

Voting Behaviors of American Jews

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Abstract

American Jews overwhelmingly support the Democratic party. In 2016, Hillary Clinton received 71% of the Jewish vote, the second-highest percentage of any racial or ethnic division in the United States. Most Jews are socially liberal, which drives Jews away from the Republican Party even if they align with the GOP's economic policies. But why does this trend occur? Through STATA analysis of ANES data from the 2016 presidential election, I conclude that Jewish voters possess many factors, such as education level and belief in equal opportunity, at a higher rate than the rest of the respondents. Jewish learning emphasizes giving to charity and a commitment to social justice, which explains the latter factor. Though there was no relationship between Judaism and their support for equal opportunity, my analysis found a statistically significant relationship between Jewish women and association with the Democratic Party.

Keywords: Jewish, 2016 election, voting

1. Introduction

“*Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof* – justice, justice you shall pursue,” states the Torah in Deuteronomy 16:20. Whether or not they have been intentionally following the words of the Torah, Jews have a long history of supporting social justice movements. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma. Jewish immigrants living in the Lower East Side of Manhattan were integral in the success of the labor movement. All throughout history, there are countless examples of Jews using their voices to pursue justice, whether it be leading a movement or simply participating in it.

Along with anti-racism, social justice and economic equality are embedded into Jewish values and traditions. From a young age, children are taught how to practice *tzedakah*, which means “justice.” In American Jewish culture, *tzedakah* is synonymous with “charity.” Hebrew schools have a “tzedakah box” where children are encouraged to deposit any spare change. These funds are then donated to charities, such as the Jewish National Fund. Via a strong social safety net and progressive tax, the Democratic Party attempts to redistribute the wealth to some capacity. In other words, their economic policies give back to the community and alleviate the poor. Of course, Democratic politicians and administrations have different policies regarding taxation. Generally speaking, the Democratic Party seeks to tax the rich at a higher rate to strengthen social welfare programs that aid the poor.

Jews also have a heightened awareness when it comes to discriminatory language. Prior to the election, Jews recognized Trump’s language regarding Muslim people and undocumented immigrants. When he cast every member of a group as inferior, our collective history as descendants of Holocaust survivors kicked in. Trump’s scapegoating and idea of mandatory Muslim registration triggered memories of pre-Holocaust ghettoization. The only thing that binds us together is our collective memory of oppression, namely the Holocaust. There are Jews that love Israel. There are Jews that think Israel shouldn’t exist. There are Jews that pray every day and there are Jews that are atheists. Save a few on the fringe, all Jews acknowledge the Holocaust and parts of their Jewish identity are rooted in it. We see the world in multiple ways. We see it as a man, a woman, or some other aspect of our identity. And then we see it as a

Jew. When public officials spout racism or discrimination, it cuts us a little deeper because we know what happens when dangerous rhetoric is normalized and what it can lead to.

2. Review of Existing Literature

As Donald Trump's racist, sexist, and xenophobic attitudes became normalized leading up to the 2016 election, Jews had even more of a responsibility to use their vote and stand on the side of justice. Historically, Jews overwhelmingly support Democratic candidates. One explanation is Jews' collective memory and identity (Hillman, 2011). Since Biblical times, powerful religious institutions have killed and expelled Jews. The Republican party often wishes to bring religion into the public sphere. When discussing religious freedom, GOP politicians seldom mention any religion besides Christianity. Us Jews understand that the Church does not inherently project antisemitism. But a history of religious institutions, namely Christian ones, doing so has implanted a collective distrust of religious figures having the same power as government officials. The Democratic Party aims to separate religion from state. This allows Jews, an underrepresented minority religion, to have maximum freedom to practice religion as they please.

Hillman also connects the history of Jews and the labor movement to modern Jewish attitudes on social justice. When Jews first immigrated to the United States, they were poor factory workers. Because they saw wealthy factory owners as oppressive, Jews began to identify as communists and socialists. They later mobilized to advocate for better wages and safer working conditions. Combined with traditional Jewish values of charity, social justice has been passed down from generation to generation. Modern American Jews associate these concepts with the Democratic Party.

A Pew Research Center study shows that an overwhelming majority of American Jews support abortion and homosexuality (Pew Research Center, 2016). Though the Torah forbids homosexuality, 80% of American Jews believe homosexuality should be accepted by society and most synagogues accept LGBT members. The Torah does not directly address abortion, but a passage in Exodus tells the story of two men who were fighting and injured a pregnant woman, causing her to miscarry. The man who caused the damage is forced to pay compensation, rather than pay with his life. Rabbis interpret to mean fetus is property, not a person. Other passages infer that a fetus is not entitled to the same rights as a human.

For these reasons and others, most American Jews flock towards the Democratic Party. Because a vast majority of Jews identify as Democrat, conservative Jews are often hesitant to identify as Republican (Weisberg, 2014). 81% of politically liberal Jews identify as Democrat, but only 53% of politically conservative Jews identify as Republican. Weisberg attributes this disparity to the Republican Party's social positions. He also found that the majority of Jews who lean or identify as Republican also identify as Orthodox. Jews who are more concerned about Israel lean Republican, too. Though past findings report that Israel is not a key concern among all Jewish voters, many Orthodox voters let their position on Israel guide their political behavior.

An article from The Forward, a progressive Jewish online publication, reported how Jews voted in the 2016 presidential election. Hillary Clinton received 71% of the Jewish vote, which is slightly more than Obama in 2012 (69%) and slightly less than Obama in 2008 (78%). Still, the numbers are considerably high (Adkins, 2016). Most of the Jews who supported Trump were more religious. 50% of Orthodox voters supported Trump, according to a poll conducted by the American Jewish Committee, which was included in Adkins' article in The Forward. Religiosity is a good indicator of whether or not someone will vote Republican. Trump's support among Orthodox Jews is no exception. It's important to note that only 10% of American Jews are Orthodox. While 50% is a significant amount, it has a negligible impact on Jewish voting as a whole because there are so few Orthodox Jews.

Those who are more educated are more likely to vote Democrat as well. FiveThirtyEight reported that 54% of voters who completed postgraduate education voted for Hillary Clinton (Silver, 2016). Many Republicans voted for Hillary Clinton during this election, but past research indicates a correlation between higher levels of education and the likelihood of identifying as Democrat. He also reported that Hillary Clinton won in well-educated counties by a large margin, while Trump swept lower-educated counties.

Because more formal education increases the likelihood of voting Democrat, it makes sense that Jews are the most educated religious group (JTA, 2016). The Jerusalem Post says is because most Jews live in the United States or Israel, both of which have overall high levels of education. 75% of Jews also have college degrees and 99% of Jews had some sort of formal education, according to the data. On average, Jews have received at least 13 years of formal schooling.

3. Statement of Hypotheses

H1: Individuals who are Jewish were more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump in the 2016 election than individuals who are not Jewish.

H2: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely to identify as Democrat than individuals who are not Jewish, controlling for the gender of the individual.

H3: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely think that society should ensure equal opportunity for all than individuals who are not Jewish.

H4: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely to have a higher level of education than individuals who are not Jewish.

H5: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely to be interested in politics than individuals who are not Jewish.

4. Research Design

The five hypotheses I chose seek to explain why Jews vote a certain way using variables that analyze separate characteristics that impact one's vote choice. One of the variables I used was "Does R favor or oppose requiring equal pay for men and women?" Because Jews are normally socially progressive, I figured this would be a good indicator of public opinion. I also used "for which candidate did R vote for?" and cleaned up the data so the results only showed the two main candidates. Because not all voters stuck to party lines in this election, I used the variable "which party represents R's views best?" Of course, I also chose the variable "is R Jewish?" Because this variable was not explicitly included in the NES 2016 data set, I had to recode variables that asked questions about the respondent's religion and combine the results from respondents who identified as Jewish.

All the data used in this study has been collected from the 2016 American National Election Study. All variables are listed in the appendix (table 6) along with the original wording of the question, frequency distribution, and minimum and maximum values. I used five dependent variables that analyzed voting attitudes and party identification. The independent variable was whether or not the respondents identified as Jewish, regardless of denomination. Though voting patterns exist within denominations of Judaism, there were only 85 Jewish respondents, so I had to recode the data so that all of the Jewish respondents were together.

The variable labeled AllJewsBin is a recode of V161247a and V161247b. These variables ask for R's subjective description of their own major religious group. The two variables are split based on whether or not R attends religious services. V161247a corresponds to respondents who attend services, while V161247b corresponds to respondents who do not attend.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Hypothesis 1: Individuals who are Jewish were more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump in the 2016 election than individuals who are not Jewish.

For whom did R vote for?	Is R Jewish?		
	No	Yes	Total
Hillary Clinton	1,242 51.58%	48 80%	1,290 52.60%
Donald Trump	1,166 48.42%	12 20%	1,178 47.40%
Total	2,408 100%	60 100%	2,468 100%

Uncorrected chi2 (1) = 18.9550

P = 0.0000

Figure 1. Cross-tabulation to test relationship between Jewish respondents and 2016 vote choice

I performed a cross-tabulation to test the relationship between Jewish respondents and who they voted for in the 2016 election. A majority of respondents voted for Hillary Clinton, but a higher concentration of Jews voted for Hillary Clinton instead of Donald Trump. Nearly 52% of non-Jewish individuals voted for her, compared to 80% of Jewish individuals. In turn, a much lower percentage of Jews voted for Donald Trump. The support for both candidates among non-Jewish voters was nearly 50-50. For Jewish voters, however, the distribution was not as even. The P-value for this table is 0.0000, which means the data is statistically significant and there is a relationship between Judaism and vote choice in this past presidential election.

5.2 Hypothesis 2: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely to identify as Democrat than individuals who are not Jewish, controlling for the gender of the individual.

Which party represents R's views best?	Is R Jewish?		
	No	Yes	Total
Democratic	411 47.46%	15 65.22%	426 47.92%
Republican	455 52.54%	8 34.78%	463 52.08%
Total	866 100%	23 100%	889 100%

Uncorrected chi2 (1) = 2.8310

P = 0.0932

Figure 2. Cross-tabulation to test relationship between Jewish respondents and 2016 vote choice, controlling for gender and only analyzing male respondents.

Which party represents R's views best?	Is R Jewish?		
	No	Yes	Total
Democratic	591 56.23%	23 88.46%	614 57.01%
Republican	460 43.77%	3 11.54%	463 42.99%
Total	1,051 100%	26 100%	1,077 100%

Uncorrected Chi2 (1) = 10.7534

P = 0.0013

Figure 2.1. Cross-tabulation to test relationship between Jewish respondents and 2016 vote choice, controlling for gender and only analyzing female respondents.

(Gallup, 2009). Just to make sure this statement was accurate, I tested EdLevel against VoteBin and found that the data had a P-level of 0.0000, meaning the relationship is statistically significant. I used a control variable because I wanted to ensure that the data shows that Judaism, not gender, causes (or does not cause) voters to identify as Democrats.

The P-value among male respondents (figure 2.1) is 0.0932, meaning the data is not statistically significant. While a higher percentage of Jewish men identified as Democrat when compared to all male respondents, this is merely a coincidence, not the result of causal relationship between Judaism and vote choice among men. The P-value indicates there is no relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

However, the P-value is much smaller (0.0013) for female respondents. This shows that there is a relationship between Jewish women and vote choice. As demonstrated in the data, Jewish women are more likely to identify as Democrat. For non-Jewish women, the difference between identifying with one of the two major parties was nearly

split evenly. On the other hand, nearly 90% of Jewish female respondents identify as Democrats. Once again, not all voters stuck to party lines this election. For this reason, I chose both Vote2016 and PartyID as variables to test.

5.3 Hypothesis 3: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely think that society should ensure equal opportunity for all than individuals who are not Jewish.

		Is R Jewish?	
Society should ensure equal opportunity	No	Yes	TOTAL
Agree strongly	1,783 57.42%	41 60.29%	1,824 57.49%
Agree somewhat	1,002 32.37	23 33.82%	1,025 32.30%
Disagree somewhat	226 7.279%	2 2.941%	228 7.186%
Disagree strongly	94 3.027%	2 2.941%	96 3.026%
TOTAL	3,105 100%	201.3 100%	3,173 100%

Uncorrected chi2 (3) = 1.8889

P = 0.6054

Figure 3. Cross-tabulation of Jewish respondents and respondents that agree that society should ensure equal opportunity.

Only a slightly higher percentage of Jews said they agree that society should ensure equal opportunity. Because the P-value is 0.6054, I must accept the null hypothesis—individuals who are Jewish are not more likely to support equal opportunity than individuals who are not Jewish. I have also begun to notice that a smaller chi2 correlates to a larger P-value. The chi2 statistic for table 3 is 1.889 and the P-value is 0.6054. The chi2 statistic for table 2.2 is 10.7534 and the P-value is 0.0013.

5.4 Hypothesis 4: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely to have a higher level of education than individuals who are not Jewish.

	Is R Jewish?		
Highest level of education	No	Yes	TOTAL
No college	1,085 26.19%	7 8.333%	1,092 25.83%
Some college	892 21.53%	7 8.333%	899 21.27
Associate degree	597 14.41%	4 4.762%	608 14.22%
Bachelor's degree	94 3.027%	26 30.95%	955 22.59%
Master's degree	476 11.49%	23 27.38%	499 11.81%
Graduate degree	164 3.958%	17 20.24%	181 4.282%
TOTAL	4,143 100%	84 100%	4,227 100%

Uncorrected chi2 (5) = 93.5132

P = 0.0000

Figure 4. Cross-tabulation of Jewish respondents and education level.

40% of Americans have completed higher education, while 75% of Jews have had higher education, making them the most educated religious group (JTA, 2016). Education level predicted who would vote for Trump or Clinton (Silver, 2016). A FiveThirtyEight article reports that Clinton swept the 50 most-educated counties and lost by a large margin in the 50 least-educated counties. To make sure the NES 2016 data set reflected this study, I tested education level against vote choice and found a P-value of 0.0000, meaning education level has a causal effect on vote choice. If Judaism affects vote choice (table 1) and education level effects vote choice (Silver, 2016), Judaism should have a causal relationship with education level. Because Judaism-vote choice, education level-vote choice, and Judaism-education level are all statistically significant, there is no need to worry about confounding variables.

As expected, this cross-tab gave a P-level of 0.0000, meaning there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. This means I can reject the null hypothesis. The chi2 is also extremely high. As demonstrated in previous tables, a larger chi2 generally corresponds to a stronger measure of association.

5.5 Hypothesis 5: Individuals who are Jewish are more likely to be interested in politics than individuals who are not Jewish.

How interested is R in politics?	Is R Jewish?		
	No	Yes	TOTAL
Very interested	782 21.94%	32 42.67%	814 22.37%
Somewhat interested	1,750 49.10%	32 42.67%	1,782 48.97%
Not very interested	741 20.79%	10 13.33%	751 20.64%
Not at all interested	291 8.165%	1 1.333%	292 8.024%
TOTAL	3,564 100%	75 100%	3,639 100%

Uncorrected chi2 (3) = 20.9780

P = 0.0001

Figure 5. Cross-tabulation of religion and interest in politics.

Though only 75 Jewish respondents answered within these four categories (responses labeled “refused,” “don’t know,” data deleted due to incompleteness, and “no post-election interview” were all coded to missing. The other 10 Jewish respondents fell within these categories, which is why the total number is smaller.), twice as many of them said they were “very interested” in politics compared to non-Jewish respondents. Less than 15% of Jewish respondents were not interested in politics, whether they answered “not very” interested or “not at all” interested. Given the P-value of 0.0001, I reject the null and conclude that Jewish individuals are more likely to be interested in politics than non-Jewish individuals.

6. Conclusion

All but two of my tests resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. In nearly all of my tests, Jewish respondents were more likely to be more educated, be more interested in politics, and vote for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election. Only Jewish women were more likely to identify as Democrat. There was no relationship between Jewish men and their party identification.

Though most American Jews believe that society should ensure equal opportunity, this may not be a good indicator of Jewish voting attitudes. Most of the respondents, regardless of religion, were Democrats and voted for Hillary Clinton. Their political affiliation could have influenced their response to the EqOppo variable. Just to see if this statement is correct, I tested EqOppo against VoteBin, which resulted in a P-value of 0.0000. Jewish respondents support equal opportunity not because they’re Jewish, but because they’re Democrats.

A limitation to my research was the small amount of Jewish respondents; there were only 85. Though the NES data is meant to be a microcosm of all voters, it can be hard to gauge the attitudes among Jews if the sample size is so small. My results supported hypotheses about Jews voting Democrat and Jews being educated, but the literature I read had already proved this. I also found it interesting that Judaism influenced party identification for women, but not for men. Women are more likely to be Democrats anyway, so this could have been why.

Despite the few outliers, most American Jews are well-educated, politically active, and liberal. My research concludes that in most cases, Judaism is a good predictor of political attitudes and voting behavior.

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