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Third-Party Voting in Gubernatorial Elections: A Study of Angus King of Maine and Jesse Ventura of Minnesota*

Howard J. Gold
Smith College

This article analyzes the election of gubernatorial candidates Angus King of Maine (1994 and 1998) and Jesse Ventura of Minnesota (1998) in an attempt to determine the factors that produced these third-party victories. Previous studies point to a “culture of independence” explanation for third-party success. This approach focuses on attributes of the electorate, such as anti-partisan sentiment, previous support for a third-party candidate, economic discontent, issue concerns, and youth. Using VNS exit poll data and a multinomial logit model, I find that only two factors—anti-partisan sentiment and prior support for a third-party candidate—are powerful explanations for the success of both King and Ventura. The analysis suggests that the Minnesota case comes closer to the more familiar model of a third-party candidate who runs against the establishment and who mobilizes disaffected voters. There are, however, certain features of the electoral context—registration rules, money, candidate reputation and ideological profile—that bind these two cases and that also serve as powerful explanations for third-party success.

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I. Introduction

When Ross Perot won nearly 20 percent of the vote in the 1992 presidential election, many political observers saw in Perot the beginning of the end of the major parties' stranglehold on American politics. Perot won only 8 percent of the vote in 1996, but the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections marked the first pair of consecutive elections since 1856 and 1860 in which alternative candidates won

*Thanks to Donald Baumer, Robert Buchele, Lois Joy, Howard Reiter, Ron Seyb, Nicholas Xenos, and the anonymous reviewers of *Polity* for helpful comments and advice.

more than 10 percent of the vote.¹ Recent third-party success has been noteworthy in sub-presidential elections as well. Two states, Alaska and Connecticut, elected third-party governors in 1990—Walter Hickel in Alaska and Lowell Weicker in Connecticut. And two members of Congress were elected as independents, Bernard Sanders of Vermont (first elected in 1990) and Virgil Goode of Virginia (elected as an independent in 2000). Perhaps most striking were the recent successes of two alternative gubernatorial candidates, Angus King of Maine and Jesse Ventura of Minnesota. In 1994, independent candidate King captured 35 percent of the Maine vote to become the state's second independent governor in twenty years. Four years later, King coasted to re-election in a landslide, winning almost 60 percent of the vote. Also in 1998, former professional wrestler and Reform Party candidate Jesse Ventura captured 37 percent of the vote in a hotly contested Minnesota gubernatorial election.

Studies of alternative candidate voting have identified a series of voter attributes that contribute to the success of these candidates. Some have suggested that low levels of partisan sentiment are a precondition of third-party success. Anti-partisan sentiment comes in a variety of shapes and forms. A high degree of independence among voters, low levels of satisfaction with the major parties or perceptions that there is little to distinguish Democrats from Republicans (predicated upon either incompetence or the parties' issue-positions): all of these have been variously cited as explanations for the success of third-party candidates.² It is also suggested that young voters—youth representing weakened partisan attachments—are more susceptible to the appeal of alternative candidates.³ Others have pointed to voters' dissatisfaction with the individual candidates fielded by the major parties—it is said that alternative candidates fare well when voters are unusually dissatisfied with the major party candidates.⁴ Still others have looked to alienation from or cynicism toward government as a precondition of third-party success.⁵ When voters feel as if government is not acting in their interest, they are more likely to be receptive to the outsider appeal of an alternative candidate. Some work has suggested that economic discontent produces an environment favorable to alternative candidate suc-

1. Rhodes Cook, "Voters Still Want More than Status Quo," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, December 21, 1996: 3474.

2. See, for example, Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*. Second Edition, Revised and Expanded (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Howard J. Gold, "Third Party Voting in Presidential Elections: A Study of Perot, Anderson, and Wallace," *Political Research Quarterly* 48 (1995): 751-773; and Daniel A. Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1974).

3. See, for example, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Jerrold G. Rusk, and Arthur C. Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election," *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969): 1083-1105.

4. See Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*.

5. See Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*.

cess.⁶ And finally, a high level of issue awareness among voters is cited as yet another factor that contributes to third-party success.⁷

Much of the work on alternative candidate voting has focused on presidential elections and has examined factors such as levels of partisanship, alienation, issue satisfaction and awareness, economic discontent, and candidate satisfaction in the national electorate. There is some recent work, however, that has begun to focus on alternative candidate voting in sub-national elections. Endersby and Thomason study the 1990 election of U.S. Representative Bernard Sanders in Vermont and conclude that his success was based upon the policy preferences of his supporters.⁸ Reiter and Walsh study the elections of Governor James Longley of Maine in 1974, Governor Lowell Weicker of Connecticut in 1990, and also of Sanders in Vermont. Their basic finding is that state-specific and idiosyncratic factors—related to candidate ideology and experience—explain the success of these particular candidates.⁹ Donovan, Bowler and Terrio study support for third parties in California and find that factors such as voter dissatisfaction with major party candidates and perceptions that the major parties are very similar help us understand why people vote for third parties. Their major finding, however, is that identification with a third party also predisposes voters to reject the major party candidates at election-time.¹⁰

What links many of these works is their focus on the relationship between voter attributes and third-party voting. Reiter and Walsh label this approach the “culture of independence.” Although these authors reject the argument, the “culture of independence” approach holds that third-party candidates are more likely to succeed when voters possess attributes that lead them to vote for an alternative candidate. These attributes come in different shapes and forms, as I described above. But what links them is the notion that there is a common culture among voters that predisposes them to support independent or third-party candidates.

In this article, I expand and extend the analysis of alternative candidate voting to recent third-party gubernatorial successes in Maine and Minnesota. My purpose is to assess whether the factors that are cited as explanations for third-party voting in other settings are helpful in explaining the outcomes in these two states. I begin with some brief background on the elections of Angus King and Jesse Ventura

6. See Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*; and George A. Chressanthos and Stephen D. Shaffer, “Major Party Failure and Third-Party Voting in Presidential Elections, 1976-1988,” *Social Science Quarterly* 74 (1993): 265-273.

7. See Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*; and David J. Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

8. James W. Endersby and W. David Thomason, “Spotlight on Vermont: Third Party Success in the 1990 Congressional Election,” *The Social Science Journal* 31 (1994): 251-262.

9. Howard L. Reiter and Julie M. Walsh, “Who Votes for Non-Major Party Candidates? The Cases of Longley, Sanders, and Weicker,” *Polity* 27 (1994): 651-663.

10. Todd Donovan, Shaun Bowler, and Tammy Terrio, “Support for Third Parties in California,” *American Politics Quarterly* 28 (2000): 50-71.

before turning to an analysis of who voted for these alternative candidates and why. My findings suggest that a culture of independence is a necessary but insufficient precondition of third-party success. I argue that a fuller account of third-party success requires an analysis of the electoral context, and I conclude with some observations about the role of money, registration rules, candidate reputation, and candidate ideology in shaping third-party success in Maine and Minnesota.

II. Background

Maine

Independent candidate Angus King was elected Governor of Maine in 1994, winning 35.8 percent of the vote and narrowly defeating his Democratic opponent, Joseph E. Brennan, a former two-term governor and member of the U.S. House of Representatives (Brennan captured 34 percent). The Republican candidate, Susan Collins, finished third, and won 23 percent of the vote, while another independent candidate, Jonathan Carter, captured 6.5 percent of the vote. Like many third-party and independent candidates elsewhere, King's campaign exploited anti-party sentiment—his slogan was “partnership, not partisanship.”¹¹

King's own background was in law, business and the media. Previously a Democrat, his only prior political experience had been as a Senate aide. He operated an energy conservation business that proved to be very profitable. And he was widely known across the state as the host of “Maine Watch,” a public affairs interview program on Maine public television, a position he held for 18 years.

King's campaign strategy was twofold. First, he went after the traditional parties. He derided the bitter competition between them and blamed a two-week shutdown of the state government in 1991 on partisan bickering. He concentrated his attacks on his Democratic rival, accusing Brennan of advocating stale ideas left over from his previous administration and deriding him as a “typical big-spending liberal hack.”¹² Second, King presented his own blend of fiscal conservatism and social liberalism—he called it “compassionate pragmatism.”¹³ He argued—reminiscent of Ross Perot—that his own background as a successful businessman provided him with the capacity for dealing with the state's big budget shortfall. He advocated school reform, including standardized tests and performance evaluation, and work for welfare recipients, though he never criticized the idea of public assistance.¹⁴ And finally, he vowed to create an environment that businesses would find more inviting.

11. Sara Rimer, “Unfettered by Party, He's Set to Govern,” *New York Times*, November 18, 1994: A16.

12. Associated Press, “Independent Elected Maine's Next Governor,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1994: A17.

13. Rimer, “Unfettered by Party, He's Set to Govern.”

14. Brian McGrory, “Maine Pragmatist Set to Govern,” *Boston Globe*, December 18, 1994: 37.

King ran as an independent but much of his campaign was directed toward attracting Republican voters. The Republican candidate, Susan Collins, never managed to portray herself as a serious contender. So the real battle was fought between Democrat and independent. King's candidacy had certain advantages that many alternative candidates do not enjoy. First, from his media days, he enjoyed statewide name recognition. Moreover, by most accounts, he was media-savvy and telegenic. Conversations with voters suggest that more than his major party rivals, King was viewed as trustworthy. Second, King had money. He was a self-made millionaire who spent \$900,000 out of his own fortune on his campaign.¹⁵ Obviously, this allowed him to level the playing field in competition with the major party candidates. And third, Maine offers an environment that is hospitable to alternative candidates. 37 percent of Mainers are registered independents.¹⁶ The state elected an independent, James B. Longley, as Governor in 1974. And Ross Perot won 30 percent of the vote in Maine to finish second there in the 1992 presidential election, his best performance anywhere.

In 1998, when King sought re-election, any disadvantages associated with being an independent were outweighed by the advantages conferred upon him by incumbency. As the press put it, King by 1998 was a "relentlessly centrist incumbent who came through on first-term promises to balance an out-of-whack budget, streamline state government, and raise school standards."¹⁷ King coasted to victory, capturing almost 60 percent of the vote. His major party rivals were reduced to near third-party status: Republican James Longley, former member of the House of Representatives and son of the former independent Governor, captured 19 percent of the vote, while Democrat Thomas Connolly, won only 12 percent.¹⁸ Whereas King emphasized fiscal conservatism and targeted profligate Democratic spending in his initial run for the governorship, by 1998, he ran from the center, arguing that "both parties have to remind themselves that things happen in the middle of the ideological spectrum, not the extremes."¹⁹

Minnesota

On October 23, 1998, only ten days before the Minnesota gubernatorial election, an article in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* described the conventional wisdom at that time—"no pundit, professor, or political pro believes Ventura can win."²⁰ On

15. McGrory, "Maine Pragmatist Set to Govern."

16. *Washington Post*. "Sketches of New Governors," November 10, 1994: A38.

17. Elizabeth Mehren, "Maine has a Role Model for Ventura," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1998: A5.

18. Two other independent candidates captured a combined 10.4 percent of the vote as well.

19. Kenneth Chutchian, "Gov. King's Rivals Scrap for Support," *Boston Globe*, August 23, 1998: F15.

20. Bob von Sternberg and Dane Smith, "Governor's Race Profile," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 23, 1998: 1A.

November 3, Jesse Ventura turned the conventional wisdom on its head and captured 37 percent of the vote in a heated three-way race to become Minnesota's first non-major party governor since 1938.²¹

Ventura's previous career as a professional wrestler is well known but should not be diminished as it provided him with instant name recognition statewide, an asset for any third-party candidate. Ventura had also served as mayor of Brooklyn Park, the state's sixth largest city (population 60,000), as a talk-radio host, and appeared in several movies. These careers also enhanced his name recognition.

Unlike many other alternative candidates, Ventura's campaign did not become associated with a burning issue that seized the electorate. Ventura certainly made his issue positions clear—he repeatedly described himself as a fiscal conservative and social liberal—but media accounts suggested that Ventura's growing appeal was predicated upon public disaffection from politics and from the political parties. His opponents were Republican candidate Norm Coleman, a former mayor of St. Paul who had switched from the Democrats (DFL); and state Attorney General Hubert Humphrey III, son of the legendary Minnesota Democrat Hubert Humphrey, but a name perhaps too well known in a time of outsider politics. In contrast to the major parties, Ventura promised to reject contributions from special interests. As one op-ed author wrote in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, “the most damning factor against both candidates was their party affiliation. The GOP and DFL have ceased to be ideological platforms in the eyes of most voters. They have become conglomerates of small but powerful lobbies with deep pockets that seek to buy influence at all levels of government.”²²

Why did Jesse Ventura pull off such a spectacular upset? Post-election analysts suggest that voters assessed Ventura's personal qualities and found them to be far more appealing than those of his major party opponents. These qualities included integrity and outsider status. But it is also important to emphasize other factors that enhanced Ventura's ability to compete. First, he was very well known. Second, Minnesota provides public financing to gubernatorial candidates, and Ventura, as the Reform Party candidate, ended up receiving almost \$500,000 in public funds, thus enabling him to mount a visible statewide campaign.²³ Ventura also participated in

21. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Farmer-Labor Party supplanted the Democrats as the other contending party in Minnesota elections. The Democrats regained major party status in 1944 when they merged with the Farmer-Labor Party. As a result, the Democrats in Minnesota are known as the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party. See Millard Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third Party Alternative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979). And the Republican Party in Minnesota is officially called the Independent Republicans.

22. Kenneth Nuckols, “Why We Voted for Jesse,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 7, 1998: 19A.

23. In the 1998 gubernatorial election, each of the three candidates received \$310,282 from the general campaign fund (this money is split evenly among candidates whose parties have received at least 5 percent of the vote in previous elections). The candidates also receive an additional share of public funding that is determined by party preference check-offs on state tax forms. Here, Ventura, as the Reform candidate, received only \$16,500 compared to \$293,000 for Humphrey (DFL) and \$249,000 for Coleman (Republican).

the gubernatorial debates and by most accounts, used his “plain-speaking, homespun wisdom”²⁴ to maximum advantage. Minnesota also has same-day voter registration, enabling last-minute voters, who are disproportionately young and politically inexperienced, to vote. In fact, over 330,000 voters, or about 16 percent of the electorate, registered on election day.²⁵ And about 60 percent of Minnesotans voted in the 1998 election, a figure significantly higher than the 1998 national average of 36 percent. According to a Coleman campaign operative, 100,000 new voters voted in Minnesota that day, with 80 percent of them supporting Ventura.²⁶ Finally, Minnesota has a strong tradition of third-party politics. From the 1920s until the mid-1940s, Democratic gubernatorial candidates ran a poor third behind Republicans and Farmer-Labor Party candidates. And in recent Senate elections in Minnesota, the Reform Party candidate has gathered between five and seven percent of the vote, thereby securing funding and a place on the ballot for future Reform party candidates.

III. Multivariate Analysis of Third-Party Voting

The various theories of third-party voting that I described at the outset specify conditions under which third-party candidates do well. These theories yield a series of hypotheses about the electorate. What the theories hold in common is the claim that voters who possess certain characteristics—alienation, anti-partisan sentiment, etc.—are more susceptible to the appeal of an alternative candidate.

The Voter News Service (VNS) exit poll questions²⁷ allow for the testing of the following hypotheses generated by theories of third party voting:

- that previous support for a third-party candidate predisposes voters to support an alternative candidate;
- that independents are more likely than major party identifiers to support an alternative candidate;
- that young voters are more likely to support an alternative candidate;
- that economic discontent predisposes voters to support an alternative candidate;
- that issue preferences predispose voters to support an alternative candidate.

Finally, matching funds are also provided to candidates—Ventura qualified for \$177,658, compared to \$181,000 for Humphrey and \$176,000 for Coleman. (Source: Minnesota Campaign Finance & Public Disclosure Board, Minnesota Secretary of State, <http://www.sos.state.mn.us>.)

24. Dane Smith and Robert Whereatt, “Ventura Wins,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 4, 1998: 1A.

25. Minnesota Secretary of State. Internet site located at <http://www.sos.state.mn.us>.

26. Brian Sweeney, “Insider’s Account of the Coleman Campaign’s Final Days,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 15, 1998: 25A.

27. The data throughout the article are from the VNS exit polls, 1994 and 1998. The data are distributed by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The analysis is of course limited by the scope of questions posed by VNS to voters as they left the voting booth.

To test these hypotheses, I constructed three multivariate models of third-party voting, one each for Maine in 1994, Maine in 1998, and Minnesota in 1998. Each model includes variables that allow for the testing of these hypotheses, as well as some additional demographic control variables. These models are presented in Table 1.

In each of the three elections, the dependent variable is respondent's vote choice.²⁸ To estimate the effects of the explanatory variables, I constructed three multinomial logistic (MNL) models, one for each election.²⁹ In all three years, voting Democrat or Republican is the response category and voting for the third-party candidate is the reference (or excluded) category. As a result, positive coefficients in Table 1 represent an increased likelihood of a Democratic or Republican vote whereas negative coefficients denote a higher probability of supporting the third-party candidate. For ease of interpretation, I converted the models estimated in Table 1 into predicted probabilities of major party versus third-party support (see Table 2).³⁰ The top row represents the probability of supporting the major party candidate for a voter who is measured at the mode on every independent variable in the model. Subsequent rows display the probability of supporting the major party candidate for a respondent who is measured at the mode on every independent variable except the one indicated in the first column.

Angus King in Maine

The multivariate analysis in Table 1 points to several key findings. First, in the 1994 race between Democrat Brennan and independent King, Republican identifiers, Bush supporters (from 1992), conservatives, and well-educated respondents were all significantly more likely to support the independent candidate.³¹ To some

28. In all three years, the dependent variable is trichotomous, with 1 = vote for the Democratic candidate, 2 = vote for Republican candidate, and 3 = vote for the third-party candidate (King or Ventura). The coding scheme for all the variables is described in the Appendix.

29. Multinomial logistic regression is an appropriate technique when the dependent variable is a nominal variable with more than two categories. See John H. Aldrich and Forrest D. Nelson, *Linear Probability, Logit, and Probit Models* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1984); and Anthony J. Nownes, "Primary, General Elections, and Voter Turnout: A Multinomial Logit Model of the Decision to Vote," *American Politics Quarterly* 20 (1992): 205-226. The model produces two sets of estimates for each election: the effect of the independent variables on the odds of supporting the Democrat over the third-party candidate, and the effect of the independent variables on the odds of supporting the Republican over the third-party candidate.

30. In MNL, the effect of the coefficients on the probability of third party voting depends not only on the value of the coefficient but also on the value assumed by the independent variable. To estimate the probability of third-party voting using the MNL coefficients displayed in Table 1, I first substituted the modal value of each variable into the MNL model. I then changed one or two variables at a time to illustrate the impact of that change on the probability of third-party voting for a voter who was otherwise measured at the mode. These probabilities are shown in Table 2. See Raymond E. Wright, "Logistic Regression," in *Reading and Understanding Multivariate Statistics*, ed. Laurence G. Grimm and Paul R. Yarnold (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1995).

31. Previous presidential vote choice, party identification, and ideology are all nominal variables with multiple categories. In constructing these dummy variables, I excluded Clinton voters, Democratic identi-

extent, King's appeal mirrored that of a Republican candidate. In fact, given the weakness of Republican candidate Susan Collins, it is not far-fetched to suggest that although King ran as an independent, the 1994 gubernatorial election in Maine had the look of a traditional Republican-Democratic race.

But beyond King's appeal to traditional Republican constituencies, two other factors stand out. All other things being equal, Perot voters were significantly more likely to support King than either Brennan or Collins. The figures in Table 2 suggest that the modal voter³² had a 60 percent chance of supporting Brennan over King whereas a Perot supporter who otherwise measured at the mode had only a 31 percent chance of supporting Brennan over King. Similarly, being an independent was significantly related to support for King over his Democratic rival—Democratic identifiers were 23 percentage points more likely than independents to support Brennan over King (see Table 2). It is clear from these figures that when controlling for all other explanations, having previously supported a third-party candidate and identifying as an independent were important explanations for Angus King's initial success.

Other traditional explanations for third-party success are less convincing in the context of this Maine election. Voters whose financial situation worsened were no more likely to support King. Being young (and therefore politically inexperienced) was not a significant predictor of support for the independent candidate (nor was gender, race, or income). And finally, self-described moderate voters were no more likely than liberals or conservatives to respond to King's centrist appeal.

By 1998, when Governor King coasted to reelection, his principal opponent was now a Republican (Longley) and King, running as a centrist, demonstrated across-the-board strength. Only three factors produced significant increases in the probability of a Republican vote: support for Dole, identification as a conservative, and support for Perot.³³ On the Democratic side, independents, Republicans, moderates, and women were all more likely to support King than his Democratic rival (Connolly) but an examination of the probabilities associated with these categories (see Table 2) suggests that these effects were not especially strong. In addition, support for Perot was not a significant predictor of support for King over Connolly. As in 1994, being young or economically worse off made no difference in the choice that voters made. I argued earlier that King's primary persona in 1998 was incumbent, not alternative candidate. His across-the-board support would lead us to

fiers, and liberals. As a result, the coefficients on "Perot voter" and "Republican voter" represent the effect of these variables in comparison to Clinton voters (excluded category). The coefficients on "Independent ID" and "Republican ID" represent the effect of these variables in comparison to Democratic identifiers (excluded category). And the coefficients on "Moderate" and "Conservative" represent the effect of these variables in comparison to Liberals (excluded category).

32. See notes at the bottom of Table 2 for a description of the modal voter in each of these elections.

33. Support for Clinton is the excluded category in this series of dummy variables (see note 31). Therefore, the coefficient on the Perot voter variable represents the difference between a Perot voter and a Clinton voter. As expected, Perot voters were more likely than Clinton voters to support Longley over King.

Table 1
Multinomial Logit Model of Third-Party Voting
(entries are logit coefficients, standard errors in parentheses)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Maine 1994</i>		<i>Maine 1998</i>		<i>Minnesota 1998</i>	
	<i>Brennan (D) v. King</i>	<i>Collins (R) v. King</i>	<i>Connolly (D) v. King</i>	<i>Longley (R) v. King</i>	<i>Humphrey (D) v. Ventura</i>	<i>Coleman (R) v. Ventura</i>
CONSTANT	3.83* (1.24)	1.57 (1.28)	-0.04 (1.53)	-4.01* (.26)	0.05 (.78)	-3.45* (.91)
INCOME	0.01 (.08)	-0.0006 (.08)	0.001 (.11)	-0.003 (.09)	-0.13 (.08)	0.15 (.08)
OLDER VOTER	0.16 (.26)	0.001 (.25)	-0.67 (.43)	0.48 (.47)	0.89* (.30)	-0.26 (.26)
FEMALE VOTER	-0.25 (.17)	-0.01 (.17)	-0.79* (.28)	-0.003 (.23)	0.24 (.19)	-0.004 (.19)
WHITE VOTER	-1.41 (1.11)	-1.84 (1.15)	0.001 (1.37)	0.22 (.92)	-0.01 (.55)	.31 (.63)
EDUCATION	-0.26* (.08)	-0.19* (.08)			0.29* (.09)	.28* (.09)
ECONOMIC DISCONTENT	0.01 (.12)	-0.10 (.12)	0.18 (.21)	0.16 (.17)	-0.001 (.15)	.004 (.15)
STATE ECONOMY					-0.38* (.19)	-0.16 (.18)

Table 1 (continued)

Independent Variables	Maine 1994		Maine 1998		Minnesota 1998	
	Brennan (D) v. King	Collins (R) v. King	Connolly (D) v. King	Longley (R) v. King	Humphrey (D) v. Ventura	Coleman (R) v. Ventura
GUN CONTROL					-1.22* (.33)	-0.83* (.23)
PEROT VOTER	-1.23* (.22)	-0.55* (.25)	-1.13 (.60)	1.37* (.36)	-1.63* (.39)	-1.34* (.38)
REPUBLICAN VOTER	-0.86* (.25)	0.15 (.25)	-0.34 (.49)	1.55* (.33)	-0.97* (.35)	1.28* (.24)
INDEPENDENT ID	-1.14* (.20)	0.17 (.26)	-0.92* (.32)	0.002 (.36)	-1.45* (.23)	0.38 (.26)
REPUBLICAN ID	-1.56* (.27)	0.46 (.28)	-1.24* (.56)	0.77 (.40)	-1.46* (.35)	0.88* (.30)
MODERATE	-0.31 (.21)	0.43 (.29)	-0.68* (.32)	0.68 (.52)	0.25 (.22)	1.31* (.33)
CONSERVATIVE	-0.64* (.26)	0.63* (.31)	-0.37 (.41)	1.23* (.53)	0.34 (.31)	1.86* (.36)

* p < .05, significant coefficients in bold.

Aldrich-Nelson pseudo-R²:

Percentage of cases correctly predicted:

Sample size:

0.24
55.4
9950.22
69.4
6090.40
65.5
1,021

Table 2
Effect of Key Variables on Probability of Third-Party Voting
(entries are probability of voting for major party candidate v. third-party candidate)

	Maine 1994		Maine 1998		Minnesota 1998	
	Brennan (D) v. King	Collins (R) v. King	Connolly (D) v. King	Longley (R) v. King	Humphrey (D) v. Ventura	Coleman (R) v. Ventura
Modal voter	.60	.43	.14	.09	.77	.30
Perot voter	.31	.31	.05	.28	.39	.10
Clinton voter	.60	.43	.14	.09	.77	.30
Bush (92) or Dole (96) voter	.39	.47	.10	.32	.56	.61
Independent ID	.60	.43	.06	.09	.43	.39
Democratic ID	.83	.39	.14	.09	.77	.30
Republican ID	.50	.51	.05	.17	.43	.51
Perot voter + Independent ID	.31	.31	.02	.28	.13	.14
Moderate	.60	.43	.14	.09	.77	.30
Liberal	.67	.33	.24	.10	.72	.12
Conservative	.52	.49	.18	.15	.78	.43
Low education	.66	.48	*	*	.58	.16
High education	.41	.30	*	*	.81	.37

Table 2 (continued)

Independent Variables	Maine 1994		Maine 1998		Minnesota 1998	
	Brennan (D)	Collins (R)	Connolly (D)	Longley (R)	Humphrey (D)	Coleman (R)
	<i>v. King</i>	<i>v. King</i>	<i>v. King</i>	<i>v. King</i>	<i>v. Ventura</i>	<i>v. Ventura</i>
Male	.66	.44	.26	.09	.77	.30
Female	.60	.43	.14	.09	.81	.30
Under 30 years old	.56	.44	.24	.06	.57	.36
30 plus years old	.60	.43	.14	.09	.77	.30
Excellent state economy	*	*	*	*	.83	.34
Poor state economy	*	*	*	*	.61	.24
Opposed to gun control	*	*	*	*	.49	.19
Supports gun control	*	*	*	*	.77	.30

^a In Maine 1994, the modal voter had the following characteristics: female, white, over 30, income between \$30,000 and \$49,999, high school graduate, financial situation stayed the same, voted for Clinton in 1992, identified as an Independent, and self-described moderate.

^b In Maine 1998, the modal voter had the following characteristics: female, white, over 30, income between \$30,000 and \$49,999, financial situation stayed the same, voted for Clinton in 1996, identified as a Democrat, and self-described moderate.

^c In Minnesota 1998, the modal voter had the following characteristics: male, white, over 30, income between \$30,000 and \$49,999, college graduate, financial situation stayed the same, state economy was good, supported gun control, voted for Clinton in 1996, identified as a Democrat, and self-described moderate.

expect many of these variables to be weak or insignificant—as indeed they are. In short, the 1998 findings displayed in Table 1 tell the story not of an alternative candidate trying to assemble a coalition of anti-partisan and disaffected voters but rather of a popular incumbent attracting votes from all segments of his electorate.

Jesse Ventura in Minnesota

Jesse Ventura ran against the political parties and against the establishment when he sought the governorship of Minnesota. To what extent did this more traditional third-party campaign win over voters whose qualities make them susceptible to an outsider's appeal?

Several factors account for Ventura's success. According to the VNS exit polls, fully 76 percent of Perot voters cast a ballot for Ventura. The findings in Table 1 reveal that even after controlling for other explanations, prior support for Perot exerted a strong and significant effect on support for Ventura over both of his major party rivals. Although Perot did not campaign for Ventura—indeed he remained silent with respect to Ventura's candidacy—Ventura did run under the banner of the Reform party, the party that Perot founded. To the extent that a loyal core of Reform voters existed in Minnesota, Ventura was highly successful in wooing their support.

Partisanship also played an important role. In the choice between Ventura and Republican Coleman, partisanship operated in a predictable fashion—Republican identifiers were more likely than Democratic identifiers to support Coleman over Ventura, and there were no differences between independents and Democrats. On the Democratic side however, both Republicans and independents were more likely than Democrats to support Ventura over Humphrey. There is, moreover, a very strong joint effect of independence and prior support for Perot (see Table 2). The modal voter had a .77 probability of supporting Humphrey over Ventura and a .30 probability of supporting Coleman over Ventura. Among independents who supported Perot, these probabilities drop sharply to .13 and .14, respectively.

There are other noteworthy patterns in Tables 1 and 2. At least one issue appears to have played a role—opponents of gun control were more likely to support Ventura over either of his opponents. Ventura's appeal over Humphrey also resonated among those under the age of 30 and among those who felt that the state economy was in poor condition. And the least educated were more likely than the most educated to support the third-party candidate. These particular effects—youth, economic anxiety, opposition to gun control, as well as independence and a previous vote for Perot—confirm the portrait of Ventura as a populist third-party candidate who mobilized disaffected voters.

IV. Observations and Conclusions

Why do third-party candidates do well in some elections and poorly in others? There are at least two approaches one might take to answer this question. The first

approach—characterized by the theories of third-party voting presented at the outset—directs us to examine the characteristics of voters themselves. When voter cynicism or economic discontent runs high, when dissatisfaction with the major parties or their candidates rises, or when voters are young or politically inexperienced—they are more likely to support third-party candidates. The second approach focuses on the context in which the election is fought. Can a third-party candidate mobilize new voters by means of relaxed registration rules? Can the alternative candidate draw on financial resources on or near par with the major party candidates? Does the third-party candidate enjoy an established reputation and wide name recognition? When a third-party candidate is well known and can take advantage of deep coffers, then that candidate is likely to do well, at least by traditional third-party standards.

The case of Ross Perot in 1992 illustrates the importance of electoral context. Rosenstone et al. report that when applied to the 1992 presidential election, their otherwise accurate model of third-party voting predicted that only six percent of the electorate would defect from the major parties.³⁴ In fact, nearly 20 percent of voters cast a ballot for a minor party candidate, and Perot alone won 18.9 percent. Why was their model so wide off the mark in 1992? An electoral context exceptionally favorable to a third-party candidate accounts for the difference. Perot's deep pockets, the media attention lavished upon him, and his presence alongside President Bush and Governor Clinton in the televised debates propelled him to a prominence that most third-party candidates never achieve. In particular, Perot's ability to spend was a crucial factor in explaining his success relative to other third-party candidates. Rosenstone et al. forecast that had Perot's expenditures equaled John Anderson's 1980 expenditures (relative to what the major parties spent), Perot's vote would have dropped by nearly six percentage points.

The analysis presented here provides some evidence to support the notion that certain voters are indeed more likely to support a third-party candidate. Two factors in particular emerge as powerful predictors of third-party support. First, the presence of a large bloc of independents proved to be a significant explanation for the success of these alternative candidates. Although neither state contained an unusually high proportion of self-described independents,³⁵ it is true that independents were still more likely to support the alternative candidate, and when controlling for all other factors, by substantial margins. This finding confirms other research conducted at the presidential level.³⁶ The presence of a large bloc of independents (or

34. Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*, 259.

35. According to the VNS exit polls, 29.6 percent of 1994 Maine voters were independent compared to 35.5 percent of voters nationally. In 1998, 27.8 percent of Maine voters and 26.2 percent of Minnesota voters called themselves independent. The national figure in 1998 was 24.3 percent.

36. See, for example, Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*; Gold, "Third Party Voting in Presidential Elections"; and Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1996* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

voters with weak attachments to the established parties) is a precondition of third-party success.

A second explanation was significant in both Maine elections and in the Minnesota case: voters who have demonstrated a previous relationship with a third party are more likely to cast a ballot for subsequent third-party candidates. Donovan, Bowler and Terrio found that voters who identify with a third party are more likely to support third parties in a variety of statewide elections.³⁷ Similarly, prior support for Ross Perot was strongly correlated with support for Angus King and Jesse Ventura. Ross Perot ran very well in Maine and Minnesota, both in 1992 and in 1996, and many voters in these states had already cast a ballot for him.³⁸ Evidently, a prior vote for a third-party candidate presages a future vote for a third-party candidate, and these voters—who at least twice supported alternative candidates—may indeed constitute a bloc that third parties can mobilize.

The strong effect of independence and prior support for a third-party candidate suggests that growing partisan instability in the electorate has paved the way for third-party breakthroughs. In 1960, *The American Voter* argued that voters held long-term psychological attachments to the parties and these attachments shaped the vote choice. Subsequent work offered a more fleeting conception of partisanship, one rooted in retrospective assessments of party performance—but still posited a strong relationship between party identification and electoral support for one of the major parties. By the 1980s, Wattenberg and others provided much evidence of party decomposition in the electorate.³⁹ One consequence of this growing partisan instability has been the success, in the 1990s, of these alternative gubernatorial candidates—alongside the success of other third-party candidates. Increasing numbers of voters have been willing to break the partisan mold and cast a ballot for a minor party candidate. Indeed, as more voters undergo the experience of actually voting for a third-party candidate, they become more likely to do so again in the future. Thus partisan instability and partisan decline have become the lifeblood of third-party success.

But beyond the effect of being independent and having voted for Perot, the Maine and Minnesota cases hold little in common. Economic anxiety played no role in Maine but perception of the statewide economy was a significant predictor of the vote in Minnesota.⁴⁰ Similarly, age had no effect in Maine but was an important

37. Donovan, Bowler, and Terrio, "Support for Third Parties in California."

38. In 1992, when Perot won 19 percent of the national vote, Maine was his strongest state; he captured 30 percent of the vote. In Minnesota that year, he won 24 percent of the vote. In 1996, Maine was again his strongest state. He won 14 percent of the vote in Maine, 12 percent in Minnesota, and 8 percent nationally.

39. See Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960); Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties*; and Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

40. In the VNS exit polls, Maine and Minnesota voters were asked about their own economic situation. But only Minnesota voters were asked to assess the statewide economy.

factor in Minnesota. In fact, the data analysis suggests the Minnesota election comes closer to the more familiar model of a third-party candidate who runs against the establishment and who mobilizes disaffected voters—young, anti-partisan, concerned about the state economy, and in this particular case, opponents of gun control as well.

Certain features of the electoral context, however, bind the two cases under study and suggest that one must look beyond the electorate for a fuller explanation of third-party success. After all, the number of independents has grown nation-wide; yet in most states third-party candidates continue to be marginalized. Four factors link the Maine and Minnesota cases. First, both King and Ventura enjoyed statewide name recognition alongside reputations for personal integrity. As Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus argue in the context of presidential elections, “nationally prestigious” candidates enjoy significant advantages over ones that are not well known.⁴¹ It is worth pointing out that the two other alternative candidates elected Governor in the 1990s—Walter Hickel in Alaska and Lowell Weicker in Connecticut—were also well known figures with established political reputations in their states. Second, both King and Ventura ran as fiscal conservatives and social liberals—an ideological profile that distinguishes them from the major parties and appears to hold some appeal for voters. Third, elections in both states are conducted in an environment conducive to third-party success. Both states allow election-day voter registration, thus enabling alternative candidates to more easily mobilize new voters who often constitute a significant part of their coalition. And both candidates were able to spend significant sums of money—Ventura from the state’s generous public financing program and King from his personal fortune—that enabled them to compete against the major parties on a level playing field.⁴² Fourth, both Maine and Minnesota are states with established traditions of third-party voting, traditions that create an environment more hospitable to alternative candidates.

The victories of Angus King in Maine and Jesse Ventura in Minnesota, alongside other third-party successes in recent years, point to a slow but creeping public willingness to at least consider alternative candidates. A series of surveys in the 1990s suggest that Americans have little confidence in the two-party system and believe that a viable third-party alternative would improve the quality of the nation’s political life.⁴³ Moreover, the success of these candidates, especially Ventura, was predicated upon the removal of obstacles that consistently stand in the way of third parties, both in gubernatorial and in presidential elections—financing, access to media and to debates, and ability to mobilize disaffected voters, especially late in the cam-

41. Rosenstone et al., *Third Parties in America*.

42. Maine recently adopted the Maine Clean Election Act to provide public financing to candidates running for state office, beginning in 2000.

43. Christian Collet, “Third Parties and the Two-Party System,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 60 (1996): 431-450.

paign. The analysis of the gubernatorial elections in Maine and Minnesota suggests that the success of third-party candidates depends not only upon voters who are favorably disposed to the appeal of such a candidate but also upon an electoral context that gives these candidates a fighting chance.

APPENDIX

Coding of Variables in Multinomial Logit Models

Dependent variable

Vote choice: 1 = Democratic candidate; 2 = Republican candidate; 3 = Angus King (Maine) or Jesse Ventura (Minnesota).

Independent variables

Income: Six-point scale where 1 = less than \$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.

Older voter: 0 = less than 30 years; 1 = 30 years or older.

Female Voter: 0 = male; 1 = female.

White voter: 0 = non-white; 1 = white.

Education: 1 = no high school; 2 = high school graduate; 3 = some college; 4 = college graduate; 5 = post-graduate.

Economic discontent: Financial situation is 1 = better; 2 = same; 3 = worse.

State economy: 1 = excellent; 2 = good; 3 = not so good; 4 = poor.

Gun control: 0 = supports gun control; 1 = opposes gun control.

Perot voter: 0 = voted Democrat or Republican in previous presidential election; 1 = voted for Perot in previous presidential election.

Republican voter: 0 = voted Perot or Democrat in previous presidential election; 1 = voted Republican in previous presidential election.

Independent ID: 0 = identifies with major party; 1 = identifies as independent.

Republican ID: 0 = identifies as independent or Democrat; 1 = identifies as Republican.

Moderate: 0 = identifies as liberal or conservative; 1 = identifies as moderate.

Conservative: 0 = identifies as liberal or moderate; 1 = identifies as conservative.