

# [***US Jews upset with Trump's latest rhetoric say he doesn't get to tell them how to be Jewish***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BMT-0G81-JC5B-G27T-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Since the start of his political career, Donald Trump has played on stereotypes about Jews and ***politics***.

He told the Republican Jewish Coalition in 2015 that “you want to control your politicians” and suggested the audience used money to exert control. In the White House, he said Jews who vote for Democrats are “very disloyal to Israel.”

Two years ago, the former president hosted two dinner guests at his Florida residence who were known to make virulent antisemitic comments.

And this week, Trump charged that Jewish Democrats were being disloyal to their faith and to Israel. That had many American Jews taking up positions behind now-familiar political lines. Trump opponents accused him of promoting antisemitic tropes while his defenders suggested he was making a fair political point in his own way.

Jonathan Sarna, American Jewish history professor at Brandeis University, said Trump is capitalizing on tensions within the Jewish community.

“For people who hate Donald Trump in the Jewish community, certainly this statement will reinforce their sense that they don’t want to have anything to do with him,” he said. “For people who like Donald Trump in the Jewish community, they probably nod in agreement.”

To many Jewish leaders in a demographic that has overwhelmingly identified as Democratic and supported President Joe Biden in 2020, Trump's latest comments promoted harmful antisemitic stereotypes, painting Jews as having divided loyalties and that there's only one right way to be Jewish religiously.

“That escalation of rhetoric is so dangerous, so divisive and so wrong,” said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest U.S. Jewish religious denomination. “This is a moment when Israel needs there to be more bipartisan support.”

But Matt Brooks, CEO of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said the former president’s comments must be heard in context of the Israel-Hamas war and Democratic criticisms of the state of Israel.

“What the president was saying in his own unique style was giving voice to things I get asked about multiple times a day,” Brooks said. “How can Jews remain Democrats in light of what is going on?” He contended the Democratic Party is “no longer the pro-Israel bastion it used to be.”

More than 31,800 Palestinians have been killed in the [*Israeli offensive*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war) that followed Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and took hostages. Much of northern Gaza has been leveled, and officials warned famine is imminent.

Trump's comments followed a speech by Senate Majority Leader [*Chuck Schumer*](https://apnews.com/article/schumer-netanyahu-israel-poland-hamas-3c86e541396fda36b0ef05b2d36c28e5), the country’s highest-ranking Jewish official. Schumer, a Democrat, last week sharply criticized Prime Minister [*Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://apnews.com/hub/benjamin-netanyahu) ’s handling of the war in Gaza. Schumer called for new elections in Israel and warned the civilian toll was damaging Israel’s global standing.

“Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion,” Trump retorted Monday on a talk show. “They hate everything about Israel.”

A cascade of Jewish voices, from Schumer to the Anti-Defamation League to religious leaders, denounced Trump's statement.

In a statement to The Associated Press on Wednesday, the Trump campaign doubled down, criticizing Schumer, congressional Democrats’ support of Palestinians and the Biden administration’s policies on Iran and on aid to Gaza.

“President Trump is right,” said Karoline Leavitt, national press secretary for the Trump campaign.

Jeffrey Herf, an antisemitism expert at the University of Maryland, disagrees with Schumer’s call for a cease-fire in Gaza, but believes most Democrats support Israel — and he said a second Biden term would be better for it than a second Trump one.

“If (Trump) loses the 2024 election, his comments prepare the way for blaming the Jews for his defeat,” Herf said. “The clear result would be to fan the flames of antisemitism and assert that, yet again, the Jews are guilty.”

Sarna saw Trump as trying to appeal to politically conservative Jews, particularly the small but fast-growing Orthodox segment, who see Trump as a defender of Israel.

Also, about 10% of U.S. Jews are immigrants, according to a 2020 Pew Research Center report. Sarna said significant numbers are conservative.

At the same time, Democrats face the tension between their Jewish constituency, which is predominantly pro-Israel, and its progressive wing, which is more pro-Palestinian.

Sarna said that while it may seem odd to focus so much attention on subsections of a minority population, “elections in America are very close, and every vote counts.”

Conservative commentator Ben Shapiro said Tuesday on his podcast that Trump “was making a point that, frankly, I have made myself, which is that Jews who are voting Democrat do not understand the Democratic Party.” Shapiro, who practices Orthodox Judaism, contended the party “overlooks antisemitism” within its ranks.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the CEO of T’ruah, a rabbinic human rights organization, said Trump has no business dictating who’s a good Jew.

“By insinuating that good Jews will vote for the party that is best for Israel, Trump is evoking the age-old antisemitic trope of dual loyalty — an accusation that Jews are more loyal to their religion than to their country, and therefore can’t be trusted,” she said. “Historically, this accusation has fueled some of the worst antisemitic violence.”

In his own time in office, Trump’s policy “of supporting Prime Minister Netanyahu and [*the settler agenda*](https://apnews.com/article/us-news-ap-top-news-international-news-politics-west-bank-3da4fb3671004679a91a7d4ae9ab4e57) only endangered Palestinians and Israelis and made peace more difficult to achieve,” Jacobs said.

Pittsburgh-based journalist Beth Kissileff — whose husband, a rabbi in the Conservative denomination of Judaism, in 2018 survived the nation’s [*deadliest antisemitic attack*](https://apnews.com/article/pittsburgh-synagogue-mass-shooting-robert-bowers-6d1d96072fb1ec04e054234e654d9037) — said it was highly offensive for Trump to be a “self-appointed arbiter” of what it means to be Jewish.

“Chuck Schumer had every right to say what he said,” Kissileff added. “Just because we’re Jews, it doesn’t mean we agree with everything the (Israeli) government is doing. We have compassion for innocent Palestinian lives.”

Brooks, of the Republican Jewish Coalition, defended the former president against antisemitism charges, pointing to his presidential record as an example of proof.

Trump pursued policies that were popular among American Christian Zionists and Israeli religious-nationalists, including moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and supporting Jewish settlements in occupied territories. His daughter Ivanka is a convert to Orthodox Judaism, and her husband and their children are Jewish. The couple worked as high-profile surrogates to the Jewish community during Trump's administration.

Trump’s core supporters include white evangelicals, many of whom believe the modern state of Israel fulfills biblical prophecy. Prominent [*evangelicals who support Zionism*](https://apnews.com/article/christian-zionists-israel-republican-presidential-candidates-97a5bd9359a9af724fb55cfb154007ef) have also been criticized for inflammatory statements about Jewish people.

Sixty-nine percent of Jewish voters in 2020 supported Biden, while 30% supported Trump, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the electorate conducted in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago. That made Jewish voters one of the religious groups where support for Biden was strongest. Also, 73% of Jewish voters in 2020 said that Trump was too tolerant of extremist groups.

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson said Trump’s comments are “in a complex middle zone” — not explicitly antisemitic, but reliant on such tropes.

American Jews base their votes on a complex mix of issues and values, “among them inclusion, diversity, climate change, civil rights,” said Artson, a leader within Conservative Judaism. “While they love Israel diversely, many of us also care about the wellbeing and self-determination of Palestinians.”

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This story was first published on March 21, 2024. It was updated on March 25, 2024 to correct the spelling of Jeffrey Herf's last name. It also was updated on March 22, 2024, to correct Donald Trump’s title in one instance. He is the former president, not the president

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Associated Press reporters Mariam Fam and Amelia Thomson DeVeaux contributed to this report.

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