THIRD PARTIES IN AMERICA

Citizen Response to Major Party Failure

Second edition, revised and expanded

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CHAPTER 2

CONSTRAINTS ON THIRD PARTIES

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

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

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

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

Barriers

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

Constitutional Biases

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

[1] See Schattschneider 1942, p. 75; Duverger 1954, p. 217; Downs 1957, p. 124; Key 1964, p. 208; and Riker 1982, pp. 753-66. Of the 107 nations Rae studies, 90 percent fit the maxim: "plurality formulae cause two-party systems" (1971, p. 93). The exceptions are countries where a minor party's strength is concentrated in a single region (Schattschneider 1942, p. 75; Rae 1971, p. 95).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ballot Access Restrictions

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

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

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

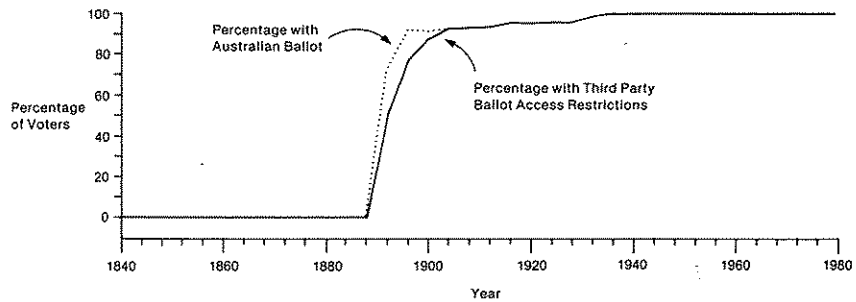
This all changed when states adopted the Australian ballot. Under the new system, each state now prepared an "official" ballot listing all the party slates, and voters could mark it secretly. It was both more difficult for parties to intimidate citizens and easier for voters to split their tickets (Rusk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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recent court decisions have reversed this trend. As a result of the lawsuits initiated by George Wallace in 1968, Eugene McCarthy in 1976, and John Anderson in 1980, ballot access laws are now as lenient as they have ever been in this century. Even Libertarian Ed Clark was able to gain a spot on all fifty-one ballots in 1980.[7]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Campaign Finance Laws

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

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

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

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

The FECA is a major party protection act. Democrats and Republicans receive their funds before the election, minor parties after. During the primaries, when name recognition is built and legitimacy established, contenders for a major party's nomination receive matching federal funds; minor parties, which do not hold primaries, receive none. During the general election, major party candidates are freed from time-consuming and costly fund-raising activities; minor parties are not. National party committees may accept individual contributions of up to $20,000; independent candidates cannot. In short, this law ensures a large gap between the financial resources available to major and minor parties.

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

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

Handicaps

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

Campaign Resources

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

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

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

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

TABLE 2.2 (*cont.*)

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

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

[a] Less than .1 percent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TABLE 2.3
Media Expenditures by Minor Parties, 1956-1972

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Media Coverage

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

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

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

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

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

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

This sort of coverage is understandable. We doubt that the media intentionally tried to undermine Anderson's cause. Nonetheless, the media can affect voters' perceptions by concentrating on who will win instead of what the candidates are saying. The de facto result benefits the major parties. We cannot unravel how much the media's treatment of Anderson caused his drop in standing or merely reflected it. But the fact remains that in the final crucial weeks of the campaign, voters saw little of Anderson in the press (not to mention Ed Clark, Barry Commoner, or John Rarick), and what little they did see was about Anderson the loser.

Televised presidential debates also exclude third party candidates. Only Nixon and Kennedy debated in 1960; only Ford and Carter appeared in 1976.[12] Although Anderson did debate Reagan in September 1980, Carter's unwillingness to participate delegitimized Anderson's candidacy and, along with ABC's simultaneous airing of the film "The Orient Express," contributed to a much smaller viewing audience than in 1960, 1976, or in the Carter-Reagan confrontation a week before the 1980 election.[13]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unqualified, Unknown Candidates

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

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

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

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

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

[a] Minor party and independent candidates who ran for president and received popular votes in more than one state.
[b] Alton Parker, Democratic candidate for President in 1904, was Chief Justice of the New York Court of Appeals; Wendell Wilkie, Republican candidate in 1940, was a utility executive.

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

The political obscurity of most minor party candidates, their inability to publicize themselves as major party contenders can, and their neglect by the media mean that many voters simply do not have information on these candidates. An unknown candidate is obviously unlikely to win many votes. Only 3 percent of the 1980 electorate claimed they did not know enough about Jimmy Carter to have an opinion about him; 18 percent said the same about Ronald Reagan. Yet 28 percent of the electorate had no information about John Anderson, 77 percent knew nothing about Ed Clark, and 85 percent knew nothing about Barry Commoner (CBS/*New York Times* Poll, October 1980). This disparity is even more striking among vice-presidential candidates: 15 percent of the electorate had not heard of Walter Mondale, 28 percent had never heard of George Bush, but 78 percent had never heard of Anderson's running mate Patrick Lucey (*Los Angeles Times* Poll, no. 35, September 2-7, 1980).[15]

Negative Attitudes Toward Third Parties

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

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

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

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

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

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

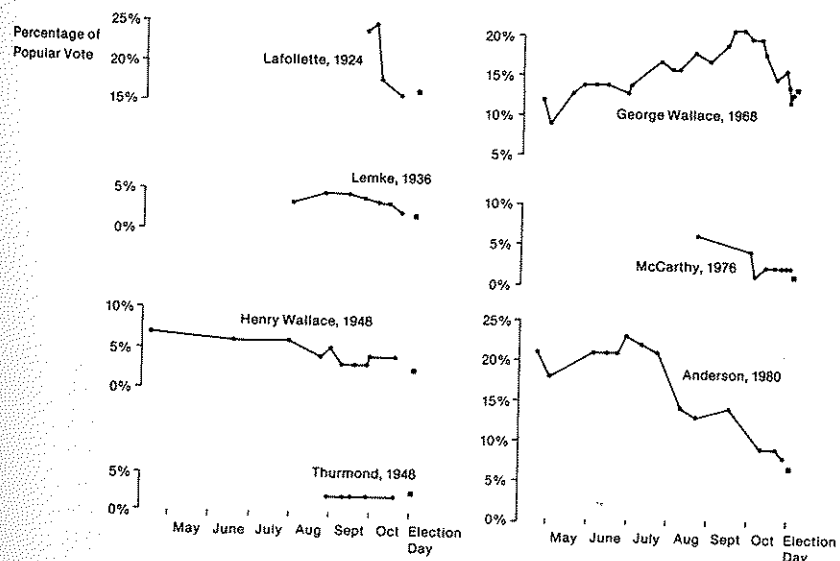
A second prevalent belief is that the two-party system is a sacred arrangement—as American an institution as the Congress, the Super Bowl, or M*A*S*H. Third party candidates are seen as disrupters of the *American* two-party system. Thus minor parties do not start out on an equal footing with the Democrats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

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

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

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

FIGURE 2.2
Decline in Voter Support for Third Party Candidates, 1924-1980



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

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

The Lynds observed a similar phenomenon in *Middletown*:

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

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

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

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

Major Party Strategies

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

Cooptation

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

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

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

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

Delegitimizing Tactics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 5

A THEORY OF THIRD PARTY VOTING

DESPITE the two-party norm and the formidable hurdles that third parties confront, minor parties do manage to attract support in every election. As we have already seen, there is considerable variation in the level of third party voting. In some years independent candidates are unable to lure even .1 percent of the electorate to their causes, whereas in other contests over 10 percent of the public abandons the major parties. Why is third party voting so much higher in some years than in others? What prompts citizens to desert the major parties? What types of people are most likely to exit; what types are most likely to remain loyal?

In this chapter we build upon the examples analyzed in part I to formulate a general theory—one that accounts for not just an instance or two of third party strength, but for fluctuations in third party support over time. We shall argue that when certain motivations to vote for a minor party candidate are high, and the constraints against doing so are low, citizens will start down the third party path.[1] Although we rely heavily upon historical examples in specifying the theory, it is important to remember that regardless of how strong the evidence for a particular proposition may appear to be on the surface, a variable's impact on third party voting can only be assessed by evaluating its effect across time while simultaneously considering other, competing explanations. We defer to the next chapter these more precise estimates of the causes of third party support.

[1] Our thinking in this chapter is influenced by Hirschman (1970).

Motivations for Third Party Voting

Three motivations prompt people to vote for a third party. Citizens do so when they feel the major parties have deteriorated so much that they no longer function as they are supposed to, when an attractive third party candidate runs, or when they have acquired an allegiance to a third party itself.

Major Party Deterioration

The two-party tradition in this country is the product of an unspoken pact between the masses and their leaders. Citizens support the political system because politicians provide (or appear to provide) certain benefits. To compete for votes at election time, each party argues that its candidate is better able to manage the government, ensure economic vitality, and represent the preferences of the citizenry. Voters need only choose between the two parties; they cast their ballots for the candidate who seems most able to carry out the charge of office, or against the candidate who has betrayed their faith or who appears least capable of delivering on his promises—or both. It is a relatively easy decision: only two alternatives need be weighed, and when a party or candidate fails to live up to citizens' expectations, voters can simply cast their ballots for the other party in the next election.

But what do voters do when both parties deteriorate? Where do they go when they do not have faith in either candidate's capacity to govern, when neither nominee seems to represent their concerns, and when both parties appear incapable of providing prosperity? When the two political parties violate their implicit pact with the people, citizens can either sit out the election or abandon the major parties to support a third party alternative.

The third party route is a path of last resort. Although the opportunity for third party voting is always present (people can join a third party at any time), voters postpone this step until they are firmly convinced that further action within the major parties would prove fruitless. Because the cost of exit

is high and the likelihood of achieving desired goals through third party activity is low, severe deterioration of the major parties must take place before significant third party activity occurs. Furthermore, since the minor party route is taken in desperation, people may not fully consider where this path will lead, only what it takes them away from. A third party vote is a vote *against* the major parties. Nevertheless, minor party voting is an instrumental act. Citizens who cast a third party ballot do so to advance the same policy goals they were precluded from achieving within the major parties.

ISSUE UNRESPONSIVENESS

Neglected Preferences: The positions of the major party nominees on the salient issues of the day can be one source of voter disaffection. The greater the distance between the positions of a citizen and the major party candidates, the higher the likelihood the citizen will vote for a third party (Downs 1957, ch. 8). As the proportion of voters who are distanced from the major party candidates grows, not only does the number of people who abandon the major parties go up, but so does the probability that third party candidates will emerge with positions that meet the concerns of estranged voters. Also, the more salient the issue over which citizens disagree with the major party candidates, the greater is the third party vote.

It is unlikely that at every election voters compare their positions to those of all the candidates, major and minor party contenders alike. In some years ten or more candidates run, and each has a distinctive position on one or more issues. Hence it would be hopelessly time-consuming and complicated for voters to gather information on all the candidates to choose the one who best approximates their own preferences. Instead, only when citizens feel a sufficient amount of distance between themselves and the major party nominees will they begin to contemplate a third party vote. Thus they need not gather information on all the third party choices in every election, nor must they judge which of the many candidates they are closest to. Indeed, given the paucity of in-

formation on most minor party contenders, it would be unrealistic to expect voters to do so. Only when voters feel estranged from the major party candidates will they seek out information on the other alternatives.

This decision rule implies, quite plainly, that people may fail to choose the candidate whose positions are closest to their own. However, it would be less sensible for voters to expend the energy needed to do so. Even if they wanted to, there is little guarantee that they could actually learn where all the minor party candidates stood on more than a few issues.

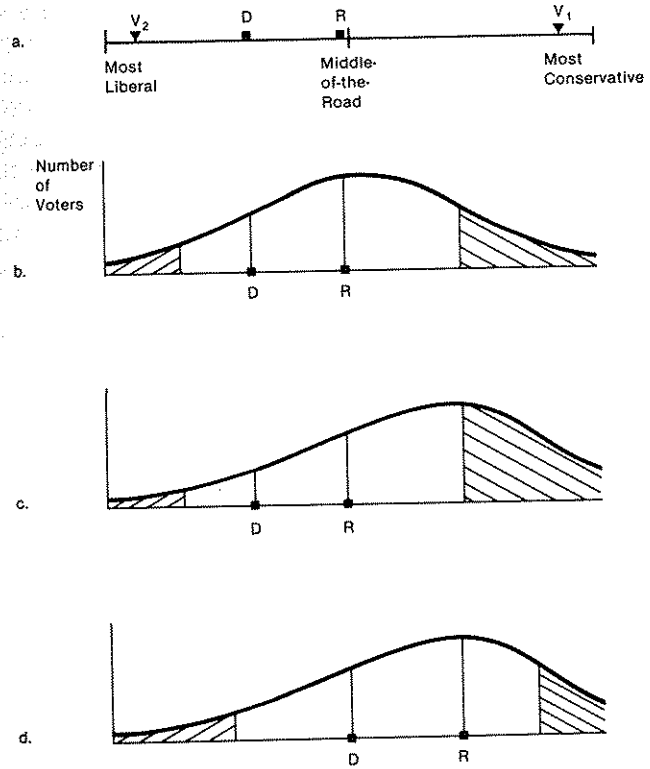
To illustrate these propositions, consider the following situation: assume that on a particular issue dimension, say civil rights, the Republican candidate takes a middle-of-the-road position relative to the electorate, and the Democratic candidate takes a position just left of center (as illustrated in figure 5.1a). If V_1 represents voters$_1$'s (very conservative) position on racial issues, then the distance between his position and even his most preferred major party candidate (the Republican) is large. Similarly, a voter who has an extremely liberal position on this dimension (V_2) will also feel estranged from both major party candidates. Because these two voters are disaffected from the stands the major party nominees have taken, they might search for a third party alternative. If a minor party candidate emerges with a position that is closer to voter$_1$'s than is the Republican candidate's, voter$_1$ will be more likely to cast a third party ballot. His probability of abandoning the Republican Party increases with the salience of the issue. Likewise, voter$_2$ will prefer a third party candidate whose position is closer to her own than is the Democratic candidate's. The greater the distance between the voter and the nearest major party candidate, the more likely it is that the voter will look for a third party alternative, and that a minor party candidate will emerge with a position closer to the voter's than is the nearest major party candidate's—hence the greater the likelihood the voter will cast a third party ballot.

How much third party voting there is in the aggregate depends on the positions of the major and minor party candidates, the importance of the issue, *and* the distribution of the voters' preferences. If there were very few citizens like voter$_1$ and voter$_2$, then we would not expect much third party voting. Under this scenario there is a low probability that a third party candidate would emerge to meet the specific concerns of these few citizens. If a candidate should emerge, he would poll very few votes. Most citizens would not be estranged from the major party candidates; few would even consider voting for a third party alternative. This scenario is illustrated in figure 5.1b. Here the major party candidates' positions appear as they did in figure 5.1a. The height of the curve at each point on the dimension represents the proportion of the electorate who have a given position on the issue; the shaded area denotes voters who may feel estranged from the major party candidates on this issue and who would be likely, depending on the salience of the issue, to search for a minor party candidate whose position is closer to their own.

If we hold constant both the major party candidates' positions and the importance of the issue, but change the distribution of voter preferences to reflect a more conservative electorate (as in figure 5.1c), third party voting should increase since more citizens are now distanced from the major party candidates' positions. In this case, we would expect that a third party candidate would emerge to meet the concerns of the discontented on the right. By the same token, if we hold constant the distribution of preferences as they appear in figure 5.1c and merely change the positions of the major party candidates to those shown in figure 5.1d, then the amount of third party voting would decrease (assuming the importance of the issue remained unchanged).

Thus we expect that the greater the distance between the positions of the voter and the major party candidates, and the greater the salience of the issue, the higher the probability of third party voting. Note that it is impossible to formulate general aggregate propositions about the amount of third party voting without knowing *both* the distribution of voter preferences on the issues and the positions of the candidates.

FIGURE 5.1
Hypothetical Positions of Voters and Major Party Candidates on Civil Rights



The shaded area represents voters who are closer to a third party candidate than to a major party candidate.

Nevertheless, some third party voting is likely whenever there exists an ideological hole unfilled by a major party candidate.

The 1948 and 1968 elections are two cases where it appears that voters' estrangement from the major party candidates' positions led many to support minor parties. Southerners resented both Harry Truman's and Thomas Dewey's civil rights policies. Truman's ten-point civil rights program would have,

among other things, provided federal protection against lynching, safeguarded the right to vote, and established a Fair Employment Practices Commission to prevent discrimination in employment. Dewey, although not as liberal as Truman, was a moderate on racial issues and just to the right of center on New Deal social welfare issues (Rosenstone 1983, appendix A). His positions on most issues were not that different from Truman's (Kirkendall 1971, p. 3133). Thus racial and New Deal social welfare conservatives stood a long distance from the major party nominees. Into this vacuum stepped the Dixiecrats. Thurmond strongly opposed the President's civil rights package, as well as his tax, labor, and economic policies. Most accounts of the 1948 election attribute Thurmond's support to this Southern disaffection with the major party candidates' racial and social welfare positions.

George Wallace's strength in 1968 can be understood in a similar way. Voters' estrangement from the major party candidates' positions, not only on race but also on civil unrest and the Vietnam War, seems to have spurred the campaign. As Converse and associates posit: "The Wallace candidacy was reacted to by the public as an issue candidacy" (1969, p. 265).

Both Nixon and Humphrey (the latter more fervently) supported existing civil rights laws on public accommodations and housing. Although both approved equal employment opportunities and supported *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, there were some differences (Page 1978, pp. 46-82). Humphrey spoke enthusiastically about past civil rights legislation while Nixon was more ambivalent about the existing laws. Nixon stood a bit to the right of center on civil rights; Humphrey was substantially to the left.

But the distance between Humphrey and Nixon is negligible compared to the space separating the two from George Wallace. Throughout his tenure as governor, Wallace battled federal authorities over civil rights: he resisted the integration of Alabama schools, tried to prevent civil rights demonstrations, and opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. During the 1968 campaign, Wallace advocated repealing both the Voting Rights

Act of 1965 and the 1968 open housing law while he continued to oppose federally ordered school integration. Voters' attitudes towards Wallace were strongly associated with their positions on civil rights (Converse et al. 1969).

Law and order—civil unrest in particular—was also a prominent issue in 1968. Here again, Nixon took the moderate stand and Humphrey the liberal one, leaving conservative voters without a candidate. Wallace filled this hole as well. His hardline law-and-order position was unambiguous: "When both national political parties say we've got to remove the causes of rioting, looting and burning, they're saying that these anarchists have a cause. . . . Poverty is not a cause for anarchy." In response to one newsman's question about his plan for stopping urban riots, Wallace bluntly stated that "people who riot ought to be bopped in the head," and that this treatment was "too easy" for some (*Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 1968, p. 2565).

With regard to the third issue, Vietnam, there was again little to distinguish Nixon's positions from those taken by Humphrey (Page and Brody 1972). Both candidates called for a gradual deescalation of the war and opposed rapid withdrawal, though their positions were fuzzy. Wallace was not much more specific about his Vietnam program than were the major party nominees, but his rhetoric—particularly that directed against anti-war protesters—was hawkish. His choice of former General Curtis LeMay as his running mate furthered that image.

In light of these circumstances, according to one observer, the 1968 election "demonstrated that millions of voters can be attracted to a third party when the two major parties are perceived as offering unsatisfactory alternatives on important issues" (Asher 1980, p. 189). Two questions remain, however: what is the marginal effect of issues in 1968 after other causes of third party voting are taken into account, and does estrangement from the major party candidates' positions explain third party voting *in general*?

Neglected Issues: Issues may affect third party voting by a second route. When voters have concerns they feel the major parties are neglecting, they may be more likely to support a third party alternative. The more prominent the unaddressed issue, the higher the probability of a third party vote.

This explanation of minor party support has surfaced sporadically. The major parties in 1840, for instance, simply avoided the abolition question that Liberty Party backers raised (Chambers 1971, p. 655; Sewell 1976, p. 84). Both Whigs and Democrats similarly refused to stake out unequivocal positions on the Wilmot Proviso in 1848.

The sixteen-year period between 1876 and 1892 was marked by an unwillingness of either major party to address the issues of currency deflation, debt, industrialization, and monopoly that had created such severe economic adversity for farmers (Burnham 1955, p. 131, Dinnerstein 1971, p. 1506). "The parties had not come to grips over economic issues. Both sides had ignored or touched lightly on such matters as labor unrest, farmer problems, public-land policies, railroad regulation, the growth of monopolies and even tariff reform" (Roseboom and Eckes 1979, p. 107). It was not until the 1896 Bryan–McKinley contest that the major party presidential candidates addressed these issues head on.

The unwillingness of the Democrats and Republicans to speak to these concerns, it is argued, led to disaffection with the major parties and contributed to Greenback and Populist strength in the closing decades of the nineteenth century:

> The postwar parties responded to new divisive, cross-cutting issues just as the prewar parties had—defensively. They evaded and straddled and postponed, just as the prewar Whigs and Democrats had evaded the demands of the abolitionists. And so the farmers in their zeal for a redress of grievances were driven to the recourse the abolitionists had found—third party action. The economic issues that became the dominant conflicts of society in the 1870s were fought for more than two decades not between the major parties, but between them, on one side, and a series of minor parties on the other. (Sundquist 1973, p. 94)

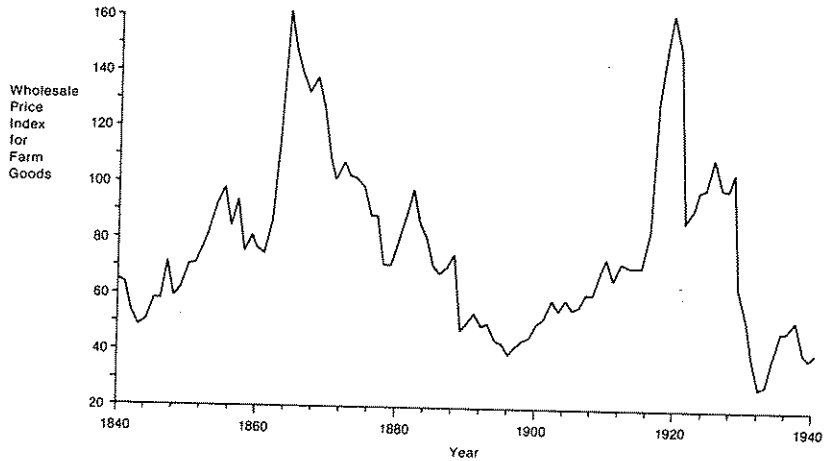
ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

A poor economy is sure to promote voter disaffection with at least one of the major parties. While the incumbent party suffers at the polls during periods of economic decline (Kramer 1971; Tufte 1978; Fair 1978), a failing economy may also make voters more inclined to abandon the major parties altogether. They are likely to be so inclined especially if neither party appears capable of resolving the situation. People suffering economic adversity may turn to a third party either because they hope it will improve their lot or because periods of economic hardship signify to them a failure of the traditional parties to meet their obligation to keep the nation economically healthy. If either notion holds, minor party voting will be higher during economic downturns than during prosperous years.

Agricultural Adversity: On several occasions, economic adversity has led farmers down the third party path. After the Civil War, Southern farmers who relied on crop liens to purchase goods found themselves unable to meet their debts when farm prices fell precipitously (figure 5.2). Between 1865 and 1896 cotton dropped from 15¢ to 6¢ a pound. A bushel of wheat that sold for $1.07 in 1870 drew only 63¢ in 1894-1897; over the same period corn fell from 43¢ to 30¢ a bushel. Overall, agricultural prices fell 73 percent during these three decades. As C. F. Emerich noted at the time, the tumbling prices

> made more difficult the payment of interest charges and mortgage debts, increased the number of mortgage foreclosures, prolonged the period required for tenants to rise to land ownership, caused the expense for hired labor to be a greater drain upon the resources of the farm, made the inequitable burden imposed upon the farmer by the general property tax more difficult to carry, increased the strain of maintaining a higher standard of living and rendered less endurable the tyranny of railroad discriminations and the exactions of trusts. (Fine 1928, p. 74)

FIGURE 5.2
Wholesale Price Index for Farm Goods, 1840-1940



SOURCE: *Historical Statistics of the United States.*

By the closing decades of the century, farmers had also grown increasingly dependent on the business establishment for marketing their goods. Western and Southern farmers had to ship their crops to market by rail, and since the railroads held virtual monopolies, local freight rates were considerably higher than charges for longer hauls in the East. Grain farmers were also at the mercy of elevator owners who arbitrarily set prices and undergraded the farmers' crop.

Both Greenback and Populist Party fortunes seem to have sprung from the agricultural depression. The Greenback Party formed in Iowa in 1876—the year that state's wheat yield was poorest. Although the party drew only .9 percent of the 1876 national vote, when depression hit two years later it won over a million votes and captured fourteen congressional seats. Greenback Party fortunes fluctuated with the farm economy: "When prosperity returned in 1879 and provided work for the unemployed and better prices for the farmers, there was a recession from politics. . . . [T]he presidential elections of

1880, 1884 and 1888, therefore, marked the decline and end of the Greenback-labor agitation" (Fine 1928, p. 69). Greenback support fell from 3.3 percent in 1880 to 1.7 percent four years later; the party did not run a presidential candidate in 1888.

Farm prices remained fairly stable between 1879 and 1884, but when commodity prices tumbled again in 1889, third party activity resumed, this time in the form of the Populist Party. There is widespread consensus that the party was "born out of the economic tribulations suffered by the southern and western farmers" (Fine 1928, p. 72). Falling farm prices, growing mortgage debt, farm foreclosures, and massive crop failures resulting from the 1890 drought led to the Populist Party's birth. The 1892 agricultural depression brought the new party heavy support in that year's presidential election. But as with the Greenbacks two decades earlier, when crop prices rebounded after 1896 and farm prosperity returned, farmers retreated from the Populist cause.

Third party support seems to result more from long-term changes in farm prices than from short-term fluctuations. Farmers experienced declining prices in the years immediately following the Civil War, but it was not until the late 1870s, when prices reached pre-Civil War lows, that third party agitation appeared. In fact, the 1876 price drop that preceded the emergence of the Greenback Party was no more severe than the price downturn that occurred in most other postwar years. The year that the Populist Party was founded, 1890, was actually a year when farm prices rose in the short run.

There are several reasons why farmers would have turned to third parties only after long-term price declines. First, the prudent response to short-term adversity (if there was any political response at all) was to give the *other* major party a chance to govern, rather than to pursue the third party route immediately. Only after both major parties had tried and failed to alleviate the farmers' economic plight did farmers set out on a minor party course. Second, in the short run, farmers could refinance their debt (even if only through another round of crop-liens). But as prices declined over time, farmers' debt grew and the threat of foreclosure increased. Only then, in desperation, did they turn to the one peaceful political route remaining. Finally, farmers' third party activity drew from extensive socio-economic networks that took years to develop. The Greenback Party, for example, derived much of its strength from the Grange movement, which had been active for nearly ten years. These networks contributed greatly to activity on behalf of farmers' interests, much of which was funneled through third parties.

If this economic explanation of farmer support for third parties can be generalized, then we should expect loyalty to the major parties in the prosperous opening decades of the twentieth century and a return to third party voting in the early 1920s and 1930s when adversity again set in. Following World War I, farmers enjoyed the highest prices they had ever known, their income doubled in just four years, and they invested in machinery and more land—all bought on credit. But agricultural depression returned in 1920. Prices collapsed (by 1921 they had dropped 44 percent); farm income fell 40 percent. Between 1916 and 1920 a farmer needed 62 bushels of wheat to pay the yearly interest on a $2,000 mortgage. Five years later, 108 bushels were necessary to meet the same interest payment (Stedman and Stedman 1950, p. 86). When industrial prosperity returned in 1923, farmers' capacity to purchase manufactured goods fell further. As in the closing decades of the previous century, farmers were again caught with huge debts and a diminished ability to meet payments. Bankruptcies, which averaged 1.5 per 10,000 farms in 1905-1914, were sixty-five times more numerous during the 1920s. Again, those who suffered economic adversity turned to a third party—this time the Progressives.[2]

[2] The thesis that economic adversity leads farmers to third party activity has been advanced outside the American context as well. Lipset's account of the rise of third parties in Canada rests heavily on economic factors. Third party agitation began when the price of wheat fell in 1913 (1968, pp. 75-76). When Canadian farmers suffered from the same adversities that American farmers faced in the early 1920s, third party strength increased (pp. 78-83). As Lipset concluded: "In Saskatchewan the postwar depression precipitated the tremendous sweep of the Progressive Party in 1921" (p. 84). The depres-

General Economic Adversity: Although few segments of the population are as sensitive to price fluctuations as farmers are, it is reasonable to expect that economic duress among the electorate at large may also lead to third party voting. Average citizens, like farmers, may view economic downturns as a failure of the two major parties. Although some historians make this claim, the evidence bearing on it is mixed at best. The Liberty Party capitalized upon the 1837 depression and economic recovery after 1844 hurt its cause (Hesseltine 1957, p. 13). Support for the Communist Party allegedly grew, even among native-born Americans, during the depression of the early 1920s (Greer 1949, p. 187). The prosperity that prevailed in 1948 is said to have dimmed Henry Wallace's fortunes (Schmidt 1960, p. 242).

Despite these examples, there are striking instances where economic adversity did not lead to much third party activity. The most obvious example is 1932, when minor parties won less than 3 percent of the presidential vote. Third parties have also done well in prosperous years, polling, for instance, 13.9 percent in 1968, when real per capita disposable income rose 2.8 percent. In short, Herring's conclusion that "third parties are bred in prosperity as well as depression" seems appropriate (1965, p. 182).

UNACCEPTABLE MAJOR PARTY CANDIDATES

Because American elections are more battles between *candidates* than contests between *parties* or sets of *ideas*, who the candidates are has a sizable impact on how people vote. The more that citizens trust a candidate or perceive him as capable of performing well in office, the more votes he will attract (Kinder and Abelson 1981). This judgment has an impact over

sion of the 1930s boosted Cooperative Commonwealth Federation strength (pp. 204-205).

Agricultural depression in Germany has been cited as one cause of the growth of the Nazi party in the early 1930s (Lipset 1963, pp. 131-37; Heberle 1970; Cameron 1981). As Loomis and Beegle noted, "the manner in which the Nazis swept the farmer-peasant organizations of pre-Hitler Germany into the Nazi movement has parallels in the American Greenback, Farmer's Alliance, Populist and similar movements" (1946, p. 734).

and above the effect of the voters' estrangement from a nominee on the issues or their assessment of the relative ability of the candidates to manage the economy.

When voters perceive neither the Democratic nor the Republican candidate as capable of doing the job, they may have difficulty bringing themselves to vote for either person. A reasonable way out of this dilemma—particularly if people feel they must vote either to fulfill their citizen duty or to punish the candidates—is to pull a third party lever. Knowing that a minor party challenger has little or no chance of victory may eliminate the voters' need to worry much about whether or not the contender is well suited for office. Thus the third party candidate's own qualifications or personal characteristics may have little to do with the decision to vote for him. Voters may cast ballots not only *for* third party challengers but *against* the major party nominees. Many observers have cited voter displeasure with Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter as an important source of John Anderson's strength in 1980.

Attractive Third Party Alternatives

Although third party voting may be driven largely by displeasure with the major parties or their candidates, the quality of the available substitute probably also affects the likelihood that people will cast third party ballots. When citizens view a minor party candidate as legitimate—that is, when the candidate has attributes that resemble those of most major party nominees—voters are more likely to choose the third party alternative. The greater the legitimacy of the third party candidate, the higher is the probability that voters will cast their lot with him.

The quality most closely associated with candidate legitimacy is experience: a third party challenger who has held high public office is electorally advantaged. Widespread name recognition gives him a leg up over more obscure contenders. Earlier campaigns and tenure in office have sharpened his political skills, and he has probably built (or could restore) a well-oiled campaign organization staffed by loyal and expe-

rienced supporters. The extent to which a candidate can enjoy these advantages is of course dependent upon precisely what sort of electoral experience he has had. A congressman from Kansas has more political prestige (and hence is more advantaged) than a city councilman from Trona, California, but both have less status than a former president.

It is conceptually useful to divide minor party candidates into three groups. The first, which we call *nationally prestigious* third party candidates, includes current or former presidents and vice-presidents, as well as current or former U.S. senators, representatives, or governors who have run for president or vice-president within one of the major parties.[3] We call the remaining current or former senators, representatives, and governors (that is, those who did not run for a national office on a major party ticket) *prestigious* third party candidates. We refer to all other independent challengers, whether they be mayors or machinists, as *non-prestigious* third party candidates.

As a rule, nationally prestigious third party candidates attract more votes than do prestigious candidates, and both run ahead of non-prestigious contenders. Political elites, potential contributors, the media, and ultimately the voters view third party challengers who have held prominent elective office as more legitimate aspirants for the White House than those who have not. Current or former senators, congressmen, and governors have a pre-existing electoral base, political organization, and political experience. And, by virtue of having won at least one major election, they are as a group probably better candidates than people who have not held these offices; their track records indicate they have the qualities and skills that attract votes.

Nationally prestigious third party candidates have an even greater advantage—widespread name recognition. These candidates, having already run national campaigns, are likely to enjoy greater legitimacy and have more supporters who have voted for them and made contributions in the past. They are

[3] This includes both major party nominees *and* candidates who sought the nomination by entering primaries in at least one-fifth of the states in the Union.

also more apt to have a national organizational base. When George Wallace (a nationally prestigious candidate) ran in 1968, he drew heavily on the foundation laid by his 1964 run for the Democratic presidential nomination (Carlson 1981). Finally, information about nationally prestigious candidates is easier for the voter to come by. Three times more voters in 1980 recognized John Anderson (a nationally prestigious candidate) than either Ed Clark or Barry Commoner (both non-prestigious candidates).

Between 1840 and 1980 nationally prestigious candidates ran for president on third party tickets nine times; prestigious candidates ran on seventeen occasions. The vote distribution for each set of candidates is displayed in table 5.1. On average, nationally prestigious candidates attract 13.5 percent of the

TABLE 5.1
Vote for Non-Prestigious, Prestigious, and Nationally Prestigious Third Party Presidential Candidates, 1840-1980

	Minor Party Candidate		
Popular Vote	*Non-Prestigious Candidate*	*Prestigious Candidate*[a]	*Nationally Prestigious Candidate*[b]
Less than 1%	87.7%	35.3%	11.1%
1-3%	9.8	41.2	11.1
3-6%	2.5	11.8	0
6-9%	0	5.9	11.1
Over 9%	0	5.9	66.6
Total	100.0%	100.1%	99.9%
(N)	(122)	(17)	(9)
Median vote	.5%	1.7%	13.5%

SOURCE: Congressional Quarterly, *Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1976); *Guide to 1976 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1977); *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, January 17, 1981, p. 138.

[a] John Hale, 1852; John Bell, 1860; Green Clay Smith, 1876; James Weaver, 1880; Benjamin Butler, John St. John, 1884; James Weaver, John Bidwell, 1892; John Palmer, 1896; Thomas Watson, 1904, 1908; J. Frank Hanly, 1916; William Lemke, 1936; Strom Thurmond, 1948; John Schmitz, 1972; Lester Maddox, 1976; John Rarick, 1980.

[b] Martin Van Buren, 1848; Millard Fillmore, 1856; John Breckinridge, 1860; Theodore Roosevelt, 1912; Robert LaFollette, 1924; Henry Wallace, 1948; George Wallace, 1968; Eugene McCarthy, 1976; John Anderson, 1980.

vote, prestigious candidates 1.7 percent, and non-prestigious candidates only about .5 percent. (These are medians.)

Another indication of the impact that prominent candidates have on third party voting is evidenced by observing how a minor party's presidential vote changes over time when a prestigious candidate either becomes its nominee or ceases to head the ticket. The Greenback Party vote, for instance, went from .9 percent in 1876 when (non-prestigious) Peter Cooper was its standard bearer to 3.3 percent in 1880 when (prestigious) James Weaver led the slate. The Free Soil Party's total dropped from 10.1 percent in 1848 when (nationally prestigious) former President Martin Van Buren ran to 4.9 percent four years later with (prestigious) U.S. Senator John Hale on the ballot. Similarly, the American Independent Party went from 13.5 percent in 1968 with (nationally prestigious) George Wallace heading it to 1.4 percent in 1972 with (prestigious) U.S. Representative John Schmitz as its leader.

Thus, the higher the quality of the third party candidate, the more attractive the independent alternative appears to voters. This obviously is not the voter's only consideration; other factors are surely at work. Nationally prestigious third party candidates have polled as little as .9 percent and as much as 27.4 percent of the presidential popular vote. Support for prestigious candidates has ranged from .1 to 12.6 percent, and several non-prestigious candidates have garnered over 3.0 percent of the vote. Furthermore, these numbers do not indicate whether prominent candidates themselves attract votes, or if they are merely adroit enough to run at the right times. A precise estimate of the impact of candidate quality on third party voting must be sensitive to other forces that may both cause prestigious candidates to run and also affect the amount of third party voting.

Third Party Loyalty

When a third party persists over a period of time, voters can develop an allegiance to it, just as they can become loyal to a major party. Even parties that seemingly disappear and then

resurface under different names can count on some partisan attachment: Libertymen became Free Soilers, many Know-Nothing supporters went on to vote for the Constitutional Union Party, and Greenbackers later joined the Populist cause.

By the same token, immigrants who developed party loyalties in their home countries may feel attached to a like-minded party in the United States—especially immigrants from countries with viable socialist parties. Upon arrival in the United States, many found the Populist, Progressive, and Socialist parties to be the most attractive choices (Fine 1928, pp. 89-90; Shannon 1955, pp. 43-45; Weinstein 1967, p. 327).

If allegiance to a minor party develops, then the extent of third party voting will be related to previous levels of third party support. It is likely that party loyalty will better explain independent voting in the nineteenth century, when there was greater continuity in third party causes, than in the twentieth century, when these runs were sporadic and centered on candidates.

Constraints on Third Party Voting

As we have already argued, constraints favoring the two major parties make it extremely costly for citizens to vote for a third party candidate. Although the most important barriers against third parties—the single-member-district plurality system and the electoral college—have remained constant since 1840, there are periods when other constraints to exit have been particularly high, as well as times when they have been lower than usual. Moreover, for some citizens these hurdles are higher than for others. The lower the barriers to exit, the easier it is for people to abandon the major parties and to cast ballots for a third party alternative.

Allegiance

Loyalty to a major party or to the political system as a whole can serve as a barrier to third party voting. Loyalty raises the cost of exit and hence reduces the likelihood that citizens will

pursue a minor party option. The stronger a citizen's allegiance to a major party, the more apt he is to interpret events in ways that are consistent with the outlook of his party, and the more difficult it will be for him to cast a third party ballot. By the same token, the more loyal a voter is to the political system, the more likely she will continue to look exclusively to the major parties for solutions. Conversely, third party voting should be easier for citizens who have weaker attachments, or who never developed system or party loyalties in the first place.

ALLEGIANCE TO THE MAJOR PARTIES

The stronger a person's attachment to the two major political parties, the less likely he is to vote for a third party candidate. Nearly all Americans identify with one of the two major parties. This identification serves as the lens through which people interpret politics and evaluate candidates (Campbell et al. 1960). Those without this bond are less likely to see the world as Democrats or Republicans and are thus less reluctant to vote for other candidates. As allegiance to the major political parties weakens, third party voting should rise.

Loyalty to a major party is likely to be strongest at the beginning of a party system and to weaken as the system ages.[4] The reason lies in the nature of a realigning election itself. As a consequence of a critical realignment, a dominant issue cleavage develops along which parties, candidates, and voters divide. This cleavage structures political debate: it defines party loyalties; it is what makes Democrats different from Republicans. But, with time, new issues arise and citizens who were not eligible to vote when the party system was founded comprise a larger and larger share of the electorate. New voters come of age; the franchise is expanded (new states are admitted to the Union, blacks are enfranchised in 1865, women in 1920, 18- to 20-year-olds in 1972); immigrants arrive. These new entrants neither identify strongly with the issues that were the basis of the party system nor have partisan loyalties that are as strong as those held by the generation that experienced the realignment first-hand (Beck 1974; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980, p. 121). These voters are apt to be more susceptible to third party appeals than people who were in the electorate at the time of the realignment.

If this argument about replacement holds, then age cohorts enfranchised after the critical election will be more likely to vote for third parties than will older cohorts. Furthermore, this likelihood should rise as the number of generations separating a cohort from the critical election increases. For similar reasons, we also expect that first-time voters will be especially likely to cast ballots for minor parties. Having no experience with electoral politics prior to their enfranchisement, and no habit of major party voting, this group should be less constrained to stick with the major parties. If this assumption holds, then the larger this pool of "non-immunized" citizens, the more minor party voting there will be.[5]

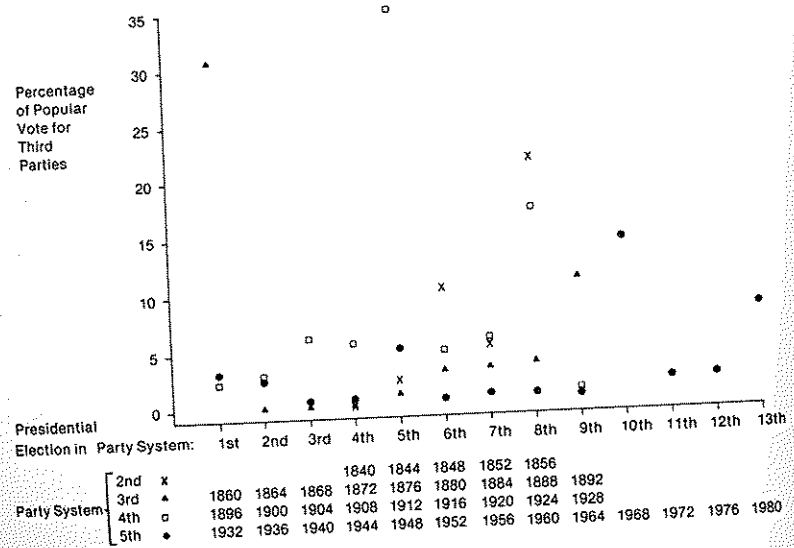
There is a scattering of evidence that points to new cohorts as being third party activists. The *New York Herald Tribune* estimated that a majority of the delegates to the 1924 Progressive convention were under the age of forty; students at Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and other universities sent delegates to the gathering (LaFollette and LaFollette 1953, vol. II, pp. 1111-12). The young were more apt to be supporters of Henry Wallace in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, Eugene McCarthy in 1976, and John Anderson in 1980.

[4] Scholars generally agree that there have been five party systems: 1789-1828; 1828-1860; 1860-1896; 1896-1932; and 1932 to the present. The 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1932 critical elections, it is argued, mark the beginning of new party systems because each brought about a reshuffling of the political cleavages between the parties and a redefinition of the issues that dominated political discourse. See Key 1955; Chambers and Burnham 1967; and Sundquist 1973.

[5] Confounding the cohort and new voter effects, of course, is age, which may also have an independent effect on third party voting. It may prove to be the case that it is mere youth that makes the new voters and younger cohorts more susceptible to a third party call. With age, attachment to the two major parties gets stronger (Converse 1976) and third party voting may decline.

The replacement argument helps explain why third party voting tends to be higher towards the end of a party system than in the years immediately following a realignment. As the system ages, the proportion of the electorate who were voters at the time of the critical election shrinks and the pool of citizens most susceptible to third party appeals grows. Except for 1860, the first four elections in a party system are relatively dormant periods for third parties (figure 5.3). Minor parties polled less than 6 percent of the presidential popular vote cast in the 1840, 1864-1872, 1896-1908, and 1932-1944 elections. Twenty years after a realignment, third party voting becomes more pronounced. Every instance of minor parties winning over 6 percent of the popular vote (save 1860) occurred at least five elections after the founding of the party system. This relationship is by no means a perfect one. There is a tremendous variance in third party strength at similar points in a party system. For example, compare 1844, 1876,

FIGURE 5.3
Third Party Presidential Vote by Age of Party System, 1840-1980



1912, and 1948—all fifth elections. Likewise, although third party voting is on average higher in the second half of a party system, not all elections at the end of a system produce third party voting. For instance, in 1888, 1928, 1952-1964, 1972, and 1976, third parties gained less than 3 percent of the presidential vote.

ALLEGIANCE TO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Given the entrenchment of the two-party norm as part of American political ideology, loyalty to the political system itself may also make citizens reluctant to cast third party ballots. As this allegiance to the political order wanes, so may a citizen's propensity to stick with the major party candidates, and the third party route may come to seem a more attractive method for bringing about fundamental changes in the way the government is organized and run. Third parties have frequently advocated sweeping changes in the American political and economic order.

Alienation may produce disaffection from the political regime in a number of ways. First, citizens may feel that the government as a whole (as distinguished from the incumbent party) is incapable of effectively tending to the affairs of state. Voters may lose faith in the government's capacity to make wise decisions or may come to view the people who run the government as incompetent, wasteful, or ineffective. If citizens' faith in the capacity of government to manage the country diminishes, simply throwing the rascals out and voting for the other major party would be inadequate. The problem runs deeper. When loyalty to the political regime falters, so may allegiance to the two-party system. Third party voting could be one expression of this erosion of confidence (Citrin 1974, pp. 976-78).

A sense of powerlessness—the feeling that one's behavior cannot affect the actions of government—may also reduce the likelihood that people will support the major parties. The inefficacious may pursue the third party alternative out of frustration with their inability to influence what their government does (Carlson 1981, pp. 116-19). If people feel that

they are incapable of having any effect on the affairs of state, one solution is to change, in a fundamental way, how the country is run.

Alienation from the political order may also grow out of a feeling of economic impotence or frustration over one's economic position in society. If economic powerlessness weakens a citizen's allegiance to the political order, then people at the low end of the economic ladder—the poor and those with low status occupations—will be alienated and less constrained from voting for a minor party. Historically, some third parties have garnered their support from the poor and the economically powerless. Manual workers and people with little or no property were more likely than the well-off to support the Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s (Unger 1964, p. 209; Lipset and Raab 1970, pp. 55-57). Poor white farmers in Georgia and Tennessee were likely to be Populists (Arnett 1922, p. 184; Martin 1933, p. 254). The least prosperous California counties were also Populist strongholds (Rogin 1969, p. 184). The poor were more apt to support George Wallace in 1968 (Lipset and Raab 1970, ch. 10; Ross et al. 1976, p. 85).

Social and economic changes that displace a group from a position of dominance in society may weaken their allegiance to the political order and the two major parties. The nativist political movements of the 1840s and 1850s, which found expression in the Know-Nothing Party, grew out of Protestant fear of growing immigrant political and economic power. In a sense, the farmer movements of the 1880s and 1890s can be characterized as a response to their perceived loss of power to commercial interests in the industrial East. Similarly, George Wallace's support has been attributed to white voters' feelings of status inconsistency from their displacement by blacks (Lipset and Raab 1970).

Structural Barriers to Third Party Voting

The lower the structural barriers to exit, the easier it is for citizens to abandon the major parties. Although the hurdles to third party voting have always been high, they have not

remained constant. The introduction of the Australian ballot in the 1890s and the ballot access restrictions that soon followed made it difficult for candidates to place their names on the official ballot. Because it is relatively taxing for a person to cast a write-in vote (especially when voting machines or punch card ballots are used), and because voters can more easily recognize than recall a candidate's name (Mann and Wolfinger 1980), citizens are more prone to vote for a minor party when the candidate's name appears on the official ballot than when it does not. Since a citizen is more apt to cast a third party vote when the cost of doing so is low, it follows that the higher the proportion of voters with minor party candidates on their ballots, the greater the third party vote.

Disparities in campaign resources and media coverage have also always made it difficult for minor party challengers to compete with the major parties for votes. But this disparity is worse in some years than in others. The greater the minor party's disadvantage in campaign resources and media coverage, the lower is the third party vote. As the cost of gathering information about third party candidates goes up, so too does the probability that a voter will remain loyal to the major parties.[6]

Finally, anti-third party sentiment and respect for the two-party norm have always been present. Although the degree of disapproval has probably varied over time, this fluctuation is no doubt due chiefly to changes in some of the factors already discussed, such as age of the party system and the proportion of the electorate with weak allegiance to the major parties. Still, there have been some periods—the Red Scare, for instance—when third party activity was more perilous.

[6] Data on campaign spending, media expenditures, and press coverage are difficult to come by. Except in recent years, it is hard to say how disadvantaged each third party candidate was. Moreover, these data are often difficult to interpret. For instance, was John Anderson's media coverage in 1980 better or worse than James Birney's in 1840? At the time Birney ran, the media were quite limited, so he had little opportunity to make himself or his positions known to the public. In contrast, Anderson's media exposure reached a higher proportion of the electorate, but so did that of his major party opponents, whose coverage all but drowned him out.

When the cost of third party activity increases, the probability of defection from the two-party system declines.

Summary

Citizens vote for third parties when certain motivations to abandon the major parties are high and the costs of doing so are low. When the two major parties deteriorate—when they fail to provide prosperity, responsive policies, and competent, trustworthy leadership—voters pursue the third party alternative. As the quality of minor party candidates and loyalty to third party causes increase, so does the probability that voters will abandon the major parties. Citizen loyalty to the American political system and to the two major parties makes it costly for people to choose the minor party route. Third party voting is also less likely to occur when these candidates are denied access to the ballot and when information about a third party cause is hard to come by. As these costs of third party voting increase, the probability that citizens will abandon the major parties goes down.

To be sure, there are many causes of third party support beyond the ones we have considered here. Indeed, any case study of a particular movement suggests additional reasons for that party's strength. The propositions we have identified are the ones that we think contribute to a general theory of third party voting. We are not asserting that there are no other causes, only that we have identified the important ones that will account for fluctuations in third party support in America.

CHAPTER 6

WHY CITIZENS VOTE FOR THIRD PARTIES

We have identified a set of motivations and constraints that affect the likelihood of citizens abandoning the major parties. Yet thus far we have mustered only a limited number of historical examples in support of the theory. Our analysis in this chapter is more systematic. Here we test whether the theory is a general one: does it explain only a few instances of third party voting, or is it able to account consistently for changes in the level of minor party support over time? How much impact does each component of the theory have on third party voting once other factors have been taken into account?

Any effort to identify the conditions that prompt people to abandon the major parties, whether statistical or anecdotal, must examine not only instances of third party strength but periods of major party loyalty as well. Understanding why a party attracts no support at all is just as crucial to a general theory of third party voting as knowing why a party attracts a large number of voters. After all, when there is little or no third party voting, citizens are probably content with the major parties' performances. The total absence of third party activity is crucial information; it would be misleading to take as our universe for study only those instances when third parties emerged.[1]

One option would be to examine separately each of the forty-five parties that polled votes between 1840 and 1980. That is, one might estimate for each party an equation accounting for years of support as well as years of non-existence.

[1] Consistent estimates would result only if we took into account the "selection equations" that explain why each party appeared in the first place (Heckman 1976; Achen 1983).