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PICK A HORSE, DITCH THE GOAT:

THE RISE OF THE SPOILER FRAME IN A BIPARTISAN ELECTION DISCOURSE

by

Barbara A.R. Dahlgren

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

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at

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May 2021

ABSTRACT

PICK A HORSE, DITCH THE GOAT:
THE RISE OF THE SPOILER FRAME IN A BIPARTISAN ELECTION DISCOURSE

by
Barbara A.R. Dahlgren

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021
Under the Supervision of Professor Michael Z. Newman

Increasingly, public opinion shows Republican and Democratic presidential candidates are some of the most onerous in recorded history, and Americans want to see third-party options alongside them. Half of Americans use televised news to stay informed, but the two-party horserace leaves little room for the multiple candidates on the ballot. This analysis explores the prominent horserace discourse of the 2012 and 2016 televised coverage of the U.S. presidential races and the "spoiler effect" frame within. Following Jill Stein's Green Party candidacy through the months surrounding each election, the coverage advanced her portrayal from "nonfactor" to "spoiler" despite the consistency in her campaign platform. During both elections, journalists delegitimized Stein and other third-party candidates with subframes the author calls "undeserved," "the scarlet Nader," and the "laughingstock." These frames are evidence of the intensely partisan two-party political system and corresponding media; their use narrows the election discourse.

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To Dan,

to Rita,

and to the troublemakers who show up uninvited.

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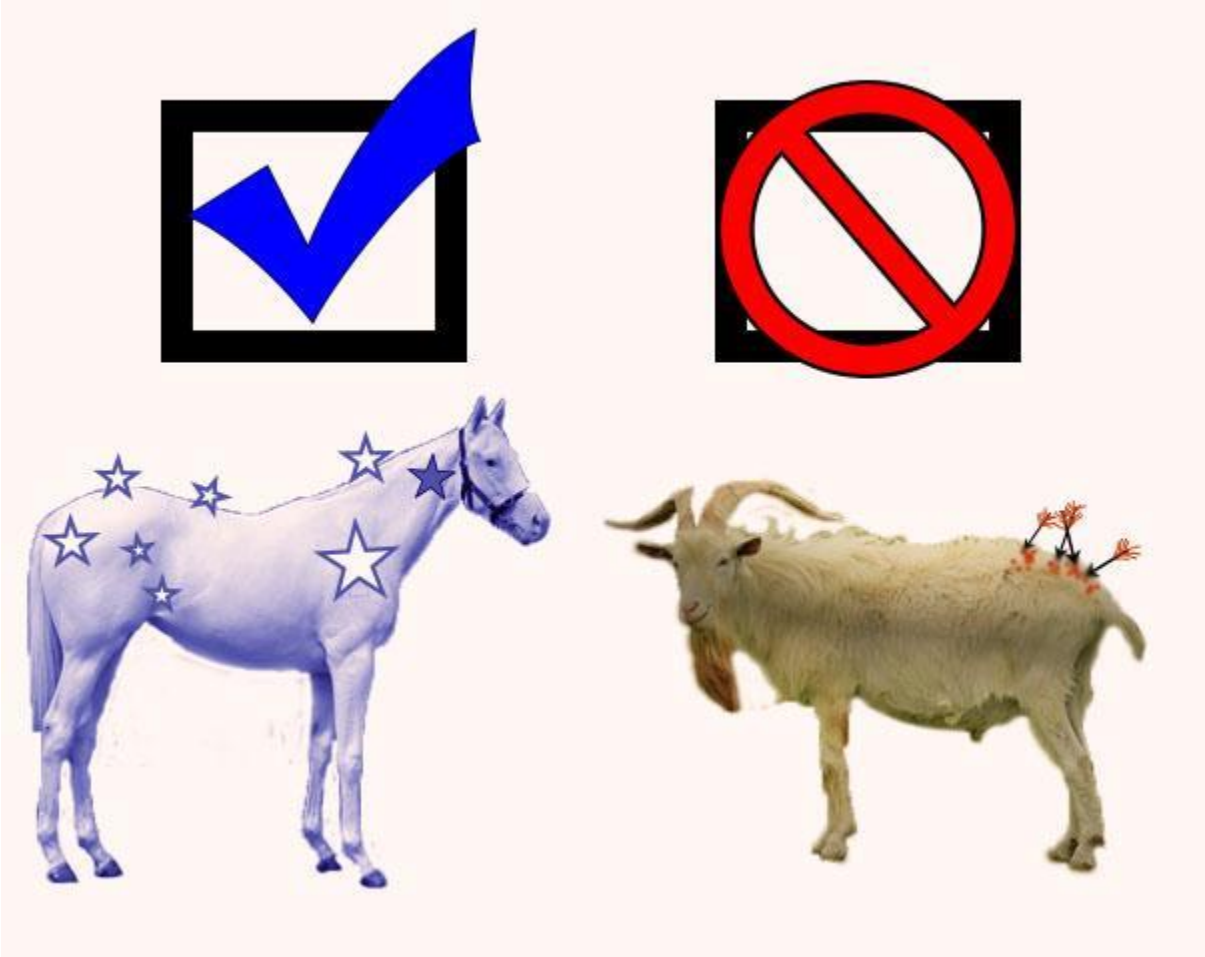

Pick A Horse, Ditch the Goat:
The Rise of the Spoiler Frame in a Bipartisan Election Discourse

Chapter 1

The News Plays a Role in Deliberative Democracy, and Third Parties are Excluded

Introduction

The year 2000 was a new leaf for many Americans beginning a new year, a new century and a new millennium. Like many other present moments, this one was the end of history; the end of the struggle. The United States' free market capitalism had won, and Russian communism had been defeated. The American people were enjoying a relative peace time compared to its cold war era peppered with other wars and foreign interventions. Even as wages stagnated, manufacturing was outsourced and automated, and the political trend was to deregulate corporations, a large middle class enjoyed an abundance of affordable telecommunication gadgets. Surely, the Clinton era was not a happy time for every American, compared to the frightening uncertainty of 2021, it now seems simple and benign. The millennium was simultaneously exciting and ominous. Either computers wouldn't be able to handle the appropriate number of zeroes and collapse the economy,[1] or, America's digitization and globalization would easily bring about techno-utopian world peace. The new era did not usher in a period where democracy was widely accepted as the main organizing principle of all society. Arguably, the world became less democratic as the first year ended with the U.S. Supreme Court deciding who would be president after an irregular vote requiring a recount in Florida. This election was a turning point to solidify the political culture of (at least) the past two decades. It

1. Y2K fear prompted many to stock up on canned goods and other supplies in case society broke down over a computational mistake.

contained elements which have remained in the electoral landscape like proprietary voting machines, neoliberal candidates with strong ties to the Clinton administration, and Republican candidates who have won without a majority of the popular vote. America has held two elections in this span in which the electoral college vote did not reflect the popular vote. While the will of the people is always challenged with systemic voter suppression, gerrymandering, and other undemocratic policies, Americans are noticeably more upset where the popular vote and electoral college vote differ. Large, non-violent protests occurred after Bush and Trump were elected because they were viewed as illegitimate.

The 2000 election was a notable event on the bipartisan political landscape, particularly due to the prominence of third-party candidates, and especially the national debut of the Green Party's first major presidential run.[2] Unfortunately, the discourse surrounding the Green Party often has little to do with the party's platform or candidates, and far more to do with the traumatic election by which President Bush won the White House. The Green Party's role in "spoiling" the election for Al Gore (D) has been the most prominent topical frame in the popular discourse of its candidates. A political spoiler, explained in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "one who mars the chance of victory for an opponent, while not being a potential winner," which is often applied to U.S. politics and sports.[3] In recent cultural memory, Ross Perot (1996, Reform Party), Ralph Nader (2000, Green Party; 2004, Independent), and Jill Stein (2012, 2016 Green Party) have all been called spoilers in presidential elections. Political science researchers and media figures have incessantly analyzed what they believe to be a mathematical fact: that

2. He also ran in 1996, but the Green Party had two factions with different relationships to Nader at the time. Also, Clinton was a popular incumbent president.

3. "spoiler, n.". OED Online. September 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/view/Entry/187269?redirectedFrom=spoiler& (accessed September 10, 2019).

third-party candidates spoil elections. Though nobody can say for certain whether elections would have yielded a different outcome in the alternate reality where "spoiler" did not run, the news media's finger pointing begins before the elections are over. I hope to create a picture of the ways mainstream televised news cast Jill Stein, along with other presidential candidates who are neither Democrats nor Republicans, as "spoilers," and examine the implications of treating candidates in this manner. I compare the coverage surrounding Stein's two bids for president to show how the "spoiler" discourse has evolved or is used differently in various political atmospheres.

This narrative has become so common that the Green Party has dedicated a lot of time and energy preparing for the questions and attacks to candidates at many levels. My personal relationship to the "spoiler" issue is informed by my experience as a co-chair for the Wisconsin Green Party with a decade of experience in grassroots organizing to help candidates gain ballot access and voice the Green Party's messages to citizens unlikely to hear much about them on the nightly news. In my experience, the "spoiler" term has been used in a variety of other contexts besides news reporting on third party presidential candidates. For example, in 2018, as I petitioned for Green gubernatorial candidate, Dr. Michael White, many who turned down my petition said they did not want Greens to have ballot access because "a vote for the Green Party is a vote for Trump." The accusation was quite curious because President Trump's platform and policies are worlds apart from the Green Party's "People, planet, and peace over profit" ideology, and he was not a candidate (two years into his presidency). Yet, through the discourse of the "spoiler effect," people aren't necessarily thinking about policy in their praise for one candidate or scorn for others. In fact, the "spoiler" likely holds more similar policy positions to the party that is allegedly being spoiled. The underlying accusation towards the spoiler is that he

is similar enough to "trick" the voters into "wasting" their votes on a candidate who cannot win.

"Spoiler" narratives are discouraging to voters who experience social pressure against voting for third parties. In addition, running for office at any level in a third-party (besides often experiencing extra barriers to ballot access) also face similar social pressures of public shaming. Americans often think of the right to vote as the ultimate democratic expression. However, if running for office is not allowed to certain groups, the role of voting is then less functional without the ability to choose an option one might see as representative of themselves. This disconnect between the kinds of representatives elected and the representative population has been an issue at least as old as the expansion of voting rights to citizens without property. This idea has some deeply troubling democratic implications. First, it reinforces the two-party system, which is problematic as their representatives may have little variance on certain policies, while disallowing people from outside this system to draw attention to any criticism of them. For example, quite a few legislative "victories" that are championed as "bi-partisan" efforts have very low approval from most Americans. This is particularly glaring in several examples of continual war expenditures and allowances through the National Defense Authorization Act.

The overwhelming majority of Republicans and Democrats continue to pour billions into the military, despite the objections from protesters, votes for advisory questions against war, and resolutions from local governments in opposition. In December of 2019, the Congress passed the NDAA shortly after the release of the Afghanistan papers.[4] This was not long after the 2015 audit of the Department of Defense "could offer no opinion because it had hundreds of

4. The Afghanistan Papers outlined how the war has been a failure from the beginning and a massive waste of taxpayer dollars as military officers in the field were charged with spending millions of dollars they didn't need and couldn't spend fast enough.

'accounting silos too illogical to penetrate.'"[5] The 2019 NDAA included new appropriations for Donald Trump's "Space Force program," a 738 billion dollar budget (yet another increase), among other provisions unpopular with the American people (like one which got rid of taxes on health insurance companies). Yet, in the Democratically controlled House, it passed 377- 48, and in the Republican controlled Senate, 68-8. From a Wisconsinite's perspective,[6] prominent Democrats like Gwen Moore and Tammy Baldwin continued their support for the appropriations as they had done in previous years, and prominent Republicans like Ron Johnson and Jim Sensenbrenner were in agreement. Whether Wisconsinites chose Democrats or Republicans in this case (assuming the election was competitive), neither party represented an option for a decrease in war spending. During the passage of the NDAA, America's media focus was the Trump impeachment hearings, so there was little room for media acknowledgment and public discussion on this multi-billion dollar military fund. It is doubtful this would have been a notable topic for the media without the impeachment hearings due to several years of normalization of the foreign wars which have become old news. The issue is not politically advantageous for most government officials to highlight either. However, since the U.S. wars on Iraq and Afghanistan began, many prominent Greens have been marchers against the war, and quite outspoken. Ending the foreign wars and cutting military spending was a prominent plank of the Stein Presidential Campaigns of 2012 and 2016. The Libertarian Party has also been outspoken about ending the wars as well.[7]

5. Taibbi, Matt. "The Pentagon's Bottomless Money Pit." *Rolling Stone.* March 17, 2019.

6. Wisconsin is a "swing state," meaning that it is seen as particularly important in presidential races because it sometimes supports the Republican nominee and other times supports the Democrat unlike Illinois which usually supports the Democrat or Georgia, which usually supports the Republican nominee.

7. "Defense Authorization Act funds war crimes, increases debt, and enriches contractors." Libertarian Party Website. August 14, 2018. https://www.lp.org/defense-authorization-act-funds-war-crimes-increases-debt-enriches-contractors/

Third political parties have championed a lot of very popular proposals in the last few election cycles which are still of national importance. For example, Gary Johnson (Libertarian) and many Green candidates have supported legalizing marijuana. Americans have been showing state-by-state that they agree in their affirmative votes on referenda, which have decriminalized and legalized the substance in multiple states. Americans are concerned about environmental issues like clean water and containing wildfires, which are both related to climate change. Yet the continuous government response has been pitiful under both Republican and Democratic administrations, at best. Yet, neither the news media, nor the big political actors can escape without at least paying lip service to The Green New Deal, which was originally adapted by Howie Hawkins (2020 Green Party presidential candidate) and Jill Stein from similar plans by European Greens. Likewise, Green policies are popular in the national conversation on student loan forgiveness (Jill Stein presented her plan to do this in 2012), and healthcare.[8] Without Green candidates' insistence on these progressive policies, it is doubtful they would have even been made known in the nation's discourse.

Nearly every presidential election and down-ballot race over the years have had more than two participants in them, and therefore had the key ingredient in a spoiler discourse. Yet, not all multi-candidate races have been framed in this way. Depending on the political climate, the public's level of discontent, and the state of the prominent news media, the "spoiler effect" likely contains deeper meanings within our social structures about who is allowed to participate in deliberative democracy. Also, more thoroughly understanding this discourse in U.S. elections is not only essential to our participation in a mediated democracy, but also helps us see the failures in our system that we ought to solve. Media studies researchers have already solidified

8. Bernie Sanders' (D) has made Medicare For All his tentpole issue in his 2016 and 2020 campaigns for president, but Jill Stein previously introduced a similar plan in 2012.

many of the challenges in journalism which could be detrimental to the information system citizens rely on to make choices. I hope to build on the wealth of research showing the biases involved in journalistic norms and their tendencies to frame elections as a horse-race. Additionally, I recognize the influence of politicians and massive consultant-centered campaigns are another problematic component which mutually benefit journalists holding up the norm. Quite a bit has been written about the challenges third parties face from many angles, including media. While Ross Perot and Ralph Nader have been subjects in historical and political science scholarship, an exploration of Jill Stein's candidacy, would add important context within the political landscape which Green Party candidates continue to inhabit.

Background

Journalism is often referred to as the "fourth estate" of the U.S. government because of its informational value to help citizens to be informed for their democratic duties. However, scholars who study the field have shown for decades a variety of problems with this model. While most Americans have some clear understanding about the partisan biases of networks like Fox (pro-Republican) and MSNBC (pro-Democrat), Bennett (2007) explained four general news biases. These biases are not about partisanship, but a by-product of how news operates in its routines and holds audience attention. "Four characteristics of news that stand out as reasons that public information in the United States does not always advance the cause of democracy: personalization, dramatization, fragmentation and authority-disorder bias."[9] Bennett goes on to explain how these biases feed into each other, for example, how news that is personalized is often fragmented from overarching narratives of systemic problems. The following section

9. Bennett, W. Lance (2012). "News Stories: Four Information Biases That Matter." Chap. in *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 9th ed., Boston, MA: Longman. P. 45.

expands on how the news operates as a part of a larger group of media businesses within our political informational system.

The agenda-setting function of the media has long been discussed as a strong effect media has on its audience, though it is not as strong as the "hypodermic needle" effects models of the early 20th century.[10] McCombs and Shaw (1972) were the pioneers of agenda-setting research, as they found strong correlations between topical media coverage surrounding a political campaign and the surveys of their subjects. They concluded that the media may not be responsible for how people think, but it can affect what they think about.[11] Iyenagar and Kinder (1987) found voters usually did not change their minds about candidates due to media coverage. Political scientists use the "minimal effects model" to illustrate this phenomenon showing that voters are only affected minimally.[12] Iyengar and Simon's (1993) work has further explained that agenda-setting is a one-way function of media in which the media has a greater effect on the public than the public has on the media. This concept has been studied across a wide variety of media, and that viewers may be affected without exposure that is repetitive or widespread. One example Iyengar and Simon used in the late 1980s was the public's opinion on drug crimes. Importance of the topic shifted from 70% to 5% in two years. Though the "war on drugs continued, the news had moved on, and so did the attention of the public."[13] The agenda of this

10. See more on the direct effect model in Shearon A. Lowery and Melvin L. DeFleur, "The Payne Fund Studies: The Effects of Movies on Children" in Milestones in Mass Communication Research.

11. McCombs Maxwell E. and Donald L. Shaw "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer, 1972), P.183.

12. Iyengar, Shanto, and Donald R. Kinder. (1987). "News that matters: Agenda-setting and priming in a television age." *News that Matters: Agenda-Setting and Priming in a Television Age.*

13. Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon. "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion: a study of agenda-setting, priming, and framing." Communication Research, Vol. 20 No. 3. Sage Publications: June 1993. P.366-367.

research is that of the presidential election which regularly highlights the races of two legacy party candidates, the Democrats and the Republicans.

Iyengar and Simon among other political communications researchers have shown another effect, priming, is an extension of agenda-setting. Priming happens when media pair politicians to certain news items making the politicians more or less popular depending on developments in the topic.[14] For example, if a politician is the "healthcare is a human right" politician, then their popularity may grow as news media focuses on the failures of private health insurance. The "private health insurance failures" idea may be an underlying frame within stories about sick people getting dropped from private healthcare, or huge profits made by notoriously stingy companies. Gabriel Lenz's (2009) work disagreed with the effect of priming, as he explained voters merely change their minds as they learn new information.[15] Although the priming hypothesis has remained relevant. For example, Ensley and Bucy (2010) showed voters were primed to think of partisan gubernatorial candidate stances in terms of the well-known party stance on issues like gay marriage. Even when the candidate distanced himself from the party's position, voters were still more likely to vote for the candidate whose party held the preferred stance. [16]

Pablo et al. (2019) challenged the Iyengar's notion that agenda-setting goes one-way between politicians, the media, and the public in their study of tweets during 2013-2014. They accepted the agenda-setting effect of journalism and controlled for the effect in their choice of the 35 news networks and their tweets. However, they found that at least through Twitter,

14. Iyengar and Simon, P. 368.

15. Lenz, Gabriel S. "Learning and Opinion Change, Not Priming: Reconsidering the Priming Hypothesis." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 53, No. 4, October 2009, Pp. 821–837.

16. Ensley, Michael J, and Erik P Bucy. 2010. "Politics Research on Gubernatorial Elections," 142–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X09337190.

politicians tend to be followers of others' agendas. Additionally, they agreed with Iyenyar and Simon's 1993 findings when they did not see any evidence legislators or the media responded to issues raised by the public at large.[17] This study is limited in its capacity to find the beginning of the feedback loop between opinion polls, politician spin, and news spin. It takes reliable information sources for the public to make decisions on which topics are important, and the news, as a major source of this information has already been shown to lead the conversation in this way. For example, during the period Pablo et al. examined, Wikileaks released a version of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which President Obama had intended to pass. Though this was an explosive story, the researchers may not have had enough to analyze within the feedback loop of the news, politicians, and the public. The circles of influence, the role of agenda-setters, and awareness of priming effects will all be identified in the discourse of this research. I will not assume the agenda-setting effect only goes in one direction, but that the people as a whole have far less influence on the discourse than the news or politicians (which do influence each other).

The concept of news loops was also explored by Richard Grusin in his 2010 book, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11*. Grusin explained that certain kinds of relationships to objects can set up feedback loops like the repetitive motion of scrolling on a touchscreen phone or playing hands of poker.[18] Grusin also showed that history is not always presented in a linear fashion, and he cited Walter Benjamin's theory that the future can be

17. Barberá, Pablo, Andreu Casas, Jonathan Nagler, Patrick J. Egan, Richard Bonneau, John T. Jost, and Joshua A. Tucker. 2019. "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data." American Political Science Review 113 (4): 883–901. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000352.

18. Richard Grusin. (2010). *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11.* Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY. P.100.

viewed as “predictive” or “immanent to the present” so that the past is therefore not necessarily static either. [19] He claimed:

> Premediating the future entails remediating the past. Premediation is actively engaged in the process of reconstructing history, particularly the history of 9/11, in its incessant remediation of the future. Thus the historical event of 9/11 continues to live and make itself felt in the present as an event that both overshadows other recent historical events and that continue to justify and make possible certain governmental and medial practices of securitization.[20]

The implications of premediation, according to Grusin, are that within the mesh of technologies he calls the "human-media assemblage” are useful in continuing feedback loops between mediated spaces, and played back to us in a variety of versions. Particularly in the case he chose this feedback loop leads to “securitization,” which continuously expands the event to accommodate continuous justification for extreme and pre-emptive measures.[21] Even ten years beyond the 9/11 tragedy, American wars which had nothing to do with the attack were still considered appropriate and justifiable to “keep America safe.” I find the similarity between the premediation loop concept and the affective loop in political campaign information from polling, journalists, and politicians important in an examination of the “spoiler effect” discourse. I am concerned with which topics end up in the loop and have anticipated outcomes. Similar to Grusin’s conclusion that the ramping-up of terror through coverage also allowed the violence of pre-emptive strikes, I hypothesize journalists preemptively justify possible losses through horserace narratives like the “spoiler effect.”[22]

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19. Grusin, 8.

20. Grusin, 10.

21. Grusin, 122.

22. Chapter 3, “A History Lesson in Forecasting and Archiving Allegations” discusses the feedback loops of polling and news are an example of premediation.

These narratives are frames, like "the spoiler effect," which create a focus for a topic as well as a border of exclusion in order to invite a particular view. Within a bipartisan elections discourse, the horse-race frame boxes in things like poll numbers, fundraising and campaign strategies while leaving out most of the issue-based discussions not relevant to the quantitative matchup between two candidates. Frames may even contain frames which can provide context or reasoning to the logic of an overarching frame in a discourse. Topics may be amplified or muted through the frames politicians, public relations workers, pollsters, and journalists utilize. A wealth of studies have been accomplished on political news framing, many of them from the perspective of politicians as framers. For example, Lance Bennett (2012) found the majority of news messages began with the analysis of government officials in which the "message development" was the role of a public official, not a reporter.[23] Since these (often partisan) actors have already packaged the narrative, the agenda was functionally set by the government officials. Besides their role in choosing the salient topics for public discussion, politicians package the information into frames compatible with the news in which the topic at hand is discussed through a specific angle.[24] Also, Bennett found that news media are complicit in helping politicians orchestrate pseudo-events, which tend to portray political figures in a positive light no matter the story.[25] Their visual representations tend to invoke positive emotions in readers especially because many audience members are merely scanning the pictures.[26] Wagner (2010), in his

23. Lance Bennett. "How Politicians Make the News." Chapter 4. in *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 9th ed., Boston, MA: Longman, 2012. P.118-119.

24. Ibid, P. 121 includes discussion of how public relations help political clients to communicate effectively.

25. Ibid, 135.

26. Ibid, 135.

chapter on presidential and congressional framing of issues outside of known partisan stances utilizes a quantitative approach to determine the party trends candidates put in motion.[27] Jennifer Stromer-Galley has shown through numerous integrative studies how campaigns conduct public relations work in the same manner that elected officials do in order to frame the debate. They have analyzed the kinds of messages manufactured by political campaigns and how they have impacted public opinion. They utilized integrated methods of audience studies through polling and discourse analysis of various campaign products like advertisements and websites. Stromer-Galley argues:

> The mass-media environment of the second half of the twentieth century shaped in specific ways the communication produced by candidates to reach ordinary citizens. Speeches were increasingly tailored to be carried broadly to the public through the filtered and framed messages of journalists in carefully constructed sound bites meant to be replayed on the nightly news or quoted in a news article... Advertisements on TV and radio were crafted to produce maximum effect in shaping the attitudes of voters.[28]

With the rise of political campaign savvy about journalistic tendencies and advertising, the information system of the public's media has become more of a terrarium than a landscape. In other words, messages have been carefully framed to portray a sample of the Earthly experience in a box, without much context for the larger discourses surrounding this processed campaign content. While campaigning used to be a production of the party bosses, friends and family, the rise of consultant-centered campaigns and the digital age of twenty-four hour news have impacted each other and the public information system.

Stromer-Galley analyzed the websites and other digital communications of presidential campaigns from 1996-2012. She was interested in the campaigns of Democrats and Republicans

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27. Michael W. Wagner. (2010) "Great Communicators? The Influence of Presidential and Congressional Issue Framing on Party Identification." in *Winning With Words: The Origins and Impact of Political Framing.* Ed. Brian F. Schaffner and Patrick J. Sellers. Routledge, New York. P. 138.

28. Stromer-Galley, Jennifer. *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age.* Oxford: New York City. 2014. P. 11.

and included primary campaigns as well. Her work includes multiple subsections per election including political climate, fundraising techniques, the "state of the internet," and the images of the candidates. She argues electioneering during the internet age is primarily about control, and that campaigns do not have much faith in the electorate to freely choose for themselves. "Underlying attitudes typical campaigns held toward citizens is they are to be managed and controlled, persuaded but not empowered except in the most limited sense."[29] Like other researchers following a trend of disillusionment with the idea the internet would promote democracy, Stromer-Galley focuses on the various ways political marketing and fundraising have adapted to using big data techniques with each campaign more advanced than the last.

The news media often covers the latest strategies of candidates and their developments rather than a deep discussion of policy and political records. Hahn and Iyengar (2002) argue that audiences demand this type of journalism and relate it to sports.[30] Much like the sports section, this kind of coverage holds the interest of both political experts and novices with its novelty.[31] Therefore, strategy aspects like fundraising are doubly important to campaigns and may have a massive effect on the amount of coverage they garner. Stromer-Galley illustrates this when she mentions how Obama had little name recognition, but due to his fundraising power in 2008 he was able to excite the media. The horse-race coverage of his rapidly growing campaign dollars gave him the name recognition he needed to rival the former First Lady. Aspects of campaigns like donation numbers and opinion polls, which are constantly reported as novel and impressive factors of campaigns, are what Russell Neuman et al. have called "horse-race politics" and relate

29. Stromer-Galley P.21-22.

30. Iyengar, Shanto, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn. 2004. "Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horserace Sells." Journal of Politics 66 (1): P. 6. The authors asked rhetorically, "why not frame elections as contests between political athletes?"

31. Iyengar, Hahn, and Norpoth, P. 25.

to an overarching conflict frame (utilized by journalists in elections and other discourses) or "two sides of the issue."[32] Rinke, Mark, Wessler, Lob, and Weinmann have called it the "strategic game frame."[33] This frame contains elements of winning versus losing, predictions of outcomes, and commentary on figures or events that bolster candidates.[34] Simply, the familiar elements of this kind of coverage contain stories about polling, fundraising, and other pre-election measures to predict a candidate's success. Rinke et al.'s work measured qualities of deliberative democracy in election coverage with a strategic game frame, and found the news discourse to be less civilized, with fewer opportunities for speakers to give reasons, and contained a high likelihood for incivility. They concluded, like many who have studied the horse race qualitatively, that this frame adds little to the public's understanding of candidate issue positions, policy, previous votes, and other aspects of election discourse which would increase the public's ability to deliberate on the candidates. The authors describe this problem as "restrict (ed) access to the public discourse," meaning the public is not privy to much "reason-giving" or substance.[35]

Toff (2016) calls this kind of reporting on public opinion "partisan scorekeeping," and it made up the majority of polling he found. Toff interviewed several journalists about their use of polls, and they explained that the "horse race numbers" they utilize are a favorite because the journalists are "junkies" for them, and they receive much more attention than other kinds of

32. Neuman, R. W., Just, M. R., Crigler, A. N. (1992). Common knowledge. News and the construction of political meaning. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P. 64.

33. Rinke, Eike Mark, Hartmut Wessler, Charlotte Löb, and Carina Weinmann. "Deliberative qualities of generic news frames: Assessing the democratic value of strategic game and contestation framing in election campaign coverage." P. 5.

34. Rinke et Al, P. 12.

35. Ibid, P.22-23.

polling uses. Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight (now an ABC product) is a paragon for this kind of inside-baseball political reporting. The sports-and-politics statistician made a name for himself crunching the scores and making predictions. The infotainment product is an ESPN aesthetic grafted to hard political news. Toff contrasts this with "public opinion storytelling" in which the press would use polling to relay what kinds of issues and positions people are thinking about.[36] Toff's results continue to show the pattern of horse race coverage established by a variety of other researchers I previously mentioned. His work also suggests that the numbers which are believed to be some of the most objective reporting actually give the public a less accurate idea of citizen attitudes while enriching a sort of team spirit about how chosen candidates are winning or losing.

As entertainment, reporting the sport of an election seems like good television. Even so, an information system with the power to set the agenda for viewers of the democratic process they are charged with participating in is consequential to society. Because this news informs a democratic duty, I consulted Barisione's (2012) framing model. Mauro Barisione wanted to measure deliberative democracy as it occurred in real situations. Deliberative democracy is a theoretical model for decision-making to create a legitimate democratic system. The concept includes the deliberation through discourse among a group of citizens or representatives in order to come to decisions by majority rule. Barisione was concerned with the framing of democracy itself, and in doing so, listed the elements within a sample which might be important to deciphering the frames and subframes. Some items Barisione suggests for analysis are setting, sponsors, promoting organizations, the physical location, the representatives, experts, and

36. Toff, Benjamin. (2016). *The Blind Scorekeepers: Journalism, Polling, and the Battle to Define Public Opinion in American Politics.* University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dissertation. (122-122).

stakeholders involved, approaches, arguments, facts, and the written structure of documents.[37] Underlying frames may then be found in the context of metaphors, words, catch phrases, and emotion.[38] Analyzing these elements can reveal frameworks and the purposes they are serving in order to assess the relationship between the media sample and deliberative democracy.[39] Once the meta-frames of the work are taken into account, the secondary frames can be gleaned from the cause and effect assigned to them, as well as "a diagnosis, a responsibility, a moral evaluation, and a prognosis."[40] In my study, I evaluate the "spoiler effect" like a frame, which calls for action from the viewer. I followed Barisione's method of identifying secondary frames, or what I call subframes which scaffold the "spoiler effect" in a bipartisan media environment.

Americans would think it mundane to note that third-party candidates tend to get little news attention at all. However, the party system, and American third parties have been studied from a variety of angles including their interaction with the press. Bernard Tamas (2018) argues that even in an upswing of third-party activity, Americans are likely not voting for third parties due to the insurmountable material disparities between major and minor parties. Though Tamas' arguments about the position of third-parties in American politics can be reductive at times, his identification of cycles of failure due to candidates' lack of resources is certainly a major contributor.[41] He goes on to explain that a lack of resources draws in fewer professional

37. Barisione, Mauro (2012) "Framing a Deliberation. Deliberative Democracy and the Challenge of Framing Processes," Journal of Public Deliberation: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 2. P. 8.

38. Barisione, P. 9-12.

39. Barisione, Mauro. (2012). "Framing a Deliberative Democracy and the Challenge of Framing Processes." *Journal of Public Deliberation*.

40. Barisione, P. 5.

41. Tamas, Bernard. (2018). *The Demise and Rebirth of American Third Parties: Poised for a Political Revival?* Routledge, New York. See discussion in chapters 3 and 7 which argue respectively ballot access laws have little to do with the decline of third parties while he sees polarization as a main reason for the rise of third parties. Both discussions argue in a one-dimensional manner about ballot access and polarization. For example, the

candidates and consultants, pays for fewer ads, garners little media attention, and earns little of the vote only to guarantee similar issues through the next election cycle.[42] For an American public that would like to have third-party options due to their frustration with the two-party system and their dissociation with it, the media framing of these parties and their candidates can be an important part of their recognition of those candidates. Their ability to create a positive feedback cycle opposite to Tamas' explanation of the usually negative feedback cycle third parties endure is contingent on their knowledge of the candidates.

A number of histories have been composed about prominent third-party candidates, and include their relationships to the press. In its infancy, Green Party congressional candidates in New Mexico garnered "double digit" percentages of the vote in three elections, which earned them a "spoiler" label in the 1990s.[43] Donald Green wrote about a few of the most successful third-party candidates in recent history, both referred to as "spoilers:" Ross Perot, a tech billionaire and Naval veteran with lifelong achievements in POW issues who founded the Reform Party, and Ralph Nader, a professional consumer advocate most famous for his book *Unsafe At Any Speed*. These men both started their presidential candidacies in the 1990s as independents. Perot worked to create the right-leaning Reform Party, which had massive energy

studies only include the number of signatures one needs to obtain ballot access, which misses a lot of the most insidious rules. In some states, it is the complex legalese surrounding the process of signature gathering which may be worse than the number of signatures alone. Also, the rules around challenges to the petition may force the burden of proof onto petitioners rather than challengers. Tamas also relies on one-dimensional studies to decide how party polarization operates to ignite third parties. While he talks about stark disagreements between the major parties, he misses that third parties are often running on issues of bipartisan agreement.

42. Tamas, Bernard. (2018). *The Demise and Rebirth of American Third Parties: Poised for a Political Revival?* Routledge, New York. 147-148.

43. Sifry, Micah L. (2002). *Spoiling for a Fight: Third-Party Politics in America.* Routledge, New York. P.153.

that fizzled before the millennium.[44] Nader allied with the Green Party, but ultimately never joined. Nader's 1996 run was endorsed by various state parties of the federation of Green Parties. His 2000 run was endorsed by the Denver convention of the Association of Green Parties, which existed apart from the USA Greens at the time. The USA Greens also endorsed, but Nader refused their help, which led to a lot of confusion.[45] Nader also ran for president in 2004 and 2008, which likely accounted for a split in activism and energy for other Green candidates David Cobb and Cynthia McKinney who received 119,000 and 161,000 votes respectively after Nader had garnered over 2 million in the notorious millennial election.[46] While Cobb and McKinney were barely covered by media at the time, Perot and Nader became infamous through press narratives. Both responses to third parties are normal. According to "Political Parties in the Media: Where Elephants and Donkeys are Pigs," the press have criticized all parties' raucous convention behavior even though the contention makes for more exciting stories.[47] News media tend to represent these large organizations with talking heads, and did so for 78% of news stories in 1996.[48] These issues are exacerbated when journalists reported on outsiders like the Reform Party. While the major parties tend to get a similar amount of coverage, the 1996 Reform Party

44. Green, Donald J. (2010). *Third-Party Matters: Politics, Presidents, and Third Parties in American History.* Praeger: Santa Barbara, CA. 117-151.

45. Green, 131-132.

46. Gillespie, J. David. (2012). *Challengers to Duopoly: Why Third Parties Matter in American Two-Party Politics.* University of South Carolina Press. P.55.

47. Kerbel, Matthew Robert. (2002). "Political Parties in the Media: Where Elephants and Donkeys are Pigs." In *The Parties Respond: Changes in American Parties and Campaigns.* 4th Ed. L. Sandy Maisel. Westview Press. P.204-205.

48. Kerbel, 194.

convention was covered as a spectacle of infighting. In 2000, the Reform Party and Green Party conventions had miniscule amounts of coverage compared to the major parties.[49]

In *Spoiling for A Fight* Micah Sifry argues, "Despite their current and historic contributions to the democratic process, third-party candidates are generally treated as nuts, nuisances, or nonpersons."[50] He illustrates this with several examples of journalists like Tom Brokaw and Robert Scheer's comments regarding Jesse Ventura's gubernatorial win. The latter said, "The people of Minnesota should be spanked for letting this happen," both insulting Ventura and Minnesotans. Sifry also notes Nader received harsh treatment from the *New York Times*, particularly as the paper called his campaign a "self-indulgent exercise." Whether the authors of these political histories are more conservative or liberal in their attitudes about the candidates, they tend to characterize the media as an enemy of third-party figures. In this study, I identify the kind of judgments mainstream broadcasters make through their framing of Jill Stein's candidacy among others. While the political climate, the news business, and candidates have changed a lot in 20 years, I examine whether the news frames varied much.

Methods

I examined a selection of televised news transcripts in the Nexis Uni archive surrounding the "spoiler" discourse of the 2012 and 2016 elections. The purpose of examining these transcripts was to identify the various and specific ways Jill Stein was branded a "spoiler" by the televised news, and how that discourse was developed throughout the two election cycles. I chose the discourse of televised news because of its broad appeal and pervasive nature in the

49. Kerbel, 196.

50. Sifry, Micah L. (2002). *Spoiling for a Fight: Third-Party Politics in America.* Routledge, New York. P.283.

American public. Though the religious watchers of televised news make up nearly half of the news consuming population,[51] others also gain exposure on buses, in train stations, through their social media feeds, at their workplaces, and more. Therefore, most Americans, whether or not they are purposeful in their news consumption, are likely to see many of the messages coming from the mainstream. I examined a lot of objects for this work. Most important were the transcripts which I call "the coverage." I was also fortunate to find the video versions of many important episodes on the Internet Archive to assist in heated discussions with a lot of "crosstalk" markings on the original transcripts. These objects made possible the task of dissecting emotion, emphasis, graphics, and heated exchanges. I was also able to interview major Green Party players in the story including Ben Manski, Jill Stein's 2012 campaign manager; Cheri Honkala, Jill Stein's 2012 running mate; and Jill Stein. These interviews, their archived campaign website, and a myriad of articles and videos provided much of the context which was often sparsely provided in the news coverage. For example, while Fox very lightly covered Stein's debate night arrest, Stein and Honkala were able to provide more context of the event which was largely ignored by the press. Other articles helped to construct a historical timeline in which the coverage occurred to provide a historical context for the media objects I examined.

In my search for this news discourse, I limited the results to those transcripts from CNN, Fox, MSNBC, ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS.[52] This grouping provided both highly partisan news

51. Elisa Shearer. Dec. 10, 2018. "Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source." *Fact Tank.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers -in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/

52. NBC and CBS transcripts were particularly scarce, and did not mention the relevant subject matter in both election years. According to Sifry in *Spoiling for a Fight*, 284, ABC had a third party beat reporting assignment in 2001. This could show a legacy of ABC news generally covering third parties more as my search results suggest.

and that which is, at least, less overtly so. It also ensured perspectives from cable, for-profit network news, and the not-for-profit of public broadcasting, even as accessibility to all of these sources became easier through the internet. I did not distinguish between hard news programs and news-like punditry because the public learns about politics from both, and do not necessarily distinguish the differences as they watch. I further narrowed the search by date to show entries between October 1 and November 30th of 2012 and 2016 when people were likely most paying attention to the election and its results.[53] Particularly CNN and Fox had multiple times the number of results for 2016 transcripts than 2012. Whether this increase was due to Nexis Uni's capacity, the coverage itself, or a combination of the two, this analysis would be endless if I mentioned every transcript possible from 2016. Therefore, I began analysis with transcripts that contained in-depth discussions of the election and candidates, rather than ones that mentioned the election polls without any substantive discussion. I often organized the resulting discourse around the events which were prominent in the Stein campaign. Not all entries were predicted to characterize Stein as a "spoiler," but there are also a myriad of other terms like "electability," "wasted vote" "stolen/taken votes" "protest vote," etc. which was why I searched for any mention of Stein as well as the term "spoiler" in an elections context. This base group of transcripts, which meet the criteria described, are the "election coverage." Within that coverage, I utilized the following questions to guide my research in search of the "spoiler effect" frame and how it is used to frame candidates like Stein. How were third-party candidates framed compared to legacy party candidates in the race? Was the coverage characteristic of the "horse-race" or

53. I mentioned a few occasions in which I searched outside my parameters in this thesis. For example, I searched Obama and Clinton respectively to confirm that Nexis Uni had archived news from outlets which appeared blank during my searches. I also broadened the search across the year just to get a sense of the size and shape of the coverage at other points in the year. For an integrated timeline of my sample broadcasts in 2012 as well as the Stein campaign events and print media the campaign was aware of according to the Stein 2012 website see Appendix B.

"game frames" as Iyengar, Neuman, Rinke et. al. and others identified and did sports analogies play a role in this framing? How has the spoiler frame changed or stayed the same between 2012 and 2016?

Chapter Breakdown

This chapter has covered an array of concepts in news and political media studies like agenda-setting, priming, framing, and in particular, horse race or game frames especially as third parties are framed. These are all concepts foundational to my characterization of the "spoiler effect" as a news frame and its relationship to bipartisanship in the media. I have outlined the news media as an industry in concert with other media industries. Public relations and advertising affect the public discourse through the news and polling industries, which set the public's agenda according to its own standards and biases. Finally, because my study is a continuation of knowledge about the case of the United States Green Party, and the "spoiler" label it seemingly cannot remove from its image, this chapter has outlined other studies about political spoilers, especially those referring to Green candidates over the young political party's existence.

Chapter 2 explores the televised news coverage surrounding Jill Stein's 2012 run for president. During this election context, a moderately popular incumbent Democratic president ran against his Republican opponent, a venture capitalist who had held a statewide office. I consider the coverage surrounding events of the Stein campaign as well as the characterizations of other third party candidates. While the coverage was scant, Stein and the Green Party experienced a lot of success at building the Green Party and became more recognizable and more popular in the public view. I contextualize this growth in the public's discontent of the legacy parties and their lackluster leadership on continuing wars, the 2008 financial crisis, and the threat

of global warming. The horse-race frame in the 2012 coverage's most prominent treatment of election news I discuss the conflation of "bipartisan" to mean "nonpartisan." I discuss bipartisanism as a norm in the coverage. In the same way the Commission on Presidential Debates is called "nonpartisan" while its bipartisan leadership bars third party participants from their debates, the news also treated Republican and Democratic candidates with neutrality while discussing third parties in negative terms. The broadcasters' treatment of Stein was mostly insignificant, but Gary Johnson and Virgil Goode took on the "spoiler" label where Stein was included as an afterthought. In this chapter I discuss three major subframes of the spoiler effect that I call "undeserving," "the scarlet Nader," and "the laughingstock" which describe ways the media covers certain candidates to delegitimize them.

Chapter 3 compares and contrasts the 2012 case of "spoiler effect" framing with that of the coverage in 2016. This election season was no less than a circus, and the result was a rejection of some news norms which created even more hyperpartisan and dramatic coverage. After eight years of a Democratic presidency, American politics were more polarized, and Obama had not been nearly as progressive as he had advertised. On one occasion the government completely ground to a halt. A stew of American frustration, political viciousness, and apathetic resignation conjured a far different campaigning climate in the contested election. Even in the media and public discourse of the United States in 2020, Americans felt the sting of that election. I outline the major shifts in both Republican and Democratic parties to produce two of the most disliked presidential candidates in recorded history.[54] While this circumstance

54. Gustavo Lopez and Antonio Flores. "Dislike of candidates of campaign issues was most common reason for not voting in 2016. Pew Research Center Fact Tank. June 1, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/01/dislike-of-candidates-or-campaign-issues-was-most-common-reason-for-not-voting-in-2016/ Roper Center. "Two Thumbs Down: 2016 Presidential Candidates' Favorability. May 27, 2016. https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/blog/two-thumbs-down-2016-presidential-candidates-favorability.

may have been a dream come true for third parties looking to make inroads to power and grow their ranks, the situation was more complicated. A good percentage of voters who chose either of the two candidates did so in a negative voting strategy.[55] The accusations against Stein were more numerous and harsher in this coverage as a result of the bitter rivalries of 2016. I recognize how the spoiler subframes returned from 2012 to delegitimize third party candidates in 2016. In addition, I found pundits often suggested a higher level of malice in the activities of Stein and her counterparts. I discuss how premediation took place as these pundits relied heavily on polling and premediation to predict each third party candidate as a spoiler including their post-election analyses.

55. People voted for the candidate they chose based more on the candidate they hated rather than their approval of their candidate. A.W. Geiger. September 2, 2016. "For many voters it's not which presidential candidate they're for, but which they're against." Fact Tank. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/02/for-many-voters-its-not-which-presidential-candidate-theyre-for-but-which-theyre-against/

Chapter 2

2012's Cable and Partisan News:

Barely Covering What the "Mainstream Media Doesn't Want you to Know"

Introduction

While the 2012 presidential election was notable for Green Party expansion, it was not the most exciting or memorable as far as the American public was generally concerned. Voter turnout was down from 2008.[56] It wasn't really a "first" except for being the first re-election of an African American president. There were no famous irregularities or upsets from the average audience perspective and it was predictable in many respects. Like most incumbent elections, the incumbent did well despite a less exciting and ambitious agenda than before. His Republican challenger could be characterized as the typical pro-business, revolving-door politician that was neither new nor particularly exciting to a mostly working-class conservative base. Unlike the previous years, the president would not have a partisan clean sweep of the other federal offices, but this too is not uncommon.[57] While Obama inherited a political mess which may have required more than a single term to straighten out, many first-term policy ideas were forgotten by the second-term president.[58] While President Obama did declare an end to the Iraq War, and

56. "2012 Election Turnout Dips Below 2008 and 2004 Levels: Number Of Eligible Voters Increases By Eight Million, Five Million Fewer Votes Cast." Bipartisan Policy Center. November 8, 2012. https://bipartisanpolicy.org/press-release/2012-election-turnout-dips-below-2008-and-2004-levels-number-eligible/

57. The Republicans became a majority in both houses of Congress in 2010 and remained that way throughout Obama's second term.

58. The Bush administration had begun wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in which he had declared "mission accomplished" while continuing the conflicts. Near the end of Bush's second term, the worst economic crash since 1929 occurred after years of deregulated markets based on risky mortgage-backed securities. The solution was a package of massive bailouts to Wall Street, which were mostly carried through during the Obama administration. The Bush era was synonymous with 9/11 fears which afforded the administration its cuts to civil liberties using the new Department of Homeland Security and the controversial Patriot Act legislation, still in effect as of this writing. Bush also eroded access to abortion and expanded oil and gas industry access to public lands. Obama was an

enacted DACA and the ACA, many of his promises were left in his desk drawer.[59] For example, his 2008 rhetoric about building a renewable energy system and moving away from fossil fuels was starkly different from his 2012 DNC nomination speech. While he didn't mention his previous goal to focus on renewables, Obama took pride in his administration's opening of millions of acres of American land for U.S. oil exploration and the prospect of opening more. Fracking for natural gas and "clean coal" were also keywords in his 2012 energy plan. In addition, Obama's rhetoric focused much more on his Republican opponent as a regressive force who could move America backwards if elected.[60]

The 2008 electorate appeared quite excited and hopeful about the first African-American president. However, Obama followed through on many Bush era schemes including billions of dollars in bailouts which helped to instigate the massive Occupy protests in 2010. His 2012 Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, ran on economic criticisms of Obama's first term because of the climb in evictions and depressed employment. While Obama was not the progressive hero his 2008 speeches conjured, Romney's was even less motivating for the public as a cultural

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exciting and promising candidate in 2008, the embodiment of hope and change as the first African American president. Obama promised to end the Iraq War in 2009, close Guantanamo Bay, invest in high quality and affordable education from birth through college, change the Medicare prescription drug law to negotiate the cheapest prices, enact a $4000 annual tuition credit to graduates in public service, and reduce the stockpile of nuclear weapons.

59. DACA refers to Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals, an executive memo by the Secretary of Homeland Security which created a pathway for young people who might otherwise be deported to have a pathway to remain in the United States. The ACA refers to the Affordable Care Act also known colloquially as "Obamacare." This was a massive and sprawling piece of legislation which Obama attributed to the conservative Heritage Foundation's research and advocacy of the idea. The ACA enacted an insurance marketplace sanctioned by the federal government to assist all Americans in purchasing health insurance if they did not have access. The least popular part was the individual mandate (effectively repealed by the Trump Administration) which included fines for uninsured Americans. The most popular portions expanded American access to health insurance, especially those Americans who had previously been priced out for living with "pre-existing conditions." Since the legislation came into effect, many conservative politicians have promised to "repeal and replace" while progressive politicians have promised to upgrade to a "Medicare for All" system.

60. One example of this was his television ads, see "'Clear Choice' - Obama for America TV Ad." August 23, 2012. BarackObamadotcom. YouTube Video, accessed 1/8/2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xsZ45Weng0

beacon for the religious right and pro-business corporate peoples.[61] Progressive talk show host David Packman called him a "gaffe machine," due to the multitude of on-camera occasions Romney was out of touch with average Americans from his pedestal as a wealthy venture capitalist. Romney's positions and rhetoric included: building a fence on the southern border, repealing "Obamacare" (the Affordable Care Act), running the nation like a business as a "political outsider," promoting deregulation and privatization, refusing global warming as an issue while promoting pro-fossil fuel expansion. These ideals contributed to his inability to unseat the moderately popular incumbent president.

Jill Stein was among other minor party candidates including Gary Johnson, Virgil Goode, Rocky Anderson, and Roseanne Barr. Johnson, Goode, and Anderson already had some name recognition from having held various offices, while Barr was the celebrity from *Roseanne.* According to Ben Manski, Stein's campaign manager, name recognition for the candidate and the party were major obstacles in her campaign.[62] His perspective of Stein's entrance into the race was one of "realistic expectations" in which Stein was only a national figure in the movement for single payer healthcare, but not yet a household name.[63] She had run for governor of Massachusetts a few times against Mitt Romney and others gaining her a little notoriety within her home state. In addition, the Green Party was at its weakest point since the 1990s as evidenced by the few ballot lines, minute membership and a sparse number of offices held. With

61. See one example on "Pop-Up Politics: Mitt Romney's Iowa Stump Speech." NPR. Youtube.com January 3, 2012 Romney became much more well-known for his soundbites about his views on the nation as a business where corporations are the citizenry. A few remarks that became famous were his "47% remark" in which he was disinterested in representing those who don't pay income tax due to their low incomes. In addition, he argued with his audience that corporations were people on another occasion. Romney's image as a former church leader, a mormon, and a deeply religious man opposing the recently litigated gay marriage case, the concept of medical marijuana, and abortion rights were important to his political image.

62. Manski, Ben. Interviewed by Barbara Dahlgren. Zoom Call. Milwaukee, WI, 9/23/2020.

63. Ibid.

little infrastructure, little funding, and no expectation major media companies would pick up on her campaign at all, Stein's team worked and succeeded in party-building, accessing the ballot, establishing a name for Stein, re-establishing the Green Party's name, and earning the national coverage she received.[64] While Stein ran the race to win, her other goals of building organizing mechanisms in the Green Party and expanding ballot access were other political goals the Stein campaign achieved.[65]

Surprisingly, Jill Stein was not referred to as a "spoiler" in the 2012 coverage.[66] This distinction was given to candidates Gary Johnson (Libertarian) and Virgil Goode (Constitution). Stein was not positioned as a relevant factor in the election by any of the major networks, though her membership as a third party candidate ensured she and her party usually received a mention among stories of the other candidates. These mentions of Stein as a member of the third-party group was one of many themes I encountered in the 2012 coverage which provide context and justification for the "spoiler effect" as a frame. The spoiler label is the categorization of figures based on extrinsic situational characteristics as well as intrinsic qualities in the candidates. One could only be a spoiler as an outsider to the two party system. The extrinsic qualities of the

64. Most of the national televised coverage Stein received during the last stretch of the campaign dealt with debates Stein participated in. According to her campaign manager, near the end of the campaign, he hired a team to work on pitching which garnered national media spots on MSNBC and CNN, but were not aired. In addition, much of their advertising strategy utilized targeted social media, the campaign website using Nationbuilder tools, and televised advertising. Since the campaign received matching funds near the end of the campaign, Manski said these funds came too late to be used for ballot access and had to be spent rapidly prior to the election, which meant suddenly paying for a lot of media.

65. Like other Green Party candidates, Stein spoke about the 5% mark which would give the Green Party greater access to the ballot and federal funding. Stein was able to achieve federal matching funds near the end of the 2012 election, and she also garnered 1% of the vote, which allowed for the retention of ballot status for the party in some states.

66. Results of my queries on Nexis Uni (searching "Green Party" or "Jill Stein" along with each major broadcaster): These contained a few interesting trends. Coverage from all news sources was rich during 2000 and 2016, but ABC, CBS, and NBC did not have a single story in 2012 besides one in February about Roseanne Barr vying for the Green nomination (with no follow up). Post-election coverage in 2016 was richer than pre-election coverage in many cases.

spoiler change each election in order to explain how certain third parties were considered non-factors in some election contexts and spoilers in others. So, the routine frame was to ensure third-party candidates could serve the function of the "spoiler" if deemed appropriate. As Rachel Maddow said in the only episode she mentioned Stein as part of an unusual poll for the reason it included all of the presidential candidates: "And maybe half a percent or even Gary Johnson`s 5 percent will mean nothing. Heck, maybe Ohio won't even be close. When elections are not close, nobody even remembers who the third- party candidates are. But when they are close, all of a sudden, that might be the most important thing in the world."[67] Maddow explained the only time the media recognizes these candidates are newsworthy is when the major party candidates are of similar favorability to the electorate. These kinds of presidential candidates are unable to be newsworthy in themselves, and they only function as newsworthy players in the context of the Democratic and Republican contenders in Maddow's view. This view of third parties can explain why mainstream coverage tends to become more likely close to election day. If the purpose of mentioning these candidates functioned only for the intrigue of pointing out spoilers before the race, then news about their events, speeches and policy positions was mostly irrelevant. Maddow explained the poll she referred to was unusual because it included third party candidates. The polls, therefore, serve to intensify the likelihood that mainstream news will not cover the campaign trail of third partisans who do not regularly appear as choices in the polls.

Maddow's reasoning for including third parties in the election discourse is ultimately unlike her inclusion of both bipartisan candidates. Like the other broadcasters, Maddow and her MSNBC colleagues followed a different set of standards for fairness in their coverage than those

67. "Rachel Maddow Show for November 5, 2012," MSNBC. *The Rachel Maddow Show.* 9:00 PM EST November 5, 2012 Monday. CQ Roll Call Transcript.

standards they placed on their consideration of newsworthy events for Democratic and Republican contenders.[68] For the most part, the pre-election coverage of third parties including Jill Stein discredited candidates while bolstering the horse-race discourse. Where third party candidates' policies were discussed on the networks, anchors often applauded their networks for airing the content at all. For example, the occasions when third partisans or their policy ideas were given moments in the news, the anchor began or ended the segment with notes about fairness and other imagery invoking the First Amendment. In addition, the post-election coverage generally helped to normalize the winner of the presidential race, utilizing third party candidate policies in the comparison to either the winning or losing candidate. This chapter discusses the contributing frames which bolstered the "spoiler effect frame" and/or marginalized non-Democrat and non-Republican contenders in 2012. It also includes examples of how mainstream televised news coverage of the national election appeared in 2012. In this coverage partisan, corporate, and public networks each had its own idiosyncrasies when dealing with third parties, but ultimately they all participated in the same anti-3rd party discourse during and after the election. These selections within the coverage carry the context of the 2-party election discourse within as well as the added context of the events mostly left uncovered which the Stein campaign experienced.

Recurring Frames De-legitimized Candidates

In 2012, the bipartisan horse-race was the most prominent way of framing the election discussion, which scaffolded certain sub-frames that supported the "spoiler effect" frame. The following are some of the sub-frames I identified. "The Scarlet Nader Frame" is what I call the

68. Stein was given about 20 minutes of time across all networks during the two months surrounding the election according to my queries.

contextualizing of third parties in a remediated version of historical events usually returning to the 2000 election. Ralph Nader's name was synonymous with the ruin of an election by an outsider. If Nader was invoked, he was usually the only prominent factor in the supposed ruin of the 2000 election as well, which is a revision of history excluding the recount process, the various ballot issues, and the Supreme Court's decision. When pinned to present candidates, they become ruiners by association. Yet another was what I call "the laughingstock" frame in which the candidate is a mostly harmless loon, who could become dangerous in the election context. The "laughingstock" is usually portrayed with humor, and tends to be a human interest story separated from much of the hard news of the election. A laughingstock is a sideshow or a distraction, but is not the main event. Both of these subframes and their overarching horse-race frame relied heavily on appeals to authority to confirm reported predictions in the form of pundits, print journalists, pollsters, and surrogates. The most prominent subframe is what I call the "undeserving" because like the benchwarmers of a sports game or the extras in a movie, candidates are treated as if they don't deserve any coverage. For third-party candidates, any coverage, even a few seconds, is a gift from above. Anchors recognize that they rarely grant the undeserving candidates any coverage, and when they do, the network ought to be hailed for its generosity. The candidate ought to be grateful to be graced with the camera at all. The coverage was short, and often the segments were disrupted by advertisements and other news items or tangents. Within third party campaigns, no matter the kind of events they held, they remained segregated from and dwarfed by coverage of the legacy candidates. Debates, even arrests were not considered newsworthy enough for little more than a mention. In the same broadcasts that hardly mention a presidential candidate arrest, more time was given to coverage of empty presidential podiums, traffic jams, and other dull subjects. The anchor would not editorialize on

the lack or poor quality of such coverage. However, they would editorialize to champion their networks for allowing stories with third-party candidates to appear, often tagging the network as pro-first amendment or outside of the mainstream. Much like the actor disappointed with his casting, the casting agency retorts, "It should be an honor for you to work with us at all." Within episodes containing third party candidates in their own words, anchors separate them from the regular election coverage in which they regularly speak about two presidential contenders. The third party candidates were a sideshow, disconnected and of low quality in comparison to the main event of the real presidential race.

Truly the most powerful way the news treated Stein and other third-party candidates as non-factors in the race was in their choice to leave them off the agenda altogether. Of the major networks, only CNN, FOX, MSNBC, and PBS mentioned Jill Stein, the term "spoil" in an election context, or the Green Party in Nexis Uni's collection of coverage.[69] Even in broadening the time-span of my search to earlier in the year, the coverage was incredibly scant with a few more mentions of Jill Stein becoming the Green nominee around July, and a few mentions in late spring that Roseanne Barr intended to run as the Green nominee for president. She ended up continuing her presidential bid in the Peace and Freedom Party, as MSNBC's Lawrence O'Donnell reminds his audience.[70]

69. Jill Stein and the Greens were mentioned far less in 2012 than in 2016. This could be due to several reasons. First, the Nexis Uni database did not archive as many sources from 2012, and of the seven networks most relied on for televised news, NBC was not included at all, though MSNBC was archived. Using the keywords "Jill Stein" and "Green Party" or "Green Presidential" or "Green Candidate" returned twenty-three transcripts. Results for channels like ABC Australia as well as many other international channels like BBC also were returned in the query. However, these were excluded because of the lower likelihood a large American audience was tuning in regularly to international versions of their network channels or other international networks as much as American networks covering local and federal news. Only two transcripts contained both terms "Jill Stein" and "spoil" (or its variations).

70. "The Last Word for October 26, 2012," MSNBC *The Last Word with Lawrence O' Donnell.* 10:00 PM EST October 26, 2012. CQ-Roll Call Transcript.

During the months surrounding the election, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney received a daily and constant stream of coverage from the major networks as a piece of nearly every program. While this was commonplace, it is important to notice the amount of time spent on the Republican and Democratic candidates during the last leg of America's most prominent election. This coverage shows which aspects of a candidate's race are important to the news media if they are candidates of the Republican or Democratic Parties. The news about Romney and Obama showed what networks found newsworthy where the "spoiler effect" could not cast a shadow on a candidate's media presence. CNN, the network which boasts that they provide news content twenty-four hours per day, aired mentions of the Stein campaign or Green Party only ten times, and one of the segments was repeated. Fox mentioned them six times, including two on its business network. MSNBC gave the Greens five mentions, and PBS mentioned the Green Party's appearance in a scheduled third-party debate before giving the debate its own three-minute segment about a week later. There were no results for broadcasts from ABC, CBS, or NBC though a simple search of President Obama and Governor Romney turned up a myriad of 2012 election coverage results from each of these networks.[71] The longest coverage, and the only broadcast on which Stein was able to speak for herself, was the CNN segment with a debate between Stein and Johnson on air which Don Lemon moderated. The closest runner up to this type of coverage was the third-party debate hosted by Larry King explained through short segments on Fox, MSNBC, and PBS where Stein was portrayed in soundbites.[72] She was also

71. This exercise showed Nexis Uni was collecting broadcasts from this period, but none included my search terms.

72. CNN 2 (See Appendix 1).

given a soundbite on an *O'Reilly Factor* segment about her wealth tax proposal after the election.[73]

CNN Calls Virgil Goode a Spoiler

While Stein was a member of the out-group, she was not called a spoiler in the 2012 coverage. However, both Virgil Goode of the Constitution Party and Gary Johnson of the Libertarian Party were. In fact, CNN was particularly concerned with Goode, considering they aired the same segment about him twice on two different programs. First, it appeared on *The Situation Room* hosted by Wolf Blitzer, which is a flashier infotainment program. Then it appeared on *CNN Newsroom* the following day.[74] The segments Blitzer reported prior to the clip were about the Vice Presidential Debate, the *Endeavor* space shuttle's retirement, and an interview with Congressman Chaffetz; the CNN news broadcast reported the latest on Mitt Romney's strategy, the *Endeavor* story, as well as a scandal about a Zumba establishment with a brothel.[75] In both broadcasts, the segment on Goode was near the end. Whitfield introduced him as a spoiler without mentioning his name: "A former congressman could cost Mitt Romney the state of Virginia and the entire election, the third party presidential candidate who may be a spoiler. (Commercial break) A Virginia congressman may turn out to be a spoiler in the presidential election. CNN's Lisa Sylvester introduces you to the third-party candidate who could have a big impact." Wolf Blitzer's introduction, though more theatrically presented, was less accusatory: "There's one candidate for president you almost certainly have never heard of, but he might just have an impact in a race in a crucial background state. Lisa Sylvester reports."

73. Fox 6 (See Appendix 1).

74. CNN 3 (See Appendix 1)

75. Mitt Romney was the Republican Presidential nominee at this point in the 2012 race.

Both of these introductions contained some crucial spoiler subframes. First, they were good examples of the "undeserving" frame because Goode was so insignificant, his name and his existence had only just become newsworthy a month prior to election day. For other candidates, the news guided its audience through important campaign events, but the Goode campaign wasn't its own news, and he wasn't even mentioned. Whitfield instead mentioned Romney because the news belonged more to him than the candidate portrayed. Before the audience gleaned any other information about Goode's candidacy, CNN presented this unnamed person as a tool against the Romney campaign. Whitfield reminded the audience twice that the candidate was in a "third party," but despite that point against him, he could actually have some kind of effect, which was the reason he became news.[76] This matter-of-fact phrasing said that third party candidates usually don't have any impact on elections, so this development should come as a surprise. Whitfield's repetition of "third party" showed an insistence that this was the most important piece of information to understand about this no-name candidate. Goode was introduced as a "cost" to Mitt Romney so if voters chose him, they must understand first that they were forcing Romney to pay a price. When the clip of Sylvester began with her voice-over, the setting of the video was a local fair, using circus-like imagery to depict Goode as a sideshow adding to the "laughingstock" subframe. Individually, these things are inconsequential, but in total, the picture is clearer. Sylvester gave the CNN audience its first look at Goode from his appearance at a county fair in Virginia, which is a fairly common event for a political candidate to participate in, but not at all necessary in the representation of Goode's candidacy after about a year's worth of events: "Virgil Goode works the crowd at a fair in Chase City, Virginia. The six term congressman has worn many political hats." The imagery of working the crowd and

76. More on the newsworthiness of supposed "spoiler" candidates in the section "How many presidential candidates are there?"

wearing many hats together while showing him under a big tent together conjures circus imagery in which he was the ringleader. The imagery was furthered by Goode's soundbite interview in which the chosen background was a carousel. Sylvester's description of his political hats also add to the circus imagery because the hats were not different offices or jobs, but different team costumes: "He has been a Democrat, an independent and a Republican. He lost his GOP congressional seat in 2008. Now, he's running for office again, this time for president. This time under the banner of the Constitution Party." While these statements all seem like normal, valid descriptions of a candidate, Sylvester had not mentioned a single policy during his congressional career, his reason for running, or any other substantive pieces of the campaign. Most important were the 'banners' he flew, and his fall from grace. Since she already set him up as a villain, the story of his comeback could not be a triumphant return.

The next section of the clip is where Goode was given a few sound bites about the campaign which were clipped between Sylvester's descriptions of him. Interestingly, he did not describe his own platform; Sylvester's voice-over took on that task:

> Goode believes in a no-exceptions end to illegal immigration. He wants to reduce the number of legal immigrants in the country as well. He also supports term limits for Congress and major federal budget cuts, including cutting defense. He is on the ballot in half of the states. And he is a write-in candidate in about a dozen more. Goode is his own campaign manager, his own fundraiser manager and his own press [secretary]. But he could still be a major game-changer, says Stu Rothenberg of the Rothenberg Political Report…[77]

Sylvester explained Goode's main issues accurately. However, Goode would have likely chosen one or two of his other points in his four-point platform had he the opportunity to speak for himself.[78] In addition, Sylvester chose the language "cutting defense" while Goode would

77. "Endeavour's Slow Move; Zumba Class a Prostitution Front; More Armstrong Witnesses," CNN, *CNN Newsroom*. 4:00 PM EST October 13, 2012. Cable News Network Transcript.

78. Goode can be found explaining his "four-point" platform a number of times on C-SPAN, which gave him and the other third-party candidates opportunities to speak on The Washington Journal, a show appearing early on Sunday morning, and also in a debate of only third-party candidates led by Larry King on C-SPAN.

have likely phrased this goal within his "balance the budget" plank as "reducing the military budget" or "cutting the war budget." This too seems like an inconsequential and miniscule difference, but while Goode's conservative audience favored a balanced budget and an end to the wars, the perceived result of "cutting defense" with the implicit meaning of a weak defense, would have been distasteful to the conservatives for whom he was campaigning. While she clipped Goode telling the audience about his "shoestring budget" in his campaign, Sylvester mostly avoided any explanation why Goode was determined to run a do-it-yourself campaign rather than a serious, meaning well-funded, campaign.

Sylvester did not linger on policy for long. The policies she described were enough to place Goode as a conservative in order to frame him as a competitor to Romney rather than Obama. She then appealed to the authority of election forecaster, Stu Rothenberg, lending her report legitimacy with his confirmation on the spoiler narrative: "Virgil Goode is a wild card, particularly in Virginia, the most recent polls showing a very tight race in Virginia. Virginia is an important state for Mitt Romney so yes, Goode could be a factor, and he could be a factor even if he wins only a handful of votes." Rothenberg completed Goode's transformation to a "laughingstock" candidate. Where he was a sideshow in his introduction, Goode was transformed into a dangerous figure against Romney. Rothenberg's "handful of votes" comment emphasized this paradox in the "spoiler effect frame" because every single Goode vote would have been an automatic "cost" to Romney's campaign rather than a merit to Goode. As a reminder, Goode was a successful politician as a former 6-term Congressman. Even with his resume, CNN only thought he was a relevant part of the 2012 election (they introduced him as a new horse in the final stretch) as a foil to Mitt Romney.

Sylvester continued with Rothenberg's point rounding out the spoiler accusation, "The

latest polls show a neck and neck race between President Obama and Governor Mitt Romney. Virgil Goode is only a blip on the poll, but just his presence alone can upset the best-laid plans by the Romney campaign if he siphons off enough votes. Goode is asked about it just about everywhere he goes." Sylvester continued to note the horserace over policy to call Goode a "blip," continuing the point that he is insignificant, but Goode was given a role in the Romney campaign as a foiler of his "best-laid plan." Goode did not earn his "handful of votes." He will have stolen from Romney if he garners any votes at all, he would be siphoning them like a *Rocky and Bullwinkle* villain stealing the gas out of a car to make a getaway. This leaves the voters no agency for who they prefer to support, and leaves Romney a victim of the new villain. Sylvester refers to the horse race once more before concluding this segment on camera: "There are other third party candidates, including, notably libertarian candidate Gary Johnson and Green Party candidate Jill Stein. RNC chairman Reince Priebus on CNN's "State of the Union" show was asked whether these outside candidates, particularly those of Goode and Johnson, might turn out to be spoilers. He is dismissing them, saying they are non-factors.

While Virgil Goode is not the main focus of this study, I think this exchange is important to how third-party candidates in general are dismissed through the "spoiler effect." The specific ways Sylvester portrays a candidate like Goode as a sideshow who is both innocuous and of grave consequence repeats with other so-called spoilers including Stein. Additionally, Stein and other candidates were afterthoughts to this sideshow segment. They were not only "non-factors" as spoilers, as Reince Priebus said, but "nonpersons" as Micah Sifry described.[79] They were too insignificant in this election to be a regular part of the election discourse.

79. Sifry, *Spoiling For A Fight, 283.*

Gary Johnson Plays into the Spoiler Effect

The Libertarian candidate was given the most time within 2012 third-party election coverage. This could have been a result of his poll numbers hovering around 5%, which CNN's Ashleigh Banfield remarked in her introduction to Johnson. Within the coverage, he was interviewed on CNN twice and Fox twice. Juxtaposed, two of these interviews show the similar styles of overtly partisan Cavuto on Fox Business (October 17) and CNN's Ashleigh Banfield (October 26th). The single-minded agenda of the horse-race created a situation where both interviewer and candidate appeared scripted. Johnson was the subject of the second to last news item of CNN's broadcast between segments, "Will Virginia be red or blue?" and "Silvio Burlusconi guilty," with other stories in the broadcast: "Hurricane Sandy Heads for U.S., Storm Affects Political Campaigns," "Romney Campaigns in Iowa," "Jobs Will Grow," and "Children Slain by Nanny." Prior to the Libertarian candidate's introduction, multiple segments addressed the presidential campaign as if it were a race with only two candidates (to be discussed further).

In most of Johnson's interviews, including those aired outside of the CNN and Fox segments discussed here, Johnson had clearly practiced answers. These answers, highlighting his policy ideas and how he handles the spoiler frame, are features of both interviews. Considering the similarity between Banfield's and Cavuto's line of questioning, Johnson's prepared soundbites worked on both occasions. He introduced himself as "the truth candidate" on CNN after being presented as a fringe candidate the audience "may not have heard of" according to Banfield when asked if he could beat his major party counterparts. He introduced himself in Cavuto's frame of the presidential debate as offering "the truth side."[80] Each interviewer asked about Johnson's view of the two presidential candidates; Banfield asked which

80. CNN 7, Fox 1 (See Appendix 1)

would be his preference since the likelihood that he could win was a "longshot." Cavuto asked what Johnson thought of the previous night's debate. During both answers, Johnson said Obama/Democrats are supposed to be "good on civil liberties" and Romney/Republicans are supposed to be "good on dollars and cents," but they are "not so good" on those issues. "I think given a head-to head with Romney, I beat Romney on dollars and cents, and head-to-head on Obama with social issues I think I beat Obama on social issues"[81] he remarked to Cavuto. As much as possible, Johnson repeated the idea that he represented fiscal conservatism and social liberalism, much like a large slice of Americans.

He played into the "spoiler effect" line of questioning when Banfield and Cavuto turned to polling. Cavuto retorted with poll numbers:

> Well, which is why, depending on the state, Governor, you hurt one or the other, I want to get to New Hampshire first, where you're on the ballot, where you, in a race that -- that has the two major candidates almost even, could tip it either way to the other guy. The same with some of these other states we're looking at -- Florida, Nevada, Colorado. Here is the traditional argument. You hurt Mitt Romney more than you do Barack Obama.

Banfield chooses similar poll results to pose her question: "In New Mexico you're polling at 13 percent, in Arizona 9 percent, Colorado 7 percent, 7 percent also in New Hampshire, 8 percent in Montana, and where you are today, campaigning in Nevada, 3 percent. Those are significant percentages in states that are razor thin. So my question for you is that are you this campaign's spoiler, meaning you could cost these states going to Mitt Romney?"

The two hosts asked about states with supposed "razor thin margins," meaning states Obama and Romney were within a few points from each other according to election forecasters. This is a good example of the way Benjamin Toff showed the use of polling in news as a way for "partisan scorekeeping" to take place rather than "public opinion storytelling." The public is told

81. Fox 1 (See Appendix 1).

nothing of policies, voting records, or the public's preferences in their politicians by knowing two candidates have close poll numbers. Polls that described Johnson as a single-digit number didn't explain if people liked his policy or record, or even recognized Johnson's name. Neither CNN nor Fox was talking about Johnson alongside Obama and Romney daily, which could have helped create a negative feedback loop in Johnson's polls that these hosts are then report as befitting their "spoiler" frame. The meaning these hosts chose placed Johnson in charge of his own name recognition and popularity while downplaying their own informational role. This frame excluded the voters' agency from consideration because it was not their preferences which mattered, only how the candidates ran the race. Public opinion was boiled down to states with numbers attached.

Johnson was not congratulated for polling with up to 13% of voters, but instead cast as a malicious figure. Johnson "hurt" Mitt Romney and "cost" him; he was not simply a candidate participating in a political race, but a saboteur. Johnson's answer in both cases was, interestingly, to play into the narrative. "...In New Mexico, in Colorado, in Nevada I take more votes away from Obama. North Carolina, Michigan, I take more votes away from Romney." While Green candidates have often combatted the premise, Johnson claimed neutrality as Banfield called him, "an equal opportunity spoiler." Unfortunately, both hosts doubled down by utilizing the "scarlet Nader" frame. Banfield's follow up recalled the effect of Nader and Ross Perot as spoilers, while Cavuto's follow up took a bit of a turn. He doubled down to question if Johnson's vote taking was even between Obama and Romney supporters, so Johnson changed the subject to 'voting one's conscience.' Johnson's remark challenged the horse-race framing (implying that voters should utilize their votes to bet on "the winner"), and instead gives voters the agency to express their preference. Cavuto retorted, "I think you could cross the two and three quarter

percent threshold of Ralph Nader, but could you ever get the nineteen percent in 1992 the Ross Perot got?" As Johnson ended his statement and as Cavuto began his retort, a prepared graphic appeared on the screen showing the percentages from Nader, Bush, and Gore in the 2000 election to emphasize Johnson's connection with Nader.[82] During Johnson's next answer, another graphic of the 1992 percentages of Ross Perot appeared, distracting from Johnson's narrative which could very well explain Perot's stated success. "Yes, let me point out the obvious. Do you hear my name every six times you hear Obama's name 45 times? Not even close. If I was just given the due that I've earned to this point, I think I might be the next president…" Perot was a rare case of a third party candidate who was given a similar amount of coverage compared to the Republicans and Democrats. He was the only third-party candidate in history to ever appear in a televised debate with both Republican and Democratic candidates, an important distinction from Nader and Johnson.

Cavuto agreed with Johnson on his point, but defended his role as one of the people responsible for giving Johnson his due. "The problem is that we have several third party candidates, you have the Green Party.... right? Do we have to coalesce around a third party period?" This is the only time during the 2012 coverage a candidate was really able to call out the news itself as a problem, and Cavuto was not able to handle it well. He could not mention but one of the other third parties, which undermined his own point that there were too many to cover. He misunderstood the purpose of these parties as a simple team to enter the race with, not the complex network of ideological allies under the umbrella of a shared platform. While Republicans and Democrats certainly have some similarities in their platforms and ideological

82. "Gary Johnson Interview." *Cavuto*. FOX Business. October 17, 2012 11:00pm-12:00am EDT. Internet Archive. Accessed 1/8/2021. https://archive.org/details/FBC_20121018_030000_Cavuto/start/1560/end/1620

leanings, Cavuto certainly wouldn't suggest that they would or should combine like he suggested of other parties. Again, such a suggestion is caused by the horserace frame because point-scoring is completely without the context of the ideologically driven goals parties are organized to carry out. Johnson brought up a similar general point about being kept out of the presidential race when he spoke about the Republicans working to keep him off the ballot: "Why is anybody afraid of giving people a choice? And in this case, look, I'm not supposed to be a factor in this race… For not being a factor, boy, they've sure spent a whole lot of time and resources trying to keep me off the ballot." While this statement is less accusatory towards media than on *Cavuto,* Ashleigh Banfield appeared to take the opportunity to attack Johnson with time running short in the segment, "And here you are, on the TV, talking to me on CNN."[83] Some of this context was in the haughty tone Banfield utilized, but the text is clear. The "undeserving" Johnson was not showing his gratitude by playing along with Banfield's questions framed to exclude him. She hinted that his significance was not a result of his ballot access struggles, but of the TV time he was being given. CNN gave Johnson a gift of five minutes, and he ought to have been more grateful.

Banfield and Cavuto asked very similar questions, but their styles were quite different. Cavuto's language was generally less combative, but he constantly interrupted Johnson. His line of questioning about the two-party presidential debate placed Johnson as more of a commentator than a candidate. For example, Cavuto asked if Johnson thought Joe Biden's smile looked creepy. The question was played for comic relief, and helped to mitigate Johnson into a non-candidate role. Banfield called Johnson a spoiler multiple times, and with each argumentative

83. "Interview with Gary Johnson." CNN Newsroom CNN October 26, 2012 11:00am-12:00pm EDT. Internet Archive Video. Accessed 1/8/2021. https://archive.org/details/CNN_20121026_150000_CNN_Newsroom/start/2340/end/2400

question, she inserted the word “sir.” For example, “But my big question for you, sir, is do you think that you could beat Governor Romney or President Obama.” When she asked which of the two candidates he wanted to win, he instead answered a different question: why it was important to vote for him. Banfield scoffed “You are a good politician, sir. I'm going to write that down as neither. Thank you, sir. Thank you so much.” Both of these questions were “gotcha” questions because they were set for binary answers. The first was a yes or no question, the second was an Obama or Romney question. If Johnson answered the first without explanation he would have looked like a loon for believing he had a good chance to win or look like a loon for being in the race if he didn’t believe he could win. The second simply asked about his preference of opponents to take the Oval Office, and either name would have delegitimized his own candidacy.

The Erasure of Newsworthy Events in the Stein Campaign

Stein made a few appearances on these shows in regards to her presidential candidacy. These were not necessarily framed to call Stein a possible spoiler in this race. That cross was given to supposedly right-leaning candidates Johnson and Goode to bare. Yet they did not become major names in public consciousness post-election when Romney lost to the sitting president just as Bob Barr (Libertarian) and Chuck Baldwin (Constitution) were immediately forgotten in 2008 as possible spoilers of McCain. Stein's role as a third-party candidate gave outlets the opportunity to mention Stein among other would-be spoilers with Johnson and Goode, but this time she was a "nonfactor." Besides Rocky Anderson,[84] Stein was aired least of all third-party candidates in the coverage, even when she might have been in the headlines. Stein was arrested three times during her campaign, and two of those occurred during the time of this news coverage. She visited a multitude of cities along with her vice presidential candidate, Cheri Honkala, and she attended three debates in addition to her written and DemocracyNow! responses to the debates she was barred from entering.[85] However, the coverage, if any, was minuscule, especially as the churn of the two-party news was covered in the headlines during nearly every broadcast I studied.

Of the twenty-three resulting broadcasts in the sample, twenty of them contained headline news from the campaign trail of Romney and Obama while zero headlines noted the arrest of a presidential candidate. No news was too small or banal. For example, CNN covered the crowds with empty podiums at both presidential campaign stump speech sites of the incumbent president and his Republican competitor. In the headlines of another broadcast Romney was taking a

84. Rocky Anderson had a far more limited amount of ballot access than Stein.

85. A complete timeline of the coverage and events noted on the archived website of Stein 2012 in addition to the sampled coverage are linked in figure 2.

Sunday away from campaigning to go to church. Yet none of the coverage found displayed some of the wildest events from the Stein campaign. For example, Stein and her running mate showed up at the second presidential debate between Romney and Obama to demonstrate that their lack of invitation was unfair, and were both arrested and detained for eight hours handcuffed to chairs. In addition, Stein spent time protesting at Standing Rock against pipeline expansions.[86] She also debated Johnson and the other candidates on three other occasions besides the CNN segment and the Chicago debate with Larry King.[87] Not only were her church visits, stump speeches, or other campaign events not considered newsworthy, but neither were the surprising, unprecedented, or informational events. Fox News was the only one of these networks to air any mention of Stein's detention at the second debate, and on both occasions the other panelists and hosts dismissed the shocking news. Rather than confronting and reacting to the information on Fox News Watch, for example, this exchange between Ellen Ratner, John Scott and the other panelists occurred:

> SCOTT: You like President Obama, Ellen.
> RATNER: Yes.
> SCOTT: The fact that he did better in this debate, did that -- did that cheer you up?
> RATNER: Well, it certainly cheered me up. I was just a little dismayed, though, at some of the press, particularly Newsbusters, who said that -- that people clapped in the press room at one point. It did not happen. I was there. And I also thought there was a lack of really talking about -- although The Daily Mail did it -- talking about some of the other groups. For instance, the fact that the Green Party candidate was arrested on her way into the debate because she didn't have a credential to get into the debate. And so I think that there has not been really coverage of a lot of other issues that didn't happen at the debate."
> SCOTT: Did the media seem cheered, Rick, by the fact that the president showed up for this one and actually, you know, participated and seemed awake?

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86. Steve Mufson, "Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein charged with trespassing in Keystone XL protest," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2012. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/green-party-candidate-jill-stein-arrested/2012/10/31/0f309970-2373-11e2-8448-81b1ce7d6978_story.html

87. Ralph Nader 3rd Party Debate November 4, 2012 Annie Lowrey. "Another Presidential Debate, but This Time the Candidates Are Much Less Familiar," *New York Times Magazine.* November 5, 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/us/politics/in-this-presidential-debate-four-third-party-hopefuls.html "Third-Party presidential debate: Gary Johnson vs Jill Stein," RT America, YouTube Video, November 5th 2012, accessed 1/8/2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4HJBE62IzI
IVN 3rd Party Debate October 18th Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZAlj0r9HKM

> RICHARD GRENELL: Yes, I think what happened, really, from the first debate is that the bar was so low for the president, he just had to show up and talk. And he was pretty good. I mean, I think he was back to being the president.[88]

While a presidential candidate's arrest for any reason might seem like a remarkable event which would carry a conversation, the host continued to question each panelist, and none of them brought the topic up again. Ratner cited the *Daily Mail* as a source for more information on Stein's arrest, which is a magazine with a poor reputation for accuracy and a right wing bias, clearly her way of appealing to the Fox audience. However, because of the brevity of the moment, Fox's audience would have had to pay undivided attention to the broadcast seeking out this information in order to follow her citation to the story.

The second mention of the arrest was from former Green candidate, Ralph Nader, when he was interviewed on *Cavuto* (Fox Business) about his new book. This segment took place the day after Cavuto had Gary Johnson on to talk about his presidential candidacy. Therefore, it is not only an example of the minimal coverage, even to newsworthy events, but also an example of "the Scarlet Nader." While the two broadcasts could be completely unrelated to one another, Ralph Nader imagery is so frequently conjured at the mention of third party candidates that this sequence could have been deliberate. Also, the first banner or "Fox business alert" placed beside Nader said, "Nader nearly got 3M votes in the 2000 pres race." The second alert, minutes later, called Nader a "consumer advocate, author, and lawyer."[89] Nader's identity as a "spoiler" in this case trumped his lifelong consumer advocacy project including the original reason for his fame, mandating seatbelts be put in cars.

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88. *Fox News Watch* for October 20, 2012. Fox News Transcript. October 20, 2012.

89. "The President Bringing Us to the Fiscal Cliff." *Cavuto*, FOX Business, October 18, 2012 11:00pm-12:00am EDT. Internet Archive video Accessed 1/8/2021. https://archive.org/details/FBC_20121019_030000_Cavuto/start/3300/end/3360

Curiously, Nader was not invited on as a Stein surrogate, or even to talk about the election at all. This was a book promotion, which was introduced by Cavuto:

> Well, you heard it once or twice about this fiscal cliff. It is coming, whether we overtalk about it or not. And the debt is soaring and Washington, well, they're just startling. The economy is still struggling. A new report showing that the government is spending more on welfare programs last year than almost anything else. Ralph Nader says this country is in crisis and needs a series of bold ideas. He proposes re- examining almost everything we do. It's all part of the 17 solutions. And its author, Ralph Nader is here.

Cavuto's introduction divorced Nader from his background as a consumer advocate and politician while he framed the solution to the national debt with cutting welfare, his guest and the political party he was known to associate with held platforms to expand these programs. While those audience members likely knew Nader's name from the 2000 election, as the Fox Business alert reminded them, those who were unaware of third party candidates in this election were given no information that other choices existed, specifically the Green Party (considering Johnson appeared the previous day).

At the end, Cavuto pointed out Nader's skepticism of the Republicans and Democrats as yet another problem with having a strong, central government, which could not be trusted to handle the fiscal cliff. Nader retorted, "No, no. I want better-elected officials which shape the future of our government. Therefore, I want more voter choice. I mean, they locked up Jill Stein of the Green Party -- eight hours chained during a debate at Hofstra because she wanted to highlight the fact that third parties are shut out of the debate system." The transcript does not actually capture Cavuto's whole reaction to Nader's retort. As Nader spoke, Cavuto looked down, then smiled into the camera as Nader talked about Stein's arrest. He said, "Fair enough," then ended the segment by calling himself, "a creature of my corporate time" and thanked Nader for joining him in the last moments of the broadcast.[90]

90. *Cavuto*, October 18, 2012.

As Cavuto reminded the audience what book they were talking about, he said, "He's hawking a book now," which was a final jab to his audience that this loony communist, who would trust big government and do away with free enterprise is doing a capitalist thing by selling a book. Without saying these words, Cavuto nodded to his crowd that Nader's plan for government sponsored programs and taxes for the rich are the mark of "the laughingstock" and to be derided. While Nader was cool and collected during his debate, Cavuto's last words against a likely stranger to much of the audience could have been perceived as more powerful than Nader's points. If Nader was perceived as a laughingstock, then the news he brought about Stein might not have struck the audience as true. Cavuto's unwillingness to acknowledge Nader's news about Stein gives the remark even less weight.

CNN, MSNBC and PBS all covered one of the third-party debates in at least one segment. In the case of PBS, *Newshour* announced the upcoming third-party debate hosted by Larry King as they covered the second bipartisan debate, though silent on Stein's arrest. During CNN's coverage, Fredricka Whitfield interviewed King about his experience hosting the debate, so the frame was more about a star performing an act of charity than it was about the battle of candidate ideas.[91] Nearly every anchor introduced the candidates by telling their audience they may not have heard of these extra candidates, without identifying any fault for refusing to cover them. PBS began with a spoiler frame, " With the presidential race in a dead heat between the two major contenders, third parties could draw just enough votes in some states to tip the balance."[92] This is a mixed metaphor between a literal horse racing term, "dead heat" and an image of a balanced scale that these candidates could affect negatively by "tipping" them.

91. CNN 9 (see appendix 1).

92. PBS 2 (see appendix 1).

While the better part of an hour was spent on the second bipartisan debate in my first PBS sample, the journalist crammed several soundbites from the four candidates in only a few minutes. The audience could get a sense of the candidates' positions on marijuana, higher education, and the foreign wars, but the time simply wasn't allotted to provide much depth. The end was rounded out with another reminder of the "spoiler effect" because the journalist mentioned Ross Perot. This media object is a great example on how all three subframes work well together to support the "spoiler effect." The "minor party" debate coverage was miniscule because the minors are "undeserving." The segment was rounded out with the guilt-by-association "scarlet Nader" frame recalling Perot as a spoiler. The "laughingstock" was also invoked because they thought it relevant to mention Ross Perot had endorsed Mitt Romney. The implication of this is that Perot has learned from his mistake and is serious as a Republican supporter. This followed a story about Larry King bungling the beginning and Johnson and Stein's most extreme iterations of their views on college with Stein saying free college and Johnson proclaiming an end to government college grants. PBS had slightly more attention to policy in its reporting but was just as dismissive, if not more of third-parties as spoilers than overtly partisan options.

Lawrence O'Donnell illustrated a standard contradiction of a crucial piece of information about the presidential race. How many candidates were there? MSNBC's coverage teased with graphics of two podiums before the upcoming segment about the mysterious debate.[93] Within a sea of coverage of the Obama and Romney campaigns, the occasional airing of other contenders seems nonsensical. Are two people running for president which the vast majority of airtime shows, or are there others on the ballot? Why haven't these other contenders been mentioned

93. MSNBC 3 (see appendix).

until October? I often met citizens during ballot access or canvassing who asked me some permutation of these questions: “Isn’t it too late to start running for president right now?” or “If they have been running for president since last April, why am I hearing about them for the first time now?” Even a routine news-watcher may be subject to confusion that other candidates were in the race based on broadcasts which constantly discussed two contenders while hardly mentioning others scheduled to appear beside Obama and Romney on their ballots. To the nearly half of Americans who never went to the polls, these choices were basically non-existent, even if they were die-hard televised news fans.

On the other hand, where coverage highlighted third parties, even in a sympathetic way as O’Donnell did, the pundits and journalists’ attitude toward the public was controlling and limiting like Stromer-Galley found. The bipartisan horse-race was a leading frame to narrow the election discourse to winners and losers. Then, every action that third-party candidates and the public took were mapped against the horse-race. O’Donnell teased before the commercial break, “ If you saw the third-party presidential candidate debate last night you just might be thinking about voting for a third-party candidate this time. I’ll tell you if you should, or shouldn’t.” During his seven minute monologue Lawrence O’Donnell remarked that he usually votes for third-party candidates, and argued their benefit to the public discourse. He also argued against the idea that votes for third parties aren’t wasted, yet his asterisk on this point excluded swing states. To underscore this point, he invoked the “scarlet Nader” frame: “If you live in a battleground state, voting for a third-party candidate can be a lot dicier. Just ask the people who voted for Ralph Nader in Florida in 2000. If you`re lucky enough to live in a state that the presidential candidates care about, then your vote really does count in the way most people want it to...”

O'Donnell's earlier sympathies for voters were genuine, but the "scarlet Nader" was a pivot away from sympathizing with a public who has little agency in public decision-making due to the media and electoral college. Duty and responsibility to vote blue are the subtext because of the horse-race. O'Donnell's sympathies were also somewhat hollow because he didn't recognize his own network and his own program as a part of that "Big media" which he says is "incapable of covering a political landscape that is more complicated than the two party system" and "does not have the resources or the interest or the intellectual capacity." The statements are all relatable, but the safe state voting strategy O'Donnell ultimately championed (during a cycle with a popular Democratic incumbent president) represented a compromise for the voter to only vote for the people and policies they believe in on certain occasions. Two days later, O'Donnell hosted the former Governor of California, Gray Davis (D), in his studio to "help" him vote.[94] O'Donnell filled out a California ballot at the end of his broadcast led through by Davis. O'Donnell, who played an exasperated voter upset over the ballot materials and his ability to vote for tax and other propositions, chose every item Davis instructed. He hesitated over the presidency as he considered Roseanne Bar, but ultimately, he chose Barack Obama as Davis instructed, even after he had advocated voting for third-party candidates from states like California.

Post-election Fox Normalizes Democratic Win

Late in November, O'Reilly addressed Jill Stein for the first time in his wealth tax story. He utilized a sound bite from Stein's campaign to begin a conversation about a wealth tax with Dr. Marc Lamont Hill, whom he introduced as a contributor of Huffington Post – a well-known

94. MSNBC 4, See Appendix 1.

liberal news website -- "where the Kool-Aid is free."[95] Marc Lamont Hill called himself a Stein supporter and had been a Fox contributor during the Obama years, often defending him over fairly benign strategic campaign or administrative choices.[96] However, it is unlikely the average viewer would not know his credentials as a university professor, a previous Fox contributor, or a CNN contributor. Without prior knowledge, Dr. Hill was immediately framed as a liberal loon. O'Reilly's Kool-Aid aside referenced Jonestown Massacre in which the phrase "drinking the Kool-Aid" referred to crazed cultish behavior.

Before O'Reilly introduced Hill, he began the segment with a clip of Stein saying a wealth tax was an "interesting" idea, especially if the tax would be on intangible wealth like stocks and bonds. In his exchange with O'Reilly, Hill defended his vote for Jill Stein and his praise for the wealth tax idea. O'Reilly immediately side-stepped the point about intangible wealth and stuck to the idea that such a law would require agents to forcibly enter the homes of Americans to assess each item within. While Hill was prepared to talk about a tax on assets as yet another self-reported line on a tax return, O'Reilly demanded that his audience picture the "Orwellian" future of government agents inspecting the books and the furniture on every American with property from "Kennedy heir" to middle-class citizen. O'Reilly described a wealthy person who had "a big house, they got a couple of cars, they got some swanky furniture, they got a pool..." While these objects describe a middle to upper-middle class lifestyle, O'Reilly ignored the real class divisions in his imagined person – the ability to maintain all of these items and a whole family in this situation without a job in addition to all of the intangible

95. Fox 5. See Appendix 1.

96. In one example, Hill defended the Obama campaign's plan for a win in 2008, which was common as he alluded to former President Bush doing the same before him. "Is Obama's Transition Team A Sign of Arrogance?" Fox News Clip, Way180. YouTube Video. Jul 25, 2008. Accessed 1/8/2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ka9fS0VCKb8

benefits of the wealthy like special access to elected representatives. In reality, the wealthy class stretched far beyond O'Reilly's conception to people who had the means to purchase several swanky homes, private jets with yachts large enough for aircraft to land, large private security forces, and more with millions of dollars left over. O'Reilly maintained his point about physical property because a mostly working class audience could identify with the repossession of furniture while they couldn't identify with the removal of lobbying and other benefits of excessive wealth, and a fleet of yachts would detract from his point. While Hill defended his points, O'Reilly interrupted him frequently to hammer home his point that the 'loony left' was out to seize your property. After months of Fox coverage in which Obama was the clear enemy of the right-wing news channel, a post-election segment demonizing Stein's position as "Orwellian" signaled that the Republican loss could have been far worse. This may have been O'Reilly's appeal to the status quo that a Democrat would, once again, occupy the White House, and while slightly disappointing, the status quo was a victory when juxtaposed with the dystopian future "the left" would have spelled.

Television consumers would have had to hunt for third party candidate stories in the 2012 coverage, specifically to learn anything about the Green candidate. While it wasn't uncommon to mention third-party candidates, they were considered extras among the cast of candidates. Besides the samples already mentioned, a few other times Jill Stein and her policy positions might have been foregrounded really lacked the context. Commentators detached the Green Party name or its policies from its context as an American political party. On CNN, one conservative commentator used the Green Party to mean that business owners voted for whomever was best for their profits "green as in money."[97] All three CNN broadcasts from

97. CNN 4. See Appendix 1.

Fareed Zakaria's show, GPS, took deep dives into green energy and immigration. In all of them he mentioned the German Green Party, but he failed to mention that the United States also has a Green Party or that it had a platform consistent with many of the solutions Zakaria discussed. Fox News' election day coverage mentioned the Green Party only once. One of the hosts was wearing a sweater with pot leaves on it, and his co-hosts chided him for his libertarian view on the legalization of marijuana (which Stein shared). The process of examining most of the 2012 samples was like searching for Easter eggs in the background of a Pixar film to show connections between broadcasts. The networks were attentive to details in their election stories, but the third parties mostly occupied the space in the background. Pundits and candidates would sometimes interact with the third-party props in their landscape, but mostly paid no attention to them. Because nearly every framing of the 2012 candidates showed the election as a horse race, most segments about Romney and Obama running neck-in-neck simply had no room for other candidates unless those candidates were perceived as rogue goats on the horse track. As Toff suggested, this could have been caused by the journalist culture that appreciates the novel stats or their audiences who also enjoy team sports in political coverage. The attention to the two-parties also bolstered the use of right/left pundit panels to comment on the action, while downplaying events like Stein and Honkala's arrests which erased all evidence of third-party voices outside the locked gates of the 2nd presidential debate. This event epitomized the horse racing quality of the election as Nassau County police helped to clear the racetrack of the pesky candidates who they claimed were literally "blocking traffic." The two small women were handcuffed near the wide gates of Hofstra University and stuffed into an unmarked vehicle where they were made to disappear from the race during a main event. Without any third-party stumbling blocks, the two

competitors and their audience were bound to define the salient racing moments among the two who weren't chained up far from the starting line.

Chapter 3

2016: A History Lesson In Forecasting and Archiving Allegations

Elections, like snowflakes, are unique, detailed structures. When compared with other elections, they resemble each other and maintain similar patterns, but are distinct. The media which routinely follow these elections once resembled a flurry, but has become a blizzard. Within the constant blast, and a thick coat of punditry, the public is given a choice. Citizens may shovel their way through hoping not to slip or make a wrong turn in the confusion or stay home until the mess is over and dig out later. Most Americans usually choose the latter, to survive political decisions and uncover true events long after election season has passed. Journalist Matt Taibbi remarked in *Hate Inc.*, which followed the 2016 election, on how the changing media landscape including the developments of Fox News' partisan echochamber market scheme, twenty-four hour cable news, and the internet culminated in new adopted standards of coverage.[98] Mainstream media actively abandoned the standards for objectivity during the 2016 campaign in favor of hyper-partisan echo chambers.[99] Taibbi noted the enormous amount of earned media given to Donald Trump. This coverage only ramped up further when pundits called for extra scrutiny towards the Republican nominee's daily scandals.[100] Taibbi recalled his

98. Matt Taibbi. *Hate Inc.* (New York, OR Books, 2019), 14.

99. Jim Rutenberg. "Trump is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism." *The New York Times Magazine.* August 7, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/business/balance-fairness-and-a-proudly-provocative-presidential-candidate.html

100. One example of Donald Trump's constant inflammatory statements earning him extra press include: "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters" proclaimed at a rally during the primary. He also disparaged military service members, and Senator John McCain's service specifically. These incidents (from late 2015) garnered lots of media attention at the time, but months later, when (usually opponents) brought these statements up as a testament to Trump's ill character, Trump would deny he said what had been documented on film leading to another news cycle about the original inflammation.

colleagues' strategy to correct the imbalance was to downplay Clinton campaign concerns.[101] He argued that these tactics served Trump's vicious attacks on journalists by lending them some legitimacy, and these tactics also served the Republican campaign by ignoring public opinion which might detract from their narrative that his Democratic opponent would surely win in a landslide.[102] The bitter bipartisan rivalry was the central election discourse, but this chapter will confront the glimpses into the third parties which were mostly rooted in thisTrump/Clinton binary. The 2016 election coverage contained many of the subframes I identified in the 2012 coverage as well as some new, more potent arguments against certain candidates' legitimacy.

On Candidates, Nomination, and Choreography

In early 2015, candidates began to roll into the news from political parties' nominating processes. Jill Stein quickly became the front runner for the Green nomination in June of 2015 after gaining name recognition from her prior run. Stein recognized her platform was basically the same as 2012, but she felt more comfortable communicating the material both succinctly and accurately.[103] She announced at the Green Party 2015 Annual National Meeting candidate forum that the campaign rocketed towards federal matching funds, which had almost eluded them during the 2012 campaign. She also spoke proudly of the alternative media's interest, which had not followed the 2012 campaign until late, if at all.[104] While Stein won her primary in a landslide, Green recognized (and unrecognized) candidates stayed in the race through the 2016

101. Taibbi, 30.

102. Taibbi, 30.

103. Jill Stein. Interviewed by Barbara Dahlgren, Zoom Call from Wisconsin to Maine, December 4, 2020.

104. Seecraig. "Green Party Presidential Forum ANM 2015." July 24, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gu57m11bCnk

Green Nominating Convention in Houston, Texas until Stein's formal nomination.

Gary Johnson won the Libertarian nomination for a second time. His primary race was similar to Stein's in that he began with more media attention than the Libertarian Party had received in some previous elections. He also dwarfed his primary competitors in funding and name recognition. Multiple candidates participated in debates during the primary season, and his convention was contested. Johnson lacked a majority in the first ballot, and he won with 55.8% of the vote on the second ballot.[105] While Stein had been a footnote in 2012, and Johnson was momentarily the "spoiler" against the Republican challenger of the incumbent Democratic president, this year was anyone's race. Johnson and Stein began on equal footing as would-be "spoilers," though Stein had a disadvantage as not only a possible spoiler, but an early person of interest in the Russiagate narrative, a constantly developing story throughout 2016-2019.[106]

During the same period, several candidates emerged in the Republican nomination process. Despite the remarkable number of prominent figures vying for the seat, the majority of them dropped out before March of 2016 to rally around Trump; Ted Cruz and John Kasich were the last to drop out in May.[107] Trump was known as a billionaire businessman in real estate and by his television appearances as star of *The Apprentice* reality show. He had commented on the political scene as a celebrity billionaire in the past; his most famous claim was that President Obama was not born in the U.S. He was not depicted as a serious candidate even after his nomination, and through election day, his chance of victory was portrayed as slim. Taibbi

105. "Road to the White House 2016. Libertarian National Convention Day 2, Part 1." May 29, 2016. C-SPANhttps://www.c-span.org/video/?409917-1/libertarian-party-selects-gary-johnson-2016-nominee&live=

106. "Russiagate" refers to the popular term to describe an alleged government scandal like Watergate. The scandal included alleged Russian hacks or possible leaks of sensitive information which Wikileaks disseminated to the public. The term was mostly used to talk about the possible involvement of the Trump campaign with Russian intelligence to meddle in the 2016 election. More on this in the post election section of this writing.

107. Cruz endorsed Trump after he dropped out.

explained how Trump gladly played into the "beauty contest" narratives about presidential races which had become popular over a decade earlier. He labeled his opponents with phrases like "low energy" while the press couldn't help but to amplify the drama. Trump's own caricature, bolstered by his shocking language in both his speeches and his Tweets, aided the news media in creating their good versus evil narrative in which Trump was like a WWE wrestling heel.[108] Much of televised news became a 24-hour Donald Trump show which analyzed every aspect of Mr. Trump, frequently diagnosing his motives.[109] Trump's platform centered around his business acumen and his wealth, which were his key leadership traits. He argued that his business knowledge would help him to deal with other businessmen, work with world leaders on foreign policy, and grow the American economy. Trump also argued that his wealth would allow him to insulate himself from the wishes of large campaign contributors.[110] In addition, other key proposals included: building a southern border wall which Mexico would pay for, repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), repeal DACA, rebuild America's crumbling infrastructure, and renegotiate world trade deals to bring back American jobs.[111] Trump was a Tea Party Republican favorite for his anti-immigrant views, but his more religious and establishment political counterparts opposed Trump as the new "Never-Trump" wing led by

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108. Taibbi, Hate Inc. explanation of "likeability test" role allowing reporters to declare candidates non-presidential based on things like physical traits and assumed roles: the candidate Americans want to have a beer with." Trump awarded his political rivals unpresidential descriptors like his charge Ted Cruz's father helped assassinate JFK. pp 126-131 discuss the parallels between choreographed wrestling and Trump's role as a "born heel." He was usually the attacking figure who could easily be characterized as villainous. However, in a media environment with a good versus evil narrative already built in, when the heel deviated from the evil script to say things that were true, Taibbi argued "it boxes in editors." pp. 132.

109. Taibbi. *Hate Inc.*, 29.

110. Candidate Trump did not entirely finance his own campaign as he promised, and while his message was clear to supporters, skeptics had good reason to doubt this and many other planks of Trump's platform as many promises became less concrete as the campaign moved forward.

111. C-Span. "Donald Trump Presidential Campaign Announcement Full Speech. June 16, 2015. YouTube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apjNfkysjbM

figures like Mitt Romney. Romney had just conducted his own presidential run with similar or identical platform points like using his business acumen to run the nation like a business, cutting taxes, repealing the ACA, and building a fence along the border. Nevertheless, he and some other players supported independent candidate Evan McMullin, a Mormon, ex-CIA agent and policy wonk from the Republican Party.[112]

The Democratic Party primary challengers were Martin O'Malley,[113] Bernie Sanders,[114] and Hillary Clinton.[115] O'Malley dropped out in February leaving Sanders and Clinton in a fight for the power in the party, which Sanders promised to fight through the convention for this support despite calls by Clinton Democrats and pundits to drop out early.[116] Further mobilizing the progressive wing of the Democrats, Wikileaks exposed DNC and media favoritism of Clinton prior to their convention through a series of internal documents like emails some suspected was a Russian cyber attack.[117] The DNC experienced large protests in and outside of the convention

112. Sabrina Siddiqui, Lauren Gambino, and Amber Jamieson. "Republican Evan McMullin to launch presidential run against Trump." *The Guardian.* August 8, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/08/republican-evan-mcmullin-presidential-run-trump

113. Governor of Maryland. A political similar to the Clintons with his personal political goals and "tough on crime" style policy, O'Malley dropped out after his 3rd place slot in the Iowa Caucus.

114. Previously Independent Senator from Vermont, and an outspoken socialist. He was most famous to this point for his use of amendments to legislation in the Senate. He quickly became the leader progressives culminated around due to the problems he ran to combat like wealth inequality and solutions like Medicare For All and a raise in the minimum wage.

115. Former first lady, U.S. Senator from New York, and President Obama's Secretary of State. She was President Obama's main rival in 2008 representing the right-wing of the Democratic Party, while Obama represented the progressive side.

116. In both parties, only a handful of candidates have campaigned through their major party conventions in the past thirty years. Calling for Sanders to drop out consumed multiple news cycles after Super Tuesday: Dean Obedillah. "Bernie Sanders is not Dropping Out." CNN.com opinion. April 27, 2016 https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/26/opinions/sanders-is-not-dropping-out-opinion-obeidallah/index.html Liz Kreutz. "Hillary Clinton Gives Bernie Sanders a History Lesson in Dropping Out." May 5, 2016. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders-history-lesson-dropping/story?id=38909381

117. Associated Press "Leaked DNC emails reveal details of anti-Sanders sentiment." *The Guardian.* July 24,2016 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/23/dnc-emails-wikileaks-hillary-bernie-sanders

hall with an exodus of Sanders supporters and delegates when Sanders called for a suspension of the rules in order for Clinton to immediately become the Democratic Party's nominee.[118] Sanders' progressive supporters who called themselves "Bernie or Bust" were left to bust, and became prime voters for the Stein and Johnson campaigns to court. Jill Stein attended the DNC protests to create a political home for the mostly young, mostly newer political base lost by the Democratic Party. Sanders was a fervent Clinton supporter after the DNC nomination process in which he stumped for Clinton at thirty-nine events in the last few months before the election.[119]

Hillary Clinton, who announced her campaign with nearly thirty years in the public spotlight, was a natural successor to the Obama administration. While the identity aspect of the first female president following the first African American president was a major selling point for the Democratic Party's darling, critics saw Clinton as a continuation of some of the most unpopular policies (particularly economic and foreign) from Obama and Bill Clinton's administrations. For example, former First Lady Clinton bought herself a warhawk reputation as Secretary of State when she encouraged Obama to raise troop levels in Afghanistan, continue to maintain up to 20,000 troops in Iraq after the war's conclusion had been announced, and funnel weapons to rebels in Syrian's civil war.[120] Unsurprisingly, she stumped for strong interventionism in foreign policy including preparedness against possible threats from Russia,

118. Andrew Prokop. "Watch: the moment Bernie Sanders officially threw the nomination to Hillary Clinton." Vox.com. July 26,2016. https://www.vox.com/2016/7/26/12291196/bernie-sanders-dnc-hillary-clinton-nomination

119. Parnes, Amie. "Democrats voice concerns over Sanders." *The Hill.* January 13, 2020. https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/477721-democrats-voice-concerns-over-sanders

120. Landler, Mark. "H Is for Hawk." *The New York Times Magazine*, April 24, 2016, 28(L). *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed December 23, 2020). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A450403136/AONE?u=milwaukee&sid=AONE&xid=39599ad6.

China, and the Middle East.[121] Economically, Clinton claimed she would incentivize companies to pay workers fairly and to ensure "equal pay for equal work." Many of her goals included private-public partnerships to "cut waste and streamline services," but at the same time she promised to reform the tax code to disincentivize rampant speculative investment and "stashing profits overseas."[122] Her energy policy during global warming also incentivized business with public monies to upgrade to renewable energy. Like Trump, Clinton also had her own election integrity promises against corporate PAC monies, and like Trump, participated in the fundraising she swore to oppose in office.[123] Obama brought up Clinton's close connections with billionaires like the Waltons,[124] in 2008, and the corporate ties continued to be a strongly criticized aspect of her 2016 run. A major theme in Clinton's platform was her role as the next in line to protect the progress of the Democratic legacy incrementally produced by Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. Like Obama, and Bill Clinton before her, Hillary Clinton was committed to a long standing tradition of incremental change through compromise, despite the increasingly hyper partisan political landscape. In addition, she claimed to be a strong opposition to any anti-LGBT, or economic "trickle-down" opponent the Republicans would most likely run. Other central issues for the would-be first female president were equal pay (regardless of identity), paid

121. Clinton mentioned 9/11 and her role in catching terrorists and taking care of 9/11 responders and veterans several times.

122. Hillary Clinton. "Hillary Clinton's official campaign launch." YouTube Video. June 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i8vdM15K6c

123. The Clinton campaign also received gobs of corporate and PAC money. Over half of her more than 700 billion dollar campaign consisted of large donations, and almost 200 million dollars was raised in pro-Clinton PAC support according to her OpenSecrets summary. 2016 Presidential Election: Hillary Clinton. Opensecrets.org. https://www.opensecrets.org/pres16/candidate?id=N00000019

124. Michael Barbaro. "As a Director, Clinton Moved Walmart Board, but Only So Far." *New York Times Magazine.* May 20, 2007. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/us/politics/20walmart.html

family leave, and universal access to preschool and childcare.[125]

Trump and Clinton were the candidates garnering nearly every top headline in the coverage I analyzed. Sanders was also a continuing figure, and his influence stretched to his former campaign staff as commentators. While the context of all of these candidates so early in the election may seem beside the point of the mainstream news' framings of elections and candidates, the events which actually took place are important to a historical understanding of the election and its coverage. In many ways, the media drifted into a post-fact zone in which little self-reflection occurred in the wake of an election in which most mainstream election forecasts were wrong. The baffled pundits hardly accounted for the ways in which their media apparatus helped to drive Trump directly to the White House through its constant coverage and clear unfair treatment of other candidates. In addition, some of the biggest concerns of voters and biggest events of the election (like the Podesta emails) were, for the most part, mitigated. The spoiler effect in itself shows the duality of effective events outside of mainstream media's coverage and the presence of media effect on events. People voted for Jill Stein despite the mediated argument of the "spoiler effect," and many people presumably did not vote for Jill Stein because they believed that news pundits were correct to argue the "spoiler effect." These pundits were often accurate in their reporting, but their massive amplification of some of the issues and events I outlined while diminishing others is a question of reliability. The prophecy that Jill Stein would be a nonviable candidate in 2016 was self-fulfilling as they continued the norm to avoid covering her campaign while her own media presence and name recognition was still small.. The prophecy that Hillary Clinton would win the presidency in a landslide was wildly unreliable in part because events and attitudes pointing to her weaknesses were

125. Hillary Clinton. "Hillary Clinton's official campaign launch." YouTube Video. June 15, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i8vdM15K6c

underrepresented in comparison to her opponent's negatives. Her opponent, contrary to Stein and Johnson, was immensely over-represented, which affirmed his legitimacy in the race even where it was intended to remove that legitimacy.

The Coverage and Continuing Themes

Of the hundreds of transcripts within my coverage parameters in 2016, I found relatively few prior to election day, while the vast majority occurred in the month following. Only a handful of transcripts from CBS, NBC, ABC, and PBS together mentioned spoilers, Stein, or the Green Party, and many of these were not rooted in election context. MSNBC and Fox each had about thirty broadcasts pre-election, and both networks had somewhat fewer post-election mentions. CNN, ABC, NBC, PBS, and CBS all increased their coverage post-election, but even so, about seventy pre-election broadcasts mentioned these terms, much more than the scant coverage from 2012. While each broadcast adds to the world constructed by televised news, most of my focus was on the sections of coverage which included the Stein or spoiler content rather than the broadcast as a whole. These broadcasts were consistent with the themes I found in 2012 which separated news about third parties from news about the Republicans and Democrats, even where candidates had strong associations with issues in the coverage. For example, poll numbers and strategy from the two-party trail was often discussed at the top of the hour without any mention of other candidates.

Particular events which were covered across multiple networks incited talk of third parties and spoilers like the 2012 coverage. For example, Al Gore joined the Clinton campaign to stump in Florida. This event, pre-framed by the campaign ensured each program to cover it would invite networks to use the "Scarlet Nader" frame in their coverage. Another was Bernie Sanders' interview including attacks on third party voters framing their votes as "a vote for

Trump." Gary Johnson's famous "Aleppo moment," September 8, 2016 on *Morning Joe,* wherein he could not recall the city of Aleppo, Syria during an interview, was another moment covered across networks and quickly became a meme standing for Libertarian or third party incompetence. The biggest third party news was likely post-election when Jill Stein asked for a recount in a few states (also called the Stein recount). The debates were a smaller focus in my objects of analysis in 2016 since none of the networks covered third party debates or the arrests of twenty-four Stein supporters outside one of the bipartisan debates either at the end of September (when the event occurred), or during my coverage parameters.[126]

Most of the Stein mentions occurred during polling number reports or offhand comments about the strategy of the major parties. More than a third of pre-election coverage only mentioned Stein specifically in passing during polling announcements. Stories or mentions about third party candidates were rare beyond their aspect as an obstacle of Democratic or Republican strategy. Like the 2012 coverage, very little of the content contained in-depth discussions about Stein, her strategy, or her policies until after the election when she suddenly garnered more in-depth coverage than both of her presidential runs combined. During spoiler claims, stories about Jill Stein's top issues, and many other reasonable spots in which any of these networks might have talked to Stein directly, she and her running mate were noticeably absent. However, Gary Johnson, Bill Weld (Johnson's running mate), and Evan McMullin were all given interviews by some of these networks prior to November 8th. Of all of the candidates, Stein was least likely to be granted more than a singular mention in a broadcast, and if her name was mentioned she was unlikely to be depicted in her own words. I only came across one Stein soundbite pre-election, and it aired on Fox. She was not interviewed on any of the major

126. DemocracyNow! "Outside First Presidential Debate, 24 Arrested at Protests & Jill Stein Escorted Away by Police." YouTube Video. September 27, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctFtLJAds1w

networks throughout my sample prior to election day. Due to the amount of polling content in which four candidates were included, Stein still enjoyed many more instances of name recognition by the media, some of which included minimal explanation of the kinds of policies her possible voters might be interested in. This often appeared in the coverage of millennial opinion, Bernie Sanders' interviews early in October, and the entrance of Al Gore onto the campaign trail.

Network and public television were some of the least likely to mention Stein's candidacy at all, partisan cable news (Fox and MSNBC) were somewhat likely, and CNN was most likely to include Stein. NBC contributed the least overall to the search results, and I will discuss its singular pre-election result later on. Of all of the networks, PBS mentioned Stein's presence in the election less than in 2012 until after the ballots had been cast. While in 2012, *PBS Newshour* aired one of the third-party debates in a five minute segment, no similar segment was noted in the 2016 coverage. Though PBS covered Jill Stein's recount effort following the 2016 election. In four of the six post-election broadcasts, Stein's recount was mentioned including an interview on November 24th, Thanksgiving Day. Much of the ABC, CNN and CBS coverage mentioning Stein was primarily focused on the context of other candidates, even where it was more substantial than the single mention of a poll. For example, CNN's *New Day* on October 1st followed a college event with Chelsea Clinton to court millennials, a voting bloc with whom Stein was popular. A student who had been a Sanders supporter challenged Clinton's legitimacy over the Wikileaks DNC leak, and walked out of the event carrying a Jill Stein sign above his head. *CBS This Morning* contained the most substantive coverage of any of its shows. This coverage consisted of a clip of Gary Johnson on John Oliver's comedy show responding badly to being asked if he was a spoiler, a clip of Jimmy Kimmel with guest Gary Johnson in which

Kimmel asked why he and Stein didn't hold a debate without the major candidates, and a story on how CBS conducts its own polling.[127] The majority of MSNBC coverage was also about polling, where Stein's role in the election was primarily as an obstacle for the Clinton team to strategize around. Post election, MSNBC contained fewer mentions, although Lawrence O'Donnell interviewed Stein on his show about the recount. While in 2012, O'Donnell was rather sympathetic to third parties, his tone was quite different in the 2016 samples. The Fox mentions were slightly more broad. While MSNBC tended to have one narrative about Stein and the Green Party, Fox conversations between pundits tended to present Stein in a variety of ways depending on the context. Sometimes, Stein was cast as such a far left figure, that her unspoken positions were suggested as a more extreme version of the Democrats. Other times, Fox hosts and panels were fairly charitable to Stein usually at the expense of Democrats. Throughout this study, I recognized the overt partisan nature of Fox and MSNBC, but I draw little distinction between punditry and news of all of the broadcasters because both types of shows have news-like sets and topical discussions which can be difficult for audiences to distinguish. Also, non-news programs are an informational source for most people. I also drew few distinctions between cable, network, and public television programming whose funding sources, left versus right pundit panels, and agendas were fairly homogenous.

127 "The latest CBS News/Battleground Tracker shows Hillary Clinton is now six points ahead of Donald Trump in the thirteen battleground states." *CBS This Morning.* CBS News Transcripts 7:00 AM EST October 17, 2016
"Sixty-three percent of likely voters in battleground states who watched the debate say the candidates should promise to accept the election results, it`s according to a new CBS News poll." CBS News Transcripts CBS This Morning 7:00 AM EST October 20, 2016
"Well, CBS News, which does its own polling, and, of course, has since 1975 but there's been a sharp rise in the number of polls since 2012." CBS News Transcripts *CBS This Morning.* 7:00 AM EST October 1, 2016.

Getting the Pitchforks Ready:

The Candidates and Voters to Blame for Clinton's Loss

The frames in 2016 were quite similar to 2012, and particularly prominent were "undeserving" and the "Scarlet Nader" frames. While fewer segments portrayed third party candidates as a sideshow, some utilized content about third parties to fill out an entertainment or human interest need in the broadcast with a much lighter tone than the hard political news of the bipartisan campaign. The "undeserving" frame was most prominent when anchors and hosts had the rare opportunity to confront candidates or public questions about the scant coverage of third parties. The "Scarlet Nader" frame was highlighted most when Al Gore joined Clinton's campaign at an event in Florida. Gore's speech was a gift-wrapped offering to the press, a memento and conversation piece for pundits to keep well-dusted while they rattled off the difference between Nader's and Gore's Florida vote like it happened yesterday.

The ""undeserving" frame," in which Greens failed to be newsworthy, was quite prevalent in the coverage. The partition between news from "the campaign trail" and the bits about third parties is the most prominent example. This did not change between 2012 and 2016; third party candidates were not considered newsworthy in the ways Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump were. I found a few explicit examples showing how MSNBC, Fox, and CNN hosts deliberately judged third party candidates as lesser characters even where the events or topics were conventionally newsworthy or where the candidates fit into the narrative. One example was Bill O'Reilly's mailbag segment which aired October 11th on Fox. He took the following question, "Give us a break from all the political banter offered daily by Clinton and Trump. There are other presidential candidates who have qualified to be on the ballot. Let's hear their visions for America." O'Reilly equated polling with voter demand, and he justified his lack of

coverage in this way. “Governor Gary Johnson and Jill Stein, the two alternate candidates do appear occasionally on FNC. But voter demand for them is low, Bill. And so folks who decide elections, if I see Johnson or Stein gain some momentum, I'll report it, but at this point, they have not.” O’Reilly was silent on questions about the amount of polling which didn’t consider third party candidates, how accurate a representation polls were, or how much coverage was necessary for voters to learn about the candidates in order to consider them in the polls. Ultimately, the onus was on the candidates to play a bigger role in the polls and the content the host considered newsworthy, not for the hosts to inform their audience about the campaigns. This could be seen as an abdication of O’Reilly’s decision making process to distinguish candidate newsworthiness merely through polling presentations.

Another example of the use of polls to combat charges of unfair coverage appeared on CNN’s *Reliable Sources* October 23rd. Brian Stelter interviewed Sean Spicer from the Trump campaign about his candidate’s battle against the media. At the time, Trump was bemoaning the media bias in coverage of him. The title of the segment was “Media bias or Trump working the refs?” which is a fascinating object for its own relation to the overarching horse-race in action. Media referring to itself as the referee implies the CNN reporters see themselves inside the competition as active participants affecting the sport. They are not merely reporters of the outcomes or even the play-by-plays; as refs they can make judgements rather than simply report judgements made by others. This is consistent with the role Taibbi criticized his colleagues for in 2016. This critique added to the criticism beyond the well-known editorial biases researchers like Bennett previously found as problematic to democracy. They began with the horse-race frame of Trump and Clinton’s poll numbers. Then, they spoke about the presidential candidate’s invocation of the DNC leaks showing favoritism of Clinton by the media and the Democratic

Party. The story, which continued to crawl across the screen as the segment played, focused primarily on the nefarious document leakers rather than the content of the documents. Clearly Trump's other claim that voter fraud was widespread was unfounded and deserved pushback. On the other hand, brushing legitimate and shared public concerns about hyperpartisanship in the media also hides an important reality in the story. A later segment captured this low opinion of the media later in the broadcast, but Stelter played opposition to his guest from the Trump campaign. Spicer, while supporting a brash candidate embroiled in some serious scandals, attacked with factual information about biased coverage. Spicer also criticized the handling of the leaked material surrounding Trump's own scandal showing his attacks on media bias were quite hypocritical and politically opportunistic, but his factual claims about media bias stood up to Stelter's comeback. Spicer's argument that Jill Stein wasn't given her fair share of coverage was one Stelter had difficulties in dismissing:

> SPICER: Look at the amount of time that you guys give Evan McMullin and Gary Johnson versus Jill Stein. Jill Stein has been nonexistent. And she still has 5 and 6 percent. You guys don't want to cover people on the left the way you do on the right. You want to make sure that more people are giving time -- (crosstalk)
> STELTER: I Think Jill Stein is closer to 2%, but that's an interesting point, especially about Evan McMullin, right? He's really only competitive in one state right now, in Utah. So, you're saying the media is tilting the playing field by boosting up Trump's opponents.
> SPICER: You boost the opponents. You put on people on panels….[128]

Like O'Reilly, Stelter used poll numbers to dismiss Spicer's claim. In the poll in question, which Stelter had advertised before the segment, it was true that Stein had been at 5% at times, but sat at 2% at the time of the interview. The poll itself was problematic as a measure of Stein's mostly younger support as half of the nearly 1000 people polled used landlines, and none of them were below age 35. In addition, the poll asked voters about name recognition of

128. Reliable Sources CNN October 23, 2016. CNN San Francisco Collection. Internet Archive. Accessed November 30, 2020. https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20161023_150000_Reliable_Sources/start/0/end/60

Donald and Melania Trump (inescapable names by October of 2016), but not of the third party candidates. The poll claimed a 3% margin of error and 14% of voters claimed they might change their minds.[129] In other words, the percentages in the polls were soft enough to claim Stein could be at 5% support or higher. Stelter's interjection implies he agreed with Spicer that candidates should receive more coverage at 5% of polling support, but neither argument supported the options that candidate coverage might be important to voter education or that newsworthiness could come from events and ideas unrelated to public opinion polling.

On October 26, MSNBC's Chris Hayes showed a rare sympathy (not seen since the 2012 coverage) to Margaret Flowers, a Green Party senate candidate in Maryland, "who got 5 percent in the most recent Washington Post poll, didn`t meet the 15 percentage point minimum for today`s televised debate." Hayes presented Flowers as a figure with agency in the polls by saying she "didn't meet" the minimum percentage, but also lent her struggle credence in showing the hurdles she had been presented with, "Getting your name on the ballot with whatever requisite signatures or filing fees are required can be difficult. Getting attention for your candidacy with ads and voter outreach can be expensive. And getting a high up number in the polls to qualify for debates can be nearly impossible." He displayed footage of her "crashing" the televised debate. This singular clip was the only other mention of a non-presidential third party candidate in all of the coverage addressing my terms. Flowers protested the statewide debate she was not invited to by showing up anyway, walking onto the debate stage with her Republican and Democratic counterparts, and demanding a podium. The Democrat was silent, and the Republican asked if Flowers could join them before security escorted her away. MSNBC's Chris Hayes was the only show which covered this episode of the small, middle-aged

129. Jennifer Agiesta. "Clinton leads by 5 heading into final two weeks." CNN.com October 25, 2016 https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/24/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-presidential-polls/index.html

woman being dragged off stage as she called to the audience about the "sham" of a debate. Following the clip, Hayes quickly segued to other stories. If this had been a Republican or Democrat, the footage and conversation might have taken a news cycle or more, but while this segment seems almost insignificant, it was more noteworthy than the pre-election Green presidential coverage on the network.

The "laughingstock" frame occurred throughout the 2016 coverage in several ways. Most prominent were mentions of Gary Johnson's "Aleppo moment" as it quickly became a meme. Often, the programs generally used humor to portray these candidates in the little representation they received. The clips of John Oliver and Jimmy Kimmel as the news' only representation of Gary Johnson juxtaposed with the serious discussions of other candidates were illustrative of that. Bill O'Reilly and *The Five* on Fox frequently played their Stein segments with silliness as well. Humor in itself is a common component of news-like infotainment programming. However, silly treatments were at least as common, if not more common than serious treatments of third parties due to the small amount of coverage. The following example illustrates multiple framing devices, and the "laughingstock" is strong throughout. The one and only pre-election broadcast in the coverage contributed by NBC occurred the day prior to election day. From beginning to end, this segment captured the cavalier attitude about presidential candidates outside of the Democrat and Republican choices. The segment began with another framing of third-party candidates in the context of the two parties. While it was somewhat sympathetic to voters looking for other choices, the broadcasters mentioned notoriety as a candidate attribute without noticing their own role in the name recognition of political figures. Anne Thompson began the segment, "With voters historically unhappy about the best

known choices, what are the other options?"[130] If NBC was truly sympathetic to the voter's plight, perhaps the names and stances of alternative candidates would have been a staple in pre-election coverage beginning around the time early voting began. Perhaps it would have been more in-depth than the three minutes given to a slew of candidates two days before voters' final opportunity to cast a ballot.

The broadcasters might order the information about candidates based on their polling, their ballot access or some other reasonable way to bring out the most prominent aspects. However, informing about the political field ran counter to the goal of this episode. Instead, the journalist who wrote this piece included a mishmash of random candidates in a seemingly arbitrary order. This segment was more of a human interest piece about celebrities and oddities. First, Thompson presented Rod Silva of the alleged "Nutrition Party," clipped in for about five seconds in his own words. Silva was on the ballot in one state, and it wasn't his home state of New Jersey.[131] Presented as "a restaurateur" Silva actually had sold off his restaurant chain early in 2015, but stayed on as "director of brand development."[132] Prior to the property's sale, Silva gained notoriety through the show *Undercover Boss,* which is likely the reason he was given the lead in this segment on third parties.[133] The inclusion of Rod Silva could have been read just as

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130. *NBC Nightly News* on NBC. "Looking beyond the election..." November 6, 2016. Referred to as NBC 1 hereafter.

131. Berg-Anderrson and Roza. "2016 General Election Presidential Candidate Ballot Access." *The Green Papers*.
https://www.thegreenpapers.com/G16/President-BallotAccessByState.phtml

132. The grill was the setting of the interview. Lisa Jennings. "Muscle Maker Grill eyes growth in California: healthful east cost-based brand has west coast appeal." Nation's Restaurant News. July 6, 2015.
https://www.nrn.com/fast-casual/muscle-maker-grill-eyes-growth-california
NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt. "November 6th 2016, 6:30pm - 7:00pm EST." Internet Archive video.
https://archive.org/details/WRC_20161106_233000_NBC_Nightly_News_With_Lester_Holt/start/1620/end/1680

133. Nancy Luna. "Undercover boss: Irvine restaurant ceo tries out at his fast food company." *Orange County Register*. January 8, 2016.
https://www.ocregister.com/2016/01/08/undercover-boss-irvine-restaurant-ceo-tries-out-at-his-fast-food-company/

easily as an advertisement for Muscle Maker Grill.

The reporter cut from a restaurant to a bar for the second candidate presentation: "The Prohibition Party claims to be the oldest third party. So we went to New York`s Prohibition Bar to measure its support…The ticket of Jim Hedges and Bill Bayes supports the Second Amendment, energy independence and renewable energy. It opposes same-sex marriage, wants to abolish the Federal Reserve, and of course, ban alcohol." Between the information about these candidates, the reporter canvassed a coincidentally named Prohibition bar in New York to ask if patrons knew about the Prohibition Party or its candidates, which of course they did not. Hedges was on the ballot in three states, and a write-in in five others, but none of these were New York.[134] The candidate was a tax assessor in Iowa, and the only elected member of the small political party.[135] Even if Hedges were campaigning strongly in New York, the last place he would have frequented would have been the kind which served alcoholic beverages. The reporter's choice to canvas a bar was a joke on the candidate to emphasize the non-choice Hedges represented in a nation of alcohol users.

Without any context given, one of the bar-goers said, "I`m vehemently against a protest vote."[136] which is often a term used to describe voting for any minor party. The protest that is referred to is one against the "two-party" candidates rather than a vote in favor of the chosen third party candidate. A record number of voters told Pew researchers in September that their vote would be against Trump or Clinton rather than for their affirmative choice between the

134. Berg-Anderrson and Roza. "2016 General Election..." *The Green Papers.*

135. "Jim Hedges." Prohibitionists.org. http://www.prohibitionists.org/candidates/hedges/hedges.html

136. NBC 1

two,[137] but a "protest vote" may have been characterized by voting against both of these figures outside the two-party system. The purpose of the language is to portray a negative vote against rather than a positive vote for a candidate of choice. While context throughout this piece was sparse, this sound bite signaled the switch from presenting an entertaining sideshow of candidates ineligible to most voters to an explanation of the danger in voting for one of these curio candidates. The next presentation was about Evan McMullin who "aims to be the spoiler in Utah."[138] McMullin was on the ballot in eleven states and a write-in in another twenty-eight.[139] He was seemingly a vote against Donald Trump in a variety of deep red states like his home state of Utah.[140] The Never-Trumper representing the conservative right abandoned through the Trump nomination was given one soundbite: "Our strategy is to deny both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, a majority in the Electoral College."

As compelling as McMullin may have been as a Republican who took his institutional record to an independent campaign might have been, his ballot access was hardly noteworthy compared to Johnson and Stein, who were next to be mentioned in the jumble followed by two marijuana party candidates. Beginning with Johnson, the segment was cut from McMullin's soundbite to Johnson's biggest campaign flub, without context to show who was talking and what the moment was about. This was noted in NBC's transcript:

> MAN #2: Aleppo.
> MAN #3: And what is in Aleppo?

137. Geiger, A.W. "For many voters, it's not which presidential candidate they're for but which they're against." Pew Research Center: Fact Tank. September 2, 2016. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/02/for-many-voters-its-not-which-presidential-candidate-theyre-for-but-which-theyre-against/

138. Anne Thompson: NBC 1

139. Berg-Anderrson and Roza. "2016 General Election..." *The Green Papers.*

140. Sabrina Siddiqui et al. "Republican Evan McMullin to launch presidential run…" *The Guardian.*

Neither Johnson, nor the host of *Morning Joe* were named, and Thompson did not place the clip into context, instead barreling through the end of the confusing segment,

> Other potential spoilers in a close race, libertarian candidate Gary Johnson on the ballot in all fifty states. And, Green Party candidate Jill Stein on the ballot in forty-four states but not tightly contested Nevada and North Carolina. This year, smoke-filled rooms produced two pro marijuana party candidates. And in Chicago, the city that lays claim to the phrase vote early and often, it`s touting Cubs infielders Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant, who combined for the final out to give the long suffering team the world championship….In fact, already proven winners.[141]

Unlike the Nutrition Party and Prohibition Party, neither of the candidates who had garnered enough ballot access to have a possibility of winning the election were explained at all. Nor were either of the candidates given a sound bite including some context about the campaigns they ran. While McMullin's strategy was meaningful enough to include because he called himself a spoiler, neither Johnson or Stein could speak about their supposed "spoiler" roles. In addition, both candidates were blurred into the announcement of pro-marijuana candidates, when Stein and Johnson also supported legalization of cannabis. The marijuana candidates shown were Thomas Keister and Dan Vacek, of which the latter appears to have found ballot access in two states.[142] Had a viewer searched each of these candidates, he would have needed a pen in hand and a quick eye for detail because each of the last four candidates had mere moments on screen. The last two were not even named by the reporter, but for the small print above their pictures as they foregrounded a close-up image of marijuana plants.[143]

This spoiler proclamation memorialized on the only NBC news clip to mention Stein within the final month before election day was quite comprehensive considering its brevity. Without mentioning a single policy or characteristic of Jill Stein, Thompson lumped her together

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141. NBC 1.

142. Berg-Anderrson and Roza. "2016 General Election..." *The Green Papers.*

143. NBC Nightly News. "November 6th 2016, 6:30pm - 7:00pm EST." Internet Archive video.

with an entire sideshow of blank starers, anti-alcohol grouches, pot smokers, and nefarious intentional spoilers (caught on camera revealing their plans). Thompson was correct to say she was not on the ballot in North Carolina or Utah, but Stein was available as a write-in on the former.[144] This omission is another way I recognize this clip as having little to do with informing voters. The clip began sympathetic to the voters' dislike of Trump and Clinton, but mostly fed them information about candidates they could not vote for. The few candidates that were most likely available were quite hidden. The punchline at the end including a soundbite from baseball players winning the World Series displayed just how little the segment was about politics at all. Or perhaps, it was absolutely about politics, but only about the political sheen that Americans view: the horse racing story of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton foregrounding a confusing mess of flat supporting characters that never actually leave the barn. The whole subject is to be avoided for the corrupt mess that it is by adjusting one's set to a finer sport like baseball. Thompson's segue into the sports moment was an allusion to the motto attributed to the Mecca of gangsters and corrupt politicians. It was in the "windy city" where characters like Al Capone said "vote early and often."[145]

The Fox network also depicted Stein with humor, sometimes they were surprisingly charitable to her. *The O'Reilly Factor* on the Fox network had the most flattering of these:

> O'REILLY: "What The Heck Just Happened?" segment tonight. As you may know, Jill Stein is running for president on the Green Party ticket. She is polling about three percent. Here's what she said earlier this week.
> (Video clip) JILL STEIN: I won't sleep well at night if Donald Trump is elected, but I sure won't sleep well at night if Hillary Clinton is elected. On the issue of war and nuclear weapons and the potential for nuclear war, it's actually Hillary's policies, which are much scarier than Donald Trump, who does not want to go to war with Russia. (End Video Clip)

144. Berg-Anderrson and Roza. "2016 General Election..." *The Green Papers.*

145. "Early and Often," WBEZ, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (WGBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC, accessed November 1, 2020, http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-50-322bvw49.

> O'REILLY: Here to analyze the campaign, from their unique points of view, McGuirk and Gutfeld. You're voting for Jill Stein, Gutfeld?
> GREG GUTFELD: No, because she's a liar. She keeps saying she doesn't sleep well at night. She's a doctor. Just write a prescription. She can get anything she wants. I don't believe what she is saying. And also she clearly hates women, going after Hillary like that. That's wrong. Also she is also representing the Green Party. An entire party devoted to money.
> O'REILLY: No, no, that's environmental...
> BERNARD MCGUIRK: Let's do this over.
> O'REILLY: I was surprised that she feels that Hillary Clinton would be more dangerous with nukes.
> MCGUIRK: She is Bernie Sanders with a backbone. Let's put it that way. And she's right…[146]

Gutfeld was clearly being silly when he called Stein a liar, and his aim was mostly at Hillary Clinton and her supporters. Calling Stein a woman-hater mocked the defensive stance liberals took to dismiss Clinton critics as sexists, taking it over the top. Some of Clinton's critics did attack her on the basis of gender, but this joke reminded the audience that Stein was also in the running to become the first female president too.[147] McGuirk's punchline was actually aimed at Bernie Sanders even with the misrepresentations of Stein. Gutfeld's silly misunderstanding of the Green Party as the money party hearkens back to 2012, when he used the term "Green Party" to mean 'in the interest of money.'[148] One could interpret the misunderstanding as a joke on either the public or on Fox for its lack of information on relevant candidates and political parties. Most likely, the piece was unintentionally self-aware, but included the only pre-election soundbite as well as high praise. Only four years before, O'Reilly railed against Stein's "Orwellian" plot to consider wealth taxes following Obama's win.[149]

The "Scarlet Nader" frame I found in 2012 cropped up in 2016 as well in many different

146. "New Leaked Emails Reveal Clinton Campaign Tried to Delay Illinois Presidential Primary; NYT Says It Welcomes Libel Suit From Trump Over Stories He Sexually Assaulted Two Women," Fox News Network. *The O'Reilly Factor* 8:00 PM EST October 13, 2016. Fox News Network Transcript.

147. This was one of the few times gender was mentioned to talk about Stein, the other mention was in a conversation on *Hannity* with Laura Ingraham, November 2nd.

148. "Election Day." *The Five.* Fox News Transcript. November 6, 2012

149. "Wealth Tax. *The O'Reilly Factor*. Fox News Transcript. November 28, 2012

ways. The most prominent of these was already pre-framed by the Clinton campaign when Al Gore stumped for her in Florida. This was covered across nearly every network packaged for networks to remind their audiences about Nader's portion of the 2000 vote. Sometimes this was presented briefly, mostly on CNN and Fox, and commanded far more time on MSNBC. For example, Rachel Maddow's representation began with Nader's tragic fall from national hero of public safety to pariah. October 5th, Lawrence O'Donnell interviewed Mitt Romney in which they discussed the Gore strategy to "pull votes away" from Stein. The October 11th edition of MSNBC's *Hardball* with Chris Matthews contained this blunt, simplistic, and remediated history:

> MATTHEWS: (introducing Gore) Anyway, he's telling young people what he ought to tell them, because after Ralph Nader got 92,000 votes in Florida and threw that election down there to W., there should be a lesson there that older people should remind younger people about: Don`t throw your vote away for somebody like Gary Johnson or Jill Stein if you really care who wins the election. It's not just a protest opportunity. It's the election of a president, and elections have consequences. (Commercial break).
>
> MATTHEWS: As the Republican Party continues to engage in all-out civil war, the Democratic Party is presenting, how's this, a united front, no longer that headline, Democrats in disarray, that old favorite. Anyway, Hillary Clinton enlisted her heaviest hitters today and hit two battleground states. Bill Clinton made two stops in Florida… And former Vice President Al Gore, the last-minute closer just called up from the bullpen, headlined an event in Miami, Florida, a place that has particular significance for Al Gore, because he lost the election there by less than 600 votes. Anyway, here's Gore.
>
> GORE: Your vote really, really, really counts a lot. You can consider me as an exhibit A of that proof. (Laughter). Elections have consequences. Your vote counts. Your vote has consequences.

Chris Matthews fully utilized Clinton's gift, ripe for remediation of the 2000 election. He even began by utilizing Gore's precise language "elections have consequences." While Gore didn't say that a vote for Stein was a vote for Trump, the implication of the spoiler was present by way of his historical significance. Matthews was the speaker responsible for garnishing Gore's appearance with the usual anti-third party imagery including "throwing one's vote away," the "protest vote," and even that of Nader acting on the election to metaphorically toss it to

George W. Bush. Matthews didn't mention any other confusing aspects of the 2000 election like the butterfly ballots on which people mistakenly voted for Buchanan when they meant to vote for Gore or that the Florida recount was ultimately called when the Supreme Court chose to halt Florida's election process. Nor did Matthews remind the viewers that Gore won the popular vote (the aspect of presidential elections within the voters' control) while he lost the electoral college vote. The one aspect of the 2000 election Chris Matthews referred to as a possible reason for Gore's loss which concerned Democratic agency was the "disarray" of the Democratic Party. While he didn't go on to explain what this meant, it could be construed as a remembrance that Gore rejected the Clintons because of the toxicity of the Lewinsky scandal. Also, Gore didn't beat Bush in his own home state, which tends to be a sign of difficulties within a campaign. The point is, for all of the relitigating of 2000 in events packaged to bring out the "spoiler" frame, little reflection was encouraged outside of blaming Nader for his participation as a candidate. While some on Fox criticized the Clinton campaign's recycling of the old tactic to blame voters or other candidates, Matthews did not encourage introspection on the part of the Democrats.

Blaming Voters and Alleging Malevolence

On October 2nd, 2016, journalist George Stephanopoulos and Senator Bernie Sanders sat down to a one-on-one about the campaigns. Sanders steered the conversation into his main thesis that Clinton was a better choice than Trump. Stephanopoulos, who had been mentioning Stein and Johnson as part of the polling segments on Good Morning America throughout September finished the conversation with the following question, "But Senator, I think what the problem is is that a lot of your supporters are not necessarily looking at Clinton versus Trump, they are looking at Clinton versus Gary Johnson, Clinton versus Jill Stein, maybe thinking about staying home. Do you agree with President Obama and the first lady who said this week a vote

for anyone else but Hillary Clinton is a vote for Donald Trump?"[150]

This question was a rare example of framing consistent with the views of voters in which more than two options exist, the largest share of voters usually opting to stay home. Even as he asked, the question was visually framed to keep the third parties in the context of negative voting in the graphic which called a vote for third-party candidates a "protest vote." The question set Sanders, the formerly independent senator, up for a confirmation of third-party spoilers:

> Well, this is what I think. I think is, that the evidence is overwhelming. That the next president of the United States is going to be Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. And I think if you're voting for somebody else, in a sense, and not supporting Clinton because she does not live up to all of your specifications or all of your ideas, I think in a sense, it is a vote for Trump. But I think also, take a look at Gary Johnson's record on the environment, on the economy. It is a very conservative approach, something that I think most of my supporters do not support.[151]

Sanders had already established the 'greater evil' of Donald Trump as he and the interviewer spoke about Trump's mysterious tax returns earlier in the broadcast. While he spoke about Clinton's possible initiatives if elected, Sanders did not deny that his own platform contrasted starkly with Clinton's. Nor did he mention the similarity of his platform to Stein's. In fact, his answer to Stephanopoulos' question avoided the mention of his ideological ally altogether instead focusing on Johnson's platform and its differences to his own. Sanders reported a clear result for two candidates on the multi-candidate field, and set up blame in possible Stein voters for a Trump win due to their "specifications." The subtext contained in Sanders' approval of the "a vote for Stein equals a vote for Trump" frame was for voters to change what they wanted in a candidate rather than expect the candidate to champion issues and take positions which were important to the voters.

Millennial voters were an important demographic which was key in this new souped up

150. "One-on-one with Sen Bernie Sanders; Campaign Highlights." *This Week*. ABC News Transcript. October 2, 2016.

151. "One-on-one…" ABC News Transcript.

"spoiler effect" discourse in which any action besides a vote for Hillary Clinton was a support to Donald Trump. When discussing the polls, the discussions tilted slightly toward "public opinion storytelling" rather than "partisan scorekeeping" due to the major issues of the millennial demographic.[152] Young voters' preference for Stein was a result of the Green platform planks which Sanders' campaign amplified through his access to audiences. However, millennials' low opinion of Clinton was presented just as likely brushed off as inexperience and idealism; Clinton's leaked fundraising speech during her primary against Sanders characterized his young supporters as "children of the recession" vulnerable in their desperation for unrealistic revolutionary messages.[153] An exchange between the former Democratic Governor of Michigan turned MSNBC commentator and the host of *Meet The Press Daily*, Kristen Welker on October 3, 2016 is illustrative of the discourse which includes a surrogate for Clinton on the specific leaked fundraiser:

> WELKER: Let me ask you about this audio that leaked over the weekend. It was from Secretary Clinton speaking at a fundraiser in February in which she basically talked about some of Senator Sanders` supporters living in their basement. Now Senator Sanders came out and defended her this week in full disclosure. But if you`re a millennial sitting on the fence thinking about voting for her --
> GRANHOLM: Listen, I`ve got those millennials. My kids are in those and they are in my basement.
> WELKER: Doesn't it make it that much harder to win them over?
> GRANHOLM: No because if you listen to that tape she was emphasizing. She was saying that millennials are frustrated. They want to be able to graduate and get a good paying job. And that's exactly why Democrats should be elected because she has got a specific plan to be able to do that. That is a nothing burger on that particular spin, which, by the way, Politico, when they reported that, ended up having to change their headline on because it was an unfair way of categorizing a sympathetic --

152. Benjamin Toff. (2016). *The Blind Scorekeepers: Journalism, Polling, and the Battle to Define Public Opinion in American Politics.* University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dissertation. (122-122).

153. The audio linked in this article presented a Clinton who found millennial criticisms of Obama's accomplishments "bewildering." That millennials hoping to be part of a political revolution was a revolution she didn't understand calling it a "false promise" and calling Sanders' plans which were most exciting to millennials "indefensible." Cristiano Lima. "Clinton gives her take on Sanders supporters in leaked fundraising recording." *Politico.* September 30, 2016.
https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders-supporters-audio-leak-228997

> WELKER: I have to tell you that when I talked to these younger voters and I was at UNH with Secretary Clinton and Bernie Sanders this past week. And some of the holdouts, some of the ones who are really seriously thinking about voting for a Gary Johnson or a Jill Stein say it goes back to the trust issue for them. And you heard today again Donald Trump bringing up Secretary Clinton's e- mail. Is it too late for her to restore that trust? And why hasn't she been able to do that? Why is she still struggling with that?
> GRANHOLM: Well, I mean she is struggling because, of course, Republicans have spent millions over the year -- hundreds of millions of dollars against her. And it's been effective, right. So yes, she has got to continue to earn their vote every single day. But bringing out people like Barack Obama, like Michelle Obama, like Elizabeth Warren, like Bernie Sanders continually saying a vote for Gary Johnson is a vote for Donald Trump. They don't want Donald Trump. We know that. But do they know the full record of Gary Johnson?....

To break this conversation down further to its elements, Welker attempted to take the oppositional side to Granholm in order to be a challenging force to the sole Democratic voice in this segment. In doing so, she attempted to question Granholm from the position of sympathy for millennials questioning Clinton's trustworthiness. Welker called millennials considering non-Clinton candidates "holdouts," which characterized this group as defiant, when paired with the earlier image that they were dependent on parents. This infantilized them in their decision to support Stein or Johnson. In addition, Granholm dismissed any fault for Clinton by posing Republican sponsored attack ads as the primary reason millennials didn't trust Clinton. Granholm created another bogeyman young people supposedly fell prey to as she implied they were sold on the attack ads. She went on to question their understanding of Gary Johnson, before Welker changed the subject. The images of millennials in their parents' basements "holding out" on Clinton, who fell prey to Republican attack ads, and who might vote for Johnson without understanding his policy created a powerful narrative blaming possible millennial voters if Trump were to be elected. It is important to note that Granholm duplicated Bernie Sanders' effort to highlight Gary Johnson's policy differences with voters on important issues like climate change without answering to Stein's policy analogous to Sanders'.

Another example of the discourses on millennials voting for third party occurred on CNN's *New Day* on October 1st in which Symone Sanders[154] said her argument to convince millennial voters to choose Clinton was: "There's no viable third party option in this election" and "If you look at the Libertarian platform and the Green party platform and compare it to the Democratic platform, there is -- there's no dice, it's night and day between those… and the democratic platform prevails." In this, it is questionable if Sanders was conflating all three platforms where she only meant to compare the Libertarian to the Democratic due to the popularity of the Green platform similar to Sanders.' Certainly, the candidate viability argument is usually made to compare the likelihood of a candidate win, which is quite different from the viability of ideas. In fact, in her previous breath, Symone Sanders spoke of Clinton's strategy for garnering millennial support included panel discussions on "free college." This directly contradicts the lack of viability in Stein's plan considering that she presented the idea of student debt forgiveness and fully funded higher education in 2012. Only the most radical members of the Democratic Party began to create discussion about Stein's solutions between four and nine years later.[155] Further examples of the discourse about millennials' role in the "spoiler effect" could be found in other CNN samples as well as a few Fox samples including Monica Crowley's assessment: "they're obsessed with climate change as an issue… sixty-five percent of millennial voters would consider a third party...So Mrs. Clinton is trying to lock down that age group and make sure they come out for her."[156] While obsession with climate change is a much different

154. Bernie Sanders' communications director during the primary turned regular CNN political commentator and surrogate for Clinton.

155. Sanders' 2016 plan was modest in comparison, and Clinton's even moreso. Sanders fully and publicly embraced student debt forgiveness in his 2019 "College for All Act," which to date, is still seen as radical by most Democratic representatives.

156. *Fox Special Report with Bret Baier.* "More Emails Related to Hillary Clinton Campaign Released." Fox News. October 11, 2016.

criticism of millennials, it is still used to marginalize the group being framed in the horse-race discussion as a conquest to be captured.

The vast majority of coverage was less critical of voter choices than of the candidates themselves. For example, on *Good Morning America's* Big Board segment, November 4th, the graphics asked about third-party spoilers and if Stein and Johnson could "swing" the election.[157] The word 'swing' must refer to a metaphorical teeter totter in which only two sides exist on which one relatively small campaign has as much effect on the sides as the bipartisan campaigns and their millions of voters. On October 17, *CBS This Morning* utilized a comedy segment in "today's eyeopener" to call Johnson a spoiler. "Third parties are a little touchy about that whole spoiler attack. Just watch Gary Johnson respond after it`s brought up...Okay, Gary. Just-- just relax a little bit. You`ve-- you`ve already undercut your credentials as a serious candidate by wearing a yellow tie with jeans."[158]

While Johnson usually had a prepared statement about the "spoiler effect," this clip showed one time he was unprepared and called the question "horrible." A network news anchor responding to Johnson's clip may have been inappropriate, but Charlie Rose's use of comedian, John Oliver, to remind the news audience of Johnson's illegitimacy as a candidate presented the same information for the voter. Rose did not talk about the clip, but for calling it an "eyeopener," which only emphasized the information within the clip rather than confront it as part of a larger discourse. Within the bipartisan horse-race the spoiler effect and subframes had not gone away, and were perhaps much more prevalent. Sometimes, segments of the voting

157. *Good Morning America.* "Big Board; Today's Top Stories." ABC News. November 4, 2016.

158. *CBS This Morning.* "The latest CBS News/Battleground Tracker shows Hillary Clinton is now six points ahead of Donald Trump in the thirteen battleground states." CBS News Transcripts. 7:00 AM EST October 17, 2016

public were also viewed critically as possible election ruiners. When Donald Trump won the electoral college vote, this already electrified media was prepared with lots of explanations. It is unsure how many of the pundits' stories about how this had occurred prepared third-party blame. The post-election timeline showed that anchors were likely just as surprised with Stein's efforts, as it took them time to reach a single narrative about the election results and Stein's wish to recount them.

Post Election: The Recount

On November 22nd, the Stein/Baraka campaign released a press statement declaring their intention to organize a recount.[159] The coverage surrounding this event was the most in depth and detailed coverage occurring at any point during Stein's time as a presidential candidate, including 2012. Shortly after the announcement, the primary quote for the bill (at least in Wisconsin) started at over one million dollars.[160] Election integrity was an important issue for Stein during her 2016 race. Her website contained multiple articles about election integrity, and ranked choice voting (particularly referring to an item on Maine's ballot which passed.) In the coverage of this event, Democratic surrogates spoke of Russian meddling and Donald Trump alleged that the election would be rigged by fraudulent voters. Both of these reasons that the Greens were recounting were amplified while the issues expressed by the Stein/Baraka Campaign and election integrity activists were quieter among the cacophony. Stein cited unfair ballot access restrictions, debates which kept out legitimate candidates, insecure voting machines

159. "Stein/Baraka Campaign Launches Recounts in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania to Restore Confidence in our Voting System." Jill2016 Press Releases. http://www.jill2016.com/ accessed October 30, 2020 via archive.org https://web.archive.org/web/20161126080352/http://www.jill2016.com/recountpr

160. Jill Stein. Interviewed by Barbara Dahlgren, Zoom Call from Wisconsin to Maine, December 4, 2020.

(which don't allow for permanent records or public verification of their internal workings), and voter suppression like voter roll purges and ID laws.[161] Her account of the events explained that Alex Halderman, a computer scientist from Michigan, discussed the possibility of a recount prior to the election, and the final decision was a matter of increased interest in ensuring the close election was fair. After all, this was the second election in fifteen years in which the popular vote did not match the electoral college decision. When I spoke to Stein, she recognized Halderman as a friend whom she had been working with on "clean elections" prior to her 2016 run.[162] The other major issue for the campaign was, of course, feasibility in mobilizing the lawyers, staff, and dollars to support such an effort. It began with a call for resources to recount Wisconsin, but with money pouring in, it quickly grew to support recounts in Pennsylvania and Michigan which were similar in several ways. The margins were thin in all of these swing states, and each warranted concerns from elections integrity activists about verifying the vote. Stein retold this story in our interview, but she also related this to her interviewers in the coverage during the last weeks of November 2016.

Nearly every post-election transcript in the coverage pertained to Jill Stein's recount effort. Of nearly one hundred CNN post-election transcripts, only five of them didn't primarily address Stein's recount. One of these was a panel with a Stein surrogate, Marc Lamont Hill, who appeared multiple times during the recount punditry as well.[163] They interviewed her on three

161. "Stein/Baraka Campaign Launches Recounts…"

162. Jill Stein. Interviewed by Barbara Dahlgren, Zoom Call from Wisconsin to Maine, December 4, 2020.

163. The purpose of the panel was to discuss the racial makeup of Trump and Clinton voters to place blame in Trump's win. Because Hill supported Stein, Don Lemon asked him, "Did you think your vote would even matter?" Hill condemned "voter shaming" when Lemon asked, "Watching the president with Donald Trump in the oval office, how do you think those Black voters who stayed home feel now?" Hill's next chance to speak encompassed the purpose of staying home or voting for other candidates, "If you feel as if the Democrats take advantage of you and they never present a candidate that accurately represents your interests, and you've already decided Republicans ain't nowhere near where you want them to be, then sometimes you do a situation where you

separate occasions in the span of a week. David Cobb, her campaign manager, and George Martin, Wisconsin Green Party co-chair, were a few other people of interest in these stories as well. Unlike the frequent Democratic and Republican Party operatives who attend the news shows frequently to give commentary, Green representation besides the candidate was unorthodox. As the story developed between November 23 through 30th during the Thanksgiving holiday, *CNN Newsroom, New Day, At This Hour, Jake Tapper, The Situation Room* and others spent large portions of each hour addressing the recount including clips from these interview segments, pre-produced segments, and a rotating cast of talking heads to discuss the Democrat and Republican slant, sometimes twice in a single broadcast.[164] *PBS Newshour* produced a few of its own recount segments and interviewed Stein on Thanksgiving. Much of the commentary was entrusted to David Sanger, a *New York Times* "national security correspondent" and Tamara Keith from NPR. These figures were often asked about Stein's intent, her goals, and other aspects of the recount which these correspondents could only speculate on.

Stein's *Newshour* interview by Skype was immediately followed by an in-studio Sanger. He was asked "where the recount comes from" and other questions similar to those just asked of Stein.[165] While the charitable interpretation of this was to show the story was intriguing enough

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vote third, or you don't vote at all. I actually advocate voting, but some people say-" he was cut off and laughed at by Lemon and the other panelists: "Then people say that's why we have President Trump for you." The liberal representative chimed in, "Exactly, congratulations, congratulations, you lost!"
"CNN Tonight With Don Lemon CNN November 10, 2016 8:00pm-9:01pm PST" Internet Archive. Accessed November 10, 2020.
https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20161111_040000_CNN_Tonight_With_Don_Lemon/start/1320/end/1380

164. CNN Newsroom aired the Stein recount story November 25, 2016 at 1PM, 3PM, 4PM, 5PM, and 6PM with a variety of commentators to discuss the development. Symone Sanders who was Bernie Sanders' communication director, Scottie Nell Hughes, editor of RightAlerts.com, and A. Scott Bolden who was the former chairman of the Washington D.C. Democratic Party all appeared multiple times.

165. "Jill Stein Raises $4 Million to Fund State Vote Recounts." *PBS NewsHour*, KQED.org, San Francisco CA, accessed October 12, 2020.
https://video.kqed.org/video/jill-stein-raises-4-million-to-fund-state-vote-recounts-1487290251/

to merit the time spent, it could also be interpreted as an odd occurrence in which two newsmen spoke about a third guest (who had joined them moments ago) as if she had not just been present with them. The host's line of questioning to Sanger could be interpreted to imply Stein wasn't a trustworthy source of the answers. PBS also broadcasted a standard panel of two pundits: one was present to attack Stein's action, while the other had a more measured take. During their November 28th panel, Amy Walter[166] equated Stein's recount to Trump's baseless voter fraud claim, mischaracterized Stein's reasoning by saying she claimed Russian hackers rigged the system, and argued the Help America Vote Act had already solved any voting machine issues. A recount to verify the machine count was a waste of time, in Walter's opinion. Stein was not on the panel to defend herself, and the other panelist did not respond to the accusations.[167]

Similarly, CNN panel discussions usually excluded the one person who ought to be there to defend herself. The networks usually chose panels of a conservative and a liberal from legacy newspapers, and Democratic and Republican operatives. These Stein campaign outsiders answered questions about Stein's motives. First, most liberal commentators characterized Stein as a grifter in the process of using disappointed liberals for fundraising and fame. Even conservative commentators like Ross Douthat, a conservative *New York Times* commentator utilized this argument:

> COSTELLO: Well, Ross, if there's absolutely no evidence that there's been any voter fraud at all and even Jill Stein admits that but she says she just wants to verify the result. She has no interest in toppling Donald Trump. Do you believe her?
> DOUTHAT: I mean, I don't want to speak to Stein's personal motives. But someone in her campaign or her operation is running adrift basically. They are getting people who are understandably upset about Hillary Clinton's unexpected defeat, in the popular vote/electoral vote

166. Editor of the Cook Political Report and political director at ABC News.

167. "PBS NewsHour; November 28, 2016 6:00pm-7:01pm PST," 2016-11-29, Internet Archive, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (GBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC, accessed January 1, 2021, http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-525-h41jh3f44s.

> difference and they're exploiting their anxieties and frankly their ignorance in order to raise money and keep themselves in business. That is the best explanation for what is happening right now.[168]

Sometimes Stein was lumped in with Trump as a person making unfounded claims. Without evidence of rigging, many thought Stein's effort was at least a waste of time or at most a scam. She was even accused of taking the money for herself and not using it on recounts at all. Errol Louis, a liberal CNN commentator and former Democratic candidate made this case:

> COSTELLO: OK. So I do want to touch on this, this recount thing with the Green Party, right? So, Jill Stein's Green Party has raised millions of dollars for recounts in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Wisconsin's deadline is today, Errol. So, if they want a recount in Wisconsin, they're going to have to ask Wisconsin by 5:00 p.m. this afternoon. Do you think that the Green Party will do that?
> LOUIS: No, I do not. And frankly, in the appeal from Jill Stein, you have to read the fine print, because she also makes clear that the donors that she's hitting up for money that there's no guarantee that any of this is going to happen. It's not clear whether they have the standing, whether they have the evidence, and of course, at the end of all this, there has to be a change in the outcome or the whole thing was a waste of time.[169]

Louis' claim that Stein would essentially steal money from her supporters was not challenged by the CNN host, Carol Costello. He returned to another of Costello's panels a few days later once the recount was underway, and he did not set the record straight, nor was asked about the wild accusations he made just days before.

The focus on the money Stein raised was a common frame for other campaign intrigues during an election horserace, but in context, the millions Stein raised for this effort were dwarfed by even a single quarter of many primary campaigns. In fact, the dollar amount reflected a group about the size of her donor base giving small dollar donations averaging about $40 each. Gradually, most liberals came to see Stein more charitably as their candidate joined the Wisconsin recount to protect the votes she had. These liberal voices tended to put the words

168. "Call for Rust Belt Recount Gains Momentum." CNN Newsroom Transcript 9:00 AM EST November 25, 2016.

169. "Trump Team Splits Over Secretary of State Post.:" CNN Newsroom Transcript 10:00 AM EST November 25, 2016.

"Russian hackers" into Stein's recount call. This was a resurgence of Russiagate to justify Clinton's participation in recounting the election they had claimed would be fair when Donald Trump cried fraud before November 8th. Stein, who was often suggested to have had a part in Russiagate, and was later accused by Hillary Clinton to have colluded with Russia, never stated that the election was likely rigged by Russian intelligence.[170] Instead, the election integrity movement, of which she had been part, was focused on how machines counted votes and the ability of states to verify the appropriate count with backed up paper ballots. Stein maintained that a candidate did not need suspicion of malfeasance in order to verify an election result, but this was often lost in the liberal commentators' "Russian hacker" narrative.

The conservatives began by lumping Stein with the Democrats. Some of them were baffled by her nefarious role as a spoiler only to supposedly change her mind in support of Clinton since Trump became elected. Lyn Sweet, a conservative commentator remarked,"If she's interested in Donald Trump not being president, she had a chance and she didn't use it during the campaign to encourage people to vote for Hillary Clinton since she had no chance of winning the White House." Another commenter called the effort "buyer's remorse."[171] Trump later Tweeted that the recount was a scam, and many of the guests became consistent with that messaging. Democrats, who had appeared concerned about accepting the election results before November 8th, were characterized as going back on their word now that Trump had been elected. The only problem was that Democrats weren't steering the recount ship, so they

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170. Kathleen Hall Jamieson. *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect A President.* Oxford Press, 2018. Pp 96-117. Jamieson described a few ads coming from foreign internet trolls which contained positive Jill Stein messages.
"Hillary Clinton" Campaign HQ with David Plouffe Podcast. Cadence 13. October 17, 2019.
In our interview, Stein related to me that she first saw headlines about her connection to Russian intelligence shortly after her 2016 nomination. She said that as early as July, "it would just flare up where suddenly a whole slew of articles would come out at the same time."

171. *Newsroom with Carol Costello.* November 24th 6AM EST. CNN Newsroom Transcript.

attached Stein with an ampersand to such statements. One regular commentator and editor of rightalerts.com, Scottie Nell Hughes conflated liberals' claims of Russian interference and Stein's own recount reasons: "Well, of course. But the difference between what Mr. Trump was saying for the last year and a half and what the Democrats and Jill Stein and the Green Party announcing are two different things. What they are claiming somebody outside of the U.S. came in and hacked and changed votes forever."[172]

The breadth and depth of this coverage as compared to coverage found pre-election and during the 2012 cycle shows more than anything that the absence of Stein's campaign in coverage which was a purposeful one. Nearly every network picked up the breaking news of the recount on the day of her press release before actually filing for the recounts. Stein took multiple interview opportunities on Thanksgiving, no less. Within hours, Stein's on-air interviews were cut for other shows and segments, which were set to rerun multiple hours each day during the news cycle. I emphasize this aspect of the coverage because this is the most prominent case of direct Stein coverage throughout the project. Like the Democrats and Republicans Stein was captured in her own words, her campaign manager and other team members and surrogates also obtained a bit of the spotlight. Despite early accusations of grifting from pundits, the Stein 2016 recount led to a few material changes for its effort. One example was an unintended consequence, in Wisconsin's contentious 2018 gubernatorial election, wherein incumbent Republican Scott Walker lost by 1.1% of the vote.[173] After the Stein recount, Republicans tightened up the recount rules only to allow losers of 1% or less to recount elections, which

172. "Hillary Clinton's Campaign Joins Green Party Candidate Jill Stein in Recount Efforts in Three Swing States." CNN Newsroom Transcript. 3:00 PM EST November 26, 2016.

173. Patrick Marley and Molly Beck. "Tony Evers denies Scott Walker a third term as Wisconsin's Governor." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.* November 7, 2018. https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/11/06/wisconsin-governor-election-results-scott-walker-versus-tony-evers/1854447002/

denied Walker what would have been his right previously, making Wisconsin Republicans the first to taste their own medicine. Stein's election integrity victories could not have been called because of the long appeals processes which yielded results years after the recount reports. Stein's recount discovered Pennsylvania's inability to verify its vote, which pressured the state into rectifying the situation with some upgrades to equipment and processes. Detroit, Michigan's evaluation on Stein's request uncovered problems with their machines' optical scanners leading to similar reforms. Her most recent victory, in October 2020, was in a lawsuit against the major election machine manufacturer, which ended in success. Stein's team was granted access to Wisconsin election machines for testing and analysis by a team of computer scientists. Whatever this team finds can be released to the public by the Stein campaign, to the manufacturer's dismay.[174] These intended and unintended consequences highlight another of the many reasons the inclusion of third parties in the public discourse can lead to political change even without an electoral win. While these aspects of candidacy and political participation were not discussed in these transcripts, they should not be overlooked. The networks which picked up the recount story dropped it as quickly as they picked it up. While the business dictated that they move on from the story leaving it fragmented, the eventual consequences of the recount were significant and valuable to the public.

The mainstream media's narrow focus on the horse-race occurred pre-election where O'Reilly and Stelter relied on polls to decide if any news about third party candidates was necessary to air. They emphasized the victors and the losers of the horse race, the spoiler subframes of third party candidates worked to downplay their presence and ideas in the race, particularly through pre-framed events from the Clinton campaign. The concentration of hyper-

174. Jill Stein. Interviewed by Barbara Dahlgren, Zoom Call from Wisconsin to Maine, December 4, 2020.

partisan good vs. evil narratives were all consuming in their search for blame or responsibility for Clinton's loss. The alleged spoilers were premediated, or suggested as a reason Clinton didn't win. These spoiler claims were ramped up to ridiculous extremes as a Clinton supporter, a Trump supporter, and finally as a Russian agent. The reality of the situation proved to be more complex than the good versus evil that was set up in the 'both sides' panels pre and post election which had little room for the complexity of reality. These panels had no space for a third event to happen in the binary narrative they had constructed. With the passing of another election cycle, many of these narratives have continued to be rehashed, even while the stories grew past the early speculation. Without serious introspection from pundits and major party operatives over the events and their portrayal of them through the narrow horse-race frame, Richard Grusin's remediation concept appears to remain present. The fear and the win/lose dynamics involved in this type of reporting distracted from the developing stories as they occurred because the battle against evil didn't have room for the gray areas and competing events which exist in reality. Commentators' binary arguments often married interest groups and ideas in ridiculous ways, the most recognizable example was the recount. Liberals cut the corners of the Stein puzzle piece to fit her recount argument with Trump's claim that millions of fraudulent votes were cast illegally. Conservatives jammed Stein into the silly role of a Clinton supporter. Both types of commentators sandwiched Stein's grassroots election integrity effort into a Russiagate narrative that was already being used to discredit Stein. This example was remarkable among the examples of the "scarlet Nader" frame and others to not only delegitimize Stein but also to demonize her in more significant ways than ever before in her career as a political candidate.

Conclusion

Beyond 2020: Building Democracy and Abolishing the Spoiler Effect

The spoiler effect is a major problem for both candidates and a public in search of democracy. I had this feeling as a young petitioner for a Green candidate when I was shouted down by people who felt that allowing Greens to participate in the race would ruin the election for the Democrat in favor of a greater Republican evil. While the "spoiler effect" is older than modern politics, its prevalence and the resulting ruthlessness towards third parties and their voters has increased over the last few decades. The political and media climates have also changed a great deal over this period, but certain workings of the political and media industries are unchanged as they were conceived in classic studies. I demonstrated in Chapter 1 how journalistic institutions are known to have certain professional biases which inform what they write about and their framings of that agenda; how governmental public relations and candidates pre-frame agendas which sometimes get passed through journalism; how the agenda presented has an affect on what the public thinks about; and how that election agenda is most commonly framed using a game or horse race frame. I also discussed how aspects of those horse race frames like fundraising and polling or "partisan scorekeeping" boost certain candidates into feedback loops of success while shutting out other candidates who don't poll or fundraise as well in part caused by a lack of coverage. I also shared the more recent history of prominent third party candidates, their struggles in competing with the legacy parties, and how the media has framed them in the past.

While I did not have access to the journalists or other workers in the media institutions who constructed "spoiler effect" narratives during the 2012 and 2016 elections, nor could I peruse the brains of the voting public to understand their information collections and

interpretations, I did have access to the news transcripts. I collected hundreds of transcripts through the Nexis Uni database of MSNBC, Fox, CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS coverage using the search terms "spoiler" and "Jill Stein" among others. While I considered the broadcasts as a whole, much of my discourse analysis was drawn from the stories and sections of the coverage containing Stein or spoiler effect terms. In addition, I consulted the videos of many of these objects which I found on archive.org, a myriad of print stories, and Jill Stein's archived campaign website to provide richer context within the elections discourse my truncated coverage explored. Additionally, I reached out to Ben Manski, Stein's campaign manager, Cheri Honkala, Stein's 2012 running mate, and Jill Stein herself to ask about the stories of the Green Party campaigns. They graciously agreed to interviews and added more levels of understanding to events which the transcripts I was examining briefly mentioned.

I expected to find a smaller amount of coverage in these broadcasts for third parties, and I also expected that third-party candidates would be called spoilers using that term among phrases like "take votes from," "ruin ___ candidate's chance of winning," and others with similar meanings. These things all occurred. However, I didn't expect that the spoiler terminology was used more often to refer to Gary Johnson, Virgil Goode, and Evan McMullin (all right wing candidates) than Jill Stein. I was also surprised that multiple candidates per race would be predicted spoilers, or that the allegation wouldn't stick to right wing candidates like it did for Greens. For example, not one anchor claimed Mitt Romney's 2012 loss was in part by Gary Johnson as so many had predicted. I believe this may have to do with ideological differences in which conservatives and Libertarians emphasize personal responsibility, which detaches their voters' and candidates' responsibilities from other events for which they did not vote or campaign. Another unexpected finding was that the "spoiler effect" and the relevant

terminology I found was not as prevalent or as damaging as the subframes within. I found multiple levels of frames under the umbrella of the bipartisan elections discourse, the main frame being the "spoiler effect."

At first, I credited the "spoiler effect" as the damaging narrative, but it is really more derivative of the subframes which discredit the candidates as spoilers. These subframes, which occurred in both 2012 and 2016, were the "undeserving," "the scarlet Nader," and "the laughingstock." These phrases describe the ways journalists and pundits justified a confrontational style of the coverage of third parties. They also helped to justify why these candidates could be left off the agenda. The limited coverage showed third-party candidates to be used as props and obstacles on a two-party stage. This left Stein and other candidates flat and unmotivated in the stories of rich characters with policies, debate powers, campaign events, and more. It also rendered them powerless to participate, but also more powerful than the multi-billion dollar campaigns who could have their strategies foiled by third-party characters. The voters also were portrayed as lacking agency. Even as a sympathetic figure, O'Donnell used language to limit voter choices while O'Reilly lowered demonized Stein's wealth tax to normalize an Obama who had been considered extreme during the race. The good versus evil language portraying the bipartisan game more neutrally but candidates like Johnson and Goode as "spoilers" revealed that any standards for objectivity didn't include third-parties. They upheld the bipartisan frame of American politics rather than a non-partisan one, which is an important distinction.

In 2016, these media began to abandon many of their objectivity ideals as the networks amplified stories about Donald Trump because he fed into media dramatization. This increase of good versus evil narration by media and hyper-partisanship further aided spoiler effect

subframes. These pundits not only discredited third-party candidates, but also infantilized certain voting publics who considered voting for third-parties. The increased dramatization in the 2016 coverage was represented by allegations of collusion between third-party candidates, legacy party candidates, and possibly foreign government intelligence. The overdramatized and amplified presentation of election events likely led to the baffled reporters' inability to understand the Jill Stein recount or their wildly inaccurate election forecasting. In addition, the duopoly narratives about good versus evil and Democrat versus Republican were a disservice in pointing out a variety of issues voters thought were important or the effects of third-party participation on issue discourses and election integrity wins. I described how Stein's recount has affected the voting processes in a few states, and also how her 2012 policies once thought of as fringe have become widely known and well-liked.

At the time of this writing, the 2020 election season has occurred. Arguably the horse race and the dramatization of these politics have continued or worsened. The Green Party was successfully kept off the ballot in multiple states, and the outcome was often framed as a win for democracy. Jill Stein has since been subject to a federal investigation into her connections with Russia, which turned out to be underwhelming at best. When I spoke with Cheri Honkala, she described "erasure" in the media. In one instance, she described her invitation to speak about homelessness issues on a PBS panel because she was (and continues to be) a leading homeless advocate. She was later uninvited because of her status as a Green Party leader. This is a plight for the people as well because their values are still often unrepresented by the two options presented. However, several solutions exist to help de-escalate this media phenomenon. Thinking as a third-party member, alternative journalism appears to be one of the most serious ways to impact the media environment. One of the solutions Stein and other Greens champion is

ranked choice voting, which eliminates "wasted votes" by ranking candidates. Journalists who worry about the future of their industry could also implement standards of coverage in order to create a mediated reality which conforms to reality. At the very least, they could agree to report the contents of government forms like ballots with previews of all choices, rather than the pre-selected horse-race. The public can begin demanding more power over their airwaves in the same way they demand net neutrality. If nothing changes, I suggest minor political parties ought to follow the bipartisan headlines, hire star power, and act in wild and crazy ways, in order to garner attention. However, opening the media to multiple parties as a rule is a much more democratic and humane solution.

Ultimately, audiences are likely tiring of the drama and the hyper partisanship because more people are turning to smaller media outlets, and some legacy media are catching on. The Hill's *Rising,* for example including Krystal Ball promoting a left populist view, and Saagar Enjeti promoting a right populist view has become fairly popular. The two hosts have garnered a lot of praise and ire for their willingness to agree with their political opposite on economic issues, hold constructive debates, and criticize their own political teammates. During the 2020 election season, they did have the Green candidate, Howie Hawkins, for an interview.[175] While the "spoiler effect" question was still present, and the hosts returned to discussing the two-party context, they were willing and able to understand Hawkins' view of the world because of their similar everyday criticisms. Out of the tumultuous political news era, this comes as a sign of progress. Other journalists who have made names for themselves in major outlets have begun using alternative media platforms in order to keep creative control of their work. I don't believe the increasingly partisan media landscape can become a perfect fourth pillar overnight, or that a

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new landscape will necessarily aid third-parties. The understanding of the ways our current mainstream televised news rationalizes decisions to create a reality separate from the ballot can serve as a starting point. Independent political parties and the public can use that information to create the democratic conditions for the information system used for vital processes like voting. Americans don't have to bet on the horse-race, even if it is the only game in town. The public and its journalists can broaden the election discourse from a horse-track to a wide and welcoming meadow.

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Appendix A:

Source list of the 2012 coverage ordered by source and date, and numbers with reference links to video versions

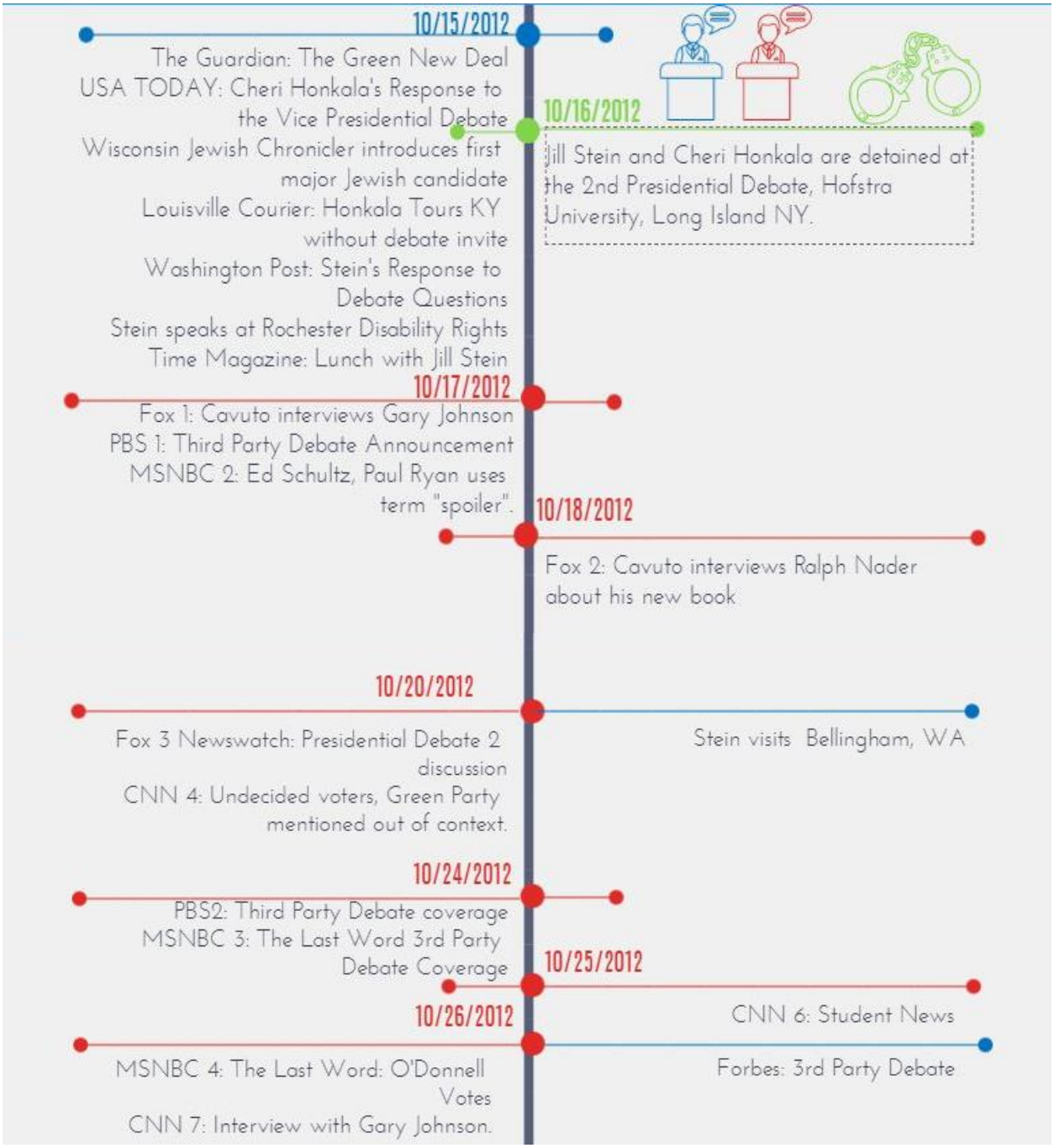
Source	Reference Number	Transcript Title and Corresponding Video URL	Date	Keywords
CNN	1	*The Situation Room:* "Vice Presidential Debate Victor?; Shuttle's Final Voyage; Interview with Congressman Jason Chaeffetz https://archive.org/details/CNN_20121012_200000_The_Situation_Room/start/0/end/60	10/12/12 6PM EST	Green Party, Jill Stein
CNN	2	*CNN Newsroom:* "Endeavor Heading to California Science Center; Third Party Presidential Candidates Debate; Interview with Author of 'Zombie Survival Guide' https://archive.org/details/CNN_20121014_020000_CNN_Newsroom	10/13/12 10PM EST	Green Party, Jill Stein
CNN	3	*CNN Newsroom:* "Endeavor's Slow Move; Zumba Class a Prositution Front; More Armstrong Witnesses https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20121013_180000_CNN_Newsroom	10/13/12 4PM EST	Spoil, Green Party
CNN	4	*CNN Saturday Morning News:* "Armstrong Stepped Down; Undecideds Wooed by Obama & Romney" https://archive.org/details/CNN_20121020_120000_CNN_Saturday_Morning/start/3660/end/3720	10/20/12 9AM EST	Green Party
CNN	5	*CNN Presents Global Lessons* "The GPS Road Map for Powering America"	10/21/12 8PM EST	Green Party
CNN	6	*CNN Student News* "Cease-Fire Proposal in Syria; Tracking Hurricane Sandy"	10/25/12 4AM EST	Green Party, Jill Stein
CNN	7	*CNN Newsroom*: "Hurricane Sandy Heads for U.S.; Storm Affects Political Campaigns; Romney Campaigns in Iowa; Jobs Will Grow; Children Slain by Nanny; Will Virginia be Red or Blue?; Interview with Gary Johnson; Silvio Burlusconi Guilty" https://archive.org/details/CNN_20121026_150000_CNN_Newsroom/start/2340/end/2400	10/26/2012 11AM EST	Green Party, Jill Stein, Spoiler
CNN	8	*CNN Presents: "*Global Lessons: The GPS Roadmap for Powering America"	10/27/12 8PM EST	Green Party

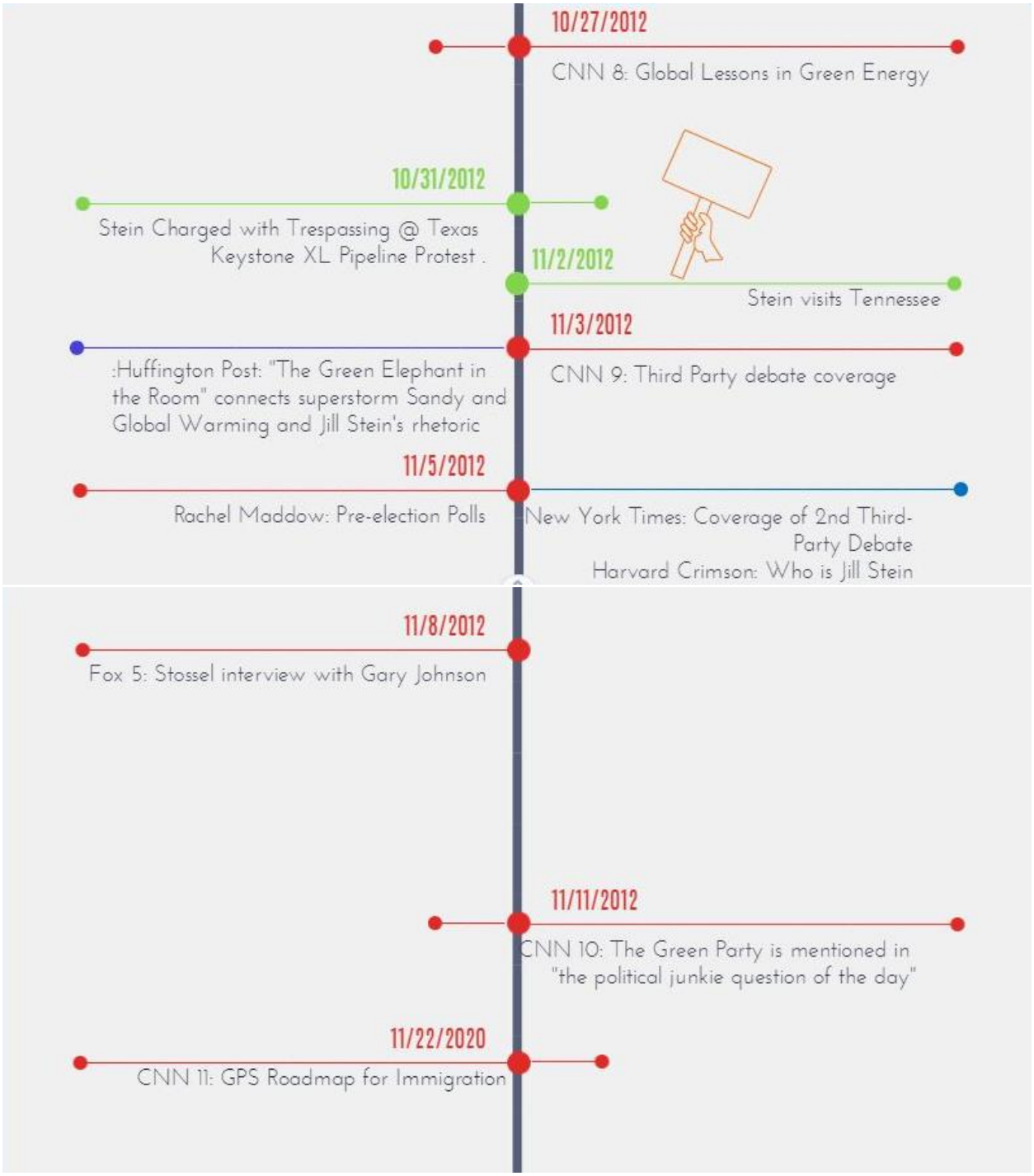
Source	Reference Number	Transcript Title and Corresponding Video URL	Date	Keywords
CNN	9	*CNN Newsroom:* "Presidential Candidates Campaign in Swing States; Clean-up Continues in Wake of Super Storm Sandy; U.S. Economy Added 171,000 Jobs in October; Michelle Obama Gives Speech in Ohio; Third Party Presidential Candidates Hold Debate; Movie Critic Picks Best Political Comedies https://archive.org/details/CNN_20121103_180000_CNN_Newsroom/start/2520/end/2580	11/3/12	Jill Stein, Green Party
CNN	10	*CNN Sunday Morning* "New Details on Petraeus' Affair; Time Running Out to Avert Fiscal Cliff; Too Early for 2016?"	11/11/12 8AM EST	Green Party
CNN	11	*CNN Fareed Zakaria "*GPS Roadmap for Making Immigration Work"	11/22/12	Green Party
Fox Business	1	Cavuto for October 17, 2012 (Gary Johnson interview) https://archive.org/details/FBC_20121018_030000_Cavuto/start/1560/end/1620	10/17/12	Jill Stein,
Fox Business	2	Cavuto: "Obama to Veto Any Deal Unless Tax Hikes on the Rich Included; The President Bringing Us to the Fiscal Cliff; Iranian president Says America's Debt Bomb Ready to Explode" https://archive.org/details/FBC_20121019_030000_Cavuto/start/3540/end/3600	10/18/12	Jill Stein, Green Party
Fox	3	Fox News Watch for October 20, 2012	10/20/12 3PM	Green Party
Fox	4	The Five "Election Day" https://archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW_20121106_220000_The_Five/start/1320/end/1380	11/6/12	Green Party
Fox Business	5	Stossel "for November 8, 2012" https://archive.org/details/FBC_20121109_020000_Stossel	11/8/12	Jill Stein, Green Party, Spoil
Fox	6	The O'Reilly Factor "America Needs Leaders; Wealth Tax; Christmas Controversy; Time Magazine's Person of the Year" https://archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW_20121129_040000_The_OReilly_Factor/start/840/end/900	11/28/12	Jill Stein, Green Party

Source	Reference Number	Transcript Title and Corresponding Video URL	Date	Keywords
MSNBC	1	MSNBC Special “First Presidential Debate Live Coverage” https://archive.org/details/MSNBC_20121004_023000_MSNBC_Special_Coverage/start/1800/end/1860	10/3/12	Spoil
MSNBC	2	The Ed Show with Ed Schultz “October 17th 2012”	10/17/12	Spoil
MSNBC	3	The Last Word “for October 24th 2012” https://archive.org/details/MSNBC_20121024_050000_The_Last_Word/start/0/end/60	10/24/12	Jill Stein Green Party
MSNBC	4	The Last Word “for October 26th 2012” https://archive.org/details/MSNBC_20121027_020000_The_Last_Word	10/26/12	Jill Stein Green
MSNBC	5	Rachel Maddow Show “for November 5th 2012” https://archive.org/details/MSNBCW_20121106_020000_The_Rachel_Maddow_Show/start/3120/end/3180	11/5/12	Jill Stein, Green Party
PBS	1	PBS Newshour “for October 17, 2012” https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_525-h707w6889m	10/17/12	Jill Stein, Green Party spoil
PBS	2	PBS Newshour “for October 24th, 2012” https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_525-fb4wh2fd26	10/24/12	Jill Stein, Green Party

Appendix B:

Linked Timeline of 2012 Events


10/15/2012
The Guardian: The Green New Deal
USA TODAY: Cheri Honkala's Response to the Vice Presidential Debate
Wisconsin Jewish Chronicler introduces first major Jewish candidate
Louisville Courier: Honkala Tours KY without debate invite
Washington Post: Stein's Response to Debate Questions
Stein speaks at Rochester Disability Rights
Time Magazine: Lunch with Jill Stein
10/16/2012
Jill Stein and Cheri Honkala are detained at the 2nd Presidential Debate, Hofstra University, Long Island NY.
10/17/2012
Fox 1: Cavuto interviews Gary Johnson
PBS 1: Third Party Debate Announcement
MSNBC 2: Ed Schultz, Paul Ryan uses term "spoiler".
10/18/2012
Fox 2: Cavuto interviews Ralph Nader about his new book
10/20/2012
Fox 3 Newswatch: Presidential Debate 2 discussion
CNN 4: Undecided voters, Green Party mentioned out of context.
Stein visits Bellingham, WA
10/24/2012
PBS2: Third Party Debate coverage
MSNBC 3: The Last Word 3rd Party Debate Coverage
10/25/2012
CNN 6: Student News
10/26/2012
MSNBC 4: The Last Word: O'Donnell Votes
CNN 7: Interview with Gary Johnson.
Forbes: 3rd Party Debate


10/27/2012
CNN 8: Global Lessons in Green Energy
10/31/2012
Stein Charged with Trespassing @ Texas Keystone XL Pipeline Protest .
11/2/2012
Stein visits Tennessee
11/3/2012
:Huffington Post: "The Green Elephant in the Room" connects superstorm Sandy and Global Warming and Jill Stein's rhetoric
CNN 9: Third Party debate coverage
11/5/2012
Rachel Maddow: Pre-election Polls
New York Times: Coverage of 2nd Third-Party Debate
Harvard Crimson: Who is Jill Stein
11/8/2012
Fox 5: Stossel interview with Gary Johnson
11/11/2012
CNN 10: The Green Party is mentioned in "the political junkie question of the day"
11/22/2020
CNN 11: GPS Roadmap for Immigration

Timeline image created with Visme software