



Libertarian Gary Johnson: This could be year for third party

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WASHINGTON--Few presidential campaigns would say they're on a roll while polling at just 10 percent. But few campaigns are like the Gary Johnson-William Weld ticket.

Johnson, a former two-term Republican governor of New Mexico, and Weld, a former two-term Republican governor from Massachusetts, are the newly minted Libertarian Party ticket after winning the nomination at the party's convention in Orlando, Florida, over the weekend.

"Anytime my name appears in the polls, you know what? I do pretty darn well," Johnson said, citing polls by [Fox News](#), [Monmouth University](#) and the Morning Consult earlier this month that had him around 10 percent in a three-way race. "My trend line is just straight up."

The Libertarian Party thinks it's trending upward, too. With the negatives of presumptive Republican nominee Trump and leading Democratic contender Clinton at historic highs – 58 percent for him, 54 percent for her – many Libertarians think this is the party's moment to attract a significant portion of the electorate.

Forty-four percent of registered voters want a third-party candidate to run against Trump and Clinton, according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll earlier this month.

"Trump, in particular, is so terrible on almost every liberty issue that there's a feeling that they could peel off a lot of 'never Trumpers,'" said Brian Doherty, a senior editor of the Libertarian magazine *Reasons* and author of "Ron Paul's Revolution: The Man and the Movement He Inspired."

"Neither Johnson nor Weld are really Libertarian enough for most Libertarian delegates. But they kind of, sort of, swallowed and said, 'Yeah, we should probably put a foot forward that the media will take seriously, that big money might take seriously.'"

Most dismiss the possibility that the somewhat quirky Johnson – he was the CEO of a legal marijuana products company until he launched his presidential bid – or any other third-party candidate could defeat Trump or Clinton.

And mainstream Republicans still appear to be searching for their own Trump alternative to make an independent run. As the Libertarians convened, William Kristol, founder and editor of the conservative *Weekly Standard*, tweeted that the anti-Trump Republican movement will produce "an independent candidate – an impressive one."

Trump dismissed Johnson's campaign Tuesday and called Kristol "a loser."

"Gary Johnson got 1 percent of the vote last time," Trump said in New York. "I think he's a fringe candidate."

Johnson, who received 1.2 million votes when he ran for president in 2012, won the Libertarians' 2016 nomination on the convention's second ballot with 55.8 percent of the vote. Weld squeaked by on a second ballot with just over 50 percent of the vote.

They are running on Libertarian principles that blend fiscal conservatism with moderate social views – favoring legalized abortion, revamping the nation's criminal-justice and immigration systems, and advocating a noninterventionist foreign policy.

"It's a good time to be a third-party candidate that aren't barking dogs, that are actually adults in the room and have actually served administratively," Johnson said in an interview. "Most people are libertarians. It's just that they just don't know it."

Johnson pledged not to speak negatively of Trump or Clinton, then quickly proceeded to call Trump's comments about Mexicans and his plan to build a giant wall along the southern border "just plain incendiary and "racist." He said electing Clinton would be a continuation of "government probably trying to do more in our lives; tax us more, certainly."

More than running against them, Johnson seems to be racing against the clock. His party is on the ballot in 34 states and working toward all 50. It was on the ballot in 48 states in 2012.

Instead of a traditional post-convention campaign swing, Johnson went to New York to do media and raise money. The media are important, he said, to improving his name recognition and his standing in the polls.

For inclusion in debates, he needs to reach at least 15 percent in five national polls, a threshold set by the Commission on Presidential Debates. It's proved to be a tough hurdle in previous elections.

Texas tycoon H. Ross Perot in 1992 was the last independent candidate to get on the presidential debate stage. Last year, the Libertarian and Green parties sued the debate commission, alleging that it has created a political "duopoly" that makes a successful third-party bid for the White House impossible.

"The rigged nature of the game is come the fall, the presidential commission will say, or has said in the past, 'Hey, this guy hasn't polled very well,' " Johnson said. "What they don't say is 'This guy wasn't in any polls.' "

But Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist Institute for Public Opinion, which conducts polls for McClatchy, said, "Polls reflect public opinion; they don't make public opinion."

"Now that he has the nomination, I think we'll see him in more polls, but be careful what you wish for," Miringoff said. "He's being fueled by the anti-Clinton, anti-Trump sentiment. A danger for being a protest vote is that anti-Trump people are so afraid of Clinton and anti-Clinton people are so afraid of Trump that they don't cast protest votes."

As for money, Johnson's campaign has raised \$348,670 but had only \$14,000 in cash on hand in April, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan organization that tracks money in politics.

Ed Crane, co-founder of the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, said he was helping out by reviving the Purple PAC, a political action committee that backed Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul's failed presidential bid, for Johnson's White House run.

"If he gets into the debates, the money will just pour in," Crane said. "We'll get money from the left, too. There are a lot of people disenchanted with Clinton."