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## Context and legacy of the 1992 Perot presidential campaign

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THE CONTEXT AND LEGACY OF THE 1992 PEROT PRESIDENTIAL  
CAMPAIGN

by

JOHN DALY

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Senior Scholars' Program

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## **Abstract**

American politics has traditionally been dominated by major parties and their candidates. Third party and independent candidates have rarely played more than a peripheral role in elections, and when they have, it has only been a transient phenomenon. Ross Perot's independent candidacy in the 1992 election was different. Perot was a significant part of the 1992 election, he overcame a number of the traditional barriers facing nonmajor party candidates, and he received the second highest percentage of the popular vote of any nonmajor party candidate this century. Perot's continued involvement in American politics following the election has made him unique among nonmajor party candidates, as he has defied the pattern of nonmajor party candidates fading into obscurity after an election. Perot's continued involvement in American politics offers the potential for significant nonmajor party activity in the future.

This paper examines the context and legacy of the 1992 Perot presidential campaign. The traditional barriers facing modern nonmajor party candidates and the historical context of Perot's 1992 campaign will be explored by looking at the candidacies of George Wallace in 1968 and John Anderson in 1980. The 1992 Perot campaign and Perot's post-election political activity will be discussed and evaluated in order to determine the potential legacies of the 1992 Perot campaign.

## The Context and Legacy of the 1992 Presidential Campaign

### Introduction

American politics has historically focused on two major parties, such as the Democrats and Republicans, and the individual candidates they nominate for elective office. Third parties and independent candidates have not been a significant part of the political norm in America. Such nonmajor party organizations and candidates have operated on the periphery of American politics, only occasionally breaking into the political mainstream, and even then only as transient players.

The independent candidacy of Ross Perot was a significant part of the 1992 election, and different from many previous nonmajor party candidacies. While there have been many previous independent and third party candidates for president, Perot is uncommon because he was respected as a serious candidate, he played a significant role in the race, and was relatively successful at the polls. Perot received serious consideration from voters, as is evidenced by surveys conducted during the 1992 campaign. The major party candidates also considered Perot a serious candidate, as indicated by their decision to invite Perot to share the stage with them in the presidential debates. The Perot campaign was also unusual in that it was able to overcome a number of barriers regarding ballot access and campaign finance in order to compete with the major party campaigns. On election day, Perot further established himself among nonmajor party candidates, by garnering the third highest percentage of the presidential popular vote than any other nonmajor candidate in American history.<sup>1</sup>

Perot's success in 1992 is cause for speculation about the potential for renewed nonmajor party activity in American politics, and perhaps for the formation of a genuine third party. Political scientist Theodore Lowi, who has recently begun to champion the need for a third party, has noted that the 1992 Perot presidential campaign demonstrates the

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<sup>1</sup> J. David Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 3.

potential for a genuine third party to develop. Lowi argues that Perot's 1992 presidential bid was different from other nonmajor party presidential candidates because Perot's support was not centered on specific issues and policies. Instead, says Lowi, Perot's supporters comprised a large portion of an electorate dissatisfied with the major parties and the two party system in general. Lowi regards Perot's strong showing in the popular vote as an indicator that the time is again ripe for the formation of a genuine third party. While he is skeptical that Perot himself can form a genuine third party, Lowi has developed a set of criteria that he feels would have to be met for a third party to develop in the future.

Perot's continued political activity following the 1992 election constitutes another way in which he has distinguished himself from previous nonmajor party candidates. Previous nonmajor party candidates have tended to fade into obscurity following an election, or at least proven incapable of exerting much political influence. Perot has defied the pattern by forming a national political organization called United We Stand America, debating Vice President Gore on the NAFTA agreement, endorsing candidates in the 1994 midterm elections, and taking the first steps towards forming a third party for 1996 and future elections. This continued involvement in politics is further reason to examine his role in modern politics and his potential impact on future elections.

This paper explores the historical context and potential legacies of the 1992 Perot presidential campaign. First, the American electoral system will be examined to understand the foundation for two-party dominance and the broad historical context of the limited success for nonmajor party candidates. The specific institutional barriers facing modern candidates will then be examined by looking at the most significant recent nonmajor party candidates before Perot, George Wallace in 1968 and John Anderson in 1980. Using the Wallace and Anderson campaigns as recent historical context, this paper will examine why and how Perot was so different and successful in 1992. Lowi's criteria for a genuine third party will then be examined, and applied to Perot's actions after 1992. The potential legacy of the 1992 Perot campaign will be explored by incorporating the political changes Perot

has induced since 1992, Lowi's criteria for a third party, and Perot's continuing role in American politics.

### The Roots of Two Party Dominance

The electoral dominance of the Democratic and Republican parties is the current example of the American political system's historical tendency towards two-party control. However, the political system has not always been dominated by two major parties. In fact, the founding father's intent was to create a system which would not be dominated by political parties. In considering what form of government should be adopted for the recently liberated colonies, America's founding fathers clearly expressed opinions against the formation of political parties in America. According to A. James Reichley, a political scholar who has studied American political parties, the founders believed:

Parties, by framing every issue in terms of winners and losers...undermine this indispensable willingness to seek at some level the common good rather than the satisfaction of special interests. Parties, therefore, are socially destructive and must be considered, as Madison wrote, a potentially "mortal disease"; (sic) as Hamilton claimed, an "avenue to tyranny;" and as Washington insisted, a source of "frightful despotism."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the opposition of the founding fathers towards political parties, there was only the briefest period after the Constitutional convention without organized parties. By 1788 the Federalist party was founded, and by 1796, with the formation of the Democratic-Republicans by Jefferson, a foundation for two party competition was established. It was not until 1836 that the two party "duopoly in national party competition" was cemented with the establishment of the Democrat and the Whig parties (later replaced by the Republican party in 1854).<sup>3</sup> Since then, two parties have dominated the political arena, and third party challenges, aside from the Republicans replacing the Whigs, have never been viable for more than one election.

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<sup>2</sup> As appears in Gordon Black and Benjamin Black, *The Politics of American Discontent* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Beck and Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America (7th Edition)* (New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p. 33.

How and why has a two party system established itself so firmly in the United States, enduring like it has in no other democracy?<sup>4</sup> A number of explanations start with "institutional theories," which focus on the institutions of American government and how they are predisposed to offer a foundation for two party competition. For example, the use of single-member districts and a plurality electoral system benefits a two-party framework. Plurality elections to elect a single representative for a district offer no reward to second or third place finishers.<sup>5</sup> The candidate with most votes wins, and there is no consideration given to the other candidates. Under such rules, a candidate can best achieve victory by building a broad coalition of supporters based on a common ideology or goal, in order to gain a large number of votes.<sup>6</sup> The exercise of building coalitions to broaden a politician's support "produces a pressure for two distinct coalitions to emerge in each district."<sup>7</sup> Broad coalitions are favored by voters because of the clear choices they offer, and with broad coalitions there is very little room left for alternative parties to define themselves.

The electoral process focuses attention on single person offices such as the presidency and governorships, further hindering nonmajor parties. The major party organizations thus feel a certain need to compete for these executive offices, a fact that works against local or regional parties "that may elect candidates in their own bailiwicks," but cannot build the necessary support to contend for high profile government positions.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, a third party must focus on organizing and contending for these executive offices, a significantly larger undertaking than running at the local level.

A final institutional explanation for two-party dominance is related to the system of direct primary elections. Just as a two-party system is favored by plurality elections, so also does it benefit from the open nature of direct primaries used to select major party candidates. Primaries offer "dissident groups an opportunity to compete for nominations

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<sup>4</sup> Beck and Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* , p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Black and Black, *The Politics of American Discontent* , p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Beck and Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* , p. 42.

within the dominant party," providing a more viable option to candidates with dissenting views than the alternative of mounting a challenge through forming a third party.<sup>9</sup>

Another set of theories advanced to explain the two-party system are based on the "social consensus" that exists among most Americans. Americans by and large have accepted the fundamental "social, economic, and political institutions" governing the country. As Paul Allen Beck has noted, Americans have "accepted the Constitution and its governmental apparatus, a regulated but free-enterprise economy, and (perhaps to a lesser extent) American patterns of social class and status." Without major division on the basic foundations of American society, "the compromises necessary to bring them [dissident groups] into one of the major parties are easier to make."<sup>10</sup> The parties have also continued to reflect the "social consensus" that characterizes American public opinion and have worked to "prevent deep cleavages" that could provide fodder for a meaningful third party challenge. Some political scientists believe the consensus agreed upon by most Americans is now so solidified that any erosion that may be occurring poses "little threat to the party system."<sup>11</sup>

While the two-party dominance may be rooted in institutional and social factors, it has surely been protected and perpetuated by the major party organizations. Barriers have been created by the parties to discourage and limit the effectiveness of third parties. Such barriers include tough ballot access requirements in many states, restrictions governing campaign finance, and maintenance of the electoral college system of electing the president. Such restrictions and barriers are justified as being "'reasonable requirements' for regulating the electoral process, but their real intent is to make it difficult for a national, or even regional, third party to form."<sup>12</sup>

The role of these barriers can be seen by examining the 1968 and 1980 presidential election contests. In both elections, nonmajor party candidates encountered barriers that

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Black and Black, *The Politics of American Discontent*, p. 139.

can be considered institutionalized in modern presidential contests. Examinations of the nonmajor party candidacies in the 1968 and 1980 elections will also serve to highlight why the Perot campaign was different from earlier campaigns. The 1992 candidacy will be assessed in comparison with the barriers, challenges, and successes of candidates in 1968 and 1980.

### **Traditional Barriers and the 1968 and 1980 Elections**

Nonmajor party presidential candidates have traditionally faced a number of barriers to entry into the electoral process. These include the legal requirements for ballot access, difficulty raising funds or qualifying for federal funding, and the problems associated with the winner-take-all electoral college system. Together these factors have served to restrict meaningful competition in presidential races to the nominees of the major parties. The effect of these traditional barriers can be understood by examining the third party candidacy of George Wallace in 1968, and John Anderson's independent presidential bid in 1980.

### **The Election of 1968**

The seeds of George Wallace's 1968 third party campaign were sown four years earlier during the 1964 presidential primaries. Wallace had gained national exposure in 1963 for blocking the doorway at the University of Alabama to keep two black students from entering. The popularity Wallace received for opposing integration encouraged him to enter three Democratic primaries in 1964. Wallace received over 30 percent of the vote in each of the primaries, and because of his strong showing he considered mounting an independent campaign. Wallace stopped considering an independent campaign after conservative Barry Goldwater secured the Democratic party nomination.<sup>13</sup> Wallace

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Rosenstone, Roy Behr, Edward Lazarus, *Third Parties in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 110.



considered Goldwater's selection an indicator that Wallace's primary appearances had been successful at "conservatizing" the Democrats.<sup>14</sup>

George Wallace's American Independent Party was formed during the 1968 presidential campaign because Wallace believed he could best represent the views of those voters who did not share the beliefs of the major party candidates. Wallace believed that America should continue to seek victory in Vietnam; that a "law and order" conservative approach should be taken toward domestic unrest; and that segregation in race relations should be promoted.<sup>15</sup> Republican candidate Richard Nixon and Democrat Hubert Humphrey both favored ending America's involvement in Vietnam. Nixon and Humphrey, to differing degrees, also agreed on the need to end segregation. Many voters did not share these stances adopted by the major party candidates, and were open to an alternative, like Wallace, who better represented their views.

Wallace enjoyed significant southern support throughout the election and sought to capture enough electoral votes to throw the election into the House of Representatives, a move he hoped would induce one of the major parties to pledge his platform to gain a winning majority.<sup>16</sup> Wallace's support among young, white, rural, southern males resulted in the candidate garnering 13.5 percent of the popular vote, and 45 electoral votes in five states.<sup>17</sup> This was the third highest popular vote percentage garnered by a nonmajor party candidate in this century (see Table 1), and has since only been surpassed by Ross Perot in 1992. Despite this success, his plan to throw the election into the House was never realized since Nixon won the electoral college handily, capturing 302 electoral votes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel A. Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore White, *The Making of the President, 1968* (New York, Atheneum Publishers, 1969), Inside Cover.

Table 1

**Top Ten Third Party and Independent Candidacies  
in Popular Vote Percentage, 1900-1992**

<b>Election</b>	<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Percent of Vote</b>
1904	Eugene Debs-Socialist	2.98
1908	Eugene Debs-Socialist	2.82
1912	Theodore Roosevelt-Progressive	27.39
	Eugene Debs-Socialist	5.99
1916	Allan Benson-Socialist	3.18
1920	Eugene Debs-Socialist	3.42
1924	Robert La Follette-Progressive	16.56
1968	George Wallace-American Independent	13.53
1980	John Anderson-Independent	6.61
1992	Ross Perot-Independent	18.86

Source: J. David Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 296-297.

Although Wallace had a relatively strong showing for a third party in 1968, his campaign faced many obstacles not encountered by his major party opponents. This was not surprising, as third parties have traditionally had to overcome obstacles that the major party nominees do not have to face, such as qualifying for the ballot. Ballot access was not even a consideration for major party candidates before, during, or after the 1968 election, as they automatically qualified on each of the 50 state ballots. However, for nonmajor party candidates, the process of qualifying for the ballot involves efforts in each of the fifty states, since each state sets its own procedure for qualifying, with differing degrees of difficulty. While some states require simple measures such as submitting a small monetary sum or a short petition signed by supporters, other states use their qualification procedures to discourage third party and independent candidates. Examples of procedures designed to discourage alternative candidates include filing deadlines set months or even more than a year before the election or petitions requiring signatures by a substantial percentage of the

state's registered voters. Some states have no procedure whatsoever for nonmajor party candidates to qualify.<sup>19</sup>

Wallace and the American Independent Party were the first third party in American history to gain access on the ballot in all fifty states. However, the party had to expend significant amounts of time and money to achieve the same kind of access automatically granted to the major part nominees. Legal costs associated with gaining access in 26 states totaled \$118,175. This sum was greater than the amounts spent by Wallace's campaign on polling, rental fees, and other miscellaneous costs, and almost as large as the \$132,000 spent on postage during the entire campaign. Wallace spent \$35,000 gaining access in Ohio alone, and another \$33,000 in California. Other non-legal costs associated with gaining ballot access totaled an additional \$169,180, of which \$165,000 was spent in New York and Massachusetts alone. More importantly, many estimate that if unreported ballot access costs from the fall of 1967 were included, the total cost of getting on the ballot in all fifty states would reach \$3 million, out of the campaign's total estimated budget between \$9-10 million.<sup>20</sup>

Wallace's achievement of qualifying for access to the ballot in every state did not ensure that his party would continue on the ballot in future elections. Many states require that nonmajor party candidates requalify for the ballot following each election. In many states, procedures mandate that a candidate gain a certain percentage of the vote in order to remain on the ballot for the next election cycle. Others require that a candidate requalify altogether, regardless of the candidates success in an election.<sup>21</sup> Following the 1968 election, Wallace's American Independence Party remained on the ballot in only nineteen states for the next election, and only six after 1970, meaning a substantial effort would have had to have been mounted to gain access again in the 1972 election.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections*, pp. 88-114.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Alexander, *Financing the 1968 Election* (Lexington, MA.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1971), pp. 90-91.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

The costs of ballot access would not have been so significant if the campaign had not been further disadvantaged by campaign finance barriers. The 1968 election was conducted before the adoption of the major campaign finance legislation of the 1970's. Consequently, presidential campaigns relied on party organizations for significant financial support. Support provided by the major party organizations and committees included contributions to their respective presidential nominee's campaign, help with coordinating fundraising drives, and, after the election, loan repayments for debts incurred during the campaign.<sup>23</sup> The Republican party helped Nixon with direct contributions totaling approximately \$2.7 million from party coffers. The Republican National Committee also helped the Nixon campaign raise funds; as a substantial list of contributors to the RNC's Sustaining Fund was used as a foundation for Nixon's mail drive to solicit funds. The Democratic National Committee and smaller party committees provided \$5 million in contributions and fundraising support for the Humphrey campaign. After the election, the DNC assumed liability for over \$6 million in loans and debts incurred by the Humphrey campaign.<sup>24</sup>

Wallace entered the 1968 race with a serious financial disadvantage. The two major parties were in a significantly better position to aid Nixon and Humphrey than Wallace's third party was to aid their candidate. Wallace's campaign did not have the party organization's mailing lists, contribution potential, or assurance for covering loans, and thus had to rely on small donor fundraising initiated by his campaign. Wallace received over 75 percent of his contributions from donors giving \$100 or less.<sup>25</sup> These small donations helped build a war chest, of between \$7-10 million. This amount, however, did not come close to matching the expenditures of the major party candidates; as \$45 million was spent by the Republicans, and \$35 million was spent by the Democrats in 1968.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 146-153.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-86.

While the Wallace campaign qualified for the ballot and mounted a challenge to the major party candidates in all fifty states, the winner-take-all nature of the electoral college in the general election continued to be a barrier to nonmajor party success. The electoral college awards all of a state's electoral votes to the plurality winner of the state's popular vote (except currently in two states, Maine and Nebraska, where the electoral votes are awarded in the same manner on a district basis). The electoral college has the mechanical effect of discouraging third parties because state-by-state there is no reward for gaining five or ten percent of the vote; all that matters is which candidate places first in each state's election. Such winner-take-all provisions make the electoral college an example of "Duverger's Law," a tenet of political behavior which states that winner-take-all provisions in plurality elections favor the formation of two distinct coalitions, a condition which fosters the dominance of two major parties.<sup>27</sup> According to Duverger's Law, the electoral college also has a psychological effect on voters. Duverger believed that voters would understand the mechanical effect of awarding electoral votes with winner-take-all provisions, and would realize that independent and third party candidates are not as viable as candidates from the two major coalitions, so that voting for a nonmajor party candidate in a sense would be "wasting" a vote. The logical effect would be that voters would tend to vote strategically for the best viable candidate, rather than "wasting" a vote on an alternative candidate. Such barriers make the electoral college difficult for nonmajor parties to compete.<sup>28</sup> While it is difficult to document the impact of the psychological effects outlined by Duverger, the mechanical effect of the winner-take-all system has clearly served to misrepresent election results and minimize the influence of third party candidates.

While the Wallace campaign does not provide any concrete evidence of the "wasted vote" effect, the winner-take-all system did misrepresent Wallace's popular support in the 1968 election. Although Wallace received 13.5 percent of the total popular vote, the 45

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<sup>27</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London, Methuen & CO, LTD, 1967).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Abramson, John Aldrich, Phil Paolino, David Rohde, "Third-Party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 110, no. 3, 1995. pp. 352-355.

electoral college votes he received in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana only represented approximately 8 percent of the total electoral college vote.<sup>29</sup>

In the context of nonmajor party candidates, Wallace received a relatively good showing in the electoral college. In 1924 Robert La Follette received 16.5 percent of the popular vote, and only received 13 electoral college votes. Of the 16 nonmajor party candidacies receiving 1 percent of the popular vote before Wallace, only 3 had received electoral votes, and only Roosevelt's 1912 campaign had won a larger share of the electoral college vote.<sup>30</sup> The poor showings of nonmajor party candidates in the twentieth century underlines how unrepresentative the college has been for nonmajor party candidates.

The electoral college also undermines nonmajor party efforts because it potentially provides limits on the number of states where a candidate can be competitive. If a given state is dominated by voters who support one particular political party, that state is likely to award its electoral votes to that party's candidate. In states where voters overwhelmingly support one party, it limits the competitiveness of other party candidates in that state, and provides the favored party with a head start on the electoral vote count. A state's trend of voting for a particular party in a series of presidential elections provides a basis for considering such a state to be dominated by voters of that party, and to be predisposed to continue supporting that party. For instance, in elections between 1948 and 1968 (aside from the Johnson Democratic landslide in 1964), only four of the seventeen states west of the Mississippi had supported a Democratic nominee in one election.<sup>31</sup> These Republican states were uncontested under the winner take all system, meaning that Wallace had a limited number of states in which he could realistically compete with the major parties.

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<sup>29</sup> based on election results in Theodore White, *The making of the President, 1968*, Inside Cover.

<sup>30</sup> Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery*, pp. 296-7.

<sup>31</sup> *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (3rd ed.)* (Washington, D.C. : Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1994), p. 47.

## The Election of 1980

The John Anderson campaign in 1980 differed from the 1968 Wallace campaign in many ways. The reasons Anderson ran, the manner in which he challenged the major party nominees, how he was affected by the traditional barriers, and his support on election day were all different from Wallace's campaign in 1968.

The 1980 National Unity Campaign of independent candidate John Anderson started after Anderson fared poorly in the Republican party presidential primaries. Anderson had the experience of 20 years in the House representing Illinois when he decided to run for President. There were no major divisive issues that distinguished Anderson from Republican nominee Ronald Reagan and incumbent Democratic President Carter. Rather, Anderson justified his candidacy by citing an alarming shift to the right in the Republican party that left little room for more moderate members like himself. He campaigned on a progressive platform promoting gun control, an increased gas tax, no new nuclear programs, support for the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, more security for homemakers, and better child care for working parents. Anderson's decision to run was also a result of his dissatisfaction with the major party nominees. Anderson felt Carter had failed as a president, and Reagan was too old and out of touch to represent not only Republicans, but America in general. Anderson's campaign attracted many independents disenfranchised with the major parties, and found support from progressive moderates of both parties. He received 6.6 percent of the popular vote without winning any states, falling far short of his own goals and those of critics who had relegated him to being a "spoiler" who could send the election to the House.<sup>32</sup>

Like Wallace, Anderson overcame the significant hurdle to qualify for the ballot in all fifty states, but only after a prolonged and costly effort. When he announced his independent candidacy on June 8, 1980, deadlines for filing as an independent had passed in five states (Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, New Mexico, and Ohio).<sup>33</sup> Rather than forsake

<sup>32</sup> Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery*, pp. 122-126.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Alexander, *Financing the 1980 Election* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), p. 350.

the opportunity to compete in these states, Anderson decided to challenge the early deadlines in court. Anderson contended that such early deadlines were unreasonable because the primary season was not finished and the major party candidates were not known. The deadlines were thus set too early for potential independent candidates to decide on a challenge.<sup>34</sup> In addition, five other states (New York, West Virginia, Arizona, Nebraska, and Texas) had measures that forbade primary voters to sign petitions for independents, and North Carolina even had a “sore loser” statute that disqualified candidates who had run in primaries from later registering as independents. Utah discouraged independent candidacies by requiring that each signature on petitions be notarized, and Michigan did not even have a ballot access procedure for independent candidates.<sup>35</sup>

The task of qualifying was complicated by the initial opposition of the Carter campaign and the DNC. Early in Anderson's effort Democratic strategists discussed plans to spend money to challenge the independent's ballot access. In May and June the media reported that the DNC had supposedly earmarked over \$200,000 to fight Anderson's ballot access campaign,<sup>36</sup> and some stories reported that the DNC had retained lawyers to aid citizens challenging Anderson.<sup>37</sup> The DNC denied rumors of earmarking money to fight Anderson, but was open about wishing to challenge the independent candidate. The maintained this position until late June when Anderson's support began to rise. At this point Carter took a more conciliatory approach towards Anderson to avoid angering potential moderate supporters.<sup>38</sup>

The Anderson campaign spent upwards of \$2 million to qualify for the ballot in all fifty states. Over \$1 million was spent carrying out state petition drives, another \$250,000 on the necessary administrators to coordinate the effort, and \$672,000 on legal costs.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>37</sup> “Democrats Said to Join Lawsuit Against Anderson,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1980, p. A8.

<sup>38</sup> “Carter Dons Kid Gloves in Anti-Anderson Effort,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 19, 1980, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, *Financing the 1980 Election*, p. 351.



The legal costs were mostly a result of the challenges that had to be brought in states with early deadlines or similar discouraging statutes. Despite Anderson's efforts to change ballot access rules in 1980, they continued to discourage nonmajor party action in later elections. In fact, part of Anderson's decision not to run again in the 1984 election as an independent was based on a failed \$100,000 effort to qualify for the ballot in California in between elections.<sup>40</sup>

The finance barriers challenging nonmajor party candidates significantly changed during the 1970s as a result of the adoption of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). While the FECA was intended to reform campaign finance and provide a more level playing field for potential candidates, the act created greater obstacles for nonmajor party candidates. One objective of the FECA was to limit the appearance of corruption and the influence of large "fat cat" donors. To achieve this goal the act established a number of contribution limits. For instance, the act limited individual contributions to \$1,000 and contributions made by multicandidate political action committees were limited to \$5,000. This meant that candidates could no longer rely on large contributions from rich individuals and companies to finance their campaigns. The act also sought to limit the soaring costs of presidential campaigns. To control these costs, the act set a number of expenditure limits for different stages of presidential campaigns. The FECA also required full public disclosure of all donations and expenditures, creating further compliance costs for the campaigns.<sup>41</sup>

Compliance with these expenditure limits for presidential candidates was voluntary, but voluntary cooperation was required in order to take advantage of public funding provisions also included in the FECA. The act established the Presidential Election Campaign Fund, which by means of a checkoff on a voter's tax filings, would collect and supply qualified candidates with funding. The fund provides qualified candidates with matching funds in the primary campaigns, money for national conventions, and funding for

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Alexander, *Financing the 1984 Election* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), p. 384.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Corrado, *Paying for Presidents* (New York: The Twentieth Century Press, 1993), pp. 1-59.

the general election campaign.<sup>42</sup> In order to qualify for this funding, candidates had to agree to the contribution and expenditure limits outlined in the FECA. In the general election campaign, candidates who accepted the full public subsidy also had to agree not to raise any private monies for their campaign.

Public financing was automatically available and approved for the major party candidates who agreed to the contribution and expenditure limits. Public financing provided the major party candidates in 1980 with over \$5 million each in matching funds during the primaries, a combined \$8 million for the party nominating conventions, and over \$29 million for each candidate to spend in the general election.<sup>43</sup> However, third party candidates could only qualify for retroactive funding following the election, and there were no provisions to supply funding in any way for independent candidates. Even when a third party candidate qualifies for retroactive funding under the FECA provisions, it is only a small proportion of what the major party candidates receive. Under the law, a nonmajor party candidate who receives at least 5 percent of the total popular vote receives a proportionate share based on the average vote of the two major party candidates. For instance, if a third party candidate were to receive 20 percent of the popular vote, and the major party candidates an average of 40 percent, the third party candidate would receive the proportionate amount (50 percent) of the total amount awarded to the major party candidates.<sup>44</sup> In order to potentially qualify for this retroactive funding after the campaign, nonmajor party candidates are obliged to observe the restrictive limits on contributions and expenditures throughout the entire campaign. Lastly, before qualifying for retroactive funding is even assured, nonmajor party candidates are expected to comply with disclosure requirements, which forces them to incur additional legal costs.<sup>45</sup>

While Anderson was hindered by the campaign finance barriers facing an independent candidate, he did manage to make some headway in challenging the obstacles

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, *Financing the 1980 Election*, p.112:

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

created by the new law. A victory for the campaign came in early September with a ruling by the FEC that as an independent candidate, Anderson could qualify for retroactive federal funding following the election. The conditions established for independent candidates to qualify for retroactive funding were the same as those established for third parties, including receiving at least 5% of the popular vote in the general election, and that Anderson would be limited to receiving only a proportionate share of the full subsidy provided to the major party candidates.<sup>46</sup>

The FEC ruling on retroactive federal funding provided Anderson with the opportunity to use the prospective retroactive funding to secure bank loans for the final weeks of the campaign. However, the Carter campaign also sought to limit access to this source of funds. The Carter campaign leaked a letter to banks hinting that loans to Anderson could break their bank charters because repayment of the loans was not assured, because the funding would only occur if Anderson received 5 percent of the popular vote. Anderson contested his inability to secure substantial loans, and on October 2 the FEC ruled that banks could legally lend to the Anderson campaign. Eventually Anderson received \$4.2 million in public monies.<sup>47</sup> But the loans and assurances of retroactive funding were not enough to support his campaign. Consequently, the independent had to rely on private solicitations, especially direct mail fundraising to generate the contributions that made up most of the campaign fund.<sup>48</sup>

The major parties also enjoyed other advantages under the FECA campaign finance rules. Major party candidates who accepted public funding also benefited from provisions allowing the candidate's national party committee to spend money on behalf of the candidate. Expenditures on behalf of presidential candidates by recognized party committees were limited to \$4.6 million, which could be raised from individual contributions limited to \$20,000 a year, and multicandidate committee contributions limited

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

to \$15,000 a year. Anderson sought to get the National Unity Campaign Committee recognized as a national party committee, which would have allowed it to spend as much as the Democratic and Republican National Committees. However, the FEC denied the request to recognize the National Unity Campaign Committee as a national party committee, because the committee supported no other candidates than Anderson and his running mate Lucey.<sup>49</sup>

As a result of these restraints on his campaign fundraising, Anderson was only able to raise \$17.1 million in total finances to spend before the election, approximately \$10 million of which came from private contributions that were subject to limits. The rest of Anderson's financing came from bank loans secured against the prospective public funding, as well as loans solicited in the last days of the campaign from major contributors. For example, Stewart Mott, a wealthy activist for liberal causes, who had provided funding for Anderson during the formative stages of his independent effort, extended a \$500,000 line of credit to the campaign during the general election. Even with the help of Mott and other donors, Anderson's \$17 million did not even begin to approach the money spent by the Carter and Reagan campaigns, as the major party candidates outspent Anderson by a two to one margin. Anderson's finances were further hurt by his need allocate funds to legal challenges to gain ballot access and federal funding. Because of these barriers Anderson never had the capital for a competitive campaign, as he could not afford a serious media campaign, to hire appropriate staff, or fund needed travel.<sup>50</sup>

The electoral college was another traditional barrier that continued to pose challenges to nonmajor party candidates in 1980. Since electoral votes continued to be awarded on a winner-take-all basis, the two major parties continued to dominate the electoral voting. The winner-take-all provisions also had the usual effect of distorting the popular vote results. In 19 states, Reagan received less than 50% of the popular vote, yet

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 341-352.

he received all the electoral votes of those states.<sup>51</sup> While Anderson received almost 7 percent of the total popular vote, he was not able to win a single state under the winner-take-all provisions, and thus received no electoral college votes.

The winner-take-all provisions also continued to favor single party domination of specific states, creating a "lock" or at least a headstart in the college for Republican party success. In 1980 a number of western states continued the trend of being predisposed to vote for the Republicans. The seventeen states west of the Mississippi all voted Republican in 1980, providing Reagan with 148 electoral votes, of which the first 123 were assured from states considered uncontested in 1980.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1980 election the electoral college continued to support "wasted vote" concerns among voters. As it became clear near the end of the campaign that Anderson could not win the necessary electoral college votes, or even a single state, the potential existed for Anderson voters to be concerned about "wasting" their votes. Anderson had peaked in the polls with 23 percent in the summer of 1980.<sup>53</sup> His support slowly declined over the fall, and by the final weeks of the campaign Anderson was receiving around 10 percent support in the polls. In the final week before the election, Anderson slipped further in the polls as he dropped to around 7 percent.<sup>54</sup> As Anderson's support dropped in the final weeks of the campaign, the Carter campaign acknowledged the importance of Anderson's voters, and began to target appeals to them to not waste their vote.<sup>55</sup> The Carter campaign ran ads and used press conferences to warn against "wasting your vote" on Anderson. On election day, Anderson took only 6.6 percent of the popular vote, and he acknowledged that Carter's tactics playing up wasted vote concerns had been "devastating" to his election day returns.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Wicker, Tom. "A Good Republican College," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1980, p. A27.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery*, p. 126.

<sup>54</sup> E.J. Dionne, "Poll-Takers Defend Survey Differences," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1980, p. A33.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Drew, *Portrait of an Election: the 1980 Presidential Campaign* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 278.

<sup>56</sup> Frank Smallwood, *The Other Candidates* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983).

The Anderson campaign proved that the traditional barriers facing nonmajor party candidates continued to exist in 1980. Anderson faced serious challenges as an independent candidate trying to qualify for the ballot in all 50 states, challenges that forced him to invest money and energy that would have been better spent directly competing with Carter and Reagan. While Anderson's effort to qualify for retroactive public financing as an independent candidate established a precedent for future independent candidates, the public financing system continued to provide an overwhelming advantage to the major party candidates. The electoral college continued to discourage nonmajor party candidates by awarding state votes on a winner-take-all basis. It continued to reward Republican candidates with a "lock" on the electoral votes of western states, and it distorted the results of the popular vote. The electoral college also continued to provide basis for "wasted vote" concerns of many potential nonmajor party voters.

Nonmajor party activity in the 1968 and 1980 elections was typical not only because the nonmajor party candidates faced significant structural barriers, but also in that the movements behind Wallace and Anderson faded after the elections. The declining presence of Wallace and Anderson was in part because the major parties followed the traditional wisdom of coopting the alternative candidate's message in order to redistribute support back into the major parties.

Nixon effectively coopted Wallace's "law and order" message by 1972, as he helped pass tough crime legislation such as the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 and other legislation.<sup>57</sup> By the time Wallace considered another challenge outside the parties in 1972, he lacked the necessary popular support, even in his southern stronghold areas.<sup>58</sup> Wallace instead returned to the Democratic party and ran as a primary candidate until an attempt was made on his life in Maryland. Wallace's injuries from the

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p. 241.

<sup>57</sup> Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections*, pp. 20-24.

attack forced him to withdraw from the race before the convention. Even if Wallace had been successful in 1972, it would have been as a major party candidate, not as a challenger outside the parties. The American Independence Party had survived without Wallace until the 1972 election, when the party nominated John Schmitz. Unlike Wallace in the previous election, the AIP candidate was not a significant factor in the race, and Schmitz received only 1.4 percent of the popular vote.<sup>59</sup>

The 1980 results in both the popular vote and the electoral college limited the role and influence Anderson could have in politics following the election. With no electoral college victories Anderson had no geographic strongholds to use as a foundation for future political action, and his popular support was insufficient to overcome the perception of a Reagan landslide in 1980. Following the election, Anderson was criticized for helping to elect Reagan by stealing Carter's moderate support, a result that Anderson had pledged to avoid during the campaign. Most of Anderson's voters returned to the major parties following the election. Reagan's choice of George Bush as his running mate placated many of the Republican moderates Anderson had counted on for support, and Democrats could look forward to finding a strong candidate for 1984, no longer obliged to support a weak incumbent like Carter.<sup>60</sup>

### The 1992 Election

On February 20, 1992, a relatively unknown Texas billionaire by the name of Ross Perot appeared on CNN's "Larry King Live" show. During the course of the interview, which focused primarily on politics and the state of the country, Larry King pressed Perot about whether he had any intention of joining the presidential race that was then underway. Perot eventually told King he would consider running as an independent candidate, but only if volunteers got his name on the ballot in all fifty states. The following day, Perot's corporate headquarters in Dallas was flooded with more calls than the switchboard could

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<sup>59</sup> Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*, p. 114.

<sup>60</sup> Drew, *Portrait of an Election: the 1980 Presidential Campaign*, pp. 206, 278.

handle, from volunteers and supporters eager to help get an independent campaign off the ground. The calls continued to come in during the ensuing weeks and a nationwide grassroots organization, with a central nexus at on Perot's Dallas headquarters, began to take shape.<sup>61</sup> The extraordinary outpouring of support Perot received was considered remarkable by the media, and Perot and his campaign began to receive national press coverage. In many ways, the support for an alternative candidate was not so remarkable, especially if voter dissatisfaction with the major party candidates in 1992 is considered.

### The 1992 Primary Campaign

Americans were upset with the federal government in 1992. In January of 1992 the Harris Alienation Index, a barometer of public feelings towards the federal government, reached an all time high as 66 percent of Americans reported feeling alienated from their government. The index measured the country's belief in such statements as: "most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself," and "the people running the country don't really care what happens to you."<sup>62</sup> A January 1992 Roper poll also revealed a pessimistic national mood, as 70 percent of Americans agreed that the country was "on the wrong track."<sup>63</sup> The candidates competing in the major party primaries in 1992 were therefore facing a dissatisfied and skeptical electorate.

The 1992 primary season did little to satisfy the angry electorate. The primaries did not produce candidates who, in general, satisfied and excited voters. The New Hampshire primary on February 18 (which was held two days before Perot's first announcement on "Larry King Live") was an early indicator of the voters' displeasure with the major parties' candidates. The perceived Democratic frontrunner, Governor Bill Clinton, got off to a slow primary start, as he secured only 24.7 percent of the vote against New England local

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Goldman, Thomas DeFrank, Mark Miller, Andrew Murr, Tom Matthews, *Quest for the Presidency: 1992* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), pp. 423-428.

<sup>62</sup> Black and Black, *The Politics of American Discontent*, p. 100.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.



Paul Tsongas, who won with 33.2 percent of the vote.<sup>64</sup> Incumbent president George Bush's victory in the Republican primary was only numerical, as challenger Pat Buchanan and others embarrassed the incumbent by securing 47 percent of the vote.<sup>65</sup> Polls conducted after the New Hampshire primary indicated that voter dissatisfaction remained high. On February 20, 1992, the day Perot first announced on "Larry King Live", polls showed that only 45 percent of voters were satisfied with the field of Democratic candidates, and only 68 percent were satisfied with the Republican candidates, including incumbent President Bush.<sup>66</sup> By March 1, 1992, less than a third of all voters considered either Clinton or Bush close to what they were looking for in a president.<sup>67</sup>

As the primary season continued, voter dissatisfaction went beyond the particular candidates to also encompass the content of the primary campaigns. A Gallup poll reported that 42 percent of Americans thought the candidates were not talking about issues they cared about. Further, 19 percent of potential voters were "undecided" when asked who they would support in a race between President Bush and "a Democrat."<sup>68</sup> The dissatisfaction in the electorate during the primaries led to speculation about possible alternative candidates who might challenge the major party nominees.

While Perot captured the spotlight late in March as a potential alternative candidate to Clinton and Bush, he was not the sole focus of speculation. During the primaries, there were some limited efforts to find an alternative from within the parties. For instance, former Massachusetts senator Paul Tsongas had been part of the Democratic field during the early primary campaign, but abandoned the race when his campaign ran into financial problems. As the primaries continued and it became increasingly clear that Clinton might

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<sup>64</sup> Gerald Pomper (ed.), *The Election of 1992* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 49.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> *CBS News/New York Times* Poll, completed February 20, 1992, Public Opinion Online, Roper Center at University of Connecticut, 1992.

<sup>67</sup> *CBS News/New York Times* Poll, completed March 1, 1992, Public Opinion Online, Roper Center at University of Connecticut, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Gallup Poll, completed March 1, 1992, Public Opinion Online, Roper Center at University of Connecticut, 1992.

capture the Democratic nomination, a small group organized to collect signatures and raise funds in an effort to lure Tsongas back into the race. The group, called "Tcitizens for Tsongas" believed Tsongas better embodied the personal character and professionalism of a Democratic presidential nominee than did Clinton, given Clinton's "slick" professional style and the many questions about his character. Efforts to get alternatives like Tsongas into the race were unsuccessful as Clinton and Bush continued to capture delegates and support from their respective party organizations.<sup>69</sup>

While recognizing the potential for an alternative to Bush and Clinton, Perot was largely reluctant to join the race. Perot's reluctance was first evident to a number of his closest advisors and political operatives who had been pressing him since November of 1991 to consider a run for the presidency. Perot had always told them he was not interested.<sup>70</sup> Even when Perot changed and outwardly began to express an interest in a possible campaign, he placed a number of conditions on his willingness to run, such as qualifying for the ballot in all fifty states. When Perot finally offered himself as an alternative candidate during his February 20 appearance on "Larry King Live," his reluctance was again apparent as King had to ask him five times whether a "scenario" for a campaign existed. Perot also continued to emphasize the precondition of full ballot access, noting "this is all just talk . . . I want to see some sweat."<sup>71</sup> It is also important to note that Perot's "announcement" on "Larry King Live" did not constitute an official announcement of his intention to seek the presidency. Perot said "I'm not asking to be drafted," but he did allow that "if you (the people) want to register me in 50 states . . . I'll promise you this: Between now and the convention, we'll get both parties' heads straight."<sup>72</sup> Perot did not give a formal announcement that he was seeking the presidency until his re-entry to the race over half a year later during the fall general election campaign.

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Mitchell, "Fed-Up Voters Look for a Savior to Spice Up Race," *Orlando Sentinel Tribune*, March 26, 1992, p. A1.

<sup>70</sup> Goldman et al., *Quest for the Presidency: 1992*, pp. 413-419.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>72</sup> "If Drafted, Perot Says He'd Run," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1992, p. A18.

Perot's reluctance to make himself an alternative candidate continued after his appearance with Larry King. Despite thousands of calls coming into his Dallas office on a daily basis, Perot continued to press acquaintances about who might run instead of him. Former senator and Democratic vice-presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen was the only Democrat on Perot's list, and James Baker the only potential Republican who Perot respected and could have had a viable chance at winning. Perot understood that neither Bentsen nor Baker were in any position to launch a bid for the presidency in 1992,<sup>73</sup> and with his own popular support rising, Perot kept developing plans to offer an alternative to Clinton and Bush. Perot continued making media appearances and eventually pledged to spend "whatever it takes," even \$100 million on his campaign.<sup>74</sup> Perot's willingness to commit personal funds to a campaign endeavor was a significant sign of his increasing commitment to the endeavor. His pledge to spend his own money was another aspect of Perot's lone potential to challenge the parties; only he had the personal financial resources needed to mount a viable presidential campaign. In other words, while many recognized the potential for a major party alternative in 1992, few would-be-challengers could have overcome the traditional barrier of campaign finance. Perot, with his \$3 billion in personal finances, had a unique advantage in having enough money to finance a viable challenge to the two major parties.

### **The Traditional Barriers in 1992**

Perot's personal wealth was not only his key into the race, but it provided him with a number of advantages. Perot already had the funds to finance a viable campaign, meaning he had no need to spend time and energy fundraising. Because Perot did not have to rely on fundraising from others, he was able to position himself as the only candidate in the race who was not tied to foreign lobbyists or special interests. Perot also

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<sup>73</sup> Goldman et al., *Quest for the Presidency: 1992*, pp. 425-426.

<sup>74</sup> Herbert Alexander and Anthony Corrado, *Financing the 1992 Election* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), p. 127.

did not need public financing, and chose not to accept these monies. By not accepting public funding, Perot was not subject to the FECA limits on expenditures his campaign could make; he could spend money where, when, and as needed, without worries about budgeting constraints.<sup>75</sup> Perot also claimed that, by not taking public financing, he was not wasting taxpayer dollars on a political campaign, unlike Clinton and Bush. However, the benefits of funding his own campaign also had their price as the press often questioned whether Perot was buying the election. Newspaper articles lamented that "the system is for sale,"<sup>76</sup> and charged Perot with furthering the trend of "more and more millionaires rising from political obscurity to 'buy' elections, out-spending their opponents by ridiculous margins."<sup>77</sup> Perot responded to these charges by acknowledging to his supporters that he was indeed "buying the election . . . I made that deal with you because you can't afford it."<sup>78</sup>

Perot's tremendous wealth helped him overcome the traditional barrier of ballot access. Unlike Wallace and Anderson, who each had to designate significant amounts of their campaign's resources to qualify on the ballot in all fifty states, Perot was able to finance a ballot access drive without compromising the financing of the rest of his campaign. Yet despite this financial advantage, he still faced significant hurdles in gaining access to the ballot. In fact, the challenge of gaining nationwide ballot access was one of Perot's early concerns as he considered an independent candidacy. John Jay Hooker, a Tennessee businessman who had been trying to persuade Perot to run, had to first convince him it was logistically possible. Hooker got an affirmative answer from Richard Winger, a specialist on the state by state ballot access rules.<sup>79</sup> It was only after Winger's assurance early in the primary season that it would be possible to qualify on every state's ballot that

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>76</sup> Martha Burk, "Let's Buy Our Own Election," *USA Today*, June 24, 1992, p. 14A.

<sup>77</sup> Douglas Schwarz, "Perot is Buying the Election, and That's Bad," *Newsday*, July 8, 1992, p. 85.

<sup>78</sup> "Analysts Discuss Upcoming Perot Appearance," *CNN News*, June 18, 1992.

<sup>79</sup> Goldman et al., *Quest for the Presidency: 1992*, p. 418.

Perot communicated his willingness to run, with the condition that supporters organize a drive to put him on the ballot in all fifty states.<sup>80</sup>

Perot had an easier time qualifying for the ballot than Anderson had, due to a number of changes that had occurred in state ballot access requirements between 1980 and 1992. Twelve states had changed their deadlines for when candidates needed to file in order to appear on the ballot. Of the twelve, only Indiana and Washington had moved their deadlines to earlier dates. This made it harder for candidates to qualify, because, as Anderson had argued in 1980, independent candidates often don't decide on a challenge until after the major parties have determined their nominees. Ten other states made their ballot access procedures more accessible. Nine states made their filing dates later (NV, MI, NJ, MA, PA, WV, OH, RI, SD), and Wyoming, which had no qualifying procedure in 1980, adopted one with an August 24 deadline.<sup>81</sup>

Deadlines are not the only important aspect in determining the restrictiveness of a state's ballot access procedure. Another important aspect is the number of signatures a state requires on ballot access petitions, and the provisions governing how these signatures are gathered. Twenty states had changed the signature requirements associated with ballot access. Seven of these made it more difficult for candidates by requiring a greater number of signatures (NC, MI, CO, NH, ND, AL, IN). Ten states required fewer signatures (NV, GA, MA, AK, OR, ID, KS, NY, SD), and three other states changed signature rules in non-quantitative manners. Maine began to require that petition signers must be registered members of the party, making it harder for signature gatherers. Virginia began to require that signature gatherers only distribute petitions in their home districts (later amended to allow gathering in neighboring districts as well).<sup>82</sup> Lastly, Wyoming's new procedure required 8,000 signatures that represented 3.6 percent of the voting populace, among the highest percentage required in the country.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 419-423.

<sup>81</sup> From a phone interview with Richard Winger (Ballot Access News), January 25, 1996.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Mitchell Locin, "Perot Supporters Get in Gear," *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1992, p. 31.

The daunting task of gathering around 732,000 signatures nationwide was further complicated by measures in certain states. Texas, Nebraska, West Virginia, and Arizona all required petition signers to have not voted in the major parties' primaries.<sup>84</sup> Maine required 4,000 signatures, but did not allow more than 6,000 to be submitted,<sup>85</sup> making it hard to insure against invalid signatures by entering extras. Hawaii required only 4,200 signatures, but they had to be in black ink.<sup>86</sup> New York remained one of the more fickle states regarding nonmajor party candidate ballot access. In New York, state Republican leaders displayed openly hostile feelings towards Perot's candidacy,<sup>87</sup> volunteers could only begin circulating petitions on July 7, five weeks before the filing deadline. The signatures had to include 100 from 17 of the state's 34 congressional districts, and signers could not have signed petitions for major party convention delegates.<sup>88</sup>

An additional requirement in 37 states required independent candidates to list a vice-presidential candidate when filing.<sup>89</sup> To comply, Ross Perot chose Admiral James Stockdale on March 30 as a temporary running mate for the Spring of 1992. Perot named Stockdale solely in order to qualify for ballot access, and intended to replace him with a permanent running mate before the major parties conventions.<sup>90</sup> However, Perot dropped out of the race before naming a replacement running mate, making Stockdale the de facto vice presidential nominee in the fall due to Perot's late reentry to the race.

The Perot campaign also faced a number of non-traditional barriers while trying to gain ballot access. In North Carolina, two men wearing Perot campaign pins entered a volunteer office and attempted to "pick up" signed petitions, only for it to be discovered they were "impostors." A businessman, also in North Carolina, claimed that Democratic state inspectors had threatened to "shut him down" if he signed petitions. In Maryland,

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<sup>84</sup> "Perot's Hope: More Than 767,000 Signatures," *St. Petersburg Times*, April 5, 1992, p. 6A.

<sup>85</sup> Steven Holmes, "Third-Party Candidate; Perot Encounters Maze of Ballot Access Rules," *The New York Times*, May 14, 1992, p. A18.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Walter Robinson, "Perot Faces Obstacles in Ballot Access," *The Boston Globe*, May 4, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Locin, "Perot Supporters Get in Gear."

<sup>89</sup> "Perot: 50-State Roundup of Independent Ballot Access," *The Hotline*, April 8, 1992.

<sup>90</sup> "Perot: Picks Vietnam War Hero as Temporary Veep," *The Hotline*, March 31, 1992.

volunteer's efforts were "bedeviled" by a number of forged signatures. Lastly, in the Florida Keys, "bogus petitions" were being circulated that did not comply with strict Florida regulations that petitions be in both English and Spanish.<sup>91</sup>

The campaign finance barriers faced by nonmajor party candidates had not changed since John Anderson's campaign in 1980. In 1992, the FECA limits on contributions remained at \$1,000 for individuals, and \$5,000 for multicandidate committees. Public financing provided each major party candidate in 1992 with up to \$13.8 million in matching funds during the prenomination campaign, and \$55.2 million for the general election. It provided each major party with \$11 million for its nominating convention and permitted national party organizations to each spend \$10.3 million on their respective presidential candidate.<sup>92</sup> While Anderson had set the precedent in 1980 for independent candidates to qualify for retroactive public financing, the rules governing this funding had not changed. Nonmajor party candidates could still only qualify for post-election funding based on a proportionate share. Given the limited public money available, Perot decided to sidestep the restrictions that would accompany the acceptance of public financing, and rely instead on his sizable personal fortune.

Perot did not rely solely on his own personal finances to fund the campaign. He also invited supporters to contribute \$5 if they wanted to have "skin in the game."<sup>93</sup> While individual contributions (not all in the amount of \$5) to the campaign totaled about \$5 million, they were a small sum when compared with the \$63.3 million Perot spent from his own fortune,<sup>94</sup> which constituted the largest contribution by a single person to a political campaign in American history.<sup>95</sup> The total expenditure of \$68.4 million by the Perot campaign is reasonably close to the amounts spent by the Clinton and Bush campaigns. However, when party spending on behalf of the Clinton and Bush campaigns is taken into

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<sup>91</sup> Robinson, "Perot Faces Obstacles in Ballot Access."

<sup>92</sup> Alexander and Corrado, *Financing the 1992 Election*, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> David Gergen, "Ross Perot's Time to Saddle on Up," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 16, 1992, vol. 112, no. 10, p. 38.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander and Corrado, *Financing the 1992 Election*, p. 128.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

account, Perot's \$68.4 total expenditure pales in comparison with the nearly \$90 million spent by or for Bush, and the \$130 million spent by or for Clinton.<sup>96</sup>

During the initial campaign from February to July, Perot spent over \$12 million of his own money, and an additional \$2.5 million from outside contributions. Most of this was spent on ballot access costs.<sup>97</sup> The extensive media exposure Perot received, which fueled his rise to the top of the polls from mid-March into July,<sup>98</sup> was essentially free, since during this period Perot relied on talk shows and news coverage to spread his message. Although he dropped out of the race in July, Perot continued to spend money on ballot access between July and October. To keep his petition drive alive in California, he at times spent \$40,000 a month, and at one point \$480,000 a month nationwide to keep offices open in all fifty states.<sup>99</sup>

Perot spent the bulk of his money after returning to the race on October 1, and most of it was spent on media. Perot spent \$10.8 million in the first ten days of October.<sup>100</sup> By the end of the month he spent \$31.9 million on television advertising. A final two hour media blitz on election eve, split between the three major networks, cost Perot \$3.2 million.<sup>101</sup> Perot's ability to finance these expenditures set him apart from previous nonmajor party candidates. Where previous nonmajor party candidates had struggled to gain any media exposure, Perot was able to buy large blocks of television time to communicate with voters.

The electoral college continued to present a formidable challenge to nonmajor party candidates in 1992. Like previous independent and third party challengers, Perot had to compete under the winner-take-all provisions. As a result, although he won 19 percent of the popular vote, Perot did not receive a single electoral college vote. Perot beat Clinton in Utah, and he topped Bush in Maine, where he came close to capturing electoral votes under

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-132.

<sup>98</sup> Pomper, *The Election of 1992*, p. 155.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander and Corrado, *Financing the 1992 Election*, p. 132.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 133.



Maine's district vote system. Perot beat Bush in Maine by 316 votes, and he only lost to Clinton by 56,600 votes (about 8 percent). Yet, even with this good showing, Perot did not receive any electoral college support.<sup>102</sup>

Although Perot did not win any electoral college votes, he did have an impact on the electoral college voting in the election. Clinton's electoral college success in 1992 was in no small part the result of Ross Perot's candidacy. Perot provided a significant third choice for voters in all fifty states. His presence created a three-way race that allowed Clinton to win the electoral college vote in a number of states with less than 50 percent support. Of the 32 states Clinton won in the electoral college, he received a majority of the popular vote in only his home state of Arkansas and Washington, D.C. Clinton won 13 other states with more than 45 percent of the vote, which still would have left him 66 electoral college votes short of victory. Clinton's victory was dependent upon 14 states he won with 40-45 percent of the vote, and four other states he won with less than 40 percent of the popular vote.<sup>103</sup> Perot received most of his support in western states formerly dominated by the Republicans, as well as in New England. Perot's support in Republican controlled western states divided the Republican vote, depriving Bush of his needed electoral base, and allowing Clinton to win these states.<sup>104</sup>

Republicans in previous elections had enjoyed a head-start of around 100 electoral votes from heavily Republican western states. Of the 32 states Clinton won, twenty broke from their Republican voting trends. Eight had not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1976, three more since 1968, and nine others, including electoral college giant California, that had last supported a Democratic nominee in 1964.<sup>105</sup> Clinton's presidential advisor, James Carville, was careful to note following the election that the Democrats had merely "picked the electoral lock, we didn't find the keys to it."<sup>106</sup> In other

<sup>102</sup> Pomper, *The Election of 1992*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>103</sup> Rhodes Cook, "Clinton Election Notable for its Tenuousness," *The Dallas Morning News*, February 7, 1993, p. 40A.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Rhodes Cook Interview, "Morning Edition," *National Public Radio*, October 30, 1992.

<sup>106</sup> James Carville from National Press Club appearance, *CSPAN*, January 19, 1993.

words, the Democrats had been able to assemble a winning electoral college block of states, but could not rely on this coalition in the future.

Whether Perot was affected by strategic voting concerns, or the "wasted vote" syndrome, is unclear. When Perot re-entered the race on October 1, polls showed him with 7 percent support. Over the next four weeks his support in Newsweek's "Battleground '92" tracking poll continuously climbed. The week before the election this poll indicated that Perot was receiving between 17 and 19 percent of the potential vote. The 19 percent of the popular vote that Perot received on election day matched these polling results. This would seem to indicate that Perot did not suffer from "wasted vote" concerns on election day, or in the weeks leading up to the election. This conclusion, however, is challenged by other studies that suggested significant evidence of strategic voting behavior and "wasted vote" concerns among voters. Studies conducted before the election showed that when potential voters were asked not to take concerns about Perot's actual chance of winning the election into account, 38 percent said they would support Perot.<sup>107</sup> Because Perot only received 19 percent of the popular vote on election day, it appears that a large number of voters made strategic decisions not to vote for Perot because they believed he could not win.

Regardless of whether Perot actually suffered from the "wasted vote" syndrome on election day, both Clinton and Bush tried to capitalize on potential "wasted vote" concerns in the weeks leading up to the election. The major party candidates aired ads and made addresses in the final weeks of the campaign urging Perot supporters not to waste their vote on a candidate certain to lose.<sup>108</sup> Perot countered these charges by claiming Bush supporters were the ones wasting their vote "because he can't win"<sup>109</sup> and by urging voters not to waste their vote "on politics as usual."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander and Corrado, *Financing the 1992 Election*, p. 135.

<sup>108</sup> Guy Gugliotta, "Examining the Wasted Vote," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 1992, p. A21.

<sup>109</sup> "George Bush Stumps in Michigan, Applauds Polls," *Inside Politics*, CNN, October 29, 1992.

<sup>110</sup> Abramson et al., "Third-Party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot," p. 354.

### Theodore Lowi and Third Party Politics

Political scientist Theodore Lowi has recently focused parts of his writing on championing a role for third parties in America. Lowi believes that the two party system is responsible for a number of the problems currently plaguing American politics and government, and that third parties are just what the American political system needs. In his view, the two party system was able to provide political solutions for the problems of the country until the mid-twentieth century. However, in the decades after the New Deal, as the federal government began its dramatic growth, battles over policy became increasingly ideological. These "ideological conflicts began to emerge more starkly"<sup>111</sup> in the early 1970's with the partisan emphasis on "wedge issues". "Wedge issues" are issues such as crime, welfare, taxes, social and economic regulation, where specific stances adopted by the parties would be sure to alienate certain blocks of voters. The purpose of "wedge issues" is to drive a wedge into the opposing party's coalition, dividing an opponent's support, and forcing an opponent to alienate a group of voters. As the major parties began to define their ideological stances on "wedge issues" they alienated blocks of voters, an experience which Lowi claims has immobilized "party leadership, and once parties are immobilized the government itself is immobilized."<sup>112</sup> Parties and candidates are immobilized by "wedge issues" because they fear taking a firm stance one way or another on such issues will alienate some crucial block of voters from their coalition. Therefore, the result of the ideological battles over "wedge issues" has been a tendency for the major parties to shy away from taking stands on issues that would likely alienate blocks of voters. The effectiveness of the federal government has been compromised by the parties' acceptance of this immobilized state.

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<sup>111</sup> Theodore Lowi, "The Party Crasher," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 23, 1992, p. 28.

<sup>112</sup> Theodore Lowi, "Towards a Responsible Three Party System," as appears in Daniel Shea and John Green, *The State of The Parties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), p. 50.

An immobilized government is a government of "gridlock." Lowi contends this state of gridlock is acceptable to both parties because each party in effect has become a "majority party." Each party has had control of at least one branch of government for most of the last forty years. As majority parties, there is little incentive for either party to define its issue stances and decide "major policy issues in the voting booth," because doing so would risk losing the party's share of control in the government. Further, neither party needs to open itself up to new interests. Only a defeated party has an incentive to define its stance on issues and open itself up to new supporters in an attempt to create a broader base of support for the future.<sup>113</sup> The establishment of the two parties as permanent fixtures of the system has allowed them to construct significant barriers to non-major party challengers. Lowi notes that the parties have created barriers to ballot access and campaign finance that support the two party system, a system "which would collapse in an instant if the tubes were pulled and the IV's were cut."<sup>114</sup>

Lowi notes that third parties in the American political system have historically been single issue movements. Third parties (or independents) have entered the political fray to highlight a particular issue not being addressed by the major parties. Success for third parties and independent candidates therefore depends on their willingness to adopt defined positions on issues the major parties fail to address. Issue-driven candidacies derive their support from constituencies that value the position taken by the candidate. In some instances such candidates have served to stimulate the interest of disenfranchised voters and thereby provided these individuals with a way back into the political process by adopting issue stances neglected by the major parties. The 1968 Wallace campaign provides an example of a successful issue-driven third party candidacy. Wallace entered the race as a third party candidate with specific stances on civil rights and Vietnam which the major parties had not adopted. For instance, Wallace's position to stay and fight in Vietnam was

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Lowi, "The Party Crasher."

shared by nearly a third of Americans,<sup>115</sup> while Nixon and Humphrey both favored withdrawal. Nixon and Humphrey favored an end to segregation; only Wallace represented approximately 15 percent of Americans who favored continuing segregation.<sup>116</sup> Wallace derived support from these voters alienated by the major party candidates' positions.

According to Lowi, the Perot candidacy of 1992 differed from earlier nonmajor party candidacies because Perot's support was not based upon his position on any single issue, but rather on a constituency unhappy with the two parties and their handling of government in general. Indeed, while Perot often defined his candidacy by focusing on the issue of the deficit, his support was not limited to this issue. Rather his appeal was founded on his status as a "political outsider" not associated with the two major parties. By 1992 Americans felt increasingly alienated from and unhappy with "Washington politicians," creating "a near collapse in public confidence and support for the president, Congress, both political parties, and for nearly everyone else involved in the political system."<sup>117</sup> The discontent voters felt towards established politicians in Washington translated into their willingness to accept new alternatives. Lowi cites polls conducted in the spring of 1992 that showed that 60 percent of American voters favored the formation of a third party as an alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. Voters were so interested in a third option, Lowi contends, that even Ross Perot's "ill-defined alternative to the established parties" was able to generate a "remarkable outburst of enthusiasm."<sup>118</sup>

Political scientist Howard Gold has done research that further supports Lowi's contention regarding Perot's support. Gold investigated whether systematic explanations for third party success could help explain factors that were critical to Perot's results in 1992. While Gold concluded that Perot's success was primarily due to idiosyncratic factors, most importantly his ability to finance a campaign with his personal fortune, he

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<sup>115</sup> Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections*, p. 8.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>117</sup> Black and Black, *The Politics of American Discontent*, p.101.

<sup>118</sup> Lowi, "The Party Crasher."

also notes that one systematic factor was significant in explaining Perot's success. This factor was "an electorate with weak partisanship."<sup>119</sup> Gold's assertion that the 1992 electorate displayed weak partisanship supports Lowi's assertion that Americans were dissatisfied with the major parties and wanted a third alternative.

Gold's research thus affirms Lowi's view that Perot's support was not grounded in issues. According to Gold, only 14 percent of Perot's supporters "identified an issue-based reason for supporting their candidate."<sup>120</sup> He further notes that while factors including the electorate's "assessments of the [major party] candidates, distrust toward government, and issue awareness - were significant [factors in Perot's support] but their effects were generally small by recent historical standards."<sup>121</sup> In other words, these systematic factors contributed to Perot's support, but when compared with the elections of 1968 and 1980, which also involved notable nonmajor party challengers, they were a less important factor for Perot than they were for Wallace or Anderson. Gold concludes that "the level of negativity/neutrality towards the parties, although stable, was high in 1992"<sup>122</sup> compared to recent elections. Gold proves that there was a stronger relationship between partisanship and vote choice in 1992 than there was in 1968 or 1980, a fact which supports "the notion that the presence of a large base of nonpartisan citizens underlay Perot's success."<sup>123</sup>

Lowi regards the 1992 campaign as a potential "beginning of the end of America's two party system," but he is careful to note his skepticism as to whether Perot himself will be able to establish a genuine third party. Lowi has described Perot as "just another pretty face" on the political scene and as an "Opera Buffa Dictator" who believes in top-down control of a party. Lowi thus emphasizes Perot's supporters as the foundation for a potential new party, rather than Perot himself. He sees the extraordinary outpouring of support for Perot as an indicator that Americans "have grasped the essential point that the

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<sup>119</sup> Howard Gold, "Third Party Voting in Presidential Elections: A Study of Perot, Anderson, and Wallace," *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, December 1995, p. 758.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 768.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 766.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 758.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 758.

current incumbents will not, and cannot, reform a system that drastically needs overhauling."<sup>124</sup> He concludes that electoral "conditions for a third party have rarely been more favorable."<sup>125</sup>

With the current political climate being so conducive for forming a third party, Lowi has outlined five guidelines towards building a genuine and successful third party in the aftermath of 1992. These guidelines state that the party should:

- be built bottom-up, based on grass roots initiatives,
- be opportunistic, with a focus towards winning elections,
- run candidates at all levels of government, not just for president,
- cross-endorse other parties' candidates,
- have organization to last beyond one election.<sup>126</sup>

For Lowi, building a third party based on grass roots initiatives is vital because one of the benefits third parties offer the political system is increased citizen participation in politics. By championing issues of interest to voters that have been neglected by the major parties, third parties offer disenfranchised voters a reason to return to the system. But as Lowi notes, "more than that, there is an enthusiasm about an emerging party that inspires people to come out from their private lives and to convert their civic activity to political activity," drawing people beyond voting to become "petition gatherers, door knockers, envelope lickens and \$5 contributors . . . an anecdote to the mass politics."<sup>127</sup> It is a simple fact that in order to remain viable and secure a place in the system, third parties have to focus on winning elections. Lowi notes that candidacies for a single office, like Ross Perot's bid for the presidency in 1992, are not anything like a real third party. "A genuine third party is just like the two major parties,"<sup>128</sup> running people at all levels of office from local to national. The party could help establish itself by cross-endorsing selected candidates from

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<sup>124</sup> Lowi, "The Party Crasher."

<sup>125</sup> Theodore Lowi, "It's Time for a Third Party. But We Won't Get One," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1995, p. A15.

<sup>126</sup> Lowi, "The Party Crasher," p. 33.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Lowi, "It's Time for a Third Party. But We Won't Get One."

the other major parties who seek to promote ideals similar to its own. Cross-endorsing could also raise the party's public visibility by providing the party an opportunity to be associated with major party candidates in an election. Finally, Lowi notes that organization to last beyond a single election cycle is the important first step towards "running candidates for office in every election [which] is the only way to secure organizational integrity."<sup>129</sup>

Lowi contends that Ross Perot is not the figure who can or will implement these guidelines to form a genuine third party that could change the political system. Lowi is also skeptical about the chances for the establishment of a third party without Perot as the champion for the alternative to the major parties. Lowi examines the potential for others like Colin Powell, Jesse Jackson, Lowell Weicker, or Bill Bradley, all of whom have been the subject of speculation for their potential to raise a third party, and summarily rejects each for their lack of political understanding or their fatal ties to the major parties. While Lowi does not recognize anyone with the potential to lead a third party movement, he regards Perot's supporters in 1992 and the other American voters eager for an alternative to the major parties as the important building block for a potential third party.

### The Perot Voter

The results on Election Day in 1992 provided a surprise to many political scientists as voter participation increased to 55 percent, ending a thirty year decline. This increase in the vote was in large part a result of Perot's candidacy. That eligible voters who had not voted in previous elections were drawn to the polls by the Perot option is confirmed by the fact that "the Democratic share of the eligible vote rose very slightly, while the Republican share declined, suggesting that Mr. Perot caused the overall increase in turnout."<sup>130</sup> Exit polls confirmed the impact Perot had on increasing voter turnout, as 14 percent of Perot's voters said they would not have voted if he had not been on the ballot.<sup>131</sup> The 14 percent of

<sup>129</sup> Lowi, "The Party Crasher," p. 33.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Pear, "55% Voting Rate Reverses 30-Year Decline," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1992, p. B4.

<sup>131</sup> Steven Holmes, "An Eccentric But No Joke," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1992, p. A1.



Perot voters who otherwise would not have voted constitutes 2.8 million Americans, or 1.5 percent of the total electorate in 1992. Since total turnout rose by 5.1 percent in 1992, Perot was directly responsible for almost 30 percent of the increased turnout.<sup>132</sup>

These turnout figures do not take into account the more general impact the Perot candidacy had on the election. Perot's candidacy increased public interest in the election, and generated more media coverage of the election. The increased media coverage of the campaign was supplemented by the \$60 million Perot spent on television, giving the 1992 election the most paid media in history.<sup>133</sup> Further, Perot's strong showing in the debates hurt Clinton's popular support in the closing weeks of the campaign, creating the perception among voters that the race was getting closer.<sup>134</sup> Close elections stimulate voter participation because voters are more apt to consider their vote as having some effect in determining the results. In fact, according to voters, the number one reason for voter decline in the elections from 1960 through 1972, was that the races were not close.<sup>135</sup> The electorate took great interest in the 1992 race, as 78 percent of voters found the election interesting, and only 17 percent found the election dull. This interest was remarkably higher than the 1988 race, where 42 percent of voters found the election interesting, and 52 percent found it dull.<sup>136</sup>

Surveys and exit polls conducted on election day in 1992 provide a host of information about the demographics of Perot's supporters, as well as insights into their motivation for supporting him. Exit polls revealed, not surprisingly, that Perot's support was greatest among voters who identified themselves as Independents. He received 30 percent of the Independent vote, as compared to 17 percent of the vote from self-identified Republicans and 13 percent from voters identifying themselves as Democrats. He also

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<sup>132</sup> Paul Abramson and John Aldrich and David Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1992 Elections* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1994), p. 120.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-121.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>136</sup> Anthony Corrado, "The 1992 Presidential Election," as appears in L. Sandy Maisel (ed.), *The Parties Respond* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 233.

received greater support from moderates (21 percent of the moderate vote) than from liberals (18 percent of the liberal vote) or conservatives (18 percent of the conservative vote). Perot did substantially better with white voters (94 percent of his support) than with minorities, a fact that in part explains why he fared better in the West and Northeast of the country, and received little support in the South. Perot appealed to middle class voters, received more support from men than women, and appealed most to voters younger than 45.<sup>137</sup>

What defined Perot voters most was their anger at the government and the major parties. Perot's supporters were at the forefront of the "mad as hell" voting movement of 1992, with 88 percent of this group indicating they were angry or dissatisfied with the government (compared with 74 percent of all voters). Frustration with the way government had been working led 69 percent of Perot's voters to agree that "government would work better if all new people" were elected in 1992 (only 49 percent of all voters agreed). This sentiment was so strong that it led most Perot voters (89 percent) to support congressional term limits.<sup>138</sup> Voter anger with the government was also directed towards the role and influence of special interests in Washington. Perot supporters (81 percent) were more inclined than voters overall (68 percent) to believe that lobbyists had "a great deal" of influence. Such an inclination helps explain their support for campaign finance reform, that would limit the role of special interests in elections.<sup>139</sup>

Voter anger in 1992 extended past the government to the political parties themselves. A poll conducted in May of 1992 by Gordon and Benjamin Black showed that 59 percent of voters were "angry" or "dissatisfied" with the Democratic party, and 60 percent felt that same way about the Republicans.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, a Harris poll conducted in July of 1992 found that 59 percent of adults thought the two party system was not serving

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<sup>137</sup> Karlyn Keene and Everett Carl Ladd (ed.), "Public Opinion and Demographic Report," *The American Enterprise*, vol. 4, no. 1, January/February 1993, pp. 90-97.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Gerald Seib, "Ross's Army," *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 1993, p. A1.

<sup>140</sup> Black and Black, *The Politics of American Discontent*, p. 149.

the country well.<sup>141</sup> Gordon and Benjamin Black contend that this discontent can be attributed to the behavior of the major parties, which were violating the principles of two party government. Instead of having parties "converge to the center" in order to attract centrist voters who are ideologically in the middle of two parties, the major parties instead became responsive to "a coalition of activists" that drive party positions to the fringes of the political spectrum, away from the majority of voters. Black uses the example of the Republican party and its position on abortion in the 1992 election to illustrate this point. The Republican party succumbed to pressure from conservatives and approved a plank regarding abortion at their convention even though only 9 percent of Americans agreed with it.<sup>142</sup>

This dissatisfaction and anger with the major parties played a significant role in Perot's support. Almost 35 percent of Perot's supporters fostered negative feelings towards both of the major parties in 1992. This is significantly higher than the 13.2 percent of Anderson supporters who disliked both parties in 1980, or even the 23.4 percent of Wallace supporters who disliked both of the major parties in 1968.<sup>143</sup> Weak partisanship caused by dissatisfaction with the parties was evident in 1992, and influenced nonmajor party support to a greater degree than it did in 1968 or in 1980. According to Gold, 13.1 percent of voters who identified themselves as being "strong/weak" partisans (rather than "Independent/leaner") in 1992 supported Perot, while the similar group of party identifiers had only given Wallace 9.1 percent, and Anderson received only 5.7 percent from the same group.<sup>144</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the major parties was also fueled by "neutral" feelings toward the parties, by a belief that there were very few differences between them. Gold, for example, found that 31.6 percent of the electorate had neutral feelings towards the parties in 1992, and that 22 percent of Perot's supporters harbored such feelings towards the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>143</sup> Gold, "Third Party Voting in Presidential Elections: A Study of Perot, Anderson, and Wallace," p. 757.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., pp. 758-759.

parties.<sup>145</sup> Neutral feelings were also manifest in voters' belief that there were few differences between the parties. A Center for Political Studies sample cited by Gold shows that 40 percent of Americans "could not articulate an important difference between the two parties and 49 percent believed that there was no difference between the parties' respective abilities to solve pressing problems."<sup>146</sup>

Another theme that appealed and motivated Perot's supporters was his conservative economic tough talk about the national debt and the economy. Perot voters overwhelmingly (89 percent) thought the nation's economy was "not so good" or "poor." While voters overall echoed this sentiment, they were not as emphatic about the depth of the decline, or the duration. Perot had focused the majority of his campaign rhetoric on the issue of the national debt, and many voters shared his view as to the importance of this issue. Exit polling revealed voters in 1992 were most concerned about the economy (42 percent) and the federal deficit (21 percent), beating out health care (20 percent) which was touted by Clinton, and family values (15 percent) which were a cornerstone of the Bush campaign. But the deficit was the most important issue to Perot voters, as 65 percent indicated they believed reducing the budget deficit should be the highest priority for the next president (only 54 percent of all voters considered it the top priority). Perot voters favored a conservative approach towards downsizing government and controlling the deficit. Reducing government spending on services was more important than decreasing taxes to Perot voters, as only 11 percent cited cutting taxes as the number one priority for the president in the next four years. In fact, while still citing the need for greater spending cuts by the federal government, Perot voters indicated in exit polls they would be open to specific taxes to fund a national health care plan.<sup>147</sup>

A final common sentiment of Perot voters was a liberal stance on some social issues, particularly towards government involvement in such issues as abortion and

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 757-758.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 758.

<sup>147</sup> Seib, "Ross's Army."

restrictions on gay service in the military. Almost half of Perot voters favored allowing openly gay service in the military, while 65 percent did not think abortion should be illegal,<sup>148</sup> and only 5 percent considered it an important issue in deciding how to vote.<sup>149</sup> According to Everett Carl Ladd another indicator of the groups' "libertarian inclinations" on social and value issues, is that they are less active in attending religious services (only 33 percent attended religious services on a weekly basis, compared with 42 percent of all voters who did).<sup>150</sup> However, Ladd carefully notes an insight to this information on Perot voter's social beliefs, as he explains "the Perot electorate was not looking for 'new values'; they just were not greatly interested in the values issues, which left them open to suasion on the economic dimension."<sup>151</sup>

Ross Perot's supporters had more in common with Republicans than Democrats, a fact which hurt President Bush. Perot voters had shown Republican tendencies in the 1988 presidential contest: they favored Bush by a 56 percent to 17 percent margin over Democrat Michael Dukakis, a greater margin than the overall electorate (53 percent Bush, 27 percent Dukakis).<sup>152</sup> More importantly, Perot cut into the traditional demographic support groups -primarily white, western, males- that Republican presidential candidates had counted on since 1972. More voters who identified themselves as Republicans voted for Perot than did identified Democrats, meaning Bush lost more of his own party's faithful to Perot than did the Democrats. Perot further undermined Bush's support by depriving him of the Republican's customary share of the independent vote. Identified independents have favored the Republican presidential candidate since the 1930's, with the exception of the Johnson 1964 landslide. However, in 1992 Clinton (38 percent) secured more of the Independent vote than Bush (32 percent), primarily because Bush split his share with Perot (30 percent). Finally, the Republican tendencies of Perot voters were apparent in the

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Everett Carl Ladd, "The 1992 Election's Complex Message," *The American Enterprise*, vol. 4, no. 1, January/February 1993, p. 51.

<sup>150</sup> Keene and Ladd, "Public Opinion and Demographic Report," p. 96.

<sup>151</sup> Ladd, "The 1992 Election's Complex Message," p. 51.

<sup>152</sup> Keene and Ladd, "Public Opinion and Demographic Report," p. 94.

shared ideologies on general issues, such as the role of government (less government services, less taxes).<sup>153</sup> While Perot voters deserted the Republicans and hurt Bush in 1992, the GOP enjoyed an advantage after the election when attempting to coopt and appeal to Perot Voters.

### After the 1992 Election

After 1992, a number of questions existed about the future of Ross Perot and his supporters. Would Perot and his followers become a permanent political force in elections to come and thus buck the historical trend of fading into obscurity following the election? Would Ross Perot be willing to continue using his personal wealth to finance a political organization, and were his supporters unified enough behind Perot or a set of principles to remain a cohesive voting block? Would the major parties co-opt the reform message Perot had espoused throughout the 1992 campaign? Would the "mad as hell" voters remain angry and continue to be open to alternative candidates who attacked politics as usual? Perot had a major impact on the 1992 election, but it was not clear whether he and the alienated American voters would continue to have an impact on the political process.

Nonmajor party challengers have historically disappeared from the political scene following an election. After capturing nearly 28 percent of the vote with his Bull Moose Party in the 1912 presidential election, Theodore Roosevelt retired from politics and headed south to Brazil to collect plant and animal samples for the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>154</sup> John Anderson had a similar experience following his failed bid in 1980. After the election he delivered lectures across the country and began work in Chicago as a television commentator. He was a political entity of interest, but certainly not of any clout.<sup>155</sup> George Wallace faded more slowly following the 1968 election, maintaining enough of a profile to consider another challenge in 1972. But, popular support in key

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<sup>153</sup> Ladd, "The 1992 Election's Complex Message," pp. 50-51.

<sup>154</sup> James Barnes, "Still on the Trail," *The National Journal*, vol. 25, no. 15, April 10, 1993, p. 860.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

southern states had dissipated by 1972 and Wallace decided against mounting another challenge to the major parties in 1972, instead entering the Democratic primaries.<sup>156</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the 1992 election, many political scientists were quick to dismiss Perot and the impact he might have on politics, and wrote him off as another challenger headed for political obscurity. According to Nelson Polsby, Perot's campaign was little more than "an ego trip by a very superficial person."<sup>157</sup> Theodore Lowi contended that Perot was in the position to further direct the political process towards a real alternative to the major parties, but that Perot was not personally inclined to such a pursuit. Lowi noted that historically "Perot will never be more than an asterisk as an independent."<sup>158</sup> Lowi believed Perot would join the ranks of nonmajor party candidates who faded into obscurity after a single election.

However, on election night 1992, before the results were even final, Perot was already pledging to keep his movement, and his own political future, alive. He told supporters, "We'll keep this going as long as you want to keep it going."<sup>159</sup> A number of factors combined to help Perot fulfill his promise of continued political activity. Whereas previous candidates had faded into obscurity following elections, factors such as Perot's wealth and the public openness towards political figures outside the major parties were an initial part of his insurance against a similar political fate. Perot's offer to fund UWSA indefinitely was another example of his continued personal commitment to government reform, and also of the unique financial advantage he enjoyed with his multi-billion dollar bank account.

Perot's 19 percent of the popular vote provided a further foundation for him to remain politically active, as he was perceived as having political clout. Americans identified Perot as the individual championing government reform, and voters had a more

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<sup>156</sup> Mazmanian, *Third parties in Presidential Elections*, p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> Stanley Cloud, "The Lessons of Perot," *Time*, November 16, 1992, p. 69.

<sup>158</sup> Jerry Buckley, "The Future of Ross Perot," *U.S. News and World Report*, vol. 113, no. 19, November 16, 1992, p. 72.

<sup>159</sup> Bill Turque, "We'll Keep on Going," *Newsweek*, vol. 120, no. 27, p. 13.

favorable view of Perot once they were not considering him as a presidential candidate, as is evident by his popularity actually improving following the election. Over the final week of the campaign his favorability ratings ranged from being slightly unfavorable (44/46), to equal (45/45), to positive (50/40). By January 1993, Perot's support had skyrocketed, and the percentage of American's who had a favorable view of him had improved to a two to one margin.<sup>160</sup> Evidence of voter's concerns with Perot as a candidate can also be found in polling conducted during October which showed that Perot was considered presidential material by only 21 percent of voters.<sup>161</sup> Similar concerns were evident from viewer's reactions to the presidential debates, as many voters expressed reservations about whether Perot was presidential material.<sup>162</sup> As his popularity strengthened following the election, Perot was quick to employ his political clout by reorganizing his UWSA support organization.

The continued development of Perot's organization United We Stand America assured that Perot and his supporters would have a vehicle for continued activity between elections. Perot announced his intention to continue developing UWSA formally on January 11, 1993, saying "We want to be a constructive, positive force to give the people in this country a voice and to, in every possible way, eliminate and the diminish the effectiveness of the special interests and the lobbyists."<sup>163</sup> In the following months, he toured the country promoting the organization and recruiting new members. Membership information has not been released by Perot, but estimates put the group at well over one million members.<sup>164</sup> The initial membership drive spearheaded by Perot in the Spring of 1993 netted at least \$15 million from individual memberships at \$15 a piece. Such a financial feat underscored the greater impact of Perot and his movement, as the Democratic National Committee took over two years to raise the same amount under the Bush

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<sup>160</sup> Barnes, "Still on the Trail."

<sup>161</sup> Larry Huggick, "Perot's Own Actions Determined His Fate," *The Public Perspective*, vol. 4, no. 2, January/February 1993, p. 17.

<sup>162</sup> Goldman et al., *Quest for the Presidency: 1992*, p. 732.

<sup>163</sup> "Current Quotations," The Associated Press, January 12, 1993.

<sup>164</sup> Barnes, "Still on the Trail." p. 860.



administration.<sup>165</sup> Perot reportedly was still content to fund UWSA operations despite this fundraising success, and simply deposited the money raised to be used for future UWSA activities.<sup>166</sup>

While the role of UWSA was never specifically outlined, it was assumed that the organization would serve as a citizens' watchdog over the major parties' actions in Washington, particularly on issues concerning the deficit, campaign finance reform, and restrictions on lobbyists and government perks.<sup>167</sup> Perot hinted at such a role when he told supporters "you gave Washington a laser-like message to listen to the people,"<sup>168</sup> a message to which UWSA and Perot would help hold the parties accountable.

While Perot denied that UWSA was being created with third party ambitions in mind, the organization did meet one of Lowi's criteria for the creation of a new party: that an organization be maintained beyond a single election. United We Stand America was organized with a national headquarters in Dallas, and state and local chapters across the rest of the nation. The organization provided a formal apparatus for Perot and his supporters to stay involved in the political process following the 1992 election, an important first step towards keeping options open for future action, including the possibility of forming a third party.

## The NAFTA Debate

Perot was not alone in realizing the strong message for change the 1992 election had sent to politicians in Washington. As the Clinton administration began a four year term, they focused on showing progress in breaking the gridlock on issues like the deficit and campaign finance reform, while at the same time looking for ways to stifle the role Perot could continue to play in politics.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> B. Drummond Ayres, "Despite Losing Election, Perot Gains in Standing," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1993, p. A10.

<sup>167</sup> Barnes, "Still on the Trail," p. 860.

<sup>168</sup> John Miniz, "Perot Embodied Dismay of Millions," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1992, p. A26.

Following the 1992 election, President Clinton focused his legislative agenda on major reforms including a reinvention of the welfare system, developing a comprehensive national health-care system, and reviving a sluggish economy. Before Clinton could act on these major reforms he had to first deal with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that had been negotiated by his predecessor, President George Bush. Clinton's policy advisors told the president that the potential for later reforms depended on the president's success at getting NAFTA approved.<sup>169</sup>

The NAFTA proposal sought to establish a free trade area among the North American countries of Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The general objectives included an elimination or relaxation of barriers to trade, such as tariffs and quotas, in order to make it easier to trade goods across the borders of these three countries. NAFTA also sought to promote fair trade among the three countries, increase investment opportunities, and provide better protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights.<sup>170</sup> While the agreement seemed like a good proposal in spirit, many Americans worried that changes to America's trade policy would cause American companies to relocate to Canada or Mexico, costing Americans jobs. Despite the support of former president Bush and the Clinton administration, NAFTA was a very controversial issue in 1993 and was not assured of passage.

Clinton's prospects of securing congressional approval for the controversial NAFTA proposal were jeopardized by the efforts of Ross Perot. Perot had opposed NAFTA throughout the election, noting his belief that the agreement would cost Americans thousands of jobs, which would go to Mexico with a "giant sucking sound."<sup>171</sup> When the Senate debate on the agreement began in the Fall of 1993, Perot seized the opportunity to play a role in opposing NAFTA after the election. Perot wrote a best-selling book outlining

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<sup>169</sup> William Neikirk, "Clinton's Big Plans Await Gritty Reality," *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>170</sup> North American Free Trade Agreement, Part One, Chapter One : Objectives (<http://the-tech.mil.edu/Bulletins/Nafta/01.objective>).

<sup>171</sup> David Rosenbaum, "Perot Debate Seen as a Way to Save Trade Pact," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1993, p. 1.

the potential harms of the proposed trade agreement entitled: Save Your Job, Save our Country: Why NAFTA Must be Stopped--Now!. Throughout 1993 Perot also toured the country to hold over 90 rallies against NAFTA. Perot made television appearances on shows including "Larry King Live,"<sup>172</sup> and he produced two 30-minute infomercials opposing the trade agreement.<sup>173</sup> Because of all this work, Perot came to be recognized as the leader of the NAFTA opposition.

The Clinton administration recognized that Perot could continue to play a role in politics following the 1992 election. But the Clinton administration also recognized that they needed to limit Perot's role and clout since he threatened to be a significant critic-at-large who could forcefully oppose the new administration. During the campaign and in the early months of the administration, Clinton did not actively challenge or oppose Perot, for fear of alienating the 19 million voters who had supported Perot in 1992.<sup>174</sup> However, in the weeks leading up to the NAFTA vote, it became clear the agreement's passage was in jeopardy, and that Clinton's future policy initiatives were also jeopardized if NAFTA did not pass. Because of the necessity to pass NAFTA, the Clinton administration made the decision to recognize Perot as the head of the NAFTA opposition and attack him.

Prior to attacking Perot on NAFTA, the Administration had gathered polling data on Perot and his supporters looking for "an opportunity to damage" Perot without alienating his supporters.<sup>175</sup> Clinton's staff found that Perot's supporters identified Perot as "a political reformer," and that "issues like the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]" were not the kinds of issues supporters used to identify with Perot. The administration thus "made a strategic decision to engage Perot in some way . . . before the NAFTA debate was over."<sup>176</sup> The White House decision to engage Perot personally was

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<sup>172</sup> "NAFTA: Here Comes the Big Sell; Perot TV Ads Coming," *The Hotline*, September 7, 1993.

<sup>173</sup> Paul Richter and Thomas Rosenstiel, "Gore-Perot Debate May be Trade Pact's Turning Point," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1993, p. A1.

<sup>174</sup> Martin Fletcher, "Perot's Humiliation Over Free Trade May Backfire on Clinton," *The Times*, November 12, 1993.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Rosenstiel, "Public Opinion; President's Pollsters: Who Follows Whom?," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1993, p. A5.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

further bolstered by Perot's steady decline in opinion polls during 1993. According to a New York Times/CBS News Poll Perot's favorability had dropped to 34 percent by mid-September of 1993.<sup>177</sup>

The Clinton administration therefore adopted a twofold strategy regarding Perot and NAFTA: (1) to discredit and diminish the role Perot could play in politics, and (2) to use attacks against Perot as a foundation for turning the NAFTA debate around. Clinton sought to isolate Perot as the "one volatile villain" heading the opposition to NAFTA.<sup>178</sup> As White House officials noted, "The more the face of anti-NAFTA is Ross Perot, the better off we are."<sup>179</sup> The White House decided that the best way to engage and isolate Perot was in a head-to-head debate on NAFTA. Such a debate would provide the chance to "provoke Perot into blowing his cool," which might discredit him as a legitimate political player, and hurt the NAFTA opposition forces at the same time.<sup>180</sup>

The Clinton administration wanted to make the debate a high stakes affair, which led to the decision that Vice President Gore debate Perot personally. While Gore was generally perceived by the public as a rather inanimate political figure, the White House believed he would have a good chance at upsetting the usually folksy and amiable Perot, and "the stakes were worth the risk."<sup>181</sup> Perot accepted the invitation to debate Gore on "Larry King Live," and the date was set on November 9, 1993. The date of the debate lent to the importance of the meeting, as it was during the height of congressional deliberations regarding NAFTA. At the time of the debate many members of congress were still undecided about whether to support the agreement, enough members that passage was still not assured. This led to speculation that the Gore-Perot debate could be "decisive" in determining the fate of the bill.<sup>182</sup> The hype was enhanced as the White House and Perot

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<sup>177</sup> David Rosenbaum, "Perot Debate Seen as Way to Save Trade Pact," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>178</sup> William Safire, "A Sputtering Perot Gets Gored," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, November 12, 1993, p. A13.

<sup>179</sup> Rosenbaum, "Perot Debate Seen as Way to Save Trade Pact."

<sup>180</sup> Safire, "A Sputtering Perot Gets Gored."

<sup>181</sup> Rosenbaum, "Perot Debate Seen as Way to Try to Save Pact."

<sup>182</sup> Richter, "Gore-Perot Debate May be Trade Pact's Turning Point."

representatives swapped pre-debate punches in the media in the weeks leading up to the debate.<sup>183</sup>

In the actual meeting between Gore and Perot on "Larry King Live," the Clinton strategy came to its fruition. Gore was able to provoke Perot with charges that the Texan stood to gain money from NAFTA's defeat, and by painting Perot as one of Congress's heaviest lobbyists seeking to "get tax breaks for your [Perot's] companies."<sup>184</sup> Perot reacted to Gore's charges by losing his composure and charging that the vice-president was "lying." The results of Perot's performance were apparent in the polls following the debate. Perot's favorability rating fell 10 points to 24 percent in the week following the debate.<sup>185</sup> Perot's performance therefore had hurt his credibility as a serious political figure. The Clinton strategy also paid off in that congressional support for NAFTA increased in the days after the debate, and NAFTA was finally passed. Passing NAFTA and discrediting Perot were important achievements for Clinton during his first year in office. NAFTA's passage bolstered Clinton's ability to propose further legislation and policy reforms, and allowed the administration to function without Perot looming as a credible source of criticism.

Despite Perot's poor performance at the debate, many of his supporters and some members of the media were of the opinion that Perot's participation in the debate was more important than the final result.<sup>186</sup> For Perot to be recognized as the leader of the NAFTA opposition, and to then share the stage with the Vice President of the United States was proof that he was recognized as a legitimate political player, even a full year after his election defeat. Perot's involvement in the opposition to NAFTA, and his debate appearance, were the first examples of the continued role Perot would play after the 1992 election. He was maintaining a political profile and defying the historical norm of minor

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> William Safire, "A Sputtering Perot Gets Gored."

<sup>185</sup> Richard L. Berke, "He's Down in the Polls, but Perot Warns a Health Care Fight Looms," *The New York Times*, December 10, 1993, p. A24.

<sup>186</sup> Debbie Howlett, "Perot's Attack Against NAFTA 'Just Warmin' Up'," *USA Today*, November 11, 1993, p. 5A.

party candidates fading into obscurity. Perot would continue to remain active the following year as he prepared to play a role in the 1994 midterm elections.

### **The 1994 Election**

While Perot maintained a low political profile after his poor showing at the NAFTA debate, UWSA and other Perot supporters were becoming increasingly active in preparing for the 1994 elections. The special elections in 1993 and 1994 were early indicators of the role UWSA would play, the tactics they would employ, and the potential benefits for candidates friendly with a Perot/UWSA agenda. It should be noted that UWSA was prevented from making official endorsements of specific candidates because of its pending tax-exempt status as an educational, nonpartisan, nonprofit political organization.<sup>187</sup> However, UWSA did find ways to let its preference for certain candidates be known without officially endorsing them.

Two special elections provided the first cases of Perot and UWSA involvement in elections following the presidential contest. In Georgia, incumbent Senator Wyche Fowler was defeated in a runoff election by Paul Coverdell. In the original election on November 3, 1992, Fowler won a plurality of the vote, but not the majority of votes cast, which is required by Georgia law to win the election.<sup>188</sup> On November 24, a runoff election was held between Fowler and Coverdell. Coverdell, the Republican challenger received an official endorsement from UWSA during the runoff campaign. UWSA was permitted to make an official endorsement in this case because at the time of the runoff UWSA was still considered part of Perot's presidential campaign organization, allowing it to officially endorse candidates.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Dave Kaplan, "Perot's Grass-Roots Organization a Growing Force in Hill Races," *CQ Weekly Report*, June 4, 1994, pp. 1456-1457.

<sup>188</sup> Thomas Edsall, "Nader Unit Says Sen. Fowler Won," *The Washington Post*, December 4, 1992, p. A10.

<sup>189</sup> Kaplan, "Perot's Grass-Roots Organization a Growing Force in Hill Races," p. 1457.

In the 1993 Texas special election to fill the Senate seat vacated by Lloyd Bentsen, Republican candidate Kay Bailey Hutchinson held a commanding lead in the weeks leading up to the election. Nonetheless, two days before the election, Perot and the head of the UWSA Texas chapter appeared with Hutchinson to announce that a survey showed 84 percent of the Texas chapter's members supported the Republican nominee.<sup>190</sup> However clearly this announcement favored Hutchinson, it could not be characterized as an official endorsement; it was merely an announcement of a UWSA membership poll's results. Hutchinson went on to win the election by a landslide.

Early elections in 1994 saw more success for candidates who received backing from Perot and UWSA. In a May special House election for Kentucky's second district seat, Republican Ron Lewis benefited from advertisements run in local papers by UWSA-Kentucky. The ads noted that Lewis supported major points of the UWSA reform agenda and that he had attended UWSA events. The ad went on to note that Joe Prather, the Democratic nominee, had "refused to respond to [a] questionnaire [about issue stands]" and that he had "declined to participate in UWSA forums."<sup>191</sup> The message of the ad "was easily discernible: Lewis fit the UWSA ideal."<sup>192</sup> Lewis went on to win the election, the first Republican to win in that district in 129 years.<sup>193</sup> Also in May, Oklahoma had a special election to replace retiring Representative Glenn English. While both Dan Webber Jr., the Democrat, and Frank Lucas, the Republican candidate, had participated in UWSA forums and had responded to the group's questionnaire on policy stands, Lucas's campaign received and was bolstered by UWSA support. Just four days before the election, members of UWSA held a news conference to announce that a poll of its members revealed that 86 percent preferred Lucas. Again, this did not constitute an official endorsement, but the UWSA announcement clearly noted the group's preference. With the

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1457.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1456.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

support of UWSA, Lucas went on to victory, ending 20 years of Democratic control over the 6th district House seat in Kentucky.<sup>194</sup>

The impact of Perot and UWSA on elections is unclear, but even if UWSA involvement in elections did not determine the final outcomes, it "put candidates on notice that they [UWSA] are for real" and that candidates should "take them more seriously in November."<sup>195</sup> Candidates of both parties would have to pay attention to Perot voters and UWSA and consider their potential impact in the fall elections.

Republicans enjoyed an apparent advantage with Perot and UWSA support in post-1992 special elections. However, they were not guaranteed favorites for such support in the 1994 midterm elections. The lessons of the 1992 presidential election gave GOP candidates cause for alarm in 1994. While Perot and his supporters claimed they were not responsible for electing Clinton, "Perot's presence on the ballot appeared to cost President George Bush more votes than it cost Democratic challenger Bill Clinton."<sup>196</sup> The lesson of 1994 was that while voters had been and could continue to be more inclined to align themselves with Republicans, they were willing to abandon the major parties for an alternative, or in many cases not to vote at all.

Republicans had provided the base support for NAFTA's passage in 1993, as more Republicans than Democrats supported the agreement in both the Senate and the House.<sup>197</sup> Perot voters who watched the NAFTA debate on CNN noted "We're keeping score for '94 - we're getting serious."<sup>198</sup> This desire to hold NAFTA supporters accountable for their vote was apparent at a UWSA meeting in Texas held during the August congressional recess. Newly elected Senator Hutchinson, who had received UWSA support in the special election, was in attendance at the meeting. When the attendees were asked if they

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 1458.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Mark Schlinkmann, "We're Keeping Score for '94,' NAFTA Opponents Warn," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 10, 1993, p. A4.



would vote for Hutchinson again if she supported the NAFTA agreement, only two indicated they would (she eventually did vote for the agreement).<sup>199</sup>

Democrats obviously faced challenges from UWSA and Perot voters in the 1994 election. For Democrats, congressional accountability meant not only being responsible in part for helping President Clinton pass NAFTA, but also failure to "to deal with the federal budget and deficit."<sup>200</sup> As the majority party, the Democrats were in charge of getting business done in Washington, and if nothing was getting done, they would in effect be responsible for the continuing state of "business as usual in Washington."<sup>201</sup> The Democrats failed to pass reform measures of interest to Perot and his supporters, which fueled the perception that the Democrats were unable to proceed on major policy initiatives even with control of two branches of government. Such failed initiatives included the major lobbying reform and campaign finance reform bills passed by the House during the 103rd Congress, which were blocked by Republican filibusters in the Senate during the final days of the Congress.<sup>202</sup> Further, many Democrats were opposed to a number of the specific reform measures sought by Perot and UWSA, such as term limits, a line item veto for the president, and a balanced budget amendment.

Although the 1992 election sent a strong message of reform and the need for change, many Democrats in Washington did not take the message seriously. Speaker of the House Tom Foley in many ways reflected the less than energized response and attention the Democratic Congress gave to a reform agenda, when in a meeting with Democratic freshmen members he "argued that nobody would be concerned about congressional reform by the time of the 1994 elections."<sup>203</sup> However, this lack of progress in enacting reforms was noted by voters. As early as the Spring of 1993, just months into the new

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<sup>199</sup> Kaplan, "Perot's Grass-Roots Organization a Growing Force in Hill Races," p. 1458.

<sup>200</sup> John Mashek, "Perot Charts Plans to Play Role in Fall Congressional Campaign," *The Boston Globe*, July 26, 1994, p. 23.

<sup>201</sup> "Ross and the Republicans," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 1993, p. A16.

<sup>202</sup> Mike Synar, "Highlights of 103rd Congress," *Congressional Press Releases*, October 7, 1994.

<sup>203</sup> David Mason and Dan Greenberg, "New House Rules: A Victory for Congressional Reform," Backgrounder #1013, *The Heritage Foundation*, January 3, 1995.

congress, 73 percent of Perot's 1992 supporters thought Washington was the same as before the 1992 election.<sup>204</sup> This sentiment continued throughout the 103rd Congress. In July of 1994, three months before the midterm elections, a Washington Post-ABC News poll showed 60 percent of Americans disapproved of the job Congress was doing.<sup>205</sup> Exit polls conducted on election day 1994 showed American voters in general remained largely unhappy with the way the federal government had continued to operate under the Clinton administration and the 103rd Congress, as 71 percent felt either dissatisfied or angry with the way the government was working.<sup>206</sup>

The question in 1994 was whether Perot supporters would continue to actively participate in campaigns and vote on election day. Would they participate and be interested in races not personally involving Perot or other candidates running in a Perot supported third party? The Republican party was so concerned with the potential impact of Perot voters in the midterm elections that they focused their polling on Perot voters when developing the Contract With America.<sup>207</sup> The Republican plan to target issues of interest to Perot voters in the Contract With America was in part responsible for the GOP success in attracting Perot voters. In the days leading up to the election, Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg acknowledged the Republican's success in courting the Perot vote. Greenberg noted that Perot voter support for the Republicans made the election look "pretty grim" for the Democrats.<sup>208</sup>

According to political scientists Walter Stone and Ronald Rapoport, who have been studying a group of two thousand Perot voters since the 1992 election, many Perot supporters who became politically active working for Perot in 1992, remained politically active on behalf of the major parties in the following election. The phenomenon of

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<sup>204</sup> Seib, "Ross' Army."

<sup>205</sup> "Congress Not Favored in Poll," *The Courier-Journal*, July 3, 1994.

<sup>206</sup> "1994 Election Day Exit Poll," Public Opinion Online, Roper Center at the University of Connecticut.

<sup>207</sup> Peter Gosselin, "Republicans Strive to Reconcile a Contract's Goals," *The Boston Globe*, November 25, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas Rosenstiel, "Perot Voter's Leaning to the Right in '94," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1994, p. A15.

supporters becoming active in an initial campaign and then continuing to be active (not necessarily for the same candidate or party) is referred to by political scientists as the "spillover effect." When considering the potential "spillover" from activity in the 1992 Perot campaign, the logical assumption might have been that Perot voters, who by and large had been mobilized to political activity by Perot championing an anti-party message for alienated voters in 1992, would not become involved in subsequent major party contests. However, Stone and Rapoport demonstrated that a statistically significant number of Perot activists were drawn into supporting major party candidates in 1994, expanding the major parties' support base.<sup>209</sup> While many Perot supporters remained active in major party campaigns, others did not continue to be politically active. The dissatisfaction and alienation many Perot voters had felt before the 1992 election continued in 1994. Such feelings of continued dissatisfaction with the parties and the federal government may have contributed to their decision not to vote in the midterm election. While voters in general are less active in nonpresidential elections, exit polls from 1994 suggest that Perot voters were less active relative to those who supported one of the major parties in 1992. Exit polls in 1994 showed that only 14 percent of all voters in the congressional midterm election had voted for Perot in the last presidential election, lower than Perot's 19 percent share of the electorate in 1992, while Bush and Clinton supporters remained within 1 percent of their 1992 share of the electorate.<sup>210</sup>

It is not surprising, given the Republican policy inclinations of Perot voters, as well as their support for GOP candidates in the earlier special elections, that Perot supporters and UWSA members overwhelmingly supported Republicans in the 1994 congressional elections. Democratic pollster Peter Hart showed no surprise as Perot voters supported Republicans in 1994, calling the "Perot factor" "ephemeral heresy . . . [because] they left George Bush for Ross Perot in 1992, and they are returning to the Republican Party in

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<sup>209</sup> Ronald Rapoport and Walter Stone, "Spillover Effects of Participation in the 1992 Perot Movement: Perot Activists in the 1994 U.S. House Elections," presented at the American Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, IL, September 2, 1995.

<sup>210</sup> "1994 Election Day Exit Poll," Public Opinion Online, Roper Center at the University of Connecticut.

1994."<sup>211</sup> While Democrats and Republicans had evenly split the Perot vote in congressional elections in 1992, the Republicans received a greater share in 1994, as nearly two-thirds voted for GOP candidates.<sup>212</sup> Further, Perot voters who had contributed to UWSA (about 4 percent of the total electorate), voted 69 percent for Republican candidates.<sup>213</sup>

While Perot supporters were cited as potential swing votes in a number of contests in the final days of the 1994 campaign, the extent of their actual impact is largely the subject of speculation. Three weeks before the election, Perot personally endorsed the Republicans, adding that his followers should also support the GOP on election day.<sup>214</sup> Appearing on "Larry King Live," Perot responded to a question about the failures of the Democratic 103rd Congress by noting, "For the last forty years the Democrats have controlled the House of Representatives. For the last 60 years they've [Democrats] controlled the Senate for all but 12 years. Those folks who work for us haven't done a good job for all those years."<sup>215</sup> Accordingly, Perot concluded that it was time for Americans to give Republicans "a turn at bat."<sup>216</sup>

The impact of Perot supporters and UWSA was important in House Speaker Tom Foley's reelection bid, one of the most watched races in the country.<sup>217</sup> Foley was locked in a tight race with George Nethercutt, a relatively unknown Republican. The race was particularly interesting because a House speaker had not lost a reelection bid since 1860, when William Pennington was defeated.<sup>218</sup> UWSA work in Washington advocating the election of new congressional representatives had particularly hurt Foley, who was fighting

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<sup>211</sup> Rosenstiel, "Perot Voter's Leaning to the Right in '94,"

<sup>212</sup> "The Dancers of Dallas," *The Economist*, August 12, 1995, p. 26.

<sup>213</sup> "Victory by the Numbers," *Time*, November 21, 1994, p. 64.

<sup>214</sup> Rosenstiel, "Perot Voter's Leaning to the Right in '94."

<sup>215</sup> Katherine Seelye, "Perot Urges Voters to Fill Congress With Republicans," *The New York Times*, October 6, 1994, p. D22.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Rosenstiel, "Perot Voter's Leaning to the Right in '94."

<sup>218</sup> Timothy Egan, "Foley, Defending Congress to the Last, Concedes Defeat to Newcomer," *The New York Times*, November 10, 1994, p. B3.

a race defined by his experience and lengthy tenure in Washington, D.C.<sup>219</sup> While activities by UWSA favored the Republicans as the party of "change", exit polls revealed that Ross Perot's official endorsement of the Republicans on "Larry King Live" only made 9 percent of voters more likely to vote Republican, while it made 13 percent of all voters more likely to support Democrats.<sup>220</sup>

Any assessment of the "Perot factor" in the 1994 election must acknowledge the larger historical significance of the groups continued organization and involvement in electoral politics after the 1992 election. Perot and UWSA showed a willingness in 1994 to cross-endorse major party candidates, one of Theodore Lowi's criteria for a genuine third party. While Perot and UWSA primarily endorsed Republican candidates, Perot showed a willingness to endorse Democrats as well, as his endorsement of Governor Roy Romer indicated.<sup>221</sup> This type of activity further met Lowi's criteria to organize beyond a single election, and showed a willingness to be involved in elections beyond the presidential level, although there was no organized effort to run a slate of third party candidates. A study by President Clinton's pollster Stanley Greenberg recognized the continued importance of the Perot movement as it identified Perot voters from 1992 as "the pivotal force in American politics."<sup>222</sup> While the Republicans clearly appealed to Perot voters on a number of reform issues in 1994, it is not clear after a single election whether Perot voters have decided to align themselves in the long run with Republicans. Republicans could have been the beneficiaries of Perot voter support in 1994 because voters were returning to the party for the long run. The Republicans may also have received the support of Perot voters only for the 1994 election, as they offered the best alternative to the Democrats in Congress who were not making progress on issues of interest to these voters. Analysis on how effective the Republicans were at bringing Perot voter support to their party and how long-lasting this support is will largely depend on the results of the 1996 and future elections.

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<sup>219</sup> Rosenstiel, "Perot Voter's Leaning to the Right in '94."

<sup>220</sup> "1994 Election Day Exit Poll," Public Opinion Online, Roper Center at the University of Connecticut.

<sup>221</sup> "Colorado: Perot Throws His Support Behind Romer," *The Hotline*, October 25, 1994.

<sup>222</sup> Rosenstiel, "Perot Voter's Leaning to the Right in '94."

However, moves by Perot in the Fall of 1995 indicated the Republicans would have to strengthen and continue their efforts as Perot continued to chart a course challenging the major parties.

### The Road to 1996

By the summer of 1995 Perot was positioning UWSA to play a role in the 1996 presidential election. Once again, Perot had to decide what role he and UWSA wanted to play in the race. Were the major parties addressing UWSA concerns? Should UWSA support the efforts of either of the major parties? Should Perot run again? Would UWSA be used as the building block for a third party? These questions led Perot to call a massive three day conference in Dallas in August 1995.

### **The UWSA Conference**

The declared purpose of the conference was to discuss the topic of "Preparing Our Country for the 21st Century." The conference, held in Dallas on August 11-13, featured political leaders from the major parties and covered a broad agenda. The Dallas gathering featured appearances by the major party leaders from the Congress and national party organizations, including House Speaker Newt Gingrich, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, Senate Majority Whip Trent Lott, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, Democratic National Committee Chair Senator Chris Dodd, and Republican National Committee Chair Haley Barbour. Participants addressed a wide range of issues including the tax system, the deficit, social security reform, the role of the United States overseas, as well as general discussions about government and leadership for America in the next century. The conference received significant press coverage from the national media, and portions of the conference were covered live on CSPAN and CNN. Larry King, with his history of close ties to Perot, moved his show to the Dallas convention site and aired special weekend editions.

The conference was not only notable for maintaining Perot and UWSA's political profiles, but also for the concerted effort displayed by Republican party members to use the conference as an opportunity to coopt Perot voters and to dissuade Perot from launching another presidential bid. As Frank Luntz, a prominent Republican pollster, put it, "The Perot voting block is the key to 1996."<sup>223</sup> The Republicans recognized that Perot had cut away from Bush's support in 1992, and felt that if Perot were to run again he would threaten to undermine the GOP nominee in 1996. If Perot stayed out of the race, the Republicans would have a chance to appeal to the Perot voters, and potentially persuade the block to vote Republican.

By the time of the August conference a preliminary group of Republicans had declared their candidacies for the GOP presidential nomination. Ten Republican challengers accepted Perot's invitation to attend and make addresses. These candidates primarily focused their message on issues important to Perot voters, including discussion of budget deficits, a line-item veto, a balanced budget amendment, the GATT and NAFTA agreements, and term limits. However, it was long-shot contenders like Pat Buchanan and Pete Wilson who got the best reaction from the Perot voters at the conference, rather than Bob Dole, the favorite to win the GOP nomination. This was largely attributed to Perot voter concerns that Dole had spent too much time in Washington and was not capable of making the reforms desired by Perot voters.<sup>224</sup> While a group of congressional Democrats and members of national Democratic organizations attended the conference, President Clinton refused the invitation to attend. Following the strong support Republicans received from Perot voters in 1994, the Clinton administration seemed content to write off attempts at coopting these voters.<sup>225</sup> Clinton chose to send Mack McLarty, a presidential counselor, to the conference as a representative of the Administration, a choice that did not lend the

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<sup>223</sup> "The Dancers of Dallas," p. 26.

<sup>224</sup> Michael Rezendes, "Perot Seeks Bipartisan Contract," *The Boston Globe*, August 14, 1995, pp. 1,4.

<sup>225</sup> Jonathan Freedland, "In Homage to Dallas," *The Guardian*, August 14, 1995, p. T2.

conference the credibility associated with having the president accept an invitation and attend.

Conference participants questioned whether the major parties could bring about the necessary reforms in Washington. This concern fueled speculation among both participants and the media as to whether Perot would form a third party and mount a challenge in 1996. Perot had hinted in his endorsement of the Republicans in 1994 that if they could not bring change to Washington he would be willing to start a third party challenge in 1996.<sup>226</sup> Perot supporters and UWSA members expressed their desire for such a party to the media throughout the convention.<sup>227</sup> Guarding against such a development, Republican presidential hopeful Lamar Alexander urged Perot to work with the Republicans, noting that a third party challenge would almost ensure a second term for President Clinton. Perot did not allude to, or make promises about, what role he might personally play in the 1996 contest, but he did press the Democrats and Republicans to make progress on reform agenda measures including campaign finance reform and restrictions on lobbyists. Perot noted that progress on such reforms would be what he considered "the nicest Christmas present you [the parties] could give the American people."<sup>228</sup> Perot's emphasis away from the rhetoric of the Dallas conference to action in Washington was characteristic of what UWSA members and other Perot supporters wanted to see from the major parties. Ideology and shared positions on issues were not enough, action would be needed before the GOP's appeals would be taken seriously.

The 104th Congress did make progress on lobbying reform before the end of the year by passing legislation requiring public disclosure of the identities, incomes, employers, and causes of lobbyists.<sup>229</sup> Despite this progress on lobbying reform, no action was made on other reform measures, such as campaign finance reform. This lack of

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<sup>226</sup> Seelye, "Perot Urges Voters to Fill Congress With Republicans."

<sup>227</sup> Rezendes, "Perot Seeks Bipartisan Contract," p. 1.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> "Let the Sun Shine In; Lobbying Reform: Congress Requires Disclosure of Those Seeking to Influence Government," *The Baltimore Sun*, December 1, 1995, p. 26A.



substantive progress on many reform measures, and the general continuation of "gridlock" in Washington the following Fall left reformers doubting whether the major parties could get the job done. These doubts prompted Perot to take further action to advance the reform agenda in 1996 by creating a new political party.

### **The Reform Party**

Having defied history by remaining a high profile political figure three years after losing the 1992 election, Perot announced his intention to form a new political party on CNN's "Larry King Live" on September 25, 1995. Perot noted he would have preferred to wait until 1996 before getting started, allowing Democrats and Republicans a six-month period after the Dallas UWSA conference to make progress on a reform agenda. However, ballot access rules for third parties in three states (CA, ME, ND) required filing before the end of 1995. Perot wanted to ensure that the "two thirds of the American people [who] won't attach themselves to either party and want an independent party" were not ignored in the 1996 election, a move that required action before the end of 1995. According to Perot, it was simple a case of being "stuck with rules" governing ballot access, and the formation of the new party was in no way a response to party leaders following the August conference. However, as Perot emphasized the point that the party leaders who had attended his conference "didn't disappoint us," he was skeptical that the parties would ever address tough reform issues like passing term limits, balancing the budget, and setting tighter rules governing ethics.<sup>230</sup>

As Perot made his case for the third party option, it was apparent that he believed an alternative to the major parties was needed to address the larger systemic problems of American government and politics. Perot told King that Americans have reached a "critical time in American history" when the government needs reforming and voter faith can be restored. Perot alluded to the alienation of the American voters from their government,

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<sup>230</sup> From Ross Perot appearance on "Larry King Live," *CNN*, September 25, 1995.

citing the decline in voter faith in government and party identification as evidence of the public's desire for a new alternative.

Perot tried to emphasize that the new party endeavor was not a personal quest, but rather was a tactical decision for the good of America. Perot told King "I don't need a party to run in, I can run as an independent," and he repeatedly said "this is not about me."<sup>231</sup> While the formation of the Reform Party may have not been "about" Perot, it certainly was dependent upon his personal wealth. An indication of Perot's commitment to the party was evident in his willingness to provide the necessary capital for getting the party organized and off the ground. Perot did note that he intended the party to become financially independent, saying that once the party was up and running he could step back and it could be funded from member contributions.

The platform of the Reform Party reflected Perot's belief in the need for large structural reforms of the American government. The party outlined nine general areas for government reform, including high ethical standards for the White House and Congress, balancing the budget, campaign reform, term limits for Congress, creating a new tax system, reform of the Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security systems, and restricting lobbyists, with specific restrictions on the operation of both foreign and domestic lobbyists.<sup>232</sup> Perot noted that the Reform party would not get involved with divisive social issues like abortion, because the party's focus was on reforming government and restoring voter confidence, and not "issues that will not determine the success or failure of our country."<sup>233</sup>

The Reform Party has established guidelines for choosing a presidential candidate. According to Perot, after the party is finished organizing and qualifying for the ballot in each of the fifty states, it will hold its own primary where any individual who receives the support of 10 percent of the party's petition signers could qualify. The national Reform

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> From the Official Reform Party Homepage (<http://www.reformparty.org/>).

<sup>233</sup> "Larry King Live," *CNN*, September 25, 1995.

Party will then circulate materials to state and local offices about the candidates who qualified, and the party will have a national convention. The convention will be linked by satellite to state and local organization gatherings, so that members can view speeches made by the qualifying candidates. Finally, registered party members will vote electronically and the winner will be nominated by the party.<sup>234</sup>

The organization of the Reform Party followed many of Lowi's criteria for a genuine third party. By deciding to form the party in time for it to qualify on every state's ballot, Perot followed Lowi's principle that a party must be competitive and focused on winning elections. If Perot had waited until sometime in 1996 to decide on organizing a challenge (not necessarily for himself), the third party option would not have been practical since by that time a third party could not qualify for the ballot in all states. The only available option would be to launch an independent bid similar to the 1992 effort.

Perot chose to create a lasting organization which will be a presence in future elections, rather than focusing on organizing temporary challenges to the major parties by way of independent campaigns. By creating a campaign organization that would last beyond a single election, Perot met another of Lowi's criteria for forming a genuine third party. While UWSA had provided the organizational foundation for Perot's continued activity after 1992, the creation of the Reform Party went the extra step towards providing an election apparatus to run and endorse candidates in elections.

The Reform Party was established by Perot with the intention of running a presidential nominee in the 1996 election. The interest in nominating only a presidential candidate violates Lowi's criteria for a genuine third party that runs candidates at all levels of government. However, Perot noted the Reform Party would cross-endorse major party nominees for other offices in 1994 if they were willing to pledge the party's platform. The invitation for endorsements appears to be limited only to major party nominees, as local and state level candidates who have claimed an affiliation with the Reform Party have not been

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

endorsed by the national party for the 1996 election, because of concerns over the quality and motivations of such candidates.<sup>235</sup> Perot did not rule out that the Reform Party could eventually develop to run candidates for all levels of office in future elections.

Lowi's final criteria for forming a genuine third party is that the party be built bottom-up, based on grass roots initiatives. Perot has maintained since he initially entered the 1992 presidential race that he was the candidate and choice of a grass roots movement. However, Perot has been criticized by Lowi and others since 1992 for being a "dictator" who has mishandled and dominated a grass roots movement. Regardless of these charges, his movement has widespread popular support. The Reform Party, like Perot's 1992 campaign and UWSA, has established state and local offices across the nation. Supporters have organized to establish the Reform Party in all fifty states.<sup>236</sup> The state and local level support the Reform Party has received matches the spirit of Lowi's criteria for grass roots support, as Americans have become politically active as "petition gatherers" and "door knockers" working to establish the party.

Even though the Reform Party effort is well financed and has gotten underway early in the election cycle, it is important to remember that the barriers to establishing a third party are substantial. Like the qualifications for independent candidates, third party ballot access rules are set by the individual states and have varied conditions. As Perot noted, a number of states have early filing deadlines to discourage third party formation. Further, when the formation of the Reform Party was announced, thirteen states had no official procedure for third parties to gain access to the ballot.<sup>237</sup>

Guidelines for third party public financing have not changed significantly since 1980 when Anderson tried to form the American Independence Party. New parties can still only qualify for a fraction of what the major party candidates automatically receive, and most of this is in a retroactive manner based on the third party's showing in election

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<sup>235</sup> Ray Huard, "Candidates Try for Seats Via Reform Party," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, December 20, 1995, p. A3.

<sup>236</sup> Official Reform Party Homepage (<http://www.reformparty.org/>).

<sup>237</sup> These states are: CO, CT, IL, IN, IA, KY, NH, NJ, NY, PN, VA, WA, WV.

results. This may not prove to be a great concern to Perot and organizers of the Reform Party, since they do not believe in the public finance system's use of tax payer money to fund campaigns. The Reform Party will likely rely on Perot's personal wealth until such time as fundraising can support viable challenges to the major parties. The question for the Reform Party is whether they will be able to achieve an equal financial footing without Perot's help, given the substantial sums that the major party nominees will continue to receive from public financing and the national party organizations.

The winner-take-all nature of the electoral college has not changed since 1992, and it will continue to limit the competitiveness of third party and independent candidates. Electoral votes are still awarded in each state on a winner-take-all basis, providing no reward for second or third place candidates. For this reason, voters could continue to favor the clear choices provided by the two major parties. The potential for voters to be concerned about "wasting" their vote and viability of third and independent candidates will also continue to exist.

### Conclusion

American politics has traditionally been dominated by major parties and their candidates. Third party and independent candidates have rarely played more than a peripheral role in elections, and when they have, it has only been a transient phenomenon. Ross Perot's independent candidacy in the 1992 election was a significant part of the election. Perot's continued role in the political process has made him unique among nonmajor party candidates in that he has defied the dominant pattern of nonmajor party candidates fading into obscurity following the election.

In 1992, American voters were dissatisfied and angry with the Republican and Democratic parties and the way the federal government was working. These feelings made the electorate receptive to Perot's independent candidacy. While Perot was a political amateur, he was embraced by many of the disenfranchised voters for his "outsider"

qualifications. Perot focused his campaign rhetoric on criticizing the federal government, and on promoting discussion of America's debt problem. Despite Perot's limited issues focus, he received 19 percent of the vote on election day, the second best showing by a nonmajor party candidate this century.

Perot was able to overcome the traditional barriers of ballot access and campaign finance in 1992. These barriers had limited nonmajor party success in previous elections, but Perot was able to organize a successful 50 state ballot access campaign, and his enormous personal wealth ensured he could fund a competitive campaign. Perot was hurt by the traditional barrier of the electoral college, as its winner-take-all provisions continued to favor the major party candidates.

Perot's 1992 campaign created some early political legacies. First, and foremost, Perot showed how a wealthy candidate could bypass the campaign finance barriers associated with the FECA and public finance. Perot used \$63 million from his own wealth to fund a campaign that could compete with the major parties' publicly financed campaigns. The Perot campaign was therefore not limited financially from hiring adequate staff, funding a media campaign, and mounting a successful ballot access effort.

The Perot 1992 campaign also demonstrated the potential for political amateurs to play a significant role in presidential politics when voters are unhappy with the government and the major parties. Perot had no campaign experience before his 1992 bid, a factor that apparently aided his image with voters of being a political "outsider." The angry mood of the electorate and voters' dissatisfaction with the government and parties was an important condition for Perot's success. Because the electorate was so upset with politics as usual, voters were receptive to an alternative to the major party candidates in 1992. It did not matter how politically inexperienced Perot was, or how ill-defined his message may have been. Theodore Lowi has asserted that Perot was different from previous nonmajor party candidates because his support was not centered on a specific issue, but rather on the alternative to the major party candidates he offered to voters. Perot did make the national

debt a campaign issue in 1992, but to a greater extent, the headway he made with the voters was founded on their anger towards the government and major parties.

Perot's continued political activity following the 1992 election has made him a significant figure in American politics. Previous nonmajor party candidates have either faded into political obscurity following elections, or have returned to political activity in the major parties. Following the 1992 election, Perot organized United We Stand America as a "watchdog" political group to follow government progress on measures like lobbying reform and campaign finance reform. Perot played an active role throughout 1993 in opposing the NAFTA agreement, a role which led to a debate on "Larry King Live" between himself and Vice President Gore. UWSA played a role in the 1994 midterm elections by promoting and unofficially endorsing a number of Republican candidates, and Perot made an announcement urging his supporters to vote Republican on election day. Perot and UWSA hosted a convention in the summer of 1995 that attracted important political figures from the major parties, as well as national media attention. Finally, Perot has taken the initial steps towards forming a third party for the 1996 and future elections. All of these activities have secured a place for Perot in American politics beyond a single election. Perot will continue to be a relevant figure on a personal level, and the organization of UWSA and the Reform Party offer the potential for Perot to have a legacy beyond his own personal involvement in politics.

Even if Perot were to fade from the American political scene, UWSA and the Reform Party will still have an impact the political process. UWSA demonstrated during the 1994 midterm elections its potential to play an active role in electoral politics. The group showed that as a political "watchdog" organization it could not only monitor the government's progress on passing reform legislation, but it could hold candidates accountable for not promoting progress on government reform. UWSA has the potential to continue its role as a political "watchdog" group promoting government action on a reform agenda, and to support candidates responsive to a reform agenda in future elections.

Perot's organization of the Reform Party will have an immediate impact on the electoral process, and it holds the potential to influence future elections. The Reform Party will change the rules governing elections, as the party attempts to attain ballot access in all fifty states. When Perot made the announcement of the party's formation, thirteen states had no provisions for a third party to qualify for ballot access. The Reform Party will at least force these thirteen states to adopt provisions for third party ballot access, defining the rules that will govern future third party attempts to gain ballot access. Perot and the Reform Party could also mount legal challenges to states with particularly difficult ballot access provisions, a move that would further pave the way for future third parties to qualify for the ballot.

The Reform Party holds the greatest potential for the Perot movement to have an impact on nonmajor party activity in future elections. As organization of the Reform Party continues, the question is whether Perot's effort will lead to the formation of a viable and genuine third party. The potential to form such a third party has existed since Perot's 1992 campaign, and has been recognized by political scientists, including Theodore Lowi. Lowi has developed criteria for creating a genuine third party that would assure that the party remains viable in future elections, and Perot has incorporated many of these criteria in his plans for the Reform Party.

The Reform Party meets Lowi's criteria in that it will be competitive and focused on winning elections, it will cross-endorse other parties' candidates, and it will have organization to last beyond a single election. Although the Reform Party will only support a presidential nominee in 1996, Perot has announced his willingness to develop the party into an organization that runs candidates for all levels of political office. Whether Perot meets Lowi's requirement that a genuine third party be formed from "grass roots initiatives" is less clear. Lowi believes that Perot has too much control over the grass roots movement that supports him for a genuine third party to develop. Regardless of Lowi's contention, the grass roots movement behind Perot has developed some organization in all



fifty states, and enjoys widespread popular support. By following Lowi's criteria, the Reform Party should become a viable and genuine third party in future elections.

Perot's 1992 campaign and continued political activity after the election were in part dependent upon his personal wealth, as he was able to finance campaigns and build political organizations. However, Perot's success in 1992 and after the election has also been possible because of the continued feelings among voters of dissatisfaction and anger towards the government and the major parties. Perot's supporters account for nearly one in five of all voters, and they have become the critical swing vote for elections after 1992. The importance of Perot voters was evident in 1994 as the Republicans sought to capture their vote by promoting reform issues in the Contract With America. The Perot voters will likely play a significant role in the 1996 election, even if Perot is not personally involved.

The popular support for a third alternative to the major parties goes beyond Perot and his supporters. While Perot and his supporters may be the most recognizable political block outside of the major parties, they are only a fraction of the voters who are angry and dissatisfied. A majority of Americans feel alienated from the government, think the nation is headed in the wrong direction, and want a third option to the major parties and their candidates. Perot has not received the support of most of this group, and with or without Perot and his organizations, these angry and dissatisfied voters will continue to have an impact on future elections. The real potential for third party success lies with this group. If they continue to feel alienated and unhappy with the government and the major political parties, they could provide support for alternatives to the major parties.

The 1992 Perot presidential campaign was one of the most successful nonmajor party campaigns this century, and it has become the foundation for significant political activity outside of the major parties. Ross Perot established himself as an important figure in American politics during the 1992 campaign, and he has become further notable for his continued role in politics following the election. Perot's initial campaign has produced two political organizations that have provided Perot and his supporters a means of remaining

politically active following the 1992 election. Perot's supporters, and other angry American voters, have provided Perot with support for his political activities, and hold the potential to have a further impact on future elections. The 1992 Perot movement was not the typical isolated and short-lived challenge to the major parties, but rather the foundation for continued nonmajor party political activity.

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