

Structural Constraints on Perot Voting Patterns

The Effects of Religious Adherence

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The presidential candidacies of H. Ross Perot have forced political scientists to rethink some conventional wisdom surrounding independent presidential bids.¹ As other chapters in this volume detail, the Perot campaigns indeed present many unique facets. By contrast, our chapter examines some important and heretofore neglected continuities between Perot and previous independent presidential candidates. We uncover these connections through a careful focus on the religious factor as it relates to Ross Perot's 1992 and 1996 presidential candidacies.

The existing literature on third party and independent presidential bids is replete with detailed case studies utilizing aggregate and individual data (Mazmanian 1974; Smallwood 1983; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984; Chressanthis and Shaffer 1993; Gould 1993). It is curious to find in all this work scant attention paid to the impact of religious belief, affiliation, or membership patterns. Decades of analysis have established the multifaceted nature of religion's influence on the attitudes and actions of American voters, to the extent that explanations of American voting behavior that omit religion's role are necessarily incomplete (Lopatto 1985; Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Wald 1997).

To date, however, there is little research that extends the findings about connections between religion and traditional two-candidate electoral contests to three-candidate races. In a recent book (Gilbert et al. 1999) we offer four hypotheses about religious factors and independent candidate voting: independent candidates do not develop significant support along denominational lines; social issue positions do not tend to predict voting for independent candidates; the religious composition of a citizen's social environment affects that citizen's likelihood of voting for an independent candidate; and most importantly, the primary effect of religion on third candidate voting is negative—religious factors tend to motivate people not to vote for independent candidates. In effect, religious factors work against independent candidates, because religious factors over time have become salient factors that structure support for the major parties and their candidates, and independent candidates have neither the time nor the resources to break this nexus.

As we will see in the analysis to follow, each of these hypotheses has been confirmed for the 1992 Perot candidacy, and most have been confirmed for 1996. Following a review of the literature on independent candidacies, we will utilize aggregate, county-level data that link 1992 and 1996 Perot voting patterns to those of other independent presidential candidates in the twentieth century, to show an important constant barrier to independent candidate success. We will also develop individual-level models of 1992 and 1996 Perot voting, to examine the impact of religious variables and to offer support for the trends revealed by the aggregate analysis. We then conclude with a look at alternative explanations of Perot's electoral fortunes, and how these alternatives mesh with our own analysis.

Existing Research

The strong tradition and inertia of the two party system, combined with significant institutional factors that make it difficult for more than two parties to remain viable, explain why minor parties and independent candidates have remained little more than curiosities to the vast majority of American voters. Despite a notable lack of success at the ballot box, independent candidates have not been ignored by political scientists. The relatively limited number of viable third party and independent runs for the presidency has generated substantial scholarship that seeks to explain how and why such candidates gain electoral support, with primary focus on demographic and election-specific factors, as well as on certain structural conditions necessary to give rise to independent candidacies (Mazmanian 1974; Smallwood 1983; Chressanthis and Shaffer 1993; Gillespie 1993; Gould 1993; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996).

To understand how we know what we know about independent candidates, we must recognize that this understanding often depends on the historical context in which the researcher resides. For example, in his classic book, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (1948), V. O. Key describes third candidacies as “deviations” from the two party norm. Key’s descriptive label might well have been different had he written one year later, given the candidacies of Strom Thurmond and Henry Wallace in 1948. With four more significant independent candidacies in the twelve presidential races since 1948, it is no wonder that more contemporary analysts describe such candidacies not as deviant but rather as regular, recurring events, stressing the considerable similarities among independent candidates in widely varying elections.² Clearly, there are aspects of the electoral process that frequently provide conditions favorable for these candidacies, and these conditions appear to occur more frequently in contemporary politics.

The most comprehensive treatment of the subject, combining historical background with empirical analysis, is *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*, by Steven Rosenstone, Roy Behr, and Edward Lazarus (1996). The subtitle indicates the primary condition for viable independent candidacies—voters must perceive that the major parties have deteriorated to the point of losing legitimacy. Rosenstone et al. offer two additional factors that could prompt voter support of an independent candidate: an attractive, nationally prestigious third party candidate decides to run; and/or citizens acquire an allegiance to a third party (1996, 126).

The first condition may arise from a variety of sources. Chressanthis and Shaffer (1993) posit that when salient issues are not adequately addressed by either major party, third candidacies almost always occur. Key suggests that independent candidates act as a “safety valve” for the expression of voter discontent with the major parties (1948, 235–246). Similarly, Downs (1957) demonstrates that as the distance between voters and parties increases, so does support for third candidates. Mazmanian (1974) and Gillespie (1993) offer additional historical perspectives that buttress the argument that political crises are at the root of every viable independent candidacy. More recent scholarship on the 1992 and 1996 Perot campaigns does not deviate from these basic conclusions (Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, and Rohde 1995; Alvarez and Nagler 1995; Gold 1995; Menendez 1996; Gilbert et al. 1999). Third candidate voting can thus be said generally to stem from animosity toward, or disaffection with, the major parties.

The latter two factors also have historical precedent, although the entry of a nationally prestigious independent candidate is more frequent than third party allegiance. Indeed, this final condition is notable for the lack of empirical research on its existence; Rosenstone et al. argue that in the nineteenth century, voter loyalty to minor parties was more substantial, but nearly all twentieth-century third candidacies have been transient and therefore no loyalty could develop nor could

loyalty be cultivated (1996, 174–175). By contrast, Rosenstone et al. show that national prestige predicts third candidate support in every case (1996, 170–174).

A more recent investigation of the 1968, 1980, and 1992 elections using National Election Studies data (Peterson, Johnson, and Gilbert 1995) addresses some unexplored questions about the timing of vote decisions and defections from one candidate to another during the campaign. Peterson et al. find that voters in the 1968, 1980, and 1992 elections are willing to choose third candidates even as election day nears, provided there are substantive reasons to do so. A candidate's likely showing is evidently not among these reasons in two of the three elections (1968 and 1992). Peterson et al. conclude that voters do not reject third candidates because of perceptions of their remoteness of winning. Along these same lines, Magleby and Monson (1995) analyze recent independent candidacies in Utah state elections and find that voters who decide late in the campaign favor the independent candidate over the major party candidates, despite the fact that late-campaign polls show independent support slipping badly (1995, 19).

One point must be made concerning the definition of viable third candidacies. The prevailing convention in the literature is that a candidate must receive at least 5 percent of the national popular vote; this is also written into current law as the threshold for receiving federal campaign funds (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 174). From our perspective, however, interesting third candidacies also include individuals who had a substantial impact on the election they contested, even if their final vote total did not reach the conventional 5 percent threshold. We will connect Ross Perot's 1992 and 1996 campaigns to several previous independent candidates: Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive) and Eugene Debs (Socialist) in 1912; Robert LaFollette (Progressive) in 1924; Strom Thurmond (States' Rights Democrat) and Henry Wallace (Progressive) in 1948; George Wallace (American Independent) in 1968; and John Anderson (independent) in 1980. Neither Thurmond nor Henry Wallace received 5 percent, but for reasons that will become obvious below, their candidacies are instructive in helping to understand the context of Perot's bids.

Finally, in using county-level data for both our aggregate and empirical analysis, we make some assumptions about the importance of social environments, or contexts, in determining citizen attitudes and behaviors. Contextual theories of political behavior posit that political attitudes and actions are a function of individual beliefs and characteristics interacting with awareness of surrounding environments (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Much of the contextual literature on religion and individual political behavior utilizes the church as the unit of context (Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988, 1990; Jelen 1992; Gilbert 1993; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Others have found modest contextual effects using the blunter instrument of county measures (Gaustad 1976; Newman and Halvorson 1980; Salisbury, Sprague, and Weiher 1984; Lieske 1993; Gilbert, Johnson, and Peterson 1995). We will make connections between the aggregate and individual-level

analysis, to show how basic factors work at different levels to impede the chances of independent candidates such as Perot.

Data Sources

Data for this paper are drawn from several sources that require some explication. First, the aggregate data on independent candidacies in the twentieth century combine two sets of two important data sources. County vote totals can be found in the set compiled by Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale (ICPSR 8611) as well as the *America Votes* series (Scammon 1995, Scammon et al. 1997). These data give percentages for all candidates in each election, including the major party candidates, independents, and a summary total for all other minor candidates.

We combine the county vote totals with religious adherence data that come from two places: the U.S. census surveys of religious membership conducted in 1890, 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936 (ICPSR 0008); and post–World War II surveys of church membership compiled by the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) in 1952, 1971, 1980, and 1990. Because the church census years do not coincide with three-candidate presidential election years (except in 1980), and because there is no reason to assume that change in denominational totals between censuses is linear, we choose to match up the years as closely as possible and append the appropriate religious adherence data to the corresponding county vote data for each election. The explanation of data sources below results in the following scheme for analysis:

<i>Election</i>	<i>Church Membership</i>	<i>Population Data</i>
1912	1916	1920
1924	1926	1930
1948	1952	1950
1968	1971	1970
1980	1980	1980
1992	1990	1990
1996	1990	1996

Population data from the U.S. census are used to calculate religious membership by counties in terms of their share of the population.

Individual-level data for 1992 and 1996 come from the National Election Studies. NES surveys provide by far the richest individual-level data source to study citizen motivations and draw comparisons across elections. We append information from the 1990 NCCC survey to the 1992 and 1996 NES, to test the

effects of county contextual measures on individual voter decisions. We also incorporate county presidential vote totals. Warren Miller (1956) finds that Democrats living in highly Democratic counties are more likely to vote Democratic—an amplification effect—than Democrats living among high concentrations of Republicans. Such effects are tested in the Perot voting model.

Modelling Strategies

With the county as the unit of analysis for the aggregate models, all variables used are expressed as percentages from 0 to 100,³ and the dependent variable is the percentage of the county vote for the third candidate(s) being studied. We estimate OLS regression models to account for the impact of county religious adherence on county vote for the third candidate(s). Models are constructed for the strongest third candidates (Roosevelt, Debs, LaFollette, Thurmond, Henry Wallace, George Wallace, Anderson, Perot), as well as models for all minor candidates combined. In the aggregate models a *negative sign* on a coefficient indicates that county vote for the third candidate decreases with each unit change of the independent variable; this is the effect we hypothesize with county religious adherence. Occasional controls for region also appear in some models.

For the 1992 and 1996 individual-level models, the dependent measure is vote choice, operationalized as a dichotomous variable: 1 if a citizen chooses Perot, and 0 if a citizen chooses any other candidate. Because of this coding scheme, the models show the specific factors that cause voters to choose or reject Perot, but the models do not reveal much about how major party voters choose between the candidates.⁴ The regression technique for this dependent variable is logistic regression,⁵ and the models attempt to account fully for the factors affecting Perot voting, and to examine in detail the effects of religious factors.⁶ Moreover, specification of both individual- and contextual-level effects ameliorates the oft-cited criticism of contextual analysis, that it fails to account for individual factors that are the true agents of causality (Hauser 1974). In each model, a positive coefficient indicates a greater likelihood of choosing Perot while a negative coefficient indicates less likelihood of choosing Perot.

Continuities: Religious Adherence and Third Candidate Voting

What does it mean to state that religious adherence, or church membership, serves to impede the electoral fortunes of independent presidential candidates? This

question motivates the aggregate analysis in this section, and it demonstrates that in one fundamental respect, Ross Perot's campaigns faced a barrier common to nearly all independent candidacies.

Since the publication of Robert Putnam's influential 1995 essay "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," scholars have given renewed attention to what Putnam terms "the norms and networks of civic engagement" (Putnam 1995, 66). Despite evidence of a modest decline in weekly churchgoing and church-related group membership since the 1960s, religious affiliation remains the most common associational membership of Americans, helping to foster civic engagement and the utilization of social capital (1995, 69–70). Social connectedness—the means by which citizens manipulate the links between democracy and civil society—clearly depends on strong institutions such as churches.

One facet of the social connections that churches provide in U.S. civil society is their essential role in strengthening the two party system. Religious institutions sustain major parties through the development of long-term attachments between certain denominations and one of the two major parties (Lopatto 1985; Kellstedt and Noll 1990). The parties themselves reinforce these connections through elite-level cue giving or through the influence of mass movements with religious ties (Lopatto 1985). These linkages lead directly to the hypothesis that higher levels of church membership should work against independent candidates. Independent candidates are not privy to the ties that bind Democratic and Republican voters to their parties over time; one factor that creates and strengthens such ties is religion; therefore independent candidates should do best where party loyalties are least strong (counties with fewer church members) or where the third candidate has an underlying base of his own (for example, George Wallace in the south in 1968).

This hypothesis is empirically tested through simple models that regress independent candidate vote on religious adherence, for each independent presidential candidacy of the twentieth century. The results are reported in Table 6.1.

In many respects, one would expect that the most distant elections should demonstrate an even stronger inverse relationship between county religious adherence and third candidate voting. If Putnam is correct that religious vitality has waned modestly in the last thirty years, then higher church membership numbers should correlate with higher levels of major party voting, thus providing a greater obstacle to minor party candidates in 1912, 1924, and 1948. Moreover, there is substantial evidence to indicate the presence of robust denominational ties to major parties prior to the New Deal realignment of the U.S. electorate (Kellstedt and Noll 1990), another factor that would serve to strengthen the adherence-major party link.

Table 6.1 reveals a consistent and robust inverse relationship between county religious adherence and voting for independent candidates. With the exception of the 1924 and 1996 elections,⁷ increasing levels of religious adherence lead to

Table 6.1. Independent Candidate Vote Regressed on County Religious Adherence (OLS regression estimates)

		Adherence Coefficient	Adjusted R ²
1912	<i>T. Roosevelt</i>	-0.05 (0.01)***	.15
	<i>Debs</i>	-0.08 (0.00)***	.10
	<i>All minor candidates</i>	-0.15 (0.01)***	.32
1924	<i>LaFollette</i>	0.01 (0.01)	.04
	<i>All minor candidates</i>	0.00 (0.01)	.26
1948	<i>Thurmond</i>	-0.27 (0.04)***	.04
	<i>H. Wallace</i>	-0.01 (0.00)*	.10
	<i>All minor candidates</i>	-0.12 (0.02)***	.29
1968	<i>G. Wallace</i>	-0.13 (0.02)***	.02
1980	<i>Anderson</i>	-0.03 (0.01)***	.02
1992	<i>Perot</i>	-0.03 (0.01)***	.57
1996	<i>Perot</i>	0.01 (0.01)*	.57
	<i>Other minor candidates</i>	-0.01 (0.00)***	.34

Source: County presidential vote totals from ICPSR 8611 and *America Votes* series; church membership figures from ICPSR 0008 and NCCC church membership studies; see text for full discussion of these data sources.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Control variable coefficients not included.

* = Significant at 0.10 level.

** = Significant at 0.05 level.

*** = Significant at 0.01 level.

lower levels of independent candidate voting. The same relationship is observed when the third candidate has bolted from the Republicans or the Democrats (Roosevelt, H. Wallace and Thurmond, G. Wallace, Anderson), when the third candidate represents a true minor party (Debs), and when the third candidate simply decides to enter the political fray (Perot 1992). Control variables such as region introduced into several models do not alter the fundamental results.⁸

Perhaps most intriguing, the 1924 and 1996 elections have something in common: the third candidate was not running for the first time. Robert LaFollette had sought the presidency for nearly a decade, while Perot was of course repeating his 1992 bid. Further, both LaFollette and Perot had the backing of a political party, not just a set of voters converted temporarily to minor candidate voting. We will explore this facet of Perot's 1996 support in more detail below. But Table 6.1 does suggest that the perception of party status attached to a minor candidate

helps to overcome the adherence-minor party inverse link found in all other twentieth-century cases.

The most recent independent bids deserve some further consideration. George Wallace's campaign was based almost entirely in southern states; John Anderson received a smattering of votes from all regions; and in 1992 Perot similarly did well in all regions and tripled Anderson's overall vote total in the process. Perot's 1996 patterns more closely resemble Anderson's in magnitude and distribution; in addition, although his vote share declines by twelve points, in 1996 Perot does do comparatively better in the same places where he did well in 1992 (Gilbert et al. 1999, 128). These three candidates could not be more different in terms of political orientation, background, and results. Yet in 1968, 1980, and 1992—the first presidential bids for each candidate—the structural effects of religious adherence operate in the same manner for each candidate. In the case of Wallace and Perot in 1996, the structural effect is strong enough to appear as a causal factor in individual-level vote models (Gilbert, Johnson, and Peterson 1995); this is not true for Anderson or Perot in 1992. Clearly, however, there is a powerful continuity running through these elections. The rather blunt instrument of religious adherence, which does not account for strength of individual beliefs and does not indicate strong concentrations of particular denominations, nevertheless works against independent candidates consistently and predictably.

Moreover, there are clues about individual voters that can be inferred from this aggregate data. While traditional methods for making inferences about individuals from aggregate or ecological data are problematic, a new method developed by King (1997) helps to overcome these long-standing problems.⁹ Using King's ecological inference program, EzI, we estimate nationwide percentages of the 1992 Perot vote for two sets of voters: citizens who belong to a church and citizens who do not. EzI estimates do not distinguish between the major candidates, but they do offer a measure of how religious adherents voted versus non-adherents, in other words a way to link the aggregate results from Table 6.1 with the survey data to be analyzed in the next section. We control for the differential turnout rates of adherents and non-adherents by dividing the estimated rate of support by the estimated rate of turnout. Using this method we estimate that 15.6 percent of church members nationwide voted for Ross Perot in 1992; by contrast, we estimate that 23.1 percent of non-church members voted for Perot, a rate nearly 50 percent higher than the rate for adherents.¹⁰

The EzI estimates for 1996 offer similar results. Controlling for turnout rates, Ross Perot receives 6.9 percent of the votes of church members, and 9.8 percent of the votes of nonmembers (standard errors not reported). The difference, in terms of percent, is slightly less than what we found in the 1992 EzI estimates of Perot voting. For all minor candidates combined, the figures are 7.5 percent support among church members and 12.6 percent among non-church members.

Thus, the spread among the larger set of minor candidate voters is larger than the spread among Perot voters.

These findings are estimates, and care must be taken not to overemphasize the literal percentages. However, they shed light on the individual decision patterns responsible for the aggregate results shown in Table 6.1, and the results are striking. Ross Perot's support in both elections comes disproportionately from people who do not attend church, a confirmation of both the aggregate findings and our hypotheses about the negative nature of the relationship between religious factors and independent candidate voting. We turn now to individual factors using the 1992 and 1996 NES data, to further explain Perot voting and the constancy of religious factors over time.

Connections: Individual Models of 1992 Perot Voting

We begin the systematic analysis by restating the initial hypotheses concerning religious factors and independent candidates: voting along denominational lines should be rare; social issues should not be good predictors of independent candidate voting; religious factors are likely to work against independent candidates; and religious contexts may play a role, though the full nature of that role is unclear.

To assess the second and third hypotheses above, Table 6.2 presents a simplified look at religious variables and Perot voting. The table displays a series of bivariate logit models, demonstrating religious links to Perot voting in the absence of other causal factors. Few of these variables appear in the fully specified Perot vote model to follow (as noted in right hand column of Table 6.2), because other causal factors override the effects of these religious measures. We present Table 6.2 to show that connections between religion and Perot voting do exist, and their impact confirms our initial hypotheses in all respects.

Based on the development of improved measures of religiosity, the 1992 NES incorporates more detailed questions about religious practices and beliefs than previous surveys (Leege, Kellstedt, and Wald 1990). Table 6.2 shows a striking consistency in how these factors affect Perot voting. For every variable included, the effect on Perot voting is negative. Higher levels of any religious activity—praying, reading the Bible, attending church—make voters less likely to choose Perot. Further, the same attitudes that were negatively related to Anderson voting in 1980 (Gilbert, Johnson, and Peterson 1995) also turn up as negative influences on Perot voting—pro-life abortion views, belief in biblical inerrancy, support for school prayer. These religious effects fall out of the full Perot vote model (Table 6.3 below), with the sole exception of church attendance. As a well-known salient

Table 6.2. Impact of Religious Variables on Voting for Ross Perot, 1992 (Bivariate logit estimates)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Significant in full vote model?
<i>Church attendance</i>	-0.17 (0.06)***	Yes
<i>Attitude toward abortion</i>	-0.19 (0.06)***	No
<i>View on authorship of Bible</i>	-0.22 (0.10)**	No
<i>Born-again Christian</i>	-0.18 (0.15)	No
<i>Support for prayer in public schools</i>	-0.08 (0.04)*	No
<i>Guidance religion gives for daily living</i>	-0.23 (0.09)**	No
<i>Importance of religion to one's life</i>	-0.59 (0.15)***	No
<i>Frequency of prayer</i>	-0.13 (0.05)***	No
<i>Frequency of Bible reading</i>	-0.20 (0.07)***	No

Source: 1992 National Election Study.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* = Significant at 0.10 level.

** = Significant at 0.05 level.

*** = Significant at 0.01 level.

factor in explaining major party voting patterns (Knoke 1974), the significance of church attendance (and its anti-Perot effect) is no surprise. Clearly, the more important a person's personal religious views are, the less likely that person is to vote for Ross Perot. This conclusion depends to an extent on the denominational adherence of individuals; however, there do not appear to be any overwhelmingly or even modestly pro-Perot denominations among the American electorate (1992 NES, results not shown).

Bivariate models are necessarily limited in scope and explanatory power. A full model attempts to incorporate all potentially relevant factors and thus to sort out what really drives individual behavior. The results of our effort appear in Table 6.3. Where relevant, we will draw parallels with other research on the individual determinants of independent candidate voting; this limits comparisons to only the candidacies of Wallace and Anderson, since no survey data exists on earlier independent candidates.

With the notable exception of a considerable personal fortune to support his campaign, the Perot candidacy fits many of the familiar patterns observed in prior

Table 6.3. Estimated 1992 Vote for Ross Perot (Logit Estimates)

Independent Variable	Coefficient
<i>Constant</i>	-0.74 (0.95)
<i>Pentecostal</i>	-1.28 (0.67)*
<i>Church attendance</i>	-0.14 (0.08)*
<i>Importance of religion to one's life</i>	-0.13 (0.16)
<i>Percent mainline Protestant in county</i>	-0.03 (0.07)
<i>Age</i>	-0.01 (0.01)*
<i>Nonwhite respondent</i>	-2.17 (0.62)***
<i>Male</i>	0.40 (0.21)*
<i>Follows public affairs</i>	-0.52 (0.14)***
<i>Discusses politics frequently with friends and family</i>	0.17 (0.10)*
<i>Folded party identification</i>	-0.27 (0.12)**
<i>Bush job approval</i>	-0.35 (0.12)***
<i>Positive feelings toward federal govt.</i>	-0.02 (0.01)***
<i>Positive feelings toward feminists</i>	0.01 (0.00)***
<i>Has reasons to vote for Clinton</i>	-0.18 (0.07)**
<i>Dissatisfied with choices among presidential candidates</i>	0.56 (0.14)***
<i>Believes Perot will better handle economy</i>	0.57 (0.22)***
<i>Favors new limits on imports</i>	0.47 (0.23)**
<i>Percent Perot vote in county</i>	0.04 (0.02)**
<i>Weighted number of cases</i>	820
<i>Percent of cases correctly predicted</i>	76.7

Source: 1992 National Election Study; 1990 NCCC Church Census.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* = Significant at 0.10 level.

** = Significant at 0.05 level.

*** = Significant at 0.01 level.

independent bids. Perot supporters are displeased with the political status quo, expressed through dissatisfaction with the major party candidates and George Bush's job performance. Perot voters tend to be young, white, and male, believing that Perot can rescue the nation's economy. More frequent political discussion with friends and family increases the likelihood of Perot voting, but Perot voting

is negatively related to following public affairs—the more a voter follows what goes on in politics, the less likely she is to vote for Perot. Being independent (measured through folded partisanship) is also a statistically significant predictor of Perot voting. These findings are somewhat parallel to factors predicting Wallace voting, though the impact of race as seen through issues is far less significant in 1992 than it is in 1968 (Gilbert, Johnson, and Peterson 1995). Further, a modest contextual amplification effect is found: Perot does better in places with more Perot voters, suggesting that he can benefit from connections to community, but significantly not from religiously oriented connections.

Some other variables delineate marked differences between Perot voters and third candidate voters in 1968 and 1980. Voters who find favorable reasons to vote for Bill Clinton do so, and are less likely therefore to vote for Perot. Unlike 1968 and 1980, the third candidate is not the sole alternative for voters who are unhappy with status quo politics and traditional choices. The findings in Table 6.3 suggest that the Clinton “new Democrat” appeal to disaffected voters mitigates the pro-Perot effects of anti-major party and anti-Washington attitudes.¹¹ Hence dislike for the parties or the federal government does not automatically translate into support for Perot; large numbers of Clinton voters show similar attitudes.

Many of these same factors that explain Perot voting also account for the paucity of significant religious factors in Table 6.3. Younger males are less frequent churchgoers and less certain believers. The seeming antireligious character of Perot voters was borne out by the results in Table 6.2, and it can be found again in Table 6.3. Some researchers have observed that white Protestants constitute the overwhelming majority of Perot voters (Kosmin and Lachman 1993, 168); others find evidence of Catholic support (Leege 1993). But in Table 6.3, no dichotomous denominational variable is found to be a positive influence on Perot voting. Pentecostals vote against Perot (they support Bush in large numbers), and frequent church attendance also decreases the probability of a Perot vote. This points to the conclusion that 1992 Perot voters are primarily secularist in orientation (Leege 1993).

Perot Voting in 1996: Dissimilar Patterns, Fewer Votes

As we argued above in discussing Table 6.1 and the EzI results, the 1996 aggregate Perot results indicate the existence of modest connections between religious institutions and patterns of Perot voting. This demonstrates the advantages of running a second presidential campaign with a nascent party organization in place. Clearly, Perot is not picking up substantial support in 1996 from religious groups or through religious institutions. But he is certainly not losing as much in these

places as he did in 1992 (Gilbert et al. 1999, 125–129). Hence we expect that individual-level models of Perot voting in 1996 should show modest contextual effects in a positive direction; that is, Perot should gain votes from voters who live among other Perot voters, and Perot should not lose as many votes from religious Americans. In fact, our models will show these patterns, and we present models for other minor candidates in 1996 as well, to demonstrate further the adherence–minor party link and to explain the differences in support for Perot from 1992 to 1996.

The analysis of causal factors related to 1996 Perot and minor candidate voting begins with Table 6.4, which displays the results of bivariate models testing the influence of religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices on Perot voting (no similar tests are done for other minor candidates). Table 6.2 showed that individuals holding stronger religious beliefs, or engaging more in various religious practices, were less likely to vote for Perot in 1992. This same basic pattern holds in Table 6.4, with one caveat. In 1992 nearly all religious factors were statistically significant when examined in isolation, but lost statistical significance (except church attendance) in the full Perot vote model (Table 3). By contrast, in 1996 only two religious factors are statistically significant predictors of Perot voting when examined in isolation: church members and more frequent church attenders are less likely to vote for Perot. All other religious factors except one have no relationship with 1996 Perot voting, either alone or in full models. The exception is a question asking how important religion is in an individual's life. This variable is not significant on its own, but becomes significant and positive in the full 1996 Perot vote model (Table 6.5).

The preliminary results in Table 6.4 suggest few connections between religious factors and Perot support in the 1996 election. This conclusion raises additional questions, for in 1992 we did find at least a consistent pattern of inverse relationships, while in 1996 no pattern is found at all. If one emphasizes the lack of any pattern, it would seem that religion simply does not matter in understanding Perot voting. But if one emphasizes the lack of the negative-connection pattern that was found in 1992, it could be argued that the Reform Party's organizational efforts have begun to pay dividends. Had Perot not formed a party organization in 1993, the only lingering effect of the 1992 campaign would have been Perot himself, who appears to have little appeal among religious institutions or their members. But party organizations, working in cities and towns with churches and church-sponsored groups, among other social institutions, can begin to build networks in these communities that can be utilized to support campaigns for political office. Thus, the *absence* of a negative relationship between religious factors and Perot voting in 1996 could signal the weakening of the barriers to Perot voting that were in part reinforced by religious institutions and the beliefs of congregation members.

Table 6.4. Influence of Religious Variables on 1996 Presidential Vote for Ross Perot (Individual-Level Data, Bivariate Logit Estimates)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Significant in full vote model?
<i>Attitude toward abortion</i>	-0.03 (0.11)	No
<i>Born-again Christian</i>	-0.03 (0.26)	No
<i>Church attendance</i>	-0.15 (0.07)**	No
<i>Church member</i>	-0.90 (0.23)***	Yes
<i>Clergyperson urged congregation to vote for a candidate</i>	-0.21 (0.61)	No
<i>Contacted by religious or moral groups</i>	0.33 (0.29)	No
<i>Frequency of Bible reading</i>	-0.06 (0.11)	No
<i>Frequency of prayer</i>	-0.04 (0.09)	No
<i>Guidance religion gives for daily living</i>	-0.12 (0.16)	No
<i>Importance of religion to one's life</i>	0.05 (0.29)	Yes
<i>Political information available at respondent's church</i>	0.20 (0.35)	No
<i>Support for prayer in public schools</i>	0.09 (0.08)	No
<i>View on authorship of Bible</i>	-0.06 (0.17)	No

Source: 1996 National Election Study.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* = Significant at 0.10 level.

** = Significant at 0.05 level.

*** = Significant at 0.01 level.

Table 6.5 examines factors that affect Perot vote choice and vote choice for all minor candidates in the 1996 election. By estimating identical models and comparing coefficients, we can infer how the addition of other minor candidates alters the relationships found in the Perot model.¹² The Perot model is of most interest, however, and we expect to find more evidence of connections between societal institutions and Perot voters in 1996 than were found in 1992.

Examining Perot voting in Table 6.5, only church membership and the importance of religion are holdovers from Table 6.4; church attendance has no significance and is dropped from the final model. Recall that the 1992 NES Perot vote model

Table 6.5. Estimated 1996 Presidential Vote for Ross Perot and All Minor Candidates (Individual-Level Data, Logit Estimates)

Independent Variable	Perot Coefficient	All Minor Candidates Coefficient
<i>Constant</i>	-11.51 (2.36)***	-9.31 (2.06)***
<i>Church member</i>	-1.10 (0.42)***	-0.99 (0.36)***
<i>Importance of religion to one's life</i>	0.94 (0.52)*	0.15 (0.40)
<i>Age</i>	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
<i>Male respondent</i>	0.81 (0.42)*	0.35 (0.37)
<i>Union</i>	-1.23 (0.57)**	-0.47 (0.44)
<i>Income</i>	-0.07 (0.04)**	-0.08 (0.03)**
<i>Southern resident</i>	1.04 (0.50)**	0.87 (0.44)**
<i>Follows public affairs</i>	-0.87 (0.28)***	-0.66 (0.24)***
<i>Nonwhite respondent</i>	-1.06 (0.98)	-0.71 (0.79)
<i>Folded partisanship</i>	0.47 (0.23)**	0.75 (0.21)***
<i>Folded liberal-conservative scale</i>	0.40 (0.24)*	0.28 (0.21)
<i>Positive feelings toward Dole</i>	-0.02 (0.01)**	-0.02 (0.01)**
<i>Gave money to a candidate</i>	1.31 (0.51)***	1.08 (0.44)**
<i>Positive feelings toward NOW</i>	0.03 (0.01)***	0.02 (0.01)**
<i>Decided late to vote for minor candidate</i>	0.09 (0.02)***	0.10 (0.04)**
<i>Feels own beliefs not similar to others</i>	0.85 (0.32)***	0.79 (0.28)***
<i>Wants growth of other parties to challenge major parties</i>	0.79 (0.26)***	0.81 (0.24)***
<i>Believes Perot would better handle deficit</i>	0.89 (0.27)***	0.87 (0.24)***
<i>Watched presidential debates</i>	-0.41 (0.21)*	-0.17 (0.18)
<i>Believes jobs, living standards more important than protecting environment</i>	0.41 (0.15)***	0.23 (0.13)*
<i>Government should provide more services</i>	-0.30 (0.14)**	-0.19 (0.13)
<i>Willing to serve on a jury</i>	1.25 (0.44)***	0.79 (0.37)**
<i>Married, widowed, living with a partner</i>	1.81 (0.53)***	1.26 (0.43)***
<i>Percent 1996 Perot vote in county</i>	0.22 (0.08)***	0.19 (0.06)***
<i>Percent other minor candidate vote in county</i>	0.08 (0.15)	0.26 (0.11)**
<i>Number of cases</i>	771	771
<i>Percent of cases correctly predicted</i>	91.7	89.7

Source: 1996 National Election Study; 1990 NCCC Church Census; America Votes, 1996 presidential vote.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

* = Significant at 0.10 level.

** = Significant at 0.05 level.

*** = Significant at 0.01 level.

also had few religious variables. The importance of religion was not significant in a bivariate model, but after numerous other salient factors are incorporated in Table 6.5, there is a barely significant and positive relationship to Perot voting in 1996.

Apart from religious factors, a contextual amplification effect—Perot voting is positively affected by rising levels of Perot voting in an individual's county—is present in 1996, just as it was in 1992. Contextual effects by definition involve the transmission of information within a defined frame of reference. If Perot gains more votes from individuals who live and work among relatively more Perot voters, then it is plausible to suggest that minor candidates can tap into existing social networks and use these to their advantage.

The Perot model in Table 6.5 has other continuities with the 1992 Perot model. Men in general and individuals who pay less attention to public affairs are still more likely to support Perot, as are political independents and ideological moderates. Respondents who believe Perot to be a good choice for handling economic policy, or who have no positive inclinations toward the major party candidates, also show greater propensity to support Perot. On the flip side, union members are less likely to vote for Perot, and as individual income rises a Perot vote becomes less likely.

The greatest differences in the 1996 Perot model come from variables assessing individual attitudes toward the political system and public officials. Perot voters in 1996 appear much less disaffected than 1992 Perot voters; this time the support for Perot has positive dimensions, rather than simply stemming from negative attitudes toward the major candidates and the political system in general. One example is a variable asking whether an individual gave money to any candidate; this variable does not appear in the 1992 model. Voters who did so are more likely to vote for Perot. Perot voters in 1996 are also more likely to be living with a significant other, and to say they would perform jury duty if asked.

To be sure, these relationships do not indicate that Perot voters are firmly grounded in the political mainstream. Yet no positive attitudes toward the political system are found in the 1992 Perot vote choice model. The 1996 Perot model therefore represents an evolutionary trend moving Perot (and perhaps his party in future elections) into the political mainstream, such that their support no longer comes from a disaffected and disconnected segment of the electorate. Perot voters in 1996 have some community attachments, evidence that the Reform Party has managed to carve out some base of support within communities.

Other modest differences include the salience of age, which we found in most presidential and state-level elections to be a consistent indicator of minor candidate voting. Although younger voters are still more likely to support a minor candidate, the variable does not achieve statistical significance in the 1996 Perot model.

Table 6.5 also presents a second model (right hand column) that estimates 1996 voting for any minor candidate, including Perot. We present this model to

assess differences between support for Perot and other minor candidates at the individual level. After considerable testing of model specifications, we have chosen to estimate a model identical to the 1996 Perot model; with identical cases and variables, changes in coefficients may indicate that some factors have a distinctive impact when all minor candidates are covered in the dependent variable.

Table 6.5 indeed reveals some differences in factors that predict voting for all minor candidates versus factors predicting Perot voting only. Gender and race do not affect support for all minor candidates, nor does a moderate personal ideology, union membership, or viewing the presidential debates. In addition, the variable measuring the importance of religion loses significance. The shift of these factors from statistical significance to insignificance indicates that other minor candidates gain support from a different set of citizens, whose political views are diverse compared to one another and distinct when compared to the views of Perot voters. The other minor candidates in 1996 range across the ideological spectrum, hence we should not be surprised that mixing other minor candidate voters with Perot voters yields mixed results. As we have shown elsewhere, other minor candidates find electoral support from a different segment of the minor candidate market than the segment from which Perot draws his support (Gilbert et al. 1999, 130).

The variable measuring the county vote for other minor candidates is not significant in the Perot model but is significant for all minor candidate voters in the Table 6.5 model. Like Perot voters, other minor candidate voters show a greater propensity to choose outside the political status quo when they live among other like-minded citizens. Without the ability to differentiate further between Perot voters and other minor candidate voters, we conclude that the non-major party vote in 1996 is divided among a portion of the electorate that in some ways validates our theory about the sources of minor candidate support. In other ways the findings demonstrate a new facet—the idea that repeat minor candidates do begin to forge connections to religious and other social institutions that might pay off in greater electoral support in future elections.

Conclusions

Pulling together the evidence from this chapter, the logical conclusion about the electoral appeal of Ross Perot in 1992 is that it had next to nothing to do with organized religion. Instead, analysis of the 1992 Perot campaign with particular emphasis on religious factors reveals a strong continuity with previous independent bids. The differences are indeed crucial to remember: Perot did much better than his recent predecessors, in fact better in terms of vote share than any truly independent candidate. Some researchers have emphasized the unique aspects of

the Perot phenomenon and concluded that his candidacy is best understood as unique (Gold 1995). Yet our analysis finds that support for Perot in 1992 was clearly not based on idiosyncratic factors, but rather was structured in predictable and logically coherent ways. The heavy media blitz Perot was able to mount (Feigert 1993) clearly contributed to his ability to gain 19 percent of the total vote. But the unique aspects of Perot's campaign crystallized into decisions made by voters, and in these decisions we assert there was more that was constant than was variable, especially (but not exclusively) the negative role of religious factors.

However, our analysis also indicates that the nature of electoral support for Ross Perot shifted not only in magnitude, but also in substance, from 1992 to 1996. The negative impact of religious adherence on Perot voting changed into a modest positive relationship in 1996. We have only observed this previously in 1924, which also included a minor candidate (LaFollette) who was well known to the general public as the leader of a nascent party organization, and whose support varied by region. We believe the change in the familiar adherence-minor candidate vote relationship indicates that party building activities, even relatively unsuccessful efforts, can begin to attenuate the inherent bias of community networks and institutions toward major party candidates and against upstart challengers. Such efforts are not strong enough to show up in denominational voting patterns (Gilbert et al. 1999, 126); Perot made no particular inroads into any one denomination, nor did any other minor candidate make such a connection.

The results of the 1996 election show that while the Perot phenomenon was not dead as an electoral force in U.S. politics, its significance had stabilized but decreased in magnitude since the 1992 campaign. Our analysis for 1992 and 1996 also shows again that the factors structuring support for Perot and other minor candidates are quite consistent with those for previous minor presidential candidates, more so than other analysts have asserted (Gold 1995). One key difference, availability of resources, helps explain why Perot received so many votes in 1992. But a second difference—the fact that Perot ran a second campaign and created a party organization to assist this effort—explains why in 1996 the institutional factors were either nominal or positive sources of support for Perot, while the usual factors such as political independence and a lack of connections to religious institutions or beliefs are the primary explanations for other minor candidate voting.

These assertions are worthy of further exploration. We stress their importance because we believe they can tell us something meaningful and novel about the relationships between American religious life and American politics. The results here focus on independent candidates, Perot in particular, but lead us back to the major parties and the nature of their persisting support among voters. If most Americans profess belief in God and at least membership in some church, they have drawn themselves in (often unwittingly) to a long-lasting, cultivated network

of attachments between the secular and sacred aspects of U.S. society. These bonds may not be as strong as they once were, and the empirical research on the decline of strong partisanship since the 1960s provides an individual-level correlate. Moreover, the increasing mobility of Americans' church attachments might correspond to their mobility in terms of electoral choices and partisan leanings. Because churches are much more than mere extensions of the civic culture, such religious or church-based ties to patterns of political behavior will remain essentially indirect; such ties produce echoes (to use Key's metaphor) of individual-level processes that bring personal beliefs and group-generated cues to bear on vote decisions and issue attitudes.

Writing on the growth of religiously conservative church bodies, Dean Kelley argues that furthering a sense of distinctiveness from society at large is a primary aspect of strong religion-fueled growth (Kelley 1972). Distinctiveness and strictness are critical salient factors in explaining the success of upstart sects, according to the religious markets paradigm (Finke and Stark 1992). A parallel could certainly be drawn to Ross Perot, whose entry into the political scene of 1992 provided distinctiveness, if not strictness. When it comes to politics, however, churches and churchgoers clearly find it advantageous to abandon distinctive, upstart political figures and strict movements or ideologies at the polling booth; witness the differential support for Perot among churchgoers and nonmembers. Instead, organized religion—represented by established (and declining) mainline denominations, ancient and enduring faith traditions, or growing offshoots in transition from sect to church—can best be viewed as a key sustaining source of Putnam's social capital, adopting new forms and furnishing institutional histories that help to foster the social connectedness necessary to a vibrant civil society. The reinforcement of a central tenet of America's political faith—support for and competition between two and only two political parties—is but one byproduct of this process. Any independent candidate who would break through this structural and historical nexus faces a daunting challenge indeed.

Notes

National Election Studies data utilized in this chapter were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) to Washington University in St. Louis. The data for the *Electoral Data for Counties in the United States: Presidential and Congressional Races, 1840–1872* (ICPSR 8611) were originally collected by Jerome M. Clubb, William H. Flanigan, and Nancy H. Zingale. Additional data were obtained by the authors from public sources described in the text. Neither the collectors of the original data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

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1. The terms *independent candidate*, *third candidate*, *minor candidate*, and *third party* are used interchangeably in this chapter. These terms refer to candidates not running as Republicans or Democrats. In practice, scholars who study such candidates have asserted with considerable justification that there is little use distinguishing among candidates running under some minor party label and candidates running unattached to any party (Rosenstone et al. 1996); we support and emulate this convention.

2. Not coincidentally, perhaps, 1948 is the same year political scientists began collecting national survey data on voter preferences.

3. Some counties have a religious adherence percentage that exceeds 100; this is partly a function of the population data that does not precisely match with the counting of church members, but it is also an artifact of the membership counting procedure. Both the Census Bureau back in the early twentieth century, as well as the NCCC through the present, use the membership totals of specific church congregations as the unit of analysis from which county totals are calculated. Since individuals can and do attend church in counties other than the ones where they reside, county church membership can (and still does, even in the 1990 NCCC data) exceed the total population of the county.

4. If the questions of interest here necessitated differentiations among all three candidates in 1992, the appropriate modelling strategy involves a multinomial probit technique; for such an analysis see Alvarez and Nagler (1995).

5. When a dependent variable is dichotomous, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression does not produce efficient or reliable estimates. Hence a logit model, which calculates probabilities based on the relationship between the independent variables and the dichotomous dependent variable using the equation $P = 1/(1+e^{-Xb})$, is the appropriate choice (Hanushek and Jackson 1977, 187–203).

6. Coding schemes for all variables are available from the authors.

7. In 1924, Robert LaFollette, an unsuccessful Republican candidate for three prior elections, gained some significant union endorsements and worked through existing parties such as the Progressives and Socialists (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 96–97). Party systems in disarray may well produce electoral outcomes that do not reflect normal patterns; the Democrats' chaos, the GOP split, and the eclectic nature of the LaFollette alliance all contributed to the disorder that marked the 1924 race and the impending end of the fourth U.S. party system. The strong Socialist support for LaFollette might have been a factor, yet 1912 Debs voting declined as adherence rose, and there is no a priori reason why 1924 patterns should have differed so starkly. Alternatively, we might expect county LaFollette and Republican (Coolidge) voting to be strongly correlated; in fact, the simple correlation between the two measures is not significant. A more satisfying explanation would connect the county LaFollette voting patterns to some specific denominational alliances grouped around issues such as Prohibition.

8. Results for control variables are not reported in Table 6.1.

9. For a detailed explanation of King's solution to the ecological inference problem, see King 1997.

10. Full results from the EzI analysis are not reported but are available from the authors.

11. For a contrary conclusion, see Alvarez and Nagler 1995.

12. For the Perot model in Table 6.5, we have added other minor candidate voters to the 0 category in the dependent variable, thus the samples are identical in the two models displayed in Table 6.5.

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