

addressing the real issues," Copeland, an activist for the legalization of ferrets and a self-described "pagan druid," said.

"The only time you see them is on a debate calling each other poo-poo heads."

The most popular minor party, by all accounts, is the emerging Green Party, whose grassroots approach and strong left-wing environmentalist stance has been winning over liberals who disagree with the centrism of the Democrats. Recent polls have placed the Green gubernatorial candidate, Michael Camejo, as garnering between 4 and 9 percent of the votes.

"The Greens have a good solid base of support," Harrelson said.

Harrelson said Democrats disillusioned with Davis' enthusiasm for campaign fund-raising were throwing support behind Camejo.

The Greens are wasting no time using Davis' reputation to build up their party's reputation, according to Camejo's campaign manager, Tyler Snortum-Phelps.

"We are benefiting tremendously from Davis," Snortum-Phelps said. "He spends all his time raising campaign money."

Davis, perhaps wary of losing more voters to Camejo, refused to allow the Green candidate to participate in a televised debate with Simon Oct. 7. Nick Velasquez, assistant press secretary for Davis' campaign, said Camejo was not included because he did not have the required 15 percent polling support to participate.

"Camejo only has 4 percent," Velasquez said. "The problem is,

if you let in Camejo, you let (American Independent Party candidate Reinhold) Gulick in."

Greens insist the shutout of third-party candidates hurts the democratic process.

"The Democrats would rather lose to the Republicans than allow third parties," Snortum-Phelps said. "They're saying, let's not have democracy. They're saying, 'third parties go home.' What does that say about democracy?"

Simon's campaign, considering the low support for Davis, seems to be floundering, Snortum-Phelps said. The latest polls show Simon, a newcomer to state politics, trailing 10 percent-age points behind Davis, who is holding steady at 41 percent.

"Simon is an ineffectual goof ball," Snortum-Phelps said. "He's a nice guy, personally, but he's in over his head."

Libertarians seem to have the same view of Simon's campaign. "Simon is incompetent when it comes to PR," Copeland said. "He doesn't really have a center. It's really sad."

One measure of voter disgust is that the fastest-growing political affiliation in California is "decline to state," Snortum-Phelps said. But beneath that are the numbers of voters that register Green. "The numbers of both the major parties are shrinking."

Snortum-Phelps said. As a result, "The Green Party is emerging as a viable alternative," Snortum-Phelps said. "This is the beginning of a real sea change for California politics."

While minor parties acknowledge they have little chance of winning this year, Libertarians and Greens say their campaign success is unprecedented.

"I've been working on this campaign for a year and a half. It's been a lot of fun. (The Libertarian Party) got 4 percent," Copeland said, citing a recent poll that had him tied with Camejo. "That's huge."

"It's been a heck of a campaign," Snortum-Phelps said. Media coverage of minor party candidates has increased, and the visibility has helped all the smaller parties, Snortum-Phelps said.

Some unhappy with major candidates, looking at options

Between incumbent Gray Davis door for third party hopefuls

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By Dan Abbott
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The 2002 California election for governor is Tuesday and major party candidates are scrambling to ratchet themselves up in the polls.

With widespread disgust with both Governor Gray Davis and Republican challenger Bill Simon, constant mudslinging and an economy that can't seem to get back on its feet, voters are turning away from the televised grudge match. For the first time in years, the third-party candidates are being listened to, campaign managers said.

"The American people should have as many parties as they want," Jeff Harrelson, assistant press secretary for the Simon for Governor campaign, said. "It's their choice."

In the past few years, voters disillusioned with the limited choices of the two-party system have been turning to smaller parties with more colorful, outspoken candidates.

Since billionaire Ross Perot's 1992 bid for the presidency, minor parties have been slowly gaining in popularity, as evidenced by Green Party candidate Ralph Nader's 4 percent showing in the 2000 presidential race.

This year, four third-parties have candidates in the governor's race, including the Greens, the Libertarians, the Natural Law Party, and the American Independent Party.

Voter distrust of both the major parties' candidates in this year's gubernatorial race is a major reason for the recent upsurge in third-party interest, Libertarian gubernatorial candidate Gary David Copeland

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