

THE ROOTS OF THIRD PARTY VOTING

The 2000 Nader Campaign in Historical Perspective

Neal Allen and Brian J. Brox

ABSTRACT

By many accounts, Ralph Nader had a substantial effect on the dynamics of the 2000 presidential campaign. While Nader's place in history is unique due to his impact on the election's outcome, Nader's campaign follows in a long tradition of significant third party candidacies in the twentieth century. We explore the 2000 Nader campaign with the goal of placing its appeals – as well as its effect on voters – within this broader context of recent third party candidacies for the presidency. Based on the nature of his issue appeals, we can characterize the Nader campaign as a blend of left-wing populism and anti-system sentiment. Noting the similarity of this appeal with those of other significant third party candidates (excepting Wallace in 1968), we go on to look at the electoral impact of Nader and these other candidates. Our analysis of state-wide voting patterns yields surprisingly large correlations between the Nader vote and votes for recent third party campaigns that were ideologically different from the Green Party campaign. Moving to individual-level analysis, we find that third party voting is driven largely by alienation from the major parties and the political system as well as identification with third parties. As a result, we find that Democrats in 2000 were unlikely to defect from Al Gore, suggesting that people who did vote for Nader did so because of their repulsion from the major parties or attraction to Nader and/or the Green Party.

KEY WORDS ■ elections ■ presidential campaign ■ Ralph Nader ■ third parties ■ United States

Like all American third party presidential efforts, Ralph Nader's presidential campaign on the Green Party ticket in 2000 did not come close to achieving victory. Nonetheless, Nader's run for the presidency in 2000 was significant for many reasons. Nader's appeal to voters on the left potentially damaged Democrat Al Gore's chances of winning the White House. Some argue that

Nader drew away potential Gore voters, in effect throwing states such as New Hampshire and Florida to George W. Bush (though others suggest that Nader's support was not gained at the cost of Gore – see, for example, Ceaser and Busch, 2001). Nader also affected Gore by forcing the latter to address issues important to voters on the left. From early in the campaign, Gore sought to minimize defections of his supporters to Nader, and many attribute the populist tone of Gore's general election campaign to Nader's presence in the race (Ceaser and Busch, 2001). Without Nader in the race, Gore might have been able to focus more on key swing voters who could have helped him win one more state and carry him to the White House. Finally, Nader negatively affected Gore's strategic situation by running particularly well in the traditionally Democratic states of the Upper Midwest and Pacific Northwest, forcing Gore to spend precious time and resources to prevent Bush victories in states like Wisconsin and Oregon.

But Nader's campaign in 2000 was important for more than just his possible impact on the final outcome. Despite his winning a mere 2.73 percent of the national vote, Nader's campaign constitutes another in a long line of noteworthy third party candidacies for the presidency. In the recent past, H. Ross Perot mounted serious challenges to the two major party candidates in both 1992 and 1996. In 1980, John Anderson served as a politically moderate alternative to Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, winning nearly 7 percent of the national vote. More distantly, major challenges from third party candidacies gained electoral votes in 1968 with George Wallace, in 1948 with Strom Thurmond,¹ in 1924 with Robert LaFollette, and in 1912 with Theodore Roosevelt and Eugene Debs.

With the exception of Wallace and Thurmond, who had regionalized appeals, these significant third party candidacies of the last century have some common threads. Each candidacy capitalized on popular discontent with the two major parties and/or the candidates they nominated. Each candidacy emphasized themes that resonated with those who disapproved of the way government was being run. Each candidacy motivated individuals to turn out to vote as well as to abandon the two major party candidates and vote for an individual who stood little chance of actually winning the election.

In this article we seek to identify the connections between Nader and his predecessors, and to shed light on the voting for minor party presidential candidates generally. We study support for Nader and other significant third party candidates at both the aggregate and individual level, analyzing the geographical distribution of voters as well as election year survey data. By looking at the campaign appeals made by these significant third party candidacies as well as individual-level data on third party voters (in the years for which we have survey data), we can see how Ralph Nader's campaign for president in 2000 fits into a long line of 20th-century third party challenges.

Historical and Aggregate Analysis

The 2000 Nader campaign was a fairly straightforward left-wing protest campaign. The central mantra and organizing philosophy of the Green Party and its candidate was that the Democratic and Republican parties are more alike than they are different, and that both are out of touch with the progressive values that should govern America. While the party did live up to its environmentalist name in advocating increased protection of the environment and increased regulation of pollution, Nader's campaign was a broad attack from the left on the policies of both parties. Nader integrated the populist anti-corporate ideology he had espoused in his decades as a public advocate with support for standard positions of the American far left like national health insurance, cuts in defense spending, and increased environmental protection (Green Party Platform, 2000). The Green Party also advocated electoral system reforms like proportional representation and transfer voting, as well as more stringent limits on private donations to political candidates.

We hypothesize that there should be similarity between the campaign appeals of Nader in 2000 and other left-wing protest candidacies, and a lack of congruity with right-wing third party candidates. Thus we expect to find the highest degree of similarity between Nader and other left-wing candidates such as Debs, Roosevelt and LaFollette, while extreme dissimilarity between the Nader campaign and the Wallace campaign. We do not have a priori expectations regarding the relationship between Nader and the Anderson and Perot campaigns, since the latter campaigns occupied a more centrist position on the ideological spectrum. A brief discussion of these campaigns helps to demonstrate how we come to these hypotheses.

The 1912 presidential campaign was the setting for the most successful frontal challenge to the two major parties since the realigning period of the 1850s. Theodore Roosevelt, running as the candidate of the newly formed Progressive Party, finished second in both the popular and electoral vote, running ahead of the incumbent Republican president Howard Taft. Roosevelt's program of new nationalism is similar to the 2000 Green Party platform, calling for national solutions to social and economic problems, along with reforms of the political system to encourage more democracy. This general similarity extends to the socialist candidacy of Eugene Debs, who criticized the two major parties and American society generally from a class-based perspective (Mazmanian, 1974), arguing that the entire political system was controlled by self-serving capitalists. The major difference between the Debs campaign and the Nader campaign is the lack of explicit class analysis from Nader. This difference is merely a small reflection of the international turn away from Marxism and socialism by left-wing movements and parties. Robert LaFollette's progressive candidacy in 1924 also was similar in orientation to the 2000 Nader campaign, with opposition to corporate power and a theory of corporate dominance of democratic institutions as the main campaign themes (Mazmanian, 1974).

The one right-wing candidate whose support we compare to Ralph Nader's is George Wallace. The former and future governor of Alabama was able to take advantage of the breakdown of the New Deal alignment in his 1968 American Independent campaign. Wallace, while maintaining the charismatic style of Southern populism, placed himself firmly to the right of both major party candidates on the major issues of the day. Opposition to federal support for racial integration was the foundation of Wallace's political career and his 1968 campaign. He also was able to flank Humphrey and Nixon on the issue of war in Vietnam, emerging as the most hawkish candidate on the Vietnam War.

The 1980s and 1990s saw three major centrist presidential campaigns outside of the two-party system. The independent campaign of John Anderson, a moderate Republican congressman from Illinois, was a party fragment campaign. Like Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, Anderson ran for the Republican nomination for president and lost to a more conservative candidate, in this case Ronald Reagan. Unlike Roosevelt and later Ralph Nader, Anderson did not place himself to the left of both major party candidates. He attempted to chart a middle course, avoiding the deep tax cuts of the Republicans and the spending increases of the Democrats.

The Perot campaigns of 1992 and 1996 share many characteristics with the Nader campaign of 2000. Both Perot and Nader had not previously run for political office before they ran for president. Both argued that the two major parties had lost touch with voters on major issues. Perot, however, did not clearly anchor himself at one end of the ideological spectrum, as Nader and George Wallace did. Like Nader, Perot in 1996 joined an existing minor political party to make a run at the presidency. Both advocated reforms of the political process to bring about a more grassroots democracy.

At this point, it seems reasonable to believe that Nader's support in 2000 is rooted in similar progressive and anti-party movements championed by significant third party candidates in the twentieth century. But before we undertake a more quantitative assessment of the similarities between Nader and his predecessors, it is important that we define what we mean by 'significant third party candidacies'. Generally speaking, each of the third party candidates we consider 'significant' either won votes in the Electoral College or, short of that, received a relatively large percentage of the national vote (usually more than 5 percent). In 1912, Roosevelt won 88 electoral votes (finishing second) and Debs won nearly 6 percent of the national vote. In 1924, LaFollette won over 16 percent of the national vote and 13 electoral votes. In 1948, Thurmond won only 2 percent of the national vote, but he managed to win 39 electoral votes (entirely from the South). Similarly, Wallace in 1968 won electoral votes from the South (in this case, 46), but also managed to garner over 13 percent of the national vote. In 1980, Anderson won over 6 percent of the national vote, while in 1992 and 1996, Perot won 19 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

In fact, in these regards, Nader appears to be the exception. Not only did Nader fail to capture any electoral votes, he did not even reach the 5 percent threshold, winning less than 3 percent of the vote nationally. Nader's campaign, however, is significant due to the fact that the two-party contest between Bush and Gore was so close, and Nader's presence in the race had an impact not only on the way Gore campaigned, but also by (possibly) siphoning votes away from Gore.

One relatively simple explanation for Nader's performance in 2000, as well as the relatively more impressive performances of the other third party candidates we consider, relates to the context in which American elections take place. Since America's federal structure allows the states to administer elections, significant variance exists among states with regard to factors such as voter registration rules and ballot access requirements. These factors can have an effect on the level of third party voting in a state. For example, states with less burdensome voter registration requirements may make it easier for citizens who are not as strongly tied to the existing two-party system to participate and support third party candidates. Perhaps more importantly, less restrictive ballot access requirements make it more likely that third party candidates will make it onto the ballot in the first place.

There is some evidence suggesting that the overall success of Nader and other third party candidates is a result of especially strong showings in those states where the electoral context favors third party candidacies and third party voting. Nader performed the strongest (better than 5 percent) in states in the Northern part of the country as well as a few in the West. Among states where Nader polled between 2 and 5 percent, one finds states in the Midwest and a few others from the West Coast. Nader received very little support – less than 2 percent – in states in the South and in states bordering the South (Michigan and South Dakota being the exceptions). This geographical pattern of Nader support bears a striking resemblance to the patterns of support for other twentieth-century third party challengers. High-performing Nader states such as Alaska, Maine, Minnesota and Montana were among the top 10 in both of Ross Perot's 1990s presidential bids. States such as Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont gave significant support to both Nader's campaign in 2000 and John Anderson's campaign in 1980. Nader's geographical support also draws parallels with the early twentieth-century campaigns of Robert LaFollette, Theodore Roosevelt and Eugene Debs. Across all seven major third party candidacies,² a geographic trend appears; all seven garner their highest levels of support from mostly Northern (with a few Western and Midwestern) states.

Looking closer, however, we see that electoral context is not a clear-cut answer to explain the fortunes of Nader and the other third party candidates. If Nader were only succeeding in states where other third party candidates (of any type) were succeeding, we would expect to see a correlation between Nader's state-wide vote totals and the average level of third party voting in

a state. Yet this correlation does not exist; the correlation between the percentage of the vote Nader received in each state in 2000 and the average state-wide percentage for third party and independent candidates between 1900 and 1996 is 0.06.³ Also, if Nader support was a function of an electoral context favorable toward third party candidacies, then we would expect to see Nader garnering a higher percentage of the vote in states that have less burdensome voter registration requirements, that require fewer signatures for a candidate to get onto the ballot, and that have later deadlines for candidates to get onto the ballot. But again we do not see the expected relationship.

Table 1 presents the results of a simple regression in which the percentage of the vote Nader received in 2000 is regressed on the number of signatures each state requires for independent and third party candidates to get onto the ballot, the number of days before election day an independent or third party candidate must fulfill the ballot access requirements, and the number of days before election day a citizen must register to vote. Coefficients for all three variables, though negative as expected, fail to reach accepted levels of statistical significance.

While Nader's performance does not appear to be linked to the electoral context of the states, it does appear to be linked to the performance of several other significant third party challengers of the twentieth century. To get a better idea of this relationship, we look at the correlation between the state-wide vote totals for the eight independent or third party candidates we consider in this analysis (Nader, Perot in 1996, Perot in 1992, Anderson, Wallace, LaFollette, Roosevelt and Debs). Based on our findings in the historical review above, we expect stronger relationships between Nader and the other left-wing or populist candidates (LaFollette, Roosevelt and Debs), weak or no relationships between the more centrist candidates (both

Table 1. Impact of electoral context on the Nader vote

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (std. error)</i>
Signatures required	-1.31×10^{-7} (1.06×10^{-7})
Days between election day and candidate filing deadline	-1.66×10^{-4} (1.16×10^{-4})
Days between election day and voter registration deadline	-2.01×10^{-4} (2.98×10^{-4})
Intercept	0.05 (0.01)
No. of cases = 51	
R ² = 0.12	

Table entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. **Significance at the 0.01 level. *Significance at the 0.05 level. †Significance at the 0.10 level. Data are from the 1 September 2000 edition of the *Ballot Access News* (Winger, 2000).

Perot in 1992 and 1996 and Anderson), and a negative relationship with Wallace.

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. The correlation between Nader and each of the other third party candidates is statistically significant, with the exception of Eugene Debs in 1912. As expected, the correlation between Nader and George Wallace in 1968 is highly negative; Wallace's support was completely in the South, whereas Nader had his strongest appeal to voters in the North and West. For all other candidates, the correlation with Nader's state-wide vote totals was positive. The correlation was quite high with John Anderson in 1980 and moderately high for Ross Perot in 1996 and 1992 and Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.

While the general direction of state vote correlations conforms to the expectations we generated in our historical review of twentieth-century third party candidacies, the best correlations are not with the expected candidates. We hypothesized that the leftward orientation of the 2000 Green Party would be reflected in correlations with the vote for left-leaning candidates Debs, Roosevelt and LaFollette. We instead found that the strongest correlation is with Anderson, and the weakest with Debs and LaFollette.

These results suggest that left-right ideology does not drive a discernible geographic pattern across the twentieth century. They also suggest that temporal proximity is more important than ideological proximity in producing a given geographical distribution of voters. It is plausible to surmise that those candidacies close in time to the Nader campaign are more closely correlated with it, especially since the early century left-leaning candidacies are

Table 2. Relationship in state-wide third party performance

	<i>Nader</i> 2000	<i>Perot</i> 1996	<i>Perot</i> 1992	<i>Anderson</i> 1980	<i>Wallace</i> 1968	<i>LaFollette</i> 1924	<i>Roosevelt</i> 1912
Perot 1996	0.28 (0.043)	1.00					
Perot 1992	0.42 (0.002)	0.73 (0.000)	1.00				
Anderson 1980	0.73 (0.000)	0.32 (0.001)	0.44 (0.000)	1.00			
Wallace 1968	-0.55 (0.000)	-0.44 (0.001)	-0.54 (0.000)	-0.73 (0.000)	1.00		
LaFollette 1924	0.27 (0.061)	0.40 (0.005)	0.54 (0.000)	0.27 (0.059)	-0.45 (0.001)	1.00	
Roosevelt 1912	0.34 (0.019)	0.29 (0.043)	0.36 (0.013)	0.49 (0.000)	-0.55 (0.000)	0.44 (0.002)	1.00
Debs 1912	0.09 (0.552)	0.29 (0.047)	0.55 (0.000)	0.04 (0.765)	-0.22 (0.127)	0.58 (0.000)	0.02 (0.868)

Table entries are Pearson's correlation coefficients between state-level voting for major third party candidacies. Values in parentheses are levels of statistical significance based on two-tailed tests. Data are from *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* (2004).

separated from the present by both the New Deal realignment and the late 1960s quasi-realignment. Any geographic similarity between, for example, LaFollette and Nader voters may have disappeared because of changes in electoral dynamics and population movement. The surprisingly high correlation between Anderson in 1980 and Nader in 2000 may result from the two candidates appealing to separate groups, moderate Republicans for Anderson and environmentalist leftists for Nader, that are both concentrated in New England states. The geographic correlation between Anderson and Nader might also reflect a general phenomenon of distrust of the two major parties that concentrated in particular states and regions.

Individual-Level Analysis

Although Nader historically fits alongside such left-wing populists as LaFollette, Roosevelt and Debs, our review of state-wide vote totals places Nader closer to Anderson and Perot of 1992. These somewhat divergent results reflect the two competing theories of third party voting at the individual level. On the one hand, voters who support third party or independent candidates may be attracted to those candidates on the basis of an identification with a third party or because they are attracted to a third party or independent candidate. Voters in general are motivated by partisan identification (Campbell et al., 1960) as well as the issue positions taken by the candidates (Aldrich et al., 1989; Alvarez, 1997; Hinich and Munger, 1994). In the case of third parties, voters may be 'pulled' toward supporting a third party or independent candidate either through positive evaluations of the candidate or by general loyalty (i.e. partisanship) toward the third party (Rosenstone et al., 1996).

On the other hand, voters may be 'pushed' away from the two major parties and toward third parties as a result of failures of the system. Voters can be pushed toward third party candidates when the major parties fail to address important issues (Rosenstone et al., 1996), when the major parties nominate unappealing candidates (Donovan et al., 2000), or when voters do not see important differences between the parties (Donovan et al., 2000). Similarly, voters can be pushed toward third party candidates by factors that relate to the political system more broadly, such as distrust in government (Gold, 1995).

In order to assess these competing theories of third party voting, we estimate a model that compares third party voters to those who vote for major party candidates and to non-voters. The functional form of the model is:

$$\text{Pr (third party vote} = 1) = F(\text{independent identification} + \text{previous third party vote} + \text{cares who wins} + \text{Democratic candidate affect} + \text{Republican candidate affect} + \text{external efficacy} + \text{sees important differences in the parties} + \text{age} + \text{gender} + \text{education} + \text{income})$$

where F is the cumulative logistic distribution function. This model is estimated on data from the American National Election Studies (Sapiro et al., 1948–2002) for the years 1952 to 2000.⁴

To test for the theory that voters choose the third party candidate because they are attracted to third parties and what they stand for, we include a variable measuring how independent the respondent is in terms of partisanship; this variable is essentially the ANES's strength of partisanship variable rescaled so that strong partisans have low scores and independents and third party identifiers have high scores. We also include a dummy variable indicating whether or not the respondent voted for a third party or independent candidate in the previous presidential election. We expect both of these variables to be positively associated with choosing third party candidates over major party candidates, and with voting for a third party candidate over not voting.

To test for the theory that voters choose the third party candidate as a protest against failures of the parties, candidates or system in general, we include five variables that measure voter alienation. We include a variable measuring whether or not the respondent cares who wins the election. We expect this variable to be negatively associated with choosing third party candidates over major party candidates on the theory that voters who care a great deal may vote strategically for a major party candidate rather than 'wasting' a vote on a more preferred third party candidate who will lose; with respect to the choice between voting third party and not voting, however, we expect this variable to be positive.

We also include measures of the respondent's affect toward both of the major party candidates. For the model of third party versus Democratic voting, we expect the coefficient for the Democratic candidate to be negative and the coefficient for the Republican candidate to be positive; for the model of third party versus Republican voting, we expect the reverse. The theory behind these expectations is that as one likes the Democratic candidate more (for example), one becomes less likely to vote for the third party candidate, while as one grows to like the Republican candidate more, one will be less likely to vote for the Democrat and instead choose the third party candidate. In the choice between voting third party and not voting, we expect the affect variables for both candidates to be negative, as dissatisfaction with major party candidates motivates voters to turn out and vote for the alternative.

Additionally, we include a measure of external efficacy, expecting that voters who feel that the system is responsive to their input are less likely to resort to voting for third party candidates in protest, though more likely to vote for third party candidates as opposed to abstaining. And we include a variable indicating whether or not the respondent sees a difference between the parties. We hypothesize that the coefficient for this variable will be negative for the two partisan models, as voters who see a difference between the parties are more likely to choose among the major party candidates; for the third party versus non-voting model, we also expect a negative

coefficient, on the theory that if one sees a difference between the major parties, they are more likely to have a preference for one or the other and would tend to abstain rather than vote for a third party candidate that would be a second preference at best.

Finally, we include control variables for age (measured in years), gender (coded 1 for male, 2 for female), education (coded into 6 categories), and income (coded into 5 categories). We have no a priori expectations with regard to the control variables.

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 3. The first column of values contains estimates of the effect a variable has on the likelihood of voting for a third party or independent candidate over a Democratic

Table 3. Determinants of third party voting

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Third party vs. Democrat</i>	<i>Third party vs. Republican</i>	<i>Third party vs. non-voters</i>
Independent identification	0.5067** (0.0530)	0.3653** (0.0536)	0.0924† (0.0538)
Previous third party vote	0.3707† (0.2250)	0.6516** (0.2120)	1.1700** (0.2433)
Cares who wins	0.2076† (0.1073)	0.3559** (0.1077)	0.8305** (0.1064)
Democratic candidate affect	-0.5660** (0.0278)	0.0853** (0.0263)	-0.2381** (0.0265)
Republican candidate affect	0.0483† (0.0257)	-0.6188** (0.0282)	-0.2563** (0.0258)
External efficacy	-0.0065** (0.0012)	-0.0079** (0.0012)	0.0020 (0.0012)
Sees a difference between the parties	-0.0574 (0.0396)	-0.0444 (0.0365)	-0.0765* (0.0328)
Age	-0.0055 (0.0034)	-0.0135** (0.0033)	0.0194** (0.0032)
Gender	-0.3949** (0.0983)	-0.3741** (0.1003)	-0.4100** (0.0993)
Education	0.1748** (0.0329)	0.0576† (0.0339)	0.3878** (0.0330)
Income	0.0620 (0.0491)	-0.0426 (0.0504)	0.4034** (0.0491)
Constant	-2.8389** (0.3892)	-1.7082** (0.4016)	-6.1927** (0.3962)
-2 log likelihood	2957.395	2904.669	2785.917
Chi-square	944.443	1002.422	754.148
Number of cases	6004	6029	4521
% corr. predicted	90.99	90.93	87.41

Table entries are binomial logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

**Significance at the 0.01 level. *Significance at the 0.05 level. †Significance at the 0.10 level.

Data are from the National Election Studies (Sapiro et al., 1948–2002).

candidate. Overall, the model performs very well, with 5 statistically significant coefficients out of 11 and another 3 coefficients that are marginally significant. Overall, the model correctly predicts 91 percent of cases. For the variables measuring attraction to third party candidates, the coefficients for both independent identification and previous third party vote are statistically significant and in the expected direction.

For the variables measuring political disaffection, the coefficient for Democratic candidate affect is statistically significant and in the expected direction (i.e. the more one likes the Democratic candidate, the less likely one is to vote for the third party candidate), and the coefficient for Republican candidate affect is also in the expected direction and almost meets standard levels of statistical significance (significant at the 0.06 level). The coefficient for the external efficacy variable is also significant and in the expected direction, indicating that voters who feel the system is responsive to their input are less likely to protest against the system by voting for third party candidates. However, it is interesting to note that the variable for caring who wins has a coefficient that is marginally significant (again, at the 0.06 level) and positive, contrary to expectations. Apparently, as voters come to care about who wins the presidential election, they become more likely to exercise sincere preferences rather than vote strategically. Finally, the coefficient for the variable measuring whether the respondent sees a difference between the parties fails to reach statistical significance.

With regard to the control variables, coefficients for age and income are statistically insignificant, while those for gender and education are significant at the 0.01 level. The coefficient for gender is negative, indicating that women were less likely to choose third party candidates over Democrats, while the coefficient for education is positive, indicating that more educated respondents were more likely to choose the third party candidate.

The second column of values comprises estimates of the effect a variable has on the likelihood of voting for a third party or independent candidate over a Republican candidate. The results of this analysis are quite comparable to those of the third party versus Democrat analysis. All of the coefficients that were statistically significant in the previous analysis are so in this one, and in many cases more strongly significant. Only the coefficient for education, which was significant to the 0.01 level in the third party versus Democrat analysis, becomes less significant in the comparison with Republicans (though it is still significant at the 0.1 level). Overall, only 2 of the 11 variables fail to produce a significant coefficient. As a result, the model correctly predicts 91 percent of the cases.

In addition, all of the statistically significant coefficients carry the same signs as they did in the previous analysis. Accordingly, people who more strongly identify as independents and those who have voted for a third party previously are more likely to support third party candidates. Furthermore, those with higher external efficacy are less likely to defect from a major party candidate, and the unexpected result that those who care more about

the outcome are more likely to support third party candidates over Democrats is paralleled here by a preference for third party candidates over Republicans. The coefficients for the candidate affect variables is reversed, but this conforms to expectations, as people who like the Republican more are more likely to stick with that candidate while those who like the Democrat more tend to defect from the Republican and vote third party. Both gender and education work in this analysis as they did before. The only real difference between the two analyses is that in the case of third party voting versus Republican voting, the coefficient for age turns up negative and statistically significant, indicating that older respondents tended to choose Republicans over third party candidates.

The final column of values in Table 3 comprises estimates of the effects of the variables on the likelihood of voting for a third party candidate over abstaining from voting. This model too performs well, yielding statistical significance for 10 of 11 coefficients and over 87 percent of cases correctly predicted. In addition, all of the coefficients are in the expected direction. Specifically, attraction to or identification with third parties – as expressed through independent identification or previous third party voting – is positively associated with voting for the third party candidate over abstaining. For the variables related to the political system, there are several interesting results. Caring about who wins is associated with voting for third party candidates over abstaining, as expected. Also as expected, seeing a difference between the parties is associated with abstaining over voting for the third party candidate. If one sees differences between Republicans and Democrats, one is probably going to vote for his or her preferred candidate, and abstain rather than support a third party candidate with no chance of winning. The coefficients for both of the affect variables are negative, meaning that as people like the major party candidates more, they are more likely to abstain than vote for a third party candidate. And surprisingly, the coefficient for external efficacy does not reach statistical significance, suggesting that feelings of system responsiveness do not motivate many potential third party voters to turn out. Finally, coefficients for all of the control variables are statistically significant and exhibit plausible signs, as older persons, those more educated, and those more wealthy are more likely to turn out to vote for third party candidates, while the coefficient for gender mirrors its earlier values, suggesting a willingness among men to support third party and independent candidates and/or an unwillingness among women to do so.

Discussion and Conclusion

To this point we have laid out a story of third party support throughout the twentieth century. Our historical analysis suggests a similar current of left-wing populism in many of the notable third party and independent

candidacies of the last 100 years, with Ralph Nader being a prominent example and George Wallace a notable exception. Yet our analysis of state-level and individual-level voting suggests that an anti-party or anti-system sentiment is at work, particularly among candidacies in the latter two decades of the century (especially Anderson and Perot) and among voters over the last 50 years.

These findings raise the question of how Ralph Nader's 2000 presidential campaign fits into this broader phenomenon of third party voting. On the one hand, some would argue that Nader fits more squarely into the trend of left-wing candidacies, attracting voters who were ideologically liberal and who might otherwise have voted for Al Gore. A look at simple descriptive statistics from the American National Election Studies provides some evidence for this view. Nader voters in 2000 rated the Democratic Party 13 points higher on feeling thermometers than they did the Republican Party; furthermore, they rated Gore 11 points higher on feeling thermometers than they did Bush. And while they viewed the Democratic Party as ideologically liberal as did Gore voters (mean placement on a 1 to 7 scale, 3.16 for Nader voters, 3.18 for Gore voters), their self-placement on the scale was three-quarters of a point more liberal than was the self-placement of Gore voters (2.79 to 3.56, respectively). In sum, Nader voters were largely liberal, much more so than the supporters of other recent third party and independent candidates,⁵ and it is reasonable to wonder if they were Democrats who supported Nader because of Gore's perceived moderation.

Yet our individual-level analysis of third party voting suggests that ideology is not the driving force behind this behavior. Using our model of third party voting versus voting for Democrats, we derived a predicted probability of voting for a third party candidate for all Democrats (including leaners) in 2000. We also used the mean values for all of the variables in the model to derive a probability for an 'average' Democrat in 2000. On the latter count, the 'average' Democrat in 2000 had less than a 7 percent chance of voting for a third party candidate (presumably Nader) over Al Gore (probability = 0.063). For the actual Democrats in 2000 represented in the ANES, the mean probability of voting for the third party candidate over voting for Gore was 0.12, with 96 percent of the Democrats predicted to vote for Gore and only 4 percent predicted to vote for a third party candidate.⁶

While we find that most Nader voters were motivated by an attraction to third parties more broadly or a dissatisfaction with the major parties and their candidates, any small percentage of voters choosing Nader over Gore because of Nader's left-wing appeal would have a large impact in an election as close as that of 2000. Indeed, the combination of a close two-party contest and the segmentation of voters by the Electoral College makes it possible for a clearly ideological candidate like Nader to have a 'spoiler' effect, since he would only need to draw a small fraction of support from the ideologically closer candidate. In the case of 2000, our analyses suggest a 1.8 percent rate of defection from Gore to Nader, as 11 of the 620

Democrats in the ANES who we predicted would vote for Gore actually voted for Nader. This provides tentative support for the widely held conclusion that Nader drew enough voters away from Gore in Florida to account for Bush's decisive margin of 537 votes out of over 6 million votes cast.

On the whole, however, our analysis of voters who support third party and independent presidential candidates suggests that these voters, in keeping with the history of third party candidacies as vehicles for protest against the two-party system, would have voted for other independent or third party candidates, or would have not voted, if Nader had not been an available alternative to Gore or Bush.

Notes

- 1 In our subsequent analyses we exclude Thurmond's Dixiecrat candidacy, as well as Henry Wallace's Progressive Party vote, because of the relatively small size of their vote totals as well as the small number of their voters in the 1948 National Election Studies.
- 2 We omit the Wallace candidacy because of the highly regionalized nature of his appeal.
- 3 The correlation coefficient has a two-tailed significance value of 0.667.
- 4 While the ANES dataset contained cases for all presidential election years between 1952 and 2000, lack of availability for key independent variables caused cases from 1956 and 1984 to be omitted from the analysis.
- 5 On a 1 to 7 scale of ideology, with 1 being extremely liberal and 7 being extremely conservative, Perot 1996 voters rated themselves 4.14, Perot 1992 voters rated themselves 4.31 and Anderson voters rated themselves 3.64.
- 6 Of the 4 percent predicted to vote for a third party candidate (N = 24), 10 voted for Gore, 3 voted for Nader, 5 voted for Bush and 6 did not vote.

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NEAL ALLEN is a PhD candidate in the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. He is completing his dissertation on the impact of Supreme Court decisions on American politics outside the judicial system. He has also published research on the Bush administration's response to the 11 September attacks in *America's War on Terror* (2003). His other research interests include American Political Development and American public law.

ADDRESS: Department of Government, The University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1800, Austin TX 78712–0119, USA. [email: nealallen@hotmail.com]

BRIAN J. BROX is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Tulane University, and studies the development of candidate organizations in the United States. He has also published research on political parties in *Social Science Quarterly*. His other research interests include American politics, political behavior and campaigns and elections.

ADDRESS: Department of Government, The University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1800, Austin TX 78712–0119, USA. [email: bbrox@gov.utexas.edu]

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