

# Vote! American Jews at the Ballot Box

## Estimating the Presidential Vote of the US Jewish Electorate

*The Jewish Electorate Institute (JEI), a non-partisan resource on Jewish voters in the United States, provides research and analysis critical for understanding the Jewish electorate. On behalf of JEI, researchers at the American Jewish Population Project (AJPP) at Brandeis University's Steinhardt Social Research Institute conducted an analysis of hundreds of national surveys of US adults to describe the Jewish electorate in each of the 435 districts of the 116th US Congress and the District of Columbia. Surveys included the American National Election Studies, the General Social Survey, Pew political and social surveys, the Gallup Daily Tracking poll, and the Gallup Poll Social Series. Data from over 1.4 million US adults were statistically combined to provide, for each congressional district, estimates of the number of adults who self-identify as Jewish and a breakdown of those individuals by age, education, race/ethnicity, as well as political party self-identification and political ideology. This report presents results from an analysis of a subset of surveys that assessed how Jewish adults voted in the 2012 and 2016 US presidential elections.<sup>1</sup>*

American Jews vote primarily for Democratic candidates in US presidential elections. Over 70% of Jewish voters in the past two presidential elections (2012 and 2016) voted Democratic. American Jewish support for the Democratic candidate is greater than the proportion of the Jewish electorate that identifies as liberal (45%) or identifies with or leans toward the Democratic Party (65%).

## Overview

It is widely understood that Jewish Americans vote primarily for Democratic candidates in US presidential elections. Supporting evidence, however, is limited. Early studies generalized to the nation as a whole the voting results from districts or wards that were predominantly Jewish.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have relied on exit polls, which are known to be biased toward particular demographic groups and ill-suited for estimation of small sub-groups—have also been used.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to these less rigorous methods, the American Jewish Population Project's National Profile of the Jewish Electorate 2020<sup>4</sup> systematically describes the Jewish vote by combining data from multiple independent surveys that assess voting behavior in the most recent US presidential elections.

## The Jewish Vote

Of the many surveys included in the American Jewish Population Project's data synthesis, several included an assessment of voting choices in the most recent presidential election. These surveys included the American National Election Study (ANES), the General Social Survey (GSS), the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), and several Pew political surveys.

Both the ANES and the GSS assessed voting in the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections. Each of the other surveys included only the assessment of the most recent election.

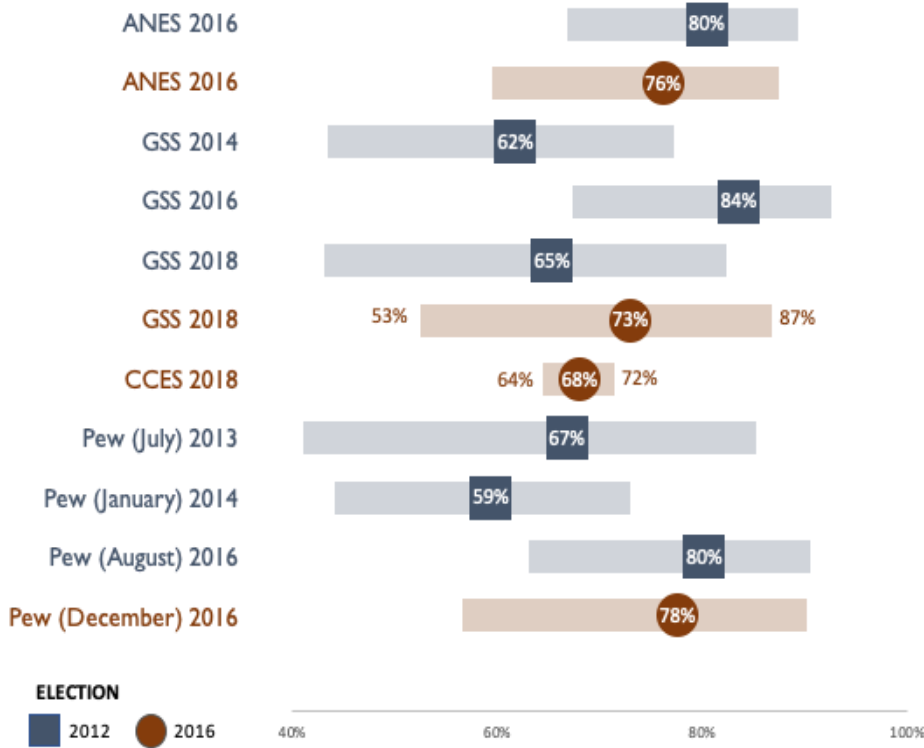
**Table 1: Surveys that Assessed US Presidential Vote**

Survey Title	Survey Year
<b>American National Election Study</b>	2016 <sup>a b</sup>
<b>General Social Survey</b>	2014 <sup>a</sup> 2016 <sup>a</sup> 2018 <sup>a b</sup>
<b>Cooperative Congressional Election Study</b>	2018 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Pew Surveys</b>	
Political Survey July	2013 <sup>a</sup>
Polarization Survey January	2014 <sup>a</sup>
Political Survey August	2016 <sup>a</sup>
Political Survey December	2016 <sup>b</sup>

Notes: a) % Democratic vote in the 2012 US presidential election  
b) % Democratic vote in the 2016 US presidential election

Across all of the surveys, the majority of Jewish respondents voted for the Democratic candidate in the most recent presidential elections. There was a wide range in the percentage across the surveys from a high of 84% (GSS, 2016) to a low of 59% (Pew, January 2014). There was also a wide range in the

**Percentage Vote for Democratic US Presidential Candidate among Jewish Voters and 95% Confidence Intervals**



margin of error across the surveys. The margin of error is the degree of error in the estimated percentage of who voted Democratic and is represented by the 95% confidence interval around the estimate. Larger margins of error equal less confidence that the result represents the population well.

The GSS 2018 survey indicated 73% of Jewish respondents voted for the Democratic presidential candidate, but the survey has a large margin of error — the percentage could be as low as 53% or as high as 87%. In contrast, in the CCES 2018, where 68% voted Democratic, there was a very small margin of error ranging from a low of 64% to a high of 72%.

To determine the overall percentage of Jewish voters who voted for the Democratic US presidential candidate in recent elections, meta-analytic techniques were used to account for the complex sample designs and the varying margins of error in the surveys. This method weights the percentage in each survey, such that surveys with smaller margins of error are given greater weight or influence on the overall average.

The specific factors that are included in the calculation are the percentage who voted Democratic, the variance of this percentage, and the design

**Table 2: Pct. Jewish Vote, Variance, and Design Effects Used to Calculate the Weighted Average Across Surveys**

Survey Title	Survey Year	Vote Pct.	Variance	Design Effect
<b>ANES</b>	2016	80.5 <sup>a</sup>	0.004	1.3
		76.2 <sup>b</sup>	0.006	1.7
<b>GSS</b>	2014	61.8 <sup>a</sup>	0.013	1.1
	2016	83.6 <sup>a</sup>	0.005	1.4
	2018	65.4 <sup>a</sup>	0.017	1.1
		73.0 <sup>b</sup>	0.011	1.2
<b>CCES</b>	2018	68.1 <sup>b</sup>	0.000	1.3
<b>Pew Surveys</b>				
Political Survey July	2013	66.8 <sup>a</sup>	0.021	0.7
Polarization Survey January	2014	59.4 <sup>a</sup>	0.010	1.1
Political Survey August	2016	80.2 <sup>a</sup>	0.006	0.8
Political Survey December	2016	77.6 <sup>b</sup>	0.007	0.9
<b>Overall</b>		<b>71.2</b>		

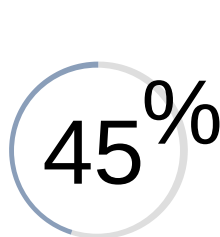
Notes: a) % Democratic vote in the 2012 US presidential election  
 b) % Democratic vote in the 2016 US presidential election

effect.<sup>5</sup> Surveys with a design effect close to one and variance close to zero are given greater weight than are surveys with large design effects and large variances. The weighted average over the surveys is 71%.

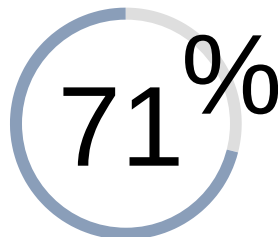
## At the Ballot Box

Overall, 71% of the Jewish electorate voted for the Democratic candidate in the recent US presidential election. This proportion aligns with Pew Research Center's analysis of 2016 exit poll data, which estimated that 71% of the Jewish electorate voted for the Democratic candidate.<sup>6</sup>

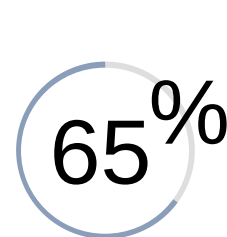
Among Jewish adults...



identify as liberal



voted for the Democratic US presidential candidate



identify as or lean Democrat

## Conclusion

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This analysis provides key information about the voting behavior of the Jewish electorate independent of party self-identification and political orientation. The meta-analysis estimates that 71% of Jewish adults voted for the Democratic candidate in the most recent presidential elections (2012 & 2016) regardless of party identification. This finding aligns with Pew Research Center's analysis of 2016 exit poll data. In contrast to the use of less reliable exit poll data for describing the vote of small populations, the American Jewish Population Project's meta-analysis provides an alternate method that systematically and reliably describes past Jewish voting behavior.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Of the 2,760 independent samples included in the AJPP data synthesis, 11 surveys assessed voting behavior in the previous election. These include the General Social Survey (Smith, Davern, Freese, & Morgan, 2018), the American National Election Study (2016), the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, & Luks, 2019), as well as several Pew political surveys (2013, 2014, 2016, 2016). A meta-analysis for complex surveys (Fox, 2011; Roberts and Binder, 2009) was conducted to estimate the percentage of Jewish voters who voted for the Democratic or Republican candidate in the most previous presidential election. This method systematically combines results across the sample of surveys by adjusting for the variance and design effects associated with each survey. These adjustments give greater weight to surveys that have more reliable – that is, less variable – estimates.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Stephen Isaacs' book "Jews and American Politics" which generalized the Jewish vote from predominantly Jewish districts in Manhattan to areas across the rest of the nation. Source: Isaacs, Stephen D. (1974). *Jews and American Politics*. Doubleday, p. 279-281.

<sup>3</sup> See for example exit poll data from Edison Research that shows American Jews have supported the Democratic candidate in every election since 1972. Source: <https://www.edisonresearch.com/u-s-election-exit-poll-analysis-the-jewish-vote/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ajpp.brandeis.edu/publications> provides new estimates of Jewish adults in the United States by congressional district, including demographic characteristics and detailed estimates of political identification.

<sup>5</sup> The design effect is a measure of the degree to which the variance in a survey is inflated by design features, such as clustered sampling. See Kish, L. (1965). *Survey Sampling*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center's analysis of national exit poll data (2016) found that 71% of Jewish adults voted for the Democratic candidate. Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>