

**SachsMEDIA**  
THE BREAKTHROUGH AGENCY™

# 50 SHADES OF PURPLE

**A Strategic Communicator's Guide to  
Navigating the Purple States of America**

If Fifty Shades of Grey revealed the tension between desire and control, this report explores the tension between perception and political reality, 50 Shades of Purple reveals the surprising complexity of America's so-called red and blue states — and what it means for those who work to shape public opinion.

# INTRODUCTION

In the color palette of American politics, the simplistic red-and-blue maps we see during election season create falsely binary perceptions. While it may seem that a state like Texas is firmly “red” or Massachusetts solidly “blue,” the reality on the ground is much less monochrome.

From California conservatives who support environmental regulations to Louisiana liberals who own guns, voters routinely defy their state’s stereotypical hue. Zoom in and you’ll see vast swaths of “purple” – not just in swing states, but in the hearts and minds of voters everywhere whose beliefs, values, and policy preferences cross traditional partisan lines in all 50 states. This complexity is particularly relevant for those who work to sway public opinion within individual states.

For professionals engaged in public affairs and communications, the examples outlined in this report underscore the importance of moving beyond simplistic red- or blue-state classifications.

***50 Shades of Purple* walks through various novel ways of looking at the “purpleness” of America by exploring:**

- 1. The top 5 ways to “Talk Purple” when advocating for policy change in any state**
- 2. Original, nationally representative 2025 survey data**
- 3. The Top 3 electoral measures of a state’s “purpleness,” with original visualizations**

By analyzing issue-specific polling data, communications and advocacy professionals can identify areas of common ground and tailor messaging strategies that resonate across the political spectrum. Recognizing and addressing the multifaceted views within a state’s electorate enables more effective policy advocacy that aligns with the actual nuanced preferences of its citizens.



**PART 1**

# **TOP 5 WAYS TO "TALK PURPLE" WHEN ADVOCATING IN ANY STATE**

**Let's talk messaging  
across the unpredictable  
spectrum of American politics.**





1

### **Use Local Data, Not National Talking Points**

Overly simplistic national narratives often alienate voters who feel disconnected from D.C. politics. Use state-specific data, community stories, and trusted messengers to localize your message. Where available, hyperlocal data and polling offers an even more reliable view of how residents feel about a policy, project, or community challenge.



2

### **Highlight Bipartisan or Cross-Partisan Support**

Showcasing unlikely alliances or endorsements across the aisle builds credibility and trust. We see from this data that Americans are not only accepting of, but in fact are largely hungry for, leaders (and issues) that find those bridges. Communicate the crossover wherever possible.



3

### **Speak to Independent Voters First**

In many states, independents outnumber members of either party, particularly among those newly registered to vote. Tailor messages to emphasize pragmatism, effectiveness, and local impact rather than ideology. Sachs Media's historical polling suggests that if you want to get a pulse on statewide views, asking only "independents" often predicts the statewide outcome. In areas where Republicans and Democrats may be starkly divided on an issue, quite often the outcome ends up falling to how nonpartisans vote.



4

### **Search for Nuance**

Approach communities with curiosity and respect for complexity. Ask, listen, and build based on what matters to them. For example, in polling and survey design, provide respondents an opportunity to offer their open-ended thoughts on an issue or proposal, and use content analysis methodology to uncover trends, commonalities, and quirks in sentiments.



5

### **Lead With Values**

Voters may reject partisan language but still support the same outcomes. Framing policies around shared values – freedom, safety, fairness, access – resonates more widely than tying them to party platforms. This is particularly important when developing messaging on the "why" of a policy proposal: Our research has consistently found that voters often care more about the *intent* of a proposal than the way it's implemented.





PART 2

# MEASURING PUBLIC PURPLENESS

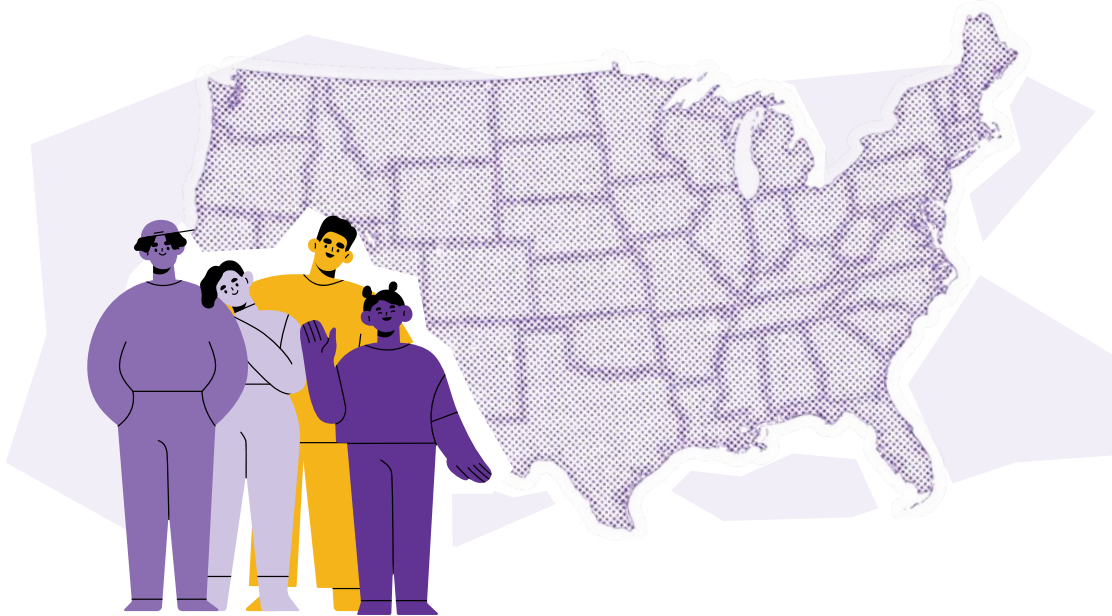
Even the reddest Republicans in the reddest states  
have streaks of blue, and the bluest Democrats in  
blue states have streaks of red.



## **Our research goes beyond partisan labels to explore where Americans stand on key issues, how they diverge from their parties, and what that says about the true shades of red, blue, and – especially – purple in today's political landscape.**

To better understand the deeper dimensions, and murkier waters, of America's ideological pool, Sachs Media conducted a nationwide survey of 1,000 U.S. adults from April 4-6, 2025. The sample was designed to be nationally representative across gender, age, region, race, and party affiliation.

Respondents identified not only their own political leanings and party affiliations (if any), but also how they perceive their home state's political identity: red, blue, or purple. Beyond these perceptions, Sachs Media used objective criteria to classify each respondent's home state by its political makeup, including prior election results, voter registration trends, and the partisan balance of power in their state legislature.

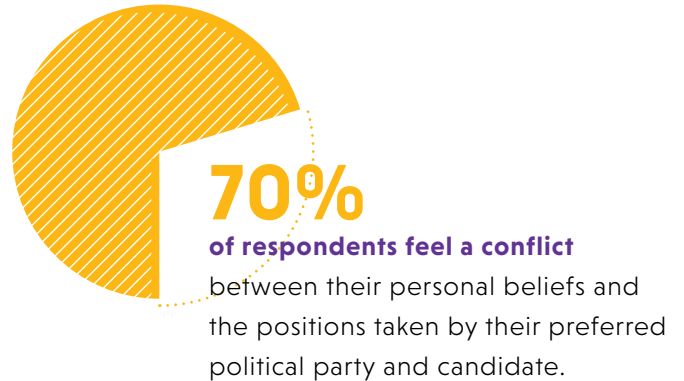


**The dual lens of self-perception and data-driven classification provides a fuller picture of the nuanced political realities across the country.**

# Here's What We Found

## Partisan Crossovers in Candidate Choice

**No state is politically monolithic**, and this partisan crossover is vividly evident in survey data. Though in the minority, Republicans in traditionally blue states and Democrats in deep-red states still form significant pockets of the electorate.



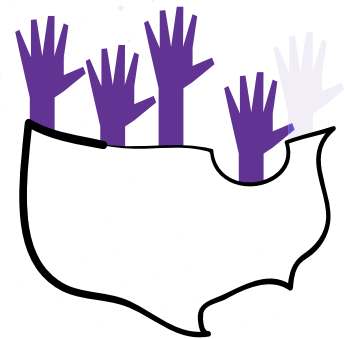
## 2 in 3 Americans

say they either frequently (15%) or occasionally (51%)  
**support a candidate from the opposing party** because  
of the candidate's stance on a specific issue.

**This is the case for statistically equal shares of Democrats (65%) and Republicans (68%) – but there's a twist.**

Partisans living in “enemy territory” are significantly more likely to vote for a cross-party candidate than those living in a state that reflects their own politics.

Specifically, 72% of Republicans in blue states and 70% of Democrats in red states at least occasionally vote cross-party, compared with 66% of Republicans in red states and 60% of Democrats in blue states.

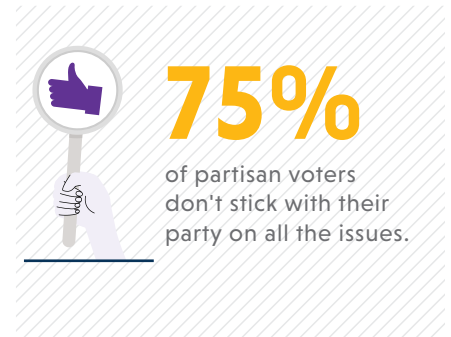




## Partisan Crossover on Issues

**Only 1 in 4 partisan voters stick with their party on all the issues** asked about in our survey:

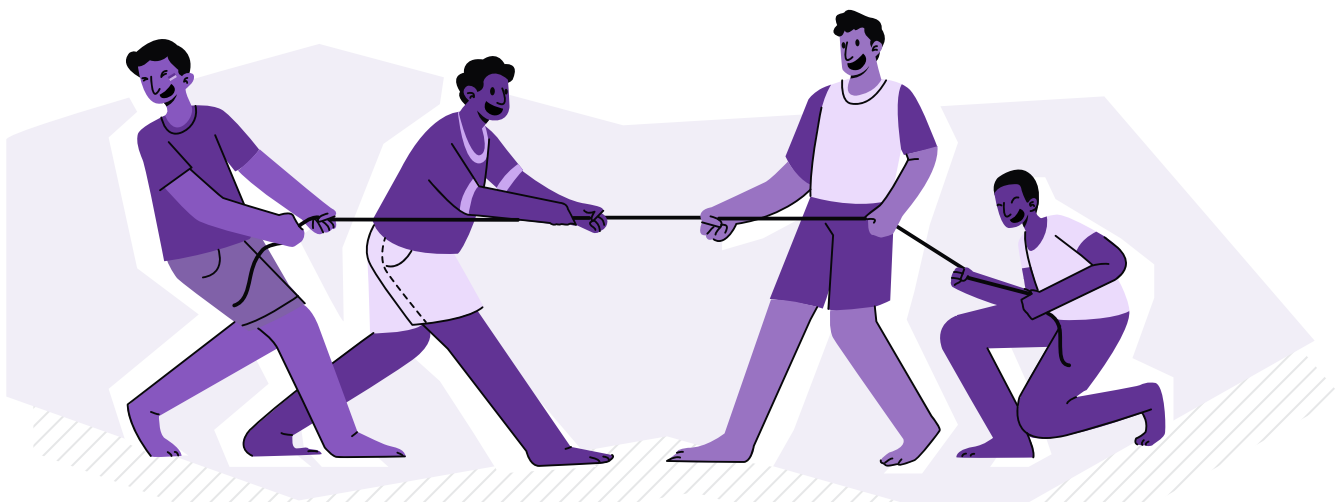
- Abortion
- Health Care Access
- Immigration
- Gun Control
- Environmental Policy



The vast majority – roughly 75% of all Democrats and Republicans – have at least one policy area where they disagree with their party's line. **In other words, three-quarters of self-identified partisans are not pure ideologues.** They might be devout conservatives except on, say, reproductive rights, or reliable liberals except on guns.

Consider Republicans living in blue states: Nearly 4 in 5 acknowledge holding at least one position that breaks with the GOP platform. The same portion of Democrats in red states (79%) report an issue on which they side against their party's line.

These "out-of-place" partisans are actually more likely to stray from party orthodoxy than their counterparts who are surrounded by like-minded neighbors.



### "Out-of-Place" Partisans

8 in 10 Republicans living in blue states and Democrats living in red states break with their party line on at least one issue.

# How Widespread is the “Purple” Mindset?

When it comes to specific issues, Americans’ beliefs routinely cross party and geographic lines. The survey asked partisans to identify issues where their views don’t fully align with a single party. The responses reveal a nation of hybrids, not herds.

## Abortion

Abortion had the highest overall cross-party divergence in the survey:



Drilling down, nearly 41% of Democrats in red states admitted they depart from the Democratic Party’s position on abortion – presumably taking a more conservative stance – while roughly 37% of Republicans in blue states break from the GOP’s anti-abortion line.

## Health Care Access

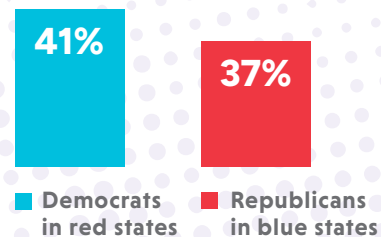
**Debates on health care see nearly as much crossover. Nationwide, about 32% of partisans aren’t in lockstep with their party on health policy.**

Specifically, 41% of Democrats in red states stood out for being more likely to question their party’s health care agenda. These might be moderates skeptical of big-government approaches – or could also be more progressive Democrats upset that their party hasn’t gone far enough.

At the same time, a sizable share of Republicans in blue states (33%) support policies their national party might label “socialized medicine,” such as a public option or Medicaid expansion.

It’s not unusual, for instance, to find a Republican in Massachusetts who supports that state’s health insurance mandate (the precursor to the ACA) or a Florida Republican backing Medicaid expansion because they see how it could work in their community.

### Question Party’s Health Care Agenda





## Immigration

Immigration had the third highest overall cross-party divergence in the survey. About 29% of all partisans – including 34% of Democrats and 24% of Republicans – aren't aligned with their party's consensus on immigration policy.

# 29%

of all partisans aren't aligned with their party's consensus on immigration policy.

### View on Gun Policy Laws



1 in 4 Republicans in Blue States support stricter gun control



2 in 5 Democrats don't hold views that match the Democratic platform in gun policy

## Gun Laws

Gun policy follows this same pattern as the other issues outlined above. While **29% overall say they hold views that aren't a perfect match with their party's stance**, nearly 4 in 10 red-state Democrats (39%) say they hold views that don't match with the national Democratic platform.

Many of these are likely blue voters with a streak of "Second Amendment" sentiment, aligning with their more conservative neighbors on gun rights. Meanwhile, in blue states, 1 in 4 Republicans (25%) support stricter gun control.

## Environmental Policy

On environmental policy, geography influences ideology, as a full **1 in 4 partisans said their views on climate or environmental policy differ from their party.**



In coal country and oil states, plenty of Democrats diverge from their party's aggressive climate stance, while in coastal suburbs quite a few Republicans embrace climate science and favor policies that support clean energy.

More than 1 in 4 Republicans in blue states (27%) acknowledge they support environmental policies that the national GOP tends to oppose, similar to the portion of Democrats in red states (25%) who see merit in the opposing party's views on this issue.

Similar patterns repeat on education, taxes, and LGBTQ+ issues.

**Instead of loyal party-line voters, we're more a nation of political omnivores who would prefer to pick and choose from each side's menu of ideas – but are often left with an all-or-nothing menu that offers no substitutions.**

# So, Who is Most Likely to Break Ranks?

Some demographics are especially likely to display purple tendencies.

## Gender plays a big role.

For instance, male voters were more apt than female voters to buck their party. **Around 80% of men in the survey had at least one cross-party viewpoint, compared to about 70% of women.** Perhaps men are less inclined to toe the party line, or it could relate to the specific issues (like guns or the military) where gender gaps in opinion exist.

## Age is another factor.

Younger voters showed a more purple profile than their elders. An impressive **82% of voters under 45 reported diverging on at least one issue, versus about 71% of those 45 and older.** Younger generations, having grown up in an era of political polarization, may rebel and be more inclined to reject rigid binaries and form more eclectic viewpoints.

## Racial diversity within parties also adds nuance.

White partisans were somewhat more doctrinaire (about 72% had a cross-cutting view) compared to the 81% of non-white partisans who had a heterodox stance.

## The Takeaway

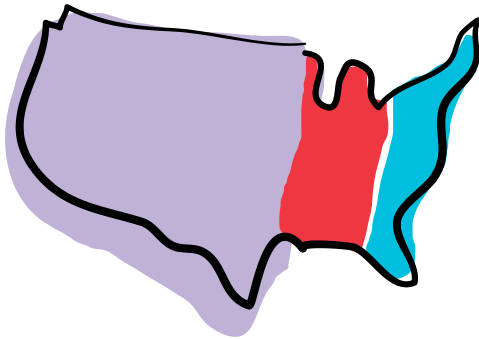
Voters may wear a team jersey – but if we take out the loudest screamers in each crowd, it appears most of those jerseys aren't really red or blue, but purple.





# People's Views of Their Own States

When asked whether their state is politically red, blue, or purple, a clear majority of Americans described their home state as a shade of purple.



## My state is...

16% "fully blue"

22% "fully red"

62% "some shade of purple"

This includes people living in states typically labeled as red or blue on electoral maps, suggesting that voters themselves view their surroundings as more ideologically blended than partisan punditry suggests. **Even in "solidly red" states, 54% of residents described their state as at least somewhat purple, as did 62% of those living in "solidly blue" states.**

# Perceptions of Representativeness

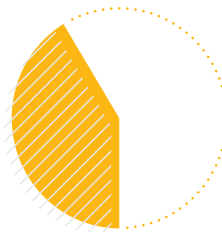
Perhaps most interesting is how people view the "representativeness" of leaders in their states.

Overall, just under half (49%) say their state's political leaders are representative of the people as a whole, while 4 in 10 (39%) say their leaders are more "politically extreme" than the people they represent.



49%

My state's political leaders are representative of the people



39%

My state's political leaders are more politically extreme

Notably, 58% of voters living in the handful of true "swing states" believe their leadership is representative of the people, more than the 49% of those living in blue states and 46% of those in red.





PART 3

# MEASURING 'PURPLENESS' OBJECTIVELY

Understanding a state's political identity requires looking through multiple lenses, each offering a distinct view. These include:

/// Registered Voter Affiliation

/// Presidential Vote Share

/// State Legislative Control

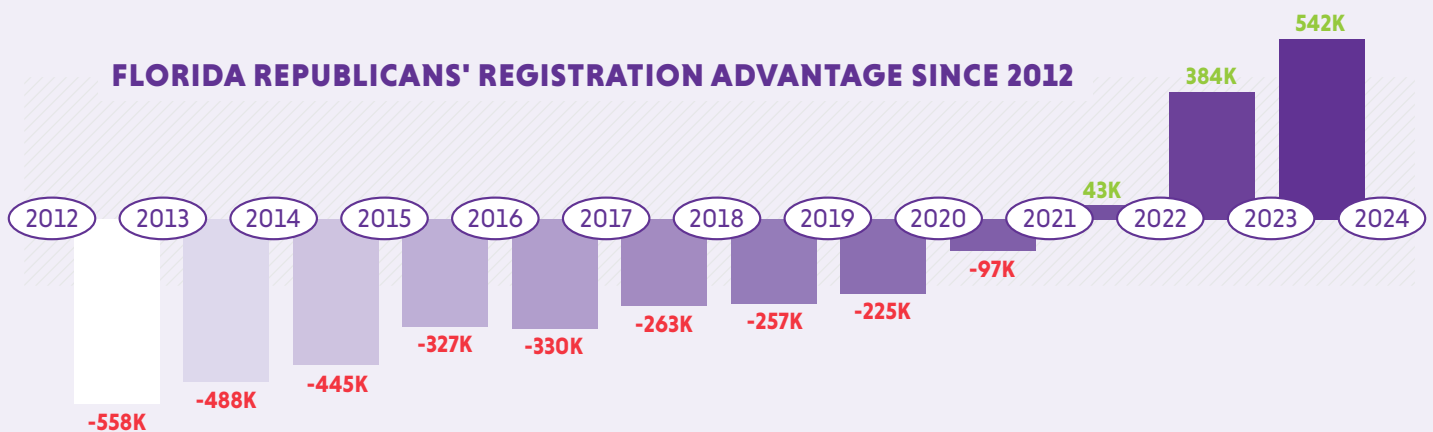


# Registered Voter Affiliation

Voter registration statistics offer a strong base for understanding a state's political landscape. These figures show how voters self-identify when they register – but self-identification isn't always a predictor of how people will actually vote on Election Day.

## Example

Consider Florida, where as of early 2024 registered Republicans outnumbered Democrats for the first time in modern history.



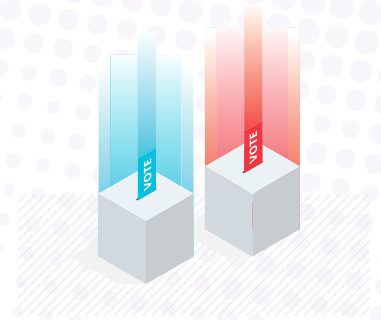
Polls show consistent bipartisan support for such issues as gun background checks, teacher pay increases, and environmental preservation.

This was clearly evident in November 2024, when two proposed "liberal" constitutional amendments appeared on the state's general election ballot: a significant expansion of abortion rights and the legalization of recreational marijuana use. Both received significant majority support (57% and 56% respectively), although they failed to garner the 60% required to be enshrined in the Florida Constitution.

Many states have large blocks of voters registered as "independent" or "no party affiliation," and many registered Republicans or Democrats vote across party lines depending on the issue or the candidate.

# Presidential Vote Share

The percentage of votes a presidential candidate receives in a state is often used as shorthand for the state's political leaning. But this is a snapshot – reflective of national-level dynamics, media coverage, and candidate-specific factors. It doesn't necessarily translate to preferences on local governance or policy issues.



## Example

In 2020, Republicans held narrow majorities in the Arizona House and Senate, but Joe Biden carried the state (albeit by a narrow margin). Meanwhile, Vermont overwhelmingly supported Biden (66%), but its governor, Phil Scott, is a Republican – and a popular one at that.

### Arizona, 2020

Red state

Red legislature

Supported Biden



### Vermont, 2020

Blue state

Republican Governor

Supported Biden

**A strategy based solely on voter affiliation or presidential vote data might misread a state's electorate completely, especially on such hot-button issues as abortion, gun control, or public education.**



# State Legislative Control

State legislatures often reflect the political geography of the state more than its ideological makeup. Gerrymandering, rural vs. urban divides, and turnout patterns in midterm vs. presidential elections all play a role. A state may vote for a Democratic presidential candidate but have a Republican supermajority in its Legislature – or vice versa. [These nuances matter.](#)

## Example

North Carolina went narrowly for Donald Trump in 2020, and in 2022 Republicans regained a veto-proof majority in the Legislature – while voters simultaneously reelected a Democratic governor.







CONCLUSION

# THE BOTTOM LINE

Meet voters where they truly are,  
not where partisan shorthand  
presumes they should be.



**When advocating for or against policy, building coalitions, or crafting messages that resonate with local communities, it's critical to understand that a given state's surface-level political identity may not reflect the deeper currents shaping public opinion.**



**Base every strategy on solid intelligence.**

Localized data, immersive community listening, and message testing helps capture the full spectrum of red-blue-purple nuance. From there, translate findings into stories that put shared values front and center – things like security, opportunity, dignity – and show in concrete terms how a proposal will improve daily life. When audiences see their own priorities reflected in the narrative, ideological defenses drop and space opens for genuine persuasion.



**Equally important is the discipline to continually revisit assumptions.**

Public opinion is dynamic – especially among the independent-minded voters who often decide outcomes – so communicators must treat messaging as an ongoing process, not a one-and-done task.



**Build feedback loops into campaigns, elevate credible local voices, and be ready to recalibrate when new insights emerge.**

By combining rigorous research with flexible storytelling, public affairs professionals and communicators can navigate an ever-purple landscape and help coalitions succeed even when party labels fail to predict voter behavior.

# SachsMEDIA

Strategic Communications & Public Affairs for High-Stakes Challenges

For more information about this report, the survey methodology or complete survey results, contact Karen Cyphers, Partner and Director of Research at [karen@sachsmedia.com](mailto:karen@sachsmedia.com)

2025  
PR NEWS  
**TOP 100**  
AGENCY ELITE

2025 O'DWYER'S  
**TOP 5**  
NATIONAL PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS FIRM

2025 POLLIE  
AWARDS  
**BEST IN PUBLIC  
AFFAIRS**

[sachsmedia.com](https://sachsmedia.com)