

## Is There Such a Thing as the Jewish Vote?

COMMENTARY

By [Guy Chet](#) & [Guy Golan](#)



*I think that if you vote for a Democrat you're being disloyal to Jewish people and you're being very disloyal to Israel. – Donald Trump*

Donald Trump is not the first Republican president frustrated by American Jews' rejection of him despite his ardent support for Israel. Richard Nixon and George W. Bush were not as blunt as Donald Trump about it, but they too were stung by the dissonance between the gratitude and affection they felt from Israeli Jews (and the tiny Orthodox Jewish community in America) and the cold shoulder they received from non-Orthodox American Jews.

American Jews have long been one of the most reliable constituencies of the Democratic Party. Only African Americans surpass Jewish Americans in allegiance to the Democratic Party. This remains the case even though the GOP and Christian right have come to embrace Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel, and even though the Democratic Party and Progressive left have come to accommodate antisemitism in their ranks. Jewish support for Democratic presidential candidates has ranged from 60% to 90% since the 1920s, averaging at 75%. This support remains steady, with Jews backing Barack Obama, Hillary

Clinton, and Joe Biden at roughly 72%. Exit polls in the recent election reveal similar Jewish support for Kamala Harris, with different polls ranging from 67% to 77%, even as others in the Democratic coalition shifted away from the party.

Jews' political allegiance to the Democratic Party flies in the face of a historical rule of thumb regarding American political sociology: As groups move from the margins of American society to the mainstream, and as they rise from poverty to wealth, they migrate from the left to the right. The failure of Jews to conform to this expectation has confounded political commentators and scholars, but it should not: That rule of thumb is based on an outdated focus on class. As the modern Democratic Party elevated identity politics over the economic concerns of working people, one can no longer identify Republicans by material wealth. Mainstream, well-off voters today are at least as likely to be Progressive Democrats.

One explanation offered by scholars pertains to the Jewish religion itself, which encourages its adherents to promote social justice in society. This rationale fails on two counts. First, Judaism is not unique in promoting social justice; second, American Jews are the least observant religious group in American society, least likely to believe in the God of the Bible, and most likely to be atheists. Indeed, the minority (21%) of American Jews who are strongly religious tend to vote Republican, as do strongly religious Protestants and Catholics.

A second theory points to Jewish history. It suggests that Jews' attachment to the Democratic Party is a product of a collective memory from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when country club Republicans and the Christian right exhibited open disdain for Jews, while Democrats opened their ranks to Jews.

What such explanations miss is the central feature of Jewish life in America – ongoing and intensifying assimilation into American society. Jews found success, access, acceptance, security, and full citizenship in America. Their integration into American society and culture has been more complete than in any Jewish diaspora at any time in history. They have moved from the margins of American society and culture to the heart of the mainstream and have been accepted into the highest echelons of America's cultural, economic, intellectual, and political establishment. Moreover, non-Jews have accepted Jews not only into their boardrooms and clubhouses, but into their intimate family circles. The astronomic rate of intermarriage with non-Jews (over 70%) points to the breadth and depth of Americans' acceptance of Jews as real and normal Americans.

As Jews integrate and dissolve into American society at an unprecedented rate, the price of Americanization has been a diminished Jewish identity. American Jews score lowest

among all diaspora communities on all the things associated with a Jewish identity: self-identifying as Jewish, raising one's children in the Jewish faith, marrying within the faith, belonging to Jewish organizations, contributing to Jewish charities, belonging to a Jewish community, attending synagogue regularly or occasionally, enrolling one's children in Jewish day schools, knowing Hebrew, visiting Israel, and feeling an attachment to the State of Israel.

With high rates of both secularism and intermarriage, American Jews are leaving Judaism behind. They produce generations of offspring whose Jewish identity is progressively marginal or non-existent, as measured by disconnection from a Jewish community, Jewish organizations, Jewish religious rituals, and Jewish causes (including the Jewish state). Every generation has a greater percentage of Jews with no Jewish childhood memories and no sentimental affinity for fellow Jews. Indeed, only one-third of Jews report having a mostly Jewish circle of friends, and over one-fifth report having no Jewish friends at all.

The political result of Jews' ongoing assimilation and dissolution into American society has been the ongoing dissolution of "the Jewish vote." Jews have become increasingly indistinguishable in their political behavior from non-Jewish Americans who share their sociology: Non-Orthodox Jews poll and vote just like secular, educated, middle-to-upper class liberal Democrats who are not Jewish. There are no high-priority public-policy issues that political strategists can identify as "Jewish" issues. The State of Israel, for example, is a high-ranking voting issue for only 10% of American Jews. More than 90% of American Jews rank the economy, healthcare, national security, and social justice as their top political priorities.

As Jews have drifted away from their religion and their houses of worship, they have also drifted away from fellow Jews in their social and charitable activities, and in their political behavior. This means that there is no *Jewish* voting bloc. Most American Jews understand themselves first and foremost as Democrats, not Jews – their affinity group is not the Jewish nation or other Jews, but the Democratic Party and other Democrats.

The people with whom they socialize, celebrate, identify, bond, and marry – and the people whom they help philanthropically and politically – are primarily liberal Democrats, rather than fellow Jews. The political party they reward with their vote, donations, and activism, therefore, is not the party that takes the lead in fighting antisemitism, protecting religious liberty, and supporting Israel, but the party that leads on left-wing priorities like abortion, global warming, migrant rights, and LGBTQ rights.

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