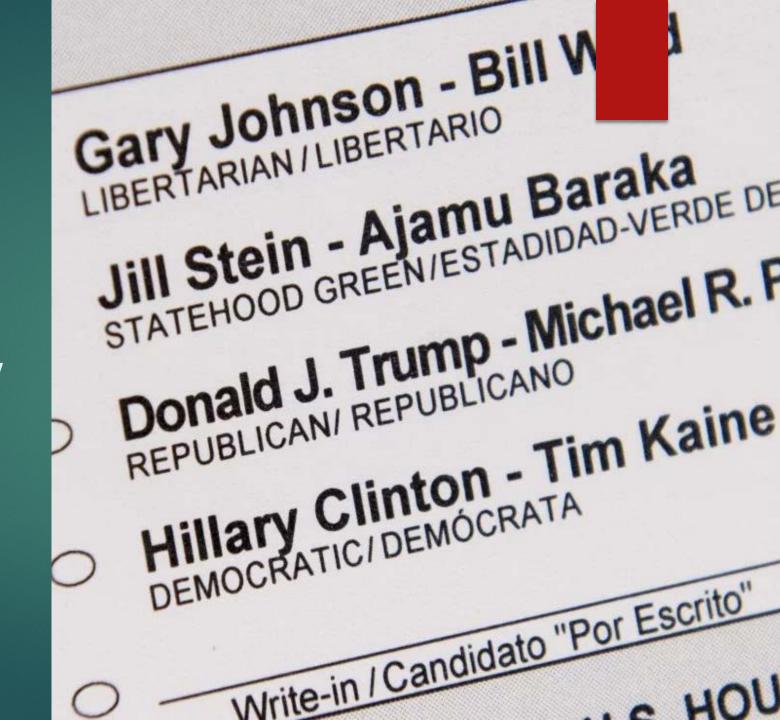# Spoilers and Signatures: Ballot Access and Third Party Performance

CAMERON SHEPARD

BEMIDJI STATE UNIVERSITY

ADVISOR: DR. PATRICK DONNAY

Why Third Parties?

- ▶ Political science and history background
- ▶ 2016 election

Trump & Clinton: the most unpopular candidates ever

% of US adults who rated the following presidential candidates unfavourable

🟦 Democrat   🟥 Republican

Candidate	Date	%
D. Trump	2016 Nov 2-5	61%
H. Clinton	2016 Nov 2-5	52%
B. Goldwater	1964 Oct 8-13	47%
M. Romney	2012 Oct 27-28	43%
G. McGovern	1972 Oct 13-16	41%
J. Kerry	2004 Oct 22-24	40%
G.H.W. Bush	1992 Oct 23-25	40%
G.W. Bush	2004 Oct 22-24	39%
B. Obama	2012 Oct 27-28	37%
R. Reagan	1980 Oct 10-13	37%
B. Obama	2008 Oct 23-26	35%
J. McCain	2008 Oct 23-26	35%

@StatistaCharts   Source: Gallup

indy100   The INDEPENDENT   statista

Obstacles Facing Third Party Candidates

- Ballot access laws
  - Signature requirements
- Campaign financing
  - Media exposure
- Partisanship
- Spoiler argument/wasted vote
- Electoral College
  - Some exceptions

13.5%
46 EV

18.9%
0 EV

Previous Research

- "Defective candidates" and third-party support
  - Abramson et al., 2000
  - Reiter and Walsh, 1995
- Signatures and numbers of candidates
  - Burden, 2007
- "Sophisticated voters" and the spoiler effect
  - Riker, 1982
  - Nelson, 1995

Hypotheses

1. Third party support will be higher in counties in non-competitive states than in counties in battleground states. (Nelson)

2. Lower signature ratios will see more candidates on the ballot, but counties will see similar amount of support regardless of number (Burden).

3. Third party support will decrease as median age increases.
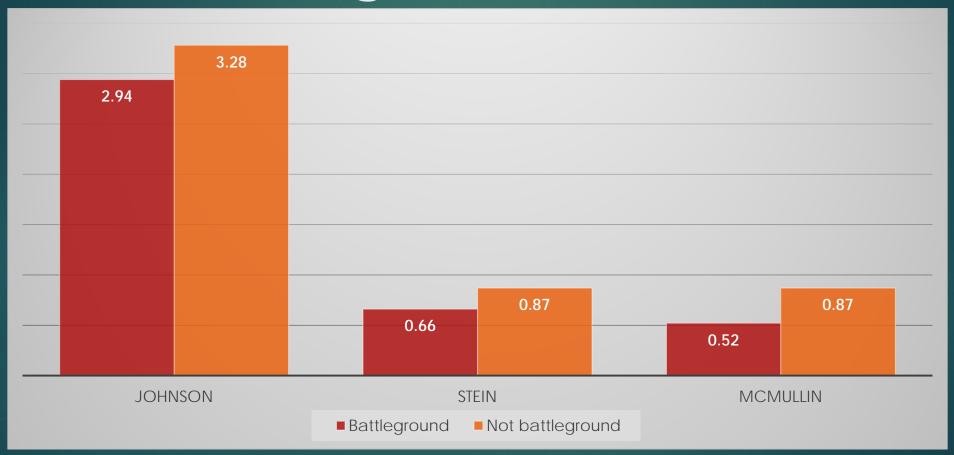
Data

- Unit of analysis: Counties and county-equivalents
  - 49 states and District of Columbia
- Election results and data
  - Dave Leip's Atlas of US Presidential Elections
- Demographic data
  - US Census, 2010
- Ballot access laws
  - Ballotpedia

Methodology

- Results for three most high-profile third-party candidates
  - Gary Johnson, Jill Stein, Evan McMullin
- Ballot status
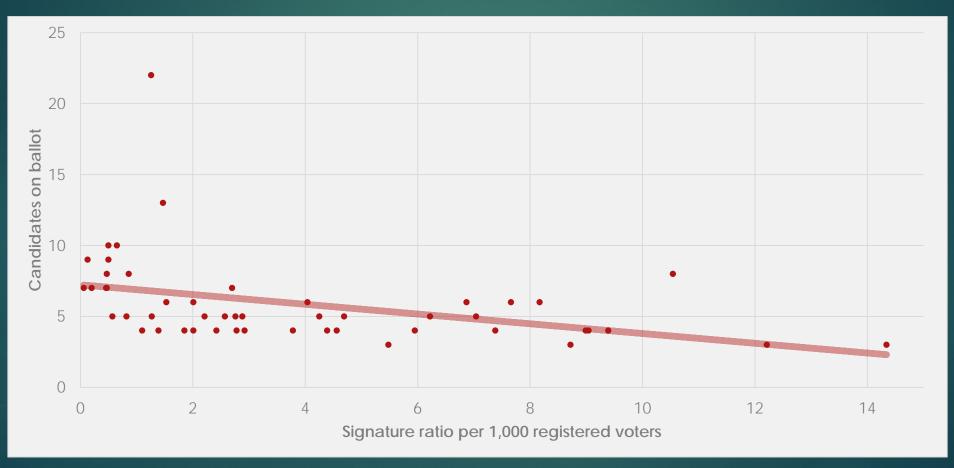 - On ballot, write-in, no access
- Battleground states operationalized
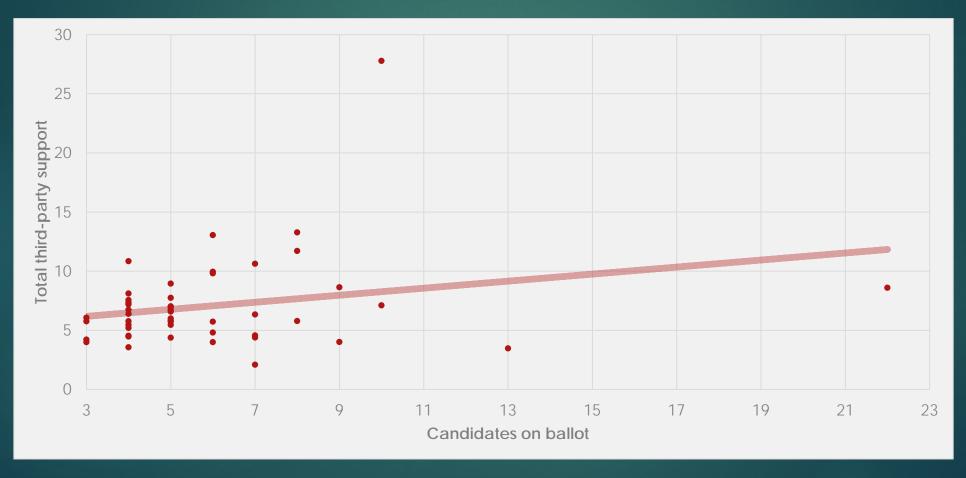
Mean vote percentage by state battleground status

Johnson: N=3113, Chi-Square=831.964, P=.000, Cramer's V=.517
Stein: N=2899, Chi-Square=555.672, P=.000, Cramer's V=.438
McMullin: N=2358, Chi-Square=345.912, P=.003, Cramer's V=.383

Ratio of signatures and number of candidates by state

R= .379, R^2=.144, Coefficient= -0.340

State third party support by number of candidates on ballot

R=.241, R^2=.038, Coefficient= .298

Regression Analysis

Independent variables	Third parties (general)	Gary Johnson	Jill Stein	Evan McMullin
Median age	-.175*** (-15.468)	-.048*** (-8.787)	-.005 (-1.919)	-.129*** (-15.049)
State battleground	.511*** (4.786)	.334*** (6.432)	.101*** (4.430)	.452*** (5.631)
Ballot access			.638*** (18.272)	1.582*** (18.816)
Population density	3.861E-5 (1.276)	-8.429E-6 (-.573)	2.625E-5*** (4.345)	1.031E-5 (.489)
Percent white	.074*** (21.240)	.035*** (20.895)	.005*** (6.388)	.030*** (10.176)
Constant	5.465	1.953	-.688	.591
F	133.927	122.328	108.771	126.016
Adjusted R^2	.146	.135	.157	.210
Number (N)	3113	3113	2899	2358

T-statistics in parenthesis
*-P<.05, **-P<.01, ***-P<.001

Results

- Hypothesis 1 was correct
- Hypothesis 2 was partially correct
  - Lower signature ratio means more candidates
  - More candidates means more third-party support
- Hypothesis 3 was correct

Thank you

- Comments/questions welcome!