



Independent Voters in Closed Primary States Are Disenfranchising Themselves and Forcing Parties Towards Their Bases

Reform Elections Now is against closed primaries. Since most elections are decided in the primaries, closed primaries disenfranchise independent voters. By the time independents get to vote in the final election, the outcome is usually decided.

New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, New Mexico, Oregon, and Nevada have closed primaries. According to “Sabato’s Crystal Ball” at the UVA Center for Politics, these states have 9,592,762 registered independent voters (21.0%) and 1,092,981 other voters (2.4%) who cannot vote in the major party primaries.

In Oregon, 31.4% of voters are independents, exceeding the number of Republicans. In Florida, New York, Maryland, New Mexico, Nebraska, and Delaware, independent voters exceed 20% of voters.

| State | Total | Dem. | Rep. | Ind. | Other | % Ind. | % Other |
|-------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|--------|---------|
| DE | 692,381 | 326,875 | 192,914 | 155,790 | 12,807 | 22.50% | 1.85% |
| FL | 12,875,998 | 4,776,092 | 4,547,635 | 3,472,684 | 79,587 | 26.97% | 0.62% |
| KY | 3,372,372 | 1,683,898 | 1,398,953 | 278,450 | 11,071 | 8.26% | 0.33% |
| MD | 3,931,730 | 2,149,873 | 1,009,765 | 799,411 | 62,681 | 20.33% | 1.59% |
| NE | 1,199,474 | 335,691 | 577,390 | 252,898 | 13,495 | 21.08% | 1.13% |
| NY | 11,303,448 | 5,621,811 | 2,632,381 | 2,387,443 | 651,853 | 21.12% | 5.77% |
| NM | 1,239,252 | 568,512 | 378,117 | 270,667 | 21,946 | 21.84% | 1.77% |
| OR | 2,681,654 | 956,149 | 700,110 | 841,801 | 183,594 | 31.39% | 6.85% |
| PA | 8,460,068 | 4,042,928 | 3,227,611 | 1,133,582 | 55,947 | 13.40% | 0.66% |
| Total | 45,756,377 | 20,461,829 | 14,664,876 | 9,592,726 | 1,092,981 | 20.96% | 2.39% |

Many other states, like Alaska, Connecticut, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Utah, have restrictions that may also ban independents from participating in primaries.

While we want to see closed primaries opened, we also want to ask registered independents: **“Why are you giving up your right to vote?”**

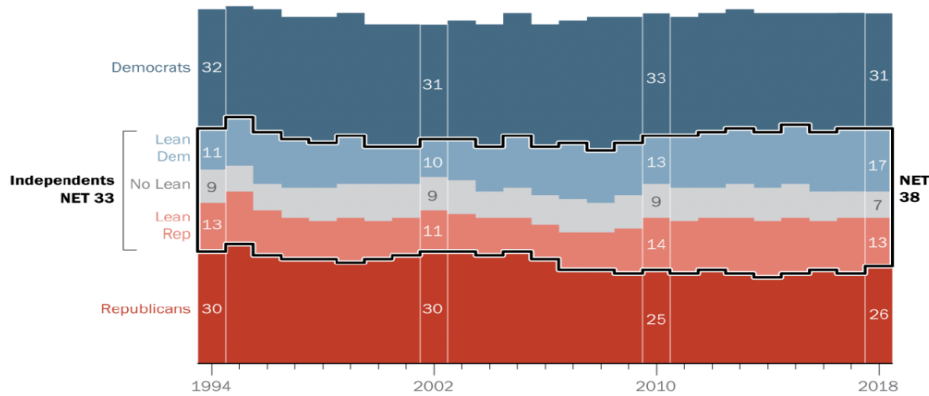
Most Independents Actually Lean to One Party or The Other

Some people are truly independent, but most independents actually lean in the direction of one party or the other, and on major issues do not differ substantially from their registered brethren.

According to the Pew Research Center, 38% of Americans are independent. Of those, 17% lean Democratic, 13% lean Republican, and 7% do not lean toward either party.

Independents outnumber Republicans and Democrats, but few are truly independent

% who identify as ...



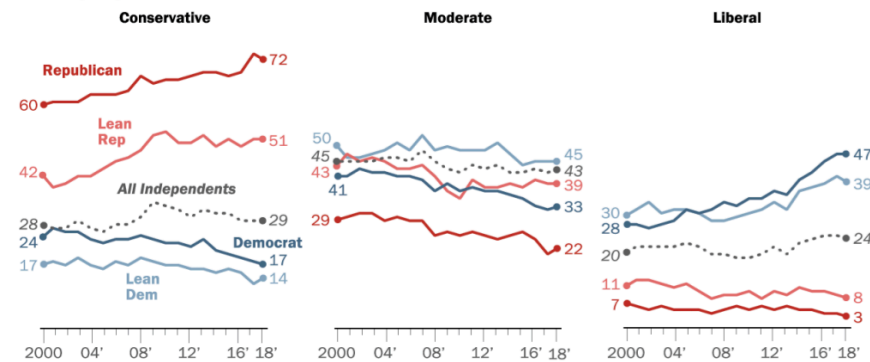
Note: Other party/Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data (U.S. adults).

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If one analyzes the views taken by these independents, Republican “leaners” tend to look like moderate Republicans, while Democratic “leaners” tend to look like moderate Democrats.

Increasing shares of Republicans and GOP leaners describe their views as conservative; more Democrats and Democratic leaners say they are liberal

% who say they are ...



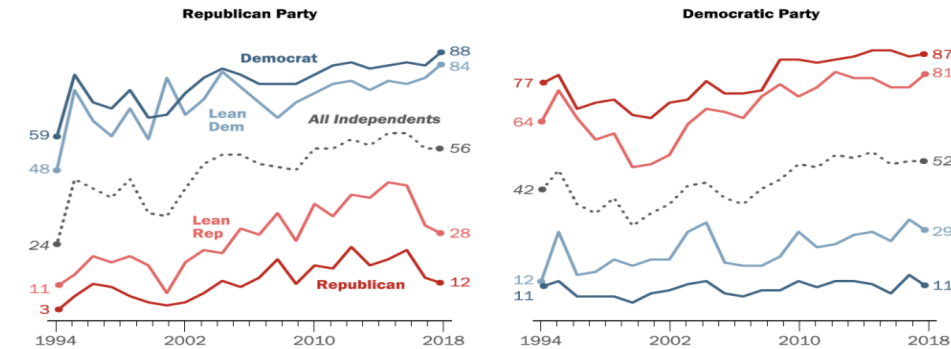
Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data (U.S. adults).

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The “leaners” tend to feel much the same way about the opposing party as do their registered brethren. Republican “leaners” do not like the Democratic Party, while Democratic “leaners” do not like the Republican Party.

Among both partisans and leaners, unfavorable views of the opposing party have increased

% with an unfavorable view of the ...

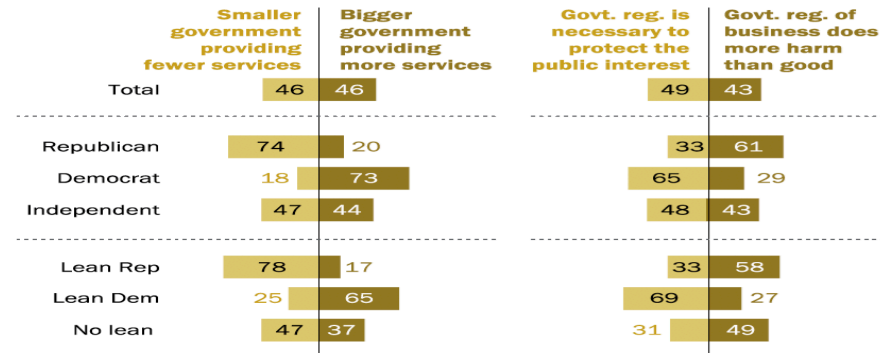


Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data (U.S. adults).
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“Leaners” also tend to reflect their registered brethren on political issues. For example, Republican “leaners” tend to support smaller government and less regulation in much the same proportion as do registered Republicans, while Democratic “leaners” tend to support bigger government and more regulation in much the same proportion as do registered Democrats. The same conditions apply to other political issues.

Independents divided in opinions about the size of government, government regulation of business

% who prefer ...



Notes: Don't know responses not shown. For government size, small sample of non-leaning independents [N=93].
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted April 25-May 1, 2018, and Sept. 18-24, 2018.

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By failing to register with the party to which they lean, independents push these parties to their bases.

A significant amount of the polarization in U.S. politics is caused by Democratic and Republican “leaners” who register as independents. According to Pew, Republican “leaners” act like moderate Republicans,

while Democratic “leaners” act like moderate Democrats. If these people joined their parties in closed primary states, they would likely pull their party towards the center. Without these more moderate voters, the parties tend to cater to their more extreme bases.

- Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez defeated Joe Crowley in the primary in the 14th Congressional District of New York. However, AOC received only 15,879 votes and won by only 4,118 votes. There are 69,504 independents or non-party voters in this district. If a small percentage had registered Democrat and voted in the primary, it would have flipped the election.
- In the Florida Democratic Gubernatorial primary, the Democratic “leaners” would likely have voted for Graham, a more moderate candidate, over Gillum. If Graham had won the nomination, she would have had an excellent chance of defeating DeSantis.

While **Reform Elections Now** strongly believes that states should open primaries, we do not believe the politicians in these states will quickly cede their power. Until parties are willing to open the primary process. Independent voters should ask themselves if being independent is really in their best interest.

If the independent voters in states like New York, Pennsylvania, and Florida registered with the parties to which they “lean”, these parties and the political dialog could become much more moderate and civil.

We urge independent voters to consider registering in the party to which they lean in order to make that party more moderate and more responsive to the needs of the voters.

Peter J. Siris
March 20, 2020