

RED COUNTY, BLUE COUNTY, ORANGE COUNTY

UCI-OC POLL

Spotlight on
Orange County,
California
as Political Prism

2023

2023 UCI-OC POLL

Orange County, California has become a prism for understanding the relationship between the left and right in American political and cultural life. With the launch of the UCI-OC Poll at the University of California, Irvine, new data are now available to help journalists, political observers, and the general public decipher demographic and ideological



shifts that portend larger electoral effects. Researchers at UC Irvine are available to help interpret these changes and provide additional information.

One of America's Few Purple Counties

Orange County, California, once known as a bastion of the John Birch Society, the heart of the Reagan Revolution, and home to conservative firebrands like Congressman “B1 Bob” Dornan, is now a consistently “purple” county. Fifty-one percent of OC voters supported Hillary Clinton in 2016, and while Joe Biden won the county in 2020, Republican Brian Dahle beat incumbent Governor Gavin Newsom among OC voters in 2022. Of the six congressional districts in Orange County, four are held by Democrats, a percentage that has seesawed since 2012 when Republicans held four of the seven districts that overlapped the county.

Nationwide, as political differences have gotten sharper and gerrymandering more common, it is increasingly rare to find a purple county, one in which congressional and presidential contests are truly competitive and Democrats and Republicans live in and among each other. Depending on the definition, fewer than 1% of American counties qualifies as purple. Among the 25 most populous counties in the country, just three are purple: Maricopa (Phoenix), Arizona; Tarrant (Ft. Worth), Texas; and Orange County, California. The OC is perhaps the most well-known.

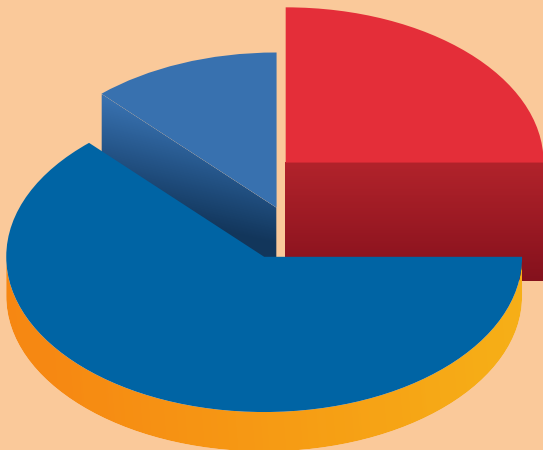
Orange County as an Incubator



If America is going to find a way out of its current quagmire in which dueling political camps refuse to engage one another, Orange County offers an example and lessons for what happens when opposing sides occupy the same geographic space and share a common county government. If basic public services are to be performed, some consensus must be reached. Think of Orange County, then, as an incubator for an America that must find ways to engage across sides.

The UCI-OC Poll as a Diagnostic Tool

To understand what is happening in Orange County – and by extension the country – the University of California, Irvine’s School of Social Ecology has launched the UCI-OC Poll. Designed as a semiannual survey on salient issues of public concern, the Poll also offers a window into changing political and social trends in “purple America.” The Poll can identify political divisions, connect partisan or ideological identity to political and policy preferences, and compare the effects of demographic shifts, changing economic conditions, or varying political moods.



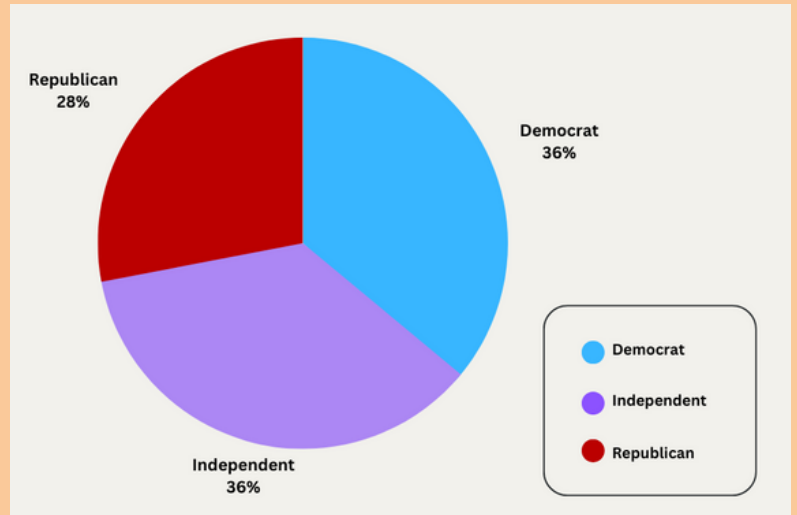
The initial UCI-OC Poll was conducted in the summer of 2023, looking at the twin issues of homelessness and affordable housing. However, what follows below are some of the most intriguing political trends that are occurring behind the scenes – or sometimes right in front of us – within one of the nation’s most famous purple counties.



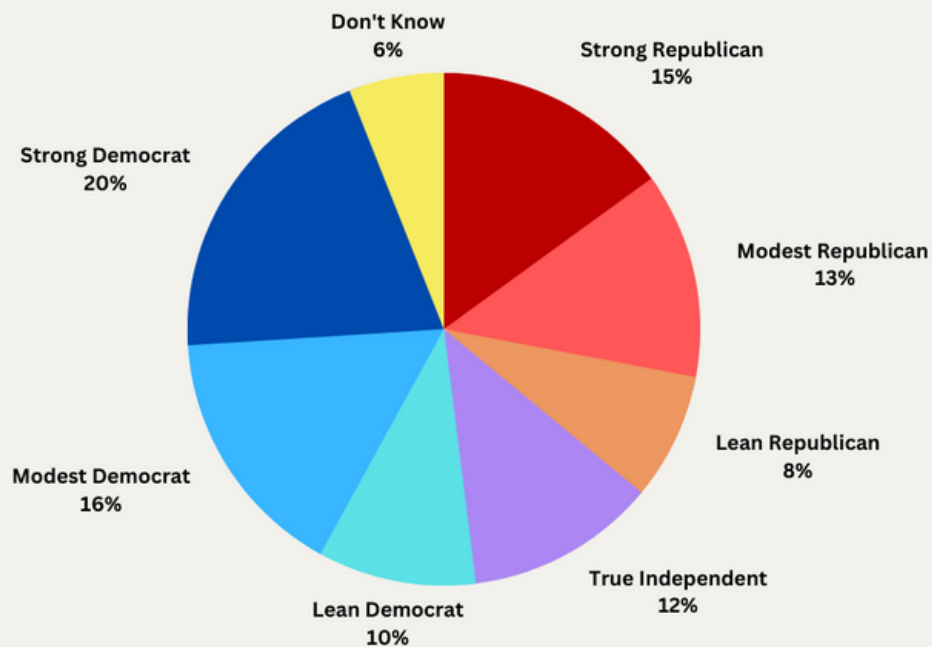
THE TAKEAWAYS

Political Identity

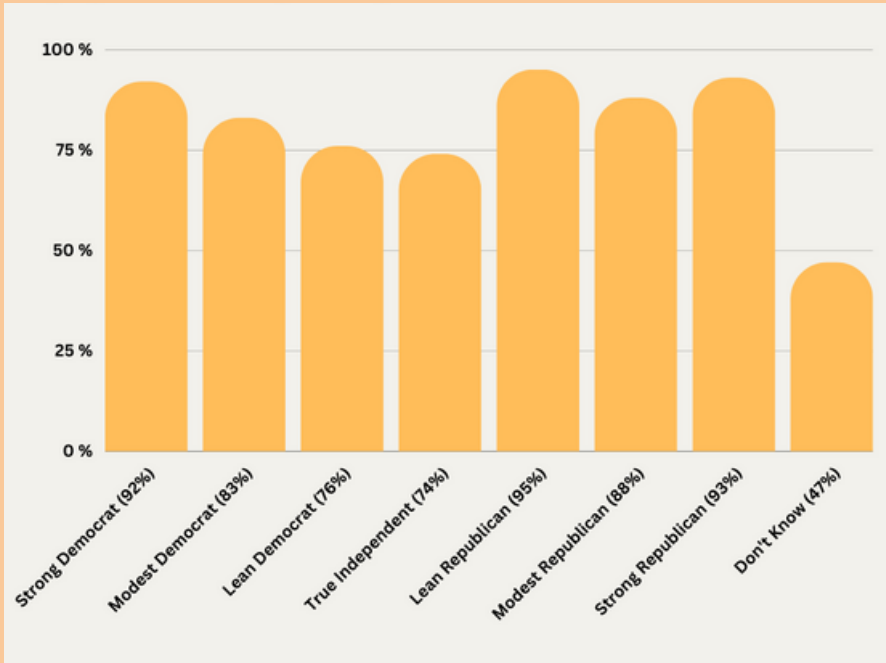
On the surface, Orange County residents are divided between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. However, many of the self-described Independents consistently prefer one party. When Independents are pushed to identify, the Democratic advantage grows slightly.



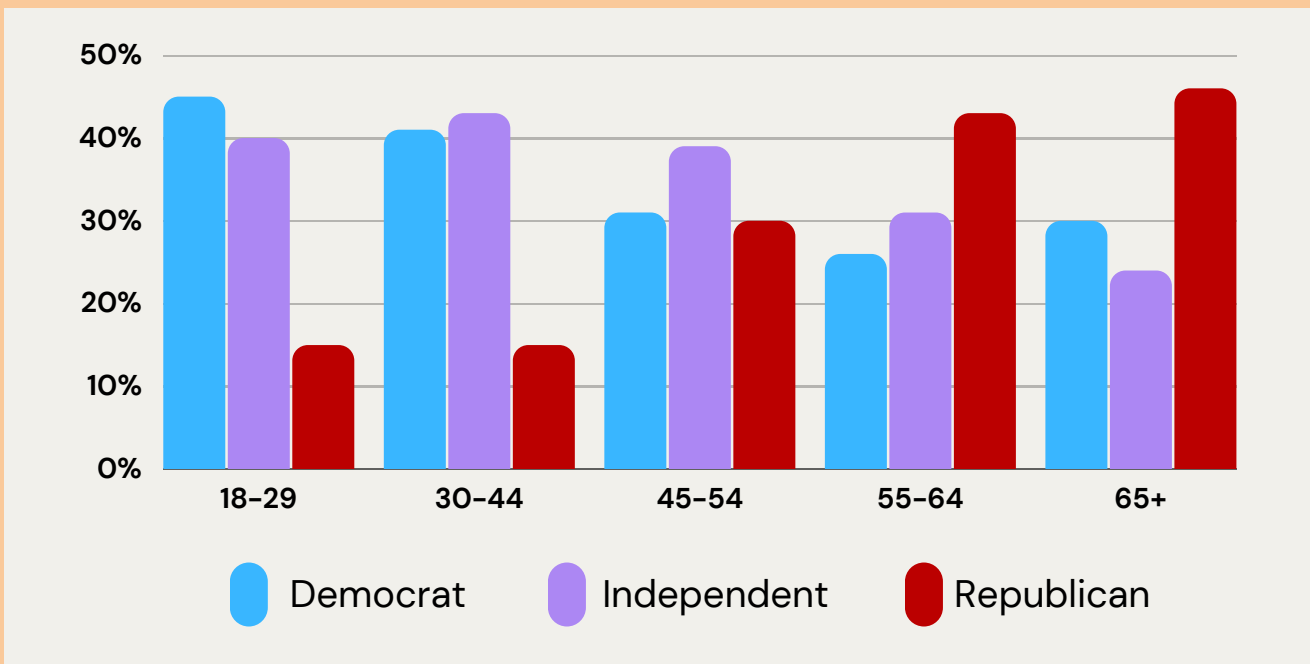
INDEPENDENT LEANINGS



Registered Voters

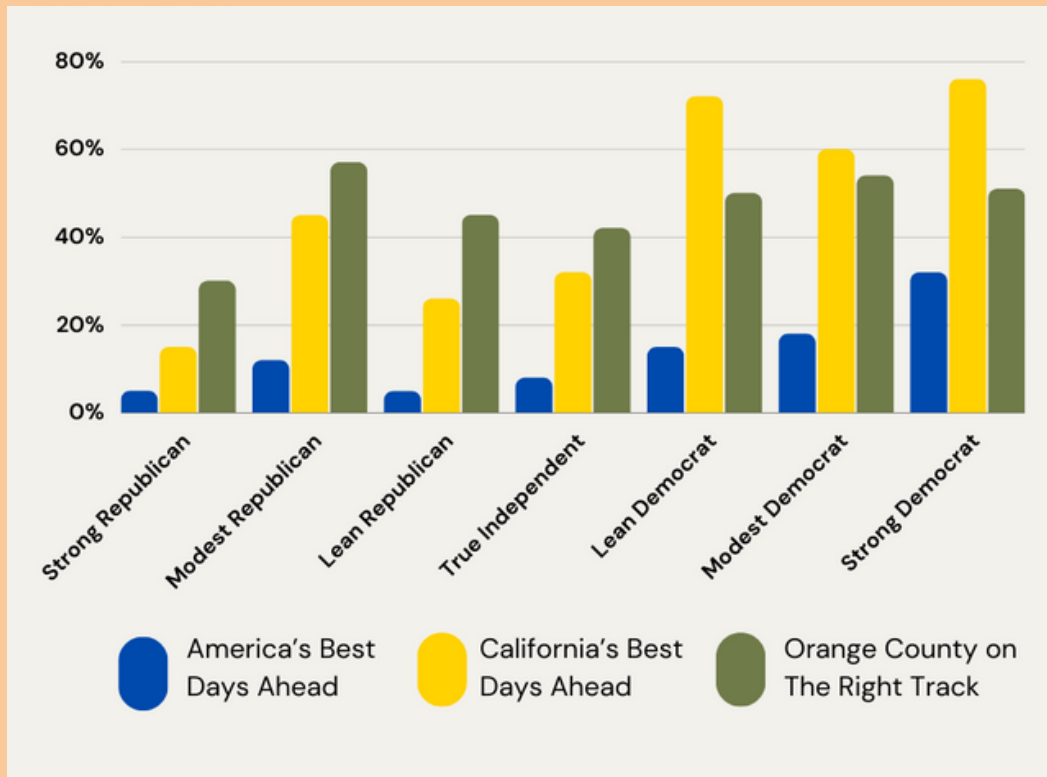


Voter registration rates are highest among the most partisan, although Republicans are more likely to be registered than Democrats. Republicans skew older, and Democrats skew younger in Orange County. However, Independents also skew younger. Republicans have a significant young adult problem in Orange County.



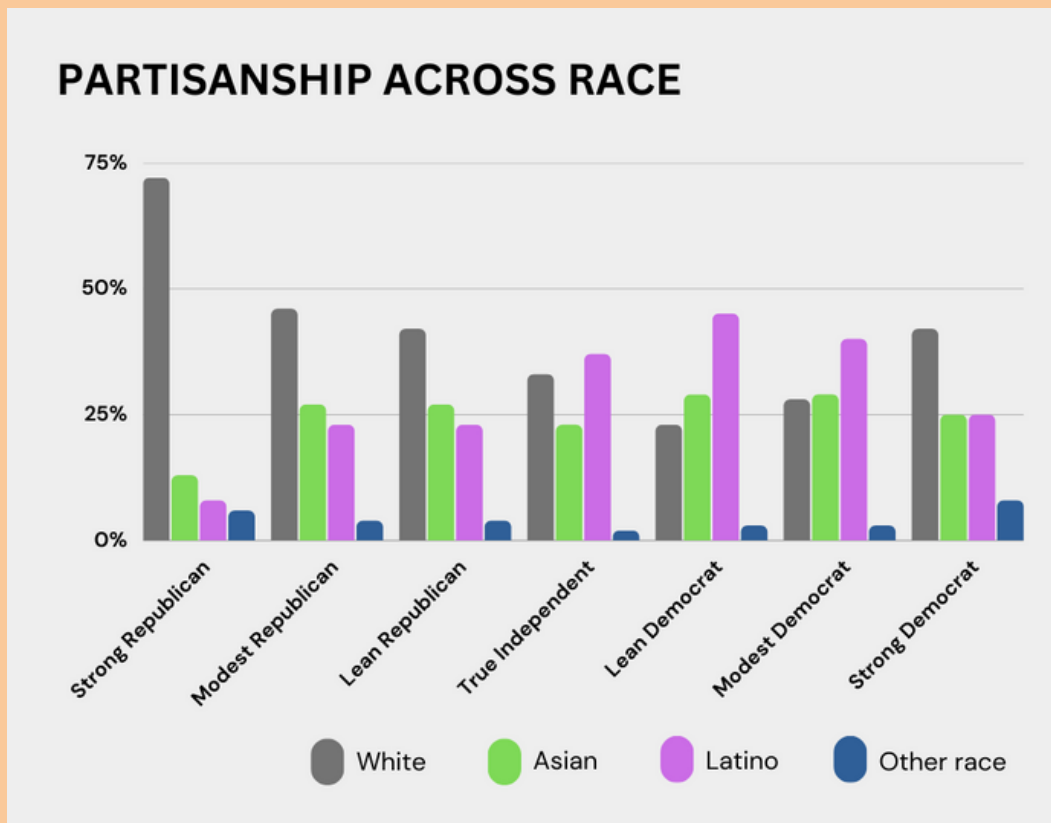
Outlook

No one is optimistic about America's future, but Democrats and modestly partisan Republicans feel better about California and Orange County.



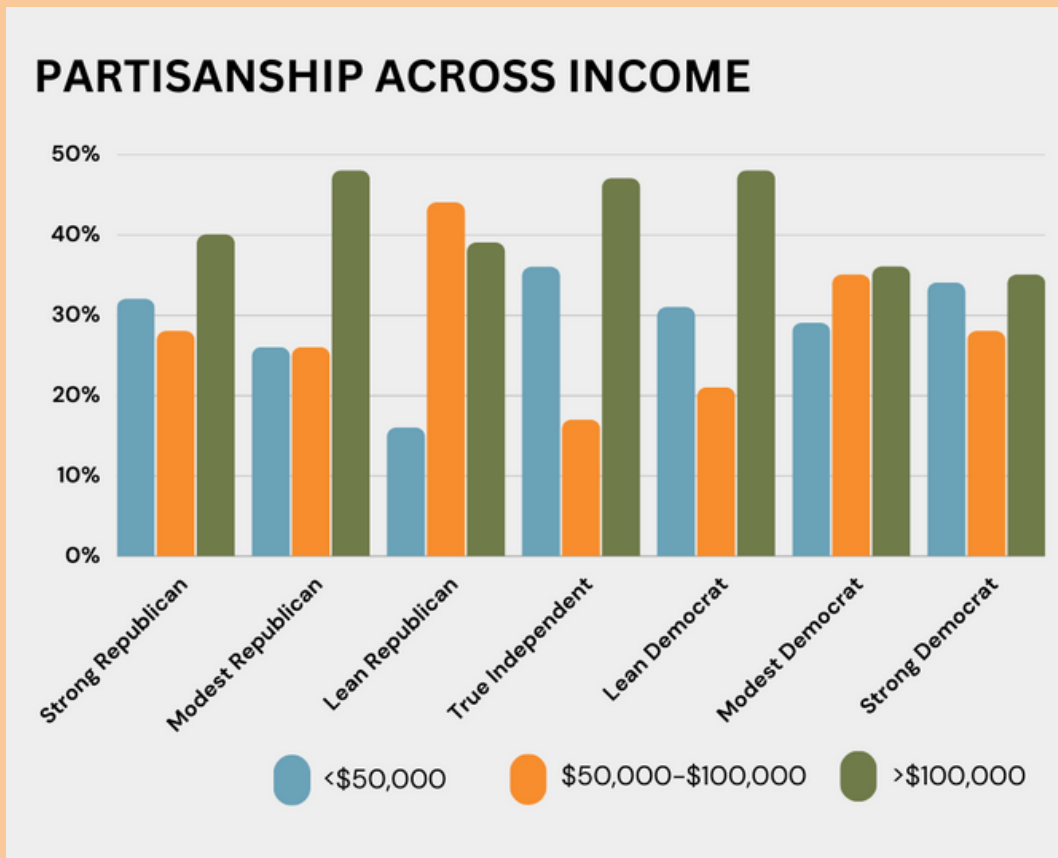
Shifting Sands

In a significant shift, modestly partisan Republicans in Orange County have become a political anomaly. Their demographics are different than strongly partisan Republicans and their values and preferences are different from Republicans as a whole. Some, in fact, mirror Democrats' views. Like all groups except strong Republicans, a majority of them is non-White.

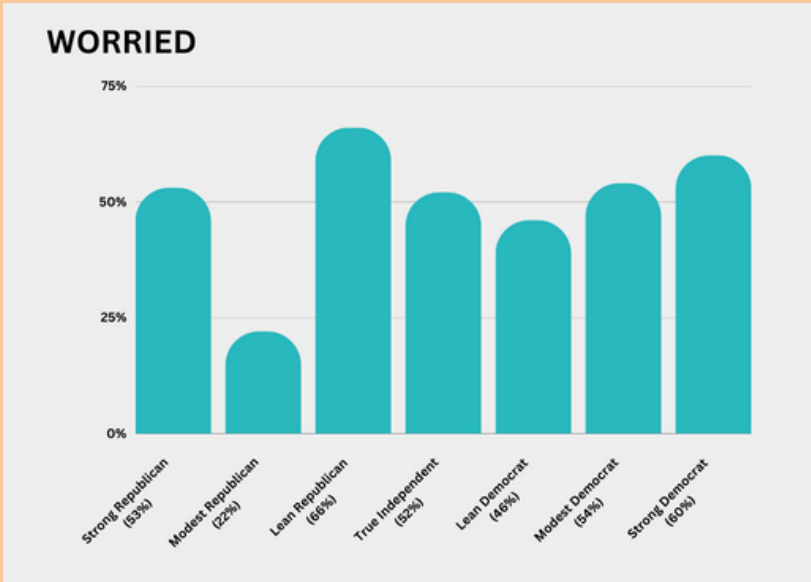


Income

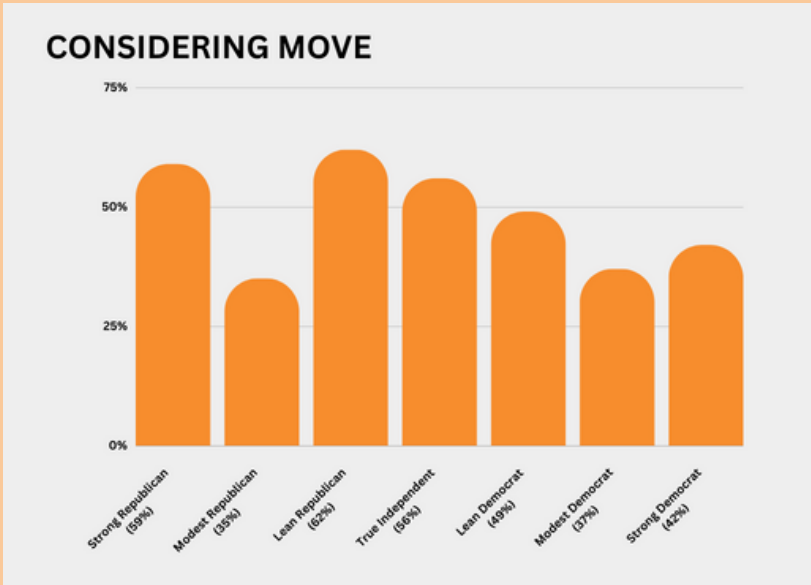
Modestly partisan Republicans are the wealthiest political demographic in Orange County.



Modestly partisan Republicans are the least likely to have worried about covering rent or facing eviction in the last two years.

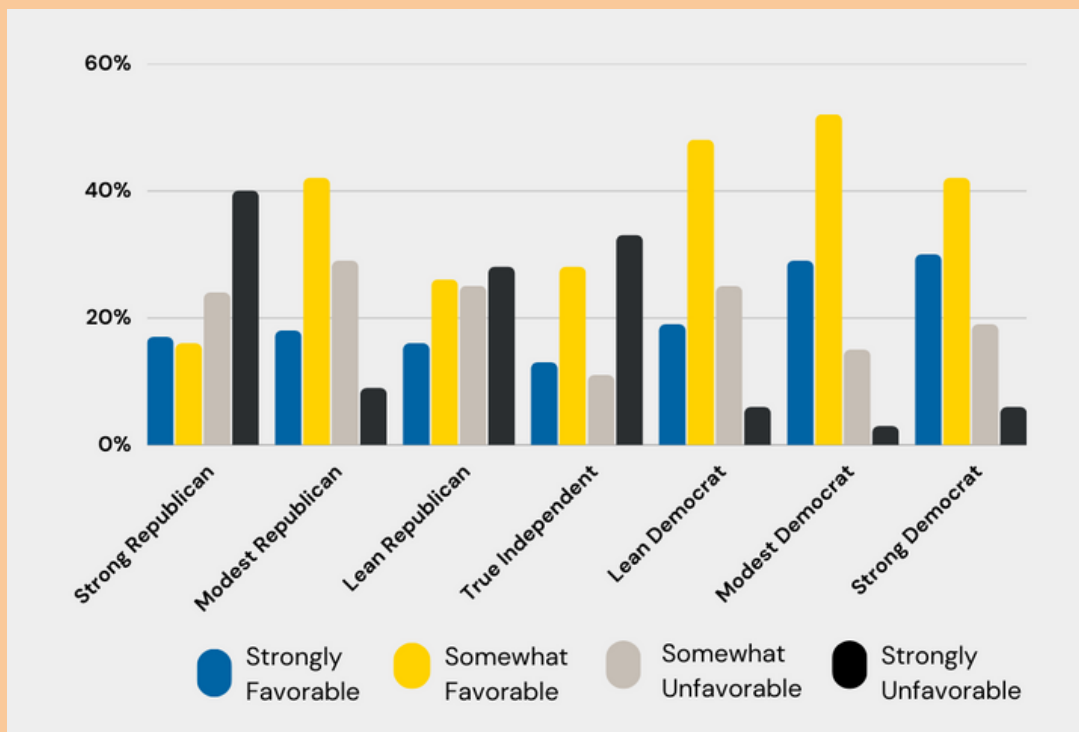


And, they are less likely to have considered moving from Orange County.



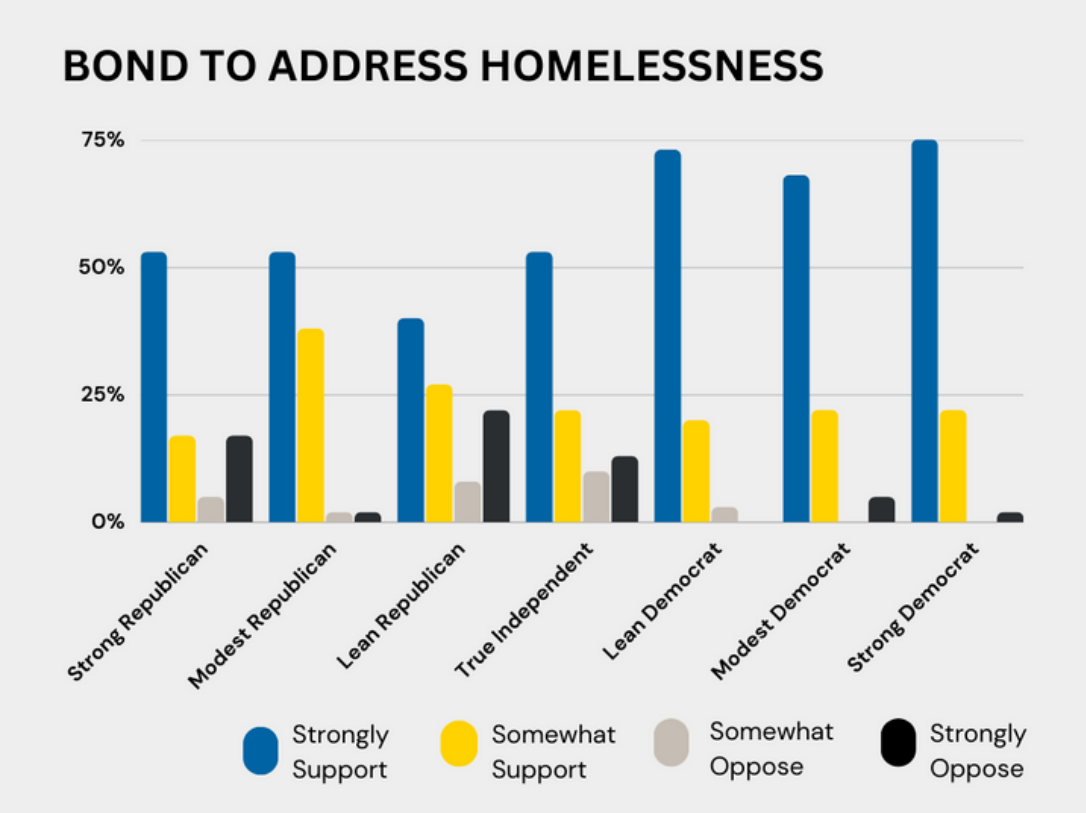
Views of Disney

Modestly partisan Republicans do not share the same cultural agenda as strong Republicans.

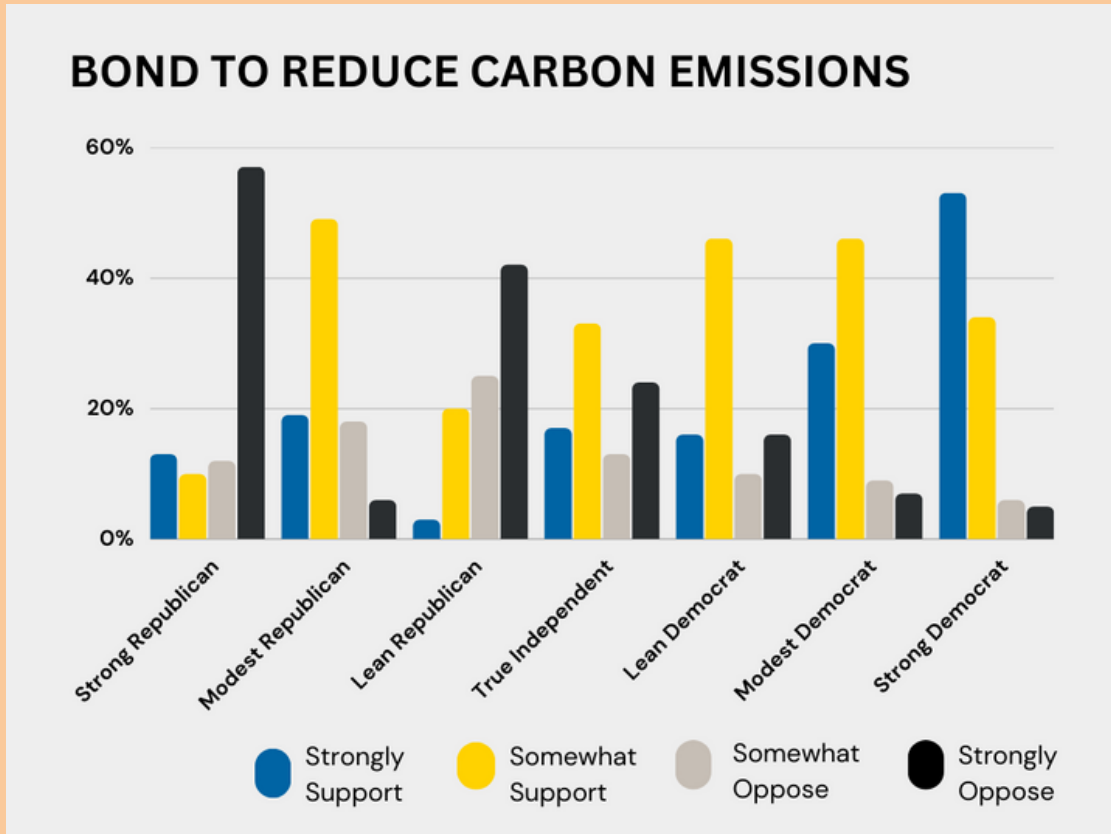


Bond Support

Like Democrats, modestly partisan Republicans do not oppose taxpayer-funded bonds, even on progressive issues.

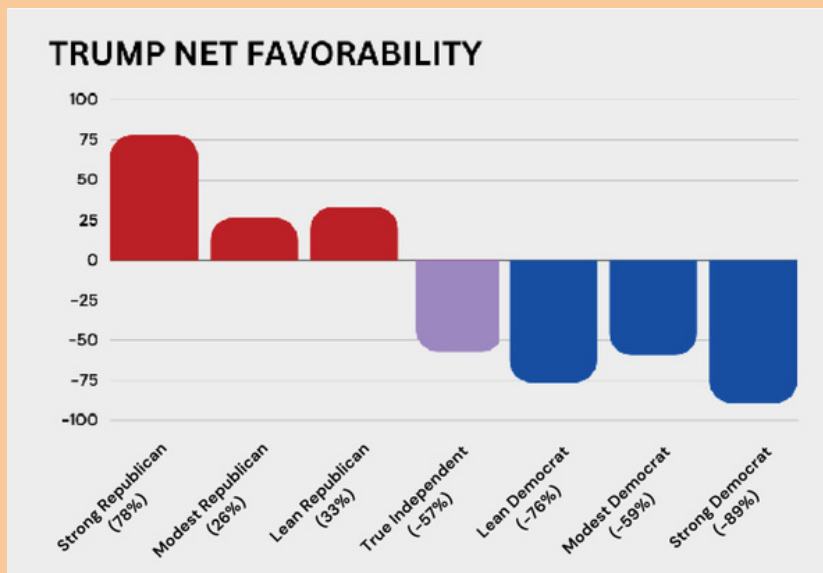
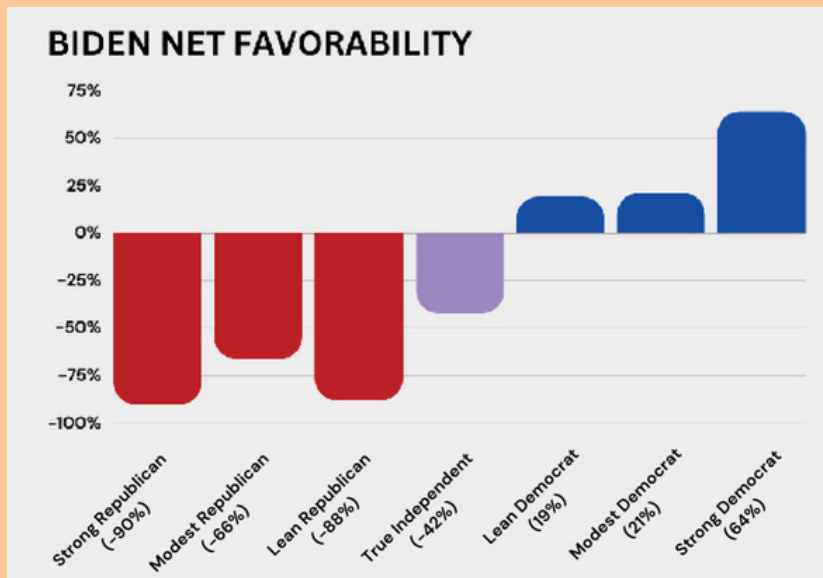


Bond Support



Implications for 2024

Modestly partisan Republicans do not like Trump or dislike Biden as much as do other Republicans. Independents, too, dislike Trump more than they dislike Biden. The Bottomline: Orange County is poised to swing left in the next presidential election on account of Independents and modestly partisan Republicans.



For more information, to speak with the pollsters, or to suggest questions for future polls, please contact Jon Gould, Dean of the School of Social Ecology at the University of California Irvine, at jbgould@uci.edu.

UCI School of Social Ecology
