

# Do third party candidates influence incumbent agendas?\*

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Most studies of third party candidates in the U.S. focus either on why candidates enter a given race, or their effect on electoral outcomes once they do. And while candidates from outside the established two party system can have a “spoiler effect”, their presence usually does not affect the outcome of the race. However, third party candidates often claim their motivation for running is merely symbolic; using the campaign stage only to imbue otherwise marginal perspectives into the election dialogue. This study tests whether third-party and single-issue candidates were successful at shaping the agendas of incumbents despite losing. I rely on repeated cross sections to track changes in the policy agendas of winning representatives in the wake of three-way races. The dependent variable is the size of the shift in the incumbents' attention to the campaign themes of third party challengers over time. To predict variation in agenda shifts, I use the third party candidates' vote share as well as several theoretically-justified control variables. Preliminary results demonstrate that third party issues are seldom incorporated into the incumbents' agenda and variation in influence is unrelated to electoral insecurity.

keyword(s):third-party politics; agenda-setting; representation; uptake; elections; campaign effects

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## *Introduction*

Unlike other industrialized democracies, the United States is characterized by an electoral process that features, and indeed favors, two dominant parties. The two-party system is perpetuated by at least two separate mechanisms—the supply side (that is, the limited pool of third party candidates) and the demand side (the disincentives for voters to support minor party candidates).

Supply of third party candidates is hampered by a number of institutional structures. Among the most severe hurdles faced by third party candidates is their limited visibility with potential voters. Candidates running from outside the Democratic or Republican parties are frequently disallowed from competing in debates and face serious institutional obstacles to ballot access.<sup>1</sup> Major parties already holding seats in Washington are also well-endowed which favors their exposure to constituents in expensive media markets. Winning races without the endorsement of a major party is such an anomaly that in the last fifty years only six candidates from a minor party have won seats in the lower U.S. House.<sup>2</sup>

The electoral demand for third-party representatives also presents voters with a quandary. Because the United States is characterized by winner-take-all elections, many voters cast their support for a major party candidate for fear of “wasting their vote”. In the event that a voters’ preferred candidate is from a minor party in a three way race, that candidate might splinter voters resulting in a victory for the challenger that a plurality of voters least favor. In this case, the third party candidate is referred to as a spoiler. Many votes are cast for major party candidates every two years out of fear of creating a spoiler election.

Additionally, the American electoral system is non-proportional. That is, if a third-party earns ten percent in a national contest, they receive no representation in the legislature. The same scenario in England or Australia would earn the third party ten percent of the seats in parliament. Therefore, a vote cast for third party can theoretically be wasted. Rational individuals are wise to cast their vote strategically in order to minimize the prospect of being represented by politicians who are ideologically opposed to them. Therefore, even though a sizeable minority of American voters might favor a third party, their chances at obtaining a seat are slim to none.

Despite their low odds of winning, third party candidates enter races for elected office at a surprisingly high rate. Among American third parties, the most well-known are the Libertarians and the Greens but minor “flash-in-the-pan” parties are always surfacing in Congressional elections. Single issue parties often coalesce to combat specific social or political ills. These grassroots populist parties often identify their campaign issue with their party affiliation. For instance, the 1990’s witnessed such parties as Better Affordable Government, World without War, Back to Basics; God We Trust; Workers World; Time for Change; Peace and Freedom; Politicians are Crooks; and finally, the Inflation Fighting Housewife Party.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.greenpartywatch.org/category/ballot-access/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://history.house.gov/Institution/>

These parties, and the candidates who carry their platforms, aren't always concerned with winning elections (Boatright 2004). Single issue and third party candidates often claim their motivation for running is merely symbolic; using the campaign stage only to imbue otherwise marginal perspectives into the election dialogue. This study tests whether third-party and single-issue candidates are successful at shaping the agendas of incumbents despite losing by often-substantial vote margins.

### *Theory*

Rational incumbents are famously nervous about reelection, even in relatively safe seats (Mann 1978). Incumbents return to Washington at a rate of about 95%, so why is it they should pay attention to minor party candidates who typically earn only about 5% of the overall vote? The threat of third party challengers comes indirectly by virtue of their ability to fracture existing voting blocs. Spoilers, as third party challengers are frequently called, may steal votes away from one or both major party candidates by campaigning on issues that are neglected by the major parties. Third party and single issue candidates pose a threat to longstanding incumbents since elections can be, and frequently are, decided by slim margins. In those cases, incumbents would very much like to absorb the support garnered by the third party to limit the possibility of constituents defecting. Perhaps all an incumbent must do to prevent future threats from third party challengers is by "taking up" their issues on behalf of constituents who previously supported a minor party.

Third party challengers seldom win national seats but their role as "spoilers" is frequently invoked to explain electoral outcomes. Herron and Lewis (2007) find that mainstream portrayals of the 2000 election as a spoiler election were exaggerated. According to this research, Al Gore's narrow "loss" to George W. Bush was not attributable to Ralph Nader's campaign stealing votes from Gore. And while altering the electoral outcome is what third party challengers are best known for, it is perhaps not their only stamp on political life. Lee (2012) claims we "should not take [third party candidates'] apparent lack of electoral success as an indication of their irrelevance". Third-party candidates often speak of neglected issues and frequently enter races to infiltrate the race to inject their issues into the campaign dialogue, and by extension, the agendas of the winner (Wittman 1989). In fact, Rosenstone et al. (1996) suggest third-party candidates add accountability to the major party candidates by introducing issues which have been neglected entirely. Whether third-party and single-issue candidates are able to extend their influence into the realm of policy within the legislature has not been addressed empirically.

Sulkin (2006) examined the possibility that incumbents borrow from their previous challengers' electoral platform in crafting their own legislative agendas. Though that research focused on the effect of *major* party challengers on incumbents, it demonstrated that incumbents are indeed swayed by challengers, especially in the wake of a close election. Sulkin coined the term "uptake" to characterize the tendency of winning incumbents to borrow from previous challengers' campaign themes. Because third party candidates tend to run issue-based (rather than ideological) campaigns, the "taking up" of third party issues may be more attractive to incumbents. Borrowing the themes of an ideologically disparate candidate may alienate existing supporters whereas incorporating aspects of third party platforms may offer less partisan risk.

Adams and Merrill (2006) demonstrate that when a centrist third party candidate enters a congressional race, the major party candidates adopt more extreme policy positions during the campaign. This finding is counterintuitive considering that, possessing the ability to “steal” votes from the major parties, third party challengers might cause their competition to temper their positions. This research informs the possibility that incumbents may be more likely to engage in uptake when the third party supporters are comprised of constituents who would otherwise be supporting them. For instance, Green Party supporters are more likely to support Democrats in the absence of an environmental party. Likewise, Libertarians are probably more inclined to be Republicans who generally advocate for government non-interference. Moreover, the number of *centrist* third party candidates is relatively few.<sup>3</sup>

Holian et al. (1997) investigate whether third party challengers have a legacy on issue-voting at the national level. They use roll-call voting on NAFTA as a case study in the wake of 1992 presidential election where Ross Perot ran a campaign as an Independent. They find that his campaign had a significant effect on the voting patterns of Congressional Republicans. It is clear from this account that Ross Perot presented enough of an electoral threat—carrying a considerable level of voter support—that Republicans thought it wise to incorporate some of the policy proposals offered by a candidate who “stole” votes from their Party. It is unclear whether we can expect this same on an individual level in Congress.

I expect the presence of third party challengers does not cause returning incumbents to shift their ideology, but rather I expect them to incorporate the central issues from the third party platform in the wake of the election. Since third-party candidates often enter a race where winning is a long-shot, they are hoping to imbue the campaign space with specific issues rather than championing the causes of a sizable group of constituents in the middle. Third-party challengers may exert an influence on the campaign discourse but is there influence strong enough to alter the set of issues pursued by incumbents after they return to Washington?

For example, a Green Party candidate who remains marginally popular might force an incumbent to address environmental issues through new campaign promises which later become part of her legislative portfolio in the form of bill sponsorships and cosponsorships. Because third-party candidates present the possibility of a spoiler effect, incumbents would like to minimize the number of supporters who defect to the platforms of single-issue candidates. Uptake could prove to be an effective strategy used to absorb this base of support.<sup>4</sup> This strategy could prove to be vital for reelection, especially if potential third-party defectors are otherwise members of the reelection constituency.

The prospect of third party candidates influencing longstanding incumbents also has normative implications. Since the incumbency rate is so high, many critics of the American system have argued that major candidates are insensitive to constituents who vote for them based on a lack of alternatives. If

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<sup>3</sup> Third parties are usually formed because the major parties are not extreme enough or are ignoring a particular issue, rather than on account of their lack of centrism.

<sup>4</sup> Incorporating a previously neglected issue may even prevent future entry of third-party candidates. An incumbent who is dedicating a lot of legislative attention to environmental issues will probably reduce the likelihood of a green party candidate entering races in the future. I cannot test for this possibility with available data, but future work on this topic will address this very question.

third party challengers can effectively synthesize the neglected concerns of a subset of constituents and effectively communicate those messages to the incumbent in the campaign space, it may well augment the policy responsiveness of legislators. A third party challenge potentially calls attention to an issue that has been neglected by the incumbent, but is salient to constituents. By manifesting as an electoral threat, single issue and third party challengers may encourage incumbents to incorporate policy areas they have previously ignored.

My first research question is descriptive: do incumbents increase their activity to third-party challengers' campaign themes after returning to the House? As I previously alluded to, third parties only pick up a small portion of votes in general elections but incumbents may still take up their issues on account of their constant pursuit of increasing their electoral security. My second question is causal: does electoral security predict variation in legislative uptake that occurs as a result of the presence of third-party candidates during an election? If incumbents are motivated to borrow from third party platforms, it should be because they are nervous about reelection. A close election should predispose incumbents to third party uptake.

### ***Research Hypotheses***

As I stated earlier, the first methodological test in this chapter is simply to discern whether or not incumbents respond to third-party candidates by increasing their attention to the central campaign themes offered by this specific type of challenger. This part of the analysis is simply descriptive since no research to date has investigated this possibility.

My second question is: can differences in the magnitude and direction of changes to the incumbents' legislative agenda changes be explained by the electoral outcomes in a three way race? I suspect that the results of an election featuring a third party may affect incumbents by way of two separate mechanisms. The first mechanism, I designate as the *electoral insecurity model*. That is, if incorporation of third-party issues is theoretically motivated by the threat of a close election, incumbents will be more attentive to potential sources of voter defection.

***H<sub>1</sub>: All else constant, incumbents who win reelection by narrow margins are more likely to take up issues from third party challengers than their electorally safe colleagues.***

The second possibility, or mechanism, by which third parties may influence incumbents comes as a result of vigilant representatives who are looking to pick up extra votes despite being electorally comfortable. This is the *electoral expansion model* whereby an incumbents attempts to expand his or her base of support by incorporating third party issues. I suspect that a great number of votes received by a minor party candidate signal a more significant opportunity for the incumbent to pick up votes. Therefore, as the third party voteshare increases, it will trigger more aggressive attempts by the incumbent to absorb support from these challengers. The greater number of votes cast for the single-issue candidate signals a bigger threat to the incumbent as a spoiler, but perhaps more importantly, it represents a larger segment of support that may be readily picked up with a subtle change in legislative focus. Therefore, we arrive at the following hypothesis:

***H<sub>2</sub>: Holding other variables constant, variation in the incorporation of third party issues by incumbents is a function of the voteshare received by the third party.***

Because both the voteshare of the third party candidate and the electoral margin may have a synergistic or interactive effect on the incumbent, I develop a composite measure of electoral insecurity and electoral opportunity to predict variation in uptake. This variable is actually the ratio of the third party voteshare to the vote margin between the incumbent and the major party runner-up. This interaction of factors allows for the possibility that incumbents only look to pick up third party voters when the threat of the other major party seems more viable.

***H<sub>3</sub>: Holding other variables constant, incumbents with a high third party voteshare to electoral margin ratio will dedicate more attention to third party issues after reelection than incumbents with a relatively lower ratio.***

Finally, I develop a fourth hypothesis informed partially by popular accounts of Green Party candidate, Ralph Nader, and his run for President in 2000. Critics of Nader's candidacy claim that he stole votes disproportionately from the Democratic nominee, Al Gore. By splintering the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, many commentators claim that Ralph Nader caused the successful election of George W. Bush. While this claim will not be tested here, these insights suggest that Green Party candidates pose a greater threat to Democrats. More generally, the threat of third parties is conditioned by whether their supporters would otherwise support the incumbents' party. Therefore, House incumbents may be more likely to draw from the platform of minor party challengers when they believe that they pose a greater threat of dividing votes from their parent party. In my sample, there are inadequate observations to test a Green Party hypothesis but there are sufficient degrees of freedom to test the relationship between Republican incumbents who face off against Libertarian challengers.

***H<sub>4</sub>: Holding all else constant, Republican incumbents who face a Libertarian challenger are more likely to incorporate Libertarian issues into their legislative portfolio.***

### ***Empirical Strategy***

To test the hypotheses above, I estimate several models of third-party effects in which the incumbent is the unit of analysis. The sample scope conditions are limited to incumbents who faced challenges from third-party candidates in an election that featured at least three candidates. In all cases sampled, races featured one Democrat, one Republican and at least one single-issue candidate. The sample features races from three electoral cycles in 1990, 1992 and 1994. The races from this time period were selected based on data availability and also the quantity of third party challengers. Although there has been a more recent resurgence in third party entry, data collection proved to be incomplete and cumbersome. There is no reason to suspect that inferences drawn from these historical races would be any different from modern elections

Because incumbents return to Congress with such regularity, it is fairly straightforward to track their policymaking activities over several consecutive legislative sessions. Here I use two-session dyads—the session before encountering a third party challenge and the session immediately afterward—to track changes to the incumbents' legislative attention. The primary dependent variable is

the change in the incumbent's legislative attention to the third party or single issue candidate. After the incumbent and the third-party challenger are identified, I isolate the issue that the third-party challenger ran on and code them according to their issue-area. As you can see in Figure 1, the races in the sample feature mainly Libertarian candidates.

[Figure 1 about here]

Next, I measure incumbent attention to the said issue in the Congressional session before and after the third party challenge to isolate any legislative changes attributable to their encounter with a third party candidate. Incumbent attention to third party issues is as a product of the number of sponsorship and cosponsorships that are pursued by the incumbent in a given legislative session that pertain to the third parties' principal issue. The classifications of the incumbent's sponsorships are discerned using the federal register of all Congressional bills accessed at Thomas.gov. The federal record classifies all bills according to the committee that bill was assigned to. The content of third party issues comport well with the breakdown of committees in the U.S. House of Representatives.

For example, Libertarian candidates run on issues that would correspond to bills referred to the Judiciary subcommittee on "Civil and Constitutional Rights". Therefore, incumbents facing a Libertarian candidate receive a measure of legislative influence calculated by the difference in sponsorships of bills referred to the "Civil and Constitutional Rights" subcommittee in the session before, and immediately afterward, their third party challenge. Likewise, the legislative effect of Green Party challengers on incumbents is calculated using the difference in the number of bills sponsored that are referred to the "Environment and Health" subcommittee.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate, if a Green Party candidate challenges and incumbent who logged 20 legislative acts dealing with environmental issues before reelection and 40 legislative acts afterwards, they receive a legislative change score of 20 acts. A decrease in legislative attention to third party issues would be indicated with a negative score.

The main explanatory variable I used to predict variation in legislative agenda changes is electoral vulnerability. Again, three separate measures of electoral insecurity are utilized to test the sensitivity of the results. My measure of electoral vulnerability is measured as the vote margin, measured in percentage points, between the incumbent and the runner-up from the opposing major party. These data were gathered from the biannual publications of electoral results published by the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. My measure of the third party candidates' level of electoral support is the overall percentage of votes earned and is also taken from the same source. The composite ratio of the third party vote share to the electoral margin is simply the integer returned from dividing the two percentages.

Other control variables include the party of the incumbent which is measured as a dummy variable for a Democratic Party affiliation. That is, an incumbent receives a one if she is a Democrat and a zero if she is a Republican. This information was obtained from the U.S. House of Representatives Clerk publications. I also include a measure of seniority in the case that more senior incumbents are either more, or less, likely to be influenced by third party challengers based on their experience in the

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<sup>5</sup> The Environment and Health subcommittee is housed in the Science, Space and Technology House Committee.

House. Seniority is a count variable indicating the number of terms served in the House.<sup>6</sup> Finally, I include two dummy variables indicating specific sessions of Congress while omitting the 101<sup>st</sup> session of Congress as a reference group. Taken together, these variables control for the possibility of session-specific variation that is unobserved but does affect the level of third party influence on the incumbent.

I also control for the possibility an incumbents increase or decrease in attention to certain issues is merely a product of whether Congress, as a whole, is either more or less concerned with those issues during a given session. To control for this possibility, I measure the total number of bills that were introduced that correspond to a given incumbents' third party challengers' issue. Table 1 indicates that in some two-session dyads, the level of congressional attention to third party issues was dramatically changing. In one example, Congress saw 137 less bills on one of the minor party issues in consecutive sessions. Therefore, this control is vital to hold constant in order to isolate the incumbent-level features that might explain variation in third party uptake.

Additionally, for all of the 1994 elections and a smattering of others, I was able to obtain results of the incumbents' primary contest before the general election. This allowed me to include a dummy variable for whether the incumbent faced divisions in his own party prior to receiving the nominee. Because incumbents may respond to third party issues on account of internal party divisions, an indicator of internal party division is a vital control. These data come from the Biennial Federal Election Commission Reports on Election Results.

### *Equations*

The following equations are used to test each of the four hypotheses delineated in the "Research Hypotheses" section and correspond numerically to the results in the Appendix. All models are estimated using OLS.

$$(Y_{it} - Y_{it-1}) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 Z_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

$$(Y_{it} - Y_{it-1}) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 Z_t + \beta_3 \frac{VoteShare}{ElectoralMargin_{it}} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

$$(Y_{it} - Y_{it-1}) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 Z_t + \beta_3 \frac{VoteShare}{ElectoralMargin_{it}} + \beta_4 Rep * Lib_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

$$(Y_{it} - Y_{it-1}) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{it} + \beta_2 Z_t + \beta_3 \frac{VoteShare}{ElectoralMargin_{it}} + \beta_4 Rep * Lib_{it} + \beta_5 P_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (4)$$

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<sup>6</sup> These data were provided by Fowler (1996).

where:

$Y_{it}$  = the combined number of sponsorships and cosponsorships pursued by the incumbent that correspond to the third-party challengers' campaign theme in the legislative session after reelection.

$Y_{it-1}$  = the combined number of sponsorships and cosponsorships pursued by the incumbent that correspond to the challengers' campaign themes in the legislative session prior to the election with said challenger.

$\alpha$  = intercept term.

$X_{it}$  = a vector of time-invariant incumbent-level variables including party affiliation; electoral vulnerability measured as the percent vote differential between the incumbent and the runner up; the third party candidates' voteshare; the incumbents' party affiliation; and incumbent seniority measured as the number of terms served in the House.

$Z_t$  = a set of time-specific dummies for each house session (and a reference group session).

$\frac{VoteShare}{ElectoralMargin_{it}}$  = the ratio between the third party percent of the overall vote and the percent differential between the major party candidate and the runner-up.

$Rep * Lib_{it}$  = the multiplicative interaction term that indicates the effect of being both a Republican incumbent facing a Libertarian challenger.

$P_{it}$  = a dummy variable indicating whether an incumbent faced a primary challenger.<sup>7</sup>

$\varepsilon_{it}$  = stochastic term

## Results

The data obtained here suggest the level of legislative influence of third party challengers on incumbents approaches a normal distribution. In other words, variation in the dependent variable is otherwise random for our sample.

[Figure 2 about here]

Although this feature supports the use of OLS to predict variation in the dependent variable, it also demonstrates that incumbents who face third party challengers increase their attention to third party issues as much as they decrease their attention to said issues. This finding is further illustrated by the descriptive statistics found in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Overall, figures associated with the main dependent variable reveals that incumbents sponsor .21 fewer bills in the session following their encounter with a single-issue candidate. In other words, incumbents are not sensitive to the issues of minor party candidates on average. Nevertheless, the multivariate regression will tell us whether electoral insecurity, or any other factor, helps us explain variation in the level influence third parties can have on incumbent agendas.

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<sup>7</sup> Primary Election Data was only available for a subset of observations including the entire 1994 sample.

The full results in Table 2 demonstrate the results of all four models. With respect to the *electoral insecurity* and *electoral opportunity* models, there is little statistical support for either. In both Model 1 and Model 2, each of the variables expected to predict variation in third party influence fail to reach conventional levels of significance. Even when the regression includes the possibility of a combined effect of third party voteshare and incumbent margin of victory on the incorporation of minor party issues, there is virtually no support. Only in Model 4, when I control for whether the incumbent faced a primary challenger do we see any supportive evidence that agenda changes are non-random.

[Table 2 about here]

Though Model 4 has only 42 observations, it is the only regression which includes a dummy variable for an incumbent facing a primary contest. When the primary election variable is held constant, the interactive effect of being a Republican incumbent who faces a Libertarian challenger becomes significant, statistically and otherwise. In fact, Republican incumbents who face a Libertarian in a three way race sponsor an average of 7.07 more bills after reelection than the reference group.

This finding is an isolated positive finding within the regression results but is substantively important both in its magnitude and implications. Given that average incumbents are characterized by no changes to their legislative agenda, incumbents in this unique group become very active on issues of and Civil and Constitutional Rights after encountering a third party challenger from the Libertarian Party. This finding lends support to our fourth hypothesis which asserted that incumbents should be more responsive to single issue challengers when they believe the third party's platform has the potential to splinter voters from their own party. Since Libertarians are more firmly rooted in the Republican Party, it is not surprising that Republican House members are more likely to respond to threats from the Right.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Limitations***

There are a number of limitations associated with this research that should be highlighted outright. First and foremost the sample size is relatively small and is slightly biased towards a null finding. Of course, this research is in its infancy and further attempts to model the influence of third parties will feature many more observations.

Second, the main instrument used to capture the legislative influence of single issue candidates was changes in the number of sponsorships and cosponsorship pertaining to a certain issue. While operationalizing this variable in this manner is straightforward, it does place a great deal of faith in quantity over quality. The number of the sponsorships may not be a reliable instrument for measuring the attention representatives pay to certain issues in the legislature. All bills are not equal in terms of their magnitude of change to the status quo. In other words, an incumbent who faced a Libertarian candidate may not increase their attention civil liberties legislation in the House by virtue of the number of bills they are involved in but by the magnitude of importance that such bills carry. For

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<sup>8</sup> Many survey data confirms that Libertarians have a right-leaning tendency. For more information see <http://www.people-press.org/2011/05/04/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology/>.

example, Congressman Bilbray of Nevada sponsored 6 bills relating to his challengers issue-themes prior to reelection and only 4 in the session afterwards. However, one bill in the session after encountering a Libertarian candidate dealt with whether the death penalty is appropriate for terrorists who are non-citizens, a bill with much stronger consequences than most. Whether it can be accurately stated that Congressman Bilbray decreased his level of legislative attention to Libertarian Issues is a subjective matter indeed.

Finally, issues raised by third parties are not uniform in content or scope. In some cases, a third party candidate may deviate from the main tenets of the platform or may make their entire campaign about one narrow issue. For instance, the Inflation Fighting Housewife Party campaigned on one issue only. That issue could be as narrow as lifting gun control restrictions or as broad as cleaning up the environment. Because I classified bills according to the federal register using committee referral and keywords, it is a blunt measure of issue transference between an incumbent and their third party challenger. In order to more acutely trace possible third party agenda influence, one would have to look deeper into the campaigns of minor party challenger and also the content of bills sponsored by incumbents. This is the direction of future research on this topic.

### *Conclusion and Normative Reflections*

This paper analyzed a relatively small sample of historical house races and legislative sessions to discern whether an incumbents' encounter with a third party or single issue challenger affected their legislative agenda. For the most part, the results indicate that incumbents are generally unresponsive to the issues presented by third party challengers regardless of their relative electoral insecurity. The results also suggest the level of constituency support received by third party candidates and their respective platforms does not affect the tendency of incumbents to take up their campaign themes in the legislative session immediately following reelection.

In terms of democratic representation, the results indicate a potential weakness in the two party system. Incumbents return to Washington with remarkable consistency yet are apparently not accountable or responsive to voters outside the major parties. On the other hand, it cannot be said that incumbents are irrational for neglecting the issues of third party candidates. If incumbents needed the votes of third party supporters, they would surely take up their issues in order to absorb support. In fact, the incumbency return rate suggests that incumbents needn't take up issues at all. Perhaps, it is the case that incumbents cannot afford to incorporate new issues or stances lest they lose *existing* supporters which are more valuable than potential supporters.

Nevertheless, the fact that a sizable minority of voters have their issues neglected in many districts suggests what Madison called "majority tyranny" in Federalist Paper #10. There is little doubt that a system of proportional representation, although a virtually impossible transition in America, would do a great deal to elevate the profile of marginalized social and environmental problems.

Furthermore, a system of instant runoff voting would allow members of Congress to get a true sense about the issues and stances most important to their electorate. In an American electoral system that encourages strategic two party voting, it is nearly impossible for constituents to send precise signals to their elected representatives about their voting and issue preferences.

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APPENDIX: Figures and Tables

Figure 1, Pie Chart of Third Party Candidate Themes in Sampled Elections, 1990-1994

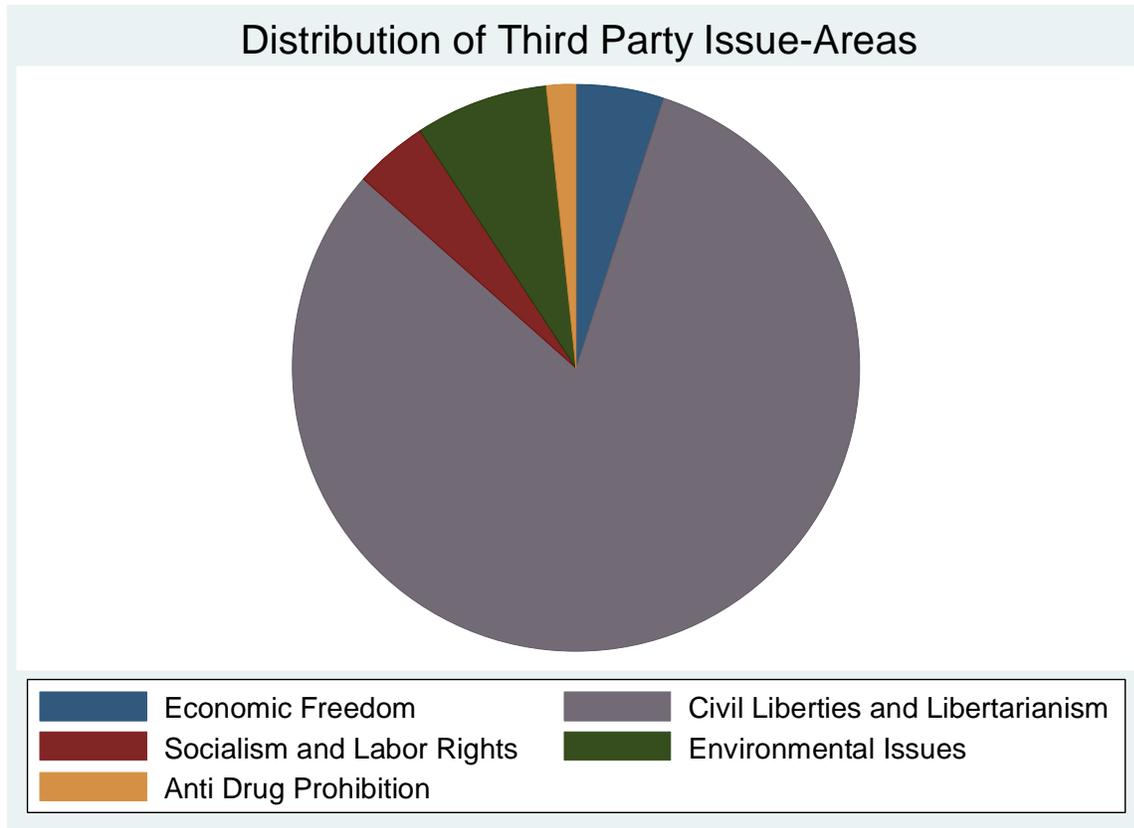


Table 1, Descriptive Statistics of Primary Independent and Dependent Variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
seniority	119	6.18	4.52	1	22
democrat = 1	119	.56	.50	0	1
third party vote percentage	119	3.47	1.8	.57	10.2
incumbent margin of victory	119	28.07	15.08	1.83	64.12
ratio of third party vote to electoral margin	119	.23	.31	.0007	1.79
change in number of sponsorships and cosponsorships relating to third party issues	119	-.21	5.44	-15	30
change in overall congressional attention to third party issues	119	-.66	31.66	-137	103
primary challenge= 1	65	.45	.50	0	1

Figure 2, Kernel Density Plot of Incumbent Responsiveness to Third Party Issues

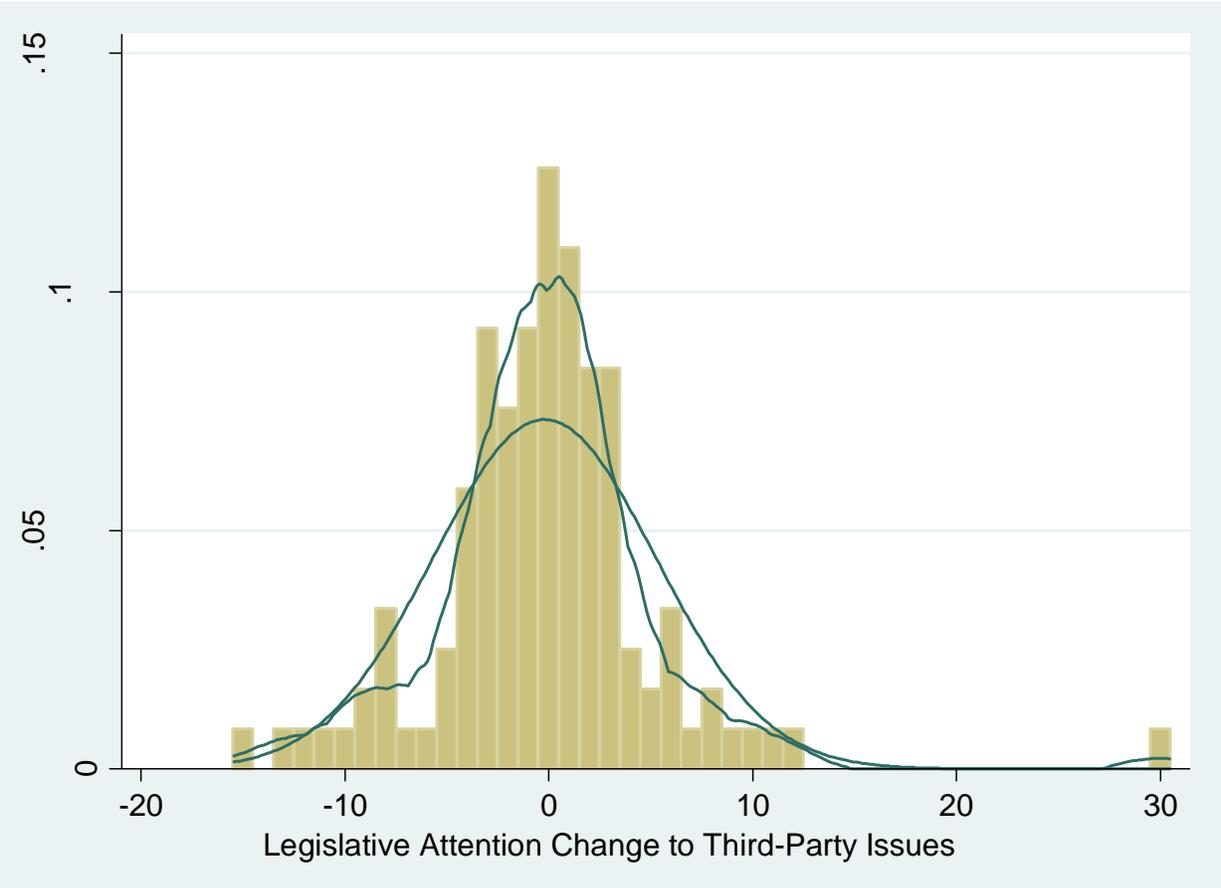


Table 2, Change in Legislative Attention to Third Party Issues, OLS Regression Results for Repeated Cross-Sections

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
constant	-.78 (2.5)	-1.06 (2.59)	-3.78 (3.31)	.93 (4.66)
electoral margin	.013 (.04)	.02 (.06)	.022 (.056)	-.12 (.08)
third party voteshare	.009 (.30)	-.06 (.34)	-.006 (.342)	.02 (.44)
electoral margin/voteshare ratio	—	1.14 (1.86)	1.24 (1.94)	-2.5 (3.02)
seniority	-.20 (.12)	-.20 (.12)	-.19 (.125)	-.41 (.23)
democrat = 1	.16 (1.04)	.14 (1.04)	2.44 (1.95)	2.71 (3.37)
congressional change in attention	-.04 (.03)	-.04 (.03)	-.04 (.03)	-.008 (.04)
primary challenge = 1	—	—	—	1.18 (2.23)
republican * libertarian	—	—	2.78 (1.99)	7.07* (3.37)
session 103	2.17 (1.63)	2.08 (1.58)	2.36 (1.61)	—
session 104	1.02 (2.46)	.90 (1.66)	1.17 (1.7)	—
N	119	119	119	42
R <sup>2</sup>	.09	.09	.11	.31
Prob > F	.70	.79	.64	.03

Note: \* indicates significance at the p<.05 level, robust standard errors are in parenthesis.