Here Come the Third Parties:
Gaining Access to the Presidential Ballot

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Third party presidential candidates are successfully fighting through obstacles to gain ballot access in the great majority of states. Three third party candidates are on three-dozen or more state ballots, with candidates from two other minor parties also winning access in a dozen or more states.

Because Ralph Nader's 2000 campaign lured voters from Al Gore who normally support Democratic candidates, most attention has focused on the implication of Nader's access for the Democratic nominee, John Kerry. Although Nader continues to pose a threat to Kerry, the Libertarian and Constitution Party candidates are on more state ballots than is Nader and may draw votes from the Republican Party nominee, President George W. Bush. The clearest threat to Bush may be in half a dozen critical races where Nader failed to gain ballot access but the Libertarian and Constitution candidates did (including major battleground states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Missouri).

Fighting onto the Ballot

Although political commentators remain preoccupied with Ralph Nader's difficulty in placing his name on the presidential ballot, two other third party candidates have gained access in more states.

The Libertarian candidate, Michael Badnarik, is on the largest number of state ballots (49 including the District of Columbia). The Constitution Party candidate, Michael Peroutka, is on the ballot in 36 states. Nader is on the ballot in 34 states plus the District of Columbia. The candidates for the Green Party (David Cobb) and the Socialist Workers Party (Róger Calero) are on the ballots in 28 and 14 states respectively.

Third Party Presidential Election Ballot Access Summary (updated 10/28/04)

Candidate	Number of States on Ballot
Libertarian (Michael Badnarik)	49
Constitution (Michael Peroutka)	36
Independent (Ralph Nader)	35
Green Party (David Cobb)	28
Socialist Workers Party (Róger Calero / James Harris)[1]	14

1 Róger Calero is the Socialist Workers Party presidential nominee. However, his name is not allowed to appear on several state ballots because he was born in Nicaragua. James Harris is listed as the nominee in those states as his 'stand in' (including in Iowa and Wisconsin).

Note: 'States' includes Washington, D.C.

Upper Midwestern voters will have a range of third party candidates to consider. Nader as well as the Libertarian and Constitution Party candidates are on the ballots in Minnesota, South Dakota, and Iowa. Nader and the Libertarian candidates are also on the ballot in Wisconsin. The presidential nominees for the Green Party and Socialist Workers Party are on the ballots in all of these states with the exception of South Dakota.

Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa are all likely to be close races. The presence of a wide range of third party candidates in these states may be a factor in their outcome. The potential kingmaker role of third parties is particularly possible in the Upper Midwest as demonstrated by the election of Jesse Ventura in the 1998 gubernatorial election in Minnesota.

Third Party Presidential Election Ballot Access In the Upper Midwest

Candidate	IA	MN	SD	WI
Libertarian (Michael Badnarik)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Constitution (Michael Peroutka)	YES	YES	YES	NO
Independent (Ralph Nader)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Green Party (David Cobb)	YES	YES	NO	YES
Socialist Workers Party (Róger Calero / James Harris)	YES	YES	NO	YES

Nader's Threat to Kerry

Third party candidates are positioned to influence the outcome of presidential contests in nearly two-dozen states. According to polls and recent elections, the philosophical orientations of the different third party candidates pose distinct challenges for Bush and Kerry.

Nader poses the biggest challenge to Kerry in 14 competitive states where he is on the ballot: Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Polls have shown these to be some of the closest contests. Although Nader is drawing support from a small number of Republicans, his strongest support is from Democrats and undecided voters who appear inclined to cast an anti-incumbent vote but will express it by voting for Nader rather than Kerry.

Third Party Threats to Bush

Bush may face his own third party problem in more than a half dozen closely contested states including Arizona, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Bush faces a potentially lopsided challenge from third parties. The Libertarian Party has won ballot access in each of these seven states, the Constitution Party in five of them. By contrast, Nader is not on the ballot in any of these states.

Election returns from previous elections and the Humphrey Institute's survey of battleground states found that the Libertarian Party and Constitution Party draw Republican voters, contributing to the defeat of GOP candidates in 2002.