

THIRD PARTIES IN US POLITICS - Read: Bennett p133-137

Different types with e.g.s

<u>National</u>	<u>Regional</u>	<u>State-based</u>
Reform Party (founded 1992)	States' Rights Party (f. 1948)	Minnesota Indep Party
Libertarian Party	American Independent Party (f. 1968)	
Green Party	(both vs civil rts in South)	

<u>Permanent</u>	<u>Temporary</u>
Green Party	American Independent Party
Libertarian Party	Reform Party (1992 and 1996)

<u>Issues-based</u>	<u>Ideological</u>
Green Party	Socialist Party
Prohibition Party	Libertarian Party

But no permanent, national third parties that win signif votes in general elections.

Unimportant – third party candidates won <1% of pop vote between them in 2008, & <1.5% of pop vote between them in 2012 (Libertarian Gary Johnson 0.9%, Green Jill Stein 0.3%)

But **Important** – can sometimes make a signif difference to gen election – 5/9 1968-2000

- prob helped decide the outcome in 1968, 1992 & 2000 (see table p 139)
- in 2008 third party votes prob cost Obama Missouri (lost progressive votes to Ralph Nader)
& cost McCain Indiana and North Carolina (lost conservative votes to Libertartian Party's Bob Barr)
- and can occasionally make a difference in state races:
 - e.g. (i) v close Senate race in Minnesota 2008, where Minn Indep Party, Libertarian Party and Constit Party all took votes off losing Republican incumbent Norm Coleman
 - e.g. (ii) Jesse Ventura elected Gov of Minnesota 1998-2002 for Minn Indep Party.
 - (but Bernie Sanders, Senator for Vermont stands as a non-party independent, although he describes himself as a democratic socialist – in practice he counts as a loyal member of the Dem caucus in the Senate and the Dem Party does not run candidates against him in elections).

Third Party Difficulties

Electoral System – FPTP used for all elections

– heavily disadvantages national third parties – e.g. Ross Perot (Reform Party) won 19% of votes across whole USA in 1992, but gained no Electoral College votes.

Regional third parties can do well occasionally – eg. George Wallace (American Indep Party) won 45 Electoral College votes from Southern states in 1968

Fed Funding – offer of “matching funds” in Pres elections biased vs third parties – only qualify if they gained 5%+ of pop vote in last gen election (only achieved 4 x in 50 yrs).
+ as many third parties temporary, even if they get >5% in one election, they aren’t around 4 yrs later to claim federal funding.
+ with longer-lived third parties, they may get no fed funding in an election when they are popular, but then be eligible for it 4 yrs later when they are doing much worse in the polls (e.g Reform party 1992-2000).

Access to the Ballot – getting on the ballot for gen elect for Pres requires you to meet the different requirements of 50 states – in some states (e.g. Tennessee) this is easy, in others it is v difficult (e.g. Calif requires signatures = to 1% of state electorate, NY requires a signif no. of signatures from every county in the state). Meeting the requirements of all 50 states v demanding & expensive – e.g. despite Nader’s rel success in 2000, he cd only contest 36 states in 2004. In 2012 Green Party only got on the ballot in 38/50 states (Libertarians 48/50)

Lack of Resources – no matching funds, have to spend much money/effort just getting on the ballot in every state + few donors will give money to candidates certain to lose.
-> unable to pay for TV ads to compete with major parties
(N.B. Perot’s strong showing in 1992 linked to his status as a billionaire, able to self-fund).

Media – third parties can’t afford many ads, and usually ignored by mainstream media as no-hopers. + almost always excluded from Presidential debates (e.g. Nader excluded in 2000) (N.B. Perot allowed in debate in 1992 – maybe contributed to his strong performance – and contributed to major parties determination to exclude third candidates in future?)

Candidates – hard for third parties to get well-know and well-qualified candts to stand for them. Even the most high-profile Pres candts (Wallace, Perot, Nader) cdn’t find credible running-mates -> lack of cred with voters (e.g in 2012 - Gary Johnson, Libertarian and Jill Stein, Green – neither a national name, tho’ Johnson had been Republ Gov of New Mexico). Sometimes high-profile figures seek nomination by an existing third party they haven’t prev been associated with – e.g. Nader & Greens 2000, Buchanan and Reform Party 2000 – cand gets platform + org backing to get on ballots across USA: party gets boost in media/polls from cand. But tensions over policy coherence & charges of opportunism common.

Portrayed as extremists by major parties – credible because many *are* extreme (Wallace pro-Segregation) or at least v ideological (Socialists, Libertarians). American voters fear extremists from both left (since late C19th) and right (since civil rts era).

As mainstream positions already held by major parties (both covering a range of views), new ones face problem – either they offer unconventional policies that appear extreme, or conventional ones that lack distinctiveness.

Limited agenda – even the stronger third party candidates lack the breadth of policy needed to appeal to the whole USA

- e.g. (i) Wallace’s appeal ltd to South on anti-civil rts agenda

- e.g. (ii) Perot credible on economy, trade & budget, but weaker on other dom & int issues.

Co-optation = having your key policies adopted by major parties so third parties lose their USP. - e.g. (i) Nixon’s 1972 “Southern Strategy” aimed to bring Wallace’s voters into GOP
- e.g. (ii) Perot’s 1992 emphasis on deficit reduction adopted by both parties by mid-1990s
(iii) – rise of small govt Tea Party strand in GOP (rep’d by Ron Paul) draws on libertarianism

BUT – What are aims of Third Parties anyway? Do they seriously hope to win the Pres?
- arguably Wallace, Perot & Nader really wanted to influence the debate – a form of interest group? Wallace and Perot certainly influenced future policy for the major parties.