Did Ralph Nader Elect George W. Bush?
An Analysis of Minor Parties in the 2000 Presidential Election

Barry C. Burden
Harvard University
Department of Government
Littauer Center 228
Cambridge, MA 02138-3001
burden@fas.harvard.edu
www.fas.harvard.edu/~burden

Though neither Patrick Buchanan nor Ralph Nader garnered as many votes as some earlier minor parties, they had the potential to affect the 2000 presidential election in ways that their predecessors could not. This is possible because of the shear closeness of the major party vote. The popular vote nearly rendered the presidential contest a tie, with Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush both winning about 48%. And the Electoral College outcome, which depended on a contentious series of legal battles in Florida, gave Bush the majority by just one vote. Al Gore's 266 electoral votes are the most even won by a losing candidate.[1] And 2000 was the first time in more than a century that the winners of the popular and electoral votes were different. In an electoral context as balanced as this one, candidates from outside the two-party system who manage even meager showings can have remarkable effects the election's outcome.

In this paper I examine the roles that Reform Party nominee Buchanan and especially Green Party nominee Nader played in the 2000 presidential election. Using a variety of data from election returns to national surveys, I address two pressing questions. First, how did minor party voters reach their decisions given the great potential for sophisticated behavior in a close election? This requires determining the sources of minor party support and the relationships between their electoral coalitions. Second, what effects did minor parties have on voter turnout and who won the election? Answering this question requires analysis of counterfactuals that estimate what would have happened had Buchanan and Nader not been running. The paper hopes to build on the growing body of theoretical and empirical research on "major" minor parties in America generally as well as understand their roles in the 2000 presidential election specifically.[2] The stark realities of this election are sure to force political scientists to rethink some of our conclusions about the dynamics of minor parties.

The paper comes in several parts. It begins by reexamining the election outcome in terms of social choice analysis. A simple look at the preference rankings of candidates shows that, for the first time in survey era, the winner of the presidential election was not the Condorcet winner. Moreover, almost no common voting method would have selected Bush as the winner. The analysis also shows that minor party voters were remarkably strategic in 2000. The second section analyzes Nader's standing in the polls dynamically by examining the patterns and determinants of his support over the final months of the campaign. Unlike nearly all minor party candidates, Nader actually rose in the polls over time, even after controlling for the closeness of the major party vote and support for other candidates. The third section turns to the effects that Buchanan and Nader had on voter participation and the major parties' vote shares. A larger number of minor party voters would have abstained with their candidates in the race. Minor parties, most notably the Greens, increased turnout both directly by mobilizing votes for themselves and indirectly by adding interest to the campaign, for a total effect of around 2.5 percentage points. The next section of the paper reexamines the possibility that Nader threw the election to Bush. It is clear that Gore and Nader were near substitutes and that Florida almost certainly would have gone Democratic without Nader in the race. Yet it is also possible that Bush would have been elected easily without Buchanan in the race. Bush might have won

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[1] Gore was eligible to win 267 electoral votes but one Gore elector from the District of Columbia abstained to protest the election outcome.

[2] As others have noted (Gilbert *et al*. 1999; Herrnson and Green 1997), there are technically many minor party candidates available to voters, making the term "third party" imprecise even if common. Earlier studies tended to limit analysis to those that received at least 5% of the popular vote (Cho 2000; Lacy and Burden 1999; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996) while others have examined even the meekest campaigns (Herrnson and Green 1997). I take the middle ground by examining Buchanan and Nader, neither of which achieved 5% or any electoral votes but both of whom are thought to have affected the election outcome substantially.

another 30 electoral votes in four other close states and would have taken the presidency, even after conceding Florida to Gore. I then turn to examining the sources of minor party support. Nader voters were more liberal, pro-choice, and educated than other voters on average. The factors that distinguished Nader from Gore in particular were economic in nature, suggesting that Gore was blamed as an incumbent. Aggregate analysis shows that Nader did much better at drawing on his earlier support and Perot's base from 1996. Surprisingly, Buchanan and Nader both performed better when the major-party vote was closer. I conclude by suggesting how this multifaceted picture of results fits with existing work on minor parties in America.

A Perverse Social Choice Function

Elections are a key mechanism for aggregating individual citizen preferences into collective decisions. The proper way to do this is a matter of great contention. A prominent line of research focuses on the rationality of voting rules and a society's social choice function. Though no single method of aggregation is ideal, some appear more perverse than others because they violate common assumptions about how preferences ought to be represented. Arrow (1951) has argued that seemingly trivial characteristics such as transitivity and nondictatorship should be maintained, but has also shown that no voting system can do so. This impossibility result confirms that no vote aggregation method is perfect. Indeed, examples can be generated that produce rather different social outcomes from the same individual preferences simply by altering the aggregation rules. At a minimum, one would hope that some basic principles of fairness are retained that at least make the process, and thus the outcome, appear legitimate to voters (see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).

Two common methods are majority and plurality rule. Majority rule would have failed in 2000 because no candidate won 50% of the popular vote. And plurality rule would have elected Gore as he clearly won the popular vote. And neither majority nor plurality rule is more natural than or superior to more complicated methods. Indeed, the Founders chose to create the Electoral College to choose presidents. Bush won the 2000 election because he won a majority of electoral votes, after a serious of legal battles in Florida held him over the 270 required for victory. One might wonder whether this rather unique method of election selected the same winner that other aggregation schemes might or whether Bush's victory was idiosyncratic to the particular set of institutions and events that put him into office.

One of the most stringent methods of selecting a candidate was proposed by the Marquis de Condorcet more than 200 years ago. The Condorcet criterion is a desirable method of choosing among multiple candidates because it sets the threshold of victory high. Condorcet argued that a winning alternative ought to be capable of defeating all other alternative in head-to-head comparisons. That is, A should be the victor only if she beats both B and C in paired situations. Even if some voters choose strategically rather than sincerely – perhaps due to a combination mechanical and psychological incentives (Duverger 1963) – the Condorcet winner should also be the election winner if she exists.

National Election Study data from 2000 make it possible to conduct a crude analysis of strategic voting. I follow a long line of research that uses rankings of the candidates on the traditional "feeling thermometers" as estimates of the relative ordinal utilities each person has for each candidate. Thermometers are reasonable proxies for respondents' utilities for the candidates and predict the vote well (Abramson *et al*. 1992, 1995, 2000; Brams and Fishburn 1983; Brams and Merrill 1994; Kiewiet 1979; Ordeshook and Zeng 1997; Palfrey and Poole

1987; Weisberg and Grofman 1981). Abramson and colleagues (1995) show that the winners of the popular and electoral vote in three notable third party elections – 1968, 1980, and 1992 – were all Condorcet winners. That is, the Electoral College victor also would have won using Condorcet's standard of beating each of the other candidates in head-to-head comparisons. Using their approach, I have verified that Clinton was easily the Condorcet winner in 1996 as well.

It is reassuring that different voting schemes – simple plurality rule, the Electoral College, the Condorcet criterion, and perhaps even approval voting – all select the same candidate in each of the last four elections with significant minor parties (Brams and Fishburn 1983; Brams and Merrill 1994; Kiewiet 1979). Indeed, it is remarkable that every presidential election for which adequate survey data exist seems to have chosen the Condorcet winner, regardless of minor party showings. This is satisfying in part because no voting method is ideal and the Condorcet method appears to be one of the most stringent as a Condorcet winner does not even exist in many settings.

The 2000 election is not so tidy. Not only did George W. Bush not take the popular vote, but the data clearly show that he was not the Condorcet winner either. This is apparently the first time in the survey era that this has happened. Moreover, it is quite possible that the winner of the popular vote – Al Gore – was also not the Condorcet winner. Examining the pre-election rankings, Nader beats Buchanan (659-240), Gore (527-500), and Bush (562-491), thus making him the Condorcet winner.[3] Nearly every other method makes Gore the winner. Running through the list of voting methods that are commonly discussed in textbooks on the subject (e.g., Shepsle and Bonchek 1997), Gore wins whether using a plurality runoff, sequential runoff, Borda count, or approval voting.[4] The 2000 election thus represents a highly unusual event in modern U.S. politics as the Electoral College and ensuing legal battles surrounding Florida are perhaps the only method that would result in George W. Bush's election.

The thermometer rankings also show an unprecedented degree of strategic voting. Unlike the elections where Wallace, Anderson, and Perot induced moderate amounts of strategic behavior, the pivotal roles that Buchanan and Nader played in 2000 produced a remarkable amount of sophisticated voting behavior. Table 1 demonstrates this by comparing respondents' candidate rankings along with their vote choice and turnout decisions. The data show that nearly all of those who rated Buchanan or Nader as their most preferred candidates voted for someone else. Among voters, over 90% of people who rated Buchanan or Nader highest did not vote for them. Not only is this large percentage astonishing, but more than a third of those who preferred Nader surprisingly chose Bush rather than Gore.

This suggests that many voters were deciding which candidate from outside the current administration was worth their support rather than simply whose platform was nearest their ideal points (Cho 2000; Lacy and Burden 2001). It seems that Nader preferrers and Nader voters are rather distinct groups. If the Nader vote was comprised mostly of traditional liberals interested in ideological purity, a strategic voter would have chosen Gore. Presumably a leftist voter who prefers Nader but fears that his candidacy is not viable would turn to Gore as second choice. A

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[3] The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of voters preferring Nader and each opponent in head to head rankings. These data are weighted using the standard NES sample weight. Ties have been ignored for the time being.

[4] As Brams and Fishburn (1983), Brams and Merrill (1994), and Kiewiet (1979) argue, there are several ways that approval votes might be computed from feeling thermometer rankings. For simplicity I take the simplest form – sincere approval voting – where ties are discarded and voting for a candidate is considered an approval vote.

sizable contingent of Nader preferrers appear to have felt that way but abstained. While many Nader preferrers who voted did pick Gore, it remains counterintuitive that so many voted for Bush instead. Many of these voters must have been motivated by the desire to end the Clinton-Gore reign and decided that Republican Bush was most likely to do that.

Table 1: Candidate Rankings, Vote Choice, and Abstention

| | | Highest Ranked Candidate | | | |
		Bush	Gore	Nader	Buchanan
Presidential Vote Choice	Bush	93.7	6.2	37.6	46.3
	Gore	5.8	93.5	52.0	43.9
	Nader	.5	.3	9.4	3.5
	Buchanan	0	0	0	3.5
	Other	0	0	1.0	2.7
	Abstain	20.0	25.9	48.1	39.8

Notes: Ranking based on pre-election feeling thermometers as the post-election thermometers do not include Buchanan. NES sample weight used. Ties are omitted.

Respondents who ranked Buchanan first were even more disloyal, but their strategic voters were cast a bit more in Bush's direction than in Gore's. More interesting are the abstention rates for each of these groups. Less than a quarter of those who placed Bush or Gore highest abstained and nearly all were loyal to their first-ranked candidates. But more than a third of those who favored Buchanan abstained and nearly half of those who preferred Nader stayed home.

This is an unprecedented amount of strategic voting among minor party supporters (see Abramson *et al*. 1995; Cho 2000; Ordeshook and Zeng 1997). It seems evident that strategic "voting" could mean more than just choosing a candidate who is not one's most preferred alternative. To the extent that abstention is a purposeful activity akin to choosing a candidate (Aldrich 1993; Lacy and Burden 1999, 2001), many Americans who preferred Buchanan or Nader found nonvoting a more satisfactory decision than either jumping to a minor party candidate at the other end of the spectrum or stomaching one of the major party standard-bearers.

It is noteworthy that abstention rates were highest among Nader preferrers. The strength of support for a chosen presidential candidate was also weakest for Nader. Nader voters say they felt less enthusiastic about their choice than did people who voted for one of the other three candidates. The percentage of NES respondents saying they "felt strongly" was 74% for Gore, 79% for Bush, and even 83% for Buchanan, but only 64% for Nader. The fact that so many of those who ranked Nader first abstained suggests that they were not particularly fond of *any* of the candidates. Those who voted for Nader probably felt tepid toward all of the candidates running and were only willing to cast protest votes because the anti-establishment Greens happen to be on the ballot. This might explain why apparently not many Nader voters regret their decisions. Only 1 in 10 Nader voters say they wish they could change their vote after knowing how close the election was (Jackman 2000). Given the perversity of the election result shown above, it is simply remarkable that 90% would pick Nader again even knowing that Bush – often their third or fourth ranked choice – would be elected president.

Campaign Dynamics

Some of the more interesting aspects of minor parties are the changes they induce in otherwise normal presidential campaigns (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). Among other things, a threatening outsider causes the Democratic and Republican nominees to deal with new issues, distribute their resources differently, and assemble altered coalitions. Strong minor parties introduce a great deal of uncertainty into the campaign and force the major parties to begin foraging about for votes more strategically. Like a zero-sum game, any support that goes to third party candidate effectively reduces the pool of votes available to the major parties. At the same time, the possibility of increasing turnout makes the situation look more like a positive-sum game. However, new voters mobilized by a minor party are relatively unpredictable, which often leads the major parties to shore up their bases.

To examine some of these dynamics, I have gathered trial heat and tracking polls conducted over the last two months of the campaign. Researchers often analyze polling data after campaigns have ended to understand what happened; reports on the major party dynamics in 2000 have already appeared (e.g., Erikson 2001). To augment these analyses, I wish to make observations about support for minor parties. To do so in 2000 is a mistake because the minor parties literally played a pivotal role in electing the president.

As one would expect, the data show that support for Bush and Gore were strongly and inversely related. But support for Gore and Nader were also negatively related. This suggests that they are "near substitutes" and that a bloc of voters was wavering back and forth between them. Indeed, the fact that half of those who preferred Nader voted for Gore (Table 1) is testament to this. The Buchanan and Nader percentages were also negatively correlated. The October correlations are larger in magnitude than the same correlations computed in September, indicating that these tradeoffs among candidates became even stronger as the campaign approached its end.

Nader's support in the polls bucks historical trends in one important way: it rises instead of falling. As Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996, 41) argue, "Third party support fades as the election approaches. This pattern of declining support has been apparent since the advent of survey data."[5] Though voters are apparently willing to consider minor party candidates when the stakes are low, they argue, the electorate abandons them when the stakes increase near Election Day. They show that this pattern holds for seven different candidacies ranging from Robert Lafollette in 1924 to John Anderson in 1980. Even Perot's unusually successful 1992 campaign apparently repeated the fate of earlier minor parties when his support dropped off as the campaign neared its end.

Figure 1 below shows that this decline does not hold for Nader.[6] Though the raw data points are a bit lumpy due to rounding, Nader's support clearly rises. A spline fit to the data shows the upturn well. Despite the variation, there seems to be about a percentage point increase over the last two months of the presidential campaign.

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[5] This appears to be true in every presidential election where a viable minor party ran. The only known exception is the 1998 gubernatorial election in Minnesota, where Reform Party candidate Jesse Ventura rose from near obscurity to victory in the final weeks of the campaign (Lacy and Monson 1999).

[6] Buchanan's support appears to follow the traditional pattern of minor party decline, though it is difficult to know with confidence. His support hovers around 1%, thus making rounding error huge and leaving little room for movement downward. Though rounding makes it difficult to know for certain, Gallup appears to have overestimated Buchanan's support by less than half a point and overestimated Nader's support by 1.5 points.
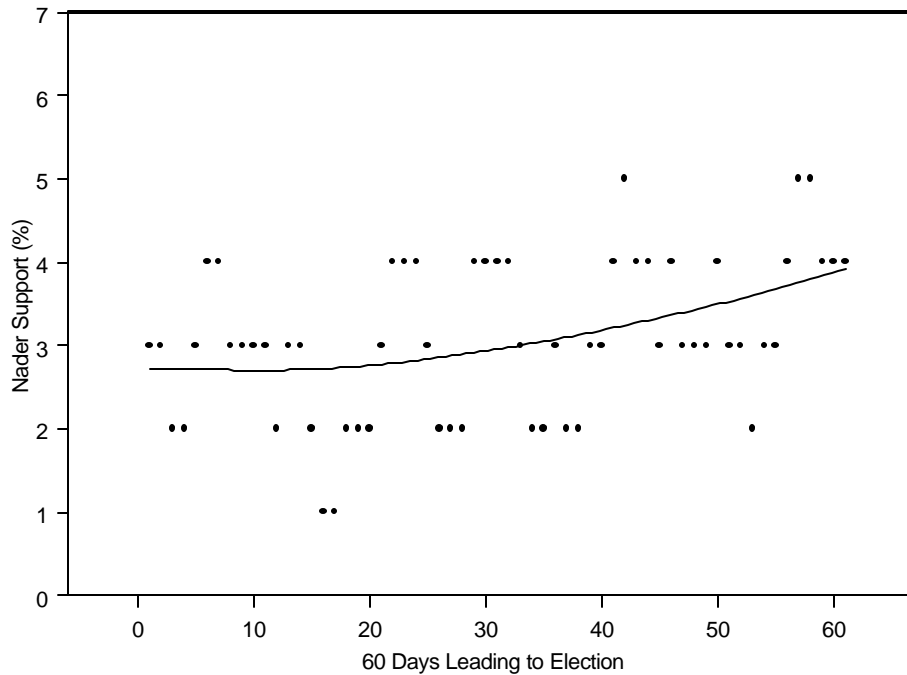
Figure 1: Time Series of Nader Support in Gallup Tracking Polls

Nader's rise in the polls defies history. Not only does minor party support wane in most polls as the consequences of committing to a candidate rise, but the 2000 major-party race remained close enough that Nader votes could have swung the election. Because of the closeness, one might have expected Nader to fall even faster than minor parties running in more lopsided elections. A "gut check" by Nader supporters late in the campaign should have caused them to waiver and throw their support, however weak, to Gore as the second best. If sophisticated maneuvering does not explain the rise in Nader support, what does?

Table 2 reports several simple time series regression models of Nader support.[7] There are five columns, each of which introduces different independent variables to the analysis. The variables include a simple daily counter, Gore and Buchanan vote percentages, and a measure of the closeness of the race. Closeness is measured as the absolute difference between the Bush and Gore percentages, so higher values indicate a more lopsided race. This is done to be sure that the relationship between time and Nader's support is not spurious. It might be, for example, that Nader's support rises only because the race gets closer.

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[7] A collection of several dozen trial heat polls is used here rather than the Gallup tracking polls shown in Figure 1. Tracking polls are adequate for analyzing the broad contours of campaigns, but are problematic for time series analysis because the observations are not independent. Though time series models allow for autocorrelation, tracking polls are based on rolling three-day averages (and in Gallup's case, quotas on the third day to compensate for missed respondents on the first two days). Fortunately Nader's rise in the polls is robust since it appears in both tracking polls and trial heat polls, even after introducing control variables.

Table 2: Explaining Nader's Daily Campaign Support

	I	II	III	IV	V
Closeness (|Bush % − Gore %|)	.12*		.12*	.12*	.08
Daily Counter		.02**	.03**	.03**	.02**
Gore %				.02	-.07
Buchanan %					.59**
Constant	3.63**	3.36**	2.88**	1.98	5.54
r	.48	.01	.15	.17	.06
Adjusted R^2	.21	.16	.15	.14	.24

Notes: $*p < .10$, $**p < .05$, two-tailed test. Prais-Winston time series regression. N = 41.

The first three columns examine the relationships between time, closeness, and Nader support. It appears – both independently and jointly – that Nader's standings rise later in the campaign and when the race is more lopsided. So Nader does better later in the campaign, even after showing that many of his supporters strategically left him when the major party campaign got tighter. The last two columns reveal how his support interacted with the nearest substitutes, Buchanan and Gore. It is perhaps surprising that Buchanan and Nader appear to do well or poorly together, as indicated by the positive and significant coefficient on the Buchanan variable. In the end, however, this analysis confirms that Nader's unique rise in the polls over the final weeks of the campaign is not due merely to closeness or the standings of the other candidates. The daily counter remains significant regardless of the control variables introduced. In addition, the size of the coefficient confirms the finding in Figure 1 that Nader rose about a point over the last two months of the campaign.

Turnout and Vote-Stealing Effects

Two of the most important effects a minor party candidate can have are in raising voter turnout and in altering the major party vote split. Minor parties of course shake things up in a host of other interesting ways, from altering the campaign agenda to fracturing the major party coalitions. In the end, however, it is enlightening to know how the election results would have been different without minor parties in the mix. Though one can never answer these counterfactual puzzles definitively by rerunning history (Asher 1995), they are ways of gaining insight on such questions using available data.

One of the ways to do this is simply to ask voters would they would have done under different scenarios. In 2000, Voter News Service exit polls asked voters about their choices in the hypothetical situation in which neither Buchanan nor Nader was running.[8] Table 3 presents a cross-tabulation of these hypothetical question and self-reported vote. Because minor parties earned so few votes, the aggregate major party split remains right at 50-50 even removing Buchanan, Nader, and the other minor party nominees.

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[8] "If these were the only two presidential candidates on the ballot today, who would you have voted for?" (Al Gore (Dem), George W. Bush (Rep), or Would not have voted for president).

Table 3: Self-Reported Effects of Removing Minor Party Candidates

		Actual Vote						
		Gore	Bush	Nader	Buchanan	Other	*All*	*2-Party*
Vote in	Gore	96.4	1.4	47.7	31.2	23.0	48.4	49.7
2-Way	Bush	2.4	97.2	21.9	26.6	36.7	49.1	50.3
Race	Abstain	1.2	1.4	30.5	42.2	40.3	2.5	
	All	48.0	48.4	2.5	.5	.6		
	2-Party	49.8	50.2					

Source: Voter News Service exit polls (weighted data). Entries are column percentages.

More intriguing is what individual voters would do. Nearly all Bush and Gore voters would remain loyal in a two-way race, as one might expect. This fits with the great consistency between ranking of and voting for major parties shown above. In contrast, many minor party voters would have abstained. Nearly 30% of Nader voters and more than 40% of Buchanan voters would have abstained without their candidates' in the race. About half of Nader's votes would have gone to Gore, the perceived next-best candidate. Surprisingly, Buchanan's brigade would have switched to Gore as least as much as it lined up behind Bush.

One can estimate the effects the candidates had on voter turnout by multiplying their actual vote shares by the percentage who would abstain in a two-way race. For example, 30.5% of Nader's 2.5% of the popular vote – or .75% – would have stayed home if he had not run. Taken together, minor parties boosted turnout directly by roughly 1.2 percentage points in 2000.

But candidates also have *indirect* effects on voter mobilization. Whereas direct effects are caused by a candidate mobilizing his supporters in an immediate way, indirect effects occur when supporters of one's opponents are mobilized by systemic changes in the campaign. Indirect turnout are caused such things as increasing closeness, adding color and drama to the race, introducing issues that mobilize new voters, and simply raising voter interest. The percentage of Bush and Gore voters who would abstain in a two-way race are suggestive of how large these indirect effects might be. These voters presumably turned out for one of the major party candidates because a minor party candidate reminded them about the importance of voting or threatened their candidates' victory. Without Buchanan or Nader in the race to make things interesting, they would have abstained. The percentages of Bush and Gore voters who would have behaved this way are small as a percentage, since most would have voted in a two-way race as well, but they are many in number. Using the same method as above, I estimate that turnout for the Bush and Gore would have fallen by a similar 1.3 points, for a total (direct and indirect) turnout effect of about 2.5 points.[9]

These self-reported results are reasonable, but ought to be taken with a grain of salt given what is known about the differences between opinions and behavior. If reliable, they ought to be replicated in other data. To check this, I turn to aggregate election returns to help develop an understanding of the turnout consequences of minor party voting in 2000. Because the Electoral

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[9] I calculate significantly smaller indirect turnout effects in 1996 using this method, probably due to a less competitive campaign between Clinton and Dole. Another way to get leverage on the turnout and vote-stealing effects is to estimate them based on predictions from regression models of vote choice and abstention (Lacy and Burden 1999, 2001). Only NES data will work here, however, as exit polls by definition exclude abstainers. Unfortunately, NES data contain too few Buchanan and Nader voters – just 3 and 33 respectively, before removing cases due to missing data – for a suitable analysis.

College operates on a winner-take-all basis within states, the first analysis relies on states as the units of analysis.

I begin with a regression model predicting voter turnout in the states.[10] Control variables are included to account for baseline turnout differences across states. Controls include such things as percent college educated, per capita income, and population density. I hypothesize that the closeness of the race in the state as well as the vote shares' for minor parties might each raise turnout. Closeness might boost turnout indirectly by voters believing that their votes matter more or simply making the campaign more interesting. Most importantly, the Buchanan, Nader, other minor parties' vote shares are included to determine which of them managed to raise turnout directly. Because Buchanan and Nader were not listed on the ballot in a few states, I run the analysis both for the full sample and the 44 states where both candidates appeared on the ballot to be sure that the results are not sensitive to write-in effects.

The results are found in Table 4. State electorates with more whites, fewer cities, more education, and higher incomes all have higher turnout. These variables capture interstate differences sufficiently enough that southern exceptionalism has disappeared. As expected, closeness of the race seems to have a positive effect on turnout after controlling for minor party showings. This could be because closeness *per se* encourages potential abstainers to turn out, or because a closer race causes the candidates engage in more voter mobilization (Cox and Munger 1989). Buchanan has a negligible effect on turnout, but Nader in contrast appears to have increased voter participation directly.

Table 4: Explaining Voter Turnout by State

Variable	All States	B & N on Ballot
Nader %	1.02**	1.30**
Buchanan %	.70	1.36
Other Minor Parties' %	-90.13	-188.44
Closeness of Race	-.14**	-.16*
South	.83	1.49
Percent Caucasian	.35**	.35**
Population Density	.001	-.001
Percent College Educated	.26*	.18
Per Capita Income	.00004	.0002
Constant	16.90**	14.23*
Number of Cases	51	44
R^2	.77	.78

Notes: Entries are OLS coefficients, weighted by the voting age population.
*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, two-tailed test using White/Huber robust standard errors.

This state-level analysis, in conjunction with the survey data analyzed above, confirm that Nader had an undisputable effect on voter turnout. Many of his supporters were so committed to him – or dissatisfied enough with every other candidate – that they simply would have abstained had Nader not run. It is this inverse relationship between voters' enthusiasm and their candidate' vote shares that allows some of the poorest performing minor parties to have some of the largest direct effects on voter turnout.

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[10] I am still in the process of collecting voter turnout data by county.

Though many would have not voted in a two-way race, the largest group of Nader voters would have gone to Gore. In fact, many journalists have speculated that the Florida fiasco could have been avoided if Nader had not run as Gore would have picked up enough potential Nader supporters to defeat Bush there.

Throwing the Electoral College

The analysis presented so far indicates that the outcome of the 2000 election was perverse. Bush not only lost the popular vote but was nearly the Condocet *loser* in head-to-head pairings with each of other candidates. Nonetheless, these findings do not address whether, as the title of this paper asks, Nader essentially elected Bush by stealing votes disproportionately from Gore. Though many Nader voters say they would vote for Gore in a hypothetical two-way race, it is difficult to know how well these responses would predict their actual behavior were that to occur. And the data are merely national averages that cannot reveal how minor parties affected the major party vote in particular states.

Florida was the center of attention for over a month following the November 7 election. The razor-thin result there was subject to ballot recounts and a series of legal maneuvers by the parties involved aimed at starting, stopping, and controlling the recounts. Just a few hundred votes separated Bush from Gore, yet Nader received nearly 100,000 votes. If even a small fraction of his voters had chosen Gore instead, the Democrats would have won the presidency.[11] In fact, Buchanan and *six* even more obscure minor party candidates each received more votes than Bush's margin of victory. Together they account for 250 times the mere 537 votes that distinguished Bush and Gore in the end. Though Nader's absence might have given Gore a clear Florida win, the absence of a number of right-wing minor party candidates from Buchanan to Hagelin to Browne might have allowed for a clear Bush victory.

While issues of ballot design and election law are important, they have overshadowed the kingmaker effects that Nader and other minor party nominees might have had beyond the butterfly ballot.[12] For a deeper look at this relationship, Table 5 shows the results of a regression model explaining the Gore vote. Here the dependent variable is Gore vote share in each county though the specification looks a lot like the state turnout model above. Nader's support in 1996 and 2000 are included as independent variables to determine how the Gore and Nader fortunes covaried. In addition to set of control variables, Clinton's share of the 1996 vote is included to tap general support for Democratic presidential candidates and the Clinton-Gore administration.

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[11] Indeed, only about 1% of the Nader vote is required to make up the final Bush-Gore difference. But one can not say that 537 are all that are needed for Gore to win. Florida law requires a recount whenever the difference is less than .5% of the total votes cast. Gore would have needed to win by roughly 30,000 votes initially to avoid an automatic recount or recanvass. Legal maneuvering might have developed differently if Gore was the leader in the initial count, leading to an unknown outcome. One must also assume that turnout and that the other minor parties' vote totals would remain constant for this kind of analysis.

[12] For a careful analysis of voting irregularities in the 2000 presidential election, see the series of papers by Wand and colleagues at <http://elections.fas.harvard.edu>.

Table 5: Explaining Gore's Vote by County

Variable	All Counties	Nader on Ballot
Nader 2000 %	-.18	-.36*
Nader 1996 %	.89*	.93*
Clinton 1996 %	.95*	.94*
South	-.39	-1.10
Percent Caucasian	-.08*	-.07*
Population Density	.0001*	.0001*
Percent College Educated	-.04	-.02
Per Capita Income	.0003*	.0003*
Constant	3.43	4.17
Number of Cases	3017	2453
R^2	.90	.90

Notes: Entries are OLS coefficients, weighted by total votes cast.
*$p < .001$, two-tailed test using White/Huber robust standard errors.

The results suggest that Gore and Nader were indeed viewed as near though certainly not perfect substitutes, as the negative sign on the 2000 Nader vote share variable indicates. This suggests that while Nader drew some of his support from the Gore camp, a much larger share of it came from other places. Potential abstainers appear to make up the lion's share of Nader's support. This corroborates the substantial turnout effects found in the state analysis above and the self-reported estimates where about many Nader voters report that they would have abstained in a two-way election.

But many Nader voters also stated that they would have supported Gore had their candidate not been running. If the dynamics in Florida were anywhere near this average effect, it is evident that Al Gore would be president today had it been a traditional two-candidate race. But was Ralph Nader able to drain away enough Democratic votes to cost Gore the presidency?

In the days following the election itself, the outcome Florida remained unsettled. Gore held 266 electoral votes to Bush's 246. Since 270 are need to win the presidency outright, the Florida outcome would determine the next president of the United States, as long as the other state outcomes remained fixed. At the same time, four other states were won by razor-thin margins that could have gone either way. Even conceding Florida to Gore, Bush could have won the presidency with only slight shifts in Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Collectively they could have thrown the election to Bush almost as easily as Florida would have given it to Gore.

Table 6: Where Buchanan Cost Bush Electoral Votes

State	Bush-Gore Difference (A)	Votes for Buchanan (B)	Ratio (A/B)	Electoral Votes
Iowa	4144	6400	.65	7
New Mexico	366	2762	.13	5
Oregon	6765	12210	.55	7
Wisconsin	5708	12825	.45	11

As Table 6 shows, Gore beat Bush by a small number of votes in each of these four states. In all four the Bush-Gore margin accounted for less than half a percent of the total votes cast (the same threshold below which Florida law requires a recount). Yet together these four states hold 30 electoral votes, five *more* than in Florida.

Also in each of these states, Buchanan won more votes than the difference between Bush and Gore. Had Buchanan not been on the ballot, it seems likely that Gore would have lost these states and Bush would have been elected regardless of the Florida outcome. All that would be required is that enough Buchanan voters choose Bush rather than vote for Gore or abstain. Assuming for the moment that no Buchanan voters would choose Gore, "enough" is anywhere from 13% in New Mexico to 65% in Iowa. Since many Buchanan voters nationally would have picked Gore in a two-way race, the thresholds are substantially higher than this in reality.

One cannot know for certain whether Bush would have won these four states without Buchanan in the race. It appears to be possible but perhaps not likely. National exit polls indicate that about one in four Buchanan voters would have chosen Bush, but the ratios probably vary tremendously across the states. Unfortunately, state exit polls have include too few Buchanan voters to reach firm conclusions. Nonetheless, had Pat Buchanan not been running, it is at least plausible that Florida would have not been subject to great public scrutiny and that Bush would have been elected easily with as many as 301 electoral votes. Bush ought to be at least as angry at Pat Buchanan – a former Republican who cost him an undisputed victory – as the Democrats are at Ralph Nader for taking Florida out of their hands.

Sources of Minor Party Support

According to exit polls, Nader support came most from those who voted for Clinton in 1996 and second from those who abstained in the last election. Together, they make up 55% of the Nader coalition. This confirms the suspicion that he drew mostly from the left and those less engaged with the system. As a share of previous voters, Nader drew most from the Perot camp, though it is only about a tenth of Perotistas, and this smaller pool makes the total Perot contribution modest. More Perot voters broke for Bush in 2000 than all of the others candidates combined (see Rapoport and Stone 2001).

It is not yet clear what individual-level determinants drove citizens to vote for Buchanan and Nader. To address this question I estimate a vote choice model using VNS exit poll data. These data have the benefit of large samples that allow for analysis of minor party voting. Otherwise rich NES data simply have too few Buchanan and Nader voters for firm inferences. The primary drawback of exit polls is that the sample excludes abstainers, but this is an unavoidable trade-off.

I estimate a discrete choice model that includes a set of explanatory variables suspected to influence vote choice. The variables fall into four broad categories. I begin with measures of general political orientation: party identification and ideology. Both are long-term attachments shown to have strong effects on voting behavior. Next are several economic evaluations. Economics and elections are deeply intertwined and these variables allow for both national and personal as well as retrospective and prospective judgements to influence vote choice. The third set of variables tap the sociocultural nature of contemporary American elections. I include a variable tapping attitudes on abortion, a measure of religious attendance, and whether a person

identifies with the religious right. Finally, a set of demographic control variables such as race, education, gender, and age are included. Question wordings are available in the Appendix.

The estimates in Table 7 show how variables influenced the choices between each of the other candidates and Nader. Nader is chosen as the arbitrary baseline category since not all pairwise comparisons are simultaneously estimable. Using Nader as baseline as least allows one to examine the most interesting Gore-Nader and Buchanan-Nader comparisons. Positive coefficients indicate that higher values on the independent variables lead to a greater likelihood of supporting a candidate other than Nader. For example, the significant coefficient of .50 on the female dummy variable reveals that women are significantly more likely to vote for Gore than Nader, all else held constant. But the variable's insignificance in the remaining columns indicates that women are no more likely to vote for another candidate relative to Nader. Some classes of variables affect all of the comparisons with Nader while others only influence one or two of the pairings.

Table 7: A Model of Presidential Vote Choice

	Gore v. Nader	Bush v. Nader	Buchanan v. Nader	Other Minor v. Nader
General Orientations				
Democrat	1.85**	.14	1.92**	.47
Republican	.32	2.35**	1.20*	.37
Ideology	.43**	1.48**	.33	1.06**
Economic Evaluations				
National Prospections	-.22*	-.39**	-.33	-.063
National Retrospections	-.44**	.03	-.13	-.66*
Personal Retrospections	-.44**	-.01	.03	-.26
Cultural Politics				
Abortion Attitude	-.08	.40**	.88**	.44*
Church Attendance	.06	-.10	.28	.12
Religious Right	.50	.79*	1.85**	1.14*
Demographic Controls				
Married	.06	.10	1.97**	.31
Homosexual	.16	-.68	-1.04	-.01
Age	.22**	.14**	-.06	.03
Income	.05	.18**	-.09	-.11
Education	-.22**	-.29**	-.55**	-.02
Union Member	.14	-.35	1.02**	-.71
Black	2.01**	-.13	.87	.94
Latino	.01	-.39	-.85	-.48
Female	.50**	-.06	.06	-.43
Constant	3.04**	-.74	-5.24**	-2.38**
Number of Cases			5012	
Log Likelihood			-2323.0	

*Notes: *p* < .10, **p* < .05, two-tailed test. Cell entries are multinomial logit coefficients.*
Source: Voter News Service exit poll data (weighted).

The major factors separating Gore and Nader voters are economic evaluations. Economic variables fail to achieve statistical significance in most other cases, but all three measures are strongly related to the Gore-Nader vote. In all three cases those who are less content with the economy tend to choose Nader over Gore. This might reflect a failed strategy on Gore's part. Though his convention acceptance speech attempted to distinguish him from the Clinton era by asking voters to see him "as my own man," Nader voters still held Gore responsible for an imperfect economy. In accord with earlier work (Cho 1999; Lacy and Burden 1999, 2001), minor parties often owe their support to anti-incumbent sentiment. And the substantive effects of these variables are not trivial. For a voter who is undecided between Gore and Nader, viewing the current economy as "poor" rather than "excellent" increases his probability of picking Nader from .50 to .79, a change of nearly 30 percentage points. Though national retrospections turn out to matter more than national prospections and personal retrospections, all three clearly separated Gore and Nader voters in 2000.

Contrast the power of economics to separate Gore and Nader voters with the effects of the cultural variables. One's attitude toward abortion and identification with the "religious right" have consistent effects on every comparison *aside* from Gore-Nader. Pro-choice voters are more likely to choose Nader than Bush, Buchanan, and other minor parties. Yet abortion attitudes do not distinguish between Gore and Nader. Again assuming that a voter is initially torn between the candidates, the probability of voting for Nader rises by anywhere from .27 (Bush) to .43 (Buchanan) as she goes from pro-life to pro-choice. For at least some voters abortion was definitive. The power of these variables to shape the voting decision fits with earlier work on the importance of abortion in modern electoral politics (Abramowitz 1995; Adams 1997). But other cultural issues matter too. Belonging to the religious right makes a .19 to .36 more likely to vote against Nader. These effects are strongest for the Buchanan-Nader pairing, which makes sense given the socially conservative content of the Buchanan rhetoric. Consistent with this, married respondents are far more likely to pick Buchanan over Nader though marriage has no impact otherwise. In contrast to the denominational differences that drive voting based on social/cultural issues, religiosity itself, as least as measured by frequency of attendance, appears unrelated to vote choice (cf., Gilbert *et al*. 1999).

Long-term political orientations such as partisanship, ideology, and demographic predispositions have strong effects on vote choice. As one might expect, liberals are almost always more likely to vote for Nader than an opponent and partisans likewise support their nominees in most cases. The one exception to this is that both Democrats and Republicans favor Buchanan over Nader. This might reflect that Nader, unlike former Republican Buchanan, comes from outside of the conventional party system. This finding reinforces the theme that Nader voters were least enamored of the entire slate of candidates.

Finally, though blacks and to a lesser degree women favored Gore over Nader, age and education had more systematic effects on the Nader vote. All else constant, younger voters and those with more education were more likely to vote for Nader. This fits with conventional views of party identification and minor party voting that expect the young to support minor parties disproportionately. It is noteworthy that age does not distinguish Buchanan and Nader, as the young tend to support minor parties of all stripes. Though income and education are often assumed to run in the same direction because they contribute to a person's socioeconomic status, they sometimes work in opposite directions here. Nader occupied a niche that attracted those with higher educations and lower incomes. While both Buchanan and Nader raised objections to free trade, union members were more likely to favor the Reform Party than the Green Party in

2000. Whereas Nader seems to have won votes on college campuses, Buchanan collected more in the union halls.

In the face of the "wasted vote" phenomenon and the possibility of electing one's third-most preferred candidate as a result, why did so many Americans nonetheless vote for Buchanan and Nader? The vote choice model above revealed that Nader tended to win the votes of white, liberal yet nonpartisan voters who were discontent with the economy. These findings confirm earlier work that found economic grievances, age, and strength of partisanship all associated with third party voting (Abramson *et al*. 1995, 2000; Alvarez and Nagler 1995, 1998; Gold 1995; Lacy and Burden 1999, 2001; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). But we should also wonder what contributes to minor party showings at the aggregate level where how rather than why a person voted as his did is most relevant.

Table 8 addresses this support issue by regressing the Buchanan and Nader county vote shares on a series of political and demographic variables. In addition to a common set of controls, I include measures of Nader's showing in 1996 to tap support specific to his candidacy. But I also wish to see the degree to which Buchanan and Nader drew from Perot's 1996 base and the votes of other minor parties that year. Rapoport and Stone (2001), for example, convincingly argue that Republicans were the main beneficiaries of the Perot movement's collapse. It is reasonable to hypothesize that minor parties drew support from the Perotistas as well. Finally, the closeness of the election is included to assess strategic voting.

Table 8: Explaining Nader and Buchanan County Vote Shares

	Nader	Buchanan
Nader's 1996 Percent	1.04**	-2.49**
Perot's 1996 Percent	.14**	-.10
Other Minor Parties' 1996 Percent	.18*	.58
Closeness of Race in State	.18**	.48**
South	-.58**	4.41**
Percent Caucasian	.004**	.36**
Population Density	-.00002	-.001**
Percent College Educated	.12**	-.18**
Per Capita Income	-.00003**	.0001**
Constant	-.98**	20.71**
Number of Cases	2453	3015
R^2	.71	.42

Notes: Entries are OLS coefficients, weighted by the voting age population.
*$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, two-tailed test using White/Huber robust standard errors.
Counties where candidates are not on ballot are removed.

The results indicate that Nader far exceeded Buchanan's ability to build on earlier third parties successes. Not only did Nader regain most of the votes earned in his lackluster 1996 run for president, but it appears that he drew from the Perot camp as well. Nader took about 15% of the 1996 Perot vote while Buchanan apparently pulled in none.

Another suspicion confirmed by this analysis is that all minor parties are not the same. Though much of the literature looks for commonalties in voting for different minor parties across elections (Gold 1995; Gilbert *et al*. 1999; Herrnson and Green 1997; Lacy and Burden 2001; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996), researchers ought to acknowledge differences as well.

Nader was more likely to win the votes of those living outside the South, with more education, but lower incomes while Buchanan did better in the South, among those with less education, and those with higher incomes. Even within the same election context, Buchanan and Nader appealed to rather different kinds of voters.

After including the 1996 minor party vote shares and controlling for demographics like race, region, and education, the lopsidedness of the election is positively related to both the Buchanan and Nader votes. This confirms a finding repeated throughout this paper that minor party voters were highly sensitive to the possibility of being pivotal in a close major party contest. The "wasted vote" logic and sophisticated voting were apparently on many Buchanan and Nader supporters' minds.

This finding bolsters the hypothesis that conviction is negatively correlated with a candidate's showing. As Lacy and Burden (2001) show, minor party candidates who do most poorly surprisingly often have the largest effects on turnout for this reason. Though Ross Perot earned 19% of the vote in 1992, he did only about as well a turning out new voters as John Anderson did with his meager 6.6% showing in 1980. Though Buchanan and Nader together garnered only a bit above 3% of the popular vote, they managed to have noticeable effects on voter participation.

Conclusion

The 2000 presidential election has done much to enlighten our understanding of minor parties in United States politics. At a practical level, 2000 added two fascinating observations to the growing number of cases available for study. In some ways this research will reinforce earlier conclusions based primarily on Wallace, Anderson, and Perot. For instance, their supporters are less partisan and less satisfied with the nations economic performance than other voters. These are the same relationships that helped and hurt earlier minor parties.

At the same time, the Buchanan and Nader candidacies stand apart from their predecessors. Among other things, these candidates could have easily affected who won the election. Gore probably would have won with Nader in the picture, and Bush could have won more easily without Buchanan around. These minor party candidates occupy an important slot at the end of a string of such candidacies. Indeed, five of the last nine presidential elections have witnessed significant minor parties. Nader but not Buchanan managed to build on these successes by tapping into the bank of Perot's voters. Nader's candidacy is unique in that his standing rose during the final days of the campaign, an anomaly among minor party presidential campaigns. And despite the closeness of the election, minor party voters in 2000 were far more strategic than their predecessors. A larger share of Buchanan and Nader supporters also would have rather abstained that voted for another candidate. These unusual dynamics lead to one of the least satisfying social choice outcomes of any presidential election.

One of the findings of this paper is that Buchanan and Nader introduced an unprecedented amount of distortion into the aggregation of preferences. This was possible because of the extreme closeness of the major party contest. Though eventually chosen the victor, Bush did not win the popular vote and would not have won using just about any other voting method. Though Democrats blame Nader for their loss, Republicans should realize that an outright victory might have likely been theirs – even without Florida – had Buchanan not run. Nader also made minor party history by defying the strong tendency of such candidates to lose support in the final days of the campaign. It actually appears that Nader rose in the polls in the

weeks preceding Election Day, this despite the possibility that he might throw the election to many of his supporters' third most preferred candidate.

Building on earlier work, this paper also showed that minor party candidates have effects on both turnout and the major party vote shares. Buchanan and Nader had surprisingly large turnout effects despite their small vote totals, suggesting that it might actually be the most meager campaigns that raise turnout the most by bringing out diehard supporters who would otherwise abstain. Because Buchanan and Nader ran as minor party candidates in the same election, we are reminded about the great differences among such candidates that are often downplayed. Nader drew support from young voters, the educated, liberals, and those upset with the economy; Buchanan won his votes in the South, from the religious right, and the less educated. These differences warn against the development of a grand theory of minor party coalitions.

Appendix

Exit poll data were collected on Election Day by the Voter News Service, an organization that conducts election surveys for major news outlets. Pollsters collected self-administered questionnaires from more than 13,000 voters in 2000. For Table 3, the two-way race question is "If these were the only two presidential candidates on the ballot today, who would you have voted for? 1 Al Gore (Dem), 2 George W. Bush (Rep), 3 Would not have voted for president." The wordings of questions used in Table 7 are listed below. Note that several of them were recoded in the way the text implies.

Democrat and *Republican*: "No matter how you voted today, do you usually think of yourself as a: 1 Democrat, 2 Republican, 3 Independent, 4 Something else"

Ideology: "On most political matters, do you consider yourself: 1 Liberal, 2 Moderate, 3 Conservative"

National Prospections: "During the next year, do you think the nation's economy will: 1 Get better, 2 Get worse, 3 Stay about the same"

National Retrospections: "Do you think the condition of the nation's economy is: 1 Excellent, 2 Good, 3 Not so good, 4 Poor"

Personal Retrospections: "Compared to four years ago, is your family's financial situation: 1 Better today, 2 Worse today, 3 About the same"

Abortion Attitude: "Which comes closest to your position? Abortion should be: 1 Legal in all cases, 2 Legal in most cases, 3 Illegal in most cases, 4 Illegal in all cases"

Church Attendance: "How often do you attend religious services? 1 More than once a week, 2 Once a week, 3 A few times a month, 4 A few times a year, 5 Never"

Religious Right: "Do you consider yourself part of the conservative Christian political movement, also known as the religious right? 1 Yes, 2 No"

Married: "Are you currently married? 1 Yes, 2 No"

Homosexual: "Are you gay, lesbian, or bisexual? 1 Yes, 2 No"

Age: "To which age group to you belong? 1 18-24, 2 25-29, 3 30-39, 4, 40-44, 5 45-49, 6 50-59, 7 60-64, 8 65-74, 9 75 or over"

Income: "1999 total family income: 1 Under $15,000, 2 $15,000-$29,999, 3 $30,000-49,999, 4 $50,000-$74,999, 5 $ 75,000-$99,999, 6, $100,000 or more"

Education: "What was the last grade of school you completed? 1 Did not complete high school, 2 High school graduate, 3 Some college or associate degree, 4 College graduate, 5 Postgraduate study"

Union Member: "Do you or does someone in your household belong to a labor union? 1 Yes, I do, 2 Yes, someone else does, 3 Yes, I do and someone else does, 4 No one does"

Black and *Latino*: "Are you: 1 White, 2 Black, 3 Hispanic/Latino, 4 Asian, 5 Other"

Female: "Are you: 1 Male, 2 Female"

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