

MEMORANDUM

To: Friends, allies, and interested parties
From: Rahna Epting, MoveOn Political Action; Matt Bennett, Third Way
Date: September 12, 2024

We helped push out RFK Jr., but third-party threats remain

From the start, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s presidential campaign was backed by MAGA operatives and donors for the sole purpose of reelecting Donald Trump. So, it's no surprise his right-wing backers told him to exit the stage once his poor excuse of a campaign was no longer benefiting Trump.

Vice President Harris and Governor Walz have given an adrenaline shot to the Democratic base and anti-Trump coalition. As the Trump campaign fumbles and Harris's popularity rises, the prospects of a Democratic victory up and down the ballot continue to improve. But make no mistake, this election will still be extremely close.

So, with RFK Jr. out of the race and endorsing Trump, how have the dynamics of the race shifted? The state of play looks slightly different, and this is how we see it:

- 1. RFK Jr.'s voters are now up for grabs.** As he leaves the race and sells out to Trump, his supporters will splinter. As we'll discuss below, a third of them are likely to come home to Harris; some will jump to Trump. But hundreds of thousands more will be released into the undecided wild for us to win, and many of them are winnable.
- 2. RFK Jr.'s departure may give Trump a small bump in the short term but may ultimately prove a liability.** As political journalist Josh Marshall [put it](#): "Kennedy is so weird and now so universally recognized as weird and this endorsement — if that's what it is — would appear so corrupt that I'm not sure it really plays as a positive."
- 3. The third-party threat still looms large.** Several third-party spoilers — including Jill Stein and Cornel West — remain in the race. And despite suspending his campaign, RFK Jr. will remain on the ballot in roughly two dozen states, including in Michigan and Wisconsin. Meanwhile, he continues to maintain national visibility as a surrogate for Trump.

CONTEXT: HARRIS'S RISE & RFK JR.'S DECLINE

The electric Harris-Walz momentum has completely halted the Trump campaign's momentum, and they're resorting to desperate tactics. Meanwhile, [as Harris has surged as a compelling alternative to Trump, RFK Jr.'s support crashed – falling from above 15% earlier this year to just 4%](#).

[Thanks in part to our coalition's efforts to highlight RFK Jr.'s dangerous views and right-wing support, Democratic voters came to see that RFK Jr. is an unhinged Trump plant.](#)

- The flow of money from [MAGA funders](#) and [major right-wing figures](#) has been well documented, and GOP operatives and [MAGA talking heads](#) continue to amplify his messaging.
- As the last few months have shown, the more voters learned about RFK Jr., the less likely they were to support him. Like Trump, [RFK Jr. is a dangerous extremist](#) who pushes deadly conspiracy theories, holds right-wing anti-science views, and supports the worst policies of Project 2025.
- Week after week, the negative – and just plain WEIRD – RFK Jr. stories kept building. These stories, including some seeded or amplified by our coalition's teams, created a negative momentum for RFK Jr. that was harder and harder to overcome.

[Harris-Walz has transformed the race and nearly erased “double haters.”](#)

- Before Biden's departure, over 60% of RFK Jr.'s voters were in his camp because they were [negative on both parties](#).
- With Harris and Walz as the new standard-bearers, we now have a surging and future-focused campaign pitted against a desperate attempt to drag America backward, led by two out-of-touch weirdos. The contrast couldn't be clearer.

THE REMAINING THREAT

[Third-party threats can still dash progressive hopes and Democratic chances.](#) Just because RFK Jr. is out of the race doesn't mean the third-party danger is gone. MAGA Republican donors know this, and that's why right-wing operatives have worked hand-in-glove with Kennedy, Stein, and West to undermine Vice President Kamala Harris and boost Donald Trump.

- Stein's vote total alone was enough to flip Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin to Donald Trump in 2016. The Green and Libertarian parties combined to change the outcome in Arizona and Florida in that election.
- The Biden-Harris ticket won Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin by fewer than 20,000 votes in 2020.
- Some of us are old enough to remember Ralph Nader and “hanging chads” in the 2000 election.
- **Third-party candidates are polling high enough in more than half the battlegrounds to potentially lock the Democratic ticket out of a victory. Democrats, and our country, cannot afford to let history repeat itself.**

Third-party candidates have gotten on the ballot in battleground states – with Republican help. RFK Jr., Stein, and West have been [actively aided](#) and [funded](#) by Republican Party operatives and donors, while MAGA celebrities like Steve Bannon [praise](#) them. Trump himself [said](#): “Cornel West, he’s one of my favorite candidates. [...] Jill Stein, I like her very much. You know why? She takes 100% from them. He takes 100%.”

- All seven key battleground states will have at least one spoiler candidate on the ballot.
- Stein will appear on the ballot in at least five or six key battlegrounds. She is on the ballot in Arizona, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin; she is tentatively on the ballot in Georgia, where a challenge is ongoing.
- West is set to appear on the ballot in Michigan, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. He is tentatively set to appear on the ballot in Georgia, where a challenge is ongoing.
- RFK Jr. will appear on the ballot in Michigan and Wisconsin.

Projected third-party vote share, based on polling averages in the battlegrounds, accounts for the full 2020 margin of victory in four crucial battleground states.

	Polling Avg: Third Party Share of Vote	Projected Third Party Vote Share in 2024	Biden 2020 State Margin of Victory
ARIZONA	0.2%	6,775	10,457
GEORGIA	1.7%	84,999	11,779
MICHIGAN	7.6%	420,987	154,188
NEVADA	0.8%	11,243	33,596
NORTH CAROLINA	4.8%	265,191	-74,483
PENNSYLVANIA	0.6%	41,622	81,660
WISCONSIN	6.5%	214,373	20,682

Source: RealClearPolitics State Polling Averages; Analysis of 2020 FEC Results

A large portion of third-party votes can be swayed between now and Election Day. In some states, they could be the margin of victory in a very close race. In the push for a Harris victory, we must keep moving more voters from RFK Jr.’s camp to hers.

- [At least a third of RFK Jr.’s supporters](#) now lean Harris and became open for conversion the minute he left the race; another fifth say they’re undecided; and as for the rest, no third-party vote is locked in until the ballot is cast.

OUR PLAN BETWEEN NOW AND NOVEMBER

With narrow margins expected, we're going to fight for every inch and every vote, and we need you to join us. Here's what we need to do together to elect Vice President Harris and protect our freedoms:

1. **Fight for every single RFK Jr. vote we can.** The surge of Harris-Walz energy has put hundreds of thousands of voters back in play. While RFK Jr. will remain on some ballots, we will fight for every single one of his voters who could be persuaded to support the Harris-Walz ticket.
2. **Make sure voters understand the stakes and show them who these candidates are under the masks.** We're at a fork in the road that could determine the direction our country takes for decades. Do we want a retrograde, repressive Project 2025 future, with a national abortion ban and tax cuts for billionaires and a president who's a tool of the MAGA right? Or do we want a joyful and inclusive America that helps lead the world out of the darkness?
3. **Keep holding third-party candidates accountable** – We need to hold these dangerous candidates and their funders and enablers accountable in the media, identify and empower voices who can amplify our message, and resource the groups on the front lines.
4. **Empower battleground voters to take ownership of their choices.** The message to every voter must be: *You* hold the choice in your hands. And the message to every supporter must be: Tell your families and friends that more than at any point in the recent past, *your* vote could be the one that decides this election – and with it, America's future.

It's not enough for us to merely discredit Trump and the third-party spoiler candidates who are enabling his path. The anti-Trump coalition – progressives, moderates, and anti-Trump conservatives – must continue making a **positive, compelling case for Kamala Harris**. That's the most effective way for us to neutralize the spoilers.

To accomplish this over the next two months, MoveOn and Third Way will continue partnering on a communications and outreach program against third-party threats. We will continue rapid-response and accountability efforts focused on West and Stein – while remaining vigilant about other third-party threats, including RFK Jr. in states where he remains on the ballot. We will continue identifying and raising the funds we can to better resource partner groups directly in the key battlegrounds who can help move effective messages to voters, and we will circulate additional research to allied organizations about the best messages to move voters away from third parties and toward Harris.

In addition to funding research and communications, we have brought on organizers dedicated to working with state partners and conducting outreach to Black and brown community leaders.

And as we refine our strategy heading into the fall, we are laying the groundwork for a paid media campaign targeting the most susceptible voters to ensure the Harris-Walz ticket clinches the White House and moves our country forward to **a brighter, more joyful future.**