

## No Labels ≠ Ross Perot



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In an email to their donors yesterday, the No Labels Party has once again compared their third-party bid in 2024 to Ross Perot’s run in 1992. While Third Way, our allies, and a wide array of independent experts agree the result of their run would be the same—zero electoral votes—the other claims they’re making to the Perot legacy are spurious. Here are the responses to those claims, with evidence to support them.

### Early third-party polling is usually a mirage.

The No Labels Party notes that Perot led the 1992 polling “just” five months out with 39% of the vote to Bush’s 31% and Clinton’s 25%. However, polling well before Election Day is notoriously unreliable. Spring polling of this type had Carter beating Reagan in 1980, Kerry ahead of Bush in 2004, McCain leading Obama in 2008, and Romney in front of Obama in 2012.

This reliability problem is particularly acute when it comes to predicting the outcome for third-party candidates. For example, in 1980, John Anderson polled at 21% in April, but he garnered just

6.6% of the eventual popular vote. In 1992, Perot managed just 19% of the vote—20 points lower than his peak poll—and didn't win a single electoral vote. When Perot ran again in 1996, he polled at 17% in March but dropped to just 8% of the vote. In 2016, Gary Johnson polled at 10% in the spring but ended up with just 3% of the vote.

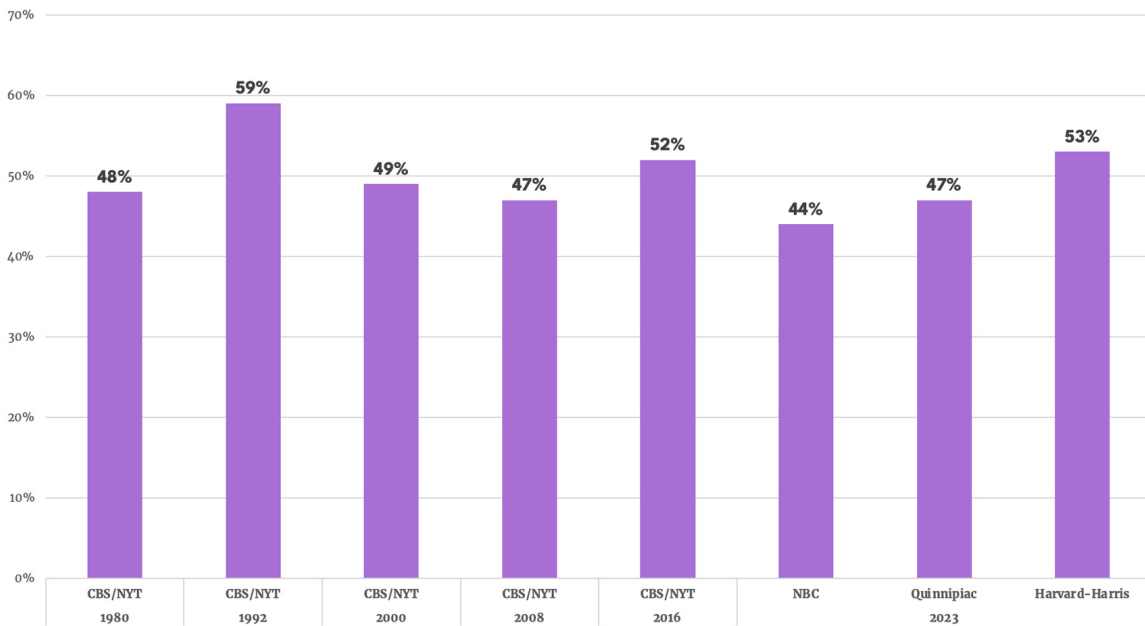
## Early dissatisfaction with the major party candidates is normal.

No Labels claims “Americans have never been **more** dissatisfied with the two major parties or **less** enthusiastic about their presumptive presidential nominees.” Their bolding is for emphasis, not links to citations, because there is no evidence to support it—the claim is false.

In fact, voters were more dissatisfied at this point in 1992; today's numbers are close to the historical average. Voters today are about as dissatisfied with Biden and Trump as they were in 2008 with McCain and Obama. And, despite Reagan's eventual romp, it's where the candidates were in 1980.

### Dissatisfaction with the major party candidates is consistent with what it's been for decades.

(Percentage of voters that want other choices/would consider voting for a third-party independent)



Sources: CBS/New York Times, NBC News, Quinnipiac, and Harvard-Harris.

No Labels follows this malarkey by noting that “72% of registered voters don't want Joe Biden to run in 2024. 63% don't want Donald Trump to run.” Those are numbers from their own polling, which has been selectively released. But let's pretend that claim is true. It is, nevertheless, irrelevant.

In one of their essays dismantling the No Labels third party case, the experts at 538 wrote: “Overall, around 4 in 5 Democrats and Republicans had favorable views of Biden and Trump, respectively.”

And they went on to point out that partisan leaners, who constitute the bulk of independent voters (see below) also have a largely positive view of their respective candidates.

The Washington Post dropped the hammer on this argument: “Only 6 percent of the country actually vehemently dislike both Biden and Trump. That’s the sweet spot for No Labels — if they can find a candidate all 6 percent of that group likes. Good luck!”

Perot benefited from an organic groundswell of supporters imploring him to run. Volunteer efforts were so successful at collecting petitions that the Perot campaign only needed to use paid ballot petition gatherers in eight states. Because theirs is an elite-driven effort, the No Labels Party is funding and staffing their ballot access drives themselves. That is hardly the picture of a public clamoring for something other than the two major party nominees.

## **Being an independent does not mean support for a third party.**

No Labels’ final point is that “45% of Americans self-identify as independent, compared to only 33% who said they were independents when Perot ran.” And that’s true! But again, irrelevant.

Here’s 538:

*“Although around 2 in 5 Americans said they were independent in 2022, it turns out about 4 in 5 of those self-identified independents actually leaned Democratic or Republican. As a result, only around 1 in 10 Americans identified as truly independent, a figure replicated in other surveys.*

*Now, these independent “leaners” might seem attainable for No Labels. After all, polling by the Pew Research Center suggests that, compared to full-fledged partisans, leaners are more likely to view themselves as moderate, want more options at the ballot box and believe none of the candidates represent their views well. But those views only matter insofar as they can sway vote choice, and research suggests that independent leaners vote for the party they lean toward at nearly the same rate as openly partisan voters.*

TL/DR: Most registered independents lean, regularly voting for the same party, and the percentage of registered independents tells you almost nothing about the electorate’s relative appetite for a third-party candidate.

So, sure, voters are grumpy about their likely D and R choices—they usually are. But no, Biden and Trump are not “historically unpopular,” and no, the door is not uniquely open for a third-party bid. And most of all, a candidate picked by a cabal of insiders and secret donors won’t look a thing like

the popular, plain-spoken, truth-telling outsider and self-made billionaire who made a brief splash (before, inevitably, fading) in 1992.