Throughout this book, we have argued that the Perot constituency played a pivotal role in U.S. national politics in the elections after Perot first ran for president in 1992. The “dynamic of third parties” describes the process whereby Perot’s or any third-party movement might have a lasting impact on the electoral system: the third-party candidate emerges to attract a significant electoral constituency animated by distinct issue concerns; one or both of the major parties subsequently bids for the third party’s constituency based on the issues that motivated the movement in the first place; and members of the third party disproportionately shift their support to the major party that makes the stronger bid. As a result of this shift in support, the third-party movement itself loses steam and disappears, and the party making the successful bid is changed to the extent that the bid entails policy commitments that are different from its long-standing issue and policy positions.

In the years following the emergence of the 1992 Perot movement, the Republicans made a successful bid with two important consequences. First, the Republican Party increased its vote share by adding a significant portion of the Perot constituency that had not supported the Republicans prior to 1992. As a result of attracting former Perot supporters as newcomers to its ranks, the Republican Party was able to win and
hold control of Congress for the first time since the 1952 elections and to win the presidency in 2000. In short, the Republican bid helped produce a “resurgence” in that party’s fortunes. The second consequence of the party’s bid was that it drew into the GOP a cohort of activists and voters committed to the Perot issue agenda, especially issues related to reform, balancing the federal budget, and “economic nationalism.”

What might these developments imply for the years since we completed the first edition of *Three’s a Crowd*? In this afterword, we examine the extent to which the Perot constituency remained intact through the 2004 election, and we speculate about how changes in the Republican Party since the election of President George W. Bush in 2000 might affect the continued involvement of Perot supporters in Republican campaigns. We argue that by 2004 the Bush record was at considerable odds with the Perot agenda, effectively amounting to a Republican disavowal of its bid for the Perot constituency in the Contract with America and elsewhere during the 1990s. Therefore, to the extent that Perot supporters remained committed to the issues that originally motivated them to commit to Perot and to switch their support to Republican candidates in the elections after 1992, two questions arise: Did former Perot supporters respond by withdrawing their backing for Republicans, and what might their response suggest for the future? To address these questions, we rely on a continuing survey of former Perot backers that we conducted immediately after the 2004 election.

CONTINUITY IN THE PEROT CONSTITUENCY

A third-party constituency, such as Perot’s, can remain pivotal in American national elections if its former supporters continue to hold the issue positions that originally motivated them. In the case of Perot’s backers, these issue commitments were the basis of the Republican bid and explained their willingness to move to the GOP (see chap. 7). An implication, however, is that the third-party supporters can remain pivotal even

---

1. The data we report are based on samples of Reform and major-party contributors begun in 1996 (see app. A).
after they have responded to the bid of one of the major parties, if they are also willing to withdraw their support if the bid is renounced.

To assess their reaction to Bush's disavowal of the Perot agenda, the first step is to determine whether the Perot constituency maintained its commitment to the issues that defined it in 1992. Figure 12.1 presents data from our surveys of major-party and Reform contributors, comparing the commitment to the Perot agenda of each of four groups: core Republicans, by which we mean Republican contributors who were never active in the Perot movement; Democratic contributors; Reform contributors as a whole; and Reform contributors who were mobilized into Republican Party campaigns between 1994 and 2000 in response to the Republican bid.\(^2\) Comparing Reform contributors with Republicans

---

2. In the 2004 survey, the items composing the Perot index were limiting immigration, limiting imports, limiting foreign involvement, support for term limits, eliminating soft-money contributions to parties, and raising taxes to reduce the deficit.
and Democrats gives an idea of how distinctive the Perot constituency was compared with each of the major parties’ core supporters, and comparing Reform contributors with those who were mobilized into the Republican Party provides an indication of whether Perot’s backers who migrated into the Republican Party maintained their commitment to the Perot issues.

Figure 12.1 demonstrates that the Perot constituency remained intact and distinct through the 2004 elections. In 1996, Reform contributors who had been active in Republican campaigns, as well as Reformers who had remained outside the Republican Party, were strongly committed to the Perot issues. In the same year, Republicans were modestly supportive of Perot issues, and Democrats were moderately opposed. The same basic pattern holds through the two following elections, except that Democrats’ opposition to the Perot agenda softened such that they were, on average, indifferent by 2004. Notice, however, that Republican support for Perot issues dropped approximately in half between 1996 and 2004 (from 0.82 to 0.38). Although there was some decline in support for the Perot agenda among former Reform Party contributors by 2004, Reform contributors were more distinctive from Republicans in 2004 than they had been in 1996.

Figure 12.1 provides evidence of continuity and distinctiveness in the Perot constituency, up to twelve years after Perot’s initial campaign. While it may not be surprising that Perot activists remained strongly committed to the Perot agenda, it is also notable that there is little difference between those who were drawn into active support for GOP candidates and those who remained outside the Republican Party. Moreover, when we break the Perot issue index into individual issue items (data not shown), Reformers were consistently distinct from core Republicans.

THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA UNDER PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

The persistence of the Perot constituency through 2004 is potentially of great political significance. The Republican Party, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, retreated spectacularly from the positions
it took in the 1990s when it bid for Perot supporters. Indeed, across the three issue dimensions that define the Perot agenda, the Republicans adopted positions and policies between 2000 and 2004 that were opposed to those advocated by Ross Perot and consistently held by his constituency since 1992.

Under President Bush, the United States committed to its most important military venture since Vietnam, when it invaded Iraq in 2003. More troubling than that invasion, from the perspective of Perot supporters’ long-term policy interests, was the decision to undertake the most extensive nation-building projects—in Afghanistan and Iraq—since the Marshall Plan after World War II. This commitment was contrary to Perot’s emphasis on domestic priorities and limited foreign involvements.3

Bush’s renunciation of the economic nationalism part of the Perot agenda extended to trade and immigration as well. In contrast to Perot activists’ persistent support of limiting immigration, Bush offered strong support for an agreement between the United States and Mexico, which would “pave the way for many illegal Mexican immigrants—up to 3 million—to remain in the United States and would serve as a precedent for other nationalities.”4 Although the 9/11 attacks prevented immediate follow-up on this initiative, the administration maintained its guest-worker program, especially for farmworkers, even in the face of strong opposition from a large number of Republican lawmakers. Bush’s support for NAFTA and the Central America–Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) remained a linchpin of Republican trade policy, despite the opposition of Perot and his supporters. Bush even backed down on his only trade policy meant to appeal to Perot’s supporters: his promise to impose tariffs on steel imports for up to three years to help domestic producers.5

Finally, Bush’s performance in the areas of the federal budget and

3. Our 2004 survey shows that Reform contributors were much more strongly opposed to the Bush administration’s Iraq policy than were Republicans, though the former were not quite as strongly opposed as Democratic contributors.


reform was less in keeping with GOP commitments to Perot and his supporters than his performance on other Perot issues. Under Bush and Republican majorities in Congress, the deficit ballooned from a surplus of $236 billion under Clinton in fiscal year 2000 to a deficit of $412 billion by fiscal year 2004. As tax revenues declined and spending increased, the prospects for ever-increasing deficits became a prominent aspect of President Bush’s legacy. The most significant reform initiative during Bush’s first term dealt with campaign finance through the vehicles of the McCain-Feingold proposal in the Senate and the Shays-Meehan proposal in the House. These proposals sought to eliminate soft money in campaigns, a policy with overwhelming support from Perot activists. But this was far from a priority for the Bush administration. Although President Bush did not threaten a veto, he did not endorse the bill, saying he would “reserve judgment” until he saw “the final product.”6 Without Bush’s support, only thirty-nine Republicans voted for the House version, and it passed on a close vote. Bush further signaled his ambivalence by failing to arrange a high-profile signing of the legislation. To add insult to injury, President Bush did not invite Senator McCain, the leading Republican proponent of reform in Congress, to attend the signing.

In sum, the Bush administration and the Republican Party effectively reneged on the bid the GOP made for the Perot constituency after the 1992 election. Since the issue commitments behind the Perot constituency remained largely intact through the 2004 election, what are the possible implications from the perspective of the dynamic of third parties? In our analysis of the Perot response to the Republican bid between 1994 and 2000, we showed that Perot activists were more involved in Republican than in Democratic campaigns from 1994 through 2000 (see fig. 9.1). The question is whether there was a change in activism between 2000 and 2004 in response to the Bush administration’s policies. Our measure of Republican campaign activity is a simple count of the number of activities that respondents did for Republicans in presidential and House campaigns, as well as for the Republican ticket as a whole. We create identical counts of Democratic

campaign activity in both years and compare them by taking the ratio of Republican to Democratic activity.\footnote{The advantage of using a ratio is that it controls for different levels of mobilization and activism that occur in both parties in different election years.}

Figure 12.2 reports the ratio of Republican to Democratic activities for 2000 and 2004. A score above 1.0 indicates a Republican advantage in activity; a score below 1.0 indicates greater Democratic than Republican activism. Consistent with our results reported in figure 9.1, there was substantially more Republican activism than Democratic activism in all campaigns in the 2000 election. In fact, Reformers were about half again as active in Republican campaigns as they were for Democratic candidates. However, by 2004, there was a noticeable shift in overall activity. Not only did the Republican advantage disappear in 2004, but there was slightly more activity in Democratic than in Republican campaigns (indicated by the total activity ratio of less than 1.0). In the presidential campaign, there
was only 87 percent as much Republican as Democratic activity, a decline in the ratio between 2000 and 2004 of almost 40 percent. Although Republican House candidates retained a slim advantage over their Democratic counterparts, this was probably due to the larger number of Republican incumbents running for reelection. But even in House races, the GOP advantage over the Democrats declined to virtual parity.

A decline in relative activity for the Republican Party is also evident when we restrict the analysis to Reformers who were mobilized into Republican campaigns (see fig. 12.3). In 2000, Perot Republicans were between five and six times more active for Republican candidates than they were for Democrats. High levels of Republican activism are not surprising, because we define “Perot Republicans” as Reformers who were mobilized into Republican campaigns. However, their level of participation in 2004 plummeted to the point where they were less than twice as active in Republican campaigns relative to their activism for

![Graph showing relative major party activity for Perot Republicans, 2000 and 2004](image-url)
Democrats. In 2000, only about 15 percent of Perot Republicans’ total activity was on behalf of Democratic candidates; in 2004, 40 percent of it was. The commitment to the Republican Party of both Reform Party contributors in general and Perot Republicans in particular clearly dropped in the first four years of the Bush administration. We attribute this decline to the Republican shift in priorities, actions, and commitments away from those of the Perot movement.

**SPILLOVER FROM PEROT TO THE MAJOR PARTIES**

Chapter 9 reports on mobilization effects from the Perot movement into the Republican Party. We showed that the more active former Perot supporters were in Perot’s 1992 presidential campaign, the more responsive they were to the bid from the Republicans. Thus, the spillover effect reflects the dynamic of third parties at work on individual third-party activists: the more engaged they were in Perot’s insurgent campaign, the more subject they subsequently were to mobilization by the bidding major party. These spillover effects from Perot’s campaign into Republican races were evident in every election year between 1994 and 2000 (see fig. 9.4). In contrast to what occurred in Republican campaigns, these years show no evidence of spillover from the 1992 Perot campaign into Democratic campaigns. The question, then, is whether the Republican renunciation of the Perot program resulted in spillover into Democratic campaigns in 2004. Spillover into Democratic campaigns would provide additional evidence that the Perot constituency reacted against the Republican policy shifts under President George W. Bush.

Figure 12.4 presents the results of analyzing the effects of activism for Perot in 1992 on relative major-party activity in 2004. We show the prevalence of Democratic activity over Republican activity for those engaging in zero, two, four, and six activities for Perot. A bar with a negative value (extending below the zero line) indicates that respondents engaging in that number of activities for Perot in 1992 were, on average, more active for Republican candidates in 2004 than for Democrats. A positive bar (extending above the zero line) indicates that respondents
were more active for Democratic candidates than for Republicans. The pattern is clear: Reform Party respondents who were most active for Perot in 1992 shifted their 2004 involvement, to the greatest extent, away from Republican candidates toward the Democrats. We see this as further evidence of the potential of third-party movements to have an enduring impact on the two major parties. Whereas the initial reaction of the Perot constituency was to fuel a “Republican resurgence” during the 1990s, the turnabout that President George W. Bush and the Republican leadership in Congress engineered in the GOP’s commitment to the Perot agenda prompted a shift toward the Democrats for the first time by the same former Perot activists who contributed to Republican successes between 1994 and 2000.

---

8. Figure 12.4 presents the partial effect from an analysis that controls for the effect of 2000 major-party activity, party identification, and contact from each of the major parties.
SPECULATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Unfortunately, our surveys ended with the 2004 elections, so we are unable to continue the analysis of the Perot constituency through the 2006 elections, when the Democrats won back control of both houses of Congress for the first time since the historic Republican victory in 1994. We think that the Perot constituency probably helped deliver the Democratic victory in 2006. However, because of the inevitable erosions that occur over a long period of time and because the Democrats did not mount an aggressive bid for the Perot constituency in 2006, we doubt that it was as strong a factor in that year as it was twelve years before, in 1994. While we are reluctant to conclude that the Perot constituency was as pivotal in producing the 2006 Democratic triumph as it was in delivering victory to the Republicans in 1994, there does seem to be sufficient evidence of an effect to conclude that the Perot constituency retains its potential to have important effects in the competition between the two major parties in 2008 and beyond.

Because the Perot constituency maintained its commitment to the issues that defined and motivated it during the 1992–2000 period and because it demonstrated its openness to persuasion from either party, there is every reason to suggest that it could be pivotal in future national elections. It also seems that the Democrats could make a much more aggressive appeal to Perot voters. Results (not shown) of the statistical model for figure 12.4 indicate that Democratic contact with Reformers was more efficacious than was Republican contact in 2004, but our survey also reveals that there were lower levels of Democratic than Republican contact among Reformers in that election. The failure of Democrats to bid for the Perot constituency led two top Democratic strategists, Stan Greenberg and James Carville, to call on their party in 2006 to “revisit the Perot voters and their concerns, even if Perot has faded from view.”9 They picked up on the same dynamic we have shown by saying that the Perot constituency “brought the Republicans back” and that it has the potential to do the same for Democrats.

Democratic strategists were not alone in suggesting the potential

---

importance of Perot’s backers in 2006. Republican pollster and strategist Frank Luntz argued that in 2006, “the Perot voters, who were the key to the Republican takeover in 1994, deserted the GOP in droves and turned control of Congress back to the Democrats [when] . . . red ink budgets, earmarked appropriations for bridges to nowhere, endless ethics scandals and a debacle of a war made them mad once again.” Luntz saw the continuing need for his party to appeal to this group rather than take their support for granted. He went on to endorse a strategy for the future that, as he put it, had “both the early front-runners for the GOP presidential nomination in 2008 . . . appeal[ing] beyond the party’s base of conservative supporters.” Luntz continued, “Arizona Sen. John McCain tapped into the old Perot constituency in his bid for the nomination in 2000, and former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani is doing that now.”

That the Perot constituency remained committed to its issues does not mean that former Perot backers thought of themselves as remaining in his political movement or that they retained their loyalty to him as a leader. Indeed, we found that by the 1996 election, when he ran for the second time, a large percentage of those who had been supportive in 1992 dropped out and evaluated him much less positively than they had in 1992. By 2000, his support had evaporated, even as the issues he stressed retained their appeal and priority. Thus, the issues defined the Perot constituency in the years after his initial candidacy, and those same issues give it the potential to play a pivotal role in American politics.

That the Perot constituency was largely intact twelve years after 1992 is a lesson of enduring importance for the American two-party system. Two different scenarios seem possible for the Perot constituency in 2008 and beyond. One possibility is the emergence of a new third-party movement. Perot demonstrated in 1992 that a candidate with the necessary skills and resources can exploit discontent with the major parties to attract significant support. At this writing, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is frequently mentioned as a possible “centrist” candidate who might lead an independent campaign to tap into discontent with the polarization between the major parties. Bloomberg himself has so far

11. Ibid.
denied an interest in running, but if discontent with the two parties and their nominees is substantial, an opening for a third-party movement may occur. If so, the Perot constituency would be an obvious starting point for an independent candidate looking for a base of support.

A second scenario following the Bush renunciation of the Perot agenda is based on the opportunity it provides the Democrats, as hinted by Greenberg and Carville. An entrepreneurial Democratic candidate or leader might articulate a program that could appeal to Perot supporters and, much as the Republicans did in 1994, target former Perot backers with direct campaign appeals. A strategy of this sort could tip the national electoral balance in the Democrats’ favor. Such a leader might point to the balanced federal budget and surplus during the Clinton years, to a more measured form of internationalism built on dissatisfaction with the Iraq experience, and to domestic economic insecurities stemming from a global economy. If so, our study suggests that there may be more than a remnant of the Perot movement available for mobilization, waiting in the wings to stimulate a new direction in major-party politics.

Whatever occurs in 2008, third-party movements will remain important to understanding major-party change years after their initial appearance. Make no mistake: there will be another Ross Perot. The future will see third-party and independent candidacies arise when the major parties fail to address important issue and policy concerns and when entrepreneurial politicians seek major elective office by running against, rather than within, the two-party system. Especially when such candidacies succeed in identifying novel and significant issue constituencies, the signals they send to the major parties will prompt response, adjustment, and change. Comprehending the forces energized by these movements enriches our understanding of the larger processes of change at work in the American two-party system.