

Election 2000: Russian Jews as Voters in New York City

Introduction

An estimated 300,000 Russian Jews currently reside in New York City, with another 100,000 living elsewhere in the New York metropolitan area. Of the total, one-third are thought to be United States citizens.

The community of Russian Jews in New York City is large and diverse, but until recently it has received little scholarly attention. As a contribution in this direction, the American Jewish Committee, in April 2000, released a study, *Russian Jewish Immigrants in New York City*, which focuses on issues of status, identity, and integration. This pioneering research effort was funded by the American Jewish Committee and carried out by the Research Institute for New Americans (RINA), a new scholarly entity devoted to the study of the lives of Russian Jews in the United States. In the case of *Russian Jewish Immigrants in New York City*, the mode of analysis was a public opinion survey of 1,024 respondents from the Former Soviet Union.

Against the background of the 2000 election campaign, the American Jewish Committee asked RINA to return to the field in order to poll a sample of Russian Jews -- all of them United States citizens -- about their political opinions. The survey was conducted between September 1-29, 2000; a total of 516 respondents were interviewed over the phone, in the Russian language, by specially trained personnel. The respondents were drawn from RINA's research panel, consisting of 1500 individuals who are representative of the entire Russian Jewish immigrant community in New York City. The survey findings can be broken down by sex, age, education, income, and religious affiliation. The margin of error for the sample as a whole is plus or minus 5 percentage points.

Key Findings

Among the key findings of the survey are the following: 1. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents either plan to participate in the November 2000 elections (81 percent) or are leaning toward participating (8 percent).

2. Of the respondents, 75 percent are registered to vote, while 25 percent are not.

3. Asked "In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?" 56 percent of the respondents indicate Democrat, 22 percent Independent, and 11 percent Republican; 11 percent of the respondents are "not sure."

4. In answer to the question "If elections were held today, whom would you vote for as President of the United States?" 77 percent of the respondents select Al Gore, 9 percent George W. Bush, 1 percent "other," 4 percent "no one," while 9 percent are "not sure."

5. Asked "If Senate elections were held today, which candidate would you vote for?" 38 percent of the respondents choose Hillary Clinton, 21 percent Rick Lazio, 4 percent "other," 8 percent "no one," while 29 percent are "not sure."

6. Cross tabulation of the data reveals that 46 percent of the respondents who plan to vote for Al Gore for President also plan to vote for Hillary Clinton in the Senate race; 13 percent of the Gore supporters plan to vote for Rick Lazio, while 31 percent are undecided.

7. Examination of the subgroup data shows that Hillary Clinton enjoys strongest support among Russian Jews who are older (51 percent of those aged 60 and over, as against 22 percent of those aged 18-40), who have lower incomes (54 percent of those earning \$10,000 or less versus 16 percent of those earning \$60,000 or more), and who have low English proficiency. In contrast, Rick Lazio's strongest support is among Russian Jews who are younger (33 percent of those aged 18-40, as against 15 percent of those aged

60 and over), who have higher incomes (44 percent of those earning \$60,000 or more versus 2 percent of those earning \$10,000 or less), and who have high English proficiency.

There are no significant differences between Clinton and Lazio supporters based on sex or religious affiliation.

8. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents favor "the death penalty for persons convicted of murder"; 12 percent of the respondents are opposed, while 21 percent are "not sure."

9. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents think that abortions should be "legal under any circumstance," 22 percent "legal only under certain circumstances," and 2 percent "illegal in all circumstances"; 9 percent of the respondents are "not sure."

10. Sixty-two percent of the respondents favor "establishing a school voucher program that would allow parents to use tax funds to send their children to the school of their choice, even if it were a private school"; 6 percent of the respondents are opposed, while 32 percent are "not sure."

Survey Questionnaire

(all responses in percents)

1. Are you planning to participate in the November 2000 elections?

Yes 81 Leaning toward participating 8 Leaning toward not participating 0 No 4 Not sure 7

2. Are you a registered voter?

Yes, I am registered as a Democrat 39 Yes, I am registered as a Republican 12 Yes, I am registered as an Independent 19 Other 5 No, I am not registered 25

3. If you are not a registered voter, do you know how to register?

Yes 36 No 50 I am not interested 14

4. In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

Republican 11 Democrat 56 Independent 22 Not sure 11

5. If elections were held today, whom would you vote for as President of the United States?

George W. Bush 9 Al Gore 77 Other 1 No one 4 Not sure 9

6. Besides the presidential election, New York Senate elections will take place in November. If Senate elections were held today, which candidate would you vote for?

Rick Lazio 21 Hillary Clinton 38 Other 4 No one 8 Not sure 29

7. Did you participate in the presidential election in 1996?

Yes 21 No 78 Not sure 1

8. If you participated, whom did you vote for?

Clinton 69 Dole 22 Other 1 No one 3 Not sure 5

9. Do you favor or oppose establishing a school voucher program that would allow parents to use tax funds to send their children to the school of their choice, even if it were a private school?

Favor 62 Oppose 6 Not sure 32

10. Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Favor 67 Oppose 12 Not sure 21

11. Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?

Increased a lot 13 Increased a little 30 Left the same as it is now 27 Decreased a little 3 Decreased a lot 4
Not sure 23

12. Do you think abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?

Legal under any circumstances 67 Legal only under certain circumstances 22 Illegal in all circumstances 2
Not sure 9

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