

Orlando Sentinel

[OPINION COLUMNISTS](#)

Half the people reading this likely identify as independent voters

| Commentary



By [STEVE HOUGH](#) |

PUBLISHED: May 24, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.

In a monthly survey, Gallup asks voters whether they consider themselves a Republican, a Democrat or an independent? Their March 2023 survey revealed 49% consider themselves independent. Those identifying as Democrat or Republican were split evenly at 25% each.

Since Gallup began conducting this poll, the number of voters self-identifying as

independents has risen considerably. Over the past decade, the number has hovered around 40%. When the registration books closed in Florida, preceding the November 2022 election, four million voters were registered without a party affiliation (NPA). We make up 28% of the electorate, but are shut out of voting in the primaries.

With these kinds of numbers, why are independents ignored and denied full rights of participation in the electoral process? It's likely due to a follow-up question asking whether the voter leans more to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Without delving deeper, this allows political scientists and pundits to erroneously conclude that we are not truly independent. I'm a lifelong independent, and I'm sure I'm not alone in taking offense.

As the director of Florida Fair and Open Primaries and a Florida task force leader for Veterans for Political Innovation, I interact with people who have discarded their longtime party affiliations and young new voters who are registering without declaring a party affiliation. We are a military-friendly state, yet half of military veterans maintaining a nonpartisan stance after serving cannot vote in our primary elections. I believe there's a better explanation for the phenomenal growth of self-proclaimed independents than to suggest that we are being deceitful.

From the Gallup data, I have drawn two conclusions. Despite the political scientists' and pundits' insistence that there are very few true independents the number will continue to rise. Secondly, the consistent increase can be correlated to a growing dissatisfaction with the divisive, dysfunctional two-party system.

When independents have only two options available, being branded closet Democrats or Republicans, adds insult to injury. Why can't we be taken at our word?

Independent Voting is the largest organization of independent voters, and they recently asked their members to complete the sentence, "I'm an independent because...". Here's what some Floridians had to say.

"I believe in supporting a government that is 'for the people.' Our current party

system is not for the people.”

“The two-party system discourages our choices in favor of their parties’ ‘lesser evils.’”

“Neither party has a monopoly on all the good ideas.”

“That’s just the way I am. Parties serve a purpose, but they should not decide who can and cannot vote.”



In 2022, 86% of Florida state races had no opposition or were not competitive (having winning margins of less than 10%). The numbers for 2020 were similar. We have a situation where the majority of our representatives win their seats in low-turnout, closed partisan primaries. In instances where primaries would otherwise be open to all voters, both parties have enlisted bogus write-in candidates to keep their primaries closed.

While some are certainly satisfied with the status quo, more and more voters are showing their disapproval by becoming independents. We are not simply closet Democrats or Republicans. Just ask us. Then show us the respect we deserve!

Steve Hough is the Director of Florida Fair and Open Primaries and a State Leader for Veterans For Political Innovation. He lives in Southport.