

American Rabbis in the 2000 Elections

PAUL A. DJUPE

ANAND E. SOKHEY

The 2000 elections were watershed elections for the Jewish community. Joseph Lieberman, an observant Orthodox Jew, was nominated to be the Democratic vice presidential candidate and the events in Florida and New York highlighted the important role of the Jewish community in American politics. The 2000 elections were, therefore, a perfect time to assess the Jewish religious community's connection to politics. Although the central place of American Jews in the Democratic coalition has been long established and continued in 2000, the role of rabbis in maintaining that connection has not been explored empirically. We investigate how rabbis of the four great Jewish movements sustain Jewish political connections, asking: How do rabbis participate in politics, how do their political agendas resonate with their political action, how did they respond to Lieberman's candidacy, and what political information did they transmit to their congregations?

The 2000 elections were watershed elections for the Jewish community. Joseph Lieberman, an observant Orthodox Jew, was nominated to be the Democratic vice presidential candidate and the events, especially in Florida, highlighted the important and sometimes central role of the Jewish community in American politics. Moreover, the unfolding events in Israel have kept a core issue of the American Jewish community high on the national agenda. As such, the 2000 elections were a perfect time to assess the Jewish religious community's connection to politics. Although the central place of American Jews in the Democratic coalition has been long established and continued in 2000, the role of rabbis in maintaining that connection has not been explored empirically until now.

Of primary interest to us and to scholars of the politics of religious groups is the role of rabbis in sustaining connections of the Jewish community to national politics. More specifically, we ask how political agendas of rabbis resonate with national campaign agendas, what the behavioral correlates are of rabbi agendas, and, generally, how and why rabbis of the four great Jewish movements participate in electoral politics.

RABBI AGENDAS AND CAMPAIGNS

The choices of issues on which to wage campaigns are the stuff that makes or breaks electoral fortunes (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1999). Aggregated under the heading of an agenda, campaigns attempt to choose issues and candidates that will resonate with and mobilize particular constituencies (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). In this understanding of electoral politics, political parties take on a slightly different cast. Instead of thinking of parties as institutions, Kleppner views them as "integrative mechanisms" (1970:36) that attempt to draw in varied constituencies by campaigning on issues dear to targeted groups. To the extent that campaign platforms are consonant with the opinions and values of the group, the campaign gains access to the group's social networks, the implicit or even explicit cooperation of the group leadership, and, often as a result, the votes and support of the community (Kleppner 1970; Djupe et al. 1997; Gilbert et al. 1999). Kleppner (1970:35) summarizes this perspective, placing opinions and values derived from

Paul A. Djupe is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Denison University, Granville, OH 43023-0810. E-mail: djupe@denison.edu

Anand E. Sokhey is an undergraduate student at Denison University.

groups at the center of his investigation of post-bellum Midwestern politics, though this notion is widely applicable.

Partisan affiliations . . . were political expressions of shared values derived from the voter's membership in, and commitment to, ethnic and religious groups. Collectively, such values provided the voter with a perspective through which he filtered existential stimuli and by means of which he translated an array of diverse events into personally relevant terms. Through this process the otherwise inchoate world of politics acquired meaning.

The attachment of groups to electoral politics is mediated through the particular constellation of issues and candidates for the election cycle. All groups are not politically relevant and need some impetus to realize their group status and to create and sustain particular partisan orientations. Kleppner (1981:136) suggests that groups initially engage in politics over specific issues, a concern that eventually expands to include the election of supportive candidates, a process that over the long run becomes institutionalized in political party coalitions. To the extent that resonant issues and candidates are sustained, the group remains rooted in that partisan identification; otherwise, group cohesion may suffer and the group's influence wanes.

Scholars of the American Jewish community suggest that the basis of Jewish liberalism is its long history as a persecuted minority status, fueling fear of and watchfulness for government persecution (e.g., Fuchs 1956; Isaacs 1974; Medding 1983; Moore 1986; Wald 1997). As such, American Jews tend to be staunch supporters of civil rights and liberties (Lipset 1995; Svonkin 1997; Greenberg and Wald 2001). More specifically, American Jews have fought desperately against anti-Semitism, against immigration restrictions, for the separation of church and state, and for a supportive welfare state, though only if benefits are applied universally (Chanes 1999). The other issue that forms the issue triad of Jewish politics is American foreign policy toward Israel, on which Republican and Democrat presidential candidates have long agreed. Of course, because American Jews have their own list of priorities, we would not expect the political agendas of rabbis to be entirely consonant with the Democratic agenda. We posit that rabbi behavior on these campaign issues depends on their centrality within a Jewish agenda, though there is a diversity of agendas within the Jewish community. The closer Democratic concerns are to Jewish concerns, the more active rabbis will be. That is, though rabbis may recognize certain problems to be of national importance, whether they act on them depends on how well the issues resonate with the values of their religious tradition.

How rabbi agendas are built is not the question at this juncture; the more important question is how rabbis' perceptions of the national agenda are related to behavior aimed at a good portion of the social networks of the Jewish community. For example, if rabbis find that environmental degradation is one of the biggest problems facing the nation, do they speak out publicly on the issue? Since clergy have some ability to set the agendas, prime, and mobilize their congregations (Jelen 2001; Djupe and Gilbert 2003), do their efforts coincide with the efforts of candidates' campaigns desperate for votes?

THE 2000 AMERICAN RABBI STUDY

To address these questions, data are analyzed that were obtained through a mail survey of rabbis conducted in the fall and winter of 2001, which included rabbis from the four major movements of American Judaism—Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, and Reform. After obtaining the membership directories of the rabbinical associations of each movement, we sent surveys to roughly half the rabbis (about 1,600 of the 3,200 rabbis in these movements). From that initial mailing and two follow-up waves, 517 surveys were returned, though not all were usable. The overall response rate, therefore, is right about one-third; the usable response rate right about one-quarter. The rates, not surprisingly, vary by movement, and decline with the increasing orthodoxy of the movement—the response rate for Orthodox rabbis is 22 percent, 30 percent for

the Conservatives, 32 percent for the Reform, and 29 percent for the Reconstructionists. Rabbis from the Reform movement dominate the data set, with a slim majority of the sample.¹ The data are weighted to reflect the population proportions of rabbis when information from all four movements is used together.

ANALYSIS

We start our analysis with those political issues and problems in 2000 with which rabbis expressed concern. The “biggest problem” question, that is, the “most important problem,” taps rabbis’ perceptions about what the agenda is and should be for the nation. We asked rabbis to write in what they felt were “the three biggest problems facing the United States today.” When we analyze these responses in conjunction with responses given to other survey questions, we are better able to discern on what issues rabbis concentrate and become active. The results yield insights into the role of rabbis as gatekeepers, how they selectively provide information to their congregations. The link between agendas and action is key to grasping the significance of clergy political action, especially, but not exclusively, during the election season.

Education, mentioned by 33.5 percent of rabbis, led all other most important problems. Health-related issues (the cost of medical care, health insurance, etc.) finished second at 31.8 percent, followed by civil rights/racial unrest (24.6 percent), concerns about the unequal distribution of wealth (23.6 percent), and poverty (19.3 percent). Other matters noted were environmental concerns (11.6 percent), family problems (9.6 percent), general societal moral decay (9.3 percent), violent acts and behavior (8.9 percent), and the economy (5.8 percent).

The indications of education, health care, and civil rights/racial problems support our speculation about the consistency between rabbi agendas, the Democratic party, and Jewish liberalism. This essentially Democratic agenda backs Lipset’s (1995) description of Jewish interests: “Jews are the most supportive of activist politics on behalf of the less fortunate, including maintenance or expansion of government welfare programs, relying on the state as an employer of last resort for the unemployed, wage and price controls in inflationary periods, and government regulations to remedy assorted ills for which big business or other large organizations are held responsible.”

In commenting on the political development and involvement of Jews in America, Isaacs (1974; see also Goren 1999) writes that “religion was a surrogate for ethnicity, a more acceptable basis for group distinctiveness.” Because Jews are not only a religious minority, but also a group that struggles to maintain some social insulation and group distinctiveness in the American milieu of cultural assimilation, it makes sense that they would support other marginalized groups (Dollinger 2000; Greenberg and Wald 2001).

Yet, we expect rabbis of the four major movements of American Judaism to differ in their perceptions of the most important problems facing the nation. Certainly, there are significant theological and social differences between the movements, which no doubt translate into differences in important political values and opinions.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of most important problems by movement and plainly shows that social welfare issues resonate across movements, but especially with Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis. Nearly three-fourths of all Reconstructionist, and three-fifths of all Reform, rabbis listed social welfare issues as a most important problem. Civil rights is also a prominent concern, but not at the level of social welfare. The portion of Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis indicating concern about civil rights was again much greater than it was among Conservative and Orthodox rabbis.

Rabbis are also concerned about the environment—about one-fifth of Conservative and Reconstructionist rabbis noted it. Orthodox rabbis stand out from rabbis in the other movements not only in their lack of concern on the environment, but in their emphasis on moral decay and family problems—four times the amount of any other movement’s rabbis.

TABLE 1
MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS RABBIS LISTED
BY JEWISH MOVEMENT

Biggest Problems, Collapsed Categories	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox
Education	38.3	30.6	16.7	19.7
Health care	38.3	30.6	18.5	15.2
Civil rights	27.7	26.3	9.3	15.2
Poverty	25.5	18.7	5.6	9.1
Environment	19.1	12.0	18.5	0.0
Moral decay and family problems	8.5	7.2	13.0	42.4
Defense	6.4	2.9	0.0	1.5

Note: The most important problems are nonexclusive and should not necessarily sum to 100 percent.

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study. See Appendix for variable coding.

Resonance of Actions with Issue Concerns

Since we now have an idea about what political concerns engage rabbis, the logical next step is to explore what concerns they choose to voice to the public. For rabbis to help complete the linking mechanism that is a national campaign, their agendas must shape their actions, especially their actions involving their congregations. More specifically, when rabbis acknowledge a problem, are they more likely to discuss it publicly? An evaluation of what issues movement rabbis take up in public is presented in Table 2; cell entries are the rank orders of the issues by frequency of their discussion within movements, sorted according to the Reconstructionist rank.²

There is considerable consonance of agenda discussion across the four movements, though there are differences too. It comes as no surprise that the Middle East peace process was the most frequently discussed topic among rabbis in 2000; other Middle East issues occupy top spots on their agendas (status of non-Orthodox in Israel, U.S. policy toward Israel). In addition, rabbis of all movements spoke out often on hunger and poverty, race relations, and abortion.

There is some difference in the priorities given to other issues with closer links to the culture wars. Gender equality and gay rights, for example, decline in importance as the conservatism of the movements increase. Domestic violence appears to be more important to Reconstructionist and Orthodox rabbis, though perhaps for different reasons, than for Reform and Conservative rabbis. The Orthodox do not find the environment or gun control to be engaging topics; instead, they care more than the other movements' rabbis about anti-Semitism, scandals in government (implying the Clinton scandals), school choice, and decline of the nuclear family, all issues with clear connections to modern conservatism.

Overall, do the public concerns of rabbis match what they perceive as the most important problems? Although education is the top single issue listed as a biggest problem facing the nation (see Table 1), rabbis' public discussion of the "state of public schools" only merits a bottom-half rank in each movement. Health care and health insurance was also a major campaign theme in 2000, and many rabbis confirmed its importance. Still rabbis addressed the issue publicly less often than perhaps we might have expected given the campaign stimuli. Rabbis did address environmental issues more frequently, matching their perception of the importance of national environmental threats. Many listed civil rights as an issue of national import, matching their public discussions of race relations. Though few rabbis listed abortion, gender equality, or gay rights as

TABLE 2
BEHAVIORAL AGENDA OF MOVEMENT RABBIS: HOW OFTEN RABBIS
TALK ABOUT POLITICAL ISSUES (RANK ORDERS OF THE ISSUES
FOR EACH MOVEMENT)

Biggest Problems, Collapsed Categories	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox
The peace process in Middle East	1	1	1	1
Gender equality	2	5	8	13
Gay rights	3	6	9	17
Status of non-Orthodox in Israel	4	2	2	5
Hunger and poverty	5	4	3	7
Domestic violence	6	16	17	6
Environment	7	8	5	16
Race relations	8	7	10	11
U.S. policy toward Israel	9	3	4	2
Wage gap between rich and poor	10	17	15	19
Abortion	11	10	12	14
Gun laws	12	9	11	20
Health care	13	15	18	12
Anti-Semitism	14	11	6	3
Capital punishment	15	12	13	22
State of public schools	16	18	19	21
Issues of aging/Social Security	17	22	21	10
School prayer	18	13	14	18
Religious persecution abroad	19	19	20	26
Scandals in government	20	20	16	8
School choice	21	21	23	9
Campaign finance	22	24	25	27
Holocaust reparations	23	25	22	15
National defense	24	14	28	24
Decline of the nuclear family	25	23	7	4
Pornography and obscenity	26	26	24	28
International trade policy	27	27	26	23
Gambling	28	28	27	25

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

issues facing the nation, rabbis of the non-Orthodox movements were concerned in their public statements with what they see as civil rights issues.

We can surmise a relationship from the information displayed in Tables 1 and 2, but a more direct test of the consonance between agendas and actions is in order. In particular, we presented rabbis with a long list of activities in which they might have engaged in the past year and asked: "On what issues have you participated in politics in the past year?³ For each type of political activity, circle the type of issue about which you were active." Table 3 displays the content of movement rabbis' reported electoral activities for two central issues to the Jewish community: Israel/the Middle East and civil rights. The table reports the percentage of all movement rabbis who reported their political activities had the particular issue content.

There are interesting variations related to which activities draw certain issue content and whether activities have any reported issue content. Registering others to vote, for instance, has very low issue content—less than a third of rabbis report specific issue mobilization. This makes

TABLE 3
THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND ISRAEL/MIDDLE EAST ISSUE CONTENT
OF 2000 ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES OF MOVEMENT RABBIS

Activities	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox
<i>Contribute Money to Campaigns</i>				
Civil rights	38.0	38.4	6.8	2.8
Israel/Middle East	30.0	37.4	17.8	25.4
<i>Work for Campaigns</i>				
Civil rights	6.0	9.6	0.0	5.6
Israel/Middle East	4.0	8.7	2.7	14.1
<i>Attend a Political Rally</i>				
Civil rights	20.0	18.3	4.1	7.0
Israel/Middle East	24.0	22.8	20.5	36.6
<i>Take a Stand on an Issue</i>				
Civil rights	54.0	65.3	37.0	26.8
Israel/Middle East	62.0	68.9	56.2	54.9
<i>Display a Button, Sign, Sticker</i>				
Civil rights	24.0	15.5	12.3	5.6
Israel/Middle East	18.0	9.1	9.6	19.7
<i>Register Others to Vote</i>				
Civil rights	6.0	11.9	6.8	8.5
Israel/Middle East	6.0	4.6	5.5	12.7
<i>Vote, Go to the Polls</i>				
Civil rights	62.0	67.1	45.2	46.5
Israel/Middle East	38.0	37.4	30.1	46.5

Note: The entries are responses to: "On what issues have you participated in politics in the past year? For each type of activity, circle the type of issue about which you were active." Therefore, 38 percent of Reconstructionist rabbis were acting on behalf of "civil rights" when they contributed to campaigns and 30 percent were acting on behalf of "Israel and Middle East." The two other issue categories offered were "moral social issues" and "domestic social welfare."

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

sense, since the motivation to register citizens is primarily civic- or group-centered and may have little direct connection to policy.

Fewer Conservative and Orthodox than Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis work for campaigns (as for all activity modes), but when they do, they are motivated by a concern for Israel. In fact, issue motivation related to Israel is consistently strong across activities and movements, though the issue of Israel serves as the strongest motivation for taking a stand on an issue and for contributing money to campaigns—activities often generated by Jewish community organizations.

It is common for Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis to be motivated by concerns over civil rights; for instance, 65 percent of Reform rabbis, 54 percent of Reconstructionists, 37 percent of Conservatives, and 27 percent of Orthodox rabbis reported a civil rights motivation for taking a stand on an issue (see Table 3). Only for some activities, however, did such motivation related to civil rights eclipse that related to Israel. Notably, they were activities tied more closely to the American electoral process (voting, registering others, and displaying a yard sign) that have worked to integrate variant groups into governing majorities (Beck 1997).

Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis are generally motivated electorally by both civil rights and Israel, but Orthodox rabbis rarely indicate that they engage in electoral campaign activities

based on a motivation related to civil rights. Few Orthodox rabbis report that they contribute money to campaigns or display a political button or sign because of motivations related to civil rights, though nearly half of Orthodox rabbis report that they go to the polls, in part, motivated by civil rights. Conservative rabbis lie in between, motivated more often by civil rights and less often for Israel than Orthodox rabbis, though still with a stronger concern for Israel than civil rights.

Moreover, the two most conservative movements are much more likely to pursue political activities within the traditional purview of religious elites, namely, within the context of the synagogue, their house of worship (Guth et al. 1997). Conservative and Orthodox rabbis take a stand on issues (mostly done in the synagogue) almost as much as Reform and Reconstructionists, while there are much larger gaps with other, less traditional, activities.

Although there are differences in priorities and activities across the movements, it seems clear that Israel serves to unite rabbis and provokes strong resonance of agendas and activities. On issues beyond those of Israel and the Middle East, parts of the Jewish community take slightly divergent paths. Although there is considerable agreement on agenda items, there are stronger or weaker connections of that agenda with action depending on the dominant values of the movement. For example, a strong civil rights message results in issue mobilization for non-Orthodox rabbis who are more likely to engage in political activities, even though all rabbis place civil rights high on their agendas (recall Table 2).

Joseph Lieberman in Jewish Imagination

The 2000 presidential election was memorable for a number of reasons, a prominent one being the nomination of Senator Joseph Lieberman for vice president on the Democratic ticket. As the first Jew to run on a major party presidential ticket, Lieberman was clearly the object of much pride within the Jewish community and a prime example of the arrival of what Medding (1995) calls the “new Jewish politics.” Said Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan, “I think this nomination just confirms the status of Jews in American society . . . It’s not a breakthrough. It’s a confirmation” (Haberman 2000).

For Jews, however, the significance of Lieberman as an elected official and candidate for vice president extended beyond his religion. Many expressed satisfaction “in America itself, for having reached a point that it could accept the possibility of a Jew—and an Orthodox Jew at that—being a proverbial heartbeat from the presidency” (Haberman 2000). Table 4 presents the results of a series of questions related to Lieberman’s candidacy. Though some Jews expressed reservations about Lieberman for his political record and his repeated calls for more religion in public life (Niebuhr 2000), rabbis across the board (approximately 75 percent or more) suggested that Lieberman made them proud and that he helped the Democratic ticket, and there is generally a positive correlation between pride over his nomination and the belief that Lieberman would help the ticket. However, relatively few rabbis expressed optimism that a Jew will be president in the 21st century, and very few rabbis, save for one-fifth of the Orthodox, agreed that “all Jews should have supported his bid for office.”

The Partisan Connections of the Rabbinical Vote

The most discussed connection of clergy to politics relates to elections. But, as Lipset (1995) notes, voting patterns are not always the most helpful indicators of where a group falls on the political spectrum, as such patterns can mask what may be considerable diversity beneath the labels. Nevertheless, the aggregate partisan affiliations and expressions of a group have real political importance for how and for whom government functions.

Table 5 presents a variety of ways rabbis may express their partisan connections to the political process. We start with their political ideology, which is overwhelmingly liberal for

TABLE 4
HOW RABBIS OF THE FOUR MOVEMENTS REACTED TO JOSEPH
LIEBERMAN'S VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY
(PERCENT OF MOVEMENT RABBIS IN AGREEMENT)

Statements about Joseph Lieberman	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox
His candidacy made me proud to be a Jew.	80.8	73.9	86.8	75.8
Lieberman helped the Democratic ticket.	74.5	79.6	83.3	75.0
A Jew will be president during the 21st century.	21.3	41.2	43.4	23.1
His candidacy increased anti-Semitic feelings.	14.9	7.4	5.7	16.9
All Jews should have supported his bid.	8.6	12.5	11.2	23.1

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis, more moderate for Conservatives, and quite conservative for Orthodox rabbis. Based on this pattern, we might expect to see a fair representation of Republicans, but only the Orthodox rabbis reveal any tangible alignment with the Republican Party. Over 90 percent of Reconstructionist, Reform, and Conservative rabbis identify themselves as Democrats (including leaners). And while a majority of Orthodox rabbis call themselves conservative, only about a quarter identify with the Republican Party (and more likely these identify closer to the Northeastern GOP than the Southern GOP).

This pattern repeats, as we might expect, in the behavioral expression of party identification, with an almost unanimous result for Gore in 2000 and Clinton in 1996 among non-Orthodox rabbis (with a few percent for Nader in 2000, too). Although there is a slight creep upward of the vote of these three movements for the Gore-Lieberman ticket from the earlier Clinton-Gore ticket, Lieberman's candidacy could not make much difference in the Jewish vote given its overwhelming support for the Democratic ticket in the 1996 election; certainly Gore did not pick Lieberman to shore up the Jewish vote. Once again, the only sign of diversity among Jewish rabbis comes from Orthodox rabbis, as about three-tenths of the Orthodox rabbis reported having voted for Bush.

TABLE 5
PARTISAN CONNECTIONS OF MOVEMENT RABBIS
AND THEIR CONGREGATIONS

Partisan Connections	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox
Political liberals	91.3	76.7	59.6	13.9
Political moderates	8.7	19.4	40.4	35.4
Political conservatives	0.0	3.9	0.0	50.8
Democratic identification	97.6	95.5	94.3	70.7
Independent identification	2.4	1.5	3.8	5.2
Republican identification	0.0	3.0	1.9	24.1
Voted for Gore in 2000	100.0	93.5	92.6	68.8
Voted for Clinton in 1996	97.8	92.5	88.9	71.9
Congregation voted for Gore in 2000	100.0	91.6	94.0	86.3
Congregation voted for Clinton in 1996	100.0	88.3	94.1	87.9
Feel "far," "very far" from Christian Coalition	100.0	93.8	97.5	77.6
Feel "close," "very close" to Christian Coalition	0.0	3.9	0.0	6.1

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

The perceptions of rabbis with regard to how their congregations voted in 2000 closely mirror the observations of other social scientists concerning Jewish voting patterns in previous elections (Lipset 1995; Wald 1997; Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999; Kohut et al. 2000). Non-Orthodox rabbis nearly unanimously report the majority of their congregations voting for Gore and Clinton. Orthodox rabbis report higher portions (by about 15 percent) of their congregations voting Democratic than do they themselves.

We also assess how movement rabbis express proximity toward the Christian Coalition, as the Coalition and Republicans have made efforts to incorporate politically conservative Jews. One of the manifestations of this effort is to speak of “Judeo-Christian” values and traditions rather than simply Christian versions. However, to this point at least, it seems this effort at incorporation has been in vain. Non-Orthodox rabbis are almost unanimous in feeling “far” or “very far” from the Coalition. And while Orthodox rabbis report identifying as conservative and voting Republican in some numbers, they only rarely express “close” sentiments to the Coalition (with only 6.1 percent reporting that they feel “close” or “very close” to the Coalition). Considering that Orthodox congregations tend to be more Democratic than their rabbinate, it is even less likely that some kind of alliance could be forged through the support of these few rabbis feeling close to the Coalition.

Beyond psychological connections with the party system, we have more direct measures of contact between rabbis and electoral politics. Numerous organizations seek to mobilize citizens to vote and become politically active, particularly in terms of donating money. Although political parties have traditionally been the prime mover of citizens, their position has weakened in the wake of nomination reforms and the rise of television (Beck 1997; Wattenberg 1996).

In Table 6 we report the percentage of rabbis who reported receiving contact from various groups in 2000 and 1998. Among rabbis, parties still dominate in terms of direct contact with the rabbis surveyed, as nearly three-fourths of the rabbis report a party (or candidate committee) contact in 2000 and three-fifths report such contact in 1998. In contrast, only about two-fifths reported a contact from a religious or moral concerns organization (a third in 1998). To place these findings in a broader perspective, we can compare these results to those that Lutheran and Episcopalian clergy reported. In the 1998 congressional elections, 59 percent of Lutherans and Episcopalians reported a party contact, while 49 percent were contacted by a religious or moral concerns organization (Djupe and Gilbert 2003). Thus, the Lutheran and Episcopal clergy experienced equivalent levels of partisan contacts and slightly elevated contacting from moral concerns organizations to what rabbis reported experiencing in 1998.

TABLE 6
CONTACTING RABBIS AND RABBIS PROVIDING INFORMATION
ABOUT THE 2000 ELECTIONS

	Contacted in 2000	Contacted in 1998
<i>Contactors</i>		
Party or candidate committee	73.1	60.6
Religious/moral concerns org.	41.8	34.8
Movement agency or group	10.9	10.1
Congregation members	11.0	7.8
<i>Information Provided</i>		
	Provided in 2000	Provided in 1998
Info. from a Jewish organization	29.5	20.9
Candidate forum in congregation	20.4	19.9
Meeting to discuss election	17.1	11.9
Voter guides	7.2	6.6
Info. from congregational source	6.2	3.8

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

Rabbis are not only the targets of partisan informational efforts, they can also serve as gatekeepers by providing such information to their congregations. However, in Table 6, we see that political information from other organizations is rarely made available to members within the synagogue. On the other hand, a full 20 percent of congregations held a candidate forum in 2000, nearly the same number held meetings to discuss the election (which would surely be high after the 2000 election), and about a third had electoral information available from a Jewish organization. We suspect, however, that there are other, more direct, contacts with members of congregations, and that within the congregation, rabbis likely constitute the most plentiful source of political information.

Multivariate Models of Rabbi Electoral Action

To understand more fully what drives rabbis to participate in electoral politics, a multivariate analysis is needed. We might start with a distinction between direct and indirect types of activities. Direct activities involve the participation of rabbis in governmental processes (e.g., voting) or engagement of governmental actors (e.g., attending political rallies). Indirect activities are intended to affect the choice of governmental representatives and their decisions through the vehicle of others, primarily, though not exclusively, the congregation. Indirect activities might include supporting a candidate publicly, publicly taking a stance on political issues, and mobilizing the congregation to vote or otherwise participate in electoral politics. In particular, we are interested in the extent to which electoral action is driven by parochial concerns or is invited by the efforts of party organizations.

In Table 7, we present OLS regression estimates of direct and indirect political activities. Direct action is represented here by working for and contributing money to a campaign; indirect activities are represented by publicly supporting a candidate and displaying a campaign yard sign, button, or sticker. The included determinants of these activities are the same across models for the sake of comparison, and there is some variation in results across models. Also for the sake of presentation, the independent variables are organized by type: political mobilization, the rabbinate, civic mobilization, and Jewish movement (the excluded reference category is the Reform movement).

Across the models, the importance of political forces leaps out. Political parties appear to be central to mobilizing rabbis to action for both indirect and direct activities. And, in an age in which the ties of parties to citizens have weakened, the political primary serves as a crucial linking mechanism. Primaries allow activist citizens to participate in the selection of nominees, but they also provide a record of who constitutes the party corps. Throughout these models, backing a candidate during the 2000 primaries produces more frequent electoral activity, while contacts from a political party increase contributions and the number of displays of visible signs of support.

Some may argue that this is a superficial effect, the byproduct of an active orientation toward politics, but we would argue that it is not. Political interest and partisanship alone do not produce activists, though these effects highlight the importance of being accessible to mobilization attempts. Supporting candidates in the political primaries and voting in primary elections allow the party to gain access to the voter. Since rabbis pursue a host of activities that spread political messages to others, contacting a rabbi may provide serendipitous gains to the party.

Similar to its effects on Lutheran and Episcopalian clergy (Djupe and Gilbert 2003), a politically consonant partisan environment increases the frequency of rabbis campaigning. It takes an organized campaign to recruit and use volunteers, which would most likely exist in states with many fellow partisans. Further, if campaign workers are recruited through social networks, then contexts with large numbers of fellow partisans will help to sustain campaign voluntarism (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992).

TABLE 7
OLS REGRESSION ESTIMATES PREDICTING RABBI DIRECT AND INDIRECT
ELECTORAL ACTION^A

Variables	Direct Electoral Action				Indirect Electoral Action			
	Campaigning		Contributing		Candidate Support		Sign, Sticker, Button	
	Coeff	(S.E.)	Coeff	(S.E.)	Coeff	(S.E.)	Coeff	(S.E.)
Political interest	0.248	(0.216)	0.280	(0.164)*	0.526	(0.154)***	0.283	(0.164)*
Political ideology folded	-0.024	(0.130)	0.125	(0.097)	0.023	(0.093)	0.201	(0.098)**
Primary candidate support	0.771	(0.236)***	0.611	(0.170)***	0.944	(0.171)***	1.235	(0.180)***
Gore wins state	0.336	(0.197)*	0.142	(0.142)	-0.006	(0.138)	-0.031	(0.143)
Contacted by party	0.178	(0.197)	0.614	(0.147)***	0.233	(0.145)	0.325	(0.152)**
Duties encourage action	0.137	(0.093)	0.122	(0.070)*	0.108	(0.067)	0.004	(0.070)
Lieberman's candidacy increased anti-Semitism	-0.178	(0.081)***	0.020	(0.060)	-0.173	(0.060)***	-0.055	(0.065)
Years in rabbinate	0.003	(0.006)	0.005	(0.005)	0.006	(0.005)	0.001	(0.005)
Education	-0.122	(0.172)	0.393	(0.162)**	0.302	(0.154)*	0.323	(0.171)*
Newspaper reading	0.358	(0.178)**	0.279	(0.136)**	-0.115	(0.134)	-0.051	(0.139)
Health care M.I.P.	-0.401	(0.195)**	-0.138	(0.146)	0.156	(0.140)	-0.128	(0.146)
Moral decay M.I.P.	0.018	(0.250)	0.167	(0.189)	0.049	(0.205)	-0.242	(0.199)
Orthodox	-0.244	(0.273)	-0.159	(0.215)	-0.050	(0.205)	0.032	(0.216)
Conservative	-0.587	(0.242)**	0.019	(0.171)	-0.361	(0.172)**	0.008	(0.171)
Reconstructionist	-0.072	(0.427)	0.117	(0.283)	0.414	(0.265)	0.282	(0.285)
Constant	1.267	(1.187)	-2.254	(1.000)	-0.535	(0.978)	-0.826	(1.029)
Number of cases	251		235		255		221	
Adjusted R ²	0.116		0.200		0.240		0.245	
S.E.E.	1.34		0.957		0.977		0.944	

^AEach dependent variable is coded 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often. See Appendix for full variable coding.

Source: 2000 American Rabbi Study, weighted data.

****p* < 0.01; ***p* < 0.05; **p* < 0.10.

Echoing the finding that individual engagement and resources are necessary to become involved in politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), the more highly educated rabbis more often contribute and engage in the indirect activities. Media use (newspaper reading) drives up both campaigning and contributing, a reflection of the nature of heavily mediated modern electoral politics.

Few facets of the rabbinate affect electoral participation; neither length of service in the rabbinate nor the suggestion that the rabbi's duties encourage political action drive up electoral activities, except for the positive effect of rabbinical duties on contributing. However, agreement that Lieberman's candidacy increased anti-Semitism discouraged campaigning and candidate support. If the world is a significant barrier, and perceptions of significant anti-Semitism would certainly qualify as a barrier, then activism within it would be perceived as useless and even likely to draw hostility. Few movement differences remain after more direct correlates are taken into account (the referent category is the Reform movement). Only Conservative rabbis are less likely to campaign and support candidates publicly compared to Reform rabbis, driven by the religious underpinnings of the movement.

Essentially no issue mobilization is present, given the inclusion of more proximate mobilization—party contact. Those who listed health care as the biggest problem facing the nation, however, are less likely to campaign. In general, having a resonant agenda is secondary to whether rabbis participate in electoral politics. Instead, rabbis need to be encouraged to act by partisan organizations. Yet, the content they choose to convey to others is of paramount importance to whether the campaign is able to connect to the larger group.

CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis presented here. First, it is clear that rabbis remain part of a core Democratic constituency, almost regardless of self-described liberalism or movement affiliation, as very few conservative rabbis identify and vote with the GOP. Second, given that rabbis (and Jews) already strongly supported the Clinton-Gore ticket in 1996, there was no Kennedyesque bump to the Democratic ticket among rabbis (and Jews) caused by the Lieberman candidacy. Finally, the rabbis most likely to support Democrats were those who are the most active and the most involved in a large number of electoral and nonelectoral activities, which serves to sustain that connection.

As we have argued earlier (Gilbert et al. 1999), the primary problem that parties face in elections is to gain access to the various social networks in society. Rabbis represent one portal to the Jewish community that, over time, has forged strong ties to the Democratic Party. In 2000, the issue agenda of the Democratic presidential nominee more or less resonated with the agenda of rabbis, especially in its more liberal movements, though that relationship is a bit more strained with Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. But, for those rabbis with an agenda consonant with that of the Democrats, there are important political alignment implications when rabbis speak out and engage in direct action that dovetails with Democratic efforts. Although the more conservative movements still vote largely Democratic, they do not necessarily sustain that meager connection with the more significant indirect action aimed at the congregation. However, other organizations in the Jewish community more than make up for the lack of activism on the part of conservative rabbis, and these organizations thereby contribute to maintaining nearly unanimous Democratic support within the Jewish community. This analysis, therefore, gives us some insight into how religious traditions intersect with campaigns to produce coalitional voting patterns over the long haul. It takes work, a set of issues that resonate, and acceptance of electoral activity as appropriate on the part of gatekeepers (in this case, rabbis) to maintain electoral coalitions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A previous version of this paper was prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 27–September 1, 2001, San Francisco. This research is supported by a grant from the Denison University Research Foundation as well as a small grant from the Association for the Sociology of Religion. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of either institution.

NOTES

1. Reform rabbis dominate the data set because they are the dominant group among the four major movements in the United States. As of 2000, there were 1,620 Reform rabbis in the United States (50.5 percent), 781 Orthodox rabbis (24.3 percent), 630 Conservative rabbis (19.6 percent), and 178 Reconstructionist rabbis (5.5 percent). Reform rabbis are slightly overrepresented with 55 percent of the sample, as are Reconstructionist rabbis with 13 percent. Both Conservative and Orthodox are underrepresented with 14 and 18 percent of the sample, respectively.
2. The mean, standard deviation, and range of cell entries for each movement are as follows: Reconstructionist mean = 2.7, $SD = 0.77$, range = 2.6 (1.5 to 4.1); Reform mean = 2.9, $SD = 0.58$, range = 2.2 (1.9 to 4.1); Conservative mean = 2.5, $SD = 0.54$, range = 2.2 (1.6 to 3.8); Orthodox mean = 3.1, $SD = 0.53$, range = 2.2 (2.2 to 4.4).
3. This question is unique to the rabbi survey in the Cooperative Clergy Study Project and was not asked of clergy and priests in the other surveys.

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APPENDIX: VARIABLE CODING

This Appendix provides coding for variables not described fully in the text or tables.

- *Political ideology folded*: This measure folds our ideology scale so that 1 = moderate, 2 = weak ideologue, and 3 = strong ideologue.
- *Most important problems*: The most important problem codes were taken from the latest National Election Study. The categories are the same aggregate categories used in the NES. The exception is moral decay, which takes on codes 380 and 381.
- *Political interest*: Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Were you very interested, somewhat interested, or not interested in the 2000 political campaigns? 1 = not interested, 2 = somewhat interested, 3 = very interested.

- *Primary candidate support*: “Besides voting, some people also work for a candidate by wearing campaign buttons, putting out a yard sign, attending speeches and rallies, etc. Did you actively support a candidate in this way during the 2000 primaries?” 0 = no, 1 = yes.
- *Contacted by a party*: “During campaigns, many citizens are contacted by groups asking them to vote for a candidate or providing information designed to influence their vote. In 2000, were you contacted by a political party or candidate committee?” 0 = no, 1 = yes.
- *Duties encourage action*: “Some rabbis are more politically involved than others for a variety of reasons. Do the following factors generally encourage or discourage your political involvement?” “Demands of my job.” 1 = strongly discourage, 2 = discourage, 3 = neutral, 4 = encourage, 5 = strongly encourage.
- *Education*: “Describe your seminary/rabbinic education.” 1 = none, 2 = some seminary, 3 = seminary graduate, 4 = postgraduate work for a doctorate.
- *Newspaper reading*: 1 = none, 2 = some, 3 = a lot.

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