

Putting the I in independent?

BY MICHAEL DOSS | THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has once again entered the political fray as a candidate for president. Democrats say Nader cost Al Gore the election in 2000 by siphoning crucial votes in a razor-thin race, and they are steamed that Nader could do it again. But the issue isn't so clear-cut. Are Nader's supporters

really closet Democrats, or are they disaffected independents who might not otherwise vote?

Here are some instances in the past where third-party candidates have roiled the waters, possibly splitting the vote in favor of the winner. Or maybe not.



Theodore Roosevelt
1912

After serving as president from 1901 until 1909, he supported Howard Taft for president in 1908's election. Taft turned out to be more conservative than Republicans realized, however, and in 1911 the National Republican Progressive League was formed to field an alternative to Taft.

Roosevelt, frustrated with Taft, formed the Progressive Party and ran against Taft and the Democrat nominee, Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt received 27.4 percent of the popular vote and 88 electoral votes, the most of any third-party candidate in the 20th century. Both Roosevelt and Taft lost, however, splitting the vote and allowing Wilson to be elected.

Woodrow Wilson, Democrat	6,301,254
435	
Theodore Roosevelt, Progressive	4,127,788
88	
William H. Taft, Republican	3,485,831
8	

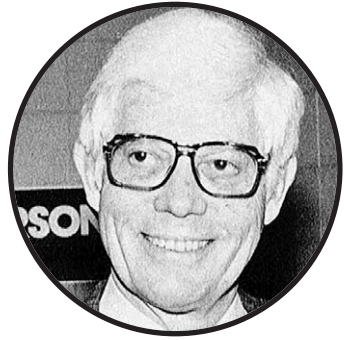
Number in bar is electoral college votes



George Wallace
1968

The two-term Alabama governor ran in his own American Independent party against Republican Richard Nixon and Democrat Hubert Humphrey, saying there was not a "dime's worth of difference" between the two. He ran on a states-rights and anti-civil-rights platform, and received 13.5 percent of the popular vote and 46 electoral votes. The election could have been closer if Wallace had won Mississippi, New Jersey and Alaska, or Missouri. He would have forced the election to be decided in the House, as Nixon would have no longer had a majority of the electoral votes. Wallace ran for president again in 1972 and 1976, but never gained the same support.

Richard Nixon, Republican	31,785,480
301	
Hubert H. Humphrey, Democrat	31,275,165
191	
George Wallace, American Independent	9,906,473
46	



John B. Anderson
1980

The Republican representative from Illinois, who had served 10 terms in the House, ran independently. Looking to be a moderate voice, he ran against incumbent Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican challenger Ronald Reagan as a National Unity Party candidate. Anderson believed the Republicans to be too socially conservative and hawkish, and he thought the Democrats' social welfare and tax-and-spend policies were economically unrealistic. Though Anderson polled well early on, his numbers dwindled after his debate with Reagan. Anderson ended up with 6.6 percent of the popular vote but no electoral votes.

Ronald Reagan, Republican	43,267,489
489	
Jimmy Carter, Democrat	34,964,583
49	
John B. Anderson, Independent	5,588,014
0	



Ross Perot
1992

The billionaire businessman from Texas ran as an independent against Republican incumbent George H. W. Bush and Democrat Bill Clinton. Perot quickly gained support from voters discouraged with the major-party choices and those unhappy with the growing national debt, which he made the main issues of his campaign. He announced his intention to run in early 1992, and polled closely to both Bush and Clinton. Because of his more conservative stance, Perot is thought to have taken more votes from Bush than from Clinton, allowing the Arkansas governor to win. Perot ran again in 1996 but received only 8 percent of the vote.

Bill Clinton, Democrat	44,908,233
370	
George H. W. Bush, Republican	39,102,282
168	
Ross Perot, Independent	19,741,048
0	



Ralph Nader
2000

The consumer-rights advocate ran as the Green Party candidate against Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush. Indifference between Gore and Bush, and a public perception that the men were politically similar, helped to push Nader to the forefront as a serious third-party candidate (he won only 1 percent of the national vote in 1996). Nader ran on a platform of civil justice, ending corporate involvement in politics, and being a voice of the people. He received nearly 3 million votes nationwide - mostly, Democrats claimed, from likely Gore voters. Bush won close elections in Florida and New Hampshire and captured the presidency by five electoral votes.

George W. Bush, Republican	50,456,167
271	
Al Gore, Democrat	50,996,112
266	
Ralph Nader, Green	2,695,696
0	

Sources: Citizens for True Democracy, Federal Elections Commission, Campaign Web sites.

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