

POLITICAL DIVERSIFICATION AND DIVISION IN THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Effect on Consensus Building and Jewish Advocacy

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Communal consensus building is crucial for effective Jewish advocacy, particularly by Jewish community relations councils. In the past, the tendency of most American Jews to possess liberal political orientations has aided advocates in their consensus-building efforts. However, analysis of data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey reveals a diversification of political perspectives among American Jews and the emergence of a political division that substantially overlaps existing religious divisions in the Jewish community. Political diversification and reinforcing divisions will likely present an increasingly difficult challenge to professional Jewish advocates in their endeavor to develop and maintain community consensus.

Communal consensus building is a critical component of American Jewish political advocacy. As professional Jewish advocates pursue their primary mission—advocating for the security of Jews here and abroad (Raab, 1991a)—the development of communal consensus on how best to pursue that mission emerges as a superstrategy from which three other important community relations strategies directly flow.

First, consensus allows the organized Jewish community to provide direction to influential Jews who have ties to the community's advocacy agencies and access to public policymakers. Since public policymakers are a prime target for Jewish advocates in pursuing security for Jews (Raab 1991b), the organized community's ability to guide the efforts of Jews with access to public policymakers is imperative.

Second, consensus aids the organized community's long-standing coalition-building goals by facilitating the community's presentation of reasonably unified political positions to other ethnic, religious, and racial communities. Coalitions with other communities, in turn, are an essential ingredient in trying to influence public policymakers (Raab, 1991b). The demographic and organizational emergence of new ethnic communities (Gad-Harf and Imerman, 1992;

Kahn, 1992; Windmueller, 1992) underscores the continued importance of a Jewish consensus for coalition building.

Third, consensus advances the organized Jewish community's effort to provide a persuasive context for much of the Jewish public's thinking on political issues and to expedite the expressive and instrumental mobilization of the Jewish public when necessary (Raab 1991b).

Communal consensus building and its strategies are particularly important for professional advocates working in Jewish community relations councils (JCRCs). Since JCRCs act as umbrella representatives of the Jewish community, council professionals must be able to foster as much Jewish group inclusion as possible when they build consensus. At the same time, professionals must tolerate nonconsensus disagreements that do not threaten the consensus that exists, and they must refrain from imposing an unrealistic communal unanimity (Raab, 1991b). In other words, a state of consensus is a balance between an unworkable fragmentation and a strict homogeneity that is not credible.

For much of the past forty years—a period Raab (1991a) has called "the Golden Age" of American Jewish advocacy—the liberal politics of most American Jews

(Berelson et al., 1954; Cohen, 1983a, b, 1985, 1989; Cohn, 1960; Elazar, 1977; Fisher, 1979; Fuchs, 1956, 1968; Gordon, 1964; Hochbaum, 1993; Lenski, 1961; C. S. Liebman, 1973; Liebman, 1979; Liebman and Cohen, 1990; Lipset, 1960; Lipset and Raab, 1984; Litt, 1970; Sigelman, 1991; Waxman, 1983) eased the efforts of professional advocates in building community consensus on the best way to guarantee the security of Jews. Despite some degree of political diversity in the community, the tendency of American Jews to possess a generally liberal political orientation meant that most Jews approached community relations strategies from a similar perspective. Most believed that the organized community should promote liberal public policies through influential Jews with ties to public policymakers, that coalition partners should be dedicated to a liberal society and public policies, and that the organized community should provide a liberal persuasive context for the Jewish public and prepare the Jewish public for mobilization on the liberal side of political and policy issues.

However, the job of professional advocates in building communal consensus may be getting more difficult. Data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS)¹ show that American Jews have become more politically diversified than much of the previous literature has suggested (and, in all likelihood, most American Jews currently believe), although Jews are still more politically liberal than Americans generally. More importantly, the NJPS data lend strong support to several recent analyses of American Jewish electoral behavior (Lipset and Raab, 1984; Sigelman, 1991;

Zuckerman, 1990) that argue that more traditionally religious Jews have moved to the right politically.

THE DIVERSIFICATION OF AMERICAN JEWS' POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

The NJPS, the first representative survey of American Jews in twenty years, asked a random subsample of respondents to report their general political perspective. Respondents could classify themselves as very liberal, liberal, middle-of-the-road, conservative, or very conservative. The distribution of political perspectives of respondents is reported in Table 1.

The data reveal the extent to which American Jews have become politically diversified. One-third of American Jews claim to have a middle-of-the-road or moderate political perspective, and close to one-fifth of American Jews say they are politically conservative or very conservative. That leaves slightly fewer than one-half of American Jews who still hold liberal or very liberal political perspectives.

Despite the diversification of American Jews' political perspectives, they remain more liberal than Americans generally. The 1990 American National Election Study (Miller et al., 1993), a representative survey of Americans, asked respondents to report their general political perspective (Table 2).

A comparison of the data in Tables 1 and 2 indicates that roughly the same percentage of Americans generally and of American Jews claim a middle-of-the-road political perspective. However, nearly forty percent of Americans generally locate themselves on the conservative side of the political spectrum, twice the proportion of American Jews who do the same. Furthermore, one-quarter of all Americans generally locate themselves on the liberal side of the political spectrum, just one-half the proportion of American Jews who do so.

A substantial portion of American Jews has moved away from liberal political perspectives, adopting instead moderate and

¹Data from the National Jewish Population Survey were provided by the Council of Jewish Federations in association with The Mandell Berman Institute—North American Jewish Data Bank and The Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York. For an overall description of these data, see Kosmin et al. (1991). All responsibility for analysis and interpretation of data presented here remains with the author.

Table 1. Distribution of the Political Perspectives of American Jews

Political Perspective	Percentage
Very liberal	9.4
Liberal	37.4
Middle-of-the-road	33.3
Conservative	18.1
Very Conservative	1.7
Total	99.9*

N=585

*Total not equal to 100.0 due to rounding

Source: National Jewish Population Survey, 1990.

conservative political perspectives. In the process, the political profile of American Jewry has come closer to resembling the political profile of Americans generally. At the same time, though, American Jews' continued relative liberalism means they have retained a significant measure of political distinction from their fellow citizens.

Political and Religious Divisions Among American Jews

Previous studies of American Jewish politics have reported evidence that the political perspectives of American Jews vary by af-

filiation with religious movements. Evidence that Orthodox Jews are more politically conservative than other Jews emerged in the 1970s (Liebman, 1973). Lipset and Raab (1984) and Sigelman (1991) recently reported that Orthodox Jews were more likely than other Jews in the 1980s to vote for Republican presidential candidates. More importantly, Zuckerman (1990) issued an empirical proposition that for the first time since the early part of this century—when class conflict led Jews to split their electoral support among Republicans, Democrats, and Socialists—a substantial

Table 2. Distribution of the Political Perspectives of Americans Generally

Political Perspective	Percentage
Extremely liberal	2.0
Liberal	10.6
Slightly liberal	12.8
Middle-of-the-road	35.6
Slightly conservative	21.9
Conservative	13.8
Extremely Conservative	3.3
Total	100.0

N=933

Source: American National Election Study, 1990.

political division may be emerging in the American Jewish community. Zuckerman argued that an ecological analysis of voting in New York City districts in the 1980, 1984, and 1988 presidential elections shows Orthodox Jews voting heavily for the Republican presidential candidates, thus revealing a potential political division, reinforced by social and economic divisions, between Orthodox Jews and other Jews.

Given these recent findings, the relationship between affiliation with Jewish movements and political perspective is re-examined here with data from the NJPS, the most valued and reliable database on American Jews currently available. In this study, political perspective is used as an alternative measure to vote choice in analyzing the political profile of American Jewry. The analysis seeks to determine whether identifiable segments of the American Jewish community have moved away from generally liberal political perspectives and have adopted either moderate or conservative perspectives. To accomplish this, the original NJPS political perspective variable was recorded into two categories. "Very liberal" and "liberal" were combined to create a new "liberal" category, and "middle-of-the-road," "conservative," and "very conservative" were joined together in a new "non liberal category."² The resulting distribution places 47 percent of the respondents in the liberal category and 53 percent in the non-liberal category.

Respondents were then classified into five categories of Jewish religious movement. Four categories correspond to the major movements of American Judaism:

Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. The fifth category is composed of secular Jews, those who identify as Jews but have no affiliation with a particular movement. A sixth category of respondents included those who were born or raised Jewish but now practice another religion. These respondents were removed from the analysis because their affiliation with a non-Jewish religion likely limits their participation in the Jewish polity and community at large, either actively as leaders or more passively as members of the Jewish public.

Table 3 reports the cross-tabulation of Jewish religious movements and general political perspective. More religiously traditional segments of the American Jewish community have adopted non-liberal political perspectives. Among secular and Reconstructionist Jews, three-fifths to two-thirds claim a liberal political perspective. Among Reform Jews, half are politically liberal, nearly the same proportion as among American Jews generally. The proportion of liberals continues to decline among Conservative Jews, with two-fifths reporting a liberal political perspective, and then plummets among Orthodox Jews, just one-quarter of whom claim they possess a liberal political perspective.

In order to quantify with greater clarity the relationship between Jewish religious movement and political perspective and in order to control for the effects of other variables, a logistic regression analysis was performed. Logistic regression is a statistical procedure particularly well suited to a dependent variable that has been divided into two categories. The logistic regression coefficient for the independent variable, labeled B, is difficult to interpret. As a result, we transform B to e^B , which can then be interpreted as the multiplicative increase in the likelihood (or odds) of being in one category of the dependent variable rather than the other category for each unit increase in the independent variable, controlling for other variables in the model (Agresti, 1990, pp. 85-86).

²The use of the term "non-liberal" is, admittedly, somewhat awkward. However, neither conservative nor moderate adequately describes the non-liberal group, since the group is composed of people with both types of political perspectives. Use of the terms "liberal" and "non-liberal" also allows us to keep a focus on the movement of sectors of the Jewish community away from a generally liberal political perspective and the consequences of this movement for communal consensus building and advocacy.

Table 3. American Jews' Religious Movement Affiliation and Political Perspectives

	Movement					Total
	Secular	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox	
Political Perspective						
Liberal	65.5	61.5	49.8	41.1	27.0	46.8
Non-liberal	34.5	38.5	50.2	58.9	73.0	53.2
Total	9.4	2.2	44.6	37.4	6.3	100.0

Pearson $r=.18$; $N=585$

Source: National Jewish Population Survey, 1990.

In the case here, the dependent variable is general political perspective, and its two categories are liberal and non-liberal. The independent variable of particular interest is Jewish religious movement. These two variables were coded in such a way that e^B for Jewish movement will tell us the multiplicative increase in the likelihood of being politically non-liberal rather than liberal as we move from secular and less traditional Jewish religious movements to more traditional Jewish religious movements.

The logistic regression model also controls for the effects of two other independent variables: secular education and income. Controlling for the effects of these variables helps ensure that the relationship between Jewish religious movement and general political perspective is a real one and not the artifact of relationships among other variables. Two other independent variables, gender and age, were initially included as controls, but were eliminated from the model after initial tests showed they were statistically unrelated to general political perspective. Table 4 displays the results of the logistic regression analysis.

We examine first the relationship between Jewish religious movement and general political perspective. The logistic regression coefficient, $B=.38$, is statistically significant, with $p=.0003$. Because the logistic regression coefficient is difficult to interpret, it is transformed to e^B , which is equal to 1.46. This means that for each unit

increase in Jewish movement, the likelihood of being politically non-liberal rather than politically liberal increases multiplicatively by 1.46 times.

A few illustrations will prove useful. The variable for Jewish religious movement was coded as seen in Table 3, moving from secular to Reconstructionist to Reform to Conservative to Orthodox. Therefore, Orthodox Jews are four units away from secular Jews. This means that we must multiply 1.46 by itself four times in order to arrive at the increase in likelihood that Orthodox Jews will be politically non-liberal as compared to secular Jews. Since $(1.46)^4=4.54$, we know that Orthodox Jews are four and one-half times as likely to be politically non-liberal as are secular Jews. Similarly, Conservative Jews are one unit away from Reform Jews and two units away from Reconstructionists. Since $(1.46)^1=1.46$, Conservative Jews are approximately one and one-half times as likely to be politically non-liberal as Reform Jews; and since $(1.46)^2=2.13$, Conservative Jews are more than twice as likely to be politically non-liberal as Reconstructionists.

Secular education likewise has a statistically significant relationship with general political perspective. In this case, the logistic regression coefficient is equal to $-.54$ with e^B equalling .59. This reveals an inverse relationship between the two variables, so that as secular education increases, the likelihood of being politically non-lib-

eral decreases. Again, an example will be helpful. The variable for secular education was coded in such a way that the most highly educated American Jews (those with at least some graduate education) were two units away from the least educated American Jews (those with a secondary education at most). Since $(.59)^2 = .35$, the most highly educated American Jews are just one-third as likely to be politically non-liberal as the least educated American Jews.

Finally, income is significantly related to general political perspective as well, with the logistic regression coefficient equal to .11 and e^B equal to 1.11. The variable for income was coded so that those American Jews with the highest incomes were seven units away from those with the lowest incomes. Consequently, the most affluent American Jews are twice as likely to be politically non-liberal as the least affluent American Jews, since $(1.11)^7 = 2.08$. The correlation between income and education among American Jews is fairly strong ($r = .37$), but income and education work at cross-purposes in their association with general political perspective. The increase in the likelihood of being politically liberal that is associated with greater levels of education is tempered by the rise in income that is also associated with more education. This illustrates the often-varied nature of income and education in their respective relationships with third variables.

The findings of the empirical analysis

are clear. Even after controlling for education and income, a relationship between Jewish religious movement and general political perspective emerges. American Jews affiliated with more traditional movements are more likely to hold non-liberal political perspectives. Conversely, American Jews affiliated with less traditional movements and secular American Jews are more likely to hold a generally liberal political perspective. Perhaps most significantly, the evidence presented here strongly supports Zuckerman's (1990) proposition that multiple and reinforcing divisions, one religious and one political, are developing in the American Jewish community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSENSUS BUILDING AND JEWISH ADVOCACY

American Jews as a community remain more liberal than Americans generally. For professional Jewish advocates, this measure of Jewish political distinctiveness is beneficial because it provides both a relatively well-defined context within which to operate and a general political orientation that they can project to the larger society.

However, the adoption of non-liberal political perspectives by more traditionally religious segments of American Jewry will likely make the practice of Jewish advocacy increasingly difficult, precisely because the superstrategy of communal consensus building will be more difficult to achieve. Non-consensus disagreements are likely to be-

Table 4. Logistic Regression Analysis: Determinants of the Political Perspectives of American Jews

Independent Variables	B	p	e^B
Jewish movement	.38	.0003	1.46
Secular education	-.54	.0006	.59
Income	.11	.0317	1.11
(Constant)	-.77	.1711	

Pseudo R-square=.57; N=435

Source: National Jewish Population Survey, 1990.

come more common and more intense, threatening the communal consensus that exists by tipping the polity's balance toward an unworkable fragmentation. *Most importantly, the overlap between religious and political cleavages may make the task of developing communal consensus particularly daunting, since multiple and reinforcing divisions—as opposed to cross-cutting ones—make for higher barriers, less common ground, and greater mistrust among sectors of a community.*

In turn, the increasing difficulty in reaching communal consensus will likely affect the three important community relations strategies outlined above. Less religiously traditional and secular Jews will continue to favor liberal public policies, but more religiously traditional Jews will come increasingly to favor moderate and even conservative public policies. Consequently, community relations agencies will have greater difficulty giving clear direction and guidance to influential Jews who have access to public policymakers, thus reducing the ability of the organized Jewish community to affect public policymaking.

In addition, the organized Jewish community will be less able to present reasonably unified political positions to other ethnic, religious, and racial communities, or even to decide who its coalition partners should be. Less religiously traditional and secular Jews will desire to project a liberal vision to other communities and will continue to favor liberal coalition partners. More religiously traditional Jews will favor projecting a moderate or conservative orientation to other communities and will want to replace liberal partners with moderate or conservative partners. This will raise obstacles for JCRCs in finding and maintaining long-term coalition partners across a variety of issues.

Furthermore, JCRCs will face greater difficulty in projecting a persuasive context to a politically diversified Jewish public and in mobilizing them when needed. Less traditionally religious and secular Jews will

continue to favor a generally liberal political context and will be ready to mobilize on liberal political issues and policies. However, more traditionally religious Jews will increasingly favor a moderate or conservative political context, will resist mobilization on behalf of liberal issues and policies, but will more eagerly mobilize for moderate and conservative issues and policies.

The present debate over the Jewish community's relationship with politically conservative evangelical Christians provides an excellent illustration (Broder 1994). The community has failed to develop a consensus on how, or even whether, to develop such a relationship. Politically conservative American Jews—including but not limited to more traditionally religious Jews—tend to favor some of the public policies that Christian evangelicals support, urge stronger ties with the conservative Christian movement, and have argued to the Jewish public that evangelicals are beneficial allies because they are strong supporters of Israel. Agudath Israel, the country's largest Orthodox group, recently decided to oppose the Christian's right over public school prayer, but admitted it was "opposition with regret" ("Agudath Israel," 1995). Meanwhile, other traditionally religious Jews continue to see Jewish opposition to public school prayer as inimical to the Jewish community's relationship with evangelical Christians.

Others in the Jewish community, however, reject the public policies that the evangelicals promote; in particular, they argue that the Christian movements' desire to minimize the separation of church and state runs counter to the Jewish community's traditionally liberal position to keep a firm wall between the two. As a result, they are wary of becoming political partners with the evangelicals, despite the evangelicals' support for Israel, and they have tried to persuade the Jewish public that the evangelicals' hidden agenda could have detrimental consequences for Jews.

With such a lack of consensus, the orga-

nized Jewish community cannot effectively guide influential Jews with access to public policymakers when they lobby those public policymakers on issues, such as the separation of church and state, that are inextricably tied to the question of the community's relationship with the evangelical movement. The organized community also cannot effectively create long-term coalitions with the evangelicals; sectors of the community may become political partners of the evangelicals, but this would likely further fragment the Jewish community politically. Finally, the organized community cannot provide a persuasive context to the Jewish public about the relationship between Jews and evangelicals, making it more difficult to mobilize the Jewish public on the public policy issues bound up with the issue of the community's ties to the conservative Christian movement.

One final implication of the political trends in the community must be recognized. As the community becomes politically diversified and divided, and as religious segments of the community are likely to disagree on community relations strategies, the likelihood increases that those at the political extremes will feel increasingly alienated from the organized community and its community relations councils. The religiously traditional sector, and in particular Orthodox Jews, are most likely to experience increasing political alienation from the organized Jewish community because they have moved farthest away from the relatively liberal political perspective that has served for the past forty years as the basis for consensus building in the organized community and still characterizes the Jewish community as a whole in relation to the larger society. Conversely, as the community moves toward the center politically, the most liberal sector composed of secular and less traditionally religious Jews may feel increasingly estranged as well.

In the coming years, then, professional Jewish advocates—and again, particularly those working in JCRCs—face a fundamentally difficult task. They must adjust to and

address an increasingly diversified and divided Jewish polity, segments of which will have very different ideas about how best to undertake the strategies designed to guarantee the security of Jews here and abroad.

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