

CA45th RESEARCH REPORT #2



CA45th

May 26, 2017 **Party Registration Trends in the 45th Congressional District**

We analyzed voter registration information obtained from the Orange County Registrar of Voters (3/23/17) to break down political party registration by age and initial voter registration date.

Results suggest distinct differences by age cohort as well as registration time periods. These differences will have implications for both the distribution of party registration in the 45th Congressional District moving forward, as well as candidate campaign strategy.

WHAT WE FOUND

1. A steady decrease in Republican party registration has been taking place since the 1990s. This has become most apparent in the youngest (18-29) voter cohort in the district which today has the lower rate of Republican party registration (23.6%) compared to older age cohorts.
2. Democratic party registration has increased during the time that Republican party registration has decreased, though it cannot be said that successive cohorts have bypassed the GOP in order to register as Democrats, Rather, the increase in NPP voters seems to be a more direct beneficiary. Again, looking at the youngest voter cohort of 18-29 year olds, NPP is the most frequently chosen mode of party registration at 38.4% of this cohort.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

- Without major party realignment, Republican party registration is expected to decrease as generational replacement takes place in the district.
- With NPP registration status increasing among younger cohorts, campaign strategies will not only need to incorporate social media strategies to engage younger cohorts, but also be cognizant of younger cohorts' disconnect from traditional political parties

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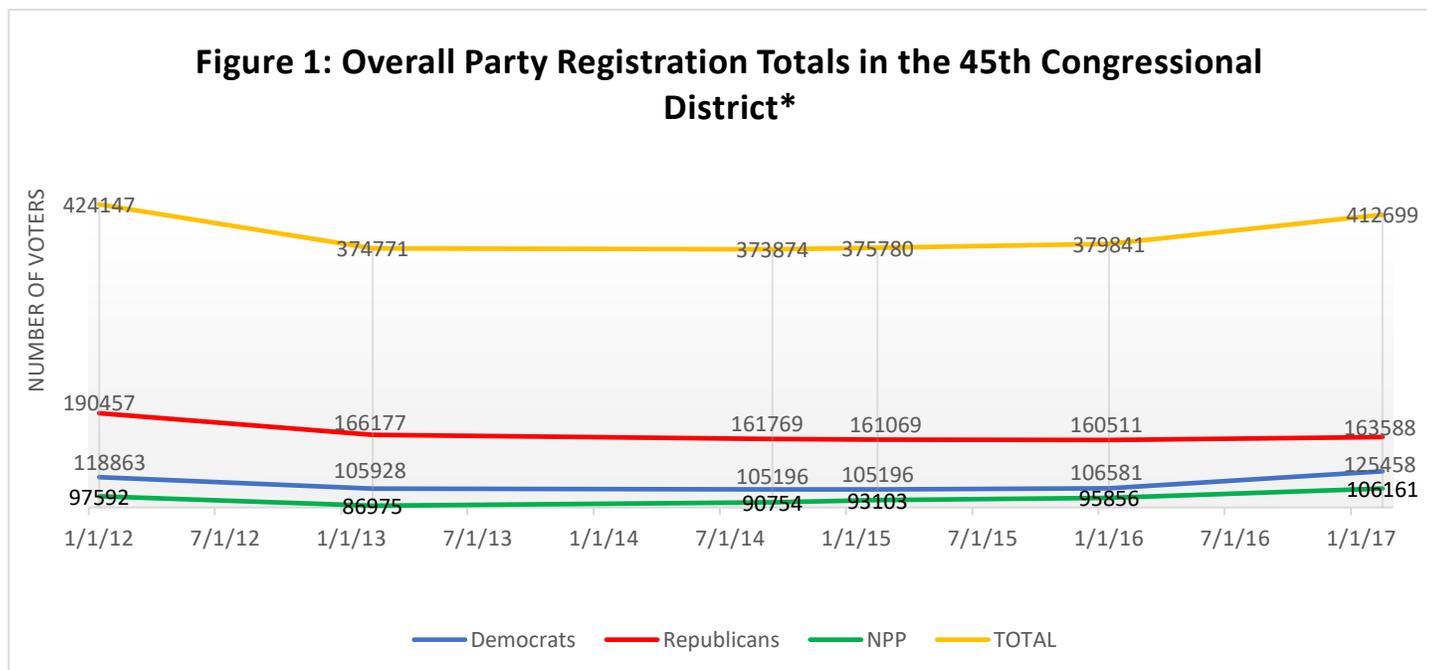
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May 26, 2017 Party Registration Trends in the 45th Congressional District

Much has been made of the increase in Democratic and No Party Preference (NPP) voters in the district.¹ Trend lines reflecting raw numbers of voters since the district was redrawn in 2012² show a clear increase in the number of Democratic and NPP voters, with a leveling of Republican voters in the district (see Figure 1).



*registration totals in redistricted CA-45th (from 2012 until present)
Source: Orange County Registrar of Voters, 3/23/17

A question which is frequently asked is whether these changes have primarily come about due to demographic shifts in the district based on ethnic and racial changes arising from immigration³ or if there is an additional demographic aspect to them.

Articles in the *Orange County Register* have suggested that while “younger voters are more apt to prefer Democrats than the older voters who are dying off,”⁴ “perhaps more significant is the growth of young voters who want nothing to do with either party.”⁵ The extent to which this is the case can be seen with an analysis and breakdown of voter registration data by age and party registration. This is shown in Figure 2. Shifts in registration are most dramatic among Republican voters. In the 66 and older age group, more than half, 52.0% are registered Republicans.

¹ <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-oc-dems-path-20170518-htmstory.html>, <http://www.ocregister.com/2016/02/08/gop-voters-in-oc-fall-below-40/>

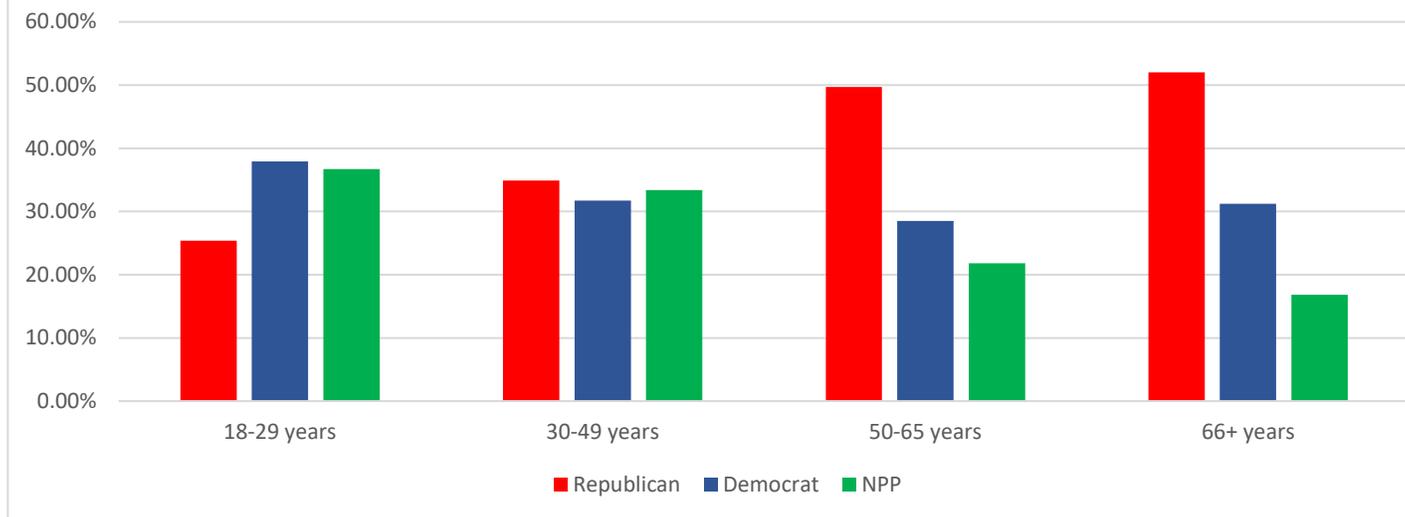
² https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/new-california-map-leaves-gop-on-defense-if-slightly-less-so/2011/07/29/gIQAPKznhl_blog.html?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.bac0cc596c4e

³ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58a121de5016e17623852960/t/5919b75529687fd2ca10d5c6/1494857558082/Citizen+at+Birth+vs+Naturalized+Citizens+and+Voter+Registration.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.ocregister.com/2017/05/26/forecasters-predict-rain-for-o-c-democrats-parade/>

⁵ <http://www.ocregister.com/2016/08/10/young-voters-pull-oc-to-left/>

Figure 2: Party Registration by Age Group, CA-45th



Source: Orange County Registrar of Voters 3/23/17

The percent of registered Republicans decreases as the age cohorts get younger, with slightly less than half, 49.7% of 50-65 year olds registered as Republicans, 34.9% of 30-49 year olds registered as Republicans, and 25.4% of 18-29 year olds registered as Republicans.

For the other categories under analysis, Democrats and NPP voters, the change over time is in the opposite direction. Of the oldest cohort of voters, those 66 years of age and older, 31.2% are registered as Democrats and 16.8% are registered as NPP. The percentage of Democrats dips slightly in the 50-65 year old age group to 28.6% and increases for NPP registered voters to 21.8%. For 30-49 year olds, the percentage of registered Democrats is again at 31.7%, while the percentage of NPP voters increases dramatically to 33.4%. Finally, in the 18-29 year old age group, the percentage of registered Democrats rises to 37.9% of this age group, with NPP registered voters consisting of 36.7% of this age group. These differences in rates of registration by age group are statistically significant.⁶

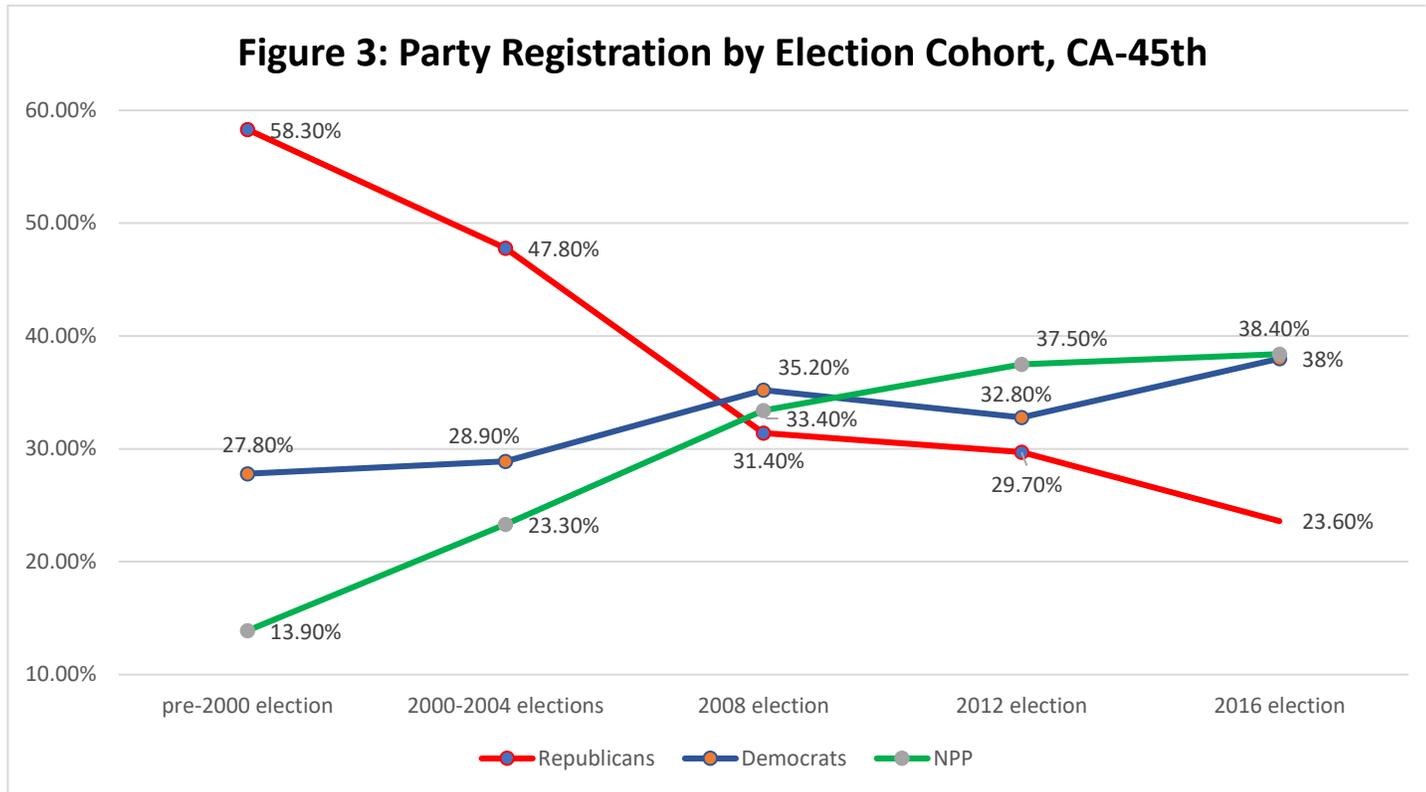
Differences in party registration are most dramatic for Republicans with a 26% decrease in share of age cohort, from the oldest category of 66 years and older (52%) to the youngest age cohort of 18-29 year olds (25.4%). While Democratic party registration increases slightly across each successive age cohort (+6.7%), NPP registered voters increase substantially across each successive age cohort by 19.9%.

The most dramatic shifts in party registration percentage takes place in the transition from the 50-65 year old age cohort to the 30-49 year old age cohort, with the share in registered Republicans decreasing from 49.7% to 34.9% and the share of NPP registered voters increasing from 21.8% to 33.4%. Given that these age groupings contain individuals with various levels of voting experience, another way to break down the registration data is by presidential election cycles. In other words, how do registration shares differ around presidential elections? Historically, registration numbers grow around presidential elections,⁷ so in looking at registration breakdowns around presidential elections, we might be able to more specifically pin down when the shifts in partisan/non partisan registration across cohorts took place. Figure 3 breaks down Party Registration by election cohort. Specifically, those who registered around the 2016 election (during the last two years), those who registered around the 2012 election (registered from 3-6 years ago), those who registered around the 2008 election

⁶ Pearson Chi-Square=19943.858 (6 d.f.), p=.000

⁷ <http://www.scp.org/news/2016/08/19/63742/california-voter-registration-hits-2nd-highest-tot/>

(registered 7-11 years ago), those who registered around the 2000-2004 elections (registered 12-18 years ago), and those who



Source: Orange County Registrar of Voters, 3/23/17

registered more than 19 years ago.

A clear majority (58.3%) of those who registered well prior to the 2000 election registered as Republicans. Around the time of the 2000-2004 elections, less than a majority (47.8%) of those registering in this time period do so as Republicans. The clear point of change takes place with the 2008 election, with a drop off in Republican registration, to 31.4%, a jump in Democratic party registration to 35.2% and a jump in the NPP registration to 33.4%. From the time of the 2008 election moving forward, the trend in party registration in the 45th Congressional district has continued in the direction of decreasing Republican registration, increasing NPP registration, and a slight increase in Democratic party registration.

The implications from this analysis of voter party registration data in the 45th Congressional District are threefold:

1. A steady decrease in Republican party registration has been taking place since the 1990s. This has become most apparent in the youngest (18-29) voter cohort in the district which today has the lower rate of Republican party registration (23.6%) compared to older age cohorts.
2. Democratic party registration has increased during the time that Republican party registration has decreased, though it cannot be said that successive cohorts have bypassed the GOP in order to register as Democrats. Rather, the increase in NPP voters seems to be a more direct beneficiary. Again, looking at the youngest voter cohort of 18-29 year olds, NPP is the most frequently chosen mode of party registration at 38.4% of this cohort.
3. The shift in party registration seems to be centered around the 2008 election.

With respect to implication #3, it seems further study is needed which will require more than voter registration data.

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