



It's Perot Stupid! The Legacy of the 1992 Perot Movement in the Major-Party System, 1994-2000

Author(s): Walter J. Stone and Ronald B. Rapoport

Source: *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Mar., 2001, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Mar., 2001), pp. 49-58

Published by: American Political Science Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1350310>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



American Political Science Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *PS: Political Science and Politics*

JSTOR

It's Perot Stupid! The Legacy of the 1992 Perot Movement in the Major-Party System, 1994–2000*

By any standard, the 2000 presidential election was close. It was close in the Electoral College, where Bush prevailed by the slimmest majority (271–266), and it was close in the national popular vote, where Gore edged Bush by about 540,000 votes in an electorate of more than 100 million. Needless to say, the 2000 election was also astonishingly close in individual states like Florida, New Mexico, Wisconsin, and Oregon.

This was an election Gore was supposed to win handily. The American economy was performing at truly historic levels, and any number of social indicators—from unemployment to teen-pregnancy to crime rates—were moving in the right direction. Polls consistently showed that a substantial majority of

Americans approved of the job Clinton was doing as president. At the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, several scholars forecast the outcome of the presidential elec-

tion based on the state of the economy, the popularity of the incumbent president, and other factors. All predicted a relatively comfortable Gore popular vote margin from a low of just under 53% to a high of about 60% (Campbell 2000a). These forecasts are interesting because they establish a baseline expectation for how well a party's candidate is expected to do before the campaign officially begins. In 2000, the baseline for Gore was considerably above 50% of the two-party vote. What happened?

Various explanations were widely circulated in the aftermath of the election:

Gore Was a Lousy Candidate

According to this explanation, Al Gore was not a compelling candidate who

could excite the Democratic base and attract independent voters. He was stiff and awkward in his public persona, ineffective in the debates, and appeared to reinvent himself constantly in response to the most recent criticisms. He demonstrated a tendency toward embarrassing exaggerations that also undermined his credibility and trustworthiness, which were especially critical given his effort to distance himself from a scandal-plagued President Clinton and run as his “own man.” Because forecasting model predictions are based on data available before Labor Day, they cannot take into account the quality of a candidate's campaign (Campbell 2000b). As a result, in 2000 they overestimated the Democratic vote.

The Clinton Factor

While a majority of Americans did not support impeaching Clinton as a result of his affair with a White House intern, there was widespread disapproval of his private behavior as president. The electorate needed a way to sanction his behavior. Clinton had made it clear that his legacy depended heavily upon a Gore victory and, as much as Gore would let him, he publicly supported his vice president's candidacy. Voters could not use the 1998 elections to punish Clinton because they were generally even more disgusted with the Republican impeachment drive than they were with Clinton's behavior. As a result, the Democrats beat history by actually gaining seats in a midterm election when they held the presidency. Gore took the fall for Clinton by running in the first national election after the scandal that was untainted by the electorate's distaste for impeaching the president.

The Nader Factor

The real monkey on Gore's back was not Bill Clinton; it was Green Party presidential nominee Ralph Nader. If

by

Walter J. Stone,

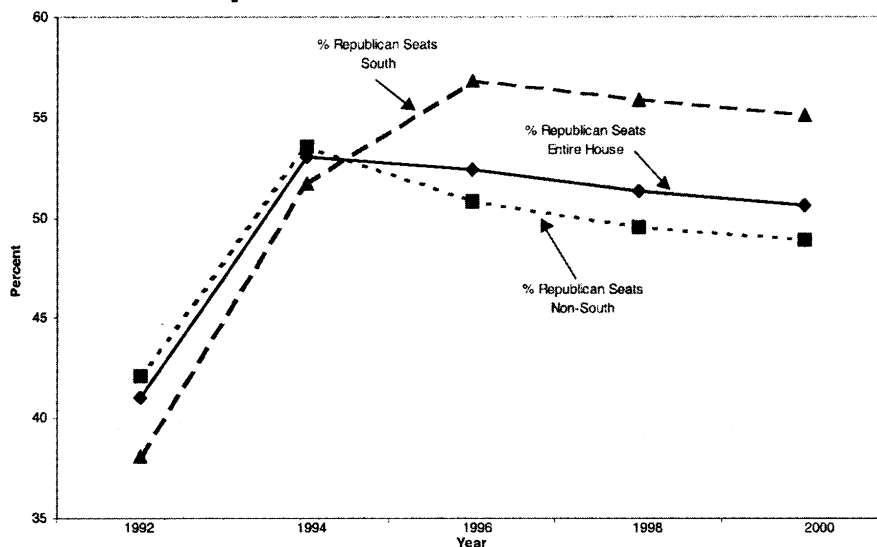
University of Colorado,
Boulder

Ronald B. Rapoport,

College of William and Mary

Nader's 3% of the popular presidential vote is added to Gore's share, the total comes within the range of predictions offered by the political scientist forecasters. Certainly if Gore had received a significant share of Nader's votes, few if any questions would be raised about whether Gore met his "baseline" expectation in the 2000 electorate. In several states won narrowly by George Bush, most notably Florida, the Nader vote was more than enough to swamp the meager differences

FIGURE 1
Percent Republican Seats in U.S.
House of Representatives, 1992-2000



between the two major-party candidates. Any reasonable allocation of Nader voters among the options available if the Green candidate had not run—voting for Gore, voting for Bush, or declining to vote in the presidential election—shows that Gore would have easily carried Florida and the election had Nader not been on the ballot.

Partisan Competition Revisited

While these explanations have some bearing on the outcome of the 2000 election, we contend that they miss an underlying change in American politics best explained by factors that have nothing directly to do with the 2000 election or the candidates involved. The trends in the partisan make-up of the U.S. House of Representatives since 1992 give perhaps the clearest indication that a major change occurred in American politics well before the 2000 presidential election. Prior to the 1994 elections, the Democrats had been the majority party in the House for 40 years. Between 1954 and 1994, they held the majority in the House very comfortably, averaging 60% of the seats. Their hold on the House seemed secure. The Democratic majority was insulated, in part, by a strong incumbency bias in House elections, but it also held because the Democrats consistently fielded stronger candidates than

the Republicans, and were able to win a majority of open seats (Bond, Fleisher, and Talbert 1997; Gaddie and Bullock 2000; Jacobson 1997).

One view is that the 1994 elections finally brought to fruition a long-simmering Republican realignment that had been evident since at least 1968 in presidential elections. The driving force of the realignment was the civil rights movement, the enfranchisement of southern black voters, and a realignment to the advantage of the Republican Party among white southerners (Beck 1999; Black and Black 1992; Carmines and Stimson 1989; cf., Abramowitz 1995; Abramowitz and Saunders 2000; Jacobson 2000a). Following Richard Nixon's "southern strategy" in the 1968 elections, the Republicans won five of eight presidential elections between 1968 and 1996, largely on the strength of majorities their candidates were able to win in the states of the Old Confederacy. Significantly, the only Democrats able to capture the White House during the past three decades were southerners—Jimmy Carter in 1976, and Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996.

As noted, however, Democratic hegemony over the U.S. House continued through the 1992 elections in which the Democrats held 59% of the seats. What changed between 1992 and 1994 to allow the Republicans to win their first majority in the House since 1954? We are persuaded that a southern realignment in favor of the Republican party is part of the story, but that it is by no means a full explanation.¹ Figure 1 indicates why increased support from voters in the South is part, but not all, of the explanation for the Republican House majorities since 1994. The Republican Party won a majority of seats in both southern and nonsouthern states in 1994. Indeed, the Republican majority was slightly smaller in southern districts than it was in those outside the South in 1994. On the basis of this fact alone, it would be difficult to attribute the Republican victory directly to North-South differences. However, the data in the figure do suggest that support in the South helped sustain the Republican majority, with a distinct gap in Republican fortunes emerging in 1996 and persisting through 1998 and 2000. Without their strong majorities in the South, the Republicans would have lost control of the House in 1998.²

The Legacy of Ross Perot

Our argument is that a largely overlooked explanation for the 1994 Republican victory and the highly competitive character of American electoral politics since 1994 is to be found in changes in the party system rooted in the 1992 Perot movement.³ These changes

resulted from predictable consequences of a “major” third-party movement such as Perot’s that we characterize as the “dynamic of third parties” in U.S. politics (Rapoport and Stone 2001). We begin by summarizing the logic behind the dynamic of third parties and its implications for major-party change. We then present evidence showing that support from 1992 Perot voters helps explain why Republicans captured the House in 1994 and continued to enjoy success in House elections through 2000, particularly in districts outside the South. We conclude with an analysis of the effect of the 1992 Perot vote on presidential politics in 1996 and 2000.

Third Parties and the Potential for Major-Party Change

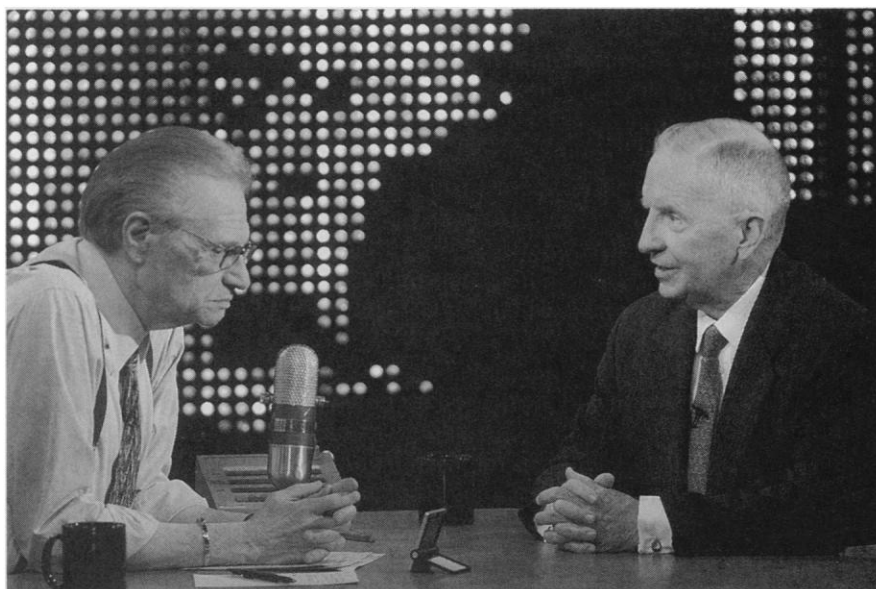
The dynamic of third parties in U.S. elections is remarkably regular. As Richard Hofstadter (1955–97) put it: “Third parties are like bees; once they have stung, they die.” Think of the major third-party movements of the twentieth century other than Perot’s (Bibby and Maisel 1998, 23). In 1912, former President Theodore Roosevelt’s Bull Moose Party attracted more than 25% of the vote, only to disappear in the next election. In 1924 Robert La Follette drew 17% of the popular vote under the Progressive banner, but did not reappear in 1928. And in 1968, George Wallace’s American Independent Party candidacy was supported by 13.5% of voters, but this was followed in 1972 by the AIP’s paltry 1.4% showing when Wallace was not the party’s nominee. In contrast to such “major” minor parties, relatively small third parties such as the Libertarian, Socialist Labor, and Natural Law parties often attract very small percentages of the vote and may persist for decades. The quick demise that typically awaits successful third parties occurs because the emergence of the third party in the first place relies upon some sort of significant failure of the two major parties to address a meaningful social or policy problem (Mazmanian 1974; Rosenstone et al. 1996). The emergence and success of the third party, then, signals to the major parties the existence of a large, discontented constituency. The larger the vote the third party receives, the greater the incentive one or both parties have to respond by trying to capture or recapture backers of the third-party movement. According to Mazmanian, “Usually after a strong showing by a minor party, at least one of the major parties shifts its position, adopting the third party’s rhetoric if not the core of its programs. Consequently, by the following election the third-party constituency . . . has a major

party more sympathetic to its demands” (1974, 143). Numerous scholars have noticed an association between the emergence and success of third parties and realignment of the major parties (Beck 1979; Burnham 1970; Sundquist 1983).

This story is obviously too simple to account fully for the Perot phenomenon in the 1992-96 election cycle.⁴ Nonetheless, it highlights three conditions that help determine whether a third-party movement such as Perot’s leaves a legacy of major-party change: (1) the third party had a large and identifiable issue constituency; (2) following the election in which the third-party candidate appeared, one or both parties bid for the third party’s supporters based in part on the issue concerns that motivated them; and (3) third party supporters respond to the major party’s bid by shifting their support. While we cannot present all of our results that speak to these conditions as they apply to the Perot movement (Rapoport and Stone 2001), we can summarize enough of them to put into context the findings we present here about how the Perot movement brought about changes in the major parties after 1992.⁵

The Basis of Support for Perot

An important basis of Perot’s support was voter dissatisfaction with the issue positions of major candidates and attraction to Perot because of the issue stands he took. We call this a “push-pull” model of third-party support because support can be explained in part



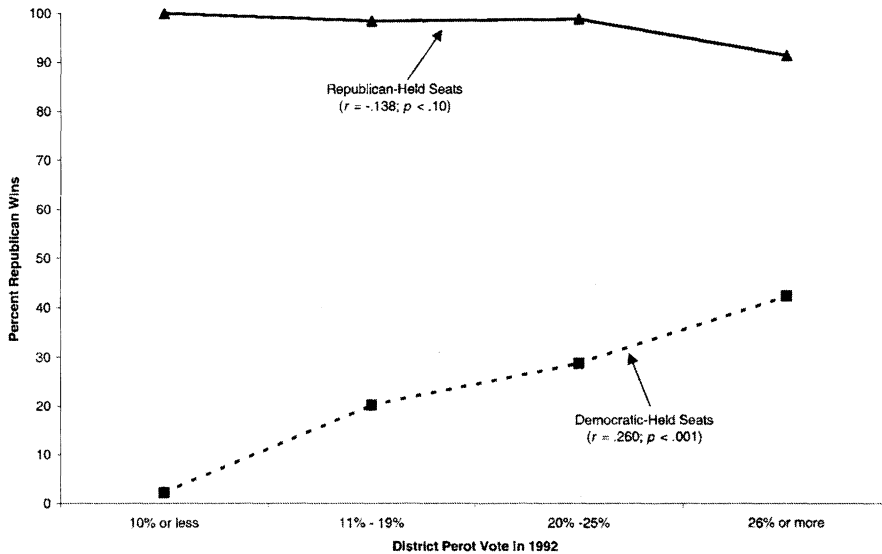
Ross Perot (R), endorses Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush during an appearance on CNN’s “Larry King Live” show, November 2, 2000. AP Photo/Mark Lennihan.

by attraction (or pull) to the candidate based on the issue positions he took and the priorities he set, and in part because of a “push” away from the major parties based on dissatisfaction with their issue positions and priorities (cf., Gold 1995; Mazmanian 1974; Rosenstone et al. 1996). The push component may be

further decomposed into dissatisfaction linked to the distance between the individual and the more satisfactory of the two major parties, and the perceived choice or degree of preference between the major parties. Thus, the greater the policy distance between the

ship of Newt Gingrich, immediately courted Ross Perot and his supporters. The Republicans were in a far better position to attract the Perot constituency than were the Democrats because they were in the minority in the House and Senate, and the Democrats also

FIGURE 2
Republican Wins in 1994 by 1992 Perot Vote Districts Held by the Democrats after the 1992 Election



controlled the presidency under Bill Clinton.⁶ This played to the Republicans' advantage because Perot supporters were very distrustful of those in power in Washington. Indeed, in the 1992 election, the incumbent president George Bush was the least favored candidate among the potential Perot volunteers we surveyed, running well behind Ross Perot and Bill Clinton, even though more respondents identified themselves as Republicans than as either Democrats or independents (McCann, Rapoport, and Stone 1999). In the 1994 elections, the Republicans could run against the Democratic incumbents and, as a party, they were not burdened by holding the reins of national power. Gingrich even went so far as to join United We Stand America, Perot's advocacy group. Additionally,

individual and the closer of the two major parties, the more likely she is to turn to a third-party candidate such as Ross Perot. Likewise, the smaller the choice between the Democratic and Republican candidates relative to the voter is perceived to be, the more likely individuals are to support a third party. We find consistent evidence from the 1992 and 1996 elections that both push factors and pull toward Perot had independent effects on potential supporters' active involvement in the Perot campaigns (Rapoport and Stone 2001). In other words, the push-pull model suggests an opportunity for the major parties to respond to the third party's backers to the extent that they have policy concerns that either the Democratic or Republican party can address by changing its positions or the issues it emphasizes. The issues that especially defined the Perot constituency were political reform (such as term limits and a balanced budget amendment), economic nationalism (such as a concern with reducing imports to protect American jobs, cutting back on foreign commitments, and reducing immigration), and balancing the federal budget (by cutting spending and increasing taxes).

The Major-Party Bid for Perot Supporters

Given an opportunity to appeal to the Perot constituency, what did the Democratic and Republican parties do after Perot's first campaign in 1992? The Republicans, particularly House Republicans under the leader-

tionally, of course, Republicans were helped by the fact that Ross Perot was not on the ballot.⁷

Evidence of the Republican bid for the policy-based affections of the Perot constituency is found in the Contract with America offered in the fall of 1994 as a rationale for electing a Republican majority to the House of Representatives. The Contract emphasized the Perot issues of a balanced federal budget, reform, and limiting American commitment to internationalism. Just as notably, the Contract omitted reference to Republican priorities such as stopping abortions and promoting free trade that united the base of the Republican Party but were strongly opposed by supporters of Ross Perot. Perhaps most importantly, Republican leaders, especially Newt Gingrich, were skillful political entrepreneurs able to make the case that their party was best suited to further the Perot agenda if elected to a majority in both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years—a plea embraced by Perot himself when he called on his supporters to “give the Republicans a majority in the House and Senate and say, all right, now, we’re gonna let you guys have a turn at bat” (Schneider 1994).

While Republican leaders orchestrated an appeal to Perot voters, individual Republican candidates evidently also saw an opportunity to capitalize. There is a clear relationship between the size of the 1992 Perot vote in U.S. House districts and the presence of an experienced Republican candidate in 1994. This effect holds up nicely with controls for whether the seat was open in

1994, the partisan predisposition of the district, and whether the Republican candidate who ran in 1992 was experienced. By our estimates, the probability of an experienced Republican emerging in Democrat-held districts where Perot received 5% of the 1992 vote was about .06. The chances of an experienced candidate running in 1994 climbed to .32 in districts where Perot won 30% of the vote (Rapoport and Stone 2001, Chap. 7). In presidential nomination races since 1992, candidates have openly bid for the Perot constituency. In 1996, Pat Buchanan ran for the Republican nomination emphasizing economic nationalism issues and, in 2000, John McCain ran as a reform candidate focusing especially on campaign finance.

The Response of the Perot Constituency

Our general claim is that Perot activists and voters responded to the Republican bid by shifting their support disproportionately to GOP candidates. While Perot voters split their congressional vote evenly in 1992, they shifted heavily toward the Republicans in 1994, giving GOP candidates two-thirds of their votes. In doing so, they accounted for almost half of the net pickup for Republican congressional candidates in 1994 over what they received in 1992.⁸ Among Perot activists, we find strong evidence of mobilization, or “spillover,” effects linked to activism for Perot in 1992 and benefitting the Republican party. The more involved activists for Perot were in 1992, the greater their participation in 1994 Republican House campaigns, independent of their previous activity levels for Republican candidates or their partisan predispositions (Rapoport and Stone 1995; 2001). In keeping with the idea that Perot activists were targeted by Republicans, we also have survey evidence showing that one of the mechanisms that facilitated this spillover was direct contact by a representative of a GOP House campaign.

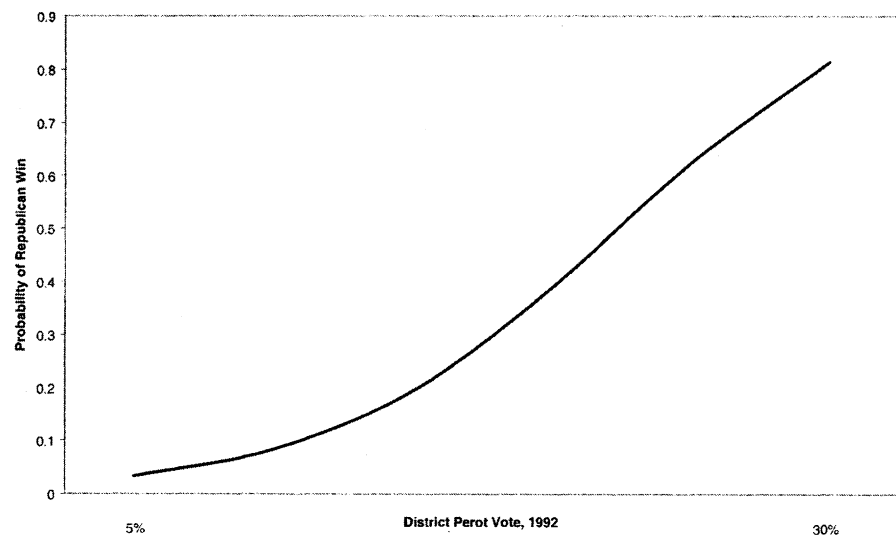
The impact of 1992 Perot support on Republican fortunes is not limited to congressional elections. There is a similar spillover effect from 1992 Perot activity to support for Pat Buchanan’s 1996 GOP nomination campaign, and we expect to find further evidence of spillover into John McCain’s maverick nomination campaign in 2000 when our data become available. Moreover, exit polls from both 1996 and 2000 show a continuing movement of Perot voters into Republican ranks. Among 1992 voters who backed the Texas independent, only one in three continued to support Perot in 1996, while fully 44% backed Bob Dole (22%

went for Clinton). Among 1996 Perot voters, Republicans registered significant gains in 2000, as about 64% went for Bush compared with only 27% for Gore. The net gain to Bush from the collapse of the Reform Party vote in 2000 was 3%.⁹ And in Florida, where Perot received over 9% of the vote in 1996, Bush’s advantage over Gore in 2000 among these voters was almost three to one. Although the exit poll data do not allow for as rigorous a test as our activist panels, our results to date strongly support the conclusion that the pro-Republican change after 1992 was over and above any “returning home” among activists who were formerly involved in Republican campaigns.

The Impact of the Perot Movement on House Elections, 1994-2000

Ross Perot’s 1992 presidential campaign produced a fundamental change in American politics that benefitted Republican candidates for U.S. House seats between 1994 and 2000. Figure 2 shows a clear relationship between the percentage of House districts that went for the Republicans in 1994 and the percent of district votes cast for Perot in 1992. The Republicans only lost four seats in the election, and none of their incumbents running for reelection was defeated. All of the action, of course, was in seats held by the Democrats after the 1992 elections. Among these Democrat-held seats,

FIGURE 3
Estimated Partial Effect of 1992 Perot Vote of Probability of Republicans Winning Marginal Democrat-Held Seats, 1994



there is a clear zero-order relationship between districts’ 1992 Perot vote and the percentage flipping to the Republicans. Only 2.2% of districts held by the Democrats after the 1992 elections where Perot won less than 10% of the 1992 presidential vote were captured by the Republicans in 1994, whereas just over 42% of Democratic seats in districts where Perot ran extremely well in 1992 were won by the Republicans in

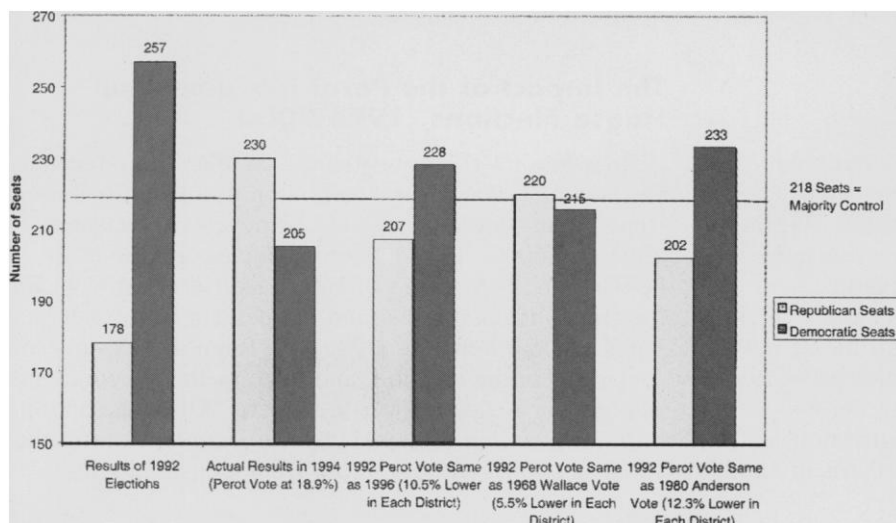
1994. The question is whether this relationship between the 1992 Perot vote in a district and the chances of a Republican victory in 1994 holds up in a more fully controlled analysis.

In the analysis for Figure 3 we take into account the partisan predisposition of the districts, the strength of

would have differed had Perot's national vote been lower.¹³ Figure 4 presents three scenarios in which the 1992 Perot vote is set to the level of other successful third-party candidacies in recent decades: the George Wallace vote in 1968, the John Anderson vote in 1980, and Perot's own vote in 1996. We estimate that had

Perot won the same popular vote as he captured in 1996 (8.4%, or a 10.5% reduction in popular vote below what he actually received in 1992), the Republicans would have failed to win control of the House. They would have picked up 29 seats over what they held in 1992, but the Democrats would have retained majority control. If they had gained 29 seats, their performance would have been unexceptional for a mid-term election. A Republican gain of 29 seats would have matched the mean number of seats acquired by the out party in mid-term elections between 1934 and 1990. If Perot had received the same popular vote as John Anderson did in 1980, the Republican seat total in 1994 would have been even lower. Had Perot won the same popular vote share that George Wallace secured in the 1968 presidential elections (13.5%), the

FIGURE 4
Simulation of Number of 1994 House Seats in Each Party by Varying Levels of 1992 Perot Vote



both parties' candidates, the possibility that some voters may have been reacting against President Clinton's policies, and whether the district is in the South.¹⁰ We focus on marginal seats because almost all of the turnover occurred in such races.¹¹ In districts where the 1992 Perot vote was 5%, the chances of the seat changing to the Republicans were only 3.3%; in districts

Republicans would have won a bare majority of House seats. By our estimate, if the Perot vote in 1992 had been below about 13.2%, the Republicans probably would not have won control of the House in 1994.¹⁴

Table 1 provides a simple comparison of the Perot effect in southern and nonsouthern districts from 1994 to 2000 and indicates the lasting effect of the 1992

TABLE 1
Percent Republican Seats among Districts Held by the Democrats in 1992

Year	Nonsouth			South		
	1992 Perot Vote in District			1992 Perot Vote in District		
	<20%	20%+	Difference	<20%	20%+	Difference
1994	9.2	33.0	23.8	21.4	23.5	2.1
1996	10.3	35.1	24.8	28.6	41.2	12.6
1998	10.3	34.0	23.7	28.6	35.3	6.7
2000	11.5	33.0	21.5	30.4	35.3	4.9
N	(87)	(97)		(56)	(17)	

where the Perot vote was between 25% and 30%, the chances of the seat changing parties were very strong—between 62% and 81%.¹²

Using our statistical model to isolate the effects of districts' 1992 Perot vote on the 1994 House election results, we estimated how the overall election results

Perot vote, especially in districts outside the South. Among all districts held by the Democrats after the 1992 election, the difference between those where Perot received 20% or more and those where he received less than 20% of the vote is consistently stronger outside than inside the South. Moreover, it has persisted well past the precipitating election, such that in the 2000 elections Republicans held only 11.5% of these same previously Democratic seats outside the South where Perot did not run as strongly, compared to one-third of nonsouthern constituencies where Perot ran well in 1992. The effect of the Perot vote is

muted in the South, where the differences are much lower. After the 2000 elections, for example, the Republicans held about 30% of southern Democratic districts where Perot received less than 20% of the vote in 1992 compared with just over 35% of districts where he attracted 20% or more of districts' presidential vote in

1992. In the South Republicans were able to win significant proportions of previously Democratic seats even without help from supporters of the Texas billionaire.¹⁵

The Perot Legacy in the 1996 and 2000 Presidential Elections

In making our case for how Perot's third-party movement affected the two-party system, we have focused so far on House elections because these races tend to reflect underlying partisan predispositions in American politics. But what effect did Perot's strong showing in 1992 have on the two ensuing presidential elections? Figure 5 shows how states' 1992 Perot vote relates to the share of the vote received by Republican candidates Robert Dole in 1996 and George W. Bush in 2000. These are partial slopes (OLS) that estimate the effect of Perot's 1992 vote taking into account the partisan voting history of each state and whether the state is in the South.¹⁶ They show a strong effect in both elections. Other things being equal in 1996, a state's 1992 Perot vote increased Dole's vote share from about 37% in a state where Perot received 10% of the vote to about 44% in states where Perot attracted 25% of the 1992 vote. This effect of the size of Perot's 1992 vote is remarkable because Perot remained on the ballot as a candidate in 1996, albeit one with diminished support. In 2000, the Bush line is shifted up from Dole's because Bush ran consistently stronger than Dole, regardless of the Perot vote in a state. What is most important is the effect of the 1992 Perot vote on George W. Bush's vote share in 2000. In states where Perot attracted 10% of the 1992 vote and other characteristics were identical, Bush's 2000 vote share would be about 43%, compared with 55% for Bush in an otherwise identical state where Perot attracted one quarter of the 1992 presidential vote share.

The 2000 election served as a dramatic reminder that the important outcome in presidential elections is not the popular vote percentage, but which candidate carries each state and receives its electoral votes. Figure 6 shows that the likelihood that Bob Dole in 1996 or George W. Bush in 2000 would carry a nonsouthern

FIGURE 5
Partial Effects of 1992 Perot Vote on 1996 and 2000 Presidential Election Results

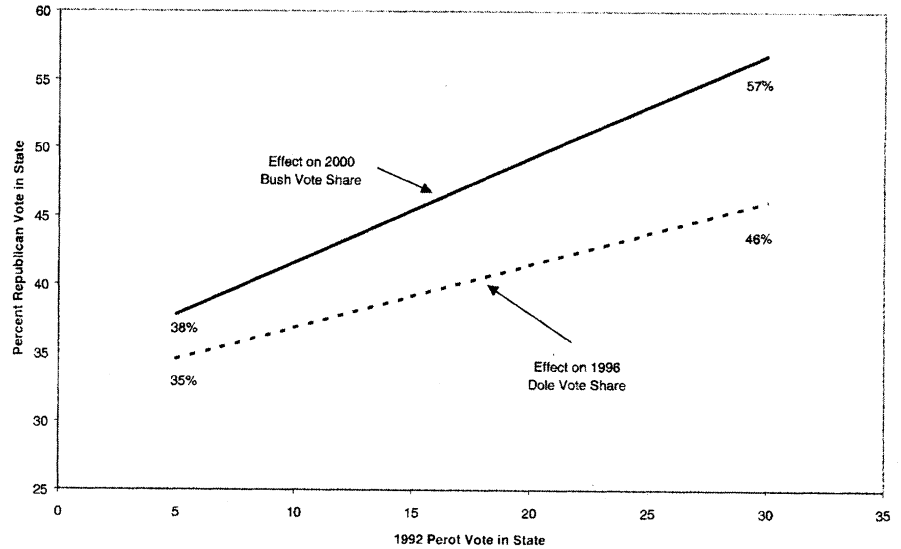
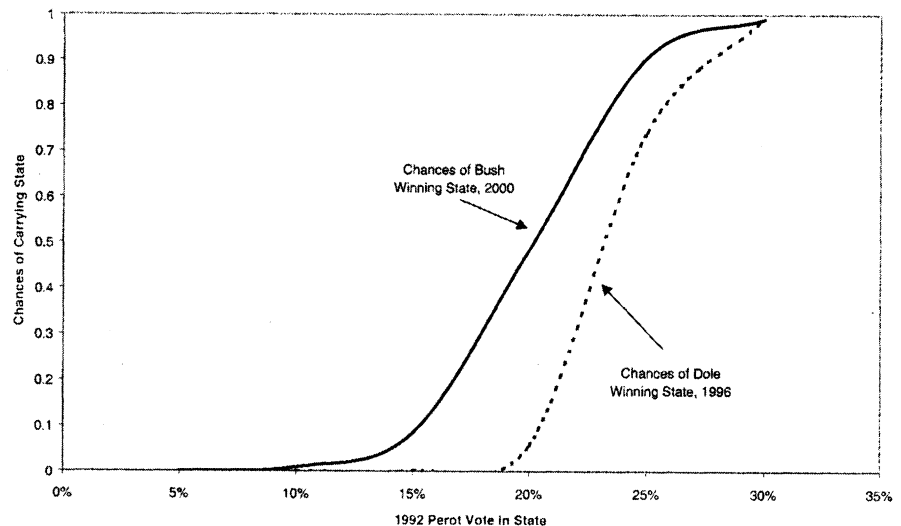


FIGURE 6
Partial Effects of 1992 Perot Vote on Probability of Republican Win in Non-Southern States, 1996 & 2000



state increased dramatically as the state's 1992 vote for Perot increased.¹⁷ The results suggest that, at the margin, the 1992 Perot vote had a strong effect on Electoral College outcomes four and eight years later. At the same time, the differences between 2000 and 1996 are apparent: Whereas the chances that either Bob Dole or George W. Bush would carry a state with a 5% or even a 10% Perot vote in 1992 were close to zero, prospects for the two candidates diverge significantly in states where Perot's vote was at the average for all states. The chances that Dole would carry a state with an average level of support for Perot in 1992 stood at only .04, but the chances that Bush would carry such a state in 2000 were .43. Needless to say, in an election

as exquisitely close as the 2000 presidential contest, anything that reduced Perot's 1992 vote even by a small amount might well have made the difference in the outcome. This supports our central claim that without Perot's historic third-party candidacy in 1992, the 2000 presidential contest would not have required 35 extraordinary days beyond November 7 and numerous court decisions to settle.

Conclusion

Although support for Perot declined between 1992 and 1996 and the vote for the Reform Party all but disappeared in 2000, the third-party movement Ross Perot started had a lasting impact on the electoral fortunes of the major parties. The effects on U.S. House races beginning in 1994 are plain. Without a strong Perot showing in 1992, it is unlikely that the Republicans would have gained the majority in the U.S. House in 1994. The effects on presidential politics are equally significant. Republican success in carrying a given state in 1996 and 2000 is strongly related to Perot's 1992 support in the state. In 1996, Clinton ran as a successful incumbent and Perot ran again as the Reform Party's nominee. The Perot effect, while clearly present, was not sufficient to make the race competitive. But in 2000, with Perot no longer on the ballot and Gore struggling to assume the positive side of Clinton's heritage, Perot's legacy was to make the election more competitive than it otherwise would have been.

The closely balanced contemporary party system is likely to enhance the influence of Perot voters in future elections. The potential these voters have for being pivotal is evident in the very steep curves representing their effects in 1996 and 2000. In a winner-take-all system that is closely contested by the two parties, a sizeable potential swing group like Perot voters can make all the difference. Republicans control the presidency and Congress for the first time since 1952, but they ought to recognize that, by holding power, they risk alienating significant numbers of former Perot voters who have demonstrated their ample skepticism

about those in power. This is unlikely to be lost on either Republicans or Democrats who no doubt will continue their efforts to woo former Perot voters.

For other evidence of the potential the current partisan climate affords third parties, we need look no further than Ralph Nader's Green Party in 2000. One of the traditional arguments against (or for) the Electoral College is that its winner-take-all allocation of states' electoral votes discourages the formation of third parties, thereby thwarting their potential influence on American politics. Because of the unit rule, most third parties in American history get zero electoral votes, even when they manage to attract substantial amounts of popular support. However, the 2000 election demonstrates that the involvement of a third-party candidate who draws votes primarily from one of the major-party candidates can directly affect the outcome of the election, even when the third candidate fails to attract a large share of the popular vote. The current partisan environment means that other third parties may be emboldened to enter the fray.

It is surprising that the influence of the Perot movement on the major parties in the U.S. has been largely ignored. Perot's was the most successful independent candidacy in 80 years, and many scholars have speculated on the effects of third parties on major-party change. By increasing the Republican vote in presidential and congressional elections since 1992, the Perot movement has worked at the margins of American politics to produce a closely balanced party system in the years following 1992. That balance is reflected in the first partisan tie in the U.S. Senate since 1880, the razor-thin margin the Republicans have in the House, and the excruciatingly close outcome of the presidential election. Ironically, a candidate who first ran as an independent, who attacked both parties for their failures to address crucial policy questions and to get beyond their own partisan interests, has helped create a new era in American politics in which partisanship is likely to be heightened and political conflict is more likely to turn on a partisan axis than at any time in the last century.

Notes

*We are grateful to David Brady, Sandy Maisel, Bernard Rapoport, and Rob Van Houweling for helpful suggestions and comments on an earlier draft, and to Gary Jacobson for supplying us with some of the data we use in this article.

1. Persuasive evidence is found in Jacobson, 2000b.
2. The Republicans captured 53.3% of non-southern seats in 1994, and 50.8% in 1996. After 1996, they dropped below 50%, winning 49.5% in 1998 and 48.9% in 2000.
3. Much of the work on the 1994 elections ignores a potential effect of 1992 Perot voters on the Republican majority in 1994, or reaches conclusions opposite ours. Several scholars, however, have looked explicitly for an effect of Perot voters. Klinkner (1996, 72–75) reports a relationship between the size of the 1992 Perot vote in House districts and Republican victory, but the analysis does not control for other possible explanations. Wattenberg (1996) found an effect of the 1992 Perot vote on Republican House candidates' vote share in 1994 in his regression analysis of districts outside the South, but he does not report evidence on actual seat turnover. Brady et al. (1996) found no significant effect on the probability of the seat changing to the Republicans in their multivariate analysis.
4. For one thing, far from disappearing, Perot created the Reform Party prior to the 1996 election, ran as its first nominee, and attracted 8.4% of the popular vote. Thus, Ross Perot was the first third-party candidate to attract more than 5% of the popular vote in two successive presidential elections since the Republican Party first emerged in 1856.
5. The principal data sources for the larger study are surveys of national samples of potential Perot activists. In 1992, we surveyed a sample of individuals who called the Perot 800 number to express interest in his effort during the spring and summer of 1992 (McCann, Rapoport, and Stone 1999). We have continued to survey this sample with panel waves in 1994 and 1996. A 2000 post-election wave is in the field at this writing. In 1996, we also drew fresh samples of Reform Party contributors and Reform primary voters, along with samples of contributors to the Democratic and Republican national committees. Respondents in these samples are also being recontacted in the 2000 wave of the study. In addition, we make limited use of the 1992–1994–1996 NES panel, which closely parallels in design our panel of Perot callers. Unfortunately, the NES study is of limited use because most questions about Perot were discarded from the interview schedule when he temporarily dropped out of the race in the summer of 1992, and because the sample of Perot voters from 1992 is small.
6. The Democrats made early, but unsuccessful, attempts to attract Perot supporters. But, among other things, the highly visible confrontation between Al Gore and Ross Perot in the NAFTA debate doomed any overt bid by the Clinton administration to win over the Perot constituency.
7. Perot endorsed the Republican efforts to win a House majority in 1994 and United We Stand America issued report cards on all House candidates, failing all but a handful of Democratic incumbents.
8. Perot voters changed their House voting from a 50–50 split between Democratic and Republican candidates in 1992, to two-thirds voting Republican in 1994. We estimate that former Perot voters made

up 16.6% of the electorate in 1994, which produces a net shift for the Republicans of about 2.8% of the electorate.

9. Multiply the 8% decline in Reform vote between 1996 and 2000 times the difference between Bush's and Gore's share of the 1996 Perot vote: $.08 \times (.64 - .27) = .03$.
10. The full results from this and all the multivariate analyses reported in this article are available on request from the first author.
11. Marginal districts are those in which the incumbent received 60% or less of the vote in 1992. Our focus on marginal districts is perhaps the single most important reason we find a significant effect of the 1992 district Perot vote on the seat switching from the Democrats to the Republicans in 1994, and Brady et al. (1996) do not find an effect. However, there are other differences between our model and theirs such that our analysis produces a significant effect of district Perot vote on the probability of the seat changing to the Republicans even when we include all Democratic-held seats ($p = .044$; one-tailed test), rather than restricting the analysis to marginal ones. Our statistical model includes controls for the partisan voting history of the district, the electoral experience of challengers, whether the seat was contested, whether the incumbent was running for reelection, the incumbent's support for key Clinton policy initiatives, logged incumbent and challenger spending, and whether the district is in the South.
12. The actual range of the Perot vote in Democratic districts was between 3% and 30%. In nine districts the 1992 Perot vote was 5% or less; in 36 districts held by Democrats after the 1992 elections the Perot vote was 25% or more.
13. We used the major-party vote share in 1994 as our dependent variable, and distinguished Republican-held from Democrat-held seats and, within each party, whether the district was marginal in the 1992 elections.
14. This analysis begs the question of what might have caused Perot to do better or worse in 1992. We assume only that if Perot had done worse than he actually did in 1992 and that if his vote losses had been distributed proportionately across all House districts, the number of his supporters in each district would have been smaller, and therefore there would have been fewer of them for major-party candidates to court.
15. We found no evidence of a significant interaction effect between district Perot vote and whether the district is in the North in our multivariate analyses of the 1994 vote. We do get a significant nonsouth-Perot vote interaction in a relatively simple regression that includes only the 1992 Democratic House vote, the 1992 Perot vote, a region dummy, and the interaction term. At this writing, we do not have all of the data necessary to replicate for later years the full multivariate analysis we run for 1994.
16. The analysis controls for each state's 1988 and 1992 vote for Bush and includes a South dummy.
17. The logistic regression slopes in Figure 6 are estimated using the same control variables as in Figure 5 (see note 16). We set the popular vote Bush received in 1988 and 1992 to their means, and the value of South to 0.

References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. 1995. "The End of the Democratic Era? 1994 and the Future of Congressional Elections Research" *Political Research Quarterly* 48(4):873–89.
- , and Kyle L. Saunders. 2000. "Ideological Realignment and U.S. Congressional Elections." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.
- Beck, Paul Allen. 1979. "The Electoral Cycle and Patterns of American Politics." *British Journal of Political Science* 9(1):129–56.
- . 1999. "The Changing American Party Coalitions" in John C. Green and Daniel M. Shea eds. *The State of the Parties*. Lanham, MD Rowman and Littlefield, third edition 28–49.
- Bibby, John, and L. Sandy Maisel. 1988. *Two Parties—Or More?* Boulder: Westview.
- Black, Earl, and Merle Black. 1992. *The Vital South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bond, Jon R., Richard Fleisher, and Jeffery C. Talbert. 1997. "Partisan Differences in Candidate Quality in Open Seat House Races, 1976–1994." *Political Research Quarterly* 50(June): 281–99.
- Brady, David W., John F. Cogan, Brian J. Gaines, and Douglas Rivers. 1996. "The Perils of Presidential Support: How the Republicans Took the House in the 1994 Midterm Elections." *Political Behavior* 18(4):345–67.
- Burnham, Walter Dean. 1970. *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*. New York: Norton.
- Campbell, James E. 2000a. "Forecasts of the 2000 Presidential Election." Distributed at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.
- . 2000b. *The American Campaign: U.S. Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton:

- Princeton University Press.
- Gaddie, Ronald Keith, and Charles S. Bullock, III. 2000. *Elections to Open Seats in the U.S. House: Where the Action Is*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Gold, Howard J. 1995. "Third Party Voting in Presidential Elections: A Study of Perot, Anderson, and Wallace." *Political Research Quarterly* 48(4):775-94.
- Hofstadter, Richard. 1955. *Age of Reform*. New York: Knopf.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 1997. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. New York: Longman.
- . 2000a. "The Electoral Basis of Partisan Polarization in Congress." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.
- . 2000b. "Reversal of Fortune: The Transformation of the U.S. House Elections in the 1990s." In *Continuity and Change in House Elections*, ed. David W. Brady, John F. Cogan, and Morris P. Fiorina. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Klinkner, Philip A. 1996. "Court and Country in American Politics: The Democratic Party and the 1994 Election." In *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context*, ed. Philip A. Klinkner. Boulder: Westview.
- Mazmanian, Daniel A. 1974. *Third Parties in Presidential Elections*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- McCann, James A., Ronald B. Rapoport, and Walter J. Stone. 1999. "Heeding the Call: An Assessment of Mobilization into H. Ross Perot's 1992 Presidential Campaign." *American Journal of Political Science* 43(1):1-28.
- Rapoport, Ronald B., and Walter J. Stone. 1995. "Spillover Effects of Participation in the 1992 Perot Movement: Perot Activists in the 1994 U.S. House Elections." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago.
- . 2001. *Party Change in America: Ross Perot, Third Parties, and Major-Party Response*. Manuscript.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus. 1996. *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schneider, William. 1994. "Ross Perot Uses His Leverage to Influence the GOP." *CNN: Inside Politics* October 7. Transcript 668-5.
- Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System*. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 1996. *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1994*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.