

Perspectives Based on Political Affiliation



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The Morrison Institute set out to gauge current differences among Arizonans on more than 20 public policy questions. The researchers included the lens of party identification, non-identification, and non-registration as part of their information gathering and analysis. This is important because Arizona's political landscape is in flux and these categories can provide a partial view of the changing landscape beyond any fixed ideological positions.

The new study discovers some interesting, even counter-intuitive things. It showed a large party-based divide of 15 or more percentage points on 20 metrics (issues). The Independents were more closely aligned with Republicans on 16 of them. While one might conclude from these findings that Independents in Arizona lean more right than left, the study also shows that Independents' views are closer to those of Democrats on some of the most ideologically polarizing questions. For example, Independents align more closely with Democrats on being willing to have low- or moderate-income housing developed in their neighborhood, on whether undocumented immigrants pose a safety threat, and on whether farmers use water efficiently. It would be fair (and wise) to conclude that Arizona's community of Independents—which includes 41% of Latinos—does not easily conform to a “one size fits all” ideological framework.

Still, the idea that the sensibilities of Independent voters

can be best understood by relativizing us to Democrats and Republicans is flawed, specifically because non-aligned voters have chosen to reject those labels. And here the Morrison study offers a novel insight. By breaking down the responses into four categories—Republican, Democrat, Independent and Not Registered—Morrison allows us to see the affinity between Independents and those who have not signed up as voters. On 12 of the policy questions, just over half, the differential in the answers by these two groups was five points or less. In another 10, the differential between the two groups was between six and 10 points.

This is meaningful. After all, Independents have chosen their identity based on a lack of confidence in the party-based system. Those who do not register have such an extreme level of disaffection that they do not sign up to vote at all. This affinity poses a timely challenge to the two major parties, namely, as Arizona potentially becomes a swing state in national elections, who will win the hearts and minds of the unaffiliated voter and the yet-to-be-registered voter? That will determine the future political direction of the state.

Finally, there was one finding of particular interest. This was on the question of whether respondents were “confident in Arizona state government handling Arizona's problems.” Just 53% of Republicans said they were confident even though the Republican Party controls state government. 38% of Democrats were confident, a more expected response given the politics of state government. 46% of Independents and 46% of non-voters said they were confident. Thus, one might conclude that with 47% of Republicans, 62% of Democrats and 54% of Independents and non-voters lacking confidence in state government's handling of problems, a broad coalition could be assembled to reform the process of governance and bring tens of thousands more voters into the process, all to create a new level of public confidence and trust in government and to re-establish the consent of the governed.