

<sup>1</sup> A December 23, 2011 article in *The Forward* affirms that President Obama has retained the backing of his major 2008 donors and bundlers, and attracted new funding as well.

issues, plus education, the economy, and social justice, matter deeply; and, from election to election, it has been a constant that American Jews make voting decisions based on values. Until there is a Congressional agreement about deficit reduction, consequences predicted for defense spending and for health, education, and welfare cuts may well influence this election. The campaign of the next year will focus our attention on the role of government in our lives. It is on that topic that Republicans and Democrats differ sharply. Jewish voters have traditionally been more supportive of the Democratic Party's interpretation of government as the guarantor of social justice, and I do not expect that to change.


The Marcellus Shale controversy in Pennsylvania raises environmental and economic concerns. It may or may not become a national issue in 2012 as the country debates dependency on foreign energy supplies and the economic and environmental issues around hydraulic fracturing or "fracking."

Today, what seems to loom most prominently is the U.S.-Israel relationship and, in particular, America's support of Israel's security in a time of increased isolation. Israel's ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, has emphatically underscored the close U.S.-Israel relationship on several strategic levels. When Turkey disinvited the Israeli military from participating in a joint military exercise, the United States, also pulled out. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called every European foreign minister

to urge support of Israel's membership in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Obama has provided Israel with an annual \$3 billion in security assistance, the highest amount ever. And recently, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak heaped praise on President Obama's commitment to blocking Iran's nuclear weapons program. And while speculation about Jewish support for Obama continues, his fundraising — within the Jewish community — remains strong.<sup>1</sup>

On the international front, Obama has repeatedly affirmed his determination to prevent a nuclear Iran from exercising nuclear power — a growing, global danger. If the current rumblings about Iran's nuclear progress continue to grow louder in the context of America's national security, the preference for diplomacy and economic sanctions vs. "other options" may well differentiate the presidential candidates.

However, just like every other election, this one will come down to the *choices* voters have and the relative merits of each candidate on a variety of issues.

As of this writing, smoke from the smoldering failure of the deficit panel "super committee" has yet to clear. Rather than a large defection of Jewish votes to the Republican candidate, my fear is that an increasingly disillusioned and cynical electorate will simply choose to stay home next November. For Jews as for all Americans, Democrats and Republicans, that would be a disastrous outcome, one I hope we will all work assiduously to avoid. 

## In Florida

MICHAEL M. ADLER

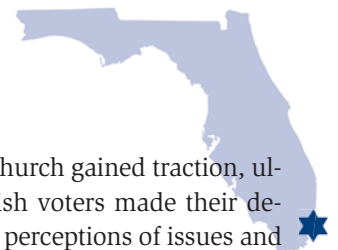
In the 2012 presidential election, Florida will be given two additional electoral votes. The Jewish community here has been and continues to be a very important part of the state's electorate. Jews will be a major factor in determining Florida's 29 electoral college votes — votes that may determine the outcome of the presidential election.

The Republican Party sees the Jewish community — a recognizable, defined, and accessible group — as a fertile target for group voter conversion. In the 2008 election, Republicans unsuccessfully tried to dislodge Jewish voters from their historical Democratic allegiance. Although some of the Republican claims about

Obama's pastor and church gained traction, ultimately, Florida Jewish voters made their decisions based on their perceptions of issues and facts rather than on baseless claims.

What will motivate Jewish voters in the 2012 election? The volatile political, economic, and social environment could define the times as uncertain. And desire for change on economic, security, and social issues could become a catalyst for political change as well. Such unpredictability has inspired political strategists to believe that they have an even greater opportunity to sway voters than in the last presidential cycle.

Jews in Florida do not vote as one




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homogeneous group. They represent diverse political perspectives and resonate with a range of issues, which may suggest that their votes are up for grabs during the next election cycle. For example, most Orthodox Jews here are more conservative when it comes to Israel; they would also vote for school vouchers and would strongly support anyone who runs against President Obama. On the other hand, Jewish women voters overwhelmingly support women's choice, which makes it extremely difficult to lure women to the Republican Party.

The large elderly population in Florida cares deeply about the economy and health care. A fair analysis of the administration's policies on health care will be important. Scrutiny will also be given to each candidate's policies on issues

that affect the elderly. While the elderly can be vulnerable to campaign propaganda, efforts to present the president's and the challenger's records accurately will, I hope, give voters essential and accessible information upon which to make their electoral decisions.

Younger Jewish voters, who appear to be less concerned about Israel, are still potentially vulnerable to the Republican primary campaign assertions that Obama is weak on security and foreign policy. But the administration's support for NATO involvement in Libya, as well as the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, both resonate with young voters.

As 2012 gets underway, the Floridian Jewish community will make informed voting decisions that impact the election. 

## Trends Among Young Jewish Voters

AARON STRAUSS

In their guide "How to Mobilize Young Voters," Rock the Vote (a nonprofit that engages and builds the political power of young people) states, "Young adults are more likely than older adults to identify as independent, a commonsense [sic] situation for a group of voters new to politics." Young Jews, though, seem to have seen enough of politics to know where to stand: In 2008, 62 percent of Jewish voters under the age of 35 identified with the Democratic Party; 22 percent eschewed a major party label; and 16 percent identified with Republicans. This breakdown is virtually identical to the Jewish electorate as a whole: 61 percent Democratic; 22 percent independent; and 17 percent Republican.

How will the Jewish vote — especially among young people — trend in the future?

Young American Jews (under 35 years old) are pulled in two different directions — not individually, but as a group. On the one hand, demographically, there are more young Orthodox Jews, most likely because their parents have children in greater numbers. Orthodox Jews are much more likely than other Jews to identify as conservative and vote for Republicans.

On the other hand, like younger voters of all religious backgrounds, young Jews tend to be more liberal than their parents or grandparents. These two tendencies — the fact that Orthodox voters (whose proportion grows faster than non-Orthodox) lean conservative and the fact that younger voters tend to be more liberal than their

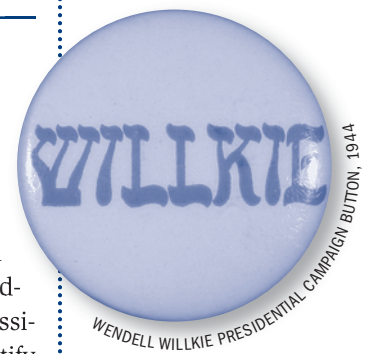
parents — balance the scorecard.

By aggregating publically available data from organizations<sup>1</sup> that conducted independent polling during the 2008 election, it is possible — with some margin of error<sup>2</sup> — to quantify these trends.

Here is what we know: Among young Jewish voters, those who self-identify as Orthodox (14 percent) and attend synagogue more than weekly (10 percent) are about double the analogous proportions for the Jewish electorate as a whole. (About 7 percent of all Jewish voters are Orthodox and about 5 percent attend synagogue more than weekly.) The American Jewish Committee confirms this two-to-one ratio in their latest survey, which includes nonvoters as well as voters.

Despite this sizable number of Orthodox individuals within the newest generation of Jewish voters, younger Jews are more liberal than their parents. A majority of younger Jews (57 percent) identify as liberal. This proportion dwarfs the much lower proportions of self-identified moderates (29 percent) and conservatives (13 percent). Among Jews of all ages, the difference between the percentages that identify as liberal vs. moderate is much less stark (47 percent to 36 percent), though self-identified conservatives are still a distinct minority (18 percent).

This tension between demography and ideology evens out when it comes to voting and party affiliation. Though the lack of data does



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<sup>1</sup> The Pew Research Center, the National Annenberg Election Survey, and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study

<sup>2</sup> Combined, these surveys include 204 Jews under the age of 35, which translates to a margin of error of 6.9 percent.