# ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

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## SENIOR PROJECT

**Zachary Clark**

**America, Home of the Red and Blue: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Institutional and Psychological Constraints that Prevent a Multi-Party System**

## Department *of* Political Science




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**Zachary Clark**

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Submitted to the Department of Political Science of Allegheny College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

*I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College community as a whole.*

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(**HONOR CODE SIGNATURE**)

Approved by:

_____ (Andrew Bloeser)

_____ (Bruce Smith)

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# Introduction

When we go to the zoo we often go with a desire to check out each and every animal exhibit there is to see. Yes, we all have our favorite choice, but we also enjoy seeing and reading about the other ones. Some of the most disheartening things about the zoo are when some of the exhibits are closed down due to remodeling or cleaning, when the weather is bad and the animals are not visible, and when the exhibit, or animal, you wanted to see so badly just is not a part of that zoo.

We can think of our American presidential election system as the latter. Since 1856 there has either been a Democratic president or a Republican president. One of the biggest frustrations with this is what if you go to our political zoo and your exhibit is not there? Well, you only have two options to see: the Donkey and the Elephant; this is because the United States of America runs under a two-party political system. This limitation directly limits our ability, as United States citizens, to have our beliefs and political views properly represented. Over the course of the past century there has been several attempts by ambitious political candidates to thwart this limiting system by breaking away from the Democrats and Republicans and forming their own party: a third party. These political attempts have ultimately failed however. The rise and fall of various third party candidates is the basis of the research you will see in the chapters ahead. Throughout the analysis of these third party attempts a couple of questions will arise time and again. What factors have led to the failure of seemingly successful third party candidates? Why have none succeeded?

While these questions will be thoroughly addressed throughout this research, the central question I am examining is: **what are the constraints that hold third parties back from taking the spotlight away from the two major parties**?

When conducting my research, I implemented a more analytical and theoretical analysis of various pieces of literature covering each of the three content areas I examined; as opposed to an empirical approach with my own data. I feel that there are enough empirical statistics present on this literature to be able to examine it thoroughly enough to recognize the problems two-party politics has on third parties. Furthermore, by establishing and critiquing the existing research I feel will bring about much more benefit in understanding how first our institutional frameworks work to constrain third parties and second how our own political and psychological tendencies help to furnish these frameworks. There is ample literature on these various areas and my work takes them and builds upon them connecting them in ways previous literature has not, thus giving us another perspective on the way third parties are withheld from reaching political success and what factors cause this.

My research will be broken up into four areas of focus. First I will be analyzing the American two-party political system and the limitations it presents to third parties. Next I will be shifting to an analysis of the use of the political party label heuristic and its limitations to third parties. Finally I will be employing three different case studies on third party candidates that showed successful tendencies, but still ended up losing in the end. Finally I will be examining various possible solutions as to how the third party can succeed, if it can.

The first chapter of this project will be focusing on the first of the two main constraints that are placed upon potential third party candidates: the institutional frameworks that feed the two-party system. In American politics we have a two-party system, this essentially means that when it comes time to choose the next President of the United States, you can rest assured that either Candidate A or Candidate B will win. In this chapter I will be examining the financial and social constraints institutions place upon third parties and why they have not, and cannot,

overcome them. The two-party system places these various constraints on third party candidates and makes it nearly impossible for them to navigate their way to the presidency. The two-party system not only has its own constraints for third parties, but it also gives rise to the other main constraint: the party label heuristic.

A political heuristic is a shortcut that potential voters can use to make their political decision making process quicker and easier. With having a family, working at least one job, and having kids it is hard for the average American voter to do the ideal gathering of every piece of information about all candidate choices and then formulate a decision. Using various heuristics can help combat this and make the process easier. The party label heuristic is when people take the label of the party that they identify with and choose whichever candidate the party chooses, even if they do not necessarily fit their actual political beliefs. This problem stems from the average American not necessarily knowing what their beliefs are and instead of searching for them in the different candidates, they rely on the title of the party to help them. Where this constraint presents a problem to third parties is through an apathetic political society fed by the institutions of the two-party system. Third parties cannot succeed enough in American politics because of the constraints of the two-party system and therefore do not get enough label recognition to be considered in the minds of everyday voters.

Within this chapter I will be looking at three different areas in which the party label heuristic plays a role in the minds of voters. First I will be examining what makes people vote the way that they do. Second I will be looking at various studies that show the heuristic in use and how it effects voter's decisions in comparison to what their beliefs align with. The final area I will look at are various nonpartisan elections and how when party labels are removed people still try to seek out the party label in helping their political decision making process. Through the

examination of these two areas of scholarship I will uncover the various constraints that the party label heuristic places on third party candidates.

The third chapter of this research will be an examination into three different case studies of past third party candidates who had initial success, but ultimately faced failures come election time. I will be looking at two candidates from the past and one from the present.

In 1912 Theodore Roosevelt was seeking his third term as president after a four year break when William Taft was in command. When Roosevelt ran and won his first two terms he ran under the Republican Party. When he ran in 1912 however that was a different story. In-party fighting led Roosevelt to split from the Republican Party and run against Taft as a third party. This third party was called the National Progressive Party, or better known as the Bull Moose Party. Roosevelt had some of the most success a third party candidate has ever seen in the American political world getting 29 percent of the popular vote. While this feat was impressive, it was not enough for Theodore Roosevelt to secure his third term in office and was eventually beaten by Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic candidate of the time.

1912 was a popular year for the third party as another candidate ran: Eugene Debs. 1912 was not the first time that Debs ran, nor was it the most significant. The most interesting and significant time was in the 1920 election, also his fourth election. Both are worth discussion however. Debs was originally a part of the Democratic Party, but for his four Presidential runs: 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920, he ran under the Socialist Party of America, or the Socialists. In the 1912 election he received the highest percent of the popular vote that an American Socialist had ever received before. He received 5.99 percent of the popular vote. While this was the highest percentage Debs ever earned, the 1920 election could still be his most prominent election year. He received 913,693 votes, the most ever by a socialist candidate and he did it through

unconventional means. While this was less percentage wise, the most significant part of this election is they were all write in votes while he was in prison.

The final case study will move onto the more modern days of our political system. In 1992 Ross Perot split from the Republican Party to run against George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. He ran as the Reform Party candidate. During this election he received 18.6 percent of the popular vote, which is one of the most significant percentages of all third party candidates.

Through the examination of these three third party candidates I will be looking at what caused initial success and ultimately their failures. I will be examining what factors led to these candidates gaining as much success as they did; for instance social, political, or economic conditions. I will also be looking at what factors led them to eventually fail and how that could trickle over to modern third party candidates.

The project will conclude by examining how the third party might survive and possibly win in our two-party system of American politics.

With more and more Americans vacating the polls on Election Day and dissatisfied with having to choose between "bad and worse," this subject is more crucial than ever to examine and thus requires a more thorough analysis. If a third party candidate can reach enough legitimacy in the polls to gain enough attention and give the voters another choice it is possible that voter turnout could increase. It could increase because people might have their views better represented and not have to choose between the lesser of two evils anymore. Through the analysis of the various attempts by third party candidates, the constraints of the two-party system and party label heuristic, and a look at possible solutions we can determine whether or not the third party can ever succeed. You do not go to the zoo to see two animals that do not match your interests, so why limit yourself to two candidates that do the same thing? As we will see in the

following chapters there are a lot of institutional constraints that prevent the United States from having a multi-party system, but one of the largest reasons rests within ourselves.

# I

# The Institutional Fetter

One of the largest constraints that potential third party candidates face is the engulfing power of the two-party system that defines American politics. The two-party system is tailored to ensure that only two political parties have the capability to get a legitimate shot at running for the presidency. In the case of the United States of America, those two parties are the Democrats and the Republicans. Our system of government is designed to help these two parties flourish and to ensure that no other outside party has any chance of winning the presidency. The system does a great job at this task based on the fact that we have not seen a president who was not a Democrat or Republican since 1856. Over a century and a half and no deterrence from the nowadays assumed norm of these two choices. The two-party system leaves us with only two options. Two options that are supposed to cater to over three-hundred million people in the United States. The main purpose for a democracy is for the people to get their political beliefs properly represented. We are all supposed to be able to do that under two choices. It is not possible. The lack of third party allowance by the two-party system is limiting our capabilities of being properly represented and thus is a hindering factor for a properly working democratic regime. Some scholars have referred to these two major parties as “Demopublicans,” or a conglomeration of a Democrat and Republican. Other scholars have referred to the whole two-party system as a tyranny. There are countless ways in which the two-party system places constraints on third parties, however, in this chapter we will be focusing on how the two-party system constrains them financially and socially. Each of these constraints will bring to light the monstrosities that potential third party candidates face when attempting to run for President.

Before moving into the financial constraints that are placed on third parties it is important to note some of the other institutional reasons that have caused us to have a two-party system. Even before the modern two major parties, America has always had only two choices. Why is this? A lot of it stems from the way our electoral system is set up. The popular vote of the people only matters to a point. The main deciding factor is how the electors that we vote in vote in the Electoral College. The birth of this stems all the way back to the Article II of the Constitution. Therefore this electoral system has been in place since day one. In almost all cases the electorate works on a "winner-take-all" basis. This means that if you get the majority of votes in the state, no matter how many other votes the other parties got, you get all of the delegates. This is problematic for third parties because of their unpopularity in which we will explore in the following sections and next chapter. They are not as well-known as major party candidates and therefore do not usually take the majority of a state and therefore do not get the delegates from that state. The Electoral College is not the only problem towards third parties that lie within the electoral system, ballot access laws also hinder them.

Ballot access laws are laws that require X amount of signatures per state in order to get your name on the Presidential ballot. The two major parties do not have to conform to these laws (we explore these laws in more detail in the sections and chapters ahead). The ones that do are third parties. They must spend the resources to go around and collect enough signatures to just get onto the ballot, then they must campaign. It is an extra step that our electoral system has put in place in order to limit the amount of political parties that our nation can choose from. These laws are not quite as old as the Electoral College, but they do stem back to the 1800's and have been one of the main causes that we have only had two parties to choose from. It is hard for third parties to spend the extra resources on gathering these signatures and it is hard for them to gather

them sometimes, especially if they are a new party who does not have established ties to the political world. These laws place an unfair constraint onto potential third party candidates and make it that much easier for the two major parties to remain on top.

Electoral rules dating all the way back to the cornerstone of our country have placed constraints on third party chances. Since day one our political system has fed a two-party system and hundreds of years later we still have that two-party system, only difference in the faces have changed.

## Financial Constraint

The financial constraints that the government places upon third parties is one of the most detrimental devices used to keep the two-party system alive and third parties dead. There is an unfair injustice occurring within the way the two major party candidates get financed and the way that potential third party candidates get financed. This injustice comes from the various institutions that surround the election financing process.

The first institution that creates an unfair financial situation for third party candidates is the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). The FECA went into effect in 1971. The purpose was to limit the amount of contributions that a candidate can receive by limiting how much an individual could give the candidate (Bennett 2008, 61). This on the surface can seem like a policy that could help third party candidates because it limits the amount the major party candidates can receive from people. That amount was one thousand dollars per person per campaign, with a maximum contribution of twenty-five thousand dollars (Bennett 2008, 62). The possibility of the two major parties getting their funds limited by this provision did not work out how it seems like it could. Third party candidates were still affected by this. One of the main provisions of this act was that taxpayers could elect to donate a dollar to either potential primary

candidates, party conventions, or general election candidates. This gave the motivated American tax payers a simple way to contribute to the political world, however, along with it came (whether indirectly or directly) the potential limitation to third parties. This limitation derived from the intervention of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) commissioner. Originally this tax direct contribution was supposed to allow the tax payer to determine which political party would get the money, thus allowing the citizen to have more of a say with his or her money and allow that contribution to go to someone who they felt best represented their political beliefs. This original plan changed however. The IRS commissioner went before the Senate and demanded that allowing the tax payer to have the choice as to which political party their money went would "take up too much space on the tax return" (Bennett 2008, 62). This occurred in 1973, just one year prior to the FECA's final form in 1974. The way in which this constrains third party candidates financially is that potential contributors to the third party movement are now prohibited to send that contribution to the candidate they desire. All of the funds get distributed now throughout the different candidates according to a two-party driven FECA. This assertion comes from the further inequality that the FECA places on third parties when it comes to convention funding.

The FECA provides two million dollars to the two major parties when they host their convention, minor parties get a small fraction of that, and new parties get nothing. A major party is considered to be a party that receives at least twenty-five percent of the popular vote in the previous election. Both the Democrats and Republicans are considered the two major parties. A minor party is one in which receives at least five percent, but not more than twenty-five percent of the popular vote in the previous election. A new party is a party that has no, or less than five percent, popular votes stemming from the previous election. Every election year the

Demopublicans are guaranteed that two million dollar grant when hosting their conventions. A grant of that magnitude is substantial in helping to fund the campaign, especially off the start and with the limitations of outside contributions. Receiving only a small portion of this grant is just as substantial to minor third parties, but in the opposite way. It substantially hurts their chances to get off of the political starting line. Moreover, receiving none of the grant makes it so a lot of these new third parties cannot even get to the starting line. This funding based around a flourishing two-party system serves third parties a huge constraint. It takes a lot of money to run a successful campaign and get the magnitude of exposure that is necessary in order to secure the publics support. Third party candidates need this exposure more because they are not as well-known as both the Democrats and Republicans are. Third parties also do not receive as much outside funding as these two parties. That is why it is detrimental that the FECA makes unfair funding to the major parties. Under the FECA major parties are allowed to spend as much as they need to on things like legal and accounting expenses and committees can raise and spend as much as they want on exposure programs like get-out-the-vote drives (Rosenstone 1996, 25). This is not the case for minor parties. Minor parties are only able to receive public funds after the November election. Then they must get over five percent of the popular vote. Then they must appear on at least ten state's ballots. The FECA places all of these limitations on minor parties and on top of it all forces them to comply with all the rules under it even though it does not benefit them and instead hurts them (Rosenstone 1996, 26). How are third parties supposed to be able to have a fair shot when it subliminally causes people to see that the two major parties are "better" than third parties just because they are more established in our politically apathetic society. This could be the case, but it also could not be. It needs to be an individual choice, but these institutional financial constraints creates inabilities within third parties to get the attention

of these individual choices. This two million dollar figure stems back to the origination of the FECA in its first election in 1976, as of 2004 this FECA grant has increased to fifteen million in the 2004 election (Bennett 2008, 114). Why is it important that parties receive grants like this to fund their conventions? The Campaign Finance Institute Task Force on Presidential Nomination Financing argues that "conventions are critical presidential campaign events" (Bennett 2008, 116). This might be the case, but the only practical purpose that these conventions serve is to "prop up the parties, to advertise them once every 4 years as the only two choices from which an American is permitted from the political menu" (Bennett 2008, 116). The exuberant funding of the two major parties and the placement on the political pedestal give them a substantial advantage, not just in terms of affording these luxuries, but also by providing exposure which we will cover in more detail in the next section. The FECA's creation and policy implementation serves as a financial barricade that third parties cannot get past; Libertarian Party chairman Edward Crane denotes it as "the only law that ever did exactly what it was intended to do: cement the two-party system in an impregnable fortress of cash from which no challenger could ever evict them" (Bennett 2008, 62). Whether this assertion seems farfetched or not, the facts speak for themselves that third parties have not been able to overcome this law.

The FECA is not the only financial constraint that third party candidates experience. The subsidy system that political parties receive provides another financial barricade for third parties' road to the presidency. State subsidy basically means that state money, whether through taxes or budgeting, helps to sustain a political party in their campaign process. The purpose of these procedures are to pump public money into the political system to counteract the private money that normally funds these parties in an attempt to "cleanse the political system, [and drive] out the pollution of private money" (Bennett 2008, 122). This theory seems to make sense, the less

private funding the less of a chance for the party to start tailoring their platform to fit the highest funder. This notion is good in theory, but not so much in practice. What the subsidy system actually does is provide "a life-support system for ageing parties which obstructs the natural, organic development of the party system" (Bennett 2008, 120). A state (not necessarily a state of the United States, but rather a state meaning a nation) handing over X amount of dollars to the campaign of a party allows the party one more mechanism to survive. It is obvious that the "party" we are talking about is one of the two (or both) of the major parties in American politics: the Democrats and Republicans. Even without assumption, in order for a party to qualify for this subsidy system they must receive five percent or more of the electorate's support in the most recent election. Unlike FECA funding where minor parties need five percent of the popular vote, five percent of the electoral vote is an almost impossibility. This once more strengthens the two-party system that engulfs American politics. By placing unrealistic regulations for potential third parties, our political system is blatantly inhibiting third parties from getting a fair chance and more times than not excluding them altogether. Nowhere within our Constitution does it say that we can only have two parties, so why does our government make it that way? The answer comes back to the reason it provides subsidy for the major parties. They know what the parties stand for and that politics is a give and receive game. The name of James Bennett's sixth chapter in *Stifling Political Competition* is "The State Feeds the Party and the Party Feeds the State." This is absolutely the case. This conclusion appears as a radical government conspiracy like the storing of UFOs in Area 51 or that Big Brother is always watching us, but these financial blockades, along with the social constraints we will see in the next section, give this conclusion concrete merit. We get further proof that the subsidy system is tailored to favor the two-party system based on a study done by Johanna Kristin Birnir. She examined other democratic regimes

that did not have the subsidy system. Her conclusion was that "countries without public subsidy of parties exhibit much greater 'electoral volatility'….Politics are more fluid, more open: new parties emerge with greater frequency and to greater effect; the status quo is not frozen" (Bennett 2008, 123). She insists the game is rigged, she compares it to a game of chess in which the two-party system gives itself "two extra queens, four extra rooks, and a passel of bishops" while the third parties have sixteen pawns (Bennett 2008, 123). Who do you think is going to win? When the two parties can move across the political board freely in every direction and third parties can only move one space at a time it is clear to see why the two major parties have gotten so far ahead and the third parties have been swept off the board. The government subsidy system is yet another example of how third parties are financially restricted by institutional influence.

The final financial constraint that third parties face is the fact that they have substantially less campaign resources. Historically third parties have had fewer campaign resources. This does not come from the third party candidates being poor or not being good enough salesman of themselves. The lack of resources again comes from the tyrannical two-party system. It is not a coincidence that since 1840 the two major parties have had more resources than any third party challenger (Rosenstone 1996, 27). There is a reason the past century and a half has been two-party dominant. There are many reasons for this notion stemming from finance laws like the FECA to public perception of parties which we explore more in the next chapter. The monetary discrepancy is astonishing. The Socialist Labor party in 1952 spent $88,018 compared to the major party $5,820,775. That is only 1.5 percent of major party spending. The American Independent party spent $710,000 while the major party spent $41,289,000 in 1972. The third party effort only amounted to 1.7 percent to that of the major party. In 1980 the Socialist Workers party spent a measly $186,252 compared to the major party's $29,040,183; only six

tenths of a percent of the major party (Rosenstone 1996, 28-29). Even the most successful third party candidate in history, Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive party in 1912, only spent 60.3 percent of what the major party spent: $665,420 to $1,103,199 (Rosenstone 1996, 28). The minor parties are forced to run ballot access drives so they can run, the major parties do not. The minor parties are forced to get petitions to make themselves an actual choice on the ticket, the major parties do not. Sometimes minor parties have to start from scratch right on the spot that year and therefore does not receive any governmental aid, the major parties never have to face this obstacle.

Institutional financial constraints are an enormous constraint on third parties in American politics. They are not the only constraint that brings third parties down however. As we could see from the 1912 run by Progressive candidate Theodore Roosevelt, he spent almost two-thirds what the major party spent and still lost. Therefore we must look at these financial constraints as only one piece of a puzzle. Another piece is that of social constraints brought forth by the two-party system.

**Social Constraint**

The vast majority of United States citizens either lack accurate knowledge about politics and politicians, or they just do not care. Whether the first one or the second one, it does not matter, it still poses a problem for third party candidates. The problem arises because people vote for candidates that they know. A lot of the reason comes from ties to political parties, which is covered in much more detail in the next chapter. An average citizen more than likely has heard of a third party, but they more than likely do not know what that party stands for and probably especially do not know who the candidate for that party is. This is where getting name recognition through social exposure is crucial to a candidate having any legitimacy in an

election. It is arguably the most important part of a campaign. If the voters know who you are and you appeal to them, you will more than likely receive their votes. This is why social constraints on third party candidates are detrimental to them even getting a fair shot in the election.

A third party candidate receiving ample media coverage is arguably the most crucial thing for a third party to do to have a good shot at the presidency. The fact of the matter is that they do not. This is where the social constraints by institutional forces begins to suck the life out of a prospective third party candidate. There are several mediums in which a candidate can broadcast himself to the populous: television, newspaper, and social media. All three of these mediums have been polluted to focus on the two major parties, rather than any hopeful third party candidate.

About six months to a year before an election year our favorite programs are interrupted by someone's campaign ad during the allotted commercial time. Whether it be for your state governor or for the President of the United States, come election season the ads are in full bloom. I want you to think back to the most recent election cycle you can remember. Now that you have that in mind, how many ads did you see for a third party? Almost all of you probably can answer zero, or in rare cases maybe count the amount on one hand. Now think about how many ads you saw for either the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate. That number is probably countless. Let us put this into some statistical perspective, during the 1980 election, CBS Evening News aired six hours and ten minutes of coverage for Democrat Jimmy Carter; three hours and nine minutes to Republican Ronald Reagan; and a measly one hour and forty-six minutes to Independent hopeful John Anderson (Rosenstone 1996, 33). This number is actually more substantial than in the recent couple of elections for a third party candidate. The numbers

are still highly imbalanced and that is just for one network. Other networks were similar, or less. This is an enormous obstacle for third parties to overcome. Since people rely heavily on name recognition in order to make their political decisions, the way to get your name known is by having media exposure to the people. Every election year the two major parties get the luxury of having nationally televised primaries in each state in the United States. This gives them an additional couple of hours on top of the countless political ads. Now think about this additional couple of hours and multiply it by fifty. Third parties do not share in the luxury of having state primaries to show themselves and their views. That means they are missing roughly 300 hours of televised media time to the Demopublicans. That does not include advertisement allotment time in which that would increase the gap substantially more. Most recently there has been a slight break away from this tradition however. On Friday April 1st, 2016 at 9:00pm eastern standard time there was the first ever Libertarian party forum (the closest thing they could get to a primary). It aired on Fox Business network on avid Libertarian John Stossel's talk show "Stossel." There was a second part to it the following Friday. This forum hosted the top three Libertarian candidates in the country right now: Gary Johnson, John McAfee, and Austin Peterson. The three candidates faced questions from Mr. Stossel along with the public's questions from Twitter. They debated on issues such as abortion, gay rights, and gun control. If you just turned the television onto it you could not tell the difference from a normal Democratic or Republican primary, until you saw three faces that are more than likely unfamiliar to you. This was a monumental step for the Libertarian party and for third parties in general. They finally surpassed the two-party system's hold on televised media and got their two hour primary they desired. With this small success still brings many insurmountable failures. First is that Fox Business is not a standard cable channel and it is certainly not a local channel that is accessible to

everyone who has a television. This means that the audience is narrowly tailored to those who have the access to the programing. Also not many Liberals would tune into anything placed on Fox Business, even though the Libertarians are generally socially Liberal especially on issues such as abortion and gay rights. This again reduces the audience greatly. Second, this forum was not a public function even though it was open to the public. John Stossel had to place it in his television show. Therefore it becomes a private contributor who had to put it on. The two major parties get time on national local television that has its own public broadcasting. On the television it did not say "Libertarian Forum," no rather it said, as it always does, "Stossel." Unless you are an active watcher of this program you would not have known what the topic was. Finally, the audience in attendance at the forum was possibly fifty people. This number is miniscule compared to the hundreds that watch the major party's primaries. While it is great that the Libertarian party put on such an event, it is very unusual and the outcomes were not anywhere as significant as a major party primary. The chances of them happening more frequently are highly unlikely, even though this precedent has been set. Television is only one of the three main mediums that third parties experience social constraints.

The second main medium is the newspaper. Let us do the same informal experiment we did with television. I want you to think back as far as you can at the newspapers you have read, whether it be a local one or a national one like the New York Times. Now again count how many times you read about, or saw the name of either a third party candidate or a third party themselves. It would be safe to say once again that this number is either zero, or small enough to count on one hand. Now think about how much you have read about the primaries that have ensued between the Democrats and Republicans; or how much you have read about Donald Trump's plans of building a Mexico funded wall; or how much you have read about the

allegations of Hillary Clinton's email scandal. If you are an avid newspaper reader it is almost guaranteed that you have come across something talking about one of the two major parties. Why is this the case? Similar reasons that it is true about television exposure, no one knows who these candidates are, so it is almost a waste for newspapers to write about them. This can be related to the analogy of credit when you are a young adult. No one will give you a loan because you have no credit, but you need things like a loan to establish credit. You need something that you do not have to get the something you need in order to have it. The same is true for third party exposure in society. No one wants to run stories about them because people do not know who they are and therefore are less likely to read them, but in order for people to ever know who these candidates are, their stories need to be run so they get that exposure. It places third parties between a rock and a hard place. There is nowhere to go except to keep following this endless circle.

In 1980 John Anderson was experiencing a third party high that had not been felt since Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. He had managed to spend 48.7 percent of what the major parties had spent (Rosenstone 1996, 29) and even made his way onto the main stage to debate with Ronald Reagan. Even with this minor success, newspaper editors did not feel that running stories about third parties was worth their time. James M. Perry, an editor of the Wall Street Journal, said:

> We base [our decision] on the simple proposition that readers don't want to waste their time on someone who won't have a role in the campaign. We're not going to run a page-one spread on a fringe candidate. We don't have a multiparty system. Until we do, nobody's going to cover these candidates (Rosenstone 1996, 35).

This viewpoint has survived in the minds of media officials and the American people forty years later. Perry talks about not having a multiparty system and until we do no one will cover third parties, but there is no way to get to the point of having a multiparty system until we cover third

parties. Until third parties are in the national news frequently and depicted as a legitimate choice to the American people, we will not have a multiparty system. Third parties do not get the proper justice they need to become reputable candidates.

Social media is another medium in which third parties do not get as much attention as major parties do. As of April 11, 2016 the leading Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson has only 396,933 likes on his Facebook page. This number is strikingly low compared to Republican front runner Donald Trump who has 6,948,213 likes on his or Democrat Hillary Clinton who has 3,150,252 likes on hers. This means that Gary Johnson only has 17.5 percent of the Facebook likes that Donald Trump has. This is a large percentage compared to other third party candidates that are even less well known that Johnson. Social media has become a forum for political debate. One might believe that it creates an equal playing field for the third party since they must follow the same rules as the two major parties do while working within Facebook and it gives them a chance to get their view points out to make up for the lack of primaries. This is not the case however because the two major parties still have the upper hand. They still have the name recognition. No one is going to follow a candidate they have not heard on television or read about in the paper. Social media is another place that the two-party system is blockading any hopes of a third party chance.

The final way in which the two major parties constrain third parties through social means is by publically delegitimizing their political attempts. Methods like these have been implemented throughout history, some more extreme than others. For instance in 1892 the two major parties persuaded their supporters to bombard Populists with “rocks, rotten eggs, and tomatoes” at their rallies (Rosenstone 1996, 44). This is obviously a rather extreme incident and

would in no way be tolerated now. Moreover, what President Truman said in 1948 could still be used today:

> the simple fact is that the [Progressive] third party cannot achieve peace, because it is powerless. It cannot achieve better conditions at home, because it is powerless….I say to those disturbed liberals who have been sitting uncertainly on the outskirts of the third party: think again. Don't waste your vote (Rosenstone 1996, 44).

This depiction of third parties as "powerless" and a waste of a vote is common place, not just by the two major parties, but by institutions themselves. We do not just rely on a popular vote in this country, we also have an electoral college that more often than not decides who is the next President. The electorate is stacked in a winner-take-all manner. If you win the majority of delegates in a state, you get the votes of that state. With the aforementioned social and financial constraints that third parties face, how can we expect them to get the majority in a single district, let alone an entire state? We cannot.

## Conclusions

Rosenstone argues that "the political obscurity of most minor party candidates, their inability to publicize themselves as major party contenders can, and their neglect by the media mean that many voters simply do not have the information on these candidates" (Rosenstone 1996, 38). All of these facts come from one thing: an institutional fetter that is placed upon third party candidates. Our system of government is why there is a two-party system. Our electoral college is why there is a two-party system. Unfortunately through these mediums and a high level of political apathy, our citizens are why there is a two-party system. It is something ingrained into our thinking. John D. Hicks depicted the two-party system as:

> it is like the Decalogue, or the practice of monogamy, or the right of the Supreme Court to declare a law of Congress unconstitutional. Right-minded citizens never question the wisdom of such a division of political forces. They see in the two parties a sort of guarantee of good government (Disch 2002, 4).

Why is it that we should see it that way? There is nothing in the Constitution that prohibits having a multi-party system and nowhere does it command a two-party system. What it does provide us with is the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights which allows for the freedom to assemble. Through that right third parties are allowed to form and should not be stopped or limited through the combination of the aforementioned financial and social constraints that are there to limit them. Standing alone these financial constraints are not always enough to completely eliminate a third party candidate's chances. Standing alone these social constraints are not always enough to completely eliminate a third party candidate's chances. Together they make it next to impossible for third parties to move from the starting line and most times to even get established. Institutional constraints are one of the most detrimental things to third parties, but they are not the only thing, as you will see in the next chapter, a lot of the problems we face for electing a third party candidate lies within ourselves.

# III

# The Party Label Problem

Electoral rules along with institutional financial and social restrictions are not the only constraint that is placed upon third party candidates. One of the most problematic entities that third party candidates face is the problem of the party label heuristic. Heuristics are shortcuts that we, as voters, use in order to sort through all the various political information and candidates in order to come to a decision about who to vote for. We use them in order to make our lives easier. A lot of Americans work two jobs, have kids that play sports, or are busy working on keeping their home chores up to date. With all these things going on it is hard for the average American to actually sit down and sort through every detail of the political world when deciding who they will vote for come election-day. In fact, it is nearly impossible for political experts and analysists to do this feat. This is where the use of heuristics become very useful. They allow us to focus on little aspects of a candidate and come to a quicker conclusion than if we had to decipher through every bit of information. They are also more practical. Why then if they are supposed to help us and make our decision making process easier do they pose such a problem? The answer is a complex one which will be examined more thoroughly throughout this chapter; however the short answer is because heuristics are not implemented correctly, especially by the nonpolitical experts.

While there are many different heuristics out there that we use and could pose problems to third parties, in this chapter we are just focusing on the party label heuristic. In an essence this means that we use a candidate's political affiliation in order to make our decision. For example we could use this if our personal affiliation has always been Democrat, we would choose

whomever the Democratic candidate ends up being. This does not sound like such a problem; but do we actually know whether or not we actually are affiliated with the political party we think that we are? Another problem that arises from this is that by using party labels, "voters can compensate for a lack of reliable information on the candidates' policy positions" (Kuklinski and Quirk 1998, 3). It allows for voters to look past all the complex political philosophies of each candidate and instead come to an opinion based on which side they "identify" with themselves. This creates a great limitation for third parties because not many of our population immediately identifies with a third party; therefore the party label heuristic only serves the two major parties and thus fuels the two-party system. Now not all voters rely on the use of this heuristic, in fact many make their judgements based on the political knowledge they have and acquire through various mediums. Before going into the more complex problems that heuristics cause, it is important first to understand citizen's mindset when they go to the polls.

**Voting Justification**

Why do people vote the way that they do? Scholars Richard Lau and David Redlawsk offer five different examples as to how and why most voters come to their political decisions. All of these people are hypothetical examples and not actual voters. They are deciding on who to vote for in the 2004 Presidential Election.

The first hypothetical voter that Lau and Redlawsk discuss is William R., he is an accountant at Xerox in New York. He represents what they call the first model of voting known as "Rational Choice." Our potential voter William R. feels the only way in which to make a choice about our next president is to "learn everything there is to know about the candidates' experience and policy proposals and to evaluate the likely consequences of those policies for his family and himself" (Law and Redlawsk 2006, 4). This is arguably the best approach when

choosing which candidate to choose for a few reasons. First, you acquire all the knowledge there is to know about the candidate, which in turn makes you well informed. Next, you take that information and apply it to you and your family's lives, thus allowing for you and them to receive the best representation of the views you and your family recognize with. This is what democracy is all about, getting properly represented. Finally, you end up making what Lau and Redlawsk argue is a correct vote. There is much difficulty in defining what is and is not a "correct" vote. They define "correctness" as a vote "based on the values and beliefs of the individual voter" (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 75). By paying attention to and scrutinizing governmental policy, or the policy of a potential candidate, one can confidently say that they voted correctly (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 73). Correct voting does not mean choosing the correct candidate that ends up winning the election, but rather choosing the best candidate that represents your political views. In this scenario, our rational voter William R. did vote correctly. He weighed out all the options of the candidate, took an immense amount of time and cognitive resources in order to choose a candidate that best fit his political values and beliefs. This is a great example of what every voter should do, but as aforementioned the "rational choice" model is not always plausible to attain. The next hypothetical voters offer some other alternatives as to how one can come to a political decision.

Our second hypothetical voter falls within the category of the "Rational Choice" model, just like our first one, William R. Our second voter is Anne D. a business consultant in San Diego. Anne D. does not have as much time or the cognitive abilities needed to process every piece of information about the candidates like William R. does, no she takes a different approach. She does not waste her time deciding on who gets the presidential nominations in the primaries, nope, she skips right to the main election itself. She also does not waste her time with

third party candidates using the notion that "no other candidate has a chance of winning" (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 4). While saying a third party candidate has no chance of winning may be reaching a bit, she is historically correct as we have only had either a Republican or Democratic candidate since 1856. Following the platform of the "rational choice" model, she is choosing a candidate based on what they can do for her. This self-interest approach mirrors William R. and leads us to conclude that Anne D. is voting correctly because she is looking at how these candidates will best represent her political values and beliefs.

Our third hypothetical voter is Warren M., a shift supervisor at an automobile factory in Detroit. How he bases his vote is simple, he is a Democrat and always has been, his father is a Democrat and always has been, thus he is voting for the Democratic candidate. Now he does look at some of the issues that each candidate stands for, but emphasizes heavily his partisan affiliation when evaluating the plans and policies of both candidates (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 4-5). Warren M. fits into what Lau and Redlawsk argue is the "Early Socialization and Cognitive Consistency" model. This model is based off of the premise that political "decisions are strongly influenced by early-learned social identifications, which, like all such identifications, tend to be accepted with little or no consideration of alternatives" (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 10). Warren M. became a Democrat the day he was born because that was the type of political environment he grew up in while observing the political habits of his father. Warren M. uses this predisposition of party affiliation to come to a political decision; furthermore, even though he does evaluate each candidate to a point his partisan affiliation will paint how he views a candidate's personal characteristics, issue positions, and how he evaluates their performance to the color of the party, in this case blue (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 9). While he recognizes as a Democrat and is voting that way could indicate a vote of self-interest, his partisan bias could be skewing his perception

of what he actually needs to be properly represented and thus the "correctness" of his vote here is to be looked at skeptically and with scrutiny. Warren M. is a prime example of a lot of American voters who are partisan driven, but do not necessarily know much about politics and do not care to acquire this information unbiasedly.

The fourth hypothetical voter is Teresa C. She is a soccer mom who lives in Atlanta. She has four kids and too many things on her mind to get into the fine details of politics. For this reason she takes the most important issues to her and decides on a candidate that best represents those positions. In this case it is prayer in school and government vouchers for private education (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 5). Teresa C. falls under their third model: "Fast and Frugal Decision Making." Teresa is what some would call a single-issue voter. Even though she is evaluating two different policies, the point of a single-issue voter is looking at the most important issue to themselves and deciding solely on that (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 12). She does not have the time to delve into the intricate details like our "Rational Choice" voter William R., but she still wants to have her self-interested topics represented. While she is voting based on the fact that she is looking for a candidate who best represents her views and beliefs on these isolated policies, to say that she is voting "correctly" would be problematic in that she is not looking at the big picture. Yes the candidate she chooses does align and represent her views on these two isolated policies, but what about the rest of their views. Voting based on single-issues will allow partial representation of what the voter wants, but will not necessarily allow for the voter to get the complete representation that they need.

Our fifth and final hypothetical voter is Herbert S. He takes a stereotypical approach when casting his vote, or what Lau and Redlawsk argue is the "Bounded Rationality and Intuitive Decision Making" model. Within his political decision making process, he makes

assumptions like one would do with the weather: “it’s going to be hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and pretty nice in the fall and spring” (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 5). Because a Democrat or Republican did this or said that in the past, that is what they will do again. This is how Herbert S. approaches making his political decisions. This “Bounded Rationality and Intuitive Decision Making” model rests on the premise that political decisions by voters are “semiautomatic responses to frequently encountered situation than as carefully weighed probabilistic calculations of the consequences associated with the different alternatives” (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 13). This stems again from a lack of political knowledge and great apathy towards politics, which is shared by many Americans for many different reasons. In the case of Herbert S. He is basing his political decisions on encountered political situations of the past elections by the party’s candidates and while these situations could remain similar through the years, they could also switch like we saw a party ideology switch between the Democrats and the Republicans in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This leads to problematic voting habits because Herbert S. may be getting the representation that he needs, but he is not necessarily getting that representation because he does not actually know what he is voting for, he only assumes he knows based on what he knew.

These five examples of hypothetical voters gives a good foundation as to how the average American votes. More times than not they fall into at least one of these five scenarios and these four models. It is crucial to understand these different models when looking forward as to how they become problematic to third parties. The remaining parts of this chapter focus on how these certain scenarios tie in to the party label heuristic and how that heuristic applies one of the largest constraints to a potential third party candidate.

## Voting Behavior and the Third Party Candidate

For the vast majority of American voters, arguable almost every American voter, these five examples of how they vote transmits directly to how they vote for either the Democratic or Republican candidate. They attribute these habits to the two major parties. This is because of the party label heuristic that is put in place by the institution of our two-party political system. These institutions then cause the voters to implement this heuristic in their decision making process because it is the only thing they "know." We are taught, whether directly or subliminally, that only the two major parties matter and if we cast a third party vote we just figuratively threw our vote in the trash. This is one of the largest constraints that is placed upon potential third party candidates.

While all five of our hypothetical voters implemented this party label heuristic in some way or another, let us look at the two prime examples of voters that cause detrimental effects to third party candidates: Anne D. and Warren M.

Anne D. instantly limits her voting choices down to either the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate before the election even begins because she knows that any other candidate has absolutely zero chance of winning the election. She becomes a prime example of the voter that overlooks the potential a third party candidate has in shaping the political scheme of the country and the potential representational capacity they could bring to her own political, social, and economical wants and needs. This is a common way for people to think and becomes a large factor in the reasoning why we have only had these two partisan choices since the mid 1800's. By instantly dismissing third party candidates she is hindering their ability to even expel their platforms and thus eliminates them from the race before it even begins.

Warren M. also hinders a potential third party candidate, but in a different way. He votes Democrat because he has always been a Democrat. He has always been a Democrat because he grew up in a Democratic household and environment. Theodore Roosevelt gives us a story about one of his non-supporters at a rally he was giving. He asked if he had this gentleman's support in the upcoming election. The man replied no with the infamous justification of "my granddaddy was a Democrat, my daddy was a Democrat, so I'm a Democrat." Warren M. exemplifies a common trait among American voters: environmental partisan influence. Since so many Americans are apathetic and ignorant towards politics, environmental partisan influence becomes a phenomenon that they commonly use in order to reach their political decisions. They see that their family has always voted a certain way and exhibits these partisan qualities, so why should they question it? In a study done on partisan heredity by Jaime E. Settle, Christopher T. Dawes, and James H. Fowler at the University of California, San Diego, they found that heritability has a significant effect of our partisan identification (Settle, Dawes, and Fowler 2009, 607). This supports the reasoning as to why Warren M. falls under environmental partisan influence. This does not mean that we come out of the womb and immediately are either a Democrat or Republican, but rather that we are predisposed to adapt our surroundings to our own beliefs. By doing that we pick up the habits of our parents, one of those habits being political affiliation even though if we are not politically educated that partisanship might not line up with our actually ideology. Their study also concluded that heritability is probably not a factor in determining ideological orientation (Settle, Dawes, and Fowler 2009, 607). This factor then brings up the question of does Warren M., or any hereditarily partisan voter, know what the party's ideology stands for and whether or not it actually aligns with their own ideology. Could a third parties ideology align with theirs better? It is always possible, but with a reliance on this environmental

partisan influence there is almost no way to gauge whether or not third party ideological alignment is probable because no one has ever said "my granddaddy was an Independent, my daddy was an Independent, so I'm an Independent."

**Problems of Heuristic Use**

While the party label heuristic is problematic for third party candidates as aforementioned above, more generally it presents problems of its own. James Kuklinski and Paul Quirk argue that the party label heuristic creates three main problems. First voters do not use the heuristic as a strategy to make a more concise vote; rather they "take their heuristics off-the-shelf, use them unknowingly and automatically, and rarely worry about their accuracy." This first problem means that voters use them as a figurative crutch in order to make their vote choice easier. In respects to this heuristic many people use that idea of environmental partisan influence because it is easier to go with what you know rather than gathering the information necessary for yourself. Their second problem is that "people often lack the contextual knowledge needed to use heuristics intelligently, or in fact to use them at all." This again returns to the fact that people lack the knowledge of what affiliation they actually align with because they do not take the time to examine the candidate's position in order to see if it lines up with their own political beliefs. Finally they argue that "information necessary to use heuristics might often be missing from the citizen's environment" (Kuklinski and Quick 1998, 6). This means that the voter is not exposed to, for example, a candidate's platform through everyday mediums like the news. Instead they must go seek it out through other means rather than having it right in front of their faces. This directly relates to how the use of the party label heuristic constrains third party candidates because it is very uncommon for third party candidate information to be exposed to the everyday

environment of a potential voter, the focus is most always focused on the Democrats and Republicans.

Another problem that arises through the party label heuristic is that voters tend to use a theory-driven approach rather than a data-driven approach according to Wendy Rahn. Her theory-driven model is when "individuals rely on stereotypes to make judgments of others." This equates to using the party label heuristic when making your political decision. Her data-driven model is a "strategy in which individuals disregard stereotypes, instead heeding the feathers of the particular, individuating information they encounter about members of stereotyped groups" (Rahn 1993, 473). This means that they take in political information whether through observations or research and use that to come to a decision about a candidate rather than the heuristic. The data-driven approach is the approach that we should take and would create more political knowledge among the people. The theory-driven approach is where the problem arises. One of the first things that she warns us about is the fact that "not all political candidates, however, are cut from the same partisan cloth" (Rahn 1993, 476). The sole use of the political label heuristic can cause a voter to vote for a candidate because they affiliate with the same party, but that candidate could actually have distinct views with that of his or her party and therefore cause the voter to not have their political views properly represented. She found that voters are capable of engaging in the data-driven approach and when they do they respond to the candidate's messages and positions. Her main conclusion, and the problem with the use of the party label heuristic, is that when given the option, they do not use this method. Her section summarizing this conclusion is highly important to understanding the constraints party label heuristic use places on political decision making and thus I will include it in its entirety:

> However, when voters have both particular information and party stereotypes available, these results show that they prefer to rely on heuristic-based processing. They neglect

> policy information in reaching evaluations; they use the label rather than policy attributes in drawing inferences; and they are perceptually less responsive to inconsistent information. Not even extreme party-issue inconsistency prompted individuals entirely to forsake theory-driven processing. Based on this analysis, partisan stereotypes appear to be quire robust cognitive categories with considerable influence in many political information processing tasks (Rahn 1993, 492).

This is where the problem of the use of this heuristic arises, we are relying on a label to make one of the most important decisions of the free world and there is science and statistics telling us that it is the wrong selection sometimes.

Richard Lau and David Redlawsk also propose that we are making an incorrect vote a lot of the time when we use the party label heuristic. A lot of the time when a sophisticated voter uses the heuristic it actually does help them come to the correct voting choice. A sophisticated voter in this case is someone with great political knowledge and knows how to take that knowledge and formulate it into a candidate choice. Where the problem here lies is that the use of heuristics actually decreases the likelihood that a non-sophisticated voter, namely an average American citizen, will come to a correct vote and instead will rely on this heuristic in order to formulate their vote. It places a disadvantage on the unsophisticated voter. The use of heuristics by these unsophisticated voters actually decreases their likelihood of making a correct vote by about twenty-one percent (Lau and Redlawsk 2001. 964). This shows that unless you are politically savvy, and a lot of American citizens are not, if you rely solely on the use of heuristics you are creating a political environment that is not capturing the political representation that you need. Lau and Redlawsk argue that this reliance on these cognitive shortcuts will lead the unsophisticated voter to a dead end and thus not make any progress for electing the one who will provide the best representation to your personal political agenda.

These are just some of the problems that heuristic use brings about in general to our capacity to cast a correct vote.

## The Nonpartisan Effect

One logical way to curve the use of the party label heuristic and make it a more level playing field for third parties would seem to be to just get rid of party labels altogether. This sounds nice in theory. We would then have to seek out information about the candidate and could no longer rely on whether or not there is a "D" or an "R" next to their name. This sounds good in theory, but when it was ran in practice, the results were not quite as one would expect them to be.

Peverill Squire and Eric Smith wanted to see whether or not nonpartisan elections actually worked, or whether we would still attempt to seek out the information that leads us to making a partisan decision. They took a local nonpartisan judicial election and re-polled people and gave the hint of the governor who appointed the judge. One of the first things that they found was people having "no opinion" on the matter before drastically changed to choosing whether or not to confirm or remove that judge (Squire and Smith 1988, 172). The respondents were drawn to the partisanship of the governor who appointed the judge and therefore lined that partisanship up with their own and made a decision that they otherwise would not have made. Their main conclusion was that "party identification is the most important savings device; consequently, it is not surprising to learn that, when possible, people employ it, even in nonpartisan elections" (Squire and Smith 1988, 178). This finding helps solidify the fact that people need that partisan cue, they need that party label. This is terribly problematic for third parties because they do not have the party label that most voters want. Most voters want the party label of one of the two major parties and no matter what is placed in front of them, they are going to find a way to get that partisan information and use it. This produces a negative effect for third parties, one that will be almost impossible to be overcome, unless we change the culture of voters.

## Conclusions

Throughout this analysis of the party label heuristic we can come to a couple of conclusions as to the implications that it brings to potential third party candidates and to how voters make political decisions in general. First, when people implement the party label heuristic they do so in order to enhance their decision for the two major parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. These party labels are the most prominent in our political system because we are tailored to a two-party system. This presents one of the largest problems to third party candidates because a lot of voters are relying on this system of choice and it favors the two parties which eliminated any third party candidates from a voters mind right off the start. Second, the party label heuristic is implemented incorrectly by voters. It is used as a crutch instead of a tool. People rely on this heuristic to formulate their political decisions almost entirely, rather than using it to aid in their decision. Finally, the last problem that the party label heuristic presents derives from the second problem. The party label heuristic allows for the continuation of a politically uneducated voter pool. Philip Dubois argues that "when the party label is not present, a larger portion of voters find themselves with no meaningful guide to voting and thus fail to participate" (Dubois 1984, 397). The heuristic is so heavily relied on that people do not become politically educated because they do not have to and they can still reach a conclusion. This presents a problem for the American political system and the voters themselves. The system suffers because people are making uneducated decisions and not learning how the system works. The voters suffer because they do not really know who they are selecting and thus could not be getting the proper political representation they need. The party label heuristic can be a good thing for voting when it is used properly, but most of the time it is not. The party label heuristic is never a good thing for third parties though because it fails to include them with its focus on the

two major parties and it eliminates them from a potential voters mind before the election process even begins.

# III

# Shots in the Dark

When we think about large scale events that have shaped the course of American history we might think of things like the Vietnam War, Hurricane Katrina, or 9/11. Not many people would think that the 1856 Presidential election could be included on this list. While nothing catastrophic occurred, something revolutionary did. Democrat James Buchanan from Pennsylvania won over Republican John C. Frémont. What was significant about this victory is that John C. Frémont was the first Republican candidate to enter the contest when the Whig party fell apart. This 2016 Presidential election marks 160 years. 160 years that either a Democrat or Republican has been the President of the United States of America. 160 years under the tyranny of the two-party system. That is not to say that there have not been attempts to thwart this two-party reign. To be clear, ever since parties came about in the early 1800's we have only had two legitimate choices to choose from; when talking about the past 160 years we are talking about the reign of our current two major parties: Democrats and Republicans. Furthermore, the third party candidates that have attempted to challenge these two are going to be ones from this two-party reign.

Almost every election always has a prospective third party candidate who is hoping to finally end this streak, but three main ones stick out as having some of the most prominent and interesting success. First, former Republican President Theodore Roosevelt who ran under the Progressive (or Bull Moose) Party in 1912. Second, Eugene Debs who ran under the American Socialist Party four times. We will be examining his 1912 and 1920 runs specifically. Third, Ross Perot who ran in 1992 under the Reform Party. There have been other strong third party

candidates, such as John Anderson in 1980 or Gary Johnson in the past couple of elections, however in this chapter we will be looking at the three aforementioned ones.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the presidential runs these three third party candidates had. We will look at how they gained so much success and what ultimately caused them to be defeated by the Demopublicans. Bringing awareness to these three cases will be crucial for future third party candidates to learn what brought these so much success, while at the same time learning what caused their failures so maybe they are not repeated.

**It Takes More than that to Kill a Bull Moose**

Ruff Rider Theodore Roosevelt had previously been our twenty-sixth President for two terms representing the Republican Party. After William Howard Taft took office for the next term, in the election of 1912 Theodore Roosevelt decided that he would run once more for President. He was seeking to gain the Republican nomination again, but this did not happen. Roosevelt figured that he could finesse his way into the nomination based on prior popularity within the Grand Old Party, even though he had deviated slightly from the party platform with his new progressive outlooks. The mistake he made though was "he waited too long in making a decision to run in January 1912, and he failed to shape an approach aimed at creating a majority coalition in the national convention" (Gould 2008, 46). Taft and his administration on the other hand "used delegates from the South, where the GOP did not exist as a real force, to build a majority for the president. They focused on exploiting the rules that favored an incumbent president to maximum effect" (Gould 2008, 46). Through these factors combining together, Roosevelt was "outraged at having the prize snatched from his grasp, [he] bolted, formed his third party, and insured Republican defeat and only one term for the hapless Taft" (Gould 2008, 45). We will get into how his break insured that the Republican Party would lose by the end of

this section. The lack of support from his old party and shocked Roosevelt and caused what became the most successful runs for President a third party has ever had.

The formal name for the third party that Roosevelt formed was the Progressive Party. That name would eventually change on his campaign memorabilia like buttons and banners to the "Bull Moose Party." In mid-October of 1912, Theodore Roosevelt went to give one of his Progressive Party speeches in Milwaukee while on his campaign trail. This speech did not go quite as planned. On his way to the podium a man pulled a gun and shot Roosevelt in the chest. The bullet penetrated through all fifty pages of the speech that he had tucked away in chest pocket. He refused to go to the hospital and instead began his speech by saying "it takes more than that to kill a bull moose." After the speech he was taken to the hospital. The nickname came about from Roosevelt telling a reporter that he felt like a bull moose (Gould 2008, 125). From there the name stuck and was cemented into the minds of his supporters after this speeches infamous one liner.

Roosevelt was aware of some of the problems that he would be faced with by forming a third party. He had to compete with three different things. First to form a new third party within a matter of months while campaigning for that developing party. Second to find a way to secure the traditional Republican votes to add to the progressive Republicans that would support him. Finally to secure enough Democrat progressives in order to not just split the Republican ticket and guarantee a Democrat win. These three obstacles presented great challenge to Roosevelt. He was finding the latter two were the problem after he did successfully create a solid Progressive Party base. Traditional Republicans stuck with Taft. Roosevelt might have received the votes of progressive Democrats if it would not have been for one factor. The Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson, who was a progressive himself. Now the Democratic progressives had the

best of both worlds, they got to stick with their partisan affiliation, while at the same time getting their progressive wants represented as well. This became one of the biggest factors that caused Roosevelt to not be elected a third time.

When it came down to election time Roosevelt may not have received the Presidency, but he did cement himself as the most successful third party candidate in American history. He did this by doing something no other third party has done since the Demopublican reign had begun. He did not come in third, rather he came in second. In the 1912 election in order to be elected President of the United States you needed to acquire 266 electoral votes. This was what Roosevelt was shooting for, but he did come up short having only gained eighty-eight electoral votes over six states (Gould 2008, 132). The election ended up with what Roosevelt feared would be his downfall: a Republican-Progressive split. When two parties that share the same side of the political spectrum, they tend to attract that half of people to each of their parties causing a distribution of their half of the votes. If there is only one main candidate appealing to the voters on the other side of the political spectrum, then they are going to take the majority of their half of voters and thus cause an uneven three way split in which one has almost half, while the other two have quarters. In the case of 1912, Roosevelt edged out Taft by acquiring 27.39 percent of the popular vote while Taft only received 23.18 percent. This opened up the field for Wilson who received 41.83 percent of the popular vote (Gould 2008, 176). The electoral vote however provided a much larger gap between Roosevelt and Wilson. This is a crucial factor for third parties because it is the closest thing they have gotten to trumping the modern two-party system and in a way they did, but they still did not end its tyranny as it still wages on over a century later, nor did they win the election.

As we saw in previous chapters, name recognition and media exposure plays a crucial role in deciding who becomes president. This is something that major parties have based on having partisan ties alone and it is hard for third parties to establish a name for themselves. The case of Theodore Roosevelt is different however. He had been President for eight years prior to this election, was a well-recognized war hero, and was popular among the people. On top of all of that the media was covering this election heavily because it was the first time that we had seen a four-candidate race (the fourth being Socialist Eugene Debs in which we will discuss in the next section) and so it was plastered all over the newspapers and in the home of the people. Why is it then that having name recognition and media exposure was not enough for Roosevelt to win?

Part of this answer does rest in the fact that he could not overcome the inevitable fact of a party split which paved the way for an easier Wilson win. The answer goes deeper than that however. The answer lies in sports and scandal. Namely the 1912 Olympics in Sweden. There was an exuberant amount of press coverage and populous attention to Jim Thorpe, a Pennsylvania boy who helped the United States acquire sixteen gold medals which helped them to overcome their Swedish and English rivals. The people went nuts over this and turned their head away from the election. Around the same time as this notorious gambler Herman Rosenthal was shot dead outside of the hotel he was staying at. Originally it was cast a hit through one of the various organized crime participants that flooded New York City. That turned out not to be the case however as authorities, and the media in turn, found out that it was police lieutenant Charles Becker. News attention quickly shifted from covering the election to coverage of these two events all the way through election season (Gould 2008, 123-124). This media departure from the election coverage could have skewed Roosevelt's chances for two reasons. First, with a

deterrence away from hearing about a third party candidate people are more likely to return to their party label heuristic use and continue following their party. Second, with the lack of media exposure it made it hard for Roosevelt to branch out to the progressive Democrats in which he would have had the best chance at swaying to his side which would have then split the Democrats rather than the Republican-Progressives.

Nonetheless, even though Roosevelt and the Progressive Party won second place they still could not get past the obstacle of major party identity within the two-party system based on the fact that instead of replacing the Republicans, he only split with them still giving them enough life to thwart the third party attempt. A bullet may not have been enough to kill the Bull Moose, but the turning away of the media and major party convulsion making the party split was enough to.

**Behind Bars**

Theodore Roosevelt was not the only third party candidate to enter the 1912 election, Eugene V. Debs also ran, under the Socialist Party. He ran for President four different times, however, the 1912 and 1920 Presidential runs are the most significant for third party analysis.

His 1912 run proved to be the most successful out of these two and most successful of any Socialist candidate then and now. Originally Debs was a part of the Democratic Party, but due to disputes about the rights of workers he broke away from the Democrats and began his Socialist Party political career (Urofsky 2004, 42). In the 1912 election he amassed around six percent of the popular vote, which was the highest that any Socialist candidate has ever got. Debs was considered a celebrity among labor movements, especially American Railway Union that he formed in 1893 (Urofsky 2004, 43). With this “celebrity” status and the fact he had already served jail time for draft avoidance and leading a nationwide railway strike that the Supreme

Court ruled interrupted Interstate Commerce (Urofsky 2004, 43) he became a popular candidate choice for the socialists that were intertwined in American culture. This fame and support transferred over to the election of 1920 in which Debs, while not getting as much as his 6 percent popular vote in 1912, managed to get nearly one million write in votes as he sat behind bars in an Atlanta prison (Chester 2004, 96). This is an extraordinary feat that has never been duplicated and more than likely will not be duplicated, especially by a third party candidate.

His statistics were short-lived however because as with every other third party candidate Debs began experiencing failure by not receiving the presidency. He had prime opportunity seeing as Roosevelt had split the Republican Party down so they both had sub-thirty percentages. If he could have done the same thing, then we might have seen our first third party President in the era of the Demopublicans. The Socialist support just could not trump Democracy. Democracy is what this country was founded upon and has become engrained in our psyche as the "right" regime. This notion, which at the time had been in effect for over a century, causes people to turn away from the notion of a regime change. Socialism is often misconstrued with Communism in propaganda and therefore becomes much less popular in the minds of American citizens. It is also hard to advertise yourself in a prison jumpsuit behind bars and even harder when you are not officially on the ballot. Those nearly one million people who wrote his name in were die hard supporters who did not care whether or not he was in prison or not, especially because it was for the Socialist cause. The mix of a lack of Socialism support and not being formally on the ballot in the 1920 election are some of the factors that contributed to the two major parties still reigning over the third party.

## Take Your Country Back

Fast forward eighty years when George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton were battling for the 1992 Presidency, but they were not only battling themselves. Out of the Republic of Texan rose Ross Perot, a self-made billionaire and now the Independent candidate in the 1992 election. Perot was an anomaly, he had more conservative view points, but did not align with the Republican Party, but also because of his conservatism did not align with the Democratic Party. He disagreed heavily with both of their economic policies and therefore started what is known as the Reform Party running under the platform that as Americans they need to "take their country back" (Rapoport 2005, 53). Ross Perot experienced the most success that a third party candidate had received since Progressive Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.

He instantly rose through the ranks and got enough signatures and ballot access support to be on the 1992 Presidential ballot. He easily destroyed the signature minimums throughout each of the fifty states plus the District of Columbia. For instance in Texas a candidate needed to get 54,275 signatures in which he got 231,000 and in Colorado he only needed 5,000 and he got 135,000. In total he was required to get 767,033 and the LA Times even said "given the wide variety of deadlines and requirements to gain access to general election ballots in 50 states…[the] standard for becoming a candidate [in 1992] would be virtually impossible to meet" (Rapoport 2005, 60). Perot did not just get the 767,033 required signatures, he got roughly 5,300,000 signatures which is nearly seven times the amount he needed. Through this he was proving himself to be a formidable challenger to the two major parties even before the official race got started.

Once the Presidential race began there was no sign of stopping Perot. As of mid-May Perot did something that no other third party candidate had done before, he had surpassed both

major party candidates in electoral support. He carried 33 percent of the electorate's support, while Bush only had 28 percent and Clinton 24 percent. This number only increased by the end of June where he was at least 13 percent ahead of both Bush and Clinton. Perot had 284 electoral votes, Bush had 158, and Clinton only had sixteen (Rapoport 2005, 56-57). Perot was riding a third party high that has never been seen before and he was looking like he had a legitimate shot at gaining the Presidential nomination. He was stealing voters from both sides: "even partisans were attracted to Perot, as both Democratic and Republican primary voters in such states as Oregon and California liked Perot as well or better than their own party's nominee" (Rapoport 2005, 57). Even though late June brought Perot all this success, in early July he all of a sudden dropped out of the race. His supporters were outraged. Why would a third party candidate who had one of the best chances of winning the Presidency and ending the Demopublican's tyranny drop out less than a month after he gained his largest lead? No one really knows why and just two months later in September he rejoined the race.

The two month hiatus took its toll as we elected Democrat Bill Clinton. Perot's impressive 18.91 percent of the popular vote was substantial as a third party candidate and whether or not he would have done better or even won if he would have stayed in the race will forever be a mystery. The fact of the matter is that he overcame a lack of name recognition, all financial constraints by being self-funded, and the crippling ballot access laws. None of this proved to be enough and one of the areas of blame for that could be the break that he took. With it he enraged a lot of his supporters and his campaign was not as strong after the loss of momentum. Nonetheless, Perot fell short of Presidential glory and became another victim of the two major parties.

## Conclusions

These three candidates are some of the most influential and successful third party candidates the United States has ever seen. Collectively they have overcome many obstacles that were thrown in their way by the two-party system and all did it in completely different parties from each other and even at times in different generations. The fact of the matter remains that none of these third party candidates could thwart the hold of the two-party system. Roosevelt came the closest to giving us a hint at a multi-party system by finishing above the Republican Taft, but even so the two major parties have still continued on and remain in full effect to this day.

# IV

# Conclusion: A Partisan Candidate with a Third Party Soul

This most recent election of 2016 brings with it a new perspective for third parties that on the surface appears as if it would have nothing to do with them. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders are fierce competitors within their respective parties, but behind their various different policy opinions lies one common feature of both of them that brings them together. They both are partisan candidates with a third party soul. This phrase means that each of them are running under established partisan lines of the major two parties: Trump for the Republicans and Sanders for the Democrats. However, neither of them line up with traditional Republican or Democratic Party lines. Rather, they both show the essence of a third party candidate. If we look back at the way Ross Perot conducted his 1992 campaign for the Reform Party, we will see that Donald Trump and his campaign shares much of the same characteristics. For instance, Donald Trump is a self-made billionaire with very little political background and so was Ross Perot. Donald Trump wants to run the country like a business, as did Ross Perot. Donald Trump wants to "make America great again" similarly to Ross Perot who wanted the American people to "take their country back." Donald Trump receives scrutiny because of some of the comments he has made against minorities, Ross Perot also received much scrutiny because of that. Donald Trump does not conform under traditional GOP Republican guidelines and the majority of his partisan contemporaries do not agree or support him. Donald Trump has much of the same characteristics as Ross Perot and similar policy desires as the Reform Party, of which he ran under for a brief time in the late 1980's. Similarly, Bernie Sanders is not the traditional Democrat that we would

think of. He brings back a Socialist Party perspective on things wanting to make things more equal in this country and work on closing down the wage gap. Now he is not a classic Socialist like Eugene Debs, but he does have this Socialist aura about him similarly to some of the things we saw under Frederick Delano Roosevelt in the 1940's. FDR was not an open Socialist, but a lot of his policy decisions have made some people regard him as a Socialist. In fact, Bernie Sanders is a Congressman from Vermont who does not have a "D" or an "R" by his name, but rather an "I" standing for Independent. Both of these current candidates seem to not align with their parties, but at the same time are both excelling within them. How can that be?

There is no clear cut answer to this and it could just be a fluke, however, it could be that working within the party lines, as we have seen with how important party labels are, can give them the possibility of getting elected, while at the same time serving their own personal third party agenda. Could this be an answer for third party candidates? Can a little bit of conformity make it so we can extinguish the two major parties from within their own lines? As of today there is no clear answer as to whether this theory is true or could work, but it does appear on the surface to be working for both Trump and Sanders. With doing this however, it still does not solve the problems of not being able to have a multi-party system, no as we have seen that comes from governmental institutions and our political psyche.

Another theory as to how third parties might be able to establish themselves on the main stage is an approach we get from Ross Perot's campaign in 1992. It is called the "push and pull" method. This method has two parts to it. First the "push" part entails a third party pushes one of the two kinds of dissatisfactions with the two-party system in order to supplement themselves into the system. The two kinds are one "a failure of either major party to provide sufficiently attractive alternatives to motivate support" and two "the amount of choice between the two major

parties" (Rapoport 2005, 26-27). The "pull" part comes from attracting voters away from (pulling) the two major parties (Rapoport 2005, 26). A combination of this pulls voters away from major parties by the candidate being a positive alternative to the two major parties based on the fact that they are pushing the recognition that some of the two major party's policies are dissatisfying. This way worked briefly for Ross Perot, but in the end also proved not enough to overcome the tyranny of the two party system.

These two theories could provide third parties with the capabilities to have a more legitimate run towards the Presidency, although neither has worked before. This is due to the fact that our two-party system is fed by both us and the government as we have seen in the previous couple of chapters.

In chapter one we looked at some of the institutional governmental financial and social constraints that are placed upon third parties that force them out of the race whether willingly or unwillingly. Implementation of financial policies like the FECA placed an overwhelming constraint onto third parties that they just cannot overcome. It give the two major parties a large head start to financing their campaigns and does not provide third parties with equal financing even if they successfully jump through the FECA's hoops. This shows that the government does not want a multi-party system by placing the two major parties on a financial pedestal and making third parties have to work that much harder to get to where the major parties are. State subsidy for major parties and tax money control also play a large factor into why third parties have had and are still having trouble to flourish like a major party. These financial constraints make it so we continue to have a two-party system with the Democrats and Republicans leading the Presidential race year after year. They make it so third parties cannot get funded enough to get on the big stage with them and can barely get off the ground to start their campaign.

In this chapter we also looked at the social constraints brought about by institutions such as television, the newspaper, and social media. The two major parties excel in these three areas based on the fact that they carry with them name recognition and therefore are worth media's time to run stories about or to promote their progress. Third parties are small, weak, and inconsistent organizations that are not worth the media's time to run in some reporters' opinions. One of the biggest reason that third parties are small, weak, and inconsistent organizations is because of the media. The media does not want to run stories about them, but at the same time that is the only way in which the parties can get exposure. Without exposure no one is going to vote for them because they do not know who they are. With exposure of who these candidates are and what their policy position is there would be a much better chance that we see more third parties making legitimate runs for President, or at least provide us with one more option than a measly two. Between financial inequality and a lack of social exposure, the two-party system remains in full effect and will continue to.

As we saw in the second chapter however, institutions are not the sole reason why we remain under a two-party tyranny. A lot of the answer rests within ourselves and our voting habits. From early on we have been taught that a third party vote is a waste of a vote, that it is un-American, that our vote is then worthless and we have not done our civic duty. If that person telling you that is the only one out there doing that then there is no problem, but they are not. There are so many people that tell us our third party vote is a waste. The only way it is a waste is if we listen to these people. The only way for a third party candidate to win is to vote for them, but if everyone is not voting for them because they feel that it is a waste, then one will never win. It must be a collective effort by third party supporters no matter what the nay-sayers say.

Beyond that, we also implement what is known as the party label heuristic. When making our political decision we immediately look for that "D" or "R" because that is what we know. Our society is highly uneducated politically and one of the main ways we learn about candidates is through our environment. What kind of household we grew up in, what geographic region, what we see in the media. All of these play a factor and when all we know is the two major parties, then that is all we vote for. The party label heuristic is one of the largest constraints placed upon third parties because it is so frequently implemented by voters and nearly completely eliminates third parties because of how much it tailors to the two major parties. You do not vote Independent or Libertarian on a whim, third party voters are more politically knowledgeable about which candidates are out there and which line up best with their political beliefs. The average American is not going to be paying enough attention to learn about a third party candidate and is therefore going to limit their choice to one of the two major parties. This ties back to the lack of institutional media coverage for third parties because the only way in which the party label heuristic could ever benefit third parties is if there was enough exposure of them to get into the minds of voters and thus reshape our two-party culture into a more multi-party culture. On paper we have a multi-party system with third parties running in almost every election, but come Election Day the two-party system retakes over.

Finally in the third chapter we looked at some of the more successful third party challengers throughout our history: Theodore Roosevelt, Eugene Debs, and Ross Perot. Roosevelt overcame the lack of media attention they were receiving due to extenuating factors and finished second in the running, the best a third party candidate has ever done. Unfortunately because his Progressive ideals were so similar to that of the Republican Party, the party split opening up an easy victory for Democrat Woodrow Wilson. That was one of the largest factors

into why Roosevelt and the Progressives did not take back the White House. Next we looked at Eugene Debs, a Socialist Party candidate who made the best run a Socialist ever had and then did an impressive 1,000,000 write-in votes while he sat in a prison cell. Political culture surround Socialism and a lack of proper broadcasting techniques while in prison is ultimately what led to Eugene Debs not having a better run at President. Finally, we looked at Ross Perot, who came out of nowhere in 1992 and took the lead from both major parties in both the popular vote and the electoral vote. However, a two month hiatus at the peak of his third party performance is what caused his campaign to nose-dive into third place and allow Bill Clinton to assume office. These three third party candidates all overcome, to a point, many of the constraints of the two-party system, but in the end the system still remains victorious. There are too many constraints to overcome and one must overcome all in order to cement a serious third party choice.

Independent ex-Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura made the comment that he loves the two-party system because "it gives me one more choice than Communist Russia." Mr. Ventura is a rather radical person with radical ideals, but his characterization is not wrong. Two choices is not a lot. Not for over 300,000,000 Americans to all be properly represented. That is why more choices could bring about more representational capacity. With all the aforementioned constraints throughout these chapters, how are third parties supposed to be able to overcome them and place themselves in our system? There are various ways in which they have gotten close, Roosevelt had the name behind him, the people knew him, but even he could not. Perot annihilated the ballot access requirement by almost seven time more than required and got plenty of exposure, but still he could not either. The fact of the matter is that until we as a culture make ourselves more politically savvy and not rely so much on label, but rather candidates, we will always have a two-party system. It is with this cultural change that then we can level the

institutional playing field, but if no one speaks up for third parties, that institutional fetter will always be on them, but now accompanying it is a cultural shackle. These constraints stop third parties in their tracks and do not let them move; and until we remove our cultural shackle and force off the institutional fetter, we will only get to see the Donkey and the Elephant at the American Political Zoo.

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