

RALPH NADER'S CAMPAIGN STRATEGY IN THE 2000 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Those observing the 2000 presidential campaign agreed that Ralph Nader could not win the presidency but disagreed about his actual strategy. Many Democrats contended that he was playing the role of "spoiler" in an attempt to attract attention or affect the election outcome. Others argued that he was trying to earn 5% of the popular vote to secure matching funds for the Green Party in the next presidential election. Count models find that Nader's travel schedule, unlike Gore's, was unresponsive to the closeness of the major-party race. Nader's appearances were driven primarily by opportunities for attracting a large number of voters, suggesting that earning 5% was indeed a central campaign goal. Data on television advertising produce a parallel result. This finding resolves an ongoing debate about Nader in particular, but also points to broader differences between major- and minor-party campaign strategies.

Keywords: minor parties; political campaigns; presidential elections; campaign strategy; Ralph Nader

Ralph Nader stands as perhaps the most consequential minor-party presidential candidate in nearly a century. His meager 2.7% of the popular vote is not among the largest third-party showings by a long shot, but he nonetheless played a pivotal role in determining who would become president following the 2000 election. The outcome itself remained undecided for weeks following election day, as neither George W. Bush nor Al Gore had earned a clear majority of the electoral vote. Though the media in the aftermath focused on ballot design and other administrative issues, it is now clear that Nader held the

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election in his hands. His absence from the campaign would have allowed Gore to win not only the popular vote but the Electoral College and the presidency (Burden, 2003; Collett & Hansen, 2002; Magee, 2003). Nationwide, Nader earned almost 3 million votes, whereas Bush and Gore were separated by only 500,000. In Florida alone, Nader got 97,488 votes, more than 180 times the difference between Bush and Gore. Nader's presence obviously had the *effect* of throwing the election to Bush; whether this was Nader's *intention* is a matter I hope to resolve.

Nader's peculiar role in the 2000 election spawned a heated argument about his true campaign goals. Knowing that Nader would not win, editorial pages and political talk shows were dominated during the campaign by speculation about precisely why he was in the race. One camp, composed mostly of loyal Democrats, argued that Nader was deliberately playing the role of "spoiler." Under this view, Nader purposely forced Gore to expend resources in a few key states that the Democrats would have otherwise won. In contrast, Nader argued that he was aiming to maximize his share of the popular vote, regardless of the election outcome. Which of the major parties won the election was apparently of little interest. Winning 5% of the vote was a critical threshold because it would guarantee the Green Party millions of federal dollars in the 2004 presidential election and foster long-term growth of the party.

The debate between the two camps began in early 2000 and has yet to be resolved. Despite the intensity of their assertions, no systematic evidence has been brought to bear on them. This lack of resolution is unnecessary: The spoiler and 5% hypotheses have rather different empirical implications. In this article, I test them directly by analyzing the Gore and Nader campaign strategies. To preview the results, I find no evidence for a spoiler strategy but strong support for the 5% hypothesis. Apparently, the Democrats' sour grapes were misplaced, as Nader appears to have been sincere about his motivations.

Building the empirical case for this conclusion involves a number of steps. I begin by assembling data on appearances by both Gore and Nader drawn from national media reports and officials from the campaigns themselves. This approach focuses the analysis on the allocation of campaign time, which is available in equal amounts to all campaigns. The appearance data are then matched to aggregate data

collected on states and media markets. The spoiler hypothesis is assessed using a measure of closeness of the major-party race, and the 5% hypothesis is tested using measures of the size of the voting population. After controlling for a host of other explanatory variables that might have influenced Nader's appearance strategy, I find clear evidence in multivariate models that his goal was maximizing votes, not throwing the election. Gore, on the other hand, pursued both votes and victory by targeting high-population centers and the most competitive areas of the country simultaneously.

DEBATE ABOUT NADER CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

Nearly everyone agreed that Nader had virtually no chance of winning the 2000 presidential election, perhaps not even a single state. Aside from Ross Perot's momentum in the summer of 1992, there have been few points in recent American politics in which a minor-party candidate appeared to have any opportunity for victory. There are, after all, substantial hurdles placed before minor-party candidates in the United States. These include specific procedural impediments such as ballot-access laws, public funding provisions that favor major parties, and candidate debate limitations (Bibby & Maisel, 2003; Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996). The challenges also extend more broadly to Duverger's conjecture about the two-party tendencies of winner-take-all electoral systems. In 2000, Nader failed to get his name on every state ballot, was not included in the presidential debates, and polled only in the single digits throughout the campaign. Without a realistic chance of victory, he must have pursued some other more tractable campaign goals. This is where the elite debate begins. Here, I outline the two main arguments about Nader's strategy, first that he was maximizing his vote share and second that he was trying to play spoiler.

SEEKING FEDERAL FUNDING

Most observers believed that Ralph Nader was on a mission to build the Green Party. Nader argued throughout the campaign that his main interest was in building a progressive political party to challenge the

corporate major parties. Like many minor parties, the Greens depend heavily on grassroots activism for success but at the same time realize that large sums of money are required if they are to reach voters through the media. Nader pinned the party's financial hopes for the future on the matching funds provided by the federal government. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) distributes these funds from the treasury to the parties of presidential candidates who abide by a series of fundraising and spending rules. A key FEC requirement is that the party in question earned at least 5% of the popular vote in the last national election (26 U.S.C. §9004).¹ For a struggling party, an influx of millions of dollars in the next presidential election would be an important resource for communicating its message in 2004.

Nader repeated this point throughout the campaign; even the campaign's Web site mentioned the 5% goal. The mainstream press faithfully repeated Nader's claim as well. *Newsweek's* Matt Bai (2000) noted just 2 weeks before election day that "His main goal is to score 5 percent of the vote, qualifying the Greens for federal matching funds" (p. 41). Days later, *U.S. News and World Report* confirmed that Nader

knows he's not moving into the White House, but he has a concrete goal: 5 percent of the vote so the Green Party will become a recognized third party and can reap millions in federal campaign matching funds in 2004. (Cannon, 2000, p. 26)

Even after the election, *The Washington Post's* retrospective account reflected that in an effort to build a lasting Green Party movement beyond 2000, "Nader's immediate aim was to reach the 5 percent threshold" (Slevin, 2000, p. A34).

With his eyes on 5%, any suggestion that Nader was playing spoiler seemed absurd. As one commentator put, the idea that Nader "has decided to play the spoiler in this presidential race is a sad testimonial to how politics drive men mad" (Quindlen, 2000, p. 64). When a former ally accused Nader of throwing the election to Bush, Nader (2002) recalls, "I told him that we were running a fifty-state campaign to maximize our votes and were not going out of our way to target swing states" (p. 243).²

These accounts consistently portray Nader's strategy as revolving around vote maximization to meet the 5% threshold. Polls conducted

late in the campaign showed Nader precariously close to 5% nationally. With no room for error, uncertainty about the polls' accuracy would foster an all-out Green effort to maximize Nader's vote.³

PLAYING SPOILER

Threatened Democrats alleged that Nader's energy was disproportionately focused on competitive "battleground" states in an effort to cost Gore a victory or exact policy concessions from the Democratic Party. Under this view, although Nader was giving lip service to long-term party building, he was in fact pursuing a short-term, spoiler strategy. Though this view was not held by most observers during the campaign, the fact that Gore won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College because of Nader helped popularize it after the election was resolved. Though perhaps not as widely held as the view that Nader was after 5%, advocates of the spoiler view managed to work their arguments into the public discourse.

Many progressives who leaned toward Nader worried about the possibility that voting Green would help elect George W. Bush. Because the Bush-Gore race was historically close, 2000 saw an unprecedented degree of strategic voting by Nader supporters (Burden, 2003; Hillygus, 2002). Some liberals devised plans both to ensure Gore's victory over Bush and get Nader 5% of the popular vote. Several Internet sites were established to "trade" Nader votes in close states such as Wisconsin for Gore votes in lopsided states such as Massachusetts. Though these sites were shut down by legal authorities, they received a great deal of publicity, and some voters apparently acted strategically anyway. Beyond the legal and ethical dilemmas posed by vote trading, the vote swapping did little to dissuade those accusing Nader of targeting Gore.

One rationale for playing spoiler is that it provides political leverage. By holding a crucial bloc of contestable votes in a tight major-party campaign, Nader might gain more influence over both the immediate outcome and long-term policy goals of the victor. In a somewhat different manner, Ross Perot had used his 19% in the 1992 election to promote his anti-NAFTA and proreform agenda during the Clinton years. Journalists suggested that Nader might be looking for the Democrats to adopt some of his causes by holding Gore's fate in

his hand. As *Newsweek* softly noted, "Nader could swing the vote to Bush. Nader insists that's not his intention, but he wouldn't exactly mind either" (Bai, 2000, p. 41). And the Baltimore *Sun* suggested that "Nader seemed to rationalize the possibility that his candidacy could help elect Bush" by turning out enough Greens to help Democrats down the ballot and retake control of the House ("Nader Rejects Concerns," 2000, p. 1a; cf., Hillygus, 2002). Playing such a pivotal role in the outcome might have given Nader more clout when working with a future Gore administration.

Others suspected that Nader was interested in more than just leverage. Editors at *The New York Times* reported on November 3 that Nader was "being more open these days about his willingness to throw the election to Mr. Bush and his desire to damage the Democratic Party" ("Al Gore in the Home Stretch," 2000, p. A30). Some reporters even asserted that "Nader himself seems to suggest that he wants Bush to win" (Milbank, 2000, p. C1). The implication is that a victory for Bush would provide fodder for Nader's progressive causes. The threat that a Bush administration might pose to environmental and other social justice concerns would energize Nader's allies. Indeed, there is good evidence that political groups are more likely to mobilize when threatened. Academics have found this to be true in a variety of realms from interest group activity to citizen participation (Campbell, 2002; Hansen, 1985; Miller, 2000). The National Rifle Association's membership grew in apparent response to the Clinton administration's efforts on gun control ("Heston Wins 3rd Term," 2000, p. A12). And the American Civil Liberties Union benefited from Bush White House responses to the September 11 terrorist attacks (Shatzkin, 2003, p. 1A). In the same vein, Nader himself asked rhetorically, "Is it better to have a James Watt, who galvanizes the environmental movement, than Clinton-Gore, who anesthetize the environmentalists?" (Milbank, 2000, p. C1).

Many still believe that "Nader didn't shy from the role of principled spoiler" and was "branded a saboteur by furious Democrats" (Magnusson, 2000, p. 3708). As an example of accusations from the left, *The New Republic's* Michael Crowley (2000) contrasts Nader's strategy with Pat Buchanan's. "Both Nader and Buchanan say they are focused on winning the 5 percent of the popular vote needed to secure election funds in 2004. But only Buchanan seems to have adopted a

strategy explicitly geared toward this goal" (p. 18). Buchanan, it seems, was trying to cultivate votes in states such as Alaska and New York where the major party outcome was a foregone conclusion. "Nader's campaign, by contrast, seems to have it in for the vice president" as evidenced by the fact that "Nader keeps returning to states that his candidacy could tip to Bush." By comparing the Green and Reform campaigns, it seemed that "Nader doesn't care about the 5 percent as much as Buchanan does" (p. 18). Even some of Nader's closest allies accused him of violating his promises (Cannon, 2000).

Though this complaint came most loudly from the Left, the mainstream media were often sympathetic to the spoiler point of view. *The Washington Post* found that near the end of the campaign, Nader "continued to hammer at Gore in states where he could do the most damage" (Milbank, 2000, p. C1), and *The Boston Globe* reported that "Ralph Nader spent the last hours of his campaign working in states where Vice President Al Gore was vulnerable" (Abraham, 2000, p. A32). One insider's account suggests that the campaign was divided about what strategy to pursue in the final days, but "Nader decided to travel to the hotly contested states" rather than "concentrate on safe states" (Martin, 2002, p. 263). Nader, says Martin, "clearly relished his role in disrupting Gore's chances" (p. 268).

In an election postmortem, *The New Republic* returned to the disingenuous nature of Nader's rhetoric. During the Florida recounts it concluded, "Despite what he had said all along, getting 5 percent of the vote and millions of dollars in matching funds didn't really matter after all" (Chait, 2000, p. 42). A Gore aide remarked to *Newsweek* that "Nader could cost us the election. Period. End of story. He gets it, too. I think he is on one of the great ego trips of modern times" ("Calling All Swing States," 2000, p. 110). Yet, the "ego trip" theory was not merely blurted out in the heat of the recount battles. As the 2004 campaign heated up, *The New Republic's* Chait (2004) restated the spoiler mantra: "Liberals assume Nader tried to maximize his vote total without regard to how it affected Bush and Gore. The truth is that he *actively sought* to help Bush, even at the expense of his own vote total" (p. 10).

In short, two rather different views of Ralph Nader's goals in the 2000 campaign have been suggested. Despite the intensity of these assertions, no systematic evidence has been brought to bear on them.

From a social scientific perspective, this lack of resolution is unnecessary, because the spoiler and 5% strategies each suggest rather different empirical implications. I test them directly by analyzing Gore and Nader advertising and candidate appearance strategies in the 2000 presidential campaign.

HYPOTHESES

The two major popular accounts for Nader's campaign behavior fortunately conform to social science parlance quite naturally. Each can be stated as a hypothesis that suggests "observable implications" amenable to empirical testing (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). In this section, I briefly lay out these two hypotheses (and two combinations of them) before turning to details of data collection and then the analysis itself.

HYPOTHESIS 1 (5%)

In an effort to secure FEC funding for the Green Party in the 2004 presidential election, Nader single-mindedly pursued 5% of the popular vote. This strategy encourages campaigning in large population centers. Visiting an urban area is advantageous because it is possible to reach more voters in a single stop and because urban residents tend to be more politically liberal than other voters. There is little to no regard for the actual outcome of the election. This 5% strategy would focus efforts on cities such as Chicago and states such as California.

HYPOTHESIS 2 (SPOILER)

In an effort to influence who won the election—and perhaps even to rob Gore of a victory—Nader targeted states where the contest between Bush and Gore was closest. There was little regard for the Green Party's aggregate share of the vote. The winner-take-all nature of electoral voting encourages campaigning in the most competitive states, independent of the total number of votes available in them.⁴ Key states such as Florida and Tennessee should be most likely to attract Nader.⁵ Should Nader have gone out of his way to avoid com-

petitive states, he might have spent most effort on lopsided states such as Texas and Massachusetts.

HYPOTHESIS 3 (BOTH 5% AND SPOILER)

This hypothesis is the union of Hypotheses 1 and 2. Nader might have very well pursued both goals simultaneously. Campaign activities often serve multiple purposes (Bartels, 1985; West, 1983). Nader's travel schedule could have been devised to both maximize his vote and affect the outcome with careful use of media markets. A trip to Boston, for example, should help the Green vote in lopsided and populous Massachusetts but is also covered by the media in southern New Hampshire, where the race was close. Appearances in places such as Philadelphia and nearly anywhere in Florida would also be consistent with this dual strategy.

HYPOTHESIS 4 (NEITHER 5% NOR SPOILER)

Nader might have pursued goals other than future funding or affecting the outcome. One goal might have been conducting a 50-state campaign, which would take him disproportionately to states such as Idaho where the voting population was small and one major-party candidate is far ahead (see Note 13). Travel plans might also center on such things as the best fundraising venues, visiting Green Party allies to repay them for earlier support, appearing at so-called super rallies in select cities near the end of the campaign, minimizing inconvenience and cost, or other idiosyncratic goals thought to be orthogonal to Hypotheses 1 and 2.

DATA AND MEASUREMENT

Because the elite debate about Nader's real motives was a war of words, social scientists might regard it as cheap talk, a candidate saying one thing and doing another. In this sense, deeds are more important than words. As a result, behavior should be a more meaningful indicator of revealed preference for one goal over another. Manifest campaign activities can be related to other variables that capture sev-

eral possible campaign motivations. The main measure of revealed campaign strategy used here is candidate appearances.⁶ Bartels (1985) has demonstrated that candidate appearances are perhaps the most instrumentally rational form of presidential campaign activity (Althaus, Nardulli, & Shaw, 2002; Strömberg, 2002; West, 1983). It is also a common currency that can be used to evaluate the Gore and Nader strategies on equivalent terms, because time is equally available to all campaigns.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: CANDIDATE APPEARANCES

I collected data on when and where Al Gore and Ralph Nader traveled during the general election campaign. Our primary interest will be in determining the reasoning behind Nader's travel schedule; comparable data on Gore are collected to provide a major-party baseline against which the Nader results can be judged. This study differs from recent research in that candidate appearances are used as a dependent rather than an independent variable (see Hagen, Johnston, & Jamieson, 2002; Herr, 2002; Shaw, 1999a, 1999b).⁷ Instead of determining the effects of candidate appearances on polls or the vote, I am concerned with the constituency-related factors that cause a candidate to visit or not visit a particular location.

It is also important to note what data are not included. First, I omit vice presidential candidates.⁸ Second, the analysis excludes Pat Buchanan, even though he might have cost Bush victory in a couple of states (Burden, 2003). Buchanan's Reform effort attracted little media attention, featured few candidate appearances, and earned the party an anemic 0.43% of the popular vote. Finally, I do not account for campaign advertising in the multivariate models. Strapped for cash, the Nader campaign ran only a small number of television spots in a few select markets. At the end of the article, I will provide some skeletal evidence suggesting that television ad buys roughly parallel candidate appearance strategies.

I analyze candidate appearance strategies between September 1 and election day. This time period follows earlier work (Althaus et al., 2002), particularly the conventional wisdom that the presidential campaign begins in earnest following Labor Day (Herr, 2002). A candidate appearance can be either a crowd event held on a first-come,

first-served basis, or a controlled event with an invited audience. In either case, the event is labeled an appearance if designed to generate favorable media coverage in the locality. The data are thus essentially measures of the number of days on which the candidate spent at least some public campaign time in a location. As a study of the use of time, this approach puts the Gore and Nader campaigns on a nearly common footing despite disparities in resources.

As with other studies of this type, there are a number of coding decisions to make. I note two coding rules. First, multiple stops on the same day to a location were treated as a single appearance. The assumption is that the media would only cover a visit once, even if there were multiple appearances on the same day (Aldrich, 1980). Second, only events designed to attract mass media coverage are included. Travel that was not clearly aimed at public campaign activities, such as private fundraisers or Gore's flights to Washington for his son's football games, were omitted.

The data come from two kinds of sources: media reports and campaign officials. First, every issue of *The New York Times* during the time period was combed for information about candidates' daily schedules. Schedules were frequently reported in the Campaign Briefing section of the *Times*. Although this provided a rather extensive list of candidate appearances, Shaw (1999a, 1999b) and others have noted that newspaper reports are sometimes incorrect due to last-minute changes in the candidate schedules and other unforeseen factors. The print media are prone to underreport travel by minor candidates and appearances in small states (West, 1983). These biases make it necessary to verify newspaper reports with the campaigns themselves.

I personally consulted with two high-level campaign officials: Gore's senior advisor and trip manager, David Morehouse, and Nader's national campaign manager, Theresa Amato. The newspaper schedules were refined by updating the *Times*'s reports with information from Amato and Morehouse. The combination of media reports outside the campaigns and firsthand travel logs from inside the campaigns allows for the most complete accounting of candidate appearances possible.

I began by mapping each candidate appearance to the county in which it occurred.⁹ Counties are an attractive unit of analysis because

they can be aggregated almost perfectly to either the state or media market level. County boundaries never cross state boundaries and almost never cross the boundaries of Nielsen's designated market areas (DMAs).¹⁰ Though earlier work focused solely on states as the unit of analysis because of their autonomy in the Electoral College, recent work acknowledges the strategic importance of media markets in presidential campaigns (Althaus et al., 2002; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002; Hagen et al., 2002).

A campaign appearance in Manhattan would be coded as a stop in New York by a state analysis, though the candidate would expect the event to be covered in the northern New Jersey and western Connecticut media as well. To allow for state-based and market-based strategies, I estimate models at both levels of analysis. This is important because Hypothesis 1 suggests that Nader would focus more on media markets, but Hypothesis 2 might imply more attention to states. For the state analysis, the sample contains 51 cases (50 states plus Washington, D.C.). For the market analysis, the sample is made of the 210 DMAs nationwide.¹¹ In the state data, county appearances were simply aggregated within state borders. In the media market data, appearances were aggregated within DMA boundaries.

Some descriptive statistics provide a sense of these data. Between September 1 and election day, Nader made a total of 83 DMA campaign stops, or 73 state appearances. New York and Washington appear to be especially prone to Nader visits, despite the attempt to exclude travel not intended for public appearances.¹² Beyond those cities, Nader spent most time in the San Francisco–Oakland–San Jose, Boston–Manchester, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Cleveland–Akron markets. Gore, in contrast, made some 99 DMA campaign appearances and 71 state appearances during the same period. His slightly greater frequency of travel is probably the result of Nader's limited campaign budget.¹³ Gore's appearances range more widely and seem to center more often on states where the outcome was most in doubt. The Gore campaign spent the greatest number of days in the Philadelphia, Tampa–St. Petersburg, Wilkes-Barre–Scranton, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh markets. Gore and Nader appearances correlate at a mere .50 at the state level and .32 at the media market level, well below the .85 correlation reported between Bush and Gore state appearances (Althaus et al., 2002; see also Strömberg, 2002). This suggests that

Gore and Nader, unlike Bush and Gore, were employing somewhat different strategies.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The key independent variables need to allow for clear tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2. Hypothesis 1—the 5% hypothesis—suggests that candidate appearances are a function of the number of votes available. If Nader was following this strategy, his appearances would be in locales with large populations to maximize his chances of meeting FEC guidelines for party funding. I use the voting age population (VAP; in millions of people) as reported by the Census Bureau to capture this effect.

Hypothesis 2—the spoiler hypothesis—expects that Nader would instead be sensitive to the closeness of the major-party contest. Closeness is measured using the two-party vote shares of Bush and Gore, specifically as $100 - [\text{Bush}\% - \text{Gore}\%]$. The measure takes on the value of 100 if the two candidates are tied at 50-50 and the value of 0 if one candidate wins all of the votes. In practice, the measure averages 80.2 at the DMA level and 84.8 at the state level. If Hypothesis 2 is correct, closeness should be positively related to the frequency of campaign appearances.¹⁴

If Hypothesis 3 is correct, that Nader pursued 5% and the spoiler role simultaneously, the population and closeness variables would both be significant and positive. If Hypothesis 4 is correct, neither variable should be related to campaign appearances.¹⁵

An array of control variables is added to the model to avoid the spurious effects caused by factors not accounted for in Hypotheses 1 and 2. Even if Hypothesis 1 and/or Hypothesis 2 were supported, it is quite possible that Nader also responded to other forces in determining his schedule.

I employ several demographic variables as controls. First, I include a dummy variable for the South due to its special role in the Electoral College and American politics generally (Black & Black, 1992). Though Nader seems to have largely avoided the region, Florida, Tennessee, and other southern states were important battlegrounds in 2000. I also include population density (people per square mile), the percentage White, and the percentage college graduates. Exit polls

find Nader's vote to be related to all of these measures, so the model should allow for an explicit targeting of such groups (Burden, 2003). Bartels (1985, footnote 7) employed a similar control in his analysis of Jimmy Carter's appearances in the 1976 campaign. The seven states where Nader was not on the ballot are omitted from this analysis.

As a foil for the Nader results, similar models are run using Gore campaign appearance data. In these models, all of the demographic variables—South, population density, percentage White, and percentage college graduates—are retained. The only change is the addition of the Democratic presidential vote in 1996. The assumption is that Gore would mine the same votes that he and Clinton used to win the presidency 4 years earlier. We might expect Gore to expend some effort in recapturing the Clinton-Gore vote that helped elect his party to office in the last election.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

My approach is to estimate multivariate models of campaign appearances that test the main hypotheses of interest while controlling for other influences. There is a multitude of models available for count data such as these. The Poisson model is attractive because of its simplicity but it assumes that mean and variance of the dependent variable are equal. The data might not fit a Poisson process if the variance is significantly smaller (underdispersion) or larger (overdispersion) than the mean. The raw appearance data indicate overdispersion because the dependent variable contains many more zeros than would be expected by a Poisson distribution. I thus use the negative binomial model to avoid unreasonable restrictions on the data.

I begin discussion of the results with the state-level regression found in Table 1. The main column of interest contains the Nader results, with the Gore column serving as a reality check from the nearest major-party campaign. The key explanatory variables of interest are closeness of the Bush-Gore contest in the state (Hypothesis 1) and the size of the VAP (Hypothesis 2). As noted above, the Gore and Nader model specifications are identical except where they include prior measures of state support for their parties.

TABLE 1
Determinants of Gore and Nader State Appearances

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>Nader</i>		<i>Gore</i>	
Closeness of Bush-Gore race	.025	(.017)	.122**	(.021)
Voting age population	.151**	(.026)	.106**	(.030)
South	-.493	(.370)	-.557	(.327)
Population density	.001**	(.0001)	.001**	(.0002)
% White	.030*	(.014)	.015	(.010)
% college graduates	.060*	(.028)	-.119**	(.035)
Clinton share of vote in 1996			.085*	(.041)
Constant	-6.71**	(1.87)	-13.69**	(3.37)
ln(α)	-17.07**	(0.79)	-3.86	(3.74)
<i>N</i>	44		51	
Log likelihood	-52.41		-61.43	

NOTE: Boldface = main variables of interest. Model is a negative binomial regression with robust standard errors. Dependent variable is the number of candidate appearances in a state between 9/1/2000 and 11/6/2000. Voting age population is measured in millions of people. Nader model limited to states where he was on the ballot.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

The results strongly suggest that Nader's travel decisions were not a product of competitiveness but were highly sensitive to the size of the voting population. Thus, the spoiler hypothesis is suspect ($p = .146$), whereas the 5% hypothesis is strongly supported ($p < .001$). This basic finding—supporting Hypothesis 1 but not supporting Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, or Hypothesis 4—holds up even when other factors are controlled.

The control variables yield interesting findings of their own. Nader was more likely to visit more areas with higher levels of education (perhaps college towns such as Madison, Wisconsin, where his rallies were especially successful). The fact that population density is a significant predictor in its own right further suggests that both candidates were pursuing vote maximization. For a given area, reaching more people is better than reaching fewer, thus making density a reasonable dimension to target.

These findings contrast rather neatly with Nader's closest major-party opponent, Al Gore. Most important, Gore, unlike Nader, is highly sensitive to the closeness of the race ($p < .001$). Not only does this result help demonstrate the validity of the closeness measure, but it provides some evidence that Gore was allocating his appearances in

an instrumental fashion. Although Nader made many appearances in lopsided states such as California (nine appearances to Gore's two), Gore focused more directly on battleground states such as Missouri (seven appearances to Nader's one). Gore was also more likely to visit states with fewer college graduates and where the Clinton-Gore ticket polled well in 1996.

Although the analysis of state campaign appearances clearly points to the 5% strategy, it is not definitive. The main limitation is the level of analysis: An appearance within a state is often planned to expose the candidate to voters in neighboring states as well. Campaigns are acutely aware of the importance of media markets and strategically design travel schedules to take full advantage. As Herr (2002) notes, "Using states as the units of analysis presents some problems in that the effects of campaign appearances are probably localized and not statewide" (p. 908). Though he contends that the problem does nothing more than increase the standard errors in a regression model, it is possible that the parameters could be biased as well, because the noise introduced by the aggregation of appearances within state borders is not random. One might expect, for example, that vote-rich states such as New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania occupy parts of many interstate media markets, whereas less populous states such as Vermont and Wyoming have borders that more closely correspond to market boundaries. This concern is a key reason why researchers have become increasingly focused on media markets as the level of analysis (Althaus et al., 2002; Hagen et al., 2002).

Creating an appropriate data set for analyzing DMAs is more challenging. As noted above, all of the independent variables were initially collected for some 3,000 counties and then aggregated to the DMA level. Thus, closeness in the Boston-Manchester media market is computed as the weighted average of closeness in two states that compose it, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. This calibrated approach also means that previously dichotomous variables will sometimes become continuous (see Hagen et al., 2002). The number of appearances is larger in the market data set than the state data set because multiple appearances in the same state are now disaggregated to the DMA. Although the state analysis would equate a trip to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with a speech in Philadelphia, the market model

TABLE 2
Determinants of Gore and Nader Media Market Appearances

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>Nader</i>		<i>Gore</i>	
Closeness of Bush-Gore race	.041	(.024)	.145**	(.024)
Voting age population	.069**	(.010)	.099*	(.039)
South	-1.08**	(.378)	-.040	(.409)
Population density & White	-.00005	(.00003)	.0002	(.0002)
% college graduates	.182**	(.027)	.061	(.043)
Clinton share of vote in 1996			.068**	(.025)
Constant	-8.25**	(2.29)	-20.47**	(3.05)
ln(α)	-15.43**	(2.34)	0.307	(0.314)
<i>N</i>	146		197	
Log likelihood	-89.71		-134.12	

NOTE: Boldface = main variables of interest. Model is a negative binomial regression with robust standard errors. Dependent variable is the number of candidate appearances in a designated market area (DMA) between 9/1/2000 and 11/6/2000. Alaskan DMAs are omitted. Voting age population is measured in millions of people. Nader model limited to states where he was on the ballot.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

acknowledges that that two are actually focused on rather different audiences.

The results of the market analysis appear in Table 2. Despite the improvements that a market-based analysis offers, the key substantive results remain the same. Even with the larger sample, the Nader-as-spoiler hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) does not quite reach standard levels of significance, whereas the 5% hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) is again strongly backed with statistical evidence. We thus again reject the hypothesis that both motivations mattered (Hypothesis 3) and the alternative conjecture (Hypothesis 4) that he responded to neither goal.

Control variables turn out to matter in similar though not identical ways as in the state analysis. Nader appearances are still positively related to the presence of college graduates but now seem unrelated to population density and race. The South is significantly less likely to see a Nader campaign stop. The increased importance of the South variable in the DMA analysis might be due to a larger sample size whereas the changes in other variables might be artifacts of a kind of

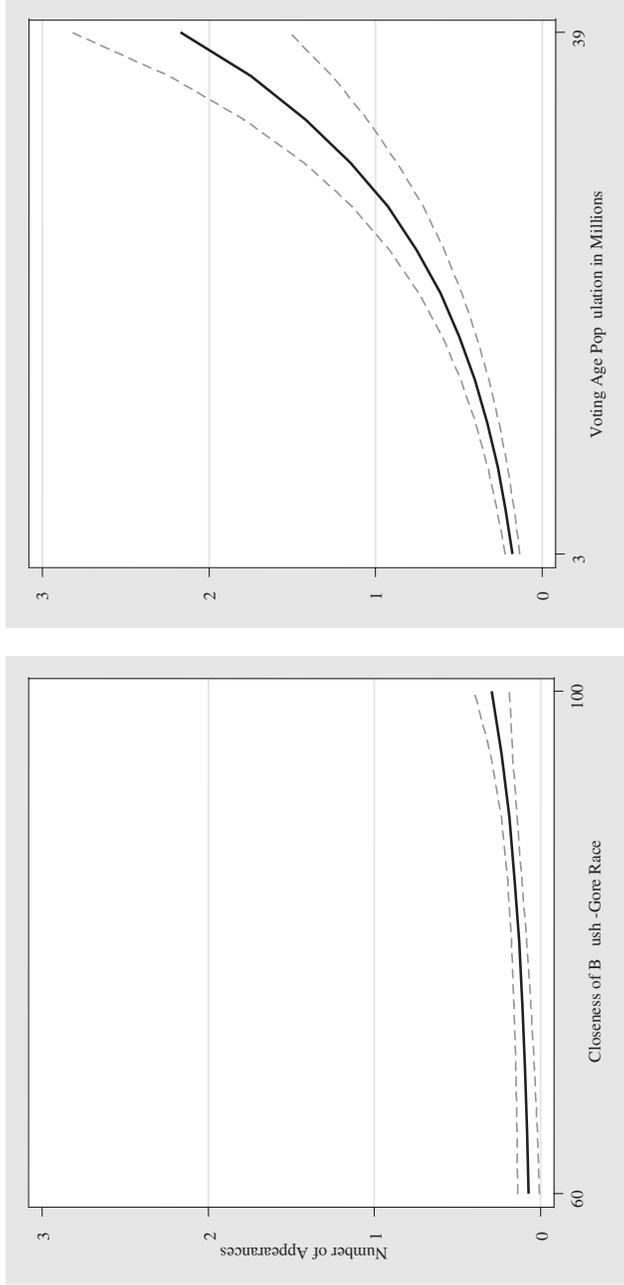


Figure 1: Effects of Closeness and Voting Population on Nader Appearances

ecological fallacy at the state level, both making the media market models more credible. These controls are fortunately only of tangential interest here to increase one's confidence in the main variables.

As before, the Gore strategy contrasts with Nader's in that competitiveness is a key explanatory factor. Closeness remains a strongly positive predictor of a Gore appearance whereas population size remains significant as well. The number of votes available matters for both, seemingly more for Gore. He was also likely to revisit locations where Clinton ran strongly in 1996.

To illustrate these differences in a more concrete fashion, Figure 1 shows graphically how Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 fared. The left panel illustrates the relationship between closeness and candidate appearances. The right panel focuses on the effect of the VAP. In both cases, the predicted values are plotted along the vertical axis using the models in Table 2 and methods outlined by King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000). The solid lines indicate the predicted number of candidate appearances holding all other independent variables at their means. Dotted lines represent the standard error of the prediction.

The left panel shows that Nader's campaign travel plans were developed with no real regard for the closeness of the race. Indeed, the coefficient in Table 2 it is based on was statistically insignificant. In contrast, the right panel shows how responsive Nader's travel decisions were to the size of the voting population. It rises quite dramatically from left to right as the (weighted) state population rises.

In short, regardless of whether the analysis is centered on states as distinct electoral units or media markets as important strategic targets, the event-count analysis of campaign appearances has produced unambiguous results. Contrary to Democrats' complaints, Nader was not intentionally trying to throw the election. A spoiler strategy would have caused him to focus disproportionately on the most competitive states and markets with the hopes of being a key player in the outcome. There is no evidence that his appearances responded to closeness. He did, apparently, pursue voter support, however, in a quest to receive 5% of the popular vote. In both models, Nader appearances were strongly responsive to the size of the VAP.¹⁶

A parallel analysis of the Gore strategy provides a useful backdrop for these findings. Gore's appearances were also affected by the size of the voting population. But his travel was also quite sensitive to the

competitiveness of the Bush-Gore contest. Gore virtually ignored locales such as Virginia, where the major-party campaign was a foregone conclusion, while repeatedly stopping in battleground states such as Michigan and Florida. There are a few decisions—especially the limited appearances in New Hampshire and West Virginia—that the Gore camp in hindsight might regret, but the statistical evidence strongly supports the contention that Gores travel schedule was designed to maximize his chance of winning the presidency. Indeed, the two campaign officials with whom I consulted stated quite directly that Gore was out to win and Nader was out to get 5% of the vote, tasks in which both candidates failed. Strömberg (2002) likewise finds that Gore (and Bush) were even more rationally strategic in their pursuit of victory than were presidential candidates in 1988, 1992, or 1996. Because the Gore campaign was primarily thinking about victory, and electoral votes are aggregated within states, one might expect states to be more important targets than media markets. And because Nader was only interested in winning votes, regardless of the states they came from, one might expect DMAs to be a more meaningful unit of analysis. It is all the more striking, then, that the candidates' strategies remain consistent regardless of which level is considered.

METHODOLOGICAL DIGRESSIONS

Some mention of the robustness of the results is in order. Because of the novel nature of the data, several experiments were conducted to validate the results above. Running the analysis at both the state and DMA levels is one substantively important way to triangulate on the problem. But methodological concerns require other kinds of sensitivity analysis as well. Four possibilities come to mind.

First, the *timing* of candidate appearances was considered. Assuming that later appearances matter more than earlier appearances (Herr, 2002), I weighted each appearance by its proximity to the election. Second, special consideration was given to appearances in New York City and Washington, D.C. Both cities are attractive because of the great concentrations of reporters and convenience of fundraisers. To be conservative, the analyses were repeated after eliminating New York and Washington appearances entirely. Third, it has been pointed

out that the VAP is a biased estimate of the number of voters actually able to participate in an election (McDonald, 2002). I reran the models in Table 1 using McDonald's state-specific measure of the Voting Eligible Population (VEP), designed to correct the VAP for aliens, citizens living overseas, ineligible felons, and the like.¹⁷ In none of these experiments did the substantive results change in meaningful ways.

TELEVISION ADVERTISING

Finally, it is natural to question whether the results presented here extend to campaign decisions beyond candidate appearances. In addition to time, which is available in virtually equal amounts to all candidates, presidential campaigns also depend heavily on money. And much money is invested in television advertising. The Brennan Center for Justice estimates that Bush and Gore ads during the general election alone cost \$163 million.¹⁸ I am particularly interested in whether the Gore and Nader ad buys work in tandem with their personal appearances or follow an alternative strategy. Bartels (1985) suggests that both are instrumental rather than ornamental activities and thus largely coincide. Goldstein and Freedman (2002) find that Bush and Gore spots, like their appearances, tended to be concentrated in the same media markets, though with important differences. Althaus et al. (2002) likewise find a powerful correlation between Bush and Gore advertising ($r = .95$) but weaker relationships between appearances and advertising of a single candidate ($r = .3$).

To probe advertising strategies, I obtained data on the specific markets in which Gore and Nader ads were broadcast in the 75 largest DMAs during the 2000 general election (Goldstein, Franz, & Ridout, 2002).¹⁹ These data, originally collected by the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG) are drawn from satellite transmissions to record the exact time, place, and content of every television advertisement. The data reveal that Nader's four television spots together aired only 200 times during the campaign. Gore ads—run by the campaign itself, the Democratic National Committee, or a combination of the two—aired more than 100,000 times. Nader's ads ran only during the

TABLE 3
Nader and Gore Television Advertisements

	<i>States</i>		<i>Designated Market Areas</i>	
	<i>Nader Ads</i>	<i>Gore Ads</i>	<i>Nader Ads</i>	<i>Gore Ads</i>
Closeness	.187	.443**	.077	.368**
Voting age population	.373*	.254*	.214**	.183**
<i>N</i>	51	51	153	204

NOTE: Entries are correlation coefficients. Nader model limited to states where he was on the ballot.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

last 10 days of the campaign in 12 media markets whereas Gore broadcast throughout the campaign in dozens of markets.

The data are unfortunately too thin to conduct multivariate analysis, but simple bivariate relationships are suggestive. Table 3 reports the correlations between the number of Nader and Gore ads run in a state or market and the measures of closeness and population used above. Regardless of which level of analysis is used, the relationships perfectly mirror those in the candidate appearances. The only *insignificant* correlations are in the upper left cell; Gore's ad buys were sensitive to both closeness and vote maximization whereas Nader responded only to the latter. It seems that television advertising and candidate appearances by the Nader campaign were both aimed at the same goal.

DISCUSSION

The analysis offered here leads to two larger conclusions. First, it shows that debates among political elites can, at least sometimes, be settled by social scientific research. In a political world where talk is often cheap, determining the effects of candidate *behavior* provides firm evidence about the actual causes of campaign actions. In this case, the war of words between competing parties has gone unresolved for 4 years and begged for a systematic analysis.

Nader's strategy was driven heavily by population and electoral votes. Though Democrats and other left-of-center elites might stay

angry at Nader for costing them the White House, the argument that Nader was purposely campaigning in competitive states to distract Gore from Bush appears to have no backing in the data. It is certainly possible that Nader's mere appearance on the ballot in some 44 states allowed Bush to win an election that Gore would have taken otherwise, but this would be an *unintentional* effect, or at least one that resulted from entrance into the race on February 21, 2000, rather than campaign strategy in the months that followed. The travel schedule and television ad buys show no evidence of a *purposeful* attempt to throw the election. Although it is true that a more benevolent (and somewhat more strategic) Nader might have actually focused his efforts on *less* competitive markets, neither his travel schedule nor his limited television advertisement decisions point to an *active* attempt to target the Democrats. The spoiler thesis is apparently the result of journalists looking to sensationalize the campaign, Democrats looking for a scapegoat, or a simple misreading of the campaign record.

It was theoretically possible for Nader to pursue both long-term party building and short-term leverage with careful use of media markets (Martin, 2002). But his campaign was either not interested in the latter or felt unable to tackle both strategies due to limited resources. This reality contrasts sharply with Ross Perot's self-financed effort in 1992. He aired mostly national infomercials and other advertisements on national television and visited only 16 states and just a few media markets personally. A fledgling party that depends on government matching funds must necessarily adopt a different strategy than one that is more easily financed by a wealthy individual.

Second, the results confirm perhaps what has been known for a long time: Major- and minor-party candidates are running fundamentally different campaigns. Beyond plain differences in professionalism and resources, it seems that major-party nominees and minor-party crusaders tend to be playing different games. Examining the 1980 vote, West (1983) found that independent John Anderson was more likely than Carter and Reagan to target general audiences rather than narrow constituencies. This is partly due to differences in funding, inclusion in debates, and ballot access, but it cannot be explained by inequalities in campaign resources alone.

In fact, Gore and Nader made a surprisingly similar *number* of personal campaign appearances in the final stretch of the general elec-

tion, though the *locations* were somewhat different. Bush and Gore, in contrast, had quite similar travel and advertising strategies (Althaus et al., 2002; Hagen et al., 2002; Strmberg, 2002). Compared to Nader, Gore ran many more ads, relied on a larger group of professional consultants, received far more media attention, and had more surrogates campaigning on his behalf around the nation. Major parties clearly benefit from advantages in funding and other resources. It is plausible that Nader's strategy would have been different had the Greens possessed more resources or had he been included in the presidential debates, as Ross Perot had been in 1992.

Both Gore and Nader had the same number of hours available to them to campaign, making candidate appearances a common metric for comparing their strategies. Nader chose to use his days in the fall of 2000 maximizing votes, whereas Gore focused more on outright victory. Unfortunately for Nader, his strategy to earn 5% of the vote failed. It is an ironic quirk of an unusual election that Ralph Nader succeeded in the goal he was not pursuing and failed at the one he cared about the most.

Finally, a note about Nader's 2004 campaign is required. The purpose and strategy of the 2004 effort was rather different. Having initially rejected running as the Green candidate, Nader courted and won the endorsement of the Reform Party, which has a more conservative history. The widely shared interpretation of the 2000 election motivated the Democrats to fight Nader's ballot-access efforts in the summer of 2004 while conservative Republicans sometimes helped him gather signatures and even made donations to his campaign. The rhetoric of party building and aiming for 5% of the popular vote also vanished, ensuring that the results presented here do not generalize Nader's 2004 presidential campaign.

NOTES

1. The Presidential Election Campaign Fund documentation defines a minor party as that earning between 5% and 25% of the popular vote and major party as that earning more than 25% of the vote. A minor party can be reimbursed for qualified expenses at the end of the campaign. The amount is a proportion of what the major parties receive based on the relative percentage of the vote earned by the minor party in the current election. In 2000, for example, the Reform Party

was eligible for some \$12.6 million in reimbursements whereas the Democrats and Republicans each received \$67.6 million.

2. Nader did personally visit every state during the campaign, but this effort was complete by the time the Green Party nominating convention was held in late June. The analysis will show that he focused on a much smaller group of states later in the campaign.

3. Polls have historically done a poorer job of predicting minor-party votes than major-party votes (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1996). The Nader campaign did not expect the polls to estimate their support levels accurately (personal communication, Theresa Amato, Nader national campaign manager, September 24, 2002).

4. Only two states—Maine and Nebraska—do not have winner-take-all rules in place. In practice, however, their proportional systems do not differ from winner-take-all. In 2000, Maine gave all four of its votes to Gore, and Nebraska gave all five of its votes to Bush.

5. Not all battleground states are equal. If Hypothesis 2 were true, one might expect Nader to target the biggest competitive states (e.g., Florida) because of their greater importance. But he might also target the smallest competitive states (e.g., New Hampshire) because it is easier to affect the outcome there. A corollary of Hypothesis 1 might be that a large-population state with an uncompetitive major-party race would be most likely to see a Nader visit. All of these ideas suggest an interaction effect between Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. As the analysis shows, it is empirically impossible to include an interaction term in the models due to severe multicollinearity between it and the main effects.

6. In a similar vein, journalist (and minor-party sympathizer) Micah Sifry (2002) suggests, "If Nader really wanted to try to deny Gore any chance of election, then the best evidence for that incendiary charge would be found in his campaign itinerary" (p. 207).

7. Earlier work on resource allocation in presidential campaigns used candidate appearances as dependent variables, but in a more limited way. Debates at the time centered mainly on the functional form between a state's electoral votes and number of candidate appearances there (Bartels, 1985; Brams & Davis, 1974; Colantoni, Levesque, & Ordeshook, 1975). West (1983) analyzed the constituent audiences that candidates sought with their appearances, and Bartels (1985, Footnote 7) reports that his Electoral College analysis holds after controlling for other explanatory variables. The only other work I could find analyzing the travel decisions of a minor-party candidate is West's (1983) study that includes independent John Anderson's travel in the 1980 campaign.

8. Nader's running mate, Winona LaDuke, was pregnant during the campaign and spent most of her time on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. Hagen, Johnston, and Jamieson (2002) find no added benefit of including vice presidential candidates in their study of campaign effects, anyway.

9. In Louisiana, parishes rather than counties are used, as the two are analogous. Alaska is unfortunately removed from the media market analysis (but not the state analysis) because electoral reporting districts, counties, and media markets do not match precisely. Washington, D.C. is treated as both a county and state, though the Washington-Hagerstown, Maryland media market is larger than the District, a fact reflected in the market analysis.

10. According to Nielsen Market Research, the company responsible for determining designated market areas (DMAs), only 5 counties out of more than 3,000 spanned more than one media market. In each case, I put the county into the largest market (defined by number of television households). Note that like states, DMAs are mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

11. Actually, the DMA sample is slightly smaller than 210. First, the 2 Alaska DMAs are removed for reasons cited above. Second, 1 DMA that covered only a partial county in California was omitted, as that county was placed in the larger of the 2 DMAs. Finally, a few cases are miss-

ing data on an independent variable, resulting in a sample size of 197 observations. In the Nader models, DMAs are omitted where Nader was not on the ballot.

12. I attempt to correct for this potential problem further, though the change has no effect on the substantive results.

13. Nader raised \$5.1 million in private donations for the general election, whereas Bush and Gore each had more than \$75 million to spend, much of it from public matching funds (Corrado, 2002). Nader (2002) reports flying commercially on low-cost carrier Southwest Airlines and staying in the homes of supporters, whereas Gore flew on Air Force Two accompanied by a media plane and large entourage.

14. Using election returns to operationalize campaign closeness is not ideal because such a measure is endogenous. I considered using the trial-heat polls instead as a more exogenous indicator. Though these data are not available at the level of media markets, I was able to locate a poll in each state near the end of the campaign. The correlation between these two measures of closeness is a strong .88. Moreover, replicating the state analysis using the polls finds no meaningful differences. As a result, I retain the vote-based measure for comparability between the DMA and state models.

15. As Note 5 reported, though the 5% and spoiler variables might be significant independent predictors, one could interpret the joint hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) as an interaction term. I experimented with interactions between voting age population (VAP) and closeness (and a similar interaction between state electoral votes and closeness) to more clearly identify the battleground states. These variables are not tenable because of extreme multicollinearity problems. The correlation between electoral votes and the interaction of electoral votes and closeness is a near perfect 0.99. VAP is also correlated with electoral votes (and the interactions) at better than 0.99. Thus, the test of Hypothesis 3 is the significance of the Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 variables entered separately.

16. Nader argued that he was not stealing votes from Gore or any other candidate. A central goal of the campaign was to mobilize many of the 100 million nonvoters in the United States (Nader, 2002). The evidence suggests that Nader did not have much success in turning out potential abstainers for his cause; the slight rise in overall turnout from 1996 to 2000 was more an indirect effect due to the closeness of the major-party race (Burden, 2003). But it is plausible that Nader would target areas with the lowest turnout in 1996. A 1996 turnout variable is insignificant when included in the models.

17. The 2000 state voting eligible population (VEP) data are taken from Michael McDonald's Web site, http://elections.gmu.edu/VAP_VEP.html/.

18. See http://www.brennancenter.org/cmagpdf/cmag2000_wrapup.pdg.pdf/.

19. These materials are based on work supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts under a grant to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University and a subsequent subcontract to the Department of Political Science at The University of Wisconsin–Madison. Though the data only cover 75 of the 210 media markets, this represents roughly 80% of the population.

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