

*Full Length Research*

## Voting Behavior among the American People

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In an attempt to distance themselves from the aristocracy of England, the Founding Fathers devised a system of government in which leaders are elected into power, not born into it. As John Jay, one of the Founding Fathers once said: "The Americans are the first people whom Heaven has favored with an opportunity of deliberating upon and choosing the forms of government under which they should live." As we already know, people vote for candidates that they want in certain positions, however, have you ever stopped and asked why people vote the way they do? Voting behavior in America can be attributed to many factors, which can be divided into two subcategories: sociological and psychological. The primary sociological aspects are income and ethnicity, while the primary psychological factors are political parties and key issues. America's voting tendencies depend on many factors, but those two are the primary reasons.

**Keywords:** Voting, Behavior, Democracy, Sociological, Psychological

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Income & Ethnicity

Research has concluded that the sociological influences in people's lives play a role on who they vote for. One factor that comes into play is income. Researchers have found that those who make less than \$50,000 a year are more likely to vote Democrat while those who make more than that amount are more likely to vote Republican (Cornell University). A study conducted by The Washington Post reported that about 60 percent of voters who earn about \$50,000-90,000 per year voted for Democratic candidate Barack Obama in the 2012 election, while 54 percent of voters who make \$100,000 and over voted for Republican Mitt Romney (The Washington Post). The complete voter trends based on income can be seen in Figure 1.

In addition to voting patterns, higher income Americans are also more likely to vote in general. The Census Bureau found that "in the 2008 presidential election, 80%

of adults from families earning at least \$100,000 per year voted, while only 52% of adults from families earning \$20,000 or less cast a vote." (CNN Money). It is believed that the reason for the disparity is due to the fact that lower income families are less educated and are not politically active. Overall, data suggests that wealthier people tend to vote more often and more Republican while lower income families tend to vote less often and more Democrat.

Ethnicity is another driving factor in how people vote. In today's society, Democrats are largely seen as the party for ethnic minorities. In the 2004 election, Republican George Bush won only 16% of the African American votes, while in 2008 Obama won 95% of the black vote (Campaign Stops). In the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton, who is an established Democrat, won the Latino votes with 64% of Latinos voting for her (Pew Research). Another Pew Research study shows that 58% of white voters voted for the Republican candidate, Donald

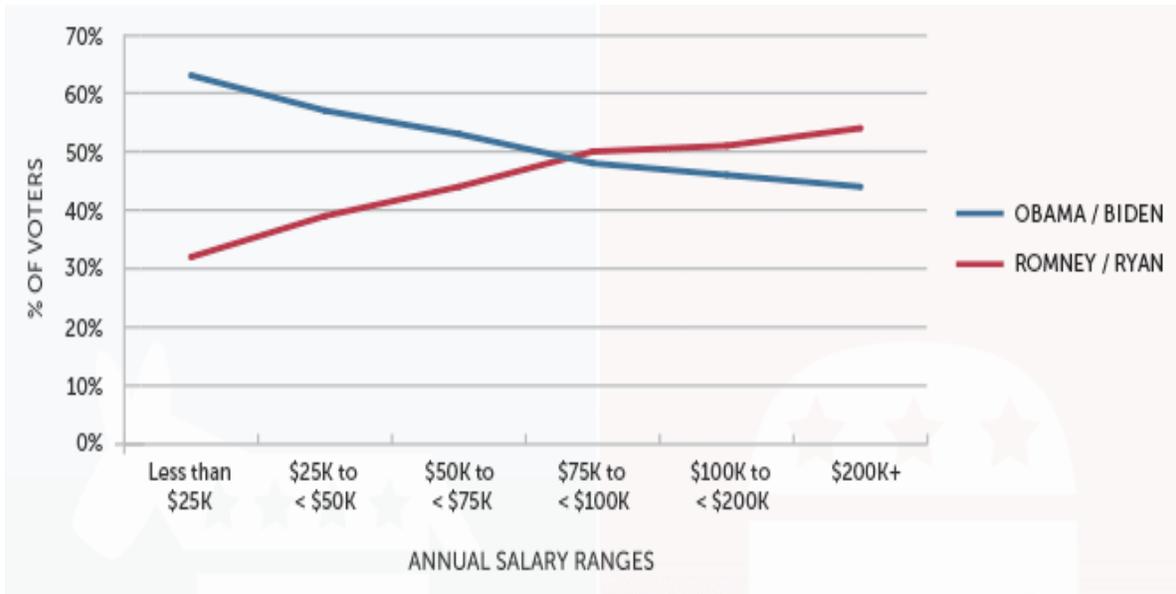
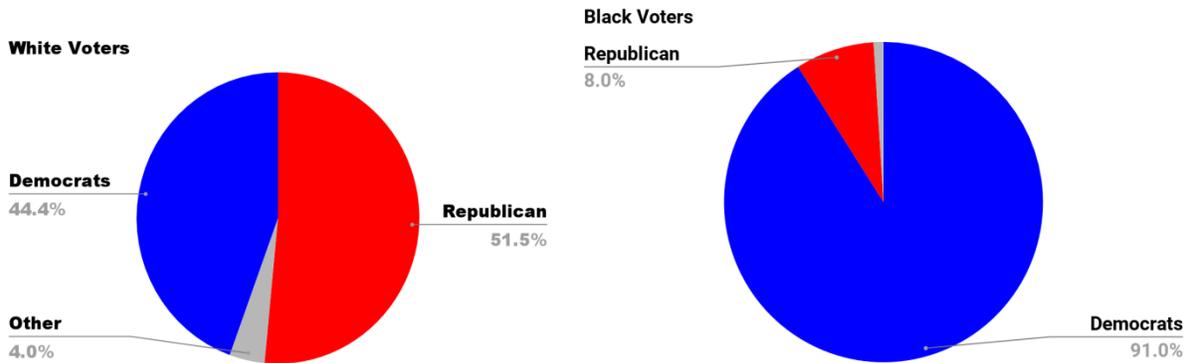


Figure 1\_ (The Atlantic)



(National Election Poll 2012 & 2016)  
Figure 2: Youth Voters by race and ethnicity

Trump, in the 2016 election (Pew Research). The Democrat party tend to favor well amongst the Asian population. Hillary Clinton won 79% of the Asian votes compared to Donald Trump's 21% (NBC News).

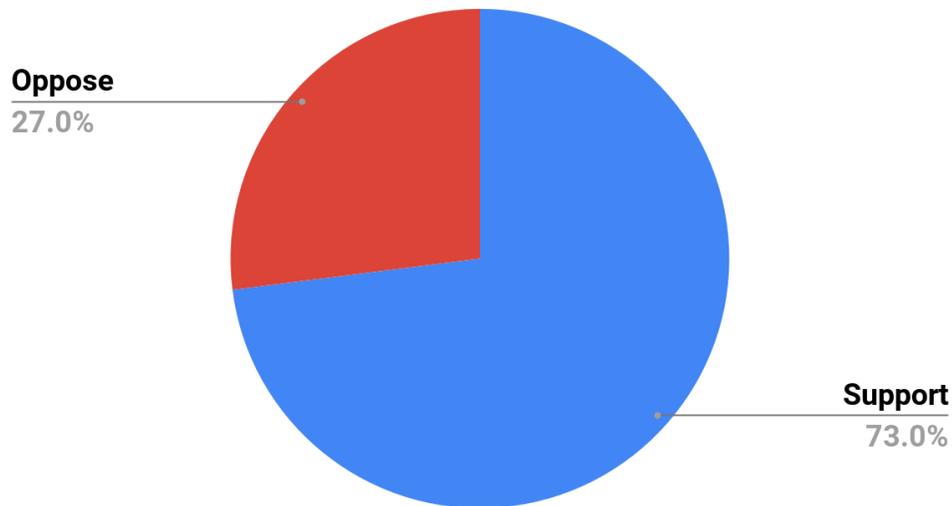
Figure 2 shows the results from the 2012 election amongst white and black voters. As you can see majority of white voters voted for Mitt Romney (Republican), while majority of the black population voted for Barack Obama (Democrat).

**Political Parties & Key Issues**

Political parties have been apart of American politics

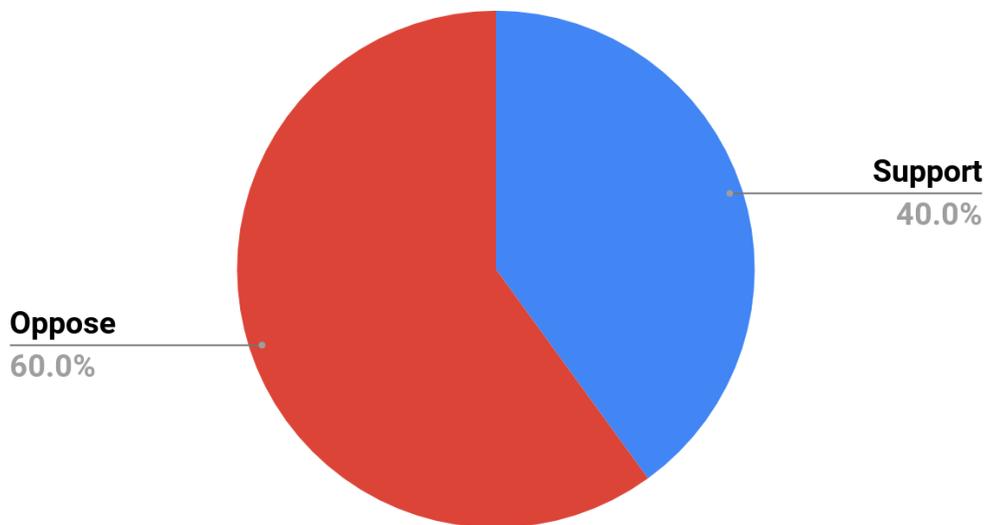
since the nation's early years. Voting today is mainly done through partisanship, or based in large part on party membership. According to 2016 exit polls, 89% of registered Republicans voted for Donald Trump while 84% of registered Democrats voted for Hillary Clinton (CBS News). This trend can be seen throughout recent history, for in 2008 Obama won 89% of the Democratic vote and 90% of Republicans voted for the party's candidate, John McCain (Cornell University). Partisanship, in fact, leads many to vote against their interest. For example, middle-class families who voted for Trump may still back him even though he supports a health care bill that could affect them negatively. On the other hand, educated professionals tend to vote

**Democrats on gay marriage**



**Figure 3**

**Republicans on gay marriage**



(Figures 3&4 Pew Research)

Democrat even though Republican tax policies will benefit them the most (New York Times).

Americans have been split upon certain issues that transpire across our societies. These issues include same-sex marriage and abortion. Democrats have long advocated for the legalization of same-sex marriage. A study conducted by Pew Research reveals that in 2017,

73% of adult Democrats are in favor of gay marriage. Moreover, only 40% of adult Republicans are for gay marriage (Pew Research). In the same study, the number of gay marriage supporters has been climbing. Among Republicans, this support has been trickling upward very slowly. When we get to issues like abortion, a growing number of support from Democrats is evident. According

to a recent Gallup poll, the number of “pro-choice” Democrats has increased from 56% to 71% since 2001 (National Review). Republicans, on the other hand, are majority “pro-life” supporters. In another Gallup poll, roughly 68% of Republicans are opposed to abortion while only 27% are “pro-choice”. Key issues like these are what formulate people’s thoughts on who to vote for. These observations can be seen all throughout political history.

## CONCLUSION

There are many reasons as to why a person votes they way they do. Income can influence a vote whether you are wealthy or not, as wealthier people will mostly vote Republican due to their philosophy of tax cuts and poorer people vote Democrat due to their favoring of more government programs. Ethnicity also plays a role for it is widely believed that the Democratic party has long been the party of ethnic minorities, with data showing that the majority of white Americans vote Republican while groups tend to vote Democrat. Political parties give rise to partisanship amongst the people and have lead to people knowing who they will vote for long beforehand. Americans are also divided on certain social issues like gay marriage and abortion. This leads them to vote for the candidate that supports their views. Voting behavior can be influenced by many factors, but primarily the are influenced by sociological and psychological reasons.

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