

The Jewish Vote: An Investigation of the Proposed Rise in 'Chosen' Republicans

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Introduction

Although the United States has constitutional barriers separating the church from state affairs, religion has a significant impact on politics. Politicians regularly discuss their religion while campaigning, and not only are a candidate's religious beliefs of great concern to voters, but one's own religious beliefs and cultural traditions have a significant impact on a citizen's voting behavior. The Jewish vote, in particular, is a vital and influential component in the United States political landscape. Although Jews in the United States only constitute a marginal group in society, they have the potential to have a great impact on the electoral process. They have a very particular voting behavior and receive much attention from politicians. Jews are overactive politically and are attributed with having the highest percentage voter-turnout rate of any ethnic group. In addition, they are the wealthiest religious group, and have a high potential to financially influence political candidates and campaigns. Jews are actively engaged in politics as activists and advocates, as well as in policy development. They are a sought-after political commodity, and have a great potential to sway elections. Historically, one key political characteristic of the Jewish community in the United States has been a close identification with the Democratic Party. However, a recent contention has arisen that Jews have begun to progressively associate more with the Republican Party. Though multiple political organizations have emerged with the purpose of lobbying for this alleged expanding group of Republican Jews, there is much debate over this proposed alteration in Jewish political identification. As Jewish Americans obtain ever more

attention from elected officials and potential to sway the electorate, it becomes increasingly significant to examine party identification of Jews in the United States, as well as whether this alleged emerging Jewish Republican is in fact a reality. The objective of this paper is to determine the validity of this proposed increase in Jewish identification with the Republican Party.

Background: Jews in United States Politics

In order to absorb the magnitude of the implication that there has been an increase in Jewish-Republican identification, one must first understand several details regarding how American Jews fit into the United States political arena. American politics in general is comparatively peculiar. Although the United States adheres to the principle of separation between church and state, it is a highly religious country. Ninety percent of the population claims they are adherents to a particular religion, and nearly ninety-five percent believe in god (Central Intelligence Agency). In addition, religious fanaticism is quite common in the United States. Although there is no official religion, religion is an extremely important component within politics. It seems recently, religion has been woven more firmly into the fabric of United States partisan politics than ever before. Religious institutions have been instrumental in campaigning for their followers to vote for a particular candidate, and it is very common for people to look to their places of worship to answer many social and political questions. Furthermore, whether one regularly attends religious services has become more important in determining how one votes for president than past standard demographic characteristics including gender, age, income and region.

Even within the peculiar political climate of the United States, Jews are an anomaly in themselves. Although they only account for about 2.3 percent of the population, they are disproportionally represented in American politics. One key reason that Jews have become so important in the electoral process is due to where they live geographically. Roughly 60 percent of Jews in the United States live in metropolitan areas, and “roughly 94 percent live in 13 key electoral college states” (Bard). Not only are these thirteen states alone worth enough electoral votes to elect the president of the United States, they are key swing states that politicians pander to for votes. Coupled with the critical geographic location of Jewish populations, the obvious power and importance of the Jewish vote is vividly seen when one considers the politically overactive and participative behavior that characterizes the Jewish community. Jews have the highest percentage voter-turnout rate of any ethnic group. As highly active citizens who regularly register and vote in high numbers, they are a key demographic group targeted by politicians. In addition, Jews are one of the wealthiest religious groups. Their potential to contribute financially and influence political candidates and campaigns are extraordinary. Collectively, these features cause the Jews to be considered one of the most influential religious groups in American politics.

Concurrent with this hyperactive political nature, Jews have also been characterized as historically liberal and voting Democrat. There has been extensive hypotheses and investigations concerning why Jews generally identify as liberal. Many theorists suggest principles of social justice found in religious and messianic principles that resonate and influence the Jewish political agenda. In identifying as liberal, Jews break with the political tendency for groups to vote based on economic interests. As Milton Himmelfarb

encapsulated so eloquently, “Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans.” This summarizes the central paradox of Jewish politics in the United States. As the wealthiest ethnic group, Jews should identify as Republicans, as they support a pro-business platform as well as economic libertarianism, and emphasize individual control of one's economic lives without state intervention. Generally, the more economically successful a group is, the more likely they will demonstrate conservative attitudes and voting behaviors, whereas the lower the socioeconomic class of a group, the more likely liberal behavior will manifest. Jews as a demographic group do not follow this trend. However, one exception to the tendency for Jewish Americans to identify as liberal is Orthodox Jews. The values of Orthodox Jewry are very different from regular Jewish Americans. They are more conservative, and in many ways align more closely with Republicans on issues such as parochial schools and abortion. Although Orthodox Jews only account for less than 10 percent of the population, they are reproducing faster than the general Jewish population, due to trends against assimilation and modernization, and thus could prove to be an important political force in the future.

Documented exit poll analysis reveals that Jewish support for both Democratic congressional candidates as well as Democratic presidential candidates has fluctuated greatly since 1968, however usually ranges between 60 to 80 percent support (Maisel 171). As a general demographic group, they support abortion rights, gay rights, separation between church and state, and are very sympathetic to the economically disadvantaged. In certain cases, Jews are stubbornly Democratic, and do not mind voting for a candidate that is clearly unpopular. For example, in 1944 although a majority of Americans began to lose faith in the New Deal policies of President Roosevelt, 90 percent of Jews remained loyal to the President

(Kamp). In addition, Jews hold a special role in the 1972 election where George McGovern lost to Richard Nixon in the second greatest landslide in American history. Although McGovern suffered from support of merely 38 percent of American public, he received 65 percent of the Jewish vote (Kamp).

The historic liberal association by American Jewry continues to be a mysterious, yet undeniable inconsistency for many scholars, as it holds for every level of income, education, and class. In the most recent 2006 Election, Jewish support for Democrat candidates for the House of Representative surged to 87 percent (CNN). Following the 2006 election, 13 out of the 100 Senate members were Jews and 30 out of the 435 member House of Representatives were Jewish. Out of these Jewish politicians, two of the 13 Jewish Senate members are Republicans, whereas only one of the 30 House members is. Nevertheless, clearly today almost more than ever Jews hold significant political power.

The fact that Jews live in key swing-states and vote in very high numbers have many critical political implications. Although historically they have consistently voted for democratic candidates, there has been much discussion in recent years that Jews are beginning to associate more with Republicans. There are various rational for this alleged shift, including an increase in nested identity and consequent rejection of Jewish culture and identification. In addition, there has been a recent emerging trend for Republicans be more supportive of Israel. The prospect that Jews could be leaning more Republican could have monumental political consequences. They are a politically powerful group, heavily involved and contributory. If captivated by a particular candidate, the Jewish community has the potential to tip the balance and swing elections.

Methods

The objective of this paper was to determine whether there has been an increase in conservative political identification among American Jewry. In order to investigate this question, it became necessary to examine various types of sources. It first became fundamental to examine Jewish political behavior. Therefore, I consulted diverse texts in order to become more aware of specific Jewish voting behavior. It was necessary to understand how Jews as a group vote, and recognize particular criteria they use in determining their chosen candidate in order to recognize a shift in voting patterns. I also consulted Jewish political organizations, newspapers, and other institutions in order to become more conscious of recent American Jewish political thought. I examined several new Jewish Republican organizations, evaluating their claims that membership is on the rise.

Additionally, it became necessary to examine various gallop polls and exit polls from elections that accounted for Jewish votes. One notes the challenge in obtaining a thorough portrayal of the political attitudes and characteristics of the Jewish population in America. As Jews are only about 2 percent of the population, a random sample of 1,000 individuals only produces about 20 Jewish respondents, which is not sufficient to analyze a particular group, let alone come to a comprehensive conclusion. It was necessary to employ polls with larger Jewish sample sizes from a range of populations in order to produce adequate Jewish responses necessary to create meaningful examination regarding various political and religious questions.

As one may note, mostly data from presidential and congressional elections is used as evidence in this report. Polls corresponding to these national elections are the most widely available data that persistently accounts for Jewish votes. As presidential elections are generally seen as the most important politically, they are the most financially infused and heavily covered journalistically, and many of these polls can be counted on as reliable depending on their source and how the poll was conducted. In addition, it is noted that many citizens vote differently dependent on national or local elections. However, in a paper of this length it was chosen to examine mostly the more dominant congressional and presidential data. In addition, it was attempted to include polls where the specific survey's methodology was most flawless.

What one finds is evidence that suggests higher disillusionment with the Democratic Party and a higher inclination for Jews to vote based more on the particular issues or candidate rather than his or her party. There is indication that more Jews are making political decisions less rooted on factors associated with being Jewish, such as the State of Israel. However, one finds these Jews still maintain a mostly liberal outlook. In general, Jews base their decisions heavily on the specific candidate and his particular platform. One of the reasons for the popularity and widespread consciousness of a possible increase in Jewish Republicans is the emergence of various Jewish conservatives and Republican organizations being established in the past twenty years. These organizations work fervently advocating and campaigning to Jewish interests, and have advertised stridently, although mostly falsely, that there has been a shift in Jewish ideology. The matter is further complicated by the recent phenomenon for Republicans to appear more visibly against terrorism and in support of a

strong defense of Israel. Therefore, more religious Jews who fervently support Israel may be more inclined to vote for particular Republicans who, among other issues that match up, proclaim strong support of Israel. In addition, Evangelical Christians, whom many Jews believe to be deeply anti-Semitic, have been historically linked with the Republican Party. Although this stigma has been wavering in recent years, it still holds some Jews with apprehension. Nevertheless, it remains yet to be shown whether the outspoken declaration by these Jewish Republican groups is in fact true.

Overview: Shifts in Population Trends and Political Behavior

There are several recent trends in Jewish political behavior of which the ramifications could account for a shift in Jewish identification towards conservatism. Jewish Americans are becoming more assimilated in society than ever. According to a the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000-01 conducted by the United Jewish Communities, intermarriage occurs in roughly half of the population and only one third of children raised by intermarried couples are raising their children with a Jewish religious upbringing (United Jewish Communities 16). Furthermore, the Population Survey reports, “At all ages, fertility among Jewish women is lower than fertility for all U.S. women, whether gauged by the percent who are childless or the average number of children ever born” (United Jewish Committee 14). Accordingly, the American Jewish population has shrunk 5 percent, from 5.5 million in 1990 to 5.2 million in 2000-01, due to the falling birthrate and popularity of intermarriage (13). In the survey, a Jew was defined as a person “whose religion is Jewish, or whose religion is Jewish and something else, or who has no religion and has at least one Jewish

parent or a Jewish upbringing, or who has a non-monotheistic religion, and has at least one Jewish parent or a Jewish upbringing” (13). However, there has been a rise in nested identity among American Jewry. As Jews are becoming more assimilated into general society, less emphasis is placed on being Jewish, and their cultural identity becomes less influential on their belief system. As more Jews are becoming more culturally assimilated, being Jewish becomes a less crucial influence on their political behavior.

In recent years, there has also been evidence of a shift in Party support of Israel that may have implications on how the American Jewry votes. There has been much concern of left wing, anti-Israel sentiment pervading the Democratic Party. In addition, since the terrorist attacks on September 11th, the Republican Party has maintained strong stance on defense and the Middle East. Many Republican candidates have been outspoken in their support for Israel. In addition, with the recent development of Iran’s nuclear program, there have been high levels of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel expression around the globe. These issues could have great implications regarding Jewish political consciousness and even voting behavior.

Jewish Republican Visibility

Although the reports that American Jewry are becoming more Republican in identification have not yet been founded, there has been a noble emergence of various Jewish organizations created to advocate for Jewish Republican interests. One of the most influential of these recent groups has been the Republican Jewish Coalition, which was founded in 1985. It is the self-proclaimed “most important voice on Republican issues in the Jewish

Community,” and has more than 35 chapters throughout the United States (Republican Jewish Coalition). These organizations claim that the time is appropriate for Jewish Americans to make a shift in party support. Many make the claim, as does Alan J. Stwinberg, that “The political conservatism of American society today fully coincides with the Jewish values of justice, fairness, respect for the dignity of man, and the punishment of those forces of evil who would seek to destroy us” (Maisel 278). Although these groups are potent lobbyists for the interests of Jewish conservatives, they are also committed to increasing visibility of Jewish Republicans, and campaigning against Democratic candidates they claim to have weak positions on Israel. Many groups have been very successful at making their voices heard, through vigorous ad campaigns, many of which challenge Democratic candidates on their loyalty to Jewish concerns and their support of Israel. These ads primarily spotlight anti-Israel remarks made by well-known Democrats. The Executive Director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, Matt Brooks, encapsulates his group’s intention when he states, “The party of Harry Truman and Scoop Jackson has become the party of Jimmy Carter, Al Sharpton, and Cindy Sheehan. Jewish Democrats should take a fresh look and see if they are still comfortable with the growing influence of the anti-Israel radical Left within the Democratic Party” (Ryce).

In addition, since the 1950s there has been evidence of a budding neoconservative movement among American Jews, who were slowly moving to the Republican Party. Primarily composed of Jewish intellectuals, they believed the Democrats were no longer worthy of their support due to their neglect of Israel as well as the overall American-Jewish community. They encouraged a more independent stance towards party identification, and

ardently endorsed several Republican presidential candidates. Nevertheless, they have attracted a very limited amount of followers to their movement.

The Reported Increase in Jewish Republicans

Several Jewish Republican groups have emerged in the past two decades, and declared, as did the Republican Jewish Coalition, that “The last decade has seen tremendous growth in the number of Jews identifying with Republican ideas and the GOP” (Republican Jewish Coalition). However, there is much evidence that proves Jewish party identification has remained quite stable. This is exposed by examining Gallup Poll analysis of party identification within religious groups between the years 1992-2001 and 2001-2002. The Gallup Poll found “almost exactly the same distribution of party identification among the Jewish population as is the case in the most recent year and a half: 50% Democrat, 32% independent, 18% Republican” (Gallup Poll). As noted, “In recent national presidential races, Jews have given at least two-thirds of their vote to the Democratic nominee, despite the tremendous amount of contemporary discussion about Jewish disaffection from the Democratic party” (Fowler 71). Furthermore, since the development of these organizations in 1985, not only has the Jewish vote for Republican candidates in presidential elections remained within normal ranges, it reached its lowest point in nearly fifty years. During the 1992 election of President George Bush, only 11 percent of American Jewry supported the president’s reelection, which was greatly declined from the 35 percent of the Jewish vote he received four years previously in 1988.

Many of these groups have claimed success regarding not only increased group membership but also visible increase in the amount of Jewish Americans voting Republican. A common trend for these types of groups seems to be to manipulate data in order to use as support for their desired argument. As stated on the Republican Jewish Coalition's website: "The Republican Party is making inroads in the historically-Democratic Jewish community. In the last four presidential elections, the Jewish vote for the Republican candidate went from 11 percent in 1992, to 16 percent in 1996, to 19 percent in 2000, and to 25 percent in 2004" (Republican Jewish Coalition). This quote, posted on the Newsroom section of their website, does not mention the 24 percent drop in the Jewish vote between the first and second election terms of George Herbert-Walker Bush's Presidency. In addition, in the five previous elections of years 1972 through 1988, the Jewish vote for Republican candidates remained above 27 percent, reaching a high of 39 percent in 1980. Thus, although there has been a stable increase in the number of Jews voting Republican in the past two decades, it is important to note that it followed substantial decline. Since the conception of the Republican Jewish Coalition in 1985, they first witnessed a huge decrease in Jews voting for Republican Candidates, its lowest support in nearly fifty years, only to then observe a steady increase each year following this nadir.

Israel and Assimilation

One of the most interesting questions throughout the seemingly inconsistencies that characterize Jewish voting behavior is the importance of a particular candidates view towards Israel. Many political analysts predicted a great increase in Jews identifying as Republicans

due to the appearance of many Republicans having stronger support for Israel than their Democratic counterparts do, however party identification has not yet shifted in the ways they forecasted. As already discovered, the younger generation of Jews has an evident feeling of detachment towards Israel. In addition, according to a poll conducted by the Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for the National Jewish Democratic Council, “only one of the seven Jews who step into a voting booth for the presidential election will the candidate's attitude towards Israel prove crucial” (Sofer). Experts postulate that the longer the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians drags on, the more the war is seen as a conflict whose participants basically refuse to make peace. Israel is simply not placed as high of a priority in Jewish voting behavior as once believed, both due to rising uneasiness towards the Israeli controversy, as well as the emotional detachment of younger Jews. However, many non-Jewish Americans also seem to care deeply about Israel. Although Orthodox Jews are more likely to be fervent supporters of Israel than secular or Reform Jews, Orthodox Jews are also more likely to be Republican. In addition, Evangelical Christians, who virtually unconditionally vote Republican, are also very likely to be pro-Israel. Support for Israel appears to be highly correlated with being more committed religiously. Much of the criticism towards Jews who still vote Democrat is instigated by the fact that many Republicans appear to have stronger convictions in Israel than their Democratic counterparts. However, Israel is simply not a crucial factor in the voting booth for a majority of Jews. This multilayered and interconnected evidence points to an understandable source for the discrepancy between the Republican organizations and conservative voices that continue to predict a shift in the

Jewish vote away from the previous Democratic identification and the fact that a clear repositioning has not yet been noticed.

Nevertheless, the consequences of this politicizing support of Israel have not yet become apparent. Historically, Israel has been a bipartisan issue. In the past, Presidents from both parties have worked tirelessly in support of the state of Israel and its efforts to forge peace. This has built a healthy relationship between the United States and Israel, and given confidence that the United States would be untiringly committed to the security of Israel and anti-terrorist efforts. However, as Jewish Republican organizations slander Democratic candidates with allegations of being hostile towards Israel, the negative long-term affect on the vital relationship between the United States and Israel could be disastrous.

Many consider President George W. Bush to be a major factor in the recovery of Jewish voters after the substantial plunge in the 1990s. President Bush garnered a 5 percent increase in the Jewish vote between his first and second election, receiving 19 percent of the Jewish vote in 2000 to 24 percent in 2004 (Maisel 153). His campaign focused heavily on foreign policy, which centered heavily on his strong foreign policies regarding terrorism and homeland security. Many Jews began to take a second look at the President's strong position against terrorism and support of Israel's defense efforts. Whereas the overall coverage of the Middle East by the news media as well as many Democrats came out critically towards Israel, President Bush emerged as exceptionally supportive of Israel's needs. Many Jews found themselves supportive of the president's strong backing of Israel and his overall management of the war on terror. In addition, his strong reaction of declaring war on terrorism following the September 11th attacks also drew support among many Jews who

were particularly devoted to Israel. It remains yet to be seen whether the next Republican presidential candidate can convey a similarly strong message to the Jewish community, and garner comparable electorate.

The evolving composition of the Jewish community in the United States also plays a heavy role in Jewish voting behavior. Jews are becoming increasingly assimilated within society, intermarrying and becoming ever-more secular. There are an increasing amount of ethnic Jews, who even though are culturally assimilated within society, share a Jewish parentage and background. Although they may not actively practice Judaism, they still identify with Jewish causes, culturally and fraternally. Their voting behavior, although ultimately reflecting this attachment vibrantly, may not be perfectly consistent with other religious Jews. In addition, granted they may retain liberal platform regarding issues such as homosexuality, abortion, and stem cell research, their affinity towards Israel is not as strong as Jews that are more religious. This development had a major influence on why many Jews do not automatically support Republican candidates who are more pro-Israel than their Democratic competitors are.

Several characteristics of the younger Jewish generation may help to enlighten the understanding of Jewish voting behavior. Ann Greenberg and Kenneth D. Wald point out the lack of a deep partisanship among young Jews, who are more prone to labeling themselves as independents. They claim that “only 10 percent of Jews under thirty-five years old call themselves Republican, while 42 percent call themselves politically Independent, and 49 percent identify as Democrat” (Maisel 175). This poll observes a rather sturdy jump in the number of responders labeling themselves Independent. However, according to this

statistic, although young Jews may be less devoted to the Democratic Party than their elders may, they are not shifting Republican Party. There are many causational factors for this decrease in partisanship. First, younger people are generally less politically active and engaged than older generations. In addition, according to the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000-01, intermarriage has become increasingly more common among the younger generation of Jews. The study also claims that “younger adults also report less frequent endorsement of two critical attitudes related to Jewish ethnicity, the importance of being Jewish and feeling emotionally attached to Israel” (21). This detached connection with Israel has many implications regarding the Jewish vote. Many Republican groups rely heavily on a strong support of Israel and combative attitude towards terrorism in order to attract the Jewish vote, however their strategy may be lost on this emerging group of young, culturally and socially assimilated Jews.

There are many prominent Jewish figures attempting to examine the phenomenon of Jewish assimilation, particularly in the context of its political implications regarding the Jewish vote. One interesting observation has been the increasing disaffection with the party system in general, not only by Jewish voters, but also by American citizens in general. In response to several negative characteristics of modern American political, many Jewish Americans, as well as Americans in general, have begun to claim themselves to be Independent, and many have begun to reject the two-party system. In a sermon addressed to the Jewish community, Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl addresses the plummeting voting rates and political apathy pervading the community, and makes a desperate plea to the younger generation to become politically actively and involved in government. Above all, he notes

“assimilation has taken its toll. Many American Jews today are far removed from the world of the pogroms and the poverty that our grandparents and great-grandparents finally escaped after leaving Eastern Europe. Our young Jewish citizens have only known freedom and take it for granted” (Stahl). However, not simply internal factors within the Jewish community affect the way in which citizens vote. Modern politics is plagued by slanderous and scandalous behavior by public officials, and evidence of increasing indifference of voters has been eminent. The numerous scandals, partisan squabbling, and defamatory campaigns seem to take up the majority of a politician’s time. In addition, voters feel increasingly powerlessness concerning the impact of their individual vote. In the United States, approximately only half of those eligible to vote in elections do so. Each of these facts, coupled with the escalating climate of fear and spiritual malaise that has recently begun to characterize the American political landscape, fuels this growing voter apathy. It remains yet to be seen whether this younger Jewish generation will emerge from the masses as a solid voice for Jewish concerns or simply another assimilated group, lost in the crowd.

The Jewish Vote as a Complex and Fluid Entity

Although there are many conditions that seem to hint at prospects for political repositioning among Jewish voters, there is as of yet very little evidence of a party shift. As David M. Shribman proposes in *Hosts, Not Visitors: The Future of Jews in American Politics*: “The appearance, for example, of a compelling national republican figure with special appeal to Jews might help sever Jews from their traditional ties. Under a model of political behavior where the elites move first, the underpinnings of such a realignment

certainly are present” (Maisel 279). He notes that the Jewish vote is tied closely with the “tensions and pressures of the time” (Maisel 279). Overall, the Jewish vote is mobilized primarily by the specific issues of the election. Jews as voters are a much more complex political electorate than many pundits give them credit. They are not single-issue voters, and although support for Israel may be a very important factor, it does not appear to be the pinnacle issue that will sway the electorate. As Ira Forman, an executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, notes “Religious freedom, reproductive rights, stem cell research, global warming, the teaching of Intelligent Design and providing for those most in need are the types of issues that drive Jewish voters. On all these issues, clear differences exist between the two parties, and the Democratic positions are the choice of nearly all American Jews” (Forman). Nevertheless, obviously, Jewish Americans are not a homogeneous group, and each distinct citizen bases his or her vote on varied qualities and factors. Moreover, it has been observed that more centralist Republicans have been able to attract a significant amount of Jewish voters. Since 1916, the percentage of Jewish voters deciding to vote for Republican candidates has varied substantially between a high of 45 percent and a low of 10 percent (Maisel 153). Many Jewish moderates are promising voters for Republicans as they could easily shift due to the precise mix of various issues, including Israel, terrorism, the economy, and other republican platforms. Although in recent years there has been a gradual increase in the percent of Jewish citizens voting for Republican candidates, it has been nearly double at other points in history. The Jewish vote depends on a variety of characteristics, including key important domestic and international issues as well as the individual candidate, both of which are features that continue to drive Jewish voting

behavior. Ultimately, though, each individual citizen makes the decision alone in that voting booth on who he or she believes is the best man or woman for the job.

Suggestion of the formation of several Jewish Republican groups in the past several decades does not necessarily communicate as an overarching trend pervading the Jewish community for Jews to identify as Republicans. As of yet, Jews have not yet overcome their traditional political orientation. Although evidence does hint at a less party-oriented electorate than exemplified by past American Jewry, Jews remain quite loyal to their Democratic tradition. Nevertheless, although there are Jews who seek to dramatically challenge this Democratic practice, it seems this is heavily based on a multifaceted set of criteria based on the particular election cycle. Depending on the particular political environment, issues, and candidate, Jews may be more responsive to a Republican candidate. However, as of yet, a majority of American Jewry have not gone astray from their Democratic roots.

It seems repeatedly, though confronted with many voices fervently declaring the opposite, most of the evidence clearly points to an obvious consistency of Jewish constituency voting for Democratic candidates. According to a Gallop Poll from May 2004, which went as far as to ask independents if they were inclined towards one major political party, "Taken together, more than two in three Jews, 68 percent, either identify as Democrats or lean toward the Democratic Party. 28 percent of Jews are either Republican or lean Republican, and 4 percent are independents with no partisan leanings" (Jewish Virtual Library). This poll proves quite enlightening regarding Independent voters. As already discussed, there has been suggestion of Jewish Americans, following the trend of greater

America, to take a more independent political stance. This poll shows that even those Jews who initially identify as Independents eventually when prompted to make a decision between one or the other, as one essentially is pressed to on the ballot, chooses Democratic.

Examination of the 2006 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion reveals similar enlightenment. The American Jewish Committee, an organization that claims to rally for all sections of American Jewry, conducted this poll through nearly 1,000 mail respondents. In response to the question “In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?” 15 percent responded as Republican, 54 percent as Democrat, 29 percent as Independent, and 3 percent were unsure (American Jewish Committee 5). This is quite consistent with the established range of Jewish vote of presidential elections for the past fifty years, which shows Democratic presidential candidates earning approximately between sixty and eighty percent of Jewish support. Throughout the 1990s, “nearly 60 percent of Jews identified with Democrats”, which remains an evident consistency with the Jewish electorate of today (Maisel 172). The findings of the American Jewish Committee in 2006, which claimed that 54 percent of respondents self-identified as Democrat, prove considerably consistent with the suggested range during the 1990s. Yet again, even the Jewish vote is dominated by a Democratic inclination, despite the allegations of Jewish Republicans and their organizations.

The 2006 Election

The most recent 2006 election is an exemplary episode of both the evident overwhelmingly Democratic inclination of the Jewish vote, as well as the ways in which

particular Republican Jewish institutions select specific statistics in order to manipulate data to demonstrate the opposite. As was briefly discussed in the introduction, Jews surfaced overwhelmingly in favor of Democratic candidates, with 87 percent of Jewish voters reportedly voting for Democrats (CNN). This accounts for the highest percentage Jewish voter support of Democrats since 1994, when Republicans took control of Congress.

Although there are obviously a multitude of reasons for this increased, a disillusionment of President Bush and the handling of the war in Iraq by the Republican-controlled Congress, as well as the President, clearly had an impact on the Jewish vote. This asymmetrical response is in general fairly consistent with the most recent analysis by the independent American Jewish Committee's 2006 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion, which showed a breakdown of 15 percent identifying as Republican, 54 percent as Democrats, 29 percent as Independent, and the rest as uncertain (American Jewish Committee 5). If a shift to the Republican Party for Jewish-Americans is eminent, as many Jewish Republican organizations proclaim, it seems it has yet to have occurred. Moreover, the circumstances of the 2006 election show the intricacy and fluidity of the Jewish vote, which has been seen to shift depending on the moment's state of affairs and candidate positions in response to those conditions.

Although statistical evidence points to a clear Democratic victory regarding the Jewish vote, several Jewish Republican organizations claimed that the Jewish vote remained stable in the 2006 election. Many groups, however, used flawed methodology as basis for asserting that Jewish support for Republican candidates remained firm in 2006. One example of this case of flawed methodology includes a poll done by the Republican Jewish Coalition

to contest the proposed Democratic surge. It relied on telephone responses from only three distinct districts (Fingerhut). A poll conducted through a telephone-response technique is much less reliable than exit polls, which are done at polling places immediately as voters leave the building. A second procedural flaw is that the responders of the Republican Jewish Coalition survey were selected from “commercially available Jewish voter lists”, and not selected randomly, which is usually considered the best way to achieve an accurate depiction of the community. Instead, the survey consulted a list of names identified as being Jewish. The survey also only considered those who identified as Orthodox, Conservative or Reform Jews. It did not consult the growing number of individuals who, through intermarriage, assimilation, or a variety of other reasons may not practice Judaism in its religious construction, however may still consider themselves Jewish culturally and ethnically. There are many Jews who partake in select Jewish holidays or other forms of cultural involvement, though they may not consider themselves religiously Jewish. These secular Jews may still regard being Jewish as extremely important, as well as a central factor in their specific voting behavior. In addition, as previously discussed, there is an overwhelmingly evident trend for more religious individuals to be more likely to identify as conservative and Republican. It appears this sample consciously overlooks a substantial portion of the Jewish community, and specifically a portion of the community that may identify as tremendously Democratic. In fact, in this survey by the Republican Jewish Coalition, 17 percent of responders were classified as Orthodox, a group that is generally regarded as more typically politically conservative than other Jewish denominations as well as the Jewish community in general. This evidence is suspect because in reality approximately less than 10 percent of the Jewish

population in the United States is classified as Orthodox. Nevertheless, this survey errors dramatically in that it greatly oversamples a generally more conservative population and omits a section that is typically more politically liberal in its attempt to prove that the community as a whole has become more conservative.

Many different organizations with divergent purposes meticulously select specific polls and surveys in order to support their claims, and it is important to be observant to the methodology and partiality of the particular census. Although numerous Jewish Republican organizations have made the claim that there has been an increase of Republican Party identification among American Jewry in recent years, this has yet to be proven. Moreover, this example from the 2006 election was not intended as slanderous exercise towards any organization. It was meant merely as an illustration not only of the flawed support used to uphold the conviction that more Jews are becoming Republican, as well as to demonstrate why this particular rumor has become widespread. In fact, according to the majority of the evidence, Jewish Americans vote as frequently for Democratic candidates as they did previously.

Conclusion

Although Jewish Americans have similar voting behavior and political concerns, they are heterogeneous body whose voting patterns have fluctuated overtime depending on a multitude of situational factors. Generally the Jewish vote can be characterized as overwhelmingly Democratic, depending on the time and its circumstances, however many Jewish American have previously supported Republican candidates. Jews as a whole share a

very similar belief system, however obviously are a diverse group of people with diverse interests and concerns. Therefore, throughout history, Jewish voting patterns have fluctuated dramatically depending on the candidate and the circumstances of that era. Nevertheless, Republicans have boasted that in recent years, more and more Jewish Americans, who have historically given electoral support to Democratic candidates, are increasingly supporting Republicans, both financially as well as in the voting booth. However, despite the recent allegations proposing that more Jews in the United States have begun to shift political party identification from Democrat to Republican, evidence demonstrates that this is not the case. There are various interconnected elements contributing to the rise of this view that in all reality is a misconception. Overall, Jewish voting behavior is tremendously more complex than political analysts theorized. Jews base their vote on a variety of issues. They are heavily involved in politics, actively and financially supporting campaigns and candidates, and possess extremely high voter turnout rates. Therefore, obviously Jews regard politics as considerably significant and have particular political concerns they naturally hold as significant. However, although Jews as a group are characterized by this natural emphasis on political participation, as individuals they have particular concerns and considerations.

The main fault in political analyst's predictions that the Jewish vote would begin to lean more Republican as Republican politicians began to support Israel more fervently lies in the fact that Jewish voters are not single-issue voters. Many Republican Jewish organizations campaigned deliberately shadowing Democrats as less supportive of Israel than Republicans. The big hope for Republican analysts was that a strong stance on Israel would sway Jewish voters, which did not work out as the hierarchy had hoped. Moreover, if the proposed

increase in Jewish Republican identification is valid, it would logically follow that more Jewish Republicans would be elected in office, especially with the prevailing lobby power of Jewish Republican organizations. However, only three of the 43 Jews elected in the House of Representatives and Congress are Republicans. This is less than 10 percent of the total Jews elected for Congressional offices.

In all, Jews remain an anomaly within the United States political system. As a group, they are remarkably wealthy and yet vote in the interests of the poor. Although some evidence shows that Jews have become more politically Independent in thinking, when pressured to vote in the ballot box they still overwhelmingly lean Democratic. However, while evidence proves that a majority of Jews are Democrats, each view is found somewhere within the vast labyrinth of Jewish tradition and philosophy. Judaism does not necessarily dictate that one be Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, capitalist or socialist. However, in the United States, the Judaic tradition, culture, and background has manifested in a strong inclination towards liberal and Democratic political concerns.

The intent of this paper was to explore and examine the relationship between Judaism and the political preferences of Jewish Americans in order to determine whether the rumored increase in Jewish Republicans is a valid assertion. An assortment of evidence was shown to demonstrate that this allegation is premature in its assertion, and that current evidence establishes that the Jewish vote is aligned as Democratic as almost any other point in history. Several political issues, such as Israel, as well as cultural and social influences, such as intermarriage and assimilation, were presented as key factors both in Jewish voting behavior and rational behind the predicted Republican shift. In addition, the 2006 election was

presented as a primary example of both the current Democratic alliance of the Jewish community as well as the ways in which Republican Jewish organizations have manipulated data in attempts to hail the opposite. In the end, the 2006 election exposed a reaction against Republican policy by Jewish voters, and further proved the prematurity of such a prediction. Nevertheless, there are many forces attempting to persuade Jewish voters to the Republican Party. It remains to be seen what the future holds for the multifaceted and reactionary voting behavior of the American Jewish community and whether their long-standing affinity with the Democratic Party will remain unbroken.

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