

**US presidential election 2024**

## Third-party candidates pose new threat to Biden re-election bid

Joe Manchin's retirement from US Senate adds centrist to list of possible presidential rivals



West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin has said he will not run again for the US Senate, but wants to ‘mobilise the middle’ of US politics © Gene J. Puskar/AP

**James Politi** in Washington YESTERDAY

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US president Joe Biden is facing a growing cast of potential spoilers to his re-election bid from across the political spectrum, complicating his efforts to rebuild his coalition ahead of a likely rematch against Donald Trump.

The list of third-party and independent candidates running for president in 2024 has been expanding — driven by the weak approval ratings of both Biden and Trump. Their poor ratings have produced a category of US voters that pollsters and strategists are describing as “double haters” — disenchanted by both of them.

Robert Kennedy Jr, a scion of the famed US political dynasty and nephew of the late former president John F Kennedy, has been running for president as an independent for several months, as has Cornel West, the progressive activist and philosopher.

Last week, Jill Stein, a leftwing activist who is often blamed by Democrats for damaging Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign against Trump in 2016, said she will be renewing her White House candidacy for the Green party in 2024.

In addition, Joe Manchin, the centrist Democratic senator from West Virginia, announced he [would not seek a new term](#) in Congress in recent days, triggering speculation that he might also be preparing to launch a White House run. Manchin is

considered a likely leader of a presidential ticket backed by No Labels, a centrist organisation.

“What I will be doing is travelling the country and speaking out to see if there is an interest in creating a movement to mobilise the middle and bring Americans together,” Manchin said as he announced his retirement from the Senate.

No Labels, which is led by former Democratic senator Joe Lieberman and former Maryland Republican governor Larry Hogan, praised Manchin effusively. It said it would decide by early 2024 whether it would try to assemble a “unity” ticket for the election and who would be on it. “Senator Joe Manchin is a tireless voice for America’s commonsense majority and a longtime ally of the No Labels movement,” it said.

Whereas third-party and independent candidates would draw votes away from both Biden and Trump, some Democrats fear that the incumbent president might be most vulnerable. Mark Warner, the Virginia senator, warned Manchin to stay out of the 2024 race in an interview with CNN this week.

“Give him his space to advocate processes and bipartisanship. I think that’s a positive thing. But I can’t imagine any world in which he does anything that will help Donald Trump get re-elected,” he said.

According to national polling averages assembled by Realclearpolitics.com, Trump has a 1.1 percentage point advantage over Biden in a head-to-head match-up, but that edge grows to 2.7 percentage points when Kennedy and West are added as options for voters.

As well as the disturbing precedent for Democrats of 2016, when Stein’s vote tally in key swing states was higher than Trump’s margin over Clinton, Biden’s campaign will also be mindful of the 1992 race. In that case, Republican incumbent president George HW Bush lost a re-election to Bill Clinton after a strong performance by independent candidate Ross Perot, who gained nearly 19 per cent of the national vote. On the other hand, if a strong libertarian party candidate emerges in 2024, they could subtract support from Trump.

Many political analysts and strategists in Washington are still sceptical that third-party and independent candidates will be a big factor in 2024.

It takes large amounts of money, significant grassroots support, and a big organisation to mount a successful presidential campaign that can gain access to ballots and compete in every state. And Biden has been successful in keeping the

...and compete in every state. And Biden has been successful in keeping the overwhelming majority of Democrats on his side as he heads into 2024. Dean Philips, a moderate Minnesota Democratic lawmaker, and Marianne Williamson, are his only challengers for the Democratic nomination, and they are not considered big threats at this stage.

Maxwell Shulman, a research analyst at Beacon Policy Advisors, said it was typical for voters to say they might vote for a third-party candidate a year from the election, “when the stakes seem hypothetical”, but “that number decreases” as the election approaches.

“Whatever the polls say a lot of those voters will come home [to the main party candidates] or not vote,” says Kyle Kondik of the University of Virginia’s Center for Politics.

Within the Democratic party, Biden is facing challenges from Dean Philips, a moderate congressman from Minnesota, and Marianne Williamson, the author.

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