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## In closing campaign arguments, Jewish partisans articulate Jewish fears that have gone mainstream

Days before Election Day, targeted ads warn Jewish voters about antisemitism, threats to Israel and attacks on democratic norms under which Jews have historically thrived.



Images from recent ads by, clockwise from top left, the Jewish Democratic Council of America, the Democratic Majority for Israel and the Republican Jewish Coalition. (JTA collage by Joseph Strauss)

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“Turn your anxiety into action.”

The phrase — which if not a translation of a Yiddish expression might as well be — was the message of [an email sent Monday to activists by Jewish Women for Kamala, an affinity group organized by the Jewish Democratic Council of America](#).

It’s a mantra on both sides of the aisle in the closing days of the 2024 presidential election. With most polls showing a statistical dead heat, Democrats are especially stressed out, remembering when what appeared to be a comfortable lead by Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump vanished on election night. Republicans, too, are feeling anxious, or at least their candidate wants them to. As Trump tells supporters at his rallies, “If we lose this election, this country is finished.”

As for the specifically Jewish sources of anxiety, closing ads by Jewish groups on both sides offer strong indications. Beyond the concerns driving general voters — housing, inflation, immigration, reproductive rights, affordable health care — these ads (more likely to be seen on your social media feeds than broadcast in major markets) are focusing on specific Jewish issues: antisemitism, defending Israel and, especially among Democrats, a fear that a second Trump term will represent a threat to American small-d democratic norms under which Jews have historically thrived.

The JDCA, in a 30-second video that started airing on Monday, begins with a narrator warning, “This is a difficult time for many Jewish Americans, a time filled with uncertainty. Our choice will impact our families and our democracy for years to come.”

Quick cut to Trump talking about “the enemy from within,” a phrase he uses to describe Democrats like Adam Schiff and Nancy Pelosi and others who have opposed or investigated him (and which even [a Fox News interviewer described as “a pretty ominous phrase to use about other Americans”](#)).

It’s the kind of language that has led to a debate — [led most recently by former Trump insiders](#) — over whether Trump’s populism and ideas about presidential power amounts to fascism, one that even made its way into the campaign’s official ads on Friday when it [released one featuring a Holocaust survivor rebutting the idea that Trump is a fascist](#).

In the JDCA ad, the debate is reinforced by an image of rolling military vehicles and Trump saying “that should be very easily handled by the military” — part of [a longer, rambling quote](#) in which Trump warned about “very bad people ... some sick people, radical left lunatics.”

The ad then pivots to refer to Trump’s remarks at [a GOP-led event about antisemitism on Sept. 19](#), when he said, “The Jewish people would have a lot to do with the loss” if the election didn’t go his way.

“Donald Trump is openly scapegoating Jews,” says the narrator. “That is antisemitism, and that is unacceptable,” Harris is seen saying.

The ad then turns from ominous to upbeat, showing images of Harris lighting a Hanukkah menorah and denouncing Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel, and describing her as a “champion, a partner and a defender of our community, our freedom and our values.”



It’s a packed, concise ad, with the subtext that authoritarianism is never good for the Jews, that Trump has dabbled in antisemitism, and that Harris is the antidote. It barely mentions Israel, [which JDCA’s own polling has shown is not the top concern among Jewish voters in swing states](#). That distinction belongs to the “future of democracy,” at 44%, followed by abortion at 36%, and inflation and the economy at 24%. Israel shows up as their fourth major concern, at 16%. (That same poll also showed that Harris is garnering 71% of the Jewish vote in the seven swing states likely to decide the election.)

Meanwhile, Harris doesn’t even show up in a closing ad by the Democratic Majority for Israel titled “Can’t Trust.” ([A second DMFI ad, released last week, touts Harris’ record on](#)

[Israel](#).) The “Can’t Trust” video is three minutes long and is able to lay out its case against Trump in more detail. It describes him as “a guy with a long history of supporting antisemites,” and name checks the marchers at Charlottesville, rapper Kanye West and white supremacist Nick Fuentes, and the antisemites spotted among the crowd at the Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

It also links Trump to some of his most ardent surrogates, including Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, both of whom have pressed conspiracy theories in which Jews regularly play a diabolical role.

Unlike the JDCA ad and keeping with its mission, the DMFI ad directly addresses Israel — probably [the one Jewish issue where Trump and the GOP have an advantage among Jewish voters](#). The ad asserts that Trump and his running mate, J.D. Vance, are isolationists who are likely to “blow up NATO, abandon Ukraine” as well as Taiwan, Japan and South Korea.

“Should we as Jews really believe that this alliance with Israel holds a special place in Trump’s heart?” the narrator asks. “What if the Israelis dumped Bibi and elect someone more centrist? What if the Saudis and the Qataris who are literally funding the Trump family want something that goes against Israel’s interest? Will Trump stand with Israel then?”



There is something more than a little defensive about the DFMI ad — instead of making a positive case for Harris, it seems to be addressing Jewish voters considering pulling the lever for Trump. [DFMI’s website has a landing page touting Harris’ “steadfast commitment to Israel’s security and to combatting the alarming rise in antisemitism,”](#) but its closing argument is aimed at the Trump-curious — reflecting a strategy by both sides to sway undecided or wavering voters in this last stretch of what has been a static campaign.

The Republican Jewish Coalition also appears to be reaching across the aisle in its closing ad, which aims directly at longtime Jewish Democrats and Jewish voters who have negative

feelings about the former president. The Seinfeldian ad was filmed (not uncontroversially) at [Hymie's, a Jewish-style deli in the Philadelphia suburb of Merion Station](#), and features three actresses portraying Jewish women of a certain age. Their conversation is pithy:

Speaker One: Did you watch the news lately? Israel's under attack, antisemitism like I never thought I would see.

Speaker Two: Did you hear about Samantha's boy, Max? He got spit on just walking that path.

Speaker One: I mean, that's scary.

Speaker Three: What about Kamala?

Speaker Two (rolls eyes): Uch, busy defending the Squad.

Speaker One: Oy vey. Trump I never cared for but at least he'll keep us [dramatic pause] safe.

Speaker Two: I never voted Republican in my life. But I am voting Trump.

Speakers One and Three (raise coffee mugs): Amen.

 **RJC**   
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While Kamala Harris is busy defending the Squad, Donald Trump will keep the Jewish community safe.

Jewish voters, some of whom have never voted for a Republican in their lives, understand the incredibly high stakes in this election. We encourage Jewish voters to listen to their... [Show more](#)

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In a release touting what it calls a “[historic \\$15MM ad campaign targeting the Jewish community in key battleground states](#),” the RJC says this last ad of the 2024 campaign reflects the fear and angst that Jewish Americans across our country are feeling, as we see Israel still under attack and antisemitism skyrocketing to unprecedented levels here at home.”

In addition to aiming to create a permission structure for never-Trumpers to hold their noses and vote for him, the ad also appears to be a callback to “[The Great Schlep](#),” the 2009 effort in which comedian Sarah Silverman urged young Jews to visit their grandparents in Florida and convince them to vote for Barack Obama. “We encourage Jewish voters to listen to their Bubbies: It’s OK to vote for Donald Trump,” the RJC says in promoting the ad.

If you were to go to the websites and social media feeds of each of the [Democratic organizations](#), you can find detailed cases to be made for their candidates on Israel, the economy, abortion and health care. The RJC’s Matt Brooks sketches out his organization’s case for Trump a bit more in [a Washington Reporter oped](#).

But in their closing arguments, partisan Jewish groups are going for the kishkes. For Democrats, Trump coddles antisemites and has authoritarian designs on his enemies, the Constitution and the rule of law. He is also a transactional politician with an isolationist bent, and not to be trusted on Israel.

For Republican Jews, Harris is in thrall to the progressive left. For all his flaws, they say, “at least” Trump will “keep us safe.”

Closing arguments can define a campaign in voters’ minds. They can also go unnoticed, especially when events overtake a news cycle in the days leading up to election. (Trump has a peculiar genius for dominating these cycles, as he did in recent days with his riff about the size of golfer Arnold Palmer’s genitals and his working-man cosplay at a McDonald’s.) Effective or not, the appeals being made to Jewish voters are a reflection of their real anxieties heading into an Election Day that can’t come too soon.

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