, the issue positions are expressed in terms of a "net liberalism" score, calculated by subtracting the conservative positions from the liberal ones for the groupings as a whole. (A positive entry indicates that a party grouping on balance holds a liberal position and a negative entry indicates that it holds conservative position. Scores near zero reveal no bias either way.) Overall, these measures show considerable variation across the party groupings.

A good place to begin is with self-identified ideology. The Two-Party groupings showed an expected pattern: Two-Party Republicans were (by far) the most conservative at -84 percent, Two-Party Democrats the most

**TABLE 5.5**  
**Ideology and Issue Positions**  
**by Party Groupings, 1996 (N = 1,714)**

	<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Services Spending</i>	<i>Budget Deficit</i>	<i>Restrict Imports</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Environment Protection</i>
<b>Multiparty</b>						
Democrats	+38*	+25*	+17*	+6	+26*	+52*
Independents	-13*	-17*	-19*	-12*	+16*	+23*
Republicans	-75*	-50*	-22*	-36*	-29*	+7*
<b>Candidate-Focused</b>						
Democrats	+6*	+23*	-3*	+35*	0	+27*
Independents	-20	-13*	-20*	+4	+7*	+42*
Republicans	-66*	-46*	-36*	+ 8	-16*	0*
<b>Two-Party</b>						
Democrats	+8*	+16*	+4*	+22*	+8*	+25*
Independents	-33*	+2	-19*	-1*	+17*	+5*
Republicans	-84*	-47*	-22*	-10*	-20*	-3*
<b>ALL</b>	-24	-6	-12	+5	+3	+21

Source: 1996 National Election Study.

Note: Entries are percent within each group; "+" are net liberal position, "-" are net conservative position; see text and notes for definition of variables.

\*p > .05



liberal at +8, and the Two-Party Independents fell in between, but with a conservative leaning of -33. This pattern reveals both the standard ideological divisions in the two-party system as well as the shift to a right that occurred in the 1990s, especially among Republicans (Ladd 1995).

The other two sets of party groupings showed the same pattern by partisanship, revealing the continuing relevance of the major parties to national politics. However, the Multiparty groupings differed from their Two-Party counterparts. For example, Multiparty Democrats were on balance much more liberal than Two-Party Democrats (+38 to +8 percent), while Multiparty Independents (-13 to -33 percent) and Multiparty Republicans (-75 to -84 percent) are less conservative than their counterparts.

The Candidate-focused groupings were more complex: Candidate-focused Democrats closely resembled Two-Party Democrats on ideology and were thus far less liberal than the Multiparty Democrats. Meanwhile, the Candidate-focused Republicans were less conservative than the Multiparty or Two-Party Republicans. And the Candidate-focused Independents were between their counterparts, leaning toward the Multiparty Independents.

These findings suggest that there was some substance behind respondents' preferences for alternatives to the two-party system, especially when combined with self-identified partisanship. The Multiparty groupings contained a large number of citizens out of step with the ideological posture of the major parties, or in the case of Independents, their counterparts committed to the two-party system. The Candidate-focused groupings also revealed such disparities, but to a lesser extent, as might be expected of individuals who disdain party labels of any kind. The other issues in table 5.5 reveal some similar differences, although the patterns are often more variegated.

The most consistent pattern occurs on the question of government services and spending, a key "scope of government question" that has divided the major parties for more than sixty years. True to form, the Two-Party Democrats were the most liberal, Two-Party Republicans the most conservative, and the Two-Party Independents the most moderate. In comparison, the Multiparty Democrats were more liberal, Multiparty Independents more conservative, and the Multiparty Republicans roughly the same as their Two-Party counterparts. Here the Candidate-focused groupings followed suit: Candidate-focused Democrats were nearly as liberal as the Multiparty Democrats and the Candidate-focused Independents approached the conservatism of the Multiparty Independents. The Candidate-focused Republicans closely resembled their co-partisans on the scope of government.

What about the federal budget deficit, one of Perot's key issues in 1992 and 1996? The next column reports perceptions of whether the budget

deficit declined or increased under President Clinton. The Two-Party groupings have a fairly negative view of the deficit, with even the Two-Party Democrats basically divided on whether the deficit increased or decreased while their party held the White House. Interestingly, the Multiparty Democrats were the only group that substantially believed the deficit had declined (+17). All the other groupings had a more negative assessment, with the Candidate-focused Republicans having by far the largest score (-36). Of course, this grouping, along with the Candidate-focused Independents, Multiparty Independents, and Multiparty Republicans, was a strong backer of Perot and the Reform Party (see table 5.4).

Another issue stressed by Perot was restriction of foreign imports, culminating in vociferous opposition to trade agreements such as NAFTA and GATT. Trade was a cross-cutting issue in terms of partisanship in 1996. For example, Two-Party Democrats on balance favored trade restrictions, while Two-Party Republicans favored free trade and Two-Party Independents were evenly divided. Multiparty Democrats supported trade restrictions at a more modest level than their Two-Party counterparts; Multiparty Republicans were the most adamant free traders; and Multiparty Independents were somewhat less so. However, the strongest proponents of trade restrictions were the Candidate-focused Democrats; Candidate-focused Independents and Republicans were less supportive of restrictions. These patterns on the deficit and trade restrictions reveal the tensions within the Perot coalition.

Another important issue is abortion, which has actually spawned a minor party at the state level (the Right to Life Party), and which Pat Buchanan tried to graft to the Reform Party in 2000. Here, too, the political spectrum was jumbled. Among the Two-Party groupings, the Republicans were the most pro-life, but it was the Independents who were the most pro-choice, followed by the Democrats, who were very modestly so. It is the Multiparty grouping which shows the strongest positions: the Democrats were the most pro-choice and the Republicans most pro-life. The Multiparty Independents were also pro-choice, resembling the Two-Party Independents. The Candidate-focused groupings were just as divided on abortion: the Democrats were evenly balanced, the Independents modestly pro-choice, and the Republicans pro-life. These numbers reveal the challenges that abortion presents to party politics of any sort. They also reveal one reason Buchanan had difficulties in 2000: many of the groupings that backed Perot on deficits and trade restrictions were pro-choice or moderate on abortion.

The final issue is environmental protection, a signature priority of the Green Party and Ralph Nader's 1996 and 2000 campaigns. The Two-Party Democrats favored such protection, while their Independent and Republican counterparts were evenly divided. The Multiparty Democrats were by



far the strongest advocates for the environment, followed by the Candidate-focused Independents. The Multiparty Independents and Candidate-focused Democrats also favored environmental protection, but at a level similar to that of the Two-Party Democrats. The Multiparty Republicans were more modestly "green," and the Candidate-focused Republicans evenly divided. Clearly, the Green Party had an issue to work with in 1996 and 2000, although the major parties had strong incentive to advocate environmental protection as well. In some cases, at least, these issue differences might be enough to pull some party groupings away from the two-party system. However, in most cases, the issue distinctiveness revealed might not be enough in and of themselves.

Did these party groupings have distinctive socio-demographic characteristics that might foster a separate political identity? Most of the social traits associated with the major parties undergird these groupings. For example, the Democratic groups contained more women, nonwhites, and lower-status citizens than the Republican groups. There were, however, a few interesting differences. Multiparty Democrats were relatively well-educated and less religious (measured by worship attendance) than the Two-Party Democrats, and were most common in the West. Multiparty Republicans were also most common in the West, but they tended to be older, deeply religious men—much like the Two-Party Republicans. Multiparty Independents tended to be younger, well-educated, less religious, and located in the Northeast. The Candidate-focused groupings also had some distinctive demography. Candidate-focused Democrats were more female, less educated, and most common in the Midwest. In contrast, the Candidate-focused Independents and Republicans tended to be younger southerners, with the key difference between them being religion: the Independents were less religious and the Republicans much more so.

### THE PROSPECTS FOR MINOR PARTIES

It is useful to summarize our findings on the nine party groupings, recognizing that there is considerable individual variation within each category. Not surprisingly, the two-party groupings represent the core of the party system. The Two-Party Democrats were slightly liberal, but especially on spending/services, trade restrictions, and the environment. They showed more than a passing resemblance to Bill Clinton's "New Democrats." The Two-Party Republicans were strongly conservative, especially on services/spending, the deficit, and abortion. This combination resembles Newt Gingrich's take on the Grand Old Party. Two-Party Independents showed the classic signs of swing voters, being on balance conservative, particularly on economic matters, but



pro-choice on abortion. It is worth recalling that these groupings were the least supportive of minor parties in the 1990s, and the least dissatisfied with current party politics. Traditional demographic differences undergirded these partisan tendencies.

The Multiparty groupings showed striking deviations from their Two-Party counterparts. The Multiparty Democrats were the most liberal on nearly all issues, including economic issues, abortion, and especially the environment. This grouping seems to have a special demographic base among well-educated and less religious westerners. The Green Party and other "progressive" parties surely could find strong support here, perhaps building on Nader's showing in 2000 (see chapter 8). However, this grouping was not especially supportive of minor parties in the 1990s compared with other groupings, nor was it especially dissatisfied with current party politics. Thus, a future "progressive party" may derive less from the push of dissatisfaction. This grouping was sufficiently different in all respects from the Two-Party Democrats, particularly "New Democrats," to suggest the possibility for a successful "progressive" party.

Multiparty Republicans were strongly conservative, but combined pro-life and free trade positions. This grouping also appears to have a special demographic constituency in the West, but made up of the traditionally religious with a penchant for the free market. Pat Buchanan looked for support among these individuals in 2000, probably in vain (see chapter 7). This grouping displayed strong support for minor parties in the 1990s and a high degree of dissatisfaction with current party politics. Thus, a future "conservative party" may derive less from the pull of issues than from the push of dissatisfaction. Clearly some new issue synthesis would be necessary to mobilize this grouping—and "compassionate conservatism" might allow the GOP to keep them within the major-party fold. Indeed, this grouping so closely resembled the Two-Party Republicans that a successful "conservative" minor party may be unlikely.

Multiparty Independents were conservative overall and on all the economic issues, but were also pro-choice and pro-environment. This grouping seemed to have special constituency among well-educated and less religious citizens in the Northeast. It could serve as the "anti-deficit" wing of a centrist party, molded after Perot (see chapter 7). Perhaps an effort led by Arizona Senator John McCain could take advantage of this grouping (Frank 2001), which scored the highest on minor-party support in the 1990s and had high levels of dissatisfaction with current party politics. Here both the pull of issues and push of dissatisfaction could operate together.

The Candidate-focused groups present a more complex picture. Candidate-focused Independents were moderate conservatives, except on the deficit (conservative) and the environment (very liberal). Char-

acterized by young, less religious southerners, they could serve as the "center of the center" in a centrist party, joining with the Multiparty Independents. They were very supportive of minor parties in the 1990s and very dissatisfied with current party politics. However, it might be difficult to induce this grouping to support party politics of any kind, and they could easily support major-party candidates.

The Candidate-focused Democrats were moderates, supportive of trade restrictions, more government spending, and environmental protection—but divided on abortion and deficits. Characterized by less educated, midwestern women, this grouping is one a "progressive" party would surely want to woo. However, this grouping could be induced to stay with the Democrats on the issues. Their relative lack of strong minor-party support and high level of dissatisfaction with current party politics points in this direction as well. Another possibility is that this grouping would contribute to a "protectionist" wing of a "centrist" party. Here the pull of issues and push of dissatisfaction opens many possibilities.

Finally, Candidate-focused Republicans were more moderate conservatives with a special distaste for budget deficits. Characterized by young, religious southerners, they could contribute to a "conservative" minor party, particularly given their level of minor-party support in the 1990s and their very high level of dissatisfaction with current party politics. However, just a bit of moderation on the part of the Republican Party may keep this grouping in the major-party fold. Like the Multiparty Republicans, the pull of issues and push of dissatisfaction may not be enough to escape the GOP fold, especially if "compassionate conservatism" becomes more than a slogan.

## CONCLUSION

What, then, can we conclude about the prospects for an expansion of multiparty politics in the early twenty-first century? First, a considerable number of citizens (six in ten) express support in the abstract for alternatives to the traditional two-party system. Of these, roughly one-quarter want a multiparty system and more than one-third prefer a candidate-focused system. However, the single largest block of voters (four in ten) supported the two-party system. Furthermore, advocates of all three systems were distributed across self-identified partisanship, dividing the electorate into a variety of party groupings.

Second, these groupings were associated with different levels of support for minor parties and dissatisfaction with the current party system. Both partisan independence and preference for multiparty and candidate-focused politics contributed to alienation from the two-party system,



while identification with the major parties and commitment to the two-party system showed the opposite pattern.

Third, the Multiparty and Candidate-focused groupings were distinctive in terms of ideology and issue positions compared with their Two-Party counterparts. A "progressive" minor party, like the Greens, and a centrist minor party, modeled on Perot, would appear to be the most likely to develop in the near term. A "conservative" party is less likely, especially one modeled after Pat Buchanan's 2000 Reform Party campaign. It is worth noting that these potential minor parties are often connected to new "postmaterial" values and other new issues, and not the traditional economic concerns that define the major-party coalitions (see Collet 1997).

Thus, one can fairly conclude that there is some basis in public opinion for an expansion of multiparty politics in America. However, the relatively high level of discontent with the current party system may not be sufficient by itself to push any of the party groupings toward a structural change in the two-party system. Likewise, the high degree of issue distinctiveness of some party groupings may not be sufficient by itself to pull the party groupings into a new system. Of course, a major crisis would increase these relatively high levels of discontent and issue distinctiveness enough to encourage minor-party development. Absent such a crisis, minor-party activists and candidates will be needed to exploit these party groupings and create successful minor parties.

Advocates of multiparty politics will surely be pleased by these findings (see chapter 3). But the prospects for creating successful minor parties are daunting. As other chapters in this book document (see chapters 2 and 10), minor parties face strong legal obstacles, from ballot access to campaign finance. But even if these legal barriers are removed, the fundamental structure of American government would still work against the new political parties in their quest to mobilize their potential constituencies. Indeed, for multiparty politics to flourish, fundamental institutional changes may be necessary, such as the introduction of proportional representation. Perhaps the most plausible institutional change would be the spread of fusion ballots, such as are employed in New York State (see chapter 9). It is easy to imagine how minor parties based in our party groupings could exercise great influence by endorsing like-minded major-party candidates as well as their own office-seekers.

Of course, achieving even a fusion ballot, not to mention more fundamental changes, will require decades of minor-party activism. And the quality of such activism would be crucial in any event. Simply put, minor parties will have to be organized and operated effectively to offer plausible alternatives to the major parties. On this score, the performance of minor parties and independent candidates in the 1990s was not especially



encouraging (see chapter 6). At the height of his popularity, Ross Perot was not a plausible presidential candidate to most Americans, and the subsequent trajectory of his Reform Party inspires even less confidence. Indeed, the failure of Pat Buchanan to build on the "legacy of Reform" in the 2000 campaign reveals the serious political challenges minor parties face. Although somewhat more successful in 2000, Ralph Nader and the Green Party faced similar hurdles.

Finally, the major parties cannot be counted out of the political process: under any circumstances, the major parties will be formidable competitors for power. Here we have chosen to highlight the possibilities for multiparty politics, but one can as readily see the strength of the two-party system in our findings. Parties that can regularly contain the issue diversity we have observed are not to be taken lightly. Consider, for example, the Democrats' success in 1996: under Bill Clinton's leadership, the party was a coalition of the Two-Party, Multiparty, and Candidate-focused Democrats, plus a healthy dose of support from all the independent groupings. And just four years later, George W. Bush and the Republicans were able to bring together the Two-Party, Multiparty, and Candidate-focused Republicans to forge a tie at the ballot box (and a win in overtime). Defenders of the two-party system can justifiably see the possibilities for the reinvigoration of major-party politics in these data (see chapter 4).

One thing is clear, however: the mix of party system preferences, discontent with current party politics, and issue distinctiveness makes minor-party forays of one kind or another a real possibility in the near future. If only for this reason, it is important to understand the prospects for multiparty politics in the United States.

## NOTES

1. The 1992 survey was conducted by *Time/CNN* in October (N = 1,653); the 1995 survey was conducted in April (N = 1,257); for more details see Collet (1996, 444). The 1999 survey was conducted by Gallup in July (N = 1,200); see Gallup (1999) for more details. The 1938 survey was conducted by Roper in May (N = 5,151) and the 1968 survey was conducted by Gallup in September (N = 1,500); for more details see Bibby and Maisel (1998, 75–76).

2. The Harris Poll was conducted in July 1992 (N = 1,256); for more details see Collet (1996, 447). The remaining data in table 5.1 come from the National Elections Studies of 1994, 1996, and 1998. These data were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, and the interpretation of these data is solely the responsibility of the author.

3. The National Election Studies 1993 Pilot Study also contained this question, and it showed 37 percent support for the two-party system, 32 percent for a

candidate-focused option, and 31 percent for a multiparty system (Collet 1996, 447). These figures suggest that support for the two-party system began to recover almost immediately after the 1992 election.

4. The first column in table 5.3 reports the recall of the 1992 presidential vote for Perot and other minor-party candidates, and the second column reports the presidential vote in 1996. Support for the Reform Party is as the top half (6–10) on a ten-point dislike-like scale (V961472).

5. The index of maximum support of minor parties was calculated by adding 1992 minor-party vote, 1996 minor-party vote, and strong support for the Reform Party, and then recoding the measure so that all measures of support equaled “1” and no measure of support equaled “0.” The percent of each group scoring a 1 is presented in table 5.3.

6. Dislike of the candidates was calculated as follows: For Democrats, a score of 50 degrees or less on the Clinton thermometer scale (V961019) was counted as dislike; for Republicans, the same measure was used for the Dole thermometer scale (V961020). For independents, the criterion was 50 degrees or less for both the Clinton and Dole thermometer scales.

7. Dislike of the major parties was calculated as follows. For Democrats, a score of 50 degrees or less on the Democratic Party thermometer scale (V960293) was counted as dislike; for Republicans, the same measure was used for the Republican Party thermometer scale (V960293). For independents, the criterion was 50 degrees or less for both the Democratic and Republican thermometer measures.

8. Dissatisfaction with the performance of American democracy was measured as the top two points (3, 4) on a four-point scale (V961459); lack of care for ordinary people by the parties was measured as the top two points (4, 5) on a five-point scale (V961468).

9. The index of maximum dissatisfaction with the party system was calculated by adding dislike of candidates, dislike of parties, belief that American democracy was not working, and belief that the parties don’t care, and then recoding the measure so that all measures of support equaled “1” and no measure of support equaled “0.” The percent of each group scoring a 1 is presented in table 5.4.

10. The net liberalism scale was calculated for ideology by subtracting self-identified conservatism (3) from liberalism (1) on a three-point scale (V960368); government service/spending by subtracting decreased spending (1–3) from increased spending (5–7) on a seven-point scale (V960450); assessment of the budget deficit by subtracting perceptions that it had increased (1) from perceptions it had decreased (2) under Clinton (V960392) on a three-point scale; restricting imports by subtracting positions opposed (5) from positions in favor (1) (V961327) on a three-point scale; abortion by subtracting pro-life positions (1, 2) from pro-choice position (4) on a four-point scale (V960503); environmental protection by subtracting opposition (4, 5, 6) from support (1, 2, 3) on a seven-point scale (V960524). In all cases, missing values were assigned moderate positions.

*Part II*

**Performance**



## Running against the Odds: Minor-Party Campaigns in Congressional and State Legislative Elections

PETER L. FRANCIA AND PAUL S. HERRNSON

Minor-party candidates are perennial underdogs in American elections. Despite the large proportion of the public that claims to no longer identify with either the Democratic or Republican parties, minor-party or independent candidates (hereafter referred to simply as “minor-party” candidates) held only three of the 1,935 upper chamber seats in state legislatures across the country in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Of the 5,440 lower chamber seats for the state legislature, a mere thirteen were held by members of a minor party. The numbers were equally modest for minor-party candidates who ran for Congress: such candidates hold none of the one hundred seats in the U.S. Senate and only two of the 435 seats in the U.S. House. Minor-party congressional candidates averaged just 2 percent of the vote from 1992 to 1998.<sup>2</sup>

Why do minor-party candidates continue to perform so poorly in elections compared with major-party candidates? Using a survey of candidates who ran for the U.S. House and state legislatures between 1996 and 1998, we demonstrate that inequities in resources and other campaign-related factors are important reasons (see the appendix for data sources). We focus on candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislatures because legislative races receive less attention than minor-party campaigns at the presidential level. Moreover, success at the legislative level is a critical component to forming a party capable of governing and setting policy.

After examining the recent growth of minor parties in congressional and state legislative elections, we compare the backgrounds, beliefs, and campaign activities of minor-party candidates with those of major-party candidates. The results reveal vast differences between the backgrounds and campaigns waged by minor-party candidates and their major-party counterparts. Minor-party candidates have less political experience, focus on different issues, run less professional campaigns, and cannot afford

advertising to nearly the same extent as major-party candidates. These differences are less pronounced at the state legislative level than at the congressional level. However, we conclude that the disparities in resources at both levels of office paint a dim picture for the future of minor-party candidates, and make it unlikely that there will be any serious challenges to the current two-party system in the near future.

## THE RISE OF MINOR-PARTY CANDIDATES

The strength of minor parties has waxed and waned over the course of the twentieth century. Minor-party candidates tend to perform best during periods of voter unrest and discontent (Ranney and Kendall 1956, 458), including difficult economic times, and when the major parties fail to address polarizing issues (Sundquist 1983). Although mild by historical standards, such factors helped fuel a rapid growth in minor-party congressional and state legislative candidates in the 1990s. At the congressional level, such candidates totaled 155 for the 1964 and 1966 elections, grew to 341 by the 1984 and 1986 elections, and jumped to 1,063 for the 1996 and 1998 elections.<sup>3</sup> In state legislative races, the percentage of minor-party and independent candidates also increased since the mid-1980s.

Minor-party candidates represented the full range of the ideological spectrum, spanning the left-wing Socialist Workers Party to the right-wing American Independent Party. Candidates have run under obscure party labels, including the Constitutional Party, Liberty Union Party, and the Peace and Freedom Party. At the state and local levels, minor parties sometimes have direct, cynical labels. In New Jersey, ballots have included candidates running on behalf of the Unbossed, Unbiased, Unbought Party and the Politicians Are Crooks Party. More familiar minor parties include the Natural Law, Green, and Reform parties, which began to field congressional candidates in the 1996 elections. The Green and Reform parties, in particular, gained increased recognition as a result of the attention generated by their presidential nominees, the well-known consumer advocate Ralph Nader of the Greens, Reform Party founder Ross Perot, and former Republican presidential candidate and conservative commentator Pat Buchanan, the Reform Party's 2000 candidate.

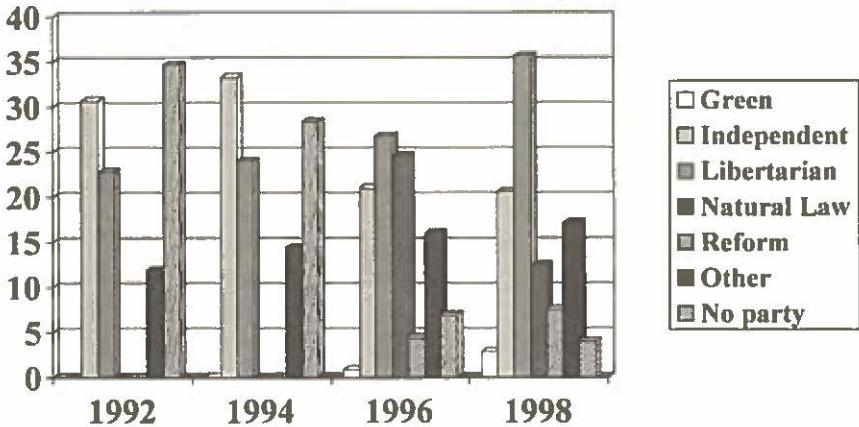
Currently seventy-nine Green candidates have won election to local office in twenty-one states, including thirty-two who were victorious in 2000. In the northern California town of Sebastopol, three of the five elected town officials belong to the Green Party, including the mayor. The Reform Party, by comparison, has roughly half as many elected officials as the Greens in less than ten states (Janofsky 2001).



However, of all the minor parties, the Libertarian Party has fielded the most congressional candidates during the past several elections (see figure 6.1). In the 1992 and 1994 elections, there were more than 200 Libertarian congressional candidates, a figure that rose to more than 300 by the 1996 and 1998 elections. In 2000, the Libertarian Party became the first minor party in eighty years to contest a majority of seats for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. It also fielded between 1,500 and 2,000 candidates across all office levels—more than all minor parties combined. There are 170 elected officials who belong to the Libertarian Party, including one in the Vermont state legislature.<sup>4</sup>

FIGURE 6.1

The Percent of Minor-Party U.S. House Candidates Belonging to the Green, Independent, Libertarian, Natural Law, Reform, and Other Parties, 1992–98



Source: Compiled from Federal Election Commission data.

## MINOR-PARTY CANDIDATES' BELIEFS AND ISSUES

Minor-party candidates hold a range of diverse ideas and beliefs. Libertarians, for example, are committed to the principle of limiting the size and growth of government. Greens, on the other hand, support stricter government regulations and laws for environmental protection and conservation. They have begun to increasingly stress broader social issues such as health care and living wages. Reform Party candidates favor trade protection and fiscal discipline reforms, such as a balanced budget amendment and a line-item veto for the president.

Despite these issue differences, minor-party candidates have some similarities. Minor-party candidates tend to hold firm ideological



convictions. Most reject pragmatic strategies that might build broader support for their party (Collet 1997, 118). Minor-party candidates also focus on similar issues on the campaign trail (see table 6.1). About 35 percent of minor-party congressional candidates and roughly 29 percent of state legislative candidates focused on economic or fiscal issues, such as tax reform—a proposal widely trumpeted by Libertarian and Reform Party candidates alike.

Another 28 percent of minor-party congressional candidates and 17 percent of minor-party state legislative candidates cited government reform and ethics as the most important issues in their campaigns. Most minor parties, including the Libertarian, Green, and Reform parties, decry political corruption in their party platforms, and support a variety of reforms. Roughly three of five minor-party congressional candidates and almost half of minor-party state legislative candidates, for example, favor term limits for incumbents, widely outpacing Democratic nonincumbent candidates and falling at about the same levels as Republican nonincumbents across both office levels. Term limits for members of Congress is one of the founding principles of the Reform Party and remains a particularly popular issue among its candidates. It is also an issue that many Republican challengers and open-seat candidates have co-opted for their own campaign platforms.

Minor-party candidates frequently mentioned campaign finance reform as one of the top issues raised by their campaigns. Not surprisingly, they were significantly more likely than major-party candidates to view the campaign finance system as having serious problems. The survey results show nearly 60 percent of minor-party congressional candidates believe the campaign finance system is “broken and needs to be replaced” compared with

**TABLE 6.1**  
Major Campaign Issues Discussed  
by Minor-Party and Major-Party Candidates (by percentage)

	U.S. House			State Legislature		
	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans
Economic/ Fiscal policy	35.1	13.4	24.2	28.6	21.3	35.2
Government reform/Ethics	28.1	11.0	22.6	17.1	8.3	12.9
Education	—	20.7	11.3	12.9	39.1	24.2
Social Issues	10.5	20.7	9.7	4.3	9.7	3.9
Other	26.3	34.1	32.3	37.1	21.7	23.8
(N)	(57)	(82)	(62)	(70)	(507)	(559)

Source: Paul S. Herrnson, Campaign Assessment and Candidate Outreach Project, 2000.

Note: Dash = less than .05 percent. Figures do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

53 percent of Democratic nonincumbents and 38 percent of Republican challengers and open-seat candidates. At the state legislative level, 42 percent of minor-party state legislative candidates view the campaign finance system as broken compared with 32 percent of Democratic nonincumbents and just 17 percent of Republican challengers and open-seat candidates.

Yet, while there is agreement on the need for reform among minor-party candidates, significant policy differences exist among the minor-party candidates over which reforms would best correct the current campaign finance system. Libertarians, for example, staunchly oppose any government funding of candidates or political parties. Greens, on the other hand, advocate just the opposite, endorsing a public finance system for federal elections. Reform Party candidates focus less on the private versus public money debate, and instead favor proposals that would ban out-of-district campaign contributions as well as proposals to reduce the cost of campaigning, such as shortening the election cycle.

Education and social issues, such as abortion and social security, were less likely to be the focus of minor-party candidates' campaigns. By comparison, major-party candidates focused a great deal more attention on such issues. Democratic and Republican congressional and state legislative candidates, in particular, were more likely to emphasize education than were minor-party candidates. Major-party candidates were likely following advice given to them from campaign professionals and numerous polls that indicated education was top concern among the public.

### MINOR-PARTY CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGNS

While there has been a growth in the number of minor-party candidates, outright victories remain an exception in most congressional and state legislative elections. Minor-party candidates have a difficult time challenging candidates from the major parties for several reasons. As discussed in chapters 2 and 10, legal barriers, such as ballot-access laws, require most minor-party candidates to circulate petitions and obtain several thousand signatures from citizens in the district to have their name listed on the ballot. Minor-party candidates must also contend with the fact that voters are socialized to the two-party system norm (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). Citizens realize that minor-party candidates face long odds of winning, making them disinclined to "throw their votes away" (Abramson et al.). The strategic considerations of voters make it extremely difficult for minor-party candidates to win over supporters (Riker 1982).

Despite these odds, minor-party candidates cite several reasons for running for office. The most commonly reported explanation is to publicize their ideological concerns or bring attention to a specific problem (Collet



1997). Libertarian state legislative candidates often note high taxes and reducing the size of government as their primary reasons for running. Others run to bring attention to their party or to offer an alternative to voters when only one of the major parties fields a candidate. Reform Party candidate Jack Gargan, who ran for a U.S. House seat in Florida's fifth district in 1998, explained that one of the prime motivations for his candidacy was to make sure that Democratic incumbent Karen Thurman did not run unopposed (Ross 1998, 3).

Most minor-party candidates were once affiliated with a major party, and many left over differences involving a particular issue (Collet 1997). Minor-party candidates not only have some previous connection to the major parties, but a majority of congressional and state legislative candidates also have some political experience. Roughly three out of five minor-party congressional candidates and two-thirds of minor-party state legislative candidates have worked on a campaign (see table 6.2). While most minor-party candidates for Congress or state legislatures have some campaign experience, they tend to have less experience than major-party candidates. More than 80 percent of Democratic congressional candidates and 77 percent of

**TABLE 6.2**  
**Political Experience of**  
**Minor-Party and Major-Party Candidates (by percentage)**

	<i>U.S. House</i>			<i>State Legislature</i>		
	<i>Minor Party</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Minor Party</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
Worked on a campaign	57.4	80.4	76.8	64.8	77.5	74.5
Did not work on a campaign	42.6	19.6	23.2	35.2	22.5	25.5
Held appointed government position	8.8	17.8	17.9	12.5	26.3	25.2
Did not hold appointed government position	91.2	82.2	82.1	87.5	73.7	74.8
Worked on staff of elected official	4.5	27.5	13.4	13.6	22.0	17.5
Did not work on staff of elected official	95.5	72.5	86.6	86.4	78.0	82.5
(N)	(68)	(91)	(67)	(88)	(567)	(631)

Source: Paul S. Herrnson, Campaign Assessment and Candidate Outreach Project, 2000.

Note: Figures do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Republican congressional candidates have worked on a campaign. The numbers were similar for major-party state legislative candidates.

A small number of minor-party candidates have held an appointed government position. Roughly 9 percent of minor-party candidates who ran for Congress and 12 percent of minor-party candidates who ran for state legislatures held an appointed government position. By comparison, the percentages were nearly twice as high for major-party candidates. Minor-party congressional and state legislative candidates were less likely than major-party candidates to have worked on the staff of an elected official. The differences in political experience that separate minor-party candidates from major-party candidates are important because those with the most political experience tend to perform better in elections (e.g., Herrnson 2000).

### CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The foundation of any serious campaign begins with a candidate's ability to raise funds. Money is critical to a campaign's success because it buys advertising and other means of mass communications that allow candidates, particularly nonincumbents, to build name recognition with voters and disseminate their campaign messages (Squire and Wright 1990; Jacobson 1997; Herrnson 2000). Money also purchases help from campaign professionals who can offer strategic advice, handle press relations, conduct polls, and help raise additional funds for the campaign. Professional campaigns are typically the most successful (Herrnson 2000; Medvic 2000).

For minor-party candidates, fund-raising is often extremely difficult, and a major cause of their poor performance in most elections. So few minor-party candidates hold elective office that it is impossible to make meaningful comparisons between their campaign finances to those of major-party candidates. However, such comparisons are possible among nonincumbent candidates. Minor-party nonincumbent candidates for the U.S. House raised an average of \$8,400 compared to \$200,000 for major-party nonincumbents. At the state legislative level, minor-party nonincumbents were out-fundraised 12 to 1 by major-party nonincumbents. To put these numbers in another light, more than 90 percent of minor-party congressional and state legislative nonincumbents raised less than \$10,000 in their 1998 campaign compared with just two-fifths of major-party congressional and state legislative nonincumbents.<sup>5</sup> Political contributors rarely give money to likely losers, presenting a problem for minor-party candidates given how rare it is for them to win office.

Even minor-party candidates who have previously waged competitive campaigns find it difficult to raise enough money to compete with major-party candidates. Green candidate Carol Miller, for example, won a respectable 17 percent of the vote in New Mexico's third congressional district in 1996. Miller, nevertheless, was out-fundraised and outspent nearly



40 to 1 by both Democrat Tom Udall and Republican Bill Redmond in 1998, and managed to win just 3 percent of the vote in that election.

Minor-party challengers and open-seat candidates are often forced to turn to their own personal or family wealth, loans, and individuals for campaign money (see table 6.3). Almost 34 percent of these candidates' campaign receipts came from personal funds or loans, and 58 percent from individual contributors in the 1998 elections. Minor-party congressional nonincumbents raised virtually no money from their party. They received less than 1 percent of their campaign receipts from labor union PACs, only 1 percent from business and trade association PACs, and less than 1 percent from other political advocacy groups. Major-party congressional challengers and open-seat candidates, on the other hand, raised funds from a wider variety of sources. Democrats and Republicans relied less than minor-party candidates on their personal funds or loans for campaign receipts, and received substantially more money from their political party organizations, political action committees, and other advocacy groups.

These patterns remain consistent for state legislative candidates. Minor-party challengers and open-seat candidates for state legislatures depend on personal funds and individual contributions for almost all of their campaign receipts, whereas major-party nonincumbents were able to

**TABLE 6.3**  
Sources of Campaign Receipts for Minor-Party  
and Major-Party Nonincumbent Candidates (by percentage)

	U.S. House			State Legislature		
	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans
Personal funds/ loans or family	33.9	24.3	19.4	71.4	27.1	29.2
Individuals	58.4	52.7	52.3	22.1	39.6	41.7
Political parties	—	3.0	5.6	3.6	8.9	10.8
Labor union PACs	0.3	10.1	0.2	0.7	12.3	1.3
Business & trade association PACs	1.3	4.0	11.1	0.8	4.8	10.3
Other advocacy groups	0.6	2.6	5.9	0.8	5.7	4.9
Other sources	5.5	3.3	5.5	0.6	1.6	1.8
(N)	(460)	(453)	(484)	(76)	(328)	(359)

Source: Federal Election Commission and Paul S. Herrnson, Campaign Assessment and Candidate Outreach Project, 2000.

Note: Dash = less than .05 percent. Figures do not add to 100 percent due to rounding. The analysis includes only nonincumbents because there are too few minor-party incumbents to make meaningful comparisons.

raise almost \$3 out of every \$10 from parties, PACs, advocacy groups, and other sources, such as interest from savings accounts or revenues from investments. Minor-party state legislative candidates were particularly dependent on personal funds and loans, which accounted for more than 70 percent of their total campaign receipts. This large percentage indicates minor-party candidates for state legislative office self-finance the bulk of their campaign operations. Minor-party candidates for state legislatures face the difficulties of attracting money from outside donors, but may also self-finance a greater portion of their campaigns than minor-party congressional candidates because it is less expensive to run for lower office. In general, the numbers for both congressional and state legislative candidates highlight the overwhelming inequities in fund-raising that continue to exist between minor-party and major-party candidates.

### CAMPAIGN BUDGETS

Most minor-party candidates have limited campaign budgets. The average campaign expenditures for minor-party congressional challengers and open-seat candidates in 1998 was about \$8,100. It was slightly less than \$3,000 for state legislative candidates. The typical major-party nonincumbent spent twenty-five times the amount of the average minor-party candidate for Congress and almost eleven times more than the average minor-party nonincumbent who ran for the state legislature.<sup>6</sup> Minor-party candidates are clearly constrained in the campaign techniques they can afford to use, and as a result, spend their money differently than major-party candidates (see table 6.4).

Major-party congressional candidates spend a sizeable percentage more of their budget on television advertising than do minor-party candidates. Roughly \$1 of every \$8 spent by major-party congressional nonincumbents is earmarked for broadcast television advertising. By contrast, just \$1 of every \$66 spent by minor-party congressional candidates goes to television advertising. Almost 60 percent of Democratic and Republican congressional nonincumbents in our survey reported that they used broadcast television advertising, compared with 29 percent of the minor-party candidates. Major-party candidates spent more than two hundred times the average amount on broadcast advertising as the typical minor-party candidate.

Cable television is less expensive and minor-party candidates spent slightly more money on cable ads than they did on broadcast ads. However, minor-party candidates were still greatly outspent by major-party candidates. At the state legislative level, minor-party and major-party candidates earmarked similar proportions of their budget to broadcast



**TABLE 6.4**  
**Campaign Budgets of Minor-Party**  
**and Major-Party Nonincumbent Candidates' Campaigns**

	U.S. House			State Legislature		
	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans
<b>Broadcast television ads</b>						
Percentage of budget	1.5%	12.8%	12.6%	0.2%	3.7%	2.8%
Average amount	\$121	\$26,758	\$22,441	\$7	\$1,349	\$1,190
<b>Cable television ads</b>						
Percentage of budget	2.7%	4.0%	1.7%	1.9%	3.1%	2.7%
Average amount	\$218	\$8,362	\$3,028	\$63	\$1,130	\$1,150
<b>Radio ads</b>						
Percentage of budget	4.5%	4.4%	5.3%	1.9%	6.5%	7.1%
Average amount	\$363	\$9,198	\$9,439	\$63	\$2,370	\$2,980
<b>Newspaper ads</b>						
Percentage of budget	3.7%	4.2%	3.9%	7.6%	11.3%	12.4%
Average amount	\$299	\$8,780	\$6,946	\$250	\$4,125	\$5,280
<b>Direct mail</b>						
Percentage of budget	9.9%	14.2%	14.6%	11.2%	24.1%	24.4%
Average amount	\$799	\$29,684	\$26,003	\$367	\$8,760	\$10,400
<b>Polling</b>						
Percentage of budget	0.4%	3.5%	1.9%	—	1.4%	1.8%
Average amount	\$32	\$7,317	\$3,384	—	\$511	\$850

<b>Overhead and staff salaries</b>									
Percentage of budget	5.2%	11.5%	9.1%	4.2%	4.6%	3.6%			
Average amount	\$420	\$24,040	\$16,207	\$138	\$1,680	\$1,534			
<b>Fund-raising</b>									
Percentage of budget	9.8%	10.2%	8.3%	3.3%	6.7%	6.0%			
Average amount	\$791	\$21,322	\$14,782	\$109	\$2,445	\$2,560			
<b>Travel</b>									
Percentage of budget	15.2%	7.0%	12.4%	8.2%	2.3%	2.2%			
Average amount	\$1,227	\$14,633	\$22,084	\$270	\$840	\$940			
<b>Issue and opposition research</b>									
Percentage of budget	2.6%	2.7%	1.5%	3.2%	1.0%	1.2%			
Average amount	\$210	\$5,644	\$2,672	\$105	\$365	\$511			
<b>Get-out-the-vote/ grassroots activities</b>									
Percentage of budget	3.0%	6.2%	4.0%	7.7%	4.6%	3.9%			
Average amount	\$242	\$12,961	\$7,124	\$254	\$1,680	\$1,705			
<b>Campaign literature, materials, and signs</b>									
Percentage of budget	33.1%	17.2%	22.3%	40.1%	27.9%	30.1%			
Average amount	\$2,672	\$35,956	\$39,716	\$1,321	\$9,855	\$12,780			
<b>Other</b>									
Percentage of budget	8.4%	2.0%	2.2%	10.4%	3.0%	1.9%			
Average amount	\$678	\$4,181	\$3,918	\$343	\$1,095	\$810			
(N)	(56)	(70)	(44)	(67)	(322)	(352)			

Source: Paul S. Herrnson, Campaign Assessment and Candidate Outreach Project, 2000.

Note: Dash = less than .05 percent. Figures do not add to 100 percent due to rounding. The analysis includes only nonincumbents because there are too few minor-party incumbents to make meaningful comparisons.



and television advertising; however, major-party candidates spent significantly more. These disparities are significant because television is the most important source of information about candidates (Hrebenar 1999, 193–94). The average adult spends four hours a day watching television (Graber 1993, 206). This gives major-party congressional and state legislative candidates an enormous advantage over minor-party candidates in reaching a mass audience.

Radio is also an important campaign communications tool. Radios exist in virtually every home and the average person spends close to two hours a day listening to radio (Graber 1993, 206). About two-fifths of minor-party congressional candidates advertised on the radio. By comparison, more than three-fifths of Democratic and Republican congressional nonincumbents purchased radio spots. They spent (on average) about twenty-six times the amount as did minor-party congressional nonincumbents. At the state legislative level, there were similar discrepancies. More than half of major-party nonincumbents ran radio ads compared with just 28 percent of minor-party candidates. The typical major-party nonincumbent spent more than forty times the amount spent by the typical minor-party candidates.

State legislative candidates spend a greater proportion of their money on newspaper ads and direct mail than congressional candidates, regardless of partisanship. Newspaper ads and direct-mail pieces are much less expensive than television and radio ads, and are more affordable for the more modest budgets of state legislative candidates. However, even on these less expensive communications, major-party candidates at the state legislative level are able to spend a greater proportion of their budget on newspaper ads and direct mail than are minor-party candidates. There is a wide disparity between minor-party and major-party candidates not only in the amounts spent on newspaper ads and direct mail, but also on the proportion of money spent on those media. Democratic and Republican state legislative candidates spent roughly \$1 of every \$8 in their campaign budgets on newspaper ads and \$1 of every \$4 on direct mail. Minor-party candidates, on the other hand, spent just \$1 of every \$13 on newspaper ads and only \$1 of every \$9 of their budget on direct mail.

The modest campaign budgets of minor-party candidates limit the number of ads they can purchase. This hinders their ability to disseminate a campaign message, build name recognition, and gain credibility. As a consequence, minor-party candidates have a very difficult time attracting free press coverage. Local media outlets often do not even begin covering the campaign until the final months or even weeks of the election, making it difficult for challengers, particularly minor-party challengers, to build name recognition with voters. When asked which candidate in their contest received the majority of newspaper endorsements, virtually none

of the minor-party candidates who ran for congressional or state legislative seats responded affirmatively, compared with one-quarter of all major-party congressional nonincumbents and one-third of major-party state legislative challengers or open-seat candidates. Minor-party candidates were also more likely to report that the media favored their opponent's campaign than were major-party candidates.

In addition to advertising and media coverage, major-party congressional candidates spend more than twice the proportion of their funds on overhead and staff salaries than do minor-party candidates. This is due to the fact that major-party congressional candidates are more likely to have paid campaign staff members than are minor-party candidates, who depend mainly on volunteers to assist them with their campaign operations. The differences between minor-party and major-party candidates are much smaller at the state legislative level because fewer major-party candidates hire professionals to carry out campaign activities.

Polling services are virtually nonexistent for minor-party candidates. Minor-party candidates also spend proportionately less on fund-raising professionals than do major-party candidates. Instead, minor-party candidates end up spending the largest portion of their budget on less expensive campaign activities.

Minor-party congressional and state legislative candidates devote a larger percentage of their budget to travel compared with Democrats and Republicans, although they spend less in total dollars. Minor-party candidates have less mass media exposure, and need to travel to make personal appearances to garner districtwide attention. In the New Jersey 12th congressional district, for example, Green Party candidate Carl J. Mayer could not afford to buy commercial air time and instead spread his message by holding campaign rallies throughout the district, often at unorthodox locations such as natural-food markets (Giegerich 2000). Mayer's modest campaign earned him roughly 5,700 votes or 2 percent of the district vote. However, Mayer's presence in the election nearly cost freshman Democratic incumbent Rush Holt his seat in the House. Holt edged out Republican and former House member Dick Zimmer by less than 700 votes.

Minor-party nonincumbents also spend a slightly higher percentage of their budget on issue opposition research, and minor-party state legislative candidates spend a higher proportion on grassroots activities. The largest expenditure, however, for minor-party candidates is campaign literature, materials, and signs. These inexpensive items are traditionally associated with grassroots campaigns. More than 50 percent of minor-party congressional and state legislative candidates used billboards or lawn signs. Nevertheless, major-party candidates still spend substantially more on these items and a far higher percentage report using them. Roughly 80



percent of Democratic congressional and state legislative candidates, and 90 percent of Republican congressional and state legislative candidates used billboards or signs for their campaigns.

Last, minor-party candidates reported spending a much larger percentage of their budgets on "other" items. This includes Web site development. More than half of all minor-party challengers and open-seat candidates reported that they had campaign Web sites compared with at least 60 percent of major-party nonincumbents. At the state legislative level, a higher percentage of minor-party candidates had campaign Web sites than major-party candidates. Web sites offer several advantages to minor-party candidates. They are less expensive than television and radio advertising, and can reach a mass audience. More than half of the general public reports using the Internet, an increase from just 21 percent in 1996 (Pew Research Center 2000a). The rise of the Internet, however, is not a panacea for minor-party candidates. Most voters are still more likely to get their political and campaign information from television, radio, and even the newspaper than the Internet (Pew Research Center 2000b). Web sites also need to be promoted, usually through advertising, which most minor-party candidates are unable to afford.

## CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION

Minor-party candidates' general inability to raise money for their campaigns forces them to depend on unpaid staff and volunteers to a much greater extent than major-party nonincumbents (see table 6.5). About 8 percent of minor-party congressional candidates employed professionals for campaign management assistance compared with about half of all Democratic and Republican congressional candidates. There are significant differences separating minor-party and major-party candidates for state legislatures as well; however, they are less pronounced. Just 4 percent of minor-party state legislative candidates hired professionals for campaign management. By comparison, 22 percent of Democrats and 18 percent of Republicans had professional management teams.

These patterns were similar for other campaign activities. A small minority of minor-party candidates hired professionals to help them with media advertising, direct mail, press relations, polling, and fund-raising activities compared with a near majority of Democratic and Republican congressional candidates. Minor-party candidates for the state legislature were much less likely than were major-party candidates to hire professionals. However, most minor-party state legislative candidates, regardless of party affiliation, relied more on volunteers and themselves to carry out their campaign operations. The gap in campaign professionalism separating minor-party and

major-party candidates presents a larger obstacle for minor-party candidates running for Congress than the state legislature.

### CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

In addition to raising money, creating a budget, and assembling a staff, campaigns also need to make important strategic decisions. Candidates and their staff must decide which voters to target for their campaign efforts. They also need to consider the content of their advertising. Should it focus on the candidate's image and qualifications or the candidate's policy stances? Should it focus mainly on the candidate or the opponent? Should the campaign's advertising go negative?

Minor-party congressional candidates are more likely to report their campaigns focused on attracting young voters and those dissatisfied with politics than are major-party candidates. Our survey shows more than 18 percent of minor-party congressional candidates targeted students, Generation X'ers, and the dissatisfied, compared with just 3 percent of major-party nonincumbents. At the state legislative level, more than 8 percent of minor-party candidates targeted this group, whereas less than 1 percent did so among major-party nonincumbents. On the other hand, the data show that almost twice the percentage of major-party nonincumbents for Congress and state legislatures targeted elderly voters, compared with minor-party candidates.

Minor-party candidates target younger voters and the dissatisfied, and major-party candidates target elderly voters for several reasons. Younger voters and the dissatisfied have weaker partisan attachments to the Democratic and Republican parties than do elderly voters, and are more persuadable and open-minded about considering alternatives to the major parties. But most important, minor parties target the young and dissatisfied because they make up one of the largest blocks of traditional nonvoters. Minor-party candidates can change the political landscape to their advantage when they bring new voters into the process.

In the first congressional district of New Mexico, for example, Robert Anderson of the Green Party won 15 percent of the vote in the 1998 special election to fill the seat vacated by Republican Stephen Schiff. Several months later, he received 10 percent of the vote in the 1998 general election. According to Dean Myerson, secretary of the Association of State Green Parties, young voters were a major source of support for the Anderson campaign (Wehrman 1998).

Minor-party candidates not only target different voters than major-party candidates, they are more likely than are major-party candidates to keep their campaign message and advertising focused on issues that they

TABLE 6.5  
 Campaign Professionalism of Minor-Party  
 and Major-Party Nonincumbents' Campaigns (by percentage)

	U.S. House			State Legislature		
	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans
<b>Campaign Management</b>						
Paid Staff/Consultants	7.5	49.3	41.3	3.7	21.8	18.4
Volunteers/Yourself/ Did not do	92.5	50.7	58.7	98.3	78.2	81.6
<b>Media Advertising</b>						
Paid Staff/Consultants	4.5	49.3	45.7	—	22.4	22.9
Volunteers/Yourself/ Did not do	96.5	50.7	54.3	100.0	77.6	78.7
<b>Direct Mail</b>						
Paid Staff/Consultants	4.5	45.2	32.6	2.4	26.2	21.1
Volunteers/Yourself/ Did not do	95.5	54.8	67.4	97.6	73.8	78.9
<b>Press Relations</b>						
Paid Staff/Consultants	6.0	42.5	34.8	—	13.1	15.2
Volunteers/Yourself/ Did not do	94.0	57.5	65.2	100.0	86.9	84.8



TABLE 6.5 (Continued)  
 Campaign Professionalism of Minor-Party  
 and Major-Party Nonincumbents' Campaigns

	U.S. House			State Legislature		
	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans	Minor Party	Democrats	Republicans
<b>Polling</b>						
Paid Staff/Consultants	1.5	45.2	32.6	—	16.0	17.9
Volunteers/Yourself/ Did not do	98.5	54.8	67.4	100.0	84.0	82.1
<b>Fund-raising</b>						
Paid Staff/Consultants/ Volunteers/Yourself Did not do	1.5 98.5	37.0 63.0	28.3 71.7	— 100.0	11.0 89.0	7.7 92.3
(N)	(87)	(73)	(46)	(82)	(344)	(375)

Source: Paul S. Herrnsen, Campaign Assessment and Candidate Outreach Project, 2000.

Note: Dash = less than .05 percent. Figures do not add to 100 percent due to rounding. The analysis includes only nonincumbents because there are too few minor-party incumbents to make meaningful comparisons.

deem most important, rather than on their qualifications or those of their opponent. More than 95 percent of minor-party congressional candidates and some 80 percent of minor-party state legislative candidates reported that their issue positions were the major focus of their campaign advertising. This fact is consistent with the primary motivations for many minor-party campaigns, which is to bring attention to issues the major-party candidates have not adequately addressed.

Major-party congressional and state legislative candidates also made their issue positions an important aspect of their advertising, but to a much lesser extent. About half of Democratic nonincumbents and a majority of Republican nonincumbents who ran for the U.S. House or a state legislature reported that issues were the major focus of their ad campaigns. Major-party candidates, instead, were more likely than minor-party candidates to stress their image and qualifications. Roughly 40 percent of major-party congressional nonincumbents and a majority of major-party state legislative nonincumbents made their image and qualifications a major focus of their campaign advertising. The same was true for more than 60 percent of major-party incumbents for Congress and state legislatures, compared with less than 2 percent of minor-party congressional candidates and only 17 percent of minor-party state legislative candidates. Incumbents are particularly likely to emphasize their image and qualifications in ads to stress their competence as officeholders. Voters rarely replace incumbents who they believe are adequately performing their job.

Major-party and minor-party candidates for Congress and the statehouse also focus less on their opponent's issue positions, and draw the least attention in their ad campaigns to their opponent's image and qualifications. Candidates across office levels and party affiliations were also unlikely to report that their advertising campaigns focus on their opponent's negative characteristics. Although, a majority of major-party congressional candidates and a near majority of state legislative incumbents characterize their opponent's campaign as negative. A smaller percentage—between 20 percent and 30 percent—of major-party nonincumbents and minor-party candidates for congressional and state legislative office report their opponent's campaign was primarily negative. Incumbents are more likely to have negative campaigns run against them because challengers, including major-party and minor-party candidates, need to provide voters with a reason to support a change in leadership and cast their ballots for someone new. Negative ads, however, can backfire when they are untruthful or mean-spirited.

Still, even the best planned strategies for challengers are unlikely to defeat incumbents who win more than 90 percent of the time. This is particularly true for minor-party candidates who are unable to wage campaigns capable of competing with those of major-party candidates. Given this

reality, it is unlikely that minor-party candidates will begin to seriously compete with major-party candidates any time in the near future.

## CONCLUSION

Minor-party candidates are more numerous today than in the past, but they are still likely to lose by decisive margins to Democrats and Republicans. Minor-party candidates have less political experience, and typically are unable to raise enough money to hire campaign aides and political consultants or buy sufficient advertising on television, in radio, or newspapers. Their campaigns are almost always overwhelmed by those waged by Democrats and Republicans, making it very difficult for them to win.

Minor-party candidates, however, do contribute to the political process by raising issues that the major parties have inadequately addressed, and their presence in an election can sometimes change the outcome or bring attention to their cause. In the state of Washington, for example, the state GOP blamed Libertarian state legislative candidate Jerry Christensen, who won 3 percent of the vote, for costing them a close race in the 25th district where Democrat James Kastama defeated Republican Joyce McDonald, 49 percent to 48 percent. McDonald's defeat gave Democrats control of the state Senate by a 25–24 margin.

Nevertheless, most minor-party candidates fail to have an impact on elections beyond bringing attention to certain issues or playing the role of spoiler. The huge disparities in campaign resources that separate minor-party and major-party candidates at both the congressional and state legislative levels make it very difficult for minor-party candidates to win office. Minor-party candidacies have increased in number, but their campaigns usually suffer from too many handicaps to raise them to the level of serious contenders.

## APPENDIX: DATA SOURCES

This chapter relied on data from several sources. Campaign finance information for congressional candidates came from the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Information on candidates' attitudes and state legislative campaign finance came from a representative nationwide survey of 2,946 candidates who ran for various political offices between 1996 and 1998. This data set includes responses from 233 U.S. House candidates in thirty-six states, and 1,341 state legislative candidates from forty-six states. It represents the underlying population of candidates on key variables, such



as partisanship, incumbency, election outcome, campaign spending, and district demographics.

## NOTES

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1. Nebraska is not included because it holds nonpartisan elections. Data came from the National Conference of State Legislatures. For more information, see [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org).

2. The average was computed using data provided by the FEC.

3. Percentages were computed from data provided by the FEC.

4. Figures obtained from the official Web site of the Libertarian Party. See [www.lp.org](http://www.lp.org).

5. Figures compiled by authors from FEC data for congressional candidates and survey data for state legislative candidates.

6. Figures compiled by authors from FEC data for congressional candidates and survey data for state legislative candidates.

## The Rise and Decline of the Reform Party, 1992–2000

JOHN C. GREEN AND WILLIAM BINNING

The electoral trajectory of the Reform Party strongly confirms the conventional wisdom about the role of minor parties in American politics (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996; Rothenberg 2001). Simply put, viable minor-party organizations have no permanent place in the system, and their political influence, which can be considerable, is based largely on the character and direction of the major parties. From the vantage point of the 2000 election, the Reform Party appears to be a nonviable organization, receiving less than one-half of 1 percent of the presidential vote. It did, however, have a major impact on the party system in the 1990s, especially on the Republican Party, raising new issues, mobilizing new activists, and giving voice to the discontents of many voters (Stone and Rapoport 2001). Although the Perot phenomenon took almost all observers by surprise, most accurately forecast the Reform Party's fate, even those who were intrigued by its prospects (Lowi 1999). Indeed, Perot's impressive general election showings in 1992 and 1996 (18.9 percent and 8.4 percent, respectively) made such a prospect minimally plausible.

Here we review the rise and decline of the Reform Party from 1992 to 2000 from the point of view of these unrealized prospects. We find that its experience illustrates the challenges facing minor parties—challenges the Reform Party failed to meet. Two related failures were especially important. First, the Reform Party failed to “survive Perot” by finding a replacement for its charismatic founder. And second, it failed to develop a cadre of partisan activists—party workers with a deep attachment to the party as an institution (see Green and Binning 1997).

## VIABLE MINOR PARTIES

Minor parties are best thought of as part of the American two-party system, serving as transient correctives to the failures of the major parties (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). Since such failures vary in scope and type, so do minor parties. Although not mutually exclusive, the major parties can fail in at least three important ways (Guth and Green 1996), each of which can "push" office-seekers, activists, and voters to support minor-party alternatives. Minor parties can also "pull" office-seekers, activists, and voters into their ranks by offering plausible responses to these failures (Partin et al. 1994, 1996; Stone et al. 1999). It is the counter-response of the major parties that both corrects the original failures and allows the two-party system to remain dominant.

First, the major parties can fail to offer plausible candidates, thus provoking campaigns by prominent personalities "independent" of their ranks. Such "personalistic" parties have been the most successful in recent times and hence are the best known. Second, the major parties can fail to address a critical discontent or issue, thus sparking protests that spill over into elections. These "protest" parties have been the most common kind of minor party in the United States and the least successful. Finally, the major parties can fail to articulate a coherent ideology, thus encouraging more consistent expressions of political principles in campaigns. Such "principled" parties have been the longest-lived minor parties in the American system, but only modestly successful at the polls.

By this logic, minor parties could persist and prosper if they successfully institutionalized their responses to major-party failure. Such an eventuality could create a facsimile of a multiparty system in the American context. Such a possibility is a far cry from a probability, of course, and there are great obstacles to its realization. Theodore Lowi (1996) makes the case for this possibility, and his argument is a useful guide for understanding the Reform Party's experience.

Lowi suggests there are three minimal features for a viable minor party in the American two-party system. First, the party must be built from the bottom up, focusing on contesting elections at the state and local levels (Lowi 1996, 51). After all, it is in these races that the major parties routinely fail to provide plausible candidates, thus offering opportunities for minor-party activity. A major obstacle is the fact that major parties have an edge in attracting ambitious office-seekers. However, there is a supply of "strategically unambitious" candidates available to minor parties (Collet and Wattenberg 1999). Minor parties can be especially effective in this regard when state law permits fusion candidacies (see chapter 9).

Second, a viable minor party must not aspire to be a "governing" party but rather an "influence" party, dedicated to changing the politi-



cal agenda (Downs 1957, 127–28). Here a minor party must be “relevant” (Sartori 1976, 123), presenting clear alternatives on issues the major parties fail to address—a common enough circumstance in the two-party system. By vigorously contesting elections on the basis of neglected issues, minor parties could serve as “honest brokers and policy managers” between the major parties (Lowi 1996, 50). The chief obstacle here is the major parties themselves, who can readily mimic minor-party issue positions. However, if minor parties carefully choose issues that convulse the major parties, this obstacle can be overcome—or rather, used to the minor party’s advantage. Indeed, Perot’s 1992 and 1996 campaigns did have a great impact on the political agenda of the Clinton administration and the Republicans in Congress after 1994 (Stone and Rapoport 2001). This is the sort of impact minor parties have traditionally had on the two-party system (see chapter 2).

Third, a viable minor party must develop a cadre of party activists dedicated to principles in politics—something the notoriously “irresponsible” major parties regularly avoid (Lowi 1996, 50–52). Such an activist corps is the prime resource for minor parties, who cannot expect to attract the funds for the capital-intensive politics practiced by the major parties. Indeed, labor-intensive politics can be especially effective in grassroots campaigns on neglected issues. The chief obstacle here is the nature of minor-party ideology: principles often breed inflexibility and factionalism. However, this obstacle can be overcome by the development of partisanship, that is, a simultaneous commitment to the minor party’s principles *and* its organizational health. In fact, much of the influence of the major-party organizations in the current, candidate-centered era stems from their dedicated corps of partisan activists.

These three features allow minor parties to compete in a party system that has strong biases in favor of the major-party organizations and against minor-party rivals. These well-known biases extend from ballot access to campaign finance (see chapters 2 and 10), and are so severe that Lowi (1999) eventually added a fourth feature for a viable minor party: it must vigorously attack the legal supports for the two-party system. In a sense, Lowi is recognizing the power of “Duverger’s Law” (Duverger 1963; Riker 1982), namely, the negative effect of the structure of American-style elections on minor parties. Not surprisingly, minor parties have done best where there are fewer institutional biases against them (Winger 1997).

Three of these features (bottom-up campaigns, focus on neglected issues, challenging the legal basis of the system) are strategic considerations that can be exploited by the fourth (dedicated partisans). Indeed, without a cadre of active partisans, local, issue-oriented campaigns cannot be carried out with any effect over time. So the institutionalization of a viable

minor party, whatever its origins, requires at minimum the development of a corps of active partisans. In this regard, each type of minor party has strengths and weaknesses. The candidates at the head of personalistic minor parties can attract a large and loyal following, but personal loyalty may not transfer into partisanship. The discontents at the core of protest parties can also attract a large and enthusiastic backing, but such concerns may be too narrow to generate partisanship. The ideology at the center of principled parties can attract a host of energetic and committed activists, but such views may be too doctrinaire to produce partisanship. The development of a corps of partisan activists was a serious problem for the Reform Party, and one that was aggravated by its internal politics.

### REFORM PARTY POLITICS 1992–2000

Taken as a whole, the history of Reform Party politics illustrates key aspects of all three kinds of minor parties, and their special strengths and weaknesses. Although the sequence of events may be unique, Perot's initial campaign (1991–94) was a good example of a personalistic minor party. The founding of the Reform Party (1995–98) was in large measure a coalescing of protest minor parties into a national organization. And the candidate recruitment struggles in the 2000 campaign were about shaping the Reform Party into a principled minor party.

### THE POLITICS OF PERSONALITY, 1991–94

It is hard to think of a better example of a personalistic minor party than Ross Perot's 1992 presidential campaign (Ceaser and Busch 1993, 87–126; Pomper 1997, 190–91; Nelson 1997, 62–66). The campaign was the epitome of modern candidate-centered politics. Perot was a well-known business leader and something of a celebrity before becoming a presidential candidate, and he used his personal notoriety, media savvy, and immense personal wealth to bypass normal political channels. A fitting symbol of his campaign was how it began: after floating the idea throughout 1991, Perot announced his presidential candidacy on the *Larry King Live* television program, 20 February 1992. His standing in the polls increased dramatically and a flood of volunteers suddenly materialized, allowing him to launch a campaign to get his name on the ballot in all fifty states.

Perot drew considerable support from existing antigovernment groups, especially those hostile to Congress, and tapped into economic distress among the middle class (Simmons and Simmons 2001). But Perot himself was the catalyst for the campaign, which he literally "made up" as he



went along, resisting the assistance of professional politicians and the advice of the campaign consultants he hired. It took a season of trial and error to develop his strategy, tactics, and platform—including an embarrassing withdrawal from the campaign in July and reentry into the campaign in October. His campaign replaced the common tools of candidate-centered campaigns with techniques that focused on him: talk-show appearances, infomercials, electronic town halls, and a cadre of grassroots activists managed from a Dallas headquarters by telephone, fax, and the Internet. Although thousands of avid “Perotistas” circulated petitions and campaigned for him, Perot himself did very little traditional campaigning of any sort. In fact, one of his few “traditional” campaign activities was to participate in the televised presidential debates (Norlin 2001).

Given the unconventional nature of his campaign, Perot’s 18.9 percent of the presidential vote was extraordinary, topped only by the nature of his supporters. Dubbed as “radical centrists,” these voters were drawn substantially from the middle of the political spectrum and social structure (Koch 2001). Distrustful of government and tired of “politics as usual,” these voters tended toward conservative positions on economic questions, except for foreign trade, and toward liberal positions on social issues.

In many respects, the personalistic nature of Perot’s 1992 campaign was the antithesis of the features Lowi identifies as necessary for a viable minor party: it was focused on the presidency rather than state or local races, its proclaimed goal was to govern rather than seek influence, and it gave no thought to developing a corps of active partisans. Perot did challenge some of the legal supports of the two-party system, but only when it was necessary for the campaign, and not as a primary goal. Indeed, much of Perot’s motivation—and appeal—was frankly antipolitical: he offered an alternative *to politics* rather than an alternative *form of politics*. These limitations can be clearly seen in the way Perot chose to institutionalize the 1992 campaign. Instead of founding a political party, he started an interest group, United We Stand America (UWSA), a “citizens lobby” dedicated to monitoring elected officials rather than contesting elections or going to court to challenge the two-party system.

However, the 1992 Perot campaigns left behind substantial resources for party building: ballot access in most states, federal public financing in future elections, a potent set of issues, a large mass constituency, and a large cadre of volunteers. These resources are not inconsequential. It cost Perot approximately \$14.5 million to get on the ballot in all fifty states, not to mention the massive volunteer effort. He spent another \$54 million on the fall campaign, largely of his own money, which gave his campaign credibility (Alexander and Corrado 1995, 132) and added considerably to his high visibility in the news media. Many of the issues Perot stressed,



from the demand for balanced budget to opposing free trade, moved to the top of the national agenda (Greenberg 1995). In 1993, UWSA had roughly one million members and \$18 million in annual dues (Barnes 1993). While it was Perot's voters that attracted the most attention from politicians, the potential corps of active partisans was the critical asset for a future party.

Quite apart from Perot, the 1992 election represented an increase in minor-party activity in a presidential year (Collet 1997). Some new parties developed in a fashion parallel to Perot and some existing minor parties saw the Perot phenomenon as an opportunity to expand their influence. A good example of the former was the Minnesota Independence Party, and a good example of the latter was the left-leaning New Alliance Party (whose leader Lenora Fulani ran for president in 1988), which merged with Perotista elements to form the New York Independence Party. The Independence parties became a magnet for Perot activists interested in a new party, and after several transformations, these activities coalesced into the Patriot Party in 1994. By 1995, it had developed sixteen state affiliates (Lowi 1996, 52; Bruni 1996; Salit 1996).

The 1994 mid-term elections also represented an increase in minor-party activity (Collet 1997). The Independence and Patriot Parties ran candidates in a dozen states. The strongest showing was the New York Independence Party's gubernatorial campaign, which gave it ballot access for 1996 (Reform Party 1996a). Of course, the most dramatic event in 1994 was the Republican takeover of the U.S. Congress for the first time in forty years. Perotista voters and activists made an important contribution to Republican congressional victories across the country (Partin et al. 1996). No doubt much of this support reflected hostility toward Democrats in Congress as well as agreement with the insurgent Republicans on a number of issues. But Newt Gingrich aggressively courted the Perot vote with his Contract with America, and UWSA issued an "endorsement" of congressional candidates, many of whom were Republicans.

### **MOLDING PROTEST INTO A PARTY, 1995-98**

Taken together, the events of 1992 and 1994 suggested that time was ripe for a new political party. Perot responded to these pressures in typical fashion. First, he organized a national convention of UWSA at Dallas in August 1995, where representatives of the major parties were invited to speak. Polls surrounding the event revealed that some three-quarters of UWSA members wanted to form a new party, and a good bit of organizing went on at the meeting itself. Then, on 25 September, Perot announced the founding of the Reform Party from the same forum where he declared

his 1992 candidacy, *Larry King Live*. He promised an all-out effort to establish a viable party, but declined to say whether he would seek its presidential nomination. This announcement launched a flurry of activity to get the Reform Party on the ballot in all fifty states. As part of this effort, Perot reorganized UWSA in January 1996, essentially absorbing the group into the Reform Party—and generating a lawsuit from disgruntled group leaders (Reform Party 1996b; Hall 1996a, 1996b).

By the summer of 1996, the Reform Party was on the ballot in all states and the District of Columbia. Perot was listed under “Reform Party” in forty-three states, as “Independence” in New York, “Independent Reform” in South Dakota, and as “Independent” in Alabama, Delaware, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming (*Ballot Access News* 1996). These names reflect in part variations in state law, but also differences in how ballot access was achieved. In many states, Perot and UWSA activists went through arduous petition or party registration drives. In other places, this chore was undertaken by state-level organizations, typically Patriot parties. And in still others, such as New York, a ballot-qualified state party (the Independence Party) allied itself with the Reform Party. Overall, Perot spent \$6.7 million to secure ballot access nationwide (Baker 1996a).

Perot next organized a national nominating convention for the new party in August 1996. Billed as an electronic town meeting, the convention took place in two places a week apart (Long Beach, California, and Valley Forge, Pennsylvania). These meetings were largely media events, dominated by speeches from Perot. The nominating of the party’s presidential candidate was conducted by mail ballot. Because Perot had delayed announcing his intention to run for the nomination, he drew a reputable opponent: former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm, a Democrat, who teamed up with former California Congressman Edward Zchau, a Republican, as a running mate. Perot handily defeated the Lamm-Zchau ticket in the voting process, which was a logistical nightmare and widely believed to have been rigged in Perot’s favor (Associated Press 1996). Perot then alienated some supporters by accepting \$29 million in federal public financing, available because of his 1992 general election showing (Corrado 1997). Accepting these funds limited Perot’s own contribution to \$50,000 and necessitated an extensive private fund-raising effort that eventually netted some \$11 million (Hall 1996c).

After the August convention, factionalism broke out within the new party, as various state leaders, many supporters of Lamm, tried to organize a “national committee” from the state Reform and allied parties. Perot eventually set up his own national committee at a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, in January 1997 and promised a “real” national convention in October 1997 with delegates elected by Reform Party members in all



congressional districts across the country (Miller 1996). Some of the anti-Perot factionalism came from individuals who ran on the Reform Party ticket for state and congressional offices in 1996. All told, 7 candidates for the U.S. Senate and 36 candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and 176 state legislative candidates had run on the Reform or allied party tickets. Despite promises to help such candidates, Perot did very little on their behalf. For example, Perot had promised to endorse like-minded major-party candidates, much as UWSA did in 1994, but he did so just once, for William Weld in Massachusetts (Baker 1996b). Ironically, a bright spot in the fall election was the victory of five congressional candidates endorsed by the New York Independence Party; all were major-party incumbents (two Republicans and three Democrats). Of course, this result reflects fusion laws and local efforts rather than the national campaign.

Compared with 1992, the 1996 general election campaign was a desultory affair (Hall 1996d, 1996e). Polls consistently showed Perot with low single-digit support, and as a consequence, he was excluded from presidential debates and had trouble buying television time for his infomercials. He was unable to recruit a well-known running mate, finally settling on economist Pat Choate, hardly a household name. The campaign spent only some \$27 million, about one-half the spending in 1992. Indeed, Perot was largely ignored until the very end of the campaign, when allegations of fund-raising irregularities by the Democratic National Committee and a weak performance by the Republican presidential ticket (including an eleventh-hour appeal for Perot to withdraw from the race) raised doubts about the major parties. On election day, Perot secured 8.4 percent of the vote, down from his 1992 showing in every state.

The Reform Party was in part an instrument for Perot's second presidential campaign, and thus a personalistic organization. However, it was also partly a coalition of protest parties, many of local origin, which had in common a deep hostility to politics as usual. These organizations exhibited some of Lowi's features: they were more oriented toward local campaigns, were issue oriented, contained the embryo of a partisan activist corps, and had struggled against the legal supports of the two-party system. Although few of these organizations were especially effective, the fledgling Reform Party had numerous assets after 1996, including money in the bank (some \$14 million on 1 January 1997), future public financing, ballot access in most states, and a large following of voters and activists.

The 1996 campaign was a humbling experience for Perot and he disappeared from public view for almost a year, resurfacing for the 1997 national Reform Party convention, where he admitted to some political mistakes (Mayer and Wilcox 2001). However, Perot and his national committee played almost no role in the 1998 elections, when state Reform parties fielded candidates—11 gubernatorial, 8 senatorial, 25 congress-



sional candidates, and 164 state legislative candidates (including fusion candidacies). Most of these candidates performed on par with minor-party candidates, and in some states, such as Ohio, weak performances cost the Reform Party ballot access for 2000. Once again, the New York Independence Party helped elect candidates via a fusion strategy, including eight members of Congress. But by far the biggest gain was the election of Reform candidate Jesse Ventura as governor of Minnesota, an event that "shocked the world"—as Ventura's supporters liked to put it (Stephen and Wagner 1999).

The circumstances of Ventura's upset victory reveal the potential and limitations of the Reform Party (Gilbert and Peterson 2001). Clearly one reason for Ventura's victory was the existence of the Minnesota Reform party (which originated in the Minnesota Independence Party). Thanks both to local activists and Perot's presidential campaigns, the party had obtained not only ballot access, but also access to state public financing and televised debates. Like Perot, Ventura enjoyed some notoriety for his political persona, honed as a local talk-show host, controversial small-city mayor, and professional wrestler. He was also a shrewd campaigner who cleverly used the news media, televised debates, and the Internet to mobilize a strong personal following. An equally important factor was major-party failure: the Democratic and Republican gubernatorial candidates ran ineffective campaigns, allowing Ventura to paint them as career politicians out of touch with the public. As with the 1992 Perot vote and the 1994 congressional election, the Ventura vote helped Republicans take control of the Minnesota legislature in 1998. And like Perot, Ventura did little to nurture the Minnesota Reform party organization apart from his own ambitions. Thus, the Ventura campaign points to the possibilities of minor parties operating from the bottom-up on neglected issues. It also points to the limitations of relying on a charismatic candidate without a corps of principled partisans.

### THE POLITICS OF PRINCIPLE, 1999–2000

As the 2000 election approached, there was a strong sense among the Reform Party state leaders that recruiting a good presidential candidate was a top priority. Although Perot retained some die-hard backers, a survey of state leaders revealed that most believed it would be better if he were not the nominee.<sup>1</sup> Also, many leaders doubted that Perot wanted to run again, but in characteristic fashion, Perot did not share his plans.

In response to this situation, the 1998 and 1999 Reform Party national conventions created a presidential nomination process. The process was complex, having two different nomination mechanisms (Farney 1999).

First, candidates could qualify to compete for the nomination by getting on the ballot in a minimum of twenty-nine states; typically this involved collecting signatures at the state level. Once qualified, the candidates could participate in a "virtual primary" where party members would express their preferences via mail, fax, or e-mail. Party members could qualify to vote in three ways: (1) by signing a candidates petition; (2) by being certified by a state party, or (3) by simply asking their state party for permission to participate. Voters would express the order of their preferences among the candidates on the ballot, and the candidate receiving the most support, calculated via a computer program, would become the nominee. However, a second nomination mechanism also was approved: the national convention delegates were allowed to set aside the primary results by a two-thirds vote, essentially setting up an alternative nomination mechanism. These delegates were to be chosen by state parties according to their own rules, which varied from state to state. (Because of Perot's 1996 showing, the Reform Party had access to \$2.5 million in public funds with which to stage a nominating convention.)

In large part, these rules were designed to help build the Reform Party by giving all elements of the party (candidates, state party officials, and local activists) incentives to participate. However, many observers believed that these rules preserved Perot's option to enter the nomination contest at the last minute, as in 1996. Whatever the case, the nomination politics began at the 1999 convention itself with the choice of a new national party chair (*Ballot Access News* 1999). With the endorsement of Jesse Ventura, Jack Gargan, a long-time party activist, was chosen chairman over a Perot loyalist. Gargan's election precipitated a bitter internal struggle over the location of the national convention: Ventura wanted it in Minnesota, while the Perotistas favored Long Beach, California.

A presidential straw poll at the 1999 convention revealed that Perot was the top pick of only a slim plurality of Reform Party leaders (22 percent), followed by developer Donald Trump (17 percent), economist Pat Choate (13 percent), former Connecticut Governor Lowell Weicker (8 percent), former senator David Boren (5 percent), General Colin Powell (5 percent), Governor Jesse Ventura (3 percent), and commentator Pat Buchanan (3 percent). Other candidates receiving some support included Ralph Nader (1996 Green Party nominee) and John Hagelin (1996 Natural Law Party nominee) (*Ballot Access News* 1999).

Soon a number of efforts were under way to recruit presidential candidates (Politics1.com 2000). Ventura indicated that he was not interested in the 2000 nomination himself, but clearly wanted to preserve his future options by recruiting an attractive candidate who would be successful enough to maintain ballot access and public funding. To that end, he urged candidates as diverse as John Anderson (an independent candidate



for president in 1980), Lowell Weicker, and Donald Trump. Trump was the most serious of these candidates, resembling Perot in many respects: he was something of a celebrity and possessed media savvy and immense wealth. In fact, Trump pledged to spend up to \$100 million if he got into the race (Hamburger 2000).

Perot loyalists were opposed to Ventura's effort, partly because it threatened their own position in the party and partly because they believed a more experienced candidate was needed. To this end, Perotistas began a "draft Perot" effort, and others talked to candidates as diverse as David Boren, Ralph Nader, and John Hagelin. (Hagelin decided to seek the Reform nomination, and also the Green Party and Natural Law Party nominations in an effort to unify all the major minor parties; he was aided in these quests with \$676,000 in public matching funds). Another group, lead by Pat Choate, approached Pat Buchanan (Brownstein 1999; Edsall 1999). Some observers believe these overtures were a cynical maneuver to oppose Ventura. But others argue there was genuine interest in Buchanan's celebrity, media skills, and ability to raise funds (he raised \$15.7 million in 1996 in the GOP nomination contest). On some issues, Buchanan fit with the Reform Party leaders quite well, such as trade restrictions and economic nationalism, although he differed quite sharply on social issues, especially abortion. In fact, both polls and independent analysts noted that Buchanan was a potent candidate, with the ability to garner perhaps as much as 10 percent of the presidential vote by building a coalition of economic and social issue populists (Berke 1999). No doubt there is some truth to both perspectives.

In the summer of 1999, Buchanan's third bid for the Republican presidential nomination was in serious trouble. Unlike his 1992 and 1996 campaigns, Buchanan faced strong competition from the right as well as from strong centrist candidates (Mayer 2001, 28). A major blow was the 1999 Iowa straw poll, where he finished fifth. Buchanan had in previous years rejected the idea of a minor-party bid, but now his problems in the GOP and the interest of Reform Party officials made the option more appealing. The Reform Party offered Buchanan (and other candidates) the chance to compete in a general election, plus considerable campaign assets: access to the ballot in twenty-one states, \$12.6 million in federal matching funds, and a cadre of grassroots activists.

After a long public courtship, Buchanan left the Republican Party and declared his intention to seek the Reform nomination on 25 October 1999 (Baum 1999). Shortly afterward, he launched two parallel campaigns, one to gain ballot access in the states (and thus qualify for the Reform primary), and the other to win state convention delegates in states where the Reform Party or allies were on the ballot. Buchanan was able to use federal primary matching funds to help finance these efforts (he received



some \$4.3 million in public funds, and eventually spent a total of \$10.6 million on the nomination).

Buchanan's twin campaigns provoked a three-stage battle within the Reform Party. The first stage was a leadership fight that arrayed Perot loyalists, Buchanan's supporters, and Pat Choate against Ventura's followers, Trump's backers, and Jack Gargan. In this struggle Buchanan benefited from an unlikely ally: leftist Lenora Fulani, a power in the New York Independence Party. This conflict ended in a nasty meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, in February 2000, where Gargan was replaced by Choate as national chair. Subsequent lawsuits confirmed the shift in leadership, and as a result, the national convention was scheduled for Long Beach, California (*Ballot Access News* 2000a). Having failed to bend the nomination process in his favor, Ventura quit the party and Trump ended his nomination bid. Shortly afterward, the Minnesota Independence Party withdrew from the Reform Party (Whereatt 2000).

The second stage of conflict occurred largely at the grass roots (Edsall 2000c; Clines 2000). Buchanan and his followers aggressively pursued the twofold strategy of gaining ballot access and naming delegates to the national convention. Buchanan's moral traditionalism was very unpopular with some grassroots Perotistas, and this dislike was exacerbated when the "Buchananeers" tried to take over existing state party organizations. Buchanan was skilled in this kind of infighting from his years in the GOP, while many Reformists and Perotistas had never experienced this kind of bare-knuckle politics. Buchanan made numerous enemies amid allegations of fraud, intimidation, and extremism from all sides. The final indignity was Buchanan's attempt to set up parallel Reform Party organizations in states where he failed to gain control of the party machinery (Janofsky 2000a). With increasing desperation, some Reform Party leaders stepped up the "draft Perot" campaign to stop Buchanan. This stage in the conflict ended on 1 July 2000, when Perot formally announced he would not seek the nomination. In characteristic Perot style, he suggested "no option" for the national convention (Janofsky 2000b).

With Perot's announcement, the anti-Buchanan forces rallied behind John Hagelin, who had been quietly pursuing the nomination. This third stage of the conflict came to an acrimonious head at the Reform Party national convention in August (Yang 2000; Edsall 2000d; Curry 2000). From the outset, it was clear that the Buchanan forces would dominate the primary vote and the convention delegates. The Hagelin forces charged that the Buchanan campaign had engaged in primary vote fraud. Although there was considerable evidence for this allegation, it is also probably true that Buchanan had more legitimate support than Hagelin (*Ballot Access News* 2000b). After a bitter confrontation, carried on national television, the Hagelin forces withdrew across the street to their own alternative con-

vention. The “official” convention then set aside the primary results by a two-thirds vote and nominated Buchanan for president and Ezola Foster for vice president (who was a black, female member of the John Birch Society). The “alternative” convention nominated Hagelin and running mate Nat Goldhaber (a wealthy former Silicon Valley businessman) by acclamation. The tumultuous conventions were followed by legal actions that secured the federal matching money and the Reform Party label for Buchanan (Perot filed an affidavit in favor Hagelin) (Barta 2000). Conceding defeat, Hagelin once more accepted the presidential nomination of the Natural Law Party.

At root, the nomination conflict was as much about the Reform Party’s principles—the proverbial “soul” of the party—as it was about power within the organization (Politics1.com 2000). Buchanan was attempting a particular issue synthesis, combing economic nationalism, especially opposition to free trade (where Buchanan and Perot had been allies) with moral traditionalism, particularly opposition to abortion (where Buchanan was at odds with Perot). Although this synthesis failed to attract much support, it was plausible and has occurred in other industrialized democracies (Osullivan 2000). To a considerable degree, Buchanan’s rivals offered syntheses of their own. John Hagelin advanced a merger of science and mysticism in support for comprehensive social reform. Lenora Fulani advocated a “left-center-and-right” coalition to take the place of Marxism in combating the evils of capitalism. Perotistas, such as Pat Choate, advocated an “ideology of reform” (campaign finance, term limits) closely linked to a consistent vision of middle-class interests (restrictions on trade, taxes, government programs, and corporations). Jesse Ventura (and perhaps Donald Trump) offered a libertarian version of this ideology, embracing reform, free trade, and legal abortions.

In any event, the bitter infighting seriously harmed Buchanan. The publicity was very negative and it led many neutral observers to conclude that the party could not be taken seriously (Ceaser and Busch 2001, 155–60). More important, Reform Party leaders and activists defected from the national ticket in large numbers. Some, such as the New York Independence Party, withdrew from the Reform Party entirely. Buchanan appeared on the New York ballot only as the Right to Life Party nominee (*Ballot Access News* 2000d; 2000b). However, the larger portion of Reformists worked in state and local campaigns (including two gubernatorial, seven senate, forty-eight congressional, and fifty-nine state legislative races), or simply sat out the election.

Contrary to the initial expectations, Buchanan was not much a factor in the 2000 general election campaign. Sidetracked by gall bladder surgery, he did not campaign full-time until the fall. Despite spending \$13 million dollars (about one-half of Perot’s 1996 spending and one-quarter of the



1992 total), he languished in the low single digits in the polls and was excluded from presidential debates. In what was perhaps a fitting "end to an era," Ross Perot endorsed George W. Bush for president on *Larry King Live*, a few days before the election ("Perot endorses Bush for president" 2000). Exit polls revealed that some two-thirds of self-identified former Perot voters backed Bush.

Although Buchanan tailored his campaign to obtaining 5 percent of the presidential vote so as to maintain federal matching funds for the Reform Party, he was unsuccessful: he received just .43 percent of the presidential vote, slightly ahead of the .37 percent of the Libertarian Party, and less than one-fifth of Ralph Nader's 2.8 percent for the Green Party. Nevertheless, Buchanan may have been a factor in the close race between Bush and Gore. In four states (Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin), the Buchanan vote exceeded the margin between Gore and Bush. If these votes had all gone to the Republicans, Bush would have received 276 electoral votes, making the disputed Florida election irrelevant. Buchanan may also have influenced the Florida outcome, both by taking a handful of votes from Bush and by inadvertently absorbing a large number of votes meant for Gore via the infamous butterfly ballot episode (Brady et al. 2001).

### REFORM PARTY ACTIVISTS: THE CASE OF OHIO

What impact did Reform Party politics have on the development of a cadre of active partisans? We can begin to answer this question with the help of two surveys of Reformists in Ohio. The first survey was of a random sample of Reform Party activists conducted in 1996. The second survey was conducted in 2000 and involved a re-survey of the 1996 respondents as well as a comparable sample of post-1996 Reform Party activists, including those who circulated petitions for Buchanan.<sup>2</sup> While our primary focus will be on the 2000 survey results, we will be able to compare them with 1996 as a whole and note changes among individuals surveyed in both years. These data suggest that Reform Party politics inhibited the development of a corps of active partisans to a considerable degree. (For other studies of Reform Party activists, see Stone et al. 1999, and Martin and Spang 2001.)

Ohio is a good place to observe Reform Party activists for several reasons. First, as one can see in table 7.1, Ohio ranked just above the middle of the states in terms of votes for Perot in 1992 and 1996, and Buchanan in 2000. Second, it also ranked among the top states in the absolute number of party activists in 1996 and 2000. Third, Ohio has seen a great deal of



pro-Perot activity since 1992, all conducted by volunteers, and much of it spawning competing factions (Hoffman 1997). In 2000, the Ohio Reform Party leadership supported Buchanan in the nomination and general elections (Hoffman 1999). And fourth, Ohio is a strong party state, where activists are likely to have had experience with traditional party organizations (Margolis and Green 1995). It is worth noting that in table 7.1, there is no strong relationship between the number of activists and the percentage of the vote across states.

**TABLE 7.1**  
**Support for Perot and the Reform Party, 1992–2000**

	<i>Percent of Votes</i>			<i>Number of Activists</i>	
	1992	1996	2000	1996	2000
Maine	30%	14%	0.68%	79	487
Alaska	28	11	1.82	87	688
Idaho	27	13	1.52	353	394
Utah	27	10	1.21	147	402
Kansas	27	9	0.69	1052	958
Montana	26	14	1.39	226	325
Wyoming	26	12	1.27	458	131
Minnesota	24	12	0.91	677	1657
Nebraska	24	11	0.52	182	352
Oregon	24	11	0.46	410	1042
Washington	24	9	0.28	395	2039
Nevada	24	9	0.78	24	522
Arizona	24	8	0.81	820	1432
Vermont	23	12	0.74	47	134
North Dakota	23	12	2.53	213	214
Oklahoma	23	11	0.73	1758	635
Rhode Island	23	11	0.56	68	240
New Hampshire	23	10	0.46	264	1042
Massachusetts	23	9	0.41	598	1444
Colorado	23	7	0.60	1740	1307
Missouri	22	10	0.42	555	1551
Connecticut	22	10	0.32	409	878
South Dakota	22	10	1.05	101	205
Wisconsin	22	10	0.44	586	1404
Texas	22	7	0.19	2582	2669
Ohio	21	11	0.57	1425	3007
California	21	7	0.41	17335	15720
Indiana	20	10	0.77	1050	1203
Delaware	20	10	0.24	156	171
Florida	20	9	0.29	3910	4389
Michigan	19	9	0.04*	1022	2608

**TABLE 7.1 (Continued)**  
**Support for Perot and the Reform Party, 1992–2000**

	Percent of Votes			Number of Activists	
	1992	1996	2000	1996	2000
<b>NATION</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>0.43%</b>	<b>49266</b>	<b>78068</b>
Iowa	19	8	0.44	154	2342
Pennsylvania	18	10	0.33	1060	3565
Illinois	17	8	0.34	905	2392
West Virginia	16	11	0.49	108	384
New Jersey	16	9	0.22	601	1804
New York	16	8	0.46	1149	9726
New Mexico	16	6	0.23	232	458
Kentucky	14	9	0.27	434	862
Hawaii	14	8	0.29	112	191
Maryland	14	7	0.21	560	1069
North Carolina	14	7	0.46	746	1818
Virginia	14	7	0.20	358	1544
Georgia	13	6	0.42	767	1105
Louisiana	12	7	0.81	79	578
South Carolina	12	6	0.25	822	728
Alabama	11	6	0.38	285	280
Arkansas	10	8	0.80	177	430
Tennessee	10	6	0.20	246	857
Mississippi	9	6	0.23	78	312
Washington, D.C.	4	2	NA	54	132

Source: Official Election Returns; *Ballot Access News* (September 1996 and September 2000c).  
 \* Buchanan write-in candidates

## PARTISANSHIP AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Were the Ohio Reformists strong partisans and how has their partisanship changed over time? Table 7.2 reports two measures of partisanship and then a scale that combines both. Only two-fifths of the 2000 respondents considered themselves to be “members” of the Reform Party, a figure markedly lower than in 1996, when almost two-thirds claimed to be party members. This lower level of self-described membership was about the same among the 1996 activists who were re-surveyed as the new 2000 respondents, strongly suggesting a real decline in allegiance.

In 2000, one-sixth of the respondents reported a “very strong attachment” to the Reform Party, down from one-fifth in 1996. A little more than one-quarter claimed a “strong” attachment, about the same as in 1996. A little more than one-third reported a moderate attachment, and finally, a



TABLE 7.2  
Ohio Reform Party: Measures of Partisanship

<i>Reform</i>		<i>Combined Partisanship</i>		<i>Attachment to the Reform Party</i>	
<b>Party Member</b>	40.4%	Core	12.6%	Very strong	15.5%
		Solid	10.5	Strong	27.3
		Mixed	36.9	Moderate	34.2
		Weak	21.0	Weak	22.9
		Peripheral	18.9		

Source: Survey by authors, 2000.

little more than one-fifth noted a weak attachment. These last two figures represent an increase over 1996. Overall, the attachment to the party declined by about the same amount as membership.

The second column of table 7.2 combines these two items to produce a five-point scale comparable to standard measures of major-party identification. The first category, "Core" partisans, included "members" who were "very strongly" attached to the Reform Party. This group accounted for one-eighth of the 2000 sample, down from almost one-fifth in 1996. The second category, "Solid" partisans, included party "members" who were "strongly" attached, and it made one-tenth of the activists in 2000, down sharply from nearly one-quarter in 1996. The next group of "Mixed" partisans lives up to its name: most were "members" with "moderate" attachments, but it also included "members" with weak attachments and nonmembers with "strong" or "very strong" attachments. This intermediate group made up just over one-third of the respondents, up from one-quarter in 1996. The remaining two groups are "Weak" (less than one-fifth of the 2000 sample, up slightly from 1996) and "Peripheral" partisans (a little less than one-fifth in 2000, up from one-eighth in 1996); none claimed to be party "members" and each expressed "Moderate" and "Weak" attachments to the party, respectively.

We can use these five categories of partisanship to explore more fully the attitudes of Ohio Reformists. Overall, only about one-eighth of Ohio Reformists were strongly connected to their party, a figure that is at least two or three times smaller than comparable groups of major party activists (Margolis and Green 1995). While the Core partisans represent a good beginning for a new party, they probably could not sustain a viable organization. But worse news for the party was the decline of the Core and Solid partisans from 1996. This represents an across the board shift away from Reform Party allegiance. For example, more than two-thirds of the Core partisans surveyed in 1996 moved to other categories and none of the Peripheral participants became Core or Solid partisans. Interestingly, when asked about identification with the major parties, more than

one-half claim to be Independents, one-third Republicans, and one-quarter Democrats (data not shown).

We asked the 2000 respondents who reported no longer being members of the Reform Party why they had left. More than one-quarter noted the lack of party leadership and another one-fifth mentioned the party's lack of competitiveness and organization. One-sixth complained about infighting and about the same number mentioned issues, including the lack of party principles. Another one-sixth noted problems with particular candidates, particularly disillusionment with Ross Perot. Interestingly, the 2000 and 1996 activists strongly supported the concept of political parties. For example, more than one-half strongly agreed that "good political parties are crucial to American democracy" and that "America needs a multiparty system." Not surprisingly, the Core and Solid partisans are the most likely to hold these views.

How do these activists see the goals of the Reform Party? We asked the respondents to choose among three: (1) elect a good candidate (a principal goal of a personalistic minor party), (2) protest poor policies (a key motivation of protest minor parties), or (3) develop alternative principles in politics (a major reason for principled minor parties). As table 7.3 reveals, the 2000 Ohio Reformists overwhelmingly chose electing a good candidate, and it was the most popular goal for the Core and Solid partisans. Protest motivations increased as one moved toward the Peripheral partisans, while principled motivations were a minority position in all categories. Support for electing good candidates changed only a little from 1996, although the support for protest declined and development of principles increased across the board.

The second section of table 7.3, which reports on standard measures of political incentives, suggests that the candidate-centered focus may have declined somewhat since 1996. The most common in both years was to "Back candidates" and the percent reporting this incentive as "very important" declined modestly from 1996. The next most common responses to this question, "Promote issues" and "Civic duty," also declined in frequency. However, in both years these purposive motivations accounted for a majority of all five partisan categories, typically declining in magnitude from the Core to Peripheral partisans. In this regard, the Ohio Reformists resembled their major-party counterparts, who were also strongly motivated by purposive incentives (Margolis and Green 1995).

More instrument incentives, such as "Win elections" and "Support party," were much less salient, however. Only among Core partisans did a majority report these things as "very important," and the percentages declined very sharply from Core to Peripheral partisans. There was even less interest in material and solidary incentives in all categories, and the figures declined from 1996. It is here that the Ohio Reformists differed most from their major-party counterparts (Margolis and Green 1995). Of course, they had much less opportunity to contest elections, build party



TABLE 7.3  
Ohio Reform Party: Motivations, Goals, Activity

	Core	Solid	Mixed	Weak	Peripheral	ALL
<b>TOP PARTY GOAL<sup>a</sup></b>						
Elect good candidates	65	61	53	51	49	55
Protest poor policies	9	12	19	25	28	20
Develop better principles	26	27	28	24	23	25
<b>MOTIVATIONS<sup>b</sup></b>						
Back candidate	78	83	75	69	55	71
Promote issues	78	69	65	65	52	65
Civic duty	78	71	58	56	49	60
Win elections	41	43	19	24	17	25
Support party	47	41	12	11	10	19
Business/employment	17	13	11	5	13	11
Fun/excitement	2	4	8	2	3	5
Social contacts	7	8	6	4	5	6
Political career	2	4	0	0	1	1
<b>POLITICAL ACTIVITY<sup>c</sup></b>						
Active in 1992	81	71	54	41	41	55
Active in 1996	85	78	39	24	13	42
Active in 2000 (anticipated)	80	47	15	4	1	22
Active state/local	79	44	20	15	17	28
Activism 1990s	60	48	58	35	35	45

Source: Survey by authors, 2000.

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Columns add to 100%. <sup>b</sup>Entries are percent reporting each motivation to be "very important." <sup>c</sup>First two rows are percent reporting being "active" or "very active"; third row are percent who score in top two categories of activism index.

organizations, and obtain personal rewards from politics. However, one might have expected activity in the Reform Party to have increased such motivations, as often occurs among major-party activists. Overall, the Ohio Reformists were less strongly motivated in 2000 than in 1996.

How active were the Ohio Reformists? The last section of table 7.3 reports on five measures of party activity. The first two are self-assessments of participation in the 1992 and 1996 campaigns, and the third an assessment of likely activity in the 2000 campaign. The fourth measure is an assessment of participation in state/local Reform Party campaigns. The final measure is an index of 1990s activism constructed from a battery of thirteen specific activities.<sup>3</sup>

In 2000, almost three-fifths of the respondents reported being "active" or "very active" in the 1992 Perot campaign. As one might expect, activism was highest among the Core partisans and much lower among the Peripherals. Reported activism in the 1996 campaign was markedly lower

for the entire 2000 sample, with about two-fifths claiming to have been "active" or "very active." Core and Solid partisans actually showed higher figures than for 1992, but the other groups showed sharp decline. And anticipated participation in the 2000 elections was markedly less for the sample as a whole, with just more than one-fifth expecting to be "active" or "very active." Here the Core partisans show a high level of anticipated activism, hardly different from their reported participation in the 1992 and 1996 campaigns. But note that all the other categories expected to be much less active in the 2000 campaign, especially the Weak and Peripheral partisans. Not surprisingly, the Core partisans reported the highest level of participation in state/local campaigns, on par with their activity in presidential campaigns and the other categories markedly less.

Such self-reports probably overstate participation, of course, and must be viewed with some skepticism. However, these patterns resemble an index of specific activities undertaken in the 1990s, shown in the final row. In 2000, the Core partisans were the most active by this measure, which generally declined across the categories. A major exception was the Mixed partisans, who were nearly as active as the Core partisans. While the Core and Solid partisans show a decline in overall participation from the 1996 sample, the Mixed partisans show an increase, as do the Weak and Peripheral partisans. The reason for these anomalies in participation is straightforward: the most active portions of Mixed, Weak, and Peripheral partisans in the 2000 sample had been Core and Solid partisans in the 1996 survey. Disillusioned with the party, these once active participants had moved away from their former party allegiance by 2000. With the exception of the Core partisans, the Reformists were far less active than their major party counterparts in Ohio (Margolis and Green 1995).

Overall, then, the Ohio Reform Party activists are not particularly strong partisans in 2000, and less so than in 1996. Only a small group had the psychological attachments, motivations, and activity levels comparable to major party activists in Ohio. Even the Core partisans were largely motivated by the personal appeal of Perot, rather than protests or principles, although the latter motivation did increase modestly over time.

## LEADERS, ISSUES, AND IDEOLOGY

Table 7.4 reports the activists' "net proximity" to political leaders and organizations.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, Ross Perot was not the most popular figure in the 2000 sample, scoring just a +24 net approval, down from a +70 in 1996. The most popular figure was John McCain, whose 2000 primary campaign strongly stressed campaign finance reform. Perot and McCain show opposite patterns across the partisan categories. For Perot, the



strongest positives are among the Core partisans, and the numbers decline as one moves toward the Peripheral partisans. In contrast, the Core partisans had on balance a negative view of McCain, and the figures become increasingly positive as one moves toward the Peripherals. The only other figure to receive a net positive rating in 2000 was Ralph Nader. Here the Core and Solid partisans were on balance favorable, while the Weak and Peripheral categories were negative. Compared with 1996, both Perot and Nader lost considerable popularity.

Pat Buchanan was a divisive figure in the 2000 sample. Overall, the assessment was negative, with the Core partisans being the most supportive and the Peripherals the least. These assessments may well have become even more polarized as the 2000 campaign progressed. However, Buchanan's scores compared favorably with other Reform party figures. Jesse Ventura received a -11 over all, but none of the partisan categories gave him a net positive assessment. Pat Choate (the 1996 vice-presidential nominee) was an even more polarizing figure. Richard Lamm (Perot's 1996 competitor for the nomination) fared even more poorly, but the worst marks were given to Donald Trump—who scored worse than Al Gore or George W. Bush, hardly popular figures among Reformists.

As in 1996, the Ohio Reformists were hostile to prominent interest groups. The Chamber of Commerce and the Sierra Club were the least

**TABLE 7.4**  
**The Ohio Reform Party: Proximity to Leaders and Groups**

	% Net Proximity					
	<i>Core</i>	<i>Solid</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Peripheral</i>	<i>ALL</i>
John McCain	-20	+11	+23	+49	+47	+26
Ross Perot	+71	+59	+32	+0	+14	+24
Ralph Nader	+22	+22	+3	-12	-14	+1
Jesse Ventura	-14	-25	-5	-21	-3	-11
Pat Buchanan	+46	+24	-13	-45	-59	-16
Pat Choate	+60	+5	-25	-25	-65	-16
George W. Bush	-67	-29	-28	0	-28	-27
Richard Lamm	-37	-34	-40	-48	-45	-41
Al Gore	-89	-68	-62	-73	-49	-66
Donald Trump	-79	-79	-74	-85	-75	-78
NRA	+51	+42	+17	+3	-22	+14
Sierra Club	-11	-14	-20	-21	0	-15
Chamber of Commerce	-17	-28	-13	-16	-15	-16
AFL-CIO	+2	-19	-12	-42	-37	-22
Christian Coalition	-30	-23	-23	-34	-47	-30
ACLU	-55	-68	-52	-58	-57	-56

Source: Survey by authors, 2000. Note: Entries are percent net proximity to leader or group; positive sign indicates closeness and negative sign indicates distance.

unpopular, but the AFL-CIO, Christian Coalition, and ACLU were also disliked with varying degrees of intensity. These figures reveal why Buchanan's issues synthesis was unsuccessful: these activists stood aloof from both standard economic and cultural cleavages. Interestingly, the only group to receive a positive evaluation was the NRA, especially among the Core partisans. This finding represents a dramatic change from 1996, when the NRA scores were comparable to those of the AFL-CIO. The NRA aside, the 2000 activists were even more hostile to prominent "special interests" than in 1996.

What about the political attitudes of the Ohio Reformists? Table 7.5 reports net issue positions.<sup>5</sup> Note first that in 2000, all five categories strongly backed staples of Perot's critique of the political system, such as campaign reform and term limits. As with support for Perot himself, support fell somewhat as one moves from the Core partisans to the Peripherals. And with a few exceptions, net support for these issues declined from 1996. A similar pattern obtained for issues central to Perot's critique of the federal government, such as the need for a balanced budget and the return of federal programs to the states.

However, a surprise occurred on elements of Perot's economic nationalism, such as opposition to NAFTA and GATT, and restrictions on immigration. Here the Core partisans were quite enthusiastic, but support dropped off very quickly, so that the Peripheral partisans were less enthusiastic. A similar but more dramatic pattern occurred on whether the United States should withdraw from the United Nations, a position perhaps closer to Buchanan than Perot, but reflecting a strong nationalist spirit. The Core partisans were on balance in favor of withdrawal, but the other categories opposed it by increasing margins, culminating with the Peripherals. On other economic issues, such as national health insurance and business regulation, these activists tended to have modestly liberal positions, giving some support to both. For all these issues, similar patterns obtained in 1996, but with lower magnitudes.

The most dramatic change occurred on abortion. In 2000, the sample as a whole held a net pro-choice position, but only about one-half the comparable figure in 1996, representing a conservative shift. This shift occurred in all the categories, with the largest changes occurring for the Core and Solid partisans, and the least among the Mixed partisans. Some of this change was caused by the influx of Buchanan activists, who were very strongly pro-life, but the shift also took place among existing 1996 activists. While this pattern may be peculiar to Ohio (where the 1998 Reform Party gubernatorial nominee was pro-life), it may also reveal the impact of the Buchanan campaign in persuading activists to change their positions for substantive or strategic purposes—a process reported by Layman and Carsey (1998) for Republican activists in the 1990s. The Ohio Reformists were on balance opposed to affirmative action in 2000, with little change from 1996.



TABLE 7.5  
The Ohio Reform Party: Issues and Ideology

	% Net Agree <sup>a</sup>					
	Core	Solid	Mixed	Weak	Peripheral	ALL
<b>ISSUES</b>						
Pro-campaign reform	87	75	74	81	56	74
Pro-term limits	83	61	62	54	62	63
Pro-balance budget	49	55	45	30	31	41
Pro-programs to states	71	63	47	71	19	51
Anti-NAFTA/GATT	80	65	50	31	31	48
Anti-immigration	68	48	55	22	13	41
Anti-United Nations	29	-5	-13	-26	-43	-15
Pro-national health	19	21	26	19	28	23
Pro-regulation	30	47	18	24	29	26
Pro-abortion	-4	-19	26	21	15	14
Anti-affirmative action	36	70	42	38	29	40
<b>IDEOLOGY<sup>b</sup></b>						
Very conservative	36	28	23	29	21	26
Conservative	33	30	30	29	21	29
Moderate	24	28	38	31	37	34
Liberal	4	8	5	8	11	7
Very liberal	4	8	4	2	9	5
<b>THE SYSTEM NEEDS<sup>b</sup></b>						
Fundamental reform	63	65	51	40	48	51
Major changes	21	22	20	24	25	22
Better leaders	16	13	29	36	27	27

Source: Survey by authors, 2000.

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Entries are net agreement with issue position. <sup>b</sup>Columns add to 100%.

Although the Ohio Reformists were not consistent ideologues in a conventional sense, they did think of themselves as right-of-center. In 2000, more than two-thirds of the Core partisans considered themselves "conservative" or "very conservative," a figure that declined to about two-fifths among the Peripherals. Although moderates were common in all the categories, liberals were rare. For the entire sample, these figures differed little from 1996, but there was evidence of polarization across the categories: the Core partisans became more conservative and the Peripherals more moderate.

A final piece of evidence is revealing. We asked these activists to choose from three remedies for the American political system: (1) fundamental

reform, (2) major changes, or (3) the recruitment of better leaders. On balance, a majority of the 2000 sample chose fundamental reform, and the Core and Solid partisans did so by the largest margin. About one-quarter chose major changes and better leaders; the latter was least popular among Core partisans and most popular among Weak and Peripheral partisans. These figures changed little from 1996.

Despite their differences on some issues, the Ohio Reformists shared a deep sense of betrayal by the political system. They fit well descriptions commonly applied to 1992 Perot voters: a "radicalized middle-class" that was "estranged from the power centers of society" and motivated by a "compelling and simple idea: elites are corrupt" (Greenberg 1995, 231). This pattern was certainly consistent with the demography of the Ohio Reformists. White, male, middle-age, and solidly middle class, they reported being disconnected from the social institutions that structure mainstream society, from churches and civic associations to interest groups and the major political parties (Greenberg 1995, 237–41). In this regard, the Core partisans differed in modest, yet significant ways from the Peripherals. The former were younger, with greater family responsibilities and fewer economic prospects. These tendencies were just as evident in 1996 as 2000.

Taken together, these data reveal that the Ohio Reformists were simultaneously "antigovernment and antiestablishment" (Greenberg 1995, 234–37). A consistent "ideology of reform" could be constructed from these opinions. But so could a doctrine of "economic nationalism," "middle-class interests," and with some effort, moral traditionalism could be added as well. Any of these options could serve as a basis for the further development of Reform partisanship. However, eight years of Reform Party politics has done little to encourage this development. Indeed, the bitter infighting and ideological struggles of 2000 may have short-circuited its progress permanently.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCCESS

Without doubt, Ross Perot and the Reform Party influenced the character and direction of the major political parties. While this success may not have been exactly what they had hoped for, it was an important achievement nonetheless. Responding to the major-party failures, Reform politics helped correct them. But the consequence of this kind of success was the failure to institutionalize the Perot phenomenon as a viable minor party. While this result was not unexpected, Reform party politics help us understand why, and the failure to develop an active corps of partisans was critical.



Although the particular sequence of events may have been unique to the Reform Party, its trajectory contained key elements of personalistic, protest, and principled minor parties, and each contributed to the final results, for good and ill. The personalistic character of the original 1992 Perot campaign was essential to the entire phenomenon, attracting the basis for a partisan activist corps. However, Perot's personal foibles and political mistakes inhibited the development of partisanship. The protest elements in the founding of the Reform Party contributed much needed fervor to the embryonic activist corps, and contributed to the rise of effective organizations in some states. However, these protests were too narrow to support the development of partisanship, and in any event, became less important over time. The debate over principles that characterized the 2000 election cycle was a useful step toward systematizing and expanding Reform partisanship. But the bitter factionalism and infighting obstructed the development of a serviceable ideology. In all these regards, the Reform Party did not "survive Perot."

Of course, the biases of the American party system made it very difficult for the Reform Party to become viable. It is worth noting that the most successful organizations appeared in states whose laws are less biased against minor parties, including progressive Minnesota and New York with its fusion ballots. This fact highlights Lowi's admonition that viable minor parties must attack the legal underpinning of the two-party system. In addition, the real successes of the Minnesota and New York Independence parties reveal the value of bottom up, issue-oriented minor parties. However, such efforts can only be maintained if an active corps of partisans is developed, and in its absence, these state parties may decline as well. If current trends continue, the Reform Party will not become a viable minor party, although under the leadership of Pat Buchanan, it might persist as a principled party on the rightward fringe of the two-party system. The initial political success of Perot and the Reform Party made it possible for Buchanan to launch his crusade, including ballot access and public funds. The Buchanan defeat has deprived the Reform Party of ballot access and public funds. As a result, the Reform Party is unlikely to be a factor in national politics.

## NOTES

1. Interviews of Reform Party state leaders conducted at the Bliss Institute, University of Akron in fall of 1998.

2. In the summer and spring of 1996, a mail survey was conducted of all the circulators of Reform party petitions in Ohio in the fall of 1995. The response rate was excellent: a single wave produced a return rate of 50 percent, excluding

undelivered mail (N = 497). There was no apparent bias in the returned survey by geography or gender. Since this sample had been quite active in circulating petitions, it contains fewer peripheral participants than other surveys of Perot activists (cf. Partin et al. 1996). In the summer and spring of 2000, the respondents to the 1996 survey were resurveyed, along with a similar size sample of Ohio Reform Party leaders, circulators for the 2000 Buchanan campaign, party campaign contributors, and participants in the 1998 Reform Party primary. This survey produced a return rate of 49 percent for all the subsamples. A bias in response was detected for the Reform Party leaders and Buchanan circulators and was corrected by weighting. Unweighted data produced very similar results. The 2000 and 1996 data sets were merged so that the respondents to both surveys could be compared.

3. The thirteen activities included primary voting, signing petitions, contacting public officials, attending campaign rallies, attending public meetings, writing letters to the editor, door-to-door canvassing, making a campaign contribution, participating in a demonstration, serving as a party official, recruiting volunteers, running for public office, and raising funds. The index summed any response to these questions during the relevant time periods. Anticipated activism was asked in both the 1996 and 2000 samples because of the surveys were completed before the general election campaigns.

4. Here "very far" and "far" responses were subtracted from "close" and "very close" responses. A positive sign indicates net closeness and a negative sign indicates the opposite.

5. As with the proximity measures, the "agree" and "strongly agree" responses were subtracted from the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses. A positive sign indicates net agreement and a negative sign indicates the opposite.



## Sharing the Spoils: Ralph Nader, the Green Party, and the Elections of 2000

CHRISTIAN COLLET AND JERROLD R. HANSEN

"Bush and Gore Make Me Wanna Ralph"

—Bumper sticker seen in Berkeley, California

"Everything's a victory, bro."

—Tre Arrow, Green candidate for Oregon's 3rd Congressional District,  
speaking to a reporter

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a *spoiler* as "one who pillages, plunders and robs" and, for many supporters of Albert Gore Jr., the 2000 Democratic presidential candidate for president, Ralph Nader fit the description perfectly. Unlike Ross Perot, whose lead in the national polls in early 1992 inspired serious deliberation of his potential, the possibility of a President Nader and a Green administration never captured the public imagination. From the beginning of the 2000 campaign, the talk around Nader was of his frugality, seriousness—and potential threat to the incumbent vice president. "Crusader Nader plays low-key, low-budget spoiler" read a June banner in the *Los Angeles Times*, a story that was followed that summer by headlines like "Nader Rocks Gore's Boat," "Nader Could Be a Spoiler in Gore-leaning States," and "Will Nader Spoil Things for Gore?"<sup>1</sup> Two weeks before election day, the *New York Times* published a scathing editorial titled "Mr. Nader's Electoral Mischief" that referred to the Green's "wrecking-ball candidacy" that was "a disservice to the electorate." "What once seemed a speculative threat," the *Times* wrote, "has become a very real danger to the Gore campaign."

In the world of minor-party politics, argues Giovanni Sartori, there is but one significant goal: establishing relevance. This can happen, he says, only when the party's "existence, or appearance, affects the tactics

of party competition and particularly when it alters the direction of the competition—by determining a switch . . . either leftward, rightward, or in both directions” (1976, 123). In 2000, some (though not all) of the strategic components for a “relevant” minor-party threat were in place: two major-party candidates who were indistinguishable on a number of issues, a precedent of alternative voting in prior elections, a campaign that was failing to energize the electorate. Perhaps most important was the tight competition between the Democrats and Republicans. Not only were both houses of Congress up for grabs, but polls at the beginning and end of the fall showed a razor-thin margin separating Gore and George W. Bush. If nothing else, an election decided by a few votes would make any party capable of taking a percentage or two of the vote decidedly relevant.

In the end, Nader received nearly 2.9 million votes nationwide in a race where fewer than 500,000 votes separated the two major parties. Although his 2.7 percent was far short of his goal of 5 percent—and qualification of the Green Party for federal matching funds in 2004—Nader arguably established Sartorian relevance. Whether real or imaginary, he became the danger that the *Times* feared. The media paid constant attention, and the Democrats were forced to adapt their strategy throughout. In early September, Gore’s running mate, Joseph Lieberman, attacked Nader directly and argued that a Green vote for president would put George W. Bush in the White House (Gerstenzang and Calvo 2000; Dobbin 2000). In the final two weeks of the campaign, the Democrats sent their nominee to traditional strongholds in an effort to appease liberals who threatened to defect to the Greens. Although we will never know what might have happened otherwise, such strategic decisions may have cost the Democrats the necessary votes to win.

In this chapter, we address the difficult-to-answer question of Nader’s impact on the election results by taking a comprehensive look at his voters and vote, employing both individual and aggregate-level data analysis. We begin with a review of the Nader campaign, from nomination to election day. We then turn to an exclusive look at data provided by The Gallup Organization’s nightly tracking poll to get a better sense of Nader’s supporters. On many social and political variables, the Gallup data reveal significant distinctions between those who backed Nader and those who voted for Gore. Subsequently, we examine the Nader vote at the county level and see important relationships among voting for Nader, voting for other minor-party and independent candidates, and the closeness of the two-party contest. After giving some discussion to the Green Party’s performance at the subpresidential level, we conclude by reviewing our evidence in an attempt to determine Nader’s precise impact on the 2000 election—and what it will mean for the Green Party and other minor parties in future elections.



## A PROFESSIONAL CAMPAIGN WAGED AGAINST PROFESSIONALISM

The choice of Ralph Nader as the presidential standard bearer of the Green Party in 2000, as in 1996, was not universally popular among Green activists. In fact, Nader was nominated by two sometimes rival organizations, the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) and the Greens/Green Party USA (G/GPUSA). The existence of the ASGP and G/GPUSA reflects a division in the Green movement over goals, strategies, and tactics. The ASGP is more pragmatic and more interested in influencing the national agenda, whereas the G/GPUSA is more committed to the Green ideals of decentralization, participatory democracy, and direct action. In 1996, it was the ASGP which took the lead in promoting a Green presidential campaign and recruited Nader. Many members of the G/GPUSA criticized the move as "undemocratic," but were nonetheless pressured into supporting the campaign. Tensions between the two organizations broke open after the 1996 campaign (Berg 1999).

As the 2000 campaign approached, activists in both organizations had come to appreciate the benefits of the previous Nader campaign, including new members, local chapters, state parties, and publicity. The ASGP leaders once again took the lead in preparing for the campaign, engineering Nader's renomination in June 2000 over John Hagelin (who also ran for the Reform Party nomination and eventually accepted renomination for the Natural Law Party). The ASGP viewed the campaign largely in instrumental terms. They hoped it would attract more party members, invigorate local and state organizations, and produce ballot access in more states. More important, they hoped to secure at least 5 percent of the popular vote and thus qualify for federal public funds in 2004 and induce the political establishment to take the Green agenda seriously. The G/GPUSA leaders reluctantly backed Nader, in the name of party unity, but many activists were opposed. Some worried about the instrumental emphasis of the effort, its top-down structure, and whether Nader was really committed to the Green agenda. Others were concerned that the Nader campaign might help elect George W. Bush president, and might lead to ASGP dominance over the Green movement (Berg 2001).

Following what some deemed a stealth candidacy in 1996, Nader's campaign in 2000 was, in the words of one observer, "very different" (Berg 2001). Belying the Green tradition as an informal, grassroots constellation of "act locally" citizen groups, the second incarnation of Nader-for-president offered some of the trappings of a professional political organization. There were slick thirty-second spots, such as "Priceless," that mocked the major parties and the costs of campaigns using a well-known MasterCard ad as its model. There was a comprehensive Web site, containing professional photographs of the candidates, field manuals for volunteers, media

kits for journalists, and persistent appeals for donations. There were well-organized, media-friendly events for Nader and other Green candidates, replete with movie stars, managers, and volunteers uniformly clad in green T-shirts. Jello Biafra, the former punk vocalist who became a presidential nominee of the New York greens and only token opposition to Nader's candidacy, put the new attitude in perspective. "Don't *hate* the media," he told his supporters at the party's national nominating convention in Denver, "*Become* the media." In other words, use professionalism to one's strategic advantage—even against the forces of corporate professionalism one despises.

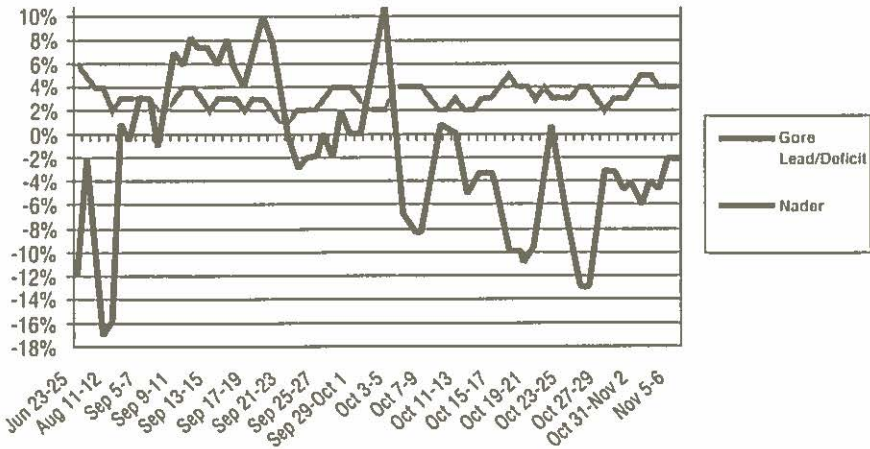
From the formal announcement of his candidacy on February 21 to election day, Nader attempted to do just that. "Now it's different. Now I'm running. It's a serious campaign to build the Green Party," he told interviewer David Barsamian on Alternative Radio two days after his announcement ([www.zmag.org/barintnader.htm](http://www.zmag.org/barintnader.htm)). Serious in fact, as well as pedantic, Nader was less than electrifying on the stump, offering his audiences polysyllabic discourses into feudalism and nineteenth-century industrialization more suited for the university lecture halls where he often spoke than the television cameras that often followed him. Sometimes, such as his 25 June acceptance speech at the Green Party national conference in Denver, the rhetoric would continue for almost two hours. "The lessons of history are clear and portentous," he said. "If you do not turn on to politics, politics will turn on you" ([www.votenader.com/press/000625acceptance\\_speech.html](http://www.votenader.com/press/000625acceptance_speech.html)).

Nader's public support, like his speeches, plodded through most of the campaign. Among likely voters measured in the Gallup tracking poll, Nader ranged nationally from a peak of 6 percent in late June to a low of 1 percent in mid-September (figure 8.1). More typically, he was in the 3 percent to 4 percent range, with his minor fluctuations often occurring in rough symmetry with Gore's wider swings. His consistency is noteworthy. Unlike most important minor-party presidential candidates throughout history, his support did not dramatically change as the race drew closer to election day (Collet 1996).

It was Nader's showing in some state polls, however, that created a stir—and garnered attention from the mainstream press. In August, a survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California showed Nader at 8 percent in the Golden State and Gore leading by 3, raising the possibility of a disaster for the Democrat in a state where he would normally be in command ([www.ppic.org/publications/CalSurvey13/survey13.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/publications/CalSurvey13/survey13.pdf)). September and October polls by the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*/WTMJ in Wisconsin and *Star-Tribune* in Minnesota, respectively, showed Nader's support growing presumably at Gore's expense (Gilbert 2000; Von Sternberg 2000). In Michigan, a *Detroit Free Press* poll showed a dead heat with Nader at 3 percent; similarly, a mid-October survey in Washington gave



FIGURE 8.1  
Nader and Gore in Gallup Tracking Poll of Likely Voters,  
23 June–6 November



Gore a slim 2 point lead with Nader garnering 5 percent. And in the campaign's final weeks, Zogby International surveying showed a series of battleground states where Nader's support was as high as 8 percent, often exceeding the difference between Gore and Bush ([www.zogby.com/features/featuretables](http://www.zogby.com/features/featuretables)).

The situation created a precarious position for Gore—and highlights where Nader may have had his most tangible impact: campaign strategy. By the summer, Nader had gained such legitimacy as a potential spoiler—relevance, if you will—that nearly every tactic the Gore campaign took to bolster its liberal support was attributed to the Greens. The first of a series of hard-hitting editorials by the *New York Times* appeared on 30 June attacking Nader's "misguided crusade" that "will be especially harmful for Mr. Gore." And Gore's bold move toward populism ("I will fight for you") at his party's national convention in July only reinforced the notion. "Gore had to come up with an antidote to Nader's potentially damaging impact," explained *Boston Globe* writer Robert Jordan (Jordan 2000). Some Nader supporters, in the meantime, coordinated strategic vote swaps between states on a Web site called [nadertrader.org](http://nadertrader.org), allowing them to ease their consciences by supporting Nader in lopsided states—and ease their fears by supporting Gore in tighter areas.

By early September, with the race growing more intense, reports began to surface about the Gore campaign's irritation at Nader. A fund-raiser in Maine saw Gore's running mate, Joseph Lieberman, address the issue directly for the first time in public, adopting a wasted-vote refrain he

would continue throughout the fall (Gerstenzang and Calvo 2000). Prominent liberals and progressive interest groups soon began their assault, with groups like "Greens for Gore" and "Former Nader Raiders" proclaiming their support for the incumbent vice president. Patricia Ireland of the National Organization of Women questioned Nader's commitment to feminism and abortion rights; the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League ran ads in battleground areas, such as Minneapolis and Madison, that claimed "voting for Ralph Nader helps elect George W. Bush" (Ruppe and Dizikes 2000). The spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, the country's largest gay-rights organization, said "a vote for Nader is a vote for Bush" (Marinucci 2000), while one California legislator suggested in an interview that Nader might himself be gay, an accusation he denied (Matier and Ross 2000). Jesse Jackson and Gloria Steinem made public statements attacking him; Senator Harry Reid of Nevada said Nader was on an "ego trip." Others, including Gore, attempted to raise the fear that a potential Bush presidency would result in a Supreme Court packed with conservatives. Even some of Nader's high-profile supporters wanted him to ease up as the contest drew tighter. Members of his steering committee, including a number of Hollywood celebrities, urged him to take his campaign away from battleground states. And in late October, billionaire Greg MacArthur pulled \$120,000 of advertising from California newspapers on behalf of Nader, saying that he would direct the resources to voters "that are more or less a slam dunk for one candidate or another" (Hausler and Orlov 2000).

Rather than becoming indignant, or even deferential, Nader was resolute. He dismissed Bush as "nothing more than a corporation disguised as a human being" but saved particular vitriol for Gore, with the Green campaign releasing daily "broken promises" allegedly made by the vice president. "There's no end to his betrayal," Nader said, claiming that he would rather have a "provocateur [who] would mobilize us" than an "anesthetizer" in the White House (Calvo 2000). On the Supreme Court issue, Nader blamed Senate Democrats (Gore among them) for confirming Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas. But more important for Gore, Nader defied warnings and continued to campaign on the West Coast in the end of October, moving to the pivotal Industrial Belt and Maine in the final week of the race. Crowds of up to fifteen thousand were reported at his "Super Rallies" in New York, Oakland, and Washington, with attendees usually paying a fee to get in. Two days before the election, Nader traveled to Miami, calling Gore a "a bully to the powerless and a coward to the powerful" for not taking a public position on the conversion of Homestead Air Force Base and other issues important to local residents.



### NADER'S ELECTORAL RAIDERS: WHO WERE THEY—AND WHY DID THEY SUPPORT HIM?

Although Nader and Reform Party candidate Patrick J. Buchanan were included in most national polls throughout the campaign, few offered sample sizes large enough to perform substantive subgroup analysis. Yet, through the use of pooled data from The Gallup Organization's nightly tracking poll, we are able to get a sense of the social and political characteristics of those attracted to the Nader campaign.<sup>2</sup> As table 8.1 indicates, his supporters were distinct from Gore supporters in many ways. While the backers of both candidates have similar income, employment, and union membership patterns, Naderites are more likely to be male, young, and well-educated. By contrast, approximately three in five Gore supporters are female, more than a third never graduated from high school, and a quarter were 65 or older.

There were also regional variations. Both candidates drew equal proportions from the East and Midwest, but Gore had a substantially higher proportion of supporters from the South. Thirty percent of Naderites, however, were in the West compared with 21 percent for Gore—echoing the findings of others who have pointed to the Pacific region's proclivity for alternative politics (Collet and Hansen 1995; Collet and Wattenberg 1999).

Perhaps the most important social characteristic distinguishing Nader and Gore supporters is the difference in religiosity. Forty percent of Gore supporters are Protestant, 29 percent Catholic, and 18 percent affiliated as Jewish, Mormon, or with another religion. Just 7 percent have no religious affiliation. Forty-three percent say they attend church about once a week. Nader supporters, though, are quite different. Nineteen percent are not affiliated with a religion. And nearly two-thirds say they "seldom" or "never" attend church services.<sup>3</sup>

Politically, Nader drew notable support from pure independents and those affiliated with the Republican Party (table 8.2). While 89 percent of Gore's supporters were Democratic identifiers—and 87 percent voted for Clinton in 1996—nearly half of Nader's backers identified with a party other than the Democrats. According to the Gallup data, just 45 percent of Nader supporters backed Clinton in 1996, with 18 percent supporting Dole and 25 percent voting for Perot. One in ten backed an alternative candidate. As one might expect, Nader backers were also more likely than Gore supporters to say they are "liberal" or "very liberal" (40 percent to 27 percent).

Though the number of cases is smaller, an exit poll conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* on election day confirms the Gallup pre-election data. In addition to finding Nader supporters to be young and low on religious involvement, the *Times* poll also reveals a number of attitudinal differences

**TABLE 8.1**  
**Social Characteristics of Gore**  
**and Nader Pre-Election Supporters Compared**

	<i>Gore</i>	<i>Nader</i>
Male	42%	54%
Female	58	46
18–29 years old	11%	17%
30–49	40	43
50–64	26	25
65 and older	24	14
East	27%	29%
Midwest	25	25
South	27	16
West	21	30
Married	51%	49%
Live with partner	5	5
Widowed	12	6
Divorced/Separated	16	14
Single, never married	17	24
Employed full time	54%	60%
Employed part time	8	6
Retired	25	16
Homemaker	5	3
Student	4	6
Unemployed	2	3
Disabled	2	3
<\$20K	19%	16%
\$20–30K	14	17
\$30–50K	25	24
\$50–75K	20	21
>\$75K	23	22
HS diploma or less	36%	24%
Some college	32	33
College graduate	32	38
Protestant	40%	28%
Catholic	29	26
Other	18	22
None	7	19
Attend church:		
Once a week	32%	21%
Almost every week	11	7
Once a month	14	10
Seldom/Never	41	63
Union member in household	22%	20%
(N)	(8096)	(591)

*Source:* The Gallup Organization. Data are pooled from nightly presidential tracking poll of likely voters, 4 September–6 November 2000.



**TABLE 8.2**  
**Political Characteristics of Gore**  
**and Nader Pre-Election Supporters Compared**

	Gore	Nader
<b>Party Identification</b>		
Republican and Rep leaners	7%	21%
Independent—no lean	4	26
Democrat and Dem leaners	89	54
<b>Vote in 1996</b>		
Clinton	87%	45%
Dole	4	18
Perot	6	25
Other	3	10
<b>Liberalism</b>		
Very liberal	4%	14%
Liberal	23	26
Moderate	46	38
Conservative	20	16
Very conservative	3	2
Don't know	3	4
(N)	(8096)	(591)

Source: The Gallup Organization. Data are pooled from nightly presidential tracking poll of likely voters, 4 September–6 November 2000.

between Nader and Gore voters (table 8.3). Nearly half of Nader voters made their decision to vote for him on election day or the week prior, while half of Gore voters decided during the primaries or earlier. Nader voters also had much more negative views of President Clinton, with one in three saying they neither liked the man nor his policies. Just 5 percent of Gore voters felt the same way. One of the most significant distinctions is in how Nader and Gore voters viewed the condition of the country. More than one-half of Nader's backers saw the country as being "on the wrong track," compared with only 12 percent of Gore's backers.

Perhaps as a result of these different views, Nader voters were less likely to support him for policy-based reasons, and more likely to believe they were registering protest. One-half of Gore's voters liked the vice president because of his "experience and intellect to be president," and just 18 percent of Nader's backers felt the same way. By contrast, 28 percent of Nader voters liked his "honesty and integrity"—a response identified by only 6 percent of Gore's voters. A slightly higher proportion of Nader's backers than Gore's said their candidate "understands average Americans' problems" (19 percent to 15 percent)—somewhat of a surprise, given the populist overtone of the vice president's campaign.

**TABLE 8.3**  
**Attitudinal Differences between Gore and Nader Voters**

	<i>Gore</i>	<i>Nader</i>
<b>Made up mind about vote . . .</b>		
Election day	8%	16%
Week before election	11	22
After debates	20	16
After conventions	9	11
During the primaries	15	9
Earlier	35	24
<b>Views on Clinton</b>		
Like him/like his policies	57%	24%
Like him/don't like his policies	3	10
Don't like him/like his policies	35	33
Don't like him/don't like his policies	5	33
<b>State of the country</b>		
Right direction	88%	48%
On the wrong track	12	52
<b>Support your candidate because . . .</b>		
Like him and his policies	72%	54%
He is the best of a bad lot	26	14
To send a protest message	2	32
<b>Like most about your candidate</b>		
Has experience and intellect to be president	50%	18%
Understands average Americans' problems	15	19
Has strong leadership qualities	14	7
Has clear vision of the future	10	14
Shares my values	10	17
Honesty and integrity	6	28
(N)	(4025)	(247)

*Source:* Los Angeles Times Poll no. 449: 2000 National Exit Poll, conducted 7 November 2000.  
*Note:* Columns do not add to 100% as voters were able to give multiple explanations.

### NADER'S "SUCCESS": AGGREGATE DATA ANALYSIS

Success for minor-party candidates is not only relative in definition but a challenge to measure. One can never be certain about the extent to which a candidate mobilized his own voters or influenced those who might have voted for a major-party candidate. Whatever claim Nader can make on the



2000 election may be due, in large part, to the simple fact that it was one of the closest two-party contests in American history. In five states—New Mexico, Florida, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Oregon—the difference between Gore and Bush was less than 0.5 percent; Nader was on the ballot in all of them, drawing an average of 3.4 percent of the vote. Nader's percentage exceeded the Gore-Bush difference in eight states, resulting in a total of seventy-three electoral votes that may have been affected by the presence of the Green nominee (table 8.4). Six of these eight were won by Gore, but two—New Hampshire and Florida—were carried by Bush. It could be argued that Nader's influence on the race boiled down to the 1.6 percent of the vote he received in Florida—the only one of the eight states won by Bush's father in 1992. Ironically, Florida was one of Nader's worst showings in the country. Just nine states gave the Green Party a lower percentage of the vote; all were in the deep South.

Two questions arise: did Nader make this a closer race than it might have been? Or, might Nader have done better had the race been less competitive between the two major-party candidates? Nader's best showing was in Alaska (10.1 percent), a state Bush won by 31 points. His next best performances were in Vermont, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, respectively (6.6 percent average share). All were carried by Gore by an average of more than 22 points. This pattern, on its surface, suggests that Nader's vote was heavily influenced by the phenomenon of the "wasted vote"<sup>4</sup> Voters, sensing the utility of their vote in a close two-party race, chose to cast their ballot for either Bush or Gore—the candidates with the best chance of winning. Alternatively, voters in states where the race was lopsided and the outcome virtually preordained, cast their ballot for an alternative (Duverger 1963).

**TABLE 8.4**  
**States Where Nader's Share Exceeded Bush-Gore Difference**

	<i>Nader</i> %	<i>D-R %</i> <i>Diff</i>	<i>2000</i> <i>Winner</i>	<i>1996</i> <i>Winner</i>	<i>1992</i> <i>Winner</i>	<i>Electoral</i> <i>Votes</i>
Florida	1.63%	<0.01%	Bush	Clinton	Bush	25
Iowa	3.14	0.32	Gore	Clinton	Clinton	7
Maine	5.89	5.11	Gore	Clinton	Clinton	4
Minnesota	5.20	2.40	Gore	Clinton	Clinton	10
New Hampshire	3.91	1.27	Bush	Clinton	Clinton	4
New Mexico	3.55	0.06	Gore	Clinton	Clinton	5
Oregon	5.05	0.44	Gore	Clinton	Clinton	7
Wisconsin	3.60	0.22	Gore	Clinton	Clinton	11
					Total:	73

Source: Federal Election Commission, 2000 Official Presidential General Election Results.

A county-level analysis finds Nader's highest percentages were, in fact, in areas that were relatively noncompetitive (table 8.5). In Nader's twenty best counties, only two were decided by fewer than 5 percentage points: in Gunnison County (Colorado) and Humboldt County (California). Looking further at table 8.5, just four of the heavily Nader counties carried by Clinton in 1996 were won by Bush in 2000. Overall, Nader appears to have gained his strongest support in areas surrounding Fairbanks and Anchorage, Alaska, and pockets of Colorado, Montana, Massachusetts, Utah, and the coastal region of California, north of San Francisco. These counties share an historical independence; one, Colorado's San Juan County, was carried by Perot in 1992.

**TABLE 8.5**  
**Top Twenty Counties/Election Districts for Nader**

<i>State Counties/Dist.</i>	<i>Nader %</i>	<i>D-R % Diff</i>	<i>2000 Winner</i>	<i>1996 Winner</i>	<i>1992 Winner</i>
Alaska District 29	18.45	14.15	Bush	Clinton	NA*
Alaska District 15	18.19	5.91	Bush	Clinton	NA*
Alaska District 7	18.01	34.30	Bush	Dole	NA*
Colorado San Miguel	17.20	17.05	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Alaska District 13	15.43	14.95	Bush	Dole	NA*
Montana Missoula	15.03	9.09	Bush	Clinton	Clinton
Alaska District 18	15.02	27.14	Bush	Dole	NA*
Utah Grand	14.94	18.38	Bush	Dole	Clinton
California Mendocino	14.68	12.68	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Massachusetts Hampshire	14.59	28.18	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Alaska District 3	14.12	6.78	Gore	Clinton	NA*
Massachusetts Franklin	13.87	23.28	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Colorado San Juan	13.30	14.00	Bush	Dole	Perot
Colorado Pitkin	12.99	20.16	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Colorado Gunnison	12.81	0.96	Bush	Clinton	Clinton



TABLE 8.5 (Continued)  
Top Twenty Counties/Election Districts for Nader

	Nader %	D-R % Diff	2000 Winner	1996 Winner	1992 Winner
California	12.68	2.92	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Humboldt					
Alaska	12.22	14.39	Bush	Dole	NA*
District 21					
Alaska	12.05	19.95	Bush	Dole	NA*
District 20					
Colorado	11.82	13.68	Gore	Clinton	Clinton
Boulder					
Alaska	11.67	25.07	Bush	Dole	NA*
District 5					

Source: Computed from the *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* ([www.uselectionatlas.org](http://www.uselectionatlas.org)).

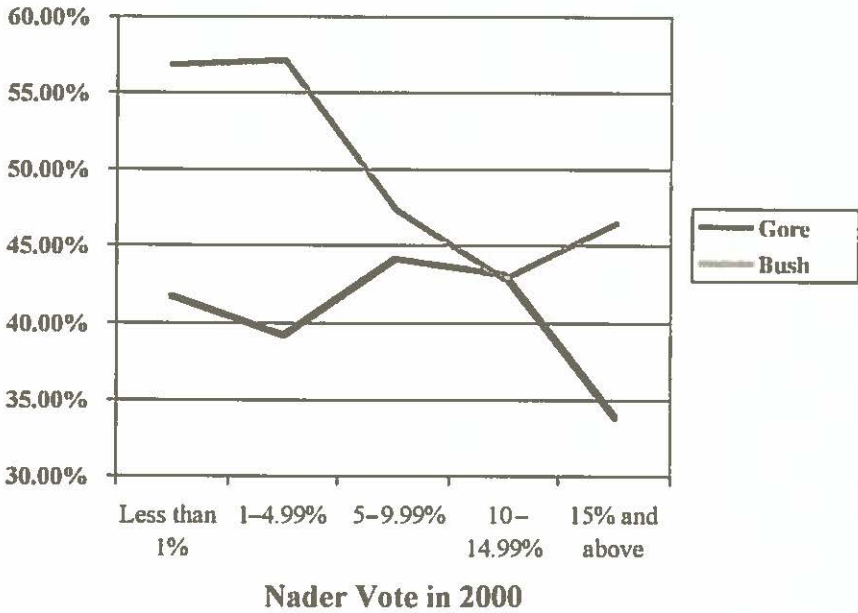
\* Under the Governor's Reapportionment Board in 1994, Alaska adopted new election districts. These districts, rather than counties, serve as the smallest constituencies for which presidential election returns are reported.

The county-level data also suggest a relationship between the Nader vote, the vote for other alternative candidates, and the impact that both may have had on the major-party candidates. As evidenced in figure 8.2a, the average vote for both Gore and Bush declined considerably in counties as Nader's vote increased (though there was a sharp drop in Gore's vote and a rise in Bush's in the handful of mostly Alaskan counties where Nader's vote was 15 percent or higher). Nader most likely had his biggest impact in the 212 counties where he received between 5 percent and 15 percent of the vote. Of these counties, Bush won 109; Gore won 103. The majority of these potential swing counties were in Alaska, Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin, respectively. Of these, only Minnesota and Wisconsin were competitive states, with Gore eking out narrow victories in both. In Florida, Nader's highest county-level percentage was 3.7 percent (in Alachua), a county Gore carried by more than 15 points. Overall, there were 55 Florida counties where Nader received between 1 percent and 4.99 percent. Bush won 41 of them by an average of 20 points. Only one carried by Bush—Madison County—saw the Nader vote exceed the difference between the two major parties.

Figure 8.2b illustrates another important finding: in counties where Nader did well, so did other alternative party candidates. Buchanan, the Reform Party candidate, did roughly twice as well in counties where Nader cleared the 1 percent threshold and about three times better where Nader cleared 5 percent. For the Libertarian, Natural Law, Constitution,

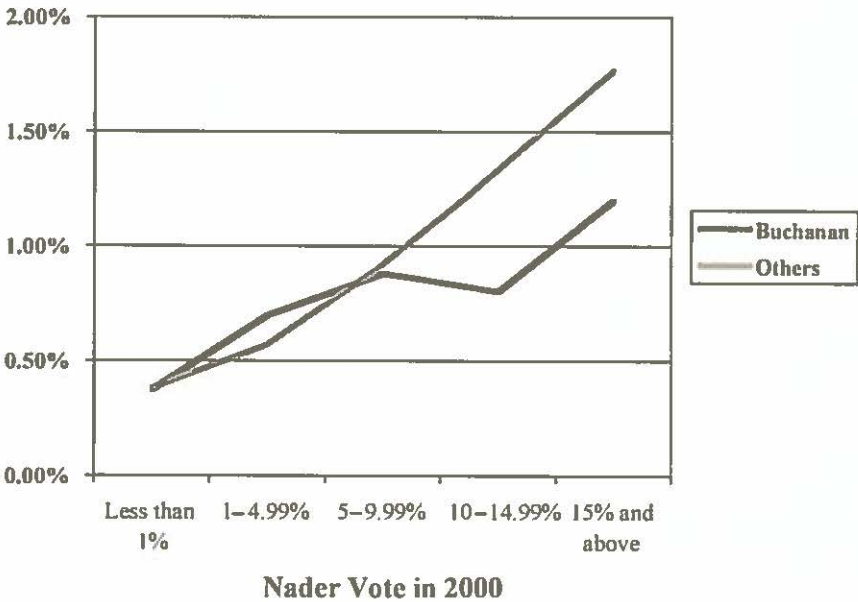
**FIGURE 8.2A**

**Mean County-Level Vote Percentages for Gore and Bush Classified by Nader Vote Percentage (N = 2,581)**



**FIGURE 8.2B**

**Mean County-Level Vote Percentages for Buchanan and Other Minor-Party Presidential Candidates Classified by Nader Vote Percentage (N = 2,581)**





and other party candidates, Nader's presence also seems to have been a benefit. The combined mean vote for these candidates roughly tripled when the Nader vote reached 5 percent.

### BREAKING GROUND: NADER'S PERFORMANCE IN 1996 AND 2000 COMPARED

Past research has found that one of the strongest predictors of the minor-party vote at the aggregate level is the minor-party vote in prior elections (Collet and Wattenberg 1999). Further, Donovan and his colleagues (2000), using individual-level data, underscore the importance of minor-party affiliation; those who identify with minor parties, they find, tend to be very loyal to their candidates. With this pattern in mind, we can ask: to what degree is the Nader vote at all related to the vote for previous alternative candidates, such as Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996? And how much of a path did Nader cut for himself in 2000 during his previous candidacy in 1996?

Table 8.6 shows the standardized coefficients for several basic regression equations based on the Nader vote in 2000. The equations include a dummy variable for the South as well as for the closeness between Bush and Gore. What the findings suggest, aside from the negative influence of the South, is a strong relationship between Nader's vote and his performance in the previous election; more than 72 percent of the variance in his 2000 vote can be solely explained by what he did in 1996. Simply put, where Nader did well in 1996 was where he tended to do well—and often better—in 2000: the Bay Area in California, and pockets of Alaska, Colorado, Utah, and Oregon.

Also found in table 8.6 is a significant relationship between Perot's vote in 1992 and Nader's vote in 2000 (Column A). While Perot's vote has been linked to other Reform Party candidates such as Jesse Ventura (Gilbert and Peterson 2001), the nexus found here is particularly fascinating since Perot and Nader represented different parties, with different ideologies and demographic bases of support. The county-level linearity between the Perot vote in 1992 and the Nader vote in 2000 ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .38, p < .001$ ) is comparable to that between George W. Bush's and his father's vote in 1992 ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .37; p < .001$ ).

Furthermore, table 8.6 confirms an aggregate-level relationship between the Nader vote and the Buchanan vote—a relationship that holds even when accounting for region and closeness between the major parties. Individually, there is also linearity between Nader support and for "other" candidates, but this is removed when the control variables and previous minor-party vote are included in the equation (H).

**TABLE 8.6**  
**OLS Regression Equations for County-Level Nader Vote in 2000**  
**(Cells report standardized coefficients)**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Perot 1992	.310 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—	.200 <sup>a</sup>
Other 1992	—	.168 <sup>ns</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	.028 <sup>ns</sup>
Perot 1996	—	—	.096 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	—	.026 <sup>ns</sup>
Nader 1996	—	—	—	.717 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	.694 <sup>a</sup>
Other 1996	—	—	—	—	.222 <sup>a</sup>	—	—	.032 <sup>ns</sup>
Buchanan 2000	—	—	—	—	—	.160 <sup>a</sup>	—	.114 <sup>a</sup>
Other 2000	—	—	—	—	—	—	.254 <sup>a</sup>	.019 <sup>ns</sup>
South	.346 <sup>a</sup>	.581 <sup>a</sup>	.499 <sup>a</sup>	.263 <sup>a</sup>	.508 <sup>a</sup>	.525 <sup>a</sup>	.478 <sup>a</sup>	.158 <sup>a</sup>
Bush-Gore Difference (absolute value)	.137 <sup>a</sup>	.150 <sup>a</sup>	.057 <sup>b</sup>	.065 <sup>a</sup>	.107 <sup>a</sup>	.091 <sup>a</sup>	.108 <sup>a</sup>	.110 <sup>a</sup>
Adj. R2	.386	.346	.288	.723	.328	.305	.342	.782
(N)	(896)	(896)	(935)	(936)	(936)	(936)	(936)	(895)

Source: Dataset constructed from the *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* ([www.uselection-atlas.org](http://www.uselection-atlas.org)).

Notes: Dependent variable is the Nader vote percentage at the county level. "Other" consists of combined vote for all other party and independent candidates.

Due to adoption of election districts, Alaska was excluded in 1992 analysis. Nader appeared on 43 state ballots. Those states where Nader did not appear—Idaho, Indiana, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota—were excluded from the analysis. "Other" includes votes for all alternative candidates aside from those for whom separate categories have been constructed.

<sup>a</sup>p<.002   <sup>b</sup>p<.05   <sup>ns</sup>Not significant.

### BELOW NADER: RESULTS FOR GREEN SUBPRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The impact of Nader on the 2000 elections raises a final question: did the consumer advocate inspire support for Green Party candidates down the ticket, for governor and the U.S. Congress? Although we lack the data to directly test the relationship between the Green vote at multiple levels, in table 8.7 we offer an indirect examination by comparing the Green's participation and performance in 1996 with what it did in 2000. As the table shows, the Greens fielded twice as many candidates in U.S. Senate



**TABLE 8.7**  
**Green Party Performance at the**  
**Subpresidential Level, 1996 and 2000 Compared**

	No. of Green Candidates		% of Races with a Green		Total Votes		Mean Vote % for Candidates	
	1996	2000	1996	2000	1996	2000	1996	2000
Governor	1	1	10	9	3,667	9,009	1.4	0.4
U.S. Senate	5	10	16	29	96,782	692,485	3.8	1.9
U.S. House	11	49	3	11	64,089	284,053	2.5	3.0

Sources: Congressional Quarterly and [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com).

elections in 2000 and more than quadrupled their representation in contests for the U.S. House. In Senate elections, their mean share of the vote fell by one-half, but in races for the U.S. House, the Greens increased their share by 0.5 percentage point. Overall, Green Senate and House candidates received nearly a million votes in eight states—six times what they received four years earlier.

Their greatest successes, however, came at the local level. According to the party's Web site, the Greens elected thirty-five candidates to office in 2000—all at the county level or below ([www.greens.org/elections](http://www.greens.org/elections)). Their biggest triumph occurred in the city of Sebastopol (Sonoma County), California, where they captured a three-seat majority on the City Council (Weiser 2000). This election was the second time a California city elected a Green majority to a city council, following Arcata's (Humboldt County) lead in 1996. The top vote-getter in the at-large race was Craig Litwin, a twenty-four-year-old student activist and organic gardener. "Tell your friends about me while planting your winter garden," says his campaign Web site. "A vote for Craig Litwin . . . is a vote for a stronger community" ([www.litwinforcouncil.com](http://www.litwinforcouncil.com)).

## THE FALLOUT AND THE FUTURE

Immediately following the election, there were numerous reports of hostility among Democrats—and some longtime supporters of Nader—for the role that the consumer advocate may have played in the election of a conservative president. "The long knives are now drawn, and they're all aimed at Ralph Nader," said Matthew Rothschild, editor of *The Progressive*, on the 8 November edition of NPR's *All Things Considered*. Bill Press, commenting on CNN.com after the election, put things more succinctly: "After eight years of progress, America may suddenly go backward

under President George W. Bush. If so, don't blame Al Gore. Blame Ralph Nader."<sup>5</sup> Michigan Congressman John Conyers asked, "Who's going to work with him now? (Associated Press 2000). The candidate, for his part, was defiant, repeating his contention that "you can't spoil a system that's spoiled to the core."<sup>6</sup> A postelection press release offered Nader saying that "rather than trying to shift blame to our campaign, the Democratic Party needs to examine itself" ([www.votenader.com/press/001110gorecanblamegore.html](http://www.votenader.com/press/001110gorecanblamegore.html)).

In spite of the controversy, one should use caution before jumping to conclusions about Nader's impact.<sup>7</sup> As the individual-level data demonstrate, his appeal went beyond disaffected liberals who may, or may not, have ever supported Gore. Nader's core supporters were, in many ways, distinctive: they were young, male, well-educated, nonreligious, and residing in coastal or rural areas. By contrast, Gore drew heavily from women, seniors, the poor, active churchgoers, and those in urban areas. Also important, the Nader constituency appeared to be strongly anti-Clinton: just 45 percent supported the president in 1996 and only 57 percent said they liked his policies. One in every two saw the nation going in the wrong direction. By contrast, 92 percent of Gore's supporters liked Clinton's policies and nine in ten believed the country was going in the right direction.

Evident in both the individual and aggregate-level data is partisan independence. Only one-half of Nader's supporters identified with the Democrats and more than one in three voted for Perot or another minor candidate in 1996. Many Naderites, as is typical of unattached voters, made up their minds close to election day. Further, the counties that supported Nader strongly in 2000 were the same ones that supported him in 1996 and, to some degree, Perot in 1992. The fact that county-level support for Buchanan and Perot is tied to Nader not only underscores the independence of voters in these areas, but also indicates that his support was a non-ideological protest vote that Gore would have had difficulty attracting—even in the most competitive of races. As a CNN exit poll indicated, nearly one in three Nader voters nationally indicated that they would not have come to the polls if the consumer advocate had not been on the ballot.<sup>8</sup>

Stronger is evidence supporting the "wasted vote" phenomenon. Nader was most successful where he had the least chance of influencing the outcome and where either Bush or Gore dominated. Most of the states where Nader might have tilted the outcome were narrow victories for Gore. The exception, ironically, was one of his worst showings: Florida. And just exactly how many Nader voters in Madison County, in particular, might have voted for Gore is a question that will burn along with the hundreds of others raised in the Sunshine State during the 2000 election.



What does the future hold for the Green Party as a result of Nader? For an organization that has been predicated on, and found success at, the local level, what the Greens must consider is a question larger than Nader himself: what is the strategic benefit of mounting a national campaign? Though he brought considerable attention, Nader's electoral "relevancy" was not without its costs for the Greens. Some loyalists believe the outcome could not have been better (see St. Clair and Cockburn 2000). Others, however, may use the postelection acrimony from angry Democrats as justification to focus on parochial politics and reinforce the grass roots.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, the future for the Greens seems bright—with or without Nader at the helm. The number of states where the Green Party is qualified for the ballot is twice as high as in 1998; the number of registered Greens has increased. And at the time of this writing, a host of Green issues—American participation in the Kyoto Protocol, energy shortages, and defense spending among them—are at the forefront of the national agenda. Echoing in the hearts of most minor-party candidates is a line from one of Aesop's fables: "You may share in the labours of the great, but you will not share the spoils." Yet in 2000, Ralph Nader and the Green Party faithful got a taste of success—even if questions remain about their spoiling the outcome for Gore. In recent years, the party has elected a state assemblywoman in California and dozens of city and county officials, demonstrating the strategic savviness of their local approach and the appeal of their ideas to coastal constituencies. But can the Greens grow? Given their youth, their firm detachment from the two major parties, and the postmaterialist ideology that guides them, it seems as if the Greens will, at the least, maintain an existence in national politics, with Nader's showing in 2000 perhaps serving as the first step toward genuine victory—and a bonafide share of the political spoils.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

The authors kindly thank Jack Ludwig of The Gallup Organization for his help regarding the use of the survey data analyzed in this chapter. The opinions and interpretations presented in this chapter are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of The Gallup Organization, Inc. The authors also thank Dan Tsang of the UCI data archive for securing other survey data employed in the analysis. Any errors or omissions are, of course, the sole responsibility of the authors.

1. Headlines from *The New York Times*, 23 June; *USA Today*, 17 August; and *The Contra Costa Times*, 14 August, respectively.

2. Beginning on 4 September and ending the night before election day, 7 November, the Gallup Organization conducted a tracking poll of likely voters in the presidential election. Pooling the 8,096 interviews conducted over this

interviewing frame yielded a large sample of 591 Americans who, at one point in the fall, indicated their support for Nader in a four-way presidential vote question that included Reform Party candidate Patrick J. Buchanan. The data were weighted to reflect the small variations between the sample characteristics and the electorate.

3. These findings are consistent with those of Gilbert, Johnson, and Peterson (1995), who consistently find a significant negative relationship between religious affiliation and church attendance and voting for third party presidential candidates.

4. See Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, and Rohde (1995) for discussion and evidence of the "wasted vote" phenomenon in voting for George Wallace, John Anderson, and Ross Perot in 1992.

5. See [www.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/11/08/press.column/](http://www.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/11/08/press.column/)

6. Quote originally from CNN's *Late Edition*, 9 July 2000.

7. Ceasar and Busch (2001, 159) put it this way: "As for the question of who played the spoiler, it is surprising how hard one must work to put Ralph Nader in that role."

8. See [www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/results/index.epolls.html](http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/results/index.epolls.html) for complete results.

9. Berg (2001) offers further analysis of these costs and benefits.

10. At the time of this writing, the two major Green factions, the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) and Greens/Green Party USA (G/GPUSA) announced plans to unify and file papers with the FEC to become a national party organization—thus suggesting an intention to become a player in national politics ([www.greenparties.org/press/pr\\_07\\_10\\_01.html](http://www.greenparties.org/press/pr_07_10_01.html)). In the meantime, there are reports that Nader is forming a nonprofit organization purportedly "to act as a 'watchdog' on the two main parties and offer up left-leaning House candidates against Democrats" (Bedard, Streisand, and Parker 2001).



## Multiparty Politics in New York

ROBERT J. SPITZER

New York State Republican Party leaders knew they faced an uphill battle in their effort in 1994 to unseat popular three-term Democratic Governor Mario Cuomo. New York had not elected a Republican governor since 1970, and statewide voter enrollment favored the Democrats by a wide margin. To buttress the chances of their candidate, George Pataki, Republican leaders quelled the doubts of the state's Conservative Party leaders, who questioned Pataki's conservative credentials, by offering a spot on the state ticket to a Conservative Party activist. This helped insure that Pataki would win endorsement by that party. In addition, the Republicans created a new party line expressly to help Pataki's campaign. With his name appearing three times on New York ballots, Pataki won a narrow upset victory over Cuomo. His margin of victory was 173,798 votes. Most of those who voted for Pataki did so on the Republican line, and although Cuomo received more votes on the Democratic line than Pataki did on the Republican line, Pataki also received 328,000 votes on the Conservative line, and 54,000 votes on the additional party line set up by the Republicans. Did the extra endorsements make a difference? Party leaders thought so. As one state Republican Party leader noted, the added lines offered "a perception that [the extra lines] give non-Republican voters an alternative" (Fisher 1994).

The state of New York poses a fascinating and instructive example of a uniquely American hybrid of a two-party system that retains major-party dominance while ensuring a stable and enduring minor-party role. Unlike the national arena, where minor parties come and go, in New York, minor parties persist and operate with a surprising degree of stability and influence, even though candidates are almost never elected to office solely on a minor-party line. For this reason, the New York case offers a feasible archetype for an electoral system invigorated by stable and persistent minor

parties. New York's electoral system also underscores the decisive importance of electoral/legal structures in shaping party politics—in particular, its rules for party recognition, and the cross-endorsement rule.

## HISTORY AND POLITICAL CULTURE

The development of New York's minor parties can be traced both to the state's political culture and to state law. Both factors intertwine and converge to produce New York's distinctive electoral map. Yet the history that gave rise to the state's multiparty political culture could not have occurred without the accommodating web of laws.

New York has witnessed the emergence of no less than sixteen recognized minor parties during the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Of these, three have maintained an automatic slot for all elections on the state ballot since the late 1970s, and four more emerged in the 1990s. The three older parties, in order of formation, are the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, and the Right to Life Party. The newer crop of parties includes the Independence Party, the Freedom Party, the Green Party, and the Working Families Party.

The Liberal Party was an offshoot of the American Labor Party (ALP). The ALP was formed in 1936 by a group of socialists and trade unionists seeking a way to support President Franklin Roosevelt and other liberal-leftist candidates without working through the corrupt state Democratic Party, then dominated by Tammany Hall (Karen 1975). The success of the Labor Party in bargaining with the major parties was such that it attracted more radical elements, and in 1943 many of the original founders, including labor leader Alex Rose, broke away and formed the Liberal Party. The ALP faded from existence in 1954, but the power of the Liberal Party grew. Dominated by Rose until his death in 1976, the Liberal Party has generally sided with liberal Democratic candidates, although it has occasionally supported moderate Republicans. Over the years, it has sought to promote such causes as full employment, consumer rights, rent control, progressive taxation, equal rights, and expanded social welfare programs (Moscow 1948; Zimmerman 1981). The party's primary power base has traditionally rested with urban Jewish voters, located mostly in New York City. In the 1980s and 1990s, it sought to expand its base by trying to win African American and Latino support. This effort was stunted, however, by the party's undisguised effort to insure its future at the expense of its historic commitment to liberalism.

At the direction of party leader Raymond Harding, the party refused to endorse the more liberal African American New York City mayoral candidacy of David Dinkins in 1989 and 1993, favoring instead Republican



Rudolph Giuliani (who narrowly lost the 1989 race, but then narrowly won in 1993). Harding further alienated liberals when the party endorsed former Republican Lieutenant Governor Betsy McCaughey Ross for governor over the more liberal Democrat Peter Vallone. Harding's reasoning was twofold: first, Ross promised to campaign aggressively for governor even if she lost the upcoming Democratic primary (she lost to Vallone), whereas Vallone made no such promise; second, Ross pledged to use her personal wealth to finance her campaign. Even though critics renewed the old joke that the Liberal Party was neither, Harding's decision to select the more conservative Ross arose directly from the desire to insure the party's future based on the way in which state law shapes party fortunes (Kolbert 1998).

The Conservative Party was also founded as a result of dissatisfaction with a major party. After his election as governor in 1958, Nelson Rockefeller dominated New York's Republican Party until 1974, when he resigned to become vice president. But Rockefeller's brand of liberal Republicanism was distasteful to many traditional conservative Republicans, especially in the business and professional class, and a group of them combined in 1961 to offer a conservative alternative to Rockefeller Republicanism. They also hoped to pressure the Republicans to move to the right (Schoenberger 1968). The Conservatives have generally sided with conservative Republicans, especially after Rockefeller's departure, although they too periodically support conservative Democrats. In some conservative upstate areas, the Conservative endorsement is pursued with equal vigor by Democrats and Republicans (Hannagan 1989; Pierce 1999).

In the 1980s, the conservative perspective received a boost because of the election of Ronald Reagan as president. This national swing to the right helped the party maintain its stability and influence. Unlike the Liberal Party, the Conservatives have maintained a greater degree of ideological consistency in their endorsements, a fact seen in the party's publicly expressed doubts about endorsing Rudolph Giuliani for U.S. Senate in his 2000 race against Democrat Hillary Clinton. Doubts about Giuliani's conservative credentials (for example, Giuliani supported abortion and gay rights), plus his longtime association with the Liberal Party, made a Conservative endorsement all but impossible (Perez-Pena 2000). This crisis was averted, however, when Giuliani pulled out of the Senate race after revelations that he had prostate cancer and was separating from his wife. The Republican nominee, Rep. Rick Lazio, was readily embraced by the Conservatives.

The Right to Life Party (RTLTP) entered New York's political fray in the 1970s. But whereas the Conservatives and Liberals were founded by political activists and business leaders, the RTLTP began inauspiciously in a book discussion group at the home of a Merrick, Long Island, housewife.

The party's grassroots beginning was prompted by attempts in the state Legislature to liberalize the state's abortion law. Those attempts succeeded in 1970, and the concerns of these formerly apolitical individuals with anti-abortion sentiments accelerated when the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that women had a right to a safe, legal abortion (Spitzer 1984). Unlike New York's other minor parties, the RTLP is predicated on a single issue—opposition to abortion. The salience of this issue for some New York voters was evidenced when, in 1978, the RTLP succeeded in establishing its own line on the New York ballot after a brief attempt to work within the major parties (notably, party co-founder Ellen McCormack sought the Democratic presidential nomination in 1976). The RTLP's 1978 gubernatorial candidate, Mary Jane Tobin, received 130,193 votes.

Aside from fielding candidates in state races, the RTLP has also run minor-party candidates for president. Unlike the state's other minor parties, however, the RTLP has operated under several handicaps. First, as a single-issue party that is generally considered extremist and inflexible, it often drives away many candidates (including many who consider themselves strongly anti-abortion) who would otherwise jump at a chance to obtain an extra ballot line. Second, New York State is one of the most strongly pro-choice states in the nation; thus, a RTLP endorsement is often considered a net liability, especially for a candidate who already has a major-party endorsement (Spitzer 1987, chs. 2 and 3).<sup>2</sup> This verdict is reflected in the RTLP's sometimes precarious fortunes. In the 1982 gubernatorial election, its candidate received just more than 52,000 votes, dropping the RTLP ballot position to fifth from 1983 to 1986. This election dip caused RTLP leaders to seek a better-known gubernatorial candidate for 1986. They turned first to the Republican-Conservative nominee, Westchester County executive Andrew O'Rourke. But O'Rourke declined the endorsement, despite his own opposition to abortion, based on the belief that a RTLP endorsement would actually cost him more votes than it would gain (Lynn 1986). The RTLP turned next to a Democrat, Nassau County District Attorney Denis Dillon. Dillon initially declined the offer because "they approached me on the basis of saving the party." Although initially unwilling to jeopardize his political career for the RTLP, he finally accepted so that he could "talk about the lives being killed by abortion" (Neumeister 1986). Dillon waged a vigorous campaign, and received 130,802 votes. In 1990, the RTLP turned to a Staten Island consultant and Republican, Louis Wein, who received about 137,000 votes. In the 1994 gubernatorial race, RTLP candidate Robert Walsh garnered 67,750 votes. The party's 1998 gubernatorial candidate, Michael J. Reynolds, received just more than 56,000 votes. During the last decade, the party has fielded fewer candidates than ever for congressional and state legislative contests.



Two new state parties were founded in 1994. During that year's gubernatorial election, millionaire businessman Thomas Golisano ran for governor on what was initially called the Independence Fusion Party. Emulating the campaign approach at the presidential level of Ross Perot, Golisano spent his own money on an extensive media advertising campaign and gained over 217,000 votes in the general election—enough for his party, renamed the Independence Party after the election, to win the fourth spot on New York ballots (below the Democrats, Republicans, and Conservatives). Based in Rochester, the Independence Party has endorsed many candidates, including Republicans and Democrats as well as independents, for local and state office. In 1995 alone, it endorsed about a thousand candidates. In 1996, Ross Perot used this line for his presidential bid. According to the party's state chair, its primary goal is to link up with other, similar third parties in other states under the umbrella of the Perot-created Reform Party to create a coherent national third party. Its issue concerns include ballot initiative and referendum options, stemming the influence of political action committees, campaign finance reform, and other government reform proposals (Kriss 1995; "New York Party" 1995; Nolan 1995). In 1998, Golisano again ran for governor, garnering 364,000 votes, which catapulted the party to the third ballot position. The state party's image was tarnished in 2000 because of the national Reform Party's endorsement of arch-conservative Pat Buchanan for president, which in turn split the state party between the moderate Golisano wing and backers of Buchanan. Senate candidate Hillary Clinton denounced the national party's endorsement of Buchanan, rejecting any effort to win its endorsement as long as Buchanan was the nominee for president. In the end, the state party refused to endorse Buchanan for president (who ran for president in New York on the Right to Life line), endorsing instead John Hagelin. Its Senate endorsement went to former Watertown mayor Jeffrey Graham.

The other party emerging from the 1994 elections was the Freedom Party. While other state minor parties have found alliance with a major party, the Freedom Party was expressly created by state Republican Party leaders to boost the candidacy of gubernatorial candidate George Pataki. Initially called the Tax Cut Now Party, Pataki received 54,000 votes on this line, qualifying it as an established party for the next four years. The Freedom Party was run out of Albany by GOP state party leaders, and was available only to Republican candidates (Kriss 1995). As a direct creature of the state Republican Party, it represented the clearest expression yet of the value attached to multiple endorsements. In 1998, the party disappeared because it fielded no candidate for governor.

The 1998 elections yielded two additional minor parties. Efforts had been under way in New York for many years to form a Green Party.

Unlike the state's other minor parties, the Green Party was already established elsewhere in the United States and abroad. Known primarily for its support of environmental issues (ergo its name), Greens have supported other liberal issues, including consumer protection, universal health care, opposition to the death penalty, an increase in the minimum wage, repeal of the state's tough Rockefeller drug laws, and stricter regulation of corporate practices. The national Green Party won wider attention when it endorsed consumer activist Ralph Nader for president in 1996 and again in 2000, when Nader campaigned more aggressively and garnered about 3 percent of the presidential vote. In 1998, state Greens endorsed actor and political activist Al Lewis (known as "Grandpa Munster" on the 1960s television show *The Munsters*). Selected because party leaders hoped to parlay his celebrity into votes, and because of his ideological compatibility (Barry 1998), the profanity-uttering 88-year-old campaigned on a shoestring budget but won 52,533 votes. In the 2000 Senate race, Lewis lost the party's primary to Green activist Mark Dunau.

The other party to emerge from the 1998 election, the Working Families Party, was the product of labor-union activists, including communications workers, auto workers, teamsters, and teachers, who believed that neither the Democrats nor the Liberals were adequately responsive to liberal-progressive concerns and the needs of working families. Party leaders were especially motivated to displace the state Liberal Party, considering it "moribund" and "for sale to the highest bidder" (Ireland 1998, 21). State party formation efforts also paralleled a similar national effort to form a labor party. The party endorsed Democratic gubernatorial nominee Peter Vallone, who received 51,325 votes. In 2000, the party endorsed Hillary Clinton for Senate.

## NEW YORK'S ELECTORAL STRUCTURE

To understand how electoral structures encourage parties in New York, one must begin with state law governing party formation. According to state election code, a political party may establish an automatic ballot line for all New York elections by fielding a candidate for governor who receives at least 50,000 votes on that party line in the general election.<sup>3</sup> If this threshold is reached, the party is guaranteed a ballot position in all New York elections for the next four years (until the next gubernatorial election). If no automatic ballot slot exists for a party or candidate, an individual seeking statewide office must obtain at least 15,000 petition signatures (fewer for nonstatewide offices). Any registered voter may sign an independent candidate's petition, regardless of the voter's party affiliation, unless the voter has already signed a competing candidate's petition.



In comparison with ballot-access requirements in other states, New York's is one of the most demanding. In fact, as revealed by the manifold ballot-access difficulties faced by Republican presidential contender John McCain during New York's 2000 primary, the state of New York has the most arcane, lengthy, cumbersome, and intricate election laws of any state in the union (Oreskes 1985). Despite this fact, however, determined and organized third parties can endure in New York where they cannot in other states by virtue of another characteristic of state law—the cross-endorsement rule, sometimes referred to as a “fusion ballot.” This key provision of New York election law says simply that parties may nominate candidates already endorsed by other parties. The votes a candidate receives on all of his or her lines are added together in the final count to determine the winner. This practice traces to the post-Civil War era, when political opponents of New York City's powerful Tammany Hall political machine would join together in “fusion” movements. Fusion candidacies incorporated multiple endorsements, but were usually associated with “good government” groups opposed to political machines. Such fusion efforts were common in the United States in the nineteenth century, but they declined by the end of the century when most states banned multiple-party endorsements (Scarrow 1986; “Fusion Party” 1991, vol. 1, 417).

Today, nine other states permit candidates to be endorsed by more than one party, including Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Mississippi, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, and Vermont (Greenhouse 1997).<sup>4</sup> But the ability to cross-endorse does not alone explain New York's vigorous third-party activity, as New York's previously discussed distinctive political culture is also a vital factor. Third parties face tough going in Connecticut, for example, because state law there sets a 20 percent gubernatorial vote threshold as a requirement for party recognition. Even so, former Connecticut Senator and Governor Lowell Weicker succeeded in organizing and establishing a new minor party in the state, called A Connecticut Party, in 1990, riding that party to the governor's office. In 1992, the party cross-endorsed incumbent Democratic Senator Christopher Dodd in his successful reelection bid (Yarrow 1992).

Cross-endorsement is a regular feature in New York elections. Not surprisingly, the Conservative Party usually sides with the Republicans, and the Liberal Party with the Democrats. Since 1974, for example, every Democratic candidate for governor has also been endorsed by the Liberal Party, and every Republican gubernatorial candidate has won the endorsement of the Conservative Party, except for the 1990 Republican gubernatorial nominee, Pierre Rinfret (he will be discussed later).

The cross-endorsement system has a number of consequences for the New York party system, the sum of which causes New York to resemble, in certain respects, European multiparty systems. First, this provision

removes a major impediment to casting a vote for a minor party, namely, the "wasted-vote" syndrome. Voters frequently have preferences for third-party candidates, but refrain from voting for them because they think they are throwing away their votes on candidates or parties that cannot win. But the cross-endorsement rule allows votes cast for a candidate anywhere on the ballot to be added to the candidate's total.

Second, one can easily calculate how many votes a party contributes to a candidate by observing the vote count on each line. Many argue that a candidate would probably receive about the same total number of votes whether he or she appeared on one line or several. It surely seems likely, for example, that George Pataki would have defeated Mario Cuomo in 1994 whether his name appeared only once or three times on the ballot. Nevertheless, candidates perceive that every line helps, and it is all but impossible to dismiss the prospect that some electoral outcomes might be altered with the inclusion of one or more extra ballot endorsements. The critical dynamic of "more endorsements equals more votes" is a near-omnipresent feature of state elections, especially when they are close. For example, during the hotly contested 2000 U.S. Senate race between Hillary Clinton and Rick Lazio, the *New York Times* referred to the two candidates' efforts to win endorsements from the state's minor parties by saying that these actions "might be as important as any" in determining the outcome of the race (Nagourney 2000).

Beyond this general perception, some voters do feel more comfortable supporting a candidate with an alternate party label. In New York City's 1989 and 1993 mayoral elections, for example, Republican Rudolph Giuliani actively sought the Liberal Party nomination because of the belief that many liberal and Democratic voters in this liberal city would be more likely to support him on that line than on the Republican line (Roberts 1989). Evidence of the importance candidates attach to multiple party endorsements can be seen in the frequency of cross-endorsements. To take the 1996 elections as a typical example: of New York's 31 representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, 26 were elected with more than one party endorsement, and they averaged just more than two endorsements per House member; of New York's 61 state senators, 52 were elected with more than one endorsement, and they averaged about 2.5 endorsements per senator; of New York's 150 state Assembly races, 120 won election with more than one endorsement, and they averaged more than 2.3 endorsements. The great concern for cross-endorsement is all the more notable given the seemingly contrary fact that the incumbent reelection rate for members of Congress is more than 90 percent; for state legislative races, incumbent reelection in recent years has been from 97 percent to 99 percent. Despite the belief that these endorsements are crucial, a study of all New York State Senate races from 1950 to 1988 demonstrated that



third-party endorsements provided a winning edge for candidates in only about 3 percent of the races (Shan 1991, 45).

Third, minor parties may go beyond merely offering an additional line by offering the only line for a candidate denied a major-party line. While not a common occurrence, there have been instances of major-party candidates denied a major line, which have gone on to win election on a minor-party line. In 1969, then-incumbent Republican New York Mayor John Lindsay was defeated in the Republican primary by John Marchi. But Lindsay was nevertheless reelected by running on the Liberal Party line, defeating Marchi and conservative Democrat Mario Procaccino. It was later said that, as a reward for Liberal Party support, no Liberal Party activist seeking a municipal job went without work. In 1970, the Conservative Party succeeded in electing one of its own, James Buckley, to the U.S. Senate in a three-way race against the Democratic nominee, Richard Ottinger, and the liberal anti-Nixon Republican incumbent, Charles Goodell.

Fourth, minor parties can run their own candidates, or endorse others, to punish major-party candidates by depriving them of votes. In 1966, the Liberal Party ran the popular Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. for governor, instead of endorsing the Democratic candidate, Frank O'Connor. Incumbent Nelson Rockefeller was considered vulnerable to defeat that year, and the more than half-million votes garnered by Roosevelt deprived O'Connor of the election (he lost by 392,000 votes). Alex Rose, then the leader of the Liberal Party, commented later that the move to nominate someone other than the Democratic nominee was sparked at least partly by a desire for retribution against Democratic leaders who were so sure of victory with or without Liberal support that they brushed aside attempts by Rose to have influence in the process of nominating the Democratic candidate (Karen 1975). Indeed, influence over major-party nomination decisions is often a key objective of minor-party leaders.

Finally, minor parties can nominate candidates before the major parties to try to influence the choices of the major parties. Recent New York politics is replete with examples. In 1980, for example, an unknown town supervisor from Hempstead, Long Island, Alfonse D'Amato, received a critical early boost in his campaign for the U.S. Senate by winning the nomination of the Conservative Party (he was later endorsed by the RTLTP as well). Using that endorsement as a political jumping-off point, he went on to challenge and defeat four-term incumbent Jacob Javits in the Republican primary. To complicate matters, however, Javits remained on the ballot because he had already earned the nomination of the Liberal Party. Meanwhile, the Democratic nominee and reputed frontrunner, Elizabeth Holtzman, found her otherwise open path to the Senate blocked by Javits' presence on the ballot. In the election, the state's liberal and moderate

votes were split between Holtzman and Javits. Javits polled more than 10 percent of the vote; D'Amato won by about 1 percent over Holtzman.

Major-party anxiety over this "tail wags dog" syndrome in the 1980s encouraged leaders of both major parties to propose that the cross-endorsement provision be wiped from the books. A Democratic party resolution, considered briefly by state party leaders, denounced cross-endorsements in saying: "The process has led to many cases where the people able to dispense such cross-endorsements obtain influence out of all proportion to the people they represent" (Carroll 1982a). Similar sentiments were expressed by the Republicans (Lynn 1982; Carroll 1982b). Despite this uneasiness with third party influence, the major parties have lived with insurgent parties and factions for many decades, in part because these insurgent party movements served as an outlet to vent public displeasure arising from disclosures of corrupt or autocratic major-party practices in the first half of the twentieth century. Those minor parties that survived, such as the Liberal Party, soon made their peace with the major parties. If major-party bosses had succeeded in suppressing dissident reformist parties, enhanced public outrage might have cost the bosses control of their own party machines. This possibility caused party leaders to at least tolerate the existence of these dissident elements. It is now typical for major-party leaders to dicker with their minor-party counterparts, recognizing that, with occasional exceptions, both parties benefit from such arrangements, even though the major parties are, at times, uncomfortable with the extent of minor-party influence. The primary venue for change in these arrangements is the state Legislature; however, it is unlikely that this body will move to alter the system from which most legislators have benefited. The addition of new parties in the 1990s has complicated these arrangements, but minor parties have at least as much to gain as the major parties by bargaining constructively.

### MINOR-PARTY LEVERAGE

New York's minor parties are interested in maximizing their influence, but their primary goal is not supplanting one of the major parties, since New York's system allows them to acquire rewards and influence without actually winning elections on their own. Minor-party leverage takes two forms. First, minor parties can trade their lines and their support for patronage, usually in the form of jobs, as the Liberals received after Mayor Lindsay's reelection. Liberals reaped similar patronage rewards after the party's endorsement of Republican New York City mayoral candidate Rudolph Giuliani, who won a close race in 1993. Republicans found themselves in competition for patronage positions with Liberal party members



throughout the city. Most notably, the son of the Liberal Party's leader was appointed New York City's chief lobbyist in Albany (Mitchell 1993; Sack 1994). The Conservative Party reaped substantial patronage rewards after Governor Pataki's narrow 1994 gubernatorial victory. Prominent party leaders were appointed to such positions as executive director of the Port Authority of New York, chair of the City University of New York, and chief of staff to the lieutenant governor (Perez-Pena 2000).

Second, minor parties may exchange their ballot lines for ideological/policy support. The RTLP in particular is motivated by the desire to impel state lawmakers to curtail liberalized abortion practices. As party leaders have made clear, they are less interested in running their own candidates, and much more interested in endorsing major-party candidates who can be persuaded to advance the right-to-life position in government in exchange for the RTLP line. The party's stated goal is to end abortions, not elect candidates (Spitzer 1987, ch. 2).

The Conservative Party has also pressed specific ideological concerns. In 1993, for example, the state head of the Conservative Party threatened Republicans in the state Legislature with the withdrawal of Conservative endorsement and support if they voted for a civil-rights bill aimed at protecting gays and lesbians. Support for the bill would be "close to a fatal issue" as far as party leader Michael Long was concerned (Bauder 1993). The measure failed to be enacted. In a similar fashion, both the Green and Working Families parties have explicitly stated their desire to push state leaders further to the left on a variety of issues.

### THE CONTINUED POTENCY OF MINOR PARTIES: GUBERNATORIAL AND MAYORAL CASES

Gubernatorial elections continue to demonstrate the attractiveness of New York's electoral system to minor parties. The 1994 gubernatorial race mentioned at the start of this chapter dramatically illustrates this point—but 1994 was no anomaly.

The 1990 gubernatorial race elevated the minor-party role to an even greater degree, nearly precipitating a crisis for the Republican Party. The near-certain reelection of Democrat Mario Cuomo deterred prominent state Republicans from challenging him. After numerous unsuccessful appeals to more than twenty potential candidates, the party settled on an unknown but affluent economist, Pierre Rinfret. The Rinfret endorsement enraged the state's conservatives, who objected to his support for abortion rights and lack of conservative credentials. The Conservative Party turned instead to New York University Dean Herbert London.

Rinfret proved to be an inept candidate who seemed uninformed about and uninterested in state issues. London, on the other hand, campaigned hard, and pre-election polls showed the two running neck-and-neck for second place. A third place showing for Rinfret would have been disastrous for the Republicans, as it would have reduced the party to the status of a "third" party, making the Conservatives the state's other major party. The Republicans would lose control over appointed patronage positions in every county in the state and suffer a nearly incalculable loss of prestige. In the election, party loyalty prevailed, but just barely; Rinfret received 22 percent of the vote to London's 21 percent. Cuomo swept the election with 53 percent of the vote. Had Cuomo faced a single strong opponent, the race would have appeared far closer.

The 1998 gubernatorial race also featured the pivotal role of minor parties. When Governor Pataki made it clear that he would not allow his lieutenant governor, Betsy McCaughey Ross, to run with him for a second term, Ross bolted the party, attempting a long-shot run for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. While the failure of her primary bid would have spelled the end for her in any other state, she found sympathy and a gubernatorial endorsement from the Liberal Party. Democrats were understandably concerned that a Ross candidacy would split the anti-Pataki vote and pull votes away from Democratic nominee Peter Vallone. On election day, Ross polled 77,915 votes—not enough to swing the outcome, but enough to again remind both major parties about the potentially pivotal influence of the minor parties.

The 1989 and 1993 New York City mayoral contests illustrate the elasticity of minor-party fortunes. After its successful endorsement of Mario Cuomo in 1982, the Liberal party succumbed to a fierce intraparty power struggle during a time when liberalism seemed out of favor. Teetering on the edge of extinction, the Liberals came back by patching up their differences and emerging as an important force in the mayoral race. Early in 1989, Liberal Party leader Raymond Harding openly courted Republican U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani, who had expressed interest in running for mayor.

The incumbent, Ed Koch, had been no friend to liberal causes, and Harding believed that none of the other Democratic challengers could mount a strong enough challenge to defeat Koch. The link between Giuliani and the Liberals raised some eyebrows, as Giuliani's liberal credentials were less than impeccable. Although a liberal supporter of Democrat George McGovern in 1972, Giuliani had switched parties, adopted a more conservative political slant, and was appointed to his position as federal prosecutor by President Reagan. Despite the ideological compromise, the subsequent Liberal endorsement immediately made the Liberals a major player in what promised to be a close election in a crowded field. Giuliani



later won the Republican nomination, making him an even more formidable challenger. And in a concession to his newfound liberal supporters, Giuliani backtracked on some of his conservative positions, including a disavowal of his one-time opposition to abortion. To the surprise of many, Koch was defeated in the Democratic primary by Borough President David Dinkins, who went on to win the election by a 3 percent vote margin over Giuliani.

Liberal party leader Harding had gambled on Giuliani and lost. Nevertheless, the early endorsement signaled to Democratic leaders that the Liberals could not be ignored or taken for granted, and that they continued to exercise influence. Even Governor Cuomo's threat to shun the Liberal designation in his next race for governor if they endorsed Giuliani did not deter them. Echoing the words of party founder Alex Rose, Harding said that his party's purpose was to "keep Democrats liberal and Republicans honest" (Roberts 1989).

Four years later, the Liberal Party enraged Democrats and African Americans by again endorsing Giuliani, against incumbent Mayor Dinkins (the city's first black mayor). This time, however, Giuliani won a narrow victory. As the *New York Times* noted, the race turned on "slivers of Liberal vote" (Purdum 1993). In the process, the Liberals had renewed their party, won substantial patronage, and moved a Republican closer to the liberal camp.

## CONCLUSION

The critical fact of the New York multiparty system is this: minor parties are able to survive, and exert continuing influence, even though they lack the key feature that ultimately dooms nearly all American minor parties—an inability to defeat the major parties in electoral contests. By surviving the turbulent 1980s, and then proliferating in the 1990s, New York's minor parties demonstrated their staying power, as well as their political flexibility. Minor- and major-party leaders cooperate when it is in their interest to do so. But ideological differences, personal disputes, and attempts to enhance power often turn cooperation into conflict. In examples like John Lindsay's 1969 reelection, or the 1990 gubernatorial race, the minor parties were the tail that wagged the dog.<sup>5</sup> But in instances like the 1986 gubernatorial campaign, the dog wagged the tail. Indeed, it would be a mistake to attribute too much influence to the minor parties. That holds true in particular for the Right to Life Party, which has found itself in a position where major-party candidates sympathetic to their point of view frequently turn down invitations to accept the RTLTP endorsement because of its reputation for inflexible extremism. The RTLTP also illustrates

most vividly the importance of electoral structures in shaping electoral behavior. Without question, New York's cross-endorsement and party recognition rules explain the otherwise anomalous fact that one of the most strongly pro-choice states in the union is also the home of the nation's only antiabortion political party.

Finally, what does this near-multiparty system offer for the voters of New York? As previously mentioned, many major-party leaders and others have come to vilify the current system (Scarrov 1983), fearing, in the extreme, political paralysis characterized by institutionalized factionalism brought about by too many parties—as occurred for example during the French Fourth Republic after World War II.<sup>6</sup> These fears have been heightened by the spread of single-issue politics since the 1970s, of which the RTLP is an obvious example, and the generalized decline of parties.

Yet the New York system offers something extra to voters and candidates. Apart from the virtues or vices of particular parties, New York voters plainly have more party options, and more policy options, when they enter the voting booth. Similarly, candidates have more options as well. Admittedly, the existence of such options makes crackpot candidacies more likely, but that is the inevitable price for an electoral system that has more than two doors (Democrat and Republican) to public office. These two elements of the New York system can be taken as a practical, and real, means to reinvigorate party politics (Mazmanian 1974; Spitzer 1988). A vote for a candidate on the RTLP or Green Party line, for example, is clearly an "issue vote," single-issue or no. Moreover, the presence of more parties has demonstrably diversified an electoral landscape considered by most voters to be uninteresting at best. Few could deny that this multiparty system sparks greater interest in the electoral process.

E. E. Schattschneider (1942) observed many years ago that competition was the hallmark of a vigorous party system, and that democracy was unthinkable without vigorous parties. The current national electoral malaise continues to lean toward decay and disinterest. The New York example offers a good reason to believe that party competitiveness, considered a hallmark of effective and responsive party politics, is enhanced by the presence of minor parties. Those who complain about the woeful state of political parties in America might be well advised to give the New York system a closer look.

## NOTES

1. New York minor parties, and their years of official ballot status: Prohibition (1892–1922); Socialist Labor (1896–1904); Socialist (1900–1938); Independent League (1906–1916); Progressive (1912–1916); American (1914–1916); Farmer



Labor (1920–1922); Law Preservation (1930–1934); American Labor (1936–1954); Liberal (1946–); Conservative (1962–); Right to Life (1978–); Independence (1994–); Freedom (1994–98); Green (1998–); Working Families (1998–).

2. In 1995, for example, a Democratic-Independent candidate for Onondaga County Executive (an upstate county that includes the city of Syracuse) was pressured by Democrats to drop his endorsement by the RTLP. Despite the fact that the candidate faced an uphill battle against a popular Republican incumbent, the Democratic challenger agreed to drop the RTLP endorsement because Democrats had a longstanding agreement, dating to 1981, that no Democratic candidate would also accept the RTLP line (Arnold 1995).

3. Ballot position is determined by gubernatorial vote. The party whose gubernatorial candidate receives the largest vote appears first on all New York ballots, followed by the other parties, according to the amount of gubernatorial vote. If a party does not field a gubernatorial candidate, it forfeits the line.

4. A Minnesota law barring parties from cross-endorsing was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1997. In the case of *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party*, the high court ruled 6–3 that states are not constitutionally required to allow candidates to appear on more than one ballot line. This ruling did not bar states from enacting or maintaining cross-endorsements.

5. In Cayuga County in upstate New York, local Republicans say that “the lack of a Conservative endorsement . . . is the kiss of death to a campaign.” This is true even though the local Conservative Party is considered poorly organized and has a small enrollment (Hannagan 1989).

6. One symptom of the continued concern about the minor parties was seen in 1986, when the liberal *New York Times* called in an editorial for the dissolution of the Liberal Party, citing its factional disputes and apparently declining influence.

## Barriers to Minor-Party Success and Prospects for Change

DIANA DWYRE AND ROBIN KOLODNY

The chapters in this book have given us a sense of how minor parties develop and their current role in the American political system, as well as how contemporary minor parties plan to address the future. In this chapter, we focus on changes that would help minor parties become viable in the United States and then assess the potential for such changes. Although we recognize the small possibility of minor-party success, we think the American democracy could only benefit if the number of competitive parties increased. We will consider three barriers to minor-party success: (1) cultural biases against minor parties in the electorate; (2) legal obstacles, such as ballot-access laws and the structure of elections; and (3) institutional hurdles, such as campaign finance regulations and the lack of media exposure. We conclude that few such changes are likely in the short run, although some modest ones are possible that could have significant long-term effects.

### CULTURAL BIASES

Scholars have long noted the powerful cultural supports for the two-party system in the United States, which are discussed throughout this book. Thus it is worth asking: Would Americans support minor parties, let alone a multiparty system, even if legal and institutional barriers were removed? Advocates of "multipartyism," such as Kay Lawson (chapter 3), answer this question in the affirmative. If minor parties were allowed to compete on an even playing field, they argue, public opinion would eventually become more sympathetic. John Green finds evidence of some support for multiparty politics in public opinion in the 1990s (chapter 5). Other scholars are more skeptical of public support, including Paul



Herrnson (chapter 2) and John Bibby (chapter 4), arguing that the American two-party system is largely appreciated on its merits, notwithstanding the legal and institutional biases in its favor.

There are at least three sources of cultural bias against minor parties. The first is the way that Americans define *democracy*. Central to this definition is the notion of majority rule. Specifically, the American electoral system is based on single-member plurality districts with "first-past-the-post" winners, which discourages candidates who cannot defeat all other opponents from engaging in electoral politics. Thus, to overcome a basic bias in favor of the current system will require Americans to accept alternative definitions of *democracy* and *majority rule*, such as proportional representation, multicandidate districts, a parliamentary system of national government, and coalition governments. Indeed, the necessity of such a redefinition lies at the heart of Lawson's argument in favor of a multiparty system (chapter 3).

The second element is more practical: most Americans recognize the entrenchment of the two-party system, so they have a strong incentive to work within it. As a result, the two-party system manages some political discontent reasonably well. The major parties are highly permeable and internally diverse, giving voters and organized interests an opportunity to influence party platforms and the choice of candidates.<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, supporting minor parties is wasted effort and a "wasted vote" (although Collet and Hansen in chapter 8 note that Ralph Nader attracted the most votes in places where voters knew that "wasting" their vote would not effect the outcome of the election). Thus, overcoming this practical bias will require Americans to view the two-party system as unresponsive to pressing problems or issues. In fact, the success of the system lies at the heart of Bibby's defense of the two-party system (chapter 4), although others note that the possibility of failure of the two-party system might encourage Americans to rethink their cultural biases against minor parties (see Lawson's chapter 3; also see Broder 1997).

The third element is political: Do minor parties offer plausible alternatives? Most Americans do not view minor-party platforms or candidates as realistic alternatives to the two major parties; John Green and William Binning (chapter 7) suggest why: minor parties tend to combine poor electoral showings with extreme or narrowly focused agendas. As Robert Spitzer shows in his review of the New York "multiparty" system (chapter 9), voters are more likely to support minor parties if they are tied to major-party candidates through "fusion" (whereby some states allow a candidate to be listed as the nominee of more than one party). Of course, minor parties can have a major impact on the two-party system by raising new issues, mobilizing new groups of activists and voters, and putting stress on the major parties, a point well illustrated by Herrnson's review

of the various types of minor parties in the United States (chapter 2). But Peter Francia and Herrnson (chapter 6) also find that minor-party candidates for legislative races keep their campaigns centered on issues rather than on candidate qualifications. Of course, minor-party candidates also have less experience than major-party candidates. Thus, to overcome this political bias will require Americans to see minor parties as viable alternatives in their own right.

## LEGAL OBSTACLES

Legal biases against minor parties in the United States are well known and well documented in the previous chapters. Here we offer a summary of these problems and possible remedies, including the legal definition of a *party*, voter registration, ballot access, fusion, and the structure of electoral competition.

### The Legal Definition of Party

Perhaps the most perplexing facet of the American political system is the lack of a universal definition of legitimate political actors. There is no one national policy regarding political parties. Instead, the definitions vary by state and by topic. There are more than fifty separate definitions of *political party* for the purposes of ballot access. Each state and the District of Columbia decide how average citizens may engage in party activities through their voter registration laws. They also decide what a political organization must do to attain party status, to nominate candidates, and to retain a position on the ballot. Many of these definitions are hostile to minor parties. The closest thing to a national definition is found in federal campaign finance regulations, such as the rules that stipulate which candidates receive public money in the presidential race and what role parties can play in the financing of congressional campaigns. These national definitions are not favorable to minor parties. Clearly, minor parties would benefit from a more favorable and consistent definition of *political party* across all levels of government and all political activities. With a more standardized set of rules under which to operate, minor parties might, for example, coordinate their grassroots efforts with their national party goals.

### Voter Registration

The closed nature of voter registration in many states often impedes minor-party success. A major problem is the requirement that new parties



collect signatures of registered party members to appear on the ballot; that is, the signatures of voters registered to their not-yet-existent party. To vote in primary elections, many states require voters to declare a party affiliation well in advance of primary election day. While other states have nonpartisan registration (e.g., Missouri) or have registration on election day (that is, "same day" registration as in Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin), many close registration to new voters or to changes in party affiliation thirty days before the election.<sup>2</sup> Although the 1993 National Voter Registration Act (i.e., the "motor voter" law) does make registration easier for citizens by allowing them to register to vote when they apply for or renew a driver's license, it does not change how party registration relates to ballot access or the flexibility citizens have in changing their party affiliation on or before election day. Amending the "motor voter" law to standardize nonpartisan or open registration across the fifty states or to require universal same-day registration would allow minor parties to gain more support from voters who are currently reluctant to give up their opportunity to vote in a major-party primary.

### Ballot Access

Ballot-access laws in the fifty states are often formidable obstacles to minor-party success. Simply put, party-nominated candidates have no chance of winning if their names do not appear on the ballot. Also, the U.S. Constitution provides for state governments, not the federal government, to set the time, place, and manner of elections. Some states have structured their conception of guaranteed ballot position to mean that only Democrats and Republicans will get on the ballot automatically each election year. Generally, any party whose candidates received a certain minimum number or proportion of votes statewide is spared from having to collect signatures or expend any other effort to remain on the ballot. Minor parties must collect signatures, pay fees, and in many states identify individuals who have officially registered as minor-party members.

These burdens are extremely difficult for minor parties to overcome, as revealed by the cases of Perot in 1996 and Nader in 1996 and 2000. Indeed, *Ballot Access News* (2000a) reports that fifteen states have no minor parties qualified for ballot position for the 2002 general elections. Four of these states have not granted ballot position to any political party other than Democrats and Republicans for thirty years or more. Despite these numerous obstacles, the number of minor-party nominees below the presidential level continues to increase, and Collet and Wattenberg (1999) argue that restrictive ballot access laws have no relationship to the electoral success of minor-party candidates. Thus while ballot access restric-

tions certainly make getting minor-party candidates on the ballot more difficult, they may not prove to be insurmountable obstacles.

Yet for minor parties and their candidates to fully and equally participate in American electoral politics, ballot-access requirements need to be less daunting. First, the traditional measures of party support used to grant ballot position would have to be relaxed. States would have to require fewer signatures on ballot petitions, not require those who sign ballot petitions to be registered voters of the new or minor party, and reduce or eliminate filing fees. Second, the deadlines for filing ballot petitions should be relatively close to election day to give minor parties more time to organize. The closer to election day, the more focused voters are on the election and therefore the more likely a minor-party candidate is to attract the attention of enough voters to collect the necessary signatures and to mount a viable campaign.

Finally, states would have to lower the thresholds to give political parties automatic ballot position once they have run candidates. Here again, uniformly favorable laws across the states would be desirable. Achieving such a standard would require either persuading each state to adopt less restrictive ballot-access laws or a constitutional amendment to take the power to set the time, place, and manner of elections away from the states and invest it in the federal government. This, of course, would require the assent of thirty-eight state legislatures. The idea of a constitutional amendment mandating a uniform ballot policy across the nation sounded rather far-fetched to us when we wrote for the first edition of this book, but in the wake of the 2000 election, a call for uniform standards might attract more support. If the electoral college were abolished as the method for selecting presidents, then fairness would mandate that ballots, at least at the top of the ticket, would have a uniform appearance and similar standards for access. We have more to say on the electoral college later in this chapter.

## **Fusion**

Legalized fusion holds some promise for minor parties, a point well documented by Spitzer in chapter 9. Fusion allows a candidate to be the nominee of more than one party, thus appearing on multiple party ballot lines. Fusion is legal in just ten states, but regularly employed only in New York. Fusion tickets can make a difference in terms of outcomes (for example, the votes Ronald Reagan received on the Conservative party line helped him win New York in 1980, and as Spitzer explains, Governor George Pataki was helped greatly by his three ballot lines in 1994). Fusion makes it easier for minor parties to realize some success because fusion tickets allow citizens to vote for a minor party without feeling they have wasted their vote.



The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the legality of banning fusion in *Timmons et al. v. Twin Cities Area New Party* (1997). The defendant in the case, the New Party, claimed that a Minnesota law banning fusion tickets was a violation of the party's First Amendment right of free association. A U.S. appeals court declared the ban unconstitutional and the state of Minnesota appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court. Minnesota's assistant solicitor general argued that the state forbids fusion to prevent voter confusion and to guard against ballot manipulation. The high court overturned the appeals court decision (6–3), finding that Minnesota's law against fusion was permissible, although they did not rule fusion itself unconstitutional. The ruling confirmed the right of states to regulate access to the ballot in ways that may discourage minor-party participation.

However, Chief Justice William Rehnquist, author of the majority opinion, justified the constitutionality of the fusion ban by arguing that the two-party system itself was entitled to state-sanctioned protection. As Douglas Amy explains:

In this case, the Court moved in dramatic fashion to wrap the two-party system in the shroud of constitutional legitimacy and to justify election rules that are biased in favor of that system. Undoubtedly, the Timmons decision will be taken into account when the Court reviews other challenges to electoral rules discriminating against minor parties. For this reason, the most lasting legal significance of the decision may not be its effect on the viability of fusion practices but the effect of the Court's hostility toward minor parties and multiparty systems on future cases involving election regulations. (Amy 2000, 160)

Thus, while cultural biases against minor parties may begin to break down and some institutional obstacles to minor-party success may fall, it appears as if the current Supreme Court (as well as lower courts that are likely to use the *Timmons* case as precedent) are likely to decide future cases involving minor parties in a way that protects the two-party system. This judicial inclination to protect the two-party system may be enough to undo any gains minor parties may make in overcoming the cultural biases against them and the legal and institutional barriers to their success.

### The Structure of Electoral Competition

Scholars have long known that the nature of the American practice of single-member plurality elections discourages minor parties. By having only one winner in each of several hundred districts, minor parties have to garner a significant amount of support to make even a small dent in the composition of the national legislature. Perhaps more important, only one view (that of the plurality winner) gets represented in the government,

often denying a majority (who did not support the winner) its say. As Lawson explains in chapter 3, the multiparty systems in Europe have very different election laws, usually with some form of proportional representation. Not surprisingly, some minor parties in the United States have endorsed proportional representation.

The electoral college compounds the anti-minor-party effects of single-member plurality elections. As the 2000 elections reminded us, presidents are not elected by popular vote, but are chosen by the electoral college. Electoral college members are selected in each state based on the state's popular vote. The method of choosing electors is left up to the state. Currently, forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have adopted what are essentially single-member plurality elections: winner-take-all on the basis of a plurality of the statewide vote. Maine and Nebraska both use proportional systems. Maine, for example, has a mixed apportionment system in which the winner of each congressional district wins that district's elector and the winner of the statewide vote wins the two "senatorial" electors. However, election results in Maine have paralleled the winner-take-all system.

The winner-take-all system discourages minor parties from seeking the presidency because they must defeat all others in a state to obtain any electoral votes. Major-party presidential candidate defeats in individual states have occurred when minor-party or independent candidates have run strong regional campaigns, such as Strom Thurmond in 1948 and George Wallace in 1968. Had they won enough electoral votes to deny one major-party candidate a majority of the electoral college votes, their efforts could have forced the election into the House of Representatives. However, if a minor party has broad-based national support, even an impressive showing at the polls may produce no electors under the current system, such as with Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996. However, if a proportional system had been in place in 1992 (whereby each state's electoral vote was divided in proportion to the popular vote the candidates received within the state) Ross Perot, who received no electoral college votes under the winner-take-all system, would have received approximately 102 electoral votes under such a proportional system. Moreover, Bill Clinton would not have received a majority of the electoral college votes, and the House of Representatives would have chosen the president in 1992 (Wayne 1997, 337).

To increase minor-party influence, states could abandon the winner-take-all method of apportioning electoral votes in favor of some form of proportional representation. Even following the Maine system of apportioning electors by congressional district would allow minor-party candidates a greater chance of success. If minor parties were to regularly win electors and the majority requirement to elect the president were



maintained, minor parties could influence the choice of president as part of a coalition, or send the election into the House of Representatives. In any event, almost any move away from single-member plurality elections to proportional representation would benefit minor parties. Yet such a change is unlikely because many of the consequences would not be desirable. For example, proportional plans tend to decrease the influence of large states and competitive states and to increase the influence of small states and noncompetitive states. Moreover, while such plans do increase the likelihood of minor-party success, they also make it more likely that the outcome of presidential elections will be decided in the House of Representatives.

### INSTITUTIONAL HURDLES

In addition to legal obstacles, minor parties face severe institutional hurdles in acquiring the resources and exposure to be effective in politics. Some of these hurdles are based in statutes, such as federal campaign finance laws, and others are based in custom, such as access to the media. We will consider two examples of these problems at the national level; there are no doubt countless more problems at the state and local levels.

#### **Campaign Finance**

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) is a significant impediment to minor-party success at the presidential level. First, the FECA encourages serious presidential candidates to pursue major-party nominations through its system of matching funds in primaries and caucuses. Second, the FECA provides significant funding for the major-party national nominating conventions and full public funding for major-party candidates' general election campaigns (payable to those campaigns as soon as the nomination is made official). For these purposes, the FECA defines a major party as a political party whose candidate for the office of president in the preceding presidential election received, as a candidate of such party, 25 percent or more of the total number of popular votes received by all candidates for president.

Third, the FECA treats minor parties differently from major parties. A minor party is defined as one whose candidate for president received between 5 percent and 25 percent of the presidential vote. Minor parties can receive some public financing. New minor parties can be reimbursed for individual contributions raised under FECA rules after the election if they receive 5 percent or more of the vote. In subsequent elections, minor parties and their presidential candidates can receive advance payments in

proportion to the vote they received in the previous election (as Perot did in 1996 for his presidential candidacy and the Reform party did for its nominating convention and presidential campaign in 2000) if the party garners at least 5 percent of the popular vote (which neither Ralph Nader nor Pat Buchanan were able to do for their parties in 2000). The FECA gives federal matching funds to any minor- (or major-) party candidate who raises at least \$5,000 in amounts of \$250 or less in twenty states (for a total of at least \$100,000). Minor parties are entitled to partial funding for their national nominating conventions and the general election based on their performance in the previous presidential election compared with that of the major parties. In 2000, the Federal Election Commission dispensed \$2.5 million to the Reform Party for its convention (compared with \$13.5 million to each of the major parties). Minor-party fund-raising is also subject to the same contribution limits as major parties, which can be a serious burden because minor parties usually have a smaller base of contributors from which to raise funds. After all, Perot's personal funds in 1992 and 1996 made the Reform Party possible. To enjoy the benefits of such a patron, minor parties must operate outside of the FECA.

Unlike most of the legal obstacles discussed here, the FECA does provide some benefits to minor parties, but not on par with the major parties. A more level playing field could be established by expanding the definition of a *minor party*. For example, the standard could be lowered to 2.5 percent of either the presidential vote or the aggregate congressional vote in a previous election (many European countries have thresholds of 1 percent or less). This threshold would have given the Green Party minor-party status as their presidential nominee Ralph Nader received 2.7 percent of the vote in 2000, far short of the 5 percent now required. New parties could receive matching funds based on the number of congressional candidates they field, the number of small contributors they have, or their strength in opinion polls. Along these lines, larger subsidies for party conventions and nomination efforts could be provided.

### Media Exposure

A significant deterrent to minor-party success is the lack of media attention. This problem applies to both "earned" and "paid" media. On the first count, journalists are inclined to report elections as events and therefore give more attention to the horse-race aspects of campaigns (e.g., poll results, candidate gaffes, negative ads) than to policy issues. This bias leads to heavier news coverage of well-established candidates, to the detriment of minor parties, and extends to media events, such as candidate debates and national conventions. Minor-party candidates are routinely excluded from the debates, even when they are prominent (such as



Perot in 1996 and Nader in 2000, who was even barred from attending one of the presidential debates as a spectator), while their conventions are rarely covered at all. Clearly, minor-party candidates have great difficulty earning free media coverage, and they also struggle to provide paid media exposure for their campaigns. The costs of the mass media are prohibitive for most minor-party candidates and media outlets have been known to refuse to sell time even to well-heeled minor parties (which happened to Perot in 1996).

The major criterion for most forms of media exposure is "electability," which minor parties are hard-pressed to demonstrate. Of course, the electability standard can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with lack of attention dooming minor parties to a poor finish. Indeed, Collet and Hansen (chapter 8) note the derogatory label of "spoiler" (for Al Gore's chance at the White House) attached to Ralph Nader's candidacy by the media, even though their analysis exonerates him of this charge. Several reforms might help minor parties gain exposure and thus become newsworthy. One idea would be to provide political parties and their candidates, including minor parties, with free broadcast time through communications vouchers and/or an "equal time" provision. Another idea would be to expand the number of party candidates normally included in the nationally televised presidential debates to include all those who legally qualify for the ballot in a given number of states. Also, broadcasters could be required to provide coverage to all candidates on the ballot as a condition of holding a broadcast license, a sort of "public service programming" extended to political candidates. As with campaign finance, almost any change in this area would help minor parties.

### PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

Having identified a number of changes that would help make minor parties more successful, we now turn to the likelihood that they will be adopted in the near future. One can easily imagine three sources of change: (1) pressure from within the major parties, (2) the court system, and (3) the ballot box. Each of these sources of change is likely to have the most effect, respectively, on the cultural biases, legal obstacles, and institutional hurdles that minor parties face. Given the magnitude of the challenge, we doubt that major changes will occur soon, but some modest alterations are possible, which could have long-term repercussions and may enhance the chances for minor-party success.

Since the major parties control all governmental institutions, significant reforms are unlikely. Indeed, many of the barriers that minor parties face were deliberately erected by the major parties, and more could be created,

particularly if minor parties became a threat. Thus, major changes, such as the substitution of proportional representation instead of single-member plurality elections, mandating that all states use proportional representation to allocate electoral college votes, or the adoption of uniform ballot-access laws, are very unlikely in the short run.

However, one should not completely count out the major parties as a source of change. For one thing, they have great opportunities for failure. In fact, it is major-party failure that prompts most minor-party activity in the first place. The more dramatic the failure, the larger the potential changes. The most significant impact of major-party failure is the erosion of cultural biases in favor of the two-party system and against minor parties. There is nothing quite like poor government to undermine the philosophical, practical, and political supports of the party system among the citizenry. Elected officials, interest group leaders, journalists, pundits, and scholars can all be effective critics of the party system. Although many political elites are committed firmly to the present arrangements, others have a passion for reform.

Another potential source of change is the court system. Minor parties are frequently in court arguing that they are denied their political rights. To the extent that such challenges are successful at the state and federal levels, the legal obstacles to minor parties can be removed or mitigated. State law is particularly vulnerable to court challenges. Lawsuits over ballot access were successful in the past two decades to the benefit of minor parties. But in *Timmons et al. v. Twin Cities Area New Party* (1997), the Supreme Court dealt minor parties a significant blow by upholding Minnesota's ban against fusion by minor parties with major-party candidates. Though states like New York may still have fusion tickets, the court majority's rationale for their decision sets a foreboding precedent. Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote, "States may, and inevitably must, enact reasonable regulations of parties, elections, and ballots to reduce election- and campaign-related disorder" and later that "while an interest in securing the perceived benefits of a two party system will not justify unreasonably exclusionary restrictions . . . states need not remove all of the many hurdles third parties face in the American political arena today." The court's finding that minor-party rights may mean "disorder" in our politics will certainly impede efforts for minor-party ballot access in the future. Indeed, in a dissenting opinion in this case, Justice John Paul Stevens bluntly acknowledged that the real reason for the decision has to do with a disdain for minor parties rather than a genuine concern for order: "The fact that the law was both intended to disadvantage minor parties and has had that effect . . . should weigh against, rather than in favor of its constitutionality."

A final source of change is the minor parties themselves and their impact at the ballot box. Any gains minor parties make in elections can help



change the system in their favor by pushing the current limits of political institutions. This process is also likely to be slow, eroding hurdles in campaign finance and media exposure, which, in turn, can help minor parties compete in subsequent elections. Although minor parties may never gain power by their efforts alone, it is hard to see how the system could become more favorable to them without persistent activity. On the one hand, minor-party activity can put pressure on the major parties, and on the other hand, minor parties must be poised to take advantage of failures by the major parties or a legal breakthrough if their status is to improve dramatically.

Indeed, minor parties themselves often erect obstacles to their own success. For instance, minor parties tend to foster factional tendencies within their ranks. Both the Reform Party and the Green Party suffered from internal factional battles during the 2000 election. The Reform Party's \$13 million in federal matching funds and its lack of a clear and favored candidate for president made the party an inviting target for takeover. The ensuing battle between Pat Buchanan and the Perot-backed John Hagelin for the nomination and the money tore the party apart, and Buchanan's far-right candidacy drove away many moderate voters who had supported Perot in 1992 and 1996 (see chapter 7). The Green Party also struggled during the 2000 election to keep its two factions working toward the same goal. The Association of State Green Parties and the Greens/Green Party USA both nominated Ralph Nader as their presidential candidate, but they disagreed over many organizational issues and some philosophical questions (Berg 2001, ch. 8). If not overcome, the tendency of minor parties to experience internal divisions may prove more detrimental to their future viability than any of the other obstacles discussed here.

In summary, few of these changes are likely to come in the short run. Yet there is the possibility that some modest changes will materialize, and their long-term cumulative effects could be significant. The question we cannot yet answer is this: Will such changes make minor parties more effective participants in the American political system, or will the system itself change, producing multiparty politics in America?

## NOTES

1. The defection of U.S. Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont from the Republican Party in May 2001 suggests that the major parties may indeed have ideological boundaries. In this case, a perception by Jeffords that the Republican Party had drifted too far to the right might appeal to other individuals frustrated by the direction of the contemporary major parties. There have also been recent defections

of Democrats to the Republicans, including U.S. senators Richard Shelby of Alabama and Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado in 1995.

2. Only one state, North Dakota, does not require voter registration of any kind. Proof of residence is all that is required to vote on election day.



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