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PORTRAITS OF ENGAGEMENT
A Pat Brown Institute Polling Program Brief

Jewish Voters in Los Angeles County: A Look at Partisanship

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About the PBI Polling Program

The Pat Brown Institute's pathbreaking Polling Program project explores the civic engagement as well as the political and social orientation of four major racial and ethnic groups in Los Angeles County: African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Jews. The Latino and Asian-American surveys were conducted in 2016 while the Jewish and African-American surveys were conducted in 2019. The findings from these four surveys are intended to generate and inform community and scholarly conversations. More information about the program is available at

www.calstatela.patbrowninstitute.org



Voting patterns of the American Jewish community during presidential elections have been relatively consistent over the past few decades. A clear majority of Jewish voters have supported Democratic candidates while a sizeable minority, around 20% to 30% of the Jewish electorate, backed Republicans.[1] Recent polls of Jewish voters suggest that the 2020 presidential election will likely follow the same pattern.[2]

Yet, despite these relatively stable trends, the Jewish electorate is characterized by great demographic, denominational, and political diversity. The Pat Brown Institute's (PBI) 2019 Los Angeles County Jewish Voter Survey helps illuminate these trends. The survey was conducted by the public opinion research firm EVITARUS and its Partner and Principal Researcher Shakari Byerly. With 1,812 respondents, PBI's Jewish survey is the first public opinion study of the Los Angeles Jewish community in over two decades.[3] The PBI survey's large sample size allows for analysis by age, partisanship, gender, and other key demographics.

1 One notable exception is the 1980 presidential election. In that year, 45% of Jewish voters supported the Democratic incumbent Jimmy Carter, 39% Republican Ronald Reagan, and 15% third-party candidate John Anderson. *https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-voting-record-in-u-s-presidential-elections*

2 The Jewish Electorate Institute's "2020 National Survey of Likely Jewish Voters," for example, found that 67% of Jewish voters planned to vote for Democrat Joe Biden while 30% intended to vote for Republican Donald Trump. *https://www.jewishelectorateinstitute.org/2020-national-survey-of-likely-jewish-voters/*

3 The PBI survey was conducted from August 7, 2019 to September 19, 2019. 93% of the respondents were reached online; 7% were reached via telephone. The margin of error was +2.30% at the 95% confidence level. Data are weighted.

With its focus on a single metropolitan area, this survey offers insights that are not typically available with national polls that survey American Jewish political attitudes.[4]

With over a half million Jewish residents, Los Angeles is home to the fourth largest Jewish community after Tel Aviv, New York City, and Jerusalem. Jewish Angelenos are extremely active in the political arena and their orientation on key issues can affect local, state, and even national politics. A detailed survey of Los Angeles County's Jewish voters is, therefore, of great contemporary relevance for understanding Jewish partisanship and political attitudes.

I. Partisanship

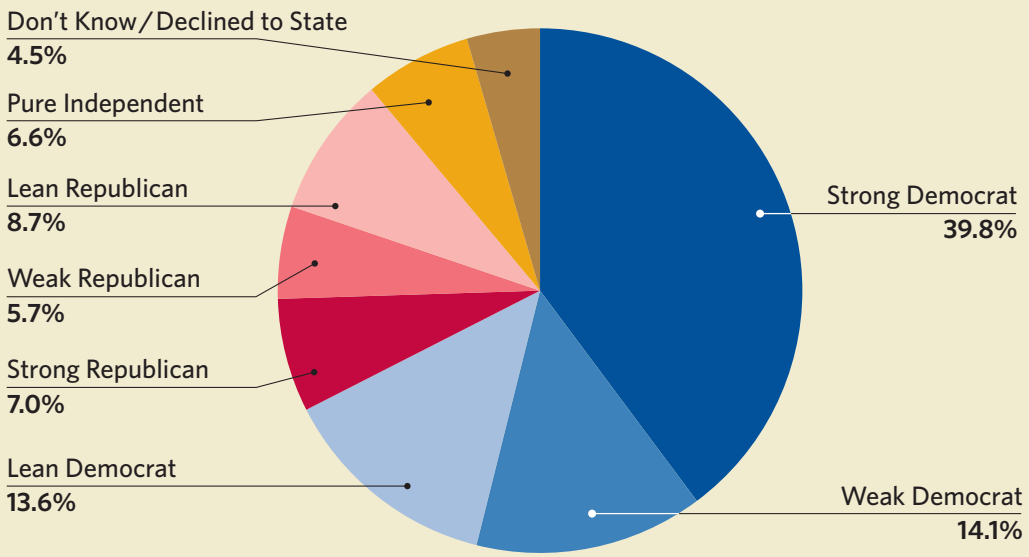
Regarding partisanship among Los Angeles County's Jewish voters, the PBI survey asked respondents, *"Generally speaking do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, or something else?"* Those who identified with one of the two major political parties were asked, *"Would you call yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or not a strong Democrat/Republican?"* Those respondents who did not identify with either party or selected "something else," were asked, *"In general, do you consider yourself to be closer to the Democratic Party or Republican Party?"*

We combined strong and weak partisans with independents who leaned towards one of the two major parties into a category of "partisans." Those who fit into none of these categories were labeled as "independents." This grouping is based on the growing view among political scientists and election observers that true independents are not as prevalent as often assumed; many voters who call themselves independent often lean toward a political party and vote as partisans.

The vast majority of Jewish voters in the PBI survey aligned with the Democratic Party (Figure 1). In total, 68% of the respondents

4 Various national surveys of Jewish voters conducted over the past few months give us confidence that even though the PBI survey was completed over a year ago, political attitudes among Jewish voters have remained relatively stable.

Figure 1.
Partisan Identification



identified as Democrats and 22% as Republicans. Only 7% were pure independents. These results closely reflect broader national trends. For example, The Jewish Electorate Institute's recent *National Survey of Likely Jewish Voters in 2020* found that 66% of respondents identified as Democrats while 26% identified as Republicans.[5]

Los Angeles County's Jewish Democrats held a stronger attachment to their partisan identity than Jewish Republicans.

"Tribalism," the notion that voters are divided into two equally intense and competing camps has become conventional political wisdom. While this may be true among the broader electorate, it was not reflected in our survey of Jewish voters in Los Angeles County. We found that Los Angeles County's Jewish Democrats held a stronger attachment to their partisan identity than Jewish Republicans.

The great majority of Jewish Democrats described themselves as strong identifiers, and these strong identifiers comprised 40% of all respondents. In contrast, strong Republicans comprised only 7% of all respondents, barely one percentage point more than weak Republicans. Lean Republicans, who constituted 9% of the electorate, comprised a larger share of the sample than either strong or weak Republicans.

Notably, Los Angeles County's Jewish Republicans were not unified on whether Donald Trump should be re-elected president. Only 83% of Republican respondents supported his re-election while 11% would not vote to re-elect the president; 6% did not know or preferred not to state.[6] Additionally, a large proportion of Jewish Republicans held liberal views on such social issues as gun control, same-sex marriage, and abortion that deviate from contemporary Republican orthodoxy.

An examination of partisan identification by demographic and denominational subgroups illuminates who comprise the Democratic and Republican bases of support.

- In every age group, Democrats outweighed Republicans and independents. Democratic identification was strongest among young voters, with 80% of 18-to-29-year-olds falling into this category. The 50-to-59-year-olds were the only age group where over a quarter of respondents identified as Republican (Figure 2).
- Women were 12 percentage points more likely than men to identify as Democrats. A sizable proportion of men (29%) identified as Republicans. In this regard, the gender gap that characterizes the larger American electorate has also become quite evident in the Jewish community. This represents a change from the 1997 Los Angeles Jewish Population Survey. In that study, men and women were similar in partisan identification, with 12% of men and 11% of women identifying as Republican, while 69% of men and 70% of women identified as Democrats (Figure 3).[7]

5 https://www.jewishelectorateinstitute.org/2020-national-survey-of-likely-jewish-voters/

6 In contrast, Democrats were united in their opposition to Donald Trump, as 99% opposed re-electing the president.

7 "1997 Los Angeles Jewish Population Survey," Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles https://www.jewishdatabank.org/data-bank/search-results/study/345

Figure 2.

Partisan Identification by Age

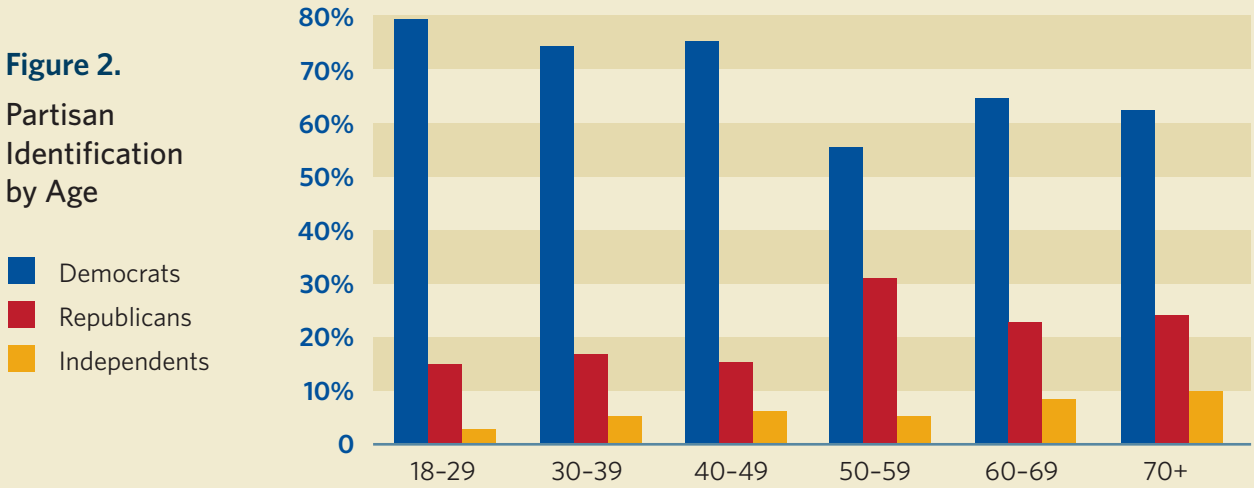


Figure 3.

Partisan Identification by Gender

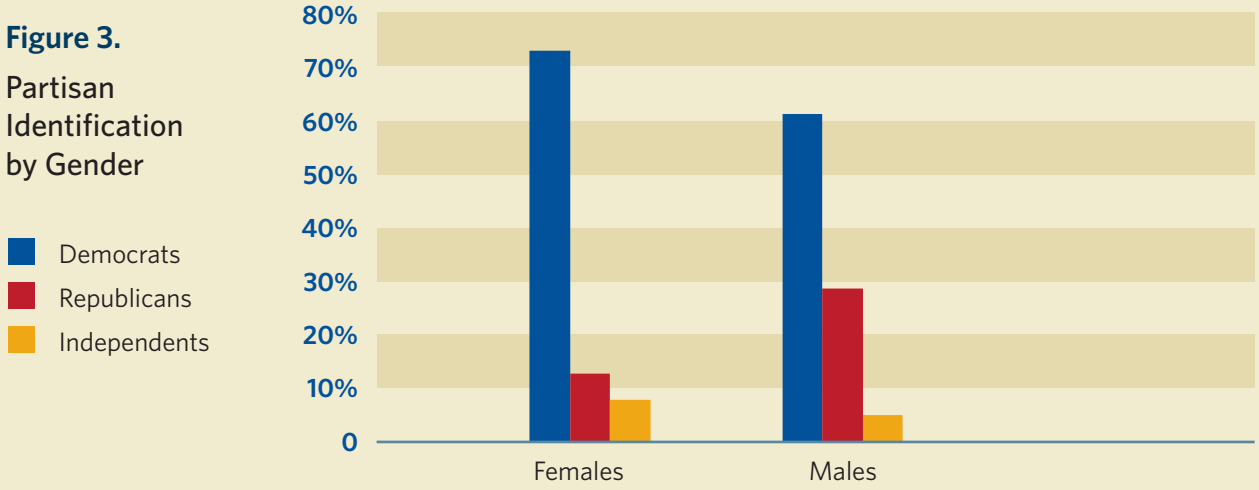
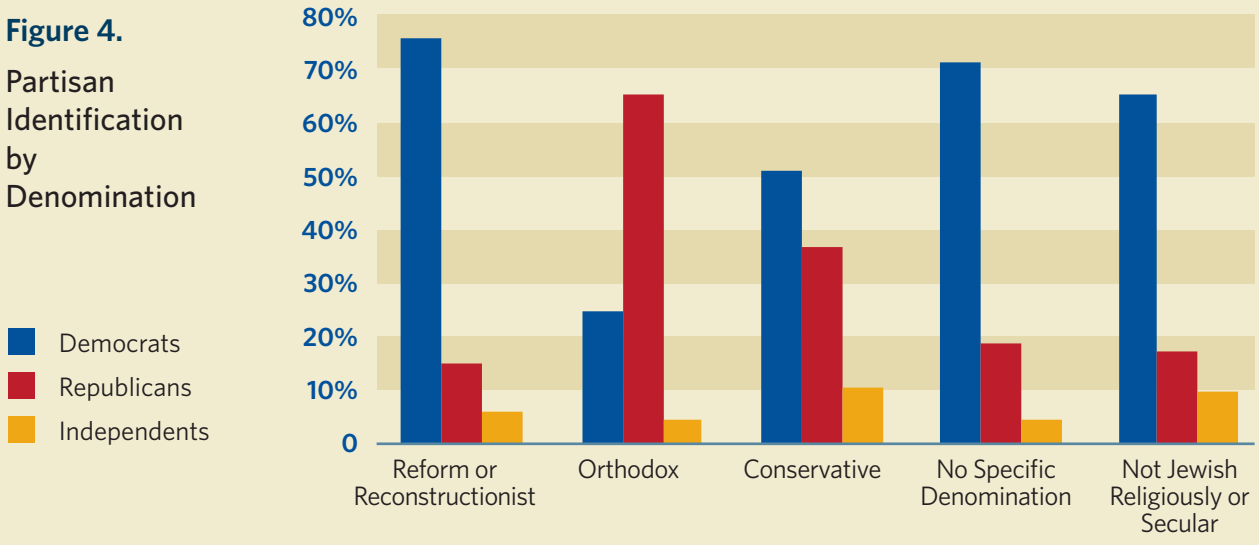


Figure 4.

Partisan Identification by Denomination



- A clear majority of those who identified with Reform or Reconstructionist Judaism (76%) considered themselves Democrats. Conversely, 65% of Orthodox Jews identified as Republicans. While a majority of those who affiliated with the Conservative movement were Democrats, a sizable minority (37%), identified as Republicans (Figure 4).

- First- or second-generation voters were 17 percentage points less likely to identify as Democrats than those who were third-generation or higher—that is, those who were born in the United States to parents who were native born (Figure 5). Among first- or second- generation immigrants, those from Iran, the former Soviet Union, and Israel were more likely to identify as Republicans than those from other countries (Figure 6).[8]

8 We surveyed a relatively smaller number of first-or-second-generation immigrants from Israel, Iran, or the former Soviet Union. Compared to other subgroups surveyed, the margin of error could be somewhat larger.

Figure 5.

Partisan Identification by Immigrant Generations

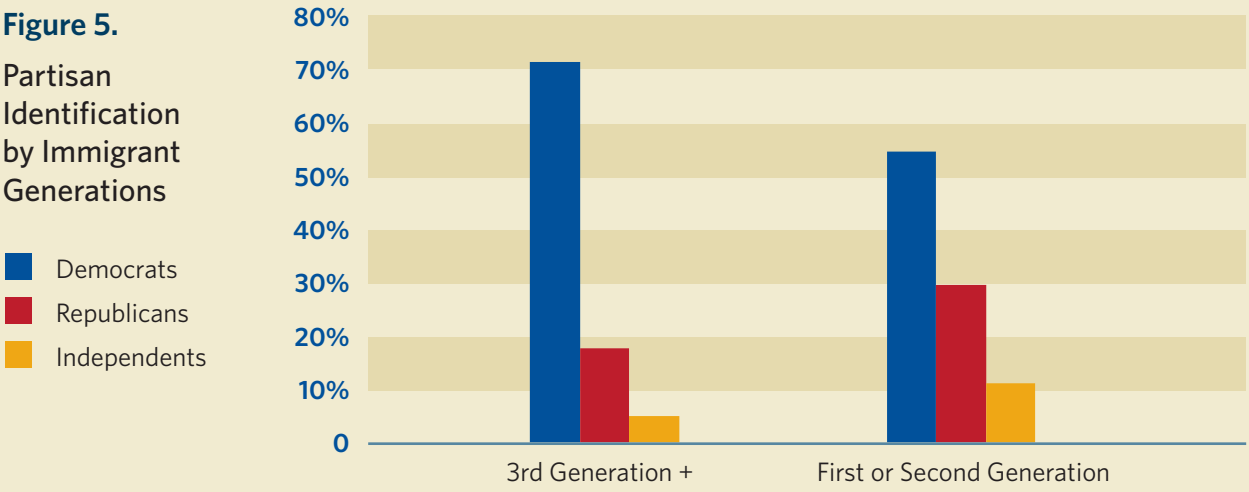
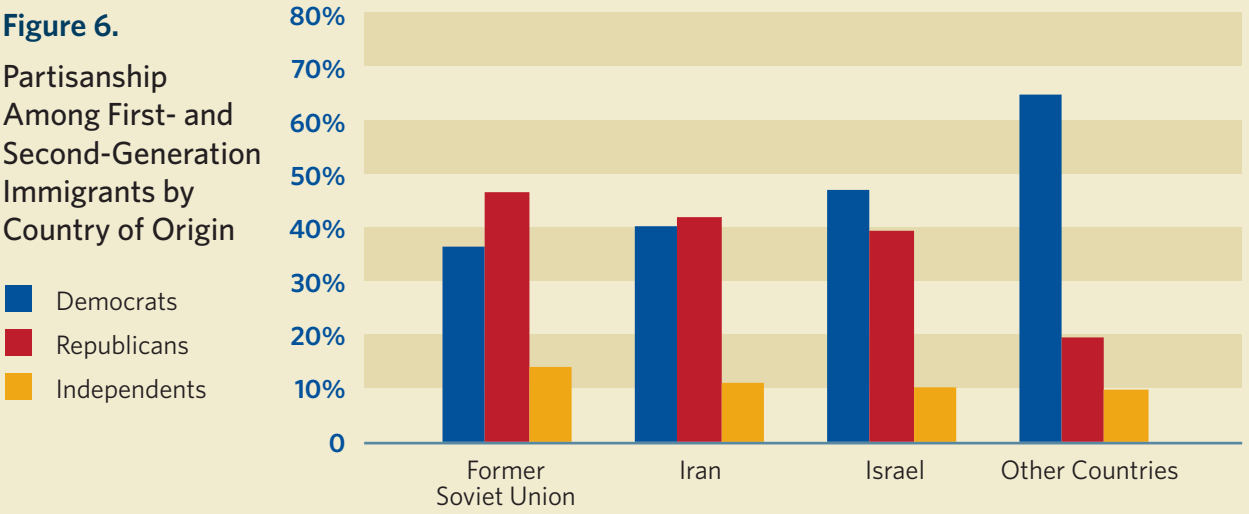


Figure 6.

Partisanship Among First- and Second-Generation Immigrants by Country of Origin



Some of these local partisan divides among subgroups mirror trends at the national level. The Pew Research Center's 2013 Survey of Jewish Americans, for example, found that Reform Jews, millennials, and, women were most likely to identify as Democrats and that Orthodox Jews gravitated toward the Republican Party.[9] However, the PBI survey also helps to highlight certain dynamics that are often not illuminated in national studies such as the sizeable percentage of Conservative Jews, those between the ages of 50 and 59, and first- and second-generation Jewish voters leaning more toward the Republican Party than the Jewish electorate as a whole.

II. Ideology

An examination of ideology among Los Angeles County's Jewish electorate reveals that a clear majority of voters viewed themselves as liberal. Indeed, 38% identified as very liberal, 19% as somewhat liberal, 20% as moderate, 12% as somewhat conservative, and 6% as very conservative (Figure 7).

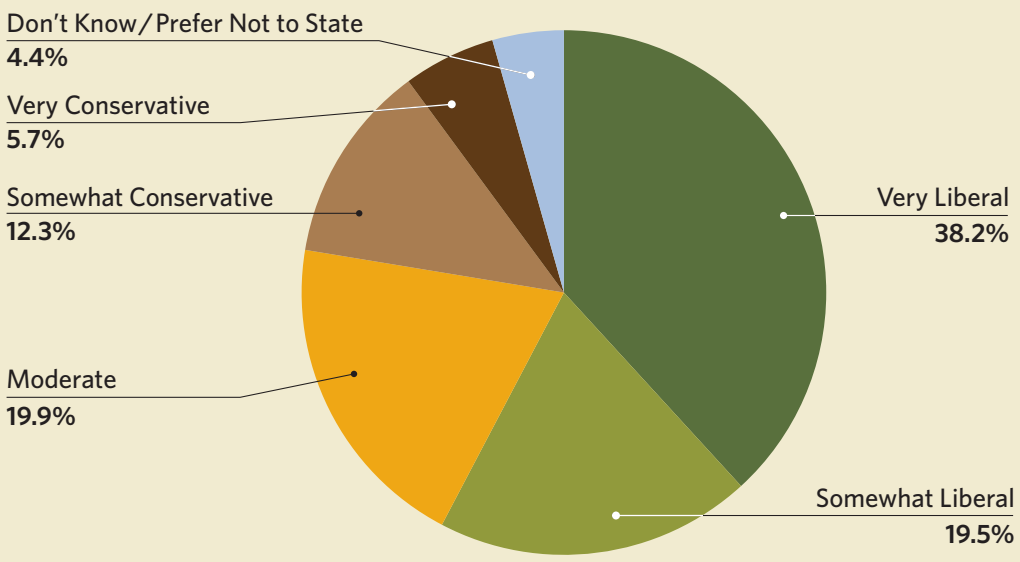
The PBI survey suggests that Jewish voters have become increasingly liberal over the past two decades. The 1997 Los Angeles Jewish Population Survey provides a source for comparison, although the answer categories for the two surveys are slightly different.[10] Over the past 22 years, the proportion of those who identified as very liberal increased by 27 percentage points and identification as moderate or middle of the road decreased by 13 percentage points. While still a relatively small proportion overall, identification as very conservative doubled from three to six percent (Figure 8).

Part of this shift may be explained by ideological differences between generations. In the current political environment, it is often assumed that young adults overwhelmingly identify as liberal. This was not always the case among Jewish

9 "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," Pew Research Center, *https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/*

10 "1997 Los Angeles Jewish Population Survey."

Figure 7.
Political Ideology of Jewish Voters



Angelenos. In the 1997 survey, young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 were the most likely age group to identify as conservative; 30% of these Jewish Gen Xers considered themselves conservative or very conservative. By contrast, the 2019 survey revealed that the youngest age cohort—18-to-29-year-olds—was the most liberal group within the Jewish electorate. Three-quarters of these Gen Zers and Millennials identified as somewhat liberal or very liberal.

For Los Angeles County's Jewish voters, partisan identification and ideology seemed to be linked. Among Democrats, 85% identified as liberal and 14% were moderates; 69% of Republicans identified as conservative while 22% were moderates. Political independents divided relatively evenly between liberal, moderate, and conservative (Figure 9).

Figure 8.

Political Ideology in 2019 and 1997

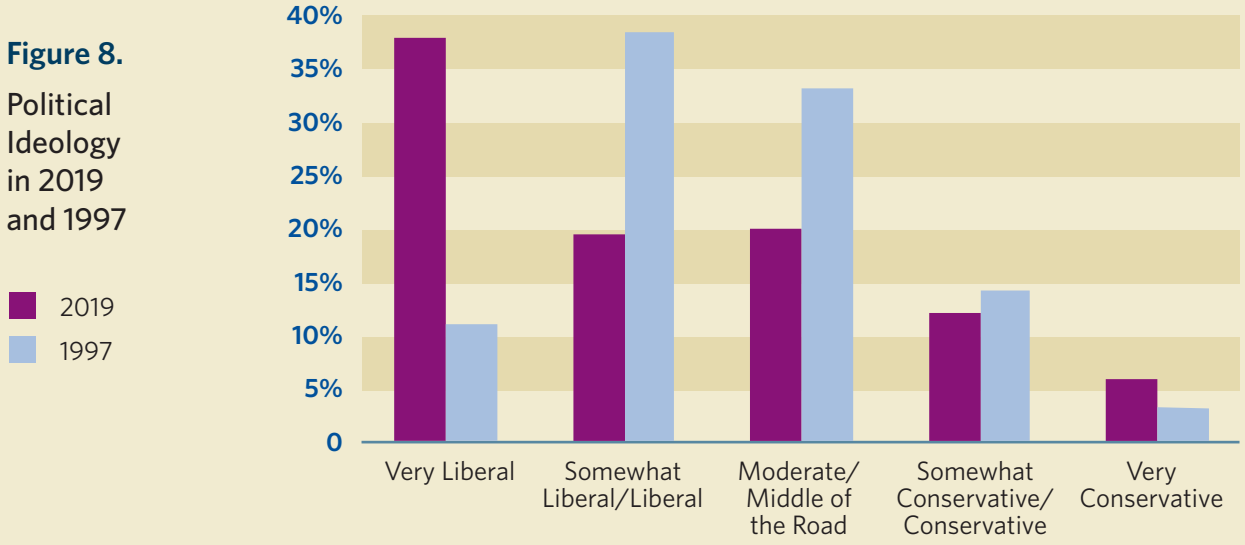
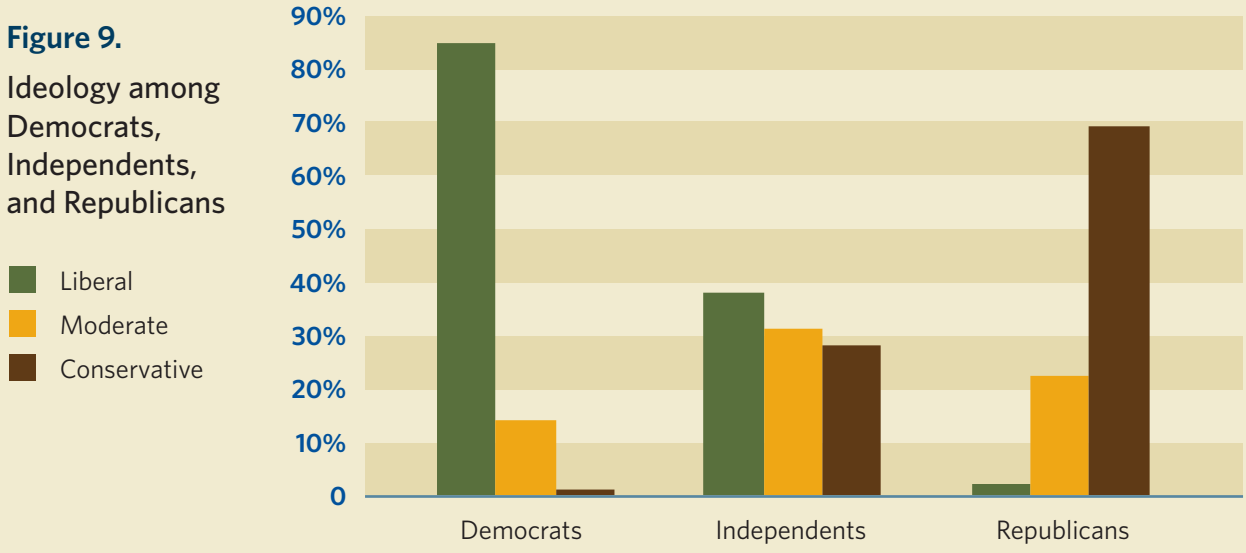


Figure 9.

Ideology among Democrats, Independents, and Republicans



Conversely, 96% of liberals identified as Democrats and 83% of conservatives considered themselves Republicans. Among moderates, 54% identified as Democrats and about a quarter as Republicans.

III. Public Policy Issues

Public policy issues both unify and divide partisans. On economic issues such as taxation and healthcare, Democrats and Republicans generally headed to their ideological corners. Among Democrats, 83% stated that they would rather pay higher taxes with more government services. A comparable percentage of Republicans (89%) preferred the opposite: to pay lower taxes and have fewer government services (Figure 10). On the Affordable Care Act, there were also strong partisan divides. Among Democrats, 92% held a favorable view toward Obamacare while 80% of Republicans were unfavorable to the ACA (Figure 11).

The influence of partisanship was less apparent when examining social issues, at least among Republican Jewish voters. On gun control, nearly 45% of Republicans supported restrictions on

Figure 10.
Partisan Views on Taxes

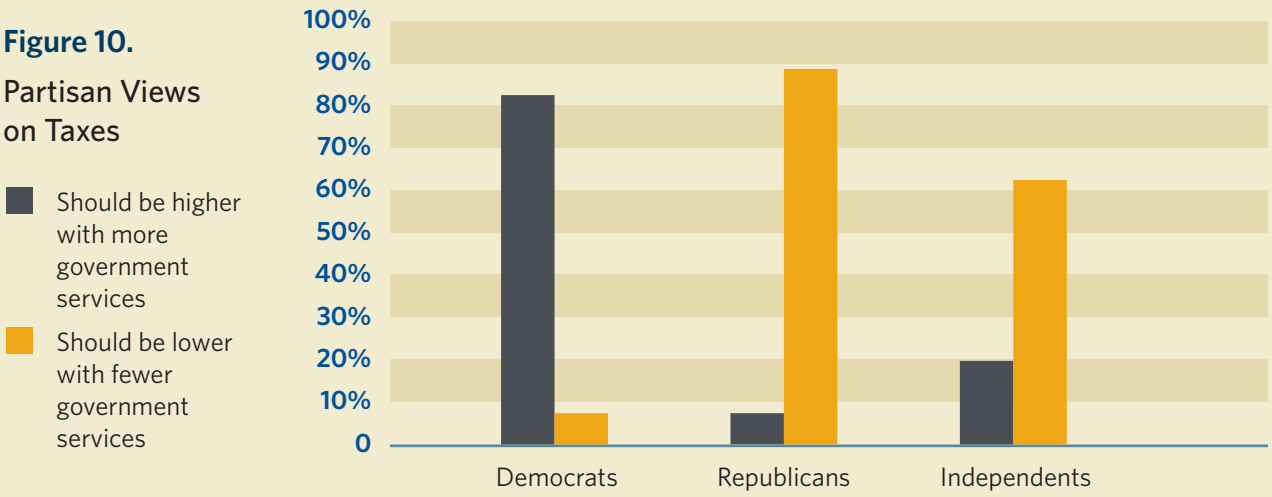


Figure 11.
Partisan Views on the Affordable Care Act

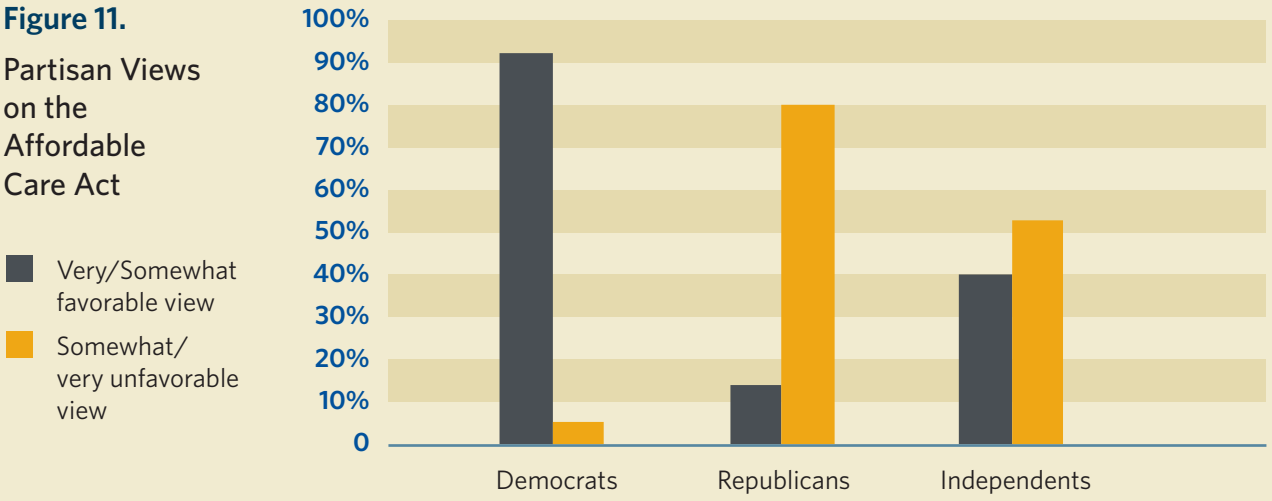


Figure 12.

Partisan Views on Gun Control

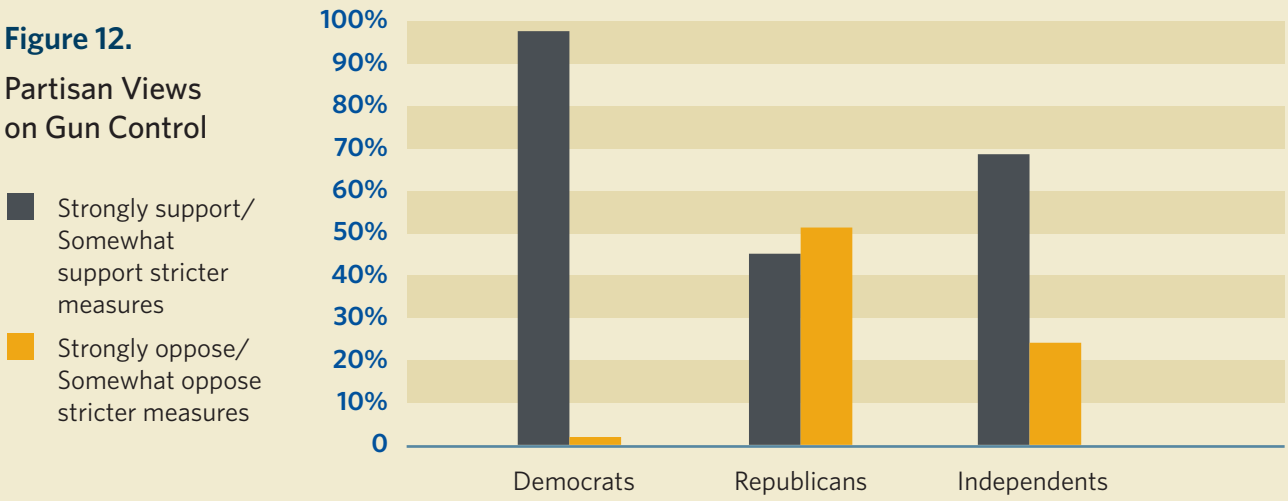


Figure 13.

Partisan Views on Same-Sex Marriage

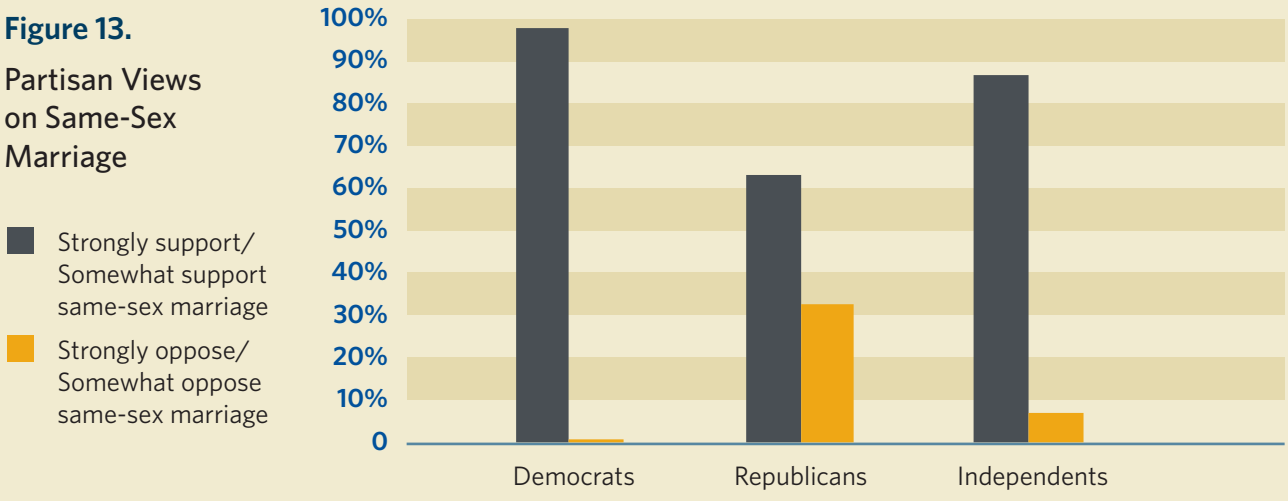
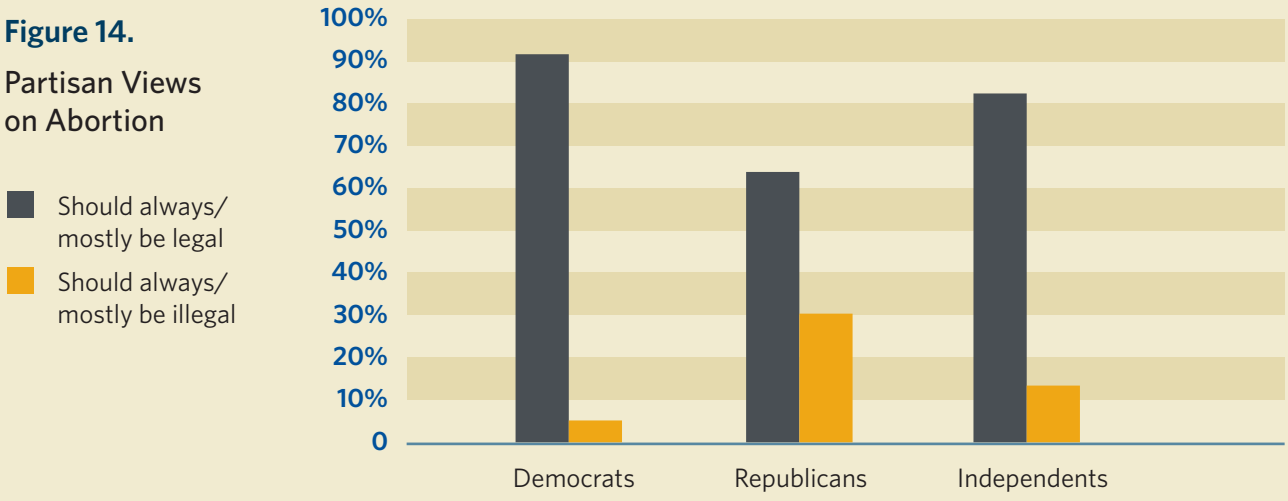


Figure 14.

Partisan Views on Abortion



gun ownership while 51% were opposed (Figure 12). While 33% of Republicans opposed same-sex marriage, nearly 63% supported it (Figure 13). On the issue of abortion, Republicans were also divided. A majority of Jewish Republicans, 54%, said that abortion should be legal, whereas 31% said it should be illegal (Figure 14).

On these same social issues, Jewish Democrats were considerably more united. On same-sex marriage, 98% stated that same-sex couples should be able to legally marry. In addition, 92% of Jewish Democrats stated that abortion should be legal, and 98% supported stricter measures on guns.

On Israel, by contrast, Jewish Republicans appeared relatively united in support of the Israeli government's policies while there were differences among Jewish Democrats. The PBI survey asked its respondents if they were (a) *"Generally pro-Israel and supportive of the current's government's policies,"* (b) *"Generally pro-Israel, but also critical of some of the current government's policies,"* (c) *"Generally pro-Israel but also critical of many of the current government's policies,"* or (d) *"Generally not pro-Israel."*

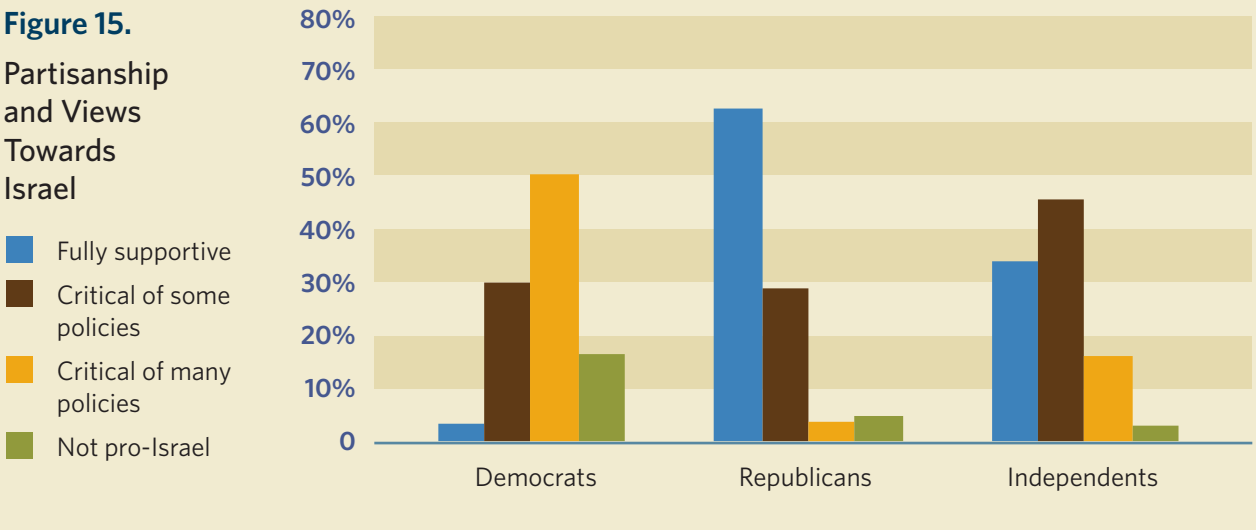
Ninety-one percent of Jewish Republicans selected answers a or b, with a clear majority, 62%, considering themselves fully supportive. While Democrats were generally pro-Israel,—a combination of a, b, and c—about half were critical of many policies and about 29% considered themselves critical of some policies. Sixteen percent of those who identified with the Democratic Party were generally not pro-Israel (Figure 15).

IV. Conclusions

The Pat Brown Institute survey found that heading into the 2020 presidential election, a clear majority of Los Angeles County's Jewish voters identified as Democrats. Jewish Democrats also demonstrated a noticeably stronger attachment to partisanship than Jewish Republicans. Not

Figure 15.

Partisanship and Views Towards Israel



only did a plurality of Los Angeles County's Jewish voters identify as very liberal, but this percentage seems to have grown over the past two decades.

Political divisions between demographic and Jewish denominational groups were also evident. Women, 18–29 year olds, Reform or Reconstructionist, and third-generation or more overwhelmingly identified as Democrats. Men, 50–59 year olds, Orthodox, and those born outside the United States or to immigrant parents were more likely than other Jewish voters to identify with the Republican Party.

Both Democrats and Republicans demonstrated unity on economic issues. Democrats, however, displayed more cohesion than their Republican counterparts on social issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun control. In the context of these salient issues, Jewish Republicans often deviated from the Republican mainstream. Nevertheless, there were differences among Jewish Democrats on support for policies of the Israeli government. These illuminate specific ways in which the two major political parties can appeal more effectively to certain segments of the Jewish electorate.

Acknowledgments

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About the Pat Brown Institute at Cal State LA

The Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State LA is a nonpartisan, presidentially chartered institute dedicated to the quest for social justice and equity, enlightened civic engagement, and an enhanced quality of life for all Californians. Former California Governor Pat Brown brought the Institute to Cal State LA in 1987. Today the Institute seeks to sustain his vision and legacy through its current programs, including the Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) Initiative, Civic U©, polling, candidate debates, and community-based research.



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