

SEPTEMBER 2010

■ **THE PERCENTAGE OF INDEPENDENT VOTERS CONTINUES TO GROW.**

The percentage of California voters registered as independents, or decline-to-state, reached a record high of 20.2% in the June 2010 primary election, more than doubling since the 1990 November gubernatorial election (9.1%). Over the same time period, the percentage of registered voters in each of the major parties has fallen: Republicans from 39.3% to 30.8%, Democrats from 49.5% to 44.5%. Nevertheless, the actual number of independent voters today (3.42 million) is slightly lower than the peak of 3.47 million in February 2009. The total number of registered voters has also declined, falling from 17.33 million in February 2009 to 16.98 million in May 2010. Since the most recent gubernatorial election in 2006, Democratic registration is up 2 percentage points, Republican registration is down 3 points, and independent registration is up 1 point.

■ **INDEPENDENTS HOLD SWAY IN STATEWIDE ELECTIONS.**

Because neither of the major political parties has a majority of California's registered voters, independents are influential in statewide elections. For example, in the previous gubernatorial election, 54% of independents in our post-election survey said they voted for Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger. But in the 2008 presidential election, most independents (59%) said they supported Democrat Barack Obama. In each case, the outcome reflected the choice of the majority of independents.

■ **INDEPENDENTS ARE DIVIDED IN THEIR PARTY LEANINGS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES.**

PPIC survey results suggest that independents who are most likely to vote lean more toward the Democratic than Republican Party (38% to 30%), but another 32% volunteer that they lean toward neither party. Democratic leanings are down 4 points since 2006. A plurality of independents consider themselves politically moderate (40%), while 29% are liberal and 31% are conservative.

■ **INDEPENDENTS MOST LIKELY TO SAY A THIRD PARTY IS NEEDED AND TO SUPPORT CHANGE IN PRIMARY SYSTEM.**

When asked if the two major parties do an adequate job of representing the American people or if they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed, independents (66%) are much more likely than Democrats (52%) or Republicans (50%) to say a third major party is needed. This does not translate into support for the Tea Party (just 29% of independents have a favorable impression of that movement); but then, favorable impressions are also low for the Democratic Party (33%) and even lower for the Republican Party (21%). Before the June primary, independent likely voters (67%) were also somewhat more likely than Democrats (61%) and Republicans (54%) to say they supported Proposition 14—the ballot measure establishing a top-two-vote-getter primary in which voters can cast ballots for any candidate, regardless of party affiliation.

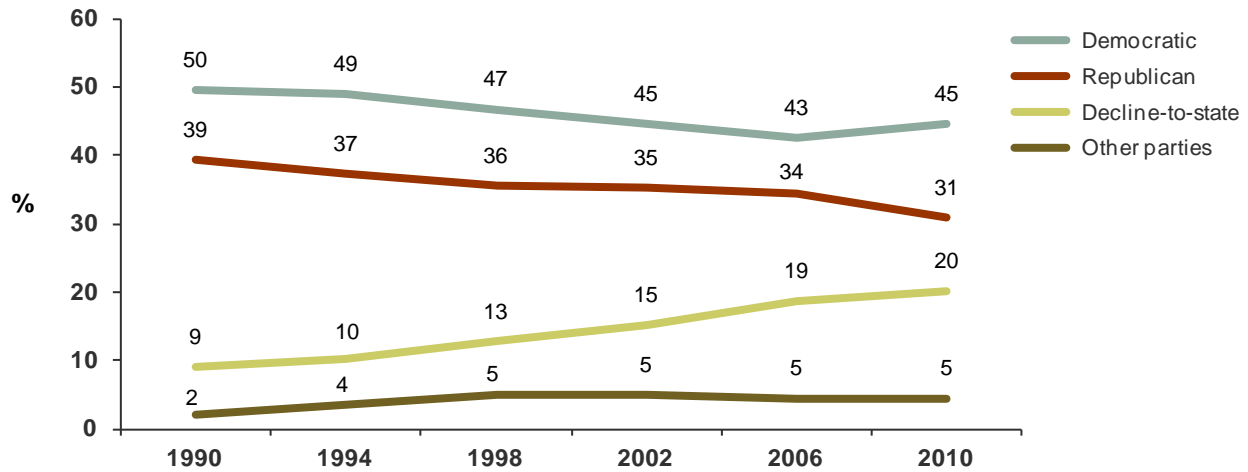
■ **INDEPENDENTS ALIGN WITH DEMOCRATS, BUT DEPENDS ON THE ISSUE.**

On certain issues that divide voters along party lines, independents often agree with Democrats. For example, majorities of Democrats and independents oppose allowing more offshore oil drilling, while a majority of Republicans favor it. On other hot-button issues, the independent stance is less clear-cut. When it came to the 2009 health care reform proposal—an issue with strong majority support from Democrats and strong majority opposition from Republicans—50% of independents in March supported it and 38% opposed it. On a few fiscal reform proposals—such as establishing strict state spending limits—independents are somewhat more in line with Republicans.



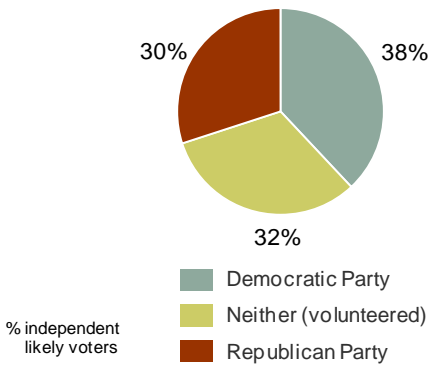
California's Independent Voters

Party Registration in Gubernatorial Election Years: 1990–2010

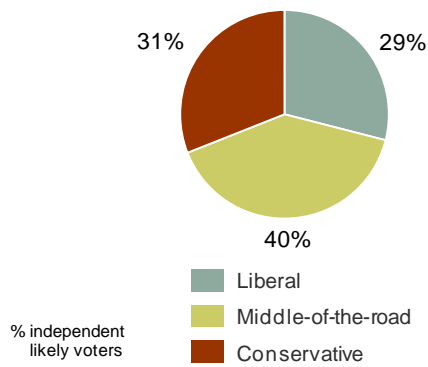


Note: Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

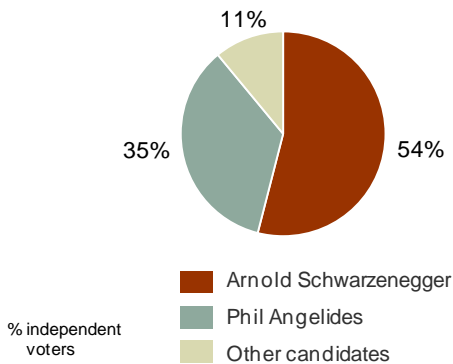
Leanings Toward Major Parties



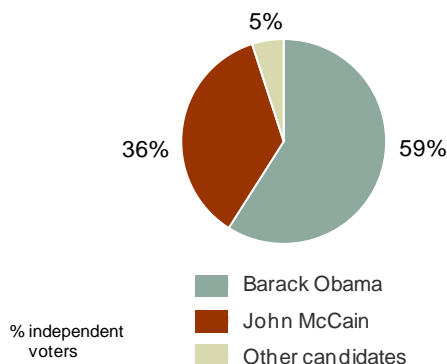
Political Ideology



2006 Gubernatorial Election



2008 Presidential Election



Sources: (1) California Secretary of State, *Report of Registration* (October 2006, February 2009, May 2010) and *Statement of Vote*, November 1990. (2) PPIC Statewide Surveys, November 2006 (including 2,000 general election voters) and November 2008 (including 2,003 general election voters). (3) Combined results of eight PPIC Statewide Surveys from September 2009 to July 2010 (including 2,905 independents, of whom 1,752 are likely voters). For more information on the demographic differences between independents and others, see "Voter and Party Profiles," http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_VoterProfilesJTF.pdf.

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