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Does No Labels' Math and Map Get Them to the White House?
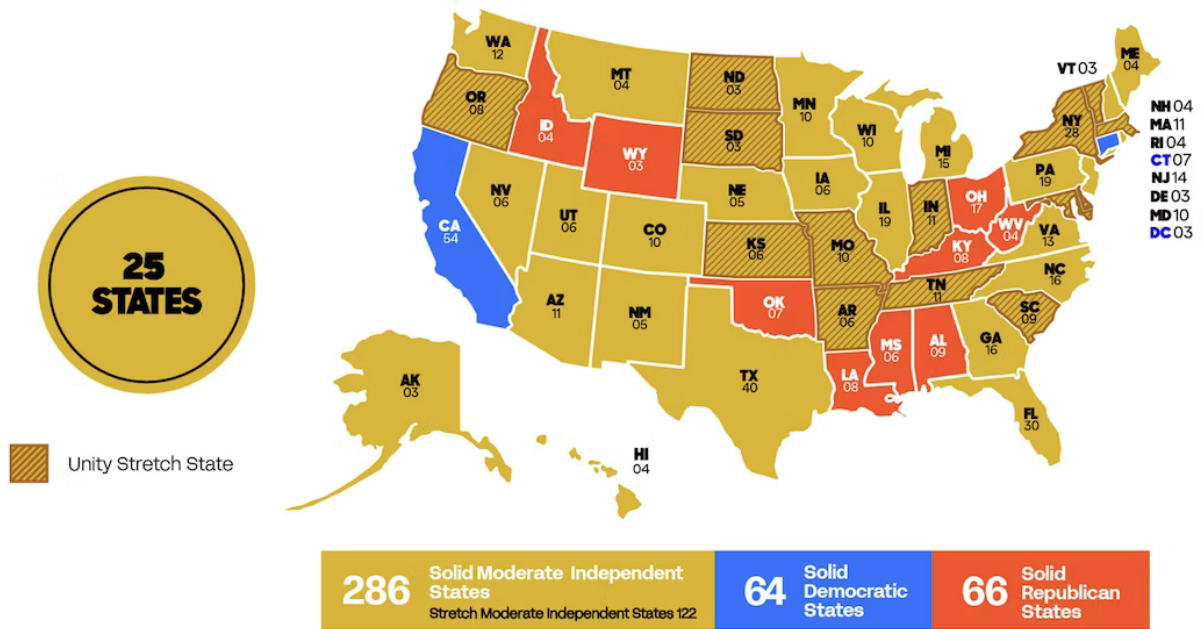
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No Labels is spearheading an effort to field a third-party presidential ticket, which they say has a "real and viable" path to win the required 270 electoral votes. We've detailed extensively why such an effort will likely serve as a spoiler to re-elect Donald Trump. In this memo, we take a close look solely at both the math and map that No Labels is relying upon to support their claim. As we demonstrate below, their own data actually undermines their case.

The No Labels Math

No Labels' own polling shows that they will elect Donald Trump & spoil President Biden's 2024 re-election
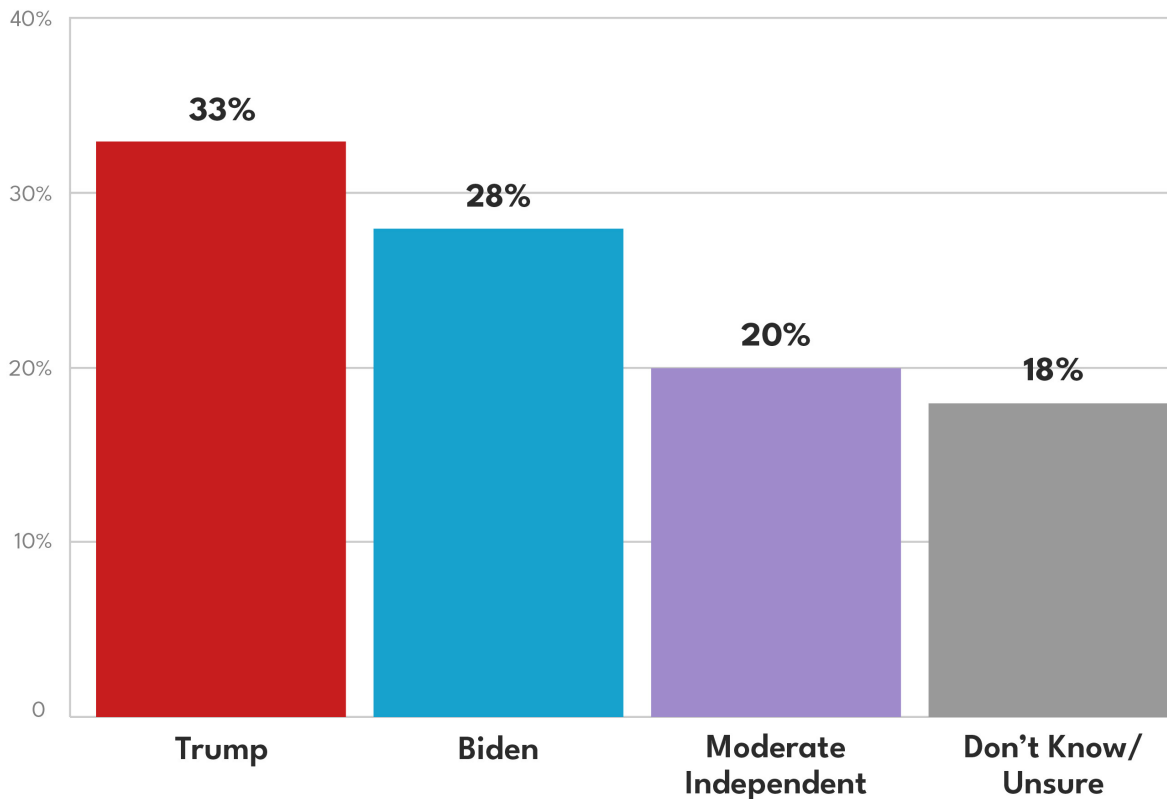
Source: Clancy, Ryan, and Dritan Nesho. "Third Way's Misrepresentation of No Labels' 2024 Victory Map." No Labels, 6 June 2023, www.nolabels.org/third-ways-misrepresentation-of-no-labels-2024-victory-map.

First, their own analysis of the electorate has shown they wouldn't come close to winning. Their pollster, HarrisX, said they would need "about 37 percent of the popular vote" to get to 270 electoral votes (EVs), an assertion repeated on the No Labels website. But their own polling reveals their candidate garners only 20% of the national vote, compared with 28% for Biden and 33% for Trump in a national three-way race. In a head-to-head contest, their poll showed Trump essentially tied with Biden at 43%-42%. The addition of their candidate swings the race to Trump. [1]

And that 20% performance for their candidate is likely to be a high-water mark. Why? Because it measures the performance of a nameless "moderate independent" with no negative attributes. A real candidate will come with their political baggage and be subjected to countless attack ads. So even if the number somehow goes up, it's hard to see how the 20% almost doubles.

Second, their notion of what it will take to win in an average state is fatally flawed. No Labels recently told supporters on a Zoom they intend to get at least 34% of the vote in every one of their 25 top target states to win. But 34% is a winning margin in a three-way race only if the Democrat

and Republican each win precisely 33%. Such a photo finish is theoretically possible in some of the closely divided, modern-era swing states. But there are not nearly enough such battlegrounds to get them even a third of the way to 270 electoral votes.

Moreover, it's highly unlikely they could clear even that very low bar, much less across a large set of states with very different electoral make-ups and geographies. Perot, the candidate they use as their model, did not win more than 30% in a single state in his 1992 run.
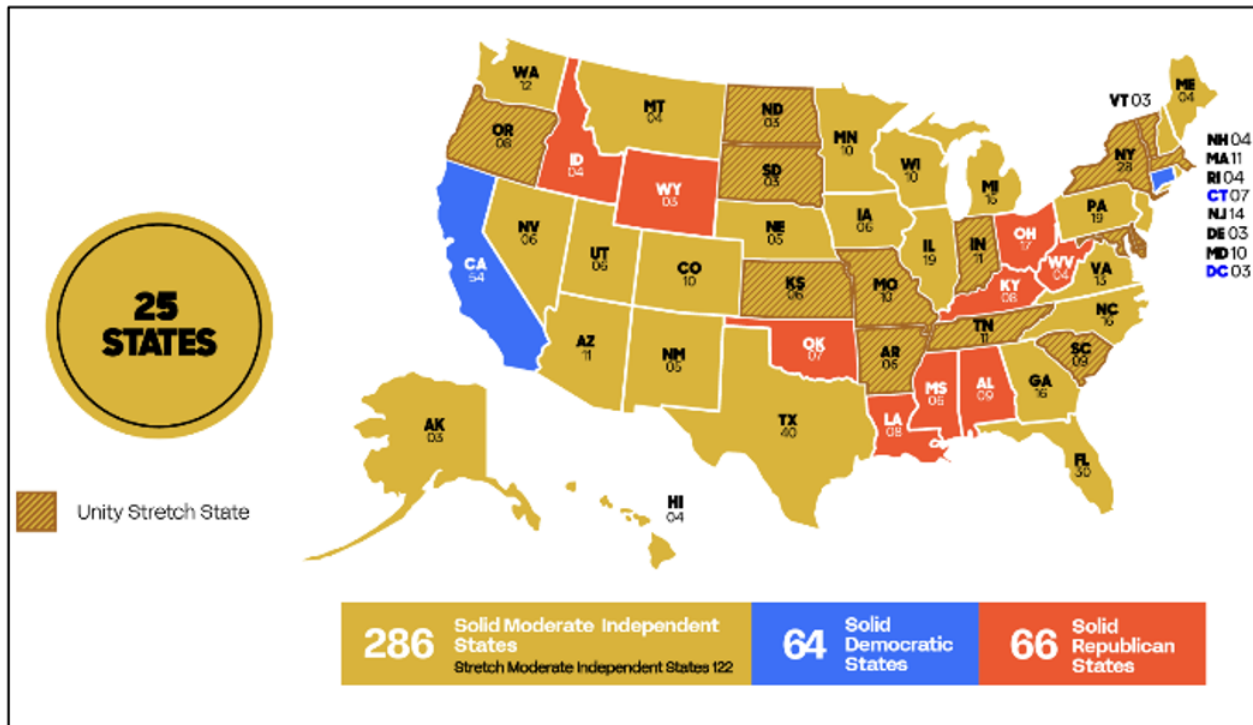
The No Labels Map

The No Labels path looks equally hopeless at the Electoral College level. They released a map purporting to show the states they could win on their "real and viable path" to 270. On its face, the map is challenging for any political professional to take seriously, but in this memo we do, carefully unpacking each of their assumptions to see how viable it is for them to get to 270 EVs. Spoiler Alert (in more ways than one): their claims fall apart immediately.

Battleground States

History makes clear that the No Labels candidate is unlikely to win even a single state. But if we suspend disbelief to explore their argument that they can pull this off, it would have to start with them winning ALL of the closely contested 2020 battleground states (the seven states decided by three points or less: AZ, GA, MI, NV, NC, PA, and WI). A friendly reminder: the most successful third-party candidate since the dawn of the modern two-party system (Teddy Roosevelt) won only six states. And though the seven closest states in 1992 were all decided by less than 2.5 points, Ross Perot won zero of them. Indeed, Perot did not manage more than 27% of the vote in any of those

seven states. But even if No Labels somehow were to run better than TR and Ross Perot, **they would still have only 93 EVs.**

To get to the next level, No Labels would then have to win ALL of the remaining gold states on their map decided by between 4-10 points in 2020 (FL, IA, ME-02, MN, NH, and TX). So, let's consider the feasibility of that. The least difficult perhaps would be NH and ME-02, with their famous independent streaks. But what about Florida, which has moved from Trump prevailing by just one point in 2016 to DeSantis cruising to reelection by 19 points in 2022? Or Texas, where Republicans have won in the presidential in every cycle since 1976 and held all statewide offices for almost 30 years? Or Iowa, which now has zero statewide elected Democrats and none in their congressional delegation? None of those are credible No Labels targets.

But even if they somehow pulled off a miracle and flipped ALL six of those (in addition to the battlegrounds), **they would end up with 184 electoral votes.** That means they would need to find 86 more, and to do that, they would need to flip some of most solidly partisan states in the country.

"Middle Ground" Partisan States

The clearest path to winning those additional 86 EVs would be to flip the least partisan states (with a partisan voter index of 8 or less) among those that remain. But taking a closer look at those remaining states reveals how unlikely (read: impossible) that would be. To get the remaining 86, they would need to win every single state in the following list: RI (Biden +21), WA (Biden +19), DE (Biden +19), IL (Biden +17), NJ (Biden +16), OR (Biden +16), CO (Biden +14), NM (Biden +11), AND VA (Biden +10). So, Biden would have to lose his home state, as well as Illinois, which he won by a million votes and Washington, which last went red in 1988. To be fair, if they felt that +21 Rhode Island was just too far out of reach, they swap in Alaska, which was "only" Trump +10.

Based on their map, that's the *easiest* path for No Labels: win 21 states (plus Maine's 2 nd), nine of which went for Biden or Trump in 2020 by 10+ points (and some by 15+). But what if they don't win ALL of those states? Where do they say the final EVs would come from? Their so-called "stretch states."

Stretch States

No Labels' claim that they have a shot at winning their "unity stretch states" seems, to put it mildly, to strain credulity. They say they could win deep-blue Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Vermont, all states Biden won by 30 points or more. They assert they can be competitive in crimson-red states in which Trump shellacked Biden, like Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas. (Ok, not crimson—they concede Alabama.) Trump won Arkansas by 28 points, Tennessee by 23, and Missouri by 15, and in each, his job approval was above 54% even after the January 6 th insurrection. That's pretty rock solid. It seems fair to conclude that if they can't get to 270 by

winning the purple battlegrounds and the least partisan of the remaining states, they can't win, because they have no realistic shot at picking up any of these "stretch" states.

Conclusion

For the sake of argument, we tried in this memo to chart a path for No Labels to an incredibly improbable and history-defying victory. But even with both thumbs on the scale, we couldn't get them close to 270 electoral votes in a manner that did not violate every known law of political physics. You don't have to believe us that they won't win anywhere. You just have to believe they won't win in places in which their victory would fall somewhere between highly unrealistic and impossible.

The tone of this memo is somewhat lighthearted, but this topic is enormously serious. If No Labels pursues this quixotic effort, they have no hope of winning. But they would almost certainly serve as a spoiler for Trump, as we describe elsewhere. And the terrible consequences of another Trump presidency are almost beyond imagining. Anyone who cares about America's future should oppose this third-party bid and urge No Labels to stand down.

ENDNOTES

1. After publication of this memo, No Labels objected that we had failed to include undecided voters in our chart. We have changed our graphic as they suggest and would note that, based on a poll taken in December 2022, they are predicting that in November 2024 they can win roughly 70 percent of all the undecided voters. This bizarre claim would add 12 percent to their vote share, putting their candidate at 32 percent of the total vote. While this assertion is astoundingly unrealistic, we are happy to include it, because it further weakens their case: even if it's true (it's not), their unnamed "moderate independent" still spoils Biden's re-election, still helps re-elect Trump, and still does not achieve a plurality of the popular vote to win the presidency. This echoes more recent polling from Echelon Insights. They showed that when a named third-party candidate is added (here it's Sen. Joe Manchin), the vote-share of the third-party candidate only reaches nine percent and leads to a 42%–41% Trump victory over Biden in the three-way race.