

Guide to Views of the Electorate Research Survey

DEMOCRACY FUND VOTER STUDY GROUP

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About the Voter Study Group

The Democracy Fund Voter Study Group is a research collaboration funded by Democracy Fund delivering insights on the evolving views of American voters.

As the 2016 presidential campaign unfolded, it became increasingly clear that the underlying values and beliefs driving voter decisions need to be better understood. To that end, Henry Olsen, John Sides, and Joe Goldman convened a politically diverse group of conservative, progressive, and independent public opinion experts to study the electorate together. This original group sought not to achieve consensus, but to engage in discussion about how the views of the electorate are evolving and the implications of those changes for our democracy.

Our Mission

The research of Democracy Fund Voter Study Group is designed to help policy makers and thought leaders listen more closely, and respond more powerfully, to the views of American voters. Our goal is to have more productive conversations where voters feel that they are truly heard. We hope the study group's research and analysis helps us understand each other and make our democracy more functional.

Data

In partnership with YouGov, Voter Study Group surveys large subsets of the American electorate over time. Our unique longitudinal data allow for deep exploration of public opinion on the issues and values that drive voter behavior.

Original panelists were interviewed by YouGov in 2011–2012 as part of the 2012 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP). In that survey, 45,000 respondents were first interviewed in December 2011 and were interviewed a second time in one of the 45 weekly surveys between January 1 and November 8, 2012. After the 2012 election, 35,408 respondents were interviewed a third time.

The 2012 CCAP was constructed using YouGov’s sample matching procedure. A stratified sample is drawn from YouGov’s panel, which consists of people who have agreed to take occasional surveys. The strata are defined by the combination of age, gender, race, and education, and each stratum is sampled in proportion to its size in the U.S. population. Then, each element of this sample is matched to a synthetic sampling frame that is constructed from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, and other databases. The matching procedure finds the observation in the sample from YouGov’s panel that most closely matches each observation in the synthetic sampling frame on a set of demographic characteristics. The resulting sample is then weighted by a set of demographic and non-demographic variables.

On average, YouGov’s methodology produces less bias across a series of benchmarks than do other methodologies using online samples. For more information on the process, see:

- Stephen Ansolabehere and Douglas Rivers, “Cooperative Survey Research,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2013, Vol. 21: 1-23. Print.
- Courtney Kennedy, et al. “Evaluating Online Nonprobability Surveys,” Pew Research Center, May 2, 2016. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2016/05/02/evaluating-online-nonprobability-surveys>.
- Doug Rivers, “Pew Research: YouGov consistently outperforms competitors on accuracy,” YouGov, May 13, 2016. Available at: <https://today.yougov.com/topics/economy/articles-reports/2016/05/13/pew-research-yougov>.

In December 2016, 11,168 panelists from the 2012 CCAP were invited to respond and 8,637 of them (77 percent) completed the survey, resulting in a final sample of 8,000 after matching down to a synthetic sampling frame. The December 2016 survey constituted the first VOTER Survey wave. Since that time, these respondents have been re-interviewed and supplemented with additional respondents in July 2017, May 2018 and January 2019. The table below outlines the number of respondents in each wave who had participated in a previous wave of the survey (reinterviews) and the number who were participating for the first time (new sample).

Wave	Total Interviews	Reinterviews	New Sample
November 2016	8,000	8,000	-
July 2017	5,000	5,000	-
May 2018	6,005	4,671	1,334
January 2019	6,779	6,565	214

For additional information about individual waves of the VOTER survey, please download the year-specific survey guides made available with the full data sets.