

WHY CALIFORNIANS ARE LEAVING THE PARTIES:  
EXPLORING NPP GROWTH AND THE PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A Policy Paper

by

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May 3, 2022

Executive Summary  
of  
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California’s No Party Preference voter bloc is growing. In recent years the number of voters that are registered under the “No Party Preference” (NPP) umbrella has oscillated around the 5 million voter mark – which at times has overtaken the statewide total registration of the Republican Party. Because of the overall proportion and growth of the NPP voter block in California, I ask, “Why has the proportion of No Party Preference voters grown in the state of California?”

To frame the California political environment that NPP voters function within, I use three lenses to view and understand No Party Preference voters: Structural, Behavioral and Ideological. I synthesized the literature review conclusions in each of the three lenses and pulled out major themes from the interviews. I also collected interview and questionnaire feedback from three categories of California voting experts (political strategists, voter registration experts and academics) in order to determine potential causes for growth.

Three stories about the California NPP bloc emerged: 1) NPP growth may not be unique to California, making the election structures of the ballot measure and nonpartisan primary unlikely contributors to NPP growth; 2) NPP growth may not be intentional at the individual level due to low political knowledge and the poor execution of the Motor Voter program; and 3) low levels of social capital, increased individual and party-level polarization and negativity in political ads as a tool for turnout may be contributing to the growth of the NPP bloc. I conclude with two policy recommendations. The first is to conduct a state-level audit or investigation into the Motor Voter program. The second is for local government executed community building and organizing programs centered around nonpartisan interests and activities, in an effort to counteract social disconnection and polarization.

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## Introduction

California is the nation's most populous state with 40 million residents, of which about 26.9 million are eligible to vote (California Secretary of State, 2022). Of those eligible, about 22 million are registered to vote (California Secretary of State, 2022; Baldassare, et al., 2021). As of January 2022, the California Secretary of State reported that 22.9% of all registered voters, over 5 million people, were categorized as "No Party Preference" (NPP) (California Secretary of State, 2022). The oldest data included in that same report showed NPP registrations from 2001 only made up 14.5% of all registered voters, and total NPP voter registration has grown steadily since then (California Secretary of State, 2022). In recent years the number of voters that are registered under the NPP umbrella has oscillated around the 5 million voter mark – which at times over the past several years, has overtaken the statewide total registration of the Republican Party (Baldassare et al., 2018).

Because of the overall proportion and growth of the NPP voter block in California, and in the context of California specific structural, behavioral and ideological perspectives, I ask the following question: Why has the proportion of No Party Preference voters grown in the state of California?

### Why should we care?

The growth of the No Party Preference voter bloc represents a behavioral shift in the population of registered voters in California (and perhaps the population of the state and country at large); however, it is unclear exactly why this change is happening. While more Californians than ever before are registered to vote, their registration behavior has also changed – fewer people (as a percentage of the total registered voter population) are opting into registering with either of the two major political parties (California Secretary of State, 2022). Perhaps this implies

that Californians are disengaging or disaffiliating from party politics – if so, what does this mean for the state? California has been perceived as a liberal haven, a true blue Democratic state, for several decades – but as the size of the NPP bloc grows, does this change the political and electoral outcomes (and so the policy and regulations implemented by elected officials) that the residents of the state have regularly voted for? Or perhaps the above interpretation is inaccurate, leaving open the possibility of misinterpreting what the increase in NPP registration implies.

There are two ideas I wish to stress when conceptualizing why we should care about the growth of No Party Preference affiliated voters. First, the growth of the NPP bloc is potentially a reflection of change in the overall population (not just registered voters); however there is very little research that digs into any kind of explanation for the change. Journalists and media outlets acknowledge that there are more “independent” voters now more than ever, but it does not appear as though academics are attempting to explain why (PEW Research, 2019). The lack of existing journalistic, academic or political practitioner research on the growth of No Party Preference voters may be due to the complicated nature of the question, however this remains unclear.

Second, while this paper focuses on the state of California, other places in the United States are experiencing changes in their voter registration as well. In recent work completed by PEW Research Center, approximately 38% of the American public describes themselves as “independent” (PEW, 2019). Gallup has been tracking this as well – they estimate 42% of the American public self-identifies as “independent” (Gallup, 2022). Similarly, in states with a majority of Republican voters and battleground states, the chunk of “independents” is growing and changing. For example, in Texas – another geographically large and populous state – “independent” voters have been in the spotlight as Democrats become more competitive with the

Republican majority in the years since the Trump presidency (Henderson & Blank, 2020). In the battleground state of Florida, where Democratic and Republican voter registration hovers around 5 million voters each, voters “not affiliated with any party” make up 3.8 million, or 26.9% of all registered voters (Florida Dept. of State, 2022). Florida’s voter designation of “not affiliated with any party” is not exactly the same terminology, and so may not measure the exact same type of people, as California’s “No Party Preference,” or Texas’ “independent,” however there may be a pattern of growth in the groups of voters that are choosing to not affiliate with a major political party. By using the state of California as a test case, there is the potential to begin to understand a nationwide pattern in voter behavior.

While I explore possible explanations for California’s NPP growth in this paper, I believe the potential for an understanding of this trend in other places is substantial. If there is an underlying pattern for this registration behavior, there is the potential for millions of people across the country to be impacted by further research that explores the “why.”

### The Roadmap

To frame the California political environment that No Party Preference voters function within, I use three approaches, or lenses, to view and understand No Party Preference voters. A first lens focuses on the California-specific political structures of the ballot measure process and nonpartisan blanket primary. The second lens is voter behavior focused, and I explore the concept of “leaners” (NPP voters who behave like their partisan counterparts), and voter contact techniques that impact voter behavior. And the third lens focuses on the potential ideological impacts of political extremism and dissatisfaction with major political parties related to factions within each party. I summarize academic literature in each of the three lenses (Structural,

Behavioral and Ideological) that give California-specific context and depth to my research question.

This three lens structure is implemented in this policy paper in two ways: in the literature review and within the interview questions I presented to California voter experts. Each section of my literature review has a corresponding set of questions within the questionnaire. For example, the first lens is Structural, which correlate with Questions 2 and 3 in my interview questionnaire (further details can be found in Appendix B).

In order to better understand the growth of the NPP voting bloc in California, I have collected interview and questionnaire feedback from three categories of California voting experts: political strategists, voter registration experts and academics. I reached out to California political strategists who have devoted their career to being in the trenches of politics – their various expertise ranges from political communications to campaign strategy to digital media. California voter registration experts give meaningful color to my research, as their expertise lends itself to the functionality of the voter registration system. And academic experts offer data driven political science expertise that is foundational to this policy paper. Further details about the individuals who agreed to be interviewed can be found in Appendix C.

Finally, I combine the research in each of the three lenses and pull out major themes from the interviews. I conclude with three major implications (or stories about the NPP bloc) and two policy recommendations that are based on the ways the major themes in the literature review and the themes I uncover in the interview feedback are related and interconnected. I hypothesize there is more than one, or perhaps a multi-faceted, explanation for the growth of the NPP bloc. Further I hypothesize that there may one or more interaction between the structural, behavioral and ideological aspects within both the literature review and the interview results.



### Why this approach?

Each section of this paper is relevant due of the nature of my research question: *Why* has the proportion of No Party Preference voters grown in the state of California? I determined that exploratory, inclusive research was the best way to approach this question, as I wanted to consciously include as many factors that could impact the NPP population as possible. In order to gather as much information about the current political environment in California as reasonable, I included a section for the two major election structures I believed could impact NPP registration: ballot measures and the nonpartisan open primary. Similarly, I wanted to include a way to account for voter behaviors that were both unique to “independents” but also impacted all voters, knowing that California-specific research may not be available for the voter contact portion. This resulted in a section of my work for behaviors: voter behaviors (“leaning”) and how voter behavior can be influenced through voter contact. And finally, I knew I needed to include an ideological portion and include the factions within the major political parties in California. Much research has been conducted about partisanship and voter ideology, so this is the concluding section of my work. I included California-specific portions, along with more broad ideological research, as I believe both are important in determining the “why” behind the grow of the NPP bloc.

I settled on interviewing experts with a short set of eight questions for two reasons. First, while conducting a broad survey that gathered voter responses would provide quantitative data, very little is known or understood about why the NPP bloc is growing. Starting with expert interviews conducted with a questionnaire based on a thoughtful and structured literature review could provide insights that has the potential to guide future quantitative survey research. And secondly, I did not have the resources (time or financial) to execute a thorough, statewide survey.

While this is an aspirational goal for the future, the scope and reach of a statewide survey was not achievable for this project's timeline or budget.

### A Quick Note on Phrasing

A quick note about the term “NPP” – while this category of voters is more commonly referred to as “independent voters” in much of the academic writing I have reviewed and will be referencing, I purposefully use the terms “No Party Preference” or “NPP.” There are two main reasons for this. First, research on “independent voters” has identified ideological differences within the group, often referring to partisans who are not registered to a political party but still vote with them as “leaners” (Lascher & Korey, 2011). This research (and much of the previously conducted research that paved the way; see especially Keith et al., 1992) also refers to “independent voters” who do not behave as partisans as “pure independents” (Lascher & Korey, 2011). The majority of “leaner” research is based on survey questions that ask if voters identify as “Republican, Democrat, independent or what?” and so refer to voters as voters think of themselves – “independent.” Because I am only referring to the NPP bloc in my research question, and not individual voters who identify as “independents” I will be refraining from using terminology outside of “No Party Preference” or “NPP” voters.

Second, the American Independent Party (AIP) (a far-right political party) can sometimes be confused for the “independent” party and I would like to avoid that whenever possible. This is such a problem in California that Wikipedia has a detailed section about the confusion on their AIP page, in a section called “Membership and accidental-membership phenomenon”:

As of 2016, about 3% of California's 17.2 million voters are registered with the AIP, making the party the third-largest of California's political parties, although it is far behind the numbers registered with the Democrats (43%), Republicans (28%) and those stating "no party preference" (24%). However, it has long been thought by political analysts that the party, which has received very few votes in recent California elections, maintains its state ballot status because people join the

American Independent Party mistakenly believing that they are registering as "independent" voters. This was confirmed in a Los Angeles Times investigation in 2016, which found "overwhelming" and "indisputable" evidence that thousands of California voters who are registered as affiliated with the American Independent Party on voter forms in fact intended to be registered as "no party preference" (i.e., as independent voters).

Very little is written about this AIP voter registration confusion; however the Wikipedia page, with various *Los Angeles Times* articles linked, does appear to accurately describe this phenomenon.

Therefore, I will be referring to California voters who are not affiliated with any party, but are in fact, registered to vote, as No Party Preference or NPP voters. I will only use the terminology "independent" when directly quoting other research, or other similarly appropriate context.

### **Literature Review**

In this portion of my policy paper I will review the most pertinent and recent academic research that are related to each section (or lens) of my research question. I also offer commentary on why I believe certain aspects of the existing research are more or less applicable to portions of my question. For a matrix view of the entire literature review, please see Appendix A. For a matrix that explains how each literature review section is related to each interview question, please see Appendix B.

### **Structural Lens: Ballot Measures**

California voters amended the state constitution in 1911 and created the ballot measure process (USC, 2022). Since then California voters have had the opportunity to participate in direct democracy through ballot proposals such as initiatives (new or amendment laws and proposed changes to the state constitution placed on the ballot by petition), referendum (a

proposal to repeal a law that was previously enacted by legislation) and the occasional legislative measure (a proposal placed on the ballot by the state legislature) (USC, 2022). The California public has used the ballot measure processes to implement changes to the constitution and statewide law hundreds of times since 1911 (USC, 2022).

But how does the ballot measure impact or interact with a voter's political affiliation, or lack thereof, if at all? In my research I ask, **“Does the California ballot measure have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?”** However, existing academic research about voters and ballot measures tends to focus on other areas of research. Some of the existing academic research is related to my question, and in the following sections I explain how my question and this work is connected.

### The Content of a Ballot Measure

In a study published in 2011, Daniel Biggers questioned the accepted idea that the number of initiatives that appear on a ballot can influence turnout in midterm elections. However, he critiques the idea that all ballot measures should be measured equally when correlating them to turnout (Biggers, 2011). The author writes that ballot measures can have an impact on increased voter turnout, however the subject and content of those ballot measures is a determining factor in overall turnout: “...it is immediately apparent that not all initiatives are equal, and that the ability of the proposition to increase turnout is conditional upon its nature” (Biggers, p. 6, 2011). Further, the author acknowledges that not all ballot measure campaigns are equal – spending, media attention and intensity vary from measure to measure (Biggers, 2011). Biggers concludes, “this study finds that social issue ballot measures have a significant impact on increasing the likelihood of turning out for all midterm and some presidential elections”

whereas the total number of ballot measures is rarely associated with higher turnout (Biggers, p. 19, 2011).

In questioning where or not the ballot measure, as a structural aspect of the California political environment, impacts voters political affiliation, I ask if the opportunity to participate in elections via the ballot measure provides an accessible route to voting that does not require affiliation with a party. Because the ballot measure has been a part of the California political environment for over 100 years, and we have only recently seen a distinct increase in NPP registration, it is unlikely that simply having the option to vote on ballot measures incentivizes NPP registration. However, Biggers' research is pertinent to my question because it acknowledges that idea that voters are influenced to turnout more by the societal issues that appear on a ballot than the opportunity to vote on a ballot measure in itself.

While further research is needed, Biggers' research supports the idea that the *content of the ballot measure* matters more to voters than the opportunity to vote on a ballot measure itself.

#### The Complexity of a Ballot Measure

Shauna Reilly and Sean Richey published ballot measure research in 2011 that explored the impact of language complexity on voter roll-off (inconsistent voting patterns within one ballot by one voter, or a voter simply not responding to all items that appear on a ballot). Reilly & Richey expanded on research that explored how complicated wording in survey questions can increase nonresponse bias, how the information included on a ballot can affect roll-off, and research on the impact of question wording in public opinion research (2011). The authors conclude, "The results of our analysis indicate that in addition to previous explanations of roll-off, readability of the question has a strong influence on participation in direct democracy...It

suggests that some voters do not answer questions that are hard to read” (Reilly & Richey, p. 66, 2011).

This is pertinent context for my research, because research on ballot measure readability informs the idea that voters participation drops off as voter understanding of the topic drops, which is applicable for all voters, regardless of party affiliation. In the conclusion, the authors go on to say, “[T]he impact of poorly worded questions is clear and has substantive policy repercussions for states that utilize direct democracy” (Reilly & Richey, p. 66, 2011). After reading this study, I looked for research that attempted to quantify how difficult California ballot measures can be to understand, in order to try and connect the dots on NPP registration growth and ease of understanding ballot measure language. If ballot measures had gotten significantly easier to understand in the last twenty or so year, then perhaps that would have incentivized NPP growth. I was not successful in locating this research – and as a voter, I would guesstimate that the readability of ballot measure language has not improved in recent years (and so causing the jump in NPP registration).

### The Ballot Measure as a Learning Tool

In 2015, Nicholas Seabrook, Joshua Dyck and Edward Lascher Jr. published a complex and robust regression analysis that rebutted the idea that ballot measures *can*, but does not always, increase the general political knowledge of voters. The authors’ research shows that, “in no instance does any measure of exposure to the initiative process predict any statistically significant effect on political knowledge” (Seabrook, Dyck & Lascher, p. 291, 2015). Specifically pertinent, “independents” (those not affiliated with a political party) showed lower levels of political awareness (Seabrook, Dyck & Lascher, 2015). Moreover, “[We address] whether there are institutional hurdles in democracy which can impede the acquisition of

political knowledge by creating too complicated a choice scenarios. We find that this may be the case” (Seabrook, Dyck & Lascher, p. 298-9, 2015). Essentially, ballot measures create complicated choices where voters (of any political affiliation) glean little overall knowledge.

This research is helpful in building the foundation for understanding why the California ballot measure likely does not incentivize the growth of the No Party Preference voter bloc, but in fact further disengages low-information and/or low-turnout voters within the NPP bloc. While this work does not include specific examples of California ballot measures that are difficult to understand, the authors conclude the article with this relevant statement: “Direct democracy emerges as not even a partial tonic for problems of political disengagement in the American public” (Seabrook, Dyck & Lascher, p. 299, 2015).

Through three recent and pertinent pieces of work, I have concluded that 1) social issues in ballot measures can increase turnout but the ballot measure itself does not, 2) the readability of ballot measure language likely disincentivizes voter participation as it may be too complicated for the average voter to understand, and 3) the ballot measure is not a good learning tool for the general public. Since ballot measures as a structure are not new to the California political environment, and the literature points to ballot measures likely being a hurdle to participation, I theorize that they do not incentivize NPP registration, and so may not be linked to the recent jump in the NPP bloc.

### **Structural Lens: Nonpartisan Primary**

California has a long history of modifying its election structures, starting with the Progressive Movement in the early 1900s, who did so in an effort to intentionally weaken political parties: “Cross-filing (1914-59) was an invention of the California Progressives, who used it and other forms to weaken the major parties, which they saw as corrupt entities

interposing themselves between the government and the governed” (Masket, p. 485, 2007). Cross-filing, while not exactly the same as California’s modern-day nonpartisan primary, does have some noted similarities: “Under cross-filing, candidates for office could run in as many party primaries as they wished and, until 1954, their party affiliation did not appear on the primary ballot” (Masket, p. 485, 2007). Cross-filing ended in 1959, and the traditional partisan “closed” primary took its place (where candidates of the same political party campaign against each other). Then in 1996, Proposition 198 was approved by voters and a “blanket” open primary was instituted (El Dorado County, 2022). Over the course of the next 14 years, through one U.S. Supreme Court case, a CA Senate bill and another proposition (Prop 14 in 2010), the California primary election system was litigated and modified, until the “Top-Two Open Primary System” of today was implemented (El Dorado County, 2022).

In the current California primary election system, “only the top two candidates in the primary (receiving the highest and second highest votes) for each voter-nominated office will appear on the general election ballot” (El Dorado County, 2022). It is important to understand the nuance and history of the current primary system as my research question asks, “**Does the California Nonpartisan Top-Two Open Primary have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?**” Much of the existing academic research on open and blanket primaries asks questions related to the moderation of candidates, polarization and partisanship in the context of those kinds of primary systems. While I am asking a different research question, I believe there are useful conclusions and insights within that literature that can inform my work.

### The Nonpartisan Primary and Partisanship

There has been a long-standing argument in political science that open primaries foster the election of more moderate politicians, or that party primaries are a polarizing election



structure (McGhee, 2016). California has been the subject of a variety of different studies testing this theory. In a recent work, where California was included among many other states with various primary types, titled “A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology” the authors explore different primary systems’ impact on polarization through the measurement of state legislator ideal points (where legislators ideology and/or partisan behavior is compared across states) (McGhee et al., 2014). The results debunk the idea that partisanship fluctuates within different primary systems: “[T]he overall polarization is roughly the same across systems; while all legislators are more liberal or conservative in one system or another, the gap between them fails to fit any obvious pattern” (McGhee et al., p. 342, 2014). Further, the authors go on to state, “The results demonstrate little effect of differences in electoral primary systems... In fact, the coefficients for semi closed systems suggest a *polarizing* effect for both parties relative to the comparison category of pure closed systems” (McGhee et al., p. 344, 2014). The authors do offer a caveat that by acknowledging that no result within their study was robust enough to reject the null hypothesis – essentially stating that while there were some statistically significant results, they are not certain there is any observable pattern or connection between type of primary system and elected polarization (either moderating or further polarizing).

The above-mentioned research gives relevant context to my question about whether or not the current primary system in California impacts voter’s political party affiliation (and so the growth of the NPP bloc). As the authors concluded, the type of system does *not* appear to have an effect on the ideology or polarization of the elected officials, which includes California. Importantly, the authors included a note about California’s results, saying that while it appears there *could* be a moderating effect within the California political environment, which includes

the nonpartisan blanket primary, they conclude that this could very well have been the result of chance, or even have the opposite result (McGhee et al., p. 348, 2014). While the polarization of legislators is not an exact measurement of voter's political party preferences, this study gives very pertinent context to the recent jump in NPP registration. I conclude that it is possible that NPP registration could be impacted by the current nonpartisan primary; however, it is unclear if the structure of the nonpartisan primary is an incentive to NPP growth.

### The Nonpartisan Primary and Moderation

One specific piece of research that does show moderation of elected representatives in California in connection to the nonpartisan blanket primary was published in 2011 and written by Will Bullock and Joshua Clinton. The authors focus on “how changing the eligible primary electorate affects how elected officials behave in office [to illuminate] the consequences of potential electoral reforms” (Bullock & Clinton, p. 916, 2011). They theorize that by expanding the eligible primary electorate, the nonpartisan open primary “changes the location of the median primary voter,” in essence moderating the electorate within a district by combining previously separate voting blocs (Bullock & Clinton, 2011). The authors concluded that while some moderation can be identified, that observation comes with a large caveat: “The moderation we detect, however, only occurs in the districts that contain the most newly added eligible crossover voters; elected officials from districts that strongly favor a single party do not change their behavior in response.” (Bullock & Clinton, p. 916, 2011). Additionally, they state in the conclusion, “In more partisan districts, the blanket primary has no effect on the behavior of the elected official” (Bullock & Clinton, p. 928, 2011).

This research gives us a specific example of cases where the nonpartisan blanket primary in California has a moderating effect on elected officials – when their own district is already

moderate. This is relevant to my question because it helps to delineate examples of when the nonpartisan blanket primary could have a moderating effect on voters as well, which could have an impact on the growth of the NPP voting bloc.

### The Nonpartisan Primary in California

Douglas Ahler, Jack Citrin and Gabriel Lenz published their work on the California top-two primary and representation in 2016, which is critically relevant to this literature review. The article is titled, “Do Open Primaries Improve Representation? An Experimental Test of California's 2012 Top-Two Primary,” and the authors’ goal was to better understand why the ideology of elected representatives has shifted towards the extremes while voter ideologies have stayed closer to the center of the ideological spectrum. Specifically, the authors investigated the following: “[W]e examine whether district electorates are indeed more moderate than partisan primary electorates and whether voters have the knowledge necessary to pick proximate (and therefore often moderate) candidates” (Ahler, Citrin & Lenz, p. 239, 2016). The authors come to the blunt conclusion that “[V]oters appear to know so little about candidates’ positions that, even if they wanted to, they could not intentionally cast a ballot for their district’s moderate candidates” (Ahler, Citrin & Lenz, p. 239, 2016). They go on to further delineate that much “[t]o a reformist’s chagrin, [our result] suggests that voters lack the knowledge to incentivize centrism in open primaries for Congress and California State Senate” (Ahler, Citrin & Lenz, p. 240, 2016).

The authors lay out four major obstacles to why nonpartisan primaries may not succeed in moderating representation: voter ignorance of candidate ideology, strategic voting, voter extremity, and multicandidate races. This context is important because it acknowledges the limits of the average voter’s political awareness and identifies important barriers to a more moderate

political environment. While the authors' do not imply that the structure of the nonpartisan primary creates this environment, they do identify how voters function within the nonpartisan primary election environment: and their conclusion is that most voters do not know enough about the politicians they are voting for to purposefully select a more moderate candidate.

In this section I have drawn three conclusions about the California nonpartisan primary as an election structure that could impact the growth of the NPP bloc: 1) type of primary election structure does *not* appear to have an effect on the ideology elected officials, making the impact of the nonpartisan primary on NPP growth unclear; 2) the nonpartisan primary has the potential to produce a more moderate elected official, but only in districts that are already moderate, and 3) the majority of voters (regardless of political party affiliation, or lack thereof) do not know enough about the politicians they are voting for to intentionally select a more moderate candidate in a nonpartisan primary, suggesting that a nonpartisan primary may not have an impact on the growth of the NPP bloc. With these three conclusions in mind, I hypothesize that if the nonpartisan primary has an effect on the growth of the NPP voter bloc, it is small, and potentially not something voters are consciously aware of when registering to vote.

### **Behavioral Lens: Voter Contact**

Voter behavior is an extensively studied portion of political science academia. Due to the depth and breadth of existing voter behavior research, there are a plethora of lenses through which I could have approached NPP voters in California based on their behavior. However, in my research, I ask **“Does the amount or type of voter contact/outreach done by major political parties in California have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?”** and because my question focuses on voter contact impacting voter behavior, I focus on two aspects of the research done on voter behavior: in-person voter contact and the goldilocks voter. This is

relevant to my research because while my efforts are centered around understanding why the NPP bloc has grown in California, there are important takeaways in research that explores *how* voter behavior is influenced.

### Voters and In-Person Mobilization

In 2000, Alan Gerber and Donald Green published a study called “The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment,” where they looked closely at whether or not citizens vote at a higher rate if they are contacted in-person or through less personal methods, such as by mail or telephone. The authors point out many of the flaws in previous studies (some of which were conducted almost 100 years ago), explaining, “[due] to the significant limitations of previous research, students of voting behavior do not have a clear sense of either the current magnitude of mobilization effects or the relative effectiveness of different mobilization strategies” (Gerber & Green, p.654, 2000). While this experiment was conducted in Connecticut, and the study is over 20 years old, I believe there are important takeaways that can help give context to the growth of the NPP bloc in California.

Through a thoughtfully designed nonpartisan experiment and regression analysis, the authors come to a somewhat surprising conclusion: in-person contact and communications via the mail are more effective at improving voter turnout than communications via the phone (Gerber & Green, 2000). “One of the most surprising results to emerge from our experiment is the ineffectiveness of telephone appeals,” they write, further explaining that for the experiment they retained a firm that regularly provided the same kind of voter phone outreach for major political parties, campaigns and interest groups (Gerber & Green, 2000). The authors go on to say that, “mail campaigns do not seem to amplify the effectiveness of personal canvassing, or visa versa... Telephone calls neither increase nor decrease the effectiveness of mail or personal

appeals. We find no evidence of second-order interaction among telephone, mail or personal contact” (Gerber & Green, p.660, 2000).

In the conclusion, the authors draw a direct connection to Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Renewal of the American Community*: “Our findings are consistent with the hypothesis that declines in voter turnout reflect massive retrenchment in the size and vitality of non-partisan and civic organizations (Putnam 2000), but they speak only indirectly to claims concerning partisan mobilization” (Gerber & Green, p.661, 2000). I think this observation is especially salient and has a direct connection to my interview observations, which are summarized later in this policy paper. In their conclusion, Gerber & Green draw connections between their work on types of voter contact and Putnam’s work on civic connection in America, suggesting that their research can only partially explain why some modes of voter contact (in-person or otherwise) appear to stimulate voter turnout more than others: “Our experiments do not tell us whether personal contact enhances interest in politics, feelings of connectedness to the electoral system, the belief that elections are important, or a sense of obligation to participate.” (Gerber & Green, p.662, 2000).

My central takeaway from Gerber & Green’s work that relates to my question about the growth of the NPP bloc in California is this: Voter contact, regardless of mode, may not have any connection to the growth of the NPP bloc, and while telephone outreach may not be as effective as originally expected, this could be a reflection on the overarching lack of civic connectedness within our society, not the mode of outreach itself. Further research that explores the connection between voter contact and civic connectedness is needed to begin to understand the impact (if any) of these factors on NPP voters in California.

## The Goldilocks Voter

Authors Carlo Prato and Stephane Wolton published a work titled “The Voters’ Curses: Why We Need Goldilocks Voters” in an effort to unpack a frustration of academics and political practitioners alike: the curse of the uninterested voter. This is relevant to my research as it is commonly accepted that self-described “independents” are less politically engaged and it may be the case that NPP voters are similar to independents in this regard. Yet even if that is so, Prato and Wolton suggest that the formula for reaching uninterested voters is more complex than is commonly suggested. The authors delineate between voters’ *interest* and *attention*: where interest is “their evaluation of the importance of politics” and attention is “their cognitive involvement with the electoral process” (Prato & Wolton, p. 726, 2016). Similarly, Prato and Wolton identify that candidates’ *competence* and the *policy* they are attempting to campaign with also play a major role in the democratic political process. In the ideal scenarios uncovered by the authors, the voter need to be interested and pay attention, but not too much: “When voters’ interests in politics is very high, voters’ welfare and attention to politics is low due to candidates’ strategic behavior. The electoral process thus performs best when voters are much like Goldilocks: they care neither too little nor too much about politics” (Prato & Wolton, p. 736, 2016).

So while voter outreach comes in many forms, the voter needs to be receptive to those messages, whether they originate from a major political party or from a candidate. Understanding California No Party Preference voters’ *interest* and *attention* is likely an area of academia that requires more research.

In this section I have drawn two conclusions about voter contact that is relevant to my research question on the growth of the NPP bloc in California: 1) Voter contact, regardless of

modes such as telephone, mail or in-person contact, may not have any connection to the growth of the NPP bloc, but perhaps could be explained by a lack of civic connectedness that is endemic to our modern society, and 2) voter receptivity and existing levels of engagement (or voter *attention*) may be more useful in determining if a voter will turn out to vote than the modes of contact used to attempt to stimulate that turnout. Based on the research in this section and the reference to Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, I hypothesize that the type of voter contact an individual experiences likely has little or no influence on their party registration status. Additionally, further research on the potential relationship between the lack of civic connectedness in modern society and recent changes in political party registration is needed to understand if there is any relationship between that and the growth of the NPP bloc.

### **Behavioral Lens: Leaners**

A well-accepted and replicated 1992 work, *The Myth of the Independent Voter* (hereafter referred to as *Myth*), introduced the idea that the majority of “independents” were not actually independent. Raymond E. Wolfinger and colleagues examined voters' behavior and discovered that although voters in the 1990s were self-identified “independents” they had a tendency to *lean* towards one of major parties in their voting behavior, coining the term “leaners” (Keith et al., 1992). I believe this is relevant to further understanding why the growth of the No Party Preference bloc in California has continued over the last several decades. While research on “independent” voters may not be perfectly representative of California NPP voters, the two categories do contain voters who do not affiliate with a major party and instead opt to either self-identify as “independent” or are registered as No Party Preference. I hypothesize the NPP bloc may have grown due to more California voters self-identifying as “independents” while



maintaining their partisan voter behavior, and so behaving much like the leaners identified in *Myth*.

Similarly, by examining the geopolitical self-segregation of California voters I attempt to expand on the possibility of leaners contributing to the growth of the NPP bloc. I include research from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), as Eric McGhee has made relevant hypotheses about partisan-leaning NPPs across the state. In my research, I ask, **“Does the behavior of “leaning independents” have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?”** and while more research is needed to answer that question, I believe the following literature is an informative start.

#### The California Leaner

Edward Lascher and John Korey recreated the work of Wolfinger and crew in 2011 in a California-focused work titled “The Myth of the Independent Voter, California Style” (hereafter referred to as “California Style”). The authors’ goal was to determine if the conclusions made in the original *Myth* still held firm in California at the time the research was conducted – among other questions, did California “independents” still lean towards one of the major political parties in behavior and ideological preference (Lascher & Korey, 2011)?

While the California electorate has changed since 2011, there are important takeaways in “California Style” that apply to my research about NPPs in recent years. Most relevant, the authors of “California style” conclude that, “Independent leaners consistency act very much like weak partisans in terms of voting preference,” meaning that individuals who self-identify as “independent” but lean towards one party or another behave very similarly to individuals who are registered with a major political party (Lascher and Korey, p. 11, 2011). If this continues to

be true in 2022 my question warrants further research: “Does the behavior of ‘leaning independents’ have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?”

It is important to note that in both *Myth* and “California Style”, voters who are actually independent in their political behavior (called “pure independents”) only make up about 1 in 10 “independent voters” (Keith et al., 1992; Lascher and Korey, 2011). Lascher and Korey note that “pure independents” (those voters who do not behave like a partisan or “lean”) are less interested in politics and “they are less strongly committed to voting and less knowledgeable than other respondents” which offers only slight clarity to my question of “Does the behavior of ‘leaning independents’ have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?” If a portion of the current NPP bloc (the “pure independent” segment) is less politically active, less committed to voting and less interested in politics, does this behavior positively impact the growth of registration? I would hypothesize if this segment of unengaged NPPs has contributed to the bloc’s growth, this segment’s impact is small, and other factors have influenced the growth as well.

#### California Geography and Self-Sorting

In regularly produced work completed at the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), Eric McGhee published “California’s Political Geography 2020” with relevant and recent conclusions about the NPP bloc. McGhee notes that while California is currently a Democratically controlled state, it has not always been that way, and for many years the population reliably voted Republican in presidential races (McGhee, 2020). Similarly, current geopolitical bifurcation of the state creates densely populated Democratic areas along the coastal regions, and less densely populated Republican areas inland (McGhee, 2020). Two helpful visual

representations from the PPIC, give context for the density of those populations (Figure 1 and 2, below):

Figure 1. The land area of the state is evenly balanced between the two parties

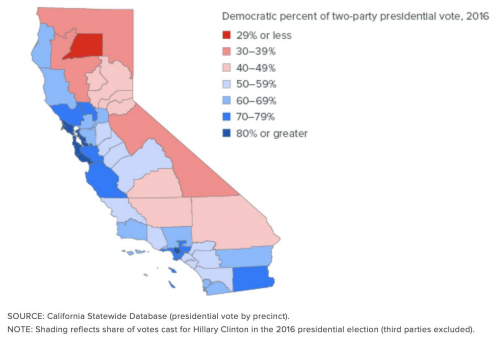
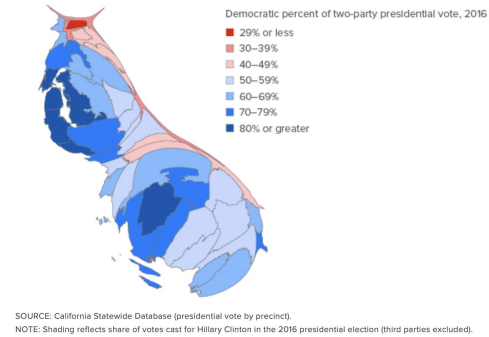


Figure 2. The state is more Democratic when distorted to reflect the number of eligible residents



SOURCE: “California’s Political Geography 2020.” Public Policy Institute of California.

McGhee goes on to further explain that self-identified independent voters throughout the state lean both Democrat and Republican; however in some of his earlier work, “independents leaned Republican in only 2 places; now they lean Republican in 11 places. Likewise, independents in the most Democratic places now tilt even more Democratic. This is consistent with the idea that many who now identify as independents might have identified with the dominant party of their area in the past.” (McGhee, p. 4, 2020). McGhee hypothesizes that former registered partisans now self-identify as “independent,” but still behave like partisans (which is supported by the behavioral research in *Myth* and “California Style”). Unfortunately McGhee does not clarify if “independent voters” have moved to the NPP bloc, and only identifies the participants in the PPIC survey as “independents.”

I hypothesize that McGhee’s observation is likely a factor in the growth of the No Party Preference. It is possible that voters who have become disillusioned with the major political parties have changed their registration to NPP, but continue to vote in the same partisan manner.

My research does not measure the magnitude of this hypothetical impact, and thus further research is needed to determine if McGhee's hypothesis is accurate.

In this section on voter behavior and California geopolitical self-sorting, I have concluded that 1) the model of "leaners" could be a guiding voter behavior that may explain a portion of the growth of the NPP voter bloc, and 2) based on the existing political self-sorting behavior of Californians and the increase in political "independent leaners" within both Democratic and Republican dominated areas of the state, the model of "leaners" should be used to conduct further research. Within these two conclusions, I hypothesize that the NPP bloc may have grown due to more California voters self-identifying as "independents" while maintaining their partisan voter behavior.

### **Ideological Lens: Polarization**

Political polarization is characterized as the extend of which people (politicians and the general public) have differing opinions on a subject, and the increase of this opposition over time. PEW Research Center noted in 2014 that, "The overall share of Americans who express consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions has doubled over the past two decades from 10% to 21%. And ideological thinking is now much more closely aligned with partisanship than in the past" (PEW, 2014). This has been corroborated many times over since then, with a more recent PEW study indicated, "Americans have rarely been as polarized as they are today" (PEW, 2020).

With this in mind, it is important to consider the impact political polarization could be having on the growth of the NPP bloc in California. In my research I specifically ask, "**Does the increasing polarization of the two major political parties in California have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?**" However, much of the research that exists on political

polarization does not measure or hypothesize on the impact polarization has on voters' affiliation with a political party (or not). In the following section, I will connect the portions of polarization research that can be related back to NPP voters in California, in an effort to inform my own research.

### Polarization and Partisanship

In “Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective,” Noam Lupu concludes that political party polarization correlates with individual partisanship – citizens become more partisan as they perceive polarization increasing. The logic for this connection is, “party polarization intensifies partisan conflict and makes parties more salient to citizens, increasing partisanship” where “the implication is that party polarization should make it more likely for individuals to become more partisan” (Lupu, p. 332, 2015). By using longitudinal and long-term survey panel data, the author finds that there is a causal relationship between national party polarization on individual partisanship (Lupu, 2015). Additionally, the author concludes that “individuals in polarized systems actually perceive their parties to be more polarized” (Lupu, p. 333, 2015). This is important to recognize, as party-level polarization is not automatically a reflection of the partisanship of the general electorate. Delineating between party polarization and the actual partisanship of the average voter helps researchers (and us) understand if the average voter is impacted by the rhetoric of politicians and large political entities.

Based on the above research, if we can conclude that the increasing polarization in American politics has a positive relationship with individual partisanship, then I ask, “If polarization and individual partisanship is increasing in the U.S. then why has the No Party Preference voter bloc in California grown significantly?” I believe there could be a possible explanation for this disconnect between partisanship and the growth of the NPP bloc. My

hypothesis is that individuals, while more polarized and partisan, are turned off by party politics, and so do not register with either major party although they still vote like partisans due to their increased polarization and partisanship. This could explain the disconnect between increased polarization, increased individual partisanship and increased registration of the No Party Preference voter bloc in California. Further research is needed to make this connection through data.

### Negative Political Ads

In an article published in 2002, authors Ken Goldstein and Paul Freedman explore how negative political ads (advertisements made by political entities that attack or show their opponent in a negative light) impact voter turnout. The authors had a specific hypothesis: “We argue that negative campaign charges are just as likely to engage potential voters, leading to a stimulation effect when it comes to turnout” (Goldstein & Freedman, p. 721, 2002). By using two unique data sources, that do not emphasize voters’ ability to recall advertisements which have impacted previous studies’ outcomes, the authors concluded that yes, negative ads do increase voter turnout, even when controlling for many other variables – “When we use our estimates of exposure to negative and contrast ads in a model of turnout, we find exposure to negativity actually *stimulates* voter turnout. It does so, we find, without regard to partisanship, information, or attention to the campaign” (Goldstein & Freedman, p. 736, 2002).

But how is this negative ad research relevant to the growth of NPP voters in California? By acknowledging that negativity in politics does drive voters to the polls, we recognize that voters can be motivated to participate in political activity (such as voting) through the stimulation their negative feelings (anger, fear, frustration, outrage) about politics. This appears to align with the research on polarization in the prior sections that shows that individuals have

become more partisan and the major political parties in the United States are more polarized (Lupu, 2015). So, if voters are motivated by what they do not like about the political party they do not support, and they are more polarized and partisan than before, I hypothesize that a potential outcome could be the movement away from political parties altogether. The growth of the NPP bloc could be connected to the growing negativity in politics in general – voters are (not consciously) motivated to participate through the use of negative ad campaigns, however when combined with the increased polarization both of the major political parties appear unattractive to the average voter. This is my hypothesis on the impact of negative ads and increased polarization, and more research is needed before any concrete inferences can be made.

In this section I have drawn two conclusions about polarization in politics: 1) as the two major political party's politics become increasingly polarized, individuals also become more partisan, and 2) negative political advertisements have been shown to increase (or stimulate) voter turnout. When combined, these two research outcomes could have a substantial impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc in California: while negativity motivates voters to continue to go to the polls, the increased partisanship and polarization actually cause average voters to dislike both major political parties and opt for "independent" (NPP) registration instead. Hypothetically, as the major parties move further away from each other (polarization), some average voters (while still being motivated to participate in political activity) may no longer align themselves with either political party, hence the increase in NPPs.

### **Ideological Lens: Political Party Factions**

While California has recently been known to be a progressive Democratic state, there are ideological factions within both the Republican and Democratic parties and their elected officials that have become more prominent over the last several years. This acknowledgement of political

factions within each major party is important to my research as it helps illuminate a potential explanation for why the NPP voter bloc has grown in recent decades. In my research I ask, **“Do the factions within the major political parties in California have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?”** While the existence of internal party divisions are acknowledged in academic research and in California specific media, there is little (if any) research on the impact of these divisions on “independent” voters. In the following section I will connect one piece of academic work on political factions to my research question, and then give examples of California media that document inter-party factions and their perceived effects.

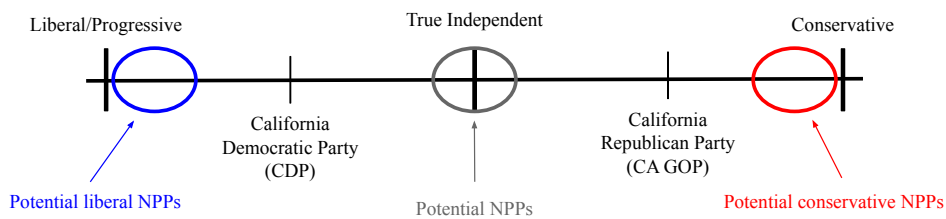
### American Party Factions

In work published in 2020, Andrew Clarke explores how ideological party sub-brands (factions) allow politicians within each of the two major political parties (Republican and Democrat) to differentiate themselves to both donors and leverage their ideological preferences, while remaining under the umbrella of the major party they are aligned with, to voters. Clarke points out that the national parties have ideological differences that have deepened over the last three decades and now “sell an ideological brand to the electorate” that is generic and central, however this brand allows voters to differentiate between the parties (Clarke, p. 452, 2020). The author writes, “I argue that legislators create factional institutions as a means of clarifying their ideological position,” and goes on to identify nine factions (five Republican and four Democrat) that existed in the U.S. Congress between the 1990s and 2018 (Clarke, p. 453, 456, 2020). For the purposes of my research, the confirmation that American political factions exist and are functional sub-brands of the two major political parties confirms that there is the possibility that the existing political factions within California politics could have an impact on the political environment.

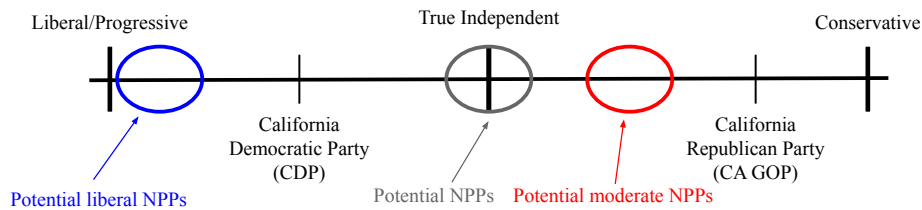


I hypothesize that there are likely two political factions that have been contributing to the growth of the NPP bloc in California: moderate conservative voters and very liberal progressives. The general understanding of the distribution of the political ideological spectrum is that the two modern major political parties fall somewhere in the moderate range on their respective sides of the spectrum, then on the far left are extreme progressives, on the far right are extreme conservatives, and in the center are true “Independents.” With each of the parties falling in the midzone of each side, there is then hypothetically three places for NPPs to fall ideologically: very progressive, true independent or very conservative. This general distribution theory can be seen in Figure 3, below.

**Figure 3: California Political Spectrum - Hypothetical Ideological Distribution**



**Figure 4: California Political Spectrum - My Theorized Ideological Distribution**



However, I hypothesize that NPPs in California have originated from different locations on the ideological spectrum than is displayed in Figure A. This is due to the shifts (or lack thereof) in the two major parties. I hypothesize that the California Republican Party (CA GOP)

has shifted ideologically into more conservative territory, while the California Democratic Party (CDP) has remained moderate. With those hypothetical ideological party adjustments, the population of California has shifted their affiliation to the parties – I hypothesize that the NPP voter bloc has grown due to voters either 1) being more progressive than the current CDP, or 2) being more moderate than the current CA GOP. My hypothetical ideological distribution of NPP growth can be seen in Figure B, above.

This is my working theory that could explain a portion of the growth of the NPP bloc based on changes in the ideological identification of voters. This theory needs extensive research to understand if there is any ideological change or connection related to the growth of the NPP bloc in California.

#### Factions within the California Legislature

California politics specific media have offered commentary on the factions within the two major political parties that supports my hypothesis in the previous section. In this portion, I will explore on two examples of articles written at the *Los Angeles Times*, by political reporters, that give examples of factions within the CDP and CA GOP. First, a 2022 article published by the *Los Angeles Times* Sacramento Bureau Chief John Myers, titled “California Politics: What’s driving a historic exodus from the California Legislature?,” Assemblymember Chad Mayes (the only Independent member of the California legislature and a former leader within the CA GOP) discussed how he believed he could change or impact the political system, and take back the power of legislating back from lobbyists. However, Mayes stated that, “We actually failed miserably at that” he was quoted (Myers, 2022). It is at the very least interesting that a former-Republican, now Independent legislator, who had the political wherewithal to leave his political party and run as an Independent, is opting to not seek further elected office. This could easily be

an outlier in the factions within the CA GOP; however, Chad Mayes could also be a bellwether for other “independents” in California.

In the same article former Assembly majority leader Ian Calderon was quoted saying, “The political world right now is brutal... It takes a massive toll on your life” (Myers, 2022). It is not very often you hear a brutally honest statement about how exhausting being a politician is – and it is unclear if this quote was given at a point of exhaustion or frustration, but I also find it unique. While the purpose of this article was not to explore NPP or “independent” voters and the factions within the parties, I believe there is relevant commentary on the state of California politics from formerly powerful politicians themselves – who are opting to not seek re-election, but instead give brief explanations for why they feel unsuccessful at their jobs.

And finally, in a March 2022 article written by Seema Mehta titled “Divisions, midterm concerns on display as California Democrats meet for convention,” the factions within the CDP are laid out for all Californians to see. She begins with setting the stage: the annual CDP convention was held virtually due to COVID-19 precautions; however that did not stop party leaders from expressing their frustrations with the party: “But the bickering between various factions overshadowed the pleas for unity by party officials who argued setting aside differences was vital for their chances in November” (Mehta, 2022). Mehta goes on to describe various labor leaders expressing frustration with the lack of progress made on liberal issues, such as single-payer healthcare and environmental policy (Mehta, 2022). Other various words and phrases are used to describe interactions between progressives and party leaders, such as “hostile,” “testy” and “paying only lip service,” that highlight the conflict between the progressive wing of the party and the more moderate leadership (Mehta, 2022).

In this section I have drawn two conclusions about factions in California politics and the growth of the NPP bloc: 1) American political factions exist and I hypothesize that there are two factions within California that may be contributing to the growth of the NPP bloc (moderately conservative voters and very liberal voters) and 2) the media has observed and identified California political factions, and California politicians acknowledge the professional exhaustion that comes with those internal battles. I hypothesize that the political exhaustion that politicians display in the media may also be felt by voters, and contribute to the growth of the NPP bloc. I theorize that the factions within the California political environment have contributed to the growth of the NPP bloc in California, although further research is needed in this area to determine if this hypothesis holds true. While it is possible that factions have always existed within California politics, I think it is important to note that the measurable increase in polarization may also be exacerbating those factions (and the level of exhaustion with it). Political exhaustion related to factional infighting and polarization may be related to each other, and impacting the growth of the NPP bloc, however more research is needed to understand the connection, if any.

### **Interview Response Themes and Conclusions**

When conceptualizing the three categories (political strategists, voter registration experts and academics) of experts for this project, my intent was to collect interview feedback from a well-rounded assortment of professionals. Ideally each interviewee would have a unique perspective on voters in California, based on their individual and professional experiences working with voters. As previous described, I reached out to a variety of political strategists, from throughout the political spectrum. I contacted California-specific voter registration experts in an effort to collect feedback that was specific to the functionality of the voter registration

system. And I spoke with academics with California political science backgrounds, from different portions of the political spectrum, in an effort to add further scholarly color to my work. Further details about who agreed to be interviewed can be found in Appendix C.

Before moving on to the larger themes I observed during the interview process, there are two stipulations I will make about my own observations. First, due to the timeline of this project, I was very limited in the number of experts I reached out to and the number of interviews I was successful in scheduling. I attempted to contact three voter registration experts, two of whom responded, and ultimately one voter registration expert interview was scheduled and conducted. I attempted to contact eight political strategists, four of which responded, and ultimately three political strategist expert interviews were conducted. And finally, I attempted to contact five California political science (academic) experts, two of whom responded, and two academic interviews were conducted. Due to the very limited scope of my interviews further research is needed to verify the observations I make in the following sections.

Second, the most tangible observation I made throughout the course of the interviews was that each participant commented on the idea that the growth of the NPP bloc (“independents,” “Decline to State,” “not affiliated with a party,” etc.) was not unique to California. This comment was offered by every participant without prompting and suggests a broader observation about American voters. My research was only intended to begin to explore why there has been growth of No Party Preference voters in California, and this observation is very much outside the scope of my work; however, I believe this interview observation reveals the importance of such work. If political strategists, voter registration experts and academics have all observed that voters appear to be opting out of affiliating with either of the major political parties across the United States, then my work signifies the very beginning of the research into why this phenomenon is

occurring. Earlier in this paper I gave two examples of states where similar growth has occurred; however I have not attempted to verify if this observation is accurate. Further research is needed to 1) confirm the experts' observation is accurate, and 2) begin to explain why voters are moving away from the major political parties across the United States.

In the remainder of this section I will connect major themes from the interviews I conducted and compare them with the results of my literature review.

### **Structural Aspects Have Nominal Impact, if any**

Earlier in this paper I hypothesized that the structural aspects of California's political environment (ballot measures and the nonpartisan open primary) may have little effect on the growth of the NPP bloc, if any, and this was corroborated by the research included in my literature review. Several of the interview participants made comments that further validated this theory. One interviewee hypothesized that there was a connection between the larger theme of NPP (or other similar label, like "independent") growth across the country and the idea that California specific structures were not a factor in California NPP growth. Their conclusion was that if the movement away from political parties is not unique to California, then the political structures likely have little to do with the growth of the NPP voter bloc.

I agree with this interviewee's interpretation. If ballot measures were encouraging growth of the NPP bloc, then we would be able to track that growth over the decades that ballot measures have been in use in California. Similarly, if changes in the California primary structure influenced voters' party affiliation we could track the growth of the NPP bloc in the years since the primary structure change. To the best of my knowledge, neither my ballot measure hypothesis nor my nonpartisan primary theory have been studied academically.

## **Motor Voter Implementation**

About half of the interviewees organically brought up the California voter registration program called Motor Voter. According to the California Secretary of State’s website, the Motor Voter program, “is making registering to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) more convenient. Eligible applicants completing a driver license, identification (ID) card or change of address transaction online, by mail or in person at the DMV will be automatically registered to vote by the California Secretary of State, unless they choose to opt out of automatic voter registration” (Secretary of State, 2022). Implemented in the early 1990s, the Motor Voter program was intended to assist Californians in registering to vote with ease – if they were already transacting with the state through the DMV, then perhaps adding voter registration into the process would help increase the total registered voters across the state. While this may have been the intent, based on the feedback from interviewees and a cursory search through the *Los Angeles Times* archives, there were (and perhaps still are) many problems with the implementation and execution of the Motor Voter program.

This is relevant to my overarching research question of, “Why has the proportion of No Party Preference voters grown in the state of California?” because any statewide voter registration program has the potential to influence the proportion of voters affiliated with a political party, or otherwise. Specifically, I suggested three potential reasons why the Motor Voter program could have influenced the growth of the NPP bloc: 1) compulsory voter registration, 2) lack of intuitiveness of the registration process through the Motor Voter process, and 3) lack of political knowledge of the average Californian.

First, based on the description provided by interviewees and the brief research I completed on the program, the Motor Voter program constituted what was perceived as a

compulsory voter registration program for California residents who were interacting with the Department of Motor Vehicles. I was not able to locate a copy of the form residents fill out during the Motor Voter portion of an interaction with the DMV, however interviewees described how difficult it was to opt-out of the voter registration questions, and that California had a terrible track record for Motor Voter implementation at the process level.

Second, interviewees indicated that the Motor Voter form itself lacked intuitiveness and was confusing, making voter registration more complicated than it needed to be. Again, while I was not able to locate a copy of the Motor Voter form used during implementation, multiple interviewees commented that the process included the resident's registration defaulting to No Party Preference – making the California resident have to affirmatively select a party affiliation or they would be automatically registered, or re-registered, as NPP. One interviewee commented that Californians may not mindfully be opting out of political party affiliation, but passively opting out through an automated process through the DMV.

Third, multiple interviewees commented on the Motor Voter program asking questions of California residents that were outside their scope of understanding, suggesting that Californians do not know the difference between the political parties, and so may not feel informed enough to make a choice during an interaction with the DMV. This observation is supported by research presented in my literature review (Ahler, Citrin & Lenz, 2016). In essence, the Motor Voter program may have accelerated the function of low political knowledge by nudging California residents to actively opt into voter registration with a political party, or passively join the NPP bloc.

The three observations and subsequent hypotheses about the growth of the NPP bloc in relation to the Motor Voter program are all purely speculative, as I was not able to locate specific



research that shows there is or was a connection between the poor implementation of the program and a specific jump in NPP registration. However, I am categorizing the observed Motor Voter program commentary in what I am tentatively conceptualizing as *passive growth* of the NPP bloc – an unintentional consequence of a poorly executed public policy idea.

### **The *Bowling Alone* Effect**

Robert Putnam published the seminal work *Bowling Alone* in 2000 which argued that the social underpinnings of modern society have weakened in countries such as the United States, with ill effects on democracy. Almost every interviewee I spoke with brought up this theme, passively or directly. Occasionally it was a tangent story about isolation, and sometimes it was a story about voter loneliness related to COVID-19, but generally there was a theme of identifying how our modern society has moved away from the general public's affiliation with institutions (which includes the two major political parties). While no interviewee specifically referenced *Bowling Alone*, the theme of societal disenfranchisement with political parties was either directly or indirectly referenced in six out of six interviews.

This observation is supported by research included in my literature review, specifically in the Behavioral subsection related to voter contact. Gerber and Green's conclusion that in-person voter contact is more effective at improving voter turnout than communications via the phone (2000). The concept that social interaction improves voter turnout is related to the idea that our modern society isolates individuals, thus pushing them away from political activity like participating in organized politics through a political party. Similarly, Prato and Wolton observed that the ideal voter need to be interested and pay attention to politics, but not too much (2016). Recognizing that because our modern society has reduced the emphasis on organizations like political parties suggests that the growth of the NPP bloc is perhaps a function of the changes in

our larger societal practices around organizational culture than electoral structures, voter behavior or ideology.

Further research is needed to pinpoint if this hypothetical *Bowling Alone* Effect has contributed to the growth of the NPP bloc in California. I hypothesize, based on the prevalence of observations within my interviews, that there is likely some kind of connection between lack of social capital and the growth of the NPP bloc.

### **“Negative Partisanship” and Polarization**

One interviewee made an observation about the nature of negativity in modern politics that stuck out as a potential topic of future research and could be related to the growth of the NPP voter bloc in California. The interviewee referred to this concept as “negative polarization,” and explained the idea as negativity in politics driving voters to action and also further into polarization. This response was prompted by a question in my questionnaire about polarization, but I interpreted this interviewee’s response as being more generally about modern politics.

The idea that voters are motivated by negativity is supported by research included in my literature review, specifically the Ideological section and polarization subsection. Goldstein and Freedman showed in their research that voters are motivated by negative political ads, so the general observation made by the interviewee about negativity stimulating voter participation is corroborated in my literature review (2002). However, it is unclear how this impacts the growth of the NPP voter bloc.

Hypothetically, if voters are motivated by negative ads (and negativity in politics generally), then perhaps voters are more polarized as well. This could lead voters to be turned off from the political parties they see as being overtly negative, thus resulting in a voter changing their registration to NPP, even though they might keep voting along party lines. This hypothesis

of a chain reaction of negative ad, to polarization, to disaffiliation with a political party is purely hypothetical and would require further research to explore.

### **The Public Policy Implications & High Level Recommendations for Governments**

So where does this leave us? Before turning to policy recommendations, I want to revisit my research question and reflect on the outcomes of the literature review and how they are (or are not) related to the interview themes I detailed in the prior section. My research question asks, **“Why has the proportion of No Party Preference voters grown in the state of California?”**

Throughout my literature review I offered hypotheses about how factors identified using each lens (Structural, Behavioral and Ideological) could be influencing that growth (or not) of the NPP bloc. Through combining my literature review hypotheses and the major themes in the interview results, I have synthesized three stories about the growth of the California NPP bloc.

#### **Story One: California NPPs May Be Bellwether for U.S.**

First, both my literature review using the structural lens and my interview results suggest that the growth in NPP registration may simply be a bellwether for what is occurring across the nation. In the literature review, I concluded that because ballot measures are not new to the California political environment, they likely create a hurdle to participation and do *not* incentivize NPP registration, therefore such measures may not be linked to the recent jump in the NPP registration. Similarly, at the conclusion of the nonpartisan primary section of my literature review, I hypothesized that if the nonpartisan primary has an effect on the growth of the NPP voter bloc, it is small, and potentially not something voters are consciously aware of when registering to vote.

If the interviewees were correct in their observations that the growth of the NPP bloc was not unique to California (again, interviewees offered this conclusion without prompting), that

reinforces the conclusion that structural aspects of California's election system likely have little, if any, impact on the growth of NPP registration. Other states' elections have their own unique combination of structures, and if the portion of non-aligned voters is growing outside of California as well, then the election structures of those locations (as well as in California) may not play a role in NPP ("independent," etc.) growth.

### **Story Two: NPP Growth May Not Be Intentional At The Individual Level**

The second story that emerged from the literature review and interviews is that California voters may lack the political knowledge and wherewithal to change their party registration to NPP purposefully, resulting in a kind of passive growth of the NPP voter bloc. I hypothesize that the many problems with the implementation and execution of the Motor Voter program may have contributed to this passive growth, creating a larger jump in registration of the NPP bloc than perhaps was intentional at the individual level.

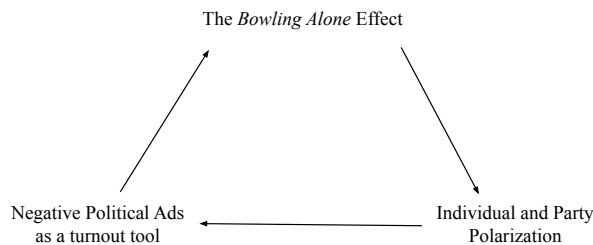
Within the nonpartisan primary portion of the literature review, I established that the average voter's lack of political awareness creates a barrier for their intentional selection of a more moderate candidate, and I believe this lack of political understanding could be a factor in the growth of the NPP bloc (Ahler, Citrin & Lenz, 2016). Specifically, if voters cannot tell the difference between the two major political parties, or the politicians affiliated with either party, they may not be motivated to purposefully select registration with one party or the other, or any party at all. When combining this lack of awareness with the poor implementation of the Motor Voter program, as several of the interviewees suggested, there may have been an unintentional spike in NPP registration. One interviewee commented that Californians may not mindfully be opting out of political party affiliation, but passively opting out through an automated process through the DMV. In essence, the Motor Voter program may have accelerated the function of

low political knowledge by nudging California residents to actively opt into voter registration with a political party, or passively join the NPP bloc, resulting in a jump in NPP registration.

**Story Three: *Bowling Alone*, Polarization & Negativity May Be Related to NPP Growth**

The third and final emerging story is about an interaction between the lack of civic connectedness (The *Bowling Alone* Effect) in our modern society, the growing political polarization and negativity as a motivator in politics that may be contributing to the growth of the NPP bloc in California (and perhaps beyond). The goal of my research was to explore why the NPP bloc in California has grown, and through that exploration I have come to a new hypothesis: I believe there may be a cyclical, or perhaps symbiotic, relationship between the lack of social capital Putnam refers to in *Bowling Alone*, and the measurable increase in political polarization (both at the party level, but also at the individual level) over the last decade or so (Putnam, 2000; Lupu, 2015). Additionally, based on the conclusion in my literature review within the Ideological section pertaining to polarization, I hypothesize that the impact of negativity in political ads (and the political environment generally) contributes to both modern society’s lack of civic connectedness and individual polarization (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002). Below you can see a diagram of a potential cyclical relationship between the three concepts:

**Figure 5: Story Three - *Bowling Alone*, Polarization & Negativity May Be Related to NPP Growth**



I hypothesize the combination of factors listed in Figure 5 has contributed to the growth of the NPP bloc by both disincentivizing political party affiliation (through increased polarization and existing societal disaffiliation with organizations) and using negativity in political ads as a motivating tool. While negativity motivates voters to continue to go to the polls, the increased partisanship and polarization actually cause average voters to dislike both major political parties and opt for NPP registration instead. The *Bowling Alone* Effect functions at both the individual and group levels – if the individual is not engaging with others (about politics or otherwise) they may be more likely to opt into the NPP bloc, as they do not feel welcomed by either of the major political parties (regardless of ideological compatibility). Further research is needed in this area.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Changes in a population's ideology, political behavior and political preferences happen over time. A responsive and nimble government will attempt to understand those changes and adjust in response – accounting for and reacting to substantive changes among constituents is a key part of a successful government. With that said, I want to acknowledge that voter registration, while a trend that governments should be aware of, is not a “problem” to be “fixed” by a government program or policy. Democracy is a vital part of our society and governments should be supporting voter registration as a form of each individual's civil and civic rights. The observations about voter behavior and ideology throughout this policy paper are intended to guide nonpartisan and non-political policy and programmatic recommendations. In the following sections I make two practical policy recommendations that are applicable at the statewide and local levels.

## Recommendation One: Further Research Needed on Outcomes of Motor Voter Program

The first policy recommendation comes as a result of the interviewee feedback about the Motor Voter program, and how that Motor Voter program may be related to passive NPP bloc growth (in combination with other factors previously described).

Throughout the interviewee feedback and in a cursory research I completed on the program, the Motor Voter program appears to have constituted what was perceived as a compulsory voter registration program for California residents who were interacting with the Department of Motor Vehicles. As I previously mentioned, interviewees indicated that the Motor Voter form itself lacked intuitiveness and was confusing, perhaps making voter registration more complicated than it needed to be. Again, while I was not able to locate a copy of the Motor Voter form used during implementation, multiple interviewees commented that the process included the political party registration defaulting to No Party Preference – making the California resident need to affirmatively select a party affiliation or they would be automatically registered, or re-registered, as NPP.

**At a minimum I recommend further research into the implications of the Motor Voter registration program.** Conducting an internal audit of the program (from the first implementation to current day) to understand the exact impact the Motor Voter program has had on NPP growth does not seem unreasonable. Similarly, a study that compared the implementation and modification timeline of the Motor Voter program to the fluctuations within NPP voter registration has the potential to reveal if there is any tangible relationship between the DMV's Motor Voter program and growth (or not) of the NPP bloc.

While multiple factors may be impacting the growth of the NPP bloc in California in relation to the Motor Voter program, the Department of Motor Vehicles should not be

implementing a statewide program that facilitates the passive or individually unintentional growth of a political affiliation – on purpose or otherwise. I recommend further research, either conducted internally or externally, in an effort to understand if the Motor Voter program had an impact on NPP registration that resulted in growth of the voter bloc.

### Recommendation Two: Funding Local & Nonpartisan Community Development

The second policy recommendation is a response to the hypothetical patterns in NPP growth that are potentially related to The *Bowling Alone* Effect, increased polarization and negativity in politics as a motivator for voter turnout. As previously stated, there was a strong, tangible theme in the interview responses of identifying how our modern society has moved away from the general public's affiliation with institutions (which includes the two major political parties), a reduced level of social connectedness and reduced social capital. Further, I hypothesized that there may be some form of cyclical relationship between these societal changes and political polarization and the use of negative ads as motivation to turnout to vote (see Figure 5).

While it is not the government's responsibility to facilitate societal connectedness or try to prevent or combat political polarization, there are programs that can help communities connect in nonpartisan and non-political ways that have the potential to neutralize the existing disinterest with institutions. **I recommend local governments fund (and strategically execute) community building and organizing programs centered around nonpartisan interests and activities.** Community building and organizing at the local level has been common place for decades across the country. City governments have funded community-focused programs (such as parks and recreation, cooking classes, youth music and sports and others) for decades; however in more recent years budget cuts and the growing wealth gap has made local budgets



smaller, while also accruing natural disaster related debt. While these kinds of programs may have fallen by the wayside during fiscally tight years, I believe there is a tangible benefit to bringing public services back to the local level.

**Additionally, I recommend those community programs and services be researched and executed strategically, with an emphasis on the strategic use of technology and messaging around the sources of funding used for the programs.** Each community is best served through different programs, just as each community is made up of different demographics – a program for youth music may not perform well in a community where a large senior citizen housing development is located. Similarly, the technology of the 2020s has changed the interests of some communities – where a city recreational program that included cooking classes and a basketball league may have performed well in the 1980s and 90s, classes that cater to the technology-based interested of current day (such as open source coding or digital video editing) may perform well in the 2020s. And lastly, the average Californian may not understand where the funding for community programs comes from, so consciously messaging how the program is being paid for (tax dollars, external funding, collaboration with not for profit entities, etc.) will help California residents absorb information about their local government.

Community engagement programs may not have the direct goal of reducing political polarization, but it could help engage local citizens through nonpartisan activities that allow them to see their neighbors in a neutral, or even positive, light. Similarly, if community engagement can lead to the development of a more tolerant and understanding community, then the effect of negative political ads may be reduced, as a tertiary benefit.

## *Conclusions & Outstanding Questions*

Throughout this policy paper I have presented a variety of hypotheses, academic research and expert feedback that I have used to explore potential explanations for the growth of the NPP voter bloc in California. I used three lenses (Structural, Behavioral and Ideological) to investigate hypothetical explanations for NPP growth and to build context around voter behavior and ideology in California through a systematized literature review. I connected the three lenses in the literature review to structured interview questions, which I presented to California voter experts. Each of the three lenses had a corresponding set of questions within the interview questionnaire. I conducted interviews with California voter experts that fell into three categories: political strategists, voter registration experts and academics. I synthesized the interviewee feedback into major takeaways and themes. I then made specific connections between the literature review conclusions and interviewee themes, which resulted in three stories about potential explanations for NPP voter block growth. Ultimately I made two public policy recommendations based on those stories, one which applied to a statewide program, and a second that could be implemented at the local level.

While I made a variety of connections between the literature review and interviewee feedback that resulted in policy recommendations (and I was able to synthesize much of the information into hypothetical stories about California voters) there is still much to learn about why the NPP bloc has grown. Specifically, I have three plausible hypotheses from the literature review and interviewee feedback that need further research. Each of the following three hypotheses stand out as reasonable explanations that have potential to clarify NPP growth in California:

- I hypothesize that the NPP bloc may have grown due to more California voters self-identifying as “independents” while maintaining their partisan voter behavior.
- I hypothesize that as the two major political parties become more polarized, voters may no longer align ideologically with either party, and so may register as NPP.
- I hypothesize that political exhaustion (related to political party factional in fighting) that politicians display in the media may also be felt by voters, and contribute to the growth of the NPP bloc.

Further research is needed on many different aspects of the No Party Preference voter bloc in California and I believe this work will pave the way for understanding NPP, “independent,” “Decline to State” and other voters who choose to be unaffiliated from any political party.

## Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my partner, Justin, who has supported, encouraged and inspired me more in the past several years than anyone I have ever known. I quite literally could not have done this without him and I will be forever grateful for his love, thoughtfulness and tireless support. I cannot wait to see what we do next.

Second, I would like to thank my mom, dad and brother for all motivating me to be the final Monte to complete their Master's degree. Without all of them lighting a competitive fire under me, I never would have gotten this far in the first place.

Third, I would like to thank Ted, Rob and Sara for their guidance and advice over the course of my time in the MPPA program. Thank you each for the time, energy and thought you put into your feedback and help over the years.

Similarly, I would like to thank the Shadow Council for believing in my ability to finish this degree and cheering me on during my darkest days. Without each of them I would not be the resilient person I am today. I would also like to thank Amanda for trusting me to be her business partner and supporting me through the final stages of this program. We have just begun our journey together and I am excited to see where Amethyst takes us.

I would like to thank each of the experts I interviewed for this project – I appreciate the professionalism and attention to detail each individual brought to our time together.

Since beginning this degree in 2017 the world has dramatically changed, and so have I. I am thankful for my 2017 and 2021 cohorts – it has truly been a pleasure to learn from each of you and I hope our paths cross again in the future.

### Appendix A: Literature Review Matrix

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Author(s), Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Findings/Relevance</b>
Structural	Ballot Measures	Biggers (2011)	When Ballot Issues Matter: Social Issue Ballot Measures and Their Impact on Turnout.	Social issues are able to increase turnout when appearing in ballot measures, however ballot measures in general do not generate higher voter turnout.
Structural	Ballot Measures	Reilly & Richey (2011).	Ballot Question Readability and Roll-Off: The Impact of Language Complexity.	Voters will not answer ballot measure questions that include language that is too complex or hard to read. Or they will choose inconsistently.
Structural	Ballot Measures	Seabrook, Dyck & Lascher (2015)	Do Ballot Initiatives Increase General Political Knowledge?	After controlling for many variables, no empirical relationship between ballot initiatives and political knowledge can be found.
Structural	Nonpartisan Primary	McGhee et al. (2014)	A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology.	Overall polarization is roughly constant across partisan and nonpartisan primaries. Essentially, primary structural differences do not mitigate polarization.
Structural	Nonpartisan Primary	Bullock & Clinton (2011)	More a Molehill than a Mountain: The Effects of the Blanket Primary on Elected Officials' Behavior from California.	The adoption of the blanket primary (from a closed primary) in 2000 created an environment where more moderate candidates were elected, specifically in less partisan districts.
Structural	Nonpartisan Primary	Ahler, Citrin, & Lenz (2016)	Do Open Primaries Improve Representation? An Experimental Test of California's 2012 Top-Two Primary.	The top-two primary failed to help moderate candidates. Voters were unable to distinguish between extreme and centrist candidates within the same party, nor were they able to engage in ideology driven voting behavior.
Behavioral	Voter Contact	Gerber & Green (2000).	The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment.	Face to face voter mobilization works better than outreach done via both mail and phone.
Behavioral	Voter Contact	Prato & Wolton (2016)	The Voters' Curses: Why We Need Goldilocks Voters.	Voters need to be both interested and invested in politics in order for candidates' campaigns to be successful – however a candidate's competence and their policy platform play a role in voter's engagement.

**Appendix A: Literature Review Matrix, con't**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Author(s), Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Findings/Relevance</b>
Behavioral	Leaners	Lascher & Korey (2011)	The Myth of the Independent Voter, California Style	The majority of California “independents” lean towards one or the other major political party, and only about 1/10 behave like a truly independent voter.
Behavioral	Leaners	Klar (2014)	Identity and Engagement among Political Independents in America	The variance in “independents” political engagement can be explained by each person’s individual value of their self-conceptualized “independent” identity.
Behavioral	Leaners	Baldassare et al. (2021)	California Voter and Party Profiles	Most “independent” likely voters lean towards a major party.
Behavioral	Leaners	McGhee (2020)	California’s Political Geography 2020	“Independents” lean towards the Democratic Party in most geographic places in the state, however there are portions of the state where the majority of the NPP voters lean towards the Republican Party.
Ideological	Polarization	Lupu (2015)	Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective	Polarization correlates with individual partisanship – citizens become more partisan as they perceive polarization increasing.
Ideological	Polarization	Goldstein, K., & Freedman, P. (2002).	Campaign Advertising and Voter Turnout: New Evidence for a Stimulation Effect.	Exposure to negative campaign ads stimulates voter turnout.
Ideological	Factions	Clarke (2020)	Party Sub-Brands and American Party Factions.	Even within highly polarized political parties, American ideology is more than a two party system – factions exists within the two major parties and political sub-brands, and those sub-brands appeal to niche donors and political support.
Ideological	Factions	Myers (February 2022)	California Politics: What’s driving a historic exodus from the California Legislature?	Assm. Chad Mayes (the only “Independent” in the CA legislature) is one of many who will not be running for re-election or seeking a new seat, in what is being called a massive voluntary exodus from the legislature.
Ideological	Factions	Mehta (March 2022)	Divisions, midterm concerns on display as California Democrats meet for convention.	Labor leaders denounce corporate money and business friendly sentiments within CDP during annual CDP

## **Appendix B: Connecting the Literature Review, Research Question & Interview Questions**

<b>Lit Review Section</b>	<b>Lit Review Subsection</b>	<b>Sub Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Question (Appendix D)</b>
Structural	Ballot Measure	Does the California ballot measure system have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?	Q2: Voter participation in CA's ballot measure process is not limited by a voter's party registration - all registered voters can vote in any ballot measure election. Do you think the electoral structure of ballot measures prompts more people to register as No Party Preference?
Structural	Open Nonpartisan Primary	Does the California Nonpartisan Top-Two Open Primary have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?	Q3: California's open primary system allows registered voters to participate in primary and general elections regardless of their party affiliation. Do you think the fundamental nature of the California open primary prompts more people to register as No Party Preference?
Behavioral	Voter Contact	Does the amount or type of voter contact/outreach done by major political parties in California have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?	Q4: When voters are registered with a major political party in California, they are often contacted via mail, phone and text campaigns, along with door-knocking campaigns, for political purposes. Do you think this volume of voter contact through the major political parties prompts more people to register as No Party Preference?
Behavioral	Leaners	Does the behavior of "leaning independents" have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?	Q5: Studies on the political behavior of "independents" have revealed that most No Party Preference (NPP) voters have leanings toward one major party and display voting patterns that are consistent with registered voters from the major political parties. Given this information, why do you think the proportion of NPP voters in California has increased in recent years?
Ideological	Polarization	Does the increasing polarization of the two major political parties in California have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?	Q6: There is much evidence that national politics has become increasingly polarized. Do you think this polarization has driven voters away from the major parties and so prompted more California voters to register No Party Preference?
Ideological	Factions	Do the factions within the major political parties in California have an impact on the growth of the NPP voter bloc?	Q7: Factions within each major party have been covered in the news media over the last several years. For example, the Tea Party on the conservative side and the Democratic Socialists on the liberal side have increasingly impacted their related political party. Do you think these internal party divides have prompted more voters to register No Party Preference?

## **Appendix C: Interviewees List**

### **Political Strategists**

Cecilia Caballo – Vice President, Bryson Gillette

Mike Madrid – Principal, Grassroots Labs

Kevin Liao – Director, Bryson Gillette

### **Voter Registration Experts**

Kim Alexander – President, California Voter Foundation

### **Academics**

Seth Masket – Professor, University Denver

Wesley Hussey – Professor, Sacramento State University, California



### **Appendix D: Interview Questions**

1. California's voter registration numbers have fluctuated over the years, specifically in the number and overall percentage of "independent" or No Party Preference (NPP) voters. In recent years the number of registered voters under the NPP umbrella has oscillated around the 5 million voter mark – and this percentage has grown over time, from about 16% of all registered voters in August 2003 to over 23% of voters in August 2021. Do you think there are any underlying reasons for this change in voter registration behavior?
2. Voter participation in CA's ballot measure process is not limited by a voter's party registration - all registered voters can vote in any ballot measure election. Do you think the electoral structure of ballot measures prompts more people to register as No Party Preference?
3. California's open primary system allows registered voters to participate in primary and general elections regardless of their party affiliation. Do you think the fundamental nature of the California open primary prompts more people to register as No Party Preference?
4. When voters are registered with a major political party in California, they are often contacted via mail, phone and text campaigns, along with door-knocking campaigns, for political purposes. Do you think this volume of voter contact through the major political parties prompts more people to register as No Party Preference?
5. Studies on the political behavior of "independents" have revealed that most No Party Preference (NPP) voters have leanings toward one major party and display voting patterns that are consistent with registered voters from the major political parties. Given this information, why do you think the proportion of NPP voters in California has increased in recent years?
6. There is much evidence that national politics has become increasingly polarized. Do you think this polarization has driven voters away from the major parties and so prompted more California voters to register No Party Preference?
7. Factions within each major party have been covered in the news media over the last several years. For example, the Tea Party on the conservative side and the Democratic Socialists on the liberal side have increasingly impacted their related political party. Do you think these internal party divides have prompted more voters to register No Party Preference?
8. California has a unique combination of structural, behavioral and ideological factors that influence registered voters' selection of party affiliation (or not). Is there any factor we have not discussed that you believe influences voters' registration behavior and nudges Californians towards selecting No Party Preference instead of one of the major political parties?

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