

California's Independent Voters

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➤ **The share of independent voters continues to increase.**

As of the June 2016 primary, the share of California voters registered as independents, also known as “decline to state” or “no party preference” voters, was 23.3%—a more than twofold increase since the November 1992 presidential election (10.3%). Over the same period, the percentage of voters affiliated with each of the major parties has fallen: Republicans from 37% to 27.3%, Democrats from 49.1% to 44.8%. Since May 2012, the share of independents has increased slightly (from 21.3%); the share of Democrats has also risen (43.4% to 44.8%), while the share of Republicans has fallen 3 points (30.2% to 27.3%). The total number of registered voters has increased slightly, from 17.15 million in May 2012 to 17.92 million in May 2016, and so has the number of independents (4.18 million today, 3.65 million in May 2012).

➤ **A plurality of independents lean toward the Democratic Party.**

Our surveys over the past year indicate that more independents who are likely to vote lean toward the Democratic than toward the Republican Party (41% to 32%), while 27% lean toward neither party. Democratic leanings among independents were similar in 2008 (44%) and 2012 (43%), as were Republican leanings (28% in 2008, 30% in 2012) and the share leaning toward neither major party (28% in 2008, 27% in 2012). Four in ten independent likely voters view themselves as ideologically middle-of-the-road (41%), while three in ten self-identify as liberal (28%) or say they are conservative (31%).

➤ **Most independents say neither party does an adequate job.**

Most independent likely voters have unfavorable views of both the Democratic Party (55%) and the Republican Party (69%). When independents are asked why they are registered as “no party preference” nearly half say they are not satisfied with the parties or that parties don’t reflect their views (48%); one in five say they vote for candidates, not party (21%). When asked if the major parties do an adequate job representing the American people, or if they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed, independent likely voters (69%) are much more likely than partisans (57% Republicans, 52% Democrats) to say a third party is needed.

➤ **Independents align with Democrats on some issues ...**

On issues that divide voters along party lines, independent likely voters often agree with Democrats. For example, 69% of Democrats and 65% of independents say recreational marijuana should be legal, while a majority of Republicans are opposed (56% not legal, 42% legal). On extending the Proposition 30 tax increase on the wealthy to fund education and healthcare, 80% of Democrats and 65% of independents are in favor, while 68% of Republicans are opposed.

➤ **... but they are an ideologically divided group.**

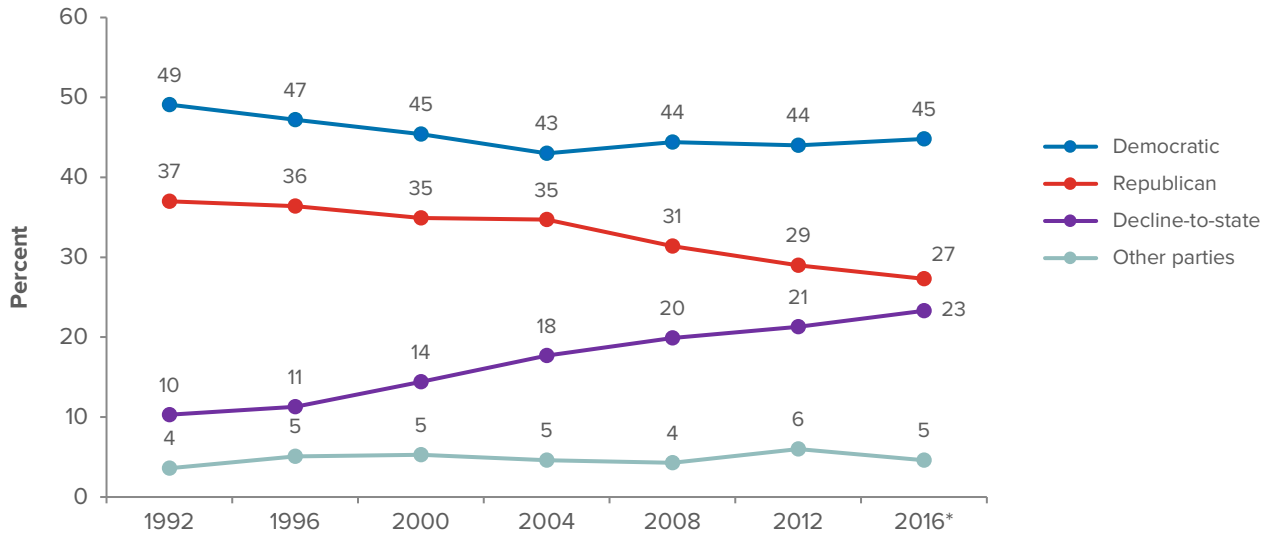
The views of independent voters who lean toward a party are often similar to that party’s positions. But on many issues that divide partisans, independents as a group are divided. When asked about the 2010 health care reform law, for example, independent likely voters are closely divided (51% favorable, 44% unfavorable). A similar pattern holds regarding the question of whether everyone has a fair chance to get ahead in today’s economy: 63% of Democrats say just a few people at the top have a chance, while 70% of Republicans say everyone has a fair chance to get ahead; among independents, 58% say everyone has a fair chance to get ahead and 38% say just a few people at the top have a chance.

➤ **Independents tend to vote for Democratic presidential candidates—but most do not like their choices.**

Leading up to the 2016 election, most independents were not satisfied with their choices of presidential candidates (May 2016: 35% satisfied, 62% not satisfied). In our July survey, independents prefer Hillary Clinton (37%) over Donald Trump (24%), Gary Johnson (10%), or Jill Stein (5%), with 11% saying they would vote for someone else or would not vote, and 13% undecided.

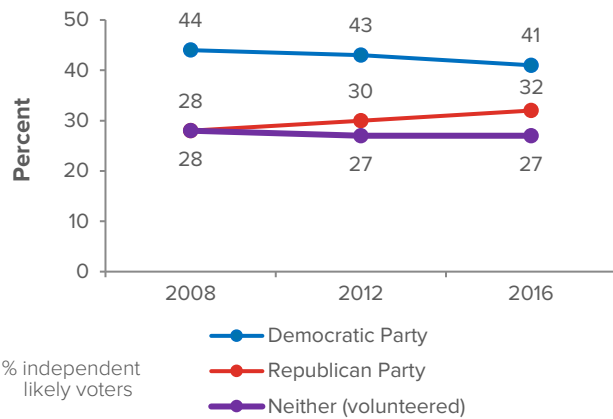


Party registration in presidential election years

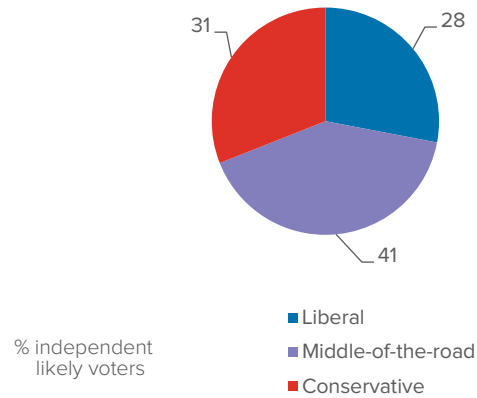


Note: Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 *Prior to June primary. All other years, prior to November general election.

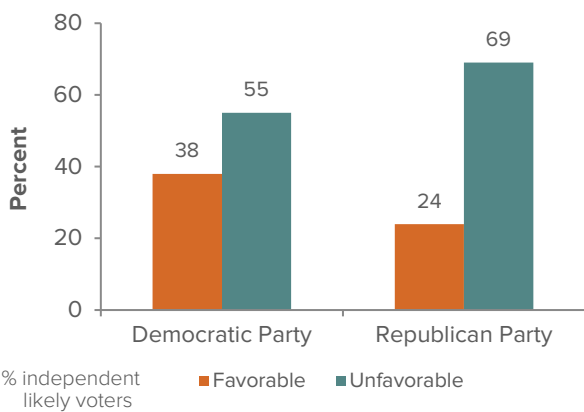
Leanings toward major parties



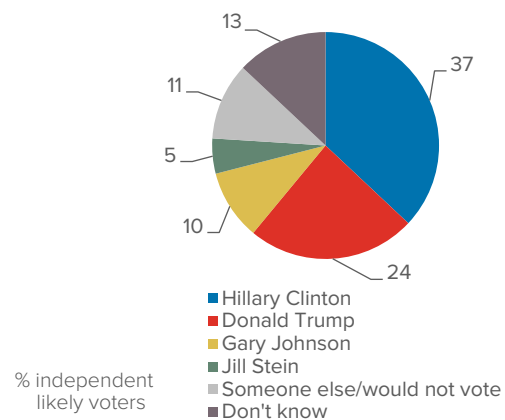
Political ideology



Favorability of political parties



2016 presidential election preferences July 2016



Sources: California Secretary of State, Report of Registration, October 2012 and May 2016. Seven PPIC Statewide Surveys from September 2015 to July 2016, 2,451 independents, of whom 1,627 are likely voters. For more information on the demographic differences between independents and others, see "California Voter and Party Profiles."

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