

JEWISH AMERICAN VOTING BEHAVIOR 1972-2008: JUST THE FACTS

**Mark S. Mellman
Aaron Strauss, Ph.D.
Kenneth D. Wald, Ph.D.**

July 2012



KEY FINDINGS

This extensive analysis of exit poll data yields several key conclusions about the voting behavior of American Jews:

- **Jewish presidential voting can be divided into two distinct eras.** In the first period, from 1972 through 1988, Republican candidates for president attracted between 31% and 37% of the Jewish vote. In the second period, from 1992 through 2008, the GOP share of the Jewish vote dropped to between 15% and 23%.¹ To smooth out the impact of occasional third-party candidates, we re-compute the vote as a percentage of the two-party vote (considering the vote for just the two major parties). Employing this measure, the GOP captured 31%-46% from 1972 to 1988, but only 16%-24% from 1992 to 2008 (see Table 2 and Graph A).
- **In 2008, Barack Obama captured 74% of the total Jewish vote, which translates into 76% of the two-party vote.** These figures are somewhat lower than the 78% of the total vote that was reported in the days after the 2008 election based on a much smaller sample of Jewish voters contained in the national sample exit poll sample alone (see below for discussion).
- **Jewish voters remain much more Democratic than the rest of the electorate.** Since 1984, Jewish support for Democratic candidates has been 21-34 points higher than the support from the national electorate. Similarly, the Jewish percentage of the two-party vote has been 22-32 points more Democratic than the national electorate (see Graph B).
- **Jews have given even higher levels of support to Democratic congressional candidates — ranging from 71% to 80% of the two-party vote between 1976 and 2000 and from 71% to 88% since 2002.**
- **A majority of Jewish voters identify themselves as Democrats, and these numbers have proved remarkably stable over time.** In 2008, 57% of Jewish voters labeled themselves Democrats, and 13% identified as Republicans. Since 1976, between 54% and 64% of American Jews have identified as Democrats while 8%-20% identified as Republicans (see Table 4 and Graph K).
- **A large plurality of Jewish voters identifies as liberals, and these numbers too have been relatively stable over time.** In 2008, 45% of Jewish voters called themselves liberals compared to 12% who labeled themselves conservatives. Between 1976 and 2008, 36%-46% of Jewish voters identified themselves as liberals and 10%-21% identified as conservatives (see Table 5).

INTRODUCTION

American Jews number about 5.5-6.5 million,² making up less than 2% of the U.S. population — certainly not one of the biggest voting blocs in the American electorate. Yet, since the middle of the twentieth century, American Jews have played an outsized role in all aspects of modern American politics. For this and other reasons, commentators seem fascinated by the Jewish vote, devoting inordinate attention to the way in which the community has cast its ballots in presidential elections.

Since the 1920s, the Jewish electorate has voted overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates in presidential, congressional, state and most local elections.³ Thus, with Republicans regularly predicting a change in the community's behavior and some right-wing intellectuals urging it, journalists naturally speculate about whether American Jews are beginning to switch their allegiance to the Republican Party. In earlier decades, analysts wondered whether Jews would follow other ethnic groups in becoming more Republican as they became more assimilated into the broader culture and moved into higher income categories.⁴ In the first decade of the twenty-first century, as Republicans argued they were more supportive of the policies of certain Israeli governments than the Democrats, journalists speculated about Jewish voters' shifting their party allegiance.

Beyond the broad questions concerning the loyalty of Jews to the Democratic Party, several other specific issues are frequently debated. One revolves around whether younger Jewish voters are voting differently than their elders. Another element of the discussion focuses on the voting behavior of more religiously active Jews who, if they were following the broader trends in society, would be increasingly Republican. And, of course, there is always the question of whether Jews in different regions of the country have different voting patterns.

Unfortunately, the talk about Jewish electoral behavior often outpaces the data. The lack of data is largely a function of size: Because American Jews are such a small percentage of the electorate, most polls of the entire electorate sample too few Jewish voters to support strong generalizations about their political behavior.⁵ In recent years some organizations have conducted polls of the Jewish electorate alone.⁶ However, the most commonly referenced data on Jewish voting comes from the national exit polls that have been conducted by various sponsors since the 1972 presidential cycle. Because they are designed to forecast elections with a high degree of accuracy, these exit polls typically interview much larger samples than traditional polls and one can be quite sure that respondents interviewed on Election Day at their voting station have in fact voted.

With this backdrop in mind, the nonpartisan Solomon Project decided to undertake a unique, in-depth examination of the Jewish vote by accessing heretofore-unexamined data from exit polls conducted over the 36-year span from 1972 to 2008. This study also represents the first detailed examination of the 2008 presidential vote in the Jewish community, as well as the first study of trends in Jewish voting over nearly four decades.⁷

This paper also goes well beyond an examination of the results from the small Jewish “national survey” samples that are typically released within days of the presidential election. Exit poll results are actually fashioned from two different sets of surveys. One is a national survey that provides the basis for the estimate of Jewish support for each candidate and that is most often cited by the media and others. The second set of surveys is the statewide polling, designed to project winners at the state level, which includes Jews in proportion to each state's electorate. Combining these two sets of data yields much larger Jewish sample sizes. Moreover, in some years multiple exit polls were conducted; when available, these data sets were merged (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Jewish Sample Size and Exit Poll Sources, 1972-2008

Year	Jewish sample size	Organization(s) carrying out exit poll surveys
1972	641	CBS
1976	444	CBS
1978	708	CBS, L.A. Times (LAT)
1980	1,274	CBS, ABC
1982	2,980	CBS, ABC
1984	1,599	CBS, ABC
1986	1,888	CBS, Washington Post
1988	3,114	CBS, ABC, LAT
1990	2,566	CBS, VRS
1992	1,768	LAT, VRS
1994	8,78	Voter News Service (VNS)
1996	1,094	VNS
1998	708	VNS
2000	1,800	VNS
2002	412	VNS, LAT
2004	1,511	National Election Pool (NEP)
2006	1,020	NEP
2008	952	NEP

These rich data enable us to probe the voting preferences of Jewish Americans more deeply. These data also include Jewish partisan preferences for Congress (for the years 1972, 1976 and every two years thereafter through 2008), Jewish party identification and Jewish ideological self-identification. In addition, we have been able to examine these attitudes within different demographic segments of Jewish electorate including gender, age, education levels, income levels, marital status, geography and synagogue attendance. (Unfortunately, the exit pollsters did not ask religious affiliation of most respondents in 2010, rendering the Jewish subsample too small for meaningful analysis.)

THE JEWISH VOTE IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (1972-2008)

The combined national and state data (properly weighted and merged), which expands the sample size for Jews in the exit polls, indicates that President Obama won 74% of the Jewish vote in 2008 — down 3 points from John Kerry's 2004 total (see Table 2).

Putting 2008 in historical perspective reveals two distinct 16-year periods. During the first, 1972-1988, Jewish support for Democratic presidential candidates varied between 44% and 68%. (Absent the aberrational 1980 results, which will be discussed below, the range was a much narrower 64-68%.) During the same period, the comparable GOP percentage fluctuated 31%-37%. However, in the second period, beginning in 1992 and continuing at least to 2008, the Democratic vote rose to a meaningfully higher level, varying 74%-79%, while the GOP percentage moved lower, ranging from 15% to 23%.

TABLE 2

Presidential Vote Among Jews, 1972-2008

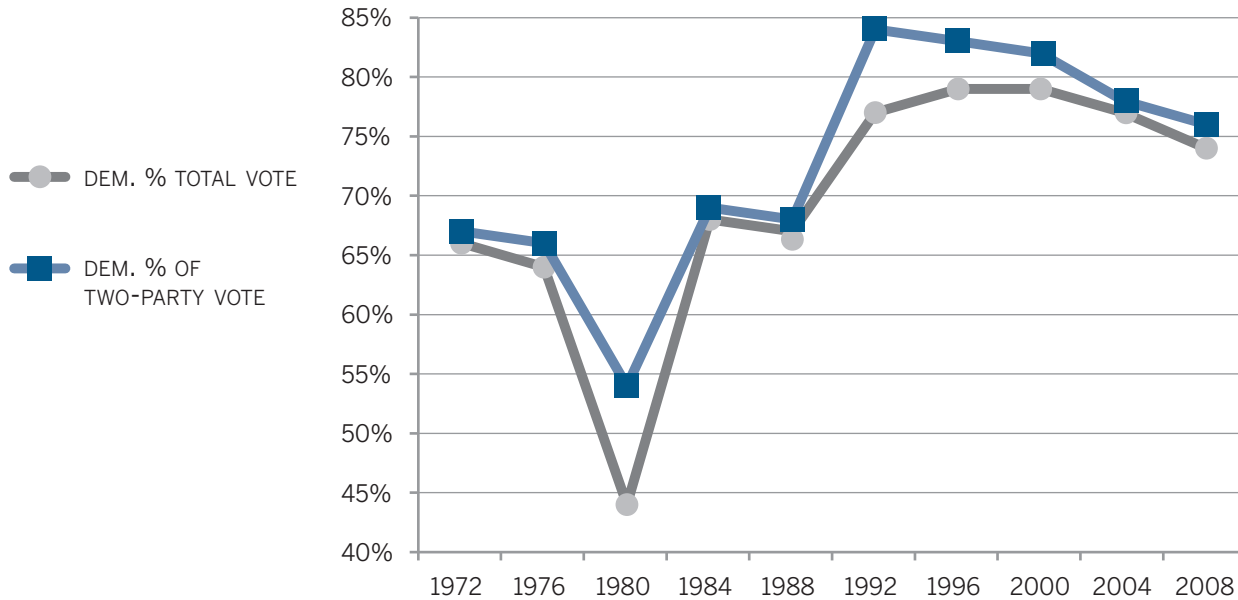
	Democratic % of Total Vote	Republican % of Total Vote	Democratic % of Two-Party Vote	Republican % of Two-Party Vote
1972	66%	32%	67%	33%
1976	64%	33%	66%	34%
1980	44%	37%	54%	46%
1984	68%	31%	69%	31%
1988	67%	32%	68%	32%
1992	77%	15%	84%	16%
1996	79%	15%	83%	17%
2000	79%	17%	82%	18%
2004	77%	21%	78%	22%
2008	74%	23%	76%	24%

In 1980 (Anderson), 1992 (Perot) and 1996 (Perot), significant third-party candidates garnered votes from the Jewish community. Therefore, the Democratic percentage of the two-party (total Democrat plus Republican) vote is a more useful measure of year-to-year changes. In the period 1972-1988, the Democratic percentage of the two-party vote varied between 54% (1980) and 69% (1984). Again, excluding 1980, the range was a much tighter 66% to 69%. In the five presidential cycles from 1992 to 2008, the Democratic vote varied between 76% (2008) and 84% of the two-party vote. President Obama garnered 76% of the two-party vote.⁸

Graph A illustrates these two eras of Jewish voting. In the earlier period (1972-1988), Democrats received about two-thirds of the two-party Jewish vote. In the more recent period, Democratic presidential candidates picked up more than three-quarters of the community's vote. The highest Democratic percentage of the earlier era, the 69% of the two-party vote Walter Mondale received in 1984, was significantly lower than the lowest Democratic percentage (Obama's 76% of the vote) of the most recent era.

● GRAPH A

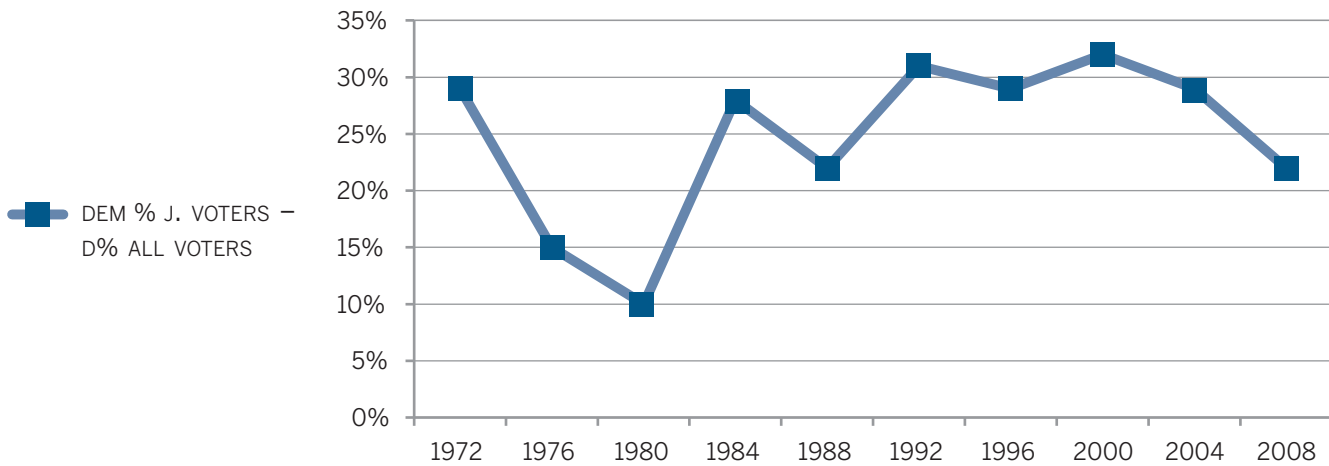
Democratic Percentage of the Jewish Total Vote & Two-Party Vote for President, 1972-2008



Another way to assess the fortunes of Democratic and Republican presidential nominees among Jewish voters is to compare the percentage of Jews voting for Democrats to the percentage of all voters casting their ballots for Democrats. If the Democratic vote drops nationally by 10%, one might expect the Jewish Democratic vote to fall in similar proportion. However, because the Jewish vote for Democrats is so high and hits what is called a “ceiling effect,” national *increases* in the Democratic vote do not typically translate into a higher Jewish vote. Indeed, the gap between Jews and other voters shrinks as the latter become more Democratic. Graph B plots the Democratic percentage of the two-party Jewish vote minus the Democratic percentage of the national two-party vote.

GRAPH B

Jewish Democratic Percentage Minus Total Democratic Percentage, 1972-2008



The gap between Jewish voters and all voters reached a peak in 2000, when Senator Joe Lieberman became the first Jew on a major party ticket, and has declined a bit in each of the two cycles since.

In eight of the ten presidential cycles between 1972 and 2008 the Democratic presidential nominee ran between 22 and 32 points better among Jewish American voters than he did among all American voters. The two exceptions were the two cycles in which Jimmy Carter was the Democratic nominee, though even in those years, Carter did better among Jews than among the electorate over-all.

The exit poll data do not provide clear-cut reasons for these voting patterns. Perhaps foreshadowing the greater problems Republicans would have with the Jewish community in 1992 and thereafter, Jimmy Carter, the nominee in the two aberrational years, was an openly evangelical candidate of the kind that has put off Jews. Carter publicly emphasized his religiosity in ways previous Democratic candidates had not. A number of studies have concluded that in the mind of American Jews, public evangelical commitments on the part of political candidates threaten the sense of pluralism that Jews believe has allowed them to succeed in this country.

There are a number of possible explanations for Jews' increased support for Democratic presidential candidates since 1992. President George H.W. Bush's contentious relationship with the Shamir government was surely a negative, but the trend persisted well beyond his tenure. Perhaps most important, the GOP became more strongly influenced by the religious right during the early 1990s. Indeed, in the 1992 election, evangelical Protestants solidified their Republican proclivities, becoming the core voting bloc in the GOP coalition, while mainline Protestants, traditionally a key Republican constituency, abandoned President Bush in large numbers, moving to Bill Clinton and Ross Perot. More important, Republican candidates at all levels increasingly aligned themselves with the evangelical community, as well as with its social and religious agenda, one that the Jewish community perceives as inimical to its domestic interests. Though Republican percentages among Jews have recovered a bit since 1992, they have never reached their pre-1992 levels.

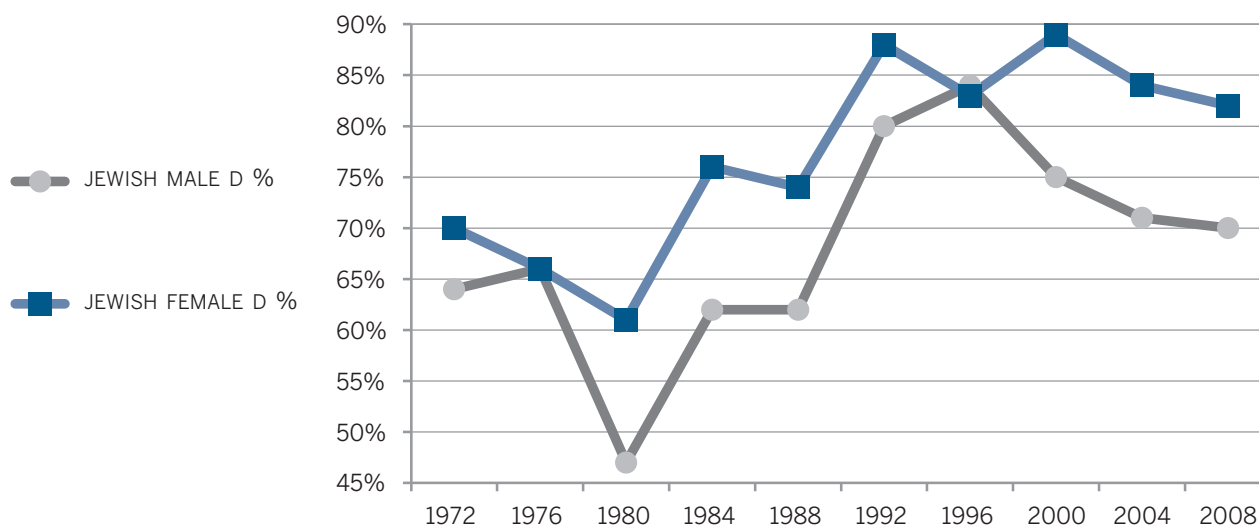
JEWISH PRESIDENTIAL VOTING AND DEMOGRAPHICS (1972-2008)¹

GENDER

The gender gap that characterizes the entire American electorate (women being more Democratic than men) is also evident in the Jewish community. In 2008, Jewish females were eight points more likely to vote for Obama than Jewish males. In fact, in eight of ten presidential elections since 1972, Jewish women were significantly more likely to vote Democratic than Jewish men (see Graph C).

GRAPH C

Democratic Percentage of Male and Female Jewish Voters, 1972-2008



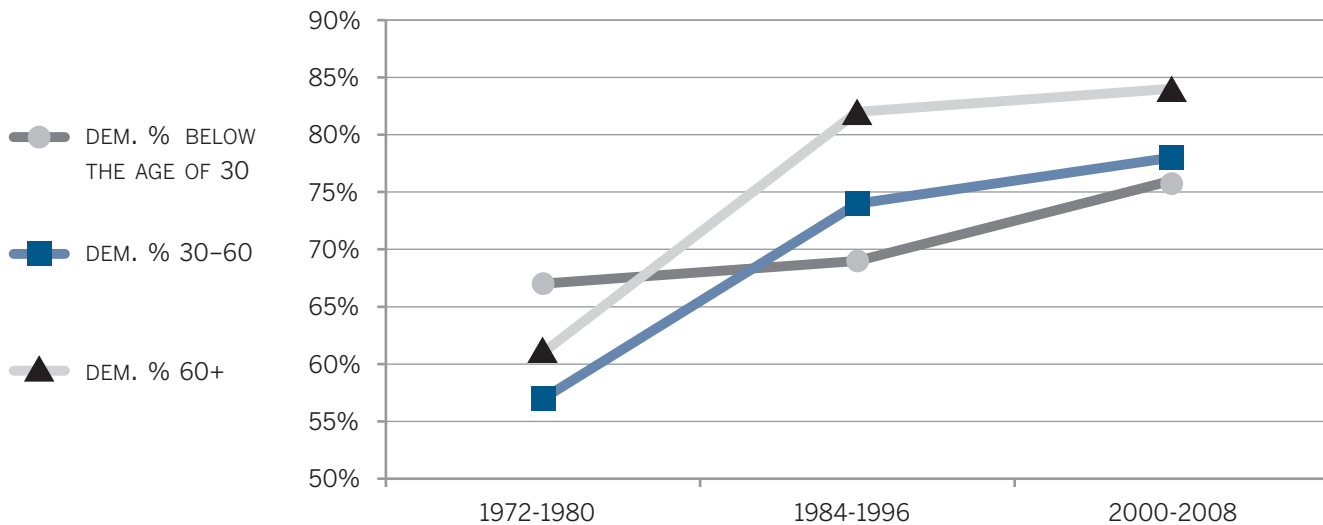
1 Because in this section the sample size (N) of many subsamples is small we have marked on each graph, any year where the sample size for two or more variables is less than 150 with an asterisk (*). We have marked those years where two or more variables have an N of 50 or less with two asterisks (**). See methodology for an explanation of the problems with small sample sizes.

AGE

In 2004, 2006 and 2008, younger voters nationally supported the Democratic candidates at much higher levels than did older voters. In the wake of the 2008 election, pundits speculated that younger voters might play a crucial role in cementing a long-term Democratic majority. In the electorate overall, voters under 30 were 19 points more likely to vote for President Obama than those over 65.

GRAPH D

Democratic Jewish Vote for President by Age Group, 1972-2008



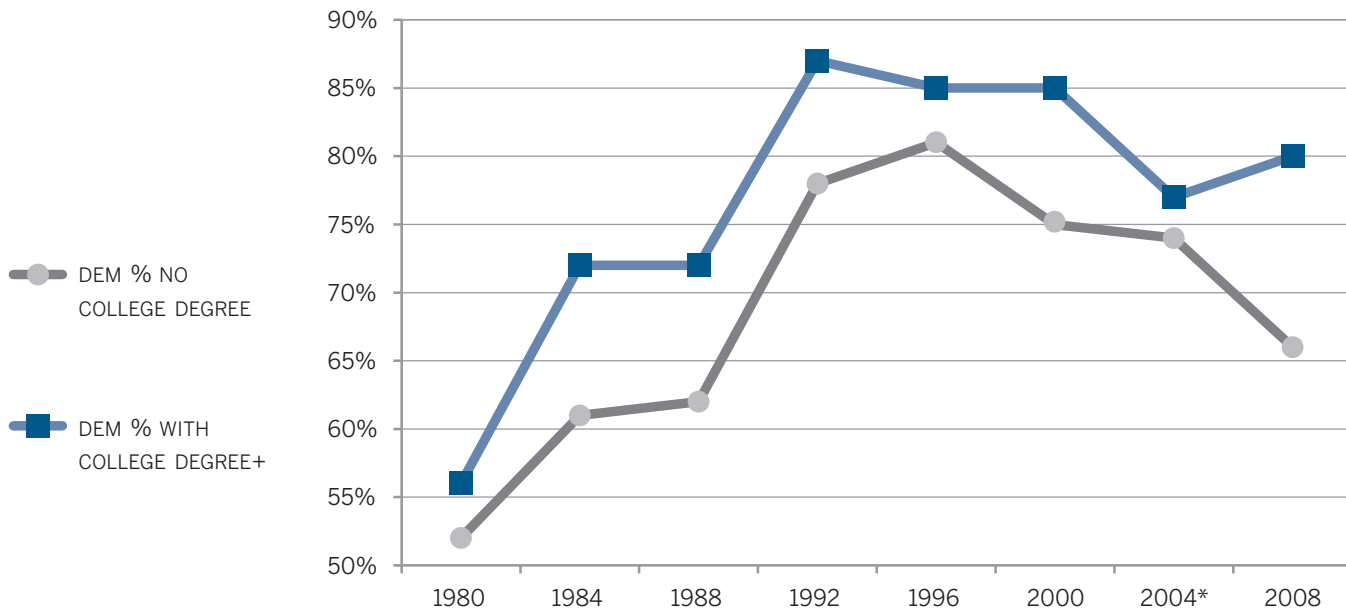
Younger Jewish voters do not appear to have followed the same trend. In fact, not since the 1970s has the youngest cohort of Jewish voters been the most Democratic. Small sample sizes make it impossible to examine individual presidential elections with statistical certainty, but combining the data from successive presidential elections shows that voters older than the age of 60 have been the most likely to vote Democratic from 1984 through to the present. Even in the combined data that includes 2008 election, voters under 30 were the least likely to vote Democratic. Jewish voters under 30 have become more Democratic over time, but their voting patterns did not undergo the same sea change as voters over 30 and Democratic performance has yet to catch up to voters in older groups.

EDUCATION

Since 1980, exit polls have measured educational levels among Jewish voters and in each of those election cycles the more highly educated cohort has voted more Democratic (Graph E).

● GRAPH E

Democratic Percentage of Jewish Voters with Less Than a College Degree vs. Democratic Percentage of Jewish Voters with a College Degree or More, 1980-2008



In 2008, this gap was particularly wide — 14 points. By this measure, the Jewish electorate followed the larger electorate in 2008 with Obama doing better among highly educated voters.

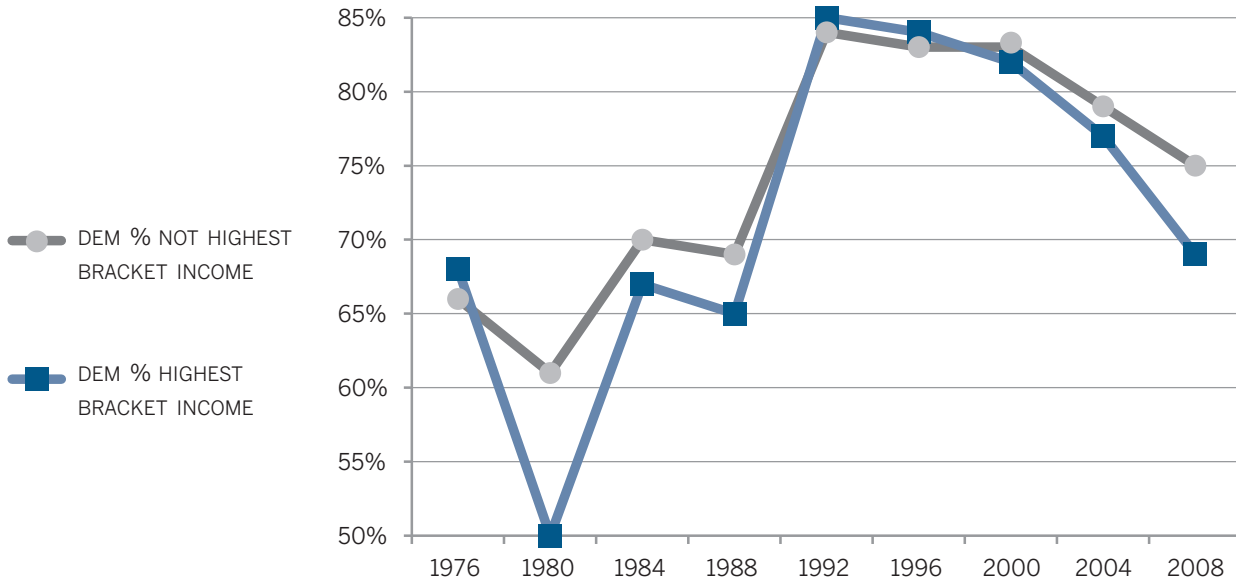
Jews may be the most highly educated ethnic/religious group in the electorate and the exit polls suggest Jewish voters have become more educated over the past 28 years. In 1980, there were more Jews without a college degree than with one. By 2008, only 25% did not have a college degree while 75% had at least a college degree.

INCOME

Every year exit pollsters ask respondents to report their incomes, though the categories used change regularly, making it difficult to chart changes in support by income. To circumvent this problem, we compared the percentage of Jews voting Democratic in the highest income bracket used in each exit poll to the percentage of Jews voting Democratic in all the other income brackets combined (Graph F).

GRAPH F

*Democratic Percentage Highest Bracket vs.
Democratic Percentage All Other Brackets, 1976-2008*



Very little variation is evident between American Jews in the highest income bracket and all other Jewish Americans. Even the two years in which Graph I suggests the greatest variation (2008 and 1980) do not yield results that are significant at the 95% confidence level.

Because the income categories on the exit polls include wide swaths of both the Jewish and general electorates (e.g. the highest income bracket in the 2008 survey includes 20% of Jews who voted), we cannot make any judgment about the very wealthiest members of the Jewish community, for example the top 1%.

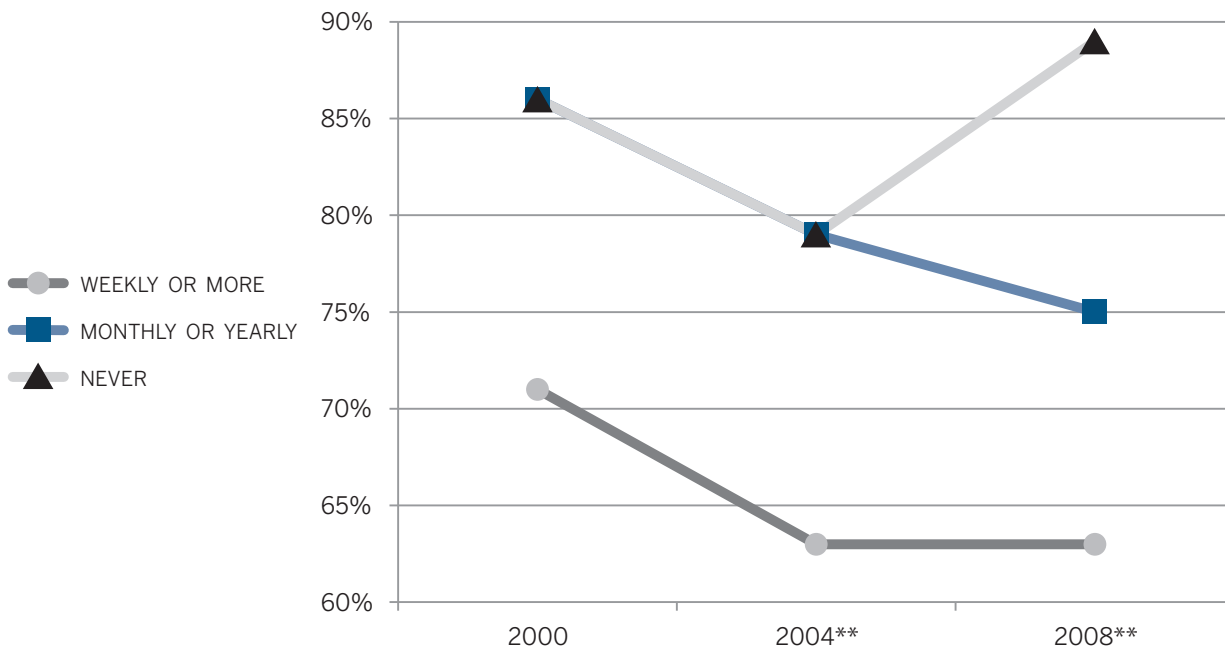
SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

In the past decade or so, political scientists have observed that one of the most powerful predictors of voting Republican among whites is their stated frequency of “church” attendance. Those who report attending more often, and hence are more likely to be religiously observant, are much more likely to vote Republican, while those who are more secular, and rarely find themselves inside a house of worship, back Democrats in overwhelming numbers.

Using synagogue attendance as a proxy, the American Jewish community is one of the most secular segments of the electorate. In 2000, the only year with sufficient sample size for confident analysis, Jews who attended services once a week or more were 15 points less Democratic than Jews who never attend synagogue, as noted in Graph G. Smaller sample sizes in other years increase uncertainty, but the data suggest the basic pattern persists.

● GRAPH G

Democratic Percentage by Synagogue Attendance, 2000-2008



While the exit polls do not ask with which religious stream Jews identify, other surveys do. An American Jewish Committee (AJC) poll in 2004 found Bush taking 60% of the Orthodox vote in August of that year.⁹ The comparable poll in 2008 found McCain carrying 78% of the Orthodox vote in September.¹⁰ However, each of these polls sampled fewer than 100 Orthodox voters, and thus carried sampling errors or more than +/- 10 percentage points. At the same time, the AJC polls showed Reform, Conservative and non-affiliated Jews — by far the largest share of the Jewish community — voting Democratic by margins of greater than 2-1.

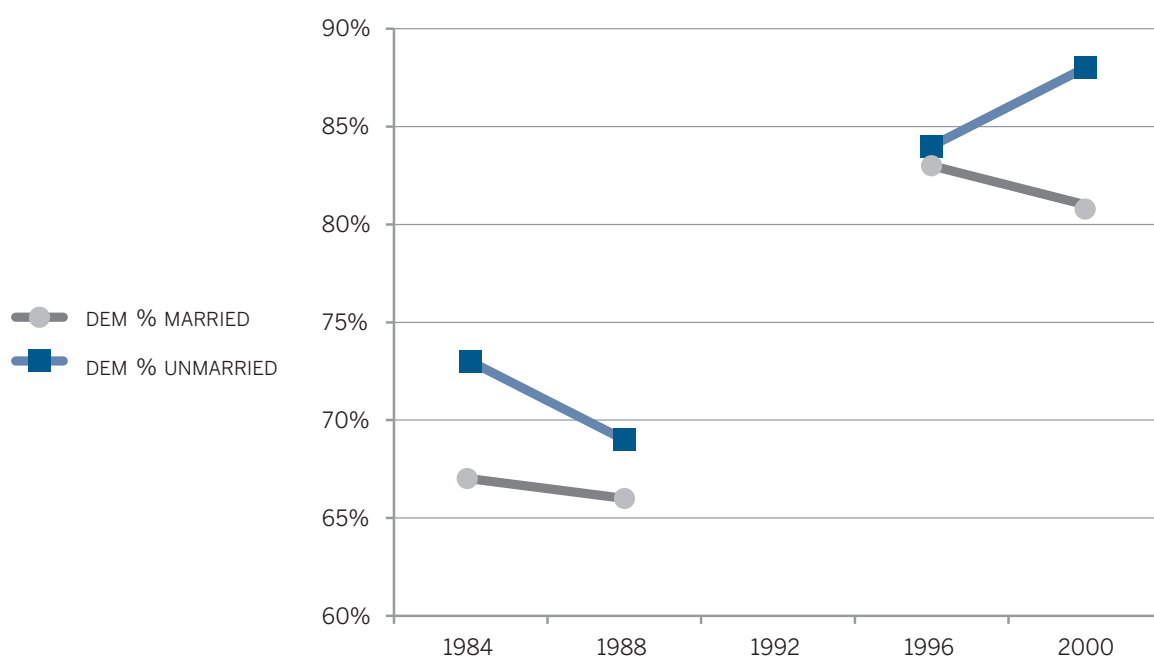
With these small sample sizes we cannot accurately estimate the size of the GOP presidential majorities among Orthodox voters.¹¹ Nonetheless, these results, as well as the synagogue attendance data in the exit polls, strongly suggest that more religiously observant Jews have been giving substantial majorities to the Republican candidate in recent elections, in stark contrast to the large Democratic majorities among other Jews, but very much in concert with the electorate at-large.

MARITAL STATUS

Analysts have long noted a marriage gap in voting behavior with single voters offering much higher levels of support to Democrats than marrieds, who tend to support Republicans. The exit polls yield data on partisan voting based marital status for American Jews in six presidential elections from 1984 to 2008 (Graph H). Unfortunately, 2008, the year in which the difference in marital status is correlated with the greatest difference in partisan choice, is also the year in which the Jewish sample size for marital status was the smallest — only 96 married respondents and 69 unmarried. With such small samples it is difficult to make any generalizations about how marital status affects Jewish voting behavior, though as in the electorate at large, it would appear that single Jews are a bit more Democratic than their married co-religionists.

GRAPH H

Democratic Percentage for Married/Unmarried Jewish Voters, 1984, 1988, 1996, 2000



REGION

Regional voting patterns are quite pronounced in the electorate at large. To examine such differences in Jewish voting behavior, we divided the country into four large regions.

The Northeast includes CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT

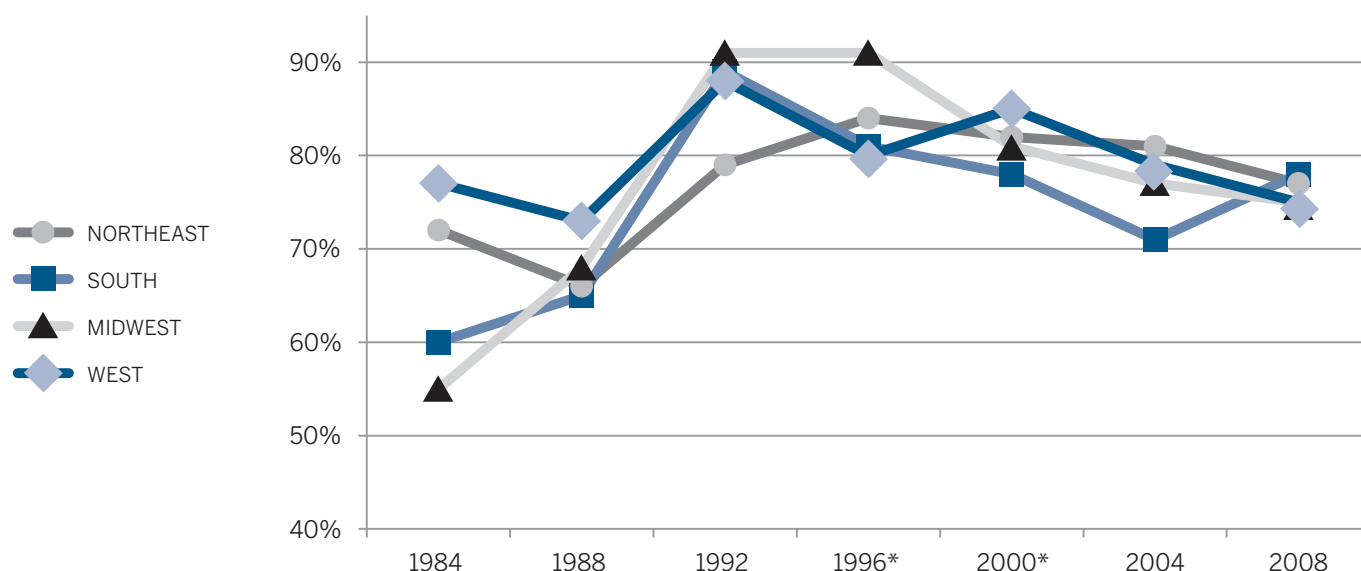
The South includes AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV

The Midwest includes IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, WI, SD

The West includes AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

GRAPH I

Democratic Percentage Jewish Voters by Region, 1984-2008



The exit polls have geographic information associated with Jewish voters as early as 1972. But in 1972 and 1976, there are no Jewish numbers associated with states from the South or the Midwest. Moreover, in the Midwest, the Jewish sample size is small — under 50 in 1980 and 1992 and under 100 in 1996. In the South the 1980, sample size for Jewish voters is also less than 50.

Despite these limitations in the data, there does not appear to be meaningful geographic variance in voting among Jews. There are, of course, vast differences among various Jewish communities of the United States. But other than an apparent regional difference in Jewish voting patterns in 1984, Jews in one section vote quite similarly to Jews in other parts of the country — at least at the presidential level.

THE JEWISH VOTE IN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS (1976-2008)

Since 1976, the exit polls have sometimes asked a so-called “generic” congressional vote question inquiring as to whether respondents voted Democratic or Republican for Congress. Table 3 and Graph J below display the two-party preferences of Jewish Americans in congressional contests, as well as sample sizes for each year.

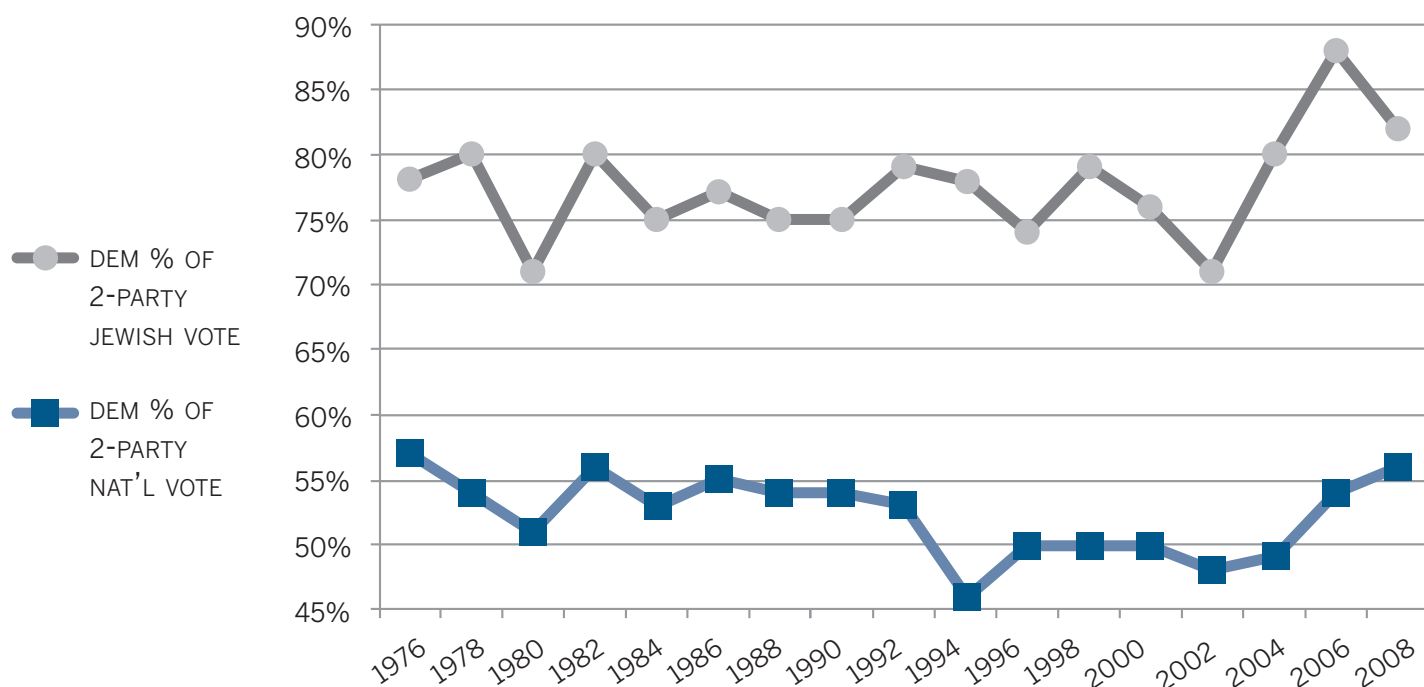
TABLE 3

*Democratic Percentage of Two-Party Vote Among Jewish and All Americans
1976-2008*

Year	Sample Size	Democratic % of 2-Party Jewish Vote	Democratic % of 2-Party National Vote	Difference Between Jewish Voters & National Voters
1976	165	78%	57%	21%
1978	268	80%	54%	26%
1980	271	71%	51%	19%
1982	1,336	80%	56%	24%
1984	831	75%	53%	22%
1986	1,128	77%	55%	22%
1988	165	75%	54%	21%
1990	554	75%	54%	21%
1992	1,176	79%	53%	26%
1994	178	78%	46%	32%
1996	233	74%	50%	24%
1998	148	79%	50%	29%
2000	319	76%	50%	26%
2002	244	71%	48%	24%
2004	236	80%	49%	31%
2006	120	88%	54%	34%
2008	95	82%	56%	26%

● GRAPH J

Democratic Percentage Generic Congressional Vote, 1976-2008



The stability of the generic Jewish Democratic percentage is apparent in the above graph. Beginning in 1976, the vote stayed between 71% and 82% Democratic, jumping to 88% in 2006. Part of the volatility may flow from the small sample sizes in 2006 and 2008.

Interestingly, the congressional data displays a different pattern than the presidential vote. The congressional vote betrays no indication of a consistently lower Jewish Democratic share prior to 1992 or an increase from 1992 on. Rather, despite all the demographic changes in the American Jewish community, Jews appear to have maintained a consistent partisan voting pattern from at least the mid-1970s until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Small sample sizes for 2006 and 2008 data make further generalizations difficult.

JEWISH PARTISAN IDENTIFICATION AND IDEOLOGY (1972-2008)

Since 1972, the exit polls have asked voters about their partisanship; since 1976, a similar question concerning ideological self-identification has been asked of voters leaving polling stations on Election Day. Table 4 highlights Jewish voters' partisanship and Table 5 reports their ideology.

TABLE 4

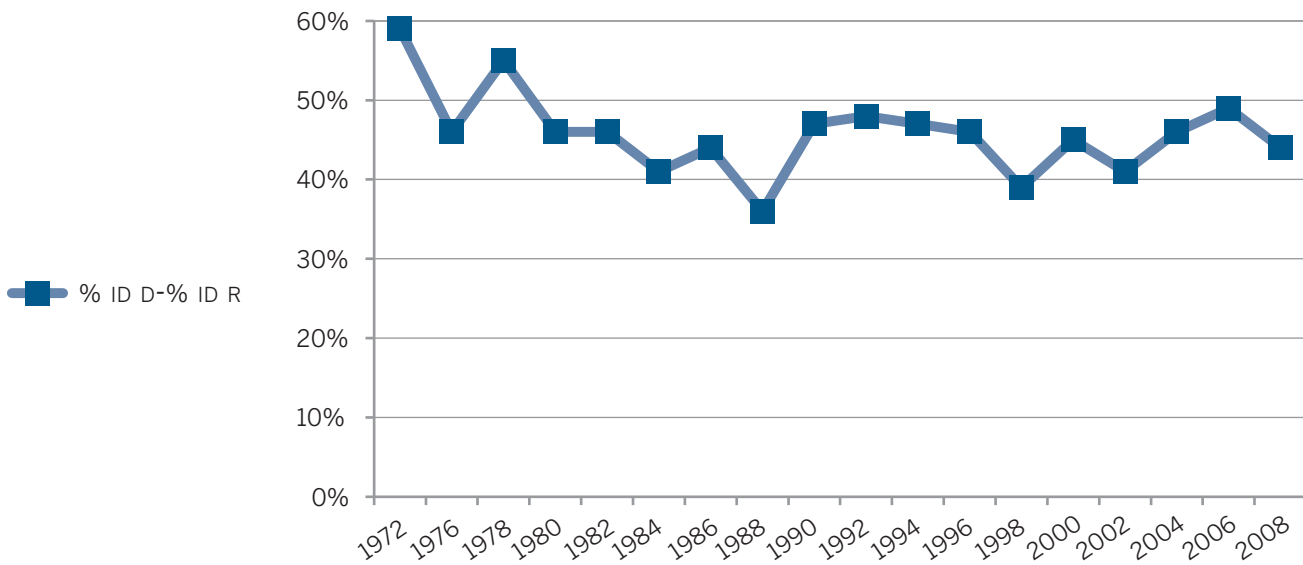
Self-Identified Partisanship Among Jewish Voters, 1972-2008

	Sample Size (N)	% Jewish Voters ID Democrat	% Jewish Voters ID Republican	Difference (ID D % - ID R %)
1972	627	68%	9%	59%
1976	444	54%	8%	46%
1978	691	63%	8%	55%
1980	1274	59%	13%	46%
1982	2928	58%	12%	46%
1984	1591	56%	15%	41%
1986	1865	59%	15%	44%
1988	3048	56%	20%	36%
1990	2544	61%	14%	47%
1992	1748	64%	16%	48%
1994	869	60%	13%	47%
1996	1085	61%	15%	46%
1998	700	55%	16%	39%
2000	1774	59%	14%	45%
2002	264	60%	19%	41%
2004	1506	61%	15%	46%
2006	1004	62%	13%	49%
2008	948	57%	13%	44%

Jews' identification with the Democratic Party slumped in the mid-1970s from a high point of 68% in 1972. From 1980 until now, it has usually remained in the high 50s or low 60s. Republicans have not necessarily benefited from this decline; GOP identification was in the high single digits in the 1970s and rose as high as 20% in 1988, but settled back down into the low teens since the mid-1990s.

GRAPH K

Jewish Percentage Democratic Minus Percentage Republican, 1972-2008



Graph K measures partisanship by subtracting the percentage identifying as Democrats from the percentage calling themselves Republican each year. (Graph K shows the data from the last column in Table 4, above.) In most years, the Democratic Party's advantage among Jews stood at 40 points or better.

Jews are more likely to identify themselves as liberals than almost any group in America. In the early 1970s, approximately 40% of American Jews were liberals, a number that changed little until the last three cycles when slightly larger numbers called themselves liberals — 46%, 46% and 45% identified as liberal in 2004, 2006 and 2008, respectively.

In 1976, 18% of American Jews identified as conservatives. Conservative identification peaked at 21% in 1984 and again in 1988. Starting in 1996 (and except for 2002 where as we have noted we have sample size and weighting problems), no more than 13% of American Jews have identified as conservatives.

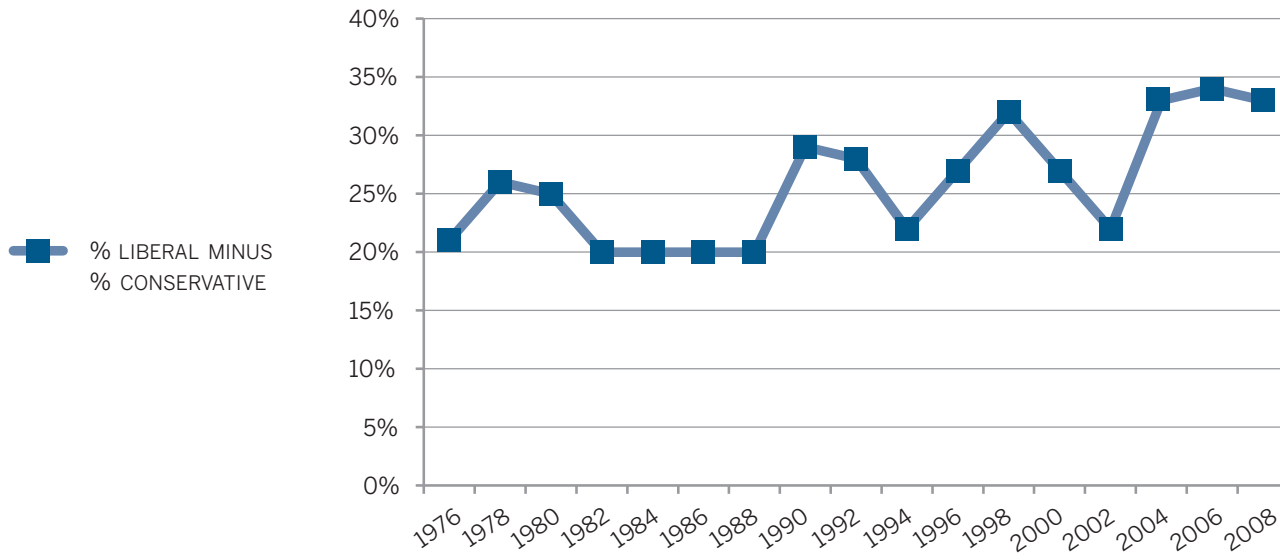
■ TABLE 5

Self-Identified Ideology Among Jewish Voters, 1976-2008

	Sample Size (N)	% Jewish Voters ID liberal	% Jewish Voters ID conservative	Difference (lib. % - cons. %)
1976	444	40%	18%	22%
1978	689	41%	15%	26%
1980	1274	42%	17%	25%
1982	2891	39%	19%	20%
1984	1581	41%	21%	20%
1986	1854	36%	16%	20%
1988	3054	41%	21%	20%
1990	1912	43%	14%	29%
1992	1576	40%	12%	28%
1994	850	41%	19%	22%
1996	1082	41%	13%	28%
1998	697	42%	10%	32%
2000	1752	41%	13%	28%
2002	409	40%	18%	22%
2004	1499	46%	13%	33%
2006	994	46%	11%	35%
2008	939	45%	12%	33%

GRAPH L

Jewish Percentage Liberal Minus Percentage Conservative, 1976-2008



Graph L measures ideology by subtracting percentage conservative from percentage liberal.

None of these data signals any widespread Republican or conservative resurgence in the Jewish electorate. In this regard, partisan and ideological identification tell the same story as the data on Jewish two-party voting at the presidential and congressional levels.

However, there are some important differences. As we have noted, the two-party presidential data naturally breaks down into two periods — a somewhat less Democratic era (1972-1988) and a more Democratic period (1992-2008). By contrast, the congressional two-party vote paints a picture of stability in the Democratic majority until the last three cycles when there appears to be some increase in Jewish support for Democratic House candidates. Yet a third trend appears in partisan identification (percent Democrat minus percent Republican), which fell after the 1970s to a range that indicates that Jews have identified about 35-50% more Democratic than Republican during the past three decades.

Ideology (percent identifying liberal minus percent identifying conservative) almost mirrors the 1980-2008 presidential voting patterns — an earlier period where the community was relatively less liberal and a later period in which it has been relatively more liberal.

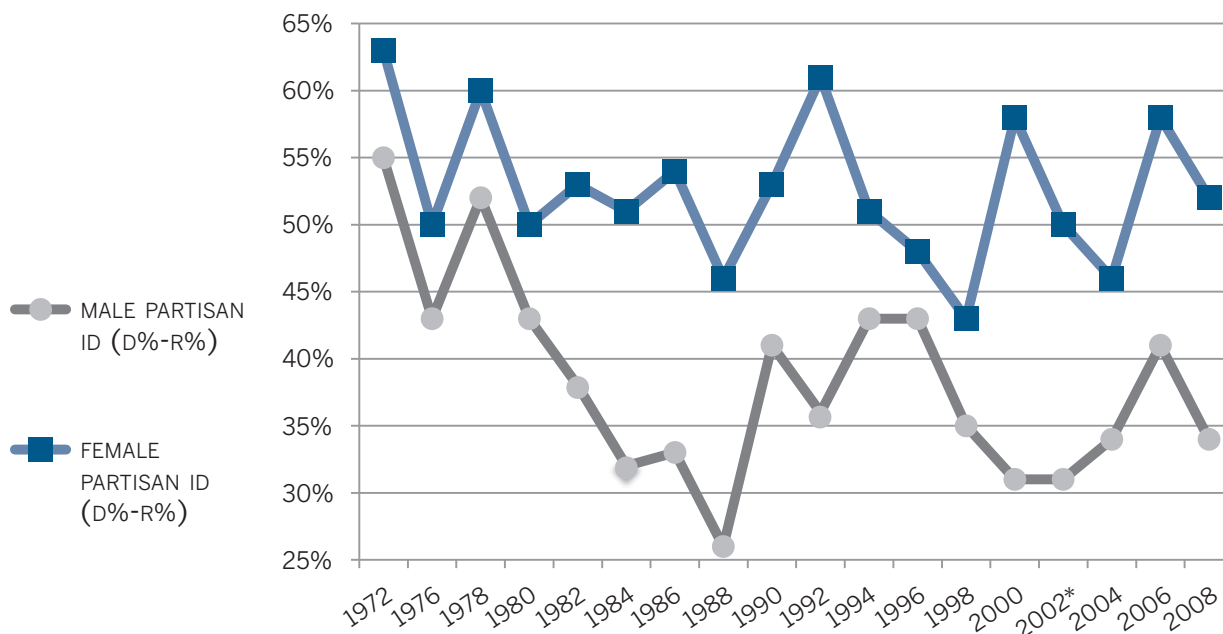
DEMOGRAPHICS OF JEWISH PARTISAN & IDEOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION

GENDER

Since 1972, American Jewish women have been consistently more likely than Jewish men to call themselves Democrats. That gap grew dramatically in the 1980s. In 2008, Jewish women were about 18 points more Democratic than Jewish men. Conversely, Jewish men became much less Democratic from the 1970s to the end of the 1980s,¹² with two periods of increase and decline thereafter. Since 1990, the percentage of Jewish men who identified as Republican subtracted from the percentage who identified as Democrats ranged from a low of 31% (in 2000 and 2002) to a high of 43% (in 1994 and 1996). Though the degree of women's Democratic partisanship diminished in the 1980s, the Democratic advantage over Republicans has ranged from 45% to 61% since 1990.

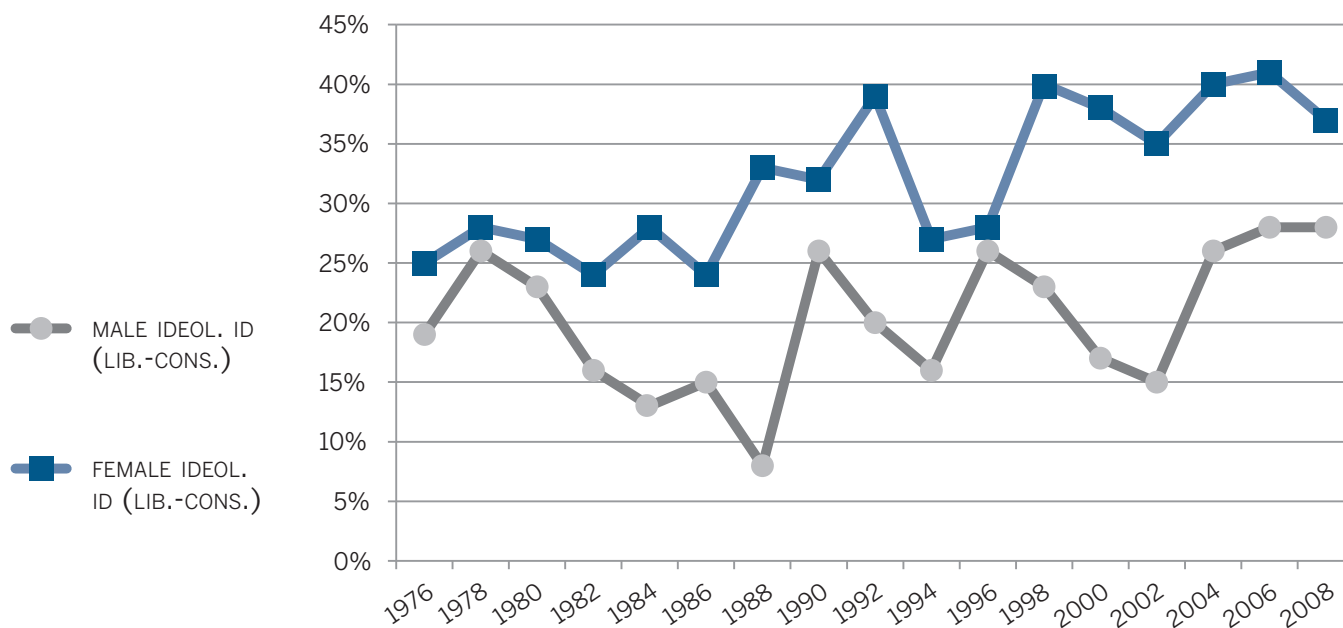
GRAPH M

Jewish Partisan Identification (% Democrats – % Republicans) by Gender, 1972-2008



GRAPH N

Jewish Ideological Identification (% Liberal – % Conservative) by Gender, 1976-2008



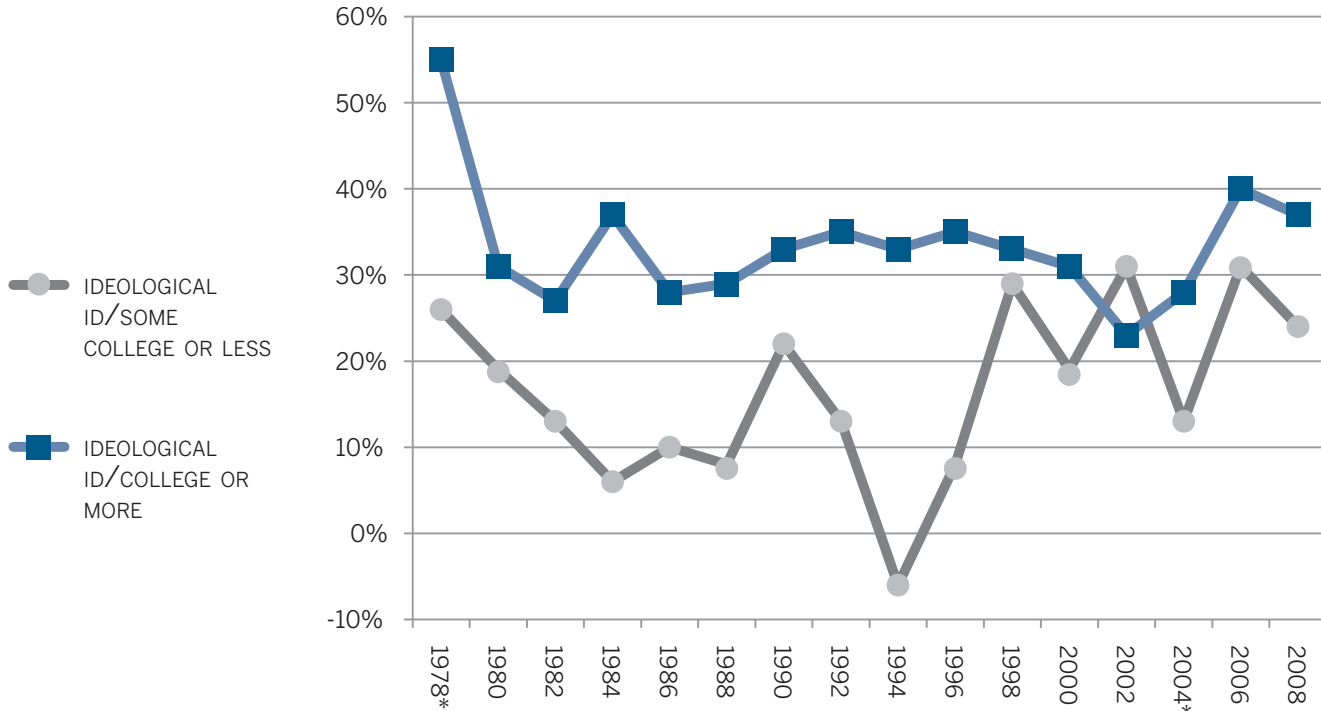
In addition to being more likely to identify as Democrats, Jewish women are also more liberal than Jewish men are. Since 1976, there has been a long-term trend toward the liberalization of Jewish American women — especially since the late 1980s. The liberalism of Jewish men became less pronounced between the mid-1970s and the end of the 1980s. But since that time male Jewish liberalism has grown — to a point where it is equal or greater than it was in the 1970s.

EDUCATION

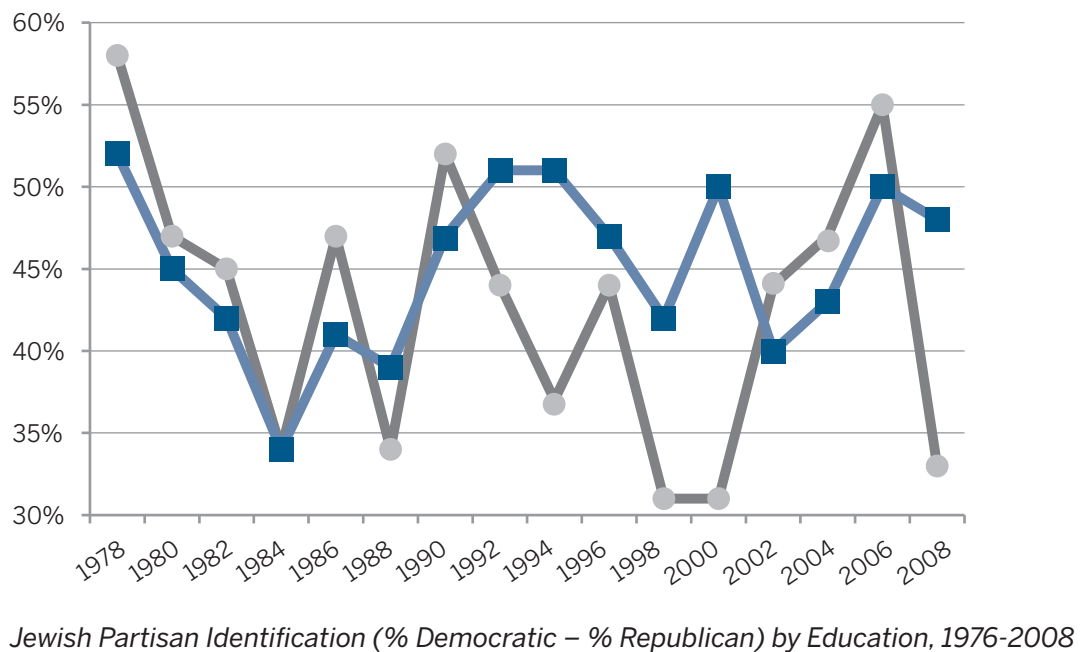
Just as higher levels of education (in this case a college degree or higher) correlate with greater support for the Democratic nominee for president, educational attainment also correlates with liberalism (Graphs O and P).

● GRAPH O

Jewish Ideological Identification (% Liberal – % Conservative) by Education, 1978-2008



● GRAPH P



Jewish Partisan Identification (% Democratic – % Republican) by Education, 1976-2008

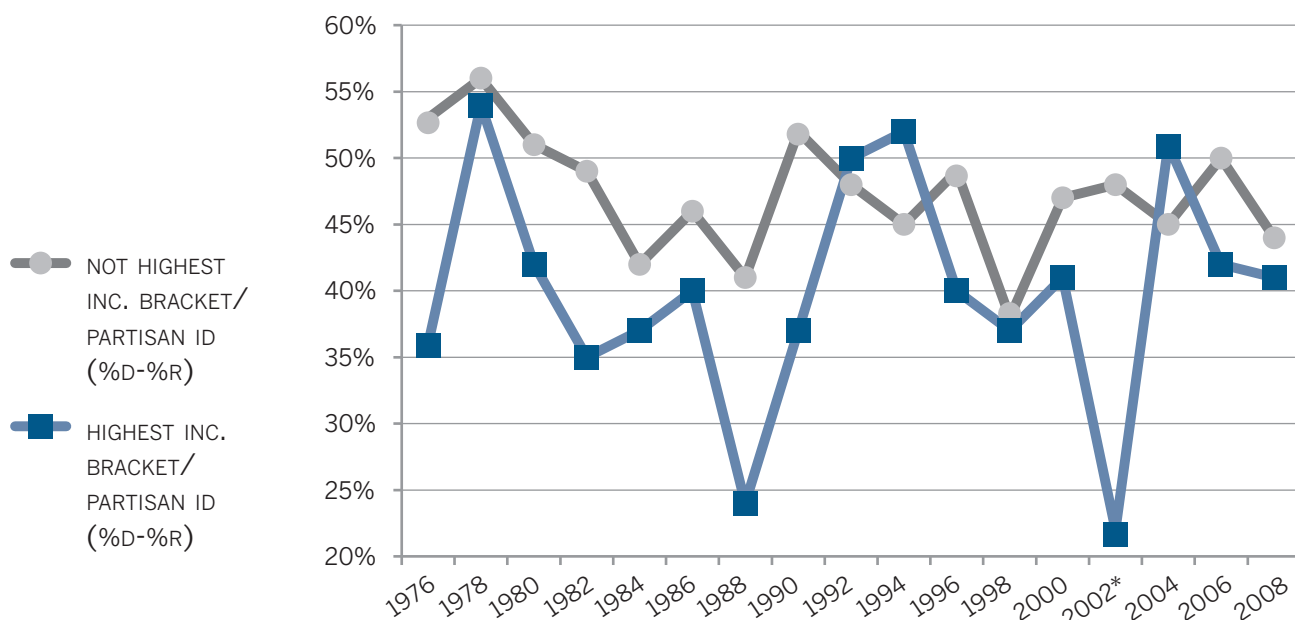
However, the relationship between Democratic identification and higher education levels is far less consistent. In some instances, Jews with college degrees proved more Democratic than those without, while in other years the opposite was the case.

INCOME

In the 17 elections between 1976 and 2008, there were three times (1992, 1994 and 2004) when the voters in the highest income bracket were more likely than other Jews to identify as Democrats. In all other cases, the reverse was true. Thus, there does not seem to be a consistent relationship between income and party identification among Jewish voters — a result similar to that obtained for presidential voting in the community.

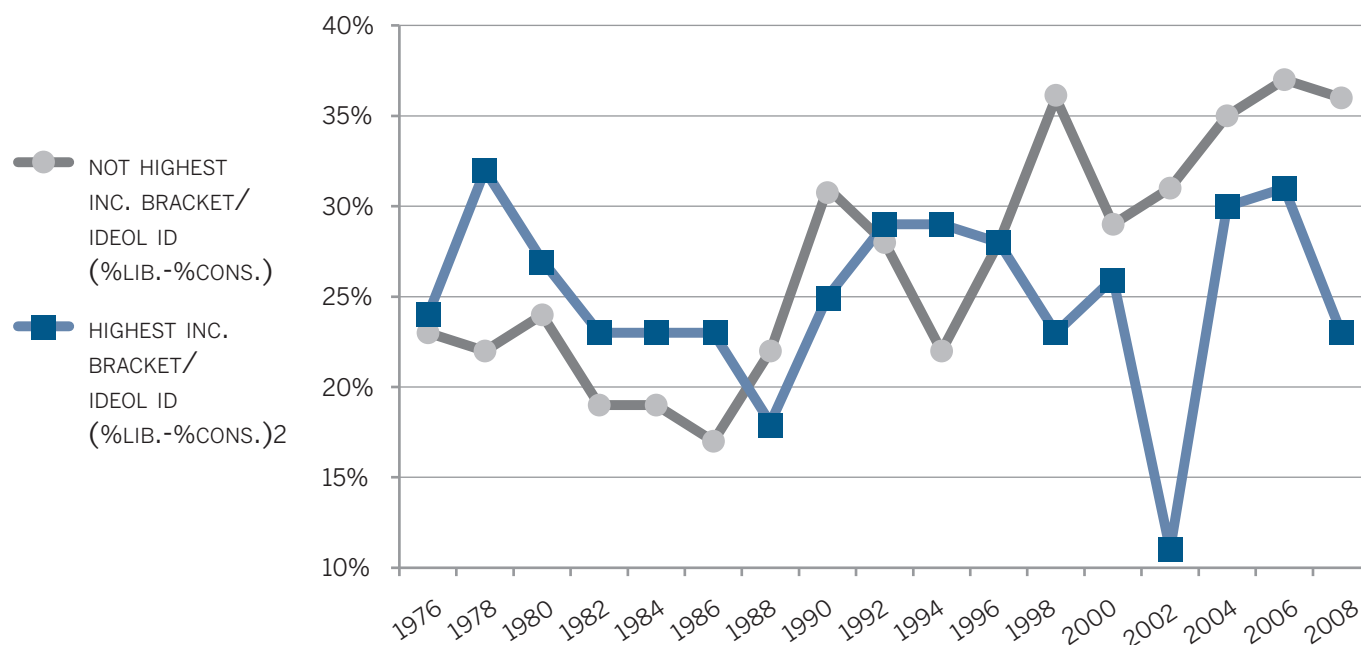
GRAPH Q

Jewish Partisan Identification (% Democratic – % Republican) by Income, 1976-2008



GRAPH R

Jewish Ideological Identification (% Liberal – % Conservative) by Income, 1976-2008



Ideological identification displays a different pattern. In the 1970s and through the mid-'80s, the highest income bracket voters in the Jewish community were somewhat more likely to identify as liberal. This happened again in the early 1990s. But since 1996, lower income Jews have been more likely to identify as liberal.

OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS, PARTISANSHIP AND IDEOLOGY

As with presidential voting, there is a correlation between the frequency of synagogue attendance and both partisan and ideological identification. In each year it was measured, frequent synagogue attendance (weekly or more) is correlated with lower levels of Democratic and liberal identification. In fact, in 2008 those who said they attended synagogue weekly or more were more likely to be conservative than liberal. However, fewer than 50 voters responded that they attended synagogue weekly or more in 2002, 2004 and 2008, so statistical confidence is low.

TABLE 6

Self-Identified Partisanship (% Democratic – % Republican) and Synagogue Attendance

Year	Synagogue Attendance Weekly or More	Synagogue Attendance Monthly or Yearly	Synagogue Attendance Never
2000	20%	53%	47%
2006	33%	52%	46%

TABLE 7

Self-Identified Ideology (% Liberal – % Conservative) and Synagogue Attendance

Year	Synagogue Attendance Weekly or More	Synagogue Attendance Monthly or Yearly	Synagogue Attendance Never
2000	1%	29%	38%
2006	28%	33%	38%

In 2006 (an off-year election), frequent synagogue attenders were significantly less likely than other Jews to identify themselves as Democrats but were not necessarily less liberal.

In the majority of years where the exit polls have data on marital status, single American Jews were more likely than those who were married to identify as Democrats and as liberals — just as they were more likely to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate.¹³ This was not the case in 2008 for partisanship. Though the sample size is small (100 married and 72 not married), the difference is big enough (66% of marrieds vs. 33% unmarried) to be significant.

In each year for which we have data, Jewish voters in every region of the country were more likely to identify as Democrats than as Republicans. However, in 2008 the Jewish voters in the Northeast were significantly more likely to identify as Democrats than Jewish voters in the South. In 1982, 1984 and 1990 Midwest Jewish voters were significantly less likely to call themselves Democrats than voters in the Northeast or the West. Southern Jews were significantly less likely to identify as Democrats than Northeasterners in 1982 and 1984.

Jewish voters in all regions were also more likely to identify as liberals than as conservatives. However, in 2008, Northeastern Jews were significantly more likely than Southern Jews to identify as liberals and in 2004, Northeastern Jews were more likely than Jews in any other region to identify as liberals. Between 1982 and 1990, there were many years when Midwestern or Southern Jews were significantly less likely than Jews in the West or the Northeast to identify as liberals.

CONCLUSIONS

- Since 1984, American Jews have been remarkably consistent in their presidential preferences, voting between 22 and 32 percent more Democratic than the nation as a whole.
- Since 1992, Jewish support for Democratic presidential candidates has increased compared to prior decades, with no evidence of significant or lasting gains for Republicans.
- As in the rest of the electorate, female Jews and more highly educated Jews vote Democratic in higher numbers. These subgroups are also more liberal and are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party.
- Unlike the electorate at large, young Jews are not more likely than their elders to vote Democratic, though their support for Democrats has increased such that more than three-quarters of Jews under 30 supported the Democratic presidential candidates in the years 2000-2008.
- The Jewish vote for congressional Democrats has never dropped below 70%.
- The limited data available show few differences by income.

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

In the 1970s, exit polls became standard practice for news organizations. Through the 1970s and 1980s, news organizations would individually commission their own exit polls. For many of these years, multiple exit polls are available. In the 1990s, news organizations and the Associated Press pooled their resources to create a consortium that has operated as the Voter News Service (VNS) and the National Election Pool (NEP) to conduct a single exit poll. Occasionally, a news organization (e.g., *The Los Angeles Times*) decided to conduct its own exit poll in addition to the consortium's survey.

The consortium conducts two types of exit polls: national and state surveys. The national topline percentages are those most frequently cited by the national press. However, the total number of interviews conducted with state-specific questionnaires dwarfs the number of respondents who answer the national questionnaire. Thus, much better data exist for questions that are common across questionnaires — presidential preference, party affiliation and ideology, for instance. National and state interviews are aggregated in this report.

The main advantage of exit polls is the sample universe: it comprises people who definitely voted. Pre-election polls have to guess at the composition of the electorate by asking people how likely it is that they will vote. Since people are prone to over-report this likelihood, sampling likely voters is prone to error. The same is true for post-election surveys. Another advantage of exit polls is that the respondents are asked how they have voted right after casting a ballot, so respondents are likely to remember their vote and report it accurately. In recent years, the NEP has supplemented its in-person interviews with a cell phone sample and an early voter sample, both conducted by telephone before Election Day.

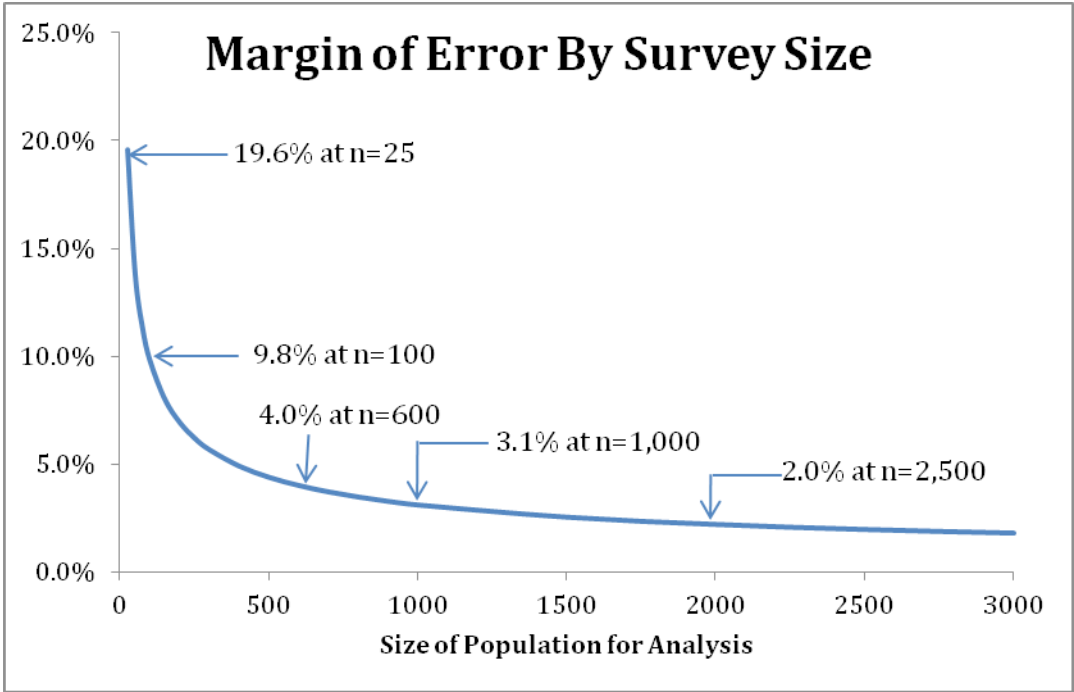
Selecting Jewish voters from a national sample, such as an exit poll, has advantages and disadvantages. The primary advantage is that the Jewish population in the survey is not self-selected. In contrast, when organizations such as the American Jewish Committee survey Jewish Americans, they rely on a panel sample — a group of people who self-select into taking surveys regularly. Since these respondents have already reported their religious identity in a previous survey, organizations like the American Jewish Committee can quickly and inexpensively select the Jewish panel members and survey them. Unfortunately, panel samples may be missing important parts of the population, which creates various forms of sample bias. Selecting Jewish voters from a larger, random national sample avoids this issue.

There are two drawbacks to selecting Jewish voters from a national exit poll. One is that occasionally the sample size is small. The number of Jewish voters interviewed in exit polls varies year to year and question to question; the sample is larger for questions asked of voters in each state (e.g., party affiliation) and lower for questions asked only of those who received the national questionnaire (e.g., generic congressional vote). On the high end, more than 3,000 Jewish voters answered questions about their presidential preference, party affiliation and ideology in 1988. On the low end, only 97 Jewish voters responded to the generic congressional ballot question in 2008. The second drawback to selecting from national exit polls is that these polls are conducted in randomly selected locations. Some of these locales may contain a large number of Jews while others may be home to none at all. There is some evidence that this can create a “cluster bias” of unknown size for populations like Jews that are geographically concentrated.

The proportions stated in this report are calculated by weighting the Jewish respondents by state to the proportions estimated by the *American Jewish Year Book* (and its successor). This weighting is applied on top of any existing weights assigned by the consortium. Our additional state-based weighting is crucial because exit polls exist for some states (in addition to the national survey) and not others. For example, in midterm elections, exit polls often are not conducted in states that have neither a competitive Senate election nor a competitive gubernatorial election. This weighting procedure was done “within reason” — we avoided altering the existing weight by more than a doubling or a halving.

An exit poll's sponsor weights the topline exit poll results to the results of the election. If the exit poll underestimates the Democratic percentage of the vote, respondents who voted Democrat would be downweighted. This weighting might alter the Jewish vote to such a degree that the unweighted numbers produce a more accurate picture. To account for this, when the exit poll's weighting altered the unweighted results by more than five percentage points, this study uses the unweighted data. Unweighted data is used once for presidential, partisan and ideological breakdowns (LA Times 1992), and three times for congressional results (CBS 1976, LA Times 1992, VNS 2002).

As with any survey analysis, sample sizes are smaller for subgroup analysis. To understand the effect of sample size on uncertainty, the following chart shows the margin of error (vertical axis) for a given sample size (horizontal axis). The margin of error is, theoretically, the maximum number of percentage points that an observed estimate might be off by 95% of the time.



(Endnotes)

- 1 Though most commentators focus on the percentage of the total vote a presidential candidate receives, in some ways, it is more useful to look at the percentage of the two-party vote as a way of comparing the vote in years where third-party voting was significant (particularly in 1980 and 1992 and to a lesser degree 1996) and years where it was not.
- 2 According to the study *Jewish Population in the U.S. 2010* (on the National Jewish Data Bank website) by Ira Sheskin of the University of Miami and Arnold Dashefsky of the University of Connecticut, the Jewish population of the United States was between 6.0 and 6.4 million in 2010.
- 3 There is evidence that partisan labels do not matter nearly as much in municipal elections (mayoral, council) even when candidates for municipal office run with partisan designations on municipal ballots. Moreover, there is ample evidence that Jewish voters seem to have much less difficulty voting for Republican candidates for mayor in big-city elections — see Jewish vote for candidates like Rudy Giuliani (NYC), Michael Bloomberg (NYC) and Richard Riordan (LA).
- 4 When this switch in allegiance did not materialize in the last half of the twentieth century, Milton Himmelfarb wrote about the propensity of this relatively wealthy subgroup of the population to vote like some of the poorest — thus the aphorism “Jews earn like Episcopalians but vote like Puerto Ricans.”
- 5 For example, assuming Jews make up 2% of the electorate, to obtain a sample of 400 Jewish voters, a national poll of all voters has to interview 20,000 total voters.
- 6 The Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC), J Street and the National Jewish Democratic Council (NJDC) have published polling results in the run-up to recent elections as well as in the immediate aftermath of those elections.
- 7 We are indebted to the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut for making available to us this exit poll data. Neither the Center nor the institutions that conducted the surveys bear any responsibility for our interpretations or analysis.
- 8 Throughout the rest of this paper, we use the percentage of the two-party vote, rather than percentage of the total vote to measure partisanship in the Jewish electorate.
- 9 *Hartford Courant*, October 23, 2004.
- 10 *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 21, 2008.
- 11 These Orthodox majorities for GOP presidential candidates in 2004 and 2008 cannot be generalized to characterize Orthodox voting in other partisan elections. In fact, there is evidence that Orthodox majorities often vote Democratic in recent congressional and state elections.
- 12 Though even in 1988 the difference between the percentage of Jewish males who identified Democratic and the percentage who identified Republican was 26%.
- 13 We have data for 1982-1990 and 1996-2008. The number for unmarried Jewish Americans was between 50 and 100 in 1998, 2002, 2004 and 2008.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mark S. Mellman, President & CEO

Mark Mellman is one of the nation's leading public opinion researchers and communication strategists. He is CEO of The Mellman Group, a polling and consulting firm whose clients include leading political figures, Fortune 500 companies and some of the nation's most important public interest groups. Mellman has helped guide the campaigns of some sixteen U.S. senators, nine governors and more than two dozen members of Congress. His groundbreaking research has helped define how nonprofits and businesses can use the Internet for online communications, organizing and fundraising.

Mellman received his undergraduate degree from Princeton University, and graduate degrees from Yale University, where he taught in the political science department. He has served as a consultant on politics to CBS News, a presidential debate analyst for PBS, and he is currently on the faculty of The George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management. Mellman's op-eds have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*, among other leading papers, and he writes a weekly column for *The Hill*, the newspaper for and about Congress.

Aaron Strauss, Ph.D., Senior Analyst

Aaron Strauss is on leave from The Mellman Group as director of targeting at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Strauss, who received his Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University, has developed and used data systems to inform political strategy, and has assisted dozens of campaigns and nonprofits since 2000. He has authored several works about the Jewish vote in American politics. Strauss also has taught at the University of California's Washington Semester Program, and teaches a class at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute. He received a master's degree and two bachelor's degrees, in political science and computer science, from MIT.

Kenneth D. Wald, Ph.D.

Kenneth D. Wald is Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of Florida. One of the first contemporary political scientists to focus on the relationship of religion and politics, Wald has published and lectured extensively about the United States, Great Britain and Israel. Currently working on a book about American Jewish political behavior, he spent the fall semester of 2011 at the University of Michigan as a visiting fellow at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies. Wald has received research grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

MISSION STATEMENT

Named after King Solomon and American Jewish patriot Chayim Solomon, The Solomon Project was founded in 1996 to educate the American Jewish community about its rich history of civic involvement.

The Solomon Project has worked toward this goal by fostering opportunities for discussion, education and engagement in the public policy arena — all from a uniquely Jewish perspective, and all to help achieve Tikkun Olam, or the repair of our society and the world around us. Our theory is simple: If American Jews are familiar with their community's past civic involvement, and if opportunities for renewed participation are made readily available, then we are contributing to both American civic culture and the vitality of the American Jewish community.

The Solomon Project has also focused on illuminating the civic values that are important to American Jewry. It has worked to demonstrate how many of those values are shared by Israeli and American democracy.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William B. Dockser, Rockville, MD - Chair

S. David Fineman, Philadelphia, PA

Michael Levy, Washington, DC

Liz Schroyer, Washington, DC