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Authors
Alvarez, R. Michael
Sinclair, J. Andrew

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Research Article

R. Michael Alvarez and J. Andrew Sinclair*

Who Are California's "Decline to State" Voters?

Abstract: California has a large, and growing, number of voters who decline to affiliate with a major political party. This study uses a large sample survey from the 2010 election cycle to ask: who are these "decline to state" voters? This article explores their positions on issues, their attitudes toward parties, their opinions on government, their political knowledge and involvement, their 2010 voting preferences, and their voting behavior in general. We find the data supports a nuanced view of California's "DTS" voters – in some ways more like "independents" and in other ways strikingly partisan.

Keywords: California politics; independent voters; decline to state; DTS

***Corresponding author: J. Andrew Sinclair**, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA, USA, e-mail: jsinclair08@gmail.com
R. Michael Alvarez, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA, USA

1 Introduction

In June 2012, the unaffiliated voters of California had a new opportunity to influence politics through the "top-two" primary. These unaffiliated (or "non-partisan" or "decline to state") voters are widely assumed to be "independents", and under the new law, they could play a central role in selecting candidates. As politicians and pundits examine the results of this new system though, misunderstanding the unaffiliated voters will muddle the picture. In this article, we argue that these voters should not be treated as uniform group of political independents.

Assumptions about the unaffiliated voters frame our expectations for the new primary, passed as Proposition 14 in 2010. The *Los Angeles Times*, in an endorsement of this Proposition, postulated, "It's a route to more pragmatic officeholders and elections controlled more by voters than by political parties – which is why the Democratic and Republican parties both oppose it so

adamantly, and why it would be a positive move for California".[1] Under the new law, all voters, regardless of party, are eligible to vote for any candidate, regardless of the candidate's party preference.[2] The two candidates with the most votes advance to the general election, even if both are Democrats or Republicans. If the unaffiliated are independents, then they may compel existing politicians to move to the center, encourage more moderate candidates to run, and generally increase the probability that a winning candidate is close to the theoretical median voter.

The unaffiliated voters draw on their numbers for their supposed strength. Although most Californians are registered Democrats or Republicans, a large and growing number "decline to state".[3] In 2010, about 20% of the state's registered voters did so, 3.5 million "DTS" voters in all.[4] Figure 1 shows these trends; while third party registration has remained relatively flat, both Republican and Democratic registration have yielded ground to DTS over time.[5] Spread throughout the state, these voters represent a meaningful portion of the electorate in just about every election.[6] The number of the DTS voters and the structure of the new primary makes "who are the decline to state voters?" a critical question for the future of California politics.

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1 See "*Time*s endorsements". June 8, 2010. Accessed online May 20, 2012, at: http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jun/08/opinion/la-ed-endorse-20100608-16.

2 Under the old "semiclosed primary" in use from 2002 to 2010, if the parties allowed them to do so DTS voters could choose to vote in one party's primary. Although both the Democratic and Republican parties in 2010 allowed DTS voters to select their ballot, only 40% of the DTS voters *who bothered to vote* ended up voting on a party ballot. See http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/sov/2010-primary/pdf/04-voter-stats-by-county-party.pdf. The DTS ballot still contained elections for nonpartisan local offices, ballot measures, and so on.

3 The 2011 version of the voter registration form reads: "Please enter the name of a political party with which you wish to register. If you do not wish to register with any party, enter 'Decline to State' in the space provided". For an example of the form, please see https://www.sos.ca.gov/nvrc/fedform/App_PDF/english_blank.pdf.

4 Aggregate state data are available in the *Statement of Vote*, issued after every election by the Secretary of State's office. Here we use the 2010 data as that is the election when we collected our survey data. According to the most recent report on registration, January 3, 2012, 21.24% of the state's voters are registered as DTS, 3,617,466 registrants of the state's 23,645,811 registered voters.

5 Here we define "third-party" voters as those registered with parties other than the Democrats or Republicans.

6 In all but six California counties, between 14% and 22% of the registered voters have declined to state. Only Fresno County has <14%; San Francisco County has the highest proportion at 30%.

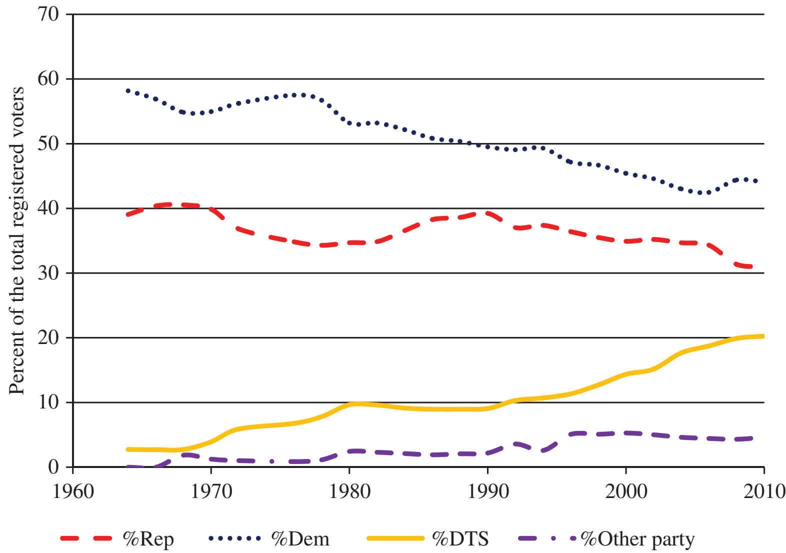

Figure 1: Changes in California voter registration over time.

The promised advantages of the new primary may well come to pass. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in May 2012 that, for the first time in recent memory, some Republican candidates for office were not signing a "no-tax" pledge; in their analysis, the candidates faced an "incentive to move toward the political middle" (Mishak and York 2012). Regardless of how well the new primary fulfills its "pragmatic" promise, productive analysis of the beneficiaries of the new primary hinges on a solid understanding of facts. Incorrectly ascribing the success – or failure – of the new system to "independent" Californians could well be the basis for unfortunate future political miscalculation. With the current conventional wisdom, fueled by academic literature, this sort of misunderstanding is quite likely.

Creating a more nuanced understanding of California's unaffiliated voters has advantages beyond just improving our understanding of Californians. An article in *USA Today* from December 2011 observed that unaffiliated voters – although this article too makes the simplification to call them "independent" – had increased their party registration share in 18 of the 28 states that have partisan registration (Wolf 2011). A study of this type provides a broad warning against considering these voters as an "independent" voting bloc in all of these states. The results of this study also provide an opportunity to further comment broadly on the definition of independence itself.

2 Motivation

The conventional wisdom in California – "unaffiliated voters are independents" – is best represented in the academic literature by Baldassare (2000, 2002), of the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). In his view, unaffiliated voters are independents by definition and he asserts that "many independent voters in California are...truly independent" (2000, p. 63).[7] He writes, "Independent voters have become not only a significant group but also one that shows no signs of having any partisan loyalty" (2000, p. 63). In 2002, Baldassare made a similar statement, writing, "The Democrats, however, should not feel that confident about their newly found status as the dominant force in state politics. Their success has depended on their ability to corral the large and growing number of independent voters in the electorate. These are fickle voters who do not hold allegiance to any political party" (Baldassare 2002, p. 225).

The positions taken by Baldassare make sense given his data and his assumption that declining to state is equivalent to being politically independent. The question used on the PPIC surveys dictates this approach: the PPIC surveys ask about party registration, not "party identification".[8] This approach is problematic in two ways. First, respondents may not correctly recall their registration status; if these mistakes are prevalent among DTS voters who are truly partisan (as we argue), a researcher will believe that a biased subpopulation reflects the views of all DTS voters. Second, the question may be insufficiently discriminating.[9] Some of the existing literature, discussed here, suggests that a more detailed question would produce different results.

Our survey data are unusual because we have registration status from the voter file as well as self-professed party identification. The "party identification"

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7 Defining independents: "Over the past three decades", he writes, "there has been a steady growth of independent voters in California – people who register to vote but do not choose a party affiliation" (2000, pp. 61). On "truly independent": In this specific passage, he draws upon the percentages of "independent" voters that support Republican and Democratic candidates from 1992 to 1998. The specific percentages mentioned in this passage actually come from a *Los Angeles Times* poll and not the PPIC data – but he applies the results here towards an argument largely based on the PPIC data.

8 Take, for example, the November 2010 PPIC survey (available online, http://www.ppic.org/main/datadepot.asp). This survey asks: "Q47a. Are you registered as a Democrat, a Republican, another party, or as an independent? (INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT SAYS THEY ARE REGISTERED AS 'Decline to State' or 'Non-Partisan' ENTER PUNCH <4> Independent)".

9 A point presented in more detail in our discussion of the results. Some combinations of party registration and self-identification are not available in the PPIC surveys that are available in ours, even in the years when the PPIC asks some follow-up questions.

questions, made famous by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes in *The American Voter* (1960), place voters onto a seven-point spectrum from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican".[10] While their surveys allowed for several types of independents, Campbell et al. tended to combine these categories; if independents generally represented low-information and low-participation voters, as they believed, then the exact differences between these categories did not matter much. In their view, independence represented a lack of an opinion rather than a sense of impartiality. Their main insight, in any case, was that these party identification questions were strong predictors of behavior.

Keith et al. in *The Myth of the Independent Voter* (1992) agreed that the party identification questions were predictive but disagreed with the way Campbell et al. (and subsequent research) treated independents. They observed that the self-identified "independent" voters who also replied they were "closer to" either the Republicans or Democrats resembled partisans more than independents; these "leaners" were hidden partisans. In *The Myth of the Independent Voter*, the authors found that pure independents are "consistently the least interested, informed, and active of any partisan classification" while the leaning independents "display an impressive tendency to vote for the candidate of the party they feel closer to" (Keith et al. 1992, pp. 59, 64–5).

Whether or not California fits into the *Myth of the Independent Voter* framework is the subject of debate. Baldassare thought not; in direct reference to Keith et al. he writes, "such is not the case in California" (2000, p. 63). Lascher and Korey (2011) thought otherwise. Using data from the Field (or "California") Poll from 1980 to 2010, they find that "expectations based on *The Myth of the Independent Voter* hold up remarkably well when applied to early 21st century California" (2011, p. 15). Our evidence largely supports and extends that conclusion.

Lascher and Korey lamented the poor quality of the data available to them. Lascher and Korey (2011, p. 6) observed that the "Field Poll was the best option" but that there were "some problems with the data". For their own analysis, they commented that they did not have a way to weight the Field Poll data, and so the analysis is "subject to both random and systematic error". Additionally, only two Field Polls with the party identification questions were available since 2006. The weaknesses with their data stemmed from having to choose from existing data sets. They too looked at the PPIC data and made similar criticisms as we do here,

10 The categories are strong Democrat, weak Democrat, leaning Democrat, true independent, leaning Republican, weak Republican, and strong Republican. These categories are in wide use in political science research.

informing their choice to use the Field Poll instead. The major point they make, though, is that they were "unaware of any research that validates the PPIC questions as appropriate measures of party identification" (Korey and Lascher 2010, p. 6). The advantage of our study, with the twin measures of party affiliation, is that we further Lascher and Korey's work with better data.

We want to address the basic question raised by the conflict in the literature: who are the unaffiliated voters? To address this, we examine the evidence for six different hypotheses. The first expectation is that many DTS voters will come from demographic groups left out of mainstream politics. The second expectation is that DTS voters are policy moderates. The third is that few DTS voters will identify with a party; that is, that they are indeed "independents" as Baldasssare claims. The fourth expectation is that DTS voters will be suspicious of government. The fifth is that DTS voters are poorly informed and little involved. The sixth expectation is that the DTS voters will not have behaved as a single voting bloc in the 2010 election. Additionally, we will conduct a multivariate analysis on what issues, controlling for a number of other factors, explain why some DTS voters report always voting for Democrats or Republicans.

In the next section, we discuss the survey data that we collected in 2010 to test these expectations. Then we present a variety of analyses that test our expectations, and we conclude with a discussion of the implications of our results for both the literature and for our understanding of contemporary California politics.

3 The Data

The unique large sample and mixed-mode survey enables us to have a great deal of confidence in our results. The survey took place before the November 2010 general election in California, from mid-September to early October. Our survey was conducted in two parts: an Internet survey, administered by YouGov/Polimetrix, and a telephone survey administered by Interviewing Service of America (ISA). Combining both surveys, we have a total of 2015 DTS voters. For the online component, Polimetrix provided 1000 DTS voters from their panel.[11] For the telephone survey, ISA conducted 800 landline interviews, 115 landline Spanish language interviews, and 100 cell phone interviews.

11 We also had 1000 registered Democrats and 1000 registered Republicans at the same time, but this paper focuses only on the DTS registrants. A grant from The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation provided the financial support for both surveys.

To adjust for non-response bias in the telephone survey and the non-random sampling in the Internet survey, we have weighted the data to reflect the characteristics of the state DTS population. Polimetrix provided a set of weights for the Internet data; using their weights and target marginal percentages (for age, race, gender, and education) we were able to generate a comprehensive set of weights for the entire data set.[12] The results presented in the main text of the article are the weighted and pooled results from both surveys, unless otherwise noted. The two surveys used identical question wording to the extent possible across the different modes.[13]

We used a multimode survey design for a number of reasons; primarily, as DTS voters might be a hard to reach group in any case, we believed that using multiple modes would likely yield the best possible sample. The appropriate point of comparison is not a theoretical ideal (no mode effects, no selection problems, etc.) but what other data exists. The November 2008 PPIC survey forms a reasonable comparison; out of the 2502 individuals contacted by a single survey mode, only 527 individuals reported registering with a third party, as an "independent", or reported not knowing their registration.[14] In that survey, only 375 voters reported registering as an "independent".[15] With the large number (2015)

12 We constructed the weights with the following procedure: first we calculated the probability of an individual of a certain type appearing in the data by multiplying the marginal percentages together. So we would get the probability of finding a white young male with a college degree. Then we would determine the frequency such individuals occur in the data set. With those numbers, we could then generate a weight that would scale up or down the influence of these types of individuals so that the weighted data generated the original Polimetrix marginal percentages.

13 The two survey modes are not equivalent; the respondent would have a slightly different experience with the Internet survey and the phone survey. For example, the Internet respondents would see the question: "What do you think are the most important problems facing California today?" with the instruction to check all that applied, and a list. The respondent would be able to see all the alternatives at once. The telephone version asked the same question but the interviewer would read the list, with instructions to "record all mentions". So when the telephone respondent had to decide whether to identify an issue as a most important problem, the respondent did not know the total number of possible responses, the content of future responses, and so on. This is a fairly typical example of the types of differences in administration between the two surveys and may affect responses.

14 The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) generously makes their data available online; as of October 2, 2011, the November 2008 survey is accessible in http://www.ppic.org/main/dataSet.asp?i=923.

15 And this, of course, is ignoring the problem of calling DTS voters "independents" to begin with, as mentioned in the discussion in Baldassare (2000, 2002).

of DTS respondents in our survey, and the mixed mode approach, our data provides the best existing sample of DTS voters.[16]

4 Who are the DTS Voters? Descriptive Results

4.1 Demographics

We expected that many DTS voters would come from groups that may feel underrepresented by the two party system. This turned out to be only partially true. DTS voters actually come from a wide variety of backgrounds and, indeed, most DTS voters are white and male (see Table 1). They represent a reasonable cross section of ages; 27% are younger than 34 years and 32% are older than 55 years. DTS voters also span many types of education experiences, with 13% having some kind of post-graduate education, whereas 33% having at most a high school education.

The demographic diversity is also evident in the other demographic variables reported in Table 1. Roughly a third of DTS voters make under $40,000 a year and

Variable	%	Variable	%
Age 18–34 years	27.0	Income <$40,000	27.9
Age 35–54 years	41.3	Income $40–80,000	31.0
Age 55+ years	31.7	Income >$80,000	27.3
At most high school education	33.1	Missing income	13.8
Some college	31.9	Born in the USA	84.2
College education	21.8	Foreign born	15.8
Postgraduate education	13.2	Full-time employment	43.8
White	56.8	Part-time employment	16.4
Black	6.1	Not employed	38.8
Hispanic	23.7	“Other” employment	1.1
Other race	13.5	Own residence	65.4
Male	57.0	Rent residence	15.5
Female	43.0	Live otherwise	19.1

Table 1: Demographics (%) of weighted DTS voters in each category.

16 In this analysis, we do not examine potential mode effects; such results are available from the authors upon request.

a third make over $80,000. Just about 14% of DTS voters also declined to answer the income question. A number of DTS voters were born outside the USA, meeting our expectation, but the vast majority (84%) were native-born.

However, probably the most interesting demographic results are those for employment and living status. Only 44% of DTS voters reported being employed full-time in 2010 and 39% said they were not employed. This can be a bit misleading though, because "not employed" also includes retired people, students, and stay-at-home parents. (For example, of the unemployed, 19% of males were between the ages of 35 and 54 years; in contrast, 52% were older than 55 years.) Additionally, a surprisingly large number of respondents, 19%, indicated that they neither owned nor rented their residence. This residence status is highly dependent on age; of those that neither owned nor rented, 43% were between the ages of 18 and 34 years.

The percentages displayed in Table 1 reflect the weighted data from our sample, using the weights we constructed for this article. The variables on the left hand side of Table 1 are the categories used by Polimetrix to compute their own weights for just the Internet sample, which we used as target marginal percentages as we computed weights for the combined telephone and Internet sample. The variables for age, education, race, and gender presented in Table 1 are the percentages from our sample after the combined weighting procedure took place. These are by design very close to the marginal percentages in each category provided by Polimetrix for the Internet sample only (using their standard method for computing weights). The variables on the right side of Table 1 were not used to compute the weights either by Polimetrix for the Internet sample or by us for the combined sample.

4.2 Policy

One common assumption about DTS voters is that they are policy moderates. We asked several specific policy issue questions on the survey, as well as a set of questions asking "what the most important problems in California today" are. However, the "most important problems" questions are difficult to interpret as measures of policy moderation. For example, if a respondent replied that "taxes" were a most important problem – does that mean that the respondent wants higher taxes, lower taxes, or just different taxes? So, while those questions have other uses, the policy analysis here focuses on four of the five specific questions that are easier to evaluate for moderation.

The policy questions evaluate both social and economic policy preferences. The first economic policy question addressed the existing budget gap in

California at the time of the survey.[17] Respondents could choose between raising taxes to solve the problem, cutting spending, or doing some combination of both. The second economic policy-type question asked whether the respondent approved, disapproved, or had some other opinion on the health care bill recently passed in 2010. We would expect that a policy moderate would prefer a mixture of taxes and cuts as well as neither approve nor disapprove of the health care bill. We actually had a fifth policy question on the survey about the financial system bailout; nevertheless, this policy proved so unpopular across parties that it does not add much to the discussion.

The social policy questions cover both abortion and gay marriage. As Baldassare (2000) characterized DTS voters as independents and liberal on social issues, we expect that most independents will approve of gay marriage and want either no change in abortion policy or to make abortions easier to obtain. In Table 2, we have combined the preference for no change on abortion and the preference to make abortions easier to obtain into a single response. The gay marriage question did not have a middle alternative; respondents had to approve, disapprove, or skip the question. For all of these questions, we coded "missing/do not know" as "absence of approval"; so all the skipped responses are included with the "disapprove" responses.[18]

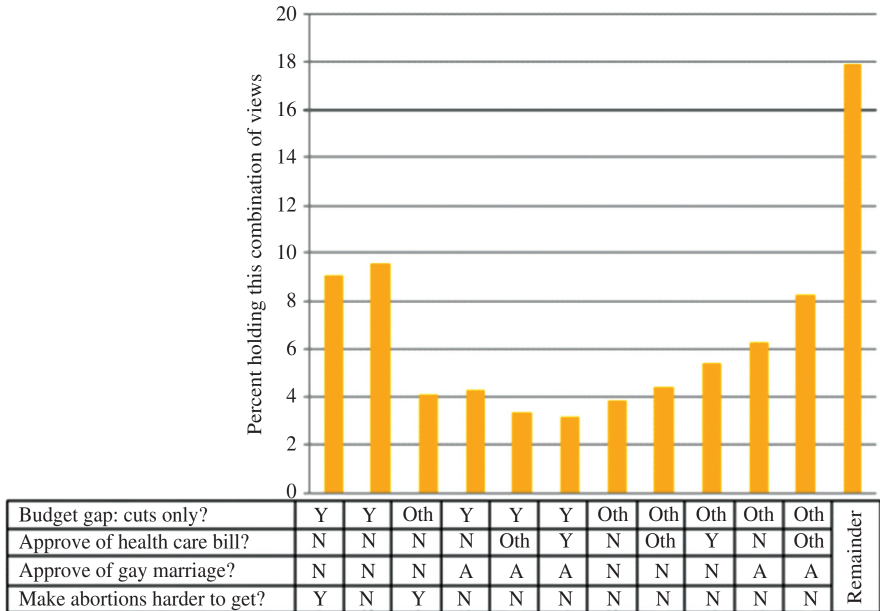
Table 2 shows the weighted percent of DTS voters that agree with different combinations of policy answers. While there are actually 36 possible combinations, Table 2 only shows the top twelve; the remaining 24 combinations contained only 20.5% of the respondents and no combination of responses had more than 3.2% of the DTS electorate. The three largest policy groups actually appear to represent traditional party views rather than moderate policy preferences.[19]

17 For details about specific questions, the survey is available from the authors upon request.

18 To test this assumption, we also ran the model in Table 6 with "missing/do not know" and "disapprove" separated. The results are basically the same and the coefficients on the "do not know" variables were never significant. For the purposes of Table 2, this assumption is really necessary to reduce the number of combinations. There are $3\times3\times2\times2=36$ possible combinations in Table 2, of which we display the 12 most common. Without making these assumptions, there are many more possible combinations (at least $4\times4\times3\times3=144$). At that point, this would not be a practical way to display the data.

19 We also conducted a principal components analysis; the results indicated that these variables reduce onto a single dimension like we use in Table 2. Results available upon request.

The largest group, made up of 17.9% of the DTS voters, holds what is essentially the "Democratic" view.[20] This group wants a mix of cuts and taxes, approves of the health care bill, approves of gay marriage, and does not want abortions to be made more difficult to obtain. The next two groups, representing just over 9% of the electorate each, largely represent the "Republican" view, differing only on abortion. These voters want to use only cuts to solve the state budget shortfall,



Budget gap: cuts only?	Y	Y	Oth	Y	Y	Y	Oth	Oth	Oth	Oth	Oth	Remainder
Approve of health care bill?	N	N	N	N	Oth	Y	N	Oth	Y	N	Oth	
Approve of gay marriage?	N	N	N	A	A	A	N	N	N	A	A	
Make abortions harder to get?	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	

Table 2: Policy positions of DTS voters.
Groups are listed by solution to the state budget gap, opinion on the health care law, approval of gay marriage, and opinion on making abortions more difficult to obtain.[21] The letters in the chart represent "yes", "no", or "otherwise". The columns above represent the percentage of respondents who hold that combination of views.

20 Some might consider a "more Democratic" view to be the "tax increase" opinion. Nevertheless, the 1010 self-identified (party ID) Democrats in the Internet survey overwhelmingly preferred the "mix" (608) to "tax" (170) view. So it seems fairer to the Democrats to say that "their" position is "mix" rather than "tax". However, of the 1010 self-identifying Democrats in the Internet survey, 704 approved of the health care bill, so it seems reasonable to identify "approve" as the "Democratic" position on that issue.

21 There were more possible responses to these questions than the ones listed here; they were collapsed for the sake of simplicity.

disapprove of the health care bill, disapprove of gay marriage, and then differ on abortion. These three groups, representing standard party viewpoints on policy, represent more than 36% of the DTS electorate. The group representing our expectation of policy moderation (a mix of cuts and taxes, not sure about health care, approving gay marriage, opposing making abortion harder) represents only 6.3% of the DTS electorate.

4.3 Parties

Our third expectation from the literature is that DTS voters will be self-identified independents. Figure 2 places all the DTS voters on the 7-point ANES party identification scale. Most DTS voters selected "independent" on the first of the branching questions; of those, about a third said they were "closer to" the Democratic party and about a third said they were "closer to" the Republican party. So 67.8% of DTS voters primarily identified as independents, even if many of them could identify which way they leaned.

Nevertheless, a non-trivial quantity of DTS voters identify as partisans. About 16% of DTS voters identify as strong partisans for the Democrats or Republicans. This identification also corresponds with self-reported voting habits; 80% of the strong partisans report always voting for their own party.[22] Considering the evidence presented by Keith et al. (1992) that leaners should be counted as partisans, there is good reason to believe that many DTS voters are not "true independents".

These data appear to directly contradict the claims of Baldassare (2000). The distribution of DTS voters across the political spectrum more resembles the whole state, Republicans and Democrats included, than it resembles a unified voting bloc of independents. Part of the problem with the PPIC question may be that many of these DTS voters may fail to recollect their registration status correctly. Unfortunately, we only asked this question on the Internet portion of the survey we conducted; nevertheless, 282 out of 1000 DTS voters in the Internet portion believed they had registered with a party. The individuals most likely to mistakenly believe that they had registered with a political party were also the same DTS

22 This is a rare case where the seven-point party ID scale corresponds with something that looks relatively monotonic: strong partisans are most likely to report voting for their own party; weak partisans are less likely; leaners are even less likely, and true independents less so again.

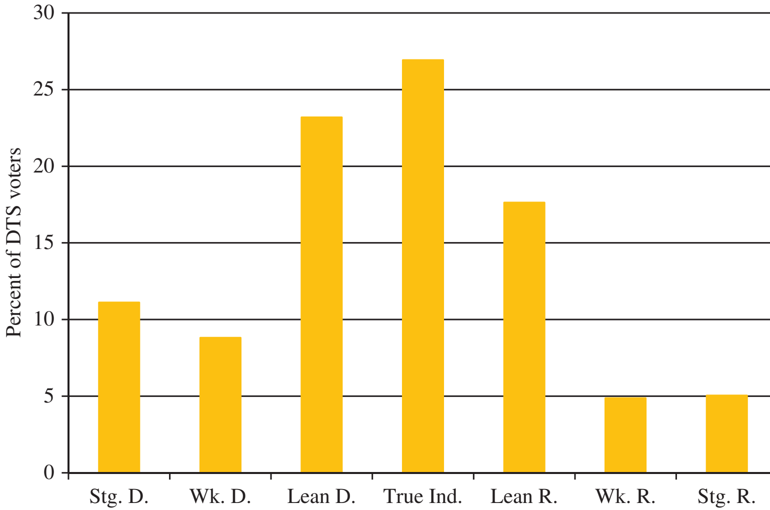


Figure 2: What do DTS voters think about parties? Party identification using the ANES-style branching questions.

individuals most likely to identify with a party.[23] So the PPIC measure, which asks how a voter registered, is likely to be biased and miss the most likely partisans among the DTS voters.

While there is little mention of the follow-up branching questions in the two books of Baldassare (2000, 2002), by the November 2010, PPIC survey respondents are asked the follow-up questions: "strong or not very strong" partisanship for registered partisans and "closer to" one party or another for "independents".[24] Nevertheless, this does not solve the problem, nor does

23 About 4% of registered Democrats, 5% of registered Republicans, and 29% of registered DTS voters incorrectly recalled their registration status on the Internet survey (which included registered Republicans as well as registered Democrats). The numbers for the partisan categories are actually somewhat low, since the question we asked did not enable us to discover individuals who registered as Republicans while claiming to have registered as Democrats. It is not clear why so many DTS voters fail to answer the registration question correctly. There are a couple of alternatives: they made a mistake while registering and think they are registered with a party, they did not understand the registration question, or they wanted to make their registration response conform with their party identification response. The incorrect registration response is particularly prevalent among strong and weak (as opposed to independent but leaning) partisans.

24 From the PPIC codebooks posted online, it appears that the follow-up questions were not asked in 1998 but were starting in 2000.

it offer a direct comparison with our data: the follow-up identification questions are determined by the answer to the PPIC registration question. That is, someone who says they registered DTS never gets the opportunity to identify as a strong Democrat. This approach prevents the discovery with his data of one of our most interesting results: more than a quarter of registered DTS voters self-identify as strong or weak partisans.

4.4 Suspicion of Government

Our fourth expectation about DTS voters is that they will mistrust government. We have two ways of measuring opinions on this issue: a battery of questions ("select all that apply") on trust in government and then a series of specific questions. Table 3 contains the answers to the trust battery as well as the percentage of individuals that agreed with the least trusting answer to the specific policy questions.

Very few voters selected "none of the above" in the "trust" battery – almost everyone had at least one complaint. The most popular objections were: the government was too complicated (46%), public officials did not care about what people thought (45%), and special interests controlled the government (46%). Very few, though, thought individuals were better off avoiding the government (6.5%), indicating that declining to state may represent disillusionment with government rather than fear of it.

DTS voters certainly disapprove of the government. When asked how much of the time they trust the government in Sacramento to do what is right, 22.7%

	% Agree
Trust in government battery statement	
Government too complicated	46.2
Public officials do not care	45.2
Better off avoiding contact	6.5
People cannot affect government	22.4
Special interests control government	46.3
None of the above	3.00
Specific questions – worst case statement	
Trust California government "none of the time"	22.7
California government run for "a few big interests"	80.9
California government wastes "a lot" of tax money	66.2
"Very little" confidence vote counted	18.9

Table 3: Opinions on government.

responded "none of the time". When asked if California is run for the "benefit of all the people" or "a few big interests", the big interests come out on top, with 81% of the responses. Similarly, a large majority agreed that the California government wasted "a lot" of tax money. While most voters believed that their vote counted, 19% still reported that they had very little confidence. Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude that DTS voters do not think very highly of state government.

4.5 Information and Involvement

The more modern view of Independents (after *The American Voter*) is that they are less informed and involved; we expect that the same will be true of DTS voters. We had three measures of these attributes. First we asked respondents to identify the current office held by four political figures: Joe Biden (Vice President), Antonin Scalia (US Supreme Court Associate Justice), Barbara Boxer (US Senator from California), and Charles Calderon (Majority Leader, California State Assembly). In Table 4, we added the number of correct responses and show what percentage of the DTS electorate answered that many of the questions correctly. While very few of the respondents managed to identify all four individuals correctly, about two thirds managed to get at least two.[25]

Most voters in surveys claim that they voted; however, there is much greater variance in responses about other types of involvement. Table 4 also shows what percentage of the respondents participated in a variety of activities. Expressing an opinion online constituted the most popular form of participation. Buying or boycotting products for political reasons, contacting public officials, and donating money were also popular choices. Even 22% of the respondents had attended a meeting where political issues were discussed. The least popular responses, distributing campaign materials and participating in protests, still had over 10%. Of course, there are some respondents who engage in none of these activities, and some people that engage in all of them; nevertheless, these levels of participation are still quite remarkable for a group that is supposedly disengaged.

The last column of Table 4 shows reported sources of political news. Television news is still the most popular source, with 63% of DTS voters getting news that way. Over 40% also accessed political information on the Internet. Only a fifth used newspapers and 7% got news from magazines. Only 3% of DTS voters, though, replied that they did not get much political news at all. Put together, these three measurement strategies indicate that at least DTS voters are not completely uninformed or uninvolved.

25 And, admittedly, at least one of the authors of this article had to look up Charles Calderon.

Political knowledge		Participation beyond voting		Sources of news	
Number correct	**%**	**Type**	**%**	**Source**	**%**
0 Correct	14.1	Contact public officials	31.6	TV	63.3
1 Correct	21.7	Attend meeting	22.2	Newspapers	23.8
2 Correct	29.0	Bought/boycott	34.8	Magazines	7.2
3 Correct	26.6	March or protest	13.6	Internet	42.2
4 Correct	8.7	Express opinion online	37.9	Do not get much	3.1
		Distributed campaign material	15.0		
		Donated money	25.9		

Table 4: Political information and involvement.

4.6 Voting Preferences in 2010

Our sixth expectation is that DTS voters would favor the propositions on the 2010 ballot and split between the Republican and Democratic candidates. Of course, the survey was in the field well before the election so many voters had not yet made up their minds. Roughly a fifth to a third of all voters were unsure, did not respond, or planned to vote for another candidate on all of these choices (represented in Table 5). Nevertheless, DTS voters appeared to split between Republican and Democratic candidates, with the Democrats somewhat ahead.

DTS voters generally supported the propositions as well. Proposition 25 changed the rules to pass a state budget, removing a previous super-majority requirement. Proposition 19 aimed to legalize marijuana at the state level.

	%		%
US Senate		Proposition 25	
Fiorina (R.)	25.7	Support	56.9
Boxer (D.)	38.0	Oppose	19.8
Unsure	22.9	Unsure	17.8
Other	13.5	Other	5.5
California Governor		Proposition 19	
Whitman (R.)	27.9	Support	57.9
Brown (D.)	32.6	Oppose	21.8
Unsure	23.2	Unsure	14.8
Other	16.3	Other	5.5

Table 5: 2010 Vote choice.

Proposition 25 would ultimately pass and Proposition 19 would fail; it is also worth noting that Proposition 19 received some negative press in between the administration of this survey and election day. In any case, the support for Proposition 25 is consistent with their disdain of government displayed in Table 3.

5 Multivariate Analysis: What Contributes to Consistent Voting Preferences?

One of the survey questions asked respondents whether or not they always voted for Republicans or Democrats. This seems like a good vehicle to use to determine what issues most influence "partisan"-like behavior from DTS voters. One appropriate method here is to use an ordered logistic regression; we placed "always vote for Democrats" at zero, inconsistent voting behavior at one, and "always votes for Republicans" at two. Positive coefficients (Table 6) represent an increasing probability of always voting Republican. We use all 2015 DTS voters included in the sample for this analysis.

Some of the demographic controls are significant at the 0.05 level. Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to always vote Democratic; holding all other variables at their median value, changing a hypothetical voter to a black voter increases the probability of always voting Democratic by 26% points. It is also the case that both the lowest and highest levels of education swing more toward the Democrats relative to individuals with just a college degree. Nevertheless, there are no significant effects by age, gender, or income.

The issues matter. Those that prefer cuts to solve the state budget crisis are more likely to always vote Republican. The magnitude of the effects for health care are larger; approving of health care increases the probability of always voting Democratic by 14% points; disapproving reduces the probably by 15% points. Approval of gay marriage has similarly sized effects and, while the effects are smaller for making abortion more difficult, they are still present. The interesting comment about health care is that this is probably not a referendum just on the health care bill itself, since most voters registered as DTS before 2010. Instead, this probably reflects an underlying view about the role of government that just happens to correspond closely with the issues at stake in the health care bill.

The other attitudes are somewhat less useful. It is not surprising, of course, that the ability to blame the other party for the California budget crisis correlates strongly with voting preferences. The comparison category here is "blame both",

	Estimate	Standard error	t-Statistic	First difference	
				Democrat	Republican
Age 18–34 years	-0.02	0.18	-0.13		
Age 55 years and older	0.16	0.11	1.55		
Female	-0.06	0.10	-0.56		
Black	-1.14	0.28	-4.04	0.26	-0.03
Hispanic	-0.51	0.17	-3.00	0.11	-0.02
Some other race	-0.07	0.14	-0.49		
At most high school education	-0.34	0.16	-2.07	0.07	-0.01
Some college	-0.25	0.12	-2.07	0.05	-0.01
Postgraduate education	-0.14	0.14	-0.98	0.03	-0.01
Income <$40,000	0.00	0.13	0.00		
Income >$80,000	0.14	0.11	1.22		
Budget gap: cuts	0.55	0.12	4.49	-0.09	0.03
Budget gap: taxes	-0.36	0.21	-1.71		
Health care: approve	-0.64	0.14	-4.54	0.14	-0.02
Health care: disapprove	1.03	0.16	6.64	-0.15	0.07
Gay marriage: approve	-0.92	0.13	-7.28	0.14	-0.06
Abortion: more difficult	0.56	0.13	4.25	-0.09	0.03
Abortion: easier	-0.17	0.12	-1.40		
Blame: only Republicans	-1.16	0.16	-7.33	0.27	-0.03
Blame: only Democrats	0.84	0.15	5.78	-0.13	0.05
Scale: mistrust (0–5)	-0.02	0.04	-0.43		
Scale: knowledge (0–4)	-0.09	0.05	-1.79		
Cut 1	-1.98	0.23			
Cut 2	2.15	0.24			

Table 6: Ordered logistic regression.
Dependent variable, "always votes for Democrats" (=0), follows some other strategy (=1), or "always votes for Republicans" (=2).[26]

which was a very popular answer among DTS (and, on the Internet survey, all) voters. Holding all other variables at their median, a hypothetical voter that could blame the Republicans for the state budget crisis was 27% points more likely to always vote Democratic. Nevertheless, a scale of the mistrust variables (adding up the number of "trust in government" problems) and a scale of political knowledge had no effect on partisan choice.

26 The first differences were only computed for variables significant at the 0.05 level. For example, the Democratic column represents the probability a voter always votes Democratic given that the variable in question is changed from a "0" to a "1", with all other variables set to their medians. n=2015.

6 Conclusion

So who are the DTS voters? They come from a wide cross section of California society, although a majority is white and a majority is male. On issues, many hold the same beliefs as partisans – although there are many different combinations of opinions. The DTS voters' party identification reflects the dispersion of issue positions; while almost 27% identify as "true independents", more than 10% identify as strong Democrats and more than 5% identify as strong Republicans. While they are not afraid of contacting the government, they certainly do not trust the government to do the "right thing". Additionally, they are relatively well informed and involved and, when they vote, their votes split between parties and slightly favored Propositions 19 and 25 in the 2010 general election.

While it is certainly the case that some of the DTS voters represent "independents", in the sense used in the literature, it is also true that this term should be applied broadly to DTS voters with caution. A candidate looking to appeal to DTS voters in the top-two primary would have difficulty finding a voting bloc that wanted an "independent" slate of issues; most of the policy groups represented in Table 2, for example, are in territory already claimed by the Democratic or Republican parties. In a spatial model sense, it seems unlikely that there is space at "the middle" for an independent candidate to enter the election and capture enough votes on issues alone to make it through the top-two primary to the general election. As with the party identification results in Figure 2, it seems like there may be *some* true independents but not *enough* for the DTS voters to constitute anything like a third party. Among the unaffiliated voters, we are likely to find examples both of what V.O. Key called "stand-patters" and "switchers" (Key 1966).

Thus, our portrait of California's DTS electorate is nuanced. Unlike what Campbell et al. claimed would be true for partisan independents, DTS voters in California are informed and engaged. But consistent with Keith et al., we see that many DTS voters may be "hidden partisans", in that they lean in their self-identifications to one party or the other. That result, paired with our finding that on many issues DTS voters have opinions similar to partisans, indicates that DTS voters may not serve the "moderating" role that many reformers have assumed for them in the first statewide implementation of the top-two primary this year in California.

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