

Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Sophisticated Voting/Minor Party Candidates

- Why care about third parties? What is their normative function in the American political system?
- What the main barriers to third parties in the United States?
 - Structural barriers: single-member districts, ballot access rules, FEC rules, presidential debate rules, Electoral College
 - How do preferences get aggregated in the U.S.? Does the electoral system produce Condorcet winners?
 - Other handicaps: media emphasizing horse race coverage; can't attract quality candidates; wasted vote logic; major parties co-opt issues and prevent third party candidates from appearing on ballot
- Why were there typically third parties in the 19th century, but third party candidates in the 20th?
- When do such parties/candidates emerge?
- Who votes for such parties/candidates?
- Does the presence of minor parties/candidates affect turnout?
- What is strategic voting, and who engages in it?