

# Why do American Jews not vote Republican?

## Introduction

In exit polls from the 2018 midterm elections, the slice of the population that voted most overwhelmingly democratic was African Americans, with 90% of African Americans saying that they voted for the Democratic candidate in exit polls<sup>1</sup>. African Americans are widely considered to be a key part of the Democratic base, as the lasting effects of Democratic politicians in the Civil rights movement has seemingly tethered them to the Democratic party. However, when looking at exit polls from the 2018 midterms, the slice of the population that voted the 2nd most prolifically for Democratic candidates was Jewish Americans<sup>2</sup>.

Jewish Americans are a small slice of the voting population, only 2% in the 2018 elections, but are overwhelmingly democratic. In contrast with African Americans, which Republican politicians are considered to have not attempted to persuade in 2018, Republican Politicians have repeatedly attempted to draw Jewish American voters toward their party, throughout elections historically until now. While the way that they have attempted to persuade Jewish American voters has changed over time, ranging from emphasizing Democratic support for affirmative action, appealing to religious liberty, to declaring their support for Israel, Republican Politicians have repeatedly attempted to get votes from Jewish American voters. However, they have repeatedly been unsuccessful, having not achieved more than 30% of the Jewish American vote that Mitt Romney got as the 2012 presidential elections since the Reagan era, and never having achieved the majority of Jewish American votes.

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While Jewish American voters as a whole support Democratic candidates, the level of support varies along different slices of the population, including denomination, birthplace, religiosity, income, and other factors. However, when compared to the American populace at large, Jewish Americans vote more Democratic in nearly all cases, sometimes significantly so.

However, this level of liberal polity is unique to the American political sphere. In April 2019, Israel elected Benjamin Netanyahu to his 5th term as Prime Minister, forming a coalition government that will likely include 65 of the 120 seats of the Israeli parliament<sup>3</sup>, the Knesset. In Canada, the only other country besides Israel and the US where Jews make up 1% of the population, 52% Jewish Canadians voted for the Conservative party (Todd 2011). In the United Kingdom, British Jews are an overwhelmingly conservative group, with 63% voting for the conservative party in the 2017 election<sup>4</sup>. Since Jews are very rare in other countries, less than 7 Jews in 1000 Citizens, data on their preferences is not available<sup>5</sup>. However, the comparison between the American Jews and Canadian, British, and Israeli Jews shows that this overwhelmingly liberal voting pattern is unique to American Jews.

Why then, do American Jews vote so Democratic? And why have repeated Republican efforts siphon voters off failed? One factor is their urban and suburban location, as they are overwhelmingly located in cities like New York City, Miami, Los Angeles or other urban locales and their associated suburbs. But these were not necessarily extraordinarily Democratic strongholds, as suburban locations were considered to be reliably Republican before 2018, and Jewish Americans were reliably Democratic before that (Grabar 2018). Location, though, is not the only factor. Another factor is that Jewish American voters are largely economically

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successful, as the areas where there is an American Synagogue have a median household income of \$97,400 for Conservative Synagogues<sup>6</sup>, \$91,500 for Reform Synagogues, and \$78,600 for Orthodox Synagogues (Quealy 2017). However, the earning potential is not the main reason they vote Democratic either, as those making >\$100,000, as a bloc, voted 52% Republican. As the historian Milton Himmelfarb noted, “Jews earn like Episcopalians, and vote like Puerto Ricans”.<sup>7</sup>

Jewish Americans, like other groups, vote in their self interest. However, it is not necessarily their economic self interest. Jewish Americans were the most common victims of hate crimes, per capita, between 2008-2012<sup>8</sup>, averaging 84.9 hate crimes per 100,000 people per year. While Jewish Americans face the most hate crimes, they believe that other groups, specifically LGBT individuals, Muslim Americans and African Americans, face more discrimination than they do. Their exposure to hate crimes, discrimination, and other forms of prejudice explains their support for Democrats, in the same way that it does for African Americans. Similar to African Americans, the voting patterns of American Jews can be explained for two reasons. First, Jewish Americans view a “liberal” regime of religion and state as a greater political motivator than economic or other interests. This “liberal” regime of religion and state is and was championed by the Democratic party as a result of their support for the Civil Rights Movement, and was subsequently advocated against by the Republican coalition with the evangelical right. Second, Jewish American identification as Democrats has caused Synagogues to become liberal community centers, causing religious attendance to reinforce liberal political leanings.

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### Historical Context

There have been Jewish communities in America since before the War of Independence, as the first Jew stepped foot in America in 1621 (Sloan 1978). However, Jews were first allowed to become citizens in 1740, when Parliament passed the Plantation Act (Lemay et. al. 1999). By the time that the War of Independence in 1776, the Jewish population was still tiny, between 1,000 to 2,000 people (Nell 2003). However, laws at the time prevented non-Protestants from holding public office or voting in many colonies until the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791 (DeConde 1992). Jews remained a very miniscule part of the population up until the end of the 19th century, when pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe led to mass immigration to the United States. Between 1880 and 1924, 2.8 million Jewish Europeans came to the United States. As a part of this mass exodus, European Jews brought together the Leftist and Progressive movements that they were leading in Europe, establishing newspapers like *Morgan Freiheit* and *Forverts*, an influential Yiddish-language paper that continues to this day (Lewin 1979). This mass immigration was stopped in 1924 by the Johnson-Reed Act, also known as the Immigration Act of 1924, which introduced quotas for Eastern European countries. Since these quota limits were set the level of the 1890 census, prior large increase in Eastern European immigration, Jewish immigration to America was nearly completely stopped (CQ Almanac 1952).

However, the effect of the ideologies brought along by mass immigration from Eastern Europe was pronounced, especially in the voting patterns of Jewish Americans. In the 1920 presidential election, Jewish Americans voted disproportionately for Eugene Debs, the Socialist

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Candidate for president. All in all, 38% of votes cast by Jewish Americans were for Debs, compared to 3% of the voting population at large (Maisel et. al. 2001).

With many Jewish immigrants settling in New York City, the New York metropolitan area, among others, became a hotbed of Progressive and Socialist activism. Debs was not the only beneficiary of this activism, as Meyer London, A New York Jew, became one of only two congressmen ever elected from the Socialist Party. First elected in 1915, London eventually served three terms in Congress. The impact of the progressive nature of Jewish Americans, though, was felt beyond support for Candidates to the Supreme Court, as in 1916, the Jewish American and progressive leader Justice Louis Brandeis was nominated and confirmed to the Supreme Court. Brandeis proved to be an influential progressive voice on the Supreme Court. This support for progressive and/or socialist policies continued through the 1920's and 1930's. The 1924 election saw Jewish Americans vote 51% for John W. Davis, the Democratic Party Candidate, and 22% for Robert La Follette Sr., the Progressive Party Candidate, compared to 29% and 17% of Americans at large, respectively (Maisel et. al. 2001).

This disproportionate support for progressive politics continued even as the progressive party faltered. Franklin Delano Roosevelt made Jewish Americans a key part of his New Deal coalition, as Roosevelt never got below 82% of the Jewish American vote, and the gap between the votes for Roosevelt of Jewish Americans and Americans as a whole was never less than 24% (Maisel et. al. 2001). This ardent support for Roosevelt was because of the economic policy and welfare-state aspects that he provided (Feingold 2013). Roosevelt also elevated Jewish Americans to positions in his administration, with many of his advisors and some 15% of all

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nominees being Jewish Americans. However, the delicate New Deal coalition caused Roosevelt to deliberately avoid criticizing anti-Semitism, both domestic and abroad in Nazi Germany (Feingold 2013).

American Jews continued to support progressive policies through the rest of the 1940's, 1950's and into the 1960's, as they voted disproportionately to the population at large, again, for Henry A Wallace, Roosevelt's Vice President before Harry Truman, and Truman in the 1948 elections. In 1956 Dwight D Eisenhower, campaigning as a New Deal Republican, achieved the recent high water mark for Jewish American support for his candidacy, achieving 40% of the vote in 1956. Eisenhower's support in the Republican primary came from the eastern establishment, a moderate faction of the party, as he supported a continuation of New Deal programs and policies. In the 1960 election, Jewish American voters returned to voting for the Democratic party in similar levels to the 1940's, with 82% voting for John F. Kennedy in the 1960 election. After Kennedy's assassination, Jewish Americans supported Lyndon B. Johnson at a rate of 90% in the 1964 election (Maisel et. al. 2001). However, this marked a turning point in Jewish American support for the Democratic party.

Whereas many Jewish Americans had been willing to support Democratic candidates in large numbers because of their economic programs, in the 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's many Jewish Americans became active in the Civil Rights Movement. Jewish Americans had long been a persecuted minority, targeted especially in the early 1910's by the White Supremacist Ku Klux Klan. Incidents like the lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish American superintendent in Georgia who was convicted of murder, but was lynched after he had his sentence commuted to

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life in prison, established a common thread of experience between the two groups. African Americans and Jewish Americans worked together to establish rights for both groups throughout the 1930's and 40's and beyond, with the alliance reaching a "golden age" in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Jewish Americans disproportionately made up a large component of the members of the civil rights movement, making up approximately half of the white volunteers for the Mississippi Summer voter registration drive in 1964. In the Mississippi Summer voter registration drive, the murder of two Jewish American and one African American volunteers for the Congress of Racial Equality captured national attention, becoming one of the catalysts for Congress to pass the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Friedman 1995). Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the Civil Rights Movement, remarked in 1965 "It would be impossible to record the contribution that the Jewish people have made toward the Negro's struggle for freedom—it has been so great."

The Act brought a profound symbolic change into Jewish American Life, as it was the the first time that the United States had limited discrimination in employment based on religion. With the passage of this, Jewish Americans finally held full legal rights and opportunities of all other Americans. However, this represented a high mark for New Deal coalition and Jewish American-African American relations, with tensions from earlier eras and mutual self-interest leading to a fracturing of the New Deal coalition, exemplified by the Brownsville Teachers strike in 1967.

While Jewish Americans and African Americans had worked together in the civil rights movement, the Brownsville Teachers strike put them on opposite sides. Brownsville was a

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predominantly Jewish area of New York City from the 1880's until the 1950's, but white flight and the construction of public housing buildings in the 1950's and 1960's caused the neighborhood to become overwhelmingly African American and Puerto Rican by 1967. However, this change was not necessarily reflected by the makeup of the Teachers, in the schools, or reflected in the leadership of the teacher's Union at the time, the Union of Federated Teachers (UFT). When the UFT went on strike in 1967 over issues of who got to control the curriculum, the school environment, and the firing of certain Jewish American teachers and administrators, the interests of the largely Jewish American teachers were placed against the interests of the largely African American students and community (Childs 2008). "The one immediate impact was a fraying of the relationship between the black community and the Jewish community in New York, and to a certain extent nationally. Therefore, the two Stalwart allies in the fight for civil rights and a fair society were split apart on this question, which was very important politically. In some ways, you could say that Ocean Hill-Brownsville helped spawn neoconservatism in New York City and nationally" (Trieman 2008). This incident cemented the fractured relationship between African Americans and Jewish Americans, entrenching the differences that had caused the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the major American civil rights organizations, to expel all Jewish American and other white members from its ranks.

This fracturing between the African American community, the Jewish American community, and the liberal establishment at large in the late part of the 1960's led to somewhat of an electoral backlash among Jewish American voters in the 1970's. Whereas Johnson had



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received 90% of the Jewish American vote in 1964, and Hubert Humphrey received 81% in 1968, Jewish American support for Democratic politicians began to wane for a bit. George McGovern received only 65% of the Jewish American vote in 1972, and Jimmy Carter received 71% in 1976. While still far outpacing the nation as a whole, the gap between overall support and Jewish American support had fallen from 38% in 1964 to 21% in 1976, a sizable 17% swing (Maisel et. al. 2001).

This change in attitudes culminated in the 1980 election where Jimmy Carter received the lowest percentage of the Jewish American vote since 1920, netting only 45% of the overall vote. John Anderson, a liberal Republican also running in the 1980 election, netted 15% of the Jewish American vote. Combined, the 15% differential (and 4% for just Carter) differential between the Jewish American vote and the overall vote for the more liberal of the candidates was a record low (Maisel et. al. 2001).

This sudden relative support for Reagan was the culmination of the Carter presidencies policies toward Israel. Whereas the Jewish American support for the Democratic party was independent from its foreign policy for the vast majority of the century, by the end of the 1970's Israel policy came into focus as a concern for Jewish Americans. In 1978, President Carter had sold advanced weapons to two of Israel's adversaries, Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Ledger 2011). This marked the first time that a president's specific actions concerning Israel played a great effect on the votes of Jewish Americans, as many believed that Carter was willing to abandon Israel. Whereas Israel had survived wars in 1967 and 1973, not to mention it's War of Independence in 1948, without much political reaction in the United States. However, what was

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seen as Carter's betrayal over Israel, despite his brokering of the 1979 Camp David Accords peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, caused Jewish American support for him to collapse. Reagan, who had supported Israel since its inception, was the beneficiary.

Reagan maintained a similar level of support throughout his presidency, only dipping down to 31% of the Jewish American vote in 1984, with Walter Mondale only getting 57% of the Jewish American vote. His Vice President, George HW Bush, got 35% of the Jewish American vote in 1988 (Maisel et. al. 2001). However, changes in the policies of the Soviet Union brought a whole new wave of issues to the forefront of Jewish American voters minds. Before 1967, very few Jews in the Soviet Union had made the decision to emigrate to Israel. However, Zionist feelings stirred up from the 1967 war and state sponsored anti-semitism had led to an increasing desire to emigrate. In addition, international condemnation after 16 Soviet Jews attempted to hijack a plane to immigrate to Israel led to a loosening of immigration restrictions in the Soviet Union in the 1970's. While at first the vast majority of those claiming to want to immigrate to Israel actually ended up there, after being granted exodus from the Soviet Union the journey necessitated a stop in continental Europe. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, at this temporary stop, many Jews would "drop out", and immigrate to the United States as opposed to Israel. Prior to 1989, Jews were unconditionally granted refugee status, and allowed to settle in the United States. However, this policy, while bipartisanly approved in congress, came back to haunt Bush. As a result of the United States no longer unconditionally accepting refugees, the number of emigrants that "dropped out" dwindled, leading to Israel requesting a loan from the United States for \$10 billion to help resettle refugees. While the United States had

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agreed to it, Bush delayed the issuance of those guarantees until 1991, waiting for Israel to stop building settlements in Gaza and entered a peace conference with the Palestinians. However, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), mounted a lobbying effort on capitol hill to pressure President Bush to issue the bonds. This resulted in Bush remarking “there are 1,000 lobbyists up on the Hill today lobbying Congress for loan guarantees for Israel and I’m one lonely little guy down here asking Congress to delay its consideration of loan guarantees for 120 days.” This comment was decried as a play on Anti-Semitic tropes of Jewish control and power, and incensed the Jewish American community, cratering their support for Bush in the 1992 Election (Cortellessa 2018). Whereas Bush had received 35% of Jewish American votes in 1988, he only got 11% in 1992, as Bill Clinton got 80% and Ross Perot got 9%.

Clinton’s support continued throughout his time, thanks to initiatives like the first and second Oslo Accords, a set of agreements aimed at bringing peace to Israel and Palestine, and a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994. Clinton’s presidency also brought a proposed peace plan that included a two-state solution into the orthodoxy for the Democratic party. Clinton got 78% of the Jewish American Vote in 1996, and the Jewish American vote for Democrats remained similar for the next 12 years, with Al Gore receiving 79% of the Jewish American vote in 2000, John Kerry receiving 76% in 2004, and Barack Obama receiving 78% in 2008. The two-state solution became orthodoxy in the Democratic party, and in turn it got overwhelming support from American Jews, as bi-yearly polls on the opinion from the Jewish American community on the two state solution since has not failed to get less than 78% of respondents in support.<sup>9</sup> Obama received 69% in 2012, and Hillary Clinton received 71% in

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2016 in line with the relative level of support that they got compared to Obama in 2008.

However, the 2018 midterms, Jewish American support Jumped back up to 76%, as the overall political environment went from 2% Democratic to 8% Democratic.<sup>10</sup>

Jewish Americans support across all denominations, as 79% of Reform Jewish Americans, 77% of Conservative Jewish Americans, and 62% of Orthodox Jewish Americans say that they voted for the Democratic candidate in the 2018 election.<sup>11</sup> Donald Trump has a 75% Disapproval rating among American Jews, and 72% think Donald Trump's comments and policies are responsible for the recent shooting that took place at the synagogue in Pittsburgh. 16% of Jewish Americans identify as Progressive and 35% identify as liberal, compared to 27% identifying as progressive or liberal in the population as a whole.

## Failures of the Republican Party to Reach Jewish Americans

While Jewish American voters have been reliably Democratic since the early 19th century, the Republican party has repeatedly attempted to woo them. From the early 1970's, Republicans have made repeated attempts at reaching Jewish American voters through issues that are important to the them, including affirmative action and Israel-Palestine relations. However, these attempts have not been successful.

In the early 1920's, as Jewish immigration to the United States reaching its peak, the percentage of Jewish Americans at elite schools began drastically increasing. At Harvard, for instance, the percentage of the undergraduate class that identified as Jewish rose from 7% in

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1900 to almost 28% in 1925 (Frank 2006). To limit the number of Jews in these elite schools, many established informal “Jewish Quotas”, whereby only a certain percentage of the population was allowed to be Jewish. While these quotas ended in the 1950’s education boom, the effect of them was still raw in many Jewish Americans minds later in the century, as affirmative action was being fought out in the court system. In 1978, an attack on affirmative action, in the form of the lawsuit *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* was brought to the Supreme Court. In this lawsuit, the Anti-Defamation League, an non-profit devoted to fighting for the rights of Jews in the US and abroad “signed in conjunction with several explicitly Jewish and Jewish-dominated organizations, argued that the racial admissions quotas utilized by the university deprived Bakke of his constitutional right to equal protection under the law”(Scheer 2018). When Justice Lewis Powell Jr. surmised in the majority opinion that “remediating societal discrimination could legally justify the use of race in admissions”, the ADL and many other Jewish American advocacy organizations were vindicated. As affirmative action came back into the forefront in the 1990’s and 2000’s, Republicans and Republican-Aligned groups like the Republican Jewish Committee attempted to use affirmative action as a Cudgel to whip Jewish American voters into opposing affirmative action. Using the argument that racial quotas are not in the best self-interest of the Jewish Community, as “more blacks must necessarily result in fewer Jews” (Sundquist 2005), conservatives in California attempted to get Jewish Americans to support Proposition 209, which said that universities shall not discriminate on the basis of race. However, this failed, as a “November 1996 referendum showed that Jewish voters opposed the initiative by a margin of 58-42, a notable contrast from the overall white vote favoring the

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proposition 63-37” (Cortellessa 2018). While lower than the margin for presidential elections at this time, Jewish Americans in California were 21 points more liberal than white voters as a whole. However, Jewish Americans came to view affirmative action as a benefit to them, as Alan Dershowitz notes “we feared that our hard-earned right to be admitted on the merits would be taken away. The WASP quotient would be held constant, and the Jews and African-Americans would be left to fight over the crumbs. ... What happened is that Jews have become the WASPs. They are among the dominant groups on campus, in terms of numbers” (Lane 2002). Jewish Americans disproportionately make up the student body of elite campuses, including nearly 25% of the student body at Harvard (Untz 2001). Rather than affirmative action co-opting the spots of Jewish Americans in favor of African Americans, elite schools have let Jewish Americans co-opt the spots that were previously reserved for WASPs. This exposed Jewish Americans to a larger slice of the proverbial pie, benefiting them.

Another issue that Republicans have repeatedly used to reach out to Jewish voters is Israel. Jewish Americans overwhelmingly are sympathetic with Israel and have not meaningfully changed since polling on their attitudes began in 2001, and likely before, not dipping below 86% sympathetic to Israel in Israel-Palestine relations.<sup>12</sup> While both parties have support for Israel in their platform, and most bills that support Israel are bi-partisan, Republicans have shifted to a greater level of support for Israel than Democrats. While the percentage of each party were similar in 1978, with 49% of Republicans and 44% of Democrats sympathizing with Israel over Palestinians, a gap has grown between the parties, with 74% of Republicans and only 33% of Democrats sympathizing with Israel over Palestinians in 2017 (Bacon Jr. 2017). A large factor in

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this has been the rightward shift in Israeli governance, as the Prime minister of Israel for a significant portion of this time, Benjamin Netanyahu, has cultivated relationships with republican politicians and other American right wing figures. However, this alliance between the Israeli government has not lead to Jewish Americans voting Republican. While 65 percent of Jewish Americans feel attached to Israel<sup>13</sup>, only 38% of Jewish Americans believe that the Israeli government is making a sincere effort toward peace in negotiations.<sup>14</sup> In addition, many Jewish Americans only hold a distant attachment toward Israel, as 70%<sup>15</sup> would consider them to be either metaphorical “extended family” to Jewish Americans, or not related at all. One reason for this distance is that Orthodox Judaism is the only sect of Judaism recognized in Israel, which 53% of American Jews believe weakens ties between American and Israeli Jews<sup>31</sup>. While Republicans support Israel overwhelmingly because of their evangelical base, with 80% of evangelicals believing supporting Israel would bring the world closer to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Bump 2018). The intense support of Israel by evangelical voters has led Republicans to adopt a more hawkish view of Israel than many Jewish Americans. In addition, Israel is not the main focus of many American Jews, as only 9% of American Jews listed it among their top two voting interests.<sup>16</sup> This discord between the Republican support for Israel and American Jewish support for Israel has not helped Republican politicians when they attempt to court Jewish American voters.

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### Continual Democratic Voting

Jewish Americans have voted overwhelmingly in a liberal manor, continually voting for liberal candidates in presidential and midterm elections by some 20% clip greater than the overall population. While Republican efforts to woo Jewish American voters have failed to materialize into votes, not all of the reason is due to a fundamental incongruity in approach. Republicans face some material challenges in attracting Jewish voters. Some of these challenges are the urban location of Jewish Americans, the historical role of Jews in the Labor movement that is antithetical to Republicans, and the Jewish American apprehension to Evangelicals. Each of these play a role in limiting the appeal of voting for Republicans and Republican policies to American Jews.

Jewish Americans are overwhelmingly located in urban areas. While the United States as a whole has between 6.8 and 7.2 million Jews in it, depending on counting measure, 2.1 million of them, or nearly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all Jewish Americans, live in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. Another around 600,000 live in the each of the Los Angeles metropolitan region and the Miami metropolitan region, and nearly 300,000 live in the Chicago metropolitan region. While 38% of the overall population of the United States live in the 20 most populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas, nearly 80% of Jewish Americans do (Dashefsky, Sheskin 2018). This overwhelming locality to significant metropolitan areas has located Jewish Americans in regions of largely Democratic support. Metro areas with >1 million people went Democratic in 2016 by a 56-40 margin. This location in urban areas would predict any group to vote



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Democratic, but does not explain the full, lasting gap between Jewish Americans and the overall populace in support for Democrats.

Another reason that might indicate Jewish American support for liberal political ideas is a relatively high level of cultural Jewishness among Jewish Americans, as opposed to religious Jewishness. In order of decreasing religiosity, 11% of Jewish Americans identify as Orthodox Jews, 14% identify as Conservative Jews, 29% identify as Reform Jews, 16% identify as Secular Jews. However, religious attendance is not inversely proportional to liberal ideology, as “Jews who attend synagogue 2-3 times monthly are not only more liberal in their support of church-state separation than weekly attenders (93 percent to 77 percent), but are also more liberal than those who attend 5-10 times yearly (88 percent), 1-4 times yearly (85 percent), or who never attend (86 percent)” (Levey 2011). This is different from the general population, as those who attend weekly or almost every week were 8-15% more Republican leaning than the populace as a whole (Newport 2005). This lack of religiosity causing Republican support is a unique factor among Jewish Americans. Why this occurs, though, is worth diving into. Religious attendance is used both as a way of fulfilling religious requirements and also building a community (O’Leary 2012). While many Churches, especially Evangelical ones, use this to build Republican support, Synagogues tend to build Democratic support. Studies have shown that close friends have a much greater impact on someone’s political persuasions than teachers, peers, and other acquaintances (Burbank 1997). The grouping of Jewish Americans in metropolitan areas pre-dispose Jewish Americans to attend religious service in these Synagogues, where the other people they meet are also liberal. This liberal religious environment leads to Jewish

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Americans with high levels of religious service attendance to be more liberal. The liberal environment can be seen in the party ID of religious leaders, as they are indicative of the orientation of the congregation as a whole. Nearly 95% of American Reform Rabbis registered as Democrats, the greatest proportion of any religious sect. Similarly, nearly 90% of Conservative Rabbis, and over 60% of Orthodox Rabbis are registered Democrats (Hersh, Malina 2017). These liberally oriented social spheres predict Jewish American Democratic support. On the other hand, actions like interfaith marriage, which goes against Jewish religious teaching, or not having a large number of close Jewish friends are correlated with Republican support among American Jews (Sackett 2015). To vote Republican, for many American Jews, goes against the values that they find in their community.

Liberally oriented religious communities are not the only reason for Jewish American liberal support. Jewish support for Democrats is also predicated on their support for a “liberal” regime of religion and state. Jewish Americans “have historically seen themselves as a vulnerable minority group and have seen the Democratic party as the party more favorable to their group interests” (Cohen, Liebman 1997). The issues that most dramatically differentiate Jewish Americans from all Americans are usually social issues, including church-state separation, political identification, social spending, and abortion. However, the overall attitudes on these issues do not necessarily predicate the level of support for the Democratic party, as similar to African Americans (Aberbach 2016), “Democratic party affiliation among [Jewish Americans] is not necessarily indicative of liberal Jewish attitudes in most key issue areas”(Dashefsky, Sheskin 2018). One reason for this discongruity, similar to African

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Americans, is that Jewish Americans view themselves as a vulnerable minority, and have seen the Democratic party protect the interests of vulnerable minority groups. This has historically shaped Jewish Americans perception of the Republican party. “In the New Deal era, if not before, most Jews associated the Republican party with big business and the social elite (at one time a symbol of anti-Semitism and exclusionary policies toward Jews); more recently, the Republican party has been associated with the Christian Coalition. In addition, Jews associate fundamentalist Christians, however unfairly, with anti-Semitism (Cohen 1984)”. This historical and modern association of the Republican party with discrimination against Jewish Americans has been constant, and one cause of the political identification of many Jewish Americans. However, Jewish Americans also hold positions on issues like school prayer and separation of church and state that differentiate their position from Republicans. Jewish Americans oppose school prayer by 27% more than the general population, and when Ronald Reagan made an amendment allowing school prayer a part of the official Republican party platform in the 1980’s, Jewish American groups were some of the most ardent opposition. In 2000, 80% of Republicans supported Student-led prayer in public schools.<sup>17</sup> Since Christianity is the overwhelmingly dominant religion in the United States, with 75% of the total population of the US identifying as Christian in some capacity, this school prayer would most of the time be Christian prayer (Newport 2016). This endorsement of what would likely increase the presence of Christianity in daily life by the Republican party, even if not directly anti-semitic, is viewed as infringing on Jewish freedom religion, and illustrates some of the hostility toward the Republican party on the part of American Jews.

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### Conclusion

Jewish Americans currently exhibit a unique disposition toward the Democratic Party despite repeated Republican efforts to win Jewish American voters. The reason for this is multifaceted, and unique to American Jews. Republicans have attempted to reach Jewish American voters in many ways and through many issues, but because of structural hurdles, they have not been able to. The Republican coalition, at its heart, is a deeply religious one, with an emphasis on traditional Christian, especially Evangelical, viewpoints. However, Republican efforts to appeal to Jewish American voters through appeals to religious liberty and freedom have not worked. This is mainly because American Synagogues build Democratic-leaning communities, and unique among American Jews, religious attendance predisposes someone to Democratic views. Republican efforts to tie their support of Israel has failed because of the distance between American Jews and Israel, and the relative difference in viewpoints. In addition, Israel is viewed as a more important issue for Republicans than it is for American Jews. Finally, direct Republican appeals to Jewish Americans on the basis of opposing affirmative action have failed because Jewish Americans view themselves as a marginalized minority, but have also benefited from affirmative action allowing them to be considered “white”.

Structural reasons also predispose American Jews toward the Democratic Party. Their location, concentrated in Urban areas in the Northeast, West Coast, and Miami, FL area locate them in overwhelmingly liberal areas. This provides them with a social environment that is largely liberal, helping to ensure that their social circles, even independent of other Jews, is

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strongly liberal. In addition, the religious nature of the Republican party as a largely Christian party, their appeals to religious freedom generally benefit their current constituents, and consequently are viewed to be not in the best interest of Jewish Americans.

While the current incongruity between Jewish American interests and the Republican Party have kept Jewish Americans voting Democratic, this is not necessarily the only reason. Further research could be done on potential religious reasons for the support, as it could be done on differences in the views between American Jews and Israeli-American Jews. Appeals to the latter because of the general right wing lean of Israeli politics could have different views than American Jews as a whole. In addition, further research could be done on the effects of two new Democratic congress members, Rashida Talib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN), who have been repeatedly accused of anti-semitism. The effects of these accusations has not been felt yet, but could make a difference in 2020 and beyond on Jewish American support for the Democratic party. However, if history is any indication, American Jews will continue to overwhelmingly support Democrats.

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## Endnotes

1. <https://www.cnn.com/election/2018/exit-polls>
2. Jewish American will be the term used to distinguish the voting actions and ideologies of Jewish Americans, as opposed to Jews as a whole, many whom are not American, and have separate voting patterns.
3. <https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-election-results-2019-dle-intl/index.html>
4. <http://www.brin.ac.uk/religious-affiliation-and-party-choice-at-the-2017-general-election/>
5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_population\\_by\\_country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_population_by_country)
6. Conservative is considered a denomination of Judaism, along with Orthodox, Reform and Reconstructionist. They are different from conservative Jews in the political sense. Any time that "conservative" is used in the political sense, it will be noted.
7. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/nyregion/milton-himmelfarb-wry-essayist-87-dies.html>
8. [https://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2008/data/table\\_04.html](https://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2008/data/table_04.html)
9. <https://jstreet.org/polling/>
10. <https://fivethirtyeight.com>
11. <https://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/J-Street-2018-Election-Night-Survey-Presentation-11072018.pdf>
12. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/247937/americans-views-israel-remain-tied-religious-beliefs.aspx>
13. <https://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/J-Street-Post-Elect-Topline-Results-110818.pdf>
14. <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf>
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