

Stop talking about the US 'Jewish vote'. It's not that simple

Political parties vie for Jewish support based on false assumptions about a single issue: Israel

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'Everybody wants the Jewish vote. As if there were one.' Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Everybody wants the Jewish vote. As if there were one. [Jews are](#) educated, generally liberal. Although they comprise only about 2% of the electorate, they vote in high numbers, overwhelmingly for Democrats. In [2024](#), 79% chose Kamala Harris. They are also assumed to be steadfast friends of Israel, no matter what it does. Republicans, waging a fake war on antisemitism while courting white supremacists, consider Jews increasingly up for grabs.

Nationally, Jewish Americans are concentrated in a few bright blue spots. A [2020](#) map from the Jewish Electorate Institute showed a third of Jews living in 20 congressional districts – out of 435 – most of them in New York, New Jersey, California and (purple) Florida. Of these, only one sent a Republican to Washington.

Today, it's two. Florida's 21st district switched parties only after falling victim to [redistricting](#) in 2022. The other outlier has elected the pro-Israel, anti-immigration Republican [Chris](#)

[Smith](#) every term since 1981. Why? The mapmakers' explanation: New Jersey fourth district includes Lakewood, where half the residents are ultra-Orthodox – scrupulously, ceaselessly observant. Unsurprisingly, among white voters, regular religious service attendance is a [big predictor](#) of conservatism.

In other words, in Lakewood, *Orthodox* may be more salient than *Jewish*.

In fact, if pro-Israel candidates are looking for votes, even *Jewish* is no longer salient. White [Evangelical Christians](#) are more firmly supportive of Israel than American Jews. The US is home to the largest population of Christian Zionists in the world, numbering more than 30 million, a third of whom belong to [Christians United for Israel](#), the largest Zionist organization in the US.

The Bible belt churches these people attend [preach](#) that the founding of Israel in 1948 was part of God's plan to bring about the End Times, and the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East are the mayhem and destruction preceding the second coming of Christ (when nonbelievers – including Jews – will [drown in the Lake of Fire](#)).

While the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac) [spends](#) far more on political campaigns, Christians United for Israel is busy mobilizing its millions to [grassroots action](#).

Meanwhile, a [minority of American Jews](#) now call themselves Zionists. A late-2025 [Washington Post](#) poll found that six in 10 believed Israel was committing war crimes in Gaza; four in 10 said the assault was genocide. And aside from the fiercest partisans, for many young Jews, Israel [just isn't that important](#).

The Gaza war figured large in the 2024 presidential elections, as the civilian death toll mounted and the Biden-Harris administration stood unwaveringly beside Israel. Now, even as the killing spreads to the West Bank and southern Lebanon, US voters are moving on. [Affordability](#) is the winning buzzword this cycle, [at least for Democrats](#). Almost no one is thinking about [foreign policy](#).

What about abortion? Climate change? Voting rights? The press, the pundits, and the mainstream party strategists keep behaving as if every Jew cares about Israel – and all Jews care about is Israel – and a candidate must be pro-Zionist or lose the elusive Jewish vote.

We saw this during the campaign of the New York mayor, [Zohran Mamdani](#). Fortright support for Palestinian self-determination had long been central to his politics, and to his appeal to progressives. But Mamdani was running for mayor, not president. His brilliant stroke was affordability – a theme that is easily understandable, widely relatable, and capable of making socialist solutions sound reasonable.

Nevertheless, from the moment he appeared, the press, from the New York Times [op-ed page](#) to [college newspapers](#) to the [international Jewish press](#), made the election a referendum on Israel – and, more perniciously, on Islam.

Mamdani's Democratic primary opponent, former governor [Andrew Cuomo](#), attacked him with flagrant Islamophobia, conflating his critique of Israel with antisemitism and signalling that his faith was a danger to Jews.

The fearmongering did not defeat Mamdani.

In the end, [only a third](#) of Jews voted for him; in Hasidic neighborhoods, 90% went for Cuomo. But progressive Jewish organizations including Jewish Voice for Peace and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice endorsed him. He won in [almost every](#) racial and class demographic and pulled in [three-quarters of voters under 30](#).

What's the lesson here? The youth vote – plus the Black vote, the Hispanic vote, the working-class vote, etc – plus good ideas and a great campaign put Mamdani over the top. Furthermore, an analysis by [Good Authority](#) concludes that no position on Israel, pro or con, is driving Jews out of the Democratic party.

Now Abdul El-Sayed, the Muslim Democrat running for Senate in Michigan, is shlepping the burden of this vaguely defined, perpetually disgruntled “Jewish vote”. After narrowly winning the primary, he [apologized](#) to members of the Jewish community for a statement he made after a Lebanese-born naturalized citizen rammed his truck into a large synagogue, injuring a guard.

The apology came after El-Sayed clumsily linked the man's [antisemitism](#) to Israeli violence in Lebanon, saying: “Hurt people hurt people.” It was an inoffensive adage among, say, prison abolitionists. But to some Jews, it sounded as if El-Sayed felt more sympathy for the perpetrator than for his targeted victims.

The Republicans have taken advantage of these fissures, attacking El-Sayed with a combination of Islamophobia and the usual hypocritical condemnations of antisemitism. At their midterm “convention”, El-Sayed's opponent Mike Rogers [claimed, falsely](#), that the Democrat had ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. And while El-Sayed definitively distanced himself from the leftwing Israel critic [Hasan Piker](#) – a Twitch streamer the press began to cover obsessively – speaker after speaker hammered on the connection between the two men.

These tactics appear to be falling flat. A recent [New York Times/Siena poll](#) found that most Michiganders have never heard of Piker. The poll found that El-Sayed leads his opponent by

39 points among voters 44 and younger, who are far more critical of Israel's policies than their elders. That generational split is also [pronounced](#) among Jews.

El-Sayed has the [endorsements](#) of JVP and IfNotNow, an organization that attracts many young Jews who are painfully rejecting their parents' Zionism, as well as Vermont's Jewish senator, Bernie Sanders. While Rogers has been collecting pledges of votes from Jewish Michiganders, more than 600 "Michigan Jews for Democracy", including elected officials and rabbis, have [signed a letter](#) in support of El-Sayed.

Recently, Mamdani [repeated](#) his condemnation of Benjamin Netanyahu as a war criminal who should be arrested in advance of the Israeli prime minister's visit to New York to address the UN. That revived Zionist fury toward the mayor, but Jews both supportive and critical of Israel – and Mamdani – held noisy [rallies](#).

The reason for Mamdani to keep trying to speak to both sides is not to win the mythical Jewish vote. It is to make common cause with people who don't want Israel swept into the sea but also cannot abide a Jewish ethnostate whose survival depends on occupation and apartheid.

That said, if El-Sayed were the Islamist Jew-hater his enemies claim he is, it should be obvious to a lot more Jews. If it were obvious to a lot more Jews, Aipac would not have [had to pour \\$32m](#) – unsuccessfully – into his primary opponent's campaign or [contemplate pouring](#) more into supporting Rogers in the general election.

And of course, the "Arab American" or "Muslim vote" is [no more unanimous](#) than the hypothetical Jewish vote.

To be frank, the whole discourse stinks. It boils down to "support the Muslim" or "support the Jew", as if this were some ancient racial animosity – natural enemies "fighting", as Trump [said](#) of the Palestinians and Israeli Jews, "for a thousand years".

Not only is this contention untrue. Such thinking obviates politics, the effort to understand a problem and convince others that your solution is best. It is not good for the Jews – or for anyone. And it is deadly for a secular, pluralistic democracy.

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