

The Geo-Demographics of American Christian Attitudes Towards Jews and Israel

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Jews often treat "Christian attitudes" toward them and their state as if those attitudes were of a piece, internally undifferentiated. In fact, Christian attitudes differ by religious denomination, ethnic background, socio-economic status, and, in the United States, even geographic location. Understanding these differences is vital for the development of appropriate strategies in Jewish attempts to relate to Christian groups and to mobilize Christian influence in public policy issues of concern to Israel in particular and to the Jewish people in general.

In 1984, Stuart Rothenberg and Frank Newport conducted a countrywide survey in which they attempted to identify and define the Evangelical voter and analyze his voting patterns. The survey was conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Government and Politics of the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation and the results were published in a volume entitled *The Evangelical Voter: Religion and Politics in America*. Although Rothenberg and Newport focus strictly on the Evangelical vote, they collected a large body of data not used in their book which dealt more specifically with the attitudes toward Jews and Israel of non-fundamentalist Christian groups as well. These data offer us an opportunity to examine the geo-demographic patterns of Christian attitudes toward Israel.

Upon analysis, these data point to some important convergences which can help guide the policy of the Jewish community in its external relations.

Attitudes Toward Israel

With regard to their attitudes towards Israel, American Christians divide into three groupings: positive attitudes are displayed in the South proper and the Mountain and Pacific West; slightly less positive attitudes are found in the West South Central region; and the least positive attitudes are grouped in the bloc of states from the Northeast through the Midwest. The West North Central states are ambivalent and share the low levels of "really dislike" characteristic of the South and West, but there are also the low levels of "really like" characteristic of the Northeast.

This is crucial for presidential politics and in fact works to Jewish advantage. Where Israel is least popular, in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and East North Central states, the Jews are also politically the strongest because of local population concentrations and involvement. Hence they are in a position to counterbalance public opinion with their

votes. Where it has the strongest support, Jews are, with the exception of Florida and California, somewhat less politically influential because they do not have the numbers or presence to be influential. The real problem geographically is in the West South Central states meaning, in particular, Texas, where there is a softness towards Israel.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS/CENSUS AREAS

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
New Engl/Mid Atl	20.77	33.08	46.15	130
East/North Centr	19.16	35.98	44.86	214
West/Nrth Centrl	11.29	43.55	45.16	62
South Atlantic	11.71	34.63	53.66	205
East/Sth Central	10.23	35.23	54.55	88
West/Sth Central	19.08	31.58	49.34	152
Mountain/Pacific	10.74	34.23	55.03	149

This pattern is carried over in the responses of the political target groups. The Conservative Republicans are by far the most positive and among the least negative, followed by the moderate liberal Democrats. The most negative are moderate liberal Republicans and the Catholics, who are also more likely to be fencesitters on this issue. The moderate liberal Republicans are mostly in the northeast and help bring down that region's overall positive rating, while most of the Conservative Republicans are in the West or, increasingly, the South.

POLITICAL GROUPS

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
Cons GOP	14.57	29.13	56.30	254
Mod/Lib GOP	20.29	33.33	46.38	69

Ticket-Splitter	13.59	41.75	44.66	206
Cons Democrat	18.47	32.93	48.59	249
Mod/Lib Democrat	12.61	37.39	50.00	222

The pattern is further reinforced by denomination and type of church. Again, among the least positive and by far the most negative are the high status denominations, most of whose members are probably also moderate liberal Republicans living in the Northeast or Midwest. This suggests that here we have a convergence of upper strata genteel anti-Semitism, the economic interests of big business and banking interests who do not want to alienate the Arabs with their wealth, and contemporary liberalism as underdogism which is especially characteristic of these archetypical "WASPS," domestically and in foreign affairs.

Catholics are the second most negative group, again probably reflecting at least residual ethnic anti-Jewish feelings, also concentrated in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and East North Central states. The Baptists turn out to be the most favorable, which correlates with the recent fundamentalist love affair for Israel and also among the least unfavorable, which in all likelihood reflects a residue of their older anti-Semitic predilections. At the same time, the other conservative denominations are more or less in the middle.

The high ranking among the Lutherans cannot be explained by the limited data. They are not a group noted for pro-Israel or pro-Jewish feelings in the past. Obviously there is a split in their ranks, since they also have the third highest negative rating after the high status Protestant denominations and the Catholics.

DENOMINATION/TYPE OF CHURCH

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
Baptist	13.14	33.58	53.28	274
Methodist	12.50	41.67	45.83	120
Lutheran	16.92	30.77	52.31	65
High Status Denm	23.08	30.77	46.15	65
Conservatv Denom	15.33	35.77	48.91	137

Catholic	18.81	32.11	49.08	218
Other Denom	12.07	37.93	50.00	58
No Specfc Denom	11.11	39.68	49.21	63

Given the configuration of presidential politics in the United States, this means that Israel is likely to continue to maintain White House support because of the convergence of constituencies, especially since Israel does well in the test for turnout propensity: the higher the turnout propensity the more favorable, while the most unfavorable have a low turnout propensity. On the other hand, Texas and the high status Protestant eastern Republican establishment need particular attention. The ethnic Catholics need less, for two reasons. First, they are losing power and, second, the data on respondents' ages suggests that in any case what is likely to have caused weaknesses in their attitude may be diminishing in the younger generation.

Overall, while there is relatively little spread with regard to positive attitudes towards Israel by age. Those below the age of 44 seem to be more positively predisposed than those above, indicating no decline in pro-Israel feeling among the great bulk of the American people. On the other hand, those under 34 are also the most anti-Israel in percentages that equal those of between 55 and 64. There is less neutrality among the younger people and more polarization. One would guess that a lot of the "anti" feeling is a result of the trendy liberalism of the young. That could pose a problem, unless the young grow out of it. Obviously, it is not enough to leave things to that hope. Negative feelings towards Israel are at their minimum between the ages of 35 and 54 and over the age of 65.

RESPONDENT'S AGE

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
18-24	16.38	26.72	56.90	116
25-34	8.56	24.32	67.12	222
35-44	11.23	25.67	63.10	187
45-54	8.51	36.17	55.32	141
55-64	12.82	34.62	52.56	156

65 and Above	15.48	35.12	49.40	168
DK/No Answer	30.00	50.00	20.00	10

This analysis is reinforced by the age-education correlation. Thus under 35 and those with no college education are more likely to be neutral than those over 54, while college education seems to increase positive responses in every age group. No doubt this is a reflection of the way in which college education lessens culturally transmitted prejudice. The most favorable/least unfavorable group by far in any of the categories dealt with so far in this discussion are the 35 to 54 year olds with some college or more. These are the people who were raised in the period when prejudice was most forcefully repudiated -- during and after World War II, and whose impressions of Israel were undoubtedly formed when Israel was considered positively in almost every respect. The most anti-Israel feelings were to be found among those under 35 with at least some college education: people who came of age when Israel already was considered to be an occupier and a denier of Palestinian civil rights, and anti-Zionist prejudice was becoming somewhat more acceptable. All in all, in looking at respondents' education, education is more likely to produce favorable feelings toward Israel and to reduce negative ones.

AGE/EDUCATION

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
Undr 35/No Collg	17.97	32.81	49.22	128
Undr 35/Som Colg	19.52	28.10	52.38	210
35-54/No College	13.69	44.05	42.26	168
35-54/Som Colleg	8.75	31.25	60.00	160
Ovr 54/No Colleg	14.87	36.92	48.21	195
Ovr 54/Som Collg	16.55	36.69	46.76	139
Aggregate	15.30	34.80	49.90	1000

This pattern repeats itself when the data are analyzed according to type of work. Upper and lower white collar and upper blue collar have almost identical positive responses,

substantially separated from lower blue collar. However, the lower blue collar and upper white collar are almost equally the most anti-Israel. The latter, one would assume, reflect again the upper class high status Protestant denominations and moderate to liberal Republicans.

TYPE OF WORK

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
Uppr White-Collr	18.29	28.05	53.66	246
Lowr White-Collr	12.04	35.19	52.78	108
Upper Blue-Collr	13.84	32.59	53.57	224
Lower Blue-Collr	18.80	38.46	42.74	117
Retired	12.32	41.71	45.97	211
Nt in Labr Force	17.02	37.23	45.74	94

The same patterns hold true for total family income, excluding "others" in race and ethnicity where the sample is too small to draw a proper conclusion. There is very little difference in positive or negative attitudes by either race, ethnicity, or sex, with the exception of males, which can be accounted for by any of the variables discussed above.

TOTAL FAMILY INCOME

	Really Dislike	Neutral	Really Like	Total
Under \$10,000	12.94	43.53	43.53	85
\$10,000-\$19,999	15.98	36.07	47.95	244
\$20,000-\$29,999	13.44	33.20	53.36	253
\$30,000-\$39,999	14.94	33.33	51.72	174
\$40,000 and over	15.58	27.27	57.14	154
Refused	21.11	43.33	35.56	90

Overall, registered Republicans are both more favorable and unfavorable to Israel, with Independents more likely to be neutral. Serious Christians are substantially more favorable and less unfavorable which, of course, is reflected in questions on the stand on religion and politics, attendance at religious services and importance of religion in daily life, and fundamentalist beliefs with regard to creation and the Bible. All of these reinforce the geodemographic analysis presented at the beginning of this article.