

Do Jews Switch Parties Every 70 Years?

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Today being the day of the New Hampshire primary elections, with the eyes of the nation fixed on the contest for the Republican nomination, it's as good a day as any to ask: **Are American Jews Becoming Republican?**

Steven Windmueller isn't exactly saying "yes" in this 2003 article, but does note that the Democratic near-monopoly on Jewish voting does seem to be cracking:

Where once the Democratic Party could count on a 90 percent Jewish turnout for its candidates, these numbers are now generally 60-75 percent, depending upon particular elections and specific candidates... there is some evidence that younger Jews do not hold the same degree of loyalty to the Democratic Party and, as a result, are more likely to register as Independent or Republican. Thus, the Republican Party may have a better chance of picking up the Jewish vote in the towns inhabited by young professionals in northern New Jersey than in the retirement communities of southern Florida. While these numbers do not indicate a definitive generational trend, it does appear that both Orthodox Jews and Jews who are from more secular backgrounds tend to vote Republican more frequently than do other Jewish constituencies, clearly for different ideological, political, and cultural reasons.

Furthermore, he notes, Jews switching party allegiances is not unprecedented:

From 1860 until the election of Franklin Roosevelt, American Jews voted overwhelmingly Republican. Just as Lincoln was perceived as a hero of the Jewish people through his leadership in overturning Grant's Order No. 11 and in leading the fight against slavery while seeking to preserve the Union, Roosevelt would fulfill a similar role for Jews beginning with his efforts to build a new coalition of political power to transform the economy and later to mobilize the nation against Nazism...

...Theodore Roosevelt was the last Republican to receive significant Jewish support; his fierce independence and support of specific Jewish concerns made him a hero to many within this community. Democrat Woodrow Wilson would capture the attention of many American Jews with his internationalist vision and, more directly, his ideas pertaining to the creation of a League of Nations. In addition, Wilson's nomination of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court, his endorsement of the Balfour Declaration and later Zionist claims in Palestine, and his condemnation of anti-Semitism both domestic and foreign would begin the repositioning of Jewish political loyalties and voting patterns.

While the leadership of the Jewish community remained staunchly Republican, including such personalities as Louis Marshall, the leader of the American Jewish Committee, and a host of other key players of that era,

the bulk of the community was to shift party allegiance as a result of changes within the community and in American society... The last Republican presidential candidate to win a plurality of the Jewish vote was Warren Harding in 1920...

Windmueller gleans general lessons on Jewish party-switching:

Jewish voting patterns may undergo significant change at those times in which Jews sense that their self-interests are being challenged, and that it is essential for them to evaluate their political position within the society. This occurred at the time of Lincoln, during the Wilson era, and as a result of the Great Depression. Whether in fact Jewish voting patterns shift significantly in seventy-year cycles remains to be seen.

The idea of seventy-year cycles is fascinating. Clearly Windmueller isn't suggesting anything fixed and regular like clockwork, but the notion that generational dynamics produce pendulum-like political trends would be worth further study, both within the Jewish community and beyond it.