

# [***Biden vs. Trump is set. What are the alternatives?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGS-BJD1-DY7V-G2BN-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; The [*Joe Biden vs. Donald Trump rematch*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/06/politics/trump-biden-general-election-analysis/index.html) is a presumptive reality after the president and former president both dominated Republican and Democratic primaries on Super Tuesday.

The flaws, general unpopularity and baked-in perceptions of both candidates suggest the coming election will be one of mutually assured destruction, where Republicans try to make Biden seem as old and feeble as possible and Democrats equate a second Trump term with the end of democracy as we know it.

What are the alternatives?

If 2024 is anything like 2020 (or 2016, for that matter), the Republican or Democratic winner will eke past the loser in a handful of key states - which means third-party or independent candidates, even though they have [*little chance of winning*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/17/politics/third-parties-elections-what-matters/index.html) such a hotly contested election, could play an important role in deciding the outcome.

**Third parties.** The Libertarian Party has been on the ballot in every state in recent elections. The Green Party is usually on the ballot in most but not all states. Those parties have not traditionally drawn large followings, but in elections with close margins, the tens of thousands of votes they win in key states in any given year lead to a lot of speculation.

It has been argued that [*stronger Libertarian and Green Party tickets*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/01/opinions/2020-election-third-parties-opinion-mitchell/index.html) in 2016, led by former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson and Jill Stein, respectively, sucked support from Hillary Clinton and helped elect Trump. There was similar grousing with regard to the Green Party's Ralph Nader in Florida in 2000.

But most in-depth assessments conclude that it's not realistic to assume third-party voters would simply opt for a major-party candidate if the third-party option was not available. The [*Libertarian Party*](https://lnc2024.com/schedule/) will pick a nominee at a party convention in May. The [*Green Party*](https://www.gp.org/2024_nomination_process) will pick its candidate in July.

**Independent candidates.** This year, there is a different kind of wild card than in 2020, when the rapper Kanye West ran for president. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has a famous name, a history in ***politics*** and deep-pocketed supporters helping him get on November ballots as an independent. The academic and social justice advocate Cornel West is also running as an independent and formed a new party: Justice for All.

**No Labels.** Sensing frustration with the major parties, [*No Labels*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/02/politics/no-labels-biden-trump/index.html) formed as a centrist group, not a political party, that set about seeking ballot access for an unnamed "unity" candidate. No such candidate has emerged, at least not yet. No Labels members will vote this week on whether or not to seek a candidate.

The group has recently suggested that if it does field a ticket, it would search for a Republican presidential candidate and Democratic vice presidential candidate. Key moderate figures like Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia have said they will not run.

No Labels chief strategist Ryan Clancy did not name any particular candidate who could serve as a No Labels candidate during an interview with CNN's Abby Phillip on Wednesday. He said the group's members, which are not publicly known, would be deciding what's next for the group.

"What you'll get on Friday is you'll get news on whether we're going to be going forward. And then if we are indeed going forward, you will hear in short order in the coming weeks of the process by which that ticket would get chosen," Clancy said.

Where are Kennedy and West going to be on the ballot?

A main hurdle for independent candidates is getting on the ballot.

Just ask Kanye West, whose weird 2020 campaign only got about [*70,000 votes*](https://www.fec.gov/resources/cms-content/documents/2020presgeresults.pdf) in 18 states. It was a telling development that people aligned with the Trump campaign [*helped West*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/05/politics/kanye-west-ballot/index.html) get on the ballot in the swing state of Wisconsin, clearly hoping he would siphon votes away from Biden.

Here's the current state of Kennedy's effort to get the signatures to appear on ballots, which is being aided by the well-funded super PAC that supports him:

Nevada and New Hampshire are swing states where Kennedy's campaign claims to have enough signatures. Add in the blue state of Hawaii.

The super PAC that supports him claims to have enough signatures to get him on the ballot in the key states of [*Arizona and Georgia*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/27/politics/rfk-pac-signatures-ballot-arizona-georgia/index.html).

He's already on the ballot in red state of [*Utah*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/03/politics/rfk-jr-utah-presidential-ballot-qualifies/index.html).

Cornel West's [*campaign says*](https://www.cornelwest2024.com/petitioning_launch) it is on the ballot in three states so far: Alaska, Oregon and South Carolina.

How do West and Kennedy do in polls?

It's complicated and in flux.

A [*February poll by Marquette University*](https://www.marquette.edu/news-center/2024/marquette-law-poll-finds-trump-at-51-biden-49.php) found that in a head-to-head matchup, Trump had 51% to Biden's 49%.

When Kennedy, West and the Green Party's Stein were added into the question, things changed. Trump was still on top with 42%, Biden got 39%, Kennedy had 15%, West had 3% and Stein had 2%.

Kennedy pulled more support from Republicans in that poll, while West and Stein pulled more support from Democrats. Trump maintained a higher portion of independents than Biden when independents were included.

When I asked CNN polling editor Ariel Edwards-Levy how to view these polls, she pointed out that polls that explicitly ask about third-party candidates by name tend to overstate the level of support they actually end up taking. There are reasons to suspect that's particularly likely in the case of Kennedy, who could be benefiting to some extent from a combination of dissatisfaction with Biden and Trump and the value of his name recognition, which doesn't necessarily indicate durable support for his candidacy.

Buzzy independent candidates have a tendency to lose support as Election Day nears. Think Ross Perot, the most successful recent independent or third-party candidate, who did not break 20% in the national popular vote and won no states or electoral votes. He may very well have helped elect Bill Clinton, the Democrat who won the White House with just 43% of the national vote in 1992.

Who is more afraid of independent candidates?

Democrats. They have actively opposed the No Labels campaign since its inception, warning that it would draw support from Biden.

And they have [*lodged complaints*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/04/politics/dnc-rfk-jr-complaint-fec/index.html) about coordination between Kennedy's campaign and the super PAC that supports him and is gathering signatures on his behalf.

If you want to know why Kennedy's candidacy is concerning to Democrats, watch Eva McKend's report after Kennedy held an event with Black voters in New York.

Kennedy has also flirted with the idea of running as a Libertarian. He spoke to the state party convention in California, for instance. But it would be an odd fit for a Kennedy - who still holds notably liberal views on some key issues and made his career as an environmental activist - to join the Libertarian Party.

"Libertarians are like wet cats. They're very difficult to herd, and they don't like to be told by rich, famous outsiders that they need to vote for their candidates," [*Matt Welch*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2024/03/02/smr-third-party-race-heats-up.cnn), the editor at large of the Libertarian magazine Reason told CNN's Michael Smerconish last week.

But Welch predicted that Kennedy has raised enough money to hire signature gatherers and lawyers needed to get on the presidential ballot as an independent candidate in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

[*Definitely read Jake Tapper's story*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/22/politics/robert-f-kennedy-jr-vaccines/index.html) on his interactions with Kennedy about Kennedy's vaccination claims. Or watch the candidate's interaction with CNN's Kasie Hunt where she rolls the tape to jog his memory on his claim that no vaccines are safe.

And expect Kennedy's opponents, particularly on the liberal side of the political aisle, to spend some time and money reintroducing people to his conspiracy-minded views on vaccines and other topics.

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