Incumbent Failure and Partisan Strength: An Explanation of the Emergence and Support of Major Third Party Presidential Candidates in the United States

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A strong disapproval among the electorate of both major party challengers is one common explanation for the periodic emergence of major third party presidential candidates in the United States. Simply put, if neither candidate is acceptable, then another candidate will find support among a large portion of the voters. However, this is not necessarily the case. Because modern third party candidates are political entrepreneurs, these candidates will look for fragmentation in the party coalitions and exploit them. Using data from the American National Elections Study, this article will disaggregate the data on feelings about the two major party candidates and who supports them. In doing so, it finds third party candidates tend to emerge when the incumbent president is politically weak and unpopular among both the nation as a whole and their party in particular, regardless of the standing of the other major party challenger. It also finds the idea that people turn to third party candidates after rejecting the two major party candidates is incorrect. Rather, people turn to a third party candidate only if they are disaffected with their party's nominee. Voters who are unsatisfied with their own party's candidate would rather look for another alternative and support a third party candidate than vote for the opposition party. This indicates partisanship among the electorate has been stronger since 1968 then previously believed.

For social scientists the emergence of major third party candidates and the nature of their support are vexing problems as they search for an explanation to why these candidates appear during certain elections and what types of people are most likely to support these insurgent candidates. Some analysts have ventured that successful minor party candidates thrive because of unique personal attributes, such as great personal wealth or name recognition, while others have explored the possibility that at certain times in our history the national political mood is ripe for exploitation by a major third party candidate either because of issue salience or economic discontent among parts of the electorate.

Of the explanations regarding the occasional appearance of major third party candidates, one has gained great currency among academics and others: a general dissatisfaction with the two major party candidates (Rosenstone 1996; Rapoport and Stone 2005). Intuitively this explanation is appealing. If voters are unhappy with the choices offered to them, it would be only natural to explore another alternative. However, there remains very little empirical support for this premise in modern elections. Using two variables

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to measure popularity of presidential candidates among voters—personal feeling thermometers and a multivariate analysis of factors of major third party candidate support—this paper explores the dynamics between the popularity of both major party candidates and the appearance of a major third party candidate. It also will explore if there is any relationship between party affiliation and the decision to vote for a third party candidate. That is, it will explore if there are any differences between Republicans who support major third party candidates and Democrats who support major third party candidates.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: to explore a new explanation for the emergence of viable major third party candidates and to explain what types of people support these major third party candidates.[1] This work contends that dissatisfaction with both major parties as an explanation for emergence of a viable, successful, major third party candidate is incomplete. Rather, the emergence of major third party candidates since 1968 has occurred only when the incumbent presidents are embattled and unpopular with their party loyalists. Additionally, major third party candidate support does not generally come from people who dislike both major party candidates, as previous literature suggests. By disaggregating the data on feelings about the two major party candidates into feelings about each candidate individually, we find major third party candidate support emerges when partisans do not support their party's nominee while their position about the other major party's candidate is largely irrelevant.

Characteristic of a Modern Third Party

Generally, literature on third parties focuses mainly on three major explanations for the periodic emergence of minor party candidates: the possible decline of party politics during this time, unique events particular to certain elections, and unacceptable major party candidates.

Major Parties in Decline

Major third party challengers tend to find success in presidential elections during times when voters are more susceptible to their message either because they believe the two major political parties are ignoring their concerns or because the level of partisanship in the electorate is waning. Simply put, Americans, according to Rosenstone et al.'s theory (1996), are more likely to abandon the major political parties when "the motivations . . . are high and the costs of doing so are low" (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 150). Other researchers have found that after controlling for the 1980 election, rates of voting for major third party candidates between 1976-1988 was higher when

it was not a closely contested campaign, when there were more people registered to vote, when there were more political independents in the electorate, and during times when people changed party affiliation repeatedly (Chressanthis and Schaffer 1993). However, these findings were not applicable to all elections. When Chressanthis and Schaffer included 1980 in their study they found the only variables that retain all of their significance were large numbers of registered voters, an absence of a governor's race, and an increased number of independents, thereby indicating that a lack of party loyalty is critical for a major third party candidate to be successful. These findings have been confirmed by other scholars who found a lack of party loyalty is a factor in major third party candidate successes (Gold 1995; Southwell and Everest 1998). However, because of the decline in partisanship during much of this time, almost any election year could be susceptible to increased levels of voting for a major third party candidate, and this factor is not a perfect predictor of major third party candidate success (Gold 1995).

Decreased allegiance to major political parties is not the only attitude that is common during periods of increased support of major third party candidates. Along with declining partisanship, major third party candidates tend to find more success among voters who state they feel less connected to the government. Those voters who feel alienated from the government (not trusting) or cynical about the motivations of elected officials were more likely to support Perot in 1992 than the major party candidates (Southwell and Everest 1998). Gold also found that feelings of distrust in government and internal inefficacy were responsible for supporting George Wallace in 1968. In addition to lack of partisanship in the electorate, unresponsiveness which leads to the emergence of major third party candidates can be found in government actors. In this explanation for increased rates of voters who support major third party candidates, the two dominant parties share a similar view that differs from a vocal minority, causing this group to seek out an alternative to the major parties (Rosenstone et al. 1996; Chressanthis and Schaffer 1993; Sundquist 1983).

Unique Events in Particular Elections

In conjunction with declining partisan responsiveness among the political leaders and electorate, there are certain intangible qualities unique to each presidential election that might explain the periodic emergence of major third party candidates. Third parties benefit when access to the ballot is made easier and when a nationally prestigious candidate (often implied as a current or former president, vice president, or member of Congress who has run for a major party's nomination, although there is no set definition of who qualifies as a nationally prestigious candidate) is running on the ticket

(Rosenstone et al. 1996). Most importantly, Rosenstone et al. states that major third party candidates will be most successful "when citizens view a minor party candidate as legitimate—that is, when a candidate has the attributes which resemble most major party nominees" (p. 139). While this appears to be a sound argument, on closer inspection it leaves something to be desired. In fact, this shows attributes which successful major third party candidates might have, but these attributes, by no means, guarantee success as a major third party candidate. Third party candidate Patrick Buchanan in 2000 was a nationally prominent figure with money and access to all of the states' ballots except Michigan where he was a write-in candidate and Washington, DC. However, he was not able to garner the attention of the media, or, in turn, many voters.

Other literature tends to focus more on the current state of affairs during the campaign season. Rosenstone et al. (1996) and Mazmanian (1974) contend that a national crisis increases support for third parties. However, it is important to remember that a "national crisis" is a matter of perception. Many challengers for elective office (in both major and minor parties) run on a platform of averting a national crisis by claiming the incumbent has not done enough to deal with a pressing problem. It would seem that the ultimate decision of what is a national crisis is left to the opinion of the voters.

Additional research has emphasized that voting for a third party candidate is more likely to increase when voters feel economically discontent (Rosenstone et al. 1996; Chressanthis and Schaffer 1993). Voters' personal observations of the nation's economy play strongly in their choice of presidential candidates. When the economy is perceived to be doing poorly, voters are more likely to reject the incumbent and seek out alternatives (Campbell 2000). This could mean that even those who would traditionally support the president and his party might be more likely to turn against their party's standard bearer and look for another option when the economy becomes worse. However, these findings are not universally accepted. Among a varieties of variables, Gold could not find any significant changes in the levels of distrust in government, economic standing, or issue awareness in 1992 compared to 1988 or 1984, and attributed Perot's success to his extraordinary ability to spend money on behalf of his campaign (Gold 1995).

Unpopular Major Party Candidates

The final explanation for the success of major third party candidates contends that they are more popular when voters do not approve of either major party candidate (Rosenstone et al. 1996). Simply put, if the two major party candidates are unacceptable, then voters will search for another, viable candidate whom they find appealing. In their description of the emergence

of major third party candidates, Rapoport and Stone (2005) state the emergence of these candidates is a response to general dissatisfaction with both major parties. In their analysis, there is a "push pull" effect of major third party candidate emergence. The "push" comes from voter dissatisfaction with the two major party candidates, who push segments of the unhappy electorate into the third party. While the "pull" comes from an attraction by an upset bloc of voters to the major third party candidate's actual message.

Others have supported this argument. Gold (1995) found that in 1968 and 1980 dislike of the two major party candidates was a significant factor in supporting Wallace and Anderson, respectively. In both of those elections, more than 10 percent of the respondents claimed to have more issues they disliked about the candidates compared to factors they liked about the candidates. But these findings have become less dramatic in recent elections. While negative evaluations of Bush and Clinton combined did have a significant affect in the decision to vote for Perot in 1992, the number of people who stated they had negative feelings about the two candidates was not significantly different from previous campaigns. In other words, while the number of people disapproving of both candidates remained constant over time, those people unhappy with both candidates were more likely to vote for Perot in 1992.

In addition to having more people state they had many dislikes about the candidates, Gold (1995) also found that some major third party candidates appeared when more people had negative feelings about the major party candidates compared to normal campaigns. In Gold's (1995) analysis, during 1968 and 1980 more than 10 percent of the population had negative feelings about the two major party candidates, compared to an average of about 5 percent of the population who expressed negative feelings about the two major party candidates in elections without a viable major third party candidate. However, the evidence is far from conclusive. In 1992 about 8 percent of the interviewees did not have positive feelings about both candidates. In Gold's words, "Perot's success did not reflect either unusually high levels of disenchantment with his two major party rivals or public affection for the candidate himself" (1995, 768).

Despite these findings, in no study has the overall feeling about these two major party candidates been disaggregated. That is, we do not know if people had stronger feelings about one of the candidates than the other one. The remainder of this paper will examine if there are changes in the negative feelings toward both candidates during times of major third party candidates and if those disaggregated feelings impact the decision to vote for a major third party candidate.

Hypotheses

This paper will test two separate hypotheses about major third party presidential candidates: one focusing on when viable major third party candidates emerge and one exploring who supports these candidates. In this study, the contention is that major third party candidates will emerge when the incumbent president is unpopular and that those who support these candidates do so because they do not like their own party's candidate.

Modern major third party presidential campaigns have been noted for their attention to an individual candidate rather than formulating a political party (Rosenstone 1996). As such, these movements are often marked by focusing on the individual attributes of a particular candidate who feels that he is "right" for that moment in time. After the salient issues have faded from the public's memories, or the candidate has been discredited, the third party political movement falls into oblivion (Rosenstone 1996). These major third party movements are not popular, grassroots movements, but movements created by individual political entrepreneurs who believe the time is ripe for another political option (Burnham 1970).

Because incumbency is such a critical advantage in modern presidential elections, viable major third party candidates will only appear when incumbents are unpopular, especially in their own party. When this happens, the majority governing coalition ceases to function effectively as the party fractures and it becomes apparent that no faction has a majority of the electorate with it. Instead, there is a group from the majority party who support the president, a group from the majority party who does not support the president, but might not support the challenging major party, and the other major party challenging the incumbent. Moreover, in presidential campaigns this challenging party might be even more fractured after a primary campaign which has pitted its partisans against one another.

This unpopularity among the incumbent's own partisans signals to political entrepreneurs that there is a percentage of the electorate—and possibly a plurality—which is looking for someone different, but might not be willing to commit to the opposition party. To examine this, we will explore if partisans of incumbent candidates have cooler feelings for their standard-bearer during years when a viable major third party candidate emerges than in other years. If the idea that incumbent failure signals to political entrepreneurs that the field is set for a major third party challenger, we would expect to find the incumbent president less popular with his partisans than the challenger in the data from the American National Election Studies from 1968 through 2004.[2]

Why Weak Incumbents Bring About Third Parties

Challengers to major party candidates for the presidency are already at a disadvantage to the typical incumbent candidate because they are forced to go through a primary contest to secure the nomination. During these times they must actively campaign against many other candidates, stake out policy positions to win the allegiance of the primary voters, and withstand a barrage of negative attacks from members of their own party. These candidates who ultimately became the nominee were not the first choice of many of the party faithful, and might be considered more as the "least worst candidate" or the "most electable" of the party, rather than the favorite of the party. Those party members who supported losing candidates in the primaries might be less enthusiastic about supporting the nominee either financially or otherwise, or might not actively participate in the general election.[3]

However, that is not the case with the party that controls the presidency. The incumbent president has a whole host of formal and informal powers unavailable to the challenger which he may marshal during the campaign, including the ability to use the powers of the office to demonstrate strong leadership abilities—past presidents have used their powers as commander-in-chief of the military, chief diplomat, and head of state to further their electoral goals—as well as the power to help influence legislative agendas (Campbell 2000). Inherently, the sitting president enjoys a degree of success in most elections because party faithful generally would rather have their candidate in office than lose power. Steger (2003) found that presidents were likely to face substantial primary challenges on two occasions: if the incumbent president was originally a vice president to another president, or if there is an intraparty split over a major issue. It appears that this intraparty split which Steger finds also presents itself in another form with the appearance of a major third party candidate. If the incumbent is able to win renomination, there still would be a divided party which might not be likely to wholly support the candidacy and would look for another alternative.

From a Downsian perspective, the incumbent candidate loses a major advantage when he faces a substantial primary challenge. Because of the nature of the primaries, and who participates in the primaries, candidates must move closer to the ideological extremes to court the more committed partisans who vote in primaries, before attempting to appear more moderate during the general election (Downs 1956; Morton 2006). For example, Johnson, in 1968, faced the insurmountable task of appealing to the liberal anti-war bloc in the Democratic primary while still remaining credible with the entire electorate. Bush, in 1992, was faced with the same problem of countering a conservative rebellion in his party and was forced to alter his

positions for the Republican primaries before attempting to appear more centrist for the general election. When an incumbent does not face this challenge, he may take a centrist position throughout the campaign that is appealing to moderates of both parties and define his opponent as an ideological extremist. By the time the party conventions occur, the incumbent president is normally preparing to be nominated by a unified party, while the challenging major party nominee is attempting to heal fractures among the divided party and rebound from a costly and, possibly, difficult primary campaign.

A weak incumbent president provides a unique opportunity for a major third party challenger. During elections when incumbent presidents are running for reelection, and are considered unpopular among their own party, they are put in a position similar to the challenging major party. They must battle for the support of their own party, withstand the criticisms of their own fellow party members, and suffer the indignity of facing a media questioning their ability to run the government if they cannot even control their own political party.

Another Way to Look at Third Parties—Incumbent Failure

As many political scientists, historians, and others have noted, there are unique moments in political time when normally stable institutions become unstable (Skowronek 1997; Sundquist 1983). These times might provide signals to political entrepreneurs that they can find success in third parties and to the media that it is acceptable to cover third party candidates who do not normally receive coverage. One of the signals that might alert a third party candidate to this weakness is when a significant portion of the incumbent's party no longer has positive feelings about the president.

While there is data supporting the assertion that there was a relationship between the emergence of George Wallace and John Anderson and the negative feelings some had with both major party candidates, this relationship changes when feelings about the individual candidates are explored. Using the NES feeling thermometers, a new trend can be seen concerning the appearance of major third party candidates and people's feelings towards the two major party candidates.[4]

While Gold (1995) found that more people had negative feelings about both major party candidates during 1968, 1980, and 1992, we find that the trends are actually more revealing than that. During 1968, 1980, and 1992 there is a larger percentage of people who say that they have negative feelings towards the incumbent candidate than in other years. One in four of those asked had negative feelings about Lyndon Johnson in 1968, while 30 percent had negative feelings about Jimmy Carter in 1980, and 35 percent of

those asked said they had negative feelings about George H.W. Bush in 1992. In the other seven elections, the candidate of the incumbent party garnered negative feelings from an average of 24.9 percent of those surveyed. Additionally, it is only in these three elections that the incumbent had a larger percentage of the population claiming negative feelings about him than the challenger.

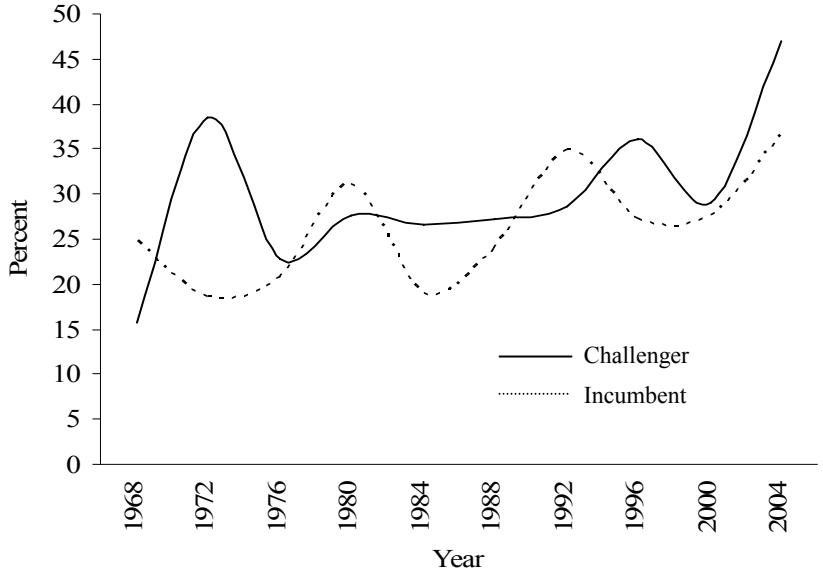
While negative feelings about both incumbents and challengers have trended upwards since 1968, when the questions were first asked, there is no dramatic increase in negative feelings towards the challenger in 1968, 1980, nor 1992. Rather the two years with substantially increased negative feelings towards the challenger occurred in 1972 with Democrat George McGovern and in 1996 with Republican Bob Dole. So, while previous research indicates that there are increased negative perceptions of both major party candidates during in 1968, 1980, and 1992, this trend is actually due to more negative feelings towards the incumbent candidate than to the challenger.

These negative feelings towards the incumbent are even more noticeable when we examine the perceptions of partisans towards their own candidate in presidential elections. Using the thermometer feelings of partisans to describe the level of satisfaction they have with their party's standard bearer, we find that in elections in which major third party candidates do not emerge, the incumbent party's candidate is more popular with his partisans than the challenger is with his party members.

Like Americans as a whole, partisans had more negative perceptions of the incumbent in the years that major third party candidates emerged. In 1968, 12.5 percent of the Democrats said they had negative feelings about Lyndon Johnson—who was so divisive of a figure that he did not run for reelection—while only 2.9 percent of the Republicans felt negatively about Richard Nixon. Jimmy Carter elicited negative feelings from 22.1 percent of the Democrats in 1980 compared to Reagan's negative response of 6.7 percent. This pattern continues with George H.W. Bush in 1992 when almost 10 percent of the Republicans had negative feelings about him compared to 6 percent of Democrats who dislike Bill Clinton.

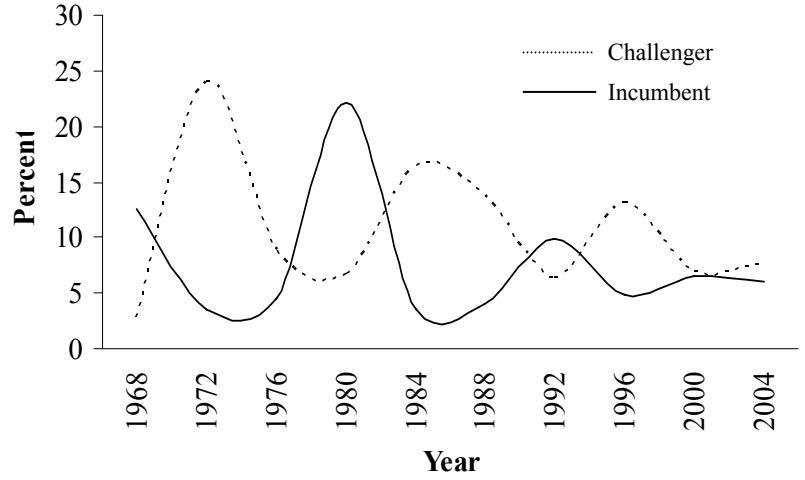
Moreover, when examining the elections of 1968, 1980, and 1992 there is one unifying event that occurs during these elections and in no other presidential election years in modern times. During these campaigns, an elected president faced a sustained, credible challenge during his party's primary by disgruntled insurgents within his own party.[5] In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson was so embattled during the preceding year that he chose to withdraw from the election fifteen days after Robert F. Kennedy announced his candidacy rather than facing the likely prospect that he would have lost his party's nomination.

Figure 1. Negative Public Perceptions of Major Party Presidential Candidates Among All Americans



Source: American Nation Election Survey.

Figure 2. Negative Perceptions of Presidential Candidates Among that Candidate's Partisans



Source: American National Election Studies
The graph traces the percent of partisans who have negative feelings about their own party's presidential candidate.

President Jimmy Carter withstood a challenge in the primaries from Senator Ted Kennedy. Kennedy, who, in the year before the primaries began, was more popular with Democrats than the President and was encouraged to run by numerous party leaders (Broder 1980). Kennedy was able to win 10 primaries, primarily in the Northeast and California, and many believe he would have faired better with a more organized campaign and if the "Chappaquiddick incident" had not resurfaced (Broder 1980; Bisnow 1983).

Twelve years later President George H.W. Bush also faced an opponent during the primaries, former aide to Richard Nixon, Patrick Buchanan, who was able to upset the President by getting a third of the vote in the New Hampshire primary. While he was not able to win a primary, he is widely credited with moving Bush ideologically to the right and was given a keynote speech at the Republican National Convention (Paolantonio 1992). In short, when it appears that a sitting president cannot control his own party, all normal expectations for the presidential campaign may change.

Who Supports Major Third Party Candidates?

While there are unique moments in time when the incumbent president is less popular with the nation as a whole and his party in particular, it is not clear if Americans view all general election candidates in the same manner or if different people have different views of the two candidates. In other words, is the previous research correct that major third party candidates appear when Americans are dissatisfied with the options presented to them by the major parties, or do members of different political parties view the candidates and issues presented to them in different manners?

This question will be explored using a probit analysis of the 1968, 1980, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections to determine if the factors involved in supporting third party candidates among Americans in general and among Democrats and Republicans (including those who lean towards on party, but consider themselves independents) separately that have been proposed by previous research are correct.[6] Specifically, this study will examine if voters who live in the South or in more rural areas are more likely to support major third party candidates, or if a voter's age has any relationship with the decision to vote for a major third party candidate. Additionally, following previous research, this study will explore the relationship between a person's perceptions about the national economy and their support for major third party candidates (however, because this question was not asked in 1968 by the NES, it will only be used in the latter cases). Finally, this study will look at voters' partisanship by exploring their belief in the difference between the two major parties, their partisan strength, and their feelings

towards to two major party candidates. If the previous research is correct that voters turn to major third party candidates when they are dissatisfied with both major party candidates, then we would expect that those voters with lower thermometer feelings of both the Democratic and Republican candidates would be more likely to support major third party candidates.[7]

When looking at all Americans during the four elections, this study confirms that a lack of support of both major party candidates is significantly related to the decision to support major third party candidates, with the exception of the 1996 election, when negative feelings about Clinton did not effect the decision to vote for Perot. However, when controlling for the voters' partisanship a different picture emerges. Among Republican voters, in no election year did their feelings about the Democratic candidate have a significant effect on the decision to vote for a major third party candidate. But in all of these elections increased negative feelings about the Republican candidate significantly effected the decision to support the major third party candidate. In other words, for Republicans, it was not dissatisfaction with the two major party candidates that caused them to support a minor party, but it was dislike of their own candidate which caused them to support the major third party candidate. This trend also emerges in recent elections among Democratic voters: in 1992 and in 1996 Democrats who supported major third party candidates were more likely to have strong negative feelings about Clinton while their opinions about the Republican candidates had no impact on their vote. In 1980 and 1968 Democrats who supported Anderson and Wallace had more negative feelings about both major party candidates, indicating negative feelings of Nixon and Reagan led to Democrats voting for Wallace and Anderson, while feelings about Bush or Dole did not impact their decision to vote for Perot.

Conclusions

In 1968, Governor George Wallace declared there was "Not a dime's worth of difference between the two candidates." However, that sentiment does not have any bearing on the decision to support a major third party candidate in 1980, 1992, 1996, or even in supporting Wallace in 1968. Rather, voters tend to support major third party candidates because they do not like the standard-bearer on the major party ticket that they affiliate with. Instead of viewing the emergence of major third party candidates as a result of the entire electorate being dissatisfied with the two major party candidates, these viable political entrepreneurs emerge at distinct moments in time by appealing to certain voters who do not support their party's candidate. In the ten presidential elections between 1968 and 2004, there were four major third party presidential candidates and six elections without a major third

Table 1. Support for Major Third Party Candidates, 1968, Standard Deviations in Parentheses

Variable	All Americans (Model 1)	Republicans (Model 2)	Democrats (Model 3)
Democratic Feeling	-0.01096*** 0.00213)	0.00463 (0.00430)	-0.01570*** (0.00320)
Republican Feeling	-0.01874*** (0.00264)	-0.03385*** (0.00673)	-0.01127*** (0.00364)
Party Strength	-0.22157*** (0.06520)	-0.38114* (0.17276)	-0.18392 (0.12441)
Difference Between Parties	-0.12170* (0.05469)	-0.05054 (0.09367)	-0.09393 (0.07270)
South	0 .76665*** (0.12889)	0.18557 (0.30512)	0.91958*** (0.17354)
Rural	0.15749* (0.07821)	-0.10065 (0.14589)	0.33187** (0.11186)
Age	-0.00479 (0.00401)	-0.01179 (0.00819)	-0.00121 (0.00567)
Trust in Government	-0.09097*** (0.02082)	-0.03195 (0.03605)	-0.08793** (0.03101)
Constant	1.52896** (0.37318)	3.00969** (0.75998)	0.65023 (0.52793)
Pearson's Goodness of Fit Chi-Squared	1944.447	872.769	550.880
DF	1018	375	546
P	0.000	0.000	0.434
N	1027	384	555

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001

Table 2. Support for Major Third Party Candidates, 1980, Standard Deviations in Parentheses

Variable	All Americans (Model 1)	Republicans (Model 2)	Democrats (Model 3)
Democratic Feeling	-0.00912*** (0.00278)	0.00125 (0.00496)	-0.01805*** (0.00449)
Republican Feeling	-0.01729*** (0.00271)	-0.03441*** (0.00622)	-0.01266*** (0.00388)
Party Strength	-0.26239*** (0.07118)	-0.09553 (0.15917)	-0.45486*** (0.13178)
Difference Between Parties	-0.01332 (0.05344)	0.09056 (0.07343)	-0.03318** (0.09752)
South	-0.38146* (0.17210)	-0.54348 (0.38202)	-0.27686 (0.22657)
Rural	-0.07287 (0.08685)	-0.33750* (0.16687)	-0.07263 (0.12325)
Age	-0.01285*** (0.00406)	-0.00686 (0.00725)	-0.01684*** (0.00588)
National Economy	-0.14795* (0.06068)	-0.05819 (0.12759)	-0.16105* (0.08067)
Trust in Government	-0.04972 (0.02962)	-0.14601 (0.08139)	-0.02466 (0.04352)
Constant	2.27317** (0.52049)	2.94074** (1.06973)	3.08367** (0.77112)
Pearson's Goodness of Fit Chi-Squared	982.411	250.604	736.759
DF	948	362	489
P	0.213	1.000	0.00
N	958	372	499

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001

Table 3. Support for Major Third Party Candidates, 1992, Standard Deviations in Parentheses

Variable	All Americans (Model 1)	Republicans (Model 2)	Democrats (Model 3)
Democratic Feeling	-0.00931*** (0.00176)	0.00312 (0.00281)	-0.01814*** (0.00342)
Republican Feeling	-0.00444** (0.00165)	-0.02144*** (0.00321)	0.00240 (0.00269)
Party Strength	-0.31753*** (0.04075)	-0.12565 (0.08172)	-0.33590*** (0.08116)
Difference Between Parties	-0.01057 (0.02818)	0.06723 (0.04435)	-0.03930 (0.04563)
South	-0.39126*** (0.09534)	-0.37974** (0.14971)	-.42712** (0.15261)
Rural	0.21562*** (0.05456)	0.05696 (0.09009)	0.28819*** (0.08257)
Age	-0.00983*** (0.00240)	-0.00849* (0.00372)	-0.01461*** (0.00400)
National Economy	0.01868 (0.03608)	0.02387 (0.04836)	-0.00931 (0.06360)
Trust in Government	-0.08040*** (0.02151)	-0.07561* (0.03132)	-0.13010*** (0.04317)
Constant	0.91872** (0.30520)	1.34454** (0.47279)	1.75419** (0.54014)
Pearson's Goodness of Fit Chi-Squared	1586.279	593.326	722.765
DF	1644	654	835
P	0.843	0.957	0.998
N	1654	664	845

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001

Table 4. Support for Major Third Party Candidates, 1996, Standard Deviations in Parentheses

Variable	All Americans (Model 1)	Republicans (Model 2)	Democrats (Model 3)
Democratic Feeling	-0.00137 (0.00260)	0.00350 (0.00425)	-0.01508** (0.00524)
Republican Feeling	-0.00894*** (0.00298)	-0.02283*** (0.00514)	0.00039 (0.00463)
Party Strength	-0.39213*** (0.06693)	-0.32623* (0.14590)	-0.34513** (0.12822)
Difference Between Parties	-0.11709 (0.06908)	-0.00698 (0.11149)	-0.18922 (0.10811)
South	-0.11989 (0.13680)	-0.17355 (0.22820)	-0.05119 (0.20446)
Rural	0.17542* (0.08426)	0.00608 (0.15105)	0.24887* (0.11849)
Age	-0.00989** (0.00382)	-0.01429* (0.00692)	-0.01168* (0.00564)
National Economy	0.08866* (0.04237)	0.09066 (0.07074)	0.14194* (0.06274)
Trust in Government	-0.05677 (0.03305)	-0.05019 (0.05882)	-0.06408 (0.04830)
Constant	0.16592 (0.43239)	1.16380 (0.80352)	0.52523 (0.63590)
Pearson's Goodness of Fit Chi-Squared	1087.473	405.158	637.763
DF	1105	469	570
P	0.641	0.985	0.025
N	1115	479	580

*p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; ***p≤0.001

party presidential candidate. Of these ten elections, this explanation for the periodic emergence of major third party presidential candidates predicts the emergence of three of the four major third party presidential candidates and five of the six elections when a major third party presidential candidate was not present.

In every election, save 1996, when a major third party challenger became viable, the incumbent president was less popular with his partisans than the other major party challenger was with his party. During the ten elections which compose this study, the only time a major third party candidate appears when the incumbent is viewed more favorably by his partisans than the challenger is 1996. However, much of Ross Perot's success in 1996 can be explained as a residual effect of his successes in 1992. Because of his ability to get on the ballot and gain a sizable percentage of the vote in all 50 states, Ross Perot was automatically placed on the ballot in many states in 1996, thereby eliminating one of the major hurdles any major third party challenger must face. Despite this advantage, Perot did not spend as much money in 1996 because he accepted public funds (Mayer and Wilcox 2001) nor gain as much media attention in 1996 as 1992. In 1992 more than 16 percent of all campaign stories in The New York Times were about Perot, while in 1996 less than 5 percent of the stories mentioned him.[8] Additionally, many of the issues which were salient and helped his campaign in 1992 were no longer important four years later (Rapoport and Stone 2005). With the economy growing and the budget deficit shrinking, several of the important issues from the 1992 presidential campaign no longer seemed pressing to many voters. Similarly, the Republican Revolution of 1994 demonstrated to many voters that change could occur within the two-party system without the presence of a major third party candidate (Rapoport and Stone 2005). Perot's credibility suffered from a bruising primary battle which Governor Richard Lamm accused of being fixed, was shut out of the debates, and found less viewers for his infomercials (Nordin 2001). In short, Perot in 1996 was not the renegade force he was in 1992, and, as such, was able to attract only half of the voters during his second campaign (Mayer and Wilcox 2001). This theory also would have predicted a major third party presidential candidate in 1976 when President Ford faced Reagan in the Republican primary, however, it is important to remember that Ford was not a traditional incumbent and never won a national election.

Additionally, at the individual level, in most cases voters do not take into account the other party's candidate when deciding to support the third party candidate. When the data on feelings about the two major party candidates is disaggregated, we find that people turn to a major third party candidate when they dislike their own candidate, and in only two cases do a partisan's feelings about the opposition party's candidates have an effect on

supporting a major third party candidate. Simply put, when a voter does not like their party's candidate they will look for an alternative rather than supporting the other party's candidate.

This demonstrates that there is an underlying partisanship which is strong enough to prevent large numbers of voters in one party to cross over to the other party when they find their candidate is unacceptable. When the party coalition crumbles, partisans of the majority party still do not defect en masse to the other party. Instead, they seek another alternative, presumably because there is some pressure which prevents them from voting for the other major party. Therefore, at these times, when the coalition is struggling, and partisanship is declining, disaffected members of the major parties still find something so unappealing about the other major party that they would take their chances with a major third party challenger rather than completely defect. Even at these times, there might be a hidden partisan pull which does not allow voters who support major third party candidates to support the opposition party candidate, even if that candidate is no more or less popular than the average minority party candidate.

Moreover, the data indicating that viable major third party candidates emerge when both major party candidates are unpopular is not wholly correct. Rather, major third party candidates appear when the incumbent is considered unpopular both with his party and the electorate at large. Because of this, major third party candidates appear when presidents have so alienated their base of support among their party faithful that the party members rebel against the president by supporting an insurgent candidate in the party primaries. At the aggregate level, there is no substantial difference in the level of support for the challenging major party candidates during years when major third party candidates emerge and when they do not. Far from being a popular, consensus candidate, the challenging major party candidate tends to be someone who was only capable of winning a plurality or bare majority of the votes of his party during the primaries.

This has a significant impact on our understanding of both the emergence of major third party candidates in particular, and the balance of power in presidential elections in general. When modern political entrepreneurs decide to enter into presidential campaigns as third party candidates, they do not take into account the relative strength or weakness of the challenging major party. Because the challenging major party always has a sizable amount of dissention and disorganization, it is only when this playing field is leveled by creating dissention in the incumbent party that major third party candidates may enter. The strength of the governing coalition, therefore, is the important variable in the major third party candidate's decision. If this coalition is splintered or weak, then the opportunity is present for a major third party candidate to run.

APPENDIX

Dependent Variable: Did respondent vote for a minor party candidate? (0 = no; 1 = yes)

Independent Variables:

Democratic Feeling: A 1 to 100 scale of the respondents feeling of the Democratic candidate where 1 is strong dislike and 100 is strong support.

Republican Feeling: A 1 to 100 scale of the respondents feeling of the Republican candidate where 1 is strong dislike and 100 is strong support.

Party Strength: A 0 to 3 scale where 0 equals independent and 3 equals strong partisan.

Difference Between Parties: A dichotomous variable asking if the respondent thinks there are any important differences between the parties. (0 = no; 1 = yes)

South: Controls for Southern states.

Rural: A three point scale for describing the respondent's residence where 1 = urban areas; 2 = suburban areas; 3 = rural areas.

Age: The respondent's age in years

National Economy: A scale of the respondent's perceptions of the national economy over the previous year where 1 = it has gotten better; 3 = it stayed the same; 5 = it has gotten worse.

Trust in government: Based on a combination of question asking the respondent "How much do you trust the federal government to do what is right?" "Is the federal government run by a few interests or for the benefit of all?" "How much does the federal government waste tax money?" and "How many government officials are crooked?" Higher scores indicate more trust in government.

NOTES

[1]It is important to remember that in a two-party political system, such as the United States, successful and viable third party campaigns are, at best, terms to be used loosely. Because of this, this work will follow Burnham's (1970) definition of major third party candidates as those who receive more than 5 percent of the popular vote, and will focus on the elections of 1968, 1980, 1992, and 1996.

[2]The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). THE 1948-2004 ANES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2005. These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Nos. SBR-9707741, SBR-9317631, SES-9209410, SES-9009379, SES-8808361, SES-8341310, SES-8207580, and SOC77-08885. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding organizations.

[3]This follows the idea that the winning candidates in primaries which are highly contentious—or primaries in general, rather than caucuses—are more likely to lose that state in the presidential election (Lengle and Owens 1995). However, other scholars have

argued that when other factors which are unique to each particular election are taken into account, divisive primaries lose their explanatory power in predicting general election outcomes (Atkeson 1998).

[4]Following both Gold and Wattenberg, this study will use feeling thermometers from the American National Election Study. In this study, respondents are asked to rank their feelings about a candidate on a scale from 0 to 100, answers between 0 and 49 are negative, 50 is neutral, and 51 to 100 is considered a positive feeling about the candidate.

[5]During 1976, President Gerald Ford faced former governor Ronald Reagan during the primaries. However, Ford was not an incumbent in the traditional sense, but entered the White House after the Watergate scandal and the resignations of President Richard Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew, and was never elected to the post.

[6]Because this analysis involves a dichotomous dependent variable, voting for a third party candidate or not, OLS regressing analysis assumptions are violated and probit analysis is used to estimate the effect of each of the independent variables. The following equation was estimated: $Pr(Y_i=1) = Pr(a+B_1X_i+\ldots+B_jX_k)$.

[7]True independents were not considered for treatment in this study because there were too few to create a reliable sample. In only one of the years did the ANES interview more than 18 people (0.007 percent of the sample) who considered themselves truly politically independent and voted for a third party candidate.

[8]Author's compilation.

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