Just the FACTS

California Voter and Party Profiles

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Independent registration has increased; four in ten likely voters are Democrats.

California's 17.7 million registered voters constitute 72.7% of eligible adults, which is about the same as in 2011 (72.8%), the last year preceding a presidential election. The share of registered voters who are Democrats is down slightly from 2011 (44.0% 2011, 43.2% 2015), while the share of Republicans is down somewhat more (30.9% 2011, 28.0% 2015). At the same time, the share of voters who say they are independent (also known as "decline to state" or "no party preference") has increased; it is now 23.6%, up from 20.4% in 2011. Our surveys indicate that among those we consider most likely to vote, 43% are Democrats, 32% are Republicans, and 20% are independents.

Independent likely voters are split between Democrats and Republicans.

In our surveys over the past year, independent likely voters were about equally likely to lean Democratic (37%) or Republican (34%); 29% did not lean toward either major party. This marks a shift from 2011, when 35% did not lean toward either party, while 36% leaned toward the Democrats and 29% leaned Republican. Independent likely voters are more likely to be moderate (39%) than conservative (33%) or liberal (28%).

Republicans are more ideologically cohesive than Democrats.

More than two-thirds (69%) of Republican likely voters say they are conservative, while slightly more than half (53%) of Democratic likely voters describe themselves as liberal. One area in which ideological divisions are most evident is taxation and spending: when asked about the role of government, 65% of Democrats say they would prefer to pay higher taxes and have a state government that provides more services, while 77% of Republicans prefer lower taxes and fewer services; independents have a slight preference for lower taxes and fewer services (50% to 43%).

Likely voters are disproportionately white; party affiliation varies across racial and ethnic groups.

Whites make up 43% of California's adult population, but 60% of those we identified as likely to vote over the past year are white. In contrast, Latinos make up 34% of the state's adult population but only 18% of likely voters. The shares of Asian (12%) and black (6%) likely voters are roughly proportionate to their shares of the state's adult population—15% Asian and 6% black. About half (48%) of Democratic likely voters are white; 26% are Latino, 13% are Asian, and 10% are black. An overwhelming majority (80%) of Republican likely voters are white; relatively few are Latino (8%), Asian (8%), or black (1%). Among independents, 55% are white, 19% are Asian, 16% are Latino, and 5% are black.

Other demographic characteristics of likely voters also vary across parties.

Democratic likely voters are more likely to be women (57%) than men (43%), while independents are more likely to be men (56%) than women (44%). Republicans are closely divided (50% men, 50% women). Half of independents (50%) are college graduates, compared to fewer Republicans (39%) and Democrats (38%). About four in 10 Democrats (39%) have household incomes under $40,000, compared to three in 10 independents (29%) and two in 10 Republicans (22%). Independents are more likely to be young adults (18 to 34, 24%) than are Democrats (17%) or Republicans (11%), while Republicans are more likely to be age 55 and older (55%) than are Democrats (49%) or independents (36%).

Democrats and Republicans tend to live in different parts of the state.

The regional distribution of likely voters mirrors that of the state's overall adult population (27% Los Angeles, 21% San Francisco Bay Area, 17% Orange/San Diego, 17% Central Valley,10% Inland Empire, 9% other counties). Most Democrats live in Los Angeles County (33%) or the San Francisco Bay Area (25%), while most Republicans live in the Central Valley (22%), Orange and San Diego Counties (22%), or Los Angeles County (20%). Independents are most likely to live in Los Angeles County (25%) or the San Francisco Bay Area (24%).

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		Likely voters	Likely voter party registration			
			Dem	Rep	Ind	Other
All likely voters		–	43%	32%	20%	5%
Ideology	Liberal	33	53	9	28	35
	Moderate	29	29	23	39	30
	Conservative	39	18	69	33	34
Strength of affiliation among major party voters	Strong	–	60	56	–	–
	Not very strong	–	39	40	–	–
	Don't know	–	2	4	–	–
Major party leanings among independent voters	Democratic Party	–	–	–	37	–
	Republican Party	–	–	–	34	–
	Neither/don't know	–	–	–	28	–
Race/Ethnicity	White	60	48	80	55	70
	Latino	18	26	8	16	20
	Black	6	10	1	5	3
	Asian	12	13	8	19	4
	Other/multiracial	4	3	3	5	3
Gender	Men	49	43	50	56	61
	Women	51	57	50	44	39
Education	No college	18	23	16	13	5
	Some college	40	39	45	38	32
	College graduate	42	38	39	50	63
Income	Under $40,000	32	39	22	29	33
	$40,000 to under $80,000	28	27	31	26	30
	$80,000 or more	40	34	48	44	38
Age	18 to 34	17	17	11	24	26
	35 to 54	35	34	34	41	34
	55 and older	48	49	55	36	41
Region	Los Angeles County	27	33	20	25	19
	San Francisco Bay Area	21	25	14	24	24
	Orange/San Diego Counties	17	12	22	18	21
	Central Valley	17	14	22	15	15
	Inland Empire	10	8	13	8	7
	Other	9	8	9	9	14

Note: "Likely voters" are registered voters meeting criteria on interest in politics, attention to issues, voting behavior, and intention to vote. For full description of this criteria and regional definitions, visit www.ppic.org/content/other/SurveyMethodology.pdf. For race and ethnicity, results are presented for non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic Asians, non-Hispanic blacks, and for non-Hispanic other race and multiracial adults.

Sources: Eight PPIC Statewide Surveys from September 2014 to July 2015, including 13,635 adults and 8,206 likely voters. California Secretary of State, Report of Registration, February 2015, October 2014, and October 2012. U.S. Census, 2011–13 American Community Survey.

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