

California Voter and Party Profiles

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➤ **Voter registration is up; the shares of Democrats and independents have increased.**

Eight in ten eligible adults (83%) are registered to vote in California as of July; this is a notable increase from the registration rate in July 2016 (73%), the year of the last presidential election. The share of the 20.9 million registered voters who are Democrats (46.3%) has increased (45.1% in 2016), while the share of Republicans (24%) has declined (from 27.1%). The share who say they are independent (also known as “decline to state” or “no party preference” voters) has been increasing and is now 24%, up from 23.3% in 2016. Our surveys indicate that 47% of those we consider most likely to vote are Democrats, while 26% are Republicans and 22% are independents.

➤ **Most independent likely voters lean toward a major party.**

In surveys over the past year, independent likely voters have been somewhat more likely to lean Democratic (46%) than Republican (37%); 17% did not lean toward either party. These shares have shifted slightly since 2016, when 41% leaned Democratic, 32% leaned Republican, and 27% did not lean toward either party. Independent likely voters are more likely to be moderate (41%) than liberal (27%) or conservative (32%).

➤ **Ideological and partisan divides are stark.**

Ideological and partisan divisions are especially evident in beliefs about the role of government. For example, when asked about the role of government, 75% of Democrats say they would rather pay higher taxes and have a state government that provides more services, while 80% of Republicans would prefer to pay lower taxes and have fewer services. Independents are divided (48% higher taxes, more services, 47% lower taxes, fewer services). Overall, three in four (77%) Republican likely voters say they are conservative, while 61% of Democratic likely voters describe themselves as liberal.

➤ **Likely voters are disproportionately white; Democratic likely voters are more diverse.**

Whites make up only 41% of California’s adult population but comprise 55% of likely voters. In contrast, Latinos make up 35% of the state’s adult population but only 21% of likely voters. The shares of Asian American (15%) and African American (6%) likely voters are proportionate to their shares of the state’s adult population—14% for Asian Americans and 6% for African Americans. Just under half (46%) of Democratic likely voters are white; 26% are Latino, 16% are Asian American, and 9% are African American. An overwhelming majority (72%) of Republican likely voters are white; relatively few are Latino (13%), Asian American (10%), or African American (1%). Among independents, 54% are white, 20% are Latino, 17% are Asian American, and 5% are African American.

➤ **Demographic characteristics of likely voters vary across parties.**

Democratic likely voters are much more likely to be women (59%) than men (41%), while independents are much more likely to be men (59%) than women (41%); Republicans (53% men, 47% women) are more evenly divided. Independents (52%) are more likely to be college graduates than are Democrats (42%) and Republicans (35%). About one-third of Democrats (32%) have household incomes under \$40,000, compared to about two in ten Republicans (22%) and independents (20%). Democrats (28%) are more likely to be young adults (ages 18 to 34) than are independents (20%) and Republicans (13%), while Republicans are more likely to be ages 55 and older (58%) than are Democrats (43%) or independents (41%).

➤ **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 (26% Los Angeles, 21% San Francisco Bay Area, 18% Orange/San Diego, 16% Central Valley, 9% Inland Empire, 9% other counties). Most Democrats live in Los Angeles County (31%) or the San Francisco Bay Area (25%), while most Republicans live in the Central Valley (23%), Orange and San Diego Counties (23%), or Los Angeles County (19%). Independents are most likely to live in Los Angeles (26%) or the San Francisco Bay Area (24%).



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		Likely voters	Likely voter party registration			
			Dem	Rep	Ind	Other
Political ideology	Liberal	37%	61%	4%	27%	38%
	Moderate	30	28	19	41	42
	Conservative	33	11	77	31	20
Strength of affiliation among major party voters	Strong	–	68	65	–	–
	Not very strong	–	31	33	–	–
	Don't know	–	1	2	–	–
Major party leanings among independent voters	Democratic Party	–	–	–	46	–
	Republican Party	–	–	–	37	–
	Neither/Don't know	–	–	–	17	–
Race/Ethnicity	African American	6	9	1	5	5
	Asian American	14	16	10	17	5
	Latino	21	26	13	20	27
	White	55	46	72	54	54
	Other/Multiracial	4	4	3	5	9
Gender	Men	49	41	53	59	56
	Women	51	59	47	41	44
Education	No college	19	20	23	14	11
	Some college	38	38	43	34	40
	College graduate	43	42	35	52	49
Income	Under \$40,000	27	32	22	20	28
	\$40,000 to under \$80,000	27	26	29	28	30
	\$80,000 or more	46	42	49	52	41
Age	18 to 34	22	28	13	20	30
	35 to 54	32	29	29	40	36
	55 and older	46	43	58	41	34
Region	Central Valley	16	13	23	15	19
	Inland Empire	9	8	12	9	5
	Los Angeles County	26	31	19	26	28
	Orange/San Diego Counties	18	14	23	19	23
	San Francisco Bay Area	21	25	13	24	14
	Other	9	9	11	7	11
Percent of all likely voters		–	47	26	22	4

Notes: “Likely voters” are registered voters meeting criteria on interest in politics, attention to issues, voting behavior, and intention to vote. For a full description of these criteria and regional definitions, visit www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/SurveyMethodology.pdf. For race and ethnicity, results are presented for non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic Asian Americans, non-Hispanic African Americans, and non-Hispanic “other race” and multiracial adults.

Sources: Seven PPIC Statewide Surveys from September 2019 to July 2020, including 11,725 adults and 7,243 likely voters. California Secretary of State, Report of Registration, August 2020. US Census Bureau, 2014–2018 American Community Survey.

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