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## Why Jews Are Voting Obama

Posted By [Shmuel Rosner](#) On October 22, 2008 @ 11:25 AM In [Contentions](#) | [30 Comments](#)

As was [1] [previously established](#) by polls, Barack Obama will be the candidate for whom Jewish Americans are going to vote. While getting the majority of Jewish votes, it looks as if Obama will not nab quite as large a percentage as previous Democratic candidates have. It is still interesting to understand the reasons for these voting patterns, and a [2] [new study](#) has some answers.

“American Jews and the 2008 Presidential Election: As Democratic and Liberal as Ever?” (released by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner) was conducted by distinguished experts. They affirm that “there is some reason to believe that this election may see a narrowing of the traditional gap between Jews and other Americans in their vote for president” - namely, Jews will not be as liberal as they were in recent years. The “gap”, though, hardly disappeared (note: the data quoted in this study is from September, so some changes should be expected):

The Jewish tilt toward the Democratic candidate may be seen through two comparisons. First, Jews split 67-33 in favor of Obama, producing a gap of 17 percentage points with the nation. Second, and even more telling, is the contrast with non-Jewish whites. While only 37% of white respondents declared a preference for Obama, 67% of Jews did so — a gap of 30 percentage points. In short, with undecided voters eliminated from consideration, non-Jewish whites tilted heavily toward McCain, while Jews tilted even more heavily toward Obama.

However, this study is not just about support but also about the reasons for this support. One conclusion: Israel, to say the least, is hardly a dominant issue:

Commentators have suggested that Jews’ concern for Israel may well serve to diminish their enthusiasm for the Democratic candidate. Indeed, Jews do care about the Israel-Palestine conflict more than other Americans. Yet, with that said, the Israel issue ranked 8th out of 15 issues in importance as a presidential election consideration for Jewish respondents. Aside from the economy (a prime issue of concern for the vast majority of respondents), ahead of Israel on Jewish voters’ minds were such matters as health care, gas prices and energy, taxes, and education. Ranking just below Israel in importance for Jewish respondents were appointments to the Supreme Court and the environment. In fact, when asked to name their top three issues, just 15% of Jewish respondents chose Israel as one of the three, and these were heavily Orthodox Jews.

So what is it that makes Jews vote Democratic, and what will make them vote for Obama?

While their political views tending in the liberal direction help explain their support for Obama, and their concern for Israel may actually pull them in the other direction, political views alone cannot explain their high levels of Democratic vote intention. Neither can the major socio-demographic variables. Rather, their vote intentions are a product of their political identities - their long-standing association with the liberal camp and the Democratic Party.

The professors responsible for this study should be commended for concluding on this bold and revealing point:

Ironically, Jews and other highly educated voters often view other Americans as responding to instinctual, historic habits, to their political heritage, if you will. People like to think of themselves as totally rational and driven by carefully considered values.

In fact, Jews in the upcoming election also respond to their identities. In their case, they will be reflecting their long-held, multi-generation attachment to the liberal camp in America, and to the Democratic Party.

Of course, this doesn't mean that they vote for the candidate with the wrong views. It just suggests that they didn't seriously ponder the implications of their vote — and didn't even try to entertain the other option.

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