

Ross
Perot
2000

ROSS FOR BOSS

The Perot Phenomenon
and Beyond

Edited by
TED G. JELEN

ROSS FOR BOSS

SUNY series on the Presidency:
Contemporary Issues

John Kenneth White
editor

ROSS FOR BOSS

The Perot Phenomenon
and Beyond

Edited by

TED G. JELEN

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Published by

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS, ALBANY

© 2001 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means including electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, address
State University of New York Press,
90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207

Production and book design, Laurie Searl
Marketing, Michael Campochiaro

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ross for boss : the Perot phenomenon and beyond /
edited by Ted G. Jelen.

p. cm. — (SUNY series on the presidency)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-4853-3 (alk. paper) — ISBN

0-7914-4854-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Third parties (United States politics). 2.
Presidents—United States—Election—1992. 3.
Perot, H. Ross, 1930– 4. Presidential candi-
dates—United States. I. Jelen, Ted G. II.
SUNY series in the presidency.

JK2261 .R677 2001
324.973'0928—dc21

00-038764

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

	List of Figures and Tables	vii
	List of Contributors	ix
	Foreword	xi
1	The Perot Campaigns in Theoretical Perspective <i>Ted G. Jelen</i>	1
2	The Television Candidate: H. Ross Perot's 1992 and 1996 Presidential Races <i>Kenneth D. Nordin</i>	15
3	A Case Study of a Third Presidential Campaign Organization: Virginians for Perot <i>Andrew D. Martin and Brian E. Spang</i>	35
4	Attitudes Toward Government, Partisan Dispositions, and the Rise of Ross Perot <i>Jeffrey Koch</i>	61
5	The Politics of a Bittersweet Economy: Economic Restructuring, Economic Stories, and Ross Perot in the Elections of 1992 and 1996 <i>Solon Simmons and James Simmons</i>	87
6	Structural Constraints on Perot Voting Patterns: The Effects of Religious Adherence <i>Christopher P. Gilbert, Timothy R. Johnson, David A. M. Peterson, and Paul A. Djupe</i>	119

vi ■ CONTENTS

7	Understanding Perot's Plummet <i>Jeremy D. Mayer and Clyde Wilcox</i>	143
8	From Ross the Boss to Jesse the Body: Did the Perot Phenomenon Spawn the Ventura Victory? <i>Christopher P. Gilbert and David A. M. Peterson</i>	163
	Index	183

Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 3.1	VFP Partisan Identification	46
Figure 3.2	VFP Political Philosophy	47
Figure 3.3	VFP Issue Positions	48
Figure 3.4	VFP View of Two Party System	50
Figure 3.5	VFP Trust in Government	51
Figure 3.6	VFP Efficacy	52
Figure 3.7	Reason for Getting Involved with VFP	55
Figure 4.1	Public Officials Don't Care What People Think, 1952–1996	66
Figure 4.2	How Much of the Time Do You Trust the Federal Government? 1958–1996	67
Figure 4.3	Are Government Officials Crooked? 1958–1996	68
Figure 4.4	Which Party Best Able to Handle Most Important Problem? 1972–1996	70
Figure 4.5	Average Feeling Thermometer toward Parties, 1978–1996	71
Figure 8.1	Minnesota County-Level Voting for Ross Perot, 1992, and Jesse Ventura, 1998	171
Figure 8.2	Minnesota County-Level Voting for Ross Perot, 1996, and Jesse Ventura, 1998	172
Figure 8.3	Minnesota County-Level Religious Adherence, 1990, and Voting For Jesse Ventura, 1998	173

Tables

Table 3.1	Demographic Description of VFP	44
Table 3.2	VFP Group Activity	53
Table 3.3	VFP Political Behavior	54

Table 3.4	Future ofVFP Leadership	56
Table 4.1	Determinants ofThird PartyVoting, 1992 and 1996	74
Table 4.2	Determinants of External Efficacy and Political Trust, 1992	76
Table 4.3	Determinants of External Efficacy and Political Trust, 1992, InstrumentVariables Analysis	77
Table 4.4	Determinants ofThird PartyVoting, 1992, InstrumentVariables Analysis	78
Table 4.5	Determinants of External Efficacy and Political Trust, 1994	79
Table 4.6	Partisan Orientations of PerotVoters	81
Table 5.1	Fit Statistics for Model 1	98
Table 5.2	Fit Statistics for Model 2	99
Table 5.3	Multinomial Logistic Coefficients from the Regression of PresidentialVote on Selected IndependentVariables in 1992 and 1996	100
Table 5.4	Multinomial Logistic Coefficients from the Regression of PresidentialVote on Selected IndependentVariables in 1992 and 1996—Model 2	104
Table 5.5	Odds ofVoting for Perot vs. Opponent from Model 1 Interactions	110
Table 5.6	Odds ofVoting for Perot vs. Opponent from Model 2 Interactions	111
Table 6.1	Independent CandidateVote Regressed on County Religious Adherence (OLS Regression Estimates)	126
Table 6.2	Impact of ReligiousVariables on Voting for Ross Perot, 1992 (Bivariate Logit Estimates)	129
Table 6.3	Estimated 1992Vote for Ross Perot (Logit Estimates)	130
Table 6.4	Influence of ReligiousVariables on 1996 PresidentialVote for Ross Perot (Individual-Level Data, Bivariate Logit Estimates)	133
Table 6.5	Estimated 1996 PresidentialVote for Ross Perot and All Minor Candidates (Individual-Level Data, Logit Estimates)	134
Table 7.1	PerotVote by State, 1992–1996	148
Table 7.2	Patterns of Statewide Vote for Perot, 1992–1996	150
Table 7.3	Evaluations of Candidates, 1992–1996	151
Table 7.4	PerotVote among Select Political and Social Groups, 1992–1996	153
Table 7.5	Multivariate Analysis of Perot Vote, 1992 and 1996	154
Table 8.1	Voter Support for Jesse Ventura, Compared with 1992 and 1996 Support for Ross Perot	175

Contributors

PAUL A. DJUPE
Denison University

CHRISTOPHER P. GILBERT
Gustavus Adolphus College

TED G. JELEN
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

TIMOTHY R. JOHNSON
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

JEFFREY KOCH
State University of New York College at Geneseo

ANDREW D. MARTIN
Washington University, St. Louis

JEREMY D. MAYER
Kalamazoo College

KENNETH D. NORDIN
Benedictine University

DAVID A. M. PETERSON
Texas A & M University

JAMES SIMMONS
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

SOLON SIMMONS
University of Wisconsin, Madison

BRIAN SPANG
attorney-at-law, Chicago

CLYDE WILCOX
Georgetown University

This page intentionally left blank.

Foreword

As this book goes to press in December of 2000, the presidential race between Al Gore and George W. Bush has apparently been decided in Governor Bush's favor. The final outcome of the election became apparent 36 days after votes were cast on November 7, and was made final by a 5–4 decision of the United States Supreme Court, which halted manual recounts in the state of Florida. The results of the 2000 presidential election will be examined and re-examined by practicing politicians, journalists, and academics alike for years to come. My purpose in this foreword is to place the 2000 election in the theoretical context which motivates this book: the aftermath of the Perot phenomenon of 1992 and 1996, and, more generally, the role of third parties in U.S. electoral politics. Despite the fact that minor party candidates, either individually or collectively, did not do as well as Perot did in either 1992 or 1996 should not obscure the revealing, and perhaps important, nature of contemporary electoral politics outside the two party system.

As I argue in the opening chapter of this collection, the main purpose of minor party candidacies is not to gain office, but to advance a policy agenda. Third parties in American politics typically measure their success by the extent to which the major parties adopt their issues positions. In this sense of altering the course of public policy, the Perot campaign in 1992 was partially successful in the sense of achieving at least one of its policy objectives: deficit reduction. In his 1992 campaign for president, Ross Perot characterized a large budget deficit as being similar to “a crazy old aunt in the attic” whose presence no one wished to acknowledge. In the presidential campaign of 2000, candidates Gore and Bush debated the question of what to do with an ever-increasing budget surplus. Partially in response to Perot's strong showing in 1992, and his somewhat weaker but still impressive importance in 1996, both parties advanced programs to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the federal budget deficit. It is at least arguable that voters who voted for Perot out of concern for the federal deficit cast extraordinarily influential votes in 1992 and 1996.

The rest of Perot's agenda did not fare as well. Perot's concern with protecting American jobs from foreign competition did not qualify for the political agenda of 2000. No serious candidate for president from either party (George Bush and John McCain for the Republicans, Al Gore and Bill Bradley for the

Democrats) opposed free trade either in principle or in policy detail. Similarly, Perot's efforts to reform the political process did not bear fruit in 2000. As I write this in the aftermath of Governor Bush's narrow and contested victory, campaign finance reform remains a mere aspiration for members of both major parties. Further, while legislative term limits have been enacted in several states (perhaps most notably, Florida), the momentum of the term limits movement appears to have abated, as many recently elected citizen legislators have belatedly discovered the benefits of experience and incumbency.

The successes and shortcomings of the Perot movement provide a backdrop for the two most highly visible minor party candidacies of the 2000 election: those of Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader. Each of these political insurgents added a central component of the Perot platform to his issue agenda: economic nationalism in the case of Buchanan, political reform in the case of Nader.

As the nominee of the Reform Party, which was Ross Perot's most enduring legacy, Buchanan did a great deal to destroy the Reform Party as a formal organization in U.S. politics. Based on Perot's 9 per cent showing in the 1996 election, the Reform Party qualified for nearly \$13 million in federal funds. Buchanan's paltry showing of just under 1 per cent in 2000 ensures that the Reform Party will not qualify for federal campaign funds in 2004.

Could Buchanan have done better? After all, he advanced a view of economic nationalism, which was a crucial part of the Perot program, and, as noted earlier, was not adopted by any candidate of the major parties. Moreover, as the chapter in this volume by Simmons and Simmons shows, there still exists a constituency for this approach to international trade. However, it seems clear that Buchanan himself was an ineffective spokesman for this issue. I have conducted some preliminary analyses of exit polls of Republican primaries in 1992 and 1996, and the results of these studies suggest that Buchanan was perceived by the electorate primarily in terms of conservatism on social issues. Indeed, in the GOP primary contests of 1992 and 1996, the best predictor of a Buchanan vote was the respondent's attitude toward abortion. By contrast, in the 1996 primaries, Buchanan split the votes of Republican economic protectionists almost evenly with Bob Dole.

In 2000, Buchanan ran a number of commercials on television and (especially) radio, in which he emphasized the importance of closing America's borders to unfair foreign competition, illegal immigrants, and illicit drugs. However, most of these spots had a strong cultural component (one radio spot has a sound background of men laughing and speaking staccato Spanish) and did not directly address the economic concerns of many blue-collar workers. To the (limited) extent that such advertisements penetrated public consciousness, they may well have reinforced Buchanan's image as a cultural conservative, which stands in contrast to Perot's own social liberalism on such issues as abortion.

Conceivably, Buchanan could have made an impact with a strong, focused

campaign from the cultural right, with a particular emphasis on the abortion issue. At a minimum, such a campaign would have posed a strategic nightmare for Governor Bush, who sought to de-emphasize the salience of divisive social issues. Buchanan might well have drawn substantial support from voters who identify with the Christian Right, some of whom may have felt abandoned by Governor Bush. However, having won the nomination of the Reform Party after a divisive convention, and having accepted the federal funding which Perot had earned in the 1996 campaign, Buchanan apparently felt honor-bound to respect the platform and constituency of his newly acquired party affiliation.

In a very general way, the presidential candidacy of Green Party candidate Ralph Nader in 2000 reflected the populist message of political reform advanced by Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996. Nader also expressed deep concerns about the effects of “globalism” in economic affairs, but appears to have based these reservations on political, rather than economic, considerations. While Nader was clearly concerned about protecting American jobs, his principal objection to economic globalism seems to have been an opposition to making decision-making structures even more remote from the influence or understanding of the average citizen. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organization are not directly accountable to American voters and represented to Ralph Nader a further concentration of economic and political power.

Despite a rather dismal 2 per cent showing in the presidential election, it seems likely that Ralph Nader did influence the outcome. While conclusive evidence for this claim must await more systematic inquiry, the circumstantial case that Nader cost Gore the presidency is rather impressive. If one makes the conservative assumption that only half of Nader’s vote would have gone to Al Gore if Nader had not been running, Nader seems to have cost Gore the states (and electoral votes) of New Hampshire (four electoral votes) and Florida (twenty-five electoral votes). Either of these states would have given Gore an Electoral College majority, and therefore the presidency. Florida is a particularly egregious example. At this writing, Bush’s winning margin in Florida is listed at 193 votes, out of over six million cast. In Florida, Nader received over 92,000 votes for President. Even a small fraction of these votes would have permitted Gore to win Florida’s electoral votes.

Thus, if one assumes that even a plurality of Nader voters preferred Al Gore to George W. Bush, the Nader candidacy seems a classic instance of the “wasted vote” thesis. By voting for a minor party, a voter is effectively casting a vote for her worst alternative. As many Democratic leaders put it in the closing days of the 2000 campaign, “A vote for Nader is a vote for Bush.”

Of course, rational choice theories of electoral behavior (discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this volume) suggest that such an outcome may be desirable for supporters of a minor party candidate, if the strategy of such voters is future-oriented. That is, a Nader voter whose preference ordering was Nader-

Gore-Bush may have intentionally advantaged Governor Bush, in an effort to persuade the Democratic Party to offer a more palatable candidate in 2004. However, such an outcome in 2004 seems unlikely. While in principle Nader's appeal could coax a more "populist" candidate into the race for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, it seems probable that strategic actors in the Democratic Party (such as potential financial contributors, state and local party leaders, and members of Congress) will understand that Nader's impact on the 2000 election was the result of the preposterous closeness of the race between the major party candidates, and cannot be attributed to any mass appeal on the part of Ralph Nader. Unlike Perot, who received nearly one vote in five in 1992, a repeat of Nader's performance in 2004 is only likely to effect the outcome under highly unusual (indeed, perhaps unique) circumstances which will almost certainly not be repeated. It thus seems improbable that the electoral or governing strategies of either major party will be affected by Nader's performance in the 2000 Presidential election.

In summary, minor party candidates occasionally perform an important agenda-setting function in American politics. In the presidential elections of 1992 and 1996, the candidacy of H. Ross Perot was formidable indeed, and threatened to affect the outcome of the race on both occasions. To a limited extent, Perot was successful in forcing his issues on the national political agenda, and achieved some success in persuading the major parties to adopt policies favored by his supporters. By contrast, although echoes of the Perot agenda were discernable in the 2000 candidacies of Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader, it seems unlikely that either will affect the political agenda of the early twenty-first century. Despite the fact that Nader may have altered the outcome of the 2000 election, it seems improbable that the Nader candidacy will have any long-term impact on the Democratic Party. To this degree, then, the Perot phenomena of 1992 and 1996 represents a another instance of a recurring feature of electoral politics in the United States, rather than a permanent change in the shape of the contemporary party system.

*Ted G. Jelen
Las Vegas, Nevada
December 15, 2000*

The Perot Campaigns in Theoretical Perspective

Ted G. Jelen

The recent presidential campaigns of H. Ross Perot, and the subsequent events surrounding Perot's Reform Party, have posed political scientists with a fascinating set of intellectual issues. In 1992, nearly one vote in five in the presidential election was cast for Perot, making his showing the strongest for a candidate from outside the two party system since 1912. Four years later, Perot's support was cut nearly in half, but he was still able to attract about 9 percent of the popular vote for president. Moreover, the Reform Party (the vehicle for Perot's candidacy in 1996) appears to have an enduring role in contemporary American politics. In 1998, Reform candidate Jesse "The Body" Ventura (a former professional wrestler) was elected governor of Minnesota, and has since become a highly visible player in Reform Party politics. Further, the Reform Party presidential nomination for the 2000 election has become the object of vigorous competition. As I write this in the autumn of 1999, both former Republican presidential contender Pat Buchanan and financier Donald Trump are publicly considering seeking the Reform Party nomination. Thus, unlike other third party movements in the twentieth century (Rosenstone et al. 1996), the Perot movement, institutionalized in the Reform Party, may well survive the political viability of its original candidate. Thus, several years after the fact, political scientists and political pundits alike have not arrived at satisfactory accounts of the Perot phenomenon, nor is there an appreciation of the long-term potential of the movement Ross Perot appears to have put into motion.

This volume is intended to help explain Perot's meteoric rise and precipitous decline in contemporary American electoral politics, as well as the apparent

persistence of the Reform movement into the twenty-first century. Perot's unusual success, and indeed, the very existence of Perot campaigns for the presidency, is difficult to explain. Almost uniquely among Western democratic systems, the United States is highly inhospitable to political challenges by movements that originate from outside the two-party system. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to review some of the formidable obstacles to American third-party movements, and to attempt preliminary explanations for Perot's ability to overcome some (but not all) of these barriers.

Institutional Barriers

Among the most well-known and well-established generalizations in the social sciences is "Duverger's Law," which states that two party systems are likely to develop in politics that use a single-member district, plurality system, such as that found in the United States (Duverger 1963). Most political offices in the United States are contested under plurality rules, in which the candidate receiving the largest share of the popular vote is declared elected, even if that share falls below a majority (50 percent).

It is not difficult to see why such an electoral system discourages third party candidates. Presumably, a voter who is contemplating a vote for a candidate from outside the two party system is likely to have a preference between the major party candidates. As the chapters by Simmons and Simmons, Koch, and Mayer and Wilcox show, Perot drew votes from both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates in 1992 and 1996. A voter whose first choice for president was Ross Perot, but who preferred George Bush (in 1992) or Bob Dole (in 1996) to Bill Clinton, was posed with something of a strategic dilemma: Does one cast a vote for her first choice (Perot), if that vote would advantage this voter's last choice (Clinton)? Would it not make more sense to vote for the Republican candidate, in an effort to deny the presidency to Bill Clinton? This dilemma, often termed the "wasted vote" thesis, has been an extremely formidable obstacle to minor party and independent candidates for most of American history.

The Electoral College, of course, magnifies the disadvantage under which third parties must compete. Under the Electoral College system, a successful candidate for president must garner a majority of the electoral votes (currently 270 of a possible 538). While, in principle, such a majority system might provide a minor party candidate with an opportunity to create an Electoral College deadlock (thereby requiring the president to be selected by the House of Representatives), such leverage can only exist if the minor party candidate in question actually received electoral votes. In most states (Maine and Nebraska are the exceptions),

the state's electoral votes are assigned on a "winner take all" basis to the candidate receiving a plurality of the popular vote. Thus, in order to have any impact on the electoral vote, a minor party candidate typically must finish first in at least one state.

This sort of Electoral College deadlock has not occurred in the twentieth century. However, minor party candidates who have received electoral votes include Robert LaFollette (1924), Strom Thurmond (1948), and George Wallace (1968).¹ What these candidates have had in common is the fact that their popular support was geographically concentrated (in Wisconsin for LaFollette, and in the South for Thurmond and Wallace). Despite the fact that he ran better than any of these three former third-party candidates in 1992, and ran better than either LaFollette and Thurmond in 1996, Ross Perot received no electoral votes in either election. While Perot was able to finish second in several states in 1992, in no state did he obtain a popular vote plurality.

Thus, the practice of American elections tends to discourage both candidates and supporters of third parties quite strongly. Given the winner take all nature of elections in the United States, it is impossible for competitors from outside the two party system to make gains that are both gradual and tangible. While it is possible in principle for third parties to increase their popular support over a series of elections, the lack of tangible rewards (in terms of the election of public officials) has tended to reduce the lifespan of third party movements in the twentieth century.

Aside from the impact of electoral laws themselves, there are other institutional barriers to third party success in American elections. One of these is differential ballot access. The mechanics of conducting elections in the United States are generally regulated by state law, and no state or territory permits candidates to have unrestricted access to the ballot. Typically, most states impose some combination of petition signatures and filing fees, which vary substantially across states (Winger 1997; Dwyre and Kolodny 1997). While restrictions on ballot access have generally become less burdensome since the Wallace campaign of 1968, the existence of fifty-one (fifty states plus the District of Columbia) separate sets of regulations poses potential third party movements with a very high initial hurdle. Candidates and parties from outside the two party system must commit substantial resources to gaining admission to the electoral contest; something that is granted automatically to the Democratic and Republican parties.

The chapter in this volume by Martin and Spang, which describes the mobilization of the Virginia chapter of United We Stand, illustrates both the potential and limitations of such grass-roots movements. On the plus side, gaining ballot access did provide volunteers with an immediate, attainable goal in the early stages of the 1992 electoral cycle. This sort of activity may have created a psychological investment in the Perot campaigns, which could have sustained the commitment of Perot supporters during difficult times (such as Perot's untimely withdrawal in

July 1992). Conversely, movements such as United We Stand are unlikely to be popular with politically active citizens, who may have strong attachments to the existing parties. Third parties are often required to recruit from the ranks of people who are socially and politically isolated. The chapter by Gilbert, Johnson, Djupe, and Peterson on the impact of religion on the Perot campaigns suggests that third-party movements generally will lack the organizational support and political skills that often characterize active church members (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). This point can be generalized. The most fertile recruiting ground for third party supporters is likely to exist within those segments of the population that are not strongly politically or socially engaged. However, such people are also likely to lack the interest and skills necessary to participate in political activity.

Thus, the costs of admission to the electoral arena (in terms of time, money, and energy) are higher for the supporters of third party candidates than for those who support one of the two major parties. Moreover, these increased costs must often be borne by people whose ability to incur them is rather limited.

Attempts to “reform” campaign finance in the post-Watergate era have also limited the potential of some third-party movements. Under the regulations that have been in place since 1976, presidential candidates affiliated with the major parties are entitled to matching funds from the federal treasury during the primary season, and are entitled to federal financing during the general election. By contrast, the campaigns of John Anderson (in 1980) and Ross Perot in 1992 had to be financed privately (albeit under the same restrictions on fund raising imposed on major party candidates) with the possibility of reimbursement by the Federal Election Commission after the election. Further, the amount of such post hoc support for relatively successful third party candidates (e.g., those who qualify at all) is contingent on the level of electoral support such candidates receive. Again, third-party candidates typically have fewer resources with which to gain financial support, and must submit to more stringent requirements than those imposed on the major parties (Dwyre and Kolodny 1997).

Finally, certain federal regulations have often limited the media coverage available to third party candidates. Most conspicuously, third party candidates bear a substantial burden in order to be included in presidential debates. For the 2000 electoral cycle, for example, presidential candidates must achieve support of 15 percent or greater in one of the major national polls to be included in televised debates between presidential candidates (Clines 1999). Since these debates have become pivotal events in the conduct of general election campaigns since 1976, exclusion from debates can be a huge handicap for candidates from outside the two party system. A candidate such as Ross Perot in 1996 is faced with something of a Catch-22: In order to gain popular support, the candidate must participate in debates; in order to participate in televised debates, the candidate must demonstrate popular support.

Given these barriers to third party success, how did Ross Perot manage to fare as well as he did? It can easily be discerned that, despite the support of nearly one voter in five in 1992, Perot was unable to overcome in any way the bias imposed by the Electoral College. Despite a high expenditure of resources in two consecutive elections, Perot did not obtain a single electoral vote. Nevertheless, Perot was able to attract a very high level of support in 1992, and managed a fairly respectable showing in 1996. It has been argued (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996) that, in 1992, Perot was able to overcome many of the traditional obstacles to third-party success by using some of his substantial personal wealth. As the chapter by Kenneth Nordin illustrates, Perot was able to purchase large segments of television time for his “informercials” with his own personal fortune. Under the Supreme Court’s 1976 decision in *Buckley v. Valeo*, personal expenditures by candidates on their own behalf cannot constitutionally be limited. Perot was apparently able to parlay the investment of his own money into adroit use of “free” media (most notably, frequent appearances on the Larry King show), which in turn generated sufficient popular support to allow Perot to be included in the presidential debates. The preceding discussion has suggested that third party candidates and movements face formidable start-up costs in order to enter the electoral competition. Billionaire Perot was able to bear these costs more easily than most other third party candidates, and was thus able to attract a relatively large popular following.

In 1996, and perhaps in 2000 as well, Perot was able to take advantage of some of the institutional provisions that have traditionally benefited the major parties. While 1996 witnessed another extended struggle for ballot access for the newly formed Reform Party, Perot himself qualified for (and accepted) \$29 million in federal funds, based on his 1992 showing (Green and Binning 1997). Based on Perot’s more limited demonstration of support in 1996, the Reform Party candidate for president in 2000 will be eligible for approximately \$12.6 million in federal subsidies, which will be available during the campaign (Clines 1999). While this total will be dwarfed by the subsidies available to the Democratic and Republican candidates for president, the \$12.6 million may provide a basis for garnering the popular support necessary to gain entrance to televised presidential debates. Thus, in 2000, the Presidential nomination of the Reform Party may well be worth having, since Perot’s previous efforts have paid some of the start-up costs of third party activity in advance.

Strategic Considerations

Despite the impressive limitations on third party activity in the United States, the presentation of alternatives to the two major parties is a frequently occurring

feature of American politics (Rosenstone et al 1996). Indeed, to suggest that Perot simply bought his way into contention in 1992 is to ignore features of the political environment in the late twentieth century that made Perot's approach particularly appealing to an important and politically consequential segment of the American electorate. While Perot's personal resources were perhaps *necessary* to his performance in the 1992 and 1996 elections, such resources would not have been sufficient under different circumstances. Thus, important questions for analysts of contemporary American electoral politics might be "Why Perot?" and "Why now?"

William Riker (1976) has proposed a dynamic theory, which can account for both the occurrence and decline of third parties in the United States. According to Anthony Downs (1956), parties in two party systems tend to converge toward the center of the left-right (or liberal-conservative continuum). As the major parties (such as the Republicans and the Democrats) come to resemble one another, voters on the extreme right or extreme left are likely to feel abandoned by the party closest to them, and increasingly indifferent to the differences between the two major parties. Thus, voters and candidates might well engage in a rational "future-oriented" strategy, in which votes in a present election are "wasted," in order to bring one or both parties closer to the optimal position on the extremes. As one of the major parties adapts to the challenge posed by the third party, by moving closer to the third party's positions, the rationale for the existence of the third party becomes weaker, and fewer voters are likely to be indifferent to the difference between the two major parties. Thus, in subsequent elections, the third party is increasingly unlikely to attract electoral support, even as its issue positions are adopted to some extent by the major parties.

At first glance, Riker's theory seems unlikely to apply to the Perot movement, since many accounts (including the Mayer and Wilcox piece in this volume) have suggested that Perot voters were "zealots of the center," who rejected the more strident issue positions of both major parties (see especially Miller and Shanks 1996). However, it does seem possible that, in the context of the 1992 election, it is the center of the liberal-conservative continuum that has been vacated by the major parties. Downsian analysis suggests that the logic of two party competition mandates that parties interested in electoral success will converge toward the center of the political spectrum. However, if the ideological movement of the Democrats and Republicans is constrained (perhaps by the internal dynamics of each party), the parties may leave vacant the center.

A recent analysis by Shafer and Claggett (1995) suggests that this is precisely what has happened in recent American politics. Schafer and Claggett have argued that public opinion in the United States is characterized by "two majorities": a conservative majority on "cultural/moral issues" involving personal morality and foreign affairs, and a liberal majority on issues pertaining to matters of economics.