



Libertarians might play big role in November, Monmouth poll shows

Norman Leahy

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Libertarians got some surprising news last week, as a Monmouth University poll showed Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson with 11 percent support in a hypothetical matchup with Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump.

Johnson pulls more support from Clinton than Trump. In a hypothetical head-to-head matchup between the two major party contenders, Monmouth found Clinton beating Trump 48 to 38 percent.

With Johnson included, Clinton's support fell six percentage points, while Trump lost four percentage points. In that scenario, Clinton leads with 42 percent, followed by Trump at 34 percent, and Johnson at 11 percent.

Monmouth University Polling Institute director Patrick Murray said of the results, "A vigorous third-party campaign is a very real possibility this year, but it is not yet clear what the impact could be. Including Johnson's name in our polling seems to be more of a placeholder for voters who are not particularly thrilled with either major party choice right now."

Murray's caution aside, Johnson's campaign embraced the numbers as proof their candidate could be a factor in the November election.

Johnson spokesman J.V. LaBeaume told AMI Newswire of the campaign's growing sense that "there is an opening against these two possible nominees."

"Even in DC," he said, "we run into folks hungry for an alternative."

As the Libertarian standard bearer in 2012, Johnson earned 1.2 million votes nationwide, or 99-100ths of a percent of the vote. Johnson and a dozen other candidates are vying for the Party's 2016 nomination, which will be decided in May.

Not all Libertarians are convinced the Monmouth numbers will hold up over time.

Former Libertarian Party executive director Shane Cory told AMI Newswire that "third-party candidates typically poll two times higher than their end result."

"In a highly contentious year, such as 2008 or 2000, when there are strong perceived differences between the two parties," Cory added, "third-party candidates are the pretty-faced fat chicks that some will flirt with but few will take to the dance."

David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, told AMI Newswire, "If any election could send voters fleeing to the Libertarian Party, you'd think it would be a choice between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton."

Even in such seemingly fertile territory, though, "without the free media that the major-party candidates get, it's going to be hard for a Libertarian candidate to break through," Boaz said.

Others do see some potential for a Libertarian breakthrough this year, pointing to the parallels between the Monmouth numbers and those that appeared in Virginia's 2013 gubernatorial race.

Senior Republican strategist Shaun Kenney told AMI Newswire that if "Trump and Clinton become the respective nominees, the national race certainly has all the hallmarks of the Virginia 2013 gubernatorial campaign."

Kenney added that's not a good thing for the major party candidates.

"Both parties will have succeeded in nominating the only candidate who could lose to the other," Kenney said.

In Virginia that year, Libertarian Robert Sarvis, running against Democrat Terry McAuliffe and Republican Ken Cuccinelli, polled as high as 13 percent just one week out from the election.

Sarvis finished with 6.5 percent of the vote.

Both McAuliffe and Cuccinelli had high negatives heading into the final vote. A Quinnipiac University poll conducted six days before the election found McAuliffe, the Democrat, with a 46-percent unfavorable rating among likely voters. Cuccinelli, the Republican, was viewed unfavorably by 52 percent of likely voters.

In the new Monmouth presidential poll, 51 percent of likely voters have an unfavorable view of Hillary Clinton, while 60 percent have an unfavorable view of Donald Trump.

Kenney says Trump's numbers, plus Johnson's potential, could spell trouble for the GOP in House and Senate races.

"There are already murmurings on Capitol Hill about a seismic eight-seat shift on the U.S. Senate," Kenney said, "and potentially the U.S. House being put into play by a Trump candidacy."

But for Johnson to actually have an effect on the November results, Kenney added, he would "have to commit himself to building a credible movement that appeals to kitchen-table values, not just winning an election."

LaBaeume is confident that as the campaign rolls forward, interest in Johnson, and possibly his poll numbers, will continue to grow.

"Our social media, our email inbox and our ringing phones are full of inquiries from Republicans, Democrats and Independents who are taking a serious look at Gary Johnson," LaBeaume said.

And the candidate is doing his part to win converts to the Libertarian cause.

"One of the make-up professionals at a recent TV spot was won over as she took off Gov. [Johnson's] make-up post-interview," LaBeaume said.