

# THIRD PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES: AVOIDING A 'SPOILER' SCENARIO

As we all learn in grade school, Presidential elections are decided by the Electoral College, not the national popular vote. As a result, recent elections have turned on the votes of a small handful of swing states with a slim margin of victory. In tight elections, third party Presidential candidates can play an outsized role in the outcome.

Many analysts maintain that Ralph Nader's Green Party campaign in 2000 "spoiled" Al Gore's presidential bid, tipping the election to George W. Bush. The final outcome in Florida (after the courts ended the vote counting) saw Gore lose by 537 votes, while Nader received over 97,000 votes (mostly from voters who would have chosen Gore over Bush in a two-way race).

In 2020, Joe Biden won the presidency with three Swing States in which he had a lead of less than 1%: Georgia, Arizona and Wisconsin. The 2020 average margin of victory in the seven most competitive states was 1.27%, spanning from +1.3% for Trump in North Carolina to +2.8 for Biden in Michigan.

WFP believes strongly in the power of independent politics to win material gains and open up new space in the political discourse. For WFP, our strategy is building our power, infrastructure and capacity from the grassroots up, acknowledging the rules that enforce a rigid two party system even as we favor changing them.

**But for us, it's important to tell the truth.** Here are two truths:

- First, none of the minor party candidates have the organizational reach, resources or popular support to win a single state, never mind win the electoral college – all they might do is threaten to tip the balance in closely contested states from Harris to Trump.
- Second, there are meaningful differences between the two major candidates for President that will impact millions of peoples lives, and strategies that advantages Trump over Harris could be costly.

The Working Families Party has endorsed Kamala Harris for President because she is the candidate that can beat Donald Trump and stop the right-wing authoritarian MAGA movement he leads from gaining power.

This document breaks down tested messages that are most promising to reach the segments of voters who may consider casting a vote for a minor party presidential candidate in swing states. We cannot afford to leave these voters uncontested, because the results could be devastating. This document offers guidance on:

- 1) Key overall general election messages,
- 2) Specific pro-Harris messages that test well with potential 3rd party voters and
- 3) Specific messages about 3rd party candidates that help voters make their decision about who to vote for.



# WHAT THIRD PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE ACTUALLY ON THE BALLOT IN SWING STATES, AND HOW ARE THEY CURRENTLY POLLING?

The landscape of third party candidates and support for them remains in flux. While Biden was facing a larger threat of third-party dissent, polling reflects that third party candidates' support has diminished with Harris at the top of the ticket. Furthermore, the top-polling minor candidate, RFK Jr., who was drawing some support from both Democrats and Republicans, has withdrawn from the race and endorsed Trump, and will remain on the ballot only in a few states.

Four third party candidates could potentially draw progressive voters away from Harris: Green Party's Jill Stein, Justice For All Party's Cornel West, Party for Socialism & Liberation's Claudia De La Cruz, and to a lesser extent, former independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Nationally, these candidates could collectively draw 2-4% of votes, enough to impact the outcome.

This memo focuses on the seven swing states where we believe the election will be decided: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Below are current polling numbers for the "Left" third party candidates in each state. Given the margin of victory from 2020 in each of these states, and current polling within the margin of error, third party campaigns could peel off enough Harris votes to swing one or more Swing States to Trump.

NATIONAL & SWING STATE POLLING	Jill Stein	Cornel West	Claudia De La Cruz	Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (withdrawn)
<b>Political Party</b>	Green Party	Justice For All Party	Party for Socialism and Liberation	independent
<b>National Polling</b>	1.2%	1.5%	<1%	n/a
<b>AZ Polling</b>	2%	not on ballot	not on ballot	not on ballot
<b>GA Polling</b>	<1%	1%	1%	not on ballot
<b>MI Polling</b>	1%	<1%	not on ballot	2%
<b>NV Polling</b>	not on ballot	not on ballot	not on ballot	not on ballot
<b>NC Polling</b>	1%	<1%	not on ballot	not on ballot
<b>PA Polling</b>	1%	not on ballot	not on ballot	not on ballot
<b>WI Polling</b>	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

From CNN, other recent public polling



# WHO ARE THE VOTERS THAT ARE CONSIDERING THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

The voters who are considering voting for Stein, De La Cruz and West are more progressive than the average voter. Before Biden and RFK, Jr. left the race, there was a much bigger swath of voters considering voting for one of the third party candidates. Third party voters also have lower perceptions of the power of their vote to have an impact, which often correlates with lower voting rates. For working-class voters inclined to Presidential 'spoiler' candidates, many of their second choices would be not voting at all, meaning that they are unlikely to vote, but if they do vote, they might just register a protest vote for one of the third party Presidential candidates.

Over the course of the past year's research, WFP has defined seven Working Class Voter clusters with distinct value profiles. Through our polling, we were able to look at which of these clusters were most inclined to support third party candidates historically and in the current election. The three clusters most open to considering left-of-center third party candidates in this election appear to be: **Next Generation Left**, **Tuned Out Persuadables**, and **Diverse Disaffected Conservatives**. We have summarized some of the findings for each cluster and their attitudes towards third party candidates and messages below and a more detailed appendix at the end of the document.

## NEXT GEN LEFT VOTER PROFILE:

**Younger**, mostly **female**, typically a Millennial woman. **Multiracial**, disproportionately Latino and mixed race. High percentage of **LGBTQ+ and genderqueer** voters. Slightly more urban and suburban; significantly **less rural**. Majority **rent or live with friends/family**. More **college** educated than other working class clusters; majority claim **family income under \$75K**. Recognize the unequal distribution of wealth in America; likely to agree that the US is a racist and sexist country. Pro-immigrant views, favor investing in social services to reduce crime, and support gun control. Don't identify as strongly with the Democratic Party but more **aligned with Democrats**.

## TUNED OUT PERSUADABLES VOTER PROFILE:

Predominantly **white** and **female**, spanning Millennials to Boomers. Highly **suburban and urban** living. **Renters**, with a higher rate of **college education**. Economically stressed, nearly half with **family income under \$50K**. Recognize an unequal distribution of wealth in America' skeptical that hard work is enough to succeed, but believe people take advantage of government programs to avoid work. Lean left socially and culturally: strong support for abortion rights and LGBTQ+ rights. Slightly left on immigration, and slightly right on crime and policing. Less nationalistic than the working class as a whole. Voted **Biden +1** in 2020. Highest rate of **undecided voters**. Among the **least likely to vote** in 2024. Third party curious.

## DIVERSE DISAFFECTED CONSERVATIVES VOTER PROFILE:

**Younger**, disproportionately **male**. Most **racially diverse** cluster, with lowest rate of white voters and highest rate of **Black** and **Latino** voters. **Urban, renters**, most likely to have **no college education**. Economically stressed, nearly half with **family income under \$50K**. Pro-worker, but less likely to blame corporations or the wealthy. Critical of corporate polluters profiting off harm to their communities. Lean right socially and culturally, with highest levels of hostile sexism and transphobia. Soft support for abortion rights. Less nationalistic, but conservative views on immigration. More progressive on policing, supporting investments to attack the roots of crime. Voted **Trump +8** in 2020. **Least likely to vote** in 2024.



# WHAT GENERAL ELECTION MESSAGES PERSUADE VOTERS TO VOTE FOR HARRIS INSTEAD OF THIRD PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES?

We tested several message frames with working-class voters and found that the three below moved third-party leaning voters towards the Democratic Presidential candidate most. **Class Conflict** was the most effective message overall at moving working-class people to vote for the Democratic nominee. **Two Futures** and **Next Gen Change** are also effective and present voters with a strategic choice narrative that accurately describes the situation they face, rather than just encouraging them to vote for their favorite candidate based on issues alone.

We also found that the messenger matters for connecting with working-class voters. Our preliminary analysis shows that **hearing these messengers from the Working Families Party served as a positive validator** and increased the persuasiveness of the argument with most working-class voters. We will be releasing these findings very soon.

<b>Class Conflict</b>	Most of us believe that people who work for a living ought to earn a living. But today, the wealthiest people and corporations get richer and richer off our backs while our wages stay the same. We need to elect Kamala Harris because she will fight for working people to keep the money they earn by cracking down on price-gouging at the grocery store, making wealthy tax cheats pay their fair share, and lowering the costs of prescription drugs.
<b>Two Futures</b>	Regardless of the candidates, this election is really a choice between two futures. Do we want to live in a future where we have the freedom to earn a good living and decide how we grow and care for our families? Or do we want to live in a future where a handful of wealthy corporations and billionaires steal our wages for their own profits and MAGA politicians control who we can love and when we can have children?
<b>Next Gen Change</b>	We all want the people we elect to represent us. But too many politicians have become reliant on big money. They answer to the demands of CEOs and corporations, instead of siding with workers and consumers. Sadly, it happens in both parties. We need to elect a new generation of Democrats who will side with working families 100% of the time and build an economy that works for all of us.



# WHAT PRO-HARRIS MESSAGES ARE MOST EFFECTIVE WITH VOTERS LEANING TOWARDS 3RD PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES?

After Biden left the race and Harris became the Democratic nominee, many pro-Administration messages that had fallen flat with voters before, began to be more convincing - even to third-party friendly voters. In particular, some positive messages about Harris' work are moving voters to her, from third party candidates or from not voting. There is now a greater opportunity to move our voters to voting and voting strategically to defeat Trump, but we have to lean in on the issues and messages that will motivate these working-class voters to vote. The two most effective pro-Harris statements among third-party friendly voters were:

<b>Message #1: Voted for IRA</b>	Kamala Harris cast the tie-breaking vote that helped pass the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which directly targeted big corporate tax cheats by instituting a minimum tax that all corporations must pay
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<b>Message #2: Fought for Homeowners</b>	When Kamala Harris was California's Attorney General, she secured over \$20 Billion in judgments on behalf of homeowners who were improperly foreclosed on.
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Recent polling also shows that it is helpful to connect Harris' accomplishments to her commitment to carrying out further change when elected. *"She has done this before, so we know she can do it again"* is a convincing framework to talk about Harris' pledges to help working-class people.

# WHAT MESSAGES MOVE VOTERS AWAY FROM SPECIFIC 'SPOILERS'?

As in most political campaigning, it can be important to raise doubts about a candidate that voters are leaning towards voting for. Even though our primary focus is moving voters to a more strategic approach, if they are inclined to vote for one of the candidates that could throw the election to Trump, we can let them know information about the candidate that might make them think twice. With RFK, Jr. out of the race (though still technically on the ballot in a few places) the candidate with the most resources and best polling that is pulling votes away from Harris, is Jill Stein. Gathering message testing from other organizations we assess that the best information to raise about Stein - if asked - is the message below.

<b>Stein Voters: Profits from Oil Companies</b>	Jill Stein claims to be an environmentalist, but she personally profits by owning stock in oil companies including ExxonMobil and Chevron. On the other hand, as vice president, Kamala Harris helped pass federal legislation to fight climate change, and will continue that legacy as president. Americans deserve a president that will not only make the environment a top concern on the campaign trail, but will actually do something about it.
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# APPENDIX

For more information on the Multi-Racial Working-Class clusters, visit <https://workingfamilies.org/winning-the-working-class/>

<b>NEXT GENERATION LEFT</b>	
<p>Next Generation Left is the most progressive cluster. They are not always consistent voters and feel their vote has little ability to make a positive impact. Highly WFP-aligned, with enthusiastic support for Medicare for All, Green New Deal, a jobs guarantee and other progressive priorities.</p>	
<i>Party Affiliation</i>	<p>Third Party / independents: 43%            Democratic: 53%            Republican: 3%</p> <p>23% Say they voted for third party candidates in past elections</p> <p>Support for third party candidates dropped significantly after Harris entered the race.</p>
<i>General Election Message Frame #1</i>	<p><b>CLASS CONFLICT:</b> Most of us believe that people who work for a living ought to earn a living. But today, the wealthiest people and corporations get richer and richer off our backs while our wages stay the same. We need to elect Kamala Harris because she will fight for working people to keep the money they earn by cracking down on price-gouging at the grocery store, making wealthy tax cheats pay their fair share, and lowering the costs of prescription drugs.</p>
<i>General Election Message Frame #2</i>	<p><b>NEXT GEN CHANGE:</b> We all want the people we elect to represent us. But too many politicians have become reliant on big money. They answer to the demands of CEOs and corporations, instead of siding with workers and consumers. Sadly, it happens in both parties. We need to elect a new generation of Democrats who will side with working families 100% of the time and build an economy that works for all of us.</p>
<i>Harris Positive #1: Voted for IRA</i>	<p>Kamala Harris cast the tie-breaking vote that helped pass the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which directly targeted big corporate tax cheats by instituting a minimum tax that all corporations must pay</p>
<i>Harris Positive #2: Fought Drug Companies</i>	<p>Throughout her career as a prosecutor and Attorney General, Kamala Harris has fought drug companies on behalf of working families – and won.</p>



## TUNED OUT PERSUADABLES

Tuned Out Persuadables are moderate independents. Vote infrequently, do not follow politics, and have the lowest belief that their vote will have an impact. Lean left on most issues, particularly class issues and progressive economic policies like a jobs guarantee and Medicare for All.

### *Party Affiliation*

Third Party/independents: 38%  
Democratic: 34%  
Republican: 25%

32% Say they voted for third party candidates in past elections

Largest number (22%) say they don't know if they prefer Democratic or Republican control of Congress.

### *General Election Message Frame #1*

TWO FUTURES: Regardless of the candidates, this election is really a choice between two futures. Do we want to live in a future where we have the freedom to earn a good living and decide how we grow and care for our families? Or do we want to live in a future where a handful of wealthy corporations and billionaires steal our wages for their own profits and MAGA politicians control who we can love and when we can have children?

### *General Election Message Frame #2*

CLASS CONFLICT: Most of us believe that people who work for a living ought to earn a living. But today, the wealthiest people and corporations get richer and richer off our backs while our wages stay the same. We need to elect Kamala Harris because she will fight for working people to keep the money they earn by cracking down on price-gouging at the grocery store, making wealthy tax cheats pay their fair share, and lowering the costs of prescription drugs.

### *Harris Positive #1: Voted for IRA*

Kamala Harris cast the tie-breaking vote that helped pass the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which directly targeted big corporate tax cheats by instituting a minimum tax that all corporations must pay.

### *Harris Positive #2: Protects Reproductive Rights*

As Vice President, Kamala Harris has met with leaders in 18 states to help them protect reproductive rights.





## DIVERSE DISAFFECTED CONSERVATIVES

Diverse Disaffected Conservatives are a multiracial group that tends to lean right of center, with notably conservative social and cultural views. Vote infrequently, do not follow politics, and have a very low belief that their vote will have an impact. Lean left on economic issues, but with low intensity. Biggest swing in vote from Biden support (May) to Harris (Aug),

### *Party Affiliation*

Third Party/independents: 38%  
Democratic: 19%  
Republican: 34%

22% Say they voted for third party candidates in past elections

Cluster with highest, most consistent support for 2024 third party Presidential candidates

### *General Election Message Frame #1*

NEXT GEN CHANGE: We all want the people we elect to represent us. But too many politicians have become reliant on big money. They answer to the demands of CEOs and corporations, instead of siding with workers and consumers. Sadly, it happens in both parties. We need to elect a new generation of Democrats who will side with working families 100% of the time and build an economy that works for all of us.

### *General Election Message Frame #2*

CLASS CONFLICT: Most of us believe that people who work for a living ought to earn a living. But today, the wealthiest people and corporations get richer and richer off our backs while our wages stay the same. We need to elect Kamala Harris because she will fight for working people to keep the money they earn by cracking down on price-gouging at the grocery store, making wealthy tax cheats pay their fair share, and lowering the costs of prescription drugs.

### *Harris Positive #1: Fought for Homeowners*

When Kamala Harris was California's Attorney General, she secured over \$20 Billion in judgments on behalf of homeowners who were improperly foreclosed on.

### *Harris Positive #2: Prosecutor Making Communities Safer*

Before becoming Vice President, Kamala Harris was a prosecutor who dedicated her career to making communities safer and taking on companies who broke the law.

