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978-1-107-13446-1 - Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction

Samara Klar and Yanna Krupnikov

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Independent Politics

How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction

The number of independent voters in America increases each year, yet they remain misunderstood by both media and academics. Media describe independents as pivotal for electoral outcomes. Political scientists conclude that independents are merely *undercover partisans*: people who secretly hold partisan beliefs and are thus politically inconsequential.

Both the pundits and the political scientists are wrong. The authors show that many Americans are becoming embarrassed of their political party. As a result, Americans deny to pollsters, party activists, friends, and even themselves their true partisanship, instead choosing to go “undercover” as independents.

Independent Politics demonstrates that people intentionally mask their partisan preferences. Most importantly, breaking with decades of previous research, the book argues that independents are highly politically consequential. The same motivations that lead people to identify as independent also diminish their willingness to engage in the types of political action that sustain the grassroots movements of American politics.

Samara Klar is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Arizona. She studies how individuals' social surroundings and personal identities influence their political attitudes and behaviors. Her work has been published in journals including the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and has been supported by the National Science Foundation. She has been recognized with a Distinguished Junior Scholar award in political psychology from the American Political Science Association and a Burns Roper Fellowship from the American Association of Public Opinion Research. Klar earned a Ph.D. in political science from Northwestern University and also holds degrees from Columbia University and McGill University.

Yanna Krupnikov is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Stony Brook University. Her research focuses on the way political communication affects public opinion and the way people express their political opinions through political actions. Krupnikov's work has been published in *American Journal of Political Science*, *Political Behavior*, and *Political Communication*, and has been supported by the National Science Foundation. She is a winner of the Midwest Political Science Association's Robert Durr Award and the award for Best Paper by an Emerging Scholar. Krupnikov earned a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Michigan and also holds degrees from the University of Toronto and Brandeis University.

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In a way, this book stands as a testament to the importance of attending academic conferences – even conferences that take place in the middle of a particularly hot and humid Chicago summer. At the annual meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology in 2012, Samara presented work on political independents. At the very same meeting, Yanna presented work on social desirability. We were two young academics who knew of each other, but just barely. After our panel, we reintroduced ourselves to one another and casually chatted about our respective projects. Before we knew it, we had hit upon an intriguing idea: *Could it really be possible that Americans believe it socially desirable to tell other people that they are politically independent?*

This book is also a testament to the dangers of casually chatting with people at academic conferences, as this particular conversation led to a project that would consume the next several years of our lives.

After our first set of experimental results demonstrated that people did find political independence to be socially desirable, we realized that our seemingly simple question was much more complicated. What followed was a quest to understand what it is about American politics that drives people to hide their partisan identities and what the implications of these “undercover partisans” are for political parties, political action, and representation. Some fourteen original experiments, many written pages, and (approximately) thousands of e-mails, numerous phone calls, and several video chats later, our casual chitchat has led to this book. And our distant acquaintanceship has led to a fulfilling coauthorship and great friendship that will last for many years to come.

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