Impotence and Indifference: Class Identity, Political Participation, and Unaffiliated Citizens

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background & Context

According to the latest *Gallup* poll, over forty percent of Americans identify as “Independent” (Gallup, 2019) — that is, as belonging to neither the Democratic nor Republican Party. Yet, in this era of “extreme political polarization” (Klar, et al, 2019), pundits and academics have largely focused on how partisan identity has become increasingly important to the formation of political attitudes. Democrats and Republicans can’t seem to agree on anything — from fundamental values to government policy to the performance of party leaders. Academics in particular have pointed out that so-called “Independents” aren’t immune to this hyper-partisanship: while a sizable chunk of the eligible voting population doesn’t identify with either party, many concede that they “lean” towards one of the two major parties (Keith et. al, 1992).

But whether or not a majority of Independents are, in actuality, closet partisans, it is hard to ignore the fact that two out of five Americans don’t *identify* with the Democratic or Republican Party, parties which by-and-large dominate mainstream political discourse and shape everyday political life. Forty percent of the eligible voting population may feel like they don’t fit in with either of the two groups, or even with the mainstream political discourse — whether it be due to feelings of alienation, powerlessness, or repulsion. And this isn’t even counting those voters and non-voters who refuse to identify specifically as “Independent.” These voters and non-voters may consider themselves “libertarians,” “anarchists,” “Green Party members,” or just “unaffiliated,” but the bottom line is that they don’t identify with the two mainstream American political parties. ¹ To understand these *unaffiliated citizens* is to understand an important and large segment of the population.

¹ For this reason, I use the term “unaffiliated citizen” to include all voters and non-voters who don’t identify with the two parties. However, I use the two terms interchangeably when referring to the literature.
Moreover, issues surrounding unaffiliated citizens — that they don’t identify with the two main parties, that many don’t see the mainstream political discourse as something worth engaging in, that many are less politically engaged than partisans (Keith et al., 1992) — should worry those concerned about the proper functioning of American democracy. Here, we have a sizable chunk of the population that has eschewed one of the most popular forms of associating with other citizens on the political stage: political parties. And the importance of associations cannot be overstated. In *Avoiding Politics*, sociologist Nina Eliasoph, quoting the French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville, argues:

> “Active citizens ruling themselves in a democracy need the voluntary bonds of [associations]: ‘Feeling and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another … in democratic societies … only associations can do that.’” (Eliasoph, 1998, 11)

In short, citizen participation in the public sphere — through informal and formal associations like political parties— is key to a healthy democracy. Communicating with other citizens and “talking” through politics and current affairs enables self-governance. It is important that we learn more about how the apparently “confused, clueless” (Krugman, 2011) segment of Independents relate to politics, and whether they are (or feel) estranged from the public sphere. Understanding such issues is integral to our understanding of American democracy in practice, and can enable us to find solutions to make it more inclusive and more representative.
1.2 Literature Review: Partisanship, Independents & Class

“Independent people don't like parties. They don't trust parties. And that's why they’re not in one. That’s why we stopped and we got out of the party-building business; we are more interested in building a movement… Our goal was to try to unite the ‘overtaxed’ and ‘underserved’ [laughs].”

– A.C. (Unaffiliated voter from The Bronx, NY)

1.2.1 Literature on Partisanship

Many political scientists and sociologists have sought to understand how people — including Independents — arrive at their political or partisan identity. Conventional theories of party identification can be more or less divided into two main schools of thought: the Downsian school and Michigan school (Wong et al. 2011, 123). The former, derived from Anthony Downs’ *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, contends that party identification is essentially a function of political evaluations. The choice to identify as a Democratic, Republican, or neither, then, depends largely on one’s ideological/political preferences (Wong et al. 2011, 124). Unaffiliated citizens, in particular, may identify as such because they feel they are too ideologically moderate — or else too liberal or conservative — to fit into the two main parties.

As opposed to the Downsian school, the Michigan school, pioneered by Angus Campbell at the University of Michigan in the 1940s and 1950s, contends that one’s attachment to a party or the party system is a strong *psychological* one, developed early in life, inherited through our parents, and through a socialization process (Wong et al. 2011, 123). Political scientists like Steven Greene have recently returned to and strengthened Campbell’s arguments, positing that partisan identity should be viewed through the lens of ‘Social Identity Theory,’ which explains how self-perceived membership in a social group affects social perceptions and attitudes. His conclusion is that just as people identify with various racial, ethnic, and religious groups, so too do they identify with certain political parties (Greene 2004).

\(^2\) Otherwise known as ‘Rational-Choice Theory’
Unaffiliated citizens, in this view, are those who have not developed a strong partisan identity, or have developed a strong non-partisan identity.

Green, Palmquist, and Schickler elaborate on this idea of self-conception and partisanship, arguing that people go through a “matching process,” by which they examine the fit between their self-conceptions and what they perceive to be the social bases of the different parties. If they feel that they fit in with one of those social bases, they will be more inclined to identify with the respective party (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004, 10). Both Greene’s and Green et al.’s research imply that the same idea can extended to Independents. Greene makes this explicitly clear in his work, noting that Independents have a strong sense of an “Independent identity,” and a weaker sense of partisan identity compared to outright partisans (Greene 2004).

Thus, ideology may not be at the heart of every unaffiliated citizen’s decision to identify as such. And there are further reasons to doubt the universal applicability of the Downsian model. Political scientists Donald Kinder and Nathan Kalmoe found that even in the current age of political polarization, ideological difference is more or less confined to political elites, while a majority of Americans are “innocent of ideology” (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017):

“[t]he abiding dispositional commitment to an ideological point of view — turns out to be rare. Real liberals and real conservatives are found in impressive numbers only among the comparatively few… deeply and seriously engaged” (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017, 7):

Similarly, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued that ideological thinking is more likely to be found among people of higher “social categories”: “lower social categories produce responses governed by class ethos and largely independent of declared political opinions… higher classes express a combination of a class ethos with explicit political principles” (Bourdieu 2015, 420). And Wong et al., analyzing patterns of partisan affiliation among Asian-Americans, found that the association between political ideology and partisan affiliation is not particularly strong. Instead, they found that what seems to really influence one’s partisan
affiliation were “markers of social, economic, and political incorporation” (Wong et al. 2011, 150).

Ultimately, whether one’s partisan identity is a function of “political evaluations” or “social identity,” it is clear that class dynamics, structures, and identities play some role: partisan identity may be a function of “political evaluations,” but, if Bourdieu is correct, the ability/tendency to make political evaluations is partly a function of one’s class position; it may be a function of social identity and a “matching process,” but class is an important aspect of one’s social identity, and may very well shape how one views the “social bases” of the two major political parties. Political scientists examining partisan identity — from Greene and Green to Downs and Campbell — have largely neglected its relationship to class, but, as I continue to assert throughout this study, this relationship is very much worth looking into.

1.2.2 Literature on Class

There are other reasons for looking into the relationship between class and partisanship. Most importantly, there is already a well-established relationship between class and political engagement (Laurison, 2016). Verba et al. (1995), analyzing voluntary activity in American politics, find that different “circumstances of initial privilege,” as well as levels of educational attainment, lead to different levels of political participation (i.e. voting, campaign contributions, or contacting elected representatives). Moreover, these initial circumstances and levels of educational attainment have huge consequences for other “participatory factors” — including income; skills acquired at work, in organizations and in churches; “psychological engagement with politics”; and “exposure to requests for activity” (514). The result is a public that is “often loud, sometimes clear, but rarely equal” (509). Indeed, Laurison finds that, in 2012, those in the 80th percentile of the income distribution voted at a rate 1.4 times higher than those in the 40th percentile (Laurison, 2016).
Scholars have offered different explanations as to why this class inequality exists (Laurison, 2016). Verba et al., mentioned above, provide an “individualist approach,” which focuses on the “lack of necessary resources and attitudes” of the lower classes. Others have offered “institutionalist approaches,” which locate the sources of low participation among the lower classes in “barriers to participation” imposed by political elites. Others still have offered “relational approaches,” which puts “socially structured differences in how people see, relate to, and understand politics” at the center of the explanation for class inequality in politics. Differences in how people “relate to politics,” in this view, are analogous to differences in other tastes and preferences rooted in “class habitus” (Bourdieu, 2015). In Distinction, Bourdieu argues that political participation is just “one kind of ‘taste’ for legitimate culture” (Laurison, 2015, 2) shaped not only by one’s possession of educational or financial capital, but also by one’s sense of being entitled to be “considered with politics, authorized to talk politics” (Bourdieu, 2015, 410). Interest or indifference towards politics is best seen as the dominated’s “suspicion of the political ‘stage,’ a theatre whose rules are not understood and which leaves ordinary taste with a sense of helplessness.” This suspicion is “often the source of ‘apathy’ and of a generalized distrust of all forms of speech and spokesmen” (Bourdieu, 2015, 467). Of course, this suspicion is not surprising, especially in the U.S. context. As political scientists like Martin Gilens have shown, there is a direct relationship between individual Americans’ financial resources and their political power, since the government is most responsive to the policy preferences of the most affluent citizens (Gilens, 2012).

Regardless of why class inequality exists in American politics, one cannot ignore that it exists in the first place. And ultimately, this study’s investigation of the link between political independence and class is premised on the link between political engagement and class — with the assumption that political independence and the act of identifying with political parties are political behaviors and manifestations of political engagement, respectively.
1.2.3 Literature on Independents

The relevance of class is implied, albeit insufficiently elaborated on, when we look at recent literature specifically focused on Independents. One example is Keith et al.’s seminal study: *Myth of the Independent Voter*. While earlier scholars such as Campbell et al. (1960) have argued that “strength of partisanship [is] positively associated with turnout and other measures of civic virtue, including interest in the campaign and concern about its outcome” (Keith et al., 1992, 16) — implying that political Independents are uniformly disengaged from politics — Keith et al. argue that political disengagement is in fact more prominent among “Pure Independents” (as opposed to “Leaner Independents”), possibly because those with less education are overrepresented among the former (Keith et al, 1992). Certainly, distinguishing Pure Independents from Leaner Independents fails to address the fact that, as Greene argues, they are united in their sense of identity as Independents. Both types of Independents have chosen to not identify as Democrats or Republicans, for one reason or another. But ultimately, the conceptual distinction at the center of *The Myth of the Independent* illustrates something profound: unaffiliated citizens — Leaner and Pure alike — vary in how they engage in politics, and at least some of this can be attributed to social class.

Samara Klar, a political scientist at the University of Arizona, offers another perspective on Independents that, while barely touching on class, provides some insight into how Independents think and act on the political stage. Acknowledging the fact that Independents, though mostly partisan, have all still chosen to identify as Independents, she argues that “independence is not simply a ‘myth’ — rather, it is a paradox” (Klar, 2016, 10). Her main contention is that people who choose to identify as Independents are really just misrepresenting, or disguising, their partisanship, because they believe that openly identifying

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3 Pure Independents are Independents who don’t feel closer to any of the major political parties; Leaner Independents are those who do feel closer to one of the two major parties. See Keith et. al, 1992.
as a partisan will make a negative impression on others (Klar, 2016). Klar also attempts to explain the variation in political engagement among political Independents, arguing that what motivates them to engage in politics is determined by the importance they place on their Independent identity (Klar, 2014).

Klar’s insights are ultimately rooted in the Michigan school of party identification, viewing the Independent identity as a social identity and — in a sense — a political behavior highly contingent on social relations. But they are also presented as psychological explanations, describing the political behavior and formation of political identity of Independents as coming down to underlying “processes, including individual-level personality traits and particular life experiences” of individuals (Klar, 2014, 588), or more specifically — the propensity to “self-monitor” (Klar, 2016).

This, however, is insufficient for the purposes of this paper, since it conceptualizes an individual as just that — insulated from the power dynamics that influence and interact with psychological processes. As Eliasoph argues, analyses of patterns of disengagement and apathy have often focused on the “inner” — the “seemingly personal, subjective, and active realm of feelings, meanings, and experiences” — at the expense of the “outer” — the “seemingly impersonal, objective, and automatic systems of money and power” (Eliasoph, 1998, 230-231). And as Soss and Jacobs argue, “individual-level models of political behavior … largely neglect changing levels of economic inequality as aspects of broader societal development” (Soss and Jacobs, 2009, 96). Looking at unaffiliated citizens through a class lens would serve to incorporate analysis of the “outer,” and changes in the political economy. An alternative perspective of unaffiliated citizens — one that factors in class hierarchies and relations — is thus necessary, and one that this paper seeks to provide.
1.3 Research Objectives & Significance of Study

Examining the literature, it is clear that political scientists have long approached partisan independence as a political identity (Klar, 2014; Greene, 2004; Green et. al, 2002) or political behavior (Klar, 2016) formed either in defiance of the two parties, or because of some attachment to an “Independent” social identity, or both. Inevitable discussions about the patterns of disengagement and apathy among (a segment of) Independent citizens have focused on the “inner” at the expense of the “outer.” Missing from the literature on partisanship is a perspective of unaffiliated citizens that views them through the sociological lens of power and domination, and hones in on the influence of class.

The relationship between class and politics in general, and political engagement in particular, is well-established among social scientists (Bourdieu, 2015; Laurison 2015; Laurison 2016; Verba et al., 1995; Manza, 1995), yet few have looked into the relationship between class and partisan identity, and even fewer have examined this relationship among Independents specifically. When we do examine these relationships, several specific questions come to mind.

We know that partisans and non-partisans arrive at their political identity on the basis of either ideological/political evaluations or social identity as the Downsian and Michigan schools of thought, respectively, have described it. But does an unaffiliated citizen’s class position shape whether he/she arrives at his/her political identity on the basis of ideological evaluations or social identity? Put another way, does the applicability of the Downsian or Michigan model of partisan affiliation vary depending on an unaffiliated citizen’s class position?

We also know, examining Green et al. and Greene’s research on the relationship between partisanship and social identity, that at least some Independents arrive at their political identity via a “matching process,” examining the fit between their self-conceptions and what
they perceive to be the social bases of the different parties. Since one’s class identity and position could potentially be an important aspect of one’s self-conception, it is worth asking: *Do the ways in which unaffiliated citizens perceive the social bases of the two major parties vary with class position?*

Finally, examining Keith et al’s research on Leaner Independents and Pure Independents, we know that a majority of Independents decide to indicate on surveys that they “lean” towards one of the two major parties, while the rest don’t; the latter group is generally less politically engaged, and those with less education are overrepresented among it. In this study, I look for evidence confirming, and explaining, the correlation between educational attainment and tendency to lean, and further explicate the relationship between class and political identity. In other words, I ask: *How do unaffiliated citizens from various class backgrounds express their partisan leanings?*

Ultimately, all three of these questions attend to the interrelationship between class, partisan identity, and unaffiliated citizens — and brings together three separate strands of academic literature: that on (1) class and political engagement, (2) partisan identity, and (3) political Independents. They are also indicative of the larger study at hand, which asks: “*How do the ways unaffiliated citizens relate to politics vary with class position?*”

This is quite a broad research question, however. In order to provide focus to my study, I break this down into two sub-questions:

1. **On class and political identity:** Why do unaffiliated citizens identify as such, and how does this vary with class position?

2. **On class and political engagement:** How do the ways unaffiliated citizens view and engage in the public sphere vary with class position?

In short, I look at the role class positionality plays in the formation of one’s (non-)partisan identity, and the impact of class positionality on one’s political behavior. These issues will be
the focus of Chapters 3 and 4, respectively. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology I use to answer this research question, and to address these two key issues.

This study is important for many reasons. For one, unaffiliated citizens make up more than 40% of the American electorate. If they are as disenchanted with or detached from the US political system as the literature suggests, we should attend to this large segment of the American population as soon as possible. This, of course, requires understanding these individuals, which is what this study aims to do.

Secondly, a number of unaffiliated citizens have been shown to be disengaged from the electoral process and political arena. Paying attention to why these unaffiliated citizens are disengaged, and examining how their partisan identities may be linked to their political behaviors, can go a long way in helping us figure out what political disengagement means in practice.

This study is also important for its theoretical contributions. We know from examining the literature that class is inextricably linked to political engagement and other political behaviors. But aside from a few indications provided by Bourdieu, Wong et. al, and Keith et. al, we don’t know how class might be linked to partisanship, and how class might be linked to partisanship among unaffiliated citizens in particular. In the following chapters, I look at the latter two relationships, and in doing so, bring attention to an interrelationship that has rarely been studied.

Lastly, this study is important for its policy implications. By drawing attention to how class may shape unaffiliated citizen’s partisan identity and his/her political engagement levels, I have been implicitly (and am now explicitly) advocating for a perspective of unaffiliated citizens that views them as a heterogenous group — not a monolithic one — with different reasons for identifying as unaffiliated, different attitudes toward political parties, and different ways of relating to politics. Political actors and non-governmental organizations wishing to
incorporate unaffiliated citizens into the political process (if they are not incorporated already) would do well to heed the analysis in this study.

**Chapter 2: Methodology & Findings**

I personally conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for ‘Interview Guide’) with twenty-three unaffiliated citizens across eight states in the Northeastern United States. I then transcribed the recordings of these interviews, and used qualitative data analysis (QDA) software to analyze these transcripts for patterns and significant excerpts. These patterns — which I will describe in Chapter 3 — form the basis of my answer to the research question posed above: “How do the ways unaffiliated citizens relate to politics vary with class position?”

### 2.1 Finding Interviewees & Establishing an Interview Sample

I found the twenty-three interviewees through two different sources. First, in late March 2019, I met with leaders of the ‘Committee for a Unified Independent Party’ (CUIP), an independent voter advocacy group based in New York City, who agreed to compile for me a list of 25 independents across urban and suburban areas and from a variety of positionalities with regards to race, gender, and class. Out of these 25 contacts, I met with and interviewed 14; these were chosen in order to balance my sample vis-a-vis race, gender, and class (as well as for some logistical reasons). To ensure balance, I tried to adhere to an “ideal sample” (Table 1) that I designed prior to arranging my interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1: &quot;Ideal Sample&quot; of Interviewees (Pre-Interview Process)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Factor</strong></td>
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<td>Class</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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I contacted the rest of the interviewees as a summer Research Assistant for Professor Laurison’s “Pennsylvania Participation Project.” This project aimed to gather information about how poor and working-class people from Southeast Pennsylvania participate in politics. Fearing that my CUIP interviewees would be mostly from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (and they mostly were), I asked Professor Laurison if I could join his project to gain access to his interview pool (i.e. to poor and working class Independents).

2.2 The Interview Process

Interviews lasted between forty to ninety minutes (though the average interview length is closer to the latter). All interviews took place either at a coffeeshop in the interviewee’s residential area, or at the home of the interviewee; I recorded each interview with the consent of the interviewee (see ‘Consent Form’ in Appendix B). Shortly after each interview session, I handwrote post-interview notes. In addition, each interviewee filled out a post-interview survey, which asked a set of questions concerning educational attainment, current income, and other biographical information (see Appendix C for ‘Post-Interview Survey Questions’). Participants of the PPP received twenty dollars in cash as well as a gift card of their choice at the very end of the interview session.

I transcribed some of the interview recordings using the Rev and Temi auto-transcription software and service; others, particularly interviews conducted in Southern Pennsylvania, were manually transcribed. This was due to a lack of access to such auto-transcription services early on in the project. Over the course of manually transcribing eleven interviews, however, I was forced to repeatedly listen closely to what interviewees said, serving as an informal means to find patterns across and throughout interview transcripts.

Throughout the course of the interview process, particularly while I was a part of the Pennsylvania Participation Project, my class and racial-ethnic positionality was at the forefront of my mind. As I made clear to all of my interviewees (or as was apparent to most of my
not only am I an undergraduate student researcher at a private liberal arts college, but I am also a (relatively “Westernized”) Asian immigrant fluent in English and obviously interested in American politics. I believe these traits both hindered and helped me throughout the interview process, making some interviewees more comfortable and candid in discussing their opinions on politics — and others less comfortable. For example, one of my interviewees — an upper class woman from the suburbs of Pennsylvania — was very impressed with my apparent knowledge of American politics, particularly as a foreign student from Hong Kong. At one point during the interview session, after I asked her about her attention to politics, she interjected to ask me questions about my interest in politics. This, however, allowed our conversation to become more casual — and indeed, this woman later candidly voiced conservative viewpoints that another, less trustful, interviewee may not have felt comfortable sharing (with a Generation-Z college student, no less).

Regardless of whom I was interviewing, however, I tried my best to ensure that interviewees were comfortable in telling their stories in a candid manner. To urge interviewees to trust me, and to eliminate any sense of intimidation or judgement in the atmosphere, I started each interview by clarifying that “there are no wrong answers,” that “the conversation will stay private,” and that “I am genuinely interested” in the interviewee’s thoughts on politics (see ‘Interview Guide’ for more details). I made efforts to start casual conversations with the interviewees to make the interviewer-interviewee relationship less salient. And during the interview sessions, I actively thought about how the interviewees might perceive my facial expressions and subconscious reactions to what they say, and thus actively attempted to maintain a friendly and amicable attitude. I only wrote notes after each interview session, and avoided looking down at my interview guide too often. This is far from a complete solution to the problems of positionality when it comes to interviews and interacting with people of various
socioeconomic backgrounds; nonetheless, it is worth pointing out these factors, and ethical to do so.

2.3 Importance of Semi-Structured Interviews

Before delving into the results of my study, it’s worth discussing the importance of my chosen methodology. My decision to utilize interviews is motivated by my wish to capture the nuances in the relationships between class identity, political identity, and political engagement that survey data may skip over. For example, the distinction between Pure and Leaner Independents is now common among surveys asking about partisan identity. Yet this ignores the fact that both groups have a relatively strong sense of Independent identity. With semi-structured interviews, I was able to ask why the Independents lean one way or another, how this affects their political engagement levels, and more.

Semi-structured interviews also account for the fact that surveys inaccurately portray the political knowledge and engagement levels of lower-class respondents. As Bourdieu argues, “the survey tacitly presupposes that the person questioned would have been capable of producing or even reproducing the proposition which constitutes the statement of the question” (467). Conducting and analyzing semi-structured interviews have enabled me to more accurately examine the political engagement of lower-class unaffiliated citizens, without the structural biases built into the survey instrument.

2.4 Reviewing the Dataset

My final interview pool consists of twenty-three unaffiliated citizens. Eleven of the twenty-three interviewees reside in Southeast Pennsylvania; five in New York City; two in New Jersey; and one each in Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Thirteen of the interviewees identify as male; ten identify as female. Eleven of the interviewees identify as white, eleven as black, and one identifies as multi-racial (“Cuban-Jewish”). Two of the interviewees are naturalized citizens (‘GH,’ ‘MB’).
In terms of partisan affiliation, eleven are self-described Pure Independents; one is a self-described ‘anarchist’ (labelled as ‘Pure’ in Figure 1); seven are lean-Democrat Independents; and four are lean-Republican Independents.

![Figure 1: Partisan Lean of Interviewees (Lean-D vs. Lean-R vs. Pure)](image)

Ten of the interviewees belong to the lower class, four are from the middle class, and nine are from the upper class. In terms of educational attainment, one interviewee finished some high school, three finished high school, six finished some college, one holds an Associate’s degree, five hold Bachelor’s degrees, and seven hold post-graduate degrees (J.D, M.Arch, M.S, MBA, etc.).

![Figure 2: Educational Attainment of Interviewees](image)

In terms of occupation, four are managers, seven are professionals, two are semi-professionals/technicians, seven are in services/sales, two are in clerical work, and one is in
craft and related trades. And when it comes to annual household income, eight are in the lower income range (HH income less than $49,999), eight are in the upper income range (HH income more than $135,000), and seven are in the middle income range.

In the end, my interview pool is made up of unaffiliated citizens from diverse backgrounds. I have met most of the specifications set out in my ideal sample (Table 1) — with a few caveats.

Table 2: Ideal Sample vs. Actual Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Specification</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>5 poor, 5 working class, 5 middle class, 5 above middle class</td>
<td>10 lower class, 4 middle class, 9 upper class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Ideally, there will be a range of race/ethnicities represented in this sample</td>
<td>11 white, 11 black, 1 Cuban-Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>10 female, 10 male</td>
<td>13 male, 10 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Above the age of 30</td>
<td>All but one are above the age of 30; one is 25.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most notably, while my ideal sample specified that there be a “range of race/ethnicities represented,” my actual sample consists of eleven who identify as white, eleven who identify as black/African American, and one who identifies as Cuban-Jewish. Unfortunately, my recruitment process (i.e. using the PPP and through IndependentVoting.org contacts) did not lead to the selection of Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Latinx Americans, or other racial minorities. This is quite problematic, since — needless to say — there are differences between how different minority groups see the two major parties, and African-American Independents
(or White Independents) aren’t necessarily representative of Asian-American Independents, Native American Independents, Latinx Americans, and so on. As such, in this study, I take special care to avoid making generalizations concerning race/ethnicity — particularly those that aren’t represented in this interview sample.

In addition, as a result of my interviewee recruitment methods, my pool consists only of residents of the Northeastern United States (with the exception of one interviewee from Virginia). Different regions of the United States have seen different trends with regards to the number and proportion of Independents — suggesting that regional factors play a role in the phenomenon of non-affiliation. The southern United States, for example, saw a surge in the number of self-identified Independents during the 1960s and a decline during the early 1970s, while the northern United States saw a steady increase in the number of Independents starting from the mid-1960s, which increased even further through the 1970s (Keith et al. 1992, 34). It is possible that unaffiliated citizens in the Northeastern United States generally relate to politics in a way that is different from and/or unrepresentative of the national unaffiliated population, but any difference would likely be insignificant in the long term. Even the statistics cited above reversed themselves after the mid-1980s; currently, the number of registered Independents in the North and South are about the same.

And ultimately, this paper is concerned with the links between class and political identity — and class dynamics and structures still permeate certain aspects of national political and social life (Manza et al., 1995; Lareau, 2011). Only interviewing unaffiliated citizens from the Northeastern United States, in short, should not significantly impact my answer to the research question posed above, “How do the ways unaffiliated citizens relate to politics vary with class position?”

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4 Defined as the eleven former Confederate states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia
2.5 Analyzing the Dataset

After transcribing all of my interviews and reviewing my interview pool, I uploaded each interview transcript to Dedoose, a web application for mixed-methods research. Descriptors — based on the corresponding interviewee’s gender, race, household income, educational attainment, occupational status, and ’final class position’ — were created and assigned to each transcript. All descriptors aside from occupational status and ’final class position’ (more details on what this means below) were assigned according to the corresponding interviewee’s post-interview survey responses. See Table 3 for a detailed list of interviewees and the descriptors I assigned to each.

With regards to gender, the post-interview survey gave interviewees the option to fill in their own gender identity. Ultimately, all of my interviewees identified as either ‘male’ or ‘female,’ and the gender descriptors I assigned reflected this. With regards to race, the survey asked “Which category best represents your racial or ethnic identity?” with response options including ‘Black or African American,’ ‘White,’ ‘Multiracial,’ and ‘Other: ______.’ Most of my interviewees identified as ‘Black or African American’ or else ‘White,’ and again, the descriptors I assigned merely reflected these answers.

With regards to household income, my post-interview survey asked “If you don’t mind, approximately how much is your annual household income?” — with eleven response options from ‘Less than $15,000 per year’ to ‘$135,000 or more’ (see Appendix C for more details). However, I ultimately categorized my interviewees into three income brackets — ‘<$49,999,’ ‘$50,000-134,999,’ and ‘$135,000+’ — and assigned household income descriptors accordingly. These income brackets roughly correspond to the Pew Research Center’s definition of lower income (household income of less than $45,200), middle income
(household income between $45,200-135,600), and upper income households (household income of more than $135,600), respectively (Kochhar, 2018).

Finally, my post-interview survey asked “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” with eight options ranging from ‘8th Grade or less’ to ‘Graduate Degree (MA/MS/etc.) or more.’ All of my interviewees completed at least some of high school, while none of my interviewees received a ‘Vocation or Technical degree/certificate.’ As such, I categorized my interviewees into six educational attainment brackets: ‘Some high school,’ ‘High school diploma,’ ‘Some college,’ ‘Associate’s degree,’ ‘Bachelor’s Degree,’ and ‘Master’s Degree or more.’

I assigned occupational status descriptors to each transcript according to the corresponding interviewees’ answers to the question “What kind of work are you in, if you’re working at all?”. These came in the form of specific jobs such as “basketball coach,” “mailroom worker,” or “sales VP.” I matched each interviewee’s answer to the relevant occupational status, referring specifically to the International Standard Classification of Occupations — an International Labor Organization classification structure (Capezzuoli, 2008), and ultimately grouped the interviewees into six occupational categories: Managers, Professionals, Technicians/Semi-Professionals, Clerical Support, Services/Sales Workers, and Craft & Related Trade Workers.

‘Final class position’ — which I categorized into ‘lower class,’ ‘middle class,’ and ‘upper class’ — is essentially a rough aggregate of the three aforementioned class indicators: income, occupational status, and educational attainment. I wanted to assign a single class identity to each interviewee in order to clarify the relationship between class and political identity/behavior, and I wanted to do so in a way that didn’t elevate one class variable (i.e., education, income, occupation) over another. To do so, I first designated each interviewee’s

All figures computed for three-person households and expressed in 2016 dollars.
household income as either ‘lower,’ ‘middle’ or ‘upper,’ looking at their actual incomes — those with annual incomes less than $49,999 were designated as ‘lower,’ those with incomes between $50,000 and $134,999 were designated as ‘middle,’ and those with incomes above $135,000 were designated as upper — while factoring in household size as well (using information from the U.S. Census Bureau and Pew Research Center) (Martinčević, 2018).

I then designated each interviewee’s occupational status and educational attainment in the same way. For the occupational statuses, I designated ‘Managers’ and ‘Professionals’ as ‘upper,’ ‘Technicians/Semi-Professionals’ and ‘Clerical workers’ as ‘middle,’ and ‘Services/Sales workers’ and ‘Craft and Other Trades’ workers as ‘lower.’ For educational attainment, I designated those with ‘Master’s degrees’ as ‘upper,’ those with ‘Bachelor’s degrees’ as ‘middle,’ and those with ‘Some College’ experience, ‘Associate’s Degrees,’ and ‘High School Diploma’ as ‘lower.’

For interviewees who have the same designation across all three variables, I gave a final class position that matched the designation. For example, KC is the owner of an insurance agency, has obtained a law degree, and has an annual household income of more than $135,000 — and so I labelled him ‘upper.’ SB works as a pharmaceutical packaging technician, has attended some college, and has an annual household income of less than $49,999 — so I labelled her ‘lower.’ Twelve of the twenty-three interviews are consistent across all three variables.

For interviewees who have the same designation for two of the variables, and a different designation that is adjacent to the other two for the third variable, I gave a final class position that matched the former. For example, ED is social worker and clinical supervisor making between $50,000 and $134,999 in a two-person household (both indicating ‘middle’ class status), and has obtained a graduate degree (indicating ‘upper’ class status). Ultimately, I labelled her as ‘middle.’ JK currently works as a restaurant cashier and has attended some
college (indicating ‘lower’ class status), but has an annual household income between $50,000 and $134,999 in a three person household (indicating ‘middle’ class status) — so I assigned to him the final class position of ‘lower.’ I labeled nine of the twenty-three interviewees in the same way.

The last two interviewees had class indicators that diverged in unique ways. Both of these interviewees, coincidentally, are naturalized citizens. One, an immigrant from Ethiopia, obtained a Bachelor’s degree but is currently unemployed (having previously worked in customer service) and is making less than $49,999 a year. Over the course of the interview, he told me about how he immigrated to the United States at a young age when his father worked as a diplomat for the United Nations, and how he considers himself “middle class.” On the basis of his family background, educational attainment, and self-identification, I labelled him ‘middle.’

The other, a recent immigrant from Canada, is a prolific music producer (i.e. a professional — indicating ‘upper’ class status) who currently makes between $50,000 and $134,999 in a two-income household (indicating ‘middle’ class status). Furthermore, as he relayed to me during our interview, his father was a nuclear engineer and his mother was a teacher while he was growing up (indicating a middle class upbringing). However, he has not obtained anything more than a high school degree, technically putting him under ‘lower class’ using my methodology. Ultimately, I labelled him ‘middle,’ on the basis of his income and occupational status, keeping his family background in mind, and acknowledging that his lack of college education is likely a product of his specific career path as a music producer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Annual Household Income (# of HH members)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Final Class Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$15,000-$24,999 (1)</td>
<td>Unemployed (previous: construction worker)</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZF</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$25,000 (3)</td>
<td>Home health aide</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JF</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$15,000-$24,999 (4)</td>
<td>Community college student (previous: campaign worker)</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>&lt;$15,000 (2)</td>
<td>Basketball referee</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$25,000 (3)</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical packaging technician</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cuban-Jewish</td>
<td>$35,000-$44,999 (3)</td>
<td>Server (previous: field organizer)</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YM</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$75,000-$89,999 (3)</td>
<td>Home health aide</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$35,000-$44,999 (3)</td>
<td>Mailroom worker</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JK</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$60,000-$74,999 (3)</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$35,000-$44,999 (2)</td>
<td>Uber driver (previously: bartender)</td>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GH</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>&lt;$15,000 (1)</td>
<td>Unemployed (previous: customer service representative)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$90,000-$104,999 (2)</td>
<td>Social worker (clinical supervisor)</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$105,000-$119,999 (2)</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Income information for each interviewee is not categorized into the lower/mid/upper income groups, and occupational information is not categorized into the ILO system, as described in the methodology. Here, to ensure the transparency of my methodology, the information is more precise.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MB</th>
<th>NY</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>$75,000-$89,999 (2)</th>
<th>Music producer, recording engineer, musician</th>
<th>High school</th>
<th>Middle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JL</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Retired (previous: health insurance executive)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Part-time independent healthcare salesperson (previous: VP of sales, healthcare)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Analyst at US Dept. of Labor</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Non-profit consulting; Adjunct professor</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC</td>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Insurance agency owner/Property tax attorney</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Orientation and Mobility Specialist</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$105,000-$119,999 (4)</td>
<td>Small business owner (hospitality company)</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>RI</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (2)</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KF</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>$135,000+ (4)</td>
<td>Non-Profit Consulting</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After assigning these descriptors, I started analyzing the transcripts to find common themes and overarching patterns, with special attention paid to patterns of political behavior and partisan formation (in line with my two key sub-questions). I started by creating parent codes for ‘Why Independent?’, ‘Attitudes Towards Voting,’ ‘Attitudes Towards Political System,’ and ‘Leaner Independent?’. As I went through the transcripts and spotted significant quotes/interview answers, or found interesting patterns (eg. I noticed that a specific reason for becoming Independent are shared by several interviewees), I began to create and assign child
codes to reflect these patterns. For a full list of parent codes and associated child codes, see Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why Independent?</td>
<td>3: Alienated, Anti-Polarization, Ideological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Voting</td>
<td>4: Never Voted, Sometimes Vote, Usually Vote, Always Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Political System</td>
<td>7: Frustrated, Disillusioned, Contempt, Confused, Distrustful, Neutral, Optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaner Independent?</td>
<td>3: Pure, Leaner (reluctant), Leaner (ready)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to ‘Why Independent,’ I eventually arrived at three child codes: ‘Alienated,’ ‘Anti-Polarization,’ and ‘Ideological.’ I elaborate on how I settled on these three child codes, and what these codes mean, in Chapter 3. For ‘Attitudes Towards Voting,’ I ended up with four; for ‘Attitudes Towards Political System,’ I ended up with seven. For the ‘Leaner Independent?’ parent code, I eventually settled on three: ‘Pure Independent,’ ‘Leaner Independent (reluctant)’ and ‘Leaner Independent (ready).’

The separation between ‘Pure’ and ‘Leaner’ Independents allows me to critically analyze the framework established and emphasized by Keith et al. And I separate those who readily admit their Independent leanings and those who reluctantly do so—a result of talking to numerous interviewees about how some unaffiliated citizens list themselves as Leaner Independents on surveys even when they don’t want to (for example, certain unaffiliated citizens, living in closed primary states with one dominant party, are forced to register as partisans in order to actually have a say in the election). Circumventing the oft-stated dichotomy between Leaner and Pure Independents, and instead acknowledging the attitudes and reasonings behind the adoption of these identities, has allowed me to better get at the question of how class and political identity are linked.

Using Dedoose’s ‘Codes X Descriptor’ function, I was able to see how interviewees from different backgrounds (eg. level of educational attainment, occupational status, annual
income, final class position) voted, how they view politics, and how they view their own Independent identity. Some of these results will be shown graphically throughout the rest of the paper; others are used simply to formulate my arguments.

Chapter 3: Class Positionality & Formation of an “Independent” Identity

“I don't really agree with either party. Um, and I haven't found a party I fully agree with. There's definitely, like I always tell people I like the fiscal responsibility that Republicans claim, but I like the progressive, like… yeah. So it's a mix.”
– N.R (Unaffiliated voter from Jenkintown, PA)

“You can't be right about everything. So we can all be so firm in what we believe is right, but if we can't figure out how to… I mean people use the word compromise — if we can't figure out how to work and create new things together, then what do we -- there's kind of no hope.”
– K.F (Unaffiliated voter from New Haven, CT)

“Um, so I think the, the thing that led me away was that, um, I felt that… it felt like the Democratic Party, they had… like my community, they, they really had us listening, but they weren't taking action. I felt. Like, um… like they counted on our votes but abandoned us I guess after the election. So I felt uncomfortable taking part of that. I felt like getting away from that system would be a good thing… is what I figured? Yeah. I mean, I guess, I guess I still agree with that, but yeah. And I, yeah, I just didn't want to be a part of like the two party system.”
– J.F (Unaffiliated voter from Brooklyn, NY)

In this chapter, I discuss my research on the links between one’s class background and the formation of one’s unaffiliated identity. More specifically, I discuss how unaffiliated citizens from various class backgrounds (1) choose their political identity; (2) perceive the social bases of the two major parties; and (3) express their partisan leanings. In doing so, I build on the aforementioned literature on partisanship, unaffiliated voters, and the relationship between class and political participation — much of which indicates that class may influence an unaffiliated citizen’s decision to identify as such.

The discussion on how Independents choose their political identity (if they “choose” this at all) is particularly important, since this is largely indicative of the kinds of political attitudes and behaviors an Independent harbors and exhibits. I ultimately use this information
to categorize my interviewees into several types of Independents, which in turn forms the basis for my later analysis of different Independents and their political behavior.

3.1 “Choosing” One’s Political Identity

Many of the Independents I interviewed believed that the two parties — or the entire “two-party system” — represented some elite group, labelling themselves Independents out of distrust of the system and/or apathy with politics in general. BSP, an “Independent progressive” from Brooklyn, NY, is one prime example:

“[Q: If (the Democrats) didn’t just talk the talk but also walked the walk, would you be more inclined to support the Democratic Party or identify as a Democrat?] No, it’s more... well, one, I don't believe that political parties should have the monopolizing position that they have in our, like in our electoral process. They've been given an official legitimacy by the government to decide who our candidates are. And two, our primaries are paid for with public taxpayer dollars. The board of elections keeps the voter rolls for the parties and that's paid for by the voters.

AC, an Independent from The Bronx, NY, is another:

“[Why do you identify as an Independent?] We don't wanna... we don't want to be forced into a party because we don’t trust them because we know that their interest is not... in solving the problem. And I think we, uh, we look at the process, of how elections are served, and independents represent that whole 60’s slogan of “more power to the people.”

Both, alongside nine of the twenty-three Independents I interviewed, see themselves as excluded from politics and ignored by the two major parties, linking their political identity to their apathy for, confusion with, or distrust of the political system. Others may not see themselves as excluded from politics, but — based on certain life experiences — empathize with and choose to fight for those alienated from the process, even adopting their language of class conflict. Regardless, rather than “choose” their political identity on the basis of political and ideological evaluations, these Independents are simply unable to “identify” with the two major parties — due to negative perceptions of and attitudes toward them. For example, EH, from North Philadelphia, PA, when asked whether he identified as a Democrat or Republican, answered with this:
“No, because they’re all the same. Even with the Independent Party, you are still in the political ring, so it doesn’t matter, right? They gonna elect who they want to elect, and we really don’t have a say-so [emphases added].”

EH doesn’t believe that he belongs to any of the two parties, or that the two parties — or any party for that matter — would include people like him.

ED, an unaffiliated citizen from West Roxbury, MA — roots her Independent identity in past experiences that shaped her conception of what “Independents” and two major parties are like:

“But, um, I actually was, um, working in Philadelphia and met an Independent candidate that was running at the time for president, Eleanor Fulani [sic, “Lenora Fulani”]… So I helped with that, uh, effort. So in doing that, I met a lot of Independents. I liked what she stood for. [T]he two major parties I saw – [while] trying to get her on the ballot – you saw how hard it was. So I learned a lot about how the people in power try to keep the people that, you know, they want to keep hold of things so they make it harder for Independents. So I didn’t like that [laughs].”

And DR, an “anarchist” from Philadelphia, PA — roots his political identity in past experiences that shaped his conception of what “anarchism” is and his lack of attachment to any party:

“[Q: Did your parents talk about electoral politics or party identity at home?] Yes. Not at like… not party identity. It was not like a heavy political household.

[Q: So what did you talk about at home, in relation to politics?] Um, well, once I started to get rowdy, it was like, no, I gotta… I should go to this demo in New York. And they’re like, what the hell, no, no, you’re going to get beat up. My friend group in high school leaned left. And I think I was very, lucky, like by chance that where I was, there were other people who like, um, were interested in radical politics and I think that that also comes from like being in punk scenes at that age.”

Other Independents identify as such on the basis of political evaluations shaped by their ideological preferences. For these Independents, political identity really is a “choice” — i.e. an outcome of “rational” decision-making. Some of these Independents see themselves as “moderates” — or “socially liberal, fiscally conservative” — and thus do not identify with the two major parties. RS, a lean-Republican independent from Philadelphia, PA, described his political identity as exactly that:

“[Q: Why do you identify as an Independent?] Um…I’m more or less just looking for someone who can, you know, hit the… check the boxes on, you know, for a moral aspect, but most certainly check the right boxes from a business perspective.”
Others see themselves as “too progressive,” or as “principled conservatives,” out of touch with the ideological platforms of the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. GH, another lean-Republican Independent from Philadelphia, PA, explained that he identifies as an Independent because while he is ideologically conservative, the Republican Party doesn’t — in practice — represent conservative principles:

“In theory, [conservativism is] what the Republicans stand for. But you know, they don’t always… like I said, it's just, you know… [the Democrats and Republicans are] two sides of the same coin. Like… they just giving you an “alternative,”” make you think you have a choice… So as an independent, like, well, you know, I'm not going to go with the Republican judge because that's what Republicans are saying now.”

On the other side of the political spectrum, CF, a lean-Democrat Independent from Providence, RI, explained that he feels that he is too much to the left of the Democratic Party to identify with it:

“[Q: Why do you feel like you should disassociate yourself from the Democratic party?] … I don't feel strongly enou— if the Democrat party here was much more progressive, I would defin— I would probably say, okay, I'm not an Independent, I’m a progressive Democrat.”

A recurring pattern, however, is that these Independents are very politically engaged and informed, and generally quite educated (holding at least a Bachelor’s degree). Many are aware of what the parties’ political and ideological platforms are, and many have considered their own ideological dispositions. Out of my pool of twenty-three Independents, nine seemed to follow this mode of thinking.

A third group of Independent reports being frustrated with the actions of the Democratic and Republican parties and of the partisans around them: “the constant bickering” and “fighting,” the “corruption” and the “shenanigans.” Some describe a political ideal of “unity” between the two parties, under which everyone “works together” to “solve problems.” For example, when asked “what it would take for you to identify with one of the two parties again?”, DS, an Independent from Gambrills, MD, said this:
“I can't think of anything. The only thing would be if suddenly there was a miracle and, um, people actually listen to each other, work together and didn't try to put power over other people.”

Others — seeing the actions of the two parties and of partisans around them — express disdain for the two-party monopoly over political and social life, and are completely opposed to political parties. SR, an Independent from Falls Church, VA, is one such example:

“Um, I'll vote for somebody to disrupt the… you know, make a statement that the race this candidate thinks he's going to cruise through is… you know, just to show him that you’ve got some competition. And that's going either way, you know. I've seen too much of the shenanigans from both parties to feel any inclination for supporting one or the other. Neither of them, neither of the parties, are for me or for us as a people [emphasis added].”

***

In summary, among my interviewees, I found three primary reasons for non-affiliation:

1. Some feel an aversion to the corrupt power apparently represented by the two major parties;
2. Some see themselves as ideologically out-of-sync with both of the two major parties;
3. Some are averse to the notion of “partisanship” — and the societal ills it brings. Furthermore, the reason one identifies as unaffiliated/Independent, or chooses to be unaffiliated, reflects one’s mode of thinking when it comes to relating to politics, and how one acts in the political sphere (which I elaborate on in Chapter 4). We have thus arrived at a three-part scheme for categorizing Independents:
Table 5: Summary of Three Types of Unaffiliated Citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Independent</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienated Independent</td>
<td>These Independents feel that the two parties represent the wealthy and the elite/establishment, adopting their Independent identity out of distrust and/or apathy. Many explain their Independent identity in class terms – using language such as “the elite,” “the people in power,” and the “system.” Many of these Independents are Pure Independents, but a considerable number readily admit their partisan leanings. These Independents often come from lower class categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Independent</td>
<td>These Independents identify as such because of ideological differences with the two main parties. Some cite their “moderate” ideology, while others cite their “conservative” principles or “progressive” ideals. Many readily admit their partisan leanings, frequently citing ideological proximity. These Independents are often relatively educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Polarization Independent</td>
<td>These Independents are tired of partisan gridlock, general ineffectiveness, and self-interestedness, adopting their political identity out of frustration or embarrassment with the two parties. Many of these Independents identify as Pure Independents, but a number also reluctantly admit partisan leanings, seeking to downplay the identity’s significance. These Independents are often from higher class categories.</td>
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At this point, one might think Anti-Polarization Independents and Alienated Independents are quite similar, in that both see the two parties as ignoring their interests. One key difference sets them apart, however: Alienated Independents frequently couch their dissatisfaction in terms of power and domination, viewing the two parties as violating subaltern group interests (i.e. in terms of class and race). Anti-Polarization Independents, on the other hand, view the two parties as violating some political ideal — whether it be freedom of thought (“each person should vote according to their interests, not their parties”) or compromise and unity (“the parties need to stop bickering with each other and come up with practical solutions”).

As Klar writes in Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction:

“Whether we blame the parties themselves or the incessant media coverage of partisan conflict, we can agree that partisanship is becoming a dirty word in politics. The increasingly popular response is to distance oneself from the party. One way to do this is to self-identify as independent” (Klar 2016, 125).
Looking at my interviewees, many people are indeed are “distancing [themselves] from the party.” Some of these are, like Klar suggests, doing so in response to partisan conflict. Others, however, are doing so because of a belief in a lack of shared group interests.

That being said, the lines between the Anti-Polarization, Alienated, and Ideological categories are not clear-cut, and not all Independents neatly fit into one of the three categories. Among my interview pool of twenty-three, four are what I describe as ‘hybrids’ — either because they have exhibited traits of two of the types, or admitted a progression from one type to another over the years. KF, from New Haven, CT, is one example of the latter. Over the course of her college years, she went from being an Ideological to an Anti-Polarization Independent:

“I think within … two years, … as I learned more about this system … I shifted to more of a… in some ways more wanting to step away from ideology, because again, I think, and this goes to like my work… we have to figure out how to work with people who we don't agree with. So yeah, I do have beliefs, but part of, part of what the problem… I mean I can't be right about everything. You can't be right about everything. So we can all be so firm in what we believe is right, but like if we can't figure out how to… work and create new things together, then what do we -- there's kind of no hope or anything.”

JL, from Quakertown, PA, is someone who exhibits both characteristics of an Anti-Polarization and Ideological Independent:

“I've always been kind of a tweener, yeah. Where I thought there's truth on both sides. I think issues... there's truth on both sides. Instead of playing a zero sum game, you try and find a solution together.”

Here, we see that JL’s ideological moderation, combined with his frustration with the two-party politics, is one of the reasons he identifies as an Independent.

Interestingly, one Independent I interviewed — DR, from Philadelphia, PA — exhibits characteristics of both Alienated and Ideological Independents. Growing up “downwardly mobile” during the 1990-1 economic recession, DR long believed that the “establishment” never cared about people like him. And as a result of hanging around “punks” and “rebels”
throughout his teenage years, he came to identify as an “anarchist” — making political decisions according to this ideology.

3.2 Class Identity & Political Identity

Regardless of the few hybrid cases, one can clearly see three distinct types of Independents — each with distinct reasons for adopting such a political identity, or at least for being unaffiliated with the two major parties. What’s more is that whether one is an Anti-Polarization Independent, Ideological Independent, or Alienated Independent largely depends on one’s class position. Looking at my interview pool, one can see this influence quite clearly. As seen in Figure 4: Alienated Independents are mostly those with lower educational attainment; Anti-Polarization and Ideological Independents, conversely, are mostly those with college degrees and post-graduate degrees.

Figure 4: Educational Attainment Breakdown of Anti-Polarization, Ideological, and Alienated Independents
The pattern is strong even when we use occupation as a proxy for class. As seen in Figure 5, Professionals and Managers make up a small share of Alienated Independents, but a relatively large share of Anti-Polarization and Ideological Independents.

Figure 5: Occupational Status Breakdown of Alienated, Ideological, and Anti-Polarization Independents

As noted in the methodology, I also designated each of my interviewees with a ‘final class position’ — balancing occupation indicators with income and education indicators, as well as factoring in household size when evaluating household income. Separating the Alienated, Anti-Polarization, and Ideological Independents into these class categories, I found the same strong pattern:
Figure 6: ‘Final Class Position’ Breakdown of Anti-Polarization, Ideological, and Alienated Independents

In short, Alienated Independents are mostly comprised of those from the lower class; Anti-Polarization and Ideological Independents are mostly members of the middle and upper classes. What can explain these disparities? The link between the Ideological Independents and class may be the easiest to solve. As noted earlier in the chapter, ideological thinking is more likely to be found among people of higher social categories. Kinder and Kalmoe argue that "real liberals and real conservatives are found in impressive numbers only among the comparatively few… deeply and seriously engaged" (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), and as many political scientists and sociologists have shown, the deeply and serious engaged are most likely those with higher education levels and incomes. Indeed, all of the Ideological Independents I interviewed had a deep knowledge of politics, of their own and the two parties’ political ideologies, and of the differences between their own political preferences and the parties’ political platforms. The fact that they are able to engage in ideological thinking is likely a product of their education, but this is likely just part of the picture. As Bourdieu argues in *Distinction*: 

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“The propensity to make everyday choices on the basis of political principles, i.e., within the logic of the political “slant” rather than ethical intuition is itself a dimension of an ethos which is also expressed in relation to language, the body, to others and to the world in general” (Bourdieu 2015, 420)

In other words, one’s tendency to engage in ideological thinking is not only a result of being educated and being able to “think ideologically,” but is also a result of one’s class habitus — a “class unconsciousness rather than a class consciousness” (Bourdieu 2015, 420).

Why are Alienated Independents mostly comprised of the poor and working class? Alienated Independents frequently think in terms of power and domination — frequently citing class and race in their criticisms of the two parties. Bourdieu, as noted in this chapter, wrote that those from “lower social categories,” relative to those from “higher social categories,” more frequently produce responses governed by class ethos:

“For problems that have not been brought into a personal or party ‘line,’ agents are thrown back on their ethos, in which the social conditions of production of that ethos express themselves” (Bourdieu 2015, 421).

Alienated Independents also distrust the two parties, seeing them as powerful authorities that don’t represent their interests or the interests of people like them. Bruch and Soss provide an explanation of why this may be more prevalent among the poor and working class, finding that “negative experiences of school authority” among the lower classes have had “significant marginalizing effects on [their] later electoral participation and trust in government” (Bruch and Soss 2018, 50). Schools, in their view, “operate as institutional mechanisms that convert social hierarchies into predictable patterns of political inequality and civic marginalization” (Bruch and Soss 2018, 50).

Finally, why are those who are concerned with party infighting and partisanship mainly members of the middle and upper class? As explained above, Anti-Polarization Independents view the two parties as violating some ideal state of political affairs — most of the time involving “compromise” or “unity.” They don’t necessarily “distrust” the two parties as much as they are frustrated, disappointed, or angry with it — emotions and attitudes exacerbated by
the hyper-partisan political environment of today. They also generally do not feel excluded from politics; conversely, many feel “authorized” to talk politics, and generally describe themselves as politically engaged and as frequent voters.

The simplest explanation is that the political values upheld by these Independents — of “compromise,” “unity” or “pragmatism” — are part of a “political program” of the middle and upper classes, learned and internalized under certain socio-economic conditions. Violations of these values by the representatives of the two major parties, then, would be more apparent to members of the middle- and upper-classes. Another explanation is that Anti-Polarization Independents have acquired a distaste for today’s politics through “cross-cutting exposure” (exposure to “disagreement in … communication environments”) (Matthes et al. 2019) — whether it be through more exposure to media, or more frequent contact with people of different partisan identities/ideological orientations — and that cross-cutting exposure is more common among those in the middle- and upper-classes.

This, however, begs the question: why would “cross-cutting exposure” lead one to become an Independent? Several scholars have investigated the links between “cross-cutting exposure” and political behavior (Matthes et al. 2019). This has some bearing on our study here, since we have thus far treated the adoption of Independent identity as a type of political behavior. Some, like Diana Mutz, have theorized that cross-cutting exposure leads to “attitudinal ambivalence” — meaning that one might feel uncertain about their political beliefs and attitudes, and hence be “less willing to take political action and tend to delay voting decisions” (Matthes et al. 2019). This, however, doesn’t seem to apply here since many of the Anti-Polarization Independents I interviewed were certain about their political beliefs and about their attitudinal beliefs concerning the two major parties. In other words, their lack of identification with the Democratic and Republican parties doesn’t seem to stem from “attitudinal ambivalence.”
Mutz also posits a second theory: that cross-cutting exposure could lead individuals to worry about how their political action might affect social relationships and threaten social harmony, thus dampening their urge for political participation (Matthes et al. 2019). This argument, in many ways, parallels Samara Klar’s arguments concerning Independents “hiding” their partisan identity due to negative perceptions of the two parties and of party in-fighting (Klar 2016). And there are signs that this applies to the Anti-Polarization Independents whom I interviewed: the defining characteristic of these Independents, after all, is that they don’t “participate” in partisan politics due to negative perceptions of parties and of everyday partisan people.

It is important to note, however, that other scholars have theorized that cross-cutting exposure could in fact positively affect political participation by encouraging individuals to reflect on their own beliefs, to demand more information concerning their beliefs and others’ beliefs, and to become more polarized (and hence more passionate about their point of view) (Matthes et al. 2019). Moreover, as Matthes et al. reveal in their meta-analysis of cross-cutting exposure research, the overall results are actually inconclusive as to whether cross-cutting exposure positively, or negatively, impacts political participation. Indeed, if we define “political participation” in the conventional sense (i.e. tendency to vote, to participate in political activities, etc.), we see that Anti-Polarization Independents in fact score quite highly in this regard. What is likely happening here is that cross-cutting exposure — more frequently experienced by middle-class and upper-class individuals — is making certain individuals (with certain political values) withdraw from partisan politics (“Big-P politics”), without necessarily making them withdraw from everyday political engagement (“Small-P politics”).

3.3 Perception of Party Bases

According to Greene et al., people generally go through a “matching process” — by which they examine the fit between their self-conceptions and what they perceive to be the
social bases of the different political parties — to determine which party they belong to. This study does not seek to confirm nor disprove the validity of this theory, but asks a more specific question: Do the ways unaffiliated citizens perceive the social bases of the two major parties vary with class position? If so, how? Asking each of my interviewees which “types of people” come to mind when they think of the two main parties, I was able to discern — to some extent — how Independents of different backgrounds think about the social bases of the two parties, and how integral this perception was to the formation of their political identity.

If individuals generally arrive at their partisan identities through the aforementioned “matching process,” the Alienated Independents I interviewed were unique in that they by and large did not see a mismatch between their self-conceptions and their conceptions of the social bases of at least one of the main parties. For example, ZF, a poor black man from North Philadelphia, PA, believed that the Democratic Party represented “the poor side of the political pool.” BSP, a working-class Cuban-Jewish man from Brooklyn, New York, said that the Democratic Party’s “supposed” constituents are “well-educated white people, people of color, and union members.”

What separates Alienated Independents from ordinary partisans — content with their “fit” into the social base of the Democratic/Republican Party — is that Alienated Independents believe that political parties are entities that extend control over their social bases, and are repulsed by this notion. They believe that parties are composed of ordinary partisans on the one hand (which could be people just like them), and elites that hold all the power on the other. AC, from the Bronx, New York, summed it up best:

“[When you think of people who are Democrats, and the type of people that they represent, what do you think of?] Well, I mean there are two types of party people to me. One is the leadership… and then you have the rank and file. Um, the leadership are people who are concerned about winning elections; um, the rank-and-file Democrats are people who I think support the rhetoric of the party that once stood for the little guy. And um, the Republican leadership again is people who want to control who gets elected and represents the party, and I think their base is not that… um, much like rank-and-file Democrats… I think they want the same things: a job, a decent life.”
To Alienated Independents, political identity is more than a social identity — it is an instrument of the powerful. Being unaffiliated is not so much about feeling distant to ordinary Democrats and Republicans; it is about removing oneself from the reach of the powerful.

The Anti-Polarization Independents I interviewed did not necessarily see mismatches between their self-conceptions and their conceptions of the social bases of the two main political parties, either. My conversation with DS, from Gambrills, MD, was particularly enlightening:

“[When you think of people who are Democrats, what do you think of? Like what kind of person comes to your mind? Stereotypes are fine.] Tie-dye, long hair… [laughs] [Hippies.] Hippies yeah. I'm of the age where… I grew up with them. [Is “hippies” a good thing or bad thing?] Oh, that's a great thing. [Were you a hippie growing up?] Not really. I did have long hair… but so did everybody else. [Yeah. Um, so Democrats — you think of you think of hippies?] Oh, that's an extreme of course, but yeah. Yeah. People who have heart and compassion and, yeah.

... Let me tell you something. All right. Um, I'm not sure how this works out, but the parties themselves, they… they don't act… they're not a being, but somehow I think the people in it are caught in a web and I don't know how, how that happens. I don't know how that happens.”

DS, like many of the other Anti-Polarization Independents I interviewed, did not see a mismatch between herself and the constituents of one of the two main parties — in this case, the “hippies” of the Democratic Party. Yet, her dislike for the Democratic Party — a “being” in itself — seemed to override any empathy she had for its social base, leading her to identify as an Independent.

The Ideological Independents I interviewed became Independents after supposedly making a “rational choice” based on their ideological preferences and the ideological platforms of the two parties. The “matching process” described by Greene et al., then, does not appear to play an overt role in the formation of these Independents’ political identities. Yet that does not
mean that social identity — and hence class positionality — does not play a role: many of these Independents’ ideological beliefs seemed to reflect the beliefs of people with whom they surrounded themselves during their most formative years. KC, a (self-professed) Ideological Independent from Mahwah, NJ, found his ideological beliefs change as he left college and became a small-business owner. RS, a small business owner from Philadelphia, PA, went through the same change. KC and RS, asked about the social base of the Democratic Party, both brought up “idealistic” college students with extreme ideologies. Class positionality, at first glance irrelevant to the discussion of the Ideological Independents’ political identities, in fact plays at least some role.

3.4 Leaner & Pure Independents

In *Myth of the Independent Voter*, Keith et al. argue for drawing a distinction between Pure Independents and Leaner Independents: the former being more politically disengaged and less likely to vote, and the latter being as politically engaged and voting as often as ordinary partisans (Keith et al., 1992). Keith et al. put forth a few hypotheses to explain this disparity — one of which being that those with less education are overrepresented among Pure Independents (and those with less education are generally less politically engaged). The link between class and political identity is implied here, but not quite fleshed out. Through my interviews, and through the categorization framework established earlier, I was able to examine what being a Leaner or Pure Independent means in practice, and how this might be influenced by an individual’s class positionality.

Many of the Alienated Independents I interviewed labelled themselves Pure Independents when they were given the choice. Of the eleven Alienated Independents I interviewed, nine identified as Pure, while the other two readily identified as lean-Democrats (see Figure 7). The Pure Independents identify as such because they feel the two parties don’t represent them, instead representing some group of elites. Being a “Pure” Independent, then,
is an act of removing oneself from the reach of these powerful elites. The other two “leaned” for two distinct reasons: one said that the Democratic Party has been relatively better when it comes to serving the interests of the lower classes; the other cited the Democratic Party’s policies and ideology.

Figure 7: Partisan Lean of Alienated Independents Interviewed

The Anti-Polarization Independents I interviewed frequently labelled themselves Pure Independents as well; the few who were Leaner Independents admitted their leanings reluctantly — qualifying any appearance of favoritism towards either of the political parties with comments about the actions of the parties themselves (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Partisan Lean of Anti-Polarization Independents Interviewed
Most of the Ideological Independents I interviewed, conversely, admitted to leaning towards one of the two parties, and most of these Leaners did so quite readily (see Figure 9). The two Ideological Independents who identify as Pure happen to be Hybrid Independents: one — who actually identifies as an “anarchist” — is both an Alienated Independent and Ideological Independent; the other was, in her formative years, an Ideological Independent, but is now more of an Anti-Polarization Independent.

![Figure 9: Partisan Lean of Ideological Independents Interviewed](image)

![Figure 10: Partisan Lean of Anti-Polarization, Ideological, and Alienated Independents (summary)](image)

The fact that Alienated Independents are mostly Pure, that Ideological Independents are mostly Leaners, and Anti-Polarization Independents are a mix (see Figure 10) makes sense in
light of how we have described each of these Independents. Since Alienated Independents see all parties as entities of power (and oftentimes an inept, or corrupt power), it is unsurprising that most refuse to identify with any party at all, and identify as Pure Independents. Indeed, in Myth of the Independent Voter, Keith et al. investigate the links between feelings of alienation and partisan independence, finding that “any attempt to relate alienation to the growing number Independents requires separating Leaners from Pure Independents and subdividing them into Democrats and Republicans” (Keith, et al., 1992, 173). Separating Leaners from Pure Independents, they found that Pure Independents comprised a relatively large share of those “least satisfied” with government responsiveness, those “least trusting” of the government, and those “least satisfied” with government efficacy — but only in certain years. They found no similar patterns among the Leaners.

Anti-Polarization Independents may “lean” towards one of the two parties (whether it be due to ideological/policy agreement or a perception of “fitting in”), but, depending on their level of dislike for the two parties, may reluctantly admit this leaning or outright denounce any leaning at all. Here is how JP, a lean-Republican Anti-Polarization Independent, responded to a question about her partisan leanings:

“[Do you identify as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?] Independent. [And the classic follow-up question is: do you lean towards one of the two main parties?] I hate saying I lean towards one of them, but… Republican... But I really feel I’m an Independent.”

Compare this to DR — quoted earlier — a Pure, Anti-Polarization Independent:

“[Um, so as an Independent, you said you don't identify at all with either of the two parties.] Not right now. [Voting-wise do you lean towards one of the two?] I finally voted for my first Republican last election. Does that answer your question? [laughs] [But generally, do you think, do you, do you lean towards the Democratic Party?] Yes, yes. Well, I'm sorry, I lean toward candidates who have a more leftist... I hate the party. I hate the party! They don't care about us!”

Ideological Independents see parties — and themselves — as ideological entities. “Leaning,” to these Independents, is simply about being more sympathetic to a certain party’s
ideology, and many are able to readily admit this. NR, an Ideological Independent, was asked why she identified as an Independent, and why a Lean-Democrat Independent:

“[why do you identify as an Independent?] I don't really agree with either party. Um, and I haven't found a party I fully agree with. There's definitely, like I always tell people I like the fiscal responsibility that Republicans claim, but I like the progressive, like… yeah. So it's a mix.

[why you identify as a lean-Democrat Independent then?] I probably want more like government oversight (laughs). And there is, um… I don't know if you've watched the debates, but like, um, Kamala Harris brought up that, you know, Brown v. Board of Education happened, and it wasn't enforced in all the states. It's like, I want the government to do that. That's your job. Like, enforce this.”

Without a strong dislike for parties (whether it be due to a dislike for partisanship, or alienation from the political establishment), and with a relatively clear sense of their own ideological inclinations, Ideological Independents are usually Leaners — and admit their leanings readily.

3.5 Race, Class & Political Identity

This research study asks: “How do the ways unaffiliated citizens relate to politics vary with class position?” The premise here is that the structural organization of society plays a profound role in shaping the life chances, habits and dispositions of individuals (and groups of individuals) — and that this structural organization of society has been heavily shaped by class in particular. Yet one cannot talk about class in the United States without talking about race, and vice-versa. More specifically, one cannot talk about class in the United States without addressing the racial inequality between blacks and whites that has long defined American society. As William Julius Wilson notes in The Truly Disadvantaged, for various and obvious historical reasons, blacks have long been concentrated in the unskilled sector of the economy. And when structural changes in the economy occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, the conditions of the urban poor — of which blacks comprised a disproportionate share — worsened dramatically (Wilson 2012, 39).

Looking at my interview pool, one can see a close correlation between race and all three measures of class identity used. For example, of the thirteen interviewees with a Bachelor’s or
Master’s degree, nine are white and four are non-white. Conversely, of the ten interviewees without a college degree, seven are non-white while three are white (see Table 2).

As one might expect then, one’s racial identity is highly correlated with the category of Independent under which one falls. Out of the eleven Alienated Independents I interviewed, eight are non-white, and three are white. Out of the seven Anti-Polarization Independents, all are white. And out of the nine Ideological Independents, three are non-white, while six are white.

**Figure 11: Racial Breakdown of Alienated, Ideological, and Anti-Polarization Independents**

That my non-white interviewees tended to be Alienated Independents, and that my white interviewees comprised a relatively large share of Anti-Polarization and Ideological Independents, likely came down to the fact that race and class are highly correlated within my interview sample (i.e. a large number of my lower class interviewees are non-white). But examining the literature, there is reason to believe that race could affect how one’s political identity is formed in ways outside of its association with class — reflecting the fact that we have ample evidence to suggest that race affects the way we structure society outside of its
relationship to class. Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton argue, for example, that racial segregation impacts blacks from all socioeconomic backgrounds by making it “more difficult for aspiring black families to escape the concentrated poverty of the ghetto and [putting] them at a distinct disadvantage in the larger competition for education, jobs, wealth and power” (1993, 150). Could the “culture of segregation” described by Massey and Denton be a factor in the alienation experienced by black Alienated Independents? My conversation with SB, a black woman from North Philadelphia, PA, may give us a clue:

“[Do you remember when you switched from being a Democrat to an Independent?]”

Um, when I started seeing, um, that Democrats really, really wasn't doing nothing for a lot of causes that I felt like needed to be addressed. Um, I really switched… to independent when — it’s strange but — I really switched after Obama became president. I did. …

What really struck me was these racial tensions, you know, because the little kids experienced it… You know, [Americans are] not, they not raised to be racist or anything like that. But for grown adults to be, you know, racist towards these little babies is just so wrong. I felt like [the Democrats] didn't push it enough. They didn't push it enough. You know, like you got all types of teenagers getting killed out here by people that say they feel threatened by because they just minding their own business because of their color, and no one's addressing it.

So if you see this keep on happening, the only thing it's making me think is… you want it to happen. … It's only getting worse. Like how can you have more cops in one city and more crime, but then you got other neighborhoods where it's less cops and it's less crime? I don't get that. That's pretty weird [emphases added].”

SB felt alienated by the Democratic Party not necessarily because of her class identity, but because of her identity as a black woman in the United States. In justifying her political independence, she talks about the lack of concern for black Americans on the part of the two major political parties — citing her own personal experiences living in North Philadelphia.

Much more could be said about the relationship between partisan affiliation and racial identity, and much more research should be conducted. But for the purposes of this paper, acknowledging the profound importance of race, and sketching out the ways race might intersect with class, should be sufficient.
3.6 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the relationship between one’s class background and the formation of one’s “unaffiliated” identity, answering my first key sub-question: “Why do unaffiliated citizens identify as such, and how does this vary with class position?” The key finding here is that one’s class background can shape why one becomes an Independent, and the type of Independent one is. Here is Table 5 again, summarizing the three types of Independents:

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<td>These Independents feel that the two parties represent the wealthy and the elite/establishment, adopting their Independent identity out of distrust and/or apathy. Many explain their Independent identity in class terms – using language such as “the elite,” “the people in power,” and the “system.” Many of these Independents are Pure Independents, but a considerable number readily admit their partisan leanings. These Independents often come from lower class categories.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ideological Independent</td>
<td>These Independents identify as such because of ideological differences with the two main parties. Some cite their “moderate” ideology, while others cite their “conservative” principles or “progressive” ideals. Many readily admit their partisan leanings, frequently citing ideological proximity. These Independents are often relatively educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Polarization Independent</td>
<td>These Independents are tired of partisan gridlock, general ineffectiveness, and self-interestedness, adopting their political identity out of frustration or embarrassment with the two parties. Many of these Independents identify as Pure Independents, but a number also reluctantly admit partisan leanings, seeking to downplay the identity’s significance. These Independents are often from higher class categories.</td>
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Alienated Independents, it turns out, are primarily those from lower class categories. Ideological Independents are primarily those with high educational attainment. And Anti-Polarization Independents are usually from higher class categories.

Trying to fill in the gaps in the literature on partisanship, unaffiliated voters, and class, I asked two additional questions in this chapter:
1. How do unaffiliated citizens from various class backgrounds perceive the social bases of the two major parties?

2. How do unaffiliated citizens from various class backgrounds express their partisan leanings?

I answered these questions with reference to the categorization framework detailed above. I found that Alienated Independents may or may not see themselves as fitting into the “social base” of one of the two major parties, but regardless, all of them see the political parties as powerful entities which extend control over their social bases, and are repulsed by this notion. As such, most of the Alienated Independents I interviewed identified as Pure Independents; for some, the act of identifying as Pure is an act of totally dissociating oneself from these entities, and removing oneself from their reach.

The “matching process” described by Greene et. al does not appear to immediately apply to Ideological Independents — whose partisan identities are supposedly rooted in a rational choice based on their ideological preferences and their perceptions of the major parties’ ideological platforms. Yet their social identity, and perceptions of the social bases of the two major parties, still matter: many of the ideological beliefs of these Independents seem to reflect the beliefs of people with whom they have surrounded themselves. Still, the fact that Ideological Independents do think in terms of ideology (at the conscious level, at the very least) means that they are more likely to have partisan leanings, and admit their leanings quite readily.

Anti-Polarization Independents vary in the ways they see the social bases of the two parties: some dislike the “partisans” on both sides of the aisle; others empathize with certain segments of certain party bases. Yet they all have an overriding dislike for the two major parties themselves. Much like Alienated Independents, Anti-Polarization Independents see parties as self-interested, corrupt entities separate from their social bases. And much like Alienated Independents, Anti-Polarization Independents adopt their Independent identities out of a dislike for the two parties, and out of a need to disassociate themselves from the two parties.
All of this being said, one cannot examine the relationship between class and political identity without touching on the relationship between race and political identity. In this chapter, I have emphasized the linkages between class and race, and have suggested ways in which race might additionally affect the formation of one’s political identity. My discussion of the issue is far from elaborate, however, and should certainly be fleshed out in future studies.

Chapter 4: Class Positionality & Political Behavior of Independents

In the last chapter, I explained how one’s class may affect how and why unaffiliated citizens choose to identify as such (“Independent,” “unaffiliated,” “non-partisan,” etc.), and posited that, heavily shaped by class structures and identities, there are essentially three main types of Independents: Alienated Independents, Anti-Polarization Independents, and Ideological Independents. In this chapter, I move on to discuss how class may affect the way unaffiliated citizens engage in and view the public sphere. In the process, I elaborate on the different ways Alienated, Anti-Polarization, and Ideological Independents relate to politics — examining whether and how they vote; whether and how they engage in politics in ways other than voting; the attention they pay to elections and to politics in general; and finally, their view of and/or attitude towards the public sphere.

4.1 Independents & Political Engagement

Keith et al. find that from 1964-1988, fifty-seven percent of Pure Independents — compared to seventy percent of Independent Democrats and seventy-one percent of Strong Democrats — said they followed politics “most or some of the time” (Keith 1992, 42). A similar pattern emerges for other indicators of political engagement within that time frame. Twenty-two percent of Pure Independents said that were “very much interested in the current presidential election campaign” — compared to thirty-one percent of Independent Democrats, twenty-five percent of Weak Democrats, and forty-five percent of Strong Democrats (Keith 1992, 44). And sixty-three percent of Pure Independents self-reported turning out for
presidential elections — compared to seventy-two percent of Independent Democrats, and eighty-three percent of Strong Democrats (Keith 1992, 48). In short, there is a small, but clear, disparity in the political engagement and interest of Pure Independents on the one hand, and Leaner Independents and outright partisans on the other. While I do not adopt Keith et al.’s general framework of categorizing Independents (for reasons stated in Chapter 1), I do factor in this idea of a distinction among Independents with regards to political engagement and interest. I suggest, however, that much of this distinction is shaped by class, and by-and-large reflects the type of Independent one is.

Looking at my interviews, one can certainly find a class distinction in voting tendency. Many of my interviewees say they ‘always vote’ — with twelve out of twenty-three interviewees claiming so during their interviews. Some of these twelve cannot vote in primaries due to closed primary laws, and others admit to missing “one or two state elections.” But otherwise, they try their best to participate in local, state, and national elections. Of these twelve, all but two are from the middle or upper class. The other eleven interviewees vary in their tendency to vote: six ‘usually vote,’ three ‘sometimes vote,’ and two ‘never voted.’ Of the five who ‘sometimes’ or ‘never vote,’ four are from lower class categories.

Still, one cannot help but notice that my interviewees seem to, on average, be quite politically active (at least in terms of election participation). This could be because my interviewees are overstating their election participation for whatever reason. Or it could be because I recruited twelve of my twenty-three interviewees through an Independent voters organization — whose members may be relatively politically active. Many of the Independents I interviewed who are from lower class categories — and are part of this group — displayed high political interest and engagement as well. BSP, an Independent from Brooklyn, NY, and IndependentVoting.org member noted that he became “politically activated” during his college years, and after working in field organizing for a while, became involved with the group.
Many of the other Independents I interviewed who came from similar situations likewise describe a moment of “political activation,” through which one developed one’s political identity (being unaffiliated) and one’s engagement with the political process simultaneously. These findings support those of Samara Klar, who, in contrast to Keith et al., finds that while Independents are in general less politically engaged than strong partisans, political engagement within this group (even among Leaners and Pure Independents) is highly varied, and appears to be best predicted by the importance one places on their Independent identity (Klar 2014). An obvious follow-up question would be: what is the source of this importance? But Klar doesn’t address this beyond suggesting that psychological factors, or feelings of powerlessness, may be the answer.

Could the linkages between political engagement/interest, political identity, and class be better explained? By using the typology of Independents established above, we can examine these linkages more clearly — factoring in class as well as the kind of Independent identity one adopts.

The Alienated Independents I interviewed seemed to exhibit the most variation in voting behavior and attention to elections. Out of the ten non-hybrid Alienated Independents I interviewed, one has ‘never voted,’ two ‘sometimes vote,’ three ‘usually vote,’ and four ‘always vote.’ Two ‘pay no attention to elections,’ three ‘pay little or some attention,’ and five ‘pay a lot of attention to elections.’

EH, from North Philadelphia, has never voted in his life. He justifies by saying the election has already “been decided,” and that elections are just part of the “political game”:

“It’s all the same political game. So … the President is only a puppet. The senator is only a puppet, right? So when you’re dealing with Republicans, Democrats… they're all the same political party — it don't matter which side of the fence you’re on. We don't elect the people. They elect who they want.

... [Did you vote in the 2016 election?]
No way. I didn't vote for either. I just didn't vote. And guess what? They used my vote for what they want. So when you don't vote, right, they'll use your vote because they know you're not voting.”

ZF and SB, both also from North Philadelphia, PA, are two Alienated Independents who claim to ‘sometimes’ vote. ZF justified his voting behavior by bringing up his distrust of and contempt for the two parties:

“[Do you always vote, usually, sometimes, or never?]  

I… Last time I voted… uh, during a presidential election… that was last… I only, I'm not gonna lie, I've mainly voted during the presidential. Yeah, that's about it. I'm not gonna lie to you, like I'm not gonna say that some of these politicians and stuff, they'd come and they not, uh, truthful. I'm just giving you that, like for the past 60, 65 years, the black people, we voted Democratic and like, nothing's really changed. Like for the black community. Like nothing really changed about voting democratic. So we're really, at the end of the day, what I've been seeing with these last elections, it really don't matter what you pick, they gonna pick, they gonna put whoever they want in the office anyway…”

Similarly, SB talked about how she refrains from voting when she distrusts both candidates on the ballot (citing the 2016 Clinton-Trump election as an example).

The seven remaining Alienated Independents claim to ‘always’ or ‘usually’ vote. JF, from Brooklyn, NY, is one example. On the one hand, she describes the two-party system and the two major political parties as alienating entities who don’t care about the underprivileged and vulnerable; on the other hand, she has “voted in every election [she] could except the primaries cause [Independents] can't do that in New York.” She does provide a caveat to this, however:

“Um, but, um, I would say… usually I try to do my best research on the candidate. Sometimes if I just really don't like them, I leave it blank. Uh, but I’ve voted for Democrats, I’ve voted for green parties, and I voted for independents as well.”

Thus, while some Alienated Independents do vote and do so regularly, these politically-engaged Alienated Independents largely bring their distrust of the parties and the general establishment to the ballot box — informing the way they vote, not just whether they vote.

In short, all of the Alienated Independents I interviewed — most of whom are from the lower class — relate to politics in similar ways: with distrust and contempt. But the level of
importance one places on their Independent identity — which is correlated with whether or not one has been “politically activated” — affects whether one *engages* with the political, and particularly electoral, system.

All of this isn’t to say that the Alienated Independents who *don’t* vote are totally disengaged from politics. Many of these same Independents who lack faith in the electoral system still engage in various political and civic activities: EH, who has never voted, frequently contributes to his religious community and volunteers in soup kitchens on the weekends; SB, who only sometimes votes, went into great detail about her volunteer work for the Red Cross, for the local youth advisory boards, and with the homeless in Northern Philadelphia; ZF, who sometimes votes, spends his weekends feeding stray animals on the street and providing them with shelter.

The Anti-Polarization Independents I interviewed are generally quite politically engaged: three out of the four non-hybrid Anti-Polarization Independents claim to ‘always vote,’ while one claims to ‘usually vote’ — depending on whether he has the proper information. Many see value in voting — whether it would affect change or not, and in spite of their distaste for parties and partisans. MB, from Kingston, NY, justified his voting behavior in the following way:

“I think voting … is a worthwhile thing. Even if it's just… you stand up and be counted and have your name registered as an independent. It makes a difference. Just a really minor difference. I mean, you know, change is a collective thing. It comes incrementally and it comes collectively, you know. And I mean, you know, American politics seems to be very impatient.”

JP, from Malvern, PA, framed voting not as an intrinsically valuable activity, but, in a way, as a duty to her country:

“[What importance do you attach to voting?] Very important. It's our country. So yes, very important. Very. And I think unfortunately, as I said before, future generations… are we finding less voters? We're actually finding more with all the publicity in the inner cities that never voted, or certain places that people, you know, needed help getting into the voting stations and having a lot more of that. So that certainly has changed.”
For many Anti-Polarization Independents, there is a tension between this urge to vote, and their negative attitudes towards the two major parties. Some of these Anti-Polarization Independents resolve this by (reluctantly) voting for candidates of the two major parties anyway; others become “strategic” in their voting, choosing to support Independents specifically; still others decide to become “candidate-oriented,” insisting that they vote for specific candidates rather than certain parties.

Interestingly, many of these Anti-Polarization Independents have admitted to paying only some, or very little, attention to elections and partisan politics. This makes sense in light of their overwhelming dislike for partisan infighting and “Big-P politics.” See how JP, from Malvern, PA, describes tuning into politics:

“I just kind of listen on the news. I read the paper, and then I get disgusted cause all I see is negative. And uh… people putting other people down. No real reasons.”

Or SR, from Falls Church, VA:

“[Do you pay attention to elections and campaigns?] Eh… not quite so much. I'm kind of… it's just my nature. Just sort of a big picture kind of guy, you know. I'm not going to follow a particular candidate. I have no interest in the gamesmanship, you know. Uh, you know… the tactics I'm really not interested in. I'm interested in the direction and the message. Right?”

Ideological Independents are likewise quite likely to vote — four of the five non-hybrid Ideological Independents ‘always’ or ‘usually’ vote, while one ‘sometimes’ votes. These Independents typically justify how they vote by tying the action to their ideological needs. Note how RS, a lean-Republican Independent from Philadelphia, PA, discusses how he votes:

“[You say you always vote, at all levels. Why is this? Why do you vote all the time?] Um, as a small business owner, you have to. You can't be apathetic and just say, hey, let's just let the chips fall where they may. ‘Cause you’re living in a big city — it's typically left-leaning. Living in Pennsylvania is typically sometimes used to be somewhat of a swing state, but now it's typically left-leaning.”

Or how GH, another lean-Republican Independent from Philadelphia, PA, discusses it:

“[What makes you want to vote, and what stops you from voting?] Um, for me, uh, probably the only thing that makes me want to vote, well I guess… Um, first I think it’s, it's the privilege and the, you know, the duty of voting, you know, that, you know, something that you should take advantage of or that everybody doesn't have the right, and so you shouldn't let it go to waste.
But, um, I guess the other one is, um… if I really feel like there are issues that are getting out of control, and that, you know, this group is not addressing, then, you know, maybe I should, you know, even though it might not make a difference, I should say I did something.

[Right. Do you remember what kinds of issues have pushed you to do this in the past?] Um, in the past… One of my biggest concerns is like, uh, you know, the rights of people that are feeling being taken away, like the constitution… how it’s… slowly being dismantled, certain liberties that we enjoyed before are kind of tampered with right now. I know now will be a really good time to do something, and I don't know if it'll make a difference, but like now I feel more obliged to.”

It is worth noting here that GH is one Ideological Independent who does not *always* vote. Yet he attributes this not to a sense of hopelessness (though he does doubt whether elections can really “make a difference”), but to a sense of confusion and distrust concerning the two parties — as a result of the information he has recently been receiving from the media:

“[So how often do you vote in elections?] Um, last one I voted on…. I don't even know if I voted in the Obama election… I think I meant to for the first one. And I was actually working the polls that day, so I didn't get a chance to vote. But after that, I didn’t bother. Like, that's when I guess the Internet started taking over and then I started getting more information. I'm like, you know what, I'm not even… (laughs)

[Did the influx of information put you off from politics in some way?] Um… It's not the amount, but the information that I was getting now… It was like, oh, that's what's really going on… huh. Ok… nevermind then.”

All of the Independents I interviewed — across all three types — seem to believe that they pay a reasonable amount of attention to “politics” (however they define it, and regardless of whether they actually engage in the political process). How can we make sense of this — beyond pointing to potential biases in my interview pool? It seems that many of the Alienated Independents I interviewed are very aware of the imbalance of power between themselves and the two parties — an awareness that usually necessitates curiosity, skepticism, and some attention to politics. Similarly, many Anti-Polarization Independents have a strong distaste for parties and partisans, a distaste acquired through exposure to the political arena. And Ideological Independents likely pay lots of attention to politics due to their relatively high level of education and interest in politics and ideology.

***
Table 6: Interviewees Categorized by Class Identity, Independent Type, and Voting Tendency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tendency to vote</th>
<th>Alienated</th>
<th>Ideological</th>
<th>Anti-Polarization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>JF</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JS</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>JP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>CF</td>
<td>DS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>JK</td>
<td>SR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BSP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>ZF</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>EH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The matrix above provides a clear and summative picture of the relationship between class, the type of Independent is, and one’s tendency to vote. The first thing to note — as I have done at the beginning of this chapter — is that most of those who ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ vote are lower class (EH, ZF, SB, DR), whereas a majority of those who always vote are upper class (SD, RS, CF, JP, DS, KF, KC).

Second, most of the Alienated Independents are lower class, but the group as a whole exhibits the most internal variation in voting tendency: Alienated Independents who are lower class and who place little importance on their Independent identity (such as EH, SB, and ZF) predictably vote at low rates; those who are lower class but do emphasize their Independent identity vote at relatively high rates (AC, BSP, JF, JS and YM); and those who are middle or upper class but still adopt the ‘Alienated’ outlook on the party system always vote (ED, SD).

7 The four Hybrid Independents mentioned in the methodology are excluded from this matrix for various reasons addressed below. See Appendix D for a version of this table which includes these Hybrids.
Ideological Independents are mostly comprised of those from the middle and upper classes, and a majority of them either always or often vote. Anti-Polarization Independent are also mostly comprised of those from the middle and upper classes, and also report to vote at high rates.

Both of these points — and the matrix in general — illustrate that class plays an important role in how Independents relate to and engage in politics, and demonstrate the interrelationship between voting behavior, class, and political identity. But they also reveal that class identity does not wholly dictate how one relates to politics, and is not the only factor shaping political behavior. Also important in shaping these Independents’ political behaviors is a sense of Independent identity — the strength of which may override any sense of powerlessness and alienation engendered by class structures and dispositions.

4.2 Independents & the Public Sphere

In this chapter, I define the “public sphere” as Eliasoph does: “the realm of institutions in which private citizens can carry on free and egalitarian conversation, often about issues of common concern, possibly welding themselves into a cohesive body and a potent political force” (1998, 11). It is the “third setting for conversation” — participation in which is optional, potentially open to all, and potentially egalitarian.

“Participation” in the public sphere has certainly been a focus of this chapter; in the previous section, I examined certain signifiers of “participation,” namely the tendency to vote and amount of attention paid to elections and “politics” (broadly defined). But as Eliasoph finds in Avoiding Politics, one’s view of the public sphere — what its boundaries are and what can be discussed within it — is equally worthy of examination. In Avoiding Politics, Eliasoph examines and analyzes how some Americans silence any public-spirited motives in favor of “unpolitical” motives even while actually participating in the public sphere; in other words, they work to produce apathy within the public sphere. For many, this silence is the result of
various institutions that evoke a sense of powerlessness within them (suggesting the influence of class structures and class identities). Keeping this in mind, in this section, I examine how Alienated, Anti-Polarization, and Ideological Independents conceptualize the public sphere and their relation to it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Alienated Independents typically view the public sphere with *contempt*, *disillusionment*, and/or a sense of *distrust* — viewing it as overly-exclusive and overly-influenced by political parties. They see themselves, and if not themselves then the vulnerable and underserved, as alienated from the public sphere — which is by and large dominated by these political parties. Here are some excerpts from my interviews with Alienated Independents (some of which have been shown in previous sections):

**EH** [*contempt*]: “It’s all the same political game. So … the President is only a puppet. The senator is only a puppet, right? So when you're dealing with Republicans, Democrats… they're all the same political party — it don't matter which side of the fence you’re on. We don't elect the people. They elect who they want.”

**ZF** [*distrust*]: “I'm not gonna lie to you, like I'm not gonna say that some of these politicians and stuff, they'd come and they not, uh, truthful. I'm just giving you that, like for the past 60, 65 years, the black people, we voted Democratic and like, nothing's really changed. Like for the black community. Like nothing really changed about voting democratic. So we're really, at the end of the day, what I've been seeing with these last elections, it really don't matter what you pick, they gonna pick, they gonna put whoever they want in the office anyway.”

**SD** [*contempt*]: “The issue is not ideology and whether I’m ideologically aligned. Do I think we should have Medicare for all? Yeah, I do actually. Um, do I think the Democrats will ever make it happen? No. Do I think that the Democrats are holding money off of making whatever they have? Like I think the Democratic party is still really corrupt. So I don't think the Democratic Party has an ideology. Yeah, I don’t… I think their ideology is green. It's about money and power.”

Anti-Polarization Independents view the contents of the public sphere — the topics of discourse and methods of discourse — as unproductive and irritating, and are *frustrated* with it. Yet they mostly revere the public sphere in its ideal form: as an inclusive and egalitarian forum where citizens can freely discuss ideas. Parties — and the idea of partisanship — are threats to the public sphere.

**MB** [*frustration*]: “I like to say to people all the time, especially my friends that are clearly Democrats: don't vote against something, vote for something. Right? Like don't
vote Democrat cause you're against Trump. You know, if you're, if you're... for whoever is going to be the next Democratic candidate or you know, in your local area or, or in your mayoral or your presidential candidate, you know, vote for them because of what they represent. Not because they're a political, you know... some people just, they're like robots. They'll just vote for Republicans. It doesn't matter who the person is right now, you know, and the same thing. Democrats, you hear people saying over and over and over, "No, vote Democrat!" you know, or "vote Republican!" Like, they don't even think about who's on that ticket. Just vote."

**JP [frustration]:** “I am so tired of this stuff that's going on in politics where they're just fighting. To me it's like... one bad thing, trying to get Trump impeached, you know, try with the... Hillary with these emails, that was years ago, let it go. It's done. Leave Trump alone with this Russia thing. It's just like, it's, it is evil, to me, it’s very evil what's going on. It’s not looking at the people, it's not looking that... Trump is supporting our country. Okay. If you don't like it, if he says stuff that's not necessarily right... he’s there to support our country. We're doing okay. Stop this stuff.”

**SR [frustration]:** “Um, I'll vote for somebody to disrupt the... you know, make a statement that the race this candidate thinks he's going to cruise through is... you know, just to show him that you've got some competition. And that's going either way, you know. I've seen too much of the shenanigans from both parties to feel any inclination for supporting one or the other. Neither of them, neither of the parties, are for me or for us as a people.”

The Ideological Independents I interviewed vary in the ways they view the public sphere: some view it with neutrality, some with confusion, some with distrust, and some with resignation — but there is no systematic pattern. This is unsurprising, given that Ideological Independents, as opposed to Alienated and Anti-Polarization Independents, don’t necessarily hold any negative attitudes towards either of the two major parties, but have simply decided to become Independents for ideological reasons.

**RS [neutral]:** “Um, as a small business owner, you have to [participate in politics]. You can't be apathetic and just say, hey, let's just let the chips fall where they may. ‘Cause you’re living in a big city — it's typically left-leaning. Living in Pennsylvania is typically sometimes used to be somewhat of a swing state, but now it's typically left-leaning.”

**GH [distrust]:** “I pay less attention to what mainstream, you know, information is. But as far as all the independent media stuff, I pay more attention than most people do. I’m trying to tell people, that is not actually what's happening. Where’d you get that from? You know, I can’t... I've always been like, you know, like a free thinker and, you know, trying to get all viewpoints before... and I don't necessarily say, oh, this is what everybody's saying so, you know, that must be true. I was like, what, what does he have to say? And then the internet came along and you know, they offer that platform where you know, people can actually give you other information about... wow, this is great.”
In summary, the attitude one holds towards the “public sphere” — defined here as the “realm of institutions in which private citizens can carry on free and egalitarian conversation” — in many ways reflect the type of Independent one is, as well as the different kinds of political behavior one displays — with the obvious exception of the Ideological Independent. Alienated Independents — comprised of those from the lower class or those who adopt the rhetoric of class conflict — view the public sphere with disillusionment, distrust, or contempt. And Anti-Polarization Independents — who by virtue of their class status are in frequent contact with (often unproductive) political discourse — typically view the public sphere with frustration.

4.3 Summary of Chapter & Further Discussion

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the relationship between one’s class background and one’s political behavior, answering my second key sub-question: “How do the ways unaffiliated citizens view and engage in the public sphere vary with class position?” In the process, I have continued to spell out what it means to be an Alienated Independent, Ideological Independent, and Anti-Polarization Independent — more specifically, what this entails for political engagement and one’s attitude towards the public sphere.

Analyzing my interview transcripts, I have found some evidence that Alienated Independents — by virtue of their class background and general alienation from the public sphere — vote and engage in politics at lower rates compared to Anti-Polarization and Ideological Independents, and tend to view the public sphere with disillusionment, distrust, and contempt. Anti-Polarization Independents are mostly quite politically engaged, even though they mostly seem to make a conscious choice to tune out “Big-P politics” and pay less attention to “elections” and “political campaigns.” Indeed, many of them view the public sphere with frustration, seeing it as an ineffective forum for productive discourse. Finally, Ideological Independents, by virtue of their high educational levels, seem to vote quite frequently compared
to Alienated Independents as a whole, and see themselves as both politically engaged and knowledgeable; they are less homogenous in how they view the public sphere, with some viewing it with neutrality, some with distrust, and some with confusion.

One may have noticed that, in this chapter, I have only discussed the political behavior of the non-hybrid Independents I interviewed. I put aside the interviewees who have exhibited both ‘Anti-Polarization’ and ‘Ideological’ traits, or both ‘Alienated’ and ‘Ideological’ traits, since it complicates the relationship between the Independent types and political behavior. Now that we have established this relationship, however, it is worth looking at these Hybrid Independents.

As I explain in Chapter 3, there are four Hybrid Independents in my interview pool who either exhibit traits of two of the types, or have admitted a progression from one type to another over the years: KF progressed from Ideological Independent to Anti-Polarization over the years; JL and KC exhibit characteristics of both ‘Anti-Polarization’ and ‘Ideological’ Independents; and DR exhibits characteristics of both ‘Alienated’ and ‘Ideological’ Independents.

The Anti-Polarization-Ideological Hybrids I talked to all view the public sphere with frustration and remain relatively politically engaged, suggesting that that their Anti-Polarization identity is more dominant when it comes to their views of the public sphere. The Alienated-Ideological Independent I interviewed is a bit of special case: he is an anarchist whose ideology demands that he refrain from any participating in any electoral system, but whose ideology seems to be deeply rooted in his alienation from the political system in the first place. That he does not vote, then, is deeply rooted in both ideological and social reasons. Further complicating the picture is that, like other Alienated Independents, he is distrustful of the public sphere; but like other Ideological Independents, he remains politically engaged and pays attention to elections out of interest.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Summary of Study

In this study, I have examined and analyzed how unaffiliated citizens — those who do not identify with the Democratic or Republican Party — relate to politics. More importantly, I have done so by viewing these unaffiliated citizens through the sociological lens of power and domination — i.e. by focusing on how class structures and identities shape these relationships. Scholars have long established that class is linked to political engagement and other political behaviors, yet not much research has been done on whether and how class is linked to partisanship, particularly among unaffiliated citizens. In this study, I have brought together three separate strands of academic literature — that on (1) class and political engagement, (2) partisan identity, and (3) political Independents — and in the process, created a framework for understanding unaffiliated citizens.

The guiding research question, ultimately, has been: “How do the ways unaffiliated citizens relate to politics vary with class position?” To provide focus to my research, I broke down my research question into two sub-questions:

1. **On Class and Political Identity:** Why do unaffiliated citizens identify as such, and how does this vary with class position?

2. **On Class and Political Engagement:** How do the ways unaffiliated citizens view and engage in the public sphere vary with class position?

In other words, I examined the role class plays in the formation of one’s partisan identity (or lack thereof), and the impact of class positionality on one’s political behavior. Ultimately, I found that one’s class background can shape why one becomes an Independent, and more importantly, the type of Independent one is. Moreover, one’s class positionality and ubiquitous systems of power and domination continue to influence how these Independents engage in politics and view their role in the public sphere.
I reached these conclusions by conducting semi-structured interviews with twenty-three Independents across eight states in the Northeastern United States and analyzing the transcripts of these interviews using QDA software. Several aspects of my methodology make it uniquely capable of answering the research question and sub-research questions posed above. The very use of semi-structured interviews, as opposed to simply analyzing quantitative data, has allowed me to capture the nuances in the relationships between class identity, political identity, and political engagements that survey data may skip over. The use of pre- and post-interview surveys, as well as the incorporation of interview questions that probe into interviewees’ class identities, has allowed me to directly answer my research question in a way that most other studies have not. Finally, the separation of ‘Leaner’ Independents into those that ‘reluctantly’ lean and those who ‘readily’ do so has clarified the linkages between the type of Independent one is and one’s class identity.

5.2 Limitations of Study & Future Directions

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, I was able to shed light on the relationship between class identity and non-affiliation. Yet using semi-structured interviews came with some drawbacks. Most importantly, focusing on narratives provided by interview subjects and making inferences from these narratives relies too much on taking what interviewees say at face value, and comes at the expense of examining larger structural trends concerning Independent voters. Put another way, while the relationship between class identity and non-affiliation has been made clearer through this study, whether this is representative of the national population, how this manifests itself on the macro level, and how this has changed over time remain unanswered.

As such, we can build on this study in several ways: first, we can examine survey data to find evidence of Alienated Independents, Anti-Polarization Independents, and Ideological Independents, and to corroborate my findings on their political behaviors. Second, we can look
at cross-sectional survey data to determine the actual share of Alienated, Anti-Polarization, and Ideological Independents among the national Independent population. Finally, we can look at longitudinal data to determine how the share of types of Independents have changed over time. One could possibly find the share of Anti-Polarization Independents rising with increasing partisan polarization, or the share of Alienated Independents rising with increasing wealth and income inequality.

5.3 Key Takeaways: Who Are These Independents?

I end this study by stressing its key takeaways. One key finding from this study deserves special attention: class can shape why one becomes an Independent, and the type of Independent one is. I have found that unaffiliated citizens generally fall under one of three types: Alienated Independents, Ideological Independents, and Anti-Polarization Independents. Alienated Independents feel that the two parties represent the wealthy and the elite/establishment, adopting their Independent identity out of distrust, contempt, and disillusionment. Many explain their Independent identity in class terms — using language such as “the elite,” “the people in power,” and the “system.” Ideological independents identify as such because of ideological differences with the two main parties. Some cite their “moderate” ideology, while others cite their “conservative” principles or “progressive” ideals. Anti-Polarization Independents are tired of partisan gridlock, general ineffectiveness, and self-interestedness, adopting their Independent identity out of frustration or embarrassment with the two parties.

Additionally, at the outset of this study, I asked three specific questions in response to the current literature on class and political engagement, partisanship, and Independent voters (see section 1.3):

1. Does an unaffiliated citizen’s class position shape whether he/she arrives at his/her political identity on the basis of ideological evaluations or social identity?
2. Do the ways in which unaffiliated citizens perceive the social bases of the two major parties vary with class position?

3. How do unaffiliated citizens from various class backgrounds express their partisan leanings?

By answering each of these questions (see chapter 3), I have developed a deeper understanding of the aforementioned types of Independents, and of what their political identity means to them. With regards to the first question: I have shown that Ideological Independents are mostly those with higher levels of education, and that Alienated Independents are those from lower classes, or otherwise speak in class terms and talk about “power” and “domination” — suggesting that an unaffiliated citizen’s class position does shape whether he/she arrives at his/her political identity on the basis of ideological evaluations (as Ideological Independents do) or social identity (as Alienated Independents largely do).

In reply to the second question: most of the Independents I interviewed, regardless of type, do not see a mismatch between their self-conceptions and their conceptions of the social bases of the Democratic and Republican party — calling into question the applicability of Green et al. and Greene’s “matching process” to Independents. In fact, to the Alienated Independents I interviewed, political identity is not just a social identity, but an instrument of the powerful, from which one should remove oneself. Similarly, the Anti-Polarization Independents I interviewed have an overwhelming dislike for the parties themselves, which overrides any empathy they have for the parties’ social bases. And of course, the “matching process” does not appear to play an overt role in the formation of the Ideological Independents’ political identities.

All of this isn’t to say that social identity doesn’t play a role at all in how these Independents arrive at their political identities; even the Ideological Independents’ ideological beliefs seem to reflect the beliefs of people they surrounded themselves with during their
formative years (initial years in the workplace, in college, etc.). Rather, I am suggesting that our conception of the matching process, and our linking of social identity and partisan identity, need to factor in how certain individuals see party labels and view certain parties.

Finally, addressing the third question: the Alienated Independents I interviewed — most of whom are from lower class categories — are mostly “Pure Independents” — meaning that they don’t feel closer or lean towards any of the two parties; the Ideological Independents are mostly Leaners; and the Anti-Polarization Independents are a mix of both — though the Leaners who did lean did not like to admit this. Not only does this complicate our understanding of “leaning” and of being “Pure”; it also puts our understanding of Leaner and Pure Independents in conversation with our understanding of class and politics.

The findings above suggest that being a certain type of Independent has certain implications (including for one’s political behavior), summarized in the table below:

---

8 I am not positing here that there is a causal relationship between being a certain type of Independent and possessing certain political behaviors — only that there is a correlation.
Table 7: Summary of Three 'Types' of Unaffiliated Citizens (Detailed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Independent</th>
<th>Class category tendency?</th>
<th>Perception of major parties’ social bases</th>
<th>Partisan leaning tendency?</th>
<th>Level of political engagement</th>
<th>Attitudes towards the public sphere?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienated</td>
<td>Lower class categories</td>
<td>May or may not see themselves as fitting into the social base; see the two major parties as extending control over their social bases and are repulsed by this notion</td>
<td>Pure Independents Ready-Leaner Independents</td>
<td>Varied levels – influenced by class as well as the strength of one’s Independent identity</td>
<td>Distrust Contempt Disillusionment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>High educational attainment</td>
<td>See themselves and the two parties as ideological, as opposed to social entities</td>
<td>Ready-Leaner Independents</td>
<td>Mostly very politically engaged</td>
<td>Various attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Polarization</td>
<td>Higher class categories</td>
<td>May or may not see themselves as fitting into the social base; all hold an overriding dislike for the two parties and partisanship though.</td>
<td>Pure Independents Reluctant Leaners</td>
<td>Mostly very politically engaged; Do not like to pay attention to elections</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of this calls into question how political scientists and news pundits have conceptualized Independents thus far. On the one hand, scholars like Keith et al. suggest that there should be a distinction between Pure and Leaner Independents, and that the latter should be treated as partisans for all intents and purposes. Yet talking to my interviewees, I have found both Pure and Leaner Independents to be uniquely critical of the two parties, and have found the concept of “leaning” to be more complex than Keith et al. suggest.

On the other hand, pundits have consistently conflated different types of voters — moderate voters, undecided voters, and Independent voters — imagining them all as simply “Independent” (Drutman 2019). Yet as my typology suggests, only a small fraction of Independent voters consider themselves “ideological” (or base their decisions on ideology), let alone “ideologically moderate.” Only a small fraction consider themselves “undecided,” which can be found among the Alienated as well as the Ideological. Recent quantitative studies have
backed up this distinction between moderates, undecided voters, and Independent voters: Lee Drutman of *FiveThirtyEight* recently found that of the 14.9% of the electorate that identify as Independent, about a third consider themselves moderate as well (5.3% of the electorate); while about a tenth consider themselves undecided as well (1.9% of the electorate) (Drutman 2019).

This study has practical implications for political parties who wish to incorporate these unaffiliated citizens into their bases, for voting rights organizations who see party registration as a way of incorporating unaffiliated citizens into the political process (especially in closed primary states), and even for Independent voter organizations looking to recruit more unaffiliated citizens. If these groups and organizations want to be successful, they should understand the heterogeneity of the unaffiliated population, the range of ways different kinds of unaffiliated citizens relate to politics, and the profound influence of class on politics.
Works Cited


Appendix A: Interview Guide

[As I explain in the methodology section, I interviewed half of my interviewees as a summer research assistant for the Pennsylvania Participation Project (PPP), which focused on the political behavior of poor and working class Pennsylvanians, rather than on Independent voters. For all interviewees, I asked the set of questions listed under ‘Core Questions.’ For the PPP interviewees, I asked a second set of questions (under the heading ‘PPP questions’).]

CORE QUESTIONS:

A. Introduction
1. Hi. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today.
2. (present consent form) So first, I’ll need you to sign this consent form. It asks for permission to record this interview -if that's OK. You can stop the interview at any point if you feel like it as well.
3. (turn on recorder)
4. Great, so thank you again for doing this interview. I’m (name), I’m (student/recent graduate) working on this project for the summer (maybe some other small-talk-y piece of info about you). Do you have any questions for me?
5. (No wrong answers/explain what you’re doing) OK, so I’m going to ask you a bunch of questions, and there are no wrong answers, I really just want to understand who you are and where you’re coming from. If you’re not sure what I’m trying to get at, feel free to ask! It’s not a test and when we’re done you get the thank-you no matter what your answers are.

B. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
1. Where are you from? What was that like?
2. What kind of work do you do (if working)? What do you like to do in your free time?

C. How would you describe your social life?
1. Are you a part of any groups or organizations? Churches, sports leagues, etc.?
2. Do you engage in any volunteering, unions, activism?
   a) Attended a protest?
   b) Attended a rally?
   c) Signed a petition (online or in the streets)?
   d) Boycotted something?
3. What do you like to do with friends or family?

D. I want to talk about your political and/or partisan identity.
1. Do you identify as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or What?
   a) If neither D/R/I: pay close attention to how they describe themselves.
2. Why do you identify as [political identity indicated]?
3. Do you “lean” towards one of the two major parties?
   a) If yes: why do you lean? Why do you still identify as Independent?
   b) If no: why don’t you lean towards one of the two parties? Do you feel closer to any of them?
4. Growing up, did any of your family members identify with either of the two major parties?
a) **If yes:** Did they talk about party/electoral politics at home? Do you remember how they talked about it? What they said? Do you think this influenced your party identity?
b) **If no:** Which party did they identify with? Do you remember how they talked about it? What they said? Do you think this influenced your party identity?

5. Growing up [including college and beyond], did any of your friends identify with either of the two major parties?
a) **If yes:** How often did you talk about parties? Do you remember how they talked about it? What they said? Do you think this influenced your party identity?
b) **If no:** Which party did they identify with? Do you remember how they talked about it? What they said? Do you think this influenced your party identity?

6. When you think of people who are Democrats/Republicans/Independents, what type of person comes to mind?

7. How do you feel about [social groups/identities listed in question 6]? [Pay special attention to the connotations conveyed by the adjectives used]
a) Follow up: why do you think have those feelings?

**E. So we're broadly interested in the question of how people see politics, government, campaigns, whether or not they're paying much attention.**

1. What does politics mean to you? When you hear someone say “politics”, what do you think of?”
2. Do you pay much attention to politics, elections, etc.? What kind of attention, how much?
   a) Do you think you pay more or less attention than average?
   b) Why do you think you’re like that?
3. What do you think of those who are involved more or less than you?
4. What kind of people do you think like to talk about politics or pay attention to campaigns? Why do they do it? What do you make of them?
5. Do you usually vote, or sometimes, or never?
   a) When do you vote or not vote?
   b) Why is this
6. Did you follow the Presidential election between Trump and Clinton?
   a) What did you make of it?
   b) Why so much/little attention? Is the amount of attention you paid similar to your friends and coworkers? More or less?
   c) Was this the same level of attention you’ve paid to past elections? Why or why not?
7. Did you know there will be an election for the [insert local election, eg. Mayor of Philadelphia] and other local offices this November?
8. Did you follow the 2018 midterm/congressional elections?
9. Are you following the 2020 primaries?
10. Do you think you’ll vote for the 2020 presidential election?
11. Generally, do you think your opinion about politics matter?
12. Do you feel that the government adequately represents you and your interests?

**F. Voting**

1. If you wanted to/when you want to vote, would you be able to/can you do so fairly easily?
   a) Why or why not?
2. Has anyone ever asked you to vote?
a) Who? When? For whom? Did you?

3. Do most/many/any people you know vote regularly?
   a) Who are they?

4. Why do you think some people vote or don’t vote?

5. What do you think about other people either voting or not voting?


7. What impact do you think casting a vote has?

8. What does voting mean to you?

G. Conclusion

1. What would it take for you to identify with one of the two major parties (if anything)? What about people like you?

2. That was my last question. Is there anything else you would like to add related to politics, voting, or anything we talked about?

3. Thank you again for your time!

4. (post-interview survey, write post-interview notes, give gift cards/cash to PPP interviewees)

PPP QUESTIONS:

A. Do you like to talk about political things?

1. If yes:
   a) Do you talk about politics a lot with the people around you (friends, family, coworkers)? What do your conversations tend to look like?
   b) Do you feel like you share most of the same beliefs with your friends? What happens when you disagree?
   c) Have you ever sought out a conversation, either in person or online, with someone who you knew you disagreed with? What made you want to do that? What was the experience like?

2. If no:
   a) That’s okay, we don’t have to get into anything you don’t want to talk about, and remember everything will be anonymized.
   b) What makes the idea of politics feel uncomfortable for you?
   c) When you are faced with a political conversation, what is that experience like?

B. Perspectives over Time

1. Do you feel like your views on politics now are different than they used to be?

2. How do you think the way you see politics/your views in general has changed over time?

3. Do you think there’s anything in your life that influences or has influenced your views? Has any issue been an influence?

4. Do you feel like your views are pretty static, or do they change sometimes, like if you find out something new about an issue?

5. Do you see anyone in your life changing their views over time? What do you think about that? What do you think caused it?

C. Politics in Media

1. Generally speaking, what kinds of things do you like to watch on TV, or look at online?
2. Do you watch any particular news channels or follow any political social media pages? Why do you like them?
3. Do you ever see anything political on TV or on the Internet? What kind?
4. Do you ever see posts or ads related to voting? Who are those posts from? What do you think of them?
   Do you ever post anything political online, or comment on anything political on social media? What’s that experience like for you?
5. What do you do when you see something on TV or online that you disagree with?

D. Interaction with the Government
1. Are there any government policies or programs that affect you or matter to your life?
   a) Military?
   b) Children in public schools?
2. Do you participate in or receive aid from any governmental programs? (if they are not sure give examples: Medicaid, veteran benefits, SNAP/food stamps, TANF/welfare, job training programs, Americorps, Social Security, student loans… )
   a) Less engaged: do you think that matters for how you think about politics?
   b) More engaged: does that shape your political views?
3. Have you ever:
   a) Donated to a political party?
   b) Called your representative?

E. General Opinions
1. What do you think about US politics in general?
2. Do you have strong opinions about any particular issues? Have you always had those opinions? Why do you feel that those issues matter to you?
3. What do you think about inequality in the US?
Appendix B: Consent Form

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Swarthmore College, 500 College Avenue
Swarthmore, PA 19081

Research Informed Consent
Title of Study: Pennsylvania Participation Project

Principal Investigator (PI): Daniel Laurison
Sociology & Anthropology, Swarthmore College
267-538-8782

Purpose
You are being asked to take part in a research study because you live in Pennsylvania and meet other broad criteria. This study is being conducted throughout Pennsylvania. The estimated number of study participants is about 2000. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This project is about understanding the way everyday people in Pennsylvania relate to politics and other forms of participation.

Study Procedures
If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to spend around an hour being interviewed about your background and your views about voting and not voting, government, and politicians.

More specifically:
1. We will agree on a place to meet for the interview that is convenient for you (ideally somewhere without a lot of background noise).
2. Interviews will last around 60 minutes. You are welcome to end an interview early if you like. With your permission, I will make an audio recording of our interview, for the sole purpose of being able to transcribe our conversation and compare it to others.
3. I will ask you questions about your views of voting and not voting, political campaigns, government, politicians, and the like. You are welcome to refuse to answer any question at any time.
4. Our conversation will remain anonymous: my notes and the transcript will use a code, rather than your real name; your name will only be linked to what you have told me through a key I will keep in a password-protected file. In any publications arising from this research, I will anonymize any descriptions of my respondents so that you cannot be identified.
Benefits
As a participant in this research study, there are no direct benefits aside from the chance to share your views.

Risks
By taking part in this study, the only risk you may experience is the possibility that something you say to me could somehow be attributed to you, and that that attribution could in some way have social repercussions or be embarrassing for you. I will take every precaution (described below) to ensure this does not happen, but it is theoretically possible.

Study Costs
Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

Compensation
You will not be paid a salary or wage for taking part in this study, but you will receive a thank-you of your choice of either 1) $20 cash or 2) $15 cash and a $10 gift card.

Confidentiality
All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Swarthmore College may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Since audio recordings of you will be used for research purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. You will be welcome to review audio files and/or transcripts if you wish. All audio recordings will be deleted once the research is complete. Only I and a professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio files. Your name will not be attached to the recordings in any way.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Swarthmore College or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Daniel Laurison at the following phone number: 267-538-8782 or 610-328-8638. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Swarthmore Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (610) 957-6150.
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of participant                        Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of participant

_________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of person obtaining consent            Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
Appendix C: Post-Interview Survey Questions

1. What is your name?

2. What is your gender?

3. How old are you?

4. Which category best represents your racial or ethnic identity?
   Mark only one oval.
   - Black or African American
   - Native American
   - Asian
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - White
   - Multiracial
   - Other: __________

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   Mark only one oval.
   - 8th grade or less
   - Some high school
   - High school diploma
   - Some college
   - Vocational or Technical degree/certificate
   - Associate’s Degree (AA)
   - Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS)
   - Graduate Degree (MA/MS) or more

6. Are you currently enrolled in an educational program?
   Mark only one oval.
   - Yes
   - No

7. If so, what type of program?
   Mark only one oval.
   - Community college
   - Technical/Professional training
   - Four (4) year undergraduate program
   - Graduate or PhD program

8. How many people, including you, are in your household?

9. If you don’t mind, approximately how much is your annual household income? (The total income of everyone you live with/share resources with, before taxes.)
   Mark only one oval.
   Less than $15,000 per year
$15,000 - $24,999
$25,000 - $34,999
$35,000 - $44,999
$45,000 - $59,999
$60,000 - $74,999
$75,000 - $89,999
$90,000 - $104,999
$105,000 - $119,999
$120,000 - $134,999
$135,000 or more

10. What’s your address if you are comfortable sharing? [For PPP:] So we are able to locate your Ward and Precinct.

11. Is there anything you would like to add or that you would like us to know? Do you have any questions for us?
Appendix D: Figures and Tables Used

All figures created using Microsoft Excel. All tables created on Microsoft Word.

Table 1: "Ideal Sample" of Interviewees (Pre-Interview Process)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Specification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>5 poor, 5 working class, 5 middle class, 5 above middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Ideally, there will be a range of race/ethnicities represented in this sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>10 women, 10 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Above the age of 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: "Ideal Sample" vs. Actual Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Specification</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>5 poor, 5 working class, 5 middle class, 5 above middle class</td>
<td>10 lower class, 4 middle class, 9 upper class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Ideally, there will be a range of race/ethnicities represented in this sample</td>
<td>11 white, 11 black, 1 Cuban-Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>10 female, 10 male</td>
<td>13 male, 10 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Above the age of 30</td>
<td>All but one are above the age of 30; one is 25.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biography</th>
<th>Class Positionality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZF</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JF</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YM</td>
<td>NY</td>
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<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
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<td>DR</td>
<td>PA</td>
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<td>PA</td>
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<td>JS</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>NJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>KC</td>
<td>NJ</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td>MD</td>
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<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>PA</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Table 4: List of Parent Codes and Child Codes Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why Independent?</td>
<td>3: Alienated, Anti-Polarization, Ideological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Voting</td>
<td>4: Never Voted, Sometimes Vote, Usually Vote, Always Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Political System</td>
<td>7: Frustrated, Disillusioned, Contempt, Confused, Distrustful, Neutral, Optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaner Independent?</td>
<td>3: Pure, Leaner (reluctant), Leaner (ready)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Summary of Three Types of Unaffiliated Citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Independent</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienated Independent</td>
<td>These Independents feel that the two parties represent the wealthy and the elite/establishment, adopting their Independent identity out of distrust and/or apathy. Many explain their Independent identity in class terms – using language such as “the elite,” “the people in power,” and the “system.” Many of these Independents are Pure Independents, but a considerable number readily admit their partisan leanings. These Independents often come from lower class categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Independent</td>
<td>These Independents identify as such because of ideological differences with the two main parties. Some cite their “moderate” ideology, while others cite their “conservative” principles or “progressive” ideals. Many readily admit their partisan leanings, frequently citing ideological proximity. These Independents are often relatively educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Polarization Independent</td>
<td>These Independents are tired of partisan gridlock, general ineffectiveness, and self-interestedness, adopting their political identity out of frustration or embarrassment with the two parties. Many of these Independents identify as Pure Independents, but a number also reluctantly admit partisan leanings, seeking to downplay the identity’s significance. These Independents are often from higher class categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Interviewees by Class Identity, Independent Type, and Voting Tendency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tendency to vote</th>
<th>Alienated</th>
<th>Ideological</th>
<th>Anti-Polarization</th>
<th>Hybrids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>JF</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>MB</td>
<td>KF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JS</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>JP</td>
<td>KC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>CF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>JK</td>
<td>SR</td>
<td>JL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BSP</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YM</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>ZF</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>EH</td>
<td></td>
<td>DR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Red = lower class interviewee  
Orange = middle class interviewee  
Green = upper class interviewee

Table 7: Summary of Three Types of Unaffiliated Citizens (Detailed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Independent</th>
<th>Class category tendency?</th>
<th>Perception of major parties’ social bases</th>
<th>Partisan leaning tendency?</th>
<th>Level of political engagement</th>
<th>Attitudes towards the public sphere?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienated</td>
<td>Lower class categories</td>
<td>May or may not see themselves as fitting into the social base; see the two major parties as extending control over their social bases and are repulsed by this notion</td>
<td>Pure Independents</td>
<td>Varied levels – influenced by class as well as the strength of one’s Independent identity</td>
<td>Distrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ready-Leaner Independents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disillusionment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>High educational attainment</td>
<td>See themselves and the two parties as ideological, as opposed to social entities</td>
<td>Ready-Leaner Independents</td>
<td>Mostly very politically engaged</td>
<td>Various attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Polarization</td>
<td>Higher class categories</td>
<td>May or may not see themselves as fitting into the social base; all hold an overriding dislike for the two parties and partisanship though</td>
<td>Pure Independents</td>
<td>Mostly very politically engaged; Do not like to pay attention to elections</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reluctant Leaners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Partisan Lean (Lean-D vs. Lean-R vs. Pure) of Interviewees

Figure 2: Educational Attainment of Interviewees

Figure 3: Annual Household Income of Interviewees
Figure 4: Educational Attainment Breakdown of Anti-Polarization, Ideological, and Alienated Independents

- **Anti-Polarization Independent**
  - High School, 8
  - Bachelor’s Degree, 3
  - Master’s Degree, 3

- **Ideological Independent**
  - Some high school, 2
  - Bachelor’s Degree, 4
  - Master’s Degree, 3

- **Alienated Independent**
  - Some High School, 1
  - High School Diploma, 2
  - Some..., 1
  - Associate’s Degree, 1
  - Master’s..., 1

Figure 5: Occupational Status Breakdown of Alienated, Ideological, and Anti-Polarization Independents

- **Alienated Independents**
  - Craft and Related Service, 1
  - Sales, 1
  - Clerical Support, 2
  - Professionals, 1
  - Managers, 1

- **Ideological Independents**
  - Craft and Related Service, 1
  - Sales, 1
  - Clerical Support, 1
  - Professionals, 3
  - Managers, 1

- **Anti-Polarization Independents**
  - Craft and Related Service, 5
  - Sales, 1
  - Clerical Support, 1
  - Professionals, 1
  - Managers, 5
Figure 6: ‘Final Class Position’ Breakdown of Anti-Polarization, Ideological, and Alienated Independents

![Graph showing the breakdown of interviewees by class position and political leaning.]

Figure 7: Partisan Lean of Alienated Independents Interviewed

![Graph showing the partisan lean of alienated independents.]

Figure 8: Partisan Lean of Anti-Polarization Independents Interviewed

![Graph showing the partisan lean of anti-polarization independents.]
Figure 9: Partisan Lean of Ideological Independents Interviewed

Figure 10: Partisan Lean of Anti-Polarization, Ideological, and Alienated Independents (summary)
Figure 11: Racial Breakdown of Alienated, Ideological, and Anti-Polarization Independents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Interviewees</th>
<th>Alienated Independents</th>
<th>Ideological Independents</th>
<th>Anti-Polarization Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race of Interviewees