CAL STATE LA

PAT BROWN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Unleashing the Power of Participation

VOICES OF LA
A Pat Brown Institute Polling Program Brief

Jewish Voters in Los Angeles County: A Look at Social and Political Geography

Bruce A. Phillips
Professor of Sociology and Jewish Communal Studies
Louchheim School of Judaic Studies at Hebrew Union College
Senior Research Fellow
USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture

Jennifer A. Thompson
Maurice Amado Professor of Applied Jewish Ethics and Civic Engagement
Director of the Jewish Studies Program
California State University, Northridge

About the PBI *Voices of LA* Surveys

In 2016, the Pat Brown Institute began a multi-year survey program with university, foundation, and individual donor support to explore the social and political orientations of four major racial/ethnic groups in Los Angeles County: African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Jews. In late 2021, PBI, in partnership with and support from the California Community Foundation, continued its racial and ethnic survey program and added surveys to elevate the voices of residents of working-class, placed-based communities of color. This combined program is now known as the PBI Voices of LA Surveys.

For more information about the program:
www.calstatela.patbrowninstitute.org

Los Angeles County is home to the fourth largest Jewish community after Tel Aviv, New York City, and Jerusalem. With over half a million Jewish residents, it is a community characterized by great denominational, demographic, and political diversity.

The story of Jewish Los Angeles is often told as one of geography and neighborhoods. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the multiracial and working-class Boyle Heights emerged as the center of Jewish life in Los Angeles, one characterized by a strong attachment to Yiddish culture and radical politics. Yet, by the late 1940s, the Jewish population in Boyle Heights had begun to dissipate and new Jewish communities developed: the Beverly-Fairfax neighborhood, Westside, and the San Fernando Valley.

Much of our understanding of Jewish Los Angeles has been based on decades-old beliefs about Jewish residential patterns and political ideology. We often assume that Westside Jews are relatively affluent and liberal and that the Jews of the San Fernando Valley are—at least by comparison—conservative. Additionally, the notion that those who reside in visibly Jewish areas such as the Beverly-Fairfax neighborhood are quite traditional and religious is also deep-seated.

This report provides an up-to-date view of the social and political geography of Jewish life in Los Angeles County, as revealed by a survey conducted by the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State LA. PBI's survey was the first public opinion study of the Los Angeles Jewish community since 1997. That survey, sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, was a community study, whereas PBI's project is a civic and political survey of registered voters. PBI's 2019 Los Angeles County Jewish Voter Survey was conducted by the public opinion research firm EVITARUS and its Partner and Principal Researcher Shakari Byerly. With 1,812 respondents, the survey's large sample size allows for analysis by age, income, educational attainment, geography, and other key demographic factors.[1]

The results of PBI's survey support some of the traditional assumptions about Los Angeles County's Jews but also challenge others. By comparing five geographic regions throughout the county, we find a variety of Jewish communities, each with its own distinct socio-economic profile, political orientation, and pattern of civic engagement.

1 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.

I. Area Profiles

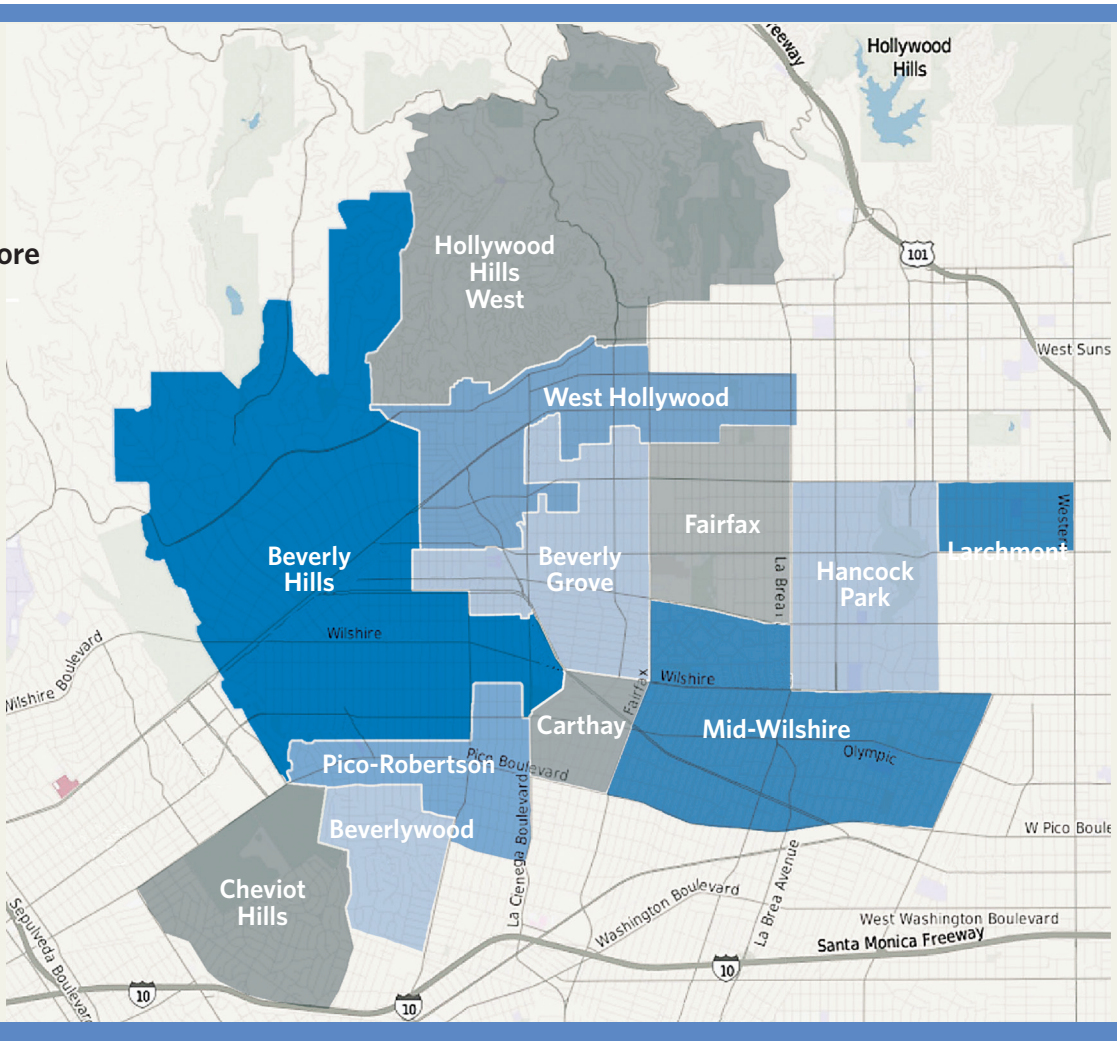
Within the PBI study, the vast majority of survey respondents resided in one of five areas throughout Los Angeles County:

1. The Urban Core
2. The Eastside
3. The Westside
4. The San Fernando Valley Flats
5. The San Fernando Valley Hills and Conejo Valley.

About one in every five respondents lives in other non-contiguous areas throughout the county such as Long Beach or Santa Clarita.

An examination of these five areas illuminates Jewish residential patterns throughout Los Angeles. It also helps to highlight the subtle though meaningful socio-economic distinctions—based on variables such as educational attainment, household income, denomination, and living situation—that characterize the county's Jewish electorate. Given that the United States Census Bureau does not have a category for Jews, we could not rely on standard census estimates. Alternatively, we drew upon the PBI survey for this demographic data. Through this framework, we can better understand how Jewish life operates within the context of local communities.

Figure 1.
The Urban Core



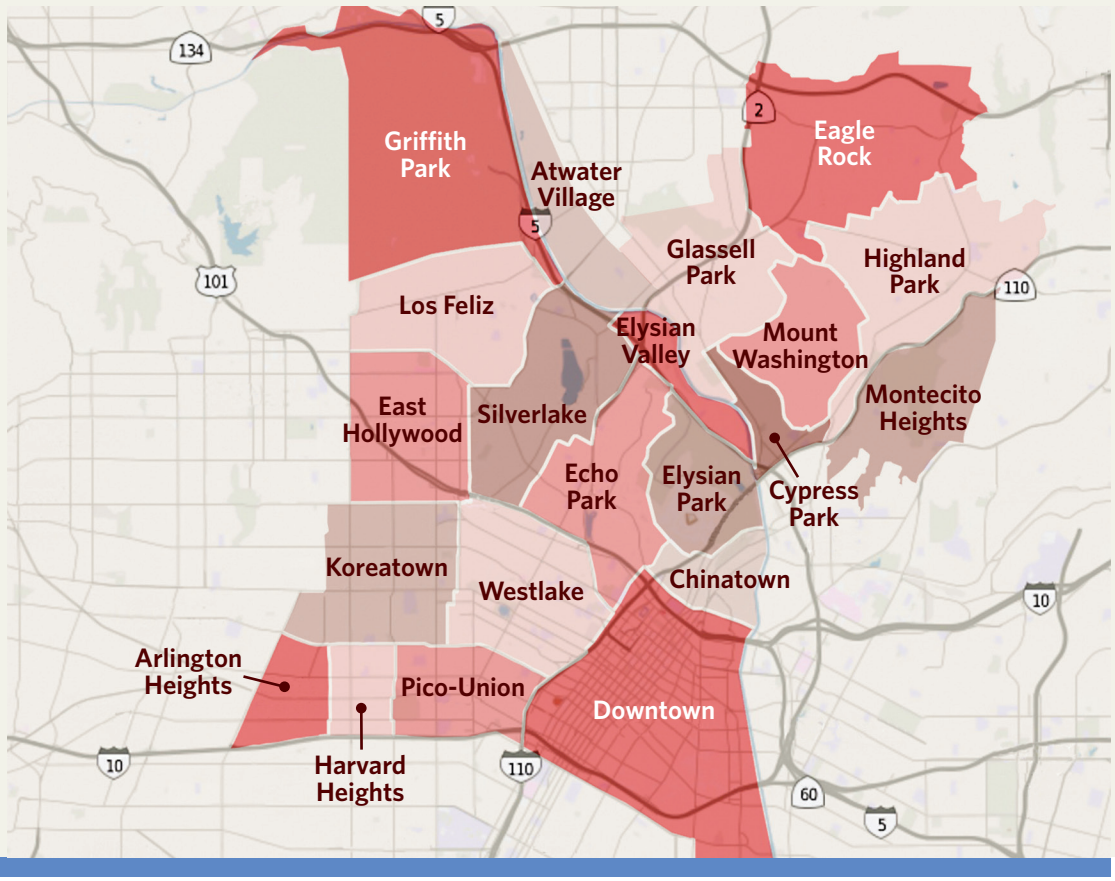
The Urban Core

The Urban Core (Figure 1) comprises a series of neighborhoods that are located between the Westside and Eastside, including Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, Pico-Robertson, Beverly-Fairfax, and Beverly-La Brea. During the final decades of the twentieth century, this area was thought to be in Jewish demographic decline. And yet today, as the PBI survey demonstrates, these neighborhoods have a higher proportion of young adults under 40 without children (31%) and a slightly lower percentage of seniors (27%) than the county's Jewish population as a whole.

This area's Jewish residents are also highly educated: 80% are college graduates, which is slightly higher than Los Angeles County Jewry as a whole. At the same time, 49% of residents—eight percentage points above the average for Jewish Angelenos—are renters.

Given the presence of highly visible Orthodox Jewish enclaves such as Beverly-La Brea and Pico-Robertson, it is not surprising to find the highest proportion of Orthodox-identified respondents here. Even so, only 15% of Jewish Urban Core survey respondents were Orthodox, while a plurality (36%) identified as Reform. Among respondents, 31% did not identify with a denomination. This area also has a relatively high percentage of immigrants: 15% are foreign born compared with 8% overall for Los Angeles County Jewry. In Beverly Hills, 44% of the respondents were first or second-generation Americans, most of whom originated from Iran.

Figure 2.
The Eastside



The Eastside

Angelenos have been known to debate with fervor what areas constitute the "Eastside."[2] From the Jewish communal perspective, the Eastside (Figure 2) primarily consists of racially and ethnically diverse areas east of mid-city that have recently experienced waves of gentrification such as Highland Park, Echo Park, and East Hollywood.

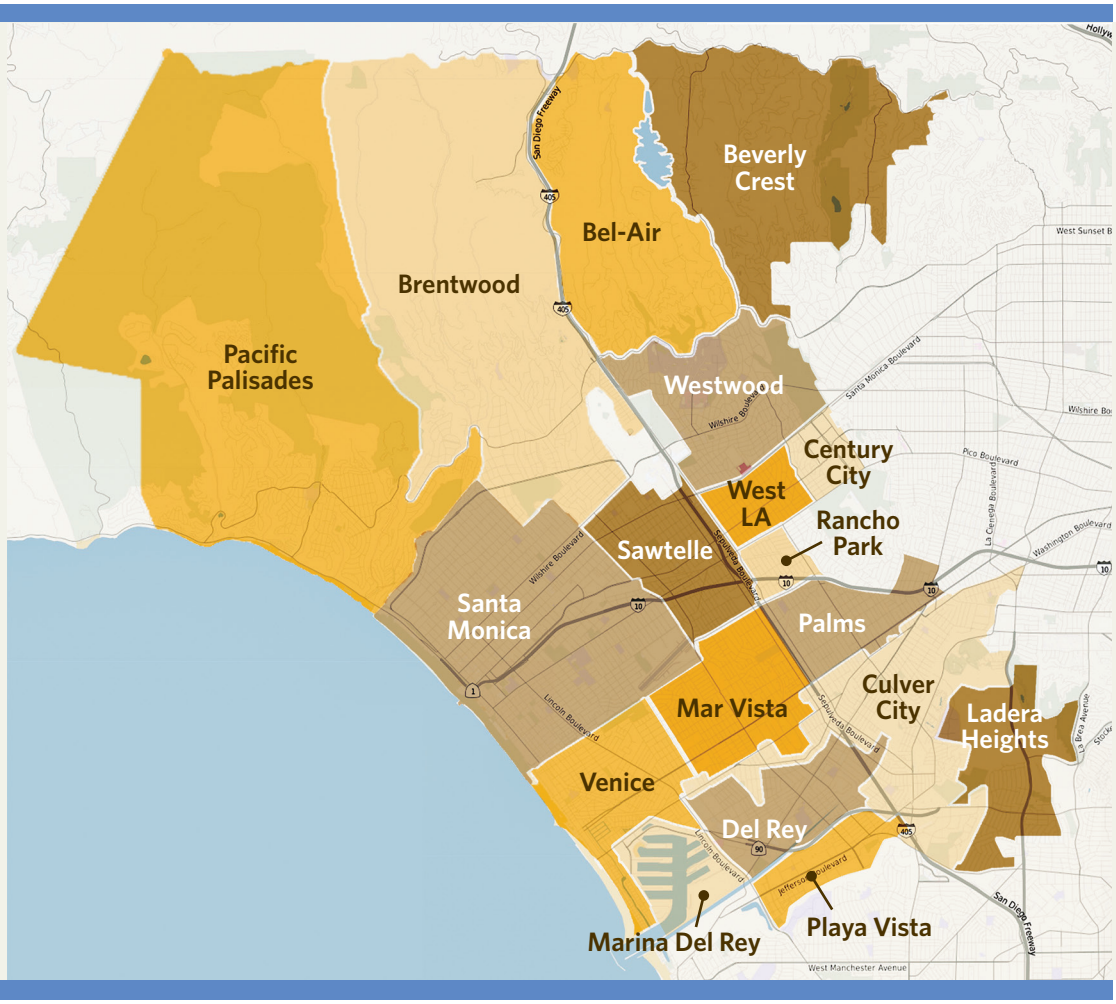
The proportion of Jewish households living on the Eastside has increased significantly since the 1997 study. Consistent with this relative growth, the Eastside—compared to other Jewish areas—has the highest proportion of residents who are "new" to Los Angeles. Indeed, 30% of the 2019 Eastside survey respondents had lived in Los Angeles for 10 years or less. Many are drawn to the Eastside because it is relatively affordable—at least compared to other areas with sizeable Jewish populations—and for its vibrant cultural amenities. Also of note, 26% of the area's Jewish residents identify as LGBTQ+, which is 12 percentage points higher than the county's Jewish average.[3]

Despite the "hipster vibe" associated with neighborhoods such as Highland Park, Echo Park, and Silverlake, the Eastside stands out, not as a Jewish young adult mecca, but for its high percentage of residents who are "empty nesters." Indeed, one-third of the area's Jewish residents, seven percentage points above the county average, are between the ages of 40 and 64 and do not have children living at home. And compared with the county average, the Eastside's Jewish residents have higher rates of home ownership (55% vs. 50%). In terms of religious life, it is the only area profiled where fewer than 50% of residents identify with a particular denomination.

2 https://projects.laist.com/how-to-la/understand/eastside/

3 Among PBI survey respondents, 14.4% of Los Angeles County's Jewish voters identify as LGBTQ+.

Figure 3.
The Westside



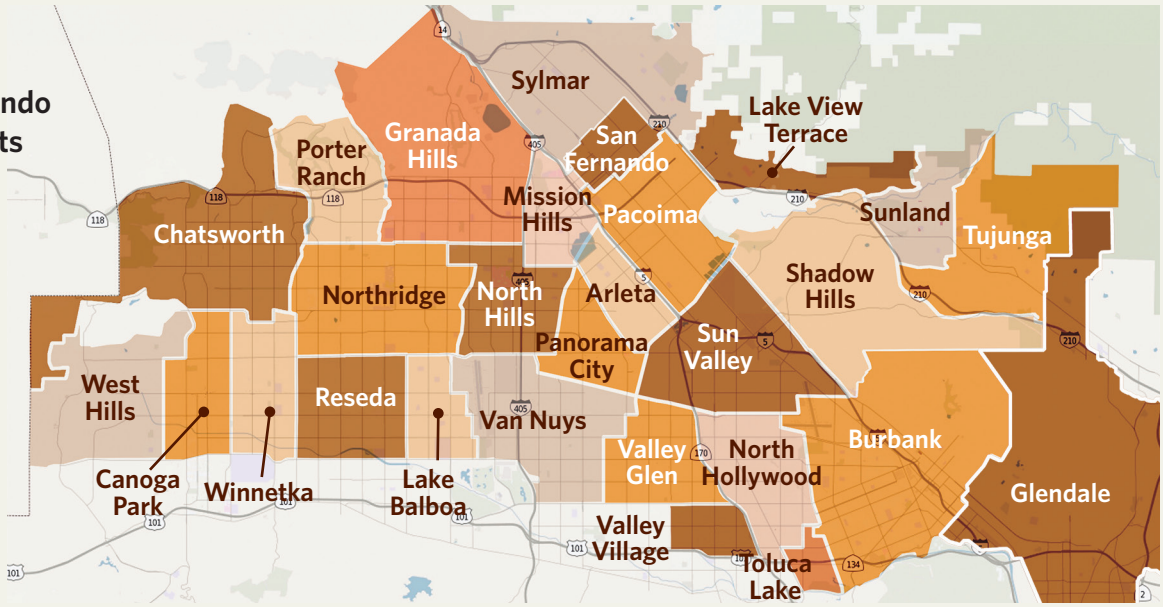
The Westside

The Westside (Figure 3) consists of a series of neighborhoods that run from west of Beverly Hills through the Pacific Ocean, including Beverlywood, Mar Vista, Brentwood, Culver City, Santa Monica, and Westwood. From a Jewish demographic perspective, the Westside and Eastside share much in common. The Westside has a high percentage of newcomers to Los Angeles; these are likely young singles who reside in apartments in neighborhoods such as Palms and Mar Vista. It also looks very similar to the Eastside in its rates of families with children (15% in both) *and* residents who are under 40 with no children (29% Eastside, 30% Westside).

What stands out about the Westside's Jewish population is its high level of educational attainment and income. Among residents, 59% hold a graduate degree, which is 13 percentage points higher than the county's Jewish population overall. Over 60% have an annual household income of more than $100,000, with about half of those (or 31% of all Westside Jewish households) reporting an annual household income of more than $200,000. Additionally, Jews on the Westside frequently affiliate with liberal religious denominations. Indeed, 44% of residents identify with either the Reform or Reconstructionist movement, which is five percentage points higher than the County's overall Jewish population.

Figure 4.

San Fernando Valley Flats



The San Fernando Valley Flats

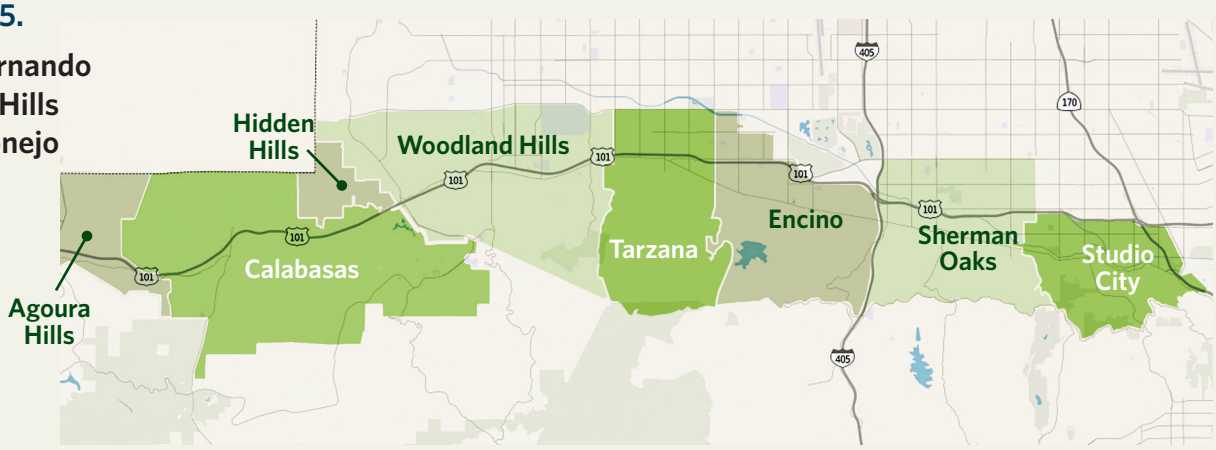
For our purposes, the San Fernando Valley Flats (Figure 4) consists of areas within the City of Los Angeles such as Northridge, Reseda, and North Hollywood as well as the independent municipalities of Burbank and Glendale. The socio-economic profile of Jewish residents in these areas is relatively modest. A quarter of its Jewish residents have incomes below $50,000 per year; 27% have yearly household incomes between $50,000 and $100,000. Additionally, compared with Los Angeles County Jews on the whole, those who live in the Valley Flats are also less likely to have a bachelor's degree (69% vs. 78%) and more likely to be renters (49% vs. 42%). Among residents, 10% live with family or do not have stable housing.

San Fernando Valley Hills and Conejo Valley

San Fernando Valley Hills and Conejo Valley (Figure 5) includes both the southern part of the San Fernando Valley that abuts the Santa Monica Mountains (Studio

Figure 5.

San Fernando Valley Hills and Conejo Valley



City, Sherman Oaks, Encino, Tarzana, and Woodland Hills) as well as a section of the Conejo Valley located in Los Angeles County.[4] This large geographic area shares some important characteristics with its neighbor, the Valley Flats. Both the Valley Hills and the Valley Flats have more families with children (24% and 25%, respectively) than the Los Angeles County Jewish average (20%). In both areas, an especially high percentage of residents—about three-quarters—have lived in Los Angeles for 20 years or longer.

Yet, the Valley Hills region is distinct from the Valley Flats and the county as a whole. It is relatively affluent, with 32% of its residents having incomes over $200,000. It also has the highest rate of homeownership (59%) of all the areas profiled. In terms of religious affiliation, 20% of residents in this area identify with Conservative Judaism, which is six percentage points higher than the county average. Only 36% of its Jewish residents, eight percentage points below the county average, do not identify with any particular denomination.

4 This includes Calabasas (and the separately incorporated gated community of Hidden Hills) and Agoura Hills.

II: Political Ideology and Partisanship

Decades of public opinion survey results and voting data have demonstrated that most American Jews gravitate towards the Democratic Party and identify as politically liberal.[5] In this respect, Jewish voters in Los Angeles County are no different.[6]

The PBI study reveals that 58% of Jewish Angelenos identified as liberal, 20% as moderate, and 18% as conservative. On the question of partisanship, 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. Ultimately, we found that 68% identified as Democrats, 21% as Republicans, and 7% as pure independents.

None of the five areas under consideration dramatically deviate from these broader political and ideological trends in Los Angeles. And yet, some distinctions between the

5 "Jewish Americans in 2020." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (2021) https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/

6 https://calstatela.patbrowninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/JewishPartisanship-1.pdf

Figure 6.

Distribution of Jewish voters by Area

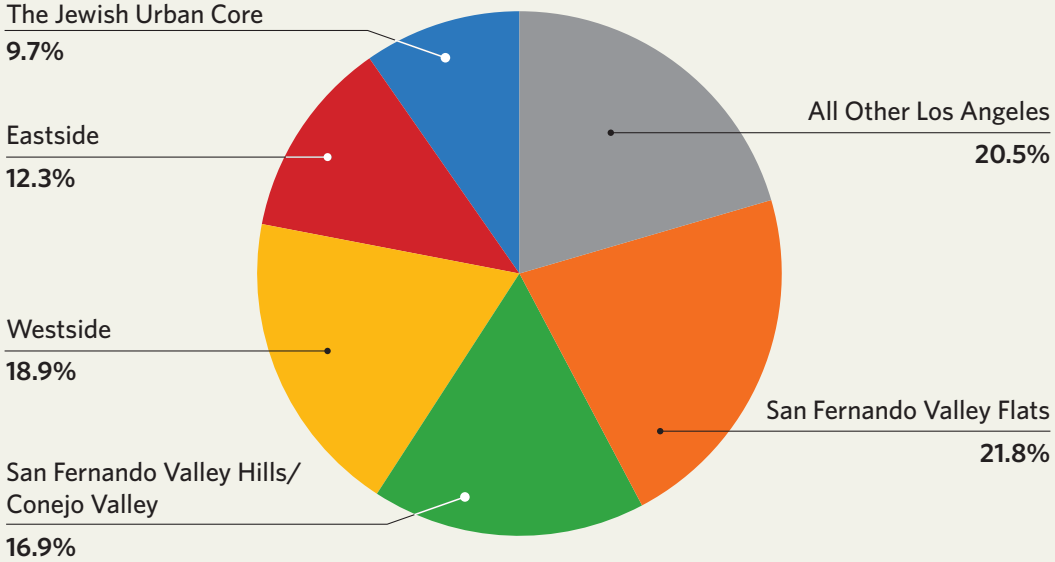
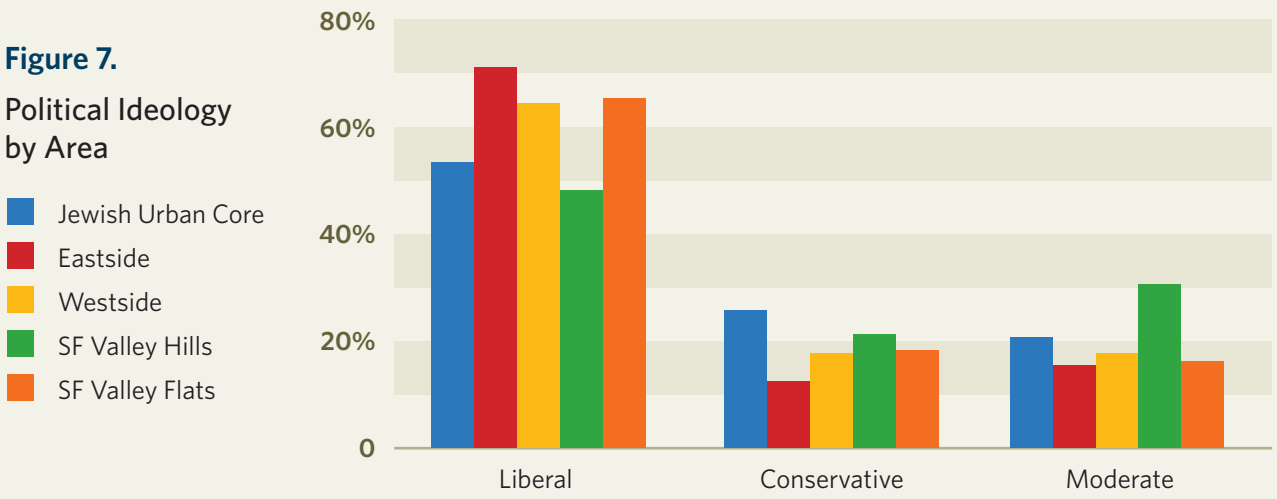


Figure 7.

Political Ideology by Area



five areas are apparent, especially when taking into account whether one identifies very or only somewhat as a liberal or conservative (Figure 7).

- The Eastside is the most liberal of the geographical regions, with 59% of the respondents identifying as very liberal and 12% as somewhat liberal.
- The Valley Flats and the Westside were also bastions of liberalism. In these areas, a clear plurality of residents respectively identified as very liberal, though Valley Flats residents were about 7 percentage points more likely to do so (48% vs. 41%). Conversely, Westsiders, compared to their Valley Flats counterparts, were 6 percentage points more likely to identify as somewhat liberal (24% vs. 18%).
- Out of the five areas, the Valley Hills was the only one where less than 50% identified as either somewhat or very liberal and a plurality of residents (in this case, 31%) identified as moderates.
- While the Valley Hills was less liberal than other areas, it was not necessarily the most conservative region. That distinction belongs to the Urban Core, where 26% of residents identified as very or somewhat conservative. Much of the conservative tilt can be accounted for by Beverly Hills, where about one-third of the respondents described themselves as conservative. Among these Beverly Hills conservatives, 60% are first-or second-generation Americans.

PBI's 2019 survey of Los Angeles County Jewish voters asked the following two questions about political partisanship and ideology:

1. *Thinking in political terms, would you consider yourself to be liberal, moderate, or conservative?*

   IF LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE, ASK: *"Is that very or just somewhat?"*

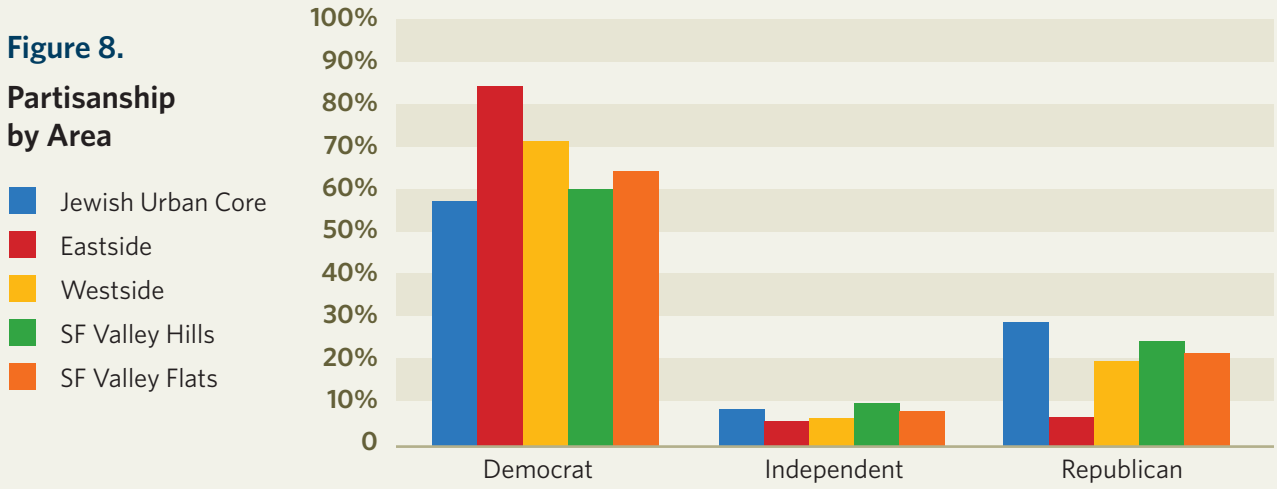
2. *Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, or something else?*

   IF DEMOCRAT/REPUBLICAN, ASK: *"Would you call yourself a strong [democrat/republican], or not a strong [democrat/republican]?"*

   IF SOMETHING ELSE, ASK: *"In general, do you consider yourself to be closer to the Democratic Party or Republican Party?"*

Figure 8.

Partisanship by Area



On the whole, partisan identification is closely aligned with political ideology (Figure 8).

- The most liberal of the five areas, the Eastside, also has the highest percentage of residents, 84%, who align with the Democratic Party; this is followed by the Westside and the Valley Flats, which are 71% and 65% Democratic. Interestingly, while the Eastside is noticeably more Democratic than the other areas, it has roughly the same percentage of strong Democrats, 45%, as the Westside and the Valley Flats.
- The area with the most self-identified conservatives, the Urban Core, was also home to the largest share of Jewish Republicans (29%). As was the case with political ideology, the idiosyncratic political culture of this area has much to do with Beverly Hills, where 35.3% of Jewish voters identify as Republican. Notably, during both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, Beverly Hills, in an otherwise heavily Democratic region, was home to one of the few precincts that supported Donald Trump.[7,8]

III: Political and Civic Engagement

The PBI survey also sought to measure and better understand expressions of political and civic engagement among Los Angeles County's Jewish voters (Figures 9 and 10). To do so, the survey asked respondents whether in the past five years, they had the opportunity to:

- Communicate with an elected official
- Attend a public meeting or hearing of a government agency
- Attend a political protest, march, or rally
- Volunteer to work in a political campaign or for a political cause

The survey found that Jewish voters in Los Angeles County are highly engaged and active in the civic arena. Yet, differences among the five areas are also apparent. For the purposes of analyzing political engagement patterns by area, we examined the data in crosstab form. We also aggregated a mean score based on a 0-4 scale, determined by whether or not a voter participated in each of the four civic engagement practices.

Once again, Jewish voters on the Eastside stand out; with a mean score of 2, they were, on the whole, the most politically engaged and active group.

- Compared to voters in any other area, Eastsiders were 19 percentage points more likely to attend a

7 Alice Walton, "Donald Trump won this one Beverly HIlls neighborhood while Clinton took the rest of liberal Westside." *Los Angeles Times*, https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-westside-trump-20161110-story.html

8 Lila Seidman, "Trump expanded his support in Beverly Hills, a rare spot of red in blue L.A. County." *Los Angeles Times*, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-11-09/trump-votes-beverly-hills-2020-election

Figure 9.

Mean Political Engagement Score by Area

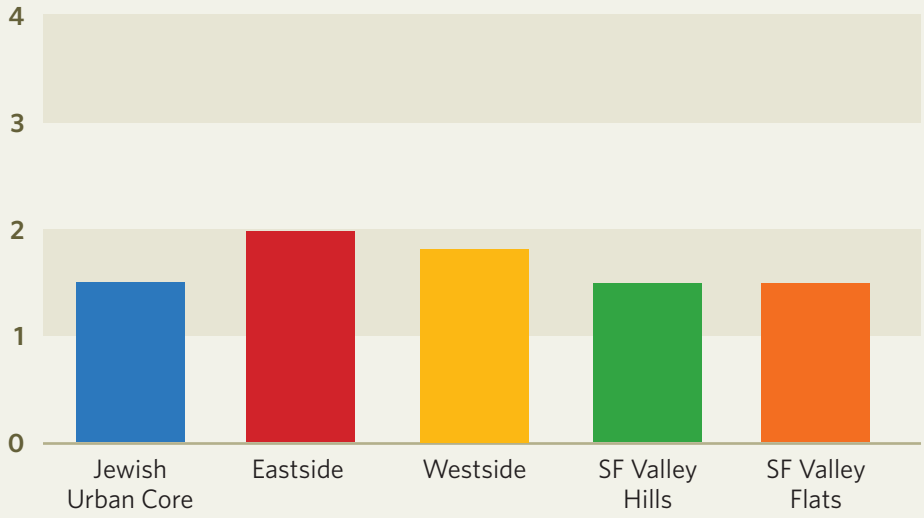
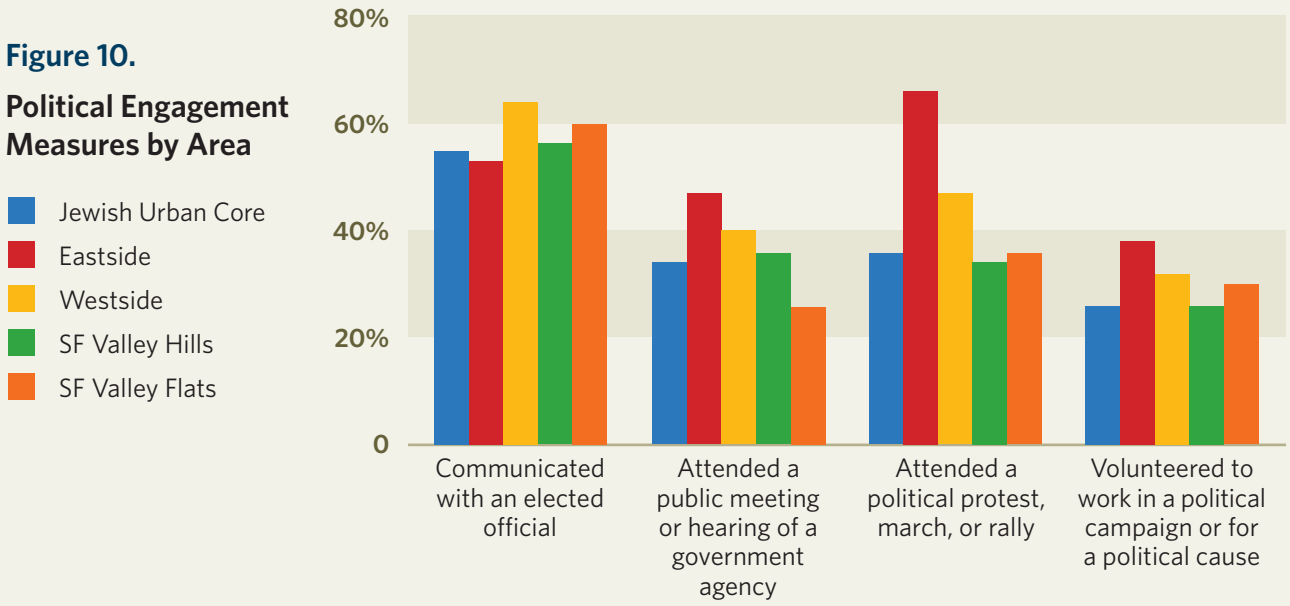


Figure 10.

Political Engagement Measures by Area



political protest, march, or rally; they were seven percentage points more likely to attend a public meeting; and they were also six percentage points more likely to volunteer for a political campaign or cause.

- Eastsiders, however, were the least likely to have communicated with an elected official.
- Westside Jewish voters also demonstrated a strong penchant for political engagement, as they had a mean score of 1.8.
- Over the past five years, 64% of Westsiders had communicated with an elected official, which is 4 percentage points higher than any other group. And 47% of Westsiders—only second to the Eastside—had attended a march, protest, or rally.

These differences between the Westside and the Eastside could, at least in part, be explained by the fact that Jews have been an essential part of the Westside's political fabric for over half a century. The Los Angeles City

Council Fifth District, much of which overlaps with the Westside, is commonly known as "the Jewish district" and its Jewish voters have a long history of engaging with the area's elected officials.

In contrast, Jewish voters on the Eastside are relatively new to the area's political scene and do not have as much experience interfacing with local elected officials. Additionally, as explained earlier, the majority of Jewish voters on the Eastside identify as very liberal. In the current political environment, this ideological outlook often lends itself to participating in political activities such as marches, protests, and rallies.

The Valley Hills, the Valley Flats, and the Urban Core shared a mean score of 1.5, which by default, makes them the least politically active areas. This is not to suggest that voters in these areas were disengaged or disconnected from the political process.

- Indeed, a clear majority of voters in each of these three areas had communicated with an elected official over the past five years.
- Other expressions of political activity, however, were noticeably less common. For example, across these three areas, only 26% to 30% of voters volunteered for a political campaign or cause. Likewise, only 36% of voters from high-density areas, 34% from the Valley Hills, and 36% from the Valley Flats attended a protest or march.

IV. Observations and Conclusions

The PBI survey provides great insight into the political geography of Jewish Los Angeles. While a clear majority of Jewish voters throughout Los Angeles County identify as liberal and Democratic, variations exist by region. The political differences among areas can largely be explained by the demographic composition of its Jewish voters. The Urban Core, for example, is home to a relatively sizeable percentage of Republicans and conservatives in large part because of its high concentration of Jewish immigrants in one specific area, Beverly Hills. The Urban Core also has the highest percentage of Orthodox Jews who also skew Republican. Likewise, the high levels of educational attainment can help to account for the liberal and Democratic profile of Westside Jewish voters. Demographic composition, however, does not explain everything. A multiple regression analysis (not shown) found that the Jewish voters who reside in the Eastside and the San Fernando Valley Flats are more liberal than other Jews regardless of age, income, immigration, educational attainment, and other traditional demographic predictors.

More generally, accounting for these two regions in a study of Jewish political geography also helps enrich our understanding of Jewish Los Angeles. The Eastside, as was the case during the first half of the twentieth century, is once again home to a politically progressive and civically-engaged Jewish community. Additionally, the Valley Flats, with its own political character, complicates the widely-accepted view of the San Fernando Valley as simply the home to the County's more conservative and affluent Jewish voters.

Acknowledgments

The Pat Brown Institute's Los Angeles County Jewish Voter Survey was supported by the Diane and Guilford Glazer Philanthropies, former State Sen. Alan Sieroty, and a number of individual donors.

PAT BROWN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Unleashing the Power of Participation

Contact us at PBI@calstatela.edu
www.calstatela.patbrowninstitute.org

@PBI
@patbrowninstitute
@pat_brown_institute