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In perusing the standard postelection books on the 2000 election, one searches in vain for references to the Perot movement, its role in the result, or its long-term effects on American politics. The implosion of the Reform Party merits mention for its sideshow value rather than for any meaningful legacy to the party system.

Why this is the case is not completely clear. In part it might be attributable to the strong personality of Perot and his enormous wealth, which focused attention on the leader rather than his movement, and in part it can be attributed to the movement’s unusual nature, which transformed itself into a political party in time for the 1996 election and then became the object of a hostile takeover by Pat Buchanan in the 2000 campaign.

Here we focus on another reason: The fact that the Perot movement had its major effect not through the Reform Party (which was founded in 1996), but through its impact on the Republican Party and its fortunes, beginning with the 1994 elections. Coverage of the drama (as well as the dramatis personae) surrounding this movement and party has obscured the important effect that Perot and his followers have had on bringing the Republican Party into parity at the congressional level, in enhancing Republican support at the presidential level, and in mobilizing new activists into the Republican Party. It may be tempting to view a candidacy such as Ross Perot’s in 1992 as an aberration in a candidate-centered age, and with no particular consequence for the two-party system once he disappeared. But we show that the effect of Perot’s campaign was lasting and significant. Although it manifested itself first and most significantly in 1994, it remained significant in every campaign through the 2000 election—eight years after Perot’s first appearance as a presidential candidate.

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Part of the difficulty in understanding the Perot movement compared with other third parties is that it did not quite follow the expected pattern (Green and Herrnson 2002). We refer to the tendency of “major” third-party movements to emerge in a single election and immediately disappear, as the “dynamic of third parties.” Or as Richard Hofstadter (1955, 97) observed, “Third parties are like bees; once they have stung, they die.” This dynamic applies primarily to third-party movements that attract a substantial share of the popular vote—over 5 percent is a good guideline—rather than parties such as the Natural Law, Libertarian, or Socialist Labor parties that regularly attract minuscule vote shares, but persist from election to election. Why do “successful” third parties quickly die? The degree of success of the party or candidate signals the depth and breadth of discontent in the electorate, and alerts the two major parties to the political implications of their failure. The larger the vote the candidate receives, the greater the incentive the two parties have to respond. As Mazmanian (1974, 143) put it: “Usually after a strong showing by a minor party, at least one of the major parties shifts its position, adopting the third party’s rhetoric if not the core of its programs. Consequently, by the following election the third-party constituency ... has a major party more sympathetic to its demands.” Hence the “dynamic of third parties”: the more successful they are, the quicker they die (Stone and Rapoport 2001).

But, while Perot may have “stung” the two parties in 1992 by attracting almost 20 percent of the popular vote, he certainly did not immediately “die.” In fact, he ran again in 1996 under the banner of the newly created Reform Party, and won more than 8 percent of the popular vote. In so doing, he became the first third-party candidate to win more than 5 percent of the popular vote in consecutive elections since the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s. Indeed, with the guarantee of federal funds for the Reform Party campaign in 2000, there was a realistic possibility that the Reform Party might continue to defy the “dynamics of third parties” and remain on the scene for the foreseeable future. Such hopes proved to be overly optimistic, and the Reform Party nominee Pat Buchanan received only about 1 percent of the vote in 2000 and was easily eclipsed among third-party candidates by Green Party nominee Ralph Nader. (For an account of the Reform Party in 2000, see Green and Binning 2002.)

Despite the fact that Perot’s political “death” was more prolonged than those of previous third-party candidates, we argue that the fundamental logic of the dynamic of third parties still applies (Stone and Rapoport 2001). In fact, by the time of the 1994 election, the normal co-optation by the major parties of third-party issues and supporters had already taken place on two of three issue clusters that Perot emphasized in 1992. As a result of this co-
Major Party Co-optation of the Perot Movement and the Reform Party

The dynamic of third parties is, of course, well known to both major parties. After a showing such as that of Perot’s in 1992, we would expect the major parties to try to attract his followers by adopting his core issue positions as much as possible. Although the Republicans were more successful in appealing to Perot supporters (as we will show), Democrats also attempted to appeal to Perot supporters. On February 15, 1993, less than a month after his inauguration, Clinton prepared to address the budget deficit. Because Clinton clearly understood the importance of Perot’s response, he called Perot the day of his address to Congress and spoke with him for about fifteen minutes (Richter 1993). Although Clinton was not successful in eliciting Perot’s full support, in a speech in Florida on February 20, Perot agreed with Clinton that tax increases were needed to balance the deficit. Perot also argued, however, that such tax increases must be accompanied by passage of a Balanced Budget Amendment, about which Perot had reversed his earlier opposition (Oliphant 1993), a cut in congressional salaries, benefits, and perks, and campaign finance reform. Further, he felt that the administration had not gone far enough on budget cuts. He demanded that the Clinton White House “give us the details on spending cuts” and “tell us precisely when they will occur” (Associated Press 1993, 9). Although there was some response from Perot supporters to Clinton’s appeal, it was the Republicans who were most successful in attracting Perot’s supporters.

The Republican strategy came into play as soon as the new Clinton administration had taken office. Almost immediately, the Republican Party, especially the House Republicans under the leadership of Newt Gingrich, began courting Ross Perot and his supporters. After some initial resistance to this approach from Bob Dole, the Republican leader in the U.S. Senate, and Haley Barbour, the chair of the Republican National Committee, both were on board by the early summer of 1993.

There were several reasons why Republicans were in a better position to appeal to Perot voters than the Democrats. Perot supporters were distrustful...
of those in power in Washington (Gillespie 1993; Gold 1995; McCann, Rapoport, and Stone 1999). Because Republicans were in the minority in the House and Senate and the Democrats also controlled the presidency under Bill Clinton, the Republicans could play to that distrust by their criticisms of the Democratic government. In addition, Newt Gingrich and several other Republican congressional leaders went so far as to join United We Stand America, Perot's political advocacy group.

Specific issue appeals also helped the Republicans. The Gore-Perot debate on NAFTA and the perception that Clinton had reversed himself on the issue, and the Clinton health plan debacle and Perot's attacks on it, gave the Republicans a realistic opportunity to capture the bulk of the Perot vote in 1994. These were all important to Republican support in 1994 since Perot was not himself on the ballot, nor had he started the Reform Party or recruited candidates to run on his behalf. Thus, the Republicans benefited from their positive appeal to Perot supporters and residual dissatisfaction with the Democrats.

The clearest evidence of the Republican bid for support from the legions of Perot supporters is found in the Contract with America, a set of common legislative and policy commitments offered by the Republican Party and its House candidates in 1994. The need for such a "contract" was strongly endorsed by Perot in the final pages of his 1992 election manifesto, United We Stand America. There he sets forth a "Checklist for All Federal Candidates." This idea "about getting a contract of issues that candidates would have to sign in order to get an endorsement . . . was transferred to the Republicans, and of course, Perot was delighted by it" (Clay Mulford, in Posner 1996, 331).

The Contract with America emphasized issues of a balanced budget amendment, limited American commitment to internationalism, term limits, and congressional reform, all issues emphasized by Ross Perot in his 1992 campaign. Just as notably, the Contract omitted reference to Republican priorities such as stopping abortion and promoting free trade. These issues united the Republican base, but were strongly opposed by the pivotal Perot constituency. As Barry Jackson, staff director of the Republican House Conference, pointed out, "The Contract was carefully targeted toward people we wanted to bring back into the fold—Perot voters that had been alienated" (quoted in Gimpel 1996, 25). In addition, Newt Gingrich and other Republican leaders were skillful political entrepreneurs able to make the case that their party was best suited to further the Perot agenda if elected to the majority, a plea embraced by Perot himself when he called on his supporters before the 1994 elections to "give the Republicans a majority in the House and Senate and say, all right, now, we're gonna let you guys have a turn at bat" (quoted in Schneider 1994).

In addition to the orchestrated effort to woo Perot and his supporters by
the Republican national leadership, the Republican Party managed to concentrate its most experienced candidates in districts with the greatest levels of Perot supporters and, therefore, districts with the greatest opportunity for gain. We have found a clear relationship between the size of districts’ 1992 Perot vote and the appearance of experienced Republican candidates in 1994. This effect holds up with controls for whether the seat was open in 1994, the partisan composition of the district, and whether the Republican candidate in 1992 was experienced. By our estimates, in 1994 the probability of an experienced Republican emerging in Democrat-held districts where Perot received only 5 percent of the vote in 1992 was about .06. On the other hand, the chances of an experienced candidate running in 1994 climbed to .32 in statistically equivalent districts where Perot won 30 percent of the vote in 1992. This indicates some combination of active recruiting by the national Republican Party and the strategic decisions of experienced potential House candidates who recognized that a substantial Perot vote created an opportunity for Republicans in 1994.

The effect of these appeals by the Republicans, in particular, was to gain a significant boost in support from 1992 Perot supporters. In 1992, exit polls showed Perot supporters splitting their votes almost equally between Democratic and Republican congressional campaigns. However, in 1994, Perot supporters voted Republican by a 2-1 majority. This 17 percent shift among almost 20 percent of the electorate resulted in a net gain of more than 3 percent of the total vote to the Republicans. In addition, Perot’s activist constituency showed similar shifts toward the Republicans in campaign activity. In both 1988 and 1992, levels of activity among individuals who called Perot’s 1-800 number in 1992 were almost identical for the two parties’ congressional candidates, but in 1994, Republican activity was 50 percent greater than that of Democratic congressional candidates (Rapoport and Stone 2000).

Because Perot was off of the ballot in 1994, and had called for “giving the Republicans a chance,” it was difficult at the time to assess the degree to which Republican support from the 1992 Perot contingent was a positive response to Perot’s call for a Republican majority, or a successful co-optation of Perot issues by Republicans. The implications of the two alternative interpretations would be crucial to Perot’s potential to remobilize his 1992 constituency when he reentered the electoral arena as a candidate in 1996, and important in determining whether the 1992 Perot campaign would influence American politics in the long term. Were major party co-optation successful, Perot would find it far more difficult to reestablish his level of support in 1996 than if the Republican success of 1994 revolved around his mobilization of his supporters on their behalf.

What expectations from the dynamic of third parties and the results from analysis of election returns can we bring to survey data of Perot supporters?
after 1992? Our general expectation is that both major parties will show some success in co-opting Perot issues as early as 1994. As a result, these same issues should emerge as more important determinants of major party support, making the Perot appeal far less attractive by 1996 than it had been earlier.

Although the process of co-optation may be common to both major parties, the success of each in appealing to Perot supporters need not be equivalent. Given the out-party status of the Republicans, their appeal on the more popular Perot issues, and Perot's endorsement of them, we expect to find Perot supporters moving disproportionately to support the Republican Party in the campaigns following the 1992 election.

In sum, our argument is that Perot's support declined because of co-optation by the major parties, and that this decline redounded disproportionately to the Republicans, helping them achieve parity with the Democrats in 2000 and beyond.

Data

To test our hypotheses, we use a panel survey of Perot supporters covering the life of the Perot movement and Reform Party. It began as a survey of potential Perot activists in September of 1992, with subsequent waves immediately after the election in 1992, after the election in 1994, immediately after the 1996 election, and immediately following the 2000 election. (For earlier reports of the survey, see Stone et al. 1999, and Partin et al. 1994, 1996.)

Not only are the response rates reasonably good (ranging from 50.3 percent to 69.0 percent across waves), but post-1992 nonrespondents do not differ on important 1992 variables from respondents. This extended panel allows us to assess how much respondents participated in the 1992 Perot movement and 1996 Reform Party campaign, as well as their participation in campaigns for major party candidates in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 2000. Because we have surveyed the same people over an eight-year period, we can monitor change and continuity at the individual level over the eight-year period in attitudes and behavior.

Our sample of potential Perot supporters is comprised of individuals who called the Perot 1-800 number in the spring of 1992. This is a more active and elite sample than simply one of voters, since all individuals had to take the initiative to call the number. Most of these (80 percent) followed up with some activity (including trying to persuade others to support Perot) on behalf of the campaign.

There are significant advantages to studying an activist sample in a study of party change. In both major parties and incipient third parties, activists
play disproportionate roles in defining party positions and priorities and in selecting party nominees. Particularly in third parties, the development of a cadre of activists is crucial to party success (Lowi 1996) since they provide a stable base of support and of campaign workers. Furthermore, because activists have more coherent and stable ideological and issue views than rank-and-file voters (Converse 1964; Jennings 1992), they reflect and shape the party positions on a wide range of issues. In a new third party, without any long-standing bases of group support, activists are likely to be particularly important as a window into the core appeal of the new party and its ideological and issue bases.

The Dynamic of Third Parties and Survey Evidence: Co-optation

In our research on the Perot movement, we have identified three distinctive sources of Perot support in 1992: issues relating to the budget/taxation, political reform, and economic nationalism. All three of these differentiated Perot from the major parties, which did not emphasize them at all or did so to a much lesser degree than did Perot. If these issues were available to Perot because the major parties ignored or downplayed them, then, by definition, they should play far less of a role in predicting major party political activity, and should be either insignificant, negative, or only weakly related to support for the Republicans and Democrats in 1992.

In September 1992, we asked respondents for their views on two reform issues (term limits and a balanced budget amendment), two budget/tax issues (measured here by a gas tax and increased taxes for social security), and two economic nationalism issues (limiting imports and curtailing U.S. involvement overseas). For each question respondents were asked the degree to which they favored or opposed each proposal. If they "strongly favored" or "favored" the Perot position on both issues in an area they were categorized as high in support; if they "strongly favored" or "favored" one of the two issues they were categorized as medium; and if neither of the issues received their support, they were categorized as low. We assigned each respondent a score in each of the three issue areas in this manner.

Since these three areas were all important to Perot's appeal in 1992, our expectation is that we should find each of these affecting Perot activity in 1992. In addition, because the issues were not central to either of the major parties' campaigns, they should not affect support for either the Democratic or Republican parties in that year. Of the three sets of issues, Republicans most directly addressed reform issues after 1992 in the Contract with America and budget/tax issues were most directly addressed by Clinton's 1993 budget plan. If co-optation occurred following 1992, then we should find that by 1994, Republican activity should have become particularly cor-
related with reform issues, and Democrats might have gained on the tax dimensions of the budget issue, which they passed soon after the election and on which they won praise from Perot. If the two parties were successful in taking these issues away from Perot, then the impact of these issues on Perot support in both 1994 and after should decline.

The relationship of the major parties to issues of economic nationalism after 1992 is more ambiguous. Neither party addressed the protectionist and foreign involvement aspects together in ways consistent with the approach of Perot’s campaign. Although many Democrats actually opposed NAFTA, it was Clinton who delivered the crucial votes that, combined with the overwhelming majority of the Republicans in the House, saw its passage. While ignoring trade in the Contract, the Republicans nonetheless failed to repudiate NAFTA or free trade. On the foreign involvement issue, however, the Republicans stood strong against Clinton’s “foreign adventurism” in Haiti, which the Democrats strongly supported. As a result, neither party can be expected to capture this issue and we should expect to find its continued influence on Perot support even after 1994.

In order to assess the level of co-optation, we look at the effect of each dimension of 1992 Perot support on Perot activity, Democratic activity, and Republican activity in 1992 and then 1994 and thereafter. Our expectation is that the level of support for Perot issues translated into Perot support in 1992 (and not into support for the major parties), but that co-optation by the major parties between 1992 and 1994 led these same individuals to increase their support for the major parties in elections in 1994 and after, on those issues for which co-optation was successful. Correspondingly, the impact of these co-opted issues on Perot support should decline after 1994. In order to insure that it is issue positions that determine campaign activity for Perot (and after), and not campaign activity that shapes issue positions, we use attitudes derived from questions asked of respondents in the September wave of our 1992 survey to predict activity that we asked about in November 1992. We use the same independent variables (assessed in 1992) to predict Perot and major party activity in 1994, 1996, and 2000. Thus, we set a difficult task for ourselves in demanding that attitudes in 1992 explain activity in the elections of 1994–2000, up to eight years after the attitudes were measured.

We begin with an examination of Republican co-optation success. Reform issues (balanced budget amendment and term limits) provided a target of opportunity for Republicans in 1994. They had been on the same side of both issues as the Perot supporters, but in their 1992 platform had not given these issues the emphasis that Perot had given them, nor that they gave them in the Contract, nor in the 1996 Republican platform. Reform of Congress (including term limits for committee chairs) led off the Contract, but the first legislative initiative was the balanced budget amendment and the last of the ten proposals was term limits. Emphasizing these issues made a great deal
of sense for the Republicans. If they could co-opt these issues they could appeal to a broad base within Perot’s constituency. Almost 60 percent of our sample of potential Perot supporters endorsed both term limits and the balanced budget amendment (59.9 percent of actual Perot activists) and this level of support was twice as great as for either of the other two issue areas.

If the Republicans were successful in co-optation of reform issues, then we should see a significant shift between 1992 and 1994 in the relationship between issue positions and Republican support. Whereas those high on “reformism” in 1992 should not differ significantly in the number of Republican activities that they performed in 1992 from those who are lower, we should begin to find significant differences in Republican activity in 1994 and after based on level of support for reform issues.

In figure 21.1 we report the mean number of activities for Republican candidates in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 2000 for our sample of activists at each level of support for reform issues. The results are very much in keeping with our hypothesis. The relationship between support for “reform issues” and activity for the Republicans increases markedly between 1992 and 1994. In 1992 those most supportive of reform issues perform about twice as many activities as those least supportive. In fact, the relationship between September 1992 attitudes and November 1992 activity is weak and fails the traditional test of statistical significance. But by 1994, the most reform-minded performed almost four and a half times the number of activities as the least reform-minded. By 1994, the correlation is almost four times as great as two years earlier and the statistical relationship is highly significant. Remarkably, continuing to use 1992 reform attitudes as predictors of 1996 and 2000 behavior, we continue to find highly significant relationships that far surpass those of 1992. In 1996 the most reform-minded perform more than four times as many activities as the least reform-minded, and in 2000 almost three times as many.

While Perot supporters took cognizance of the Republicans’ appeal on reform issues, they were also aware of what Democrats were doing. Democratic proposals for budget balancing through increased taxes came to play a much more important role in shaping responses to Democratic candidates in 1994 and after than they had in 1992. As figure 21.2 shows, in 1992 there was only a very small relationship between budget/tax issues attitudes and activity for the Democrats. Those supportive of both the gas tax and social security taxes performed, on average, .70 activities for Democratic candidates, compared with .52 for those failing to support either tax proposal. On the other hand, two years later, 1992 taxation issue attitudes had become much more closely tied to Democratic support. Supporters of both tax proposals now performed 1.14 activities for the Democrats, more than twice as many as those supporting neither proposal, who perform only .54 activities. Interestingly, by 1996 the issue is slightly more closely linked to Democrats,
with a ratio in Democratic activity of almost 3:1 between the strongest and the weakest supporters of tax increases on gasoline and on social security. In 2000—eight years after attitudes were assessed—1992 attitudes on the budget and taxes remain significantly related to Democratic activity, even though they had not been eight years before. Unfortunately for the Democrats, budget and taxation issues do not show the same level of support for Perot’s position that reform issues did. Half as many potential Perot supporters supported neither of these initiatives as supported both of them. Still, the co-optation of these issues by the Democrats cut into Perot’s ability to differentiate himself from the major parties and make unique appeals.

Both the Democratic and Republican parties were limited by their history and ideology from poaching on reform and budget and taxation issues, respectively. As a result, and as expected, “reform” attitudes do not impact the Democrats in a positive way, nor do “budget” attitudes impact the Republicans.

What does all of this mean for the Perot movement? To begin with, figure 21.3 shows that as support for Perot positions in all three issue areas increased in 1992, activity for Perot also increased significantly. Those most supportive of reform issues, economic nationalism issues, and budget issues show increases in mean Perot activities in 1992 of .79, .84, and .54, respectively. All three effects are statistically significant. However, by the time of the 1996 election, even with Perot running as an active candidate, both reform and budget issues were totally unrelated to Perot activity. On the other hand, although the absolute level of Perot activity dropped precipitously over
the four years, economic nationalism attitudes remained significantly related to Perot activity. Supporters of both decreased military involvement and limiting imports (based on 1992 attitudes) performed almost three times as many activities in support of Perot in 1996 as those in support on neither issue. In fact, the same 1992 attitudes were more strongly related to Perot activity in 1996 than they were in 1992. Furthermore, economic nationalism was significantly related to neither Democratic nor Republican activity in 1996. Unfortunately for the future of the Perot movement, economic nationalism was insufficient to propel Perot’s vote above the 8.5 percent he received on Election Day in 1996.

In sum, we have shown that the core issues in Perot’s campaign were clearly associated with active support for Perot in 1992. However, the Democrats were able to co-opt the budget issue by taking up the cause of increasing taxes to balance the federal budget, and the Republicans were especially successful in raiding the Perot constituency by co-opting the reform issue. These efforts by the two major parties meant that after 1994, support for the issues they co-opted related more to activity in that party than to support for Perot.
In contrast to the major party co-optation hypothesis, there is another possible way to account for the rallying of Perot supporters to the Republican Party after 1992. Since Perot endorsed the Republicans for 1994, it is possible that the rallying was simply a response to his endorsement. By this account, the motivation was not issue appeals by the Republicans, but rather their leader’s urging (an urging that Republicans could not necessarily count on after 1994).

If this hypothesis was correct, those most favorable to Perot in 1994 would be most likely to heed his request to work harder for the Republicans in 1994. In fact, however, those who rated Perot less positively (i.e., as either "Poor", "Below Average," or "Average") actually were more active on behalf of the Republicans than those who rated him more positively (i.e., "Above Average" or "Outstanding"). Although the difference is quite small (1.2 acts for Republicans among those less favorable to Perot, versus 1.1 on average for those more favorable to Perot), it is in the opposite direction to that predicted by the Perot mobilization hypothesis.
Even if co-optation had been successful for the major parties in 1994, it was done without Perot on the ballot. After the 1994 congressional elections, Perot still had two years in which to reclaim his supporters before he ran again in 1996. He failed to do so with either activists or with the mass electorate. This failure to remobilize the bulk of his constituency is important in both its results and its causes. It is important in its results because it produced a shift toward the Republicans that extended through the 2000 election. It is important in its causes because it further demonstrates that the seeds of the collapse were already in place by 1994.

Without denying the importance of Perot’s strong showing relative to other third parties in 1996, the evidence for the decline in Perot support, particularly among his activist stratum, is undeniable. Based on the 1996 exit polls, Perot received votes from only a third of his 1992 supporters, while Dole got almost half of their votes (44 percent), with Clinton getting the other 22 percent. Had Perot attracted the same vote as in 1992, Clinton’s margin over Dole would have increased by about 3.5 percent.

In our sample of supporter/activists the story is, if anything, even stronger. Only 25 percent of those who were active for Perot in 1992 were at all active in 1996. In fact, half again as many 1992 Perot activists were active for Dole-Kemp during the general election campaign as were active for Perot-Choate. These numbers indicate that there was a significant collapse of the Perot constituency between 1992 and 1996, and that it moved disproportionately toward the Republicans. This latter point is very much in keeping with our argument that Republican issue appeals provided a much stronger attraction than was the case for the Democrats. In 2000, the 8.5 percent of the electorate that had remained with Perot in 1996 split better than 2-1 for Bush, giving him the votes that allowed him to win the election.

Looking at the difference in total Republican and Democratic support (including congressional, presidential, and state and local races) among our potential Perot activists, we see a strong shift over the eight years of our survey. As figure 21.4 shows, in 1992, Perot activists were slightly more active on behalf of Democratic candidates than on behalf of Republican candidates. By 1994, however, these same Perot activists were doing significantly more for Republicans, and the difference remains significant through the 2000 elections, eight years after initial Perot activity and six years after the difference first appeared. Combined with the electoral shift to the Republicans from Perot voters, there can be little doubt that Perot’s contribution to the electoral parity the Republicans achieved by 2000 was crucial.

All of the foregoing suggests a classic co-optation process. Perot showed great success in 1992, and that success was highly correlated with three sets of issues: budget/taxation issues, reform issues, and economic nationalism. In the ensuing two years, two of these three issue clusters were co-opted by the major parties—reform by the Republicans and budget/taxation issues by
the Democrats. As a result, in 1994 and after, reform issues became correlated with Republican activity and budget/taxation issues with Democratic activity—while both ceased to be related to Perot activity. On the other hand, economic nationalism, which neither party really tried to co-opt, continued to have a significant impact (equal to that of 1992) on Perot activity.

The dynamic of third parties implies that a new third party is particularly vulnerable in the period after the election in which it first appears, and the more successful the party is in that first election, the greater its peril. The historic showing by Perot in 1992 created a golden opportunity for the Republicans to attract new supporters, an opportunity they exploited to win their own historic victory in 1994. This insight would mean that the eventual death of the Perot movement was rooted in the Republican victory in 1994, and that Perot faced a difficult, if not impossible, challenge in reclaiming the supporters he lost to the Republicans in 1994 when he ran again under the Reform Party banner in 1996.

To make our point, we need to show first that the Perot activists who increased their Republican activity in 1994 were the same individuals who were active for the Republicans when Perot reentered presidential politics in 1996—in other words, the 1992 Perot supporters who deserted Perot in 1996 were the same people who had already turned to the Republicans in 1994.
Of course it is possible that we are wrong and that Republican pickups from 1992 Perot supporters in 1996 came equally from those who had moved to the Republican party by 1994 and those who had not yet moved toward the Republicans by 1994, but who did so between 1994 and 1996. Our focus here is on 1992 Perot supporters (those who were more active for Perot in 1992 than they were for the Republicans), since it is this group that Republicans needed to win over in order to broaden their appeal and undercut Perot's support. (This group comprises almost three-quarters of our sample of potential activists.)

The results support our expectation. Of all 1992 Perot activists, almost one-third (30.2 percent) increased their level of Republican activity in the 1992–1994 period. Of these 1992 Perot activists who increased their Republican activity in 1994, just about one half (49.4 percent) remained active for the Republicans in 1996. On the other hand, only one third as many (14.7 percent) 1992 Perot activists who did not increase their activity for Republicans in 1994 showed greater activity for Dole-Kemp in 1996 than for Perot-Choate (data not shown).

Our results, therefore, show that the shift to the Republicans in 1996 found its roots in increased Republican support in 1994. Those who increased their Republican support between 1992 and 1994 (with Perot off the ballot) tended to remain faithful to the Republicans when Perot reentered in 1996. Even though those increasing their Republican activity between 1992 and 1994 comprised less than one-third of the sample, they made up better than 60 percent of the individuals who moved from being Perot activists in 1992 to becoming Republican activists in 1996.

But what about 2000? Do we see a strong influence of the 1994 election on Republican activity six years later? Of the original pool of Perot supporters, is it those who shifted in 1994 that comprise the bulk of 2000 Republican activists? As we found for 1996, the answer continues to be yes. With Perot off the ballot, we should expect greater major party activity in 2000 than we found in 1996, and that is certainly the case. But more important, almost two-thirds of 1992 Perot supporters who increased their Republican support between 1992 and 1994 were active for Republican candidates in 2000. This contrasts with only about one in five who had not already shifted toward the Republicans by 1994. Viewed another way, more than two-thirds of Perot activists who were Republican activists in 2000 had already moved toward the Republicans by 1994 (even though they comprised less than 30 percent of all 1992 Perot activists).

**Conclusion**

The 1992 Perot movement provides a recent example of a rare event in American electoral politics: a third party candidate who captures the nation’s
attention and attracts significant numbers of votes. In 1992, Perot bested every third-party candidate since 1912 by winning almost 19 percent of the popular vote. The appearance and success of Ross Perot in the 1992 election provide an unprecedented opportunity to study the dynamic of third parties by following his activist supporters through the next four national elections.

The dynamic of third parties anticipates significant change in the major party system following the appearance of a successful candidacy such as Perot's, because the Democratic and Republican parties have such powerful incentives to appeal to the third party's supporters. The Perot constituency offered three possible avenues of appeal to the major parties: reform, the federal budget and taxation, and economic nationalism issues. While the Democrats made a play for Perot supporters based on their attention to the budget/taxation issues, the Republicans were both better positioned and ultimately much more successful in attracting Perot voters and activists to their cause. They did this by appealing on the reform dimension of Perot support, especially in the Contract with America leading up to the 1994 elections.

Indeed, because of their success in co-opting the reform issue, the Republicans realized their own historic victory in 1994, just two years after Perot ran his insurgent campaign for president. In attracting a significant share of the 1992 Perot base to their cause in 1994, the Republicans sealed the doom of the Perot movement and the as yet unborn Reform Party. Perot was able to run again in 1996, thanks in large part to a generous subsidy from the Federal Elections Commission, but he had already lost much of his support to the Republicans, and he was largely unsuccessful in attracting new supporters. As a result, his vote declined sharply, although he was able to win 8.5 percent of the popular vote, still an impressive showing against the performance of other third-party candidates in American history. By 2000, the dynamic of third parties had taken its full effect, and the Perot movement along with the Reform Party it had spawned was dead.

Despite the fact that Perot was unsuccessful in building a lasting "third force" in American electoral politics, his legacy was an impressive change in the landscape of American politics and the two-party system. The result of his 1992 campaign was a Republican majority in both houses of Congress for the first time in forty years, and parity between the Republican and Democratic parties in presidential and congressional politics. Moreover, he succeeded in changing the debate on three core issues: reform, the federal budget, and economic nationalism. If the first two have been, perhaps temporarily, captured by the major parties, the third remains up for grabs. Pat Buchanan sought to capitalize on fears of globalization in his bid for the GOP nomination in 1996 and his own ill-fated Reform candidacy in 2000. Despite the failure of this issue to provide any traction in elections since 1992, we see it as a looming presence in American politics, which can be exploited in the future by a skilled candidate in either party (or in a new third party) if
economic conditions deteriorate and public concern about foreign involvement increases. These are not, in our view, unlikely events in the next decade, and if they emerge we are likely to witness the effects of the unresolved agenda of the Perot movement reverberating through American electoral politics yet again.

Notes

This chapter is drawn in part from the authors' manuscript in preparation, *Party Change in America: Ross Perot and the Emergence of the Reform Party.*

1. We do not distinguish between candidacies such as John Anderson's in 1980 and Ross Perot's in 1992 that are "independent" of any party label, and those such as Robert LaFollette's in 1924 or George Wallace's in 1968 that have a party label.

2. Although the Contract with America was the most direct appeal to Perot supporters, the 1996 Republican platform also showed a clear nod in this direction, and a shift from 1992. The 1992 platform led off with family/society, followed by individual rights/safety. Sections on the economy and government reform followed. In 1996 the section on the economy (which now gave greater weight to balancing the budget) led off, followed by government reform. Family/society and individual rights/safety followed.

3. The number of activities measured is simply a count of the number of activities one carried out for Republican candidates for governor, senator, and representative in 1994. When we use only activities for Republican candidates for representative, the results are identical.

4. Although figure 21.1 shows only the bivariate relationship, the effects we find are independent of either traditional Republican support or spillover from other issues.

5. The Voter News Service (VNS) exit poll showed Bush receiving 61 percent from Perot's 1996 supporters, compared with 28 percent for Gore, 2 percent for Buchanan, and 8 percent for Nader; see members.cox.net/fweil/VNS2000National.html (accessed January 2001).
References


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