

What's the Matter with Palm Beach County?\*

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“What’s the matter with Kansas?” the journalist Thomas Frank (2004) asked. People in the Jayhawk state, Frank’s birthplace, have a median income at or below the national average. While less affluent voters are more likely to be Democrats, Kansas is the fifth most *Republican* state in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Frank (2004, 167) was puzzled that blue collar workers seemed so devoted to the Republican party and to conservative movements in general. Kansas is Republican because it is socially and religiously conservative, “...a magnet for the preternaturally pious, for every stripe of Christian holy man from the hermetic to the prophetic to the theocratic” (Frank, 2004, 215). More than a third of Kansans identify as evangelical Protestants compared with a quarter of all Americans. Only one state outside the South–West Virginia–has a higher share of evangelicals than does Kansas.<sup>2</sup>

As evangelicals are committed to Republicans–78 percent voted for Mitt Romney in 2012,<sup>3</sup> American Jews are strongly linked to the Democratic party. Since 1928, at least 60 percent of American Jews have voted for the Democratic candidate for President in every election except 1980.<sup>4</sup> Even as other Americans voted *en masse* against the Democrats–in 1952, 1972, and 1984–Jews have stayed with the party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: In 1940 they were estimated to give 90 percent of their ballots to FDR. And while working class Kansans remain loyal to the Republicans, upper middle class Jews stay with the Democrats.

The Democrats’ Kansas is Palm Beach County, Florida, which gave 58 percent of its votes to Barack Obama in 2012, even as the state of Florida barely went for the incumbent President.<sup>5</sup> A quarter of Palm Beach County’s residents are Jewish–compared to two percent for

the country as a whole—and the county has the fourth largest Jewish population in the country. Almost two-thirds of Palm Beach Jews are 65 or older (Luxner, 2006)—and older voters nationally gave Romney 56 percent of their votes. Palm Beach median household income is almost identical to that for the United States as a whole.<sup>6</sup> But Palm Beach's Jewish population is far more affluent—with almost half responding to an exit poll claiming incomes of \$75,000 or more.

Republicans targeted this wealthy area: "...Palm Beach County is ground zero for the Republican Jewish movement," said Sol Dinerstein, head of the county's Republican party (Alvarez, 2012). Yet, Palm Beach County's Jews were much more likely to vote for Barack Obama over Mitt Romney in 2012—by 74 to 26 percent. Wealthy elderly Jews voted in large numbers in ways that were not only very different from less affluent (and younger) Kansans—but from the rest of the country. While Obama carried slightly more than half of the national vote (50.9 percent),<sup>7</sup> he won 69 percent of the Jewish vote, slightly less than he received in 2008 ( 74 percent) and that he won in Palm Beach County. So what's the matter with Palm Beach County?

The heavy Jewish vote for Obama should not be a surprise since Jews have been loyal Democrats since the New Deal. Yet, *some* Jews and many Republicans— especially Jewish Republicans--saw 2012 as their party's best chance since 1980 to win Jewish support. Obama, Republicans charged, didn't understand Jewish concerns. He had not visited Israel as President. He had a chilly relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, and had publicly clashed with the Israeli leader over building settlements on the West Bank and Gaza. Republicans made support of Israel a major campaign issue and spent large amounts of money, directly and through independent political action committees, in the hope of swinging enough

Jewish votes in key states such as Florida to elect Mitt Romney President.

The realignment of the Jewish vote didn't happen. To be sure, Obama lost some support among Jews compared to 2008, but he lost votes among most groups in an election that was closer than four years ago. The story of Jewish voting in 2012 is straightforward even if unanticipated by some: The historic loyalties of Jews to the Democratic party remained intact. Republicans were *not* able to use Israel as an issue against Obama for two reasons. First, Israel did not rank highly as a voting issue for Jews. Second, most Jews strongly support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem and see their positions on the Middle East as closer to Obama's than to Romney's.

There is another message in the Jewish vote—as well as the national vote more generally—in 2012. The campaign was marked by huge levels of spending, up to \$6 billion in total, as outside groups (corporations and other donors, many of whom could remain anonymous under a Supreme Court ruling in 2010). A small share of that was targeted at Obama's Middle East policies, but the Jewish share of the electorate is not large. Despite the heavy spending, there is little evidence that it made much difference—or even that the campaign mattered that much. This is remarkable since the unemployment rate remained high at 7.9 percent—and that the President's poor performance as an economic manager—and as an advocate of policies that many voters rejected—led to historic Republican gains in the House of Representatives (as well as in the states) in 2010. Republicans were optimistic that they could build on this momentum with an economy that was still anemic and prevail in 2012 with the support of many more Jewish voters. They didn't prevail and American Jews stayed loyal to the Democrats.

My task here is to lay out the basis for Jewish ties to the Democratic party generally and

in 2012 more specifically. The traditional liberalism of Jews is part of the story. The Republican drift to the right—especially on social issues—is another part. So is the mistaken emphasis by Romney and outside financial supporters on Obama’s reputed hostility to Israel. American Jews didn’t accept this argument. To the extent that Middle Eastern politics mattered at all, they favored Obama among the Jewish community. Romney’s close ties to Netanyahu swayed few Jewish voters and more dovish policies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict helped the President a bit with the Jewish community. The small number of Jews who defected from Obama in 2008 to Romney in 2008 seem more motivated by economic and social conservatism than by issues related to Israel. Even where Republicans thought that they had won a bigger battle—on campaign contributions—most American Jews who gave money to Obama in 2008 contributed to the 2012 reelection drive. A small number did *not* give again in 2012 seemingly because of disagreement with the administration’s Middle East policies. While they withheld money from the Presidential reelection campaign, they did *not* donate to Romney. They simply closed their wallets.

I support these claims through an analysis of an exit poll of Jewish voters on election night 2012 by Gerstein, Bocian, and Agne for the lobbying group J Street (see n. 5). The survey was conducted among 800 self identified adult American Jews (with a margin of error of 3.5 percent). The survey was conducted, as many others are now, on the Internet through invitation to participants by the firm Mountain West Research Center.<sup>8</sup> The data are weighted to ensure representativeness.

### **The Election in Context**

The 2012 election defied conventional wisdom in at least two ways. First, the

unemployment rate hovered around eight percent for most of the year, dropping “only” to 7.7 percent in the week before the election. A weak economy in which most people believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction means that the incumbent should be in trouble. Yet President Obama won—by what is now seen as a substantial margin (Lauter, 2012). Second, the extraordinary level of spending in the 2012 election—much of it targeted against Obama especially within the Jewish community—seemed to have little effect. I shall elaborate on the weakness of Republican attempts to sway the Jewish vote below.

Republicans hoped that the election would be a referendum on the state of the economy and critiques of the administration’s foreign policy. Democrats, in turn, tied their campaign to the extremism of the Republican party and to Romney’s inconsistent positions over time. It was to be a contest in which the “campaign mattered” (Holbrook, 1996). After the President’s weak performance in the first debate, Romney rose to parity in some polls and overtook the President in others. This led *New York Times* columnist David Brooks to argue in early October:

Let this be a lesson to you political scientists: Campaigns matter. The things that have shaped this campaign are not things you can put into a model. It’s been the character of the candidates — doubts about Romney’s authenticity — and the quality of the campaigns — Obama’s ability to segue from the Bain attack [on Romney’s role as the head of an asset manager firm that cut jobs] to the Medicare attack to the more general character attack in a coherent way, step by step.<sup>9</sup>

By the time of the election, there was more support for the counter-argument, originally made by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944, 74) of “minimal effects” of campaigns: “What the political campaign did, so to speak, was not to form new opinions but to raise old opinions

over the thresholds of awareness and decision. Political campaigns are important primarily because they activate latent predispositions.” Voters, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee argued (1954, 115), “...are likely to fall back on...early allegiances, experiences, values, and norms...”. Republican attempts to charge the President with poor performances on both economic and foreign policy fell on deaf ears. And the huge amount of spending on both sides seem largely wasted: The statewide Presidential vote shares in 2012 were almost exact replicas of what they were four years earlier ( $r^2 = .967$ ).<sup>10</sup>

The 2012 elections seems to reflect “minimal effects” more than a great debate over the issues of the day—or even a referendum on the economy. Why did all this money and rhetoric not matter more? First, by election day the American public had become more optimistic about the direction of the country (see Table 1 below). Second, campaigns matter mostly to undecided voters, who are less numerous in Presidential elections than other contests (Sides, in press, 11-13). In 2012, there were few such undecideds and most were considered unlikely to vote (Cillizza, 2012). Third, the strong polarization in the American electorate means that voters are increasingly loyal to their own parties and unlikely to defect even under adverse conditions. Partisans are more likely to see the economy through the lens of their own political views (Bartels, 2008, ch. 4; 2012).

The economy did matter— a bit. Obama received about two percent fewer votes in 2012 than he did in 2008 and about five percent less of the Jewish vote. And it seems, especially for the Jewish vote, that most of the lost support came from voters upset over the state of the economy and the corresponding concern that the country was heading in the wrong direction. The outcome could have been worse for Obama had he not mobilized minority (notably Latino)

voters (Taylor and Cohn, 2012). Yet, the President was on track to maintain most of his 2008 support—especially among Jewish voters.

### **The Long-Standing Loyalty of American Jews to the Democratic Party**

The 2012 exit polls indicate that 69 percent of American Jews cast ballots for Obama, down slightly from 74 percent in 2008. The Jewish vote for Democrats has shrunk somewhat, from almost 80 percent in 1992 and 1996 (Mellman, Strauss, and Wald, 2012, 5). However, few groups in the American electorate have been as loyal to any party as the Jews have been to Democrats.

Why have the Jews been so Democratic? Most Jews are liberal on economic and especially social issues (Mellman, Strauss, and Wald, 2012, 18-20). So more liberal positions on issues of aid to the poor and social issues such as prayer in school and abortion lead to Jewish identification with the Democratic party.

Also critical is the status of a minority in American society. Jews identify with other minorities that have been outside the mainstream of American society and had to become “white” (Goldstein, 2006) or at least tolerated, notably African-Americans, but also gays and lesbians (Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman, 1989; Glaser, 1997; Greenberg and Wald, 2001; Djupe, 2007).

The question of identity extends to two other issues that may push Jews in different directions. Jews overwhelmingly support Israel, the only Jewish state, and have largely taken it for granted that American backing for Israel is bipartisan. The initial support for Israel as an independent state came from a Democratic President (Harry S Truman) and the overwhelming share of Jewish political leaders have been—and continue to be—Democratic. In recent years,



some Democratic identifiers have become more critical of Israel, while Republicans have rallied to the defense of the Jewish state.<sup>11</sup> Republican leaders and conservative Jews pointed to the cool relations between Obama and Netanyahu and the initial omission of support for recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital in the Democratic platform. A more general hawkish position on international and defense issues leads Republicans to be more willing to use force against threats to American allies, especially Israel, that are threatened by enemies such as Iran. Republicans sought to make support for Israel an issue that would benefit them in 2012.

However, the strongest support for Israel among Republicans comes from evangelical Christians. Most Jews are uncomfortable with close ties to evangelicals. They disagree with them on social issues and on the separation of church and state. Jews fear that close ties between the church and state will lead to the promotion of America as a Christian nation—and a large share of the public sees being a Christian as essential to what it means to be a good American (Theiss-Morse, 2009, 86). Jews also worry that evangelical support for Israel rests upon the belief that a renewed Jewish state is part of the prophecy of “end times,” when Christ returns to the earth and those who do not accept Christianity will not be saved. Most evangelicals argue that it is very important to convert non-Christians, so Jews stand apart from the party of these true believers, the Republicans. In the 2004 election, Jews who viewed evangelicals negatively were 25 percent less likely to vote for George W. Bush rather than for John Kerry. Only one other factor loomed as large in Jewish voting behavior in that Presidential election: party identification (see Uslaner and Lichbach, 2009).

Republicans were convinced that American Jews were finally ready to back their party in 2012. Obama had visited Muslim countries—Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia,

Afghanistan) but not Israel. Iran was proceeding apace with the development of nuclear technology. Obama had pledged not to permit Iran to obtain nuclear weapons, but Romney had promised Israel support if it attacked Iran (and Obama would not go this far). Romney charged that Obama “threw Israel under the bus” (Weinger, 2012).

Republicans made a concerted effort to win a greater share of the Jewish vote. The Republican Jewish Coalition raised \$6.5 million to support the party’s nominees and other groups such as the Emergency Committee for Israel launched a series of television ads criticizing Obama (Lake, 2012). The group Secure America Now launched a series of television ads costing \$1 million describing the Iranian nuclear threat and the tensions between Obama and Netanyahu (Siddiqui, 2012). The Republican Jewish Coalition sponsored an ad with a Jewish voter who had cast his ballot for Obama but would support Romney in 2012 because of conflicts with Netanyahu (Kessler, 2012). These ads were targeted at states and regions with large Jewish populations, especially where the election was likely to be close. And this means Florida (with more than eight percent of the electorate being Jewish), and especially Palm Beach County with its large Jewish population.

Boosting the Republican cause was Sheldon Adelson, a casino magnate who donated up to \$150 million of his personal fortune to Republican candidates in 2012, mostly through outside groups that were not directly connected to candidates. Most of the funds for the Republican Jewish Coalition came from Adelson, as well as unspecified amounts to other groups (Stone, 2012). Republicans were buoyed by some early polls showing sharp declines in Jewish support for Democrats—down to about 65 percent in a Pew survey in September and Gallup polls in June and July.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, Republican gains among Jewish voters were meager. Jews voted Democratic for the same reason most Americans cast their ballots for Obama: There were more Democrats than Republicans in the electorate, they were more optimistic about the state of the economy. They cared more about health care and were more supportive of Obama's health care policy. While Jews are more liberal than other voters, ideology played a minor role in their 2012 vote choice. What mattered more was negativity toward the Tea Party—which I see as a proxy for negative evaluations of evangelicals that mattered so heavily for the 2004 Jewish vote.

The Republicans gained little traction on Israel for three reasons: First, only a small share of Jewish voters (10 percent) saw Israel as one of the most important issues. Second, where Israel mattered for vote choice, the more dovish positions of American Jews bolstered Obama, not Romney. Third, the media blitz directed at Jewish voters had little effect on voters—and may have even backfired. I move on to a discussion of how Jews voted in 2012.

### **The Unchanging Jewish Voter<sup>13</sup>**

I examine Jewish voting in 2012 through an election night exit poll by the firm Gerstein Bocain Agne for J Street, which calls itself “pro-peace pro-Israel” ([www.jstreet.org](http://www.jstreet.org)). The data were gathered through an internet survey on the evening of November 6 (election day) with a margin of error of 3.5 percent.<sup>14</sup> The data were made available to me by Jim Gerstein, head of the firm.

The Gerstein poll shows that Obama won 70 percent of the Jewish vote, almost identical to the 69 percent reported in the national exit polls (see Table 1 for the source). How do Jewish voters compare to non-Jews? I use the Gerstein survey and the exit polls.

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Table 1 about here

Jews are more likely to be Democrats than all voters by 55 to 38 percent—and are 10 percent less likely to call themselves Republicans. They are substantially more likely to be liberals (42 percent to 25 percent), to say that the United States is moving in the right direction (55 percent to 46 percent), and to approve of Obama (68 to 53 percent). The exit polls asked about support for the Tea Party, the J Street survey presented voters with a feeling thermometer. I divided the thermometer at 50 degrees (neutral), which is a rough measure for comparisons. But the differences are clear: 72 percent of Jews had negative views of the Tea Party, compared to just 30 percent for the full sample.

The most important issue question is also not fully comparable. The Gerstein survey gave voters a choice of 13 issues while the exit polls only provided a choice of four issues. It asked voters which two of these issues were most important while the national exit poll asked for *the* most important concern. The two surveys show the centrality of the economy and the deficit for both Jewish and all voters. Jewish voters appear more concerned with foreign policy and health. Yet, foreign policy did *not* play a central role in vote choice by Jews (see below). On three issues—health care, the economy, and handling the deficit—Obama had a more significant advantage over Romney among Jewish voters than among all voters. Finally, Jewish voters have much higher levels of education: Only 10 percent have no college background, compared to 24 percent for all voters. Two thirds of Jewish voters have a college or post graduate degree compared to 47 percent of the full sample.

Next I estimate a model of vote choice for Jewish voters in 2012. Without publicly

available data for the full electorate, I can't make any comparisons with all voters. But the story for Jewish voters tells a tale that is largely one of "minimal effects." My model includes variables that are standard in vote choice studies: party identification, ideology, the direction of the country, education, income, and age (gender was consistently insignificant). The survey did not have questions on preferences by issue, only which issues were most important and whether voters saw one candidate would do a better job on a series of issues (Israel, the Middle East, Iran, the economy, terrorism, Social Security and Medicare, fighting imports, health care, and the deficit). These job approval questions are all highly correlated with each other (with simple correlations ranging from .76 to .87) and with the Presidential vote itself (ranging from .75 for the deficit and the Middle East job approval to .84 for fighting imports and health care). So I can't use any of these measures as simple surrogates for issue positions. I use the measure of health as the most important problem (coded as in n. 16 below) as a predictor of vote choice. I also tested for the impact of other important problems, but none were significant.<sup>15</sup>

Following Uslander and Lichbach's (2009) argument that attitudes toward evangelicals had powerful effects on vote choice of American Jews in 2004, I use the closest available proxy—attitudes toward the Tea Party. Tea Party supporters are more likely to be evangelicals and very religious, even compared to other Republicans (Abramowitz, 2011; Jacobson, 2011).

Since this is a model of Jewish voting, I include a battery of questions on Israel and religiosity. If the Republicans were to make inroads in the Jewish vote, then they should gain support from voters who oppose a Palestinian state, want the United States not to take a role in Israeli-Palestinian talks (which might involve pressuring Israel to make concessions), believe that the United States is unfair to Israel, and especially who see Israel as one of the nation's two most

important problems.

Religiosity could matter because it has become a key fault line in partisanship among all voters (Newport, 2009). More religious Jews are more conservative (Mellman, Strauss, and Wald, 2012, 25) and more likely to vote Republican. Although only a tiny share of American Jews, ultra-Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn voted overwhelmingly (in a few cases more than 90 percent in a precinct) for Romney.<sup>16</sup> Those who are very religious are also socially conservative and thus distant from their fellow Jews on social issues. For religiosity, I include the frequency of attending services, whether someone is a member of a synagogue, and self-identification as an Orthodox Jew.

I present the results in Table 2. Since vote choice is a dichotomous variable, I use probit to estimate the model. Probit coefficients have no ready interpretation (unlike regression coefficients). So I calculate the “effects,” the changes in the probability of vote choice as one moves from the minimum to the maximum values of each predictor (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). For age, I restrict the range of the effects to ages 18 to 75 so that values that apply to only a few individuals don’t drive the estimates.

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Table 2 about here

The key takeaway from this analysis is that Jewish voters seem unremarkable. Party identification and the direction of the country are the first and third most important factors driving vote choice among Jews in 2012 (by the size of the “effects”). Strong Democrats are 57 percent more likely to back Obama than are strong Republicans. In a more simple bivariate comparison 92 percent of Democratic identifiers (and 98.4 percent of strong Democrats) voted

for Obama and just seven percent of Republicans (four percent of strong Republicans) did likewise. People who thought the country was heading in the right direction were 17 percent more likely to support the President. Ideology matters, but the effect is muted. Liberals and progressives were just five percent more likely to vote for Obama (and the coefficient is significant at  $p < .10$  for a one-tailed test). This does not mean that liberalism is unimportant for Jews—but that ideology is dwarfed by other factors, notably party identification and Tea Party support. Voters who thought that health care was the most important issue were three percent more likely to vote for the President. Overall, Jewish voters don't seem distinctive, as Sigleman (1991) argued two decades ago.

Jews who had the most negative opinions about the Tea Party were 32 percent more likely to back Obama. This should not be surprising since only 11 percent of all voters supporting the Tea Party backed the President. Yet, Jews who backed Obama were *very strongly* opposed to the Tea Party, rating them on average just 14 on a 100 point thermometer. A third of all respondents to the Gerstein survey rated the Tea Party at zero and 69 percent below the neutral point of 50. Republican Jews who voted for Romney only rated the Tea Party at an average of 54—and they constituted just 19 percent of the sample. For the full exit poll sample, 30 percent expressed opposition to the Tea Party compared to 72 percent of the Jewish sample. The powerful effects of the Tea Party thermometer on the vote for Jews reinforces the argument of Uslaner and Lichbach (2009) that Jews are uncomfortable with the apocryphal arguments made by supporters and leaders of this movement.

The more religious Jews were more comfortable with Romney. How often one attends services is not significant, nor is synagogue membership. However, the Orthodox are more likely

to vote for Romney, but the impact is only four percent. Neither education nor age is significant, but the wealthiest respondents were seven percent more likely to vote for Romney than those with the least income (under \$20,000 a year). Yet even the wealthiest respondents—with income over \$200,000 a year—voted more often for Obama than Romney (by 59 to 41 percent).

On the foreign policy questions, there is no evidence that sentiments on Israel or the Middle East more generally helped Romney. To the extent that they mattered, these issues helped the President. Voters who thought that Israel was the most important issue were no more likely to vote for Romney than the 90 percent of Jewish voters who did not put priority on Israel. Supporting an American role in peace talks didn't matter either. However, two measures of Middle East policy did reach statistical significance. Voters who opposed a Palestinian state and, who saw the United Nations as unfair to Israel were more likely to vote Republican. The effects were modest at seven and six percent, respectively. Yet *Jewish voters favored the more dovish position on both questions*. Most Jewish voters (80.8 percent) favor a Palestinian state; even more (81.8 percent) want the United States to take an active role in peace talks, and over half said that the United Nations was fair to Israel (50.2 percent). See Table 3 for a summary.

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Table 3 about here

The large sums spent on television ads had no effect. Forty-four percent of Jewish voters saw the ads and were no more likely to vote for one candidate over the other. Most respondents didn't see Netanyahu as favoring either candidate, but a small plurality thought the Israeli Prime Minister backed the Republican nominee (17.6 percent compared to 14.8 percent). So Romney got a small boost from perceptions of Netanyahu, but he lost more support on the Palestinian



state and the United Nations treatment of Israel. The ads backfired precisely where Republicans hoped that they would do the most good—in Palm Beach County. Sixty three percent of Palm Beach residents saw the ads, but 63 percent also said that they made no difference. And by 27 percent to 11 percent, the ads made them more likely to vote for Obama rather than Romney.<sup>17</sup>

The problem that the Republicans faced in mobilizing Jewish voters is that their most likely targets were a small share of the Jewish electorate. Most Jews expressed dovish opinions on the Middle East conflict. Only a small share of the Jewish population identifies as Orthodox (less than 10 percent).

I used the base from the probit model to estimate the likelihood that different ideological groups on Middle East issues would vote for the President. I report these percentages in Table 4. These are not effects. They represent the survey respondents based upon the probit in Table 2. The first entry in the table represents the most hawkish respondents: saying that Israel is the first or second most important problem, seeing the United Nations as unfair to Israel, opposing both a Palestinian state and an American role in negotiations. Only a quarter of voters with this ideological profile cast ballots for the President. Over three quarters of voters with the opposite, dovish profile voted for Obama. But the first group of voters comprised a tiny share of the sample, barely more than one percent (eight voters in total). And the second is far more numerous, over a third of the sample.

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Table 4 about here

Perhaps this is too stringent, since only ten percent of all respondents cited Israel as the most important (or second most important) problem. So I reestimated the hawkish and dovish

groups without the Israel important question. Almost 30 percent of the hawkish group voted for Obama, but they are still a small share of all respondents (four percent). The dovish group cast 74 percent of their ballots for Obama and they are 37 percent of the sample used in the probit. *The Republicans' problem was that there weren't enough Jewish hawks to provide Romney with much support.*

While 80 percent of respondents who believed that Netanyahu favored Obama voted for the President, only 53 percent who thought that the Israeli Prime Minister backed Romney supported Obama. This may seem like a substantial gap, but there is no evidence that such views were shaped by the television ads. (as Lazarsfeld and his colleagues anticipated from the pre-television media). Romney didn't do much better among voters who saw the ads attacking Obama on Israel than he did from the slightly larger group that didn't see the ads. His advantage was just a single percentage point. As Lazarsfeld and his colleagues anticipated, perceptions of whom Romney favored reflected pre-existing biases. By 22 percent to 10 percent), Democratic identifiers believed that Netanyahu favored Obama; by 26 percent to 10 percent, Republicans were convinced that the Israeli Prime Minister backed Romney. Republicans who saw the ads saw Romney favored by 29-16 percent, but GOP identifiers who did *not* see the ads believed that Netanyahu supported their nominee by 22 to four percent. Even more counterintuitive are the results for Democrats, who thought their candidate was favored by 14-11 percent if they did not see the ads, but by 30-18 percent if they *did see the commercials*.

The estimation of the model only includes respondents for whom there is no missing data on any of the variables. This sample *underestimates* support for the President; only 64 percent of respondents in this estimation voted for Obama. So whatever positive effects there are for

Romney on these measures may be too large.

Overall the model performs very well. The estimated McKelvey-Zavoina  $R^2$  is .852 and the model correctly predicts 93 percent of vote choices.<sup>18</sup> There is considerable support for my claim that the 2012 election for Jews did not represent a reaction against Obama's Middle East policies. Instead, it was a reaffirmation of the traditional ties to the Democratic party and a rejection of the economic and especially cultural conservatism of the Republican party. Jews voted like other Americans, but more so.

### **Jews and Democrats: The Enduring Ties**

Not surprisingly, there is a strong correlation between vote choices for President and for the House of Representatives (see Table 5): 91 percent of Jewish voters were consistent in their party choice for the two offices, mostly for Democratic candidates (60 percent). Jewish voters are even more consistent than all voters ( $r = .800$ ). While there are no readily available data for 2012, 85 percent of voters cast consistent party ballots in the 2008 American National Election Study ( $r = .675$ ).

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Table 5 about here

Jewish voters are also consistent over time. While there are always issues of selective recall when asking about past behavior, the tight connection between Presidential vote choice in 2008 and 2012 (see Table 6) is consistent with the model in Table 2: 91.7 percent of Jewish voters chose the same party in both years, again predominantly the Democrats. Only 40 voters shifted from Obama to Romney and 19 from McCain to Obama.

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Table 6 about here

With just 59 switchers, analyzing vote change is imprecise. Recognizing the hazards involved, I present some data on the roots of switching in Table 7. And the story is straightforward: Only two of the measures I used in the model in Table 2 reach statistical significance: Jewish voters who shifted to Romney were more negative on the direction of the country and more positively disposed to the Tea Party. None of the issues relating to Israel or the Middle East even approached significance, nor did the importance of the health care issue. Obama lost some support among Jewish voters upset with the economy. This is consistent with the cross-sectional results of the exit polls (see Table 2 for the source) showing that 84 percent of respondents who saw the country moving in the wrong direction voted for Romney and that 93 percent believing that the country was going in the right direction supported the President. Neither party's candidates lost many supporters: 52 percent of the switchers were Independents, compared to 27 percent of the full sample. Two thirds of Jewish voters defecting to Romney were either Independents or Republicans. Despite all of the efforts of Republicans and outside groups to persuade Jewish voters that Obama was not a supporter of Israel, there is little evidence that even the small number of switchers were motivated by Middle East policy. Voters who said that Israel was one of the two most important problems were *more likely to shift to Obama*.

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Table 7 about here

If the Republicans did not succeed in converting many Jewish voters, they seemed— from initial reports—to do better in raising money. The Gerstein/ J Street survey asked respondents if

they had contributed to either candidate in 2012. I present a simple ordered probit model of contributions in 2012 in Table 8. I use ordered probit since the dependent variable is a trichotomy (contributed to Obama, not at all, or to Romney). Most respondents (89 percent) were consistent in their contributions, with 70.6 percent not giving in either year. Only five of Obama's 2008 contributors (.6 percent of the full sample) gave to Romney in 2012; only four of McCain's givers (.5 percent) gave to the President in 2012.

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Table 8 about here

The best predictor of donations in 2012 is donations in 2008. Party identification also shapes contributions. Almost no one identifying with a party gave money to the other party's candidate. Independents were almost equally divided, with a slight edge to giving to Romney. Most issues had slight effects on contributions. Respondents who felt that the economy was the most important problem in the campaign were more likely to give to Romney, as were voters who said that the United Nations is unfair to Israel. But in each case, Romney did not gain many new donors. For each measure, the likelihood of contributing to Romney increased by two to three percent. Wealthy donors were more likely to give to Obama (by five percent), not Romney.<sup>19</sup> Most issues, especially on the Middle East, did not shape political giving among American Jews in 2012.

Romney did not gain a lot of contributors from his attacks on Obama's position on the Middle East. Jewish voters who believe that the United Nations is unfair to Israel are significantly less likely to contribute to Obama—but not to give to Romney (see Table 9). Jewish voters who are upset with the U.N. treatment of Israel seem to have stood on the sidelines in

terms of contributions in 2012.<sup>20</sup> Nor was there a rush to emulate Sheldon Adelson. The survey included a feeling thermometer measure for Sheldon Adelson asked of half the sample. I reestimated the model in Table 8 including the Adelson thermometer and it was far from significant. Despite the widely publicized big money donations from Adelson, the contributions of pro-Israel political action committees that give directly to candidates still favored Democrats in 2012—and by similar percentages compared to previous years. Most Jewish money (64 percent) continued to flow to Democrats.<sup>21</sup>

### **Reprise**

The Republicans had high hopes for winning a larger share of the Jewish vote in 2012 than they did in 2008. They scored a minor victory by increasing their vote share by five percent. Most Jews who deserted Obama did not desert the Democratic President because of Israel. As with all voters, there was significant economic discontent in the country. This dissatisfaction was not sufficient to deprive the President a second term. Considering the state of the economy and the level of polarization in the country, Obama's four percent margin of victory among all voters seems remarkable.

The Republican failure to make inroads with the Jewish vote may be even more remarkable. Yet it should have been predictable. Even as Republicans swept the country in 2010, picking up 63 House seats, Jews stood loyal to the Democratic party, giving it 66 percent of their vote (Gerstein, 2012, 2). The full electorate gave Democratic House candidates only 48 percent of the vote.<sup>22</sup>

Why didn't the Republicans make more gains among Jews, especially in "ground zero" Palm Beach County? American Jews' negative evaluations of evangelicals led many to

reinforce their Democratic loyalties in 2004 (Uslaner and Lichbach, 2009). Yet evangelicals were not as potent a force in national politics then as the Tea Party has become since 2010. The cultural conservatism of the Tea Party and the strong drift of the Republican party to the right seems to have left little room to court Jews or other minorities.

The attempt to frame the election as a referendum on Israel for American Jews failed since Jews are not single issue voters. Nor did Israel loom large as a determinant of vote choice. Support for Israel has traditionally been bipartisan. Prominent Jewish politicians and rabbis joined to fight the attacks on the President and Netanyahu himself realized that his closeness with Romney could be seen as interference in American politics, especially as some Israeli politicians argued that Obama had been a strong friend of the Jewish state (Alvarez, 2012; Rudoren, 2012). Many Jews apparently saw the negative ads as reflecting poorly on the Republicans—and thus they seem to have backfired.

Why did Jews support President Obama in 2012? For the same reasons that they have voted Democratic for many years—as liberals and especially as a minority that worries about how minorities fare. This “insecurity” did *not* extend to support for Israel. And with little difference in the policies of the two parties on this issue, there was little reason to make support of Israel a central voting issue, especially since American Jews are as dovish on the Middle East as they are liberal on social issues. In places such as Palm Beach, older Jews have voted Democratic for many years, perhaps for more than 40 years when Kennedy and Humphrey won about 80 percent of Jewish vote (see n. 4). Old habits die hard, especially when the opposition seems unappealing. The Republicans spent a lot of money in losing the election in 2012, among all voters and Jews.<sup>23</sup> As John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote in another context, “money can’t buy me love.”<sup>24</sup>

TABLE 1: Jewish and Non-Jewish Voters Compared

Question	J Street Jewish Sample	Exit Polls All Voters+
<b>Party Identification</b>		
Democratic	55	38
Independent	25	32
Republican	19	29
<b>Ideology</b>		
Liberal/Progressive	42	25
Moderate	33	41
Conservative	25	35
<b>US Right Direction</b>	55	46
<b>Approve Obama</b>	68	53
<b>Support Tea Party*</b>		
Support	17	21
Neutral	11	42
Oppose	72	30
<b>Most Important Problem**</b>		
Economy	53	59
Deficit	20	15
Foreign Policy	22	5
Health Care	32	18
<b>Obama Better Health Care</b>	72	52
<b>Obama Better Economy</b>	64	48
<b>Obama Better Deficit</b>	57	47
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	1	3
High School completed	9	21
Some college	25	29
College degree	42	29
Post graduate	23	18

\* Feeling thermometer in J Street survey: 50 = neutral, < 50 opposed, > 50 support.

\*\* J Street survey had 13 problems listed (plus "other"; foreign policy here is for most important problem Israel, terrorism/national security, and Iran; exit poll had only the four issues listed and only one issue selected.; Exit poll data from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-exit-poll/US/President>



TABLE 2  
 Probit of Presidential Vote Choice 2012 Jewish Voters

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	MLE/SE	Effect
Party identification	-.496****	.052	-9.49	-.569
Tea party thermometer	-.021****	.004	-6.06	-.320
Ideology	.156*	.100	1.56	.046
US in right direction	1.299****	.201	-6.45	.165
Favor Palestinian state	.217**	.111	1.94	.066
Did Netanyahu help Obama/Romney	-.227*	.158	1.44	-.044
Support US role in Israeli-Palestinian talks	.060	.113	.53	.017
Saw TV ads criticizing Obama on Israel	.107	.190	.56	.010
UN fair to Israel	.231**	.113	2.06	.062
Israel most important problem	-.114	.289	-.39	-.011
Health most important problem	.290*	.203	1.43	.028
How often attend services	.020	.094	.21	.008
Member synagogue	-.056	.233	-.28	-.005
Orthodox	-.382*	.286	-1.33	-.039
Education	.070	.083	.85	.034
Income	-.145**	.071	-2.04	-.071
Age	.006	.006	.93	.031
Constant	5.647***	.813		

\* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001

Estimated R<sup>2</sup> = .851 -2\*Log Likelihood Ratio = 253.126 N = 720

Percent predicted correctly: 93.3 (model) 70.0 (null)

TABLE 3

## Jewish Voters' Attitudes on Key Variables

<b>Variable</b>			
Did Netanyahu help Obama/Romney	14.8	Obama	17.6 Romney
Support US role in Israeli-Palestinian talks	81.7		
Support Palestinian State	80.8		
Saw TV ads criticizing Obama on Israel	43.9		
UN fair to Israel	50.2		
Israel most important problem	10.0		
Health most important problem	32.5		
How often attend services	33.5	Weekly/ Monthly	51.0 Hardly ever / Never
Member synagogue	41.5		
Orthodox	9.3		

TABLE 4

## Probabilities of Voting for Obama/Romney by Attitudes toward Israel

Attitudes	Obama vote share	Number of cases*
Israel first or second most important problem, oppose Palestinian state, see the UN as unfair to Israel, oppose US role in Israeli-Palestinian peace process	25.0	8
Israel not most important problem, favor Palestinian state, see the UN as fair to Israel, favor US role in Israeli-Palestinian peace process	75.9	249
Oppose Palestinian state, see the UN as unfair to Israel, oppose US role in Israeli-Palestinian peace process	29.1	32
Favor Palestinian state, see the UN as fair to Israel, favor US role in Israeli-Palestinian peace process	73.9	268
Believe that Netanyahu favored Obama	80.4	112
Believe that Netanyahu favored Romney	53.0	132
Saw ads attacking Obama on Israel	63.6	330
Didn't see ads attacking Obama on Israel	64.6	390

\* Base is 720, from the probit in Table 2. The cell entries are frequencies from the data, not estimated probabilities from the probit.

TABLE 5

## Congressional Vote by Presidential Vote

Congressional Vote	Presidential Vote		Total
	Romney	Obama	
Republican	86.2	13.4	268
Democratic	6.2	92.1	483

Correlation = .800

TABLE 6

## Presidential Vote 2012 by Presidential Vote 2008

Presidential Vote 2008	Presidential Vote 2012		Total
	Romney	Obama	
McCain	89.1	10.1	224
Obama	6.8	93.2	494

Correlation = .812

TABLE 7

## Vote Change from 2012 by Attitudes

Variable	Romney Shifters	Obama Shifters	N
Direction of US	22.0	56.3	59*
Tea Party thermometer	40.2	16.0	52*
Favor Palestinian state	70.5	86.4	52
Favor US role in talks	82.8	85.0	59
UN treats Israel fairly	56.7	51.7	59
Saw anti-Obama Israel ads	51.3	50.3	52
Health 1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> most important	20.0	30.2	59
Israel 1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> most important	11.5	19.9	59

p < .01

TABLE 8

## Contributions to Presidential Campaigns in 2012: Ordered Probit

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	MLE/SE
Contribution 2008	1.686****	.118	14.32
Party identification	.251****	.036	6.97
Ideology	.031	.061	.51
Favor Palestinian state	.034	.068	.50
Did Netanyahu help Obama/Romney	.098	.093	1.06
UN fair to Israel	.144**	.059	2.43
Israel most important problem	.105	.182	.058
Economy most important problem	.2221**	.110	2.02
Income	-.057*	.039	-1.49
Sheldon Adelson thermometer+	-.0001	.003	-.06
Cut point 1	2.945****	.504	
Cut point 2	6.015****	.579	

\* p < .10 \*\* p < .05 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .0001

Estimated R<sup>2</sup> = .398 -2\*Log Likelihood Ratio = 668.788 N = 783

+ Only asked of half the sample (N = 353). All other coefficients for the full sample.

TABLE 9

Campaign Contributions and Attitudes toward the UN and Israel

Contribute to:	Attitudes toward the UN and Israel				N
	Very fair	Somewhat Fair	Somewhat Unfair	Not at all fair	
Obama	45.92	16.50	15.25	7.95	143
No contributions	45.92	75.58	80.27	82.39	598
Romney	8.16	7.92	4.48	9.66	59
N	98	303	223	176	800

Correlation = .166

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## NOTES

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1. See <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/statemedian/> and <http://www.gallup.com/poll/156437/heavily-democratic-states-concentrated-east.aspx>.
  2. See <http://www.beliefnet.com/politics/religiousaffiliation.html>
  3. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-exit-poll/US/President>
  4. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/jewvote.html>
  5. [http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/FL/Palm\\_Beach/43850/112842/en/summary.html](http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/FL/Palm_Beach/43850/112842/en/summary.html).  
The comparisons of voting behavior in 2012 come from national exit polls (see n. 3) and national and Florida surveys of the Jewish vote by Gerstein, Bocian, and Agne and data for Palm Beach County provided by Jim Gerstein.
  6. Cf. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html> for the United States with <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12/12099.html> (for Palm Beach County).
  7. <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=2012&f=0&off=0&elect=0>
  8. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.jstreet.org/images/Election-Night-Press-Release.pdf>.
  9. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/03/no-longer-debatable-campaigns-matter/>
  10. See calculations by Alan Abramowitz at <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/12-from-12-some-takeaways-from-a->

- wild-election/.
11. See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153092/americans-continue-tilt-pro-israel.aspx>, showing that only 53 percent of Democrats support Israel over the Palestinians in 2011 compared to 78 percent of Republicans, although 65 percent of Democrats held a positive view of Israel (compared to 80 percent of Republicans).
  12. For Pew, see <http://features.pewforum.org/2012-political-party-identification-trends-more-republicans-gop/slide7.php>; for Gallup, see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/155111/Mormons-Widely-Favor-Romney-Jewish-Voters-Back-Obama.aspx> and <http://www.gallup.com/poll/156338/Americans-Positive-Negative-Toward-Netanyahu.aspx>
  13. With apologies to Eric R.A.N. Smith.
  14. For details, see [https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.jstreet.org/images/2012\\_election\\_survey\\_findings.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.jstreet.org/images/2012_election_survey_findings.pdf)
  15. The other issues were education, the economy, health, Social Security and Medicare, taxes, abortion, the deficit, and terrorism.
  16. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/11/24/nyregion/the-city-vote-precinct-by-precinct.html>
  17. The data on Palm Beach County were graciously provided by Jim Gerstein.
  18. I estimated another model that excluded all insignificant variables and found no appreciable change in the effects reported in Table 2. I used sample weights in the estimation.

19. These estimates were derived using Stata's margins command (in Stata 12).
20. The same pattern holds for seeing the economy as the most important problem.
21. See <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/totals.php?cycle=2012&ind=Q05>
22. The 2010 Time Series American National Election Study (pre-election) and wave 2 of the American National Election Study Evaluation of Government Survey both give this figure.
23. And, of course, the Democrats spent a lot as well, but they won.
24. <http://www.lyrics007.com/The%20Beatles%20Lyrics/Can't%20Buy%20Me%20Love%20Lyrics.html>