

Jews and the Tea Party Movement: Some Additional Reflections

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In my 2011 Jewish Political Behavior Survey, involving a cohort of some 2300 Jewish voters, the results referenced a strong impulse among a number of these participants to embrace the Tea Party movement.¹

In more general terms, the particular voters in this study demonstrated a high level of Jewish institutional connection. Similarly, there appeared as well to be congruence around shared class values, educational achievements, income capacity, and institutional affiliation patterns. These voters reflected a commonality of background, yet highly divergent political outcomes and social priorities. The data around personal achievement and institutional connection “reaffirmed the extraordinary levels of accomplishment that in many ways have defined American Jewry”. This cohort specifically reflected the perceived make-up and character of the Jewish communal activist, fully aligned with the “organized” Jewish community enterprise, while socially linked to the broader society and culture.

One of the overriding understandings extracted from this research was to affirm that there exists “*a deep and growing political division among American Jews.*”² This was in part affirmed by the level of support generated by this cohort for positions embraced by the Tea Party movement.

As the 2010 Pew Center Study on the Tea Party and American Politics noted, nearly one-half of the Jews (49%) disagreed with the views of this movement. In that same survey, some *15% of American Jews supported the Tea Party’s ideas.*³

In the study that I recently released (May, 2011), data related to the degree of Jewish interest in and support for the Tea Party movement represented a specific area of concentration in this research.⁴ In this article, I am seeking to identify corollary patterns between the Pew findings and the Windmueller survey, as well as to explore other factors that might contribute to the engagement of certain Jewish voters to embrace the values, positions, and policies of the Tea Party movement.

At the outset it is important to note that there is not a single “Tea Party” organization but rather a number of political organizations that have coalesced around a shared ideology.

¹ “*This political survey was intended to provide a snapshot of a number of Jewish voters. It offers some interesting insights into the depth and intensity of Jewish political engagement, but by the nature of this study it does not permit one to make any defining conclusions.*” As the research was not based on a statistically-framed sample, the data must be understood as only a picture into the political mindset and behaviors of a cross-section of American Jewish voters.

<http://jewishphilanthropy.com/survey-confirms-the-depth-of-the-political-divide-among-jewish-voters/>

² Ibid.

³ Scott Clement, “The Tea Party, Religion and Social Issues”, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 23, 2011.

⁴ Windmueller Study

“The Tea Party is an American populist political movement which is generally recognized as conservative and libertarian has sponsored protests and supported political candidates since 2009. It endorses reduced government spending, opposition to taxation, in varying degrees, reduction of the national debt and federal budget deficit, and adherence to an originalist interpretation of the United States Constitution.”⁵

There are four core organizations that represent the different political strains and interests of this movement, including the Tea Party Patriots, an organization with more than 1,000 affiliated groups across the nation; Americans For Prosperity and Freedom Works, two organizations that claim a membership of 1 million members each and the Tea Party Express.⁶

Findings:

Listed below are some of the particular findings generated from the 2011 (Windmueller) study:

Men, by more than two to one, were more likely to be Tea Party members than women. Several polls have been conducted on the demographics of the movement, and these surveys indicate that Tea Party supporters are “mainly white and slightly more likely to be male, married, (and) older than 45...”⁷

In the Windmueller study the following question was asked of the participants:

I find the Tea Party to be “Refreshing” or “Alarming.” We looked at the data from this survey, extracting responses by sex, age, and education.

	<i>Refreshing</i>	<i>Alarming</i>
<i>Males:</i>	603 51%	380 32%
<i>Females:</i>	277 31%	486 54%

Older voters rather than younger ones in this survey seem to more readily identify with this cause, confirming the findings noted in various polls.

<i>Age Cohort</i>	<i>Refreshing</i>	<i>Alarming</i>
20-29	26 20%	72 56%
30-39	44 28%	82 53%
40-49	93 41%	98 44%
50-59	204 48%	152 36%
60-69	257 45%	224 39%

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea_Party_movement

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Less-well educated Jews were more likely to be associated with the Tea Party movement than their more educated counterparts in the Windmueller study. This finding appears to run counter to the national polling data concerning levels of education, as most studies suggest that members of this movement are “*likely to be more wealthy and have more education.*”⁸

	<i>Refreshing</i>	<i>Alarming</i>
<i>Ph.D.</i>	127 40%	140 44%
<i>M.D.</i>	91 72%	21 17%
<i>M.A.</i>	265 32%	419 51%
<i>B.A.</i>	289 47%	220 36%
<i>Some College</i>	99 54%	58 32%
<i>High School</i>	9 53%	6 35%

In keeping with the findings of other studies, the more religiously conservative or traditional a person was in his/her practice or belief, the more likely that individual would resonate to the views and values of the Tea Party movement. In the Pew Center Study, the religious right overwhelmingly identified with the social views of the Tea Party movement.⁹

In the Windmueller study there appeared to be a similar correlation between religious conservatism and practice and a stronger level of commitment to the principles of the Tea Party movement.

	<i>Refreshing</i>	<i>Alarming</i>
<i>Reform</i>	175 27%	344 54%
<i>Reconstructionist</i>	6 20%	20 67%
<i>Non-Denominational</i>	15 20%	37 49%
<i>Conservative</i>	253 45%	221 39%
<i>Orthodox</i>	142 67%	42 20%

Some Core Issues: Same-Sex Marriage-Health Care-Gun Ownership

Three measures examined within the Pew Study and replicated in this research confirmed the specific characteristics associated with Tea Party advocates:

⁸ Ibid.

		Tea Party Perspective		
		Refreshing	Alarming	Neither
I believe that government should permit same sex marriages.	Agree	29%	63%	18%
	Disagree	71%	5%	11%
I support the President's efforts to create a national health care program.	Agree	4%	78%	19%
	Disagree	96%	4%	13%
I support legislation controlling the access to and purchase of guns.	Agree	35%	61%	18%
	Disagree	66%	6%	11%

“In addition to adopting a conservative approach to the economy, Tea Party supporters also tend to take socially conservative positions on abortion and same sex marriage. ...Tea Party supporters oppose it (same-sex marriage) by more than two to one (64% opposed, 26% in favor).”¹⁰ In this study the numbers were even more conclusive as 71% disagreed with same-sex marriages.

On the rights of gun owners, Tea Party backers heavily endorse this proposition. In the Pew Study, 78% of those who endorsed Tea Party positions, or by a more than 4 to 1 ratio, embraced this viewpoint. In this study, 66% or 2/3rds of the participants held a similar position. One of the groups referenced by those who endorsed gun ownership in the Windmueller study involved Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, Inc.¹¹

This organization defines its objectives in the following statement:

“To destroy "gun control" and to encourage Americans to understand and defend all of the Bill of Rights for everyone. Those are the twin goals of Wisconsin-based Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership (JPFO). Founded by Jews and initially aimed at educating the Jewish community about the historical evils that Jews have suffered when they have been disarmed, JPFO has always welcomed persons of all religious beliefs who share a common goal of opposing and reversing victim disarmament policies while advancing liberty for all.”¹² In some measure, this organization may come to symbolize the emerging interest in and support of some of the core values and priorities of the Tea Party Movement.

¹⁰ Scott Clement, The Tea Party, Religion and Social Issues, Pew Forum on Religion and Social Life, Pew Research Center, February 23, 2011.

¹¹ <http://jpfo.org/filegen-a-m/jewsandguns.htm>

¹² <http://jpfo.org/filegen-a-m/about.htm>

Other Key Issues:

In the Windmueller study, participants were asked the following question:

“I have no problem with the construction of the Mosque (Community Center) near Ground Zero.” Of those who had indicated that they had found the Tea Party movement to be “refreshing”, 93 % opposed this construction. While the Tea Party does not hold a formal position on this issue, a number of its key leaders have embraced positions critical of this construction.¹³

In the Windmueller study, individuals were asked to identify political parties that they financially supported; an overwhelming number contributed to one of the two major parties but some 65 respondents noted that they supported one or more of the minor parties. Under this umbrella, some 25 of these individuals indicated that they had made financial commitments to one or more of the Tea Party groups.

Respondents in the Windmueller survey were invited to offer various political comments. Listed below are a few of the comments offered by Tea Party supporters:

I do not understand how so many American Jews can be left wing and ignore the facts.

The preponderance of liberal and left-wing organizations (in the survey) speaks volumes about the overwhelming leftist bias of my people to the detriment of the human race in the long run.

It's about time we Jews woke up to the disaster they (Democrats) represent.

Connecting the Dots:

The national anger found among the electorate encompasses concerns over the economy, jobs and health care reform as individualized issues. But the deeper despair is tied to what a number of commentators have described as the lack of accountability and the lack of respect when dealing with one another. Such themes are not only evident among Jewish constituencies but take on a specific bent in expressions of anger that were offered in the Windmueller survey by both supporters and opponents of the Tea Party movement. True believers, according to Eric Hoffer, represent those who “throb with the ferment of frustration.” Such individuals seek a “common enemy.” “There can be no mass movement without some deliberate misrepresentation of the facts.”¹⁴

Last year, when writing about the “New Angry American Jewish Voter, I noted:

Similar to the Tea Party movement, there is a growing momentum to mobilize support for Israel among the electorate and to hold politicians accountable for their commitment, as

¹³ http://nmp.net/teapartymovement_info/

¹⁴ Ibid.

well, to the Jewish state. Some of this discontent is being directed against other Jews who hold views that align with Peace Now and J Street or other center-left positions on Israeli policies, which are interpreted by the Jewish political right as giving aid to the enemies of Israel and adding fuel to the negative and problematic image of the Jewish state internationally.¹⁵

In that article, I went on to suggest:

The divisions that now define American Jewish voting patterns are framed and influenced by a number of elements. A new generation of voters includes a significant Orthodox cohort, along with a growing presence of Russian, Iranian and Israeli activists, who generally reflect a more conservative political bent and represent an important and growing factor in the ever-shifting Jewish political scenario. Possibly a far more interesting and emerging base of support can be found among male baby boomers (55 to 64 years of age), whose voting patterns have increasingly reflected a shift to the right. This political transition is particularly significant among Jewish voters, as this age cohort dominates the Jewish population base. Not only worried about their own economic status, this constituency is deeply concerned by what they observe as the erosion of support for Israel.¹⁶

Some Concluding Reflections:

There are clearly changes taking place within the Jewish electorate; the nature of the depth and breadth of this political recalibration remains uncertain. How will these emerging social ideas be transformed at the voting booth in both national and local elections? In what ways will Jews be directing their financial support for candidates and political causes in the future? As additional voter sampling is carried out regarding the Tea Party phenomenon in general and its impact on Jewish constituencies, we will gain a richer understanding of the depth of the impact of this movement on reshaping politics within this society.

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¹⁵ http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover_story/article/the_new_angry_american_jewish_voter_20100810/

¹⁶ Ibid.