ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: On the Fringe: Third-Party Gubernatorial Candidates and the Press

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This dissertation is a study of how the news media cover the campaigns of third-party gubernatorial candidates. The study has two parts: a content analysis that examines press coverage of the 2002 gubernatorial campaigns in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Maine, and a series of in-depth interviews with eight political reporters who covered two of those races.

The content analysis shows that newspaper coverage of Greens and Libertarians is significantly different from the major parties. Third-party candidates are featured less prominently than are Democrats and Republicans; sources from within minor parties are quoted less frequently than are officials from the major parties; the news frames adopted by reporters often come from a two-party perspective; and third-party candidates are separated from their major-party rivals. The exception to this coverage was found in the Maine press, which provided the 2002 Green gubernatorial candidate with almost equal coverage to the Democrats and Republicans.

The long interviews suggest that reporters view campaigns almost exclusively as a *contest* between people and believe they have an economic incentive to narrow the field of candidates to make campaign coverage more manageable. The interviews also

identified five criteria reporters use to determine each candidate's newsworthiness. To get on the media agenda, the reporters said, candidates must (1) demonstrate a high degree of public support; (2) show that their issues resonate strongly with the voters; (3) have strong name recognition; (4) run a serious campaign; and (5) raise enough money to be competitive in the general election. Such criteria work to the strengths of the major parties and the weaknesses of minor-party candidates.

In short, reporters accept the hegemony of the two-party system without question and have, in many ways, been co-opted by the Democrats and Republicans. Rather than encouraging free flowing debate during an election campaign, the news media act as barriers to American political discourse, excluding marginalized voices from the discussion and failing to challenge the dominate narratives established by political elites.

ON THE FRINGE: THIRD-PARTY GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES AND THE PRESS

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Third-party and independent candidates have played an important role in American politics. They have raised issues that the two major parties have ignored (Magarian 1992; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984); pushed for and won policy innovations, such as a woman's right to vote (Sifry 2003); served as barometers of the public's discontent with the status quo (Cook 1989); and, in the words of one New York politician, promoted and expanded democracy by "offering voters a broad field of candidates and programs" (Christman 1993).

But third-party and independent political candidates often face uphill battles when seeking elected office (Bell 1977; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984; Winger 1997). Legal, cultural, and institutional barriers all converge to make it difficult for those not affiliated with the Democratic or Republican parties to meet such basic political requirements as getting on the ballot or financing meaningful campaigns (Dwyre and Kolodny 1997; Magarian 1992). In Florida, for instance, a third-party candidate who wishes to run for the U.S. Senate must collect 200,000 signatures to qualify for the ballot (Herrnson and Faucheux 1999). Moreover, federal campaign finance laws often provide substantial funds to major-party candidates while withholding public monies from third-party contenders until after an election—and then only if the third-party candidate received more than 5 percent of the popular vote (Dwyre and Kolodny 1997).

As if these hurdles were not large enough, third-party and independent political candidates are often ignored by the news media (Joslyn, 1984; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984; Sifry 2003; Stempel 1969; Stempel and Windhauser 1984; Stovall 1985; Zaller and Hunt 1994; Zaller 1999). When they do get exposure, minor-party politicians are usually portrayed as inconsequential players or spoilers who have little chance of winning. If they have any impact at all, we are told, it is usually to tip the election in favor of a major-party candidate, leaving citizens with a sense that they will be wasting their vote if they cast a ballot for anyone other than a Democrat or Republican (Herrnson and Faucheux 1999).

When reporters are asked about such practices, many argue that it is up to them to weed out the serious contenders from the likely losers. Veteran political correspondent Jules Witcover, for instance, freely acknowledged that "if a guy is a bomb, it's our job to ignore him" (quoted in Zaller and Hunt 1994, 376). Likewise, the *Boston Globe*'s Curtis Wilkie said before one presidential debate that if it were up to him, he would exclude third-party contenders from all such forums and include only the Democratic and Republican party candidates "alone" (Hellinger 2000, 19). Such attitudes seem ironic given that reporters and editors profess deference to the First Amendment, only to display callous indifference when third-party candidates complain that their exclusion from news coverage is, in many ways, denying them their right of free speech.

Yet despite these admissions by some in the profession, scholars have paid little attention to the type of coverage third-party and independent candidates usually receive from news organizations. Most of the research on third parties has focused on political issues such as the American voting system (Brams and Fishburn 1978; Richie and Hill

1996), the American party system (Bibby 1997; Bibby and Maisel 2003 and 1998; Harmel 1997; Herrnson 1997; Lawson 1997; Lowi 1983; Ranney and Kendall 1954), the exclusion of third-party candidates from political debates (Eisner 1993; Hellinger 2000; Levine 2001; Magarian 1992), voter attitudes toward third parties (Collet 1996; Donovan, Bowler, and Terrio 2000; Lacy and Monson 2002; Reiter and Walsh 1995), explanations as to why third parties fail to win elections (Abramson et. al. 1995; Dwyre and Kolodny 1997; Winger 1997), and the practice of fusion—or when a minor party cross-endorses a major-party candidate (Argersinger 1980; Hasen 1997; Michelson and Susin 2004; Scarrow 1986; Spitzer 1997). There is also an abundance of research that examines third-party candidates who either won elective office or were major factors in a campaign, including studies about H. Ross Perot, Jesse Ventura, Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Bernard Sanders, and Ralph Nader, although most of this research pays little attention to the role of the mass media (see Endersby and Thomason 1994; Frank and Wagner 1999; Gillespie 1993; Green and Binning 2002 and 1997; Gold 1995 and 2002; Harold 2001; Koch 1998; Lacy and Burden 1999; Lentz 2002; Levine 2001; McCann, Rapoport and Stone 1999; Mughan and Lacy 2002; Parenti 1975; Rose 1994; Stone and Rapoport 2001; Zaller and Hunt 1994 and 1995; Zaller 1999).

The few studies that do analyze press coverage of third-party candidates are limited in scope in that they examine only one campaign, emphasize story counts, or focus exclusively on presidential politics.[1] Some of the early studies on the press and minor parties, for example, did little but document that third-party presidential contenders generally receive less coverage than Democrats and Republicans (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984; Stempel 1969; Stempel and Windhauser 1984). Later research moved beyond a pure analysis of story volume to examine such issues as *why* the press has traditionally ignored minor parties at the national level (Zaller 1999), *how* the news media has covered independents like John Anderson (Stovall 1985), *why* third-party contenders such as George Wallace have successfully gotten the news media's attention (Pirch 2005), and *how* even a popular independent like Perot could not circumvent the traditional news media (Zaller and Hunt 1994 and 1995).

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[1] The only study found that examines news coverage of a third-party candidate who ran for something other than president – Jesse Ventura's successful bid to become governor of Minnesota in 1998 – examined how the former professional wrestler was covered by the press in his capacity as an entertainer rather than as a representative of the Reform Party (Frith 2005).

However, while each of these studies contributes greatly to our understanding of the challenges third-party presidential candidates face when they mount national campaigns, they leave a gap in the literature when it comes to minor parties at the state level. Filling this gap is important because third parties have had greater success in state politics than they have had running for president. While no candidate from a minor party has ever occupied the White House, independent and third-party contenders have won thirteen gubernatorial elections in the 20th century, including contests in Minnesota in 1930, 1932, 1934, 1936, and 1998; Wisconsin in 1934, 1936, and 1942; Alaska and Connecticut in 1990; and Maine in 1974, 1994, and 1998 (Gillespie 1993; Gold 2002; Reiter and Walsh 1994; *Third Party Watch* 2005).[2] Moreover, minor-party and independent gubernatorial candidates have made major inroads throughout the country in recent years, with such nominees as Peter Camejo of California, Jonathan Carter of Maine, David Bacon of New Mexico, Richard Mahoney of Arizona, Thomas Golisano of New York, Gary Richardson of Oklahoma, Tom Cox of Oregon, and Ed Thompson of Wisconsin all polling between 5 and 15 percent of the vote in 2002 (*Green Party Election*

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[2] This list is limited to candidates who did not use fusion to win an election.

Results; New York Times, 7 November 2002; *St. Louis Post Dispatch,* 7 November 2002; *Third Party Watch*).

Given this history and the fact that an independent candidate could conceivably win a three-way contest for governor with less than 35 percent of the vote in some states, it would seem that reporters covering gubernatorial campaigns would have less justification for ignoring candidates from minor parties than do national reporters covering presidential races. Is this, in fact, the case? Are third-party gubernatorial candidates also ignored or covered differently from major-party contenders, or are they given equal coverage? What criteria do journalists use to make these decisions and from where did those criteria come? Finally, if third-party candidates for statewide office are treated differently from their major-party opponents, is this because—as reporters often say—those candidates will most likely either lose the election or have little impact on the contest, or are there institutional and political biases at work that predispose reporters toward what they conceive as "mainstream" candidates? What are the ramifications of such biases for the political system?

This dissertation seeks to examine these questions through a study of four gubernatorial campaigns in which a third-party candidate was involved. Using a combination of content analysis and long interviews with journalists, the study will examine the patterns that characterize the coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates as compared to their Democratic and Republican opponents; it will compare coverage in the national versus the regional press to determine whether journalists at different levels adhere to different sets of guidelines; and it will explore the reasons reporters give for the decisions they make on the campaign trail. The focus here is not to document story volume, but rather to examine *how* third-party gubernatorial candidates are portrayed when they *do* receive coverage.

The four campaigns that are analyzed come from the following 2002 contests: the California race between Democrat Gray Davis, Republican Bill Simon, and Green Peter Camejo; the Maine election between Democrat John Baldacci, Republican Peter Cianchette, and Green Jonathan Carter; the Oregon campaign between Democrat Ted Kulongoski, Republican Kevin Mannix, and Libertarian Tom Cox; and the Wisconsin contest between Democrat Jim Doyle, Republican Scott McCallum, and Libertarian Ed Thompson. The reason these four campaigns were chosen is explained in Chapter 3, which outlines the methodology of this study.

Such an analysis is important to explore for at least three reasons that will be discussed below. First, the exclusion of minor-party voices from election news coverage undermines the American tradition of open debate and serves as an example to illustrate how other unconventional voices may go uncovered during national or state public policy debates. Put another way, the study could provide clues about other blind spots the news media may have concerning legitimate viewpoints that are perceived to come from the fringe of society. Second, by consistently narrowing political discourse to the positions of two dominant parties, journalism risks opening the door to political movements that seek to erode First Amendment guarantees. Third, minor parties have historically made a positive contribution to the political debate in this country. Why such voices are excluded from the modern news media—the main conduit through which ideas enter the public realm—is thus important to understand because such practices risk denying citizens the benefit of hearing potentially good ideas from marginalized corners of society.

The American Tradition

The first justification for this dissertation is a normative one: that the news media undermine the American tradition of open debate in the so-called marketplace of ideas by excluding third-party candidates from their election coverage. Put more positively, the press could better enhance political discourse if it were more amenable to nontraditional viewpoints that usually find it impossible to compete with the two major parties.

This is not to suggest that all third parties should be given equal coverage with the Democrats and Republicans, or even with each other. Obviously, journalists have limited resources and must make editorial decisions. In addition, not all third-party candidates are serious or have the appropriate experience for the job they seek. They run for fun or to express misguided anger at "the system." Others even campaign for a joke—as radio personality Howard Stern almost did in 1993 when he toyed with the idea of running for governor of New York on the Libertarian ticket. But there are other third-party contenders who take their decision to campaign seriously. Even if they strongly doubt their ability to win, they enter an election because they are trying to make a statement, build a movement for the future, offer ideas that are not being discussed, or represent a voice that might otherwise go unheard. Does America suffer in any way when the press turns a deaf ear to that voice? It is a hard question to answer. Yet, if we as a society are truly committed to open debate—to the concept that all ideas get a fair shake so that the best ones can be chosen to solve social, political, and economic problems—then we owe it to ourselves to better understand why certain voices are consistently sidelined while others are allowed to dominate our discourse.

How third parties are covered in the news media is not an idle concern. The notion that American democracy should function as a marketplace of ideas in which truth emerges from free and open debate is deeply rooted in our culture. First introduced by John Milton in the 17th century and later expanded by John Stuart Mill, the idea that *all* reasonable opinions should be allowed to flourish in the public square has long been used to justify freedom of speech over the oppression of tyranny. In his famous essay on the liberties of man, Mill (1859, 1978 reprint,16) argued that "the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation—those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it."

Such views gave birth to what has since been dubbed the libertarian theory of the press, which assumes that each individual is a rational creature who can choose between right and wrong as long as the news media help society "discover truth … by presenting all manner of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1963, 51). Expanding on this in 1947, the Commission on Freedom of the Press said that the mass media should act as a forum from which all ideas can be heard and debated. The commission said: "It is vital to a free society that an idea should not be stifled by the circumstances of its birth." It acknowledged that the press "cannot and should not be expected to print everybody's ideas," but added that "all important viewpoints and interests in the society should be represented in its agencies of mass communication," including those with which news organizations disagree (*A Free and Responsible Press* 1947, 23-24).

The marketplace metaphor has evolved over the years but still holds its grip on our national conscience. While Meiklejohn (1961, 19) recorded "a friendly disavowal" of the "Miltonian faith that in a fair fight between truth and error, truth is sure to win," he nevertheless said that "the people need free speech because they have decided, in adopting, maintaining and interpreting their Constitution, to govern themselves rather than to be governed by others." In addition, Chafee (1954) pointed out that all viewpoints should be welcome in the marketplace so as not to drive potentially dangerous ideas into hiding, where they could brew undetected until they posed a real threat to society.

The continued power of the marketplace metaphor is evident in that it has moved beyond academic circles and has been incorporated into the lexicon of American civil law (Hopkins 1996; Napoli 1999). When Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes proclaimed in *Abrams v. United States* (1919) that "the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market" (630), he did more than offer an eloquent dissent in a case that upheld the conviction of five Russian immigrants for publishing revolutionary pamphlets—he gave power to a 250-year-old metaphor that has since been used by the U.S. Supreme Court to "bolster free expression in virtually every area of First Amendment jurisprudence …" (Hopkins 1996, 41). In the 80 years since *Abrams*, the Court's use of the marketplace concept has increased dramatically as the justices have recognized that "there is not a single, universal marketplace of ideas, but numerous mini-marketplaces, each with its own dynamics, parameters, regulatory scheme, and audience" (Hopkins 1996, 48. See also Baker 1978).

Likewise, the Federal Communications Commission has cited the metaphor in making policy for the broadcast industry, although in recent times the FCC has moved toward an economic interpretation that has led to deregulation rather than a democratic interpretation that has fostered an increased flow of information (Napoli 1999). In any case, some scholars have come to see the mass media as the modern-day marketplace (Lichtenberg 1987)—a notion that has been adopted by public officials like the late Senator Paul Wellstone, who leaned heavily on the marketplace concept to argue for improvements in the news media by saying that a free society can only function effectively when citizens have "access to a wide and diverse range of opinions, analyses, and perspectives" (Wellstone 2000, 552).

The notion that American democracy should operate as a marketplace of ideas is particularly salient during political campaigns—a time when the views of different candidates should be competing for the votes of the citizenry. It is during the weeks before an election that the public "wants and expects" the news media to present "diverse points of view" (Immerwahr et. al, 1982, 178-179). Meyrowitz (1995), for example, has demonstrated that voters approach campaigns through a prism he calls "public logic," in which citizens look for candidates "with new ideas" and view campaigns as an opportunity to foster "a national dialogue on key issues" (48). From this perspective, voters seem to assume that they have a right—or perhaps, a hope—that they will be given a wide-range of viewpoints from which to choose.

But let's not be naïve. While this brief review is meant to illustrate how America has long been wedded to the belief that a healthy democracy is one that tolerates, accepts, and is exposed to many different opinions, it is also true that America has never actually achieved the complete openness that the marketplace metaphor is meant to describe (see Barron 1967). Moreover, there is much scholarship that questions whether the public even demands that such a marketplace exist. The classic election studies of the middle 20th century, for example, showed that most voters pay little attention to campaigns and tend to vote according to such factors as family, religious, or ethnic background rather than a careful consideration of each candidate's issue positions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). More recent research has found that journalists need not write about politicians from outside the mainstream because busy voters demand to hear only about candidates who are deemed important enough for them to spend valuable time learning about (Zaller 1999). Given such conclusions, it would seem to matter little whether news organizations provide the public with information about third-party candidates because few people will care about it anyway.

From a normative sense, though, none of this should matter. The marketplace metaphor is an ideal that history says is important to us. Starting with 17th century philosophers and embraced by present day courts, policymakers, citizens, and scholars, the concept embedded in the marketplace of ideas goes to the core of how we see ourselves. It is a place where we as a society believe we *should* be—and journalism is part of the mix. This is not to say that we have failed as a society or that journalism is in crisis just because some voices are silenced in the news media. Far from it. But if we continue to believe that our democracy grows healthier when a wide-range of opinion is allowed to flourish in the public square, then it is worth studying why the news media consistently ignore certain views. Third parties represent just one of those voices, but an understanding of these movements may open our eyes to other ways in which the news media may be stifling debate and undermining our notions of who we are as a society.

First Amendment Restraints?

A second reason this study is worth pursuing is related to the first: news organizations have a self interest in understanding how journalistic norms fail to broaden the political debate beyond its current confines. Such practices undermine what journalism should be and may give government an opening to one day regulate the press. Granted, just because third-party candidates are usually ignored during election campaigns does not mean that American journalism is bad or that the government will suddenly step in to restrict press freedom. But how news organizations approach minor political parties is indicative of how they cover other viewpoints that do not comport with immediate social norms. It shows how dissent in general is portrayed by the news media, and it points to larger patterns of coverage that violate the tenets of journalism and could, over time, lead to political movements that seek government regulation to curtail the autonomy the news media now enjoy.

This is not as farfetched as it may seem. The Commission on Freedom of the Press hinted at government regulation in 1947, when it called on news organizations to recognize that the freedoms they enjoy under the First Amendment come with certain obligations—namely, that the press has a social responsibility to reflect a wide-range of viewpoints in its coverage of public affairs. While the commission strongly supported a news media free from the shackles of government, it nevertheless argued that press liberties were being jeopardized by corporate media owners who were consolidating their control over the communication industry and engaging in self-serving, profit-driven activities that were inflammatory, sensational, and narrowing the range of American political discourse. The press must act to correct these problems itself, the commission said, or an outside agency like government might have to step in. In a report it released after nearly two years of study, the commission summed up its philosophy this way:

> If modern society requires great agencies of mass communication, if these concentrations become so powerful that they are a threat to democracy, if democracy cannot solve the problem simply by breaking them up—then those agencies must control themselves or be controlled by government. If they are controlled by government, we lose our chief safeguard against totalitarianism—and at the same time take a long step toward it (*A Free and Responsible Press* 1947, 5).

The commission proved to be prescient. Twenty years after the release of its report, a George Washington University law professor, Jerome A. Barron, created a stir when he called for a new interpretation of the First Amendment that would force news organizations to open their stations and news pages to viewpoints that usually fall outside the political mainstream. In arguing for legislative and judicial action to regulate print as well as broadcast news organizations, Barron said that media monopolies and technological developments in the communication industry had changed the media landscape from the one envisioned by the founding fathers. "First Amendment theory must be reexamined," Barron (1967, 1642) wrote, "for only by responding to the present reality of the mass media's repression of ideas can the constitutional guarantee of free speech best serve its original purpose."

The crux of his position rested on the notion that American constitutional theory was based, at least partially, on the flawed assumption that there is an open "marketplace of ideas" that automatically allows for the free flow of viewpoints as long as government does not get in the way of the speaker. But if such a marketplace ever really operated in the United States, Barron argued, "it has long ceased to exist," leaving the country with a dangerously outdated vision of the First Amendment that has evolved into a "rationale for repression" (1642). Said Barron:

> Our constitutional law has been singularly indifferent to the reality and implications of nongovernmental obstructions to the spread of political truth. This indifference becomes critical when a comparatively few private hands are in a position to determine not only the content of information but its very availability, when the soap box yields to radio and the political pamphlet to the monopoly newspaper (Barron 1967, 1643).

Like the requirements imposed on broadcasters through the FCC's fairness doctrine, Barron said newspapers should be forced by law to open their pages to comments by the general public. This "right of access to the press," as he called it, "could be rooted most naturally in the letter-to-the-editor column and the advertising section" (1667). He said newspapers should be legally compelled to provide a rational explanation for why an individual's letter or advertisement was not printed, adding that editors and publishers should no longer be permitted to reject unpopular viewpoints on arbitrary grounds. Only through such government action, Barron argued, could the country secure "an effective forum for the expression of divergent opinions" (1678).

Barron's views were ultimately rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1974 case *Miami Herald v. Tornillo*, but his controversial proposal sparked a "right-of-access" movement that reverberated throughout news organizations and the legal system during the 1960s and 1970s. Citing Barron's proposal, freelance writer Hazel Henderson said, "The battle now shaping up over the public's right of access to the mass media may well be the most important constitutional issue of this decade" (*Columbia Journalism Review*

1969, 7). Gilbert Cranberg reported that “even severe critics of the press consider Barron’s prescription for making newspapers accountable to government strong medicine,” but he pointed out that Barron’s proposals were resonating with such groups as the American Civil Liberties Union, which passed a resolution during its 1968 biennial conference that urged the ACLU’s national board of directors “to file suits to establish a legal right of access to the press” (*Saturday Review* 1970, 48). That Barron’s piece was being taken seriously within the news media was made even more evident in 1969 when the Freedom of Information Center at the University of Missouri’s School of Journalism published a report outlining the pros and cons of a right-to-access law, concluding that:

> All in all, it is not far-fetched to predict that the courts and legislatures of the land might one day be tempted to find in a right of access and a right of reply a way to get at the death of newspaper competition and the alleged one-sidedness of the American press (*Access to the Press: A New Right?* 1969, 8).

Could a similar movement occur today? The prospects seem unlikely. But history can be cyclical, and given that the consolidation of media ownership has only increased in the years since Barron wrote his piece (see Bagdikian 2000; McChesney 1999), it does not seem beyond the realm of possibility that a new call for government regulation of the press could some day come from segments of society that are consistently sidelined. For one thing, many of Barron’s views still resonate with contemporary theorists. Lichtenberg (1987) has written that “regulation [of the press] is needed just because private power poses a grave threat to the independence and integrity of the press” (353); Graber (1986) has suggested that “the definitions for what constitutes monopoly control might be made more rigorous for the media than for other businesses” (273); and Bunker (2000) has pointed out that several constitutional theorists are now arguing that the First Amendment can be violated not just by government—which has been the traditional understanding of free speech doctrine—but also by "private action," that is the activities of "private actors to suppress speech…" (2) In addition, given the consolidation of the media that followed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, some political advocacy groups "have argued that federal regulations should apply to the content of various media, defining what material promotes or undermines the public interest" (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 211).

Such statements should give the news media pause. With views like these circulating through society, it is no exaggeration to suggest that the news media may one day find itself fighting to protect its very rights if large segments of the population come to believe that they are not being completely served by the current media structure. Again, this is not to suggest that government action is imminent because a third-party candidate is ignored by the press, but such practices do point to larger patterns of how the news media ignore unconventional voices, something that could lead to public frustration and long-term consequences.

Historic Role of Third Parties

Finally, news coverage of third-party candidates is a subject worth exploring simply because of the historic role minor political organizations have played in American politics. From their attacks on the institution of slavery in the 19th century to their success in helping to win such reforms as tough child-labor laws, free public education, strong business regulation, direct election of senators, and woman's suffrage, third parties have, in the words of one scholar, "made the United States a more just and democratic society" by serving as "essential vehicles for popular discontent" and helping to "stimulate dialogue" about vital social issues (Magarian 1992, 879-880; see also Sifry

2003 and Smallwood 1983). While the positions that third parties have taken throughout their history were often viewed as extreme or radical at the time, many of these stands eventually made their way into mainstream society to become the order of the day. The influence they have exerted over the political process has come both directly, such as when a third party wins an election and actually implements its policies (Gillespie 1993), and indirectly, or when a third party movement and its ideas are absorbed into one of the major parties (Rapoport and Stone 2005; Sundquist 1973). In either case, minor political organizations have made their mark.

Admittedly, it is often impossible to draw a direct correlation between the positions taken by a third party and the public policies eventually adopted by government. The point is not that a third party must be given sole and unequivocal credit for a particular reform to make it worthy of attention, but rather that minor parties deserve consideration because they have often been at the forefront of important social issues that the two major parties had initially refused to address (particularly at election time). If history suggests anything, it is that movements that seem unconventional at the moment should not automatically be disregarded as unrealistic, irrelevant, or extreme because they may one day hold sway with a majority of the population.

The influence of third parties has historically been felt most strongly at the state and local level, where independents and minor-party contenders have won office and implemented policy. In Vermont, the left-wing Progressive Coalition controlled the Burlington mayor's office and held seats on the city's Board of Alderman throughout the 1980s. The party continued to exert influence on state politics during the following decade and even elected one of its members, Bernard Sanders, to the U.S. House of

Representatives in 1990 (Gillespie 1993). That same year, Independent Lowell P. Weicker Jr. became governor of Connecticut, where he battled Republicans and many Democrats in the state Legislature before narrowly winning passage of a controversial 4-percent income tax to help close a budget deficit that had grown steadily for years under the leadership of the two major parties. Eight years later, the Reform Party's Jesse Ventura was able to put his fingerprints on Minnesota politics after he surprised the establishment in 1998 to capture the statehouse in St. Paul.

The recent third-party victories in New England and the upper Midwest are not unique, though. Throughout the early 20th century, third-party movements made their mark on state politics by winning elections outright or taking control of one of the major parties. The radical Nonpartisan League, for example, infiltrated the North Dakota Republican Party and used it to pass legislation that created a state-controlled bank and gave women the right to vote; the Farm-Labor Party was the dominant political force in Minnesota politics throughout the 1920s and 1930s, when it controlled the governorship and held a majority of the state's congressional delegation; and Wisconsin's Progressive Party established public works projects to help destitute citizens during the Great Depression and pushed through the nation's first program to provide unemployment insurance for those without a job (Gillespie 1993).

In other cases, third parties have strongly influenced the Democrats and Republicans at the national level, with the most recent example being the long-term fallout from Ross Perot's 1992 presidential campaign. According to Rapoport and Stone (2005) and Stone and Rapoport (2001), the Republican Party moved quickly to absorb Reform Party supporters into its fold following the 1992 election, adopting many of

Perot's themes as its own. The Contract with America, for example, "emphasized Perot issues of a balanced federal budget, reform, and limiting American commitment to internationalism" while omitting any "reference to Republican priorities such as stopping abortions and promoting free trade that united the base of the Republican Party but were strongly opposed by supporters of Ross Perot" (Stone and Rapoport 2001, 52). The maneuver, the authors argue, led directly to the so-called Republican Revolution of the mid-1990s and George W. Bush's presidential victory. According to their analysis of the 1994 midterm and 2000 presidential elections, Stone and Rapoport (2001) found that Republican candidates for the U.S. House won more easily in congressional districts where Perot ran well two years earlier, while at the presidential level, Bush was far more likely than Al Gore to win nonsouthern states in which Perot received strong support at the polls. "Without Perot's historic third-party candidacy in 1992," the authors concluded, "the 2000 presidential contest would not have required 35 extraordinary days beyond November 7 and numerous court decisions to settle" (Stone and Rapoport 2001, 56).

Aside from the influence third parties have exerted at the state level or Perot's continued effect on contemporary national politics, minor parties have also helped influence the course of history on several major issues that have faced the nation throughout its history. The remainder of this section, then, will look at one of those issues: the fight over slavery. This example is not meant to be an exhaustive historical recounting, but rather a brief examination to illustrate a specific role that minor parties played in forcing policymakers to confront perhaps the biggest domestic issue ever to face the United States. In doing this, my hope is to show that, at least in some cases, if it were not for a third-party entering the political fray, certain issues may not have been discussed at all—or the debate over them would likely have been delayed to some point in the future.

Slavery. Starting with the creation of the Liberty Party in 1840 and culminating with the replacement of the Whigs with the newly formed Republicans in 1856, no other issue in American history has been the catalyst for more third-party efforts than the nation's debate over slavery (Nash 1959). In the two decades before the Civil War, three major national third-party movements challenged the two-party system in an attempt to thrust the issue of African bondage onto the national stage. Until these third-party movements surfaced in the late 1830s, the two major parties had been content to keep the slavery issue on the backburner where it could do little damage to their national standings. In 1827, for example, former Democratic President Martin Van Buren argued that "national parties were the means of keeping the slavery issue quiet," adding twenty years later that his party should nominate candidates "who have not committed themselves to either side of this important and delicate question [slavery]" (Sundquist 1973, 40, 52).

Liberty was routed in 1840 but rebounded four years later when its presidential candidate more than tripled the party's nationwide vote and won enough support in New York to affect the outcome of the election, handing the White House to Democrat James K. Polk over his Whig opponent, Henry Clay. Recognizing that the antislavery movement was stronger than initially thought, northern politicians from both major parties "moved as far toward the abolitionist pole as necessary to absorb most of the movement…" (Sundquist 1973, 47). This effectively ended Liberty as a player in presidential politics, but its very existence sent a signal to politicians in the North that their survival could hang on how they addressed what had become known as the South's peculiar institution.

Still, the issue carried great risks for the Whigs and Democrats, each of which entered the 1848 presidential election without any intention of discussing the volatile issue. But that strategy was thwarted when disgruntled members of both parties, along with abolitionists and former Libertymen, joined forces in yet another third-party effort to push slavery into the spotlight. This time operating under the banner of Free Soil, organizers of the new party nominated a recent abolitionist convert in Van Buren and drafted a platform that proposed to stop the spread of slavery into the western territories and abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. "Political reality" may have "inhibited both major parties … from making any blatant appeals to the slavery restriction faction," one historian has said, but "the clash over the extension of slavery was brought before the public … through a third party" (Mazmanian 1974, 36-37).

Van Buren captured 10 percent of the popular vote nationwide, and thirteen of the party's congressional candidates won seats in the House of Representatives (Rosenstone et al. 1984; Sundquest 1973). Although the party began to break apart shortly after the election, its strong showing at the polls was an indication that "the question of slavery in the territories could no longer be brushed aside" (Mazmanian 1974). A third party had made a major impact on the American political system.

With slavery now squarely in the middle of the nation's debate, the country underwent a major political realignment (Sundquist 1973). The Whigs and Democrats tried once again to put the issue behind them, crafting the Compromise of 1850 by granting concessions to both sides of the dispute. But the compromise proved unsustainable. No longer able to hold its regional factions together, the Whig Party collapsed as a major force in American politics and the newly formed Republican Party stepped in to fill the void. Campaigning on a platform to contain slavery, Republican congressional candidates effectively took control of the House of Representatives in 1854, and the party's 1856 presidential candidate took 33 percent of the popular vote, carrying all but five free states. Four years later, the party captured the White House under Abraham Lincoln. (Gienapp 1985; Mazmanian 1974).

Would slavery have become the issue that it did had it not been pushed so fervently by third parties? It is hard to imagine that it would not have. But the history of the United States is one in which minor parties were, in fact, intricately involved in the debate over the enslavement of black Americans. Indeed, the antislavery societies that sprang up throughout the North had first tried to work within the two-party structure but grew frustrated as they were consistently forced to choose a candidate who was "the least hostile" to the antislavery cause (Nash 1959, 24). The third-party movements that followed, although ignored at first, gave antislavery societies another outlet in which to express their grievances—and they used these mechanisms to eventually bring change to American society.

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What I hope this discussion has done is provide at least three reasons why this dissertation is important. It is designed to answer the "so what" question, if you will. To summarize, this dissertation hopes to add to the literature by focusing on an area that has yet to be fully studied: how third-party gubernatorial candidates have been covered by regional and national news media. It is my hope that this study of statewide races will provide a different perspective than the traditional examination of third-party presidential candidates. It is harder for reporters to dismiss minor-party gubernatorial contenders given the fact that a candidate can win a statewide contest with less than 35 percent of the vote. This is far different from the winner-take-all Electoral College system used in a presidential campaign, which gives journalists legitimate cover to ignore third-party candidates who have virtually no chance of winning. Because this is less true at the state level, this study of gubernatorial elections may have a better chance of identifying other factors that may come into play when reporters and editors make coverage decisions. The key questions are: How is the coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates different from that of the Democrats and Republicans? How do reporters approach gubernatorial campaigns that involve a third-party candidate? And what factors can we identify to account for any differences in the coverage?

Plan for Dissertation

The analysis will begin with a literature review in Chapter Two that examines the usefulness of studying campaigns. Previous research, including the classic studies of the 1940s and 1950s, found that campaigns have little affect on voters. Chapter Two indicates, however, that while many campaigns do not matter, some do—and for this reason, they are worth examining. Next, Chapter Two will review the literature on third parties by focusing on three questions: Is the two-party system natural to American politics? Why do some people vote for third-party candidates? And why do third parties typically lose elections? The chapter will then examine the role of the press during political campaigns, focusing on agenda setting, story framing, and priming before turning its attention to how the press covers third-party candidates specifically. Finally, the literature review will end by introducing three possible explanations for why minor parties are treated differently by the news media. These theories include Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance, Meyrowitz's (1995) notions of journalism logic, and Gramsci's (1971) concept of political hegemony.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study, explaining how the content analysis and long interviews were completed. The chapter also includes a justification for combining qualitative and quantitative techniques in a single study and why it was important in this case. Chapters Four and Five outline the results of the study, looking first at the findings of the content analysis and next at the observations from the long interviews. Chapter Six is the concluding chapter and includes a discussion of the findings, their potential ramifications, limits to the study, and potential avenues for additional scholarship. The appendices at the back of the book contain the code book used in the content analysis, the questions used in the long interviews, and other supplemental materials.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This dissertation is a study of how the news media cover the campaigns of third-party gubernatorial candidates, focusing specifically on the 2002 elections in California, Oregon, Maine, and Wisconsin. Before outlining the study's methodology and reporting its results, it is important to first put this project in the proper context with a discussion of three broad issues that will be addressed throughout this literature review.

First, this chapter will examine whether campaigns are even worth studying at all given the vast amount of scholarly research that suggests they matter little to election outcomes. Second, the literature review will consider the past research on third parties to examine three questions: Is the two-party system natural to American politics? Why do some people vote for third-party candidates? And why do third parties typically lose elections? Third, the chapter will look at the role the news media typically play in campaigns and how the actions taken by reporters may or may not influence public perceptions of the candidates. As part of this discussion, the literature review will examine theories of agenda setting, framing, and priming. In addition, this section will analyze the scholarship on press coverage of third-party candidates, and it will offer three possible explanations as to why journalists treat minor-party politicians differently from those who come from the Democratic and Republican establishment.

In general, the literature cited in this chapter supports the view that campaigns are worth studying because they are moments in the nation's history when voters are tuned into politics and learn about the issues and policy choices that confront them. The literature also indicates that while the two-party system developed naturally from the constitutional system established by the founders, the nation's history is full of examples of third-party efforts to challenge the status quo. While those efforts have rarely met with success at the ballot box—particularly at the presidential level—they have nevertheless provided an outlet for various forms of political dissent, allowing them to voice their opinions and at times affect the policy debates at the nation's power centers. Finally, this chapter will show that the news media still play an important role in bringing political information to the public and influencing the nation's agenda. Through the use of certain news frames, the literature suggests, reporters narrow the political debate by determining which candidates are legitimate and viable and which ones are from outside the mainstream and likely losers. Such reporting decisions, the literature shows, are based on long established journalistic norms that reflect both the pragmatic need to use limited resources wisely and the (unconscious?) acceptance of elite hegemony.

Do campaigns matter? The Minimal Effects View

There is considerable doubt in the political science literature about the effectiveness of political campaigns to persuade voters and change the outcome of elections. From the earliest days of research into American voting behavior, scholars have illustrated that most citizens cast their ballots in consistent and predictable ways based not on the messages they receive from campaigns but on such factors as their party identification, awareness about political issues, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968). The notion that campaigns have minimal effects has been further supported by evidence that voters reject political messages that contradict their personal values (Zaller 1990); that most citizens do not alter their political opinions enough during campaigns to change their original vote choice (Finkel 1993); and by the fact that political scientists have developed election prediction models that can accurately and consistently forecast the outcome of presidential elections even before a single campaign event is held or ballot cast (Abramowitz 1988; Gelman and King 1993). Campaigns have been seen as so inconsequential by some, in fact, that Downs (1957) posited that it is irrational for the democratic citizen to pay close attention to election contests because the benefits derived from gathering political information are outweighed by the costs of acquiring such knowledge.

Yet despite this evidence, candidates spend millions seeking public office, and the news media spend millions covering them. In the last presidential election, for example, President Bush and his Democratic opponent, John Kerry, reportedly spent more than $600 million in their race for the White House (*San Antonio Express-News*, 2 January 2005). One year later, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg spent $80 million in his re-election campaign despite the fact that he consistently led his Democrat opponent by almost 30 percentage points (*Washington Post*, 5 November 2005); and in 2006, spending in the Massachusetts governor's race toped $42 million, "obliterating" the state's previous record set four years before (*Boston Globe*, 7 November 2006, A1).

It is not just campaign spending that points to a general belief that campaigns make a difference. Journalists too have historically attributed Election Day results partially to the quality of a candidate's campaign. White (1961) stated eloquently in his analysis of the 1960 presidential election that the campaign is a time when "the citizens—as they gather at rallies or read their newspapers or sit at home watching the candidates on TV—will be able to stew, mull, reflect and argue, until finally there simmers down in the mind and belly of each individual his own decision on choice of the national chieftain" (211). Likewise, McGinniss (1969) argued that election outcomes were being cynically manipulated by a partnership of politicians and advertising executives; and Smith (1988) concluded that "it was Bush's symbolic politics—largely negative advertising on television attacking Dukakis—that won him the presidency" in 1988 (685). More recently, Associated Press political correspondent Walter R. Mears reported that the three debates scheduled between Al Gore and George Bush would be "crucial" in determining who would win the support of "undecided voters" in 2000 (*Washington Times*, 18 September 2000, *A16*), and four years later the *New York Times* attributed part of Bush's re-election to the fact that he "ran a very effective campaign" (Nagourney, 2004, 1).

So who is right? Are campaigns fruitless efforts to change public opinion, as much of the political science literature suggests, or do they matter to the election outcome, as many politicians and journalists seem to think?

The early research into American voting behavior was fairly pessimistic about the ability of campaigns to significantly alter individual opinion and change the outcome of an election. One of the first attempts to examine how voters make up their minds was the Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) study in Erie County, Ohio, during the 1940 presidential election. In that work, the authors found that a citizen's political orientation is heavily influenced by a variety of social pressures that come from his or her family, religious organization, workplace, social clubs, and neighborhood. In many cases, the authors showed, these social pressures are fairly consistent and push voters toward one or the other political party, such as when a blue-collar worker from a lower-class neighborhood is inclined to join the Democrats while a business executive from a wealthy community naturally affiliates with the Republicans.

These findings were reinforced in a follow-up study of voters in Elmira, New York, during the 1948 election. In that research, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) concluded that party identification and voting behavior are formed early in life, are determined greatly by the person's immediate environment (family, community, religion), and are fairly stable over time—so that a person born into a strong Democratic family will likely join the Democratic Party and consistently vote for Democratic candidates for most of his or her life. These conclusions were further buttressed by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960), who found that voters do not know enough about public policy to base their vote on such issues, relying instead on partisan cues to help them filter campaign events, interpret political activity, and evaluate candidates. For most voters, Berelson et al. (1954) said, campaigns do more to reinforce their preexisting views than to persuade them to take on alternative positions. Moreover, it is these partisan voters—the very voters who are least likely to be influenced by the campaign—who are most likely to pay attention to what the candidates are doing and eventually cast a ballot on Election Day (Campbell et al. 1960). The citizens most susceptible to changing their political preferences are those who pay little attention to politics, ignore campaigns until the final days, and often decide not to vote (Berelson et al. 1954).

Subsequent research at the individual and aggregate levels supported many of the findings of the early studies by suggesting that campaigns most likely have minimal effects because other variables too easily explain voting behavior. Fiorina (1981), for example, expanded on the notion of retrospective voting first developed by Key (1966) to argue that voters often identify with a party and cast a ballot based on the past performance of the incumbent, rewarding those who perform well and punishing those who do not. Other studies have shown that elections are often decided based on national economic conditions (Bartels 1992; Bloom and Price 1975; Fair 1978; Frankovic 1985; Keeter 1985; Kramer 1971; Markus 1988, 1992; Quirk and Dalager 1993), the popularity of the incumbent (Abramowitz 1988; Frankovic 1985; Howell 1982; Rosenstone 1985), or the policy preferences of the voters (Markus and Converse 1979; Page and Jones 1979)—all factors that are in place well before a campaign gets underway.

It is true that some scholars and journalists began questioning whether partisanship was still the driving force behind American voting behavior—with some even claiming that the two major parties were dead or in serious decline (Broder 1971; Burnham 1970; Fiorina 2002; Joslyn 1984; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976; Niemi and Weisberg 1976; Wattenberg 1984). However, more recent research has found support for the conclusions of the 1940s that a person's vote choice can be accurately predicted based on partisan affiliation (Bartels 2000; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002; Miller 1991; Pomper 1998).

Miller (1991), for example, illustrated that while the correlations between party identification and vote choice declined somewhat in the 1960s and early 1970s, it rose steadily throughout the following decade, concluding that "there is no indication from any recent election that party identification is less relevant to the vote decision in the 1980s than it was three decades earlier" (565). Zaller (1990) added to this body of knowledge, showing that citizens filter political messages through their own values, accepting those that are consistent with their principles and rejecting those that are not. In a book he published two years later, Zaller (1992) also found that political awareness is directly tied to political polarization, with citizens who are highly aware of politics forming consistent and stable opinions that become even more entrenched when the debate among political elites becomes more partisan, such as during campaigns.

Along these lines, Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002) have pointed out that partisanship is particularly strong among those Americans who actually take the time to vote; and Bartels (2000) showed that "the impact of partisanship on voting behavior has increased markedly in recent years, both at the presidential level and at the congressional level" (35), a phenomenon he attributed partially to the influence of ideological extremes in both major parties. Finally, in his attempt to "reexamine" the minimal effects model, Finkel (1993) maintained that most voters during the 1980s chose a presidential candidate before the national conventions and that attitude changes during the campaigns of 1980, 1984 and 1988 accounted for a net impact of between 1 and 3 percent. He added that while campaigns have the potential to bring significant changes at the ballot box, they typically serve more to activate the existing political predispositions of the electorate.

To summarize, then, minimal effects theory is based on the notion that campaigns have little impact on the outcome of elections because (1) most voters, particularly those who pay close attention to politics, are highly partisan and have already decided for whom they will vote well in advance of the campaign season; (2) the voters who do make up their mind during the campaign make up a small portion of the overall electorate and are usually less likely to pay attention to events that occur on the campaign trail; (3)

elections results are too easily explained by other factors, such as the popularity of the incumbent and national economic conditions; and (4) most voters do not change their opinion enough during a campaign to alter their original vote choice. Taken as a whole, this evidence strongly suggests that campaigns have little effect, thus raising serious questions about whether it is worth studying campaigns at all, let alone those involving third-party candidates with small partisan constituencies.

Evidence of Campaign Effects

The answer is not so simple, though, and through the years enough evidence has surfaced to suggest that while not all voters are influenced by campaign events, some are, and while not all campaigns change enough minds to alter election outcomes, some do (Allsop and Weisberg 1988; Campbell 2000, 2001; Fenno 1996; Herr 2002; Holbrook 1996, 2002). Moreover, there has been discussion in the literature over just want constitutes a campaign effect, with some scholars arguing that campaigns should be viewed beyond just how they impact the election results to a broader definition that considers how campaigns stimulate learning within the electorate and force political leaders to reconnect with their constituents (Fenno 1996; Kahn and Kenney 2001). To this school of thought, studies that fail to find strong campaign effects are simply looking in the wrong place. In short, there may be evidence to support the notion that campaigns are worth studying because sometimes they help determine who wins and other times they serve a larger democratic function.

Even the early election studies of the 1940s and 1950s suggested that campaigns might have some effects. For example, one type of voter who may be prone to campaign persuasion are those who face what Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) called "cross-pressures"—internal conflicts that make it difficult for them to decide between the Democratic and Republican candidates during an election. Such conflict arises, the authors argued, when a voter has contradictory personality or social characteristics that make him or her inclined to support aspects of both political parties—such as a traditionally Democratic-leaning Catholic might experience if he or she were also part of the upper class, which would normally vote Republican. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) concurred, saying this "psychological conflict" within the voter may occur when a person associates with groups that have a "political heterogeneous membership" (80)—that is, a voter has friends, family members, and coworkers who have opposing political views. How voters resolve these conflicts sheds light on how these citizens are different from those who do not face cross-pressures as well as the impact a political campaign may have on helping voters make their decisions.

In Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's study (1968), the authors suggested that many cross-pressured voters will delay their vote decision until late in the campaign. "The more evenly balanced these opposing pressures were," the authors said, "the longer the voter delayed in making up his mind" (Lazarsfeld et al, 56). In addition, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet said some voters delayed their decision in hopes that the internal conflict they felt would be resolved before they were forced to cast their ballot. "A person might hope that during the campaign he could convince other members of his family, or even more, he might give the family every chance to bring him around to their way of thinking," the authors wrote, adding—and this is key—that a cross-pressured voter "might wait for events *in the campaign* to provide him with a basis for making up his mind" (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968, 61).

The conclusions suggest that cross-pressured voters are influenced by both their immediate environment as well as campaigns. For instance, Lazarsfeld et al. said cross-pressured voters are heavily influenced by friends, coworkers, and family members, often basing their voting decision on the opinion of "the person who saw them last before Election Day" (67, 69). However, the authors pointed out that because they are easily influenced, cross-pressured voters may also be more susceptible to the campaign messages of each candidate, particularly those they hear toward the end of the election cycle. This carries great importance for political professionals, who may seek to target cross-pressured voters in the late stages of the campaign. Lazarsfeld et al. (1968) recognized this point, explaining that "such conflicting pressures make voters 'fair game' for the campaign managers of both parties, for they have a foot in each party" (61).

> From this particular point of view, the heavy campaigning of both parties at the end of the campaign is a good investment for both sides … We will recall that the people who make up their minds last are those who think the election will affect them least. It may be, then that explicit attempts by the candidates and their managers to prove to them that the election will make a difference to them would be more effective than any amount of continued argumentation of the issues as such (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968, 61).

Along these lines, Zaller (1992) showed that citizens who either have high or low political awareness are the least likely to change their views—the highly aware because they are interested in politics and have solidly formed opinions, and citizens who have little awareness because they are not receiving political messages and so cannot be persuaded either way. Those who are moderately aware about politics, Zaller said, can be influenced by elite discourse because they receive enough information to absorb political messages, but they do not pay enough attention to distinguish the partisan cues behind the message and so have more difficulty rejecting ideas that may conflict with their political values. Given this assessment, while campaigns might not reach the highly partisan or the uninvolved, they could persuade moderately aware voters enough to influence the outcome of an election—particularly one as close as the 2004 Bush-Kerry contest.

In addition, Zaller indicated that the intensity and type of a message can also impact the message's influence. High-intensity messages, such as those during a campaign, may have more influence because they are more likely to get through even to those citizens who pay little attention to politics. Moreover, Zaller says citizens who are highly aware can still be persuaded by political messages when those messages are separated from ideology—in other words, when the citizen cannot tie the message to either the Democrats or Republicans. Admittedly, campaigns are a time when messages are directly linked to political parties, meaning that highly aware citizens should be capable of distinguishing between those they will accept and those they will reject. However, research has also shown that political messages that are not connected directly to partisan cues may filter down to voters before a campaign actually begins and, therefore, have influence once candidates begin making their appeals. Lang and Lang (1966) showed that some messages take root *between* elections and can persuade voters before they can identify them with certain parties or candidates. In their assessment, Lang and Lang suggest that the news media—through its use of certain news frames—often determine which issues will dominate a campaign long before a campaign begins, thus creating a cumulative effect on the public that comes into play once two candidates face off against each other.

Campbell (2000) expanded on this line of thought, developing what he called "the theory of the predictable campaign" (28) in which he established that "the reason …

elections are predictable is not that campaigns have no effect, but that campaign effects themselves are largely predictable" (187). In other words, Campbell said, campaigns must operate within a certain context based on such factors as the partisanship of the electorate, the state of the economy, and the popularity of the incumbent. This context then shapes the actions taken by politicians during the campaign as well as how receptive voters are to the campaign messages they receive in a given year. Under this reasoning,

> the real question about presidential campaigns is not so much whether they matter, but how much they matter … Perhaps the best characterization of campaign effects is that they are neither large nor minimal in an absolute sense, but sometimes large enough to be politically important (Campbell, 2000, 187, 188).

While many scholars who challenge the minimal effects paradigm head-on acknowledge that most campaigns have swayed too few voters to make much difference in the majority of American elections, they nevertheless contend that there are numerous cases in which a campaign either increased the vote total of one of the candidates or, in some instances, actually determined the winner of a presidential contest.

Campbell (2000), for example, found that campaign effects account for an average net change in the national vote of 6 to 9 percent, a differential that was able to turn the tide in at least two elections during the 20th century—1948 and 1960. Later, Campbell (2001) added three other elections to this list, saying that campaign effects may have contributed to the outcomes of the 1976, 1980, and 2000 presidential contests. His analysis found support in Holbrook (2002), who illustrated that Harry S. Truman's aggressive Whistle-Stop campaign in 1948 was directly responsible for the Democrat's victories in California, Illinois, and Ohio—three states that allowed him to capture the White House. Without this strategy, Holbook maintains, the *Chicago Tribune*'s famous

Election Day headline declaring Republican Thomas Dewey the winner would have been correct and the newspaper would have been spared decades of embarrassment.

Other studies report similar campaign effects, even in cases in which the election outcome was never in doubt. Shaw's (1999a) analysis of the three presidential campaigns between 1988 and 1996 showed that a candidate could increase his level of support by as much as 2.1 percent if he devoted three additional days to a particular state; Herr (2002) found that Bill Clinton was able to use public appearances in 1996 to capture votes that would otherwise have gone to Republican Bob Dole or independent Ross Perot; Abramson, Aldrich and Rohde (1991) indicated that Bush's decision in 1988 to consistently attack Michael Dukakis was effective at swaying undecided voters because the Democrat did not respond; Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) reported that exposure to political advertisements can influence less partisan voters and boost a candidate's share of the vote by nearly 5 percentage points; and Petrocik (1996) developed the concept of "issue ownership" to show that presidential candidates between 1960 and 1992 were able to win elections when the issues they defined as their own dominated the campaign discourse.

In addition to studies that examined overall changes in the vote, some research indicates that certain campaign events have more powerful effects than others. Shaw (1999b) found that campaign speeches have minimal impact on the electorate, but presidential debates and national conventions have larger and longer lasting effects on voters, a contention that was held up by Campbell, Cherry and Wink (1992) and Geer (1988). Holbrook (1996) uncovered similar effects in his studies of presidential politics from 1952 to 1992. It is true, Holbrook said, that economic conditions and the general political mood of the country are major factors that tend to push the electorate toward a predetermined election outcome, but he added that public opinion does change—sometimes significantly—in response to major campaign events such as national conventions and televised debates.

Studies of congressional contests have also revealed evidence of campaign effects. Jacobson (1990) showed that challengers in House elections can increase their vote share by as much as 12 percent if they have enough money to compete; Fenno (1996) reinforced this notion with a qualitative examination of U.S. Senate races from the 1970s to the 1990s that found numerous cases in which poorly run campaigns cost incumbents their seats; Herrnson (1989) revealed that the outcome of close congressional races can be determined by money and campaign services (polling data, media kits, legal advice, and strategic support) that are infused into the campaign by the national parties; and Jacobson and Kernell (1981) maintained that while national conditions shape the context of elections for the U.S. House and Senate, a well-run campaign can mean the difference between winning and losing a congressional seat.

In summary, the current research suggests that campaigns are indeed worth studying because (1) some voters, such as those who face cross-pressures or are naturally less partisan, can be influenced by the information they receive during a campaign; (2) certain campaign events, such as political debates and national conventions, can have long-term impact on voter perceptions; and (3) there are at least a handful of presidential election outcomes that appear to have been decided by the campaign strategies employed by the candidates, most notably those of 1948 and 1960 and possibly those in 1976, 1980, and 2000. Given this research, then, it would seem that campaigns may indeed matter—at least some of the time.

Aside from the studies mentioned thus far that try to measure how certain campaign events change public opinion, some scholars insist that campaigns matter not because of how they alter individual vote choice or election results, but rather for the vital role they play in American society. To them, campaigns are not so much contests between individuals as they are key moments in the nation's political life cycle—a time when elected leaders are required to reconnect with their constituents (Alvarez 1997; Fenno 1996; Kahn and Kenney 2001; Shaw 1999a), citizens learn about the issues and choices before them (Bartels 1988; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Drew and Weaver 2006; Dutwin 2000; Franklin 1991; Holbrook 1999; Jamieson, Hagen, Orr, Sillaman, Morse, and Kirn 2000; Kahn and Kenney 2001; Lodge, Steenbergen and Brau 1995; Popkin 1991; Weaver 1996), and democratic institutions and values are legitimized (Gronbeck 1978; Katz 1997; Pomper 1967). Campaigns have come to be seen as so vital, in fact, that to most Americans "it is difficult to imagine a truly democratic process without [them]" (Shaw 1999a, 345).

Fenno (1996), for example, concluded that campaigns were important because they are "an integral part of the continuous negotiating process by which elected officials forge and test, reforge and retest, their connections with their constituents" (154). It is through this ritual, he said, that candidates are forced to leave the insolated confines of elective office and reacquaint themselves with the community and people they represent. This process is so important to the continued health of representative democracy, he added, that the study of campaigns should move "beyond the dominating focus on voters and beyond the dominant notion that campaigns are worth studying only to explain electoral outcomes toward the study of representation" (Fenno 1996, 336).

Other studies have documented that voters use campaigns to gain knowledge about the political system and learn about the issue positions of candidates (Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Holbrook 1999). Jamieson et al. (2000) illustrated that citizen learning is particularly strong during campaigns that are hotly contested. In their analysis of the 2000 presidential primary season, for instances, Jamieson et al. found that citizens in battleground states not only learned more about issues from the campaign than did those in less competitive states, they used the information they acquired to shape their voting decisions. Similar results were reported by Dutwin (2000), who found that Republican presidential candidate John McCain was more easily recognized in states where he campaigned heavily than he was in states were he appeared less often (90 percent to 70 percent).

Finally, campaigns are seen as important by some because they strengthen democratic institutions. Neubauer (1967) pointed out that "by definition, political democracy in nation-states requires some minimal level of citizen participation in decision making," a process that has traditionally been played by elections and campaigns (1002). It is through that process of electioneering, some have said, that society legitimizes its institutions and reaffirms its commitment to core democratic principles. As one scholar wrote, campaigning

> ultimately legitimates itself as much as it does its instrumental output. As people engage in campaign activities, they symbolically reinforce the values for which the activities stand. Each time one waits in a long line to vote, one is committed even more deeply to the value of voting—"participatory democracy." Each time one hands out campaign literature on a street corner, the literature itself acquires more significance because we value "political information" as a systemic "right." Each time a debate is held, America's commitment to "open inquiry" and "freedom of examination" deepens. Each time a baby is kissed, another citizen discovers that "the people count." And each time another

> candidate says "I was a poor boy myself," the American Dream is born anew. Thus each time the country spends its tens of millions on an election, it commits itself to as much if not more the next time; that is not only a matter of inflation but of moral dedication as well. Hence, presidential campaigning is an almost insidiously self-reinforcing or self-justifying activity (Gronbeck 1978, 272-273).

The point here is that campaigns serve a higher purpose. They matter not solely because of what they have to say on Election Day, but because they bring citizens closer to their elected leaders, educate voters about important issues, and bring legitimacy to government. It is perhaps these last points that have the greatest implications for a dissertation that examines how third-party candidates are covered in the news media. For if the definition of campaign effects no longer rests entirely on electoral outcomes, then how political reporters cover minor-party contenders moves beyond a simple discussion of fairness to a broader debate about the long-term health of our democracy.

Literature on third parties

Throughout the years, scholars have shown a fascination with third parties, producing a rich body of literature that examines everything from the role minor parties have played in American history to explanations as to why certain people may be predisposed to voting for "alternative" candidates. As early as 1933, Hicks proclaimed that third parties had successfully influenced the two major parties throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, bringing about such changes as "the abolition of slavery, the restoration of 'home rule' in the South, the regulation of the railroads by state and nation, the revision of the banking and currency systems … [and] the conservation of natural resources" (27). While third-party candidates had not won many elections, he wrote, "what is of infinitely greater consequence is the final success of so many of the principles for which they have fought" (Hicks 1933, 26).

Since then, other scholars have attempted to document these successes, examining such issues as the formation of the National Progressives of America to fight for the regulation of big business (McCoy 1957), the creation of the Republican Party in the North in the 1850s to fight the expansion of slavery (Gienapp 1985; Mazmanian 1974), the influence of the Conservative Unionists during the 1864 presidential election (Harris 1992), and the rise and fall of the Progress Party in the 1890s (Argersinger 2002; Key 1952). Still other studies have taken a closer look at the American Labor movement of the 1930s (Lovin 1976), how environmental and cultural factors helped the Socialist Party gain support in the West during the early 20th century (Berman 1990), and how the National Women's Party was able to successfully push for a constitutional amendment on women's suffrage after the state-by-state battles advocated by the more moderate National American Woman Suffrage Association yielded small gains (Cott 1984; Graham 1983-1984; Lunardini and Knock 1980-1981).

A common thread that runs through each of these studies is the notion that American democracy has thrived because minor parties have challenged the two-party system. In raising issues that the two major parties had chosen to ignore, some have implied, small political movements have forced an array of subjects onto the national agenda and helped move America closer to one of its stated ideals—the concept that all people have a voice in the marketplace of ideas. As one group of scholars put it:

> Third parties are … in fact necessary voices for the preservation of democracy. They represent the needs and demands of Americans whom the major parties have ignored… In short, third parties should not be viewed as organizations that stand outside the mainstream of the American political system. They are very much a central part of it. Minor parties provide voters with an important opportunity to express their discontent. This makes third party support one of the clearest barometers we have of the electorate's evaluation of the Democrats and Republicans (Rosenstone, Behr and Lazarus 1996, 222-223).

Given the significance of third parties throughout American history—a subject that was thoroughly covered in Chapter 1—this section of the literature review will turn its attention to three major questions of importance for this dissertation. First, why does the United States have a two-party system and is this a natural part of American politics? Second, who votes for third-party candidates and under what circumstances? Third, why do minor-party candidates usually lose elections? A fourth question—how has the press treated so-called alternative candidates when they seek national and state office?—will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. The answers to all these questions, however, will establish the context through which third-party candidates are currently viewed in the American political environment.

Debating the American party system.

Perhaps the biggest advocate of a multiparty system in America is Cornell University government professor Theodore Lowi, who has long said that the time is right for a third party in the United States to emerge. In 1983, Lowi wrote an article for the journal *PS* in which he called on the American Political Science Association to begin a dialogue that would directly confront the conventional wisdom that two major parties were a natural part of American political culture. Arguing that the post New Deal era had "produced conditions inhospitable to a national two-party system" (700), Lowi (1983) said that the Democrats and Republicans alone "simply cannot grapple with the complex alternatives facing big, programmatic governments in a manner that is meaningful to large electorates" (705).

In his paper, however, Lowi acknowledged that America would never move toward a multiparty system unless it first dismantled nine myths that, he said, help keep the two-party system in place: (1) American democracy has always been based on a two-party system; (2) the two-party system brings significant public benefits, such as automatic majorities and stable government; (3) the two-party system is natural to the political framework established by both the Constitution and state statutes (namely the Electoral College and the single-member district system for Congress); (4) voting for third-party candidates is tantamount to wasting your vote; (5) a vote for a third-party candidate helps elect the worst of the two major-party contenders; (6) multiple party representation in Congress would bring chaos to the system; (7) a third-party presidential candidate who won enough electoral votes to push the election into the U.S. House would result in a constitutional crisis; (8) third parties that do well at the polls would give a small minority veto power over the majority; and (9) a third-party president would be unable to govern because Congress would be controlled by one of the two major parties.

Lowi said that many of the political scenarios listed above either already exist, were nonsense on their face, or would not present the problem that critics of a multiparty system predict. “In the first place,” he wrote, “if a two-party system is so natural, why are there so many rules and laws defending it?” (702). He questioned why voters should have to choose between two major-party candidates “if they have concluded that *both* major candidates are worst” (703); he said it was doubtful that two parties automatically form majorities given that historically there has been little party cohesion in Congress; and he disputed the notion that third parties would create havoc in the system, arguing that “the defenders of the status quo will always invoke the specter of constitutional crisis when in fact constitutional crisis is contemplated by the Constitution itself” (704). He added:

> Party systems, like governments, are to a large extent built on myths. And as with government myths, party system myths are a powerful defense against criticism and change… During the past 20 years or more, the reality of the American party system has deviated so far from the ideal image that the myths supporting it should have been exposed for what they are. But myths die hard, as long as high priests in academe and journalism rise to their defense (Lowi 1983, 700-701).

In another article written more than a decade later, Lowi (1999) called the current two-party system "brain-dead," adding that the political domination of the Democrats and Republicans "would collapse in an instant" without the array of state election laws that protect them against serious outside competition (171). He said that when political parties are new, they are innovative and democratic. But as they become entrenched in the establishment, those same organizations become less dynamic, more interested in preserving their own power, and act to thwart serious debate on important public policy problems. The final result, Lowi (1999) said, are two major parties that must "be all things to all people" (178)—a position that helps them garner the 51 percent support needed at the polls to command control over the government, but one that forces them to compromise on too many of their principles to be effective once they attain power. "What a liberating effect this would have on party leaders and candidates, to go after constituencies composed of 34 percent rather than 51 percent," he wrote. "In a three-party system, even the two major parties would have stronger incentives to be more clearly programmatic, since their goal would be realistic and their constituency base would be simpler" (Lowi 1999, 178).

Lowi's position is seconded by Lawson (1997), who maintains that America already has a multiparty system but that it is severely constrained by the Democrats and Republicans. Contending that a multiparty system "is more natural" than the "bi-hegemonic" one present in the United States (59), Lawson said changes in American electoral laws that would allow third parties to flourish would increase free expression, provide better protections for minority rights, enhance majority rule, and significantly increase voter participation. She said several measures can be taken to avoid the government paralysis of other multiparty systems, such as instituting run-off elections and maintaining a certain number of single-member congressional districts; and she called for five changes in election law to end the domination of the two major parties, including the abolition of laws that discourage the formation of new parties, public financing for all campaigns, an end to private donations and the use of personal bank accounts to operate campaigns, free media to all candidates, and a move toward proportional representation in Congress rather than the current use of single-member districts.

Other ideas. Other ideas have also been put forth. Fresia (1986) has called for proportional representation in Congress as well as changes in the Constitution that would replace the Electoral College system of electing presidents with a direct vote by the people—with runoffs, if necessary. That view found support in Richie and Hill (1996), who said a system of proportional representation would open the door to new political parties, thus increasing political participation by giving voters more choices. Said the authors:

> The implications of proportional representation will be clear to those who believe more credible third parties would strengthen our democracy. Today, third-party candidates are usually ignored because winning 10 percent of the vote makes them at best “spoilers.” Third parties are trapped in a vicious cycle of marginalization: many potential supporters will not want to waste their votes on sure losers because it would take votes away from their “lesser of two evils.” [Proportional representation] would dramatically change this calculation. It would free people to vote their hearts, not their fears, thereby breaking the two-party stranglehold on representation and promoting the new voices and real choices we urgently need (Richie and Hill 1996, 24-25).

Other scholars have suggested a system known as "approval voting," in which voters can cast ballots for as many candidates as they want in a given race (Brams and Fishburn 1978; Brams and Merrill 1994). Such a system, advocates contend, is "more sincere and more strategyproof" than the single-ballot system used in the United States and would allow voters to choose two or three candidates in a multi-candidate race for Congress, giving voters a greater number of choices and increasing the chances that voters will "report their true preferences" on Election Day rather than defaulting to the Democratic or Republican nominee (Brams and Fishburn 1978, 832).

Brams and Fishburn (1978) say that an approval voting system would likely change the outcome of many elections, such as New York state's three-way U.S. Senate campaign in 1970. In that race, the authors point out, the conservative James R. Buckley was elected with only 39 percent of the vote, beating the two liberal candidates, Charles E. Goodell and Richard L. Ottinger, who split the majority vote. The authors said that with an approval voting system, many people who voted for either Goodell or Ottinger would have voted for both, increasing the chances that one of the two left-wing candidates would have won. "If approval voting had been used," the authors write, "the outcome probably would have been different since a number of the 61 percent who supported either Goodell or Ottinger would have voted for both Goodell and Ottinger in an attempt to ensure that Buckley would not win" (Brams and Fishburn 1978, 832).

Brams and Merrill (1994) continued this analysis of approval voting in another study that examined the 1992 presidential election to determine whether Perot would have won if voters were free to cast ballots for multiple candidates. The study concluded that Perot would have "at least doubled his vote total," but it would not have changed the outcome of the election. Instead, the paper said that an approval voting system would likely have given Clinton the victory with more than 50 percent of the popular vote. (Clinton won the election with 43 percent of the vote.)

Defending the two-party system. But not everyone agrees with the notion that structural changes should be implemented to foster multiple parties. Some scholars maintain that a public discourse that is limited to the major parties or a small number of candidates actually brings political stability, legitimacy, and accountability to the American electoral system (Bibby 1997). Government is better able to serve the public, Broder (1971) has said, if its under the control of two healthy major parties rather than if it is divided between multiple smaller ones. He said that if the Democratic and Republican parties were to weaken or collapse, it would make government less effective, lead to public frustration, and raise the specter that voters could eventually support a demagogue who threatens democratic institutions.

From a practical standpoint, Romance (1998) warned that America might head down a dangerous path if it chose to open the Pandora's box of Constitutional amendments and other legal changes that would be required to increase multiparty participation in politics. "Before we start changing laws and spending time and money reforming the system," he said, "we should be reasonably sure of what we are doing. Let me be clear, a multiparty system would mean significant changes in our political practices and, possibly, would necessitate major reforms to the foundation of our political order" (Romance 1998, 33).

To these scholars, there are many advantages to the current system that encourages only two major parties. First, the two-party system makes it easier for voters to hold leaders accountable because it is clear which party controls government and is responsible for the results of policy; second, two-party systems avoid gridlock in a diverse nation like the United States because it forces people from a wide-range of political perspectives to work together in governing coalitions; third, the two-party system naturally developed through the separation of powers concept enshrined in the Constitution; and fourth, a two-party system avoids extremism by encouraging moderate parties that can only win if they appeal to a wide group of voters (see Bibby 1997; Bibby and Maisel 2003; Romance 1998).

Beyond this, the two-party system is directly tied into the very fabric of American culture. Although it is true that the Founding Fathers would have preferred a politics free from partisan factions, there is no denying that "the constitutional structure they put in place practically guaranteed the development not only of parties but of a particular kind of party system: two-party democracy" (Reichley 1992, 28). In addition, the United States is different from other western countries that have developed multiple parties, Reichley (1992) says, because American politics has been historically centered around two ideological traditions: a republican tradition with links to Alexander Hamilton and a liberal tradition that comes from Thomas Jefferson. While both ideologies "cherish individual freedom," Reichley says, republicanism emphasizes the rights of investors and others to promote economic growth while liberals focus on individual liberty and the "almost unlimited right to socially unrestrained expression and behavior not physically harmful to others" (3, 4). This political culture, Reichley maintains, makes it highly unlikely that America will ever move beyond two major parties, adding that "a two-party system representing these two traditions is in this sense natural to our politics" (4).

Third parties—past and future. Yet despite these powerful forces that work against third parties, these small movements have not only been part of the country's political system for more than 200 years, some predict they will continue to grow. Smallwood (1983) pointed out that "the overall performance of third parties has been stronger than might be expected in light of the cultural and institutional influences that have helped to reinforce the two-party monopoly" (13); White and Shea (2000) maintain that while "the chips are clearly stacked against third parties … it seems entirely likely that minor parties will find the political environment in the next millennium more hospitable than during the past one hundred years" (296, 299); and—in a kind of manifesto of Green Party philosophy—Rensenbrink (1992) wrote: "… Greens will be more and more successful, even in the conventional sense. Over the long haul, they and their message for the world will prevail" (234).

Why the confidence?

And if it is true that American politics has naturally gravitated to just two major parties, why is it that third parties have been so consistently part of the political landscape?

Theories of third-party voting.

There have been several attempts over the years to answer these questions by forming general theories to explain when third parties form and why voters cast ballots for them. Although many of these theories grow out of the analysis of individual third-party movements, a number of patterns have emerged in the literature.

One of the most popular explanations for third-party voting is that certain citizens are predisposed to support minor candidates. These citizens make up what has been dubbed an “alternative culture” (see Gold 2005, 524) in which age, education, occupation, distrust of government, and political cynicism all act as predictors of the third-party vote (Converse, Miller, Rusk, and Wolfe 1969; Elliott, Gryski and Reed 1990; Hetherington 1999; Ladd 1981; Lipset and Raab 1970; McEvoy 1971; Phillips 1982; Reiter 1977; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996; Southwell and Everest 1998). Peterson and Wrighton (1998), for example, found that low-partisan independents who shared a strong distrust in government were more likely than other citizens to vote for third-party presidential candidates, while Elliott, Gryski and Reed (1990) concluded that “more educated voters … may be more prone to support third party efforts” (130). Other studies showed that Perot received a higher percentage of the vote from citizens who expressed cynicism about politics (Southwell and Everest 1998) as well as those who were under the age of 30 (Southwell 2002); and Converse et al (1969) indicated that younger voters, particularly those from rural areas in the South, were predisposed to vote for George Wallace’s independent candidacy in 1968.

Gold (2005) challenged this notion of an “alternative culture,” arguing that his study of three successful gubernatorial third-party candidates found no evidence of a predisposition predicated on age, education, and socioeconomic status. Instead, Gold said that citizens who supported such alternative candidates as Walter Hickel in Alaska, Lowell P. Weicker Jr. in Connecticut, and Angus King of Maine made up what he called a “culture of independence” (538) that included voters who were not registered in a political party and who had voted for a minor-party candidate in the past—in Gold’s words, those who had “demonstrated a past relationship with a third party” (538). These results supported his previous findings in a study of minor-party success in Maine in 1994 and 1998 and Minnesota in 1998 (Gold 2002).

Local explanations. Reiter and Walsh (1995) agreed that there was little evidence of an “alternative culture,” but said their analysis of three statewide elections indicated that support for third parties at the local level was based more on local factors than any broad characteristics that could be applied to the national electorate as a whole. For example, the authors contend that James Longley was able to win the 1974 gubernatorial election in Maine as an independent because of his reputation for integrity and his hometown appeal, while the 1990 victories of independents Weicker in Connecticut (governor) and Bernard Sanders in Vermont (U.S. Congress) were based on their strong name recognition and attractive ideologies that stressed fiscal conservatism and social liberalism. In Weicker’s case, many Democrats were willing to abandon their own candidate and vote for the A Connecticut Party contender not because they were tired of the two-party system but because they saw it as the best way to ensure that conservative Republican John Rowland did not capture the statehouse (Murphy 1992). Likewise, Endersby and Thomason (1994) demonstrated that Sanders capitalized on local conditions to win his first term to Congress, putting together a coalition of liberal Democrats who had no one else to support because their party had nominated a weak candidate and conservative Republicans who were angry with their party’s moderate incumbent, Peter Smith.

Distrust in government? Others have disputed the contention that voter cynicism is a driving force behind third-party voting. Although he did not take on the notion of an “alternative culture” directly, Koch (1998) nevertheless demonstrated that it is the support of third-party candidates that leads to an increased distrust in government rather than the other way around. Arguing against the edict that "models of third party support assume causality flows from political cynicism to candidate support" (142), Koch's analysis of data gathered by the American National Election Study showed that those who voted for either President George Bush or Democratic candidate Bill Clinton in 1992 actually expressed more cynicism toward government when surveyed in 1990 than did those who eventually voted for Perot. However, Koch's study found evidence that Perot supporters became more cynical toward government as the campaign went on.

> Did Perot himself, with his incessant rhetoric on the problems of the contemporary political order modify and politicize his supporters' political cynicism, creating distinctions between Perot voters and others that did not exist prior to his candidacy …The picture that emerges is of a group of citizens who were generally similar to other voters in 1990 and 1991 in terms of their discontent with the contemporary political process and its leaders, but who became exceptionally more cynical during the 1992 election as a result of the Perot candidacy (Koch 1998, 144, 146).

Geographic explanations. Geographical explanations have also surfaced to explain minor-party success, with some states showing stronger patterns of third-party support than other states. During the 2000 presidential campaign, for example, Ralph Nader did particularly well in Alaska, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Colorado, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont—all states that also gave significant support to Ross Perot in the 1990s and John Anderson in 1980 (Allen and Brox 2005). Taking a slightly different tact, Elliott, Gryski and Reed's (1990) analysis of state legislative races between 1976 and 1984 found stronger support for third parties in the West than in the South.

Part of the reason for these geographical differences, the scholarship has shown, is that some states have implemented election laws that make it easier for smaller parties to compete with and occasionally defeat the Democrats and Republicans (Gillespie 1993;

Lentz 2002; Winger 1997). In New York, for example, the so-called "fusion" laws permit minor parties to cross-endorse major-party candidates, a practice that allows them to demonstrate their electoral power and have a say in public policy (Scarrow 1986; Michelson and Susin 2004). Other states, such as Maine, have generous public financing statutes that provide statewide candidates of any party with substantial funds as long as they demonstrate a measure of public support and agree not to raise money from private sources (Chapter 14: The Maine Clean Election Act). In addition, Ventura was assisted by Minnesota's liberal regulations that made it easier for him to get on the ballot, register new voters as late as Election Day, gain access to public financing, and participate in the gubernatorial debates—all factors that led the news media to take his candidacy seriously (Frank and Wagner 1999; Lacy and Monson 2002; Lentz 2002).[3]

Three reasons for third-party voting. The most comprehensive attempt to form a theory of third-party voting, though, was put forth by Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996), who said there are three reasons why people will vote for a minor-party candidate: when citizens believe that the major parties have deteriorated to the point where they no longer function effectively; when an attractive third-party candidate is on the ballot; or when voters begin to feel loyalty to a minor party. The authors contend that "the third party route is a path of last resort" for most voters, but they add that citizens will eventually cast their ballot for a minor-party candidate when it becomes clear that "further action within the major parties would prove fruitless," particularly when the major parties have either mismanaged the economy or nominated unqualified candidates who are unacceptable to the electorate (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 126).

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[3] In Minnesota, the Reform Party was considered a major party in 1998 because its candidates had won more than 5 percent of the vote in the previous statewide election. Ross Perot had won 24 percent in the 1992 presidential election and Dean Barkley had won 5 and 7 percent of the vote in the 1994 and 1996 U.S. Senate contests.

These arguments have found some support in the literature. Examining the presidential campaigns between 1976 and 1988, for instance, Chressanthis and Shaffer (1993) concluded that voters gravitate to third-party candidates when they perceive that the major parties have failed to address major national problems. Similar results were reported by Collet (1996) in his analysis of National Election Survey data over the second half of the 20th century as well as McCann, Rapoport and Stone (1999) in their examination of Perot's initial support in the early days of the 1992 campaign. Lentz (2002) suggests that the same may be true at the state level, pointing out that Ventura was able to win the Minnesota governorship in 1998 partially because the Democratic Party was fractured and partly because voters were angry with the two-party system.

Gold (1995) agrees with this assessment, but adds that third parties also do well when the major-party candidates are unattractive, when the third-party candidate is prestigious, during periods of low partisanship, and when one of the major candidates has such a large lead over the other major-party candidate that voters feel they can cast a ballot for a minor party without fear of "wasting" their vote (Gold 1995, 752-753). Still others have indicated that some citizens make a rational choice to vote for third parties, using their ballot to transmit an individual preference that "in the aggregate" they hope will be "interpreted as a signal to alter the direction of current policies as run by the major parties" (Chressanthis 1990, 193).

The Rosenstone et al. (1996) contention that some third-party voting is based on a loyal following of party constituents has also been supported by scholarship. Doctrinal parties such as the Libertarians, Socialists, and Communists have attracted highly committed followers who identify with and actively work to build these organizations (Gillespie 1993). Allen and Brox (2005) demonstrated that most of Nader's voters during the 2000 presidential election would have supported other third-party candidates or would not have voted at all had Nader not been in the race; and Donovan, Bowler, and Terrio (2000) showed that support for third-party candidates in California is based somewhat on a group of party loyalists who vote for minor candidates regardless of who the two major parties nominate. Through an analysis of minor-party voting in the Golden State, the authors conclude:

> [W]e find a core of loyal (registered) supporters of these small parties. The fairly substantive independent effect of minor party registration across high-visibility and low-visibility state offices suggests that many minor party loyalists select small-party candidates regardless of the stakes of the office or their evaluations of major party candidates. Rather than being attracted to prestigious candidates, some voters are probably attracted to these small parties because of the positions they take on public issues or because of some sort of socialization process that led them to become loyal to the party. At present only a small proportion of the electorate fall into this category (Donovan, Bowler, and Terrio 2000, 67).

Why third parties form. A related questions is why do third parties form in the first place. Looking at the protest movements that consistently developed during the 19th century, Hicks (1933) wrote that "third parties have come about as natural by-products of our diverse sectional interests" (27) while Mazmanian (1974) said simply that third parties are a product of times of crisis. Key (1952) maintains that many dissident movements begin as pressure groups and only form into alternative political parties when the major parties fail to give those groups "a real hearing" (300), a contention that finds support in several recent studies of individual third-party movements (Cott 1984; Graham 1983-1984; Lunardini and Knock 1980-1981; White and Shea 2000). Sifry (2003) takes a slightly different position, saying that third-party movements blossom when the two-party system becomes corrupt, leaving the public with the impression that the major parties act with impunity in a system that does not hold them accountable.

Nevertheless, Sifry has tried to move the debate beyond an analysis of why and when third parties find support to a discussion of how minor parties may thrive in the future. According to his analysis, a third party will become a serious long-term challenge to the Democrats and Republicans only when it lets go of presidential aspirations and starts building a grassroots organization that can consistently field candidates for lower offices such as governor, state legislature, and city council. It is through such party building, Sifry says, that a minor party might eventually grow into a national movement with broad support, a contention that has found support among other scholars (see Lowi 1999). Holding up the Greens, Libertarians, New Party, and Labor Party as four small organizations with the potential to grow national followings, Sifry says that voters will only begin to take these third parties seriously when they can demonstrate progress toward electoral success and when they can jump three major hurdles: money, organization, and public awareness. Until then, Sifry says, third parties may find it difficult if not impossible to attract the national following that will eventually be needed to challenge the Democrats and Republicans.

This last point leads to our third question: Why do third parties consistently lose?

Why third-party candidates lose.

One of the biggest explanations for why third-party candidates usually fail at the ballot box rests with the partisanship of the American electorate. According to this analysis, most voters are simply too loyal to one of the major parties as well as the political system as a whole to abandon the Democrats and Republicans for the politically unknown (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996; Zaller and Hunt 1995). This loyalty to the major parties makes the cost of voting for third-party candidates too high for most citizens (Downs 1957), while the partisanship of most voters creates an electorate that tends to interpret campaign issues from the perspective of the party with which they identify (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). The "habitual loyalties" of most voters, Zaller and Hunt (1995, 120) said, means that "candidates cannot … run outside of the system; they must somehow run through it."

Structural barriers. But even running through the system is difficult because of the many structural barriers in place that make it difficult for minor parties to compete on a level playing field (Lowi 1999; Rosenstone et al. 1996). Dwyre and Kolodny (1997) have pointed out that election laws in many states make it difficult for minor-party contenders to get on the ballot or raise money to finance their campaigns. For example, third-party candidates at the federal level cannot receive public funding unless they first receive 5 percent of the vote, meaning that this money is not available to them when it is most needed—before the election (Dwyre and Kolodny 1997).

This observation is buttressed by examinations of Perot's 1992 campaign, where the exception may prove the rule. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996), for instance, have said that "what distinguishes Perot from his predecessors, foremost, and what explains much of his phenomenal showing in 1992, is money, and plenty of it" (232). The millions Perot had to spend was unusual for a third-party candidate, the authors said, adding that his money allowed Perot to break two other barriers that often restrain third-party challengers: he received extensive media coverage and he appeared "shoulder-to-shoulder with both major party candidates in televised presidential debates" (Rosenstone et al. 1996, 232.)

Gold (1995) agreed:

> The evidence presented here suggests that systematic explanations for third party success are of limited use in explaining Perot's breakthrough, especially when compared to previous third party experiences. By process of elimination, one must conclude that the candidate's ability to spend money—at a level that rivaled the expenditures of the major parties—was indeed the single most important factor in explaining the Perot phenomenon (770).

In addition to the lack of money, some scholars have pointed out that third-party presidential candidates will continue to face an uphill battle as long as the United States continues to use the Electoral College system and its winner-take-all method of allocating most electoral votes (Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino and Rohde 1995). At the congressional level, Abramson et al. (1995) said, minor parties will have difficulty winning because American elections are decided on a single ballot without runoffs. While minor-party candidates might do well in a voting district—and even finish second in some—they cannot get a plurality in any one district to win a seat in the legislative body, the authors contend. Although they said that "the psychological effects of the plurality-vote system are … difficult to document," they point out that "the argument that voters should avoid wasting their votes on a candidate who has little chance of winning is well known to politicians and has been used frequently by them" (Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino and Rohde 1995, 354).

The effect of this psychological barrier between third-party candidates and voters has been seen as so powerful that it has been given the status of a physical law—to be specific, "Duverger's law," after the political scientist who first articulated the notion that election regulations can dictate the type of party system that exists. Under this reasoning, voters operating in a winner-take-all election system like that in the United States will be reluctant to cast their ballot for a third-party candidate because they do not want to waste their vote or contribute to the election of their least favorite candidate. As Duverger himself (1972) put it: "The simple-majority single-ballot system favors the two-party system" while "the simple-majority system with second ballot and proportional representation favor multi-partyism" (217, 239). Although Duverger's law has been ridiculed by some (Lowi 1999), others contend that it has stood the test of time and found support in countless studies over the years (Riker 1982).

Exclusion from debates. Another reason that third parties fail to resonate, some scholars say, is that their candidates are often excluded from debates, particularly at the presidential level. This is an important factor given that debates have been shown to provide important information to voters, who then use what they learn to make voting decisions (Campbell, Cherry and Wink 1992; Frank and Wagner 1999; Geer 1988; Holbrook 1996; Lentz 2002; Shaw 1999b). For example, Frank and Wagner (1999) contend that Ventura's participation in the six debates held during the 1998 Minnesota race was the "single, identifiable turning point in the campaign," allowing the former wrestler to move ahead of Democrat Hubert Humphrey III and Republican Norm Coleman by the second week in October (19). That analysis was buttressed by Lentz (2002), who said "it is difficult to convey how much better Ventura seemed to perform than Humphrey and Coleman. Many observers noted that he seemed full of common sense, much better able to fix problems that could be fixed and leave alone those that could not" (40). Both studies point out that it was not until Ventura was able to use the debates to gain traction that he then began getting the press coverage needed to be considered a legitimate contender.

The consistent exclusion of third-party candidates from debates has led several scholars to call for reform. After the disputed 2000 presidential election, Levine (2001) said that the country needs to examine how the Commission on Presidential Debates decides who is permitted to participate in these nationally televised forums. For example, Levine pointed out that Ross Perot met the commission's three-part criteria for inclusion in 1996 but was not initially invited to participate in the debates between then-President Bill Clinton and Republican challenger Robert Dole.

Levine also questioned whether the public is served by the commission's criteria, which says that to be invited to a presidential debate a candidate must show evidence of a national organization, signs of newsworthiness and competitiveness, and indications of popular support. He pointed out that Green Party presidential nominee Ralph Nader could only meet two of the three criteria in 2000 and so was not invited, while Reform Party presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan's unsuccessful bid the same year did not meet any of the criteria. Under this system, Levine (2001) said, a third-party candidates' First Amendment rights to free expression are abridged, adding: "Although there is a difference between the Sedition Act of 1798 and the CPD [Commission on Presidential Debates], the outcome remains the same—that some aspects of the freedom of speech guarantee of the candidate has been abridged" (2225).

Kraus (2000) concurs, saying the criteria used to determine who is included in presidential debates should be changed to make it easier for third-party candidates to participate. He says that the question should be less centered on a candidate's ability to win an election and more focused on the ideas that candidate can bring to the table.

> Ideally, the eligibility of a third or minor party presidential candidate to debate ought to depend on achieving the following: 1) legally qualified as a presidential candidate on the ballot of all 50 states, and 2) legally eligible for federal matching funds. Popularity in the polls, or having a likely chance of winning, ought not to be part of the criteria in deciding who should debate. Views expressed by minor party candidates may be helpful in the selection process, may influence the agenda of the discussion, and may bring compelling ideas to the debate rostrum (even though the candidate has little chance of being elected) (Krause 2000, 262).

Third-party deficiencies. But not all the blame for minor-party problems at the ballot box can be laid on structural barriers. Minor parties often fail to win elective office because they nominate candidates who are either unknown or blatantly unqualified for the positions they seek (Rosenstone et al. 1996). In other cases, third parties pursue political strategies that lead to their own demise. Berggren (2005), for example, said that Ralph Nader's 1996 and 2000 presidential campaigns may have given the Green Party a short-term boost, but the party's continued reliance on a candidate-centered strategy could lead to long-term problems once Nader decides either to stop running or to abandon the party for another tactic.

Such fates have befallen other minor parties that found they could not survive their famous patrons. The Reform Party all but died with the departure of Ross Perot (Green and Binning 2002; Sifry 2003. See also McCann, Rapoport and Stone 1999) while the Bull Moose, Progressive, American Independent, A Connecticut, and Minnesota Independent parties all dissolved once they lost the big names at the top of their tickets, namely Theodore Roosevelt, Bob LaFollette, George Wallace, Lowell Weicker, and Jesse Ventura, respectively (Berggren 2005; Rosenstone et al. 1996). In Connecticut, for instance, Weicker failed to build a truly three-party system in the state after his 1990 gubernatorial victory because his A Connecticut Party was unsuccessful at registering new voters or recruiting their own candidates for local and statewide offices (Rose 1994). As Berggren (2002) put it:

> Candidates can only take minor parties so far. When the candidate goes or the campaign dissolves, party collapse or party anonymity is not far behind. This is the inevitable downside to the candidate-centered politics. A celebrity candidate, such as Nader, can create parties or jumpstart them. They can provide instant credibility, create enthusiasm and interest among voters and pundits, or maybe even fund their own campaigns … But minor parties that live by candidate-centered politics can die by it too, and die rather quickly (10).

Third parties also tend to attract small constituencies. Several scholars have indicated that any gravitation of voters toward independent candidates represents only a temporary aberration in the political system that has little long-term consequences for the two major parties. Looking at four presidential campaigns that involved independent challenges (1968, 1980, 1992, and 1996), Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino and Rohde (2000) found "little erosion of support for the major political parties" (495). The authors said it was true that support for the third-party candidates in those races was based on "dissatisfaction with the major-party candidates," but they added that support for the Democrats and Republicans had not deteriorated enough to open the door for a serious, long-term third-party challenge (495). Moreover, the authors said that while party loyalties had declined somewhat from the mid-1960s to about 1978, partisanship has rebounded since 1980—an analysis that has been supported by additional research (Bartels 2000; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002; Miller 1991; Pomper 1998).

"Although there may be occasional victories by third-party candidates, such as Jesse Ventura's victory in the 1998 Minnesota gubernatorial election," Abramson et al. reported, "we see little in the way of short-term prospects for a new political party" (516). For a third-party to capture the White House, they added, it would need a strong candidate with a real issue agenda that is attractive to the electorate. As the authors put it, "…the third party must also be able to attract the resources—money, media attention, and activists—that would make it possible for the party not just to win the occasional elective office but to win a larger number of such offices at all levels of government" (Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino and Rohde 2000, 519).

They are not alone in this analysis. Although Collet (1996) reported that a 1995 *Los Angeles Times* survey found that half of the public considered the two-party system to be "unsound" and an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll reported that 82 percent of Americans said the two-party system either had "real problems" or "is seriously broken" (433), his analysis pointed out that none of the third-party and independent candidates who mounted serious challenges in the 1980s and 1990s had built a "top-to-bottom party organization" that would allow it to run serious candidates for statewide and legislative elections on a consistent basis (435).

In addition, few voters are willing to give their unqualified support to a third party, the study found, and many have doubts that a third party could govern in a system dominated by Democrats and Republicans. Collet also reported that voters "show more antipathy toward the 'system' itself—the two parties together in an abstract sense—rather than the Republicans and Democrats in particular" (436). He concluded that while voters at times desire a change in the current party system, there are still many questions about whether they would support a specific third party.

Stolen issues. Finally, when third parties do resonate with the public, the major parties often steal their issues, eventually rendering the party irrelevant (Lowi 1999; Reichley 1992). In addition, Harold (2001) has suggested that minor parties often lose an opportunity to influence the political system because they reject all offers of compromise and insist on ideological purity. Targeting Nader's 2000 presidential campaign in particular, Harold said that the Greens may have increased their influence over public policy if Nader had been willing to work more closely with Democrats rather than insisting that they were one-in-the-same with the Republicans. "By rejecting the coalitions that were being built between Democrats and Greens online, Nader may have missed a unique opportunity," Harold (2001, 599) wrote, adding:

> Perhaps, for third parties like the Greens, the key to success is not to resist being co-opted by the corrupt system—hence maintaining pure authenticity—but strategically to allow themselves to be co-opted in productive ways (599).

To summarize, the literature on third parties leads to several conclusions. First, despite the passionate arguments made by some advocates of a multiparty system, it appears unlikely at this time that the nation will move beyond the current system dominated by the Democrats and Republicans. Supporters of the present political structure not only make many compelling arguments for keeping the two-party system in place, but there are currently no serious movements underfoot to change the U.S. Constitution or state laws to remove some of the barriers that inhibit third-party activity. Moreover, few third parties stick around long enough to pose a serious threat to the Democrats and Republicans. As Hofstadter (1955) put it: "Third parties are like bees; once they have stung, they die" (97). In this sense, it appears that a two-party system is probably a natural outcome in the American political environment.

Second, even in a system that makes it difficult for them to operate, minor parties have nevertheless consistently challenged the two major parties, raising issues and influencing public policy throughout American history. At times, minor parties have attracted small but loyal followings that have worked on their behalf regardless of what the Democrats and Republicans were doing. At other times, they have given an angry electorate an opportunity to protest the polices of the major parties and signal their discontent with the system as a whole. While this has led to little electoral success at the national level, some independent candidates have won elections at the state level, where they have captured governorships as well as congressional seats. This has been particularly true in places like Maine and Minnesota, where election laws are more favorable to third-party participation.

Finally, some scholars have said that third-party candidates should be considered important not because of the influence they can bring to election results but because of the ideas they can bring to the campaign. Their participation in political debates, for example, could not only influence the dynamic of the overall campaign, but it could force the two major-party candidates to address issues that would otherwise go unanswered. Hicks (1933) himself pointed out that the importance of third parties does not rest in their success or failure at the ballot box, but rather in the different perspective they bring to issues of public importance—a perspective, he reminds us, that the two major parties have often adopted.

It is perhaps this last point that is the most poignant and leads to a crucial question for this dissertation: How do third-party candidates get those ideas into the public domain? The answer, of course, points partially to the press.

The role of the news media in political campaigns

It has generally been accepted that journalists play a vital role in American political campaigns at the state and national level. Since the world of politics is often "out of reach" to the citizenry in that most people will have no direct contact with the candidates or the campaigns (Lippmann, 1922, 18. See also Patterson 1980), the main conduit through which citizens have traditionally received information about public affairs is the mass media, particularly television (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). It is through the news media, Lippmann (1922) said, that the democratic citizen is able to reach beyond his or her personal experience and learn about "vast portions of the world that he could never see, touch, smell, hear, or remember" (18). Without this capability to learn about events for which the public does not participate in directly, Lippmann said, representative government itself could not work successfully.

But the press is more than just a neutral channel that links the public to the broader world of electoral politics. As society has learned more about the function of the mass media in a democracy, scholarship has demonstrated that in addition to being a provider of information about campaigns, the mass media can be an active participant in the political process too. Among other things, studies show that the press can set the nation's political agenda (McCombs 2004; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder 1987), organize elections by determining which candidates are the most viable (Davis 1994; Graber 1997; Joslyn 1984; Patterson 1980 and 1994), shape candidate images through the use of certain news frames (Davis 1994; Jamieson and Waldman 2003; Joslyn 1984; Patterson 1980 and 1994; Zaller and Hunt 1995), and act as "guardians of political norms" by legitimizing important political institutions (Graber 1997, 3; Blumler 1978).

While reporters are sometimes uncomfortable with the notion that they are more than just neutral bystanders, they nevertheless acknowledge that they play an extraordinary role in helping the body politic choose its leaders, with many journalists viewing themselves as public representatives charged with scrutinizing candidates to determine which ones are most suitable for elective office (Zaller and Hunt 1995). Political reporter Jules Witcover (2001), for instance, has observed that it is the journalist's duty to watch presidential contenders and "take their measure for American voters" (4). Likewise, Joann Byrd (1998) of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote that journalists not only cover politics, they often play a major part in determining which of the major-party nominees will be the likely winner. The *Washington Post*'s James R. Dickenson (1987) once referred to the press as the nation's "screening institution," adding that the demise of old-time party bosses makes the news media the de facto judge of a candidate's moral character (A21). And long-time ABC-News White House correspondent Sam Donaldson (1999) defended his "bulldog" approach to political journalism by claiming that he was "looking for straight answers on topics *the public* has an interest in" (288).

The central role ascribed to the press in the political process has often made it a lightning rode for criticism. Although on its best days the news media have been viewed as the watchdog of government and the main firewall between freedom and despotism (Chafee 1954; Hocking 1947; Meiklejohn 1961; Streitmatter 1997), the press has also come under sometimes aggressive attack from both the right and the left, with conservatives claiming that reporters have a liberal bias (Efron 1971; Goldberg 2002; Rusher 1988) and progressives arguing that the press is a mechanism of social control designed to protect elite power centers (Altschull 1995; Parenti 1993). Still others contend that rather than holding up a mirror to society and objectively reporting each day's events, the news media construct reality through the use of story selection and news frames that emphasize certain aspects of an issue while ignoring others (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Edelman 1988; Entman 1993; Iyengar 1991; Tuchman 1978).

That the news media serve a political function in American democracy should come as no surprise to critics, though. Since the early days of the Republic and the formation of the partisan press in the 1790s, newspapers have always been an organ of political argument and opinion (Emery, Emery, and Roberts 2000). Allies of Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, for instance, were so concerned about the power of newspapers to shape political events that they convinced editor Philip Freneau to move to the new federal capital in Philadelphia in 1791 to start a Republican newspaper to counter the acerbic political writings of Federalist John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, which was widely seen as the voice of Jefferson's rival, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton (Smith 1977).

Although the press began the move away from editorial argument and more toward objectivity and news in the 1830s with the advent of the commercially oriented penny newspapers, the American news media nevertheless maintained its place as a purveyor of political information throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Schudson 1978). During the progressive era, for example, the so-called muckraking reporters of weekly and monthly magazines were said to drive government policy through a series of exposes on everything from the oil industry to municipal corruption (Emery, Emery, and Roberts 2000; Leonard 1986; Stephens 2007; Streitmatter 1997). Later in the century, reporters would be blamed for losing the Vietnam War and praised for uncovering the Watergate scandal (Emery, Emery, and Roberts 2000; Stephens 2007; Streitmatter 1997). And, as the growth of television helped nationalize the news media starting in the 1960s, electronic journalism began to change the political landscape so that politicians began to measure their success “as much by seconds on the evening news as by polls…” (Schudson 1995, 173).

Many scholars believe that the political role of the news media has expanded in recent years due to several legal, economic, and political changes that occurred in the 1970s. These include modifications in the Federal Communications Act that allowed news organizations to cover political campaigns without worrying about the strict requirements of the equal time rule, the consolidation of news media into larger organizations with more financial resources to devote to politics, and the political reforms of the McGovern-Fraser Commission that altered the presidential nomination process by replacing national conventions with a system of open caucuses and statewide primaries (Davis 1994; Joslyn 1984; Patterson 1994). These new political rules at the presidential level, Bartels (1988) says, reduced the power of party insiders and increased the influence of the news media by throwing the nomination to rank-and-file voters. Politicians no longer had to curry favor with party bosses but instead made direct appeals to citizens through the press. The result was three major changes to American presidential elections: an increase in the number of primaries used to select delegates to the national conventions; a larger number of candidates entering the primaries; and a significant boost in the power of the news media in the nomination process (Bartels 1988).

Although this general consensus about media influence has recently been contested by those who believe that party leaders are beginning to regain control over presidential nominations (Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller 2001), the notion that reporters are still a power to be dealt with holds tremendous sway in political circles. For one thing, scholars have spent the past 40 years justifying their research on press and politics by consistently paying homage to the power of American journalism in the electoral system (see Benoit, Stein and Hansen 2004; Graber 1971; Kahn 1995; Steele and Barnhurst 1996; Stevens, Alger, Allen, and Sullivan 2006; West 1994). Even in the age of the Internet, *USA Today*'s Peter Johnson (2007) recently reported, presidential candidates find it difficult to bypass the traditional news media when trying to reach large segments of the electorate—a contention that has been supported by several studies finding that conventional news organizations are the dominant force for political news on the Web (Margolis and Resnick 2000; Pew Research Center 2000; Resnick 1998; Singer 2000). When it comes to election campaigns, Davis (1994) says, "we expect the news media to organize and mobilize public opinion" through "the process of winnowing candidates and organizing the agenda for the public discussion…" (4).

The importance of the press in American elections is reflected in the wide range of academic studies designed to identify and explain the patterns of political news coverage in the American media. For example, scholarship has compared the campaign coverage of television and print journalism (Johnson 1993; Robinson and Sheehan 1983); examined coverage of gubernatorial and senatorial campaigns by both newspapers and local TV stations (Kahn 1991; Kahn 1995; Ostroff 1980; Ostroff and Sandell 1989; Stevens, Alger, Allen, and Sullivan 2006); analyzed the decreasing length of candidate sound bites on the national news (Bucy and Grabe 2007; Hallin 1992; Kendall 1993; Steele and Barnhurst 1996; Stevens et al. 2006); and documented the often negative—but sometimes positive—tone of political coverage in the news media (Benoit, Stein, and Hansen 2004; Flowers, Haynes, Crespin 2003; Lichter 2001; Reber and Benoit 2001;

Robinson 1976; Robinson and Sheehan 1983). Still other studies have looked at the themes used by national and regional newspapers in their election coverage (Graber 1971; Rozell 1991; Shaw and Sparrow 1999); the influence of the civic journalism movement on newspaper reporting practices (Kennamer and South 2002); reporters' reliance on official government sources for political information (Dunn 1969; Sigal 1973); the differences in how the press frames gubernatorial candidates based on race and gender (Banwart, Bystrom and Robertson 2003; Devitt 2002; Jeffries 2002); and the age-old debate over media bias (Beniger 2001; D'Alessio and Allen 2000; Edwards and Cromwell 2006; Efron 1971; Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter 1986; Morris 2007; Rusher 1988; and Stevenson et al. 1973).

Each of these studies adds to our knowledge about how politics is covered in the United States, but there are three areas of research that deserve special attention for this dissertation. The sections that follow will examine some of this work, focusing on (1) the agenda setting function of the press, (2) the press's obsession with the contest aspect of the campaign, and (3) how the news media cover dissent in general and third-party candidates specifically. The chapter will end with a brief discussion of why third-party candidates are covered differently by the news media, focusing on three theories: Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance, Meyrowitz's (1995) description of journalistic logic, and Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony.

Agenda setting

For more than half a century now it has been understood that the mass media help set the nation's political agenda by choosing which candidates and issues to highlight and which ones to leave out. As early as 1938, an analysis of British newspapers by a nonpartisan group of academics and professionals concluded that "perhaps the influence of the press may best be estimated by considering it as the principal agenda-making body for the everyday conversation of the ordinary man and woman" (*Report on the British Press*, 263). This concept was articulated in the United States 25 years later by Cohen (1963), who famously wrote that the news media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (quoted in Baran and Davis 2000, 300).

The agenda-setting tradition has come a long way since these observations, and today it is generally accepted that the press does more than just tell citizens *what* issues to think about—it tells voters *how* to think about them (McCombs 2004; McCombs 2005, 544). This leap beyond a simple understanding of how issue salience is transferred from the media to the public began in about 1984, when scholars started exploring the impact media messages might have on the formation of candidate images, issue knowledge, and the attributes voters associate with "objects" in the news (Weaver 1996). The result has been a deeper appreciation for not only basic agenda-setting effects, but also what scholars now call "attribute agenda setting" and "agenda building" (McCombs 2004, 98-118; McCombs 2005, 544-549). The remainder of this section will provide a brief review of the literature in each of these three subareas.

Basic agenda setting. In its most basic conceptualization, agenda setting is the notion that the news media help set the public agenda by emphasizing certain issues and making them more prominent in the collective mind of a community (McCombs 2004; McCombs 2005). The empirical analysis of this theory began with McCombs and Shaw (1972), whose examination of undecided Chapel Hill voters during the 1968 presidential election demonstrated a strong correlation between the issues accentuated by print and broadcast journalism and the issues citizens cited as the most important facing the nation. Funkhouser (1973) reported similar results one year later, saying that "the amount of coverage in the media apparently is strongly related to the general importance of issues in the public's estimation…" (71)

Follow-up studies analyzing the presidential elections of 1972 and 1976 showed that media agenda setting (1) was strongest among voters with higher levels of exposure to the press, (2) occurred more frequently during the early primaries than during the fall election, (3) was more significant for issues with which voters had less personal experience, and (4) was more pronounced when the source of the news was deemed highly credible (McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes 1974; Shaw and McCombs 1977; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal 1981; Winter 1981).

Other studies reported that newspapers had stronger agenda-setting effects than television (Palmgreen and Clarke 1977; Tipton, Haney, and Baseheart 1975; Williams and Larsen 1977); media influence increases as coverage of an issue intensifies (Brosius and Kepplinger 1990; Winter 1981); newspapers could set the public agenda on some issues but not on others (Smith 1987); and weak partisans are more susceptible to media influence than are voters who strongly identify with one of the major political parties (McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes 1974). Still others have reported contradictory results regarding the power of television to influence the public's agenda, with some studies concluding that TV news had virtually no impact on candidate images during a campaign (Patterson and McClure 1976) and others finding that citizens frequently use television to learn about candidates and issues (Chaffee and Frank 1996; Zhao and Chaffee 1995; Weaver 1996).

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) challenged some of these early assertions about the broadcast media, particularly Patterson and McClure's claim that the network news "fails to have any meaningful effect on the viewers' feelings about the candidates and knowledge of the issues" (Patterson and McClure 1976, 144). Conducting 14 experiments on the agenda-setting effects of TV news, Iyengar and Kinder found that public concerns closely matched the issues discussed on the broadcasts—with the effect lasting for at least one week. What's more, the authors' examination of time-series data going back seven years indicated a strong correlation through time between what television says is important and what the public believes is important. "By attending to some problems and ignoring others," Iyengar and Kinder (1987) wrote, "television news shapes the American public's political priorities" (33).

Agenda setting effects have also been found outside the context of election campaigns. Bosso (1989) showed that while famine had been an annual tragedy for Ethiopia for most of the 1970s and early 1980s, it only became a problem for the American public when Tom Brokaw broke the story on NBC News in October 1984. Winter and Eyal (1981) found strong agenda-setting effects on the part of the news media, with survey respondents naming civil rights as a major national issue in the weeks following heavy front-page coverage of the problem in the *New York Times.* Gross and Aday (2003) demonstrated that local television news coverage of crime played a major role in making that issue salient for heavy TV consumers. Hester and Gibson (2007) showed that public concern over same-sex marriage was closely linked to their exposure to newspaper coverage of the issue; and Brosius and Kepplinger (1990) demonstrated a two-way flow to agenda setting, with television coverage of certain issues causing problem awareness within the public and problem awareness within the public sometimes causing television coverage.

Taken together, the data strongly supports an agenda-setting function for the news media, albeit with limits to that power. But the press does more than just set political priorities through the transfer of issue salience from the news pages to the public consciousness—it may also determine how issues and candidates are interpreted by the body politic.

Attribute agenda setting. Research over the past 20 years indicates that by emphasizing certain characteristics—or attributes—of a particular issue or candidate, the news media makes those characteristics more significant in the public mind (McCombs 2005; Son and Weaver 2005). This effect, which has been called attribute agenda setting, is based on the notion that the news media play an active role in both *framing* political issues and *priming* the public in how it should feel about those issues (Weaver 2007). Both framing and priming have significant ramifications for political campaigns, for as Weaver (1994) puts it: "By making certain issues, candidates, and characteristics of candidates more salient, the media can contribute significantly to the construction of a perceived reality that voters rely upon in making decisions about whether to vote and for whom to vote" (349).

The concept of framing has been given many definitions in the literature but generally refers to *the context* in which a reporter portrays a person, issue, or event in the news. Just like a window frames what a person can see from inside a house looking out, so too do the news frames journalists employee highlight certain aspects of an issue or person while hiding others. Callaghan and Schnell (2001) say that frames "define policy debates and structure political outcomes" (185). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) say that framing "refers to modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience" (12). And Weaver (2007) maintains that "the perspective and frames that journalists employ draw attention to certain attributes of the objects of news coverage…" (142).

But perhaps the most comprehensive definition came from Entman (1993), who said that "framing essentially involves selection and salience," adding that "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (52). In short, Entman said, journalists use news frames to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.

Related to this is the concept of priming, which Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2002) say is "the impact that agenda setting can have on the way individuals evaluate public officials by influencing the thematic areas or issues that individuals use to form their evaluations" (8). In other words, journalists place the attributes of political candidates and issues within a certain framework that is then used by the public to interpret, evaluate, and eventually form judgments about those candidates and issues. Because voters cannot always remember everything they've learned about a particular candidate, the news media essentially primes voters by calling attention to certain issue/candidate attributes and thus encouraging voters to consider these characteristics when making judgments at the ballot box.

Attribute agenda setting and its two companions (framing and priming) have all found support in the literature. Iyengar and Kinder (1987), for instance, reported that broadcast journalism often establishes the context through which many voters form their opinions about politicians who seek public office. It is through this priming function, the authors said, that television news "can shift the grounds on which campaigns are contested" and thus "may … determine who takes office … and who is sent home" (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 121). Likewise, Iyengar (1987 and 1991) found a strong connection between the episodic and thematic frames used by broadcast journalism and how people explained or understand such issues as poverty and terrorism. When the press framed poverty in terms of individuals, he said, citizens tended to blame the poor for their condition. When TV framed poverty in terms of government policy, he added, citizens blamed "the system" (Iyengar 1987 and 1991).

Other studies also lend support for attribute agenda setting. In their examination of the 2002 Texas gubernatorial and U.S. senate elections, for example, Kim and McCombs (2007) reported that the candidate attributes highlighted by the news media were the same attributes identified by the public as the most significant to consider when making voting decisions. Moreover, the study reported that the public also adopted the media's portrayal of each attribute as either positive, neutral, or negative—then used those positive-to-negative impressions to form judgments about the candidates. These conclusions were supported by several other studies analyzing how the public embraces the media’s representation of a candidate’s professional and personal characteristics (Golan and Wanta 2001; Kiousis, Bantimaroudis and Ban 1999; Min 2003).

The literature also indicates that how national and international news events are framed can have a significant impact on public perceptions of the president. Krosnick and Kinder (1990), for example, found that the news media’s attention to revelations about the Iran-Contra scandal caused a priming effect that reduced President Reagan’s standing in the polls. In addition, Krosnick and Brannon (1993) showed that President Bush’s performance ratings increased after the 1991 Gulf War partially because media coverage of the crisis helped push the public to assess the president’s performance mostly on Bush’s managing of the conflict rather than his handling of other foreign policy matters. Son and Weaver (2005) added to this discussion, demonstrating that the agenda-setting function of the media occurs over the long term rather than the short term. In other words, it is the cumulative coverage of an issue or candidate that creates the strongest effects on public opinion, the authors said.

Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) analyzed the effects of attribute agenda setting during the hotly debated decision by the city of Ithaca, New York, to approve a large shopping complex in 1999 that would allow national retail chains into the community. The analysis showed a connection between the debate as it unfolded in a local newspaper and the way that residents viewed the dispute. According to the authors, heavy newspaper readers were more likely than light newspaper readers to cite the pro-con arguments that had been reported in the *Ithaca Journal* when expressing their opinion on the development. As the authors said: “By covering certain aspects of an issue prominently, we found, mass media can influence how salient these aspects are among audience members" (Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan 2002, 20-21).

What this research suggests is that the press is anything but a neutral bystander in the political process. Through the news frames reporters choose, they "promote a particular interpretation" of an event (Entman 2007, 164) and tell readers "which policy issues to use as criteria to evaluate the candidates" (Ramsden 1996, 66). But the press does not work alone in creating frames and priming voters. A major question that researchers have asked over the years is: If the media sets the public agenda, who sets the media's agenda?

Agenda building. News is created—and agendas are built—through a complex negotiating process that occurs each day between reporters and sources, both of whom face their own pressures and operate within boundaries dictated partially by organizational structures and professional norms (Berkowitz 1992; Sigal 1973). This relationship is in a constant state of flux in which power to influence the news agenda continuously shifts between the holders of information and the journalists themselves (Reese 1991). Along the way, this process is affected by such factors as journalistic competition, the tenets of objectivity, reporting routines, and newsroom culture (Berkowitz 1992; Sigal 1986). Yet of all the dynamics that go into producing news and eventually building the media/public agenda, "those governing the choice of sources are of prime significance" (Gans 1980, 281). As another scholar put it: "What the news is depends very much on who its sources are" (Sigal 1973, 189).

Research over the past 35 years suggests that reporters rely most heavily on elites to tell their stories, particularly government officials. This was thoroughly documented by Sigal (1973) more than three decades ago and has since been supported by numerous follow-up studies. In one examination of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and four North Carolina newspapers, for example, Brown et al. (1987) found that U.S. and other public officials dominated the coverage in all six newspapers between 1979 and 1980, accounting for more than half of all sources appearing on the front pages of the two national dailies. While the local papers were more apt than the national publications to quote activists and other community organizers, the study said, the newspapers in North Carolina nevertheless still used a predominant number of state and local officials on their news pages. This was particularly true for routine stories, Brown et al. (1987) said, adding that there "seems to be a clear indication of the dominance of elite news sources" in the press (49).

Berkowitz (1987) reported similar results in a duplicate study that focused on television. His content analysis of network and local newscasts in Indiana found that at both the national and local level, nearly half of all sources appearing in the broadcasts were affiliated with some government agency. What's more, most of the men and women who were quoted on these broadcasts came from the top echelons of government rather than from lower-level positions. Finally, Berkowitz found that three-quarters of stories that appeared on TV, whether on the network news or a local broadcast, were based on routine events, which typically give the holders of information more power than the journalists.

In another study conducted several years later, Berkowitz and Beach (1993) said that reporters will turn to a more diverse mix of sources when writing either nonroutine stories or articles that include a great deal of conflict. However, this is only true when reporters are writing about communities in which they are familiar. When reporting from new locations, the authors said, journalists turn to the most recognized sources—government authorities—regardless of whether the story is routine, nonroutine, or conflict.

More recently, one study concluded that the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Anchorage Daily News* used mostly power elites to tell the story of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, including important representatives from the oil industry as well as from the U.S. and Alaskan governments (Smith 1993). Wieskamp (2007) showed that government officials were portrayed as voices of authority in helping to frame the link between immigration and crime during a high profile trial in Minnesota in 2005; Alexseev and Bennett (1995) indicated that the U.S. press tends to limit public debates within a framework dictated by government representatives, thus removing much chance "for the public to become actively involved in policy issues in ways that might define new policy options" (409); and Mason (2007) found that Australian reporters relied predominantly on "sources from the main institutions of society, particularly government sources" in reporting on major crises, such as the 1987 coup of the Fijian Parliament.

This tendency on the part of reporters to turn to government authorities and other elite sources can be attributed to several factors and "should not be viewed … within the framework of conspiracy and social control," says Berkowitz (1987, 513). Rather, scholarship indicates that the structure of news organizations, journalistic routines and pressures, and the concept of objectivity all play pivotal roles in pushing reporters toward what they consider to be the most credible sources of information.

Tuchman (1978), for example, says that because newspapers and television stations must produce fresh news each day to sell to consumers, they have had to develop an organizational structure that guarantees their ability to regularly collect and process enough material to fill the daily news hole. Using the metaphor of a news net, Tuchman said journalists are able to haul in a daily catch of information because they have been organized into a "beat system" that stations them in geographical and institutional areas where they believe news will occur on a regular basis. Since these beats usually include such places as City Hall, the police station, and other locales of centralized power, Tuchman says, they create journalistic routines that guarantee reporters will be in daily contact with elites each day. In a sense, he writes, the news net "imposes order on the social world because it enables news events to occur at some locations but not at others" (Tuchman 1978, 23). The result is a media agenda built through the prism of those who hold power—or in Tuchman's words, a reality that has been "constructed" for public consumption.

Sigal's (1973) research also examined the impact of the reporter's daily environment on his or her ability to collect the news. His comprehensive examination of how news is made showed in part that reporters were simply one component of a much larger organization that dictated their professional customs. For one thing, Sigal said, the process of news gathering is based on routine behavior. Reporters under heavy pressure to continuously produce copy are forced to contact sources who can be relied upon to consistently provide information each day—something government officials are only too happy to do. In addition, Sigal says reporters operate within a bureaucracy that has limited resources and a hierarchal structure that (1) constrains reporting activity to a set of pre-established customs designed to collect information as cheaply as possible and (2) forces reporters to negotiate story topics and angles with editors and sources who each bring a different perspective on the news. As Sigal (1973) put it:

> Like other large-scale organizations, newspapers have standard operating procedures that govern much of their employees' activity. Reporters, particularly when they are covering the U.S. government, rely on routine channels—handouts and press conferences—and informal channels—principally, background briefings—to obtain much of their information (115).

Although these observations were made more than three decades ago, scholarship in the ensuing years found similar tendencies and conditions. Seven years after Sigal's work, for example, Gans (1980) said that news organizations like CBS, NBC, and *Newsweek* were still heavily reliant on government officials mainly because congressman, senators, and other authorities were able to "supply the information that makes national news" (282). Reese (1991) found that reporters faced the same organizational, cultural, and economic constraints in the 1990s as they had in the 1970s. And Berkowitz (1992) discovered that reporters tend to accept government officials' view of the world because journalists operate in a similar environment as their sources and so over time see things from the same perspective—a problem some editors refer to as "going local."

In addition to organizational limits and reporting routines, research indicates that the media agenda is also influenced and built under the constraints of journalistic objectivity. Sigal (1986) says that objectivity places journalists at the mercy of sources because reporters are restrained from forming their own interpretations of events. Moreover, Berkowitz (1992) and others says that to be "objective," reporters must get information from "legitimate" sources of information. Policymakers, because of their authoritative positions, automatically fit this bill (Berkowitz 1992; Brown et al. 1987; Sigal 1986).

Finally, competition is another factor that drives reporters to build the media agenda with the help of official sources of information (Sigal 1986). Because reporters do not want to get scooped, they stay close to public officials to make sure that their competition does not get a story they miss. “For network correspondents,” Sigal (1986, 19) writes, “this often means trailing the president without filing a story, just to make sure he does not make news in their absence—and in the competitor’s presence.” Such a mentality leads to pack journalism, in which reporters from different news outlets file the same stories based on information from the same elite sources (Crouse 1972; Sabato 1993).

From an agenda-building perspective, which sources are quoted on the news pages is not without consequence. Some scholars point out that the types of sources reporters use plays a big role in the types of stories that are written and how those stories are framed. By relying so heavily on government authorities and other elites for information, they say, reporters are allowing those who hold the levers of power to at least partially control how public affairs is presented to the citizenry. “The sources a newsman talks to largely shape what he reports,” Sigal (1973, 2) says. “Not only does theory color his view of events but also men intervene to screen his line of sight.” Brown et al. (1987) agree, saying: “By controlling the information available to these target audiences, sources are able to define decision-making options and, ultimately, to control the decision-making process” (46).

One way that this occurs, Berkowitz (1992) says, is in how journalists use policymakers. According to his analysis, reporters rely on government officials to not only express their opinion in an ongoing dispute with the public but to also establish the context in which the discussion occurs in the first place. “Beyond the ability to become part of an existing policy debate, news sources can provide situation definitions of issues that establish the boundaries of future discussion,” Berkowitz (1992, 91) said. Hallin (1984) discovered the same phenomenon in his examination of how the press covered the Vietnam War, arguing that government officials provided the so-called “neutral” facts and context through which the policymakers then debated opponents of the conflict.

Recent studies seem to bare this out. Marchi (2005), for example, examined how the *Boston Globe* and *Boston Herald* covered the controversial proposal by the Massachusetts Port Authority in the late 1990s to expand Logan Airport in Boston, which was opposed by neighboring communities. Marchi said that while opponents were permitted to voice their opinion on the pages of both newspapers, each publication ultimately accepted the perspective of government sources, who were allowed to frame the context of the debate. Likewise, Kim (2003) demonstrated that the news sources used by Korean and American newspapers at least partially accounted for the different frames publications in each country adopted to describe the 1997 Korean Air Flight 801 crash in Guam. While American reporters followed the lead of U.S. officials and focused on pilot error as the most likely cause of the crash, Korean newspapers framed the incident as one of bad weather, poor navigational equipment, and possible incompetence by Guam air traffic control agents—the context pushed by the government in Seoul.

But journalists are not at the complete mercy of their sources either. Callaghan and Schnell's (2001) analysis of how the networks covered the gun control debate between 1988 and 1996 showed that while various interest groups and political actors all tried to incorporate their frames into the news coverage, journalists often "structured the debate by generating their own frames" (201). The authors noted that "in contrast to previous researchers, network coverage of the gun control issue did not seem to follow official (i.e. congressional) opinion" (Callaghan and Schnell's 2001, 201). In addition, Weaver and Elliott (1985) reported that while prominent sources such as the City Council can have an important impact on the stories a local newspaper prints, reporters and editors also bring their own judgment to the table when deciding what is news. Put another way, there are times when sources have the upper hand, such as during campaigns when reporters are herded around in packs and the candidate's aides possess most of the information, and there are situations when reporters control the story, such as when a source is less prominent or when a scandal erupts (Reese 1991; Sabato 1993).

In summary, the agenda setting tradition suggests that the news media do more than just tell readers what to think about. Through the process of framing and priming, the press emphasizes certain attributes about an issue or candidate and encourages citizens to consider those characteristics when making decisions on Election Day. But the press does not act alone. News is made—and agendas built—through a process in which reporters navigate a complex terrain influenced by news sources, the organizational structures of the news outlet itself, journalistic routines, the notion of objectivity, and competition.

All of this has serious ramifications for third-party candidates, who like any political aspirant must rely on the press to help create the context in which they will operate. The research reviewed here thus leads to two important questions: How does the agenda-setting function translate into campaign coverage? And what impact might this have on how reporters cover third-party candidates?

How the press covers political campaigns: The horse race

One area of political news coverage that has received a great deal of scholarly attention is the press's propensity to cover campaigns as if they were horse races. If the research has taught us anything, it is that reporters spend most of their time assessing each candidates' campaign strategy, momentum, organizational and financial strength, expectations, support in public opinion polls, and political endorsements—all at the expense of public policy issues (Adams 1984; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Broh 1980; Clarke and Evans 1983; Craig 2000; Crouse 1972; Harmon 2000; Johnson 1993; Patterson 1980 and 1994; Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Russonello and Wolf 1979).

What's more, the news media's fascination with *the contest* is not unique to today's journalists. Sigelman and Bullock's (1991) analysis of campaign coverage between 1888 and 1988 found that newspapers have always focused more on hoopla than substance, concluding that the contest has trumped issues well before radio and television came on the scene. Littlewood (1998) points out that horse-race journalism can be traced back to at least 1824, when partisan newspapers in North Carolina and other states used rudimentary straw polls to keep tabs on the presidential election between Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams. By the late 1800s, newspapers in Chicago were forecasting presidential elections based on postcard ballots mailed to registered voters throughout the Midwest while the press in New York and other parts of the country tracked candidate support by monitoring gamblers who bet on elections, conducting man-on-the-street interviews, and eventually teaming up with the newly syndicated Gallup Poll organization in the 1930s (Crespi 1980; Folkerts and Teeter 2002; Littlewood 1998).

There were bumps along the way, such as when the *Literary Digest* wrongly predicted that Republican Alf Landon would defeat Democrat Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election (Squire 1988). But generally speaking, the use of surveys grew significantly in the second half of the 20th century when large news organizations created in-house polling operations and adopted social science methodologies as part of the precision journalism movement popularized by Philip Meyers (2002) in the 1970s (Gollin 1980; Weaver and McCombs 1980).

Today, scholars have attempted to document various aspects of horse race journalism in an attempt to better understand how the contest paradigm plays out in the news and the impact it may have on elections. In his analysis of CBS over a 28-year period, for example, Craig (2000) illustrated that journalists present presidential campaigns as a series of daily successes and failures based on the candidates' standing in the polls, leaving voters with the message that campaign skills are more important than governing skills. His content analysis showed that the number of poll stories reported on the CBS Evening News not only increased from about 20 per year in 1968 to nearly 100 in 1992, but that those stories were being aired earlier in the news broadcast. Similar findings were reported by Broh (1983), whose analysis of all three networks showed that the number of national and statewide polls used on the evening news broadcasts jumped from 89 during the 1972 presidential election to 188 by 1980.

The same is true for print journalism. King's (1990) analysis of newspaper themes found that the horse race dominated the 1988 presidential primary coverage in *USA Today* and the *New York Times*, with each newspaper devoting 89 percent and 74 percent, respectively, of their front page stories to the contest aspect of the campaign. By contrast, only 11 percent of the *Times*' coverage and 7.5 percent of *USA Today*'s reporting discussed issues, King said. These findings were consistent with both Benoit, Stein, and Hansen (2005), who found that the horse race was the main news theme of all presidential campaigns covered by the *New York Times* between 1952 and 2000, and Rhee (1996), who reported that *USA Today*'s reliance on tracking polls encouraged the newspaper to focus mostly on who was winning and losing the 1992 presidential election.

Horse-race journalism does not always dominate campaign coverage, though. Graber (1971) reported that the personality attributes of the 1968 presidential candidates were the main emphasis of the 20 newspapers she analyzed, with style and image ranking second and third. Russonello and Wolf (1979) followed up on this analysis, concluding that horse race coverage actually decreased between the 1968 and 1976 presidential elections, although they said public opinion surveys still played a big role. Stovall and Solomon (1984) found that while polls are an important part of campaign news coverage in the American media, they are sometimes overshadowed by other types of stories.

Broh (1980) added a slight twist to the literature, reporting that journalists use polls to track who is winning and losing at particular moments during a campaign but rarely use them to predict winners or analyze public policy issues. Likewise, Johnson (1993) said that horse race coverage is not always the same throughout a campaign. Analyzing the 1988 presidential primary season, Johnson found that reporters relied heavily on both public opinion surveys and each candidates' organizational strength in the early part of the campaign but began monitoring "momentum" in the later stages.

One reason that reporters focus on polls could be because many journalists do not believe that a candidates' stands on the issues will impact the election (Clarke and Evans, 1983). In addition, Patterson (1994) points out that while each day's survey results represents fresh new information—and thus is newsworthy—a candidate's issue position ceases to be news after a reporter writes one or two stories about it. Skewes (2004) found that reporters are forced to write about polls and strategy because they have little or no access to the candidates and so have few opportunities to quiz them on important issues; and Atkin and Gaudino (1984) say polls are frequently used in press reports because they meet the journalist's definition of news: they convey concrete information that is objective and well defined; they produce information that is important to a large segment of the population; and they are fairly timely because they measure public attitudes about events or candidates recently reported in the media.

Another explanation for why the horse race dominates is that reporters tend to view campaigns "as a contest between two candidate organizations" rather than as a contest of ideas, a clash of political values, an expression of social conflict, or a ritual used to legitimize government (Joslyn 1984, 109). Because news organizations tend to see campaigns through the contest paradigm, Joslyn says, they structure their coverage by assigning reporters to individual candidates rather than to individual issues, a practice that encourages them to write about winners and losers. Patterson (1980) agrees with this assertion and writes: "Although journalists consider the campaign to have more than ritual significance, they tend not to view it primarily as a battle over the directions of national policy and leadership. It is seen mainly as a power struggle between the candidates" (22).

The American press's reliance on polls to tell most campaign stories has been fairly controversial over the years, with some scholars seeing it as a distortion of democracy and others arguing that public opinion measures can be used to hold elite power accountable. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994), for instance, say that "horse race journalism squeezes out more relevant information, such as factual reporting of the candidates' positions on the issues, their performance in office, and so forth" (427-428). Such reporting distorts the democratic process, Patterson (1980) says, because it diminishes the public's concern with each candidate's issue stands and leadership ability and leaves citizens with little substantive information in which to base their vote. Joslyn (1984) concurs, saying that "of all the patterns in news coverage of the presidential nomination campaign, this focus on the horse race may well be the most consequential" (133). With little substantive information about the candidates, he says, voters must form impressions of political contenders based on their public support.

More than that, a candidate's public standing may also affect the type of coverage he or she receives. For example, Patterson's (1994) analysis of presidential primaries showed that the news media tends to write negative stories about frontrunners and candidates who are behind in the polls or perceived to be losing ground. The only type of candidate who can expect a high degree of positive coverage, Patterson said, are those who are gaining in the polls—the so-called bandwagon candidates. This was supported by Stevens et al. (2006), whose study of local Minnesota television's political coverage concluded that "when a candidate is leading or gaining [in the polls], he or she receives more coverage, and more positive coverage, than if he or she is losing or slipping in the polls" (75).

Evidence also suggests that reporters use survey results to determine which candidates will be covered and which ones will be ignored. Adams (1984), for example, concluded that news organizations heap lots of attention on those who do well in public opinion surveys and significantly less on those who do not. This observation was supported by at least three studies: Zaller's (1999) analysis showing a correlation between poll support and media attention among presidential candidates between 1980 and 1996; research by Harmon (2000), who found that perceived front runners and major challengers receive the greatest amount of coverage in presidential primary campaigns while other contenders—including those from minor parties—toil in obscurity; and a study by Atkin and Gaudino (1984), which concluded that "potential candidates with low poll standings tend to be ignored by journalists, at least until their ratings in the polls begin to rise" (124).

This raises serious questions for the role of a supposedly "objective" news media, some scholars say. Referring to presidential primaries, Ramsden (1996) put it this way:

> If the media start favoring one candidate or another before the process has indicated who is more "worthy" of coverage, then it becomes the media rather than the voters who determine who goes on to do well in the remainder of the race. Conversely, the media could dismiss a candidate before the public even knows him well enough to render a judgment (81).

Although the effects of horse-race journalism is still up to debate, scholarly research suggests that poll stories may influence how people vote—thus distorting the ideal concepts of democracy. For example, a study of the early stages of the 1984 Democratic presidential primary found that voters will throw their support behind candidates who are leading in the polls, thus using survey data to make voting decisions rather than issue positions (Adams 1984). According to this research:

> Journalists did more than just follow the lead of poll standings in 1983 by continuing to reinforce the preexisting pecking order. They also independently contributed to poll shifts. The overall pattern is interactive: Prior visibility begets high poll ratings which beget media coverage/legitimacy which begets improved poll standings which beget media coverage/legitimacy (Adams 1984, 10).

These results were supported by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994), who conducted three experiments on the impact of polls on the electorate and concluded the following: "Overall, the pattern proved consistent. The more favorable the poll information, the more significant the surge in electoral support for the candidate leading in the polls" (425). This undermines normative notions of democracy, the authors said, because it leads voters to "choose between the candidates on the basis of what other people think" (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994, 428). This is particularly true of third-party candidates, Lang and Lang (1984) said, because voters often practice "tactical voting" in which they decide not to cast a ballot for a minor-party contender simply because polls say the candidate cannot win. As the authors put it:

> Anyone who ever considered voting for a third-party candidate in a two-party race knows the dilemma: should one waste a vote or try to influence the outcome by supporting the less undesirable of the other two candidates? The focus on winning is a major obstacle to third-party challengers, up against the charge of being nothing but spoilers (Lang and Lang 1984, 136)

Bartels (1988) added to this discussion in his analysis of political momentum in presidential primaries. Although he was not addressing third-party candidates specifically, his observations carry relevance. According to Bartels:

> The desire to avoid "wasting" a vote on a minor candidate in a multicandidate race is relevant in primary campaigns. The logic of the notion is that a voter should attempt to maximize favorable impact on the outcome of the election, rather than to simply express support for a favorite candidate. If the voter's favorite candidate has no chance to win, it may make sense to vote for a second-best candidate who does have some chance, forestalling the election of a still less attractive alternative (Bartels 1988, 109).

Not all scholarship agrees that horse race coverage is as prevalent or as detrimental to democracy as some contend. Pippa (2001), for example, acknowledges that news stories about poll results dominated the 2000 presidential election coverage, but he said that there was enough issue-based reporting available in print, television, and online journalism to allow the public to form a thorough understanding of where Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore stood on the issues. Likewise, Palmgreen (1979) found that when the news media provides extensive coverage to political issues of national importance, "learning from the media is not only possible, but predominates" (31).

Gollin (1980) believes that media-generated polls actually help the democratic process by generating interest in the election and encouraging citizens to vote. In addition, Gollin maintains that polls conducted by news organizations "enable the press actively and independently to define or divine public opinion as a counterweight to polls taken by others for their own purposes," adding that "press polls can also test the claims of public support made by spokesman for diverse interests, nationally or locally" (456). This contention was supported by journalist Rachel Smolkin's (April/May 2004) report in the *American Journalism Review*, which said polls allowed political reporters to accurately assess which of the 2004 Democratic presidential candidates really had public traction and which ones would not last, such as one-time frontrunner Howard Dean.

Other scholarship has raised questions about the so-called bandwagon effect. For example, while Skalaban (1988) demonstrated that favorable poll results for Ronald Reagan help boost the Republican's support at the ballot box during the 1980 presidential election, he found that the effect did little to persuade strong partisans and was only a factor for voters with weak political opinions. Similarly, Bartels (1985) says the bandwagon phenomenon is most likely to occur when a little-known candidate has unexpected success and upsets the stability of the presidential nomination process. In his analysis of the 1980 Democratic and Republican primaries, Bartels (1985, 812) found that "supporters flock to the candidate with momentum mostly because he is new, exciting, and getting a lot of attention," adding that "they bolster this diffuse support with more specific, reasoned political judgments only later (or, if the candidate fades, not at all)." This was consistent with Beniger (2001), whose analysis of more than 200 Gallup opinion polls between 1936 and 1972 discovered that a presidential candidate's success in statewide primaries had a bigger affect on his standing in national polls than the other way around. In short, he said, there was little if any bandwagon effect associated with national surveys.

In any case, the scholarship that examines horse-race journalism is relevant to this dissertation for at least two reasons. First, most of the research here focuses on major-party candidates running for president and does not address how the horse-race mentality plays out at the gubernatorial level when third-party candidates are involved. This dissertation seeks to close that gap. Second, the research strongly suggests that the contest paradigm through which reporters view campaigns may be an explanation for why third-party presidential candidates receive scant coverage in the news media. Such evidence lays a foundation for the current study in that it helps establish some guidelines for both the content analysis and long interviews that are part of this research. More specifically, this study seeks to determine whether reporters who cover statewide politics also adopt the contest paradigm used by the national press and, if so, how does that horse-race approach impact the decisions they make about politicians who come from outside the mainstream.

This is no small point. As Graber (1997) put it:

> How journalists cover stories often plays a crucial part in shaping the perceptions of reality of millions of people in all walks of life… In the process of image creation, the media indicate which views and behaviors are acceptable and even praiseworthy in a given society and which are unacceptable or outside the mainstream… The media thus help to integrate and homogenize American society (3).

How, then, does this homogenization process play out in the coverage of dissent and third-party candidates?

Press coverage of dissent and third-party candidates

Dissent has rarely had a friend in the news media. For most of American history, groups that have challenged conventional norms have had trouble getting a sympathetic ear from the press (see Emery, Emery and Roberts 2000; Kessler 1984; Sloan 2002; Streitmatter 2001). Even the Civil Rights demonstrations of the middle 20th century, which received favorable coverage in their early years, caught the ire of reporters after 1965, when "the movement went from the South into other parts of the country" and more radical African-American leaders such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael became the face of what was eventually called "the Black Power Movement" (Sumner 1998).

While the press seems to recognize the right of the public to participate in government affairs, it often acts to delegitimize and marginalize groups that pose a serious challenge to the status quo and elite discourse (Entman and Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 1980; Luther and Miller 2005). Rather than discuss the substance behind the actions of dissident groups, journalists focus on the spectacle of public demonstrations, emphasizing violence, arrests, and the unconventional behavior of protesters—even if this behavior comes from a small minority and does not represent the group as a whole (Baylor 1996; Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Hertog 1992; Small 1994; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, and Augustyn 2001). Such news coverage eventually hurts a movement's ability to recruit new members, and it makes it impossible for such groups to amplify their message to the public at large (Baylor 1996; Entman and Rojecki 1993; Small 1994).

During the anti-war demonstrations of the 1960s, for example, the mass media eventually turned against protest groups like the Students for a Democratic Society—marginalizing the movement by trivializing its goals, emphasizing internal dissension, framing it as a polarizing force in society, and highlighting "deviant" behavior (Gitlin 1980. See also Small 1994). Margolis and Burtt (1989) showed that one protest group in Pittsburgh failed to raise awareness about unemployment partially because it was portrayed as irresponsible by the local news media. Shoemaker (1984) illustrated that the more abnormal a group is perceived to be by newspaper editors, the less favorable coverage that group receives in the press; and Luther and Miller (2005) found that demonstrations supporting the Bush administration's Iraq war policy received more favorable coverage in national newspapers in 2003 than did anti-war protesters.

One form of dissent that goes beyond public protests is the third party. Yet while the literature reflects widespread scholarly interest in how dissident groups generally are covered by the news media,[4] there has been surprisingly little analysis of how reporters treat independent and third-party candidates for political office. Most of the early studies of third parties and the press did little more than emphasize story counts, concluding that independent presidential candidates generally receive less coverage than do Democrats and Republicans (Graber 1971; Stempel 1969; Stempel and Windhauser 1984). Likewise, while Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996) found "a huge disparity between the amount of coverage the media give minor parties and the attention they devote to the Democrats and Republicans" (33), their analysis of the 1980 presidential election failed to explain why such a discrepancy exists.

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[4] In addition to the studies mentioned above, see the following for a discussion of how the press covers dissent: Cohen 1981; Gamson 1995; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Hackett and Carroll 2004; Hocke 1999; Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Zuniga and Shah 2006; Kielbowicz and Scherer 1986; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Paletz and Dunn 1969; Powlick and Katz 1998; and Wells 1978.

Others have tried to fill that gap. Stovall (1985) showed that coverage of John Anderson's 1980 independent presidential campaign "fell considerably short of that given to Carter and Reagan" because journalists tend to "value third parties for what they contribute to the debate on the campaign itself, not the issues raised in the campaign" (271). His analysis of 50 newspapers found that Carter and Reagan events were 50 percent more likely to generate press coverage than were Anderson events. In addition, Stovall reported that while Anderson tried to run an issue-based campaign, reporters were only interested in what he had to say about the campaign itself—the only category in which he actually received more coverage than Carter and Reagan.

Robinson and Sheehan's (1983) analysis of the 1980 election determined that third-party presidential candidates are unlikely to have any credibility with the press unless, like Anderson, they start their careers in one of the major parties. Being the odd man out may help gain some attention in the short-term, they said, but candidates who run from outside the mainstream will soon learn that there are limits to the news media's interest. "As far as the media are concerned," the authors wrote, "only Democrats and Republicans deserve national attention. Running inside the party does more than confer major party status; it also provides a platform, both literally and figuratively. It was the GOP which gave Anderson his platform" (Robinson and Sheehan 1983, 244).

Pirch (2004) took the analysis a step further, examining the presidential campaigns of George Wallace, John Anderson, H. Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader to determine why the press gave coverage to these third-party candidates while ignoring the dozens of other contenders who have run for president over the years from outside the Democratic and Republican parties. He concluded that minor-party candidates will get on the news media's radar only if they present a compelling story in one of four ways: the candidate is ideologically inconsistent so that he or she cannot be clearly labeled "liberal" or "conservative;" the candidate takes unique political positions that appeal to voters of both major parties but do not stray too far from what the press considers to be the mainstream; the candidate appeals to a broad demographic group; and/or the candidate is likely to effect the outcome of the election. This last point, which goes to the strategic nature of most political coverage, is particularly dangerous, Pirch says, adding that

> if it is true that the media might focus on third party candidates whose presence can influence the outcome of the election, then the next question appears to be "what influence did the media have on these voters?" … It appears that if and when the media focuses on third party candidates because of their strategic role in the election, then the media could be dangerously close to unwittingly influencing the election (Pirch 2004, 162).

Along those lines, Joslyn (1984) maintains that "a candidate who is ignored will have a difficult time producing the voter awareness necessary for electoral success" (12). All of this raises what Zaller and Hunt (1994) call a "chicken-and-egg problem," saying that

> if reporters ignore a candidate because they think he is a loser and the candidate fails to take off in the polls, it may be because the candidate was weak to begin with, or it may be because the candidate has been ignored by the press (Zaller and Hunt 1994, 377).

McLeod and Hertog (1992) would likely agree, saying that reporters may affect election outcomes by assuming—and then telling readers—that minor-party candidates have little public support, thus decreasing the chances that anyone would vote for them. Although their study of three anarchist demonstrations in the 1980s did not deal with third-party contenders directly, the authors nevertheless said that their study was relevant for understanding why Democrats and Republicans have dominated political discourse. For example, McLeod and Hertog revealed that reporters rely on loaded terms or cue words like obscene, eccentric, and abusive to characterize dissident groups as a minority, even when news organizations have little quantitative data to support those characterizations. To illustrate the point, the authors said that while "no public opinion polls were taken to present the spectrum of public reaction to the anarchist protesters [in Minnesota] … the *Fargo Forum* quoted a Minneapolis police officer who emphasized the minority status of anarchists by characterizing them as 'a bunch of punk-rockers from the Hennepin-Lake area, led by a *small* number, and I mean a small number of people'" (McLeod and Hertog 1992, 264). The authors concluded:

> Informal references to public opinion provides a way to examine discourse between the two major parties and subsequent political analyses by the media. Indeed, these types of cues might have a powerful effect on shaping voting patterns. They might also shed some light on the maintenance of the two-party dominance in the United States (McLeod and Hertog 1992, 273-274).

Pirch might also find backing in Zaller and Hunt (1994 and 1995), whose exhaustive two-part examination of Perot's 1992 campaign found that support of the independent presidential candidate tended to rise when the Texas billionaire received positive news coverage and fell when the coverage turned negative. The authors contend that the press (along with political parties) is a major force in presidential politics, pointing out that despite Perot's best effort to circumvent the traditional news media by attracting voters through unmediated communication via television talk shows like *Larry King Live* and *Donahue*, in the end, even a successful candidate like Perot could not build a winning national coalition without appealing to mainstream news outlets. In fact, Zaller and Hunt conclude, Perot's inability to handle the traditional press may have been one of the significant factors in his eventual fall from grace.

Third-party candidates cannot always complain, though. Zaller (1999) points out that when politicians from minor parties are successful at attracting media attention, they normally receive more than their fair share of coverage—even if that coverage still falls considerably short of that given to the Democrat and Republican. For example, Zaller's found that John Anderson received 10 percent of the coverage in *Time* and *Newsweek* during the 1980 election but only 6.6 percent of the popular vote. Likewise, George Wallace got 28 percent of the coverage in the two magazines during the 1968 campaign, but only 13.5 percent support at the ballot box. In addition, while Perot received 19 percent of the vote during the 1992 presidential election, he received 23 percent of the coverage in the news magazines and 22 percent of the coverage on TV news.

The scholarship also reflects an interest in how journalists handle so-called "minor" candidates from within the two major parties. Einsiedel and Bibbee (1979) analyzed how the three major news magazines covered the Democratic presidential candidacy of Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and discovered that he was rarely noticed. According to their analysis, McCarthy appeared in only three stories in the 27 issues that were examined. Moreover, of the 14,000 square inches of space that the three magazines devoted to presidential politics that year, the authors reported, only 2 percent included any mention of third-party candidates—and of that, only 1 percent mentioned McCarthy.

Meyrowitz (1995) found similar results in his analysis of the 1992 Democratic presidential campaign of Larry Agran. In that study, Meyrowitz illustrated how the former mayor of Irvine, California, was all but ignored by national news reporters during the New Hampshire primary, even when public opinion polls showed him either tied or leading several of the "major" candidates in the race, including Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin and former California Governor Jerry Brown. At first, Meyrowitz said, reporters indicated that they ignored Agran because their news organizations simply did not have the resources to cover all the candidates, forcing them to choose between those who had the best chance of winning. However, Meyrowitz said, when Agran continued to be ignored in March—after the field had been winnowed down to Bill Clinton and Jerry Brown—reporters still refused to write about Agran, explaining that they could not "change the narrative in midstream." Said one *New York Times* reporter: "Once the ball got rolling, it was very hard to cover him [Agran]. The press would have to go back and explain who this guy was" (quoted in Meyrowitz 1995, 54).

In any case, each of these studies focus exclusively on presidential politics and so leave a gap in our understanding of this phenomenon at the gubernatorial level. In fact, the only study found that examines how the press covers third-party candidates for governor was an analysis by Frith (2005), who showed that Jesse Ventura was taken much more seriously by the Minnesota press during his 1998 governor's race than was Arnold Schwarzenegger by the California media during the 2003 special recall election. However, this analysis focused on Ventura and Schwarzenegger as celebrity candidates and had very little to do with third-party politics. This dissertation hopes to close that gap.

Why third parties may be ignored

Embedded in the discussion above about the horse race and third-party candidates are several potential reasons for why the news media may ignore political aspirants who come from minor-party movements. First, because reporters use a contest paradigm to interpret election campaigns, they see no reason to cover candidates who have little chance of winning the horse race. Second, journalists value third-party candidates for what they bring to the campaign rather than the issues they raise. And third, journalists do not have the resources to cover every nominee during an election contest and so are forced to make judgments that exclude weaker candidates. Beyond that, scholarship reviewed in this chapter also suggests that third-party candidates have trouble getting on the news media's radar screen because many of them are simply not qualified for the office they seek. In other cases, minor-party nominees represent small constituencies that generate little interest among the general population, fail to build long-lasting coalitions that can seriously challenge the Democrats and Republicans, and run in a system that has traditionally and legally favored only two major parties.

Each of these explanations has merit, but can they be expanded to create some theoretical framework that examines more broadly how third-party candidates are covered and why they are covered this way? In the subsections that follow, three such theories will be discussed: John Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance, Joshua Meyrowitz's (1995) observations of journalistic logic, and Antonio Gramsci's (1971, 1994a, 1994b) notion of political hegemony.

Rule of Anticipated Importance. Zaller (1999) has developed what he calls "The Rule of Anticipated Importance" to explain why certain candidates and issues are thoroughly covered by the news media while others are virtually ignored. According to his analysis, reporters will only expend limited journalistic resources—reporting talent, space in the newspaper, and air time in a broadcast—on stories that they believe will carry some importance for their readers and viewers in the future. When it comes to election campaigns, Zaller says, this means that it is the reporter's job to determine which candidates have a realistic chance of winning and then focusing most of the attention on them.

Zaller provides three reasons for why reporters use the Rule of Anticipated Importance to make such judgments. First, he says that reporters understand that most voters do not have the time or inclination to study every candidate who runs for president. Faced with busy schedules and obligations, most citizens only want to learn about the two or three candidates who could have an impact on their lives in the future. Second, "journalists have a collective incentive to get the story right" (Zaller 1999, 90). That is, reporters do not want to undermine their own credibility and embarrass the profession as a whole, Zaller says, by consistently promoting weak candidates who eventually fade from public importance. Finally, Zaller says that political reporters operate in a highly competitive, cutthroat atmosphere in which each individual journalist's status among his or her peers depends very much on the reporter's ability to accurately assess which candidates have legs and which ones are simply the flavor of the week. Like school children playing King of the Hill, reporters do not want to lose their place in the journalistic pecking order by writing too much about candidates who are unlikely to prevail at the ballot box. As Zaller puts it:

> Although journalists, like stock market investors, often run in packs, each individual reporter, like each individual investor, has an incentive to find undervalued candidates

> and invest in them. Thus, poor choices by existing pack leaders create opportunities for would-be pack leaders, and journalism is full of such ambitious individuals (90-91).

According to Zaller's theory, reporters use several indicators to anticipate a candidate's likely future importance. Most importantly, journalists keep a close eye on a candidate's public support through the polls, with greater amounts of coverage generally going to political contenders who are either leading or registering close behind the frontrunner. Analyzing the so-called invisible primaries between 1980 and 1996, for example, Zaller found a correlation between the percentage of support a candidate received in public opinion surveys and the percentage of his or her coverage in the press. One illustration of this came from 1991, when then-President George Bush "was favored by 78 percent of Republicans in the last pre-December Gallup Poll and received 70 percent of the campaign coverage allocated to Republican candidates in the *New York Times*" (91-92).

But reporters are not slaves to the polls alone, Zaller says. In addition to monitoring surveys, reporters also examine a candidate's ability to give a good speech, win support from party leaders and activists, raise substantial funds, attract and organize a strong campaign staff, perform well before TV cameras, and display that most cherished among political skills: charisma. These intangibles, as Zaller calls them, explain why certain candidates (such as Bill Clinton in 1992) may receive substantial coverage in the press even though they are not registering particularly high numbers in early opinion polls.

Zaller's theory, as he points out, has serious ramifications for third-party candidates. At its most basic level, the Rule of Anticipated Importance suggests that most minor-party political aspirants will be ignored by reporters because these candidates have little chance of winning national elections and so are expected to have little, if any, future consequence. But the theory also predicts that third-party candidates can convince reporters to take their campaigns seriously when (1) they are a fresh face that generates interest within the electorate and (2) they demonstrate enough public support to either win the election or impact the race between the Democrat and the Republican. Ross Perot was just such a candidate in 1992, Zaller says, adding that Perot's public appeal and newsworthiness were fairly high the first time he ran for president but tapered off significantly in 1996 when his second campaign was viewed as stale and lackluster.

Finally, the Rule of Anticipated Importance suggests that the media attention given to third-party candidates may not always be positive. Under Zaller's theory, there is a direct correlation between the anticipated importance of a minor-party contender and the amount of media scrutiny that the candidate will receive. In most cases, Zaller says, the additional coverage will be negative—a situation Perot faced during his 1992 run for the White House when he was perceived as an important factor in the race.

Journalistic logic. A second explanation for why third-party candidates are ignored may rest with the mindset and routines of the journalists themselves. In his analysis of Larry Agran's campaign for the 1992 Democratic presidential nomination (mentioned earlier in this chapter), Meyrowitz (1995) identified what he described as three campaign logics to explain different coverage patterns vis-à-vis "minor" candidates: national journalistic logic, which restricts campaign coverage "to a narrow set of largely predetermined major candidates;" public logic, which is open to hearing about a variety of candidates and ideas; and local journalistic logic, which falls somewhere in-between

(44-45). Since this dissertation is most interested in how reporters think, this section will discuss the differences and similarities of only the two journalistic worldviews.[5]

Under Meyrowitz's framework, national reporters look for reasons to exclude certain presidential candidates from their coverage. The main reason for this, Meyrowitz said, is that news organizations simply do not have the resources to be on the road with dozens of contenders each day—particularly when most of these candidates have little chance of eventually winning. As one reporter from the *New York Times* told Meyrowitz, "Even six candidates are a lot to cover if you give them equal time" (46). Another journalist with the *Los Angeles Times* agreed, saying: "Journalists don't sit around in newsrooms asking, 'Whom else should we cover?' The big question is 'Whom can we *stop* covering?'" (47).

National reporters attempt to weed out candidates by assessing which ones have the best chance of winning the contest. They do this, Meyrowitz said, by examining each candidate's financial strength and standing in the polls, taking cues from other national media outlets to see what their colleagues are saying, and asking their sources to tell them which contenders party insiders consider to be the "major candidates." Moreover, national reporters told Meyrowitz that coverage often begets coverage—in other words, candidates who receive lots of attention early in a primary season are more likely to receive attention later.

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[5] Meyrowitz acknowledges that these three categories—which he developed through interviews with political reporters, surveys of the general public, and an analysis of story content, all from the New Hampshire primary—"are not as neatly bounded as their labels may suggest" (45-46). Some national reporters, for example, expressed views that reflected local journalistic logic while local reporters had attitudes that vacillated between public and national journalistic logic (45-46). Nevertheless, Meyrowitz argues that his observations of three distinct ways of interpreting a campaign is valuable in explaining the differences in how national and regional news organizations cover candidates who are perceived to be minor players in the political process.

This is different from local journalistic logic, which puts a higher premium on the value and freshness of a candidate's ideas. According to Meyrowitz, local editors and reporters determine who to cover by evaluating each candidate's political experience and then assessing whether the candidate (1) is running a serious campaign, (2) has interesting ideas that address state and national problems, and (3) holds campaign events in the newspaper's circulation area. In addition, he said that local reporters also interview sources to determine which candidates were most viable. But rather than talking to national party insiders for the scoop on who is a major player in the race, Meyrowitz says, local reporters talk to regional politicians, college professors, and regular voters to see which candidates are resonating with the public.

In short, Meyrowitz summed up his findings this way: Local journalistic logic dictates that a candidate should receive media coverage to determine whether his or her ideas catch on with the public; national journalistic logic maintains that a candidate should be excluded from coverage until he or she can first demonstrate public interest in his or her views.

Meyrowitz provided two reasons to account for the differences between national and local journalists. First, national reporters may have an incentive to winnow the field of candidates to reduce the cost of campaign coverage for their news organizations. Local newspapers and television stations also face financial considerations, Meyrowitz says, but while national reporters must travel with the candidates, thus accruing hotel and plane expenses, local reporters simply wait for the candidates to come to them. Second, presidential campaigns have certain implications for a national reporter's career that do not exist for journalists at the local level. That is, while regional reporters will go back to covering city council meetings, the school board, and local police after the campaign has ended, a national journalist could find him- or herself on the White House beat should the candidate he or she is covering win the election. In the context of Agran's 1992 campaign, Meyrowitz wrote, "national journalists had much more to gain from covering high-status candidates, win or lose, than they had to forfeit from ignoring Larry Agran" (53).

Meyrowitz's journalistic logics and Zaller's Rule of Anticipated Importance both provide explanations for why third-party candidates may or may not receive coverage by the news media. However, both of these theories were formulated through observations of politics at the national level and do not deal directly with gubernatorial races. Do the same dynamics come into play in state campaigns? Do reporters at regional newspapers try to anticipate the importance of gubernatorial candidates in much the same way as national reporters do in presidential races? Is there a difference, as Meyrowitz suggests, between regional and national news organizations in how they cover major- and minor-party candidates seeking the office of governor?

In addition to these questions, this dissertation seeks to examine how and why the coverage of third-party candidates is different when minor-party aspirants do receive coverage. Zaller takes a slight step in that direction—showing, for example, that serious third-party presidential contenders can expect negative press scrutiny if they show signs of affecting the election outcome. But can there be more to it? Is it possible that the patterns of third-party coverage go beyond a simple calculation about a news organization's financial resources or a candidate's potential future consequence? To help examine such questions, it is important to turn to the third possible explanation for third-party coverage: the concept of hegemony.

Hegemony. The notion of hegemony is most closely associated with the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who fashioned his concepts of political and cultural domination in an attempt to explain why the socialist movements of Europe had failed to bring an end to capitalism in the early 20th century (Bocock 1986; Carragee 1993). In his writings from prison, where he was held by Mussolini from 1926 until his death in 1937, Gramsci (1971, 1994a, 1994b) drew a connection between power and persuasion, arguing that a dominant group can best maintain control over the masses through the use of consent—or convincing the public to accept as its own a value system that best serves elite interests. To Gramsci (1971), this socialization process occurs from within the superstructure of a society, including its education and communication systems. Intellectuals, he said, were the "deputies" of the privileged class, helping to persuade "the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group…" (Gramsci 1971, 12).

Fontana (1993) explains it this way:

> Hegemony is defined by Gramsci as intellectual and moral leadership whose principal constituting elements are consent and persuasion. A social group or class can be said to assume a hegemonic role to the extent that it articulates and proliferates throughout society cultural and ideological belief systems whose teachings are accepted as universally valid by the general population… The social group or class that is capable of forming its own particular knowledge and value systems, and of transforming them into general and universally applicable conceptions of the world, is the group that exercises intellectual and moral leadership… Hegemony is thus conceived as the vehicle whereby the dominant social groups establish a system of "permanent consent" that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals (140-141).

Just what role the news media is ascribed in this concept of social control has been a subject of intense interest for many years, generating a wealth of studies both exploring and refuting the so-called "media hegemony thesis" (see Carragee 1993 for a comprehensive review). While scholars such as Altheide (1984), Robinson and Sheehan (1983), and Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1980) raise serious questions about the charge that journalists act as a hegemonic force in American society, others contend that through the sources and frames they employ in their stories, reporters and television broadcasters essentially protect the status quo and existing power centers.

Hall (1977), for example, made the link between hegemony and the mass media through the concept of "encoding"—the idea that media organizations construct social reality by giving meaning to events through the use of certain codes or news frames (see also Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson 1992; Jansen 1994; Joslyn 1984; and Tuchman 1978). Although the media do not intentionally choose to support a dominant ideology, Hall says, it nevertheless operates within boundaries established through a social discourse that eventually reaches a consensus reflective of elite opinion. "Precisely because they have become 'universalized and naturalized,'" Hall writes, the value systems of the privileged class "appear to be the only forms of intelligibility available… The premises and preconditions which sustain their rationalities have been rendered invisible by the process of ideological masking…" (Hall 1977, 343). He adds:

> In the interplay of opinions, freely given and exchanged, to which the idea of consensus always makes its ritual bow, *some* voices and opinions exhibit greater weight [and] resonance, defining and limiting power—for the pure consensus of classical liberal-democratic theory has long since given way to the reality of the more shaped and structured consensus, constructed in the unequal exchange between the unorganized masses and the great organizing centers of power and opinion… (Hall 1977, 342).

The result, some scholars and journalists say, is that most news reports about politics and public affairs are embedded with the hegemonic views of opinion leaders. Wicker (1978) maintains that "objective journalism almost always favors Establishment positions and exists not least to avoid offense to them" (36-37); Hallin (1984) found that reporters often make value judgments about which viewpoints are legitimate and which ones are deviant based on the consensus of top policymakers; and Graber (1997) has shown that mainstream political institutions such as Congress and the presidency are routinely legitimized and celebrated by the news media while outside groups are marginalized. It is true, Graber says, that the press occasionally does investigative pieces that disparage a public official or reveal corruption within public institutions, but these are usually portrayed as a deviation from the system rather than as a problem with the system itself. For the most part, Graber (1997) writes, the press displays "a supportive attitude toward political leaders and the American political system in general," adding that "news stories cast a negative light on antiestablishment behavior, such as protest demonstrations that disrupt normal activities, inflammatory speeches by militants, or looting during a riot" (123).

Soloski (1989) agrees, saying that journalists' reliance on elite sources for most of the information that appears in the news firmly imbeds reporters "within the power structure of the community." He adds:

> For both journalists and news consumers, news reifies the socio-political system. Journalists perceive the existing socio-political system as the legitimate site for gathering news and perceive public officials as the legitimate sources of news. By choosing to concentrate their coverage on the power structure of society, journalists present a very specific picture of society (Soloski 1989, 870).

One reason for this, Rachlin (1988) says, is that reporters have been socialized by the same cultural forces that shape the society in general and are subject to the same pressures to conform. In addition, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, studies have shown that reporters rely heavily on official government sources for most of their information about politics and public affairs (Dunn 1969; Graber 1997; Sigal 1973).

These official spokespersons are not only used by reporters to counter the opinions of those who challenge the system, they are often considered the authoritative sources of the "objective" and "factual" information that establishes the context of the debate (Hallin 1984). What's more, when government officials are quoted in most political news reports, they are rarely challenged by the reporter. As Joslyn (1984) writes: "The facts presented [in news reports] are often words spoken by so-called authoritative or informed sources. Although these utterances may well be personal opinions or preferences and may be factually inaccurate, once they are spoken to the journalist, they become facts capable of being transmitted to the news" (104).

Others point to the economic structure of American journalism as the root of hegemonic values, arguing that the consolidation of media organizations over the past quarter century has given large corporations enormous incentives to confine debate within a political context that never threatens their bottom line (Bagdikian 2000; McChesney 1999). Herman and Chomsky (2002), for example, have developed what they call the "propaganda model" for explaining the bias in the American news media. Under this conception of hegemony, the authors illustrated that all political discourse is filtered through a media system that is (1) dominated by large corporations, (2) relies on advertising for its primary source of revenue, (3) depends mostly on official sources for information (government and corporate experts), (4) subjected to intense pressure from sources and advertisers when it does challenge elite discourse, and (5) operates in a fiercely anticommunism political environment that, at least during the Cold War, acted as a "control mechanism" on the press (2). Under this system, Herman and Chomsky say, elites use the mass media to manufacture consent, thus persuading the general public to support value systems and institutions that ultimately favor the dominant group's interests.

Lichtenberg (1987) concurs, saying that many views are excluded from newspaper and broadcast reports because of several factors: the media is owned by "large corporations whose interests influence what gets covered;" news companies are driven by an economic need to capture a large audience and so avoid controversial subjects that make readers and viewers uncomfortable; and journalists are easily manipulated by government authorities (330). Such statements are supported by McManus (1992), who has said that the capitalist economic model used in the United States drives news organizations to use "market logic" rather than journalistic logic to determine what is *news* (see also Picard 1985). Rather than seeking to inform people about their society, such as writing about all candidates in a campaign, "market logic" leads news organizations to report what will sell in the marketplace, such as news meant to entertain. Said McManus: "The inherent conflict between the logic of business and the logic of journalism should be profoundly troubling for those who consider reliable information necessary for proper operation of a democracy" (205).

Lewis (1999) does not disagree with this assessment, but he leans toward a slightly different interpretation of hegemony. According to his analysis, pro-corporate forces are able to get a generally left-leaning American public to accept a rightward tilt in government policy by sustaining a hegemonic system in two ways: (1) at the level of political economy through a campaign finance system that allows rich individuals and businesses to provide the public with their choice of candidates even before any votes are cast, and (2) ideological hegemony in which the schools and the mass media are used to portray the American system as democratic, pluralistic, and representative of the public rather than what Lewis believes it really is: a center-right system designed to protect corporate and elite interests.

What's more, some scholars believe that the hegemonic influences evident in traditional news media are now being extended into the Internet. Singer (2000), for example, found evidence that Web-based news media are "normalizing" the Internet—in other words, journalists are doing on the Web what they do in traditional print. This view is supported by Resnick (1998) and Margolis and Resnick (2000), who contend that the same restraints that place limits on public discourse in the real world have come into play in cyberspace. Not only do the two major political parties dominate third parties on the Web, Margolis and Resnick point out, but mainstream news outlets dominate other potential news sources. "Far from remaking American politics," they write, "the development of cyberspace, and particularly of the WWW, seems more likely to reinforce the status quo" (Margolis and Resnick 2000, 54).

To be sure, most of the research that has examined hegemony on the Internet is already getting "old," and no recent studies dealing with third parties and the Web could be found. In addition, there is a body of scholarship that has refuted the media hegemony thesis as it pertains to traditional news outlets. In their analysis of the 1980 presidential election involving independent John Anderson, for example, Robinson and Sheehan (1983) found no hegemonic forces at work in campaign coverage. They said that while it is true the news media rarely have an antiestablishment tone, television news is often highly critical of politicians and rarely serves as a mouthpiece for the elite.

Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1980) said that it is difficult to support the notion of hegemony in the media because elite opinion has rarely, if ever, been monolithic and all encompassing. As the authors put it: "What is the dominant ideology? While it is often assumed that the dominant ideologies are clear, coherent and effective, we show that, on the contrary, they are fractured and even contradictory in most historical periods" (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 1980, 156). In addition, the authors contend that while Marxists focus on "the 'means of mental production'" when explaining how hegemonic forces are dispersed to the masses, they fail to recognize that media messages "do not have uniform consequences for all social classes" (157). In fact, Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner say, dominant groups are often more exposed to hegemonic communications that are the supposed subordinate ones.

Altheide's (1984) examination of hegemony within news reports found that reporters not only resist socialization into a dominant ideology, but that news organizations have frequently challenged the status quo and acted as "agents of change" (477). This is supported by Streitmatter (1997), who highlights 14 case studies from American history to illustrate how journalism has frequently played an instrumental role in bringing change to society—both good and bad. In addition, scholars such as Lichter, Rothman and Lichter (1986) have demonstrated that most Washington-based reporters have traditionally been liberal-leaning Democrats who are more apt to challenge conservative notions of society than succumb to establishment viewpoints.

Still, the media hegemony thesis, like the Rule of Anticipated Importance and Meyrowitz's notions of journalistic logic, provides another framework in which to proceed with this dissertation. It is another possible explanation for why third-party gubernatorial candidates may receive different treatment by the press than Democrats and Republicans. However, unlike the theories put forth by Zaller and Meyrowitz, notions of hegemony imply more ideological tendencies on the part of journalists. These may not be intentional, of course, but they may nevertheless appear in the language used in news reports as well as the attitudes displayed by the reporters themselves.

Summary and Research Questions

This chapter has made several points that will be recapped here. First, the scholarly literature suggests that gubernatorial campaigns involving third-party candidates are worth studying because (a) third parties have played an instrumental role in American politics throughout history and (b) campaigns in general are important rituals that help foster debate, spark citizen learning, and legitimize public institutions. Second, the press plays an instrumental role in how the public understands campaigns, constructing a reality through agenda setting, framing, and priming. The media-public agenda is built, the literature indicates, by the sources reporters turn to for information as well as journalistic routines and notions of objectivity. Third, the press covers campaigns mostly as horse races in which it is mostly concerned with how the Democrat and Republican are fairing in public opinion surveys and other measures of the contest. Finally, dissent in general and third-party candidates in particular receive little coverage in the news media, possibly because of such factors as Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance, Meyrowitz's (1995) notions of journalistic logic, and Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony.

Based on the discussion that has been outlined in this chapter, this dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of press coverage of third-party candidates who run for governor and how is that coverage similar to and different from the treatment of Republicans and Democrats?
    a. What are the characteristics of third-party coverage?
    b. How is the text about third-party candidates different from the texts about the major-party contenders?

2. Meyrowitz says that national and regional journalists operate under different campaign logics, with national reporters focusing mostly on the horse race and regional reporters emphasizing issues and ideas. How do Meyrowitz's observations translate into the way regional and national news organizations cover third-party candidates at the gubernatorial level? In what ways is the coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates in regional newspapers similar to and different from the coverage in national newspapers?

3. Lippmann (1922) and others say that the public's main way of learning about a campaign is through the news media because few members of the public will experience the campaign directly themselves. What role do political reporters believe they play during a campaign?
    a. How do political reporters define the term campaign?
    b. How does the definition drive news coverage?

4. Zaller (1999) and Meyrowitz (1995) say that national journalists choose who to cover based not on the ideas of the candidates but on their public support as measured by polls, fund raising abilities, and support from party leaders. Is this true at the state level?
    a. What criteria do reporters use when deciding which gubernatorial candidates to cover?
    b. How did these criteria develop?

5. Zaller (1999) says journalists operate under a theory he calls the Rule of Anticipated Importance, meaning that news organizations faced with limited resources will only cover candidates who are perceived to have some importance in the future. Other scholars, such as Gramsci (1971) and Hall (1977) maintain that certain voices are left out of public debate because of hegemonic forces at work that confine discourse within boundaries established by society's elites. Which of these explanations comes closest to explaining the coverage patterns of third-party gubernatorial candidates?
    a. Do reporters cover third-party candidates differently for the practical reasons outlined by Zaller?
    b. Or do reporters ignore minor-party contenders because they are predisposed to accept a Democrat-Republican paradigm?

This study is designed to broaden our understanding of what the scholarly literature suggests and what we intuitively know: that third-party candidates are not treated the same as major-party candidates by the news media. By answering these questions, this project hopes to explicate the practical and possibly the ideological reasons for why reporters cover third-party gubernatorial candidates differently from Democrats and Republicans. It is not my intent to, in the words of the late Dr. Michael Gurevitch, "push at an open door."[6] Rather, my hope is to begin the process of documenting the underlying factors that contribute to how political discourse is practiced in the United States. For if it is true, as Lippmann (1922) and others (see Lichtenberg 1987) have suggested, that the news media is the main conduit through which Americans learn about politics, then it is imperative to understand how reporters facilitate that debate, particularly when they are dealing with voices from outside the mainstream.

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[6] Dr. Michael Gurevitch of the University of Maryland-College Park made these comments to me personally during a private meeting in the Fall of 2002 when I was taking his Communications Theory course. In doing so, he was urging me to design a study that did not seek out findings that were obvious, but rather attempted to discover something new about my topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study has two parts: a content analysis that examines four gubernatorial campaigns involving third-party candidates and a series of in-depth interviews with eight political reporters who covered two of those races. The content analysis is designed to answer Research Questions 1 and 2 while the long interviews will address Research Questions 3 through 5. The codebook that was used for the content analysis and the protocol for the in-depth interviews are included in Appendices A and C, respectively. This chapter will explain how the content analysis and interviews were conducted, and it will provide some rationale for why certain choices were made and procedures followed.

Designing a dissertation that mixes research methods is, in some ways, cutting against the grain of mass communication research. Systematic examinations of recent trends in the field show that few scholars have utilized qualitative and quantitative techniques in a single study over the past 10 to 20 years (Cooper, Potter, and DuPagne 1994; Kamhawi and Weaver 2003; and Trumbo 2004). Nevertheless, combining methodologies—sometimes called “multiple operationism” (Campbell and Fiske 1959, 101) but more generally known as triangulation (Webb et. al. 1966, 1969)—will allow this study to take advantage of each technique’s strengths to draw a more complete picture of how regional and national newspapers cover third-party candidates at the state level. This strategy has been used in several studies of the news media in the past (for example, see Clarke and Evans 1983; Clarke and Fredin 1978; Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig

2005; Wolfsfeld et al. 2002; Wolfsfeld et al. 2000) and is based on the “growing acknowledgment that complex social phenomena can usefully be understood by looking at them both quantitatively and qualitatively” (Rossman and Wilson 1994, 315). More specifically, the quantitative content analysis shows how third-party gubernatorial candidates have actually been covered in newspapers by examining such variables as story length, media type (national vs. regional newspapers), news sources, candidate portrayals, issue frames, tone of news coverage, and candidate themes while the in-depth interviews delve more deeply into the attitudes of journalists to identify the pressures, biases, and motivations that drive the political reporters who produce the very content under analysis. In short, the quantitative part of this study seeks to show *what* political reporters actually wrote during a campaign and the qualitative part tries to explain *why* they wrote it.

Although some scholars have argued that the détente between qualitative and quantitative techniques cannot be sustained because each is based on completely different assumptions of reality (Smith and Heshusius 1986), there is an abundance of literature that advocates the use of multiple methods in single studies (Campbell 1975; Campbell and Fiske 1959; Denzin 1978; Erzberger and Prein 1997; Jick 1979, 1983; Light and Pillemer 1982; Mathison 1988; Padilla 1992; Rossman and Wilson 1994; Smith 1975, 1981; and Webb et al. 1966, 1969). While much of this comes from the fields of psychology, sociology, and education, scholars have also backed the idea of combining qualitative and quantitative techniques in the study of mass communication (Dominick and Wimmer 2003; Jankowski and Wester 1991; Weaver 1988; and Weaver 1993).

Proponents of triangulation often argue that any single methodology has a number of weaknesses that can raise serious questions about the validity and reliability of results. By combining two or more methods in a single study, advocates say, the strengths of one technique can often neutralize the weaknesses of another, thus increasing the confidence one can have in a study's findings (see Erzberger and Prein, 1997, for an explanation of this reasoning). Webb et al. (1966, 1969), for example, maintained that "as long as the research strategy is based on a single measurement class, some flanks will be exposed" (173). Denzen (1978) agreed, saying different methods reveal "different aspects of empirical reality," adding that "in the present stage of social research single-method investigations are no longer appropriate" (28). According to Denzen (1978):

> Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observation must be employed… The combination of multiple methods in a single investigation will better enable the sociologist to forge valid propositions that carefully consider relevant rival causal factors (28-29).

Campbell and Fiske (1959), who are sometimes credited with introducing the idea of triangulation (see Mathison 1988), argued that multiple methods should be used in the validation process to ensure that a study's results reflect variances in the social phenomenon under study rather than variances in the methodology itself. Rossman and Wilson (1994) gave four reasons for mixing methods in a single study: (1) corroboration, or using one method to confirm the results of another; (2) elaboration, using qualitative methods to expand on the findings of quantitative research; (3) development, using the results of one method to shape a second method; and (4) initiation, or applying a second methodology to a study after the results of the first method either sparked new lines of thinking or uncovered contradictions in findings. Others have maintained that research methods all have their inherent biases—a fact that investigators can compensate for by employing different techniques. Said Smith (1981, 1975):

> Research methods are never atheoretical or neutral in representing the world "out there." They act as filters through which the environment is selectively experienced. By using one's knowledge of how each method may selectively bias or distort the scientist's picture of "reality," combinations of methods may be selected that more accurately represent what is "out there" (357).

Mathison (1988) tried to take the debate a step further, arguing that while some of the assumptions surrounding triangulation are flawed, the mixing of methods is nevertheless justified because "several levels of evidence are required for the researcher to construct plausible explanations" (16). The use of multiple methods will often reveal inconsistent or contradictory results, Mathison (1988) said, something that forces researchers to make sense of findings by "embedding the empirical data at hand with a holistic understanding of the specific situation and general background knowledge about this class of social phenomena" (17). Erzberger and Prein (1997) concur, arguing that mixing methods can lead to three possible outcomes: convergence of results, which would increase the validity of the study; a more comprehensive understanding of a social phenomenon; and contradictions in results that can undermine previous theories and assumptions about the phenomenon under study. Finally, some scholars say that regardless of whether triangulation confirms findings, increases reliability, or uncovers contradictions, a major advantage of utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study is to allow for each technique's assumptions about reality to uncover new truths or perspectives that would otherwise go unnoticed. "In this sense, triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new and deeper dimensions to emerge" (Jick 1979, 1983, p. 138).

It is this last point that is so central to the design of this dissertation. The goal here is not necessarily to seek convergence or divergence of results, although such findings would be welcomed. Nor does this study mix methods to limit the flanks that will undoubtedly be exposed. No study is perfect—there will always be limits. Rather, it is the hope that a qualitative method such as long interviews will allow this study to elaborate and expand on the numbers provided by the content analysis—in other words, to allow new dimensions to emerge. By using triangulation, this study seeks out multiple levels of evidence that complement one another and lead to a better understanding of how and why certain voices are left out of political discourse. It seeks a richer, thicker, more holistic description of the phenomena of third-party candidates and the press. Put another way, while the content analysis can provide a precision that shows how minor parties are portrayed in the news media when they do receive coverage, the long interviews can provide the meaning behind such coverage.

Content Analysis

The content analysis is designed to assess how regional and national newspapers covered the gubernatorial campaigns in California, Maine, Oregon, and Wisconsin in 2002, the last major off-year election cycle available at the time this study was designed. These campaigns were chosen for three reasons: they all involved a credible third-party candidate who had strong professional or political credentials; they each featured a third-party candidate who ran a serious campaign designed either to win the election or build a foundation for the future; and they all involved third-party candidates who demonstrated popular support by receiving more than 5 percent of the total vote, the threshold used by the federal government and most states to determine major party status for the next election cycle.[7]

The analysis looks at how the Democratic, Republican, and third-party (Green or Libertarian) candidates were each covered in three statewide newspapers and three national newspapers. The only exception to this rule is in California, where four regional dailies were included in the analysis. This was done to cover all three major cities, Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Diego, along with the state capital, Sacramento. Included in the study are the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Sacramento Bee* in the California election; the *Bangor Daily News*, *Portland Press Herald*, and *Kennebec Journal/Morning Sentinel* in the Maine contest; *The Oregonian*, *The Register-Guard* and the *Statesman Journal* in the Oregon election; and the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and *The Capital Times* in the Wisconsin campaign. The three national newspapers included in the study are the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. (See Table 3.1)

Each of these regional newspapers was chosen for one or more of the following reasons: the newspaper either had a large circulation in the state; the newspaper is considered an influential publications in the state; or the newspaper is located in the state capital. In addition, the study tried to identify newspapers from different regions in each state to take into account any regional differences in perspective that might occur. For the purposes of this study, a national newspaper was defined as a newspaper that either has a national circulation, such as the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, or one that covers national politics from a national rather than a regional perspective, such as the *Washington Post*. In addition, the three national papers were chosen for these reasons: the *New York Times* is still considered the premier newspaper in the United States and, until recently, had been called the nation's paper of record; the *Washington Post* is considered one of the leading political journals in the country; and *USA Today* is the only truly national newspaper in America that focuses on general news.[8]

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[7] In his book *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (1970), Walter Dean Burnham defines successful third parties as those that have won at least 5 percent of the vote. See also, Ronald B. Rapoport and Walter J. Stone, *Three's a Crowd: The Dynamics of Third Parties, Ross Perot, and Republican Resurgence*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

The unit of analysis for this study is the newspaper story. A sample of articles was randomly selected from each regional newspaper using the "constructed week" approach described by Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998) and Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993). Under this methodology, seven articles per candidate, per newspaper were randomly selected, making sure that all seven days of the week were equally represented in the sample. In the Wisconsin race, for instance, I randomly selected 21 articles from the regional press in which Libertarian Party candidate Ed Thompson was mentioned—seven that appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, seven from the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and seven from *The Capital Times*. For each publication, the seven articles included one article for each day of the week, so that there is one article from a Monday, one from a Tuesday, and so on. This was done to avoid any "cyclic variations of content" that occur for different days of the week (Riffe, Aust and Lacy 1993, 134). The process was repeated for Democrat Jim Doyle and Republican Scott McCallum so that the final sample for the regional news media in Wisconsin totals 63 articles—seven for each candidate for each of the three statewide newspapers for a total of 21 stories per candidate. Multiplied over four campaigns, I had a sample of 273 articles from regional newspapers to code.

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[8] In making this statement, I should point out that while the *Wall Street Journal* is also considered a national newspaper, it focuses on business news and so targets a more specific audience than does a general circulation paper like *USA Today*.

There was one exception to the constructed week approach: the sample collected from *The Register-Guard* of Eugene, Oregon. Because this newspaper produced only 21 staff written pieces about the entire campaign and several days of the week were unrepresented in the population, there was no way that a pure constructed week approach could be used. In this case, the entire population of articles was taken; the sample was then split into three piles of seven articles; and each pile was randomly assigned to one of the three candidates.

The national media is a bit tricky because none of the national newspapers devoted consistent coverage to any one gubernatorial campaign. This means that for most candidates (but particularly for the Green or Libertarian party candidates) the overall population of articles was too small for each individual newspaper to either construct a week of coverage or take a census that could lead to any meaningful conclusions about how the national news media handles third-party candidates. For example, a preliminary LexisNexis search for articles about Green candidate Peter Camejo of California found only one article from the *Washington Post* and only three from the *New York Times* between Labor Day and Election Day. Therefore, to help minimize this problem, the articles that appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* were combined into one population set for each gubernatorial candidate and defined generically as “national newspaper coverage.” The entire population of national news stories for each individual candidate (a census) was then collected and used in the study (See Table 3.1). The one exception to this was in

California, where the national news media devoted enough coverage so that a constructed week approach was used in the samples of the two major party candidates. The full population about the Green Party candidate was taken because the sample was so small.

Table 3.1: Content Analysis Methodology
Newspaper Articles Coded (September 2, 2002 – November 12, 2002)

Newspapers	**2002 Gubernatorial Candidates**[1] **(Includes vote percentage received by candidate)**
Regional Newspapers (7 articles per candidate per newspaper)	
California Los Angeles Times San Francisco Chronicle Sacramento Bee San Diego Union-Tribune	Gray Davis (D) 47.3 percent Bill Simon (R) 42.4 percent Peter Camejo (G) 5.3 percent
Maine Kennebec Journal/Morning Sentinel (Augusta) Bangor Daily News Portland Press Herald	John E. Baldacci (D) 47.1 percent Peter E. Cianchette (R) 41.5 percent Jonathan K. Carter (G) 9.3 percent
Wisconsin Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Wisconsin State Journal (Madison) Capital Times (Madison)	Jim Doyle (D) 45 percent Scott McCallum (R) 41 percent Ed Thompson (L) 10 percent
Oregon The Oregonian (Portland) The Register-Guard (Eugene) Statesman Journal (Salem)	Ted Kulongoski (D) 48 percent Kevin Mannix (R) 47 percent Tom Cox (L) 5 percent
National Newspapers (all articles)	
New York Times	All candidates
Washington Post	All candidates
USA Today	All candidates

[1] D = Democrat; R = Republican; G = Green Party; L = Libertarian

Admittedly, combining articles from the three national newspapers into one population eliminates my ability to assess how individual national newspapers may differ in their approach to third-party candidates who run for statewide office. It also raises questions as to whether variations in each organization's work practices, resources, and newsroom cultures could alter the coverage in each publication just enough so that reaching conclusions about an entity called "the national news media" becomes problematic. On the first point, since each individual national paper provided only minimal coverage to each of the gubernatorial campaigns under study, it would not be possible to make assessments about individual publications even if the articles from all three newspapers were coded separately. Put another way, unless the stories from all three national papers are combined, there could be no national media component to this study. As to whether it is problematic to combine articles from three individual newspapers into one generic data set called "national news coverage," there is precedent for viewing the national news media as a kind of single entity. Gans (1979), for example, has shown that national news organizations as diverse as television networks and national news magazines tend to follow similar routines and adhere to the same journalistic values when making judgments about what is news; Meyrowitz (1995) identified what he called a "national journalism logic" that drives the choices national reporters make when covering campaigns; and Reinemann (2004) showed that journalists routinely rely on other news media when making news decisions and deciding what stories to publish. In addition, it has been illustrated that national news reporters often act in unison, or packs, when reporting major stories such as campaigns (Crouse 1972, 2003; Sabato 1991, 1993). Given these observations in the scholarship, I felt there would be minimal problems in combining the stories from the three national newspapers into one population for the purposes of this study.

The articles from the regional and national news media were drawn from stories that were published between the traditional Labor Day campaign kickoff on September 2 and November 12—one week after the November 5, 2002, election. The decision to broaden the potential sample beyond the election was based on research that advises scholars to analyze postelection coverage when examining campaigns so as to capture what Hale (1993) calls the "emergence of a 'conventional wisdom'" in the days after voters have cast their ballots. Such contentions are supported by other studies, which point out that "immediately after an election, journalists have a real incentive to propose explanations for the election results" (Hershey 1992, 946). For the purposes of this study, then, including articles that appeared in the week after the election may shed light on how reporters interpreted the third-party candidate's impact on the campaign.

The sample of articles from regional newspapers was chosen by randomly selecting the order of each newspaper and then conducting a LexisNexis search of each newspaper separately using the following search terms: (candidate's full name) AND gubernatorial OR governor. (For the national media, the same search was conducted but for all three national newspapers combined.) The same search was conducted in online newspaper archives for publications like the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Register-Guard*, and the *Statesman Journal* that were not available on LexisNexis. From the population of articles about each candidate from each regional newspaper, I then constructed a week's worth of coverage by randomly selecting a start date and then working forward in eight-day intervals until seven articles about the candidate from the publication were identified, one for each day of the week. For example, if the randomly selected order of the Wisconsin newspapers was the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, *The Capital Times*, and the

Wisconsin State Journal, and the randomly selected start date for Wisconsin Libertarian candidate Ed Thompson was Monday, September 16, then the first article that mentioned Thompson that was published in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* on September 16 was chosen for the sample. The next date from the *Journal-Sentinel* to be chosen was Tuesday, September 24, followed by Wednesday, October 2. If no article appeared in the *Journal-Sentinel* on the next designated day, then the next available article in the database from that publication was chosen, provided that it did not fall on a day of the week that was already represented in the sample. The procedure was followed up until November 12. If, after that time, there were still days of the week from the *Journal-Sentinel* that were not represented in the candidate's sample, I went back to the original start date and moved backward until September 2 to fill in the remaining days. For example, if a Wednesday was still not represented for Thompson after following the eight-day interval procedure, I returned to the original start date of September 16 and moved backward to the next available Wednesday, which would have been September 11, followed by September 4 if need be. If no articles about Thompson appeared in the *Journal-Sentinel* on either of those Wednesdays, then a "Thompson story" that appeared in the newspaper on any Wednesday during the sample period (September 2 to November 12) was randomly selected by picking a number out of a hat. Once seven Thompson articles were chosen from the *Journal-Sentinel,* the same procedure was followed for the next two regional newspapers in Wisconsin. The same process was followed for the Democratic and Republican party candidates.

To avoid duplication of articles, each candidate's constructed week began on a different day, so that if the Green or Libertarian party candidate's start date began on a

Monday, the Democrat's might have begun on a Tuesday and the Republican's on a Wednesday. The order of the candidates was also randomly selected. Despite these efforts, however, there is some duplication of articles in that the same article might appear in the sample of two different candidates in a campaign. This problem was minimal, but it could not be avoided completely given that some of the publications in the study were small and devoted limited resources to covering the campaign.

In designing this study, I considered using the entire population of articles that appeared about each candidate in each regional publication. However, this was quickly disregarded because of the sheer number of potential articles. The California race alone produced a population of well over 1,000 news stories about the gubernatorial campaign. In addition, because many of these articles mention more than one candidate, they were likely to be listed in the population set of multiple candidates, making it more difficult to avoid article duplication in the analysis.

The constructed week, or stratified, approach was deemed a methodologically sound way of developing a sample that would allow for generalizations to a broader population while also limiting the study to a manageable level. The method is cited in several texts about content analysis (see Krippendorff 2004; Neuendorf 2002; and Riffe, Lacy and Fico 1998; Stempel and Westley 1989). Moreover, Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) found that the constructed week approach actually provides a better estimate of a population than does simple random and consecutive day sampling because it captures variations in coverage that occur from day to day and week to week. They also found that one constructed week was an efficient and accurate way of estimating the daily newspaper coverage of an issue for up to a six-month period. As the authors put it:

> The basis for constructed week sampling – that news holes vary by day of week – is supported by [the research]… The distribution of newspaper stories is simply not normal. Constructed weeks produce better estimates than purely random samples of days because they avoid the possibility of oversampling Sundays or Saturdays. Our comparison with consecutive day sampling, which may also avoid oversampling individual weekdays, demonstrate the further importance of sampling across weeks (as in constructed week sampling) if one seeks generalizability beyond the consecutive days period itself (Riffe, Aust and Lacy 1993, 136, 139).

To ensure intercoder reliability, an assistant recoded 20 randomly selected articles from the sample. This procedure netted 89 percent agreement between the two coders. This falls well within Neuendorf's (2002) suggestion that a content analysis have anywhere from 70 to 90 percent agreement between coders. As she puts it: "It's clear from a review of the work on reliability that reliability coefficients of .90 or greater would be acceptable to all, .80 or greater would be acceptable in most situations, and below that, there exists greater disagreement" (Neuendorf 2002, 143).

In determining which races to include in the study, I looked at the ten independent and third-party gubernatorial candidates in 2002 who received at least 5 percent of the popular vote, the threshold used by the federal government to designate public campaign funding and automatic ballot access for the party in the next election.[9] Of those, three were Greens, two were Libertarians, and five were independents. Only Green and Libertarian candidates were considered for the study for five reasons: first, these candidates came from established political organizations with their own ideology and clearly outlined issue platforms; second, the Greens and Libertarians are the two largest minor parties in the United States with a consistent record of running candidates at the state and local level;[10] third, both parties are committed voices of dissent that have been clearly defined as outside the established political order; fourth, each party represents a different point on the left-right political spectrum, giving the study a nice ideological balance; and fifth, both organizations represent long-term movements to challenge the two-party system, unlike many independent candidacies, which are often either fleeting efforts by one unknown man or woman or the short-term political aspirations of a well-known politician who was originally a Democrat or Republican. This last point is important because a major purpose of this study is to analyze how the news media portrays candidates who do not come from the major parties. By including independents, the analysis ran the risk of contaminating the sample with candidates who were former Democrats and Republicans using the independent route for personal political reasons during one election cycle.[11]

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[9] The ten candidates were: Richard Mahoney of Arizona (Independent, 7 percent of the vote); Peter Camejo of California (Green, 5 percent); Jonathan Carter of Maine (Green, 9 percent); Timothy Penny of Minnesota (Independent, 16 percent); David Bacon of New Mexico (Green, 5 percent); B. Thomas Golisano of New York (Independent, 14 percent); Gary Richardson of Oklahoma (Independent, 14 percent); Tom Cox of Oregon (Libertarian, 5 percent); Cornelius Hogan of Vermont (Independent, 10 percent); and Ed Thompson of Wisconsin (Libertarian, 10 percent).

It was also important to actively select credible third-party candidates to examine as opposed to randomly selecting candidates from the entire population of 2002 minor-party gubernatorial contenders. Because one of the main research interests of this study is to determine what biases may exist in newspaper culture that would predispose reporters to ignore any candidate who is not a member of the Democratic or Republican parties (regardless of his or her credentials or public appeal), it was vital that the study look at serious candidates who were not far from the mainstream. Using simple random sampling would likely lead to the selection of third-party candidates who ran unprofessional, underfinanced campaigns or those who were naturally marginalized by radical political positions and unconventional behavior—something that would defeat the purpose of this study. Put another way, by purposely choosing *serious* third-party candidates to study, it is my hope that this analysis will help identify explanations other than the standard reasons journalists give for why they ignore minor-party candidates—namely that third parties have no chance of winning because they are outside the mainstream.

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[10] Furthermore, the Libertarians have a long history of running candidates for statewide office while the Green Party has been treated in the literature as a mainstream organization with the potential to influence national policy. Described by some scholars as having a bright future, the Green Party has increased its membership since Ralph Nader's 2000 presidential bid and has effectively built state-level party organizations that are helping Greens run candidates for local and statewide offices throughout the country (Collet and Hansen 2002; Francia and Herrnson 2002; and Sifry 2003).

[11] This was the case of independent Timothy Penny, who received 16 percent of the vote in his unsuccessful bid to become governor of Minnesota in 2002, and was a former congressman from the Democratic Party who started the gubernatorial campaign with strong name recognition and a long history in mainstream Democratic politics. Including someone like Penny in the study would not give an accurate representation of how the news media cover third parties since reporters would likely know Penny from his days as a Democrat and so would naturally cover him the way they would any major party candidate. For the purposes of this study, then, such an independent candidacy was viewed more as a vehicle for one man's immediate political ambitions than the organized effort of a committed and permanent third party.

In sum, then, this content analysis is designed to give a snapshot of how regional and national newspapers cover third-party candidates at the state level. The study is not designed to measure quantity of stories—it has already been established that Democrats and Republicans receive more coverage than third-party candidates (see Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996, 1984; Sifry 2003; Stempel 1969; Stempel and Windhauser 1984; and Zaller 1999). The purpose here is to show how the coverage of third-party gubernatorial contenders differs from Democrats and Republicans when the press provides coverage to minor parties. The key questions here are, how does the newspaper text of major and minor parties differ and what biases inherent in the news media might be gleaned from the coverage? It is my hope that this study documents specifically how third-party gubernatorial candidates are covered at the state level so as to gain a better appreciation for how certain points of view are sidelined in American political discourse and what might be done to bring those voices back into the debate.

In-depth interviews

While the content analysis provides a general snapshot of how third-party gubernatorial candidates are covered by regional and national news media, the in-depth interviews were designed to, in the words of McCracken (1988), "take us into the mental world of the [journalist] … to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world" (9). The interviews provide this study with a richer understanding of how political reporters view campaigns, their role in election contests, and the values and criteria journalists use to make news judgments about which candidates to cover and which ones to ignore. The long interviews are considered a critical part of this study because they flesh out the numbers provided by the content analysis by giving us a more in-depth view of why certain news decisions are made during campaigns.

Because this study examines the criteria used by *political reporters* when deciding which candidates to cover in a gubernatorial campaign, subjects were purposefully selected based on their job responsibilities at regional and national newspapers (i.e. political reporters who cover gubernatorial campaigns). In this sense, then, the sample was a cross between what Patton (2002) calls a "homogeneous" and "intensity" group—homogeneous because it focuses on a particular subgroup of journalist, the political reporter; and intensity because as a group, political reporters tend to observe and experience campaigns at an intimate and intense level.

The interviews were conducted with eight reporters at regional newspapers who covered the 2002 gubernatorial campaigns in California and Wisconsin.[12] It was difficult to arrive at a number of subjects to interview because many texts on qualitative methods are fairly vague on the matter of sample size. McCracken (1988), for example, recommends that investigators interview about eight subjects while Patton (2002) says "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry," adding that "sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (244). In addition, a perfunctory scan of the literature found that studies using in-depth interviews vary widely in the number of subjects questioned. For example, Holohan (2003) interviewed 16 journalists for her study on coverage of Haiti, Deuze (2005) interviewed 14 editors for his analysis of tabloid newspapers, and Lee (2004) conducted 20 interviews in a study of journalistic deception. Other studies came up with such numbers as 21, 28, 47, 133, and 162 interviews (see Jensen 2005; Berger and Reber 2005; Lachover 2003; Wolfsfeld, Khouri and Peri 2002; and Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross 1996).

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[12] These two campaigns were chosen out of the four campaigns under study in the content analysis for three simple reasons: they are the two biggest of the four states under study; they each have a diverse, large and sophisticated media environment that should provide a rich choice of journalists to interview; and they each represent vastly different regions of the country.

Given such uncertainty in qualitative analysis, this study sought to interview a sufficient number of journalists so as to gain as wide a perspective as possible "so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it" (Seidman 2006, 55). One way to gauge whether enough subjects had been interviewed was to watch for the saturation effect—that is, the point at which the researcher begins to hear the same information over and over again (Seidman 2006; Rubin and Rubin 2005). The eight interviews I conducted met that standard. The journalists came from a variety of regional newspapers from two distinct regions of the country so that some variety of perspective was built into the study. However, since all the subjects came from one subgroup of the profession (the political reporter), I anticipated that they would have similar pressures and attitudes about campaigns so that eight interviews would be sufficient to gain an in-depth understanding of how journalists operate when covering gubernatorial campaigns involving third-party candidates.

The list of potential subjects was drawn by looking at bylines from each newspaper. The articles were drawn from the Lexis-Nexis database or a newspaper's online archive. Once political reporters had been identified, they were ranked based on the number of stories they had written about the 2002 gubernatorial campaign in their state, so that the reporter at each publication with the most bylines was ranked one, the reporter with the second most was ranked two and so on. E-mails were then sent to the two reporters at each regional publication who had the most bylines about their respective gubernatorial campaign (see Appendix F for the text of the letter). The e-mails, which were followed up with a telephone call about a week later, explained the scope of the project, asked each reporter if he or she would be willing to participate in the study, explained what participation would entail for them, and outlined how their contribution would further the goals of the research and hopefully help the profession. If one or both of the reporters at any one publication declined to participate, then the next one or two reporters on the list would have been contacted. However, this was not a problem. Each reporter who was contacted agreed to participate in the study.

Those who agreed to take part were asked to sit for a 60- to 90-minute interview in which they were asked a series of questions about how they covered political campaigns. The questions were built around three preliminary themes: campaigns, third-party candidates, and things that influence coverage. The interviews followed a somewhat structured approach, with major questions and probes written in advance. However, because one of the strengths of the in-depth interview is its flexibility, I also followed the lead of the subject and asked new questions that arose during each individual interview (see McCracken 1988; Patton 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2005; and Seidman 2006). Some of the questions were broad and others focused on specific actions taken by the reporter during the 2002 gubernatorial campaign. The latter types of questions were gleaned at least partially from the results of the content analysis of these races.

The eight reporters from California and Wisconsin were interviewed between June 24 and July 11, 2007. All but one were conducted in person, with the eighth interview done via e-mail. Subjects were given a copy of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E) prior to the interview, which they were asked to read, sign and date before the interview began. All of the reporters agreed to be digitally recorded, and all agreed to let the investigator use their names in the study. While the gubernatorial campaigns under study occurred five years ago, none of the reporters had any problem remembering the events of the past. In fact, all of the reporters spoke of the 2002 campaign as if it was fresh in their minds.[13]

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[13] The study considered the fact that some reporters might have trouble remembering their coverage of campaigns that occurred five years ago, especially given that some of them either moved on to new jobs or were involved in the coverage of the 2006 gubernatorial elections. However, because campaigns are fairly intense experiences, especially high-profile races such as those for governor, the study assumed that most reporters would be capable of recalling certain decisions they made only four years earlier. This was not an unreasonable assumption. Other studies that have relied on the in-depth interview as a method of inquiry have also asked reporters, with success, to recall how they covered events that occurred several years in the past. Wolfsfeld, Khouri and Peri (2002), for instance, interviewed Israeli and Jordanian journalists who covered the peace process between those two countries in the 1990s. Many of the interviews were conducted in 1997 and asked reporters to discuss events that had occurred as far back as 1994. Likewise, Holohan (2003) interviewed 16 American journalists in the late 1990s about events they had covered in Haiti in the early 1990s. In both cases, the authors reported insightful results.

Written transcripts of the interview were produced by an outside service provider hired by the investigator. The digital recordings, which have been saved on the investigator's computer hard drive, were uploaded to the Web site of the transcription service provider, who produced and e-mailed written transcripts of each interview, usually within one week. The transcription service provider was asked to destroy both the digital recordings and the written transcripts in its files after the investigator had received electronic copies of the written documents, which were each printed out for analysis.[14]

The analysis of the data followed a fairly flexible format that allowed me to approach the material with an open mind so that important insights could emerge naturally from the text. In the initial stage of the analysis, I read all eight answers to the same question, making note of language use and themes discussed by the reporter. I was able to develop broad categories for each of the themes to capture the differences and similarities in how reporters addressed the same issue. I then bracketed key quotations that effectively summarized the dominant viewpoints expressed in the text. In addition, minority viewpoints were also bracketed to capture insights that may have been provided by only one or two reporters. When this was completed, my observations and key quotations were entered into a Word document so that the responses of each reporter to the same question could be compared side by side. I then moved on to the next question in the transcripts and followed the same procedures again. This process was helpful in identifying common patterns and attitudes that surfaced from the interviews.

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[14] Although it was not needed, several measures were established in the event that a subject wished to remain anonymous. To ensure that information could not be directly tied to a subject, each participant was assigned a code number and given a pseudonym that would have been used in the text of the dissertation. All material from that subject would then have been associated with the subject's number and pseudonym only. I began each interview by collecting personal information about the subject (Name, Position, Job Responsibilities, and Institution). This information was entered on a Subject Form, which was filed at the investigator's home office in a separate and secure file. Each subject was assigned a code number, which was entered on the Subject Form. The code number was the only identifying information placed on the tape cassette used to backup the digitally recorded conversation. It would also have been the only identifying information placed on the written transcript of the interview had the subject wished to remain anonymous. The cassette tapes were stored at the investigator's home office separate from the Subject Form. The digital recording was stored on the investigator's hard drive. The hard copy of the written transcript was also filed separately from the Subject Form. The electronic copy of the written transcript was stored on the investigator's computer hard drive as well as a flash disk. For any subject who wished to remain anonymous, the transcript would have been filed only under the subject's code number. Code numbers were set up so that the investigator could identify only the state where the subject works—but not the institution. For example, California reporters were labeled CA1, CA2 while Wisconsin reporters were labeled W1, W2. This process should have been sufficient to ensure confidentiality if any reporters had wished to remain anonymous.

In conducting the data analysis of the interview transcripts, I tried to keep several questions in mind: What did I learn from the interviews? What surprised me? In what ways were the interviews consistent with the literature and in what ways were they inconsistent? How have the interviews gone beyond the literature? In what ways did the data support contentions that the news media ignore third-party candidates? In what ways did the data contradict those arguments? (See Seidman 2003 for a more complete list of potential questions to ask in qualitative analysis.)

Discussion

There was a time when Paul F. Lazarsfeld felt compelled to offer a compromise between the warring factions in the field of public opinion who vehemently disagreed over the usefulness of the in-depth interview as a research tool. Lazarsfeld's proposal, if one can call it that, was meant to bridge the gap that existed between those who believed the public's opinion could best be gleaned from highly structured survey questions and those who argued that a different technique was needed to gain a more in-depth understanding of why the public feels the way it feels. Lazarsfeld singled out six functions of the long interview, saying the method works best when researchers are trying to (1) clarify the meaning of a respondent's answer, (2) single out the decisive aspects of an opinion, (3) determine what has influenced an opinion, (4) identify the patterns that exist in the complex attitudes of the public, (5) understand an individual's interpretation of what motivates their actions, and (6) clarify and refine statistical results that were developed using other methodologies (Lazarsfeld 1944, 40-47).

The qualitative-quantitative controversy that Lazarsfeld experienced in the 1940s continues today. Yet as a tool for the collection of data, the long interview has been called "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory" (McCracken 1988, 9). It is a technique designed to tap into the why of human experience as it strives to explain the intricacies behind an individual's beliefs and behavior. It seeks to question fundamental assumptions of society by inspecting the cultural lenses through which individuals view their world (Rubin and Rubin 2005; Seidman 2006). It has been used in a wide-range of fields, including education and government studies to sociology and communications, making what Iorio (2004) calls a "far reaching" contribution to our understanding of human behavior (112).

It is in this light, then, that this project proceeded. The long interviews may not be generalizable to a broader population of political reporters, but what they lack in precision they make up for in depth. For it is through this method that this dissertation attempts to reach a greater understanding of how journalists make the decisions they face when covering campaigns involving candidates who may not be part of mainstream American politics.

Chapter 4: Content Analysis Results

The content analysis showed significant differences between how the news media covered the gubernatorial campaigns of Democrats and Republicans and how it covered those of third parties, specifically the Greens and Libertarians. In general, the analysis showed that third-party candidates for governor are featured less prominently than their major-party rivals, even in cases in which voters seem to be receptive to a minor-party alternative; sources from within the major parties are quoted in newspaper stories considerably more often than are sources from minor parties; third-party hopefuls are typically defined as being separate from the main Democratic-Republican contest; and third-party candidates are more likely to be portrayed as spoilers or long-shots while Democrats and Republicans are typically viewed as serious contenders. In addition, the analysis revealed that third-party nominees are more likely than major-party aspirants to be portrayed as either offbeat or extreme in their political views, although newspapers more often than not painted all candidates—regardless of party—as mainstream. Finally, the data suggest that third-party gubernatorial candidates do fairly well in having their message delivered to the public through the news media, although they still fall slightly behind Republicans and Democrats.

The analysis also indicates some differences between regional dailies and national newspapers. Small- and medium-size regional publications are more likely to devote a higher percentage of their overall coverage to third-party candidates than are larger national dailies; smaller newspapers feature third-party contenders more prominently than do larger publications; regional newspapers focus less attention on a candidate's ideology than do larger newspapers; and regional publications are far more likely to allow third-party candidates to speak for themselves than are larger newspapers, where reporters tend to use their own voice to explain the positions of candidates.

The content analysis also revealed differences in how newspapers in different states covered their respective gubernatorial candidates. While newspapers in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin all followed a similar pattern of either excluding or sidelining third-party candidates for governor, newspapers in Maine treated Green gubernatorial candidate Jonathan Carter as a major contender who was equal to the Democrat and Republican. This exception manifested itself in several ways. For example, Maine newspapers gave the third-party candidate the same prominence as the Democrat and Republican; they turned to Green Party sources for comment significantly more often than their counterparts in the three other states; they quoted Carter directly and indirectly throughout the campaign; and they often portrayed Carter as a serious contender rather than a spoiler. In short, Maine newspapers generally treated the Green Party candidate as a significant part of the race for governor in 2002 whereas the newspapers in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin treated their respective third-party candidates as mostly insignificant side notes.

The remainder of this chapter will explain the results of the data analysis in more detail and explore possible implications for this and future studies. In addition to outlining the quantitative statistical results generated by the content analysis, the chapter will provide qualitative support through examples from the texts of news stories themselves. These qualitative examples were collected during the coding process and will serve as a snapshot on press coverage of third-party candidates, thus fleshing out the quantitative insights provided by the numbers.

Prominence of Coverage

The most obvious way in which third-party gubernatorial candidates are treated differently is in the prominence of coverage given to each candidate. In terms of raw numbers, candidates who ran for governor on the Green or Libertarian ticket in these four states in 2002 simply appeared in fewer stories than did Democrats and Republicans. As Table 4.1 illustrates, 2002 third-party gubernatorial candidates in California, Wisconsin, Oregon, and Maine appeared in 26 percent of the 2,241 stories that were published in the regional and national newspapers included in this study.[15] By contrast, Democrats appeared in 86 percent and Republicans appeared in 73 percent.

The minimal coverage afforded to third parties was particularly pronounced in the national press, where Greens and Libertarians were virtually invisible. Of the 132 stories that appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* that discussed the gubernatorial races in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Maine, only 4.5 percent mentioned the third-party candidates in those races. By contrast, Green and Libertarian gubernatorial hopefuls appeared in 27 percent of all stories appearing in the regional press.

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[15] This number was derived from a search of the Lexis-Nexis database as well as the individual archive systems of three of the newspaper's in the study. (These three newspapers were not available through Lexis-Nexis and include the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Statesman Journal*, and the *Register-Guard*. Stories that appeared in a fourth newspaper, the *Kennebec Journal*, are not included in this aspect of the analysis because it is not available on Lexis-Nexis and its archive system made it difficult to get a full counting of all staff written articles that it published.) For example, to determine the total number of stories about the 2002 California gubernatorial campaign that appeared in the four California newspapers that are part of this study, the following search terms were used for each publication: "governor" OR "gubernatorial" AND Gray Davis OR Bill Simon OR Peter Camejo AND NOT Opinion, Letter, Editorial. The same process was used for the other races.

A qualitative reading of the news stories revealed two different ways in which third-party candidates were ignored. In the most typical case, stories simply neglected to mention the Green or Libertarian party contender at all, with the report written as if the only candidates on the ballot were the Democrat and Republican. However, a second way that third-party contenders were excluded from coverage included instances in which reporters chose not to mention the Green or Libertarian candidate's name even when that candidate was part of a story. For example, the *Sacramento Bee* published a campaign piece on September 27 that examined the Republican Party's struggle to remain a relevant force in California politics. While the story cited Republican candidate Bill Simon in the lead and Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in the second paragraph, it never once mentioned Green candidate Peter Camejo by name—even though the opening two paragraphs clearly referenced him indirectly to make a broader point about the GOP. To the *Bee*, Camejo was simply "the Green Party candidate." Below are the first four paragraphs of the story, which ran under the headline: "GOP tries to dispel its gloom."

Table 4.1: Candidate Appearances

Newspaper	Total articles	Democrats	Republicans	Third Party
Regional Papers	2,109	1,804 *86%*	1,543 *73%*	566 *27%*
National Papers	132	119 *90%*	85 *64%*	6 *4.5%*
Totals	2,241	1,923 *86%*	1,628 *73%*	574 *26%*

> When Republican candidate for governor Bill Simon faced off this month in a solo debate with the Green Party candidate, Democrats declared California's Republican Party a nonentity.
>
> To spend precious time debating a candidate whose party draws 1 percent of registered voters showed just how small-time the GOP had become, said Roger Salazar, campaign spokesman for Gov. Gray Davis.
>
> "Simon," he jabbed, "has finally relegated California's Republican Party to minor-party status."

> Salazar was being facetious. But he'd tapped a dark fear among Republican activists: that a wipeout in this year's elections could drive the already-battered state party closer to irrelevance (Talev, 2002).

In addition to mentioning third parties less often, there were several other ways in which Democrats and Republicans were more prominently featured in the news media in 2002. For example, Table 4.2 shows that of the 334 newspaper articles that were analyzed as part of this study, the Democratic nominee was the first candidate to be mentioned in 166 stories, or 49.7 percent of the sample, while the Republican candidate appeared first in 102 stories, or 30.5 percent of the sample. The Green candidate was emphasized first in 28 of the stories, or 8.4 percent of the time, and the Libertarian was mentioned first in 14 stories, or 4.2 percent of the sample.

Table 4.2: Candidate appearing first in the story

Party	Frequency	Percentage
Democrat	166	49.7
Republican	102	30.5
Green	28	8.4
Libertarian	14	4.2
Other	24	7.2

Where a candidate first appeared in a story also proved to be significant. As Tables 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate, Democrats and Republicans were almost twice as likely to have their names appear in headlines or the lead paragraph of a story than were third-party candidates. According to this analysis, when daily newspapers wrote stories about Democrats or Republicans, they mentioned the major-party candidate by name in the headline or lead 48.5 percent of the time. Minor-party candidates who were featured in newspaper stories had their names appear in headlines or the lead graph in 24.5 percent of the cases studied.

Third-party candidates were more likely to be introduced by name in the second to ninth paragraphs of a story, and they were more than twice as likely to appear first in the tenth graph or later than were major-party contenders. Put another way, when a third-party candidate was featured in a story, his name did not appear until at least the tenth paragraph in 31.4 percent of the cases studied compared to just 12.6 percent for major-party candidates.

Table 4.3: When does the candidate's name first appear in the story: By individual party

Party	Headline or Lead	Second to ninth paragraph	Tenth paragraph or later	Total
Democrat	65 *53.7%*	43 *35.5%*	13 *10.7%*	121 *100%*
Republican	47 *42.7%*	47 *42.7%*	16 *14.5%*	110 *100%*
Green	15 *26.3%*	28 *49.1%*	14 *24.6%*	57 *100%*
Libertarian	10 *22.2%*	17 *37.8%*	18 *40%*	45 *100%*

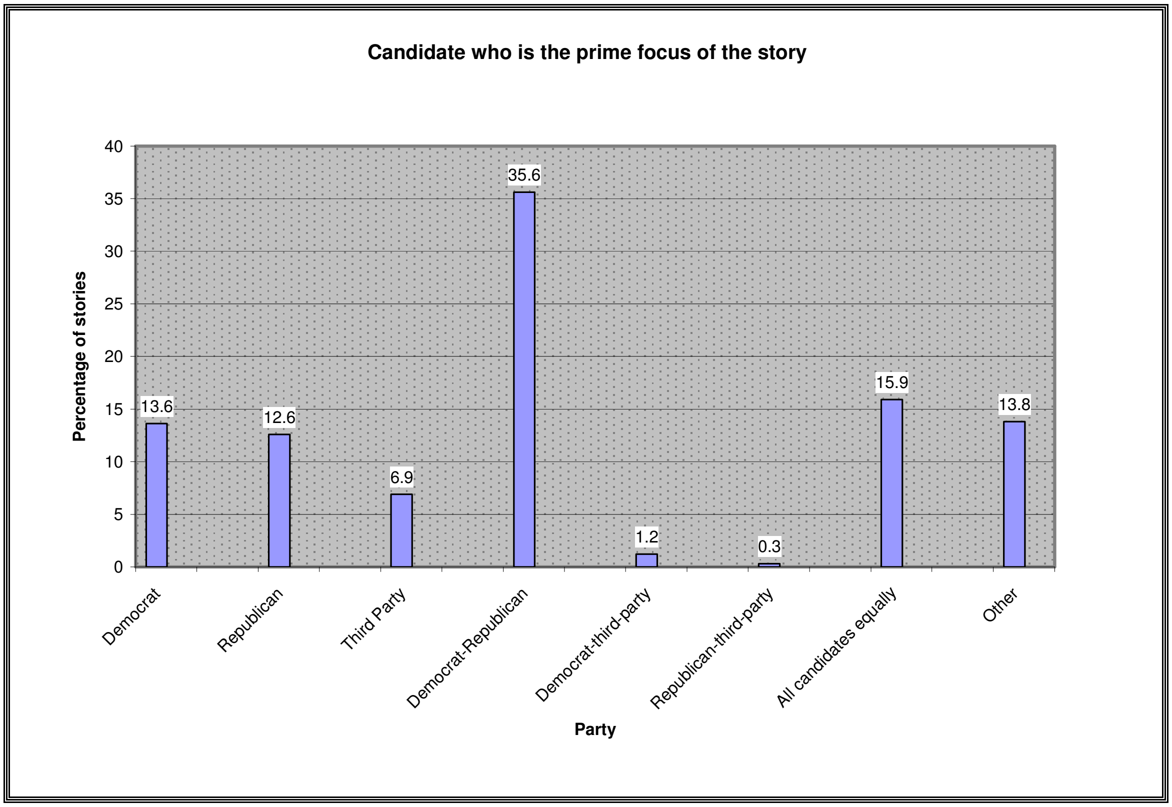
Table 4.4: When does the candidate's name first appear in the story: By party status

Party	Headline or lead	Second to ninth paragraph	Tenth paragraph or later	Total
Major Party	112 *48.5%*	90 *39%*	29 *12.6%*	231 *100%*
Minor Party	25 *24.5%*	45 *44.1%*	32 *31.4%*	102 *100%*

Democrats and Republicans were also more likely to dominate the stories in which they appeared. As shown in Figure 4.1, in 62 percent of the 334 stories analyzed, one or both of the major-party candidates were the main emphasis of the story. Third-party candidates were the primary focus of a story in 6.9 percent of the cases studied, and they were equally emphasized with Democrats and Republicans in almost 16 percent of the stories. Figure 4.1 breaks these numbers down by individual party.

Major-party candidates were also featured on the front pages of the 16 newspapers more regularly than were third-party candidates. Table 4.5 shows that when regional and national dailies published stories in which the Democrats and/or Republican was the main focus, the newspapers placed these stories on the front page in 30.6 percent of the cases and on the front page of the local section in 15.8 percent of the sample. By contrast, stories that focused mainly on a third-party candidate appeared on the front page in 10.5 percent of the cases and on the front page of the local section in 21.1 percent. Generally speaking, stories that emphasized third-party candidates were placed on the inside pages of newspapers in almost 70 percent of the cases studied.

Figure 4.1



The regional and national newspapers also wrote longer stories about Democrats and Republicans than they did about Greens or Libertarians. For example, when one or both of the major-party candidates was the main focus of a story, the article was typically 500 words or more while stories that emphasized third-party candidates tended to be less than 500 words. Stories that emphasized third-party candidates were usually more than 500 words only when the story also focused significant attention on a major-party contender as well (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.5: Where stories are placed – by party

Candidate who is the main focus of the story	Front Page	Front Page of Local Section	Inside Pages	Total
Democrat and/or Republican	60 *30.6%*	31 *15.8%*	105 *53.6%*	196 *100%*
Third-Party candidate	2 *10.5%*	4 *21.1%*	13 *68.4%*	19 *100%*
Major-party candidate(s) and third-party candidate equally	24 *54.5%*	9 *20.5%*	11 *25%*	44 *100%*

Table 4.6: Story lengths – by party

Candidate who is the main focus of story	1 to 499 Words	500 to 999 Words	1,000 or more words
Democrat and/or Republican	54 *26.1%*	87 *42%*	66 *31.9%*
Third-party candidate	13 *56.5%*	6 *26.1%*	4 *17.4%*
Major-party candidate(s) and third-party candidate equally	6 *10.3%*	34 *58.6%*	18 *31%*

Likewise, third-party candidates almost never appeared in stories alone, without their major-party rivals. However, Democrats and Republicans often appeared in stories that never mentioned their Green or Libertarian challengers. Table 4.7 shows that when a Democrat was mentioned in a story, his Republican opponent also appeared in the same story in more than 95 percent of the cases studied while the third-party candidate appeared in 34.7 percent of those stories. The same numbers hold when a Republican is mentioned in a story. By contrast, when a Green Party candidate appeared in a story, that same story also mentioned the Democrat and Republican in 100 percent of the cases. Both major-party candidates appeared in 95.6 percent of all stories in which a Libertarian candidate was mentioned. Put more simply, a third-party candidate is almost never mentioned alone in a story, whereas major-party contenders often appear either alone or only with their other major-party rival.

Table 4.7: Other candidates mentioned in the story

Candidate who is the main focus of the story	Democrat or Republican mentioned	Green or Libertarian mentioned	Democrat and Republican mentioned	The other major party candidate and a third-party candidate	No other candidate mentioned in the story
Democrat	73 *60.3%*			42 *34.7%*	6 *5%*
Republican	71 *64%*	1 *.9%*		36 *32.4%*	3 *2.7%*
Green			57 *100%*		
Libertarian		1 *2.2%*	43 *95.6%*		1 *2.2%*

This tendency to de-emphasize third-party gubernatorial candidates was particularly interesting in California, where newspapers constantly sidelined Green candidate Peter Camejo despite the fact that voters consistently said they were unhappy with the two major-party contenders, Democrat Gov. Gray Davis and Republican Bill Simon, and would welcome an alternative. For example, in an October 6 report in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the newspaper reported that "the degree of dissatisfaction this year with the major candidates seems unprecedented" (Curiel, 2002), adding in a story one day later that voters felt "frustrated with the choices they face" (Gledhill, 2002). Likewise, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported on October 7 that "polls have consistently shown the majority of California voters to be unhappy with the choice between Democrat Davis and Republican Simon" (Marelius 2002a); and the *Los Angeles Times* quoted one 70-year-old voter on October 29 saying that while "Gov. Davis can't make up his mind whether to put his right shoe on his right foot," she will nevertheless vote for him because Simon "is an idiot"[16] (Barabak, 2002).

Yet even in the frustrated atmosphere of 2002, Camejo remained virtually invisible to the news media. He appeared in only 10 percent of the stories published in the *Sacramento Bee*, 6 percent of the stories published in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 17 percent in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and 5 percent in the *Los Angeles Times*. In the national press, Camejo appeared in only three stories, or 4 percent of the total.

A typical way that Camejo was handled occurred on October 14, when the *Chronicle* outlined the gubernatorial candidates' positions on the environment. Despite the fact that the environment is an issue close to the heart of the Green Party, Camejo was mentioned only once and was described simply as "a strong supporter of environmental protection plans" (Wildermuth, 2002a). He was never quoted in his own words in the story, which gave Simon four graphs to outline his environmental proposals and Davis two paragraphs. Moreover, the story was dominated by the environmental debate between Davis and Simon.

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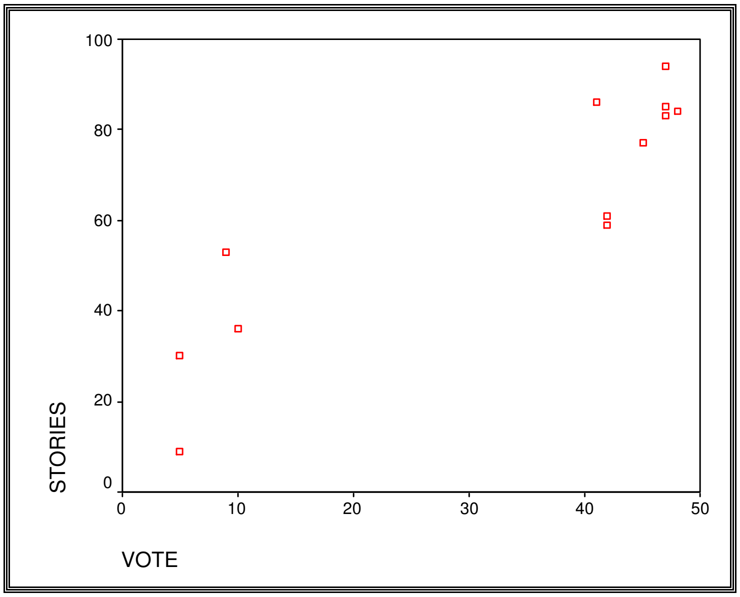
[16] The evidence of voter discontent was made more apparent a year after the 2002 election, when Californians recalled Davis before electing Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger in a special election.

In addition, Camejo remained invisible even when voters were quoted expressing a desire for a candidate other than Davis and Simon. For example, the *Washington Post* reported on October 9 that "polls show most Californians wish someone else were running" (Kurtz, 2002), while the *Chronicle* quoted a 71-year-old focus group participant as saying he "kept thinking how nice it would be to have a third candidate" in the race (Gledhill, 2002). The fact is, there was a third candidate in the race, but neither the *Post* nor the *Chronicle* mentioned Camejo in their respective stories.

Not surprisingly, the analysis indicates that Democrats and Republicans have a clear media advantage over Greens and Libertarians, who must first struggle to get mentioned in a story and then struggle again to be named in headlines, lead paragraphs, and in stories that do not also cover the Democrats and Republicans. Such coverage gives Democratic and Republican contenders many more opportunities to get their name into the public domain than is afforded third parties.

Figure 4.2



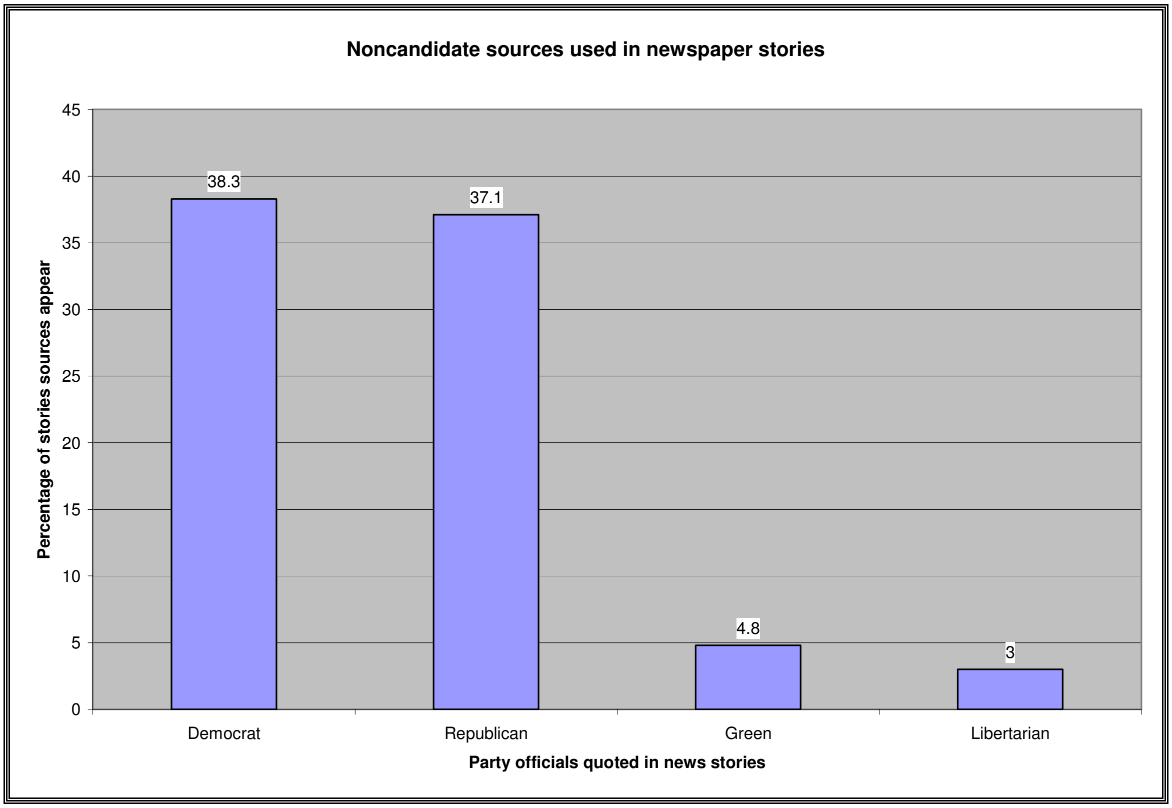
It is difficult to determine through a content analysis what impact, if any, this kind of coverage has on such factors as voter intentions or election results. However, a Pearson's test indicates that a strong correlation exists between the number of stories written about a candidate and that candidates eventual vote total. As Figure 4.2 shows, candidates who appeared in a higher percentage of stories also received a higher percentage of the vote, with a correlation coefficient of .896. This raises an interesting chicken-and-egg question: Did candidates receive more votes because the press wrote more stories about them, or were political reporters adept at taking the public's pulse and so were able to concentrate their coverage on the candidates who would eventually succeed at the ballot box? The answer would require additional research. In any event, the analysis suggests that political reporters accept the hegemony of the two-party system with little question.

Sources used by reporters

One major difference in the coverage between major-party and third-party gubernatorial campaigns rests with the sources that reporters typically use in their news stories. According to the content analysis, the news media turned to Democratic and Republican party officials for comment significantly more often than it quoted leaders from within the Libertarian and Green parties. These sources included campaign spokesmen, state party chairmen, political consultants, pollsters, and party leaders other than the candidates themselves. As Figure 4.3 illustrates, national publications and regional newspapers in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Maine quoted Democratic Party officials in 38.3 percent of the stories published and Republican Party officials in 37.1 percent. By contrast, Green officials were quoted in 4.8 percent and Libertarians in 3 percent.

These results by themselves are not surprising. It is no secret that highly organized Democratic and Republican party operatives are better equipped to make themselves available to reporters than are smaller, less structured minor parties. In addition, as the literature review showed, journalists gravitate toward elite sources when gathering news (Gieber and Johnson 1961; Sigel 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Weaver and Elliott 1985; Brown, Bybee, Wearden and Straughan 1987). What makes the discrepancy between major-party and minor-party sources interesting in this study, however, is the notion that the people who are quoted in news stories often play a vital role in establishing the frames through which those stories are told (Gans 1979; Kim and Lee 2003; Marchi 2005; Reese 1991; Tuchman 1978). To reiterate a point made in Chapter Two, local reporters essentially imbed themselves into the power structure of a community when they rely so heavily on government officials for information. This in turn legitimizes that power structure and passes along elite interpretations of events as objective fact, effectively "eliminating sources of news who would radically challenge the status quo" (Soloski 1989, 868).

Figure 4.3



One question for this study, then, is this: How did the news sources used by reporters covering the 2002 elections in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Maine help frame the stories about the gubernatorial campaigns in those states? The question is more or less a qualitative one, because the content analysis did not code for news frames. Nevertheless, in-depth reading of the 334 stories about these four campaigns suggests that in most cases, the major-party sources who dominated the news coverage in the national and regional press interpreted the 2002 gubernatorial contests from the perspective of the two-party system, even when an individual story prominently featured a serious third-party challenger.

For example, on September 7, the *Wisconsin State Journal* of Madison analyzed the growing number of people throughout the state who were placing Ed-Thompson-For-Governor signs along highways to show their support for the Libertarian gubernatorial candidate. The 476-word article prominently featured Thompson in both the headline and the lead paragraph, but it relied heavily on major-party sources to interpret what those signs meant for the gubernatorial campaign. Here are the opening eight paragraphs:

> If signs could vote, Libertarian Ed Thompson would be the odds-on favorite in the race for governor.
>
> More than 850, 4-by-8-foot, black-and-gold signs carrying Thompson's name have sprouted along Wisconsin highways in recent months. That's on top of 9,000 smaller lawn signs.
>
> Even U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., has noticed.
>
> "We've always said signs don't vote. And they don't," Feingold said. "But the presence of Ed Thompson signs is a warning to Democrats."
>
> "Yes, we should win this time," Feingold continued. "We've got the best candidates. But be on alert. Don't take things like that for granted. It's pretty significant, and it's pretty amazing…"
>
> Thompson is an important factor in the governor's race, Feingold said, and he could "cut either way" into Republican or Democratic support.
>
> Republican strategist Brandon Scholz agreed Thompson is "a wild card." State voters have an independent streak, and Thompson has made some strides since announcing his long-shot candidacy, he said.
>
> But Scholz isn't convinced that the Thompson "sign burst" indicates a growing, grassroots movement (Milfred, 2002a).

There are two issues to take note of in this story. First, even though this story is ostensibly about Thompson's growing presence on the campaign trail, the newspaper chose to quote Democrats and Republicans first, rather than someone from the

Libertarian Party, at the beginning of the story about the significance of Thompson's lawn signs. Second, the major-party officials quoted in this story clearly cast Thompson's campaign in the context of how it affected the contest between the Democrats and Republicans. In the story, for instance, Feingold saw Thompson's signs not as a grassroots effort in support of a political outsider, but rather as "a warning to Democrats," while Scholz portrayed Thompson's role solely as a "wild card" that might impact the race between Democrat Jim Doyle and Republican Gov. Scott McCallum.

It seems logical that Democrats and Republicans would frame the debate this way—after all, that is how they saw the campaign. But is that the only interpretation of Thompson's campaign signs? What about the Libertarian Party's perspective? Did Libertarian officials see the growing presence of Thompson campaign signs as a warning to Democrats, or did they view this development as an indication that voters might be willing to take a new path? And what about the people who placed the signs on their lawns in the first place? What made them support Thompson, and could that support be used by Libertarians to grow their party? Most of these questions went unanswered because neither Libertarian officials nor ordinary Thompson supporters were quoted in the story. It is true that Thompson was paraphrased saying that "his signs show he's catching on." But these comments did not come until after the major-party sources had already framed the issue within the two-party system.

In another example of how major-party sources framed the debate, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published a story in September in which it quoted a spokesman for Democratic Gov. Gray Davis belittling the Green Party as a small political organization that contributed little to the California gubernatorial campaign. In the story, the Davis spokesman criticized the governor's Republican opponent, Bill Simon, for "resorting" to a formal debate with Green candidate Peter Camejo. Said the spokesman: "When you debate a third-party candidate, you are a third-party candidate" (Wildermuth, 2002b). The quote was obviously meant as an insult to Simon and the Republicans, but it also denigrated the Green Party. However, while the Simon camp was quoted in the story defending its decision to debate Camejo, there were no sources from the Green Party to either respond to Davis's attack, give their perspective on the role of minor parties in political campaigns, or discuss the debate between Camejo and Simon. The insinuation that third parties are completely insignificant—an interpretation fostered by a highly placed Democratic Party operative—was allowed to stand as fact because third-party officials were not afforded the opportunity to challenge it.

The two-party news frame that was evident in most of the press reports from 2002 did not come from major-party sources alone. Independent analysts such as political science professors and unaffiliated pollsters, who appeared in almost 23 percent of the stories analyzed, also interpreted these campaigns as contests solely between the Democrat and Republican. For example, the *San Diego Union Tribune* quoted Mark DiCamillo, the associate director of the Field Poll, saying that voters "have a negative view of *both* candidates." The use of the word "both" suggests here that Davis and Simon were the only candidates on the ballot. The paper went on to quote DiCamillo saying: "This is first and foremost an election about Davis. The main reason voters are voting for Simon has nothing really to do with Simon. It has everything to do with Davis, and the rejection of Davis is very strong" (Marelius, 2002b). Such analysis casts the campaign in the two-party system and ignores the fact that other candidates were involved in the election.

In a similar example of a two-party news frame, the *Chronicle* quoted a political science professor analyzing the California campaign by saying that “the public keeps saying, ‘We hate *all* the candidates’” (Gledhill, 2002). In fact, the voters said they disliked only two candidates: Simon and Davis. Previously reported polls said nothing about voters “hating” Camejo, and, in fact, the *Chronicle* had reported that Camejo was “personable, knowledgeable, funny and effusive … the sort of candidate who would benefit from more exposure” (Curiel, 2002). Yet by quoting an independent analyst referring to Simon and Davis as “all” the candidates, the paper was reinforcing the notion that only Democrats and Republicans are legitimate. Reporters essentially passed along quotes like this without challenging their underlying assumptions that Democrats and Republicans are either *all* or *both* of the candidates.

Another way to explore the impact that sources have in framing news stories is to look at the rare article in which third-party officials are actually quoted at length. One such example came from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which published a 1,797-word story on October 6 that analyzed the frustration voters felt toward Davis and Simon and examined the “other options” California voters had in the election. The story is unique in that it quoted Green Party officials and other third-party advocates extensively, thus giving them an unusual forum to challenge the two-party paradigm through which most political campaigns are viewed. Ralph Nader, for instance, was quoted disputing the perception that the only role a third-party candidate can play in an election is that of a spoiler—a perception that is frequently reported as objective fact. While Nader acknowledged that third-party candidates have little chance of winning, he said they are nevertheless worth listening to because “they change the agenda” and “push the (major) parties to address issues they’d prefer to ignore” (Curiel, 2002).

In addition, the story quoted former presidential candidate John Anderson challenging the criteria used by the *Los Angeles Times* to exclude Green candidate Peter Camejo from a debate it was sponsoring between Davis and Simon. That criteria, which said Camejo could not participate in the debate because he was not polling at least 15 percent in public opinion surveys, went unchallenged in the press until Anderson called for a new standard, saying that “an independent or third-party candidate should be invited (to a debate) if he gets 50 percent of the respondents saying he should be included.” At the time, polls were showing that 69 percent of Californians believed Camejo should be included in the debate. That point was buttressed by Nader, who reminded readers that Minnesota gubernatorial nominee Jesse Ventura of the Reform Party was considered a long shot in 1998 until he participated in the debates that boosted his public exposure and ostensibly won over converts (Curiel, 2002).

The journalistic use of sources is important to examine because (1) prominent sources can add a level of credibility to a story and (2) sources help reporters frame a story within a certain context. As this analysis indicates, reporters relied heavily on sources from the two major parties as well as independent analysts who thought in terms of the two-party system. In many cases, these sources were allowed to interpret the race from their Democrat-Republican paradigm, which was then passed along as objective fact. In this sense, the content analysis strongly suggests that stories are imbedded with the hegemony of the two-party system, which is subtly reported as the natural way of things. Subsequent qualitative study of individual stories, as noted here, support the finding in the content analysis that a two-party paradigm is powerful and dominant.

Separate but not equal

The content analysis found that third-party gubernatorial candidates are often defined as being separate from—or outside of—the main contest between the Democrat and the Republican. While major-party candidates were often defined in terms of their opponent—that is, the first time they were mentioned by name in a story they were usually paired with their major-party rival in the same sentence—third-party candidates were typically defined in terms of themselves. This propensity by reporters to couple major-party aspirants together while introducing third-party contenders alone acted to physically separate Greens and Libertarians from the text about their major-party opponents, thus removing them from the main contest for elective office.

In terms of numbers, Table 4.8 illustrates that Green and Libertarian gubernatorial candidates were introduced by name alone in separate sentences in nearly 60 percent of the cases and were paired with one of their opponents in 40 percent. By contrast, Democrats and Republicans were introduced by name together with their major- or minor-party opponents in 64.2 percent of the cases. A major-party candidate was introduced alone in a story in only 35.8 percent of the articles studied.

Table 4.8: How is the candidate defined?

Party	Defined in terms of himself	Defined in terms of his opponent
Major Party	83 *35.8%*	149 *64.2%*
Minor Party	61 *59.8%*	41 *40.2%*

One qualitative illustration of this occurred on October 25, when *The Register-Guard* of Eugene, Oregon, published a story reporting on the campaign finance reports filed by the three gubernatorial hopefuls in the race. As the example below shows, Democrat Ted Kulongoski and Republican Kevin Mannix were paired together in the lead paragraph, and the main thrust of the story was a comparison between how much money Mannix and Kulongoski had raised and spent in relation to each other. Libertarian candidate Tom Cox, on the other hand, was introduced by himself, and his campaign finances were reported solely in terms of Cox as an individual candidate and were not directly compared to what his rivals had raised or spent.

> SALEM – Both major-party candidates for governor have exceeded the $2 million mark in contributions as they enter the home stretch of their campaigns, according to financial disclosures made public Thursday.
>
> Republican Kevin Mannix pulled in a pair of contributions totaling $450,000, along with loans totaling $150,000 from two Salem businessmen to help draw ahead of the fund-raising totals of his Democratic opponent, Ted Kulongoski.
>
> Thanks to his $1.18 million in contributions for the 30-day period that ended Sunday, the Salem attorney's fund-raising totals reached $2.25 million.
>
> Kulongoski, a Portland resident who stepped down last year as a Supreme Court justice, took in $836,651 in the latest 30-day reporting period, giving him a new contribution total of $2.12 million for the entire campaign, which ends with the Nov. 5 Election Day…
>
> The third candidate, Libertarian Tom Cox of Hillsboro, reported a new fund-raising total of $38,378, thanks to contributions of $8,228 in the latest fund-raising cycle. The management consultant has been his own biggest contributor with $9,600 overall.
>
> Despite the loan and outstanding bills, Mannix so far has been able to surpass Kulongoski in spending, most of which has gone to TV and other means of marketing their messages to voters.
>
> Mannix reported spending $2.15 million through last Sunday while Kulongoski reported expenditures totaled $1.77 million… (Steves, 2002a).

In addition to the physical textual separation the example above illustrates, third-party candidates were also separated from the main issue debates that dominated the campaign. In most cases, for instance, Democrats and Republicans were portrayed as in conflict with each other over such issues as taxes, budget deficits, education, and the environment. Their comments appeared either in the same paragraph or adjoining paragraphs, and their arguments were framed in opposition to one another. Third-party candidates, on the other hand, typically appeared alone in their respective paragraphs and were simply quoted stating their opinions about a particular issue. Although there were times when a Green or Libertarian was framed in opposition to one of his opponents, in most cases, this was the exception more than the rule.

For example, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* published a story on October 17 reporting on a four-way debate between Democrat Jim Doyle, Republican Scott McCallum, Libertarian Ed Thompson, and Green Jim Young.[17] The two third-party candidates were physically removed from the issue debate right from the beginning of the story with a headline that read: "Doyle, McCallum tangle over ads: 3rd-party candidates join front-runners in Eau Claire forum." Here, the two major-party candidates were mentioned by name together in the main headline and were portrayed as competing with each other. The unnamed third-party contenders were relegated to the subhead and were portrayed simply as *joining* the front-runners. The trend continued throughout the rest of the 995-word story, the first eleven paragraphs of which are below. Take note that neither Thompson nor Young are included in the disagreements over taxes and negative advertisements in the first half of this story.

> EAU CLAIRE – Republican Gov. Scott McCallum and Democratic Attorney General Jim Doyle clashed Wednesday over the same issues that dominate their television ads – selling off health care payments from the tobacco companies, taxes, funding for schools and pay raises for teachers.
>
> And both candidates disowned a report released Tuesday from a bipartisan panel that recommends big tax increases and cuts in state funding in a variety of areas to balance Wisconsin's books.

---

[17] Young is not part of the content analysis, but will be included briefly in the discussion here.

> McCallum had a direct answer – "No" – when asked whether a tax increase was inevitable to balance the state budget and help deal with the expected $2.8 billion deficit over the next two years. And the governor said repeatedly that Doyle's campaign promises, which he claims total $2.7 billion, make a tax increase unavoidable if Doyle is elected.
>
> In turn, Doyle said McCallum was wrong – "I'm against raising taxes" – and accused McCallum of killing $8 million in spending for the elderly while spending $9 million to buy three new state airplanes since becoming governor in February 2001.
>
> And there also was a new wrinkle to what has become a highly negative, and personal, tone to the campaigns: When asked about their negative ads, both McCallum and Doyle offered to change the ads – but only if the other did so.
>
> And those promises seemed empty as the Eau Claire session ended.
>
> "I make this offer right now: Let's stop the negative ads. Let's change the tone," Doyle told more than 2,500 University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students and curious western Wisconsin residents. "For the next three weeks, let's talk about the positive things about our campaign."
>
> But Doyle's campaign this week began running ads that criticize the governor's flights in state planes, including the timing of the governor's reimbursement for a controversial flight to Rhode Island with his family and a family friend. Those are the type of ads McCallum said he must answer with his own ads that "document a clear difference" between them.
>
> "If he takes his negative ads off, I'll do the same thing," said McCallum, whose campaign this week began running an ad critical of Doyle's own flights in state-owned planes.
>
> "I've got to respond, if he continues" to run negative ads, the governor explained.
>
> It was the first debate that included the two third-party candidates – Libertarian Party candidate Ed Thompson and Green Party hopeful Jim Young (Walters, 2002).

There were sections of this story in which third-party candidates were reported interacting and disagreeing with their major-party rivals. In paragraph twelve, for instance, the *Journal-Sentinel* wrote: "Thompson thanked McCallum and Doyle for the non-stop negative ads, saying they are so angering voters that he is becoming more popular" (Walters, 2002). However, exchanges like this one were rare and did not represent the typical way in which campaign stories were cast. Table 4.9 provides a side-by-side comparison of the typical Democrat-Republican exchange and the typical third-party exchange. As the table indicates, the Democrat and Republican are portrayed in conflict with each other. The third-party candidates simply state their opinions and are not in conflict with anyone.

Table 4.9

Typical Democrat and Republican exchange	Typical third-party exchange
Using the tobacco settlement money to balance the budget: Doyle again denounced McCallum for signing the budget-repair bill that sold off – like private bonds – future health care payments from cigarette manufacturers to avoid raising taxes or cutting services. Doyle called that a "one-year payoff just to get (McCallum) through the election." But McCallum said Doyle, as attorney general, could have stopped the sale, but instead sent Wall Street bonding attorneys a letter supporting the sell-off. "Be honest. Be honest with the people," McCallum chided Doyle. Responding, Doyle said he was pushed into issuing a legal opinion that said only that the Legislature and governor had the legal authority to package and sell to investors decades of future tobacco payments. "I told them, yes, you can pass a stupid law," Doyle said (Walters, 2002).	Thompson again proposed cutting state spending, including half of the $1 billion budget a year that runs state prisons, and said state government should raise new money by legalizing video poker and other forms of gambling. And, any community that passes a referendum asking for an Indian casino should get one, Thompson added. Young proposed raising sales taxes to help the elderly pay property taxes on their homes and said corporate income taxes should be tied to whether companies pay workers "living wages" (Walters, 2002).

Finally, third-party candidates were defined as outside the system through the language used to describe them generally. The press often portrayed Greens and Libertarians as "others"—or extras to the real contest between the major-party candidates. In the California campaign, for example, Democrat Gray Davis and Republican Bill Simon were sometimes called "the major-party candidates," "*both* candidates," or simply "*the* candidates," while the four third-party hopefuls who were on the ballot for governor were called "the four minor-party candidates," "the four *other* candidates," or, in one story citing poll results, simply as "other" (see Bazar, 2002; Finnegan and Gold, 2002; Marelius, 2002a and 2002c).

The same language was used in Oregon, where Democrat Ted Kulongoski and Republican Kevin Mannix were frequently called "the two major candidates," "both candidates," or "the two major-party candidates," while Libertarian Tom Cox was frequently introduced as "a third candidate for governor," "the third candidate in the race," or as "an alternative" to the two frontrunners, terms that highlight his outsider status (see Law, 2002a; Mapes, 2002a; Mapes, 2002b; Mayer, 2002; Steves, 2002b; Steves, 2002c). For example, in a political profile about Cox that appeared in the *Statesman Journal* of Salem, Oregon, on October 27, the newspaper reported that "the Libertarian offers alternatives to the traditional parties' candidates" (Law, 2002b). In other words, Cox was an "alternative" rather one of three candidates competing for the state's top job.

In Maine and Wisconsin the language was more neutral, with each candidate typically introduced by their party name (for example, Democrat Jim Doyle, Republican Scott McCallum, or Libertarian Ed Thompson). However, there were a few rare instances in which the Wisconsin press used language that sidelined Thompson. For example, the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* once referred to the 2002 gubernatorial contest as "the campaign for governor between (Republican Scott) McCallum and Democratic Attorney General Jim Doyle" (see Walters and Toosi, 2002). Generally speaking, though, Wisconsin newspapers avoided these broad labels.

Spoilers and long shots

Third-party candidates were also defined differently in terms of the role they were said to play in a gubernatorial election. In almost half of the stories in which they appeared, Greens and Libertarians were defined as either long-shot candidates with little chance of winning or potential "spoilers" whose only role would be to siphon enough votes from one major-party candidate so as to effect the outcome of the election. By contrast, Democrats and Republicans were defined as "serious contenders" in almost 86 percent of the stories in which they appeared. Democrats and Republicans were portrayed as long shots in less than 1 percent of the stories studied, and they were rarely if ever portrayed as spoilers or protest votes (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10: How is the candidate's campaign role portrayed?

Party Status	Serious contender	Spoiler or long shot	Protest vote	Role not mentioned
Major Party	199 *85.8%*	1 *.4%*	0	32 *13.8%*
Minor Party	15 *14.7%*	45 *44.1%*	5 *4.9%*	37 *36.3%*

The reporter's decision to use the term "spoiler" in the context of Green and Libertarian candidates is of particular interest here because it suggests that the only important role a third-party aspirant can play is as one who effects the election between the Democrat and Republican. What this implies is that certain votes naturally belong to certain candidates—in other words, there are Democratic votes and Republican votes, but no in between. Under this logic, a third-party candidate has no natural constituency and therefore must steal votes that would normally go to another candidate. This is not always the case, though. As the literature review indicated, while it is true that third-party candidates are occasionally spoilers who steal votes away from major-party candidates (Magee 2003), it has also been shown that minor parties generate their own votes by attracting people who would not otherwise go to the polls (Allen and Brox 2005; Michelson and Susin 2004; Southwell 2004); who want to send a message to the Democrats and Republicans (Chressanthis 1990); and who are simply loyal to alternative parties (Donovan, Bowler, and Terrio 2000; Gillespie 1993; Rosenstone et al. 1996). Not only does such language strongly suggest that reporters have accepted the hegemony of the Democrats and Republicans, but it ignores the other roles a minor-party can play, such as broadening the political debate to issues that might not otherwise get aired and bringing out voters who may otherwise stay home.

Nevertheless, such language was used frequently by regional and national newspapers. In Oregon, for example, the *Statesman Journal* reported on October 1 that Libertarian Tom Cox "figures to draw a significant number of votes that otherwise might go to (Republican) Mannix" (Law, 2002c), a contention that Mannix had been making throughout the campaign. When Democrat Kulongoski appeared to have won the election, the newspaper reported this angle again, saying that Cox had been "a thorn in Mannix's side"—a candidate who the GOP worried would "siphon Republican votes …" (Law, 2002d).

Other newspapers also characterized Cox as a spoiler. In a story that reported on a previous election match-up between Mannix and Cox, *The Oregonian* wrote that "Cox demonstrated an ability to pull votes from Mannix in the 2000 attorney general's race" (Nokes, 2002); and the *Register-Guard* quoted Mannix in its Election Day coverage saying, "The threat of future Libertarian candidates drawing votes away from Republicans will have to be confronted" (Steves, 2002d). The same story did quote Cox saying that it was Mannix and the Republicans who were responsible for the Democrat's victory—not him. Nevertheless, like most third-party contenders, Cox was forced to address the spoiler question.

Newspaper reporters were also quick to label third-party contenders as long-shot candidates. Although the *Statesman Journal* reported that Cox was a smart candidate—"a math whiz and National Merit Scholar in high school" (Law, 2002b) who at least one voter considered to be "a legitimate candidate" (Law, 2002e)—the newspaper also pointed out twice that Cox had "no chance of winning" (Law, 2002e) or "the least chance of winning" (Law, 2002b). Newspapers in California, Wisconsin, and even Maine used similar language at times to describe their respective third-party candidates—although Maine usually did not handicap the race by placing labels like "long shot," "underdog," or "frontrunner" on any of the candidates in that race.

Democrats and Republicans who lagged in the polls were not described in the same way. For example, California's Republican gubernatorial hopeful, Bill Simon, was far behind Democratic incumbent Gray Davis throughout most of the 2002 election. Yet, the press treated him as a serious contender, often referring to him simply as "the challenger" or Davis's "Republican opponent." Likewise, the *Washington Post* referred to Wisconsin's incumbent Republican governor, Scott McCallum, as "an early underdog" in the race against Democrat Jim Doyle (Broder, 2002a), but it called Libertarian Ed Thompson a "long-shot" (Broder, 2002b). Such language represents two different ways of describing a candidate who is behind in the polls, although the former connotes potential seriousness and the latter suggests hopelessness. It should be pointed out that no poll numbers were given in either case to support the *Post*'s claim. The labels were simply applied as if they were the objective truth. Such coverage seems to support McLeod and Hertog's (1992) observation that casual references to public opinion marginalize outside groups.

When third-party candidates did well in the polls, reporters usually chalked this up as a protest vote against the two major parties rather than as natural support for the candidates themselves. For example, when Libertarian Ed Thompson received more than 10 percent of the vote in the Wisconsin election, the *New York Times* sought to explain how this could occur, writing: "Perhaps because voters were unhappy with the nasty tone of the race … Ed Thompson, running on a Libertarian ticket, made a strong showing as a third-party candidate" (Christian et al, 2002). No polling data was used to support the contention that Thompson's support came mainly from voters disgruntled over the negative campaigning of the two major parties. Likewise, the *Los Angeles Times* saw Camejo's 5 percent vote total as a clear signal of the "voters' discontent with California's two major-party candidates," quoting one political consultant saying that the Green candidate's support was "a true protest vote" (Daunt and Reiterman, 2002). Again, the newspaper used no polling data in making this assessment—it was simply stated as fact.

Offbeat or Extreme

The news media rarely described any of the candidates' physical or personal characteristics, regardless of party. Reporters also refrained, for the most part, in defining each candidates' ideology. For example, the news media avoided giving any physical description of both major- and minor-party candidates in nearly three-quarters of the 334 stories analyzed in this study. Likewise, in roughly 8 out of 10 stories, the press did not characterize where a major- or minor-party candidate sat on the ideological scale. This is a testament to the press's attempt to remain objective when covering campaigns.

However, when a candidate's physical appearance or personal characteristics were described or their ideology defined, a minor-party candidate was more likely than was a major-party contender to be cast as outside the mainstream. Table 4.11 shows that in only 1.7 percent of the stories analyzed was a Democrat or Republican described as either sometimes or often extreme, while third-party candidates were described as sometimes or often extreme in 7.8 percent of the stories. Table 4.12 shows that a minor-party candidate's political ideology was described as radical or extreme in 5.9 percent of the cases studied, while a major-party candidate's ideology was described this way in less than 1 percent of the stories analyzed.

Table 4.11: How the candidate is physically and personally described – by party status

Party status	Mainstream	Sometimes or always offbeat or extreme	Candidate not described
Major Party	60 *25.9%*	4 *1.7%*	168 *72.4%*
Minor Party	18 *17.6%*	8 *7.8%*	76 *74.5%*

Table 4.12: How the candidate's ideology is portrayed.

Party status	Mainstream	Radical or extreme	Ideology not described
Major Party	18 *7.8%*	2 *.9%*	212 *91.4%*
Minor Party	10 *9.8%*	6 *5.9%*	86 *84.3%*

Green gubernatorial candidate Peter Camejo, in particular, was cast as ideologically extreme in several stories that appeared in the California press. The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, characterized Camejo as "an activist" who "like many *radicals* during the 1960s … found his way to UC Berkeley, where his role in campus activism convinced then-Gov. Ronald Reagan to brand him 'one of the most dangerous men in America.'" Later, the *Times* pointed out that in 1976 Camejo "ran for president on the Socialist ticket" (Daunt and Reiterman, 2002). The *San Francisco Chronicle* added to this portrait, calling Camejo a former "Socialist Workers Party" member (Wildermuth, 2002b) and an "activist" who used to "mail away for radical pamphlets" (Herel, 2002).

Camejo wasn't the only one, though. The Wisconsin press occasionally highlighted Libertarian candidate Ed Thompson's colorful background. He was called "a third-party maverick" (Milfred, 2002b) by the *Wisconsin State Journal*, a "professional poker player" who was running a "populist-tinged campaign" (Broder, 2002b) by the *Washington Post*, and an "anti-government political hero," (Borowski and Walters, 2002) by the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel.* This contrasts with adjectives used to describe Democrat Jim Doyle—who was referred to as "the state attorney general" and "the front-runner" (see Doyle, McCallum agree to 3 debates but are clashing over others; Dresang, 2002; Toosi and Borowski, 2002; and Walers and Schultze, 2002)—or Republican Scott McCallum—who was called "Governor," the "underdog," and a "leading candidate" (see Borowski and Walters, 2002; Broder, 2002a; Doyle, McCallum agree to 3 debates but are clashing over others; Milfred, 2002c; Pommer, 2002; Toosi and Borowski, 2002; and Walers and Schultze, 2002).

Still, third-party candidates were usually cast as mainstream when they were cast at all. For example, as Tables 4.11 and 4.12 show, Greens and Libertarians were physically and personally described as mainstream in 17.6 percent of the stories and ideologically mainstream in 9.8 percent of the stories in which they appeared (compared to 26 percent and 8 percent for major-party candidates, respectively).

The preceding three sections of this chapter have been, for the most part, an analysis of language—in short, an examination of the words reporters use to represent what they see as "the reality" of a political campaign. In all probability, reporters choose certain labels—whether it be "long-shot," "spoiler," or "radical"—not because of some outward political bias in favor of one candidate and against another, but because they are looking for short cuts that will allow them to quickly convey the essence of a campaign in the limited time and space with which they have to work. In addition, many of these labels can be easily justified. California's Green Party candidate Peter Camejo, for instance, rarely registered more than 5 percent support in public opinion surveys throughout the gubernatorial campaign. If that doesn't represent a long shot, what does?

Yet as Hodge and Kress (1979), Fairclough (1995), and others (Merrill, 1965; Cole and Shaw, 1974; Donohew, 1982; Fry and Sigman, 1984; and Fry and Fry, 1986) have shown, language is not neutral. It is wrought with meanings and ideological perceptions of reality that color how we view and act upon the world around us. Which words are used and how they are structured in a sentence may not only affect how readers perceive news events (Fry and Sigman, 1984), they may also shed light on the predisposition of the writer (Merrill, 1965). In some cases, the reporter's impartiality may be intentional, as Merrill showed with his study of the attributive verbs used by *Time* magazine to quote presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy. But in many other instances, the biases conveyed by language may be hidden, even from the journalists themselves. As Hodge and Kress wrote in 1979: "There are basic assumptions about reality which are built into the language at so deep a level that they act largely unconsciously" (p. 63).

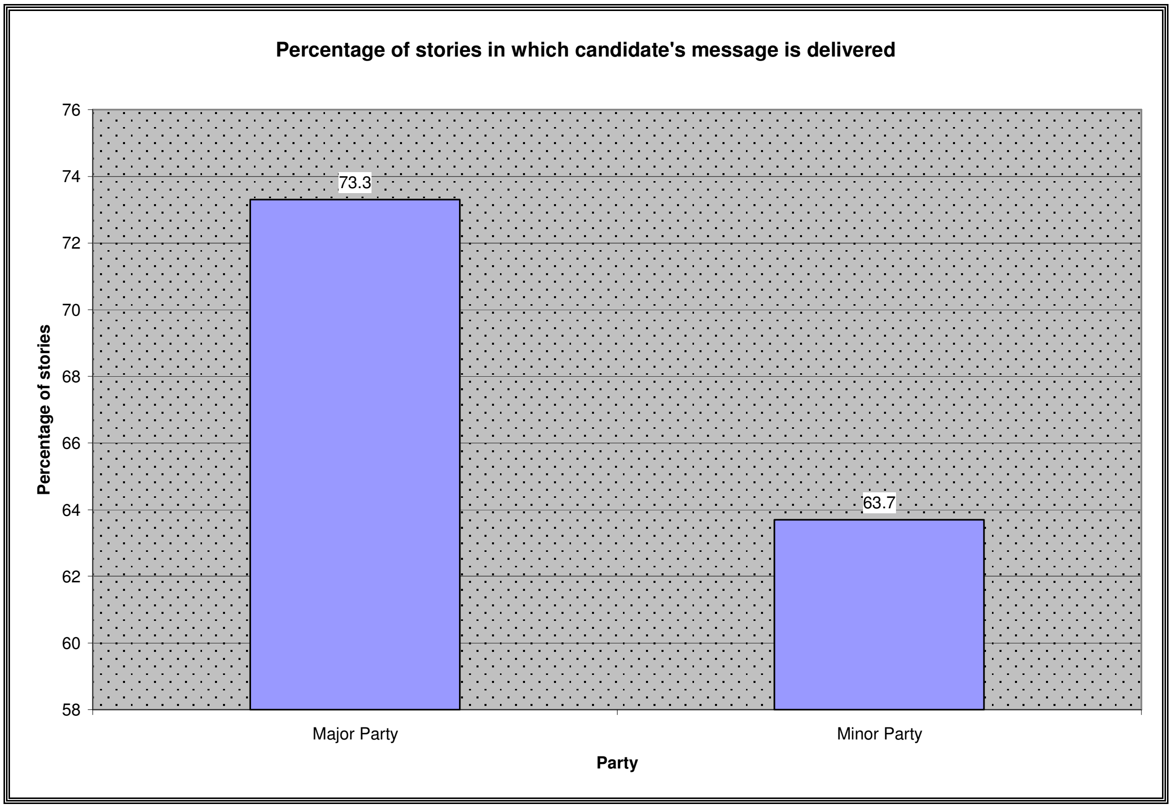
In this light, then, the present study assumes that the words reporters used to describe major- and minor-party candidates during the 2002 gubernatorial campaigns provide clues into the mindset of the journalists who covered those elections. It is true, as the results above indicate, that reporters normally guarded against their biases by avoiding labels that described the physical, personal, and ideological characteristics of the candidates they were covering. But at times, these biases slipped through, such as when losing third-party candidates were said to be "long shots" while losing major-party contenders were simply "underdogs." Such language use represents another way in which third-party candidates are sidelined, and it points to reporters' (perhaps unconscious?) acceptance of the hegemony of the Democrats and Republicans.

Message delivered?

When third-party candidates are featured in the news media, they do fairly well in having their messages delivered to the public—although major-party candidates still have a slight advantage. For example, when third-party candidates were featured in a news story, the candidate's message was reported in the story in 63.7 percent of the cases, compared to 73.3 percent of the time for major-party candidates (see Figure 4.4). Likewise, news reporters allowed the candidates themselves to deliver the message, rather than the reporter delivering it for them. Figure 4.5 shows that in nearly 54 percent of the cases in which a third-party candidate's message was delivered, it came in the form of a direct or indirect quote from the candidate himself while the press synthesized the message in the reporter's voice in only 24.5 percent of the cases.[18] This was similar to major-party candidates, who were permitted to deliver their own message through direct and indirect quotes in 61.6 percent of the stories while reporters used their own voice to deliver the major-party candidate's message in 25 percent of the stories.

Newspaper reporters also gave equal coverage to the issues of both major- and minor-party candidates—and, in fact, third parties had a slight advantage in this category. For example, when a newspaper included a Green or Libertarian in a story, the third-party candidate's issues were discussed in 49 percent of the cases while a major-party candidate's issue positions were outlined in 41.4 percent of the stories in the analysis (see Figure 4.6).[19]

Figure 4.4



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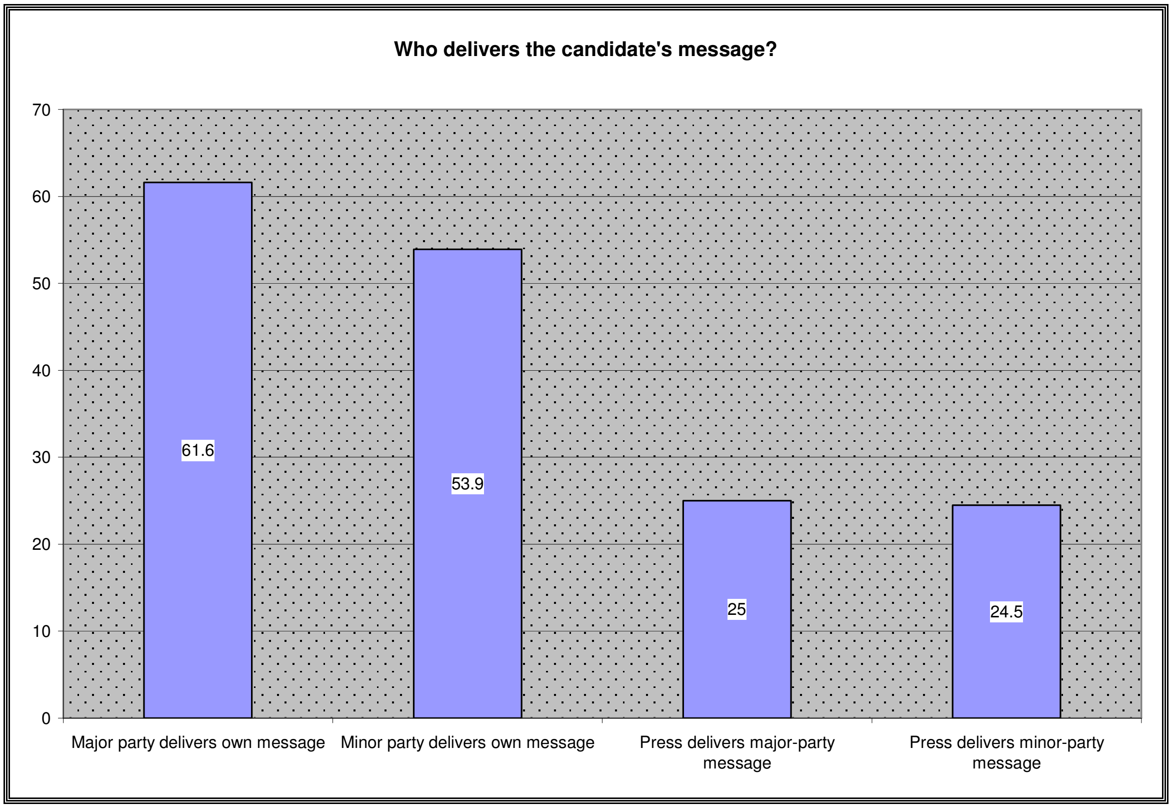
[18] In other cases, supporters outside the campaign helped delivered a candidate's message.

[19] It should be noted that most of the 334 stories included in this analysis (54.5 percent) did not discuss issues at all.

Figure 4.5



There was also a fairly wide spread of issues that were associated with both major- and minor-party candidates. Table 4.14 shows the rank order of issues associated with Democrats and Republicans versus Greens and Libertarians. As the table illustrates, tax-and-budget issues were closely associated with both major- and minor-party candidates, followed by education. One noticeable difference is that the third-party candidates were more closely associated with complaints about the American political system than were major-party contenders, for obvious reasons. However, it should be noted that most of the stories that highlighted a candidate's complaint about the American political system were published in the California press and were associated with Green Peter Camejo, who made changing the electoral system a major issue of his 2002 gubernatorial campaign.[20] Other than this, no discernable differences in the issues associated with each candidate could be gleaned from the data analysis.

Figure 4.6

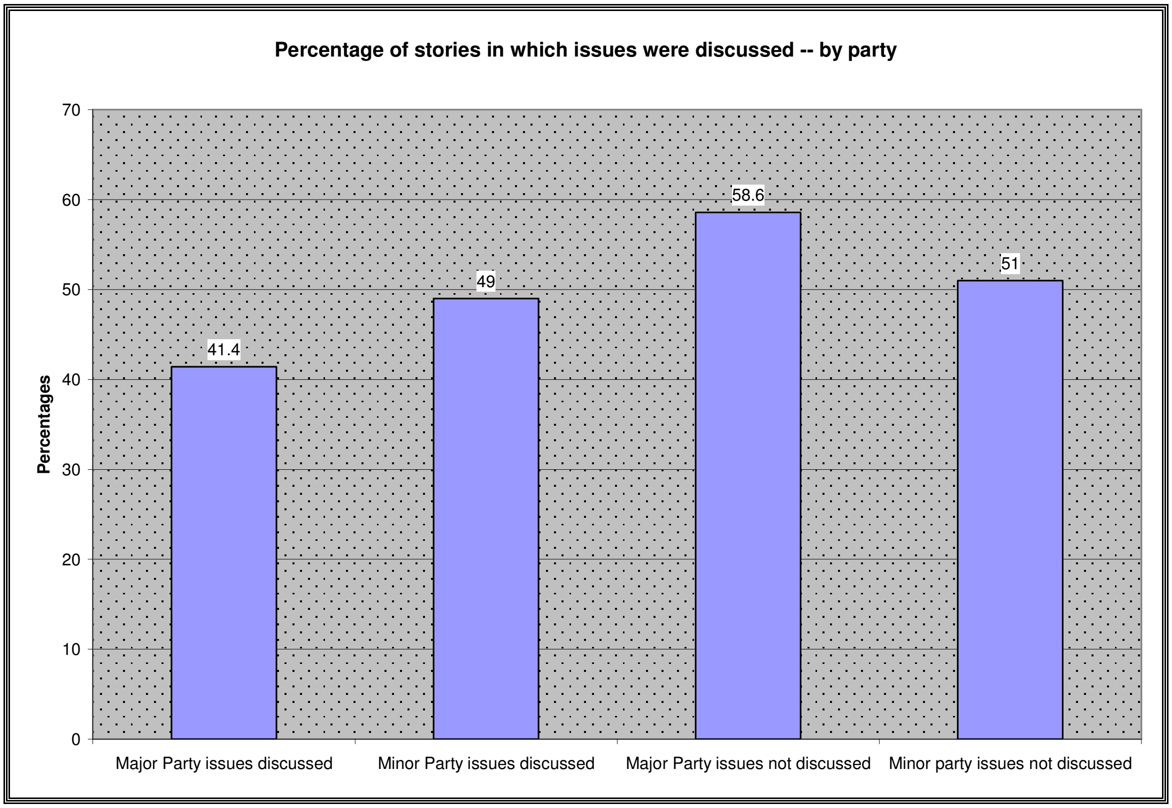


Table 4.14: Rank order of issues associated with major and minor parties

Major Party	Percentage of stories	Minor Party	Percentage of stories
1. Tax and budget	14.2	1. American political system	12.7
2. Education	6	1. Tax and budget	12.7
3. Economy	5.2	2. Education	3.9
4. Corruption	3.4	2. Healthcare	3.9
5. Abortion	3	2. Immigration	3.9
6. Environment	2.6	3. Crime	2
7. Healthcare	2.2	3. Abortion	2
8. Crime	1.3	3. Civil Rights	2
8. Immigration	1.3	3. Economy	2
9. Civil Rights	.4	4. Corruption	1
		4. Environment	1

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[20] Peter Camejo's 2002 gubernatorial campaign Web site listed "Free and Fair Elections" as the third issue on his 10-issue platform. The other three third-party candidates who were included in this study did not make the American political system a big issue in their campaigns.

Regional vs. National publications

The content analysis also picked up differences in the way regional and national newspapers cover third-party gubernatorial candidates. Although most regional papers followed similar patterns of excluding or sidelining Greens and Libertarians, they nevertheless devoted slightly more coverage to third parties than did national newspapers. In citing this finding, however, it must be noted that the three national newspapers included in this study published only six stories that included any mention of a Green or Libertarian gubernatorial candidate in these four states. This sample is so small that it may be problematic to draw too many conclusions about the nature of national newspaper coverage of minor parties at the gubernatorial level.

The main area of difference between regional and national newspapers in the study rests with which candidates are the main focus of news stories. In the three national newspapers, a Democrat and/or a Republican was the main focus of the story in 55.9 percent of the cases studied.[21] A Green or Libertarian from California, Oregon, Maine, or Wisconsin was never the main focus of any story that appeared in the three national newspapers included in this study for the 2002 campaign (see Table 4.15).

Democrats and Republicans dominated coverage in regional newspapers as well, but not to the same extent that existed in national publications. Table 4.15 illustrates that in regional newspapers, a Democrat and/or Republican was the main focus of the story in 63.3 percent of the cases studied while a Green or Libertarian was the main focus in only 8.4 percent of the stories published.

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[21] In 44.1 percent of the cases, some other major-party candidate was the main focus of the story. This category picked up cases in which national newspaper published “wrap-up” stories that highlighted major events in several gubernatorial or legislative races around the country. In such stories, one of the gubernatorial candidates from either California, Oregon, Maine or Wisconsin was mentioned in the story, but he was not the main focus.

National newspapers were also more likely to characterize a third-party candidate as outside the mainstream than was a regional newspaper. As is noted in Table 4.16, minor-party candidates were described as offbeat or extreme in 16.7 percent of the stories published in the three national newspapers, which never described third parties as mainstream. By contrast, regional newspapers described third-party gubernatorial candidates as mainstream in 18.8 percent of cases, and offbeat or extreme in 7.3 percent.[22]

Finally, national publications were more likely to handicap the race by describing third-party candidates as spoilers or long shots. As Table 4.17 shows, major-party candidates were portrayed as serious contenders in almost every story published in national newspapers, which almost always portrayed third-party candidates as spoilers, long shots, or protest votes. Regional newspapers were kinder in this sense, describing third-party candidates as mainstream in 15.6 percent of the stories, spoilers or long shots in 41.7 percent, and protest votes in 4.2 percent. Again, regional papers followed similar patterns as national dailies, but to a lesser extent.

Table 4.15: Candidate who was the main focus of the story – by publication status

Publication status	Major party candidate	Minor party candidate	Major and minor party equally	Other candidates in other races
National newspapers	33 *55.9%*	0	0	26 *44.1%*
Regional newspapers	174 *63.3%*	23 *8.4%*	58 *21.1%*	20 *7.3%*

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[22] It should be noted that in the great majority of cases, both regional and national newspaper avoided descriptions all together.

Table 4.16: How is the candidate described – by publication status

Publication status	**Party status**	**Candidate description**		
		Mainstream	**Sometimes offbeat or extreme**	**Not described**
National newspapers	**Major Party**	12 *22.6%*	0	41 *77.4%*
	Minor Party	0	1 *16.7%*	5 *83.3%*
Regional newspapers	**Major Party**	48 *26.8%*	4 *2.2%*	127 *70.9%*
	Minor Party	18 *18.8%*	7 *7.3%*	71 *74%*

In many ways, these differences should not be surprising. One might expect regional papers to devote more coverage to a third-party candidate given that they are writing for an audience that will be voting in the election. National newspapers may refrain from covering third-party candidates because they are writing for a national audience, many of whom have no say in a particular state's election and so may have little motivation to know every candidate who is on the ballot in that state. In addition, political reporters at regional newspapers may actually know the candidates on a much more personal basis and therefore view them as much more than simple labels. Finally, smaller newspapers may feel less secure in handicapping a race because they have fewer resources and may not have the same access to polling data as larger publications, some of which conduct their own surveys.

Table 4.17: What role does the candidate play – by publication status

Publication status	Party status	What role is the candidate said to play?			
		Serious contender	Spoiler or long shot	Protest vote	Role not described
National newspapers	Major party	46 *86.8%*	0	0	7 *13.2%*
	Minor party	0	5 *83.3%*	1 *16.7%*	
Regional newspapers	Major party	153 *85.5%*	1 *.6%*		25 *14%*
	Minor party	15 *15.6%*	40 *41.7%*	4 *4.2%*	37 *38.5%*

State-by-State Difference

One exception to almost all generalizations about third-party coverage is the reporting that occurred at the three newspapers in Maine, which treated the Green Party's gubernatorial candidate like he was a serious contender worthy of consideration by voters. When Maine newspapers handicapped the race, they pointed out that Green candidate Jonathan Carter was far behind in the polls, but they reported survey results without then labeling Carter as a long shot. Instead, they let the numbers speak for themselves. Maine newspapers also wrote extensively about Carter's position on the issues, usually intertwined his messages along with those from the Democrat and Republican, and they frequently allowed Green Party officials to give their perspective on the race.

This was not unique to Carter. Independent John Michael, a state representative, also ran for governor in 2002. Although this analysis did not code for Michael, a qualitative reading of the coverage indicates that Maine newspapers also treated him as an equal participant in the race, despite the fact that he had little campaign funding and received only 1 percent of the popular vote on Election Day. He was almost always included in reporter-generated stories about issues, and he was quoted extensively in formal debate stories. That said, Maine newspapers did seem to label Michael a long shot much more often than they did Carter, although, again, the data analysis did not code for Michael and so there are no numbers to quantify this.

In terms of raw numbers, newspapers in Maine devoted a significantly higher percentage of their coverage to Carter than newspapers in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin devoted to the third-party candidates in their elections. Tables 4.18a through 4.18d give a state-by-state comparison. In Maine, the two largest newspapers in the state, the *Portland Press Herald* and the *Bangor Daily News*,[23] published 101 and 98 stories, respectively, about the 2002 gubernatorial campaign during the time period used in this analysis. Of that, the *Portland Press Herald* devoted 87 articles to the Democrat, or 86 percent, 71 articles to the Republican, or 70 percent, and 62 articles to the Green candidate, or 61 percent. The *Daily News* actually gave Carter a higher percentage of stories than it published about the Republican, with 50 percent of its stories mentioning Carter and only 46 percent mentioning Republican Peter Cianchette.

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[23] The third Maine newspaper in this study, the *Kennebec Journal*, is not included in this part of the analysis because its articles were not available on Lexis-Nexis and its online archive made it difficult to calculate total articles per candidate.

Tables 4.18a – 4.18d: State-by-State Differences

Table A: California

Newspaper	Total Articles	Davis (D)	Simon (R)	Camejo (G)
Sacramento Bee	213	206 *97%*	133 *63%*	22 *10 %*
San Diego Union Tribune	141	131 *93%*	74 *53%*	9 *6%*
San Francisco Chronicle	202	182 *90%*	128 *63%*	35 *17%*
Los Angeles Times	302	286 *95%*	195 *65%*	15 *5%*
National Newspapers	78	73 *94%*	42 *54%*	2 *3%*

Table B: Wisconsin

Newspaper	Total Articles	Doyle (D)	McCallum (R)	Thompson (L)
Capital Times	185	128 *69%*	155 *84%*	58 *31%*
Wisconsin State Journal	144	104 *72%*	119 *83%*	66 *46%*
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	424	347 *82%*	373 *88%*	156 *37%*
National Newspapers	26	21 *81%*	23 *89%*	3 *14%*

Table C: Maine

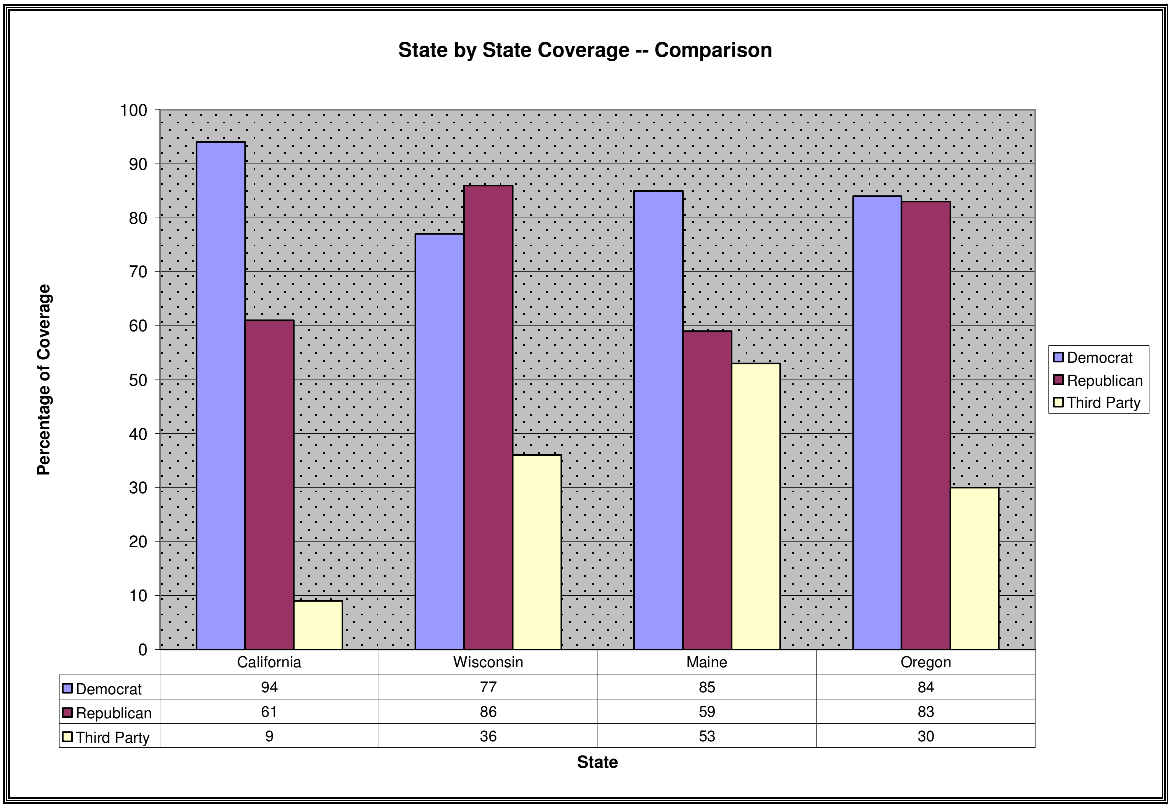
Newspaper	Total	Baldacci (D)	Cianchette (R)	Carter (G)
Bangor Daily News	98	82 *84%*	45 *46%*	49 *50%*
Portland Press Herald	101	87 *86%*	71 *70%*	62 *61%*
National Newspapers	16	14 *88%*	11 *69%*	2 *13%*

Table D: Oregon

Newspaper	Total Articles	Kulongoski (D)	Mannix (R)	Cox (L)
Oregonian	143	124 *87%*	115 *80%*	60 *42%*
The Register-Guard	65	50 *77%*	54 *83%*	14 *22%*
Statesman Journal	91	77 *85%*	81 *89%*	20 *22%*
National Newspapers	12	11 *92%*	9 *75%*	1 *8%*

As Tables 4.18a through 4.18d indicate, the state to come closest to these percentages was Wisconsin, where Libertarian Ed Thompson was mentioned in 31 percent of all campaign stories published in the *Capital Times* of Madison, 46 percent of the coverage in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, and 37 percent of the coverage in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*—although these numbers are small compared to the coverage each newspaper gave to the Democrat and Republican in that campaign.

Figure 4.7



The table also shows that Tom Cox, the Libertarian who ran for governor in Oregon, also received a fair amount of coverage while Green Peter Camejo of California fell far behind the coverage given to Democrat Gray Davis and Republican Bill Simon. Take note, though, that the coverage in Maine is much more even between the Green, the Democrat, and the Republican than coverage in the other three states, where the third-party candidate typically received about half the coverage given to major-party candidates—or less, as in the case of California. This difference in coverage is illustrated in Figure 4.7, which measures the percentage of stories in which each candidate appeared.

Table 4.19 also suggests that Maine newspapers viewed the campaign as a multi-party race, as opposed to a two-man race. As the table shows, the Democrat, Republican and Green candidate were equally represented in nearly half of all stories that the three Maine newspapers published about the 2002 gubernatorial campaign. Put another way, in 44 percent of the stories that appeared in the *Bangor Daily News*, the *Portland Press Herald*, and the Augusta-based *Kennebec Journal*, the Democrat, Republican and Green candidate were each mentioned equally and treated like serious contenders. This is far different from the coverage in the other three states, where all three candidates were equally represented in only 5.8 percent of the stories appearing in the California press, 9.6 percent of the stories in the Oregon press, and 8.3 percent of the stories that appeared in Wisconsin newspapers. By contrast, most of the stories that appeared in the California, Oregon, and Wisconsin press focused on either the Democrat, the Republican or both major-party candidates together, an indication that these newspapers viewed these campaigns through the two-party paradigms while Maine newspapers seemed to break that mold.

Maine newspapers also gave the third-party candidate equal prominence in headlines and leads. An analysis of Table 4.20 shows that Green candidate Jonathan Carter's name appeared in a headline or lead paragraph in 37.5 percent of the cases analyzed, compared with 27.3 percent of the time for the Republican and 53 percent of the time for the Democrat. In other words, Carter's name was highlighted in headlines and lead paragraphs more often than was the Republican candidate's. This is in stark contrast to newspapers in California and Oregon, where the third-party candidates appeared in headlines or leads in only 18 and 13 percent of the cases studied, respectively. Wisconsin came close to Maine's coverage, placing Libertarian Ed Thompson's name in a headline or lead in 30.4 percent of the sample, slightly more than the Republican, Kevin Mannix.

Table 4.19: Candidate who is the main focus of story

State	Democrat	Republican	Third Party	Democrat-Republican	Democrat-third party	Republican-third party	All three candidates equally
California	17 *16.5%*	26 *25.2%*	7 *6.8%*	41 *39.8%*	0	1 *1%*	6 *5.8%*
Maine	9 *12.2%*	8 *10.8%*	6 *8.1%*	4 *5.4%*	4 *5.4%*	0	33 *44.6%*
Oregon	9 *12.3%*	7 *9.6%*	2 *2.7%*	41 *56.2%*	0	0	7 *9.6%*
Wisconsin	11 *13.1%*	1 *1.2%*	8 *9.5%*	33 *39.3%*	0	0	7 *8.3%*

The three newspapers in Maine were also more likely than newspapers in the other three states to treat the third-party candidate as a serious contender, although Democrats and Republicans still dominated in this category. Table 4.21 gives a state-by-state comparison on how newspapers defined the roles of Democrats, Republicans, and third-party candidates in their respective gubernatorial elections. The table measures the percentage of stories in which a candidate was defined as either a serious contender, spoiler/long shot, or protest vote. Take note that Maine newspapers portrayed Green candidate Jonathan Carter as a serious contender in almost half of the stories in which he appeared. This far outpaced the newspapers in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin, which almost never portrayed the third-party candidates in those campaigns as anything other than a spoiler, long shot, or protest vote.

Maine dailies also turned to third-party sources (other than the candidate) significantly more often than did newspapers in the other three states. It should be noted, however, that the *Bangor Daily News*, the *Portland Press Herald*, and the *Kennebec Journal* still quoted Democratic and Republican party operatives much more often than it

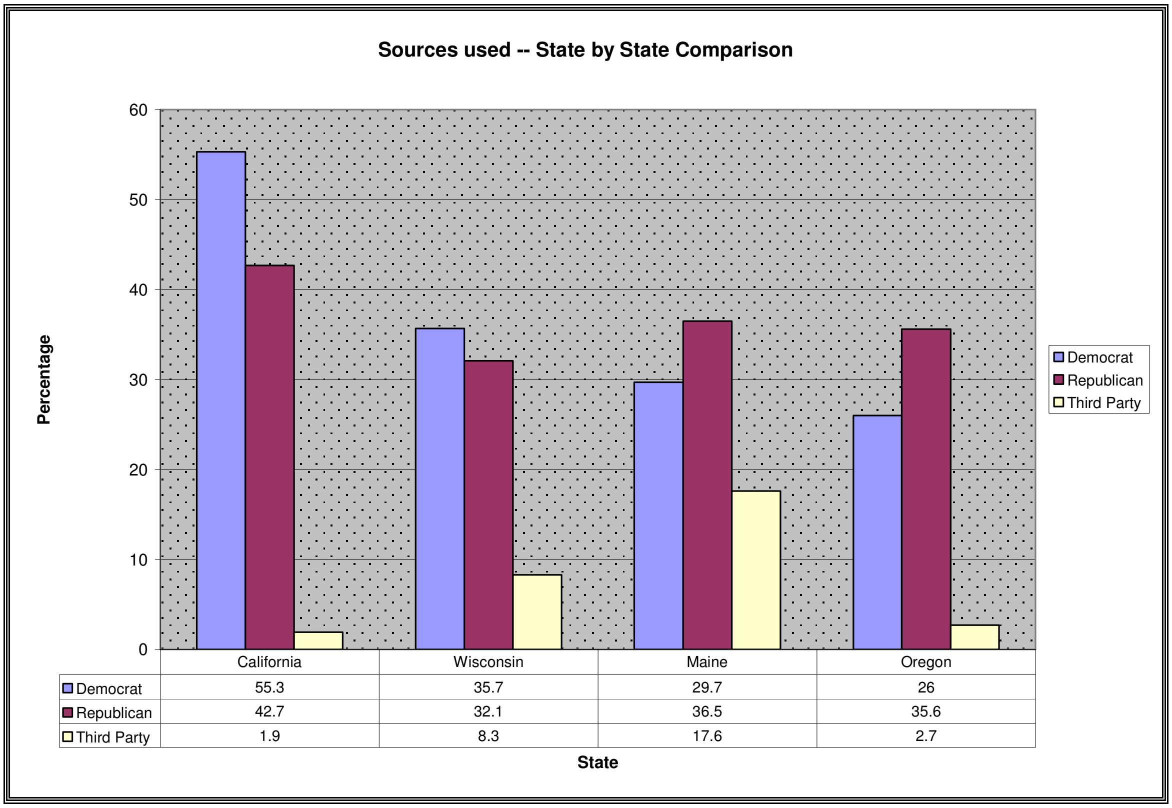
Table 4.20: When does candidates name first appear – state by state analysis

State	Party	Headline or lead	Second to ninth graph	Tenth graph or later
California	**Democrat**	25 *71.4%*	9 *25.7%*	1 *2.9%*
	Republican	23 *65.7%*	10 *28.6%*	2 *5.7%*
	Green	6 *18.2%*	16 *48.5%*	11 *33.3%*
Maine	**Democrat**	15 *53.6%*	11 *39.3%*	2 *7.1%*
	Republican	6 *27.3%*	13 *59.1%*	3 *13.6%*
	Green	9 *37.5%*	12 *50%*	3 *12.5%*
Oregon	**Democrat**	11 *42.3%*	14 *53.8%*	1 *3.8%*
	Republican	10 *41.7%*	11 *45.8%*	3 *12.5%*
	Libertarian	3 *13.6%*	10 *45.5%*	9 *40.9%*
Wisconsin	**Democrat**	14 *43.8%*	9 *28.1%*	9 *28.1%*
	Republican	8 *27.6%*	13 *44.8%*	8 *27.6%*
	Libertarian	7 *30.4%*	7 *30.4%*	9 *39.1%*

Table 4.21: How is the candidate's campaign role defined – state by state analysis

State	Party	Serious contender	Spoiler or long shot	Protest vote	Role not mentioned
California	**Major Party**	60 *85.7%*	0	0	10 *14.3%*
	Minor Party	0	14 *42.4%*	5 *15.2%*	14 *42.4%*
Maine	**Major Party**	40 *80%*	1 *2%*	0	9 *18%*
	Minor Party	11 *45.8%*	5 *20.8%*	0	8 *33.3%*
Oregon	**Major Party**	48 *94.1%*	0	0	3 *5.9%*
	Minor Party	3 *13.6%*	12 *54.5%*	0	7 *31.8%*
Wisconsin	**Major Party**	51 *83.6%*	0	0	10 *16.4%*
	Minor Party	1 *4.3%*	14 *60.9%*	0	8 *34.8%*

Figure 4.8



	California	Wisconsin	Maine	Oregon
Democrat	55.3	35.7	29.7	26
Republican	42.7	32.1	36.5	35.6
Third Party	1.9	8.3	17.6	2.7

quoted Green officials. Nevertheless, Maine newspapers quoted third-party officials almost twice as often as third-party officials were quoted in Wisconsin newspapers, the state that comes closest to the Maine totals. Figure 4.8 illustrates these differences by measuring the percentage of stories in which noncandidate sources from the Democratic, Republican, Green, and Libertarian parties were quoted in newspaper stories in their respective states during the 2002 gubernatorial election. For example, the bar chart shows that Green Party officials were quoted in 17.6 percent of the stories appearing in Maine newspapers and less than 2 percent of the stories appearing in California publications.

Several examples from the Maine press coverage is warranted here to illustrate the points made above. First, newspapers in the Pine Tree State treated all four gubernatorial candidates equally rather than referring to Democrats and Republicans as major-party contenders and Greens and Libertarians as “the other” candidates. In describing the candidates in the election, the *Bangor Daily News*, *Portland Press Herald*, and *Kennebec Journal* frequently used such language as “Maine’s four gubernatorial candidates,” “all four gubernatorial candidates” and “the four-man race for governor” (see Baldacci seen leading in gubernatorial race, 2002; Carrier, 2002a; Higgins, 2002).

Second, when writing about the major issues that dominated the campaign, the three Maine newspapers almost always included substantial comments from Green candidate Jonathan Carter. For example, on October 31, the *Bangor Daily News* published a reporter-generated story that analyzed how each of the gubernatorial candidates felt about various environment issues, such as hunting, river pollution, and land conservation. The 1,704-word story mentioned Democrat John Baldacci 13 times, Republican Peter Cianchette 15 times, and Carter 14 times (Edgecomb, 2002). In another reporter-generated issue story about everything from abortion and gay marriage to term limits and gun control, the *Portland Press Herald* quoted Carter 17 times compared with 11 times for Baldacci and 12 times for Cianchette (Carrier, 2002b). And in a formal debate story in October, the *Kennebec Journal* gave Baldacci nine mentions, Cianchette 10, and Carter seven (Weinstein, 2002).

A third example of the differences between Maine and the other three states rests with how Maine newspapers frequently defined Carter as a serious contender rather than a spoiler or long shot, even when these newspapers reported poll results showing the Green candidate trailing the Democrat and Republican with only 4 to 7 percent support. In one case, the *Kennebec Journal* even reported that despite Carter's poor showing in opinion surveys, he should nevertheless be taken seriously because he had enough money to be "competitive financially" (Baldacci spending mounts up, 2002).

Finally, Maine newspapers were much more likely to integrate third-party candidates into their coverage than were newspapers in the other three states. In other words, while newspapers in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin physically separated third-party candidates from their major-party rivals, Maine newspapers intertwined coverage of Green Jonathan Carter with the coverage of Democrat John Balducci and Republican Peter Cianchette so that all three were portrayed as (1) part of the campaign for governor and (2) competing with each other over issues of public importance. This conclusion that Maine coverage was distinctive from the coverage in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin, however, was reached more from an in-depth reading of the Maine newspaper stories than from the numbers generated by the quantitative content analysis, which did not clearly pick up on these differences.

For example, Table 4.22 outlines how major- and minor-party candidates were defined in terms of one another. A candidate was defined in terms of himself if he appeared alone in a sentence the first time his name was mentioned in a story. A candidate was defined in terms of his opponent when his name appeared with one of his rivals the first time his name was mentioned. As noted earlier in this chapter, third-party candidates were more often than not defined in terms of themselves rather than as one of three legitimate candidates for governor.

Table 4.22: How are candidates defined – state by state analysis

State	Party	Defined in terms of himself	Defined in terms of his opponent
California	**Major Party**	28 *40%*	42 *60%*
	Minor Party	18 *54.5%*	15 *45.5%*
Maine	**Major Party**	20 *40%*	30 *60%*
	Minor Party	14 *58.3%*	10 *41.7%*
Oregon	**Major Party**	19 *37.3%*	32 *62.7%*
	Minor Party	17 *77.3%*	5 *22.7%*
Wisconsin	**Major Party**	16 *26.2%*	45 *73.8%*
	Minor Party	12 *52.2%*	11 *47.8%*

In the case of the California, Oregon, and Wisconsin, a third-party candidate who was introduced alone in a story usually remained physically detached from the two major-party aspirants throughout the rest of the story. Although Table 4.22 indicates that newspapers in Maine may have done the same thing, this result is misleading and fails to capture the extent to which newspapers in Maine defined the Green candidate as an instrumental part of the gubernatorial campaign.

To fully appreciate how the Maine press covered Carter, one must take a qualitative look at that coverage and compare it to another state. Table 4.23 below provides just such a side-by-side comparison. On the right side is a story from the *Kennebec Journal* reporting on a formal gubernatorial debate held in late October. On the left side is a story that appeared in the October 12 edition of *The Oregonian* of Portland, Oregon, reporting on a formal debate held in that state. While the Maine newspaper integrated Carter's comments throughout the story, the Oregon press physically separated Libertarian Tom Cox from the main action between the Democrat and Republican. Although Cox is quoted criticizing Republican Kevin Mannix, his role is limited to a few paragraphs. The Maine story, on the other hand, casts the debate as a four-way contest between all the gubernatorial candidates on the ballot.

Part of the reason Maine newspapers may be more open to third parties is that the state has a history of electing independents, including James Longley in 1974 and Angus King in 1994 and 1998. Ross Perot also received more votes in Maine in 1992 than did Republican President George H.W. Bush, with Perot finishing second to Democrat Bill Clinton (see Baldacci seen leading in gubernatorial race, 2002). In addition, Maine has what many consider to be a fairly strong public financing law, which provides substantial funding to candidates who can reach a certain fund raising threshold on their own. Green candidate Jonathan Carter, for instance, had almost $1 million in public financing on hand for the campaign—one reason he may have been taken seriously by the press there. Finally, Maine newspapers may have had fewer resources to conduct polls on a consistent

Table 4.23: Story comparison

Report from *The Oregonian*	Report from the *Kennebec Journal*
Kulongoski rips Mannix on taxes, budget at debate Democrat Ted Kulongoski took the aggressor's role Friday at a gubernatorial debate in Portland, continually prodding rival Republican Kevin Mannix on taxes, budgets and social issues. Mannix, who polls show has chipped away at Kulongoski's lead in recent weeks, got in some of his own licks but spent much of the debate before the City Club of Portland defending his legislative record as well as his tax and budget plans. Libertarian Tom Cox also spent much of his firepower on Mannix, although he chided both candidates for not matching the detail of his draft spending blueprint for state government. Kulongoski's tougher tone was evident in the one new issue he injected into the race: the sexual abuse scandal facing the Catholic Church. Kulongoski, a former Supreme Court justice, blasted Mannix for voting for a 1999 bill that would have overturned a court decision opening the door for victims of long-ago cases of sex abuse to sue the church and other organizations for the actions of priest, teachers and others. The Democratic candidate said it was "unconscionable" that Mannix voted for a bill that would keep organizations from being held "responsible for pedophilia and … offenses committed against children." Mannix charged that Kulongoski mischaracterized the bill, and after the debate, he called it "cheap-shot sensationalism by a desperate politician…" Cox, who stood at a podium between the two major-party candidates, offered his own conclusion of Mannix, saying, "In his heart, he is still a Democrat," a reference to Mannix's move to the Republican Party in 1997. Mannix, who this summer laid plans for nearly $800 million in the next budget, repeated his contention he can do that without new taxes because there will be an extra $1.6 billion in the general fund for the 2003-05 budget… Kulongoski and Cox said Mannix is using budget sleight-of-hand to claim there will be $1.6 billion more in actual spending. "We need, above all, fiscal conservatism," Cox chided… Mannix and Kulongoski also exchanged shots on the state's Public Employees Retirement System, with Mannix criticizing the Democrat for being unwilling to remove all PERS beneficiaries from the board that governs the financially troubled system. And Kulongoski once again criticized Mannix for voting against major reforms in the system when he was a legislator in 1999… (Mapes, 2002a). *(No other Cox mentions after this point)*	**Governor candidates face off** Guns, gay rights and gambling were among the issues up for discussion Wednesday night as Maine's four gubernatorial candidates held their final televised debate before next week's election. Each of the four stressed his particular message. Democrat John Baldacci and Republican Peter Cianchette focused on their economic plans, Green Independent Jonathan Carter emphasized his single-payer health care proposal and Independent John Michael highlighted his distaste for government. The closest thing to drama in the 90-minute televised debate at the Portland Club was when, during a portion in which each candidate was allowed to pose a question to the other candidate, Cianchette asked Baldacci in particular whether he would pledge to not raise taxes. "I would really like to hear from John Baldacci," said Cianchette, who has made reducing taxes a key component of his campaign. In fact, Cianchette posed the question twice – during the question session and at the beginning of the debate, during his opening statement. Baldacci answered by saying that during his tenure in the U.S. House of Representatives, Congress balanced the budget and provided tax relief. He also said, "I'm committed to not raising taxes." Carter, by contrast, said that taxes likely will have to go up in order to make up for the state budget deficit, although he said his plan would decrease property taxes. Michael said he would never allow taxes to increase, even if "all the state employees have to show up to work in their underwear…" Baldacci and Carter said they would support a state gay rights law, and Cianchette said that while he supported gay rights while he was in the Legislature, any new proposal should go to the voters. Michael said he does not support a gay rights law or gay marriages. Carter called for mentoring, after school programs and for people to learn parenting skills. Cianchette talked about working with schools and community based programs, and, stressing his message, said that with a stronger economy, there will be less drug abuse… Carter asked the others about a national park in northern Maine, specifically about a feasibility study whether one is needed. Cianchette said he opposes a national park and prefers Maine's solution of providing conservation easements. Baldacci, too, said he likes conservation easements. Michael said he doesn't like the idea of a national park and would consider taking back Acadia National Park. Cianchette asked about taxes. Michael asked whether it would be appropriate for an Indian tribe … to open a casino in Maine. All three other candidates said they oppose any casino … On other issues, Baldacci and Carter said they'd like the state to have a community college system. Because of Maine's budget deficit, Cianchette said he would prefer to link the university and technical college system to create more educational opportunities… (Weinstein, 2002).

basis, thus leaving them with little choice but to devote more space to the policy debate between the candidates because they lacked horse-race data to work with.

Discussion

As the content analysis shows, Greens and Libertarians receive significantly different coverage in the press than do the major-party contenders. They appear less frequently in headlines, lead paragraphs, and stories; minor-party sources are quoted much less frequently than are officials from the major parties; the news frames adopted by the news media often take on a two-party worldview; and third-party candidates are often separated from their major-party rivals in that they appear in separate sentences and paragraphs. Moreover, while Democrats and Republicans who are behind in the polls are called “underdogs,” third-party candidates are called “spoilers” or “long shots;” and when minor-party aspirants show strong support at the ballot box, reporters explain this from a two-party perspective rather than considering other potential explanations, such as the possibility that some so-called alternative candidates may have a natural constituency of their own.

Regional dailies tended to be more sympathetic to third-party gubernatorial candidates than was the national news media, which virtually ignored anyone who was not running as a Democrat and Republican. One reason for this could be that regional news organizations are writing for a local audience that may have a greater interest in knowing about all—or at least most—of the candidates on the ballot while national news organizations are simply trying to provide a broad overview for readers who will have no say in a particular state’s election. However, the sample of stories from the national press was so small that it is difficult to draw any broad conclusions here.

As noted, the coverage in Maine was different. There, reporters tended to treat minor-party candidates as serious politicians who were an important part of the campaign dynamics. What impact this had on the electorate is beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear that the news media can leave different impressions based on what it chooses to emphasize. Although this is purely a qualitative observation, the sense one gets from reading the coverage in the California, Oregon, and Wisconsin press is that the campaign is mostly about the contest between competing candidates to see who will win on Election Day. This is in stark contrast to the coverage in Maine, where the overall impression is that the campaign was primarily about the policy debate among the contenders for public office. There was clearly a greater effort by Maine journalists to make sure that a diversity of voices were consistently heard throughout the election season. If the Maine coverage suggests anything, it is that a campaign can be covered in a variety of ways and that news organizations, if they are committed to fostering a healthy debate, can use their resources wisely to make sure voters are exposed to many different voices and not just those from the established parties.

Chapter 5: Long Interviews

Eight in-depth interviews conducted with California and Wisconsin political reporters using the protocol in Appendix C identified five possible explanations for why even the most serious third-party candidates receive scant coverage in the press. Each of these reasons has multiple facets and suggests both ideological and practical reasons why reporters choose to emphasize some viewpoints and sideline others.

First, the interviews suggest that while campaign journalists see their role as helping inform the public so that citizens can make educated decisions at the ballot box, reporters ultimately define those responsibilities within the parameters established by the two major parties. More specifically, it is clear from the ways that political journalists describe their jobs that they rely on institutions dominated by the Democrats and Republicans to tell them which issues and candidates are important and worthy of coverage.

Second, the interviews indicate that regional reporters define the term "campaign" almost exclusively as a *contest* between people or political camps, thus supporting the literature cited in Chapter Two. Such a definition not only excludes other, more idealistic notions of what a campaign can be in a democratic society, but it also establishes a journalistic mindset that immediately favors candidates from the two major parties at the expense of dissent, which is seen as less newsworthy because it is unlikely to prevail on Election Day.

Third, in their language and their political outlook, reporters accept the hegemony of the two-party system. While reporters sometimes ruminate over whether they should "challenge the system," the interviews suggest that journalists often knowingly operate within the existing political structure. When they talk about objectivity, what they are really talking about is fair coverage for Democrats and Republicans—and not necessarily for third-party contenders.

Fourth, according to the interviews, news organizations may have an economic incentive to narrow the field of candidates to make campaign coverage more manageable. In several cases, political journalists said that they were forced to make certain editorial decisions because they were either the only ones covering a particular campaign or because limited budgets and news holes did not allow them to spend time with candidates who they perceived to be likely losers.

Finally, the interviews suggest that third-party candidates have trouble getting news media attention because they cannot meet the criteria reporters have informally developed to determine which candidates are serious enough to cover. To the journalists, these criteria are practical ways in which they can make news judgments quickly and efficiently, but these journalistic standards are also a window into how political reporters think, providing concrete reasons for why certain candidates and agendas have difficulty getting into the public sphere.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the interviews in greater detail. It is divided into the following sections: First, the chapter will establish some context by briefly describing how the interviews were conducted, who participated, and the general outlook of reporters who cover gubernatorial campaigns, including their perspective on third parties. Second, the chapter will provide in-depth accounts of the five explanations for why reporters cover third-party candidates differently. These five sections will discuss the rationale journalists use when talking about these issues, and they will quote reporters in their own words so the reader can understand the nuances of their viewpoints. Finally, the chapter will end with a brief discussion and summary that pulls together the various themes identified through the interviews.

It is not my intent here to be critical of the reporters who were gracious enough to participate in this study and allow me to use their names in this dissertation. They spoke freely of their experiences on the campaign trail and obviously had given many of the questions substantial thought as part of their professional careers. They offered compelling and practical reasons for why they make certain coverage decisions, and they indicated that they operate under tight constraints that make it difficult for any one journalist to give every candidate a fair shake. As a former newspaper reporter and magazine editor myself, I could relate strongly to and see the practical wisdom in the tools they have developed to meet the challenges they face.

It is also my impression that each of the journalists was honest, forthright, and happy to help in the research project. Although it was evident that sometimes reporters were unaware of their own biases, they did not seem to intentionally bolster one group of candidates over another. On the contrary, all the reporters who were interviewed appeared genuinely concerned with being fair and objective on the campaign trail. They believe in the job they are doing, they are trying to do the right thing for their readers, and they take their role in a democratic society seriously.

Their comments provide a glimpse into the reporter's world and show how the dominance of the two major parties permeates the thinking of journalists and can, at times, blind them to their inherent biases in favor of "the system." Nothing that was said during the interviews contradicted the findings of the content analysis reported in Chapter Four. In fact, the data presented here offers a compelling complement. While the content analysis showed that the news coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates is weak, the data reported here will explain why. It will get behind the coverage to show the process reporters go through when writing about gubernatorial campaigns that involve more than the two traditional parties. It is only through such an analysis of the attitudes expressed here that one can hope to contribute to the discussion of how news organizations approach political campaigns and the role journalists play in either fostering or stifling political debate.

The interviews

The eight 60- to 90-minute interviews were conducted between June 24 and July 11 in 2007 with political journalists who have extensive experience covering gubernatorial campaigns, including those with third-party candidates. Seven reporters were interviewed in person, and one—John Marelius of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*—was interviewed by e-mail because his schedule did not permit a face-to-face meeting. Three of the California reporters were interviewed in San Francisco and Sacramento while one, Margaret Talev, a former reporter with the *Los Angeles Times* and *Sacramento Bee* who is now a Washington correspondent for the McClatchy Group, was interviewed in Bethesda, MD. The three Wisconsin reporters were interviewed in Madison, WI. Four interviews were conducted at local coffee shops recommended by the reporters and three were completed in the news offices of the journalists. Six of the reporters were men; two were women. (See Table 5.1 for a full list of the reporters interviewed.)

Table 5.1: Reporters interviewed

Reporter	Years of Experience	News Organization
Mark Z. Barabak	29	*Los Angeles Times*
David W. Callender	24	*The Capital Times*
John Marelius	30	*San Diego Union-Tribune*
Carla Marinucci	30	*San Francisco Chronicle*
Scott Milfred	15	*Wisconsin State Journal*
Margaret Talev	13	*McClatchy Group*
Steven Walters	37	*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*
Kevin Yamamura	8	*Sacramento Bee*

It was clear from the interviews that the reporters enjoy covering gubernatorial campaigns. Although they occasionally lamented the long hours and repetitive nature of watching a candidate over the course of several months, they nevertheless expressed deep satisfaction with getting out of the office, meeting with "real people," dissecting the statements of the candidates, and presenting useful information to their readers. Having a front-row seat to history, as more than one reporter put it, is another factor that seems to motivate political journalists when covering campaigns. For example, John Marelius of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* said, "As corny as it might sound, covering political campaigns … can be becoming a part of history in the making." That opinion was shared by the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s Carla Marinucci, who said: "We write the first draft of history and it's part of … the excitement. You are getting a front row seat to history. You're traveling—I've traveled with presidents from Clinton to Bush and all the candidates and witnessed first hand some of the major events in American history."

Reporters were both cynical and idealistic about the nature of campaigns. On the one hand, reporters are savvy to the various tactics politicians use to manipulate the press on the campaign trail—such as making an announcement in a conference room that is obviously too small for the anticipated crowd so as to give the impression that there is strong interest in what they have to say. On the other hand, most of the journalists who were interviewed still displayed an idealistic view of the campaign as an institution—and it is this idealism that seems to be the source of their professional enjoyment in covering them.

This attitude was summed up by Scott Milfred, who worked as a political reporter for the *Wisconsin State Journal* before recently becoming the newspaper's editorial page editor. In describing why he enjoyed covering gubernatorial campaigns, Milfred said:

> You sort of felt like it was a big decision for the state, and that people needed information to make the right decision. And when I was running it … I just wanted the coverage to be good and to really try to let voters know who these people—who these candidates were and what they really—what their records really were in terms of experience and accomplishments and screw ups. [I wanted to tell people] what were their positions now and really try to drill down on what is the difference between the candidates…

Most of the reporters who were interviewed expressed a positive attitude toward the idea of third parties in the abstract, saying in some cases that they actually hope candidates from outside the system will catch fire with the electorate. While some reporters were understandably hesitant to express their opinion about particular parties for fear of compromising objectivity, others characterized minor-party candidates as more honest or authentic than Democrats and Republicans. They said third-party candidates are often more accessible to the press and more willing to answer questions on a wide-range of topics. In contrast, they said, major-party contenders are usually more guarded, shielding themselves from direct contact with journalists and trying to "stay on message" rather than giving straightforward answers to questions about public policy.

Following is a sample of some of the more positive comments reporters made when asked for their general impressions of third-party gubernatorial candidates.

Steven Walters of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*:

> [I'm always] very interested to see if their campaigns catch on. [I'm] intrigued by the possibility that their campaigns are going to catch on and begin resonating. Maybe privately wanting them to do better than one, two, three percent, you know. 'Cause I think—I know from covering the 2002 race, that [Democrat] Jim Doyle had to be a better candidate knowing that [Libertarian] Ed Thompson was going to get somewhere between eight and 16 percent of the vote.

Scott Milfred of the *Wisconsin State Journal*:

> I think they're great. I voted for [Libertarian] Ed Thompson [for governor in 2002]. I didn't even like Ralph Nader's politics, but I interviewed him a handful of times and I almost voted for Ralph Nader, even though I didn't like his politics, because I just like him. I wish there was a third party. I wish third parties could be more credible. I'm, you know, like I said, I'm a centrist… I think the Democrats and Republicans are so stale and they're boring and they're in their containers, and they won't come out of them even when they know they're wrong. And they play to the same tired dinosaur constituencies…

John Marelius of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*:

> There is a prevalent attitude in the major parties that voters are throwing away their votes if they vote for a third-party candidate. I don't agree. If a voter believes in the philosophy of the Green Party, Libertarian Party or whatever, it is perfectly appropriate for them to vote for that party's candidates. The same applies to voters who are attracted to a particular third-party candidate even if they don't totally share that party's philosophy. Sometimes voters use third parties as a vehicle for "none-of-the-above" votes. If voters want to send a message to the major parties that says, "You're going to have to do better than these candidates if you want my vote," that too is appropriate.

Carla Marinucci of the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

> I think third party candidates do contribute to the discussion… There are some reporters who have no desire or no interest in covering third-party candidates because it's a waste of time, you know, or it's a bad choice of resources. I'm not one of those. I think that they elevate the discussion and I'm sorry we don't have more time or resources to cover them because anything that helps voters to understand and readers to understand, you

> know, what are the issues and what are the varying spectrum of ideas out there on issues that affect our lives—I think that's a good thing.

At other times, though, reporters indicated that they see third-party candidates as outside the mainstream and somehow different from major-party aspirants. In one case, for instance, a reporter described third-party contenders as "niche candidates" who have "a desire to spread the word about their belief system" to the public—a curious distinction from major-party nominees given that all political organizations play to certain constituencies (or niche audiences) in an attempt to inject their worldview into the electorate. In other cases, reporters described minor-party candidates as idealistic politicians who—perhaps naïvely—challenge a system that is unlikely to bend. The reporters did not see this as necessarily bad, but they also felt no obligation to indulge those aspirations with news coverage.

The following three quotations represent this more cautious perspective on third-party candidates.

Margaret Talev of the McClatchy Group:

> I think many third party candidates run for office on a specific issue platform [and] … their desire to run is a desire to spread the word about their belief system and to get other people to consider living in a way that they want them to live… I think some people run for office for the experience of running for office. I think, I mean, how cool is that, right, to go around the state and meet different people, to shake hands, to make the human connection. So, I think there are those [third-party] candidates too and they're like maybe on more of a personal journey, you know. Which is great, but, I'm not – I'm not gonna cover it necessarily.

Mark Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times*:

> Third party? Well, it connotes to mean outside the system, obviously. It connotes to mean quixotic, and I don't mean in a pejorative way. But the fact is, it means someone for good or ill, who is willing to go up against a system that is very stacked against them. And that can be a good thing in terms of someone who is principled and believes strongly in what they're doing and is willing to make the sacrifice and face long odds because they believe firmly in something. And it can mean delusional.

John Marelius of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*:

> Because it's theoretically possible for an independent or minor-party candidate to be elected governor of California by simply receiving a plurality of the votes cast, it's conceivable there could be a circumstance where such a candidate warranted comparable coverage to the major-party nominees. But it hasn't come close to happening. Most of the time, I don't believe the voters would be well served by "equal coverage" of minor-party candidates. Two percent of California voters are registered with the American Independent Party, which grew out of the George Wallace candidacy in 1968. It is widely believed that is greatly inflated… The other party registrations: Green, .89 percent; Libertarian, .53 percent; Peace and Freedom, .37 percent. The Reform Party and Natural Law Party have been dropped from the ballot in recent years because of declining registration. In other words, while more than 4 in 10 California voters are Democrats, barely one in 200 are Libertarians. I don't believe that giving "equal" coverage to Libertarian candidates most of the time would be fair to the voters…

It would be easy to conclude that these attitudes would have a direct influence on how political journalists write about minor-party gubernatorial candidates—and perhaps, to a certain extent, they do. But how a reporter's feelings play out in his or her news coverage is a process that is much more complex and goes beyond a simple correlation between a journalist's opinions about third parties and how many column inches he or she decides to give a specific candidate in a specific news story. If the interviews are any indication, how third-party candidates are covered has more to do with the five factors mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely that (1) reporters see their campaign role as informing the public about candidates and issues but rely on Democrats and Republicans to tell them which candidates and issues are important; (2) journalists define the term campaign as a contest, which makes minor-party aspirants inherently less newsworthy; (3) reporters accept the hegemony of the two-party system; (4) news organizations have an economic incentive to limit campaign coverage; and (5) reporters have developed a set of criteria for deciding who gets covered that is difficult for third-party candidates to meet. The rest of this chapter will explore each of these five conditions.

How reporters perceive their role

All eight reporters articulated some notion that their role is to cut through the white noise of the candidates' messages and provide readers with objective, substantive information that voters can use when making a decision at the ballot box. In fact, this concept of "journalist as informer" was a powerful theme in each of the interviews. Reporters said their role is to seek "essential truths" about the candidates; to help readers properly interpret the wide array of competing political messages that are transmitted in the months before an election; to act as the readers' advocate by trying to force candidates to discuss issues they might try to avoid; and to keep the candidates honest through the journalistic watchdog role.

For example, Kevin Yamamura of the *Sacramento Bee* said his responsibility is to know "more than most people about what's going on in the campaign and be able to … cut through the messaging or the strategy to provide readers and voters with clear information." Marelius said: "The entire responsibility of a political reporter is to the broader society—that is, the voters. Simply put, we try to give them the information they need to vote intelligently." Barabak said his role was "to inform people—to make sure people are fully informed when they step into the ballot box;" and Walters said his job is to "connect the dots" for a busy electorate by explaining the candidates' positions on the major issues of the day. As Walters put it: "I like the model of [the] reporter being the provider of information for people who aren't at the realm and who … are tuning in very late to the campaign."

This job is difficult, the reporters said, because most candidates try to control the daily message by steering clear of news professionals and hiding the specifics of their likely programs so as not to alienate needed constituencies. It is up to journalists, the interviews suggest, to go beyond sound bites and uncover a candidate's true intentions. Talev put it this way:

> What any journalist is trying to do for their audience is describe essential truths about something to their readers. And a candidate goes out of his or her way really to mask those essential truths about themselves. They want you to see what they want you to see… And so, if you look at what issues they're peddling, where their money is coming from, what they've done before and what they say they want to do, I think that helps you get to the essence of … if you vote for that person, what you're getting.

The *Wisconsin State Journal*'s Milfred touched on a similar theme when he explained how he knows whether he is playing his role effectively.

> I think my main rule is to ignore what is the "campaign" and to really try to give people information about the issues that are really affecting them … If you're frustrating the candidates, you're probably doing something right… If you're getting the candidates to talk about things that they're not talking about anywhere else, officially anyway, I think then you know you're doing something…

However, it appears from the interviews that reporters unconsciously define their role as informer within boundaries established by the Democrats and Republicans. They did not say this explicitly, of course, but their bias came through in subtle ways when journalists explained which sources they turn to for political information and how they develop story ideas about campaigns. Most of what journalists know about politics comes from observing and talking to people and institutions that are typically dominated by the two major political parties. In short, the two-party system provides the menu of story ideas from which reporters choose.

For example, at least two of the reporters who were interviewed indicated that they know which subjects are important to cover in a gubernatorial campaign simply by being around the Capitol building and observing which issues are being tackled by state government. The *Bee*'s Yamamura, for instance, said that when he is covering a campaign he tries to focus on issues "that are problematic with the state, issues that the state is grappling with in the legislature currently;" and Walters of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* said his ideas for political stories usually develop by "listening to people" and from "covering the Capitol and its issues for 17, 18 years."

Although it would seem natural for a state Capitol reporter to get information from sources at the state Capitol, it is also true that every state legislature in the country save one (Nebraska's nonpartisan body) is dominated by either the Democrats or Republicans—and sometimes both. Relying on these institutions for information, therefore, means that political journalists are continuously exposed to a Democrat-Republican worldview on what is important. Issues that the major parties deem significant enough to tackle and talk about during legislative sessions will likely be the same issues that dominate campaign discourse—an observation that is supported by the agenda-building studies cited in Chapter Two (see Berkowitz 1987; Brown et al. 1987; Gans 1980; Sigal 1973, 1986; Weaver and Elliott 1985).

This is not to suggest, of course, that issues such as budget deficits and gun control are not major stories that a reporter should cover during an election campaign. They most certainly are. However, one might argue that other issues are equally as pressing, such as a third-party candidate's contention that the electoral system—the very system that makes American democracy possible—is rigged against anyone running for public office from outside the Democratic and Republican parties. But because reporters are not talking to these unconventional sources on a regular basis, these types of issues rarely get on the media's agenda—and when they do, they are rarely if ever considered the major issue of the day (see Baron 1967; Lichtenberg 1987; Tuchman 1978).

The interviews showed a second way that two-party institutions influence articles that appear in newspapers: reporters said they receive many (but not all) of their campaign story ideas from the campaigns they cover. Although it is true that some of those ideas can and do come from the campaigns of third-party candidates—for example, Scott Milfred of the *Wisconsin State Journal* said that he typically called Libertarian gubernatorial candidate Ed Thompson during the 2002 Wisconsin campaign to get his opinion on various issues—in most cases reporters indicated that when they were referring to "the campaigns" they usually meant the Democrats and Republicans.

For example, when Carla Marinucci of the *San Francisco Chronicle* gave examples of the various sources she usually contacts during an election, she said they normally include "the chairman of the state Democratic Party" as well as "Democratic Party fundraisers, the precinct workers, [and] major labor people on the Democratic side…" Walters made similar references to the major parties when providing examples of sources with whom he is in regular contact, saying at one point that in addition to analyzing candidate advertising and schedules, he would call "the local Democratic and Republican chairmen and chairwomen" to see what they "think about the campaign." Other reporters made similar references.

Finally, when reporters discussed the independent sources or noncampaign officials they seek out for "neutral" information about the election, they again indicated that many of these people come from within the two-party structure. For instance, Walters of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* said that he sometimes tries to get the opinion of special interest groups, citing the Wisconsin Realtors as an example—a group, he said, that "generally back(s) Republicans." Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times* cited the

Service Employees International Union as an example of a noncampaign source that he has tapped to test his own observations about politics—an organization that has donated millions to the Democrats and Republicans over the past 16 years (The Center for Responsive Politics). And while the *Wisconsin State Journal*'s Milfred indicated that university professors and other unaffiliated sources are vital to a reporter's work because they can provide information without spin, the examples of such neutral sources that he chose to cite included a former Wisconsin Supreme Court justice, a retired superintendent of schools who is a Democrat, and a former moderate Republican governor—sources that all come from the established order.

On the surface, this all makes perfect sense. Given that the United States currently has a two-party system, it is only logical that reporters would turn to sources from or connected to the Democratic and Republican parties for information, perspective, and analysis about politics. But it is equally important to recognize that by using such sources and institutions to gauge which problems and solutions are the priorities, reporters are by extension adopting the values and priorities of the two major parties. They absorb what these institutions tell them and then reflect this back to the electorate, thus embedding their campaign reporting with a Democrat-Republican worldview. Scholar Leon Sigal noted this trend almost four decades ago in his academic analysis of journalistic sources when he said:

> What the news is depends very much on who its sources are… Who gets to appear in the news and who provides the information that readers get are the basic questions of a democratic polity. If these questions are addressed in the future as they have been in the past, journalistic practices will continue to foreclose access to the many and grant it to the few, and the few will be the holders of political power, not their opponents (Sigal 1973, 189, 192-193).

What are the implications of this journalistic mindset for candidates who seek to challenge this system from outside the two major parties? One possible outcome is that it adds yet another obstacle in the path of third-party aspirants who hope to raise issues not being discussed at the state Capitol or other mainstream institutions. These candidates are forced to debate within a context established by their opponents—and they cannot look to the press for help in either broadening that debate or consistently reporting their message to the electorate. In fact, they can expect the opposite. In almost every case, the reporters who were interviewed indicated that one of their responsibilities is to explain to voters what the established candidates are saying. Not one of the journalists said that his or her role was to broaden the debate beyond what the system defines as appropriate. In other words, reporters appear uncomfortable with setting the agenda of a campaign and prefer to follow the lead of the candidates.

The inclination of reporters to rely mostly on two-party sources and institutions for political information is consistent with the content analysis reported in Chapter Four, which found that third-party candidates receive less prominent coverage than Democrats and Republicans and are often physically separated from the text about their major-party rivals. One reason for these differences in coverage could be, as the interviews suggest, because third-party gubernatorial contenders must always operate within a media context established by the traditional parties. As long as Democrats and Republicans continue to view Greens and Libertarians as detached from "the system," it is likely that journalists will continue framing Greens and Libertarians as separate from the established political order.

Campaign as contest

The interviews suggest that reporters view campaigns mostly as the process by which one candidate tries to defeat his or her opponent(s). In fact, the notion that a campaign is a "contest" was emphasized by seven of the eight political journalists who were interviewed. In only one case did a reporter describe campaigns as something other than a game—and even in that instance there were still aspects of the definition that referred back to the competition.

This contest paradigm was articulated in both the overt definitions reporters gave for the term "campaign" as well as the manner in which reporters talked about such things as how they cover elections, the sources they turn to for political information, and the role that voters and issues play in the fight for elected office. This tendency to see campaigns mostly as a competition makes third-party candidates less newsworthy than their Democratic and Republican rivals because minor-party hopefuls usually are far behind in the contest. This win-lose model used by reporters also de-emphasizes the more normative aspects of a campaign, such as a campaign's role in encouraging public participation in a wider political discussion. The rest of this section will examine the overt and subtle ways in which reporters expressed the contest paradigm, and it will analyze the ramifications of this worldview on third-party gubernatorial candidates.

Defining campaign. The first way that reporters stressed the competition was in the definitions they provided for the term "campaign." Talev, for instance, said a campaign is "the organization that a candidate puts together to win a race," adding later that the primary function of a campaign is "to win." Marelius of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* put it this way: "A campaign is the process … of candidates making their cases to the voters." David Callender of Madison, WI's *Capital Times* defined the term as "actively seeking election to a political office" as well as "the organization … and the techniques you use to run for that office;" and the *Los Angeles Times*'s Barabak said that a campaign is "the attempt by individuals to elect themselves to a particular political office, or to establish a certain public policy through the ballot box."

One of the most comprehensive definitions, though, was given by Milfred of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, who said:

> I guess it's the process of attempting to become elected… There's the public campaign and then there's the very private and secret campaign and the money campaign. And so there's lots of aspects to the campaign… It's much thicker and broader and just all the constant scheming by both sides on what to do on a daily basis and the changes in course and the constant trying to use the public's attention—what there is of it—and the news to call attention to your campaign and your positions.

The one exception to the contest paradigm was provided by Walters of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*—the most experienced of the eight reporters interviewed—who described campaigns as a public "dialogue." However, even here Walters made passing reference to the contest element. As Walters put it:

> I really think campaigns are a dialogue between the people who want to get elected and embrace and hold the levers of power, and those that they want to govern. And it's a tremendously interesting dialogue… You have the supporting fundraisers and you have the great machine enablers and you have the creators of the sound bites and the advisors and then you have this great restless body politic who either engages these candidates or says, you know, I think you're, I think you're all a bunch of horse feed. So that's what I mean by the dialogue.

Campaign coverage. The contest paradigm through which reporters view campaigns also was evident in how reporters said they cover various candidates. In answering a wide range of questions about their daily routines during the election season, the reporters tended to focus on elements of a campaign that directly pertain to the competition, such as fundraising, political strategy, polls, and political advertisements. For instance, when Barabak was trying to recall some of the political stories he had written over the years, the first two he mentioned dealt with campaign financing and advertising. Talev followed a similar line of thought, saying that in the final weeks of a campaign she will "check with TV stations about ad buys," read blogs "to get a sense of what activists are talking about," and access "campaign finance [forms] online" to see how much money the campaign organizations have and who is funding those operations.

In Wisconsin, Walters said that, among other things, he watches which regions of the state—or markets—that the candidates visit as an indication of where the parties believe they need a big turnout on Election Day to prevail. For example, he said that in 2006, the Republican gubernatorial candidate chose not to waste time campaigning in Democratic-leaning Milwaukee, instead going to GOP strongholds to try to generate a large Republican turnout at the polls. Said Walters: "When you track what markets the Republican candidate was in [during] the final days, it tells you what they need to win."

Sources used. A strong indication of how important the contest model is to political journalists rests with the sources reporters typically turn to when researching campaign stories. In all eight interviews, reporters mentioned "campaign officials" first when asked who they are most likely to contact during a typical day on the campaign trail. Put another way, the first type of source the reporters thought to talk about were those whose main function is to help win *the contest*. For example, Talev said that while the sources she contacts may change from day to day depending on the story she is writing, she usually develops a list of ten to 20 people over the course of a campaign who she tries to call regularly. In describing who these sources are, Talev said: "You would talk to the campaign's press guy. You might talk to the campaign's pollster, the campaign's media's guy—on both sides… So you check with the candidate's campaign folks every day to find out what they're doing."

Other reporters emphasized official sources as well. Yamamura of the *Sacramento Bee* said he checks the Internet and his e-mail "to see what the campaigns are putting out." He said he also places "phone calls to each of the campaigns" and talks to "campaign staff" and "consultants" each day. Marinucci of the *Chronicle* said she is in touch with the campaigns' "communications director [and] press secretaries," adding that "you could be talking to major fundraisers and certain major strategists or … the behind the scenes folks that are shaping the campaign." Callender of *The Capital Times* said: "Basically, it involves … in some way or another, finding out from each of the candidate's organizations what they're up to, what's going on, or what other kinds of external factors are sort of affecting whatever they're doing that day, and then just following that." And Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times* said he usually talks to "senior people on campaigns" because "to really, sort of, get the nitty gritty of what's going on in the campaign, I would want to talk to … people at the highest level I possibly could."

This tendency on the part of reporters to turn to official sources for information about the campaign should not be surprising. For one thing, the findings here are consistent with prior research indicating the importance of official sources to American journalists (Gans 1980; Sigal 1973; Stocking 1989; Tuchman 1978). In addition, it should seem inherently natural that reporters would talk regularly with sources who are associated with a particular "beat," whether that be the White House staff if the beat is the presidency, medical experts if the reporter covers health care, or campaign officials if the reporter writes about politics.

But let's be clear: The main reason any campaign official speaks to a reporter is to better the chances of his or her candidate on Election Day—something that is not lost on most political journalists. (For a discussion on how sources attempt to manipulate reporters for their own purposes, see Sigal 1973.) Scott Milfred said as much, pointing out that campaign officials "only raise ideas that they think will benefit their candidate." Nevertheless, the fact that most of the reporters who were interviewed thought about campaign officials first when talking about who they interview when covering a campaign is an indication of how political journalists think. Such revelations go to the reporter's mindset and strongly suggests that the contest paradigm is paramount.

That said, reporters also indicated that they interview college professors, issues experts, and voters when covering campaigns. In fact, these types of sources were considered highly important to all the reporters who were interviewed in that people who are not associated with a campaign come with a higher degree of credibility because they are viewed as objective or neutral. However, it should be noted that these other sources were always mentioned after reporters first discussed campaign officials. They also tended to talk at greater length about campaign officials, an indication that they may be in much greater contact with these sources than they are with others. The priority that reporters place in official sources can be summed up with a statement made by Walters of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. In the final five days of a political campaign, he said, he is typically in contact with "handlers, editors, [the] candidate and finally, real people."

The role of voters. Another way in which the contest aspect of a campaign is expressed by journalists is in how reporters tend to view the role of voters, who are seen mostly as the final measure of how well a candidate is performing in the game. This is not to suggest that reporters do not value voters for other things as well, such as their views on the issues. In fact, the *Bee*'s Yamamura echoed other reporters when he said that part of his job is to find out "what we think voters think is important and sort of exploring those issues." In addition, Milfred described a series of stories the *Wisconsin State Journal* published in 2002 in which each gubernatorial candidate agreed to be escorted by newspaper reporters to previously undisclosed public venues, where they would have to meet with voters and respond to a variety of questions.[24] However, when talking about voters, the interviews suggest that reporters place the greatest emphasis on citizens as a gauge for the competition.

This was best expressed by Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times*, who said he frequently travels away from the power centers of Sacramento to see how the campaign is playing with regular citizens so he can better determine which candidate may be winning. As one example, Barabak said he went to San Benito County, CA, during the 2006 governor's campaign to interview voters there about which candidates they were supporting. He chose to talk to people in that area, he said, because the county has "almost a perfect track record" of not only picking the winner of each gubernatorial election, but coming "within literally decimal points of the statewide total." In other words, the voters there were a perfect gauge for how the candidates were performing in the contest.

The role of issues. Finally, the contest paradigm that seems to dominate the thinking of reporters is evident in the way that journalists discussed (or in some cases, did not discuss) the role that public policy issues and ideas play in a political campaign.

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[24] The candidates were not told in advance where they were being taken. The point was to force candidates to discuss issues that were important to the public in an unrehearsed, spontaneous format designed to uncover the candidate's true policy positions.

While the interviews suggest that reporters believe issues are or should be important factors on Election Day, in five of the eight interviews, reporters did not talk about issues or ideas when defining the term campaign until the investigator raised the subject with them first. This omission on the part of some reporters may be an indication that issues, while considered important, are not the first thing that come to mind for some reporters as they approach a campaign.

In addition, when reporters were asked about the role that issues and ideas play in an election, they seemed to value issues mostly in terms of how they might impact the contest—in other words, how candidates use policy proposals as a tactic to win public support. Milfred, for instance, agreed that a campaign was "a contest of ideas," but he said that most candidates "package those ideas in extremely narrow and kind of cynical and hot button or sound bite ways" to appeal to a certain audience. Walters said, "Yeah, it's about issues, but it's about issues that are ginned up and may or may not be valid."

In other cases, reporters saw "issues" as just another strategic element of a candidate's run for office. As Talev illustrates:

> Yeah, it's a campaign about ideas. It's also a campaign about tweaking those ideas and … targeting those ideas and convincing people that you're the one with the better kind of idea… Every campaign for governor is gonna be about jobs, education, the environment, roads, infrastructure, technology, you know, work force development… [In] every campaign for governor, what they do, you know, is if you look at any statewide poll of what issues resonate the most with voters, coincidentally, those would be the main talking points in every [candidate] speech.

Such comments imply a certain mindset on the part of the reporters, providing further support for the observation that journalists have a contest mentality when it comes to campaigns. However, it is important to point out that other dynamics could be at work here. It may very well be that reporters view issues and ideas mostly as elements of the contest because this is actually how politicians use them. Moreover, reporters indicated that issues are not always at the forefront of their minds because other factors are more significant to the outcome of elections. Again, this suggests that the contest is paramount in the reporter's mind, but it is also an indication that they are making this judgment based on outside forces.

Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times* stated this point of view most effectively, saying:

> You know, the more I do this, the more convinced I am that it is mainly about persona and personalities. And I don't mean that in a pejorative, superficial sense, but the more I do this the more I think people judge people… In other words, there are individuals who have certain issues, but I think they're the distinct minority. I think most people have … a handful of issues they care about, and I think once they get beyond that and they feel that a candidate has a certain level of competency or they trust them on a certain handful of issues, I think then what's much more important is a sense of, "Do I like this person? Do I trust him or her? Do I feel they have a good character?"

There is also the question of what reporters believe the newspaper audience demands. Throughout the interviews, reporters said that voters—despite what they might tell pollsters—are not particularly interested in reading about issues. The evidence? Newspapers publish many issue-related stories throughout the course of a campaign, reporters said, but those stories often go unread. According to Marinucci:

> There is a lot of information out about the candidates and what their positions are and where they stand, and many opportunities to see them in person. But I look at our Web site, for instance, [to see] what are the top ten stories everyday that are viewed on the Web, and … I can almost guarantee you it's a Paris Hilton or, you know, the daily dish gossip stories. It's not the presidential, it's not the campaign stories that are [being read].

Milfred of the *Wisconsin State Journal* agreed. He said most people blame reporters for the lack of issues in many gubernatorial campaigns, but he said that is an unfair criticism. "Well, you know, any day you read our paper during a gubernatorial campaign, there is some real analysis of issues going on," Milfred said, adding later that in the last gubernatorial election:

> [O]ne of our debates was about the economy. We sponsored that. But, you know, I don't think the ratings were that great for that debate. So, whoever saw that debate, I think, wow—they got—it was all about ideas.

Whatever the reason, it appears from these interviews that in the minds of reporters, issues have become a means to an end in the overall contest for public office.

Implications. The main point here is that from their overt definitions of the term campaign to the manner in which they discuss voters and issues, reporters demonstrated a strong bias in favor of a contest paradigm when talking about the election season. This journalistic tendency has important implications for third-party candidates and provides at least one explanation for why they are either ignored or treated differently by the press, as shown in Chapter Four. Under this definition of the term "campaign," minor-party gubernatorial contenders are inherently less newsworthy in the eyes of journalism because they do not contribute anything meaningful to the one aspect of an election that is the central focus of the reporter: the contest. In this sense, the comments made by the reporters strongly support Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance because reporters are always looking for the candidates who are likely to have some impact on the lives of their readers.

Reporters said as much. According to Yamamura, for instance, the *Sacramento Bee* provided good news coverage to Green Party gubernatorial candidate Peter Camejo during the 2002 campaign but significantly less coverage during the 2003 recall election "because we didn't feel that he had as much of an impact on *the race*." Talev and Marelius made similar comments.

Said Talev:

> I mean, our role is really to chronicle what's happening, right? And if what's happening is that someone's running in the low single digits, then they're not, they don't merit the same kind of day-to-day attention… Your job is to tell people what they need to know about a person who could get elected.

Marelius added:

> Some candidates have a chance to win; others do not. Obviously, who falls in which category is a judgment that needs to be constantly reevaluated as the campaign proceeds. There's nothing unfair about this.

There is no doubt that a major element of any campaign is, in fact, the win-lose game. This is something that has been understood for most of American history and was implicit in many of the early election studies, which argued that campaigns had minimal effects partially because they had little impact on the outcome at the ballot box—i.e., the contest (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968). However, the reporters' definitions miss the more normative, idealistic notions of what a campaign can be—namely that elections are an opportunity for representatives to reconnect with their constituents (Alvarez 1997; Fenno 1996; Kahn and Kenney 2001; Shaw 1999a), a chance for voters to learn about important issues (Bartels 1988; Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Drew and Weaver 2006; Dutwin 2000; Franklin 1991; Holbrook 1999; Jamieson, Hagen, Orr, Sillaman, Morse, and Kirn 2000; Kahn and Kenney 2001; Lodge, Steenbergen and Brau 1995; Popkin 1991; Weaver 1996), and a moment when democratic institutions are legitimized (Gronbeck 1978; Katz 1997; Pomper 1967). By focusing so much attention on the contest elements of the campaign, reporters may be denying the electorate a chance to hear the perspectives of alternative candidates—even if in the end the public chooses not to vote for them.

The results reported here raise several questions. Would the coverage be different if reporters viewed campaigns more in terms of ideas and debate? Would reporters be more inclined to cover minor-party contenders if they defined campaigns as Walters did:

public dialogues in which the main goal was to foster political discourse and explore alternative solutions to statewide problems rather than to determine which candidate is best positioned to win on Election Day? In other words, would a change in paradigm make third-party candidates more newsworthy? The answers to these questions are outside the scope of the present study. What is certain is that the contest paradigm is deeply entrenched in the way reporters think and provides one possible explanation for why, as the content analysis showed, third-party candidates are covered differently than Democrats and Republicans.

Objectivity and two-party hegemony

The notion of objectivity is an important concept in journalism, and it came through strongly in the interviews with the eight political reporters from California and Wisconsin. Although three of the reporters (Callender, Marelius, and Talev) indicated that pure objectivity is not possible (and all three plus Yamamura said they aim mostly to be fair), in all eight cases, the reporters said they or their editors take numerous steps to make sure that their stories are as balanced as possible. However, the interviews suggest that while reporters strive to be neutral in who and what they choose to cover, ultimately their comments and choices indicate that they accept the hegemony of the two-party system. When they talk about objectivity, what reporters really mean is being fair to Democrats and Republicans. This section, therefore, will examine the reporters' notion of neutrality more thoroughly by showing (1) the techniques reporters say they use to make their stories balanced, (2) why these measures may not be effective at ensuring that certain dissenting views get aired, and (3) how reporters readily acknowledge that they view the two-party system as a natural part of American politics.

Ensuring objectivity. The main way that reporters said they guard against bias is to interview as many sources as possible to make sure that a wide-range of viewpoints are reflected in their stories. Marelius of the *Union-Tribune* said he tries to "interview enough people until I'm not hearing anything new." Callender of the *The Capital Times* said reporters need to be "as complete as possible." Marinucci said the *San Francisco Chronicle* "bends over backwards to make sure the story has … a variety of voices that don't just represent one side or the other …"

Talev put it this way:

> Talk to a lot of people when you report any story, especially an enterprise story or an investigative story… Don't just call two experts to write on the story and hit send, which is a challenge on the campaign trail when you're short on time. But I think the best way to guard against unfair bias is to make sure that you're hearing a lot of points of view to help you decide what's the common thinking on someone.

Other steps are taken as well. Walters said some editors at the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* will count quotations and paragraphs of campaign stories to ensure that coverage is quantifiably equal between candidates. Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times* said that while he is not always successful at it, he tries to avoid loaded words and labels such as liberal or conservative to describe a candidate, while Milfred of the *Wisconsin State Journal* said that when he covered campaigns, he could guard against bias by removing any emotional attachment he might have felt toward any of the candidates. Said Milfred:

> At the time I really could care less who won … and I suppose that makes me a bad citizen. But that was my mind set, and I'm being honest about that… I wasn't like a closet conservative or a closet liberal. So that made it easier too… That's how I approached the whole objectivity and fairness thing.

These techniques aside, reporters indicated that being objective is not difficult as long as a journalist understands the proper way to research and write a news story. Barabak explained:

> The analogy I've used before is it's almost like baking a cake or following a recipe. It's not to say that all stories are formulaic, but there is a certain formula or way of putting together a story. Getting a set of facts, providing some perspective, presenting all sides of an issue within reason. I mean, you know, I don't think if I say the sun was shining, I need to quote a meteorologist in the story. You don't take it to that extreme, but … if you bake a cake and you put in too much sugar or you put in too much salt or too much baking soda or too much flour, it's going to taste funny, it's going to come out funny. If you don't put in all the right ingredients in a story … then it's going to be funny.

Ineffective measures? But while measures like talking to numerous sources, counting paragraphs, and understanding the basic formula of balanced news writing may be effective at guaranteeing that Democrats and Republicans get to air their views in the newspaper, they appear to be far less successful at capturing the perspective of dissenting opinions coming from outside the mainstream of American politics. For one thing, when reporters say they ensure balance by calling multiple sources, they do not consider the fact that most of those sources are either Democrats, Republicans, or officials from other institutions affiliated with the two major parties—something that was documented both in the content analysis in Chapter Four (see pages 156 to 162) and the results from the long interviews discussed in previous sections of this chapter.

In addition, all eight reporters acknowledged that they or their newspapers usually provide third-party gubernatorial candidates with substantially less coverage than they give to their counterparts in the Democratic and Republican parties,[25] something that did not seem to upset the journalists or strike them as problematic in any way, even when discussed in the context of journalistic neutrality. For example, the three reporters from Wisconsin all agreed that while 2002 Libertarian gubernatorial hopeful Ed Thompson did not receive the same amount of exposure as did his major-party rivals (one reporter said he received about 20 percent of the news stories), they nevertheless described the coverage they gave him as “tremendous,” “aggressive,” and far better than average for a typical minor-party contender. This is interesting because it suggests that reporters measure coverage of third-party candidates on a different scale so that even when outsiders receive fewer paragraphs, column inches, and overall stories than the Democrat or Republican, reporters still believe that the coverage is sufficient.[26]

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[25] Reporters used words like "minimal," "not regular," and "not equal" to describe how often a minor-party gubernatorial contender typically appears in their publications.

Two-party hegemony. In the end, though, it does not matter to reporters that the measures they take to guarantee objectivity fail to capture alternative viewpoints because unconventional perspectives are not a priority. If the interviews are any indication, reporters consciously—and at times unconsciously—accept the hegemony of the two-party system as a natural part of American politics. They consider campaigns to be primarily two-person affairs, and they rarely think to question the existing power structure or their role in maintaining it. As the comments that follow indicate, part of this is simple practicality—reporters do not have the physical ability to cover everyone. But part of their reality is also ideological, as the two-party system has become deeply entrenched in the way reporters conceptualize and talk about politics.

For example, in discussing his daily routine on the campaign trail, Walters said, “It’s a good day when handlers from *both candidates* are mad at me.” Yamamura said he knows he has done a good job “if we had complaints on *both sides*.” Talev said that a campaign is “a contest between *two people*,” and Milfred said that while he appreciates third parties because they raise issues the Democrats and Republicans are sometimes unwilling to talk about, he nevertheless indicated an unconscious acceptance of two-party hegemony when he said that he tries to push candidates to answer questions even in cases in which "neither campaign" wants to talk about a particular issue.

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[26] In a conversation I had with Ed Thompson during my visit to Wisconsin, the former Libertarian gubernatorial candidate said he also felt that his news coverage was fair.

Marinucci used similar language when discussing the relationship between Internet bloggers and newspaper journalists. In explaining that electronic media critics sometimes unfairly condemn the press for writing negative stories about candidates a particular blogger supports, Marinucci said:

> It isn't my job to try to destroy a campaign or to build up a campaign. [It is] simply to tell the truth about what's going on in the campaign or the candidate, and I do that for *both sides*, and we do [equal coverage] on *both sides*… I don't like bloggers who have a very specific point of view… It's not my job to support *one side or the other*…

The use of such language as "both sides" to describe a campaign strongly suggests a subliminal two-party mindset on the part of the journalists. But while reporters are sometimes unconscious of how their Democrat-Republican bias infiltrates their thinking, the interviews also indicated that reporters are often fully aware that they may be helping to sustain the two-party system through their coverage. Some reporters struggled with the idea that they are supporting the status quo, but others indicated that they have simply accepted the existing power structure as a natural part of politics. They neither give it much thought, the interviews suggest, nor do they see it as their role to question the system's underlying premises.

For example, when asked what the two-party system meant to her, Marinucci answered this way: "I think that's a system that I'm covering right now, so I don't–I mean, I don't think it's my job to have any feelings about it…" Callender made similar remarks: "Well, I think the two-party system is basically the vehicle through which most campaigns are run these days. You know, it's sort of the existing superstructure for campaigns. I guess that's the best way to put it."

Talev went into more detail, indicating that it is not necessarily the job of a reporter to challenge the existing political structure. Talev said:

> I mean, we really do have a two-party system, essentially. And, the system perpetuates itself and I guess to some extent, we perpetuate it by covering it that way, but we also cover it that way 'cause that's the way it is. And, I guess, it's a real question which is "should newspapers support the status quo" or "should newspapers seek to shake up the status quo"? But, primarily the way elections are covered, newspapers support the political status quo. I don't mean in terms of incumbents and helping people stay in their jobs, but I just mean in terms of newspapers primarily cover the people who demonstratively can win and maybe that bolsters their ability to win. And I think that's something we always have to be careful about and that if there's a legitimately strong independent candidate, we should cover them. But, I mean, the question, the test becomes, at what point do you know that they're [a third-party candidate] a real candidate, that they're really in the game–they're a real player.

Barabak indicated that reporters sometimes question whether they are perpetuating the existing power elite, but he said that because the United States operates as a two-party system, newspapers ultimately make the right decision for their readers when they limit their coverage only to those candidates who are likely to win. Barabak said:

> It is really very difficult to decide who you cover and who you don't because you realize you're part of this self-perpetuating cycle: They're not seen as legitimate, so they're not covered. They're not covered, so they're not seen as legitimate. It's very very difficult… But you have to make that choice. You just don't have the time, you don't have the resources… To my mind, you're better serving readers if you give them more information on the people most likely to win than a little bit about everybody.

But how do reporters know which candidates are likely to win?

Barabak acknowledged that this is "guesswork," but he said news organizations approach this question knowing that America operates in a two-party system in which most people will cast their ballot based on party labels. Barabak said:

> We do know empirically from studies that something like 75 to 80 percent of people are going to vote based on party label. Mickey Mouse can run as a Republican and Donald Duck will run as the Democrat, and people are going to vote for them because they're the Democrat and the Republican. So, because of the structural and built-in biases in our electoral system, you can assume that the two major-party candidates are going to have the greatest chance of being elected in a standard election… So you start with that presumption and then, you know, and then it's just horse sense or whatever you want to call it.

In Wisconsin, the *Journal-Sentinel*'s Walters seemed to have reservations about third parties being ignored by the news media, but like Barabak he said that newspapers must eventually bow to the fact that they are covering a two-party system. In the following exchange, Walters says that one reason minor-party candidates may be ignored by the press is because other institutions fail to include them in big news events, such as debates. The interview with Walters went like this:

> **Walters:** Sometimes the framers of events … [contribute to a third-party candidate being ignored] when they don't let [Libertarian] Ed Thompson attend a debate. So if my editors are counting eleven graphs for [Democrat Jim] Doyle and eleven graphs for [Republican Scott] McCallum [in a debate story], and Ed Thompson is on the outside [of the debate hall] … giving sound bites—you know, let me in, let me in—… in that situation, I'm giving Ed Thompson four paragraphs. The organizer of the debate—the sponsors of the debate—did not invite Ed Thompson. [I write a] paragraph [saying] that the Libertarian candidate Thompson appeared outside the hall and made the following points. But the news was made *inside* the hall where Doyle and McCallum, you know, squared off.
>
> **Investigator:** But if you recognize that the system is rigged that way, why—what stops you from saying, "All right, I'm going to cover that debate" but…?
>
> **Walters:** History. History... It's been, it's been a debate—it's been a government of D's and R's, and so, unfortunately, I'm probably giving into the historical trends that we've had a two-party system in Wisconsin. Even though [Robert] LaFollett was a progressive—LaFollett a candidate, former governor, former U.S. senator, candidate for president. Wisconsin has had a history of paying serious attention to third party candidates, but that history was in hiatus until Ed Thompson came along. You know, we hadn't done a lot with third parties post LaFollett. You know, it was a game between D's and R's largely.

The acceptance of two-party hegemony is consistent with the data presented in the content analysis, which also found a Democrat-Republican worldview embedded right in the texts about gubernatorial campaigns. It is evident from these interviews that the two-party bias that was so obvious in much of the reporting about the 2002 campaigns is something that occurs both unconsciously as well as with the implicit acceptance of the reporters. Journalists sometimes recognize (and even lament) that they are aiding the wishes of the major parties, but they go along with it, the interviews suggest, because that is simply the way politics works in the United States.

Lack resources

The interviews suggest that reporters are growing increasingly concerned with their job security as well as the declining resources newspapers are willing to spend on campaign coverage. This is a problem, several reporters said, because campaigns are an important part of American democracy that should be scrutinized thoroughly so voters are clear about the choices before them on Election Day. Yet the lack of resources affects campaign coverage in that it limits the types of stories reporters can do, it lowers morale among reporters, and it sometimes forces journalists to reduce the number of candidates they can cover. This section will focus on the latter concern.

The impact of money on the journalistic process was described by Talev, who said when she covered politics in California she often had to make coverage decisions based on her travel budget. "From the newspaper's perspective, the challenge is always money," Talev said, adding:

> You want to be on the road with these people as much as possible, but it's very expensive, especially in a big state, especially if they're on a lot of airplanes and you really have to decide, well, what events are they just doing for TV and what events would it be useful—would there actually be a reason to go.

Marinucci was even more blunt in discussing resource issues:

> I think the existence of these kinds of political campaign jobs may not be around too much longer. I'm the only one left now at my paper and most—every major newspaper I know is laying off people that do this kind of work.

Marinucci said that a newspaper like the *San Francisco Chronicle* does not have the financial resources to devote extensive coverage to candidates who have little chance of winning. She said her newspaper will usually do a few pieces about a gubernatorial candidate from the Green or Libertarian parties just to let voters know they are on the ballot, but the organization cannot justify assigning a full-time reporter to cover a third-party contender exclusively. Marinucci said:

> Our coverage of third-party candidates is not regular by any means… Let's say [we] have, say, a candidate, a Green Party candidate like Peter Camejo [who ran in 2002]. We'd certainly do a profile to tell people where he stands on issues. We certainly include, you know, cover him on the debates. We may do here and there some kind of a major take-out on him if he's saying something. But in terms of regular coverage like we cover Democratic and Republican candidates, we just don't have the staffing to do it …

Barabak made similar comments, saying that even a newspaper as big and as influential as the *Los Angeles Times* does not have the resources available to cover every candidate in a gubernatorial campaign. As Barabak put it: "The thing I always come back to is a question of triage… Even the *LA Times* with all the kings' horses and all the kings' men cannot devote equal resources to every candidate."

In addition to a lack of monetary funds, Talev said newspapers have limited news holes. With so many stories competing for space each day, she said, editors are forced to make decisions based on such factors as what will be the most important information to the largest possible audience. Unless readers express an increased demand for news about third-party candidates, she said, journalists have little incentive to devote limited space to them. The one possible bright spot for minor-party candidates, Talev added, could be the Internet. Here is how she put it:

> I think it's entirely possible that as newspapers or news organizations develop their Web sites, that there could be, if there was an interest in it, a section of coverage devoted more to third-party candidates where if you want to learn more about the third-party candidates there could be a link for you to click on and there could be reporters who would be covering, giving extensive coverage either to one third-party candidate or to a collection of third-party candidates… I think there would be interest, but as long as there's sort of a paradigm for a news organization, a print news organization [with] limited space, limited news hole, then what you're going to see is primarily coverage of, in a primary, the leading couple of same-party contenders, then in a general election coverage of the Democratic nominee and the Republican nominee… I do think the Internet in theory changes a lot if not everything…

The journalists' comments reported in this section suggest that print newspapers have an economic incentive to limit the field of candidates only to those candidates which they perceive to generate the most public interest. However, this finding requires additional research to fully understand. It may be true, as the comments indicate, that news organizations refrain from covering third-party candidates partially because they do not have the money or space to do so. What is less clear from the interviews is exactly how these economic coverage decisions are made in the newsroom—or, if you will, the boardroom. In addition, the paradigm that now governs how third-party candidates are covered could soon become—if it hasn't already—an artifact of the old print medium. Future research should look at how news organizations use the Internet to cover gubernatorial campaigns and whether electronic news coverage of third parties is dramatically different from what has traditionally appeared on the printed page.

Reporter's criteria

According to the interviews with the eight reporters from California and Wisconsin, third-party candidates also have trouble getting the press's attention because they cannot meet the five criteria that are particularly salient with political journalists when making coverage decisions. These criteria include the following: (1) is the candidate generating strong public interest, either in the polls or at public events, to make them a viable contender who can impact the race; (2) is the candidate raising important issues that are resonating strongly with the public; (3) does the candidate have strong name recognition or public prestige; (4) is the candidate campaigning seriously and actually trying to win; and (5) has the candidate raised substantial funds to compete effectively. All eight reporters mentioned at least one of these criteria (and usually more) during the interviews.

To determine the significance of the criteria, reporters were asked to rank the importance of each condition. The investigator then weighed each criterion with a point system based on how often each standard was ranked first, second, third, or fourth by a reporter.[27] Criterion that were mentioned by only one or two reporters were dropped from the sample so that only those that were used by at least three journalists were included. This was done to establish patterns across all eight reporters. Table 5.2 shows the order of importance reporters gave to each of the five criteria as well as the number of points each condition received.

Table 5.2: Reporters' newsworthiness criteria

Criterion	Points
Public Interest in the Candidate	23
Raising Salient Issues	14
Name Recognition	12
Campaigning Seriously	11
Financial Strength	8

Public interest. Public interest/viability was the most important of the criteria that reporters cited when judging whether a third-party candidate should be covered more extensively. Seven of the eight reporters mentioned this criterion during the interviews, with six ranking public interest as either the first or second most important condition to determining coverage levels. This should not be surprising given that reporters tend to view campaigns mostly as a contest.

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[27] A criterion was given 4 points each time a reporter ranked it as his or her most important condition. In addition, a criterion received 3 points each time a reporter ranked it as his or her second most important condition, 2 points when it was listed third and 1 point when it was ranked fourth.

The reporters measured public interest in four ways: is the candidate receiving enough support in public opinion polls to make him or her a viable candidate; how large are the candidate's crowds during public events like speeches and rallies; how much are political insiders talking about the third-party candidate; and does the newspaper's readership have an inherent interest in candidates from outside the political mainstream. This criterion lends support to both Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance as well as Meyrowitz's (1995) journalism logic.

The *Union-Tribune*'s Marelius ranked viability as his top criterion. As he put it: "The most important criterion in determining how much coverage to give a third-party or independent candidate is whether the candidate has a chance to win or affect the outcome of the election in some meaningful way. This is critical." Marinucci of the *San Francisco Chronicle* used similar language. In determining how much coverage to give to a third-party candidate, Marinucci said she looks to see if the candidate has some "possibility of viability" and "some indication of widespread support." In other words, she asks whether "the candidate has either the resources or the people to make any kind of impact on the race other than completely marginal, other than marginal." Walters agreed, saying that in determining whether to take a third-party candidate seriously, he looks to see if there are "more than three people at the Dodgeville Supper Club when [the candidate] speaks;" and Yamamura said, "It helps if they are actually showing up in the polls."

Reporters in San Francisco and Madison said that readership interest in third-party candidates is also a factor that their newspapers will consider when determining whether to give a minor-party contender coverage in their news pages. Marinucci, for instance, said her progressive audience in the San Francisco area is particularly interested in hearing from Green candidates such as Peter Camejo. This is an interesting point because the content analysis reported in Chapter Four indicated that the *San Francisco Chronicle* did, in fact, provide Camejo with more coverage than did the other three California newspapers that were analyzed (see chart on page 184). The coverage in the *Chronicle* also tended to be more positive, the content analysis showed.

Callender said the same is true in Madison, home of the University of Wisconsin and a town which has long been considered a progressive hub. In addition, the fact that Ralph Nader carried several wards in the city during the 2000 presidential election, Callender said, gave his newspaper an incentive to report on third-party candidates during the 2002 gubernatorial election. Callender said:

> I think in general, our newspaper was an outgrowth of the progressive party. And … progressive and third-party politics in Wisconsin … is a fairly significant element of our political culture in a way that it may not necessarily be in the fabric of that in other states. So, I think that to some extent, in Wisconsin in general, we will give more attention to that. And again, I mean, it gets back to national politics. There are some wards in Madison, for example, where Ralph Nader carried those wards in the 2000 presidential cycle. So there is, I think, an obligation to some extent to at least give a baseline of attention to these third-party candidates simply because, particularly in dealing with our market, there is strong support in those quarters—strong reader interest.

This is also consistent with the content analysis, which showed that Wisconsin newspapers gave far more coverage to Libertarian Ed Thompson than California newspapers gave to Green Peter Camejo (chart on page 184).

It should be noted here, though, that public interest alone may not be enough to spark press interest in a third-party gubernatorial candidate. The interviews suggest that even in cases in which a minor-party contender is receiving unusual support in the polls or drawing large crowds at events, reporters will still remain skeptical about the candidate’s true impact on the campaign until they have clear evidence to the contrary.

In other words, third-party contenders bear a greater burden of proof that they are serious. Unlike Democrats and Republicans, public support does not automatically translate into press coverage for a Green, Libertarian, or other alternative candidates.

Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, said that while it is true that Camejo's 2002 Green Party candidacy was the closest thing California has had to a serious third-party challenge in years, reporters were never convinced that his support was anything other than a negative reaction to the Democratic incumbent, Gray Davis.[28] Moreover, Barabak said that most of Camejo's support would have evaporated quickly if Democrats feared there was a real chance the Republican challenger, Bill Simon, could have won the election. Barabak said:

> My Yogi Berra formulation is … it wouldn't have been so close if it had been closer. And by that I mean, there were a lot of people in the end who said Gray Davis is going to win anyway, so I'm going to vote for Peter Camejo… I think there were a lot of people who figured it was a safe vote to vote for Peter Camejo…

Barabak was also skeptical about some reports that voters in 2002 were more willing than usual to consider alternative candidates out of anger at the Democrats and Republicans. He added:

> Yes, the level of dissatisfaction was notably higher in 2002 than in other elections, but people are always hoping for some sort of alternative and that's an idealized candidate. It's not Peter Camejo. It's not Ross Perot. It's not Michael Bloomberg. It's this perfect candidate who's going to come in and is going to make everything great and is going to be firm and resolute in their beliefs, which are going to jive 100 percent with my beliefs… And, so again, yes, there was an inordinately high level of voter dissatisfaction with Gray Davis and with Bill Simon, but you know, there was an opening for an idealized candidate but not for a guy like Peter Camejo, who was good in some ways and bad in some ways and … [was] like any other human being.

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[28] As the content analysis in Chapter Four showed, California newspapers provided little coverage to 2002 Green Party gubernatorial candidate Peter Camejo—even though he received 5 percent of the vote on Election Day, voters expressed unprecedented displeasure with the major-party candidates throughout the campaign, and nearly 69 percent of Californians polled said Camejo should be included in the formal candidate debates because they were interested in hearing more from him (see pages 153 to 155 and 162 of this dissertation).

Salient issues. Reporters said they are more likely to cover a third-party candidate if that person is talking about issues that are resonating strongly with the public. This was the Number 1 criterion mentioned by Callender, Walters, and Barabak.

Barabak said he sees campaigns as a narrative that includes characters who interact with each other. If one of those candidates is forcing the others to respond to his or her ideas and issues, then that candidate deserves coverage regardless of which party nominated them. Put another way, reporters look for candidates who can shape the dialogue of the campaign.

How a candidate articulates these issues is also important. In Wisconsin, for example, Libertarian Ed Thompson won kudos from the political press corps when he addressed two issues of major concern in 2002: corruption in state government and public fear over rumors that some deer meat was tainted with Chronic Wasting Disease, a neurological condition that produces small brain lesions in infected animals. Walters explained how the dynamic worked and why it was so effective at winning Thompson substantial exposure in the news media:

> It was the neatest campaign to cover. I mean, here's a guy [who says] I want to talk about how dirty state government is, so I'm going to go to Madison's sewage treatment plant. I want to talk about how I don't think Chronic Wasting Disease, which affects white tailed deer, which is an industry in Wisconsin—I'm not a hunter, I don't eat venison, but I'm aware of how ingrained hunting is—so Ed Thompson says: "I'm not afraid of Chronic Wasting Disease. I'm going to go to the heart of deer country and eat venison." And the cameras–you've got to love him. Ed Thompson, if he would have had two to three hundred thousand more [dollars] to raise his profile in some of the major media markets, he would have done a lot more damage than 11 percent. He was fun to cover. He was fun to cover.

Name recognition. Name recognition was also a significant criterion mentioned by four of the eight reporters. Callender, for instance, pointed out that "if Brett Favre (the quarterback of the Green Bay Packers) were to suddenly announce tomorrow that he's decided to join the Libertarian Party, I don't think, you know, even if he had $10 in the fund raising, I don't think it would make any difference—I think there would be coverage of him."

Talev said that while editors usually determined which candidates get covered, the first condition she mentioned was whether the candidate had statewide or national name recognition. As Talev put it:

> Let's say that [New York City Mayor] Michael Bloomberg runs for president, right. He was a Democrat, he's mayor as a Republican, now he's an independent. He's worth a gazillion billion dollars. Okay, if he runs, people are gonna cover him. At least they'll cover him for a while until he flames out or presents himself as a real candidate… But if statewide polls show they're registering two or three percent, how many times do you have to go out on the road with them if that number doesn't change?

Wisconsin reporters pointed out that name recognition was a major reason that Thompson received substantial coverage for a third-party candidate during the 2002 gubernatorial campaign in Wisconsin. This is how Callender of the *Capital Times* explained it:

> Ed Thompson … had the same last name as the longest serving governor in Wisconsin history—the guy that ran up the highest margins ever and who had left the office a year before [Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson, Ed's brother]. So, I mean, that in and of itself made Ed an extraordinary candidate.

Campaigning seriously. Reporters said they pay close attention to the level of a third-party candidate's engagement. In other words, is the candidate really trying to win or is he or she just taking up space on the ballot? There are several ways reporters measure this. First, reporters look closely at the candidate's organization to determine if it is a well-oiled machine with volunteers and a headquarters or just the candidate and his brother; second, they look to see if the candidate is trying to facilitate coverage by sending reporters e-mail, press releases, and other communications announcing policy positions and dates for campaign events; and third, they look to see if the candidate is doing such things as updating his or her Web site and going out on the campaign trail day after day.

Milfred said that this type of public engagement is perhaps the biggest factor that he uses to determine whether the candidate should receive significant coverage, adding that Thompson's Libertarian candidacy displayed a high level of energy that showed he was truly trying to win the statehouse.

> Number one is: Are they running a credible campaign? You know, in this day and age, if you can't send out an e-mail to a reporter that says you're even running, that says you're going to have an event, then forget it, especially for a major race… And it's pretty clear when you look at most third-party candidates that they know they can't win, they are not going to put their life on hold for this campaign, they're doing it because their third party needed somebody to run…

Other reporters made similar comments. Yamamura said he looks at a candidate's "level of engagement," adding that candidates are more likely to get covered if "they're trying actively to get their message out on a daily basis, and if that proves effective." Marelius said he asks himself whether a candidate has "the wherewithal to conduct a credible campaign and get a message out to voters;" and Walters said he looks for third-party candidates who attempt to "facilitate coverage" by "letting you know where the candidate's going to be," adding that one reason many third-party efforts fail to get news coverage is because they do not alert reporters about their events.

Financial strength. Finally, how much money a candidate has raised is another factor that reporters use to determine whether a third-party contender is serious enough to warrant significant coverage in the news media. However, this criterion seems to have uncovered a slight difference between the reporters in California and Wisconsin, suggesting that different criteria might emerge in different states. All five reporters from California mentioned fundraising as a criteria without being probed by the investigator.

Although each of the California reporters gave different levels of importance to a candidate's financial strength, they all nevertheless thought it was important enough to bring up on their own. Not one of the three Wisconsin reporters discussed a candidate's level of financial support until they were specifically asked about it by the investigator—and in two of the three cases, the Wisconsin journalists indicated that while they do not ignore financing completely when determining who to cover, they do not give it much credence because they consider it a fairly weak indication of a candidate's overall support.

For example, Callender of *The Capital Times* said that Thompson's 2002 race shows that a candidate with significantly fewer resources than his major-party rivals could still compete effectively in Wisconsin. When asked whether a candidate's financing should be considered as a criterion for determining coverage, Callender said:

> Yeah, to some extent. I think there has to be at least a sort of a baseline in order for them to be able to get—to be able to generate a certain degree of name recognition. But again, you don't have to have a lot of money as Ed showed in order to get the name—the name ID. It has to be more of either, you know, either personality or the issue.

This view was seconded by Milfred of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, who said: "We would look at fundraising, but I mean, I wouldn't say, 'He hasn't raised enough money for me to cover him.' I mean, that's kind of offensive and dumb."

Part of the difference here may rest with the importance of money in each race. California has three large media markets in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego that require substantial resources to buy television advertising. Wisconsin is a smaller state with only one comparable market in Milwaukee. Travel costs are also higher in California. In this sense, then, money may be a bigger fact of life in California politics than it is in Wisconsin.

Discussion

The data presented here suggests that there are practical and ideological reasons to explain why third-party candidates receive news coverage that is substantially different from that given to Democrats and Republicans. From a practical standpoint, reporters must deal with the reality of limited resources, a busy electorate, and a political structure that makes it difficult for even the most serious minor-party contender to compete effectively for elected office. In addition, the interviews suggest that reporters are particularly skeptical of third-party aspirants and do not want to be drawn into covering candidates who are not taking the campaign seriously.

But there also appear to be ideological reasons to explain the coverage differences. Reporters clearly see campaigns mostly as a contest in which third-party candidates are inherently less newsworthy because they usually have little impact on the race. Moreover, the interviews strongly suggest that reporters have a deep-seated bias in favor of the two-party system. They view two-person campaigns as normal and multicandidate races as odd; and they accept the Democrats and Republicans as the natural holders of political power in America.

The long interviews also provide lessons for both third-party candidates and political journalists. For those who would run against "the system" via the Green, Libertarian, or other minor-party ticket, the criteria discussed by newspaper reporters provide alternative candidates with a road map for how they might traverse the challenging media landscape before them and work their way onto the news agenda.

As for journalism, these results should make reporters pause and take stock. It is true that the reporters who participated in this study made several excellent points that indicate the practical necessity of news organizations to use their resources wisely and provide information that will be useful to their readers. But the interviews also revealed some inherent biases that raise questions about the concept of objectivity and strongly suggest that reporters have allowed themselves to be co-opted by those in power to protect their hold on government. Political journalists should consider this lesson and ask themselves whether they are really serving democracy when they consistently ignore certain voices or frame them in ways that make them less salient or serious with the electorate.

That said, it is not my intention to judge whether political journalists are doing the right or wrong thing in how they cover gubernatorial campaigns. Rather my hope is to draw attention to some of the factors that may contribute to the process reporters follow on the campaign trail so as to open a broader debate in journalism circles about the manner in which elections are viewed. Is it true, for instance, that readers are better served by receiving substantial information about a small group of candidates rather than minimal information about many more contenders? Or is the electorate hurt when certain perspectives on a matter of public importance are not heard because they are not being voiced by those in power? Will the Internet change the way third-party candidates are covered by the mainstream media? If so, how?

These are difficult questions to answer. One thing seems certain in the short-run, though. If we can use these interviews as a gauge, third-party gubernatorial candidates are likely to occupy their current space in American political life for some years to come—on the fringe.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

It is no secret that third-party presidential candidates are often ignored by the news media (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1984; Sifry 2003; Stempel 1969; Stempel and Windhauser 1984; Stovall 1985; Zaller and Hunt 1994; Zaller 1999)—and this study shows that the same is true at the gubernatorial level. But the main purpose of this project was not to assess story volume but rather to examine *how* minor-party candidates are covered by the news media when they *do* receive coverage. In essence, this dissertation's primary question is: What is the nature of press coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates and how is it similar to and different from the treatment of Democrats and Republicans?

The content analysis in Chapter Four shows that newspaper coverage of Greens and Libertarians is significantly different from the text about the major parties. Third-party candidates are featured less prominently in headlines, lead paragraphs, and entire stories than are Democrats and Republicans; sources from within minor parties are quoted much less frequently than are officials from the major parties; the news frames adopted by the news media often come from a two-party perspective; and third-party candidates are often separated from their major-party rivals—both in terms of their physical location on the printed news page as well as from the public policy debate that makes up the campaign.

The data analysis also found that reporters use different language when conveying messages about the roles minor- and major-party aspirants play in an election campaign. For example, Democrats and Republicans who are lagging in the polls are called “underdogs,” but third-party candidates are called “spoilers” or “long shots.” In addition, when third-party candidates do well in the polls, reporters question why and look for explanations from within a two-party paradigm. More often than not, the news media conclude that citizens voted for a Green or Libertarian only to express anger at the Democrats and Republicans. Such explanations are reported as fact, even in cases in which there is no supporting evidence to corroborate it. Left unexplored is whether the third-party candidates themselves had a natural constituency or whether they had raised issues that resonated with the public.

Given these results, the content analysis and supporting qualitative observations show that reporters are heavily influenced by the two-party system—a system they see as “the natural way of things.” Rarely in the newspaper coverage that was analyzed in Chapter Four did news accounts in California, Oregon, and Wisconsin even think to question the dominance of the Democrats and Republicans. It was simply taken for granted. This was particularly surprising in Wisconsin, which has a history of progressive third-party politics in Robert LaFollett and others. In many ways, the newspapers in these states (but particularly those in California and Oregon) treated third-party candidates as abnormal phenomenon that disrupted rather than legitimately challenged “the system.” In short, the hegemony of the Democrats and Republicans was imbedded directly in the text of news stories through the language, news frames, sources, and story structures used by reporters to represent the reality of the campaign. Looking at how gubernatorial elections were covered, it is clear that reporters have been co-opted by the major parties, thus becoming one more factor that helps Democrats and Republicans maintain their control over American politics.

Such reporting practices carry serious ramifications for the American political process and journalism as a profession. For one, the news media's tendency to protect the status quo acts to stifle political discussion by making it impossible for anyone with viewpoints perceived to be "unconventional" from infusing their opinion into the campaign. The press essentially becomes a barrier to political discourse rather than an institution that encourages free flowing debate. As long as reporters ignore or ridicule those who challenge the two major parties, Democrats and Republicans will feel little pressure to engage the body politic in a serious dialogue about the important issues that face American society—particularly sensitive issues that threaten to divide key constituencies such as moderates or their base supporters on the left and right. In such an environment, civil society is denied the ability to have an honest and comprehensive discussion about the issues.

In addition, research presented in Chapters Four and Five suggests that citizens who are looking for fresh perspectives and alternatives to established political organizations are marginalized and alienated from the political process. Rather than acting as an independent force that challenges the dominant narratives constructed by the political establishment, reporters go along with elites and are complicit in creating political storylines that automatically push aside viewpoints that attempt to challenge fundamental assumptions about the American political order. In this sense, the news media is just one more cog in the nation's political power structure, and the notion that journalism is suppose to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable is turned on its head.

The exception to this hegemonic coverage was found in the Maine press. It is here that further research is warranted to determine whether the equal coverage afforded to third-party candidates in Maine newspapers can truly be attributed to the historical and legal reasons cited in the content analysis—namely that Maine may be more sympathetic to minor parties because (1) it has elected several independent governors throughout its recent history and (2) the state has a generous public financing law that provides hefty sums of money to third-party contenders who can demonstrate substantial support from the electorate. Future studies should take a broader look at how the Maine news media cover third-party candidates at various levels with an eye toward examining whether all minor-party candidates are treated equally or whether some are provided more coverage than others. In addition, future studies should examine the exposure third-party candidates receive in the Maine press across elections to see whether the 2002 gubernatorial contest was an aberration or a typical way that the press there approaches campaigns. Finally, reporters in Maine should be interviewed to determine whether they view campaigns differently than reporters in other states and whether they use different criteria for deciding which candidates to cover.

In any event, one thing seems perfectly clear: From the perspective of third parties, Maine newspapers did it right in 2002. News reports in the *Portland Press Herald*, *Bangor Daily News*, and *Kennebec Journal* generally treated Green Party candidate Jonathan Carter as an equal of the Democrat and Republican. While these newspapers frequently reported poll numbers showing Carter far behind his major-party rivals, they rarely handicapped the race by labeling the Green's chances as next to nothing. They simply let the numbers speak for themselves. In addition, the Maine newspapers integrated all four gubernatorial candidates into the text so that minor-party contenders were not physically separated from the Democrats and Republicans;[29] and all three newspapers provided in-depth coverage of each candidate's issue positions. Finally, news reports in Maine refrained from using language that sidelined third-party aspirants. For example, when referring to the gubernatorial contenders, the newspapers in Portland, Bangor, and Augusta typically used language such as "Maine's four gubernatorial candidates." By contrast, newspapers in the three other states tended to refer to third-party aspirants as "other" or "alternative" politicians while Democrats and Republicans were labeled as "both candidates" or sometimes "all of the candidates." In short, the press in Maine did what journalism is suppose to do: reporters presented the facts without loaded terms such as "long shot" and "spoiler," thus allowing the voters to decide which candidate was best.

The 2002 campaign coverage in Maine provides a road map for how third-party gubernatorial candidates can be covered by the press, thus undermining reporters' arguments that a lack of resources makes it impossible for news organizations to write about every candidate in a race. The press in Maine faces many of the same challenges as newspapers in other states, yet somehow the newspapers there found the money, staff, and news space needed to paint a more complete picture of the election campaign.

In addition to the type of coverage third parties receive in the news media, this dissertation builds on the research of Meyrowitz (1995) by asking whether a difference exists between how national and regional newspapers cover minor-party gubernatorial hopefuls. As the research reported in Chapter Four shows, the short answer is a qualified yes.

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[29] In addition to Green candidate Jonathan Carter, state Rep. John Michael ran for governor as an independent in 2002. He was not part of the content analysis coding in this study.

Like Meyrowitz—whose study of the 1992 Democratic presidential primary in New Hampshire concluded that national reporters operate under a campaign logic that seeks to narrow the field of candidates to be covered while regional journalists tend to be slightly more sympathetic to unconventional politicians—this study found that (1) regional newspapers gave significantly more coverage to minor parties then did national newspapers and (2) local reporters were less likely than national journalists to label and ridicule third parties. However, the findings here must be qualified because the sample of national press reports was small, with only six stories out of 132 mentioning third-party candidates. On the one hand, this dearth of coverage in the national press suggests that journalists at large newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *USA Today* see little value in writing about candidates who they do not believe can win, thus lending support to Meyrowitz's theory of a national journalistic logic. On the other hand, the sample of actual stories was too small to definitively draw any general conclusions about the nature of national coverage of third-party candidates—at least at the gubernatorial level.

Part of the reason that national newspapers may have devoted so little coverage to these gubernatorial campaigns is that three of the four states in this study (Oregon, Wisconsin, and Maine) are relatively small states that do not normally generate much national attention. To better assess the differences between actual coverage of third-party gubernatorial candidates in the national and regional press, a future study should choose a statewide campaign involving a third-party contender with strong enough name recognition that he or she would naturally attract a good amount of national consideration. A campaign that comes readily to mind is Jesse Ventura's successful 1998 campaign for governor in Minnesota. Examining a campaign such as this might provide a better understanding of the differences that exist between regional newspapers and the national press.

This dissertation also asked how political journalists view their role during an election campaign and what obligations, if any, they felt toward the larger community. According to the long interviews reported in Chapter Five, journalists envision their role as that of informer or educator. In other words, the reporters said that they have a strong obligation to their readership to synthesize the events of the campaign and provide in-depth information about the candidates so that citizens can make educated decisions at the ballot box. Reporters acknowledged Lippmann's (1922) assertion that they are the primary way in which most citizens will learn about the candidates for elective office, and their comments reflected the seriousness with which they take this responsibility. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, reporters view this role exclusively from a two-party perspective, thus limiting their ability to broaden public discourse beyond the confines established by the Democrats and Republicans.

The long interviews provide support to Zaller (1999) and Meyrowitz's (1995) contention that reporters cover candidates based on such factors as public support, fundraising ability, and backing from party elite. In addition to citing campaign officials, political strategists, and senior party leaders as valuable sources of political information, the reporters who were interviewed identified five *candidate newsworthiness criteria* that they use to judge whether a political contender for governor should receive substantial coverage in the press. In order of importance, reporters said a gubernatorial candidate is more likely to get on the news media's agenda when he or she (1) demonstrates a high degree of public support, both in opinion surveys and campaign events; (2) shows that his or her issues resonate strongly with the voters; (3) has public prestige and name recognition; (4) is running a serious campaign; and (5) has raised enough money to be competitive in the general election.

These criteria are a significant finding of this study for two reasons. First, they serve as guideposts to third-party political candidates who are truly trying to win public office, telling them what they need to do to have a chance of being taken seriously by the news media. More importantly, though, the five criteria shine a light on how reporters think about politics and demonstrate how journalists have been socialized and trained to view campaigns from a perspective that helps the Democrats and Republicans maintain their hold on power. The five candidate newsworthiness criteria are more than just practical standards to make a journalist's job more manageable—they point to the reporter's mindset and reveal the ideological underpinnings reflective of the dominant Democrat-Republican paradigm so accepted by the press. In this way, journalists are both unconsciously and reflexively in collusion with the two major parties, establishing a set of standards for newsworthiness that play directly to the strengths of established elites.

Under the first three criteria, for example, reporters are essentially saying that they will only commit resources to political aspirants who are already known and supported by the public. Not only do these criteria give Democrats and Republicans a clear advantage over Greens and Libertarians—who are less likely to have strong public support in the early stages of an election campaign because most voters will not have heard of them or their policy proposals—they create a chicken-and-egg dilemma: third-party candidates are not covered by the news media because they have little public support and name recognition, but they cannot generate public support and name recognition because they are not covered by the news media. What such criteria fail to consider is the possibility that a candidate may gain support and influence the debate if only given the chance to consistently air his or her views in the press. These three criteria also play to the strengths of Democrats and Republicans, who have had ample opportunity to build support and name recognition in their capacity as state legislators, attorneys general, or other public officeholders well before they enter a major campaign such as that for governor.

In addition, the news media's tendency to look at fund raising ability as an indication of a candidate's seriousness also helps the well-financed Democratic and Republican parties keep the Greens and Libertarians at bay. This criterion acts to both exclude poorly financed third-party aspirants—thus making it even more difficult for them to raise money—and creates a system under which wealthy donors establish the set of candidates who are then presented to the voters by the news media as legitimate contenders for public office. Since these contributors to political campaigns are unlikely to give money to candidates who challenge their social and economic status, third-party candidates and other voices from the fringe will remain financially weak and thus viewed by reporters as less legitimate. Put another way, rather than challenging the dominant political narrative that is constructed by those who finance the American electoral process, reporters look to those with financial muscle to tell the news media which narrative to write.

Still, editorial choices must be made. Reporters need some standards with which to judge candidates. As the long interviews indicate, there is no question that journalists should assess the seriousness with which each candidate is campaigning and exclude from coverage those who are simply putting their name on the ballot but doing little else to organize. However, if reporters truly see themselves as informers who educate the public about the candidates and policy choices before them, then the news media should place less emphasis on things such as poll results, name recognition, and fundraising ability, and look to criteria designed more to foster debate and give qualified but otherwise lesser known candidates a chance to win over voters. I would recommend three standards for determining which candidates are covered.

First, reporters should consider providing substantial coverage to any candidate who outlines a detailed plan for tackling major social, economic, and political problems, whether those ideas are resonating with the public in the early stages of a campaign or not. As part of this analysis, journalists should examine the specifics behind the plan as well as any previous experience the candidate may have in implementing such proposals. Rather than determining seriousness by looking at opinion surveys and campaign finance forms, reporters should examine the thoughtfulness behind each candidate's ideas and worldview to determine which political hopefuls are substantive and reflective and which ones are shallow and reactionary. Reporters should then commit to covering these "serious" candidates thoroughly for several weeks or months so that the public has a chance to hear their ideas. If, after a period of time, certain candidates still fail to register in the polls, reporters might then consider dropping them from the regular coverage.

Second, reporters should place more emphasis on a candidate's professional and personal background to determine whether his or her previous experiences match that of the office being sought. In addition to looking at a candidate's past positions in elective government, though, journalists should consider a candidate's background in the private sector as well as the nonprofit world, volunteer work, and other community service. Just as a potential employer checks with the references of a job applicant, reporters should conduct their own background checks on political aspirants by talking to the candidates' coworkers, former supervisors, and other associates to determine what kind of skills the political hopeful might bring to elective office and whether their previous experience makes them qualified for public service.

Finally, rather than using *public opinion* surveys to determine coverage decisions, reporters should use *public interest* polls. In other words, news organizations should ask their audiences which candidates the voters are interested in learning about and then devote more resources to those contenders who score the highest numbers. This would give more control to readers and voters and reduce the influence of party insiders and campaign contributors. Such a criterion might help a candidate like Peter Camejo of California, who consistently registered low numbers in public opinion polls during the 2002 gubernatorial election even as voters said they were interested in hearing more about his policy positions. The press must move away from the notion that the only candidates worth covering are those who can win. By focusing on candidates that the public is interested in, reporters could provide third-party contenders a chance to win public backing and influence the larger political debate while also giving the electorate exposure to a wider range of ideas. In short, journalists should view campaigns as a chance to break from the conventional Democrat-Republican way of covering public policy and broaden the dialogue beyond the tiny confines of mainstream thought.

In addition to identifying the journalists' criteria for determining candidate coverage, this study found strong support at the gubernatorial level for Zaller's (1999) Rule of Anticipated Importance, which suggests that reporters—faced with limited time and resources—narrow the field of candidates to be covered by focusing most of their attention on politicians who they anticipate will have importance in the future. Zaller used this theory to explain why third-party presidential candidates as well as second-tier major-party contenders receive far less coverage than Democrats and Republicans who are perceived to be frontrunners. In the research reported in this dissertation, it was clear that a similar dynamic is also at work with reporters covering statewide politics. As the long interviews suggest, reporters view campaigns mostly as a contest between different political camps, and they devote their resources mostly to those candidates who are likely to win. In addition, the political journalists who were interviewed echoed the points Zaller made in his 1999 study when they said (1) most voters do not have the time or inclination to know about every candidate on the ballot and look to reporters to tell them which ones are worthy of their attention, and (2) even news organizations as large as the *Los Angeles Times* simply do not have the resources to cover every candidate in a race. In many ways, the five criteria identified in this study (public support, issue salience, name recognition, campaign seriousness, and financial strength) are specifically designed to help journalists anticipate which gubernatorial candidates are likely to have the most importance in the future. Why else gauge public support and fundraising ability if not to predict which candidates are likely to be competitive on Election Day?

Having said that, though, there is also evidence from the interviews that reporters have been socialized and trained to accept the two-party system as the natural way of things—a finding that is consistent with the results of the content analysis. While reporters believe that their main responsibility is to educate and inform the public, they tend to define this role from a two-party perspective. From the sources reporters turn to for information to the language they use to describe campaigns, it is evident that political journalists both consciously and at times unconsciously accept the hegemony of the Democrats and Republicans. Although some of the reporters seemed to struggle with this and questioned whether they should take a more active role in challenging the status quo, in most cases the journalists were unapologetic about any contribution they may make to boosting the two-party system. In the comments that were gleaned from the long interviews, the reporters indicated that they either give little thought to how third-party candidates are treated or they stated flatly that politicians from smaller political organizations do not deserve equal coverage with Democrats and Republicans because they represent small constituencies. In this sense, reporters do not value the contribution that third-party candidates might make to the public policy debate because they were not perceived to be true contenders in *the contest*.

The data also strongly suggest that journalists construct a certain campaign narrative that may not always comport with reality. Campaigns, for instance, are not only about the contest, yet this is the one aspect of an election that dominates the news coverage. In addition, the gubernatorial campaigns that were analyzed in this dissertation included third-party candidates who actively engaged the electorate and campaigned aggressively—if not to win, then to try to influence the public agenda. In all cases but Maine, those minor-party hopefuls were nearly invisible from the news pages or framed as hopeless outsiders who should not be taken seriously because of lagging poll numbers. This kind of reporting represents a constructed reality that reflects one aspect of the campaign—the contest—over all other potential truths. It also hurts democracy by reducing debate and possibly alienating segments of the populations not associated with the major parties.

As a research methodology, the interviews nicely complemented the content analysis by explicating the process reporters follow when covering gubernatorial elections that involve minor-party hopefuls. While the content analysis was able to show *how* the coverage between Greens and Libertarians differed from that provided to Democrats and Republicans, the long interviews explained *why* that coverage was different. One contribution of this research, then, is to show how the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods can add a depth to results that would otherwise be missing if only one methodology had been used.

At the very least, these findings should place a new burden on journalism educators to recognize that the current state of campaign coverage represents a problem for American discourse that needs to be addressed in the classroom. It is vital that the next generation of political reporters be taught to think more critically about the fundamental assumptions of American politics and to continuously ask themselves "how do I know what I know." Whether they are taking a news writing, communication theory, or journalism history course, students must learn to challenge the dominant narrative of American politics—to hold conventional wisdom under a microscope and question who benefits most from the current system. It is no longer enough for reporters to simply accept the two-party framework as a natural part of the American system—they must ask themselves *why* the Democrats and Republicans dominate and what role the press plays in perpetuating that system. Perhaps most importantly, reporters need to understand that certain political narratives become so ingrained in their psyche that they do not even think to question them. It is the job of the journalist to recognize these biases, break free from the parameters established by those in power, and move America toward a more truly democratic discussion that encompasses as many perspectives as possible.

Limitations to the study

One limitation to this study is the fact that no reporters from Maine were interviewed to explain why the coverage of third-party candidates in the Pine Tree State was so different from that of California, Wisconsin, and Oregon. The main reason for this was that Maine political reporters were not immediately available to conduct interviews during that phase of this project in the summer of 2007. For example, one reporter declined to participate, and two others indicated that while they were interested in sitting down with the investigator for a one-on-one interview, their schedules and mine made it difficult to coordinate such a meeting. It is my hope to add to this research later by including the Maine reporters in this analysis.

In addition, there are limitations to the long-interview format that should be recognized. First, although there is no reason to believe that any of the reporters who were interviewed for this project intentionally misled the investigator, there is always the possibility that subjects may exaggerate certain facts or alter their attitudes to fit with what they may believe to be the goals of the investigator. Because there was no component of this study that called on the investigator to observe reporters on the job, there is no way this study can compare what was said during the interviews with how reporters actually performed their work. I overcame this limitation by asking extensive follow-up questions to test the reporters' portrayal of their attitudes and to challenge them on any inconsistencies. I have no reason to believe that the reporters were anything but honest and forthcoming in their responses.

Second, some might argue that while news is produced by a team that includes the reporters, assignment editors, and publishers, this study fall short because it includes only the attitudes and insights of the reporters. I compensated for this potential problem by questioning reporters about their level of independence at their news organizations. In addition, reporters are a vital element in deciding what is news. They are the ones on the front lines of a campaign, and most of the reporters indicated during the interviews that they have a tremendous amount of autonomy and exert significant influence over which stories are eventually covered. Moreover, while editors can decide, among other things, where a story appears in the newspaper, the size of the headline, and whether a photograph will be published along side it, they frequently turn to reporters for advice on what is news given that it is the reporter who has the most contact with the "outside world." In this light, the insights provided by the interviews here offer a comprehensive picture of the news gathering process and tap the knowledge of the one group of journalists who have a tremendous influence over the final news product: the reporter.

Third, although the reporters spoke easily about the 2002 gubernatorial campaign as if it had recently occurred, it is possible that reporters may have faulty memories or inaccurate notions of their own ability, leading them to unintentionally under- or overstate how they actually covered the campaign. Again, I took this into account by asking numerous follow-up questions to check for any inconsistencies in reporters' answers.

Finally, there is always the possibility that the presence of an investigator may "create as well as measure attitudes" (Webb et al. 1966, 1). Denzin (1978) points out that "the presence of an observer is a potentially reactive factor, since the observer may produce changes in behavior that diminish the validity of comparisons" (257). This potential problem was overcome by taking a nonjudgmental posture, allowing the subject to speak freely, and trying to understand the subject's views from his or her perspective. In-depth follow-up questions were also asked throughout the interview to measure consistency in responses. There was no indication from the interviews that any of the reporters were uncomfortable or trying to give the investigator what they believed he wanted.

Future research

In addition to the suggestions made earlier, there are several other possible research projects that could shed additional light on the intersection of third-party politics and the press, both today and in the past. First, future research should compare the difference between mainstream and alternative media in the coverage of third-party or fringe candidates and ideas. Such a study might indicate that America has a marketplace of ideas after all. Although the mainstream media may not report on third-party candidates, it may be that third party ideas make it into the public debate through other means, such as alternative newspapers and broadcast programs such as Pacifica Radio's *Democracy Now*. Along these lines, it would be interesting to analyze online media, specifically blogs and other electronic news sources, to determine how they perceive third-party aspirants. Do they challenge the mainstream media or follow it?

Second, a future research project should compare the difference in third-party coverage between the American and European press. Such a project might shed light on the role that a country's election system plays in influencing which candidates and ideas are reflected in the news media.

Third, the long interview format that was used in this study could be expanded to a case study of a gubernatorial campaign involving a strong third-party candidate in which the investigator covers the campaign in real time over several months. Such a study could focus on the third-party candidate as he or she campaigns around a state so that the investigator can witness first hand how seriously the politician is taking the race as well as the reception he or she is receiving. Such a study could include extensive and multiple interviews with the candidates, political reporters, and editors. Because such a study would have great immediacy, it would provide valuable insight into how news organizations actually make coverage decisions at the moment in which those decisions are actually being made.

Fourth, it might be valuable to determine whether different ownership structures affect the type of candidates and ideas that get into the news. For example, one might compare the *St. Petersburg Times*, which is owned by the not-for-profit Poynter Institute for Media Studies, and the *Tampa Tribune*, a commercial enterprise, to see how they each cover campaigns generally as well as those involving third-party candidates. Would a newspaper like the *St. Petersburg Times*, which has less pressure from profit-driven corporate executives, approach a third-party candidate differently than a news organization using a traditional business model?

Finally, it is imperative to determine whether news coverage of third-party candidates somehow affects the actual vote totals these candidates receive on Election Day. Future research should employ an experimental design to see how different groups of voters respond to news stories about minor-party candidates, with one group reading a news report in which a Green or Libertarian hopeful is portrayed as a spoiler or long shot while another group reads a story in which the candidate is painted as a serious contender. A major question to explore is whether voters decide not to vote for a third-party candidate because of the messages they receive in the news media.

Closing comments

This study has its genesis in the 1987 mayoral campaign in the small town of Wallingford, Connecticut—a race I covered as a young political reporter for the Meriden *Record-Journal* newspaper, circulation 33,000. The four-man race included the one-term Republican incumbent, his Democratic challenger, a former Democratic mayor who was running as an independent, and a retired Portuguese immigrant named Pasquale Melillo who ran a one-man operation from his small house against what he called the corruption of the two-party system.

From the beginning of that campaign, I made an editorial judgment that Melillo had little to no chance of winning. There was no doubt that he was dedicated—he had spent several weeks during the hot summer months going door-to-door to get enough voter signatures on his petition to get his name onto the ballot—but from his unshaven face to his ragged clothes and odor-filled home, Melillo did not come across as the typical candidate who was likely to generate significant interest from this central Connecticut community. Moreover, he was running against three strong candidates who were all well known in town and well financed.

With this in mind, I devoted most of my coverage to the three "major" candidates, either ignoring Melillo altogether or providing him with one or two paragraphs, usually at the end of my article. The decision was simple for me: With only 12 to 15 column inches in which to tell my story, I could not justify significant coverage to a man who had no serious campaign operation and was, by all accounts, the quintessential small-town gadfly with little popular support.

Yet something bothered me about this. Was I acting to promote debate or shut it down? What right did I have as a journalist to decide which candidates would have access to the news pages? And what impact did my coverage have on the race? Was Melillo receiving little coverage because he had no chance of winning, or did the independent mayoral candidate have no chance to win because he received little coverage? The questions nagged at me throughout the fall campaign, and they were intensified by Melillo's frequent telephone calls to me to complain about his lack of coverage—phone calls that could last 20 to 30 minutes and at times become fairly philosophical.

Melillo lost, of course, finishing fourth in an election that saw the incumbent mayor win re-election by a mere 33 votes. But the 1987 campaign has always stuck with me, and over the years I have observed the coverage of third-party candidates from afar.

At first, I was fairly sympathetic to the decisions that political reporters made when they decided to give minimal exposure to Greens, Libertarians, or other minor-party hopefuls, figuring they were facing the same choices I did when I covered the Wallingford election 20 years ago. But as time went by, I began to see this differently.

Today, I believe that American democracy is in crisis—not because our institutions are about to crumble or that we are on the verge of succumbing to dictatorship, although some activists have made that argument (Wolfe 2007), but because the country lacks a healthy discourse that allows many voices to be heard in the so-called marketplace of ideas. There are many reasons for this, of course. But the one that interests me most is the role played by the news media, the one institution perhaps best positioned to foster debate and engage the larger body politic in a wide-ranging discourse about the problems and potential solutions before us.

Instead of opening their pages and airwaves to a variety of viewpoints during an election season, news organizations cover campaigns mostly as a contest in which voices that are perceived to lack public support are either ignored or sidelined. This attitude assumes that only those perspectives that can win at the ballot box have any importance in the public debate. I fundamentally disagree. In my view, the public has a right to hear as many voices as possible so that they can sift through the various ideas that are before them and choose the ones they believe are best. Yet the public is consistently denied this right by the press, which decides for itself which issues can be legitimately aired in the public sphere based on criteria that have more to do with the game of politics than with the public discussion, or dialogue, as the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*'s Steven Walters put it.

This is not to say that the press has to include all voices. There is no question that resources, space, and time will force news organizations to make crucial choices each day about which stories to publish or air and which ones to ignore. There is no way around this. The real question becomes, where do you draw the line? And right now, this research and the studies highlighted in Chapter Two show that this line is currently being drawn too narrowly. Rather than looking for reasons to exclude certain candidates from its coverage—as the news media currently do—a healthy communication system should be looking for ways to expand our discourse, to include as many perspectives in the debate as possible.

It may very well be, as Mark Barabak of the *Los Angeles Times* and John Marelius of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* contend, that the public is better off receiving more information about a few candidates than less information about many. But is that really the case? Would the public really miss out on substance if one or two additional candidates were to be included in election coverage? Given the enormous attention the press gives to the horse race today, it seems that the public is not receiving much substance anyway. Perhaps if news organizations redirected the abundance of column inches now devoted to contest-related stories and instead used them for issue pieces, reporters and editors would find that they have more than enough space to include the positions of third-party candidates and others from the so-called fringe. With the Internet, we may be moving in that direction anyway.

In any case, this dissertation can serve as a starting point to a broader debate among journalists about the way that third-party candidates and other manifestations of dissent are covered at all levels. As I know from my experience as a political reporter, there are practical decisions that must be made on the campaign trail. But journalists must also recognize their ideological predisposition toward the two-party system; and they must debate the ramifications of these biases on the quality of political discourse. The press has a special responsibility in our society. It is the place citizens go to expand their world beyond their immediate experience. We look to the press to inform and foster public debate. Reporters must keep this in mind too when evaluating what to do with these voices from the fringe.

Appendix A:
Codebook – Content Analysis

Variable number	**Category Names and Codes**
V01	Story ID number
V02	Candidate 01. Ed Thompson (Libertarian) 02. Scott McCallum (Republican) 03. Jim Doyle (Democrat) 04. Peter Camejo (Green) 05. Bill Simon (Republican) 06. Gray Davis (Democrat) 07. Jonathan Carter (Green) 08. Peter Cianchette (Republican) 09. John Baldacci (Democrat) 10. Tom Cox (Libertarian) 11. Kevin Mannix (Republican) 12. Ted Kulongoski (Democrat)
V03	Campaign ID 1. California 2. Maine 3. Oregon 4. Wisconsin
V04	Newspaper 01. New York Times 02. Washington Post 03. USA Today 04. Los Angeles Times 05. San Francisco Chronicle 06. Sacramento Bee 07. San Diego Union-Tribune 08. Portland Press Herald 09. Bangor Daily News 10. Kennebec Journal-Morning Sentinel 11. The Oregonian (Portland) 12. The Register-Guard (Eugene) 13. Statesman Journal (Salem) 14. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 15. Wisconsin State Journal (Madison) 16. Capital Times (Madison)

V05 Newspaper Circulation

1. Under 50,000
2. 50,000 to 99,999
3. 100,000 to 249,999
4. 250,000 to 499,999
5. 500,000 to 1 million
6. More than 1 million

V06 Date of Story

1. September
2. October
3. November – before election
4. November – Election Day or after

V07 Placement of campaign story

1. Front Page
2. Inside Front Section
3. Front Page of Local Section
4. Inside Local Section
5. Front Page of Feature Section
6. Inside Feature Section
7. Other

V08 Story type—Defined by headline and lead

1. Horse Race (polls/fund raising/strategy/endorsement)
2. Formal Candidate Debate
3. Candidate speech/press conference
4. Informal issue debate/candidate sparring
5. Voter reaction
6. Political analysis
7. Political profile
8. Political rally/convention
9. Other

V09 Story Length

1. Less than 250 words
2. 250 to 499 words
3. 500 to 749 words
4. 750 to 999 words
5. 1,000 to 1,499 words
6. 1,500 to 1,999 words
7. 2,000 words or more

V10

Which candidate mentioned first
1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Green
4. Libertarian
5. Other

V11

Candidate who is the prime focus of story
1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Third Party
4. Democrat-Republican equally
5. Democrat-Third Party equally
6. Republican-Third Party equally
7. Democrat-Republican-Third Party equally
8. Other

V12

When is candidate’s name first mentioned
01. The headline
02. The lead
03. Second paragraph
04. Third paragraph
05. Fourth paragraph
06. Fifth paragraph
07. Sixth paragraph
08. Seventh paragraph
09. Eighth paragraph
10. Ninth paragraph
11. Tenth to fifteenth paragraph
12. Sixteenth to twentieth paragraph
13. Twenty-first paragraph or beyond
14. One-paragraph story

V13

Which third of story is candidate first mentioned
1. First third of story
2. Second third of story
3. Final third of story
4. Last paragraph

V14

How is candidate first defined
1. Candidate is defined in terms of himself
2. Candidate is defined in terms of opponent

V15 How is the candidate’s campaign role portrayed

1. Serious contender (chance to win)
2. Spoiler (no chance to win, but can impact who wins)
3. Long shot or plays no role
4. Role not mentioned
5. Protest Vote

V16 Is the ideology of the candidate discussed (liberal/cons)

1. Yes
2. No

V17 Portrayal of candidate’s ideology/ideas

1. Mainstream liberal
2. Moderate
3. Mainstream conservative
4. Extremist
5. Ideology not discussed

V18 Tone of coverage toward candidate (based on overall story)

1. Positive
2. Neutral
3. Negative

V19 How many times does candidate’s name appear

1. 1 to 5 times
2. 6 to 10 times
3. 11 to 20 times
4. 21 or more times

Sources used (other than candidates)

	Party of source	Yes	No
V20	Democratic officials	1	2
V21	Republican officials	1	2
V22	Green officials	1	2
V23	Libertarian officials	1	2
V24	Voters	1	2
V25	Unaffiliated analysts	1	2
V26	Other	1	2

V27 Other candidates mentioned in the story

1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Green
4. Libertarian
5. Democrat-Republican
6. Democrat-Green/Libertarian
7. Republican-Green/Libertarian
8. No other study candidates mentioned

V28 Is the candidate's message delivered in the story

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, who delivers the candidate's message

	Source	Yes	No	NA
V29	Candidate (or campaign)	1	2	3
V30	Supporters not part of campaign	1	2	3
V31	The press	1	2	3
V32	Opponent (or opponent's campaign)	1	2	3
V33	Opponents not part of campaign	1	2	3

V34 Is the candidate described in any way

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, who describes the candidate

	Source	Yes	No	NA
V35	Candidate (or campaign)	1	2	3
V36	Supporters not with campaign	1	2	3
V37	The press	1	2	3
V38	Opponent (or campaign)	1	2	3
V39	Opponents not with campaign	1	2	3

V40 How the candidate is described

1. Mainstream
2. Offbeat
3. Extreme
4. Not described
5. Sometimes mainstream, sometimes offbeat/extreme

V41

Are the candidate’s issue positions outlined
1. Yes
2. No

V42

News coverage given to candidate’s positions
1. Zero paragraphs: Issues not covered
2. 1 to 5 paragraphs
3. 6 to 10 paragraphs
4. 11 to 15 paragraphs
5. More than 16 paragraphs

V43

How the candidate’s key issues are framed
1. Mainstream
2. Offbeat
3. Extreme
4. Some mainstream, some extreme/offbeat
5. Not framed – not discussed

V44

Theme: First issue mentioned by candidate
01. No issues
02. Tax and Budget
03. Abortion
04. Education
05. Healthcare
06. Civil Rights
07. Political Process/System
08. Housing
09. Labor
10. Environment
11. Economy
12. Government corruption
13. Immigration
14. Other
15. Crime

V45

Theme: Second issue mentioned by candidate
01. No issue mentioned second
02. Tax and Budget
03. Abortion
04. Education
05. Healthcare
06. Civil Rights
07. Political Process/System
08. Housing
09. Labor

10. Environment
11. Economy
12. Government corruption
13. Immigration
14. Other
15. Crime

V46 Party of Study Candidate

1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Green
4. Libertarian

Coding Instructions

V01 Story ID number

Record the three-digit identification number that is handwritten in the upper right-hand corner of each story. The first story will have an ID number of "001." The one-hundred and first story will have an ID number of "101."

V02 Candidate

Record the two-digit code to identify the candidate whose coverage is being evaluated by this study. This variable is designed to identify from which *sample* the story comes. It is NOT designed to identify the candidate who is the main focus of the story. Stories that come from the "Ed Thompson sample" are coded "01." Stories that come from the "Ted Kulongoski sample" are coded "12."

V03 Campaign ID

Record the one-digit code for the state gubernatorial campaign that is being covered by the story.

V04 Newspaper

Record the two-digit code to identify the newspaper in which the story appeared.

V05 Newspaper Circulation

Record the one-digit code to identify the circulation of the newspaper in which the story appeared. The circulation figures for each newspaper are included at the end of this codebook and are based on the numbers provided by the *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook*, 85th Edition. The numbers include daily circulation for M-F. They do not include Sunday figures.

V06 Date of Story

Record the one-digit code to identify the month in which the article appeared in the newspaper.

V07 Placement of campaign story

Record the one-digit code to identify where the story appeared in the newspaper. Lexis-Nexis stories display the section and page number of the story just above the body of the news story. Stories obtained from other archives also identify the placement of the story.

V08 Story type – Defined by headline and lead

Using the headline and the lead as your guide, record the one-digit code to identify the type of story that is under evaluation. Use the following definitions:

1. *Horse Race*: Any story with a headline or lead that stresses poll numbers, financial strength of the candidates, the campaign strategy, a candidate's general level of support, or political endorsements. These are stories with headlines and leads that stress who is winning and who is losing or who has a good or bad political strategy.

2. *Formal Candidate Debate*: Any story that covers a formal debate involving at least two of the candidates for governor.

3. *Candidate speech or press conference*: Any story in which the candidate has given a speech or held a press conference to discuss public policy issues or any other matter involving the campaign. This would not include stories in which an incumbent governor holds a press conference about issues unrelated to the campaign. A story of this nature should be removed from the sample and replaced with another story about the campaign. Use the story as your guide. If the story places the press conference or speech in the context of the election, then the story should be counted as a candidate speech or press conference. In general, these should include speech stories or press conferences that cover a wide range of issues raised by the candidate. The candidate may attack or criticize his or her opponent, but the story includes only a quick response from the opponent. The primary focus of the story is on the candidate's speech or comments during the press conference.

4. *Informal issue debate/candidates sparring*: Any story in which the candidates are quoted in opposition to each other discussing public policy issues, campaign issues or attacking each other on the campaign trail. These include enterprise stories (initiated by the reporter) about a particular issue in which the reporter quotes each candidates' campaign about where the candidate stands on that issue; stories in which candidates release written statements or are interviewed and quoted criticizing their opponents; press conferences in which each candidate is criticizing his or her opponent or responding to criticism. The primary focus of these stories are the back and forth debate between the candidates.

5. *Voter reaction*: Stories in which the primary focus is how average voters who are not associated with any campaign are responding to the candidates. This would include person-on-the-street stories or other stories in which voters are quoted. This would NOT include rallies or other public demonstrations involving a candidate's supporters.

6. *Political analysis*: Stories in which the newspaper steps back from the day-to-day events of the election and provides an in-depth analysis of the campaign. The newspaper will usually label these stories "analysis."

7. *Political profile*: Stories that feature primarily one candidate. These stories will give personal, professional and political background on the candidate. They are designed to give an in-depth profile of the candidate.

8. *Political rally/convention*: Stories about the party's nominating convention and stories about a candidate's political supporters holding a rally. This includes street demonstrations and other forms of public gatherings by a candidate's supporters.

9. *Other*: Any other political story about the campaign not covered by this list.

V09 Story Length

Record the one-digit code that indicates the length of the story by number of words. LexisNexis and most other archives display the number of words of each story just above the body of the article. If the number of words is not displayed, please count the words of the story.

V10 Which candidate mentioned first

Record the one-digit code for the candidate who appears first in the story.

V11 Candidate who is the prime focus of the story

Record the one-digit code to indicate the candidate(s) who is the main focus of the story – regardless of the sample from which the story comes. For example, a story should be coded "1" for Democrat if the Democratic candidate is the main subject of the story, even if that story comes from the Green Party candidate's sample. The coder may use the headline and lead as a guide to identify the main subject(s) of the story. In general, the candidate(s) who appears most often in the story is the main subject(s). The code "8," or "Other," should be recorded when the primary focus of the story is on a candidate who is not a member of the Democrats, Republicans, Greens or Libertarians.

V12 When is candidate's name first mentioned

Record the two-digit code that best indicates in which paragraph the candidate under study (the candidate identified in Variable 02) appears in the story. For example, if the story you are coding is from the "Ed Thompson" sample, then you would record the paragraph in which Ed Thompson is first mentioned, even if the bulk of the story is about another candidate.

V13 Which third of story is candidate first mentioned

Record the one-digit code that best indicates in which third of the story the candidate under study (the candidate identified in Variable 02) appears in the story. To determine which third of the story the candidate appears, count the number of paragraphs in the story and divide the story into three equal parts. Take note that you should record the code "4" (last paragraph) rather than "3" (final third of story) if the candidate under study appears in the last paragraph of the story.

V14 How is candidate first defined

Record the one-digit code that best describes how the candidate under study is defined when he first appears in the story. Use the following definitions for your evaluation:

1. *Candidate is defined in terms of himself*: When the name of the candidate under study is first reported in the story, it appears alone in the sentence; or, when the name of the candidate under study first appears in the story, it appears in the same sentence as another candidate,

but both candidates are treated as completely independent entities with no relationship to one another.

2. *Candidate is defined in terms of opponent*: When the name of the candidate under study is first reported in the story, it appears in the same sentence as another candidate in the race and is related directly to that other candidate. For example, a candidate who is described as an opponent of another candidate would be coded as “defined in terms of opponent.”

V15 How is the candidate’s campaign role portrayed

Record the one-digit code that best describes how the article portrays the role that the candidate is playing in the campaign. Use the following definitions:

1. *Serious contender*: The article portrays or implies that the candidate under study as either having a serious chance of winning the election or having broad support in the electorate. The article may also indicate that even if the candidate is likely to lose the election, he or she is a major candidate under consideration by voters. To determine whether a candidate is being portrayed as a serious contender, look for language that suggests that the candidate is in first or second place in the polls, that the candidate is in third place but within striking distance of the leader, that the candidate is drawing big crowds at events, that the candidate has raised significant money, that the candidate has the support of major political leaders in the state, or any other language that the reporter uses to justify the contention that the candidate should be considered a serious player. The coder should infer that the candidate under study is being portrayed as a “serious contender” if the article focuses at least half the article on that candidate without otherwise suggesting that the candidate is a spoiler or nonfactor in the campaign.

2. *Spoiler*: The article portrays the candidate under study as having no chance of winning, but it reports that the candidate may be able to determine the outcome of the election by drawing enough votes away from another candidate in the race.

3. *Long shot or plays no role*: The article portrays the candidate as playing no role in the campaign at all. The candidate is said to be a long shot, the candidate is said to have no chance of winning, and the candidate’s level of support is believed to be so low that he or she will not swing the election in favor of any other candidate in the election.

4. *Role not mentioned*: The story does not mention the role that the candidate is playing in the election. The candidate is mentioned so infrequently in the story (perhaps only once or twice) that the coder can not infer whether the candidate is being portrayed as a serious contender, spoiler or nonfactor in the election.

5. *Protest vote*: The candidate’s support is said to come from people who wish to make a statement against “the system.” The story reports that voters are unhappy with the Democrat and Republican and are voting for the third-party candidate to register a protest of some kind.

V16 Is the ideology of the candidate discussed (liberal/conservative)

Record the code for "yes" if any source or the reporter in his or her voice identifies the ideology of the candidate under study. In this context, ideology means that the candidate has been labeled a liberal, conservative, extremist, socialist, communist, far right wing, far left wing or any other terms used to place a candidate's ideological position on the political spectrum.

V17 Portrayal of candidate's ideology/ideas

If the answer to Variable 16 is yes, then the coder should record the one-digit code that best describes how the article portrays the candidate's ideology. Use the following definitions:

1. *Mainstream liberal*: The candidate under study is described by sources or the reporter in his or her own words as a liberal. The label is used without any adjectives to indicate that the candidate is outside the mainstream.

2. *Moderate*: The candidate under study is described by sources or the reporter in his or her own words as a moderate, middle of the road or any other term used to indicate that the candidate is mainstream, but neither liberal nor conservative.

3. *Mainstream conservative*: The candidate under study is described by sources or the reporter in his or her own words as a conservative. The label is used without any adjectives to indicate that the candidate is outside the mainstream.

4. *Extremist*: The candidate under study is described by sources or the reporter in his or her own words as having an ideology that is outside the mainstream. Such terms would include extreme right wing, radical, socialist, communist, far left wing.

5. *Ideology not discussed*: The candidate under study is not branded with any ideological label. Choose this code if the answer to Variable 16 is "no."

V18 Tone of coverage toward candidate (based on overall story)

Using the headline and first four paragraphs of the story, record the one-digit code that best describes the overall tone of the coverage of the candidate who is under study. Use the following definitions:

1. *Positive*: The candidate under study is generally portrayed in a favorable light. Use the headline and lead to get an overall impression of the coverage. Use this code if the candidate is either praised by sources, appears confident or is shown taking bold or innovative positions on issues. This could include stories in which the candidate is described as ahead in the polls, connecting with voters, running a strong campaign, being a good administrator, having a proven track record, being successful in past campaigns, putting his or her opponent on the defensive, being free of special interests, being innovative and bold, or any other adjective with positive connotations.

2. *Neutral*: The candidate under study is portrayed in neither a positive nor negative light. While some sources might disagree with the candidate's issue positions, the candidate is allowed to answer that criticism. The article uses few, if any, adjectives that lead to value judgments about the candidate or his or her issue positions. The story is balanced.

3. *Negative*: The candidate under study is portrayed in a negative light by sources or the reporter in his or her own voice. This would include stories in which the candidate is under attack for mistakes made during the course of the campaign as well as stories in which the candidate is described as on the defensive, far behind in the polls, disorganized, having trouble connecting with voters, being booed during a rally, or performing poorly in a debate or while giving a speech. This would also include stories that point out general failures in the candidate's ability as an administrator, legislator or candidate. Look for any use of adjectives with negative connotations.

V19 How many times does candidate's name appear

Record the one-digit code that indicates how many times the name of the candidate under study appears in the story. For example, if the story comes from the "Ed Thompson" sample, then you would count each time Thompson's name appears in the story. Do NOT count pronouns referring to the candidate.

V20 to V26 Sources used (other than candidates)

Record the one-digit code (Yes or No) that best describes the type of sources used in the story. For example, if one or more Democratic Party officials are quoted in the story, you would record the code "1," or "Yes," for "Democratic officials." If a political science professor who is not an official leader of any political party is quoted in the story, then you would record "1," or "Yes," for "Unaffiliated analyst." Record the code "2," or "No" for any sources who do not appear in the story.

V27 Other candidates mentioned in the story

Record the one-digit code that best describes which candidate(s) other than the candidate under study is reported in the story. For example, if the story under evaluation comes from the Democratic candidate's sample, the coder should determine whether the Republican, Green, or Libertarian party candidates also appeared in the story. If both the Republican and Green party candidate appeared in the story, then choose code "6" for "Republican-Green/Libertarian." If the Republican candidate appears but the Green or Libertarian candidate is omitted, then choose code "2" for Republican only. If no other candidates who are part of the study appear in the story, then choose "8" for "No other study candidates mentioned."

V28 Is the candidate's message delivered in the story?

Record the one-digit code (Yes or No) that best indicates whether some version of the study candidate's message appears in the story. The candidate's message could be his or her position on a particular issue of public policy or it can be any point that the candidate is trying to make in the story. For example, the coder would code "Yes" if the story reports that the Democratic party candidate's supporters carried brooms during a rally to symbolize how their candidate will "sweep away corruption," since ending corruption would be the candidate's message.

V29 to V33 If yes, who delivers the candidate’s message

If the answer to V28 is “No,” then record “3,” or “Nonapplicable,” for V29 through V33. If the answer to V28 is “Yes,” then record the codes that best describe who delivers the study candidate’s message. The study candidate’s message could be delivered by the candidate, the candidate’s campaign, the candidate’s supporters, the press or the candidate’s opponents. For example, the candidate’s opponents might take a portion of the study candidate’s message and seek to distort it or frame it in a way that will hurt the study candidate in the election. Likewise, the press might outline the candidate’s overall campaign message without quoting any sources. This variable is designed to identify which candidates had control over their message and which ones saw their message framed by their opponents or the press.

V34 Is the candidate described in any way

Record the one-digit code (Yes or No) to indicate whether the candidate has been described in any way in the article. In this context, description is defined as any physical or personal description of the candidate under study. This includes any description of how the candidate looks or acts in public as well as descriptions of the candidate’s personal and/or political style, speaking abilities, governing skills, leadership abilities, hair style, clothing, facial expressions, lifestyle or any other physical or personal depiction.

V35 to V39 Who describes the candidate

If the answer to V34 is “No,” then record “3,” or “Nonapplicable,” for V35 through V39. If the answer to V34 is “Yes,” then record the codes that best describe which sources describe the candidate in the story. The candidate could be described by himself, his supporters, the press, or opponents. The press describes the candidate when the reporter, in his or her own voice, gives a description without quoting any source. This variable is designed to identify which candidates had control over their image and which ones saw their image controlled by the press or their opponents.

V40 How the candidate is described

If the answer to V34 is “No,” then record the code “4,” or “not described” for V40. If the answer to V34 is “Yes,” then record the one-digit code that best describes how the study candidate is described in the story. Use the following definitions:

1. *Mainstream*: The candidate’s physical appearance, personal habits or lifestyle choices are described as being typical for an American politician. There are no adjectives or descriptions that carry value judgments or indicate that the candidate is odd or offbeat in any way. The coder should infer that the candidate’s physical appearance, personal habits or lifestyle choices are considered mainstream if they are described without any indication that they are considered offbeat or extreme.

2. *Offbeat*: The candidate’s physical appearance, personal habits or lifestyle choices are described as slightly eccentric. Look for adjectives that indicate the candidate is somehow different from mainstream politicians or society. For example, a candidate’s clothing or hair might be described as *rumpled*. In other cases, the story might point out that a candidate has certain habits or has made certain lifestyle choices that are different from the “typical”

American family, such as driving a battery-powered automobile or living in a house powered exclusively by solar energy.

3. *Extreme*: The candidate's physical appearance, personal habits or lifestyle choices are described as significantly different from the average American. Look for adjectives with strong connotations. A candidate might be described as being overly emotional – he gives a *fiery* speech; or the candidate might be described as making extreme lifestyle choices, such as living on a commune, shaving his head or covering his body with tattoos.

V41 Are the candidate's issue positions outlined

Record the one-digit code (Yes or No) that best indicates whether the study candidate's opinion on issues of public policy are described in the story. Code "1," or "Yes," only if the candidate, the candidate's campaign, the candidate's supporters or the press provide at least a brief description of the candidate's opinion on at least one issue. Code "2," or "No," in the following two circumstances: 1) No issues are reported in the story; or 2) An issue is raised in the story, but the article does not explain the candidate's opinion on that issue. For example, code "No," if the story reports that the Democratic candidate spoke about "education and tax issues," but it does not specify what the candidate would do about education and taxes. This variable is designed to identify which candidates were successful in having their opinions expressed through the news media and which ones failed to get their opinions explained.

V42 News coverage given to candidate's positions

Record the one-digit code that best explains how many paragraphs are devoted to explaining the study candidate's position on issues of public policy. If the answer to V41 is "No," then the code for V42 should be "1," or "zero paragraphs."

V43 How the candidate's key issues are framed

If the answer to V41 is "No," then record the code "4," or "Issues not framed or discussed," for V43. If the answer to V41 is "Yes," then record the one-digit code that best describes how the study candidate's opinions are framed in the story. To determine how an issue is framed, look for adjectives and descriptions used by the reporter to explain the opinion of the candidate under study. The reporter can frame an issue in his or her own words or by quoting certain sources who comment on the study candidate's opinions. The story's frame is determined NOT by the study candidate's opinion itself, but rather how that opinion is described or labeled by the reporter. An opinion can be framed as mainstream, offbeat or extreme. Use the following definitions for these terms:

1. *Mainstream*: The study candidate's proposals and opinions about matters of public policy are described by the reporter as being typical for American politicians. There are no adjectives or descriptions that frame the issues or proposals as in any way odd or offbeat. The issues raised by the study candidate are described by the reporter as being a "typical" part of the political debate in America, such as abortion, capital punishment, protecting the environment, improving education, and reforming healthcare; the study candidate's opinions and proposals on these issues are depicted

by the reporter as being typically moderate, liberal or conservative; and/or the study candidate's opinions and proposals are described as being acceptable to existing institutions, both private and public. In general, the framing of the study candidate's issues should be coded as "mainstream" if the issues are simply reported in the story without any value judgment attached by the reporter. The reporter can attach a value judgment either in his or her own words or in the sources he or she chooses to use in the story.

2. *Offbeat*: The study candidate's opinions and proposals on matters of public policy are framed as slightly outside the mainstream. Look for adjectives that suggest that the candidate's opinions and proposals are impractical, unrealistic, eccentric, amusing, and are generally described as lacking credibility. The story depicts the study candidate's opinions and proposals as being a slight challenge to existing institutions; the issues raised by the study candidate are described by the reporter as issues that are not typically discussed during political campaigns; the study candidate's opinions and proposals on major public policy issues are described as "unusual" for a typical politician in America; and/or the candidate's opinions and proposals on major public policy issues are outside the paradigm in which these issues are typically discussed.

3. *Extreme*: The study candidate's opinions and proposals on matters of public policy are described as far outside the mainstream. Look for strong adjectives that suggest the candidate's opinions and proposals are dangerous, unreasonable, ideological/dogmatic, foreign, and/or to the far right or left. The study candidate is described as raising issues that are almost never discussed in political campaigns; the study candidate's opinions and proposals are described as a major threat to American institutions; the study candidate's opinions and proposals are described as fundamentally altering some form of the American social, political or economic system; and/or the story describes the candidate's opinions and proposals as being far beyond what the "typical" American would accept.

4. *Some mainstream, some extreme/offbeat*: The study candidate's opinions and proposals on matters of public policy are described in different ways throughout the story. In some cases, the candidate's viewpoints are portrayed as mainstream. In other cases, they are portrayed as extreme or offbeat.

V44 Theme: First issue raised by the study candidate

Record the two-digit code that best describes the first public policy issue that is attributed to the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters. The coder should record this code even if the details of the study candidate's opinion on that issue are not discussed. For example, if the story says that the Green Party candidate "discussed education and abortion during the debate," then the coder should record "04," or "education," as the first issue attributed to the candidate in the news story – even if the story does not elaborate on the Green Party candidate's opinion on education. This variable is designed to identify which issues are raised first by Democrats, Republicans, Greens, and Libertarians.

V45 Theme: Second issue raised by the study candidate

Record the two-digit code that best describes the second public policy issue that is attributed to the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters. The coder should record this code even if the details of the study candidate's opinion on that issue are not discussed. For example, if the story says that the Green Party candidate "discussed education and abortion during the debate," then the coder should record "03," or "abortion," as the second issue attributed to the candidate in the news story – even if the story does not elaborate on the Green Party candidate's opinion on abortion. This variable is designed to identify which issues are raised second by Democrats, Republicans, Greens, and Libertarians.

Use the following definitions for V44 and V45:

1. *No issues*: No issue is attributed to the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters.
2. *Tax and Budget*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about taxes, budgets, government spending, government revenue, budget surpluses or deficits.
3. *Abortion*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about abortion – for example, taking a pro-choice or pro-life position.
4. *Education*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about public school and higher education in any way.
5. *Healthcare*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about the state's or country's healthcare system, including health insurance or access to healthcare etc…
6. *Civil Rights*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about civil or human rights of any group, including African Americans, homosexuals, religious minorities, children, immigrants, etc…
7. *Political Process/System*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about their complaints about or proposed changes, improvements or reforms to the process under which the country chooses its elected leaders.
8. *Housing*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about any issues related to housing, including booming real estate prices, building affordable housing, or improving the conditions of housing for the poor.
9. *Labor*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about the needs of labor unions and blue-collar workers, including protections for union organization, raising or lowering the minimum wage, or working conditions in factories.
10. *Environment*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about protection of the environment, including such issues are urban sprawl, pollution, global warming, and open space preservation.
11. *Economy*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about the overall condition of the state's economy.

12. *Government corruption*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about ways to end government corruption or blaming an incumbent for corruption.
13. *Immigration*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about legal or illegal immigration.
14. *Other*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about issues not mentioned above.
15. *Crime*: The story quotes the study candidate, the candidate's campaign or the candidate's supporters talking about crime or police.

V46 Party of Study Candidate

Record the one-digit code that best describes the political affiliation of the candidate under study.

Appendix B:
Newspaper Circulation List

California

Los Angeles Times	902,164
The Sacramento Bee	293,705
San Francisco Chronicle	400,000 +
San Diego Union-Tribune	366,740

Maine

Bangor Daily News	62,462
Portland Press Herald	77,788
Kennebec Journal and Morning Sentinel (Augusta)	15,167

Oregon

The Oregonian (Portland)	324,836
Statesman Journal (Salem)	53,366
The Register-Guard (Eugene)	79,266

Wisconsin

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	227,387
The Capital Times (Madison)	21,611
Wisconsin State Journal (Madison)	101,639

National

USA Today	2.6 million
New York Times	1.05 million
Washington Post	661,124

Source: *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook: The Encyclopedia of the Newspaper Industry*, 85th Edition (2005).
All figures are daily circulation: Monday through Saturday. (Does not include Sunday circulation)

Appendix C:
Long Interviews with Political Reporters

CAMPAIGNS

1. What is it like for you to cover a big political campaign, such as a campaign for governor?
    a. *What do you like best about covering campaigns?*
    b. *What do you like least about covering campaigns?*

2. How would you define the term "campaign"?
    a. *What is the primary function of a campaign?*
    b. *To what extent is a campaign a contest between candidates?*
    c. *To what extent is a campaign a contest of ideas?*
    d. *As you see it, is a campaign primarily a contest between candidates or a contest of ideas or something else? Explain your answer.*
    e. *How would you define the term "election"?*

3. Could you explain to me what you do during the typical day on the campaign trail when covering a major campaign, such as a campaign for governor?
    a. *How do you typically schedule your time during the day?*
    b. *Who would you typically meet with and/or talk to when covering a campaign?*
    c. *Who initiates most of the contact between you and sources associated with a campaign?*

4. What do you see as your role as a political reporter during a gubernatorial political campaign?
    a. *How do you know when you are playing that role effectively?*
    b. *How do you know when you may not be playing that role effectively?*

5. As a political reporter, what would you say your responsibilities are, if any, to the broader society when you are covering a gubernatorial political campaign?
    a. *How do you know when you are meeting those responsibilities?*
    b. *How do you know when you may not be meeting those responsibilities?*

6. What does it mean to you to be objective when covering a political campaign, such as a campaign for governor?
    a. *** *Get examples from 2002 to illustrate this*
    b. *How do you know when you've covered all sides of a story in a campaign?*
    c. *What procedures, if any, do you follow to make sure that all sides of a campaign story are covered fairly*
    d. *How do you guard against your own biases?*

7. How much of a campaign do you typically observe first-hand?
    a. *How often are you physically with the candidate?*

    b. *How often are you covering speeches or other events that involve the candidate?*

8. How much of a campaign do you understand solely through interviews?

THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

1. There are times when a gubernatorial campaign involves multiple candidates, such as when independents or third parties challenge the Democrats and Republicans. Looking back on the gubernatorial campaigns you have covered that involved a third-party candidate, how would you assess the coverage you gave to that third-party candidate?
    a. *Ask for examples*

2. When a campaign involves more than the two major-party candidates, what criteria do you use to determine whether the third-party candidate should receive substantial coverage?
    a. *When deciding whether to give substantial coverage to a third-party candidate, how much weight do you give to*
        i. *the candidate's support as measured by public opinion surveys?*
        ii. *the candidate's chance of winning?*
        iii. *how much money the third-party candidate has raised?*
        iv. *what political sources tell you about the third-party candidate?*
        v. *the third-party candidate's ideas?*
        vi. *the third-party candidate's ideology?*
        vii. *the third-party candidate's political and professional credentials?*
        viii. *the third-party candidate's public demeanor?*

3. In the preceding question, we discussed criteria you use to determine whether to give a third-party candidate substantial coverage. Can you rank those criteria in order of importance to you?
    a. *How did you come to this ranking?*

4. Where would you say these criteria come from? In other words, how did you as a reporter come to use these criteria?

5. As a political reporter, what kind of a third-party gubernatorial candidate would you say makes a good story?
    a. *What kind of Democrat or Republican makes a good story?*

6. As a political reporter, what kind of a third-party gubernatorial candidate would you say does not make a good story?
    a. *What kind of Democrat or Republican would you say does not make a good story?*

7. As a political reporter, what kind of third-party gubernatorial candidate would you give equal coverage to that given to the Democratic and Republican candidates?

8. As a political reporter, what kind of third-party candidate would you completely ignore?
   a. *As a political reporter, what kind of Democratic or Republican candidate would you completely ignore?*

9. How would you describe your attitude toward third-party candidates generally?

INFLUENCES ON NEWS COVERAGE

1. Think back on the gubernatorial campaigns you have covered. Which specific sources did you regularly go to when covering those campaigns?
   a. *Ask for examples from the 2002 gubernatorial campaign*

2. Think back on the gubernatorial campaigns you have covered. From where did your ideas for stories come? In other words, list for me the sources of your story ideas, being as specific as possible.
   a. *Democratic Party officials or candidates?*
   b. *Republican Party officials or candidates?*
   c. *Third party officials or candidates?*
   d. *Other reporters?*
   e. *Editors*
   f. *Enterprises stories generated solely by you?*
   g. *Voters or readers*
   h. *Others?*

   i. *Can you explain the importance of each of these sources relevant to each other?*

3. Think back on the gubernatorial campaigns you've covered. How did you decide which issues to write about during those campaigns?

4. To what extent, if any, do other reporters influence the types of stories you write about during a campaign?
   a. *Generally speaking, how much do political reporters from various news organizations talk to each other about what the main story of the day is during a campaign?*
   b. *Generally speaking, can you discuss with me any ways in which reporters at other news organizations influenced what you covered and what you did not cover during a campaign?*

Appendix D: Subject Form

Subject's Code Number:_________

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Newspaper Name	
Circulation	
Staff size (Number of reporters)	
Number of political reporters	
Number of reporters typically assigned to gubernatorial campaign (if known)	

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Subject's name	
Subject's job title	
Subject's job responsibilities	
Years at newspaper	
Years as news reporter	
Number of governor races covered at this newspaper	
Number of governor races covered in career	
Number of campaigns covered at this newspaper	
Number of campaigns covered in career	
Date of Birth	

Appendix E

Page 1 of 3
Initials ______ Date _____

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Philip Merrill College of Journalism
University of Maryland – College Park

Project name	On the Fringe: Third-Party Gubernatorial Candidates and the Press
Project purpose	This is a research project conducted by John Kirch and Kathy McAdams at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park. The project is part of John Kirch's doctoral study and dissertation research. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a political reporter with experience covering gubernatorial elections that involve third-party candidates. The purpose of this research project is to identify the criteria political reporters use to determine which candidates and events to cover during gubernatorial election campaigns in which a third-party candidate is on the ballot.
What will I be asked to do?	You will be asked to answer questions during a taped interview that lasts about 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a location convenient to you. This could include your office, a hotel lobby, or coffee shop. During that interview, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your approach toward covering gubernatorial campaigns. For example, questions will cover such topics as how you define campaigns, which sources you typically use when writing about an election, and how you determine which third-party candidates are newsworthy. In the course of that interview, there may be one or two questions regarding the 2002 gubernatorial election in your state.
Confidentiality	We are asking for your permission to use your name and the name of your newspaper in the text of the dissertation. However, the use of your name and the name of your newspaper in the dissertation is voluntary and completely within your control. You may opt at any point during the study to remain anonymous, meaning that your name and the name of your newspaper will not appear in the dissertation. If you wish to have your name and the name of your newspaper to remain anonymous, we will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To protect your confidentiality, the following procedures will be applied: 1. I will begin each interview by collecting personal information about you (Name, Position, Job Responsibilities, and Institution). This information will be entered on a Subject Form, which will be filed at the investigators home office in a separate and secure file. 2. Your Subject Form will then be assigned a code number. 3. The code number will be the only identifying information placed on the tape cassette used to record our conversation as well as on the written transcript of the interview. The cassette tapes will be stored at the investigator's home office separate from the Subject Form. The hard copy of the written transcript will also be filed separately from the Subject Form.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project name	On the Fringe: Third-Party Gubernatorial Candidates and the Press
Confidentiality continued	4. The electronic copy of the written transcript will be stored on the investigator's computer hard drive as well as a compact disc. The transcript will be filed only under your code number. 5. Cassette tapes and electronic and hard copies of each transcript will be destroyed two months after the dissertation has been approved by John Kirch's dissertation committee. 6. Code numbers will be set up so that the investigator can identify only the state where you work—but not the newspaper. For example, California reporters would be labeled CA1, CA2 while Wisconsin reporters would be labeled WI1, WI2. 7. Each code number will be randomly assigned a first-name-only pseudonym, which will be used in the text of the dissertation in place of your name.
Potential risks?	There are no known risks associated with participation in this research project.
What are the potential benefits of this project?	The study is not designed to help you personally but to help the investigator learn more about how reporters cover gubernatorial campaigns involving third-party candidates. The study may help journalism in general by suggesting ways newspapers can improve their coverage of election campaigns.
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized in any way.
Contact information of investigators	If you have any questions regarding the research project, please contact: John Kirch, Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 20742; (e-mail) JFK909us@aol.com; (telephone) 301-681-0033 Kathy McAdams, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, 2130-J Mitchell Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; (e-mail) Kmcadams@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-9359

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project name	On the Fringe: Third-Party Gubernatorial Candidates and the Press
Contact information of Institutional Review Board	If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.
Statement of consent on confidentiality and audiotape	This research project involves making an audiotape of you. We are also asking for your permission to use your name and the name of your newspaper in the dissertation. You may opt for your name and the name of your newspaper to not be used in the dissertation. Please check the appropriate lines below: _____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. _____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. _____ I grant the investigator permission to use my name and the name of my newspaper in the dissertation. _____ I do not grant the investigator permission to use my name or the name of my newspaper in the dissertation.
Statement of age of subject and consent	Your signature indicates that: 1. You are at least 18 years of age 2. The research has been explained to you 3. Your questions have been fully answered 4. You freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project
Subject's Name (Print)	
Subject's Signature	
Date	

Appendix F:
E-Mail Sent to Political Reporters

Dear _______,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism who is working on a dissertation that examines how the news media covers third-party gubernatorial candidates.

I am writing to request an interview with you as part of my study, which will include the comments of newspaper reporters who have covered gubernatorial campaigns in which either a Green or Libertarian candidate was on the ballot. My research indicates that you covered the 2002 gubernatorial campaign in (Wisconsin or California), when Democrat (Jim Doyle or Gray Davis) defeated Republican (Scott McCallum or Bill Simon) and (Libertarian Ed Thompson or Green Peter Camejo). Because of your experience, I am particularly interested in your perspective on how you cover campaigns generally, as well as campaigns that involve third-party candidates.

The 60- to 90-minute taped interview would be conducted later this summer, depending upon your availability. It would be conducted in person, at your work or other location convenient for you. Most of my questions are general in nature and deal with such topics as how you define campaigns, which sources you typically use when writing about an election, and how you approach campaigns that involve third-party candidates. It is also possible that one or two questions may come up regarding how you covered the 2002 gubernatorial campaign in (Wisconsin or California).

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may opt out of the study at any point before, during, or after the interview. In addition, although I would like to use your name and the name of your newspaper in the text of my dissertation, you may opt to remain anonymous.

Your thoughts and perspective will allow me to better understand the methods and criteria reporters use to determine how they cover political campaigns. This study has potential to provide important insights about media coverage that may help reporters decide how to inform their readers about political campaigns in the future.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. As a former reporter, I appreciate how busy you are and will work with you to accommodate your schedule. I will contact you by telephone within the next day or so – or please feel free to contact me by e-mail or telephone if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

John Kirch
University of Maryland
jfk909us@aol.com
(301) 681-0033.

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