

# The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events  
impacting the world's financial markets*

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### IS THE JEWISH VOTE REALLY THAT IMPORTANT? William M. Stern

In 1960, Milton Himmelfarb, the nation's foremost commentator on Jewish voting trends and now senior political expert at the American Jewish Committee in New York, wrote that Jews "earn like WASPs but vote like Puerto Ricans."

Most analyses today do not go much beyond that of the distinguished scholar quoted above. In fact, the public remains relatively unaware of just exactly how crucial the Jewish vote is, and for whom the Jews have voted in the past.

The only conclusion that can be made on Jewish voting patterns in national elections -- or that needs to be -- is that virtually all Jews are heavily influenced in their voting patterns by the candidates' perceived stands on Israel.

Extensive conversations with a wide range of political experts in and out of the Jewish community lead to the following irrefutable conclusions.

0 That Jews define themselves as "liberal, humanistic, passive, and intellectual" and vote accordingly in local elections.

0 That when it comes to picking Presidents, they overwhelmingly support candidates who favor a strong and well-armed Israel. Only if the presidential candidates are considered equally favorable, do Jews vote heavily Democratic. Between 1960 and 1980, Jews averaged 77%-79% Democratic in national elections, some 24% higher than the rest of the electorate.

So how crucial is the Jewish vote? Well, America's Jews represent only 2.7% of the general population -- less than 1 % in 39 of 50 states. But their voter participation is dramatically higher than any other identifiable portion of the electorate.

0 In the last three federal elections, over 90% of all eligible Jews registered and of these, over 90% voted.

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0 Nine out of ten Jews live in 12 states that represent 279 electoral votes. Just 270 electoral votes are needed to elect the President.

The Jews thus are potentially the swing vote in many of the nation's most crucial Electoral College states. They represent close to 25% of the vote in New York; 12% in New Jersey; 10% in Florida; 7% in Pennsylvania; and 6% in California.

Former White House Jewish liaison Mark Siegal uses a surprisingly accurate rule of thumb in estimating the Jewish vote: simply multiply the Jewish population by three to get their proportion of the electorate in the Democratic primaries, and by two for the percentage in the general election.

Today some 53% of all Jews are registered Democrats while only 14% are registered as Republicans. The remaining 33% are Independents.

In 1976, Jews reported giving the Democratic candidate (Jimmy Carter) a rather typical 72% of their vote, and in New York, 80%. If the Jews of New York state had voted like other whites, let alone other whites of similar income and age, Gerald Ford would have won New York, and the presidency.

In 1980, most breakdowns of the total Jewish vote gave Reagan 37%, Carter 45%, and Anderson 18%. For the first time since Alfred Smith in 1928, Jews did not give the Democrat a majority of their votes.

Reagan, in fact, received more votes from Jewish men than Carter did. It was the women's majority -- a sizable gender gap -- that gave Carter his Jewish plurality. Reagan's 37% showing was considered a major breakthrough for a Republican candidate, particularly in a three-way race. As the 1982 congressional elections made clear, the 1980 outcome was hardly a shift to the right by Jews but simply an anti-Carter vote and a reflection of Reagan's strongly pro-Israel statements throughout the campaign.

In any given presidential election, no matter who is running, a minimum of 20% of Jews will vote Republican and 45% Democratic. The undecided 35% is the Jewish vote that candidates traditionally court. In 1980, Reagan and Anderson divided this vote fairly evenly, with Carter emerging empty-handed.

The jury is still out on this floating Jewish vote in 1984. Assuming John Anderson runs -- as most analysts here do -- he will receive some of this vote, but less than he cornered in 1980.

White House strategists have told us they fully expect Reagan to garner 40%-42% of the Jewish vote in 1984. This means he would have to get more than half of the undecideds. We think this figure is optimistic, especially since Reagan will almost certainly be running against Mondale, not Glenn.

Reagan's record with Jews will have to be contrasted this time with Mondale's virtually perfect record of pro-Israel votes as a Senator. Election experts agree that Mondale has not been tainted

at all by Carter's low standing in the Jewish community. In fact, Mondale campaign strategists are expecting to capture a dramatically large sector of the Jewish vote in the general election.

Political analysts here agree that if the new strategic consensus with Israel agreed upon in late November holds stable until Election Day, Reagan will at least be in the running with Mondale for that 35% of the Jewish vote considered undecided.

Reagan's position with Jewish voters, however, has clearly slipped. In fact, the most recently available figures indicate that Reagan's popularity level among Jews is 10%-15% lower than with the general population. This is due in very large part to his Mid-East policies, according to most political analysts.

If Reagan can recapture the high approval ratings with Jews that he enjoyed when he took office, big electoral states such as New York, California, and New Jersey can probably be considered "safe" Republican states in 1984.

If he cannot, these states may well be decisive battlegrounds in the 1984 election.

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