

Changing Jewish Communities

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ARE AMERICAN JEWS BECOMING REPUBLICAN? INSIGHTS INTO JEWISH POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

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- An overwhelming majority of American Jews - 73 percent - describe themselves as moderate or liberal; 23 percent label themselves as conservative. Only 19 percent voted for Bush in the 2000 elections, but there are indications that Jewish support for the Republican Party is on the rise.
 - The growing Orthodox communities in the New York metropolitan area and elsewhere are distinctively Republican. In addition, Jews raised in households with a non-Jewish parent and who identify nominally with Judaism also tend to vote Republican.
 - Among Jewish voters polled during the 2002 New York governor's race, 47 percent indicated they would consider supporting George W. Bush. A Luntz Research Poll in April 2003 showed that 48 percent of Jews surveyed said they would consider voting for Bush in 2004.
 - In November 2002 and again during the recall election on October 7, 2003, California Governor Grey Davis received 69 percent of the Jewish vote. The *Los Angeles Times* Exit Poll indicated that 31 percent of Jewish voters supported Arnold Schwarzenegger. Together with the nearly 10 percent showing that Republican conservative State Senator Tom McClintock garnered from the Jewish community, the two leading Republican candidates attracted 40 percent of the Jewish vote.
 - According to one scenario, the Jewish vote might still be significant in determining the 2004 presidential election. Nine key states with significant Jewish populations account for 212 electoral votes or 78 percent of the total needed to secure the White House.
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Jews have been viewed in the United States as a hot political property. During the twentieth century, political parties and the political establishment have sought to be responsive to the Jewish community and its agenda. Jews, in turn, perceive themselves as political activists, engaged in advocacy, policy development, and the electoral process. In order to understand the basis of this engagement with politics, it is essential to focus on several key elements in Jewish history and tradition, political thought, and, most directly, the American experience.

Historical Context

In revisiting the contours of Jewish history, Jews over the centuries have been both the victims of political systems and in turn have been able to influence political and social ideas. In experiencing these counter forces, Jews came to understand the necessity of engaging political elites and monitoring the secular "state" regarding their physical, social, and economic well-being.

Jews were historically invested in their own governance. In crafting communal infrastructures, they were able to manage and govern their internal affairs while engaging the political establishment, often negotiating their physical and material security. This phenomenon of internal governance has been one of the Jewish community's abiding strengths in the course of its march through history.

More recently, Michael Walzer has begun to edit a series of texts reflecting the evolution of this Jewish political tradition. His emerging work, along with the writings of Daniel Elazar, Alan Mittleman, David Biale, Jonathan Woocher, David Novak, and others, has created a body of literature on Jewish political thought and behavior. This material for the most part seeks to join together Jewish ideas with historical experience.

Uniqueness of the American Jewish Story

From the moment of their arrival in New Amsterdam one can document the unfolding of this unique connection between the North American continent and the Jewish people. Peter Stuyvesant, the then-governor of New Amsterdam, petitioned the Dutch West India Company, requesting the right to bar this community of Jews from settling in the colony. The company's response laid out the first core principle that has come to define the Jewish "contract" with America, directing Stuyvesant to permit Jews to remain and in turn charged that Jews would be responsible for "caring of their own." Creating the infrastructure of communities, social and human services, and synagogues and cemeteries represented an age-old Jewish imperative, but in the American context the meaning of this event would come to symbolize more than a level of toleration. It would reflect the partnership between the public and private sectors in meeting core communal religious and social concerns.

America never promoted a culture of state-sponsored or state-supported anti-Semitism. This represented a significant break from the European model where such practices were the norm. The Virginia Declaration on Religious Freedom, crafted by Thomas Jefferson, affirmed the principle of separation of church from state, a standard embodied in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, thereby removing from the American political culture any direct alignment between the state and its religious elements. Similarly, an environment of personal toleration and acceptance was established in the constitution's central text, where no religious tests were to be established, permitting the full participation of citizens in the public sector.

When President George Washington was elected to his first term, a number of congregations sent the new president congratulatory letters. In the context of answering these messages, Washington responded to the Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island, affirming the notion of religious liberty while guaranteeing the legal and physical well being of the community. This principle was challenged in 1862 when General Ulysses Grant issued Order No. 11, directing that all Jews conducting business as peddlers or merchants in the Tennessee River Valley be removed from that area. This order represented the first and only occasion where a specific government action was directed against the Jewish community. By the early part of January 1863, following the petition of Jews from across the Union, President Lincoln demanded that this order be rescinded, referencing it as an abomination against the United States. The White House understood that this proposed action was against the principles that the nation sought to represent, and it came to symbolize for Jews the value of political advocacy and communal vigilance.

The American Jewish community has so embraced this model of representative democracy as to create its own "federalist" system of communal governance, creating networks of national, regional, and local structures where authority and function were designated and separated along the lines of the American political system. Even the selection of terminology describing or identifying institutions emulated this nation's political structure. Terms such as "union," as represented in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (recently renamed the Union for Reform Judaism); the idea of "federated" as identified with the local Jewish communal federation system; or the introduction of the concept of a "congress" as adopted and employed originally by the American Jewish Congress - all are extracted from the American political process. Furthermore, the Jewish communal infrastructure reflects the notion of a "separation of

powers," where tasks and functions are divided among different institutional entities, i.e., religious, cultural, social, and humanitarian. American Jewry totally embraced the federalist model and its system of governance, demonstrating another element in the connection between Jews and American politics.

The high percentage of registered voters within the community is another significant characteristic of the American Jewish political tradition, with Jewish voting participation levels being among the highest of all ethnic groups and religious communities in the nation. This degree of civic engagement reflects a passion for politics, in part a reaction to Jewish historical experience where the opportunity for participation was often denied or limited. American Jews, in turn, have developed a type of civic culture that suggests that a citizen of the society has an obligation to be engaged in its political process.

Early Jewish Voting Trends

From 1860 until the election of Franklin Roosevelt, American Jews voted overwhelmingly Republican. Just as Lincoln was perceived as a hero of the Jewish people through his leadership in overturning Grant's Order No. 11 and in leading the fight against slavery while seeking to preserve the Union, Roosevelt would fulfill a similar role for Jews beginning with his efforts to build a new coalition of political power to transform the economy and later to mobilize the nation against Nazism.

While Jews have not always been Democrats, they have had a long and engaged history with progressive ideas. These values and core notions were a critical element in the ideology of the Republican Party during the later half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Theodore Roosevelt was the last Republican to receive significant Jewish support; his fierce independence and support of specific Jewish concerns made him a hero to many within this community. Democrat Woodrow Wilson would capture the attention of many American Jews with his internationalist vision and, more directly, his ideas pertaining to the creation of a League of Nations. In addition, Wilson's nomination of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court, his endorsement of the Balfour Declaration and later Zionist claims in Palestine, and his condemnation of anti-Semitism both domestic and foreign would begin the repositioning of Jewish political loyalties and voting patterns.

While the leadership of the Jewish community remained staunchly Republican, including such personalities as Louis Marshall, the leader of the American Jewish Committee, and a host of other key players of that era, the bulk of the community was to shift party allegiance as a result of changes within the community and in American society. As the new wave of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century assumed a level of involvement and acculturation with their "new homeland," they began to explore their own political identity. American Jews caught up in the growth of the trade union movement began to address the "progressive" agenda including the rights of labor, along with issues related to how cities ought to be governed. It would be the Depression, however, that would formalize the community's special relationship with the Democratic Party.

The last Republican presidential candidate to win a plurality of the Jewish vote was Warren Harding in 1920 (when Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs took an estimated 38 percent to Harding's 43 percent and Democrat James Cox's 19 percent). Between 1928 and 1948, Democrats Al Smith, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman won at least 75 percent of the Jewish vote, at times gaining as much as 90 percent of the Jewish vote.

Reflections on Jewish Liberalism

Jewish scholars and activists have written extensively on "why" Jews are generally identified as "liberal," beginning with the application of religious and prophetic principles of social justice in helping to frame a liberal political agenda. For others, the "universal" values and ideas of liberalism resonated with the messianic principles of Judaism. The optimistic belief in a world moving from authoritarian rule to democratic and universal ideals was seen as aligned with progressive political interests.

The Jewish historical experience provides another perspective. Since Jews had lived under regimes that were defined as autocratic, it was natural for this community of immigrants to embrace liberal political values and to even experiment with socialist ideas. As a result, the Democratic Party and other liberal and even left-oriented political expressions became the avenue of affiliation for many of these new Americans.

Over time it became "politically chic," according to some writers, to be seen as part of the left by embracing causes of liberalism and advocate for those who were not able to articulate their own interests. Others have suggested that Jewish political behavior was tied to the pull of assimilation. Jews desiring to identify with the mainstream of America were to be found in the ranks of the Democratic Party, which was seen in the 1930s as the ascending political force in American politics. Jews seeking to blend in with the social norms of the society related to the political shifts within the society. Jews affiliated with the Republican Party and its conservative viewpoint have offered a similar explanation for their own more recent engagement.

Finally, there are those who see the advocacy institutions within the Jewish community as naturally aligned with the liberal institutions of the general society. As a result, there was shared linkage between liberal causes that were nurtured and developed inside the Jewish community, and the labor movement, women's organizations, or other social activist endeavors.

Data on Jewish Voting

Jewish voting patterns after World War II reflected sustained engagement with the Democratic Party. In summarizing voting studies of the past forty years, 50 percent of American Jews identify with the Democratic Party. Another 30-35 percent are Independents, while some 13-17 percent define themselves as Republicans.

Where once the Democratic Party could count on a 90 percent Jewish turnout for its candidates, these numbers are now generally 60-75 percent, depending upon particular elections and specific candidates. Historically, Jews have voted overwhelmingly Democratic in congressional races. Over the last several decades, Jewish support for Democratic congressional candidates peaked at 82 percent in 1982, according to the *New York Times*. By contrast, the high point for Republicans was 32 percent of the Jewish vote garnered in House races in 1988. During the 1990s, Democrats secured at least 73 percent of the Jewish vote in House of Representatives races.

Only Ronald Reagan among Republican presidential candidates was able to break this pattern when he received nearly 38 percent of the Jewish vote in 1980. Traditionally, Republican candidates for the White House receive around 18 percent of the national Jewish vote.

According to data collected over the past several years, an overwhelming majority of Jews - 73 percent - describe themselves as moderate or liberal; 23 percent label themselves as conservative. By contrast, 42 percent of American Protestants and 34 percent of Catholics identify themselves as conservative.

There are a number of indicators today that may impact on future elections. For example, there is some evidence that younger Jews do not hold the same degree of loyalty to the Democratic Party and, as a result, are more likely to register as Independent or Republican. Thus, the Republican Party may have a better chance of picking up the Jewish vote in the towns inhabited by young professionals in northern New Jersey than in the retirement communities of southern Florida. While these numbers do not indicate a definitive generational trend, it does appear that both Orthodox Jews and Jews who are from more secular backgrounds tend to vote Republican more frequently than do other Jewish constituencies, clearly for different ideological, political, and cultural reasons.

Jewish voting patterns are also distinctively different in state and local elections. In larger metropolitan areas with significant Jewish populations, such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia, one finds Jewish voting patterns in local and statewide campaigns driven by self-interest with respect to financial, security, and specific public policy concerns. Similarly, the attractiveness of particular

candidates may contribute to altered voting patterns. Centrist Republicans in local and state elections are often able to attract significant Jewish support.

Two cohort groups within the Jewish community show particularly significant voting patterns. The growing Orthodox communities in the New York metropolitan area and elsewhere are distinctively Republican, and are contributing to the reshaping of political outcomes in some local and state elections. Correspondingly, Jews raised in households with a non-Jewish parent and who identify nominally with Judaism also tend to vote Republican, according to data extracted from various Jewish surveys.

The 2002 Election

The election outcome shifted during the final weeks of the 2002 campaign, according to polling data available ten days prior to the November 5th election. Five percent of those voting, according to both the Gallup Poll and the CBS/*New York Times* Poll, made or altered their electoral choices within the closing days of the campaign, changing the final outcome, permitting the Republicans to retain control of both houses of Congress and to secure a majority of governorships.

The impact of 9/11 was most directly tied to the New York governor's race. A Marist Poll conducted one month before the November 2002 campaign placed New York's Republican governor, George Pataki, in a dead heat with his Democratic challenger, Carl McCall, among Jewish voters. Republican candidates in mayoral elections in the 1990s, especially in New York and Los Angeles, did especially well among Jewish voters. Here again, the unique convergence of personality and circumstance may have been more significant factors in voter preference than party affiliation.

During the 2002 New York governor's race, people were asked: "If the elections were held today, in New York State, and George W. Bush were a candidate in this state, would you support him?" 47 percent of Jewish voters polled indicated they would consider supporting George W. Bush, a figure significantly higher than the 19 percent he received in the 2000 election.

Jewish candidates continued to be elected at all levels of government and in all parts of the nation. In the current Congress are eleven Jewish Senators and twenty-four Jewish members of the House. Two Jewish governors, Edward Rendell (Democrat) of Pennsylvania and Linda Lingle, the first Republican and first woman to be elected governor of Hawaii, were also elected in 2002.

The Schwarzenegger Factor and the Jewish Question

In November 2002, California's nearly one million Jews overwhelmingly supported the return of Grey Davis to Sacramento as governor, despite significant criticism directed against his campaign and his lackluster leadership and performance. In that election and again during the recall election held on October 7, 2003, Davis received 69 percent of the Jewish vote, a percentage exceeded only by the African-American community's 80 percent support for Davis.

The *Los Angeles Times* Exit Poll indicated that 31 percent of Jewish voters supported Arnold Schwarzenegger to be the state's next governor. Together with the relatively strong 10 percent showing that Republican conservative State Senator Tom McClintock garnered from the Jewish community, the two leading Republican candidates attracted 40 percent of the Jewish vote. However, the Schwarzenegger candidacy was unique, built around his name recognition and Hollywood image. He must be seen as an anomaly among California Republicans, due in part to his positions on abortion, gay rights, and a host of other social and economic issues that place him outside the conservative focus of many within that party.

It is noteworthy that California's Democratic Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante received 52 percent of the Jewish vote, as compared with 46 percent from his own Latino community.

While it is difficult to identify the extent of Jewish support for the other 130 candidates on the California ballot, in 2002, many Jews supported Green Party candidate Peter Camejo, according to a *Los Angeles Times* poll. The party that year captured over 5 percent of the vote in several key statewide contests, and elected 171 candidates in state and municipal elections.

Clear divisions could be seen in the voting patterns of Northern and Southern Californians. More liberal Bay Area voters, including Jews, tended to support the Davis-Bustamante campaigns, overwhelmingly rejecting the Schwarzenegger option. In Los Angeles County, the Westside Jewish vote continued to reflect its traditional liberal bent by also endorsing the Democratic candidates, whereas San Fernando Valley Jews, often identified as being more conservative, appeared to embrace the two primary Republican candidates. Similarly, based on media interviews, it would appear that more traditional Jews tended to embrace the Schwarzenegger or McClintock campaigns.

Trend-Lines

In relative terms, the impact of American Jewish voting clout continues to decline, as can be noted in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Illinois, and California. Even in Los Angeles County, where Jews account for around 4 percent of the electorate (the same percentage as the Jewish vote nationally), the Jewish "leverage factor" in several close state and county races appears to have been minimal.

A Luntz Research Poll in April 2003 showed that 48 percent of Jews surveyed said they would consider voting for President Bush in 2004. The poll also found that Bush's performance moved 27 percent of Jewish voters to say they were more likely to vote for Republicans for other offices as well.

According to one scenario, the Jewish vote might still be significant in determining the 2004 presidential election. Four key states with significant Jewish populations account for 128 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win: California (55), New York (31), Florida (27), and New Jersey (15). Adding the next five states with large Jewish populations brings 84 additional electoral votes: Illinois (21), Pennsylvania (21), Ohio (20), Massachusetts (12), and Maryland (10). Thus, the "Jewish vote" could have a major impact on the outcome of 212 electoral votes or 78 percent of the total needed to secure the White House.

Core Issues and the Jewish Vote

Several core issues have served as political barometers for Jewish voting attitudes. The key Jewish issue remains support for Israel. The pro-Israel position of candidates and party platforms have represented a powerful measure by which Jews defined political allies and identified enemies. Historically, Democrats were seen as the party more sensitive and committed to the interests of the Jewish state, but over time, and especially since the Bush presidency, this label may hold less value. Politicians are judged by their votes, statements, legislative and political initiatives, and relationships to Israel and its advocates.

Historically, the Jewish community endorsed efforts to preserve the separation of church and state. Today, however, significant numbers of Orthodox Jews aligned with other sectors of the Jewish community have embraced state and federal support for parochial education and the school voucher initiative. Jewish Republicans are similarly comfortable with the goals of charitable choice, the introduction of religious practices in the public square, opposition to abortion, and concerns about the moral basis of society.

Since the events of 9/11 and over three years of terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens, a number of alarming trends may be identified that could impact on Jewish political consciousness and even voting patterns. The rise of anti-Semitism across the globe and in the U.S. represents a major concern for many Jews and may have implications for how they view candidates and define issues. According to the most recent studies, there has been a drop in favorable attitudes about Jews by non-Jews in the U.S. over the last eight years.

Will these external factors change the political modality of Jewish voting? In contrast to these disturbing patterns, the current Republican administration is consciously seeking through its statements and actions pertaining to international terrorism and the case for Israel to align itself with rising Jewish communal concerns in these areas. The Jewish voter, along with all Americans, faces new political challenges. These issues might ultimately be reflected in new voting patterns. What occurs on the streets of Baghdad and Tel Aviv will no doubt shape the thinking of America's Jews. Similarly, the impact of the new forms of European anti-Semitism will also influence Jewish political thinking. Economic realities at home, which have been a key factor in determining voter choices in the past, may be counterbalanced by the continuous reality and threat of international terrorism that will also define voting outcomes.

Jewish voting patterns may undergo significant change at those times in which Jews sense that their self-interests are being challenged, and that it is essential for them to evaluate their political position within the society. This occurred at the time of Lincoln, during the Wilson era, and as a result of the Great Depression. Whether in fact Jewish voting patterns shift significantly in seventy-year cycles remains to be seen.

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