

Are California's Registered Independents Shy Partisans?

December 10, 2015

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Abstract

Nearly one in four California voters are registered as independents (officially “no party preference”), and the share of registered independent voters in the state has more than doubled in the past twenty years. With California’s open primary system, these independent voters have an influential voice in nominating contests. They also complicate expectations in races where Democrats and Republicans need large numbers of independent voters in order to reach majority support. Previous research into party identification has shown that most survey respondents who identify as independents will say they lean toward one of the major parties when asked, and the preferences and voting behavior of those independent party leaners look a lot like those who identify with the same party. Can we say the same about voters who register as independents? Using survey data from the Public Policy Institute of California’s periodic statewide surveys, this paper examines survey responses from registered independents and explores how their opinions compare to those of party members. Attitudes toward the major parties, policy preferences, and political ideology are considered, with an objective of gaining a more thorough understanding of California’s large and growing number of independent voters. This examination shows that California’s registered independents are not a homogeneous group and that independents predictably share views with the political party they lean toward. This finding suggests the potential for estimating party support among registered voters. It also demonstrates the value of considering the partisan leanings of registered independents, which can help to illuminate California’s trend toward increasing partisan registration.

Nearly one in four California voters are registered as independents, and the share of registered independent voters in the state has more than doubled in the past twenty years. With California's open primary system, these independent voters have an influential voice in nominating contests. They also complicate expectations about election outcomes in races where Democrats and Republicans need large numbers of independent voters in order to reach majority support.

Though California's trend toward independent registration has been ongoing for decades, recent reforms may further encourage independent registration. For instance, since 2012, elections for state and local offices have operated under a top-two primary system, where primary elections are open to all registered voters and include all candidates for the office, regardless of party. Under this system, there is no need to register with a party in order to vote in local and statewide primaries. (Wood, 2014) Another electoral reform, signed into law this year, will have the state Department of Motor Vehicles automatically register eligible adults upon getting or renewing a driver's license. These new registrants will be given the opportunity to register with a party or as a no party preference voter, but many unregistered voters may not have a party preference, and thus will increase the number of independent voters upon their automatic registration.

What are we to make of the over four million Californians who are currently registered to vote with no party preference? Should they be thought of as swing voters who might support a Democrat or a Republican in any given election, or are their preferences more stable? Should they be thought of as one voting 'bloc,' or are they better understood as disparate groups?

Past research on political independents has often focused on those who identify as independents in a survey, rather than those who register as independent voters. The authors of *The Myth of the Independent Voter* challenge the assumption that those who identify as independent really are up for grabs in any given election (Keith et al., 1992). Instead, the authors show that in the National Election Studies, most independents say they lean toward the Democrats or Republicans

when asked (p. 13), and these responses offer important guidance. By examining independents and how they lean, Keith, et al., conclude that “Independents, defined inclusively, have little in common. They are more diverse than either Republicans or Democrats. Most of them are not uncommitted, and they are not a bloc. They are largely closet Democrats and Republicans” (1992, p. 4).

Specifically, Keith, et al. (1992), show that independents who lean toward the Democratic or Republican party have vote preferences (p. 68) and attitudes (p. 98) similar to those who say they weakly identify as Democrats and Republicans. The independents who do not lean toward either party, termed “pure independents,” might be seen as up for grabs. They are also less engaged than the others (see Keith, et al., 1992, pp. 41-59), and they make up a small share of independents overall.

William G. Mayer (2007) also addresses the partisan behavior of independents in his analysis of swing voters. He defines swing voters as those who show the smallest differences in favorability toward competing candidates, and he says swing voters are not necessarily independents. With this definition, Mayer finds “pure independents account for just 13% of the swing voters” and that swing voters are most commonly weak partisans (2007, p. 367). He finds, though, that in media reports, the concepts of swing voters and independent voters are often conflated: “Having declared an interest in ‘swing voters,’ [journalists] examine survey data on or interview people who call themselves independents” (Mayer, 2007, p. 366) Examples of this conflation continue to appear in election coverage.¹

The differences among independent party identifiers, and their similarities with partisan identifiers are considered in many analyses, and are often thoughtfully explained (see, for example,

¹ For examples from the 2012 and 2014 elections, see Zeleny, J., & Sussman, D. (2012, January 19). Obama is faulted by swing voters in a new survey, *The New York Times*, p.1; Hudak, J. (2012, September 5). Clinton can bring back Obama's hope, *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-09-04/clinton-convention-obama-speech/57585492/1>.; Langer, G. (2014, November 5). A fresh blast of discontent reshapes the political order, *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2014/11/a-fresh-blast-of-discontent-reshapes-the-political-order/>.

Pew Research Center, 2015; Entin, 2015, Abramowitz 2009). While such analyses address independent party identification in surveys, they do not address independent voter registration. We might expect to find the same patterns among registered independents because party registration is itself a form of party identification. On the other hand, where voter registration is not automatic, we are dealing only with those who have opted into the electoral system. We might suspect that these adults have given more consideration to their independent identification, and that registered independents might constitute a coherent group of like-minded voters. Furthermore, because registered voters are more engaged than the adult population as a whole, the pure independents among registered voters will not necessarily be less engaged with politics than other registered voters, as pure independents are among party identifiers.

Survey data can be a valuable resource for examining independent party registration. Surveys conducted using a state voter registration file can be used to analyze responses by party registration using official party status. Random digit dial surveys can also be used to analyze party registration by relying on respondents' self-reported party registration.²

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) has conducted periodic surveys of California adults since 1998 and these surveys regularly ask respondents for their party registration. The surveys also ask registered independents which party they lean toward. Using survey data from 2013 and 2014, PPIC researchers analyzed the demographics and attitudes of California's registered independents (Baldassare, Bonner, & Shrestha, 2014). Assessing independents as a whole, the authors found mixed opinions on the Affordable Care Act and on the role of government. Considered separately, though, the authors found that those independents leaning toward the Democrats had different opinions from those who leaned toward the Republicans.

² Though relying on self-reports allows for misreporting by respondents, a 2012 study validated self-reported registration against state voter files. Among registered voters, the study found 94.6% accuracy on self-reporting as a registered Democrat and 93.3% on self-reporting as a registered Republican. (Ansolabehere and Hersh, 2012, p.454)

Following the insights from previous research on independent party identifiers, this paper further explores the opinions of independent party registrants in California. Using survey data from the Public Policy Institute of California's periodic statewide surveys, this paper examines the responses of registered independents and explores how their attitudes compare to those of party members. Party attitudes, policy preferences, political ideology, and political interest are considered, with an objective of gaining a more thorough understanding of California's large and growing number of independent voters.

Methods

The data used for this paper comes from the Public Policy Institute of California's Statewide Survey series. PPIC makes its historical survey data available via its website.³

In order to present a current portrayal of the views of California's registered independents, the most recent survey data available is used. Because we are considering the differences between subgroups of registered voters, sample size is a consideration. For that reason, when appropriate, responses from multiple survey waves are combined to allow for better between-group comparisons. The full text of each survey question analyzed is included in an appendix.

In the analysis that follows, data is aggregated from the seven PPIC survey rounds conducted during 2015. For questions related to policy preferences, the analysis is limited to questions that were asked in two of the 2015 rounds, and the data from those surveys are combined. For questions related to party favorability and the need for a third party, data from December 2015 is used. On a question that asks independents whether they would join a party that matches their views, the most recent data available is from October 2014. Where responses to this question are

³ For PPIC survey reports, see <http://www.ppic.org/main/series.asp?i=12>. For survey data, see <http://www.ppic.org/main/datadepot.asp>.

similar across time, the 2014 data is supplemented by two surveys from 2012 in order to increase the sample size for analysis.

The survey data analysis also depends upon five regularly-asked questions about party registration. First, in the PPIC surveys, each respondent is asked if he or she is a registered voter in the state of California. If so, the respondent is asked which party he or she is registered with, or if he or she is registered as an independent (or decline-to-state) voter. Next, registered Republicans, Democrats, and independents receive separate follow-up questions. Registered Republicans are asked if they consider themselves to be a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican. Democrats receive a similar question. Registered independents are asked if they think of themselves as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party.

These questions allow us to create seven-way registration typology consisting of the following categories: strong Democrat, weak Democrat, independent Democrat, pure independent, independent Republican, weak Republican, and strong Republican. This typology is similar to that used by Keith, et al. (1992), as a measure of party identification, including the category of pure independent, which refers to those independents who say they lean toward neither the Democrats nor the Republicans. In this analysis, those who say they don't know if they lean toward a major party are combined with those who say they lean toward neither party to create the pure independent group.⁴ The difference between this typology and that of Keith, et al. (1992), is that here we are considering both party registration and a measure of party identification. In this way, we can illuminate the three broad categories of Democratic, Republican, and independent registration and examine both where differences within each group exist and where similarities exist across them.

Responses to survey questions on party attitudes, policy preferences, political ideology, and political interest are compared across each of the seven registration groups. Additionally, z-tests are

⁴ A separate analysis indicates that excluding the "don't know" respondents from the pure independent group does not change the outcomes substantively.

used to test for significant differences between all groups. For each question, differences from independent Democrats, independent Republicans, and pure independents at the $p < .05$ significance level are noted in the tables. Where we see significant differences within the registered independents, we can say that independents are not a homogeneous group, and where we see non-significant differences between registered independents and registered partisans, we can say that independents may be expected to vote like party members.

Findings

Party Attitudes

Among registered independents in the 2015 PPIC surveys, 41 percent lean toward the Democratic Party, 30 percent lean toward the Republican Party, 25 percent say they lean toward neither party, and 4 percent say they don't know if they are closer to one party or the other.

Among all registered voters in the PPIC surveys, strong Democrats are most common (23%), followed by weak Democrats (19%). Next most common are strong Republicans (14%) and weak Republicans (13%). Ten percent of registered voters are independent Democrats, 7 percent are independent Republicans, and 7 percent are pure independents.

Among non-registered citizens, who may be added to voter rolls as part of the new DMV voter registration law or other reform efforts, 46 percent think of themselves as closer to the Democratic Party, 24 percent say they are closer to the Republican Party, 24 percent say neither, and 5 percent don't know.

Using survey data from December 2015, Table 1 shows favorability toward the Democratic Party and the Republican Party for each of the seven registration groups. It also indicates where the responses of independent Democrats, independent Republicans, and pure independents differ significantly from the other groups.

Table 1. Party Attitudes

	Strong Democrat n=338	Weak Democrat n=238	Independent Democrat n=164	Pure Independent n=94	Independent Republican n=146	Weak Republican n=167	Strong Republican n=187
Favorable impression of Democratic Party	82%	68%	66%	13%	20%	15%	2%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>	*			*	*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*				*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*	*	*				
Favorable impression of Republican Party	6%	19%	11%	13%	51%	65%	82%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>					*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*	*			*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>					*	*	*
Third party is needed	45%	67%	57%	73%	74%	63%	48%
<i>difference from Ind D</i>							
<i>difference from Ind R</i>	*						*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*						*

* indicates difference at the $p < .05$ significance level

Beginning with attitudes toward the Democratic Party, strong Democrats (82%) are most likely to express favorable impressions. About two in three weak Democrats (68%) and independent Democrats (66%) express favorability, a difference that is not statistically significant. Independent Republicans (20%) and pure independents (13%) do not differ significantly from each other in their favorability toward Democrats, and they are not significantly different from the weak Republicans.

Regarding favorability toward the Republican Party, a similar pattern exists. Favorability is most common among strong Republicans (82%), which is significantly more common than among weak Republicans (65%) and independent Republicans (51%), who do not differ significantly. On this question, registered Democrats, independent Democrats, and pure independents respond similarly.

Pure independents are unlikely to have favorable impressions of either the Democratic Party (13%) or the Republican Party (13%), and in both cases, their likelihood of favorability is statistically similar to that of the opposing partisans and independent leaners.

We can also assess how registered independents feel about the need for a third major party and how their opinions compare with registered Democrats and Republicans. This is an important question with regard to registered independents' motivation for their party choice. If they are more likely than registered partisans to desire a major third party, that might help to explain their status as registered independents.

In December 2015, the PPIC survey asked, "In your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?" There is similarity across most groups on this question, with majorities of all but the strong partisans (45% Democrats, 48% Republicans) saying a third party is necessary. Independent Democrats (57%) are statistically similar to all groups, and the independent Republicans (74%) and pure independents (73%) are significantly more likely than the strong partisans to call for a third party.

In another question concerning party preference, PPIC has asked registered independents only, "Would you join a political party if it was a good reflection of your political views or do you prefer to be unaffiliated with any specific party?" In the data from October 2014, there is some variation between the three independent groups, but no significant differences. In each group, over six in ten say they would remain unaffiliated even if a party matched their views (74% independent Democrats, 62% independent Republicans, 69% pure independents). In most cases, then, independents seem choose their registration status for reasons other than policy differences with the parties. When response data on this question from 2012 and 2014 is combined, the larger sample allows us to see a significant difference between independent Democrats and independent Republicans.⁵ The independent Democrats (75%) are more likely than independent Republicans

⁵ Though we might expect responses to this question to change over time, the responses among independent Democrats and independent Republicans are consistent across the surveys in March 2012, May 2012, and October 2014 when this question was asked. (For the independent Democrats: 76%, 74%, and 74%; for the independent Republicans 59%, 65%,

(62%) to say they would remain unaffiliated even if a party reflected their views. This suggests that dissatisfaction with the parties may be more of a factor in independent registration among the independent Republicans than it is among the independent Democrats.

Policy Preferences

Another way to compare registered independents with registered partisans is to examine their opinions on public policy. The table below compares responses to questions in four issue areas across the seven registration groups.

First, we consider a general spending-priorities question that asks respondents if they'd prefer to use a budget surplus to either pay down the state debt and build up reserves or to restore some funding for social services. On this question, strong Republicans (82%) are most likely to prefer paying down the debt and building up reserves, while strong Democrats are least likely to say the same (30%). The responses of independent Republicans (73%) do not differ significantly from registered Republicans or pure independents, but they do differ from independent and registered Democrats. The responses of independent Democrats (46%) do not differ significantly from weak Democrats or pure independents, but they differ significantly from strong Democrats, independent Republicans and registered Republicans. Pure independents (56%) sit squarely in the middle on this question, and differ significantly only from the strong Democrats and the strong Republicans.

On the subject of immigration, again the opinions of independents align with the party they lean toward. When asked to say if immigrants are either a benefit or a burden to California, strong Democrats (74%) and independent Democrats (80%) are most likely to call immigrants are a benefit. On the Republican side, the responses from independent Republicans (34%) do not differ

62%.) For that reason, I feel comfortable aggregating the responses to make a comparison between independent Democrats and independent Republicans. On the other hand, responses among pure independents have shown some variability over the same period (86%, 81%, 68%), so I make no comparisons with the aggregated pure independent responses here.

significantly from those of pure independents or registered Republicans (40% weak, 22% strong). Pure independents are in the middle (51%), and they differ from registered and independent Democrats at one end and strong Republicans at the other.

In a question touching on tax and energy policy, PPIC asked if the extraction of oil and natural gas in California should be taxed. Here again we see clear alignment between independents and the party that they lean toward. Democrats are more likely to favor taxing oil and natural gas extraction, and while the responses of independent Democrats (62%) do not differ significantly from those of registered Democrats (50% weak, 58% strong), they do differ from all other groups. Independent Republicans (27%) are less likely to support the taxation and their responses are similar to pure independents (38%) and registered Republicans (38% weak, 26% strong). On this question, pure independents (38%) significantly differ only from the strong Democrats and independent Democrats.

On one final policy question, the legalization of marijuana, there is some cross-partisan agreement. Here, weak Democrats (60%) and weak Republicans (56%) offer similar opinions. The likelihood of independent Democrats (66%) to favor legalization is similar to most groups and only differs significantly from the strong Republicans (32%). The same is true for pure independents (55%). Similarly, the opinion of independent Republicans (52%) differs significantly only from the strong Democrats (68%) and the strong Republicans.

On three of the four policy questions, then, the responses of independent Democrats and independent Republicans differ significantly. On the fourth, marijuana legalization, there is some bipartisan agreement, the opinions of each independent group are similar, and the independents are similar to the weak partisans on both sides.

Table 2. Policy Preferences

	Strong Democrat	Weak Democrat	Independent Democrat	Pure Independent	Independent Republican	Weak Republican	Strong Republican
pay down debt and build up reserve	(n=686) 30%	(n=489) 49%	(n=284) 46%	(n=188) 56%	(n=229) 73%	(n=298) 69%	(n=351) 82%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>	*				*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*				
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*						*
immigrants are a benefit to California	(n=677) 74%	(n=461) 67%	(n=279) 80%	(n=205) 51%	(n=243) 34%	(n=316) 40%	(n=367) 22%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>		*		*	*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*				
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*	*	*				*
tax oil extraction	(n=693) 58%	(n=466) 50%	(n=271) 62%	(n=215) 38%	(n=226) 27%	(n=304) 38%	(n=362) 26%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>				*	*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*				
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*		*				
use of marijuana should be legal	(n=677) 68%	(n=677) 60%	(n=677) 66%	(n=677) 55%	(n=677) 52%	(n=677) 56%	(n=677) 32%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>							*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*						*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>							*

* indicates difference at the $p < .05$ significance level

Political Ideology

Apart from their opinions on specific issues, we can also examine the self-reported political ideology of each registration group. Beginning with self-reported liberalism (those respondents who say they are either very liberal or somewhat liberal politically), among registered independents, independent Democrats (49%) are most likely to call themselves liberal, and independent Republicans (12%) and pure independents (19%) are less likely. Independent Democrats are, in fact, distinct from all other groups on this question: they are less likely to be liberal than strong Democrats (59%) and more likely to be liberal than weak Democrats (40%) (or registered Republicans). Pure independents are distinct from all other groups except independent Republicans. Independent Republicans are slightly more likely than strong Republicans (7%) to call themselves liberal, but they are as likely as weak Republicans (11%) to do so.

Considering those who call themselves political moderates (“middle-of-the-road” in the PPIC surveys), similarities exist between weak Democrats, independent Democrats, independent Republicans, and weak Republicans. In each of these groups, between 31% and 39% call themselves moderate. Independent Democrats (33%) and independent Republicans (31%) are both statistically distinct from strong Democrats (22%), strong Republicans (11%), and pure independents (51%). Pure independents are significantly more likely than any other group to call themselves moderate.

The pattern on self-reported conservatism is a bit more mixed. Strong Republicans (81%) are by far the most likely to call themselves conservative, followed by the independent Republicans (56%) and weak Republicans (48%), who look similar to each other. All other groups are significantly less likely than the independent Republicans to call themselves conservative. Pure independents (24%) are significantly less likely than independent or registered Republicans to call themselves conservative, and their answers are similar to the independent and registered Democrats. Independent Democrats (15%) are less likely to call themselves conservative than weak Democrats (23%), but they are similar to strong Democrats (17%) and pure independents.

Table 3. Political Ideology

	Strong Democrat n=2,442	Weak Democrat n=1,625	Independent Democrat n=972	Pure Independent n=774	Independent Republican n=822	Weak Republican n=1,038	Strong Republican n=1,288
liberal	59%	40%	49%	19%	12%	11%	7%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>	*	*		*	*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*				*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*	*	*			*	*
moderate	22%	36%	33%	51%	31%	39%	11%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>	*			*			*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*			*			*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*	*	*		*	*	*
conservative	17%	23%	15%	24%	56%	48%	81%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>		*		*	*	*	*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>	*	*	*	*			*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*		*		*	*	*

* indicates difference at the $p < .05$ significance level.

Political Interest

Finally, we consider a question regarding interest in politics. Research on independent party identifiers has shown pure independents to be less engaged than partisan identifiers.

Strong partisans are most likely to say that they have a great deal or a fair amount of interest in politics (79% Democrats, 87% Republicans). Independent Republicans (73%) are next most likely to say the same, and they are significantly more likely to say so than weak partisans (54% Democrats, 65% Republicans), independent Democrats, or pure independents. Independent Democrats (65%) are more likely to say they have a great deal or fair amount of interest in politics than are weak Democrats. While pure independents are among the least likely to say so (60%), they are statistically similar to weak partisans and independent Democrats.

Table 4. Political Interest

	Strong Democrat n=2,442	Weak Democrat n=1,625	Independent Democrat n=972	Pure Independent n=774	Independent Republican n=822	Weak Republican n=1,038	Strong Republican n=1,288
A great deal or a fair amount of interest in politics	79%	54%	65%	60%	73%	65%	87%
<i>difference from Ind. D</i>	*	*			*		*
<i>difference from Ind. R</i>		*	*	*		*	*
<i>difference from Pure Ind.</i>	*				*		*

* indicates difference at the $p < .05$ significance level.

Discussion

By examining the opinions of registered independent voters, in combination with their party leanings, we find results similar to those reported in previous research on independent party identifiers.

One exception is the finding on political interest. Unlike among party identifiers, among registered voters, pure independents do not stand out as being less interested in politics than other groups. This could be because, unlike party identification, voter registration in California has

required some level of interest in and engagement with politics. As California moves to a system of automatic voter registration, though, the political interest among independent registrants may change.

On questions of party attitudes, political ideology, and policy preference, the registered independents we examined consistently align with the party they lean toward, and often differ significantly from independents with different partisan leanings.

Regarding party favorability, independents favor the party they lean toward at about the same rate as weak members of the same party. Independents' favorability of the party they lean toward is also statistically distinct from the favorability of pure independents and independents who lean toward the other party. These response patterns show that independent party leaners express similar attitudes toward the party as many party registrants, and that within the independent population meaningful differences in party attitudes exist.

Regarding a third major party, independent Democrats, independent Republicans, and weak independents are about as likely as weak partisans to say a third party is needed. These similarities across groups show that dissatisfaction with the major parties is widespread, it exists among weak party members, and it is not limited to registered independents.

Despite this call for a third major party, strong majorities across the registered independent groups say they would not join a political party if one reflected their views. This finding suggests that even if registered independents believed the Democratic or Republican parties reflected their views, they may remain registered independents for other reasons. Notably, independent Republicans are more likely than independent Democrats to say they would join a party that reflected their views, which may indicate that independent Republicans are less likely to find their views reflected in the Republican Party than are independent Democrats in the Democratic Party.

On political ideology, again, registered independents consistently sort themselves in ways that align with their partisan leanings. Independent Democrats are significantly more likely to call themselves liberal than are other independents, and independent Republicans are significantly more likely to call themselves conservative than are other independents. Pure independents are most likely to call themselves middle-of-the-road. These findings show significant ideological differences among registered independents, which can be identified by using the partisan leaning question.

Independent leaners also express policy preferences consistent with party members. On three policy questions with sharp partisan differences (on spending priorities, immigration, and a tax on oil extraction), the opinions of independent leaners differ significantly from members of the opposing party and independents leaning toward the opposing party. And in each case, independent leaners' opinions are similar to the weak members of the party they lean toward, the strong members of that party, or both.

On each of these policy questions, it is pure independents only who do not show a consistent pattern of responses when compared to the other registration groups. On any question, they could show similarities to or differences from the strong and weak partisans and the independent leaners. Perhaps a different analysis could point to demographics or attitudinal questions that would illuminate patterns in their responses to policy questions. In any case, they appear to be the voters that are truly up for grabs on any given issue.

In PPIC surveys from 2015, pure independents make up 27% of registered independents. Considering their role in California elections, these pure independents represent about 7 percent of all registered voters, compared with about 16 percent who are independent leaners, and 71 percent who are registered as either Democrats or Republicans. That pure independents make up such a small share of the California electorate, while independent leaners account for over twice as many

voters, suggests that many analyses would benefit from disaggregating the registered independent group.

The question on partisan leanings offers a way to break up the registered independent group and clarify their attitudes. As we have seen, on many questions, the opinions of registered independents do not fall in between registered Democrats and registered Republicans because independents are a more moderate group. Their opinions only appear moderate when the distinct groups of independent Democrats, independent Republicans, and pure independents are combined. For a deeper understanding of California's large, and growing, population of registered independent voters then, it is important to consider what they have to say when they are asked which party they lean toward. In that way, we may be able to predict their partisan behavior, even though they have stated in their voter registration that they are independents.

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Appendix: Survey Questions

Registration Typology

Next, some people are registered to vote and others are not. Are you absolutely certain that you are registered to vote in California?

Are you registered as a Democrat, a Republican, another party, or are you registered as a decline-to-state or independent voter?

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or Democratic Party?

Political Ideology

Next, would you consider yourself to be politically: [read list, rotate order top to bottom] very liberal, somewhat liberal, middle-of-the-road, somewhat conservative, or very conservative?

Policy Preferences

The state is projected to have a budget surplus of several billion dollars over the next several years. In general, how would you prefer to use this extra money? [rotate] (1) Would you prefer to pay down state debt and build up the reserve [or] (2) would you prefer to use some of this money to restore some funding for social service programs that were cut in recent years?

In general, do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal, or not?

Please indicate which statement comes closest to your own view—even if neither is exactly right. [rotate] (1) Immigrants today are a benefit to California because of their hard work and job skills [or] (2) Immigrants today are a burden to California because they use public services.

For each of the following, please say if you favor or oppose the proposal. [rotate question battery] How about taxing the extraction of oil and natural gas in California?

Party Attitudes

Do you have a favorable or an unfavorable impression of the Democratic Party?

Do you have a favorable or an unfavorable impression of the Republican Party?

In your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?

Would you join a political party if it was a good reflection of your political views or do you prefer to be unaffiliated with any specific party?