

Voting Trends Among Portuguese Americans: An Exploratory Survey

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Introduction

- PALCUS recently carried out an online survey of Portuguese Americans to ask about their voting behavior and preferences, and, particularly, who they voted for in the last two presidential elections. While there are some studies related to the political incorporation of Portuguese Americans into the United States as well as on voter turnout and on whether people from this ethnic group have voted along ethnic lines, to our knowledge, there are no current studies on the voting preferences of Portuguese Americans (see Scott & Fraley, 2014 and Scott 2015).
- The current survey, carried out by PALCUS after the general election of 2020, does not provide definite answers to questions related to the voting behavior and preferences of Portuguese Americans. The survey was not administered using probability sampling techniques, and, as such, we cannot claim that the results are representative of the entire Portuguese-American population.
- Rather, the survey is based on a sample of convenience, that is, of people who are connected to social media or are members of PALCUS who chose to participate in the survey. The results of this survey, therefore, can only provide an exploratory overview of voting patterns among those Portuguese Americans who participated in the survey. The survey questionnaire may be accessed through this link: <https://palcus-voting-trends.questionpro.com>

Introduction

- **The theory and factors that influence voting behavior and preferences**
 - Theoretical expectations, congruent with classical assimilation theory (Dahl, 1961), posited that people from predominantly working-class immigrant groups, due to shared class interests, would exhibit uniform voting behavior, generally in favor of co-ethnic candidates. Most often, the political incorporation of immigrants and their American-born descendants took place through the political machines of the Democratic Party. Aiding in this process were labor unions, which mobilized the working-class vote in favor of Democratic candidates.
 - There were some exceptions to political incorporation through the Democratic Party machines. For example, in New Haven, Italian-American immigrants and their descendants became incorporated through the Republican machines. Dahl's explanation for this divergent path was that by the time the Italians arrived, Democratic Party politics were dominated by the Irish, leading the Italians to find opportunities through the Republican Party.
 - Nevertheless, the theory still held that as the economic integration of immigrants and their descendants proceeded within and across generations, the ethnic group would become more differentiated both socioeconomically and politically. Their voting patterns would, consequently, become more diversified and come to mirror those found in the mainstream society. Given that Portuguese Americans have made substantial inroads socioeconomically, Robert Dahl's theory would lead us to assume that Portuguese Americans, nowadays, vote in a more diversified way than they did during their initial years of integration into American society. We would also expect that their voting patterns would be similar to those of the mainstream American population.

Introduction

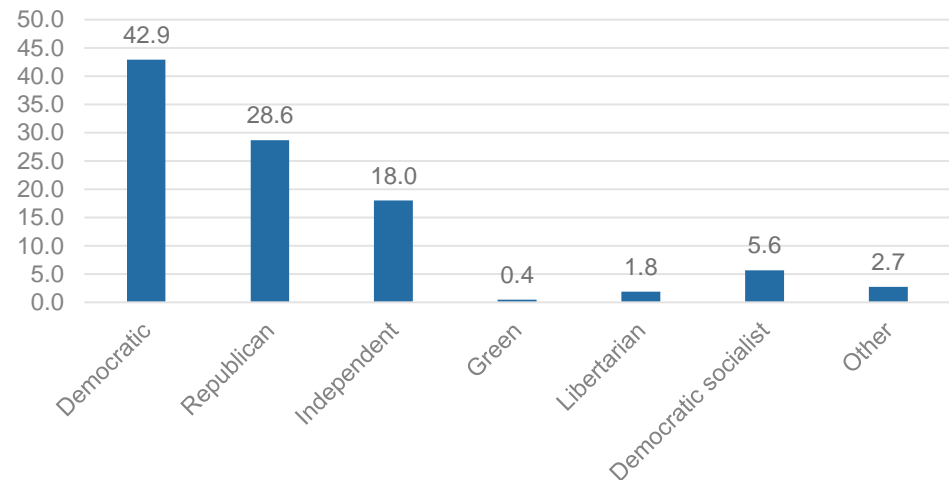
- **The theory and factors that influence voting behavior and preferences**
 - Dahl's theory, developed in the 1950s and early 1960s, is useful to interpret the political integration of older working-class immigrant groups in the industrial Northeast of the US—such as the Irish, Italians, French Canadians, and Portuguese, among others. Its applicability to the experience of Portuguese Americans in California's inland areas and the Central Valley—where agrarian and other primary sector occupations have prevailed, and where Republican politics have been dominant—needs to be explored. Its usefulness to interpret the political integration of today's immigrants in a the post-industrial society, characterized by bipolar migration—whereby some immigrants arrive with high levels of education and occupational skills and others with low levels of education and skills—may also be limited.

Introduction

- In addition to Dahl's theory concerning the political integration of immigrants, various other socioeconomic factors are related to voting behavior: age, gender, marital status, education, income, occupation, state of residence, area of residence (rural v. urban), religious affiliation, religiosity, among others.
- We did not include survey questions about religious affiliation and level of religiosity. Traditionally, Catholics have been more likely to vote for Democratic Party candidates than Protestants have. This, in part, might be explained by the working-class background of Catholic immigrants. In today's society and at the current level of integration of Portuguese Americans into mainstream America, it is possible that conservative social values, such as opposition to abortion, have become more relevant cues in the political choices of Portuguese-American Catholics.
- Below, we present the results of the survey. We start with the questions related to political behavior and then move on to the demographic and socioeconomic variables included in our survey, correlating those with the voting preferences of survey respondents in the presidential election of 2020.
- There were over one thousand responses to the survey. After we eliminated incomplete answers as well as responses from those who were younger than 18 years of age and those who were not citizens of the US, we ended up with 895 responses.

Political Views of Survey Respondents

Political views	Number	Percent
Democratic	382	42.9
Republican	255	28.6
Independent	160	18.0
Green	4	0.5
Libertarian	16	1.8
Democratic socialist	50	5.6
Other	24	2.7
Missing values	4	--
Total	895	100.0



About 43% of those taking the survey identified as Democratic, 28.6% as Republican, 18.0% as independent, 5.6 as democratic socialist, and the remainder were distributed among various other types of views.

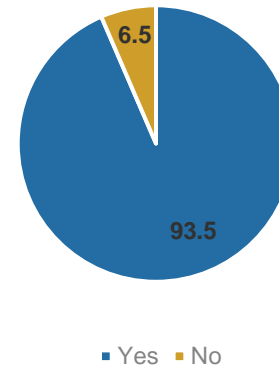
Among those who responded "Other," a few stated that they were conservative or fiscal conservative but did not identify as republican. There were also some who stated that they had no party identification or specific political views and voted for the candidate they liked the best.

According to data presented by the Pew Research Center, "Around a third of registered voters in the U.S. (34%) identify as independents, while 33% identify as Democrats and 29% identify as Republicans" (Gramlich, 2020).

Among the Portuguese Americans who participated in the survey, there is a higher percentage identifying as Democratic and a lower percentage identifying as independent than in the American population as a whole. However, the percentage of Republicans is very similar to that of the entire US population.

Voter Turnout in 2016

Voted in 2016	Number	Percent
Yes	837	93.5
No	58	6.5
Total	895	100.0

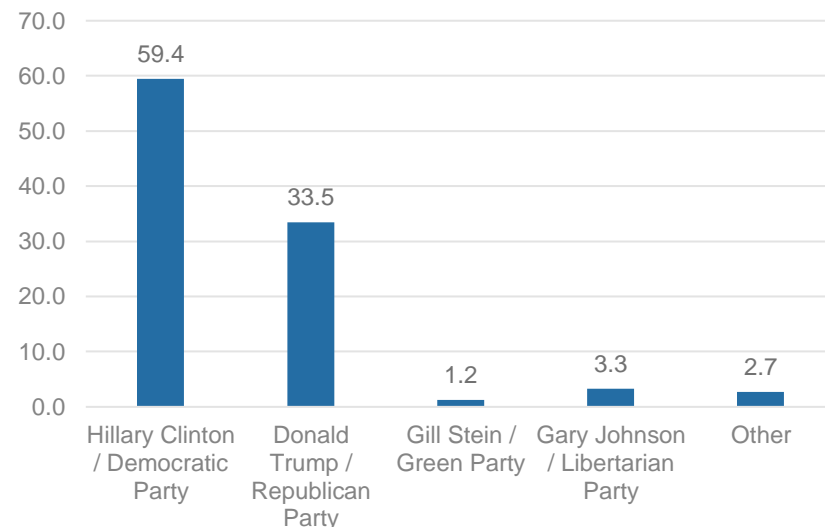


The respondents displayed a high level of turnout in 2016, 93.5 percent. According to data presented by the Pew Research Center, around 87% of registered voters cast a ballot in 2016 (Gramlich, 2020).

We cannot, of course, ascertain from these data that the Portuguese have a higher rate of turnout than Americans in general do. To start with, according to data provided by the US Census Bureau, among those born in Portugal, close to 25% are not American citizens (American Community Survey, 2019). Further, the lack of representativeness of our sample does not permit us to generalize the results of this survey to the entire Portuguese-American population.

For which candidate did you vote in the 2016 general election for president of the United States?

Candidate	Number	Valid Percent
Hillary Clinton / Democratic Party	492	59.4
Donald Trump / Republican Party	277	33.5
Gill Stein / Green Party	10	1.2
Gary Johnson / Libertarian Party	27	3.3
Other	22	2.7
Total	828	100.0

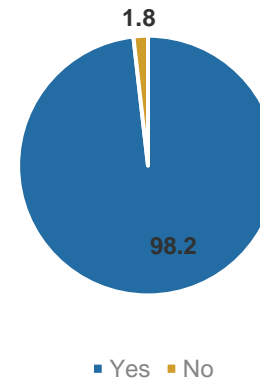


Note: Those who did not vote in 2016 were not asked this question. Missing values were excluded.

Over 59% of 828 respondents who participated in the 2016 election voted for Hillary Clinton and 33.5% voted for Donald Trump. Gil Stein and Gary Johnson together attained 4.5% of the vote. Those who responded “Other” indicated that they voted for a write-in candidate, including Bernie Sanders, John Kasich, etc. Nine respondents skipped this question. Comparing the data in this table to the data on political views, it appears that many of those who indicated they were independent opted for Hillary Clinton, but overall there is a significant correlation between political orientation and the candidate for whom respondents voted.

Voter Turnout in 2020

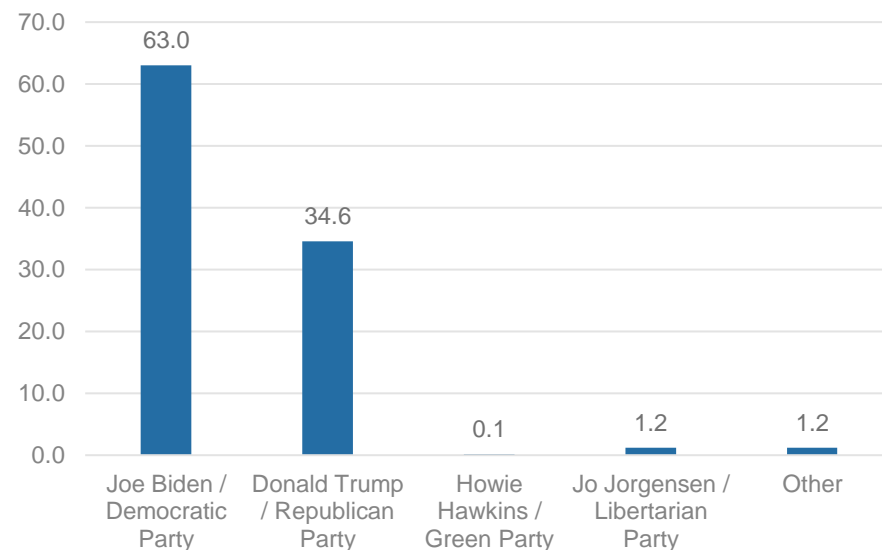
Voted in 2020	Number	Percent
Yes	879	98.2
No	16	1.8
Total	885	100.0



The US voter turnout in 2020 was record high. In 2020, voter turnout among eligible voters was 6.1% higher than it was in 2016 (Schaul et al., 2020). Among the survey respondents, the voter turnout was 98.2%.

For which candidate did you vote in the 2020 general election for president of the United States?

Candidate	Number	Valid Percent
Joe Biden / Democratic Party	547	63.0
Donald Trump / Republican Party	300	34.6
Howie Hawkins / Green Party	1	0.1
Jo Jorgensen / Libertarian Party	10	1.2
Other	10	1.2
Total	868	100.0



Note: Those who did not vote in 2020 were not asked this question. Missing values were excluded.

63% of the respondents who filled out this survey question voted for Joe Biden and 34.6 voted for Donald Trump. Compared to 2016, there was a lower percentage of respondents voting for candidates of other political parties or write-in candidates. In general, the vote remained consistent from 2016 to 2020. Those who voted for the Democratic party candidate in 2016 tended to vote again for the Democratic candidate in 2020 and those who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 also tended to vote for him in 2020. The correlation between the two variables was significant at the 0.01 level.

For which candidate did you vote in the 2020 general election for president of the United States?

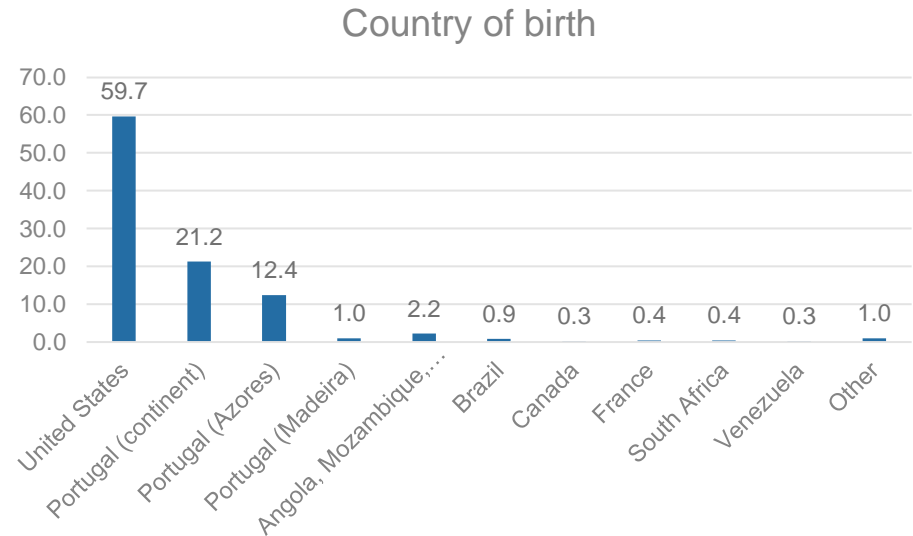
	Voted for Biden in 2020	Voted for Trump in 2020
Voted for a write-in or third-party candidate in the 2016 elections	30	14
Did not vote in 2016	32	15
Switched from Clinton in 2016 to Trump in 2020	---	16
Switched from Trump in 2016 to Biden in 2020	17	---

There were, nevertheless, some changes in voting preferences from 2016 to 2020 that were somewhat more favorable to Biden than Trump.

- Among respondents who voted for a write-in or third-party candidate in 2016, 30 voted for Joe Biden in 2020, whereas only 14 respondents voted to Donald Trump.
- Among those who did not vote in 2016, 32 voted for Joe Biden in 2020 and 15 voted for Donald Trump.
- 16 respondents who voted for Hilary Clinton in 2016, voted for Trump in 2020.
- 17 respondents who voted for Donald Trump in 2016, voted for Joe Biden in 2020.

Country of Birth

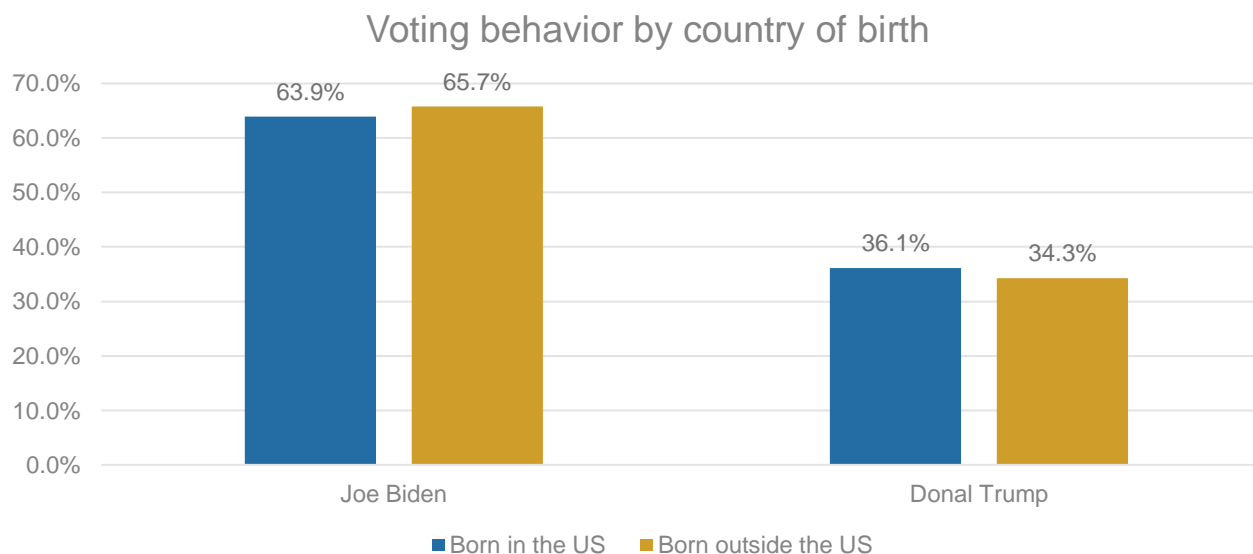
Country	Number	Percent
United States	534	59.7
Portugal (continent)	190	21.2
Portugal (Azores)	111	12.4
Portugal (Madeira)	9	1.0
Former Portuguese territories	20	2.2
Brazil	8	0.9
Canada	3	0.3
France	4	0.4
South Africa	4	0.4
Venezuela	3	0.3
Other	9	1.0
Total	895	100.0



Almost 60% of the respondents were born in the US. In addition to the countries listed in the Table, respondents who indicated “Other,” were from countries such as Argentina, Belgium, Chile, China, Germany, Honk Kong, and Tunisia.

Among those born in Portugal, over 61 percent were born in the continent, 36 percent in the Azores, and 3 percent in Madeira.

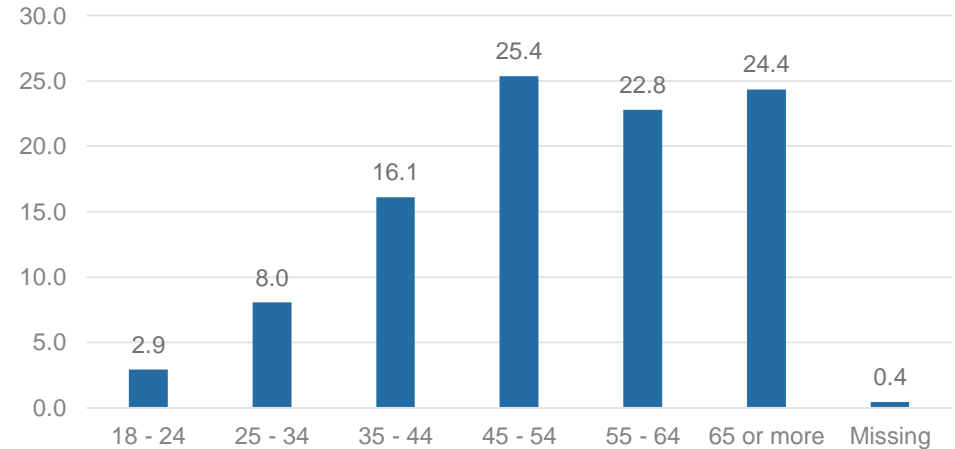
Voting Behavior by Country of Birth



In order to determine whether country of birth affected voting behavior, this variable was recoded into born in the US and born outside of the US. We also excluded from this analysis the candidates of other parties due to insufficient numbers of responses in those cells. A total of 534 respondents were born in the US and 361 were born outside the US. The data show that among the survey respondents, country of birth had no effect on how they voted.

Age

Age	Number	Percent
18 - 24	26	2.9
25 - 34	72	8.0
35 - 44	144	16.1
45 - 54	227	25.4
55 - 64	203	22.8
65 or more	217	24.4
Missing	4	0.4
Total	895	100.0

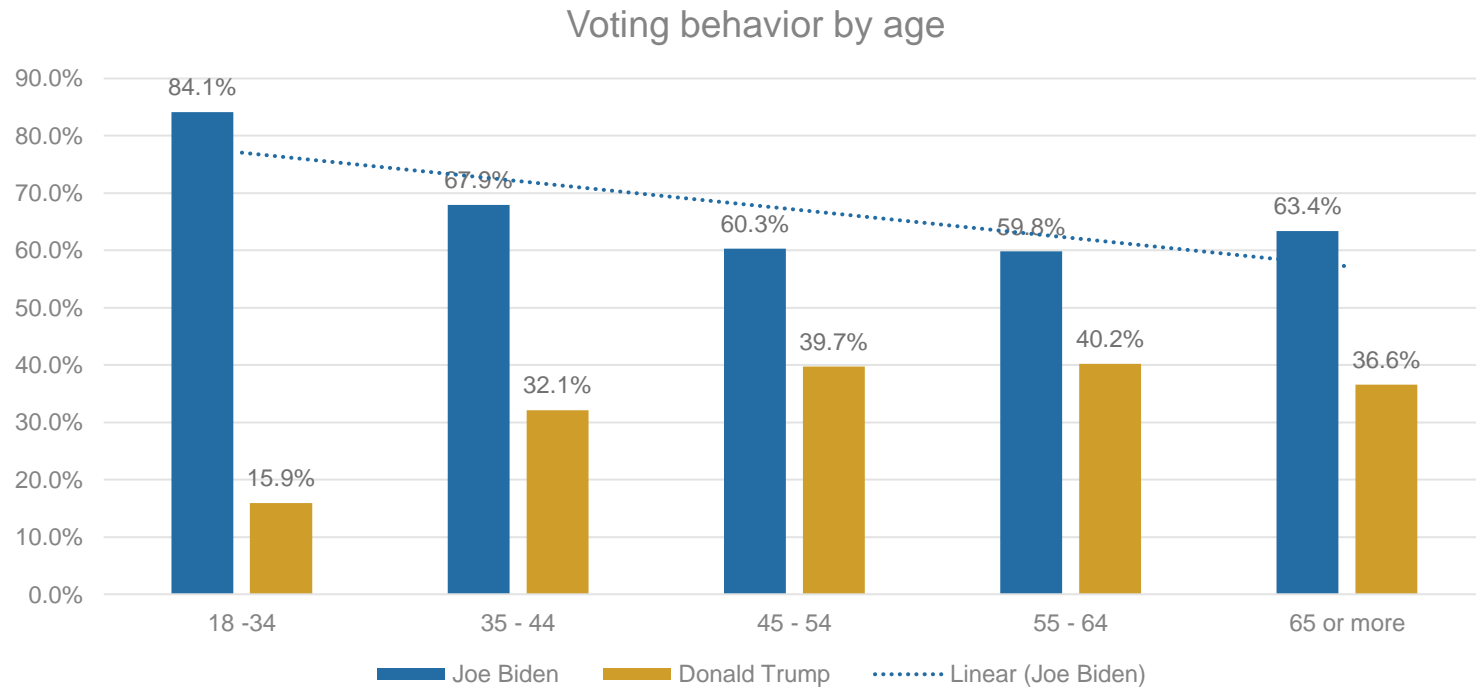


According to the PEW Research Center, the American voting population is aging: “52% of registered voters are ages 50 and older, up from 41% in 1996” (Gramlich, 2020).

In our survey, 72.4 percent are 45 years of age or older and 47.2 percent are 55 or older. Although our sample is not representative and thus does not allow us to determine the ages of Portuguese-American voters, we nevertheless know, through Census data, that the Portuguese-American population is, on average, older than the entire American population.

For the United States as a whole, the median age is 38.5 years, for all Portuguese Americans, it is 41 years, and for those born in Portugal, it is 59.5 years (American Community Survey, 2019).

Voting Behavior by Age



Note: In order to increase the number of cases in each cell, we combined the two lowest age categories.

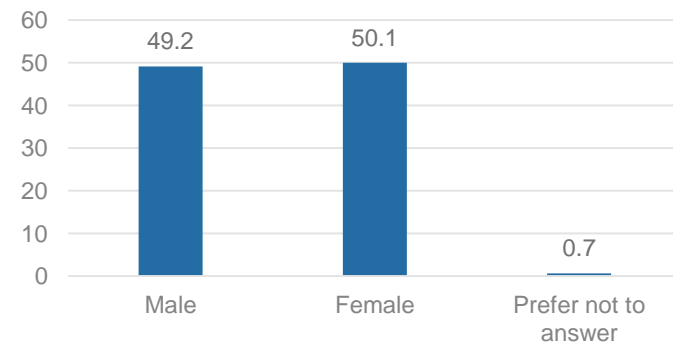
In our sample, it appears that younger people were more likely to vote for Biden than older people were, however among the three categories of 45 and older, there is little difference in terms of voting preferences (cont'd in the next slide).

Voting Behavior by Age

- Notwithstanding, our results follow trends that conform to those found in the general American population, with younger persons tending to vote for Biden and older individuals tending to vote for Trump. As stated by Roberts about how Americans voted in 2020:
 - The youth vote, as usual, was low, just 13% of the total vote, but those under 29 years voted 61-36 for Biden. And those aged 30-44 years (23% of the vote) also backed Biden 54-43. Those aged 45-64 (a huge 36% of the vote) went narrowly for Trump 51-48. And those over 65 years (another sizeable chunk of 27%) again narrowly voted for Trump 51-48. So 63% of those who voted were older than 44 years and backed Trump (narrowly); while those under 45 (just 37% of the vote) heavily backed Biden. (Roberts, n.d.)
- The results from our sample are congruent with those found for the American population in general, even though, due to sampling issues, we cannot ascertain if this was the case among all Portuguese Americans.

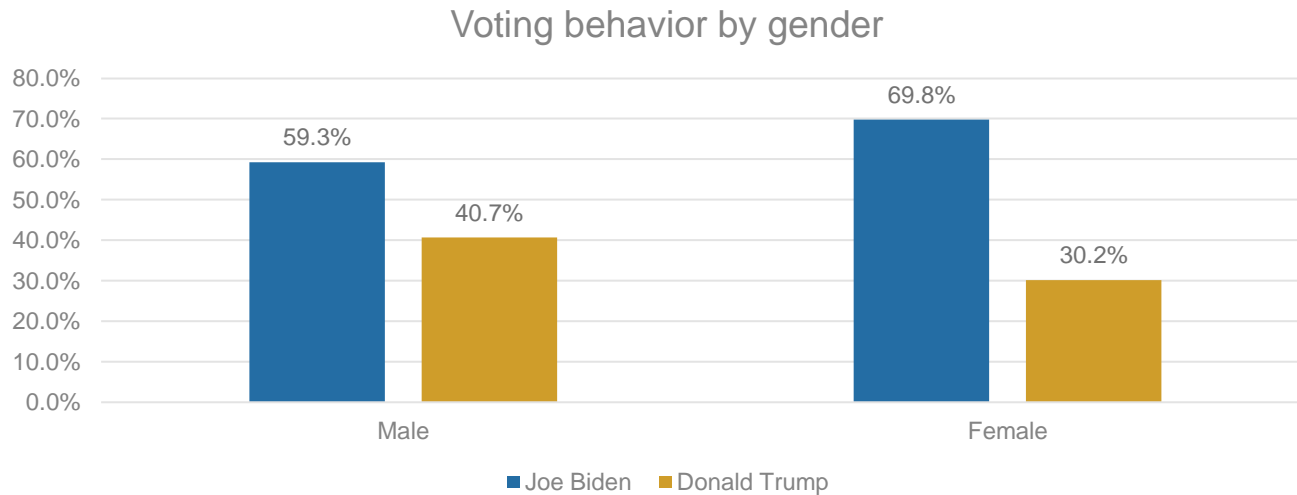
Gender

	Number	Percent
Male	438	49.2
Female	446	50.1
Prefer not to answer	6	0.7
Missing values	4	--
Total	890	100.0



There was a gender balance among the respondents, with just a slightly higher percentage of females than males. Six respondents preferred no to answer this question and four opted for not answering it at all.

Voting behavior by gender



At the national level in the US, there is a gender gap in voting behavior. “AP VoteCast showed a 9-percentage point difference between men and women in support for Biden and Harris: 55% of women and 46% of men” (Noveck, 2020).

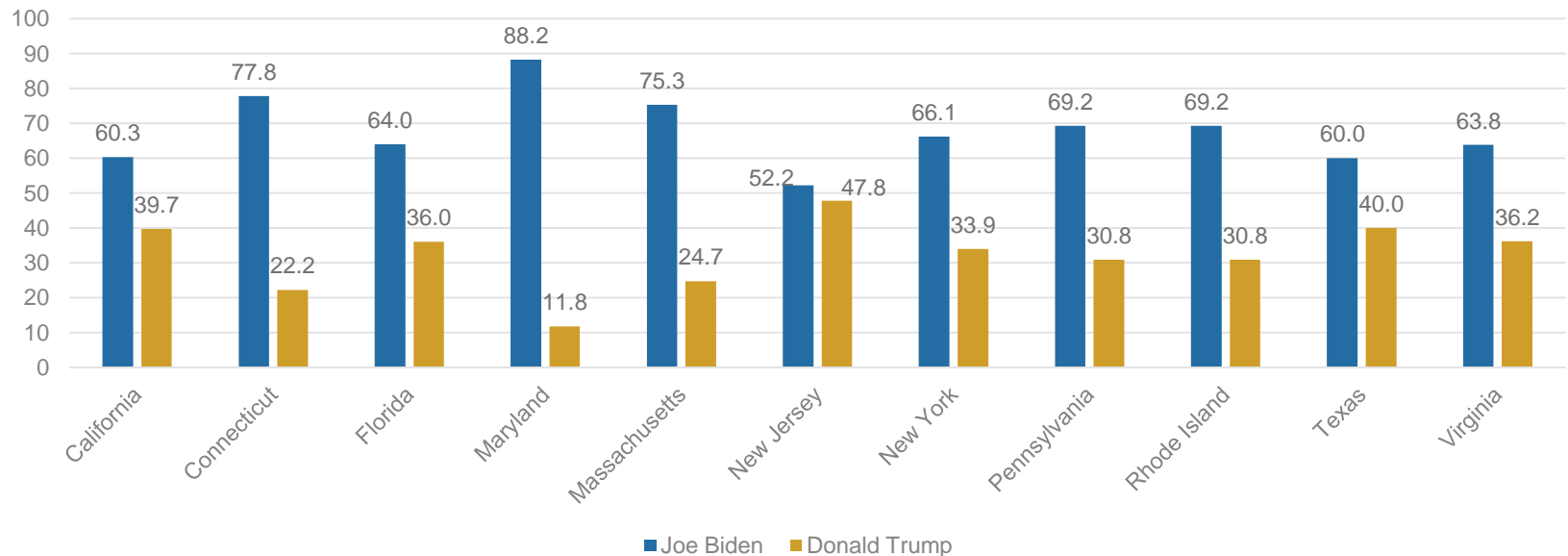
In terms of the gender gap, the results in our sample match those at the national level, with a gender gap of 10.5%. In our sample, however, both men and women favored Biden.

State of Residence

State	Number	Percent
California	374	41.8
Connecticut	29	3.2
Florida	54	6.0
Maryland	18	2.0
Massachusetts	89	9.9
New Jersey	70	7.8
New York	64	7.2
Pennsylvania	14	1.6
Rhode Island	28	3.1
Texas	26	2.9
Virginia	30	3.4
Others	99	11.1
Total	895	100.0

We present data for states with 14 or more respondents and placed all other states and responses from survey participants currently living outside the US in the category of “Others.” Close to 42% of the respondents were from California.

State of Residence by Voting Preference

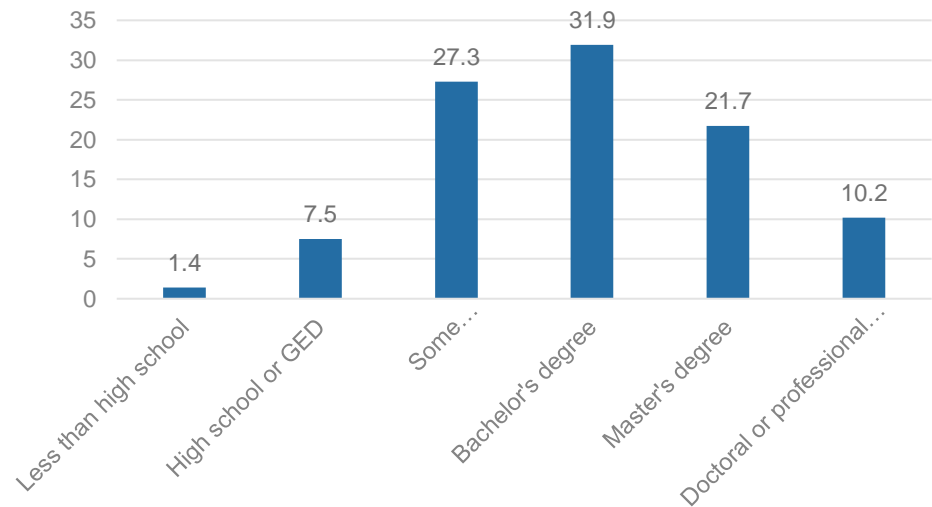


A crosstab analysis shows that in all states, Joe Biden received a higher percentage of votes than Donald Trump did. In New Jersey, the vote between the two candidates was the closest, whereas in Maryland it was the widest. Due to small samples sizes within some of the states and lack of probability sampling, we cannot draw conclusions from the state data and these results cannot be generalized to the entire Portuguese-American population.

Level of Education

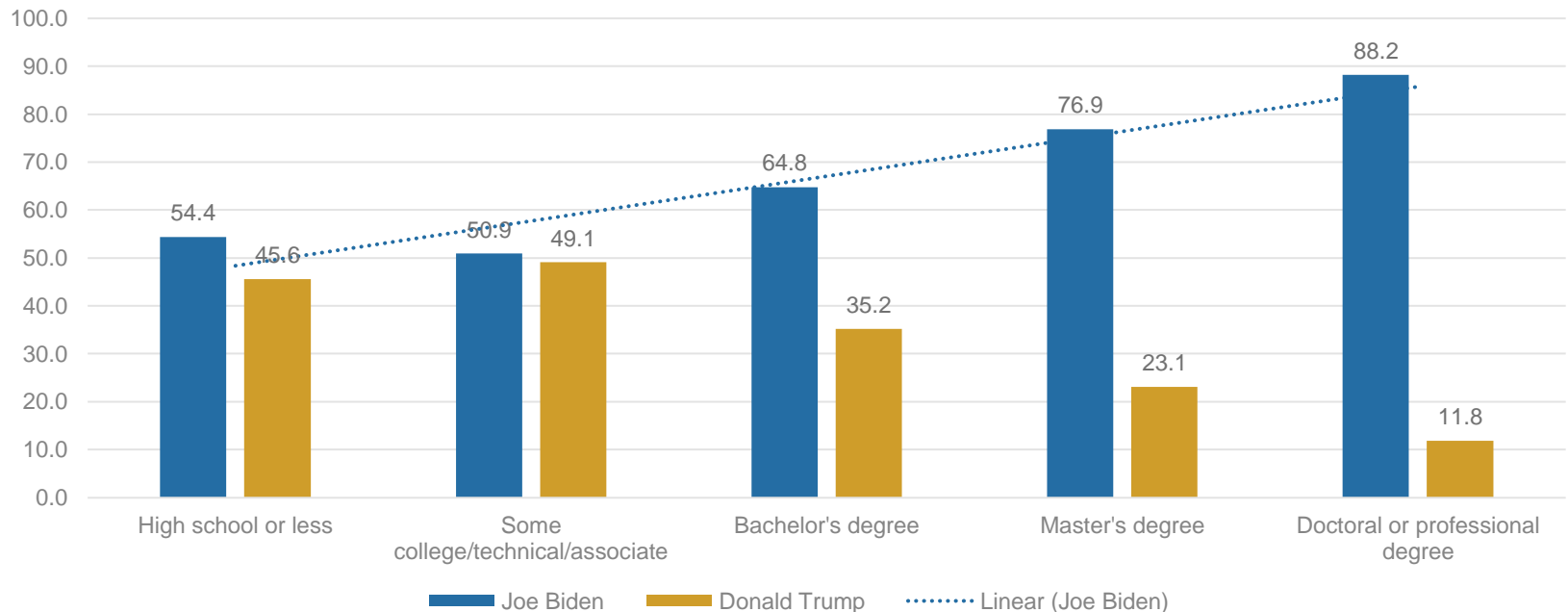
Status	Number	Percent
Less than high school	12	1.4
High school or GED	65	7.5
Some college/technical/associate	238	27.3
Bachelor's degree	278	31.9
Master's degree	189	21.7
Doctoral or professional degree	89	10.2
Total	871	100.0

Prefer not answer and missing values were excluded



The respondents to this survey are in general highly educated, displaying considerably higher levels of education than the Portuguese-American population in general. Among the survey respondents, 98.6% have a high school degree or higher, and 63.8% have a bachelor's degree or higher. According to 2019 American Community Survey data, 88.3% of Portuguese Americans have a high school or higher level of education and 31.6% have completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

Voting Behavior by Level of Education



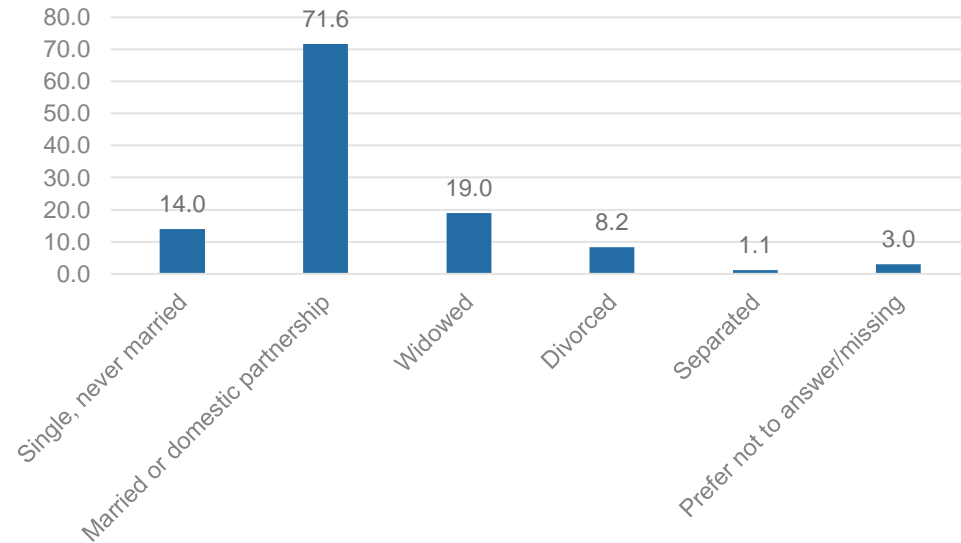
A crosstab analysis of the level of education and voting behavior showed that, in general, the higher the level of education among respondents, the more likely they were to vote for Joe Biden.

This corresponds to national data published by Pew Research Center stating that: “Voters who identify with the Democratic Party or lean toward it are much more likely than their Republican counterparts to have a college degree (41% vs. 30%). In 1996, the reverse was true: 27% of GOP voters had a college degree, compared with 22% of Democratic voters” (Gramlich, 2020).

Studies have also found that there is a positive relationship between education and voter turnout: the higher the level of education, the higher the level of turnout. Nowadays, those with higher levels of education are also more likely to hold liberal political views than are those with lower levels of education (Burden, 2009; Duffin, 2020; Sondheimer & Green, 2010).

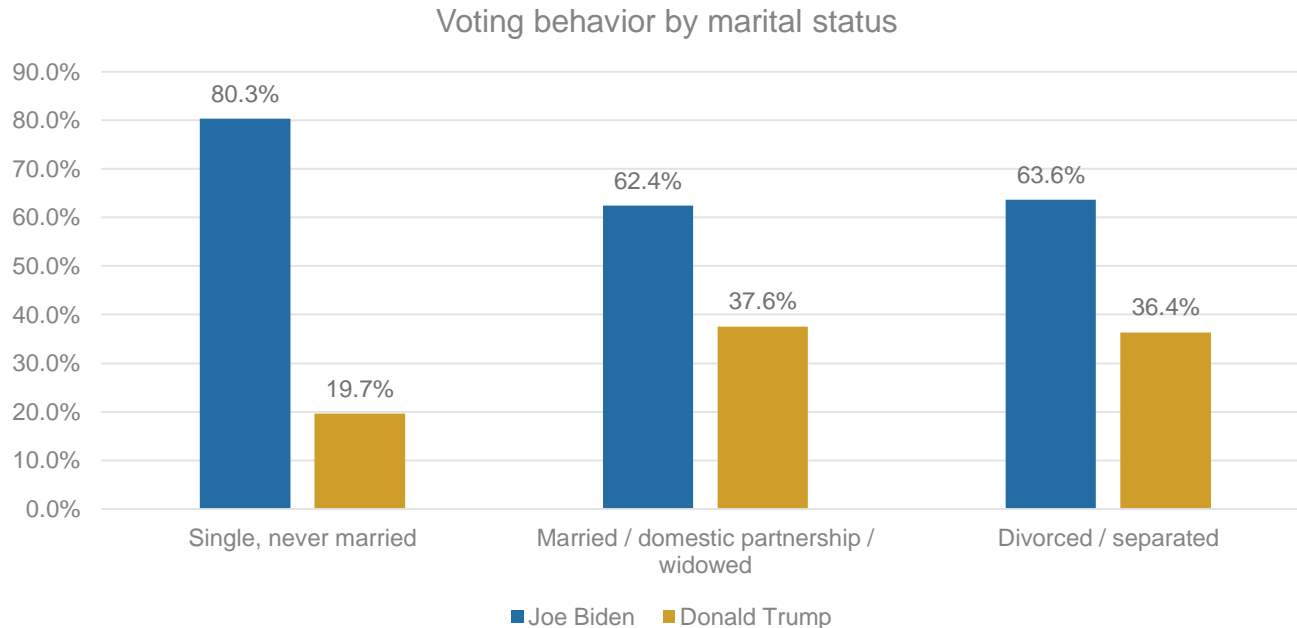
Marital Status

Status	Number	Percent
Single, never married	125	14.0
Married or domestic partnership	641	71.6
Widowed	19	2.1
Divorced	73	8.2
Separated	10	1.1
Prefer not to answer/missing	27	3.0
Total	895	100.0



Over 71% of the respondents are married or involved in a domestic partnership.

Voting Behavior by Marital Status

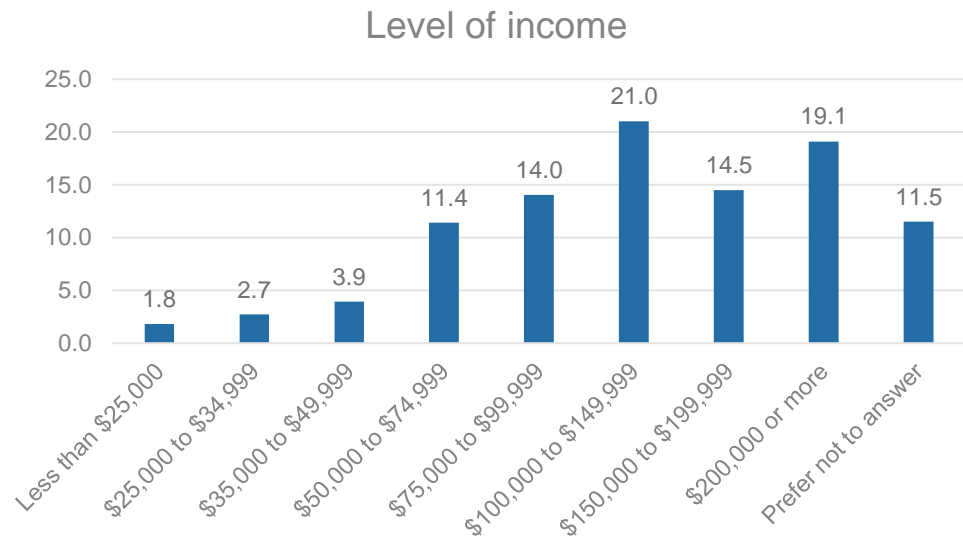


We did a crosstab analysis of marital status by voting behavior in the presidential election of 2020. In order to increase the sample size within some of the cells, we recoded the variable by combining widowed with married and divorced with separated.

The results show a statistically significant relationship, with those who are single being more likely to vote for Biden, while those who are married, widowed, divorced or separated displayed similar voting patterns. Although there are interactions between this variable and the respondent's age, binary logistic regression analysis (not presented in this report) shows that marital status has an independent effect on voting preferences.

Level of Income

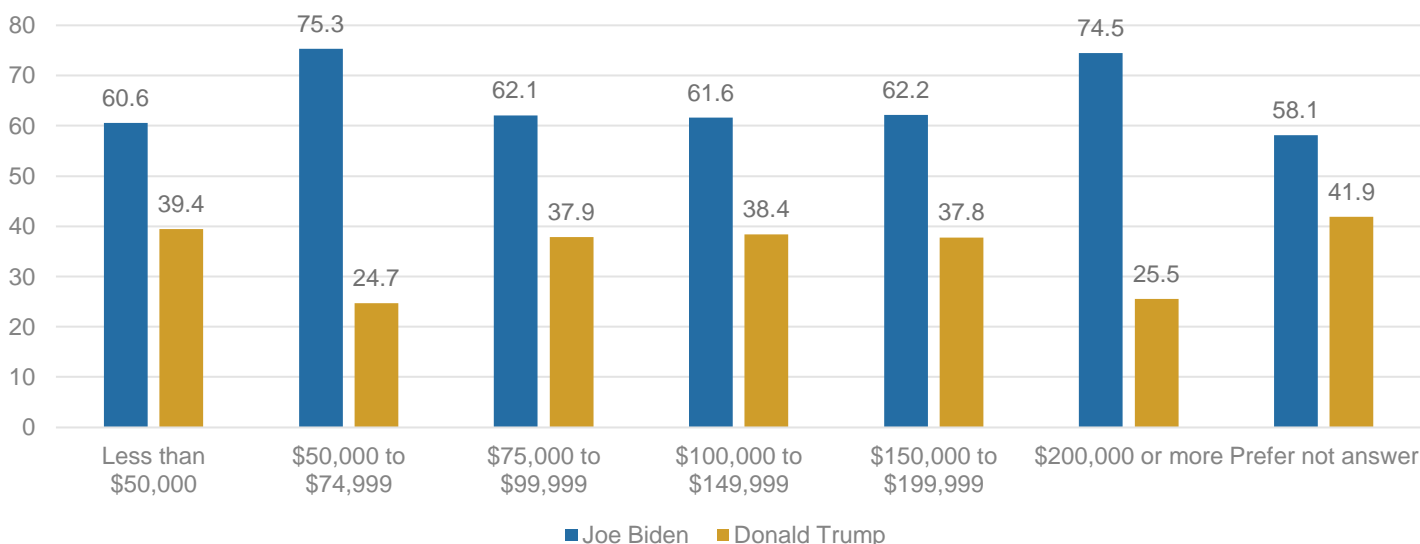
Level of income	Number	Percent
Less than \$25,000	16	1.8
\$25,000 to \$34,999	23	2.7
\$35,000 to \$49,999	34	3.9
\$50,000 to \$74,999	99	11.4
\$75,000 to \$99,999	121	14.0
\$100,000 to \$149,999	182	21.0
\$150,000 to \$199,999	126	14.5
\$200,000 or more	166	19.1
Prefer not to answer	100	11.5
Total	867	100.0



Note: missing responses were excluded

The respondents generally display a high level of income. American Community Survey (ACS) data indicate that the median family income for Portuguese Americans is \$93,899. For those born in Portugal, it is \$82,932. Even though we are unable to determine whether those who preferred not answer or skipped this question had lower levels of income, in our sample, the average income is around \$120,000. This may be, in part, a reflection of the high number of respondents from California, where the median family income for Portuguese Americans is \$102,452 (in New Jersey, it is \$110,243).

Voting Behavior by Income



In order to increase the number of cases in the lower income brackets, we combined the first three categories in this question into the attribute of less than \$50,000. There is no clear relationship between income and voting behavior among those who responded to our survey. Those who preferred not to answer the question had voting preferences similar to those who made less than \$50,000 per year.

Although we cannot determine social class by income alone, family incomes below \$99,000 have been considered to be working-class incomes.

Estimates related to the overall working-class vote in the US suggest that the white working class, particularly white men, favored Trump over Biden. Nevertheless, estimates also suggest that working-class support for Trump was much stronger in small towns and rural areas, with the urban working class voting for Biden over Trump (Roberts, n.d.).

Concluding Remarks

- With this survey, we were able to attain some insights that can serve as a foundation for dialogue on this subject matter as well as for future more representative studies.
- Our survey data suggests that a majority of Portuguese Americans remains identified with the Democratic Party. This may partially be explained by the state of residence of this population.
 - That is, Portuguese Americans, with the exception of those who settled in the California's inland areas and the Central Valley, remain concentrated in states where the Democratic Party is dominant. Further, the majority of Portuguese-American elected officials in these states, again with the exception of those residing in the Republican-dominated areas of California, have been Democrats, and they have played a significant role in the mobilization of the Portuguese-American ethnic vote (Scott & Fraley, 2014).
 - Adding to this, most immigrant groups, including the Portuguese, settled in states with significant urban areas. Vote estimates from the 2020 presidential election show a rural-urban divide, with voters in rural areas and small towns favoring Trump and those in large urban areas preferring Biden (Roberts, n.d.).
 - The geographical concentration of Portuguese Americans in Democratic states perhaps explains the lack of a statistically significant impact of the variable state of residence on the voting behavior of survey respondents.

Concluding Remarks

- Likewise, in our data, we observed no impact related to the country of birth, as immigrants and the American-born voted in similar ways. Our data also did not allow us to discern a clear relationship between income and voting preferences.
- In terms of the relationship between age, level of education, and marital status, the Portuguese Americans who participated in this survey showed patterns of voting similar to those of the American population in general: younger voters, women, those with higher levels of income, and single people were more likely to vote for Joe Biden than for Donald Trump.
- In terms of gender, there was a gender gap among our respondents very similar to that found among the general American population, with women favoring Biden by a considerable margin. Still, while Trump edged out Biden among American men in general, Biden outperformed Trump among the Portuguese men who participated in this survey.

Concluding Remarks

- This brings us back to Dahl's theory of the stages of political incorporation of immigrants, whereby as integration into the receiving society progressed within and across generations, the political participation patterns of immigrants would mirror those of the wider society. To a large extent, the results of our survey suggest that, at least among the participants in this survey—both immigrants and the American-born—vote in patterns that are very similar to those of the wider American population.
- It is possible that the respondents who participated in this online survey are generally more integrated into American society than the overall Portuguese-American population. Such integration could be the factor that explains the similarity in the voting patterns of our respondents to those of the general American population. Only a survey based on a representative sample would allow us to determine, for certain, whether this pattern holds true for all Portuguese Americans.
- Last, but not least, it would be worthwhile to carry out a study based on a representative sample, perhaps using quota sampling techniques, of the voting behavior and preferences of the Portuguese-American population.

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MUITO OBRIGADA!

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