

Florida's vote outcome in the 2012 election



The Florida outcome in the 2000 election may have been influenced by the Green Party's nominee Ralph Nader. Mr. Nader received far more votes than Republican nominee George Bush's winning margin over Democratic nominee Al Gore. In the end, Mr. Bush won the popular vote of Florida. Without the state's 25 electoral votes, he wouldn't have reached the 270 electoral votes to win the overall election.

Florida's vote outcome in the 2000 presidential election

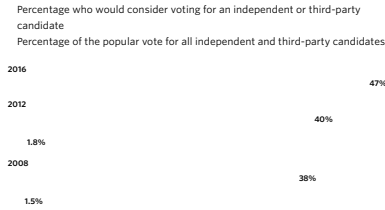


Source: Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections

Another major complication for third parties is that the idea of voting for them is far more appealing than the act itself.

Each election year, people have increasingly said they would consider an independent or third party candidate. But that support shrinks when they enter the voting booth: in 2012, 40% of people polled said they would consider voting for a third-party candidate, but only 1.8% actually voted that way in the election.

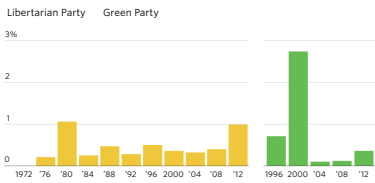
'Would consider' a third party versus voting for one in each election year



Sources: WSJ/NBC News polls (consider an independent or third-party candidate); Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections (popular vote)

At a national level, the Libertarians and the Greens—another major third party—haven't had much success. The Libertarian party has been on the ballot each presidential election since 1972 and the Green party since 1996. At best, the Libertarians won 1.1% of the national popular vote (1980) and the Greens won 2.7% (2000).

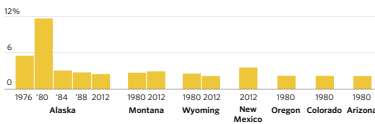
Percentage of the national popular vote each election year



Source: Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections

At a state level, the Libertarians have gained higher levels of support out west. While they reached 11.7% in Alaska during the 1980 general election, the states to watch this year would be Colorado and New Mexico—two battleground states with 9 and 5 electoral votes respectively.

Elections where Libertarians won over 2% of the state's popular vote



Source: Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections

Photos: Associated Press/Andrew Hamik (Clinton), Associated Press/John Raoux (Johnson), Foreign Photo Service/Zuma Press (Trump)