Californian Politics

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This paper describes and analyzes the partisan politics of California as they relate to the 2016 Presidential election. I argue that California is a safely Democratic state which will use all 55 Electoral College votes for Hillary Clinton. I argue it will vote this way primarily because of demographics, history, political ideology, policy preference, and industry.

Politically Relevant Characteristics

The demographics of California are essential to understanding why it leans the way it does, as is the case for any state. As of July 1, 2015, California's population consists of 6.5% Black or African-Americans, 14.7% Asians and 38.8% Hispanics or Latinos. The foreign-born component of the population stands at 27%, and 43.8% of Californian households speak a language other than English at home (US Census Bureau, 2015). According to the Pew Research Center, 26% of Hispanics identify as Republican or lean Republican, while 56% of them identify as Democrats or lean Democratic. Among African-Americans, 11% are Republicans or lean Republican, while an overwhelming majority – 80% - are Democratic or lean Democratic. Furthermore, 65% of the Asian demographic identify or lean Democratic, while only 23% of Asians identify as Republican or lean Republican (Pew Research Center, 2015). What makes this data even more compelling is that in 2012, 91% of leaning Democrats voted for Obama, and 91% of leaning Republicans voted for Romney. The tendency of leaners to vote consistently for the party toward which they lean is predictable and reliable. Therefore, California has a

significant number of constituents who are likely to vote for the Democratic nominee, increasing the chances of Clinton winning California through demographics alone.

If California were a country, it would have the 6th biggest Gross Domestic Product in the world. Therefore, it is important to understand the Californian economy and how it affects partisan politics in the state. Southern California provides the most jobs per region (8 million), and it specializes in Manufacturing, Motion Pictures, Services and Tourism, and International Trade. The San Francisco Bay Area provides 3.5 million jobs and specializes in High-Tech manufacturing and Tourism (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2015). Regarding industry contributions to the 2016 election cycle, Motion Pictures has contributed 91% of its $11,086,023 in profits to Democrats. Miscellaneous Services has contributed 56% of its $6,957,573 to Democrats. Tourism has donated 47% of its $11,417,330 profit to Democrats, with 53% going to Republicans. Most significantly, high-tech manufacturing has contributed 59% of its $39,921,850 to Democrats (OpenSecrets.org, 2016). Therefore, the types of industry that predominate in California tend to show monetary support for Democratic candidates. As Mark Hanna said, "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money and I can't remember what the second is." The prevalence of industries that donate to Democratic candidates suggest that industry is a critical contributing factor to Democratic success in California.

This argument is also supported by an examination of the lobbying activity of these industries. High-tech manufacturing is a lobbying heavyweight and has spent between

$137,486,478 and $121,948,480 on lobbying activities each year between 2008 and 2015. Motion pictures spent $2,950,000 within the same time period. Miscellaneous services has spent $5,524,195, and Tourism has spent $12,114,613 (OpenSecrets.Org, 2015). Excepting tourism, a majority of the lobbying money from these industries is used to further their interests, which align with Democratic ideals.

Political Ideology

The policy prioritization and preferences of Californians provide valuable insight into why this state reliably leans Democratic. However, California is currently in a unique situation, where their primary policy concern is the drought – which is a non-partisan issue except for the technicalities of executing water redistribution (Felde, Novak, 2014). From May 2014 to May 2015, jobs and the economy went from the most important issue for all adults to the second most important, decreasing from 33% to 20%. In the same period of time, the drought's importance rating increased from 12% to 39%, making it the most important policy issue. The top five policy issues in order of importance are now: drought; economy; drugs; environment; and immigration (Public Policy Institute of California, 2015).

Californians as a whole tend to hold very liberal social policy preferences and more conservative fiscal policy preferences. For instance, 53% of likely Californian voters say they would prefer to pay off debt and build up the reserve, while only 42% of likely voters say they would like to use the money to restore funding to social service programs that have been cut in recent years. Fifty-two percent of likely voters and 67% of Republicans say that the budget is a

significant concern. Perhaps the clearest example of the social/fiscal divide comes from the finding that 70% of Californians favor increasing taxes on cigarettes, while far fewer favor other proposals for generating state revenue. A solid majority - 61% of likely voters – say that the Federal government wastes a lot of the money received from taxes (PPIC, 2015).

Californian social policy preferences can be characterized as more liberal. Fifty-seven percent of all adults say that vaccines are "very safe," and 67% of adults say that children who have not been vaccinated should not be allowed to attend public schools. With regard to the marijuana debate, 54% of all adults favor its legalization, which is marginally higher than the nationwide average (PPIC, 2015). California has adopted some of the strongest provisions nationwide to ensure equal pay for men and women (McGreevy & McGrerian, LA Times, 2015). It is also very active in the environmental policy arena. California spent $9,108,000,000 on environmental and natural resources spending, compared to just $208,160,500 in Arizona and $126,482,492 in the neighboring state of Nevada. As a sign of the increasing importance of environmental issues to Californians, the budget has increased from $6,801,000,000 in 2013. The state has also signed climate agreements with Mexico and China, enacted mandatory carbon reductions, and required emissions standards for automobiles (Ballotpedia, 2016).

History

California voted for the Republican nominee in the four elections from 1976 – 1988. Since then, it has voted for the Democratic nominee by an increasingly larger margin each time,

with the Democratic nominee garnering 51.1% of the vote in 1996 and Obama earning 60.2% in 2012 (270towin, 2016).

There are a number of reasons why this change has occurred. Firstly, California was not overwhelmingly Republican in the first place. Before it became solidly Democratic, it was already fiscally conservative and socially liberal. Secondly, the Republican Governor Wilson, who served from 1991-1999, was instrumental in enacting Proposition 187, which was designed to deny public services to undocumented immigrants. This measure effectively alienated the fastest growing demographic of the state. Governor Wilson also took conservative stances on social issues such as gay rights, abortion, and the environment, which conflicted with the liberal social ideals of a significant number of constituents. Once these decisions had effectively caused California to become a blue state, Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected to the Governor's office as a Republican. Although he was initially popular, by the end of his term his approval rating had sunk to 23%, which damaged the Republican cause (Field Poll, 2011). Finally, the Republican Party in California has realized in recent years that it must soften its stance on social issues if it wants to make headway with the younger voters, but their message is being overshadowed by the national party's more conservative positions on the same issues (Ina Jaffe, 2013). These factors have combined to help the Democrats solidify their advantage since 1988.

Context

Qualified political parties in California have two options for holding presidential primaries. The first is to hold a closed presidential primary, wherein only voters indicating preference for a party may vote for that party's nominee. The second is to hold a modified-closed primary, wherein the party allows voters who did not state a preference to vote for the party's nominee. The Democrats chose to hold a modified-closed primary for the 2016 elections, while the Republicans chose to hold a closed primary (Alex Padilla, 2016).

California is dominated by eligible voters who are registered as Democrats. Of all likely voters, 45% identify as Democrats, 31% as Republicans, 20% as Independent, and 4% as Other. Among the 20% of independents, 41% identify as leaning democrat, 32% as leaning republican, and 27% as true independents (PPIC, 2016). An estimated 91% of leaners on both sides will vote for the party towards which they lean. Party identification is the single biggest determinant of vote choice, and the trend favors Democrats. In 2012, Obama won 60.2% of the vote when 43.7% of registered voters were Democrats and 29.4% were Republicans. As of May this year, both of those measurements have shifted in Clinton's favor: 44.8% of registered voters in California are now Democrats, while only 27.3% are Republicans. Given these party identification numbers and the strength of PID as a determinant of vote choice, I argue that Clinton will win California.

2016 Presidential Election

Hillary Clinton won the Democratic nomination for California in 2016. She ran against Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont. Clinton earned 2,754,302 votes, which was 53.07% of all

votes. Bernie Sanders earned 2,381,722 votes, which was 46.04% of all votes. Clinton won Southern California and edged Sanders in central California, while Sanders performed well in the North and in less populated regions. Critically, Clinton won the state's most populous county - Los Angeles - with 57% of the vote. She also won by more than 10% in San Diego and Sacramento. On the other hand, the most populous county Sanders won was Santa Cruz, which has a population of 275,000 – just 2.7% of the population of Los Angeles (CBS SF Bay Area, 2016).

There are a number of reasons why Clinton, rather than Sanders, won the Democratic primary in California. Although Sanders' supporters displayed great enthusiasm at his rallies, they did not turn out to vote with similar enthusiasm. The Clinton campaign ran a more organized ground game, targeting women and minorities and mobilizing their vote. Conversely, Sanders spent time trying to win Indiana, West Virginia, and Oregon to make up for his east coast losses, while Clinton used that time to get the votes of those constituents likely to vote by mail (who are older, regular voters, and therefore likely to be more conservative, voting for Clinton before Sanders). In doing so, Clinton built a large lead before in-person voting even began (Mehta, 2016). Furthermore, California's primary was the 52nd of 58 primaries. By the time California held its primary, Clinton had already won 31 states and was reportedly fewer than 30 delegates short of the majority needed to become the nominee (Scher, Politico, 2016). There was no realistic chance of Sanders earning the nomination even if he won California, pushing the result even further in Clinton's favor.

I also argue that Clinton and Sanders activists fall on either side of the pragmatist/purist divide. Sanders is more ideological and further left than Clinton on many policy issues. His core following is the younger, politically inexperienced, and more radical left who were excited at the possibility of real change and electing someone who did not fit the mold of a classic politician. Clinton, on the other hand, fits much more comfortably within the Democratic establishment, espousing more central policy preferences and having spent twenty four years of her life in public service. Therefore, her supporters are likely to be more pragmatic; they are motivated to elect the party as well as the candidate, and know that mobilizing the vote is one of the most important strategic factors in achieving their goal. Sanders supporters, by contrast, are enthralled by the candidate and less so by the party, for which he was arguably too moderate. Their prioritization of the candidate over the party meant that the more pragmatic ground game of the Clinton campaign overpowered the sheer enthusiasm of Sanders supporters.

The Republican Party primary was also late, and was a winner-takes-all election. Donald Trump earned 74.76% of the vote, taking all 172 delegates (Leip, 2016). His margin of victory was consistent in all counties across the state. By far the most significant reason for Trump's dominance in California was that he was the declared the presumptive nominee more than a month before the California primaries. Trump was all but guaranteed to win the nomination of the party before the California primary, so a vote for any other candidate would have been a squandered vote.

I, along with every poll and analyst in the country, predict that Clinton will win the general election in California, and will receive all of California's 55 Electoral College votes. As discussed in this paper, California's demographic groups tend to identify as Democrats, or leaning Democrats. Despite the fact that Trump continues to dominate media headlines and has defied the pattern of "discovery, scrutiny, decline," his chances of stealing California are projected at a low 0.3% (FiveThirtyEight, 2016). Trump's negative remarks about Hispanics and his far-right stance on the Mexican border have alienated the Hispanic demographic, which has significant voting power in California. Sanders' endorsement and support on the campaign trail combined with Clinton's well-organized ground game aimed at getting out the Californian votes that just need to be mobilized leads me to believe that California is almost certainly going to continue its trend of voting blue.

I would suggest that Trump's best course of action for California is not to waste valuable time campaigning there. All the indicators point towards California being won by Clinton, so his time and campaign resources would be better spent trying to convince and mobilize voters in a swing state such as Florida to vote Red.

I would also suggest that Clinton's tactics in California should not change going forward. She should continue to let Trump alienate women and Hispanics, leaving both of those significant voting groups no viable choice but to vote for the Democratic candidate. Clinton should stay vigilant with her ground game, however, and use Obama's mobilization blue-print from the 2008 and 2012 elections, which have been proven to be reliable and effective. A large

majority of Californians hold ideals closer to those of Clinton than Trump, but the Democrats

must ensure that those ideals translate into votes on November 8th.

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