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Who is Arizona's Independent Voter?

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Who is Arizona's Independent Voter?

Independents are the No. 1 party in Arizona, although they are not really a party. On official voter rolls of the Arizona Secretary of State's Office, independents are identified as "other," tossed in a catch-all drawer to be categorized alongside the two major parties – Republican and Democratic – and the third parties (Libertarian, Green and Americans Elect). On the ballot, they're listed as IND but there is no official Independent Party in Arizona. They're simply independents, an unlikely group of like-minded and unlike-minded individuals who seem to take pride in their independence from organized and recognized political parties.

In March 2014, for the first time, the proportion of registered Arizona voters declaring themselves as independents exceeded the proportion citing their political party preference as either Democratic or Republican. The most-recent official roster has 37 percent (or 1.219 million) of registered Arizona voters declared as independents; 34 percent (or 1.115 million) as Republicans; and 28 percent (or 932,722) as Democrats.¹

With no real shape other than growing percentages that cannot be ignored, (independents made up only 11.6 percent of the electorate in 1992), independent voters represent a potential changing wind across Arizona's political landscape. But that formidable force has yet to materialize with any measurable or sustained impact, with independent voters remaining as unharnessed as they are unpredictable in terms of actual votes.

Are independent voters truly an untapped resource that could determine elections, aiding in the transformation of Arizona from a conservative "red state" into a "purple" moderate state or even more progressive "blue state?" Or, with no organization and a track record of poor turnout in both primary and general elections, are independents a much-ado-about-nothing "party" of non-participants?

Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for Public Policy, at the request of the Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission, sought to get a better understanding of independent voters for the purposes of enhancing election officials and voters' information about independent voters. No composite was possible, however, as independent voters are a nebulous group of independent individuals.

At first glance they seem to run the gamut on the political ideology scale, but really they mostly fall into three distinct and identifiable categories: conservative, liberal and moderate. Make that heavy on the moderate (73.3 percent). Sliced thinner but more broadly, data suggest independent voters overall lean more liberally on social issues than the overall electorate but more conservatively on fiscal matters – although much depends on the particular issue.

This first-of-its-kind study included four focus groups with 33 independent voters and 2,000 surveys gauging viewpoints of all Arizona voters, providing comparable and contrasting insight. The data helps define not just the shadowy silhouette of the state's 1.2 million independent voters, but also their philosophies, viewpoints and voting patterns, and how they sometimes vary and sometimes mirror voters from the traditional parties.

¹ *State of Arizona Registration Report, 2015 October Voter Registration, Arizona Secretary of State*

Political Philosophy of the Independent Voter

To understand independent voters, we need to know how their philosophy compares to voters of other parties. We asked 2,000 Arizona voters – 400 registered Democrats, 400 registered Republicans and 1,200 registered independents – to peg their political philosophy along a 10-point scale, with 1 as “extremely liberal” to 10 as “extremely conservative.” By dividing the 10-point scale into three parts (1-3 = liberal; 4-7 = moderate; and 8-10 = conservative), we find that most Arizona voters view themselves as moderate to conservative, with more describing themselves as conservative than as liberal.²

All Arizona voters Liberal 15.5% Moderate 60.1% Conservative 24.4%

Arizonans’ self-descriptions mirror election outcomes. Arizona voters presently skew decidedly conservative, with Republicans holding all major statewide offices and controlling both houses of the Legislature. As the following statistics indicate, Republicans cluster at the conservative end of the scale while Democrats cluster on the liberal end. Nearly 45 percent of Republicans define themselves as conservative (8-10 on the scale) while nearly 35 percent of Democrats define themselves as liberal (1-3 on the scale).

Predictably, when we analyze independents, we see that nearly three out of four rate themselves as moderates (4-7), with nearly equal bookends of liberals and conservatives but in smaller percentages than the general electorate. The majority of all registered voters, regardless of political affiliation, also see themselves as moderate.

Table 1. Party Affiliation by Political Leaning (Self-Reported)

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
Liberal (1-3)	34.6%	3.2%	12.1%
Moderate (4-7)	52.1%	51.9%	73.3%
Conservatives (8-10)	13.4%	44.7%	14.6%

Why They Became Independent. How They Describe Themselves.

The survey sample finds that almost half (48.8 percent) of independent voters changed from another party: 21.1 percent are former Democrats, 24.5 percent are former Republicans and 3.2 percent from another party. Focus group participants unanimously stated that the two major parties do not reflect their views, and they are turned off by the polarization of politics:

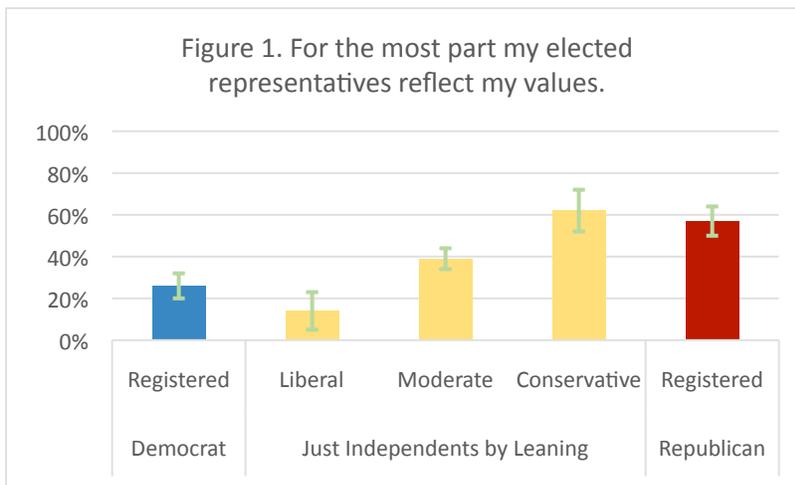
“The reason we don't care for either party is the polarization thing: ‘We are absolutely socialist.’ ‘We are all for business.’ And neither one of those is true. But sometimes you get stuck thinking that way simply because it's easier.”

²13 percent of registered Democrats define themselves as “conservative” and 3 percent of Republicans define themselves as “liberal.” It underlines the assertion that Arizona voters show great inconsistency, as the data will bear out.

Some switched over to being an independent after growing weary of the status quo. In fact, the rise in the number of voters registered as independents can be viewed as a rising distaste with the current two political parties in power. All independents described the current political parties as representing the parties' interests, not the interests of the people. Seeing government rule as increasingly polarized, they all are very dissatisfied with the current political system and their voter registration says that. One respondent stated:

“I think if the existing parties were less partisan, a lot fewer people would be registered as independents. You can count me in that group, because part of what really turns me off is their commitment to their ideology rather than their commitment to governing, and so part of me being an independent is a protest statement.”

Such frustration is not confined to independents, with the overwhelming majority of respondents believing there is too much partisan conflict at the Arizona state capitol. With the exception of conservatives and Republicans, most Arizonans don't feel their elected representatives represent their values (Figure 1).



Source: ASU Morrison Institute for Public Policy

Nearly one-half of registered Democrats (48.9 percent) and Republicans (46.8 percent) would “consider changing their party registration to independent.” On the other hand, one-third of independents (34.5 percent) who are either conservative or liberal leaning would consider joining one of the established parties. Among this group, 47.6 percent would become Democrats, 41.3 percent would become Republicans, and the remainder (11

percent) would select some other party.

We asked what it means to be an independent voter. They explained that “independent” means “more choices and less commitment with the parties.” With more options comes more of an obligation to do research independent of party lines, which is why independents also describe themselves as more informed and more critical of what politicians say than other voters. One participant stated:

“The independents are the ones that can sort of maintain the line, stand there in front of all of it and make a selection of something that is not spoon-fed to you. (An) independent says, ‘I looked at it. I believe in the system. I believe in the Constitution, in the voting, but these two clowns ain't got it.’”

Independents “look at the issues, gather as much facts as they can ... and try to avoid a lot of the media hype.” They are “free thinkers,” “not tied to party politics,” and they “vote on the issues, not along party lines.” Group participants summed it up with the statement: “We’re not a party. We’re a mindset.”

How Similar to the Parties Are They?

Are independents really as “independent” as they claim? Many independents commented that they never vote a straight ticket by party, even when they had political leanings one way or the other. We questioned if that was really the case, and when asked to respond to general criticism that an independent was really just a Democrat or a Republican jumping on a trend to be labeled as “independent,” reactions were mixed. Although all agreed that they never vote based on party affiliation, there was no general consensus among group members pertaining to how much their current views varied from their previous party views (if they had one).

For example, some admitted to having ideologies that are consistent with one party or the other:

“We all come from a place where we have our basic ideologies, and that we will align with that ideology, and this is maybe our value system. And so I think there's a basis that maybe we do on that – as you said, there's a scale, that maybe I would lean more socially progressive or more liberal; you may lean more conservative. ... But I think the ideologies maybe do align with the Republican or Democrat. Or Libertarian.”

Others admitted to holding views consistent with one party, but changed to independent for strategic reasons. Some stated that being an independent provided them “safe harbor” in a climate of political strife between Republicans and Democrats. One participant became an independent because it was strongly recommended he do so for his political bipartisan job. Further, a previously registered Democrat admitted:

“I switched because I was tired of being a disenfranchised Democrat in the primaries. I wanted my vote in the primaries to count for something, and so if you want to have a say about politics in Arizona, at least out where I live, you need to be voting on the Republican primary. And so that's why I switched to independent.”

When they were asked if they were “middle-of-the-road” instead, the majority disagreed with the term itself:

“There's not really a middle road 'cause there's so many issues, you know? And some of them are highly conservative, some of them are very liberal, and you can't really be middle-of-the-road with all the issues that are going on ...”

Others just flat out disagreed that their political views were consistent with any one party and/or that they ever had voted a straight party ticket.

“When you're voting a straight party ticket it's like, ‘does not apply, does not apply, does not apply,’ and the same when you're voting on the liberal side versus the conservative side. There (are) shades, so try to get in the middle, and what's left?”

‘Well, the Libertarians sound pretty good. OK, I’ll go with them.’ But none of them are 100 percent on every list. So you’ve got to be independent.”

In fact, when survey respondents were asked if they preferred to vote along party lines, the results validated what the focus group participants had stated. Independents, as well as most Arizona voters, don’t adhere to party line voting. Less than half of Democrats prefer to vote along party lines, while just more than half of Republicans feel that way. In short, Arizona’s electorate appears to be fluid and, potentially, changeable.

Table 2. I prefer to vote along party lines.

All registered voters	37.8%
Democrats	47.7%
Liberal independents	25.2%
Moderate independents	12.8%
Conservative independents	27.2%
Republicans	51.7%

Arizona’s Most Important Issues

So, where do these moderate independents stand on Arizona’s “most important” issues? Respondents were asked to indicate which one of the following list of issues they consider to be the most important and which they rank second.³ As is true in nearly every Arizona poll for at least the past decade, concern about education sits decidedly at the top of the list. Half of Arizona registered voters (49.5 percent) rank education as either the first or second most important issue facing the state. In fact, nearly one-third (32 percent) rank it first.

Predictably, there are differences by political party affiliation. While 56 percent of registered Democrats rank education as Arizona’s first or second most important issue, only 37 percent of Republicans do so. Registered Republicans rank “immigration issues” (44 percent) and “the budget and how tax dollars are spent” (43 percent) as either the first or second most important issue facing Arizona. Education is third among registered Republicans (37 percent).

Recognizing the individuality of independent voters, we analyzed the responses of independents by dividing them into the three aforementioned categories: conservative independents, moderate independents and liberal independents. And what we found is indeed surprising. The priority issues of conservative-leaning independents tend to line up with Republicans’ top issues while those of liberal-leaning independents tend to line up with Democrats. The views of moderates were not as clearly matched. For example, similar to Democrats, liberal independents (67 percent) place education at the top of the list of important issues facing Arizona, at a rate higher than either major party.⁴ And conservative independents align with Republicans – 46 percent rank immigration issues as either the first or second most important issue facing the state and 36 percent rank education as

³ Full survey results are located in the Appendix.

⁴ Moderate and liberal Independents represent 85% of registered Independents.

Arizona’s most pressing issue, corresponding to 37 percent of Republicans who see this as a priority.

On the other hand, moderate independents – those who consider themselves neither conservative nor liberal – vary in their policy priorities. On education and immigration, they tend to track more closely with the opinion of Democrats than Republicans, but on healthcare and social programs to assist the poor, their responses take a more Republican than Democratic bent.

Table 3. Arizona Issues Rated 1 or 2 for Importance

	<u>Independents</u>				
	Rep	Con	Mod	Lib	Dem
Education	37%	36%	60%	67%	56%
The budget/how tax dollars are spent	43%	32%	34%	22%	25%
Immigration issues	44%	46%	24%	17%	22%
Jobs and employment	21%	25%	22%	20%	21%
Healthcare	13%	17%	17%	17%	25%
Social programs to assist the poor	4%	7%	9%	20%	19%
Marijuana laws	7%	4%	8%	8%	8%
Sustainability	4%	5%	8%	12%	8%
Gun issues	13%	9%	6%	6%	7%
States’ rights	10%	11%	6%	1%	1%
Campaign finance laws	3%	3%	4%	7%	5%

Focus group responses revealed that this prioritization has to do with voters’ personal experiences. For example, those with children in school were more likely to focus on education. For many, the budget not only has to do with controlling costs but dealing with income inequality for those who are falling further and further behind economically. Health care is a serious concern for those who are unable to afford the co-pays on their insurance.

Unlike the Democratic and Republican parties, independents have no common policy platform, no high-profile leaders to speak of, no predetermined slate of candidates, and no recognized spokespeople to verbalize any message. They are really a “catch-all” category of voters who do not identify themselves with either of the two major political parties – or with the less prominent parties, for that matter. But they don’t always identify with fellow independents either.

In summary, the intensified political battle for the independent vote by Republicans and Democrats is not, in actuality, for all independents (since the far right and far left aren’t likely to change positions). The challenge is to capture moderate independents, those in the middle who see themselves as separated from both political party philosophies and whose vote cannot be easily predicted or won. Based on how independents describe themselves, that means the contest to garner independent votes by Democrats and Republicans is for about as little as 17 percent (or 553,000 people)⁵ or 26 percent (or 845,765 people) of

⁵ If the Political Leaning scale re-classified “moderate” to 5-6 among independents, up from 4-7, there would be fewer Independents.

registered independent voters who are unlikely to commit to either a liberal or conservative philosophy or platform.

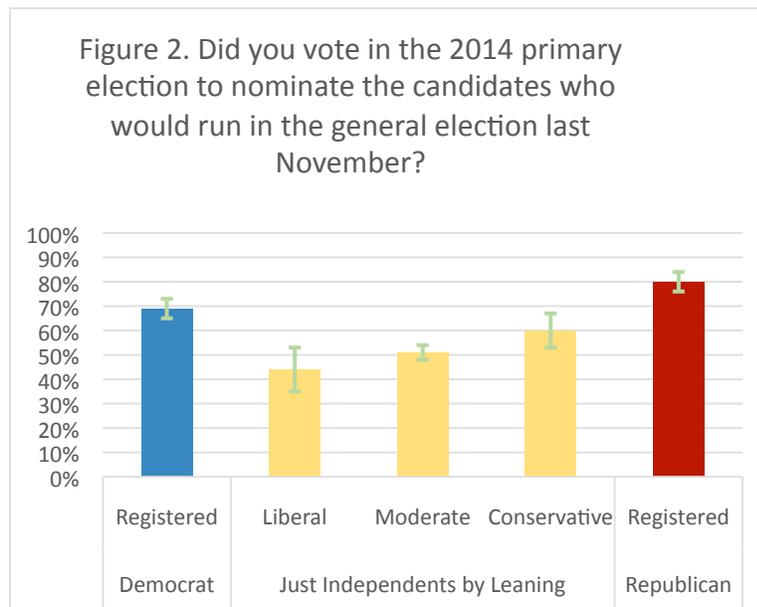
Independent Voter Turnout – Why They Don’t ...

By and large, the independent voters feel that they can change politics at the state level. Since independents are not affiliated with Democrats or Republicans, they feel that they can have a lot of influence on state policy issues that are highly contested by acting as the “swing vote.” In addition, they believe that their large number can change the way politicians approach their campaigns. A participant stated:

“I think it kind of forces candidates to really look at the issues a little bit more with regards to how they think that the public might ... be concerned with those issues, because of the fact that, you know, when you take a look at the block of the population that falls into independent category, they're not money in the bank. You know, where you might be looking at, ‘Oh, well, I've got this many Republican people that I can count on, I've got this many Democrat people that I can't count on,’ there's something in between there now that they've got to really try to – they've got to try to get those votes.”

Further, participants hoped that their presence at the polls would reduce some of the polarization of the parties. As one participant stated:

“I think the bigger the independent party gets, the more it has a tendency to try to moderate either side and draw them [party politicians] back to the center when it gets real close to elections.”



Source: ASU Morrison Institute for Public Policy

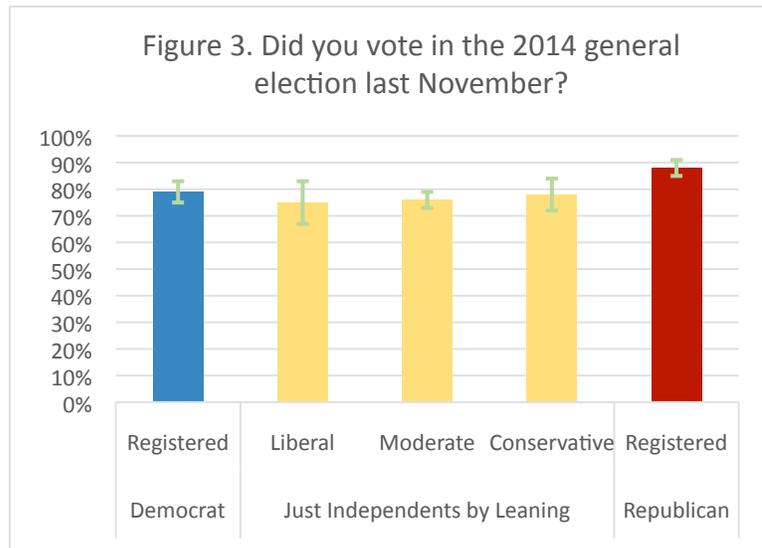
While Democrats and Republicans equate the vote of moderate independents with political success, independents are less likely to actually cast ballots than either registered Democrats or Republicans, particularly in primary elections. So, the actual number of moderate independents who can influence election outcomes is usually lower than both the perception and the potential.

Because there is no official “Independent Party” in the state of Arizona, an independent voter is allowed to cast a ballot for one of the recognized parties in the primary election. Like most Arizona voters, independents for

a variety of reasons often ignore primary elections – even though low-turnout primaries typically advance party-favored legislative and congressional candidates to uncontested or weak challenges in the general election, almost guaranteeing their victory.

In the survey, 52 percent of independents reported voting in the 2014 primary election compared with the same claim by 81 percent of Republicans and 68 percent of Democrats (Figure 2). The actual turnout is much less, however, with the Arizona Secretary of State’s Office putting voter turnout in the 2014 primary at just 27 percent overall.

A much higher percentage of independents (76 percent) reported voting in the 2014 general election, compared with 88 percent of Republicans and 79 percent of Democrats (Figure 3). Actual voter turnout for the 2014 general election was 47.5 percent in Arizona, according to the Secretary of State’s Office.



Source: ASU Morrison Institute for Public Policy

We know actual voter turnout is significantly lower than survey respondents indicate because voters tend to overstate their voting behavior – primarily because it is socially unacceptable to admit to not voting.

Actual voting statistics for Democrats, Republicans and independents in the 2010 primary and general elections in Maricopa County (the most recent data we have available) are 25 percent and 50 percent for Democrats; 42 percent and 61 percent for Republicans; and 8 percent and 34 percent for independents, respectively. In short, independents exert almost no impact on primary elections and a much-reduced voice, compared with Republicans and Democrats, in general elections.

We asked independents about their prior voting patterns to understand why these rates are so low. Some did not vote because they did not like the options, so they chose to express their displeasure by not voting at all. Regarding the primaries, however, some stated that because it takes time for them to research, they prefer to wait until the general election, which they viewed as more important. But perhaps the most telling finding is that many did not realize that independents could participate in Republican or Democratic primary elections, even though they have been legally able to do so since 1998.

Other independents simply do not want to vote in the primaries. Some said they would feel like they were cheating if they vote and do not actually support that party’s candidate:

“Democrats should pick the Democratic (candidate) – I mean, it's their party. They should pick it. Republicans, same way. I don't belong to either one of them, so I shouldn't have a say in that.”

Independents who did vote in the primaries said they strategically placed their votes where they would make the most impact, predominantly in the Republican primary. Consider these examples:

“If I have a liberal perspective or a Democratic kind of perspective in one thing – in one area – the party will probably put someone forward that I probably like would be okay with. And so if I can vote in like the Republican primary and pick and choose maybe someone who I might not align as much with but would still agree more with that person rather than one of the other people, I would like that vote to count in like the group I'd necessarily wouldn't have all the agreement with, if that makes sense.”

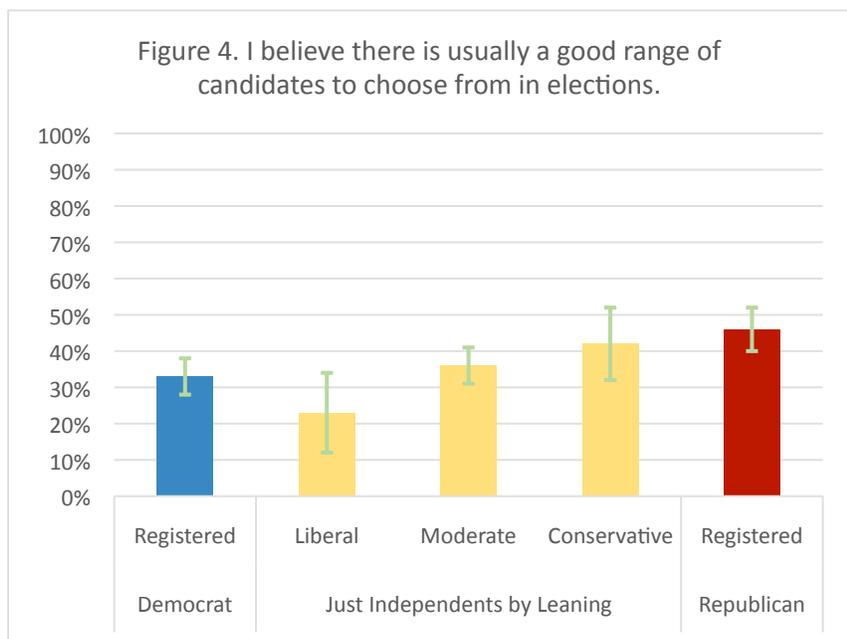
“I've changed party to vote for someone I didn't want to win, so I could vote for them so I knew they would lose in the general and my person would win.”

As Figure 4 shows, the majority are dissatisfied with the range of candidates from which to choose, and some are dealing with it by voting strategically – or not voting at all.

Independents in Arizona do not come together, and in fact may not be able to come together with so many divergent views to form a unified bloc. As a result, they have less influence than the other parties in impacting election results.

One participant stated:

“Independent is such a big chunk of the voting block that if we can organize it, we would swing either vote. But, because we vote spread it out to the people that we want, it's a balancing act every election.”



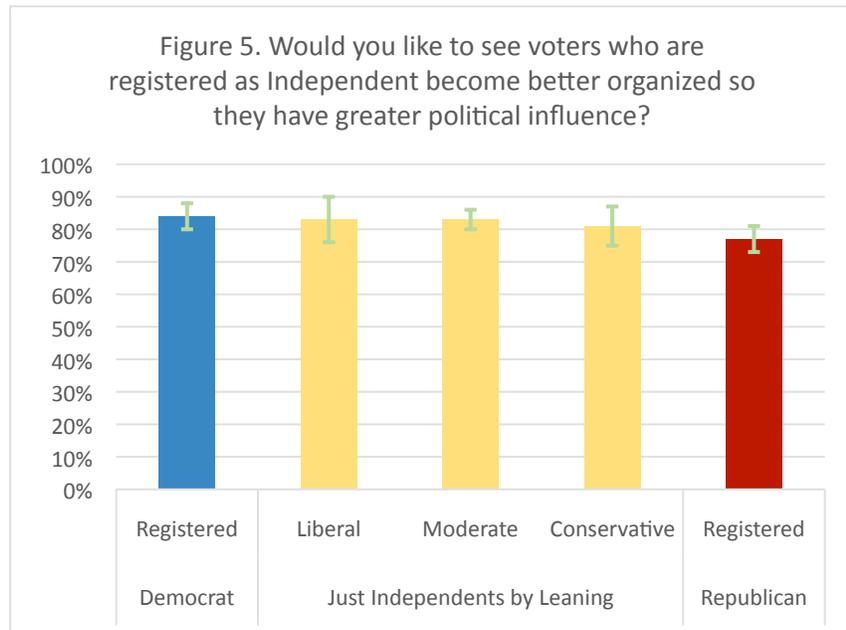
Source: ASU Morrison Institute for Public Policy

When asked their thoughts about organizing a formal Independent party, most in the focus group were against it, stating they don't like to be defined and they were purposely "not part of a club."

In other words:
Independent means independent.

Interestingly, however, across the board, survey respondents wanted to see Independents organize (Figure 5), pointing to the fact that there is dissatisfaction among voters in every party.

Voters are looking for more options. They just don't know how to access them.



Who is Arizona's Independent Voter?

Conclusion: 'We're not a party. We're a mindset.'

So, who is the Arizona independent voter? The truth is, there is no such political animal because there is no "typical" independent voter. As a singular unit, he or she doesn't exist and it would be virtually impossible – or more accurately, misleading – to "create" the prototypical Arizona independent voter.

Many independents reject the two major parties, although many still choose to vote along the party lines that reflect their political ideology or leanings. It is clear that the independent voter category is comprised of a wide variety of political opinions, beliefs and values. They range from very conservative supporters, to some of Arizona's most liberal voters, to some of Arizona's most libertarian citizens – and everything in between. Their views may vary from the predominant party platforms, but they also may vary from each other, as well.

There is no cohesive voice or voting bloc. Perhaps one independent voter said it best: "We're not a party. We're a mindset."

In fact, many independent voters bristle at the mere suggestion that independents perhaps should form a singular party for maximum impact. Most independents say they like to vote on candidates and issues on a case-by-case basis, and despite many being on one extreme end of the political spectrum or the other, many still consider themselves "moderate" although their viewpoints on issues would suggest otherwise.

But that is not to say there isn't a "moderate" undercurrent to the majority of independents, because there is. The bulk of independents reside somewhere in the middle on the political spectrum on many issues, meaning they have the most power to perhaps affect the outcome of a political contest.

In other words, it's not a conservative independent automatically cancelling out the vote of liberal independent (and vice versa) in a one-to-one exchange ratio. Instead, it's the large contingent of moderate independents that leans either left or right on a particular issue or candidate that determines how the overall independent vote goes in an election. They wind up tipping the scale among all independents, albeit in an unpredictable manner that largely depends on their actual turnout at the polls and not just their opinions on a survey or poll regarding Arizona most pressing issues.

Although they are largely moderate, independent voters like to see themselves as agents of change, a viable alternative to the gridlocked polarization and what they see as the partisanship failure of the two-party system. But data underscore the fact few independents vote in the general election – and alarmingly fewer still vote in the primary, when many of Arizona's elections are essentially decided.

Independent voters may believe they are better informed than their partisan counterparts, yet many do not even know they can vote in the primary election. Restrictive earlier laws regarding independents and primaries, and presidential preference elections (where only party members can choose a party's nominee), only add to their confusion.

For independent voters – again, by sheer numbers the largest "party" in Arizona – to have a greater impact on elections there must be a change so that their actions speak louder than their words. And that means voting, something registered independents have failed to do on a large enough scale and in a consistent enough manner to be a bona fide game-changer in Arizona politics. But if Arizona independent voters do become frequent voters, a more moderate voice could make itself heard loud and clear on Arizona's political landscape.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY RESULTS

This section provides a broad overview of how Arizona voters view Arizona’s political landscape and current policy issues. The survey results of 2,000 Arizona voters is organized by issue area and analyzed according to political affiliation and political leaning. While state spending and education lead the list of greatest concern, their opinions about state government and social issues vary widely compared with their more liberal and more conservative counterparts. While liberal and conservative independents tended to be similar to Democrat and Republican responses, respectively, moderate independents continue to show unpredictable responses.

Campaign Funding

One of the most impactful changes in political campaigns over the past few years revolves around campaign contributions, limits on contributions and campaign contribution disclosures. When asked whether they support or oppose campaign contribution limits, more than eight in 10 Arizona voters (80 percent) support campaign contribution limits including 73 percent of Republicans, 82 percent of Democrats and 85 percent of moderate independents.

Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of registered voters (87 percent) favor “disclosing the source of campaign contributions – who is giving money to candidates and political causes,” including 88 percent of Republicans, 82 percent of Democrats and 88 percent of moderate independents.

And, finally, when asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement “all contributions to political campaigns should be made public,” an overwhelming 95 percent agree. As the following table shows, agreement is universal, regardless of political affiliation.

All contributions to political campaigns should be made public.

All registered voters	95.1%
Democrats	95.1%
All Liberals	97.9%
Liberal independents	95.8%
Moderate independents	96.3%
All moderates	95.4%
Conservative independents	94.7%
Republicans	94.2%
All conservatives	93.0%

Better Elections

There is a decided split, politically, over whether the government should do more to increase voter turnout. Only half of Republicans (49 percent) and conservative independents (51 percent) favor the government doing more, while 85 percent of Democrats, 87 percent of liberal independents and 72 percent of moderate independents favor such an effort.

There is strong support among voters (86 percent) for the government to provide unbiased, non-partisan information to voters about candidates and issues on the ballot, including 78 percent of Republicans, 90 percent of Democrats and 90 percent of moderate independents.

There also is strong support (82 percent) for an independent agency to oversee and enforce campaign finance laws. There is strong bi-partisan support: 76 percent of Republicans, 87 percent of Democrats and 84 percent of moderate independents favor such oversight and enforcement by an independent agency.

Election Structure

Based on the research findings, the vast majority of Arizona voters favor changes in the current election structure.

Respondents were asked whether they would “support primary elections where all candidates for an elected office are included on the same ballot, without identifying their political party.” While there is some split by political affiliation, 58 percent of all registered voters would support such a ballot change. Republicans oppose this change by a narrow margin (46 percent favor the change), while Democrats (58 percent) and moderate independents (72 percent) favor it.

There is overwhelming support (85 percent) among registered Arizona voters to allow “all registered voters, including independents, to vote for any candidate on the ballot, rather than just those from a single political party.” Support comes from all political persuasions – 73 percent of Republicans, 90 percent of Democrats and 94 percent of moderate independents.

Voters also “support primary elections in which the two candidates receiving the largest number of votes, regardless of their political affiliation, face off in the general election” (82 percent of all registered voters, 78 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Democrats and 87 percent of moderate independents).

Arizona voters appear eager to see more “middle-of-the-road” candidates in public office. Even among Democrats (83 percent) and Republicans (67 percent), the vast majority would like to see more middle-of-the-road candidates in public office.

I would like to see more "middle-of-the-road" candidates elected to public office

All registered voters	80.3%
Democrats	83.3%
Liberal independents	92.4%
Moderate independents	92.3%
Conservative independents	72.3%
Republicans	67.4%

Education

“All things education” elicits strong feelings among moderate independents. Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with each of the following education related statements. In all cases, moderate independents show strong support for education. Their responses track much closer to the opinions of Democrats/liberal independents than to the opinions of Republicans/conservative independents. More than three quarters of moderate independents favor raising taxes rather than reducing school funding, would be willing to pay higher state taxes to improve Arizona’s public schools and favor state funding for full-day kindergarten. Each of these opinions tracks more closely with Democrats/liberal independents than with Republicans/conservative independents.

I prefer that Arizona reduce funding for state services such as public schools, universities and public health rather than raise taxes.

Agree

All registered voters	23.5%
Democrats	16.2%
Liberal independents	2.7%
Moderate independents	15.4%
Conservative independents	50.4%
Republicans	35.6%

I would be willing to pay higher state taxes to improve Arizona's public schools

Agree

All registered voters	65.8%
Democrats	84.4%
All Liberals	91.4%
Liberal independents	86.2%
Moderate independents	77.4%
All moderates	70.6%
Conservative independents	49.7%
Republicans	43.3%
All conservatives	42.0%

Full-day kindergarten should be fully funded by the state

All registered voters	76.7%
Democrats	94.9%
Liberal independents	83.1%
Moderate independents	81.1%
Conservative independents	71.1%
Republicans	58.8%

Social Issues

While six in 10 registered Arizona voters believe “climate change is caused, primarily, by human activity,” it is an issue that divides the public – 85 percent of Democrats agree this is true, only one-third of Republicans agree. That’s one of the largest disagreements between political parties among the issues tested. Moderate independents fall between these two extremes, with two-thirds agreeing with the statement. Their position is closer to the Democratic/liberal independent position than the Republican/conservative independents, but their position does not align entirely with either liberals or conservatives.

Climate change is caused, primarily, by human activity

All registered voters	59.5%
Democrats	84.0%
Liberal independents	89.4%
Moderate independents	66.3%
Conservative independents	45.6%
Republicans	32.9%

The vast majority of Arizona voters, 83 percent, “believe the state has a responsibility to help the poor,” including more than 90 percent of Democrats and liberal independents and 84 percent or moderate independents. Conservative independents (71 percent) and Republicans (75 percent) also agree, in large numbers, although are less enthusiastic than their more liberal counterparts, that it is the state’s responsibility to help the poor.

I believe the state has a responsibility to help the poor

All registered voters	83.0%
Democrats	93.4%
Liberal independents	97.5%
Moderate independents	83.8%
Conservative independents	70.6%
Republicans	74.5%

Immigration, deemed by voters to be among the most important issue facing Arizona, garners high interest among voters. Two-thirds of Arizona registered voters (68 percent) believe Arizona should support comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship.” Support is highest among liberal independents (93 percent) and registered Democrats (80 percent), followed by moderate independents (77 percent). Only among Republicans (46 percent) do less than 50 percent favor this plan. Again, on this issue, moderate independent voters more closely mirror Democrats/liberal independents than Republicans/conservative independents, although more than six in 10 conservative independents also favor this plan.

I believe Arizona should support comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship

All registered voters	67.6%
Democrats	80.4%
Liberal independents	93.3%
Moderate independents	76.9%
Conservative independents	62.4%
Republicans	45.5%

Only 42 percent of registered Arizona voters feel “Arizona’s gun laws should be more restrictive than they are.” While slightly more than seven in 10 Democrats and liberal independents favor more restrictive gun laws, only 16 percent of Republicans, 31 percent of conservative independents and 40 percent of moderate independents agree.

Arizona's gun laws should be more restrictive than they are

All registered voters	42.0%
Democrats	71.8%
Liberal independents	73.0%
Moderate independents	39.5%
Conservative independents	30.7%
Republicans	16.3%

The vast majority of Arizonans oppose eliminating the death penalty, particularly conservative independents and Republicans. While moderate independents are not quite as definitive on this issue, they align more closely with those favoring the death penalty than those opposing it. Even among Democrats, retaining the death penalty is favored.

The death penalty should be eliminated

All registered voters	28.9%
Democrats	46.2%
Liberal independents	65.0%
Moderate independents	29.2%
Conservative independents	16.0%
Republicans	12.5%

Three-quarters of registered Arizona voters support women’s rights to abortion services. Liberal independents (99 percent), Democrats (82 percent) and moderate independents (82 percent) overwhelmingly favor women’s rights to abortion services. Even among Republicans, the party that has most vocally opposed abortion, six in 10 supports the right to abortion services.

I support women's rights to abortion services.

All registered voters	74.3%
Democrats	82.4%
Liberal independents	98.9%
Moderate independents	82.1%
Conservative independents	63.7%
Republicans	59.9%

Even though the U.S. Supreme Court has settled the legality of gay marriage, there remains significant resistance among Republicans – only 47 percent agree “marriage should be legal for any consenting adult, regardless of their sexual orientation.” Moderate independents align more closely with Democrats on this issue, more than eight in 10 of both political groups favors legal marriage status for any consenting adult, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Marriage should be legal for any consenting adult, regardless of their sexual orientation

All registered voters	69.1%
Democrats	82.0%
All Liberals	91.8%
Liberal independents	97.9%
Moderate independents	82.6%
All moderates	77.4%
Conservative independents	53.7%
Republicans	46.6%
All conservatives	40.2%

The issue of states’ rights is a clear point of departure among political groups. Conservative independents (94 percent) and Republicans (91 percent) almost unanimously favor “continuing to challenge the federal government over states’ rights. Democrats (54 percent) and, particularly, liberal independents (33 percent) are far less supportive.

I believe Arizona should continue to challenge the federal government over states' rights

All registered voters	73.5%
Democrats	53.8%
Liberal independents	32.5%
Moderate independents	75.7%
Conservative independents	94.4%
Republicans	90.7%

State Government

As previous polls have determined, voters are less than enamored with Arizona government. It is, of course, understandable that the party out of power – in Arizona’s case, the Democrats – would be dissatisfied with state government. It is somewhat surprising, however, that members of the party in power, the Republicans, also indicate serious concerns. As the following table indicates, less than one-third of registered voters are “satisfied with the way things are going in Arizona state government,” including 43 percent of Republicans, 40 percent of conservative independents and 31 percent of moderate independents.

I am generally satisfied with the way things are going in Arizona state government.

All registered voters	31.2%
Democrats	18.8%
Liberal independents	13.9%
Moderate independents	30.8%
Conservative independents	39.5%
Republicans	42.5%

Arizona voters show little confidence in their legislators “effectively solving the budget problems facing the state.” Only three in 10 registered voters agree they can accomplish this task, including only 35 percent of Republicans, 32 percent of conservative independents and 25 percent of moderate independents. Again, while it might be expected that members of the minority party indicate dissatisfaction with the majority party, it is surprising that so few members of the majority party show confidence in the Legislature’s ability to solve the state’s budget problems.

*I am confident the Legislature will effectively solve
the budget problems facing the state*

All registered voters	29.9%
Democrats	29.4%
Liberal independents	19.6%
Moderate independents	24.5%
Conservative independents	31.8%
Republicans	35.0%

Two-thirds of voters believe “the state Legislature has the wrong priorities.” Predictably, Democrats and liberal independents are most likely to feel this way, 80 percent and 83 percent, respectively. The majority of moderate (77 percent) and even conservative independents (61 percent) also believe the Legislature has the wrong priorities. While it is certainly possible, if not likely, that the priorities Republicans and conservative independents want are very different from those liberal independents and Democrats want, it is clear neither is satisfied with the Legislature’s current priorities.

I believe the state Legislature has the wrong priorities

All registered voters	68.3%
Democrats	79.5%
Liberal independents	82.8%
Moderate independents	77.0%
Conservative independents	60.7%
Republicans	50.3%

More than eight in 10 voters believe “there is too much partisan conflict at the Arizona state capitol.” Members of all political groups analyzed agree, in large numbers.

There is too much partisan conflict at the Arizona state capitol.

All registered voters	81.5%
Democrats	84.7%
Liberal independents	84.4%
Moderate independents	85.8%
Conservative independents	81.7%
Republicans	74.5%

Only 41 percent of voters believe that, “for the most part my elected representatives reflect my values.” Democrats (26 percent) and liberal independents (13 percent) feel, decidedly, that their representatives do not reflect their values. Moderate independents are somewhat more satisfied (39 percent), but the proportion is still below 50 percent. Predictably conservative independents and Republicans feel more positively toward their representatives.

For the most part my elected representatives reflect my values.

All registered voters	41.2%
Democrats	25.7%
Liberal independents	13.1%
Moderate independents	38.6%
Conservative independents	60.9%
Republicans	57.0%

I believe the Governor is providing good leadership in formulating state public policy.

All registered voters	41.7%
Democrats	21.4%
Liberal independents	10.2%
Moderate independents	37.0%
Conservative independents	55.7%
Republicans	62.9%

Arizona voters are less than enthusiastic about how the state runs its programs. Less than half (44 percent) believe the state does “a good job” – including one-quarter of Democrats and liberal independents. Moderate independents (46 percent) are less negative while conservative independents (51 percent) and Republicans (61 percent) react more positively. However, considering that state government is dominated by Republicans, their reaction appears to be less than enthusiastic.

I think Arizona state government generally does a good job running its programs.

All registered voters	43.9%
Democrats	25.9%
Liberal independents	23.5%
Moderate independents	46.2%
Conservative independents	50.6%
Republicans	60.7%

It comes as little surprise that independents feel “the two-party system has outlived its usefulness” (more than eight in 10 of all independents), but it is somewhat surprising that 66 percent of Democrats and 55 percent of Republicans feel the same way.

The two-party system has outlived its usefulness

All registered voters	67.1%
Democrats	66.4%
Liberal independents	84.8%
Moderate independents	80.0%
Conservative independents	81.4%
Republicans	54.7%

Voters are very clear: They do not approve of the Legislature trying to use voter-protected funds for purposes other than that approved by voters. There is no variation by party affiliation. In fact, only one in five approves of this practice.

If the Legislature is experiencing budget problems lawmakers should be allowed to use funds that are voter protected

All registered voters	20.4%
Democrats	21.8%
Liberal independents	22.3%
Moderate independents	22.8%
Conservative independents	20.7%
Republicans	18.4%

Slightly less than four in 10 registered Arizona voters (38 percent) “believe there is usually a good range of candidates to choose from in election.” Not even half of any of the political groups analyzed felt there was a good range of candidates. While there is some variation among groups, there appears to be general dissatisfaction among voter about their choices at the polls.

I believe there is usually a good range of candidates to choose from in elections

All registered voters	37.7%
Democrats	33.0%
Liberal independents	24.6%
Moderate independents	36.2%
Conservative independents	39.5%
Republicans	45.7%

Exactly half of all Arizona registered voters believe the power of state government should be reduced. With the exception of liberal independents, each political group analyzed is within 4 percentage points of 50 percent.

I believe the power of state government should be reduced

All registered voters	50.0%
Democrats	54.2%
Liberal independents	35.6%
Moderate independents	47.7%
Conservative independents	49.4%
Republicans	47.7%

More than eight in 10 voters believe they pay “their fair share.” This belief is consistent across all political groups analyzed.

Considering the benefits my family and I receive from the state of Arizona, I think I pay my fair share

All registered voters	83.4%
Democrats	81.1%
Liberal independents	76.9%
Moderate independents	86.2%
Conservative independents	88.4%
Republicans	84.8%

The majority of Arizona voters do not believe that everyone in the state is overtaxed. Slightly less than four in 10 registered voters believe “everyone should pay lower taxes than they currently pay.” Even among conservative independents (48 percent) and Republicans (49 percent) only about half believe everyone in the state is overtaxed. Considering the fervor politicians have built around taxes, it is a bit surprising there was not a bigger support for a lowered tax structure.

Everyone should pay lower taxes than they currently pay

All registered voters	38.4%
Democrats	33.5%
Liberal independents	16.6%
Moderate independents	31.9%
Conservative independents	48.1%
Republicans	49.0%

However, seven in 10 Arizona voters believe Arizona must “continue to reduce its overall spending,” including more than eight in 10 Republicans and conservative independents and 76 percent of moderate independents.

*The state of Arizona needs to continue
to reduce its overall spending.*

All registered voters	69.2%
Democrats	52.0%
Liberal independents	33.7%
Moderate independents	75.6%
Conservative independents	85.9%
Republicans	81.1%

While only 31 percent of registered Arizona voters are generally satisfied with the way things are going with state government, nearly twice that many (59 percent) are generally satisfied “with the way things are going in their local community’s government. Clearly voters’ opinions of the operation of state government are problematic, considering their opinion of their local government. This comparison allows the reader to recognize the level of dissatisfaction with Arizona state government.

*I am generally satisfied with the way things are going
in my local community's government*

All registered voters	59.3%
Democrats	51.8%
Liberal independents	48.2%
Moderate independents	60.0%
Conservative independents	57.0%
Republicans	67.6%

Methodology

Survey data were collected by telephone survey between May 19, 2015 and July 21, 2015. Respondents were randomly selected from the registered voter rolls – 410 Democrats, 400 Republicans and 1,200 non-party declared (independents). Interviews averaged 12 minutes in length.

The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for independents; plus or minus 5 percentage points for Republicans; and plus or minus 4 percentage points for Democrats.

Four focus groups with a total of 33 independent voters were conducted on Sept. 29, 2015 and Sept. 30, 2015. Two sessions were held each day. Focus group participants were randomly recruited from the independent voter rolls. Focus groups were balanced by sex and age.

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