

# **Does America Feel The Berg?**

## **Jewish Candidate Performance in Congressional Primaries**

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American Elections F'22

December 12, 2022

Senior Political Science Capstone

**Abstract:**

*Historically, Jewish Americans have faced challenges in getting elected to political office, and have been underrepresented in Congress, though the opposite appears to be true in more recent years. Since they constitute a distinct cultural and religious group, I hypothesize that Jewish American voting behavior follows trends of group identity, similarity voting, and ethnic voting seen in other groups that lead them to favor voting for Jewish candidates. Via examinations of House primaries from 2002 to 2018, where one candidate has a Jewish signifying last name (“JSLN”) and their opponent does not, I find evidence via visualizations and linear regression models that having a JSLN impacts has a small, positive effect on vote share, especially in whiter congressional districts.*

## **Introduction**

*“[A Jew has] an enormous handicap running for public office in a state where you have such a small minority of Jews... I’ve talked to enough Jews to know that you have a tough job if you’re Jewish and running for office... It’s part of the conventional wisdom of politics. It would have to be a very unusual race and an unusual constituency to have a Jew run for public office. In New York it’s an advantage but, outside of New York, it’s a disadvantage.”* (Myer Feldman quoted in Isaacs 1974, 198-199)

Since the first meeting of Congress in 1789, over 12,000 people have served as representatives or senators, and only about 200 have been Jewish. Yet, over half of that group were elected in the last half century or so, indicating a sudden rise in the political success of Jewish congressional candidates (Stone 2011; Total Members of the House & State Representation 2022). Jewish candidates historically faced extreme difficulties in getting enough support to be able to run for office, let alone win those elections, but that has changed rapidly in recent years. Due to the limited availability of data on Jewish voters and candidates—largely a result of a limited sample size—there is a lack of research conducted on this potentially systemic bias. Jewish Americans may be a minority population of the country, but tend to be perceived by the public as having an outsized role in political affairs. Increased research into the political behavior of Jewish voters and candidates, as well as how non-Jewish voters behave regarding Jewish candidates, can help academics trace the origins of these stereotypes, and make efforts to combat their negative impacts.

Conversely, Jewish candidates may possibly experience unique, also unexamined, advantages in elections. Jewish voters likely wish to see themselves represented in higher offices, so may prefer voting for Jewish candidates when other mechanisms of decision making are unavailable. This has larger implications for American elections: In an increasingly diverse

country with strong diasporic communities, if people are inclined to support candidates demographically similar to them, we should then be expecting a wave of more diverse elected officials. This remains to be seen, as most minority groups remain underrepresented in government, with the noticeable and more recent exception of Jewish politicians. If there is a reason for this, perhaps other minority groups can use it to their advantage to seek out more proportional representation in American politics. In stark opposition to historical trends of Jewish electoral success Jewish Americans may be one of the few minority groups today that are actually overrepresented in Congress. Discovering the underlying causes for this may reveal potential avenues to increase representation across the board, or at least explain this unique and understudied phenomenon.

In this paper, I examine if Jewish voters in non-partisan situations are more likely to vote for candidates they perceive to be Jewish by examining primary House elections from 2002 to 2018. I find evidence that candidates with Jewish signaling last names fare better in House primaries, especially in whiter districts, but have limited support for the claim that Jewish voters prefer Jewish candidates. I begin by examining the literature on how voters decide which candidates they prefer in elections, going from the basics of party to heuristic cues that matter more in low information elections like race, gender, religion, and other demographic details. I then tie this to broader themes of group identity, similarity voting, and “ethnic” voting to further display the interaction between identity and voting behavior. I link these theories to the electoral outcomes of Jewish American candidates, hypothesizing that they will be favored by ingroup members and voted against by outgroup members. I also suggest a possible temporal element to this relationship and propose a theory for how this has changed over time.

## **How voters decide**

A key question in political science is how voters decide whom to vote for, what leads to those decisions, and how those preferences are formed (Druckman and Lupia 2000). An early model of preference formation is the funnel of causality, which presents voting behavior as a chain of events over time leading up to an election narrowing down to a voting decision. Sociodemographic characteristics, party identification, and personal political ideology are long-term factors in voting behavior that are more developed and stable, located at the mouth of the funnel, while specific issues, candidates, and campaigns are the short-term, more variable, factors at the tip of the funnel closer to Election Day itself (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 2006; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008).

Voters rarely make their election decisions from a blank slate, nor do they take the time to consider every single position of candidates. The long-term factors of voting behavior influence the short-term ones, creating a causal flow wherein voters rely heavily on their own personal identities and preferences to make decisions in individual elections. In short, voters use certain cues as shortcuts to determine which candidates would best represent their interests, thereby making their best efforts to vote correctly based on those inferences (Campbell et al. 1960).

## **Candidate demographics: heuristic cues and similarity voting**

Party identification is by far the most convenient and used shortcut, and voters prioritize this information above all others to identify and stereotype candidates who may hold certain ideology and stances on issues similar to their own (Barber and Pope 2019; Bonneau and Cann 2015; Conover and Feldman 1989; McDermott 1998; 2007; Rahn 1993). Voters are able to assume candidates associated with a particular party fall in line with their party's platform, which frees voters from needing to seek out more "costly" information specific to each candidate

(Boudreau, Elmendorf, and MacKenzie 2015; Conover 1981; Riggle et al. 1992). When going into an election knowledge blind, voters do their best at voting correctly based on the candidate's party label, since it is a fairly accurate way to choose the candidate most likely to be aligned with their own interests. However, in its absence, like in nonpartisan elections or primaries, uninformed voters are less likely to be able to choose between candidates altogether (Schaffner and Streb 2002). As such, voters must turn to other cues to determine candidate party identification—notably, demographic indicators.

In low information or non-partisan elections, other types of nonpolitical cues and heuristics emerge. These are based on stereotypes associated with certain demographic identities—like gender, race, ethnicity, and age—that voters are often able to glean from candidate names, which are then used to approximate candidate party and ideology (Matson and Fine 2006). These demographic cues can hurt minority candidates, especially in low information elections that are perceived as less important, as voters are more able to “indulge” in their prejudices when they cannot fall back on party (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2020; Sigelman and Sigelman 1982). Since party is not a factor in primary elections, these nonpolitical cues and heuristics take on stronger roles in voting behavior in these elections. These perceptions can cloud party officials of minority candidates, thus impacting who they recruit to run in primaries (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019).

The second dimension to this behavior is “similarity voting,” where voters pick candidates demographically similar to them (Meng and Davidson 2020). Though this ties into the broader mechanism of using information shortcuts to determine the characteristics of unknown candidates, it falls more into the realm of group identity and community bonds (McDermott 2009b). This is heightened in response to the strength or salience of that identity, or presence of

that specific identity in issues focused on in that election (Koch 1994). Instead of voters using heuristics (regardless of whether said voter shares those identities) to approximate the ideology of candidates, voters instead show preference for demographically similar candidates for the mere fact that they have a shared identity.

The more a voter perceives a candidate's upbringing as similar to their own, the more likely it is that a voter will vote for that candidate (Meng and Davidson 2020). As such, sharing similar group identities inherently increases a sense of connection and closeness between voters and their preferential candidates, as they feel bonded over shared experiences. This positive correlation with demographic proximity exists regardless of the level of knowledge voters have about the candidates, but is especially strong among minority or underrepresented groups (Cutler 2002; Erkel 2019; Piliavin, 1987).

A large body of research has found that voters associate certain personality traits and belief stereotypes with female candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; McDermott 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Stauffer and Fisk 2022). There is a circular relationship here, as described by Huddy and Terkildsen (1993): since women's personalities are seen as more compassionate and gentle than men, they are expected to be more liberal and therefore be Democrats. Inversely, women's beliefs are stereotyped to be more liberal and Democratic than their male counterparts, so they are better equipped to deal with social issues that require compassion. From both angles, women are strongly associated with the Democratic Party by voters, who use gendered cues to conclude that female candidates possess a blue-leaning ideology (Dolan 2004).

As a result of these gendered stereotypes, female candidates experience unique challenges when running for office (Bauer 2015). Women not only face much more difficulty in their campaigns, but also wait longer before running for office and tend to be more qualified

once they do (Dolan 2014; Fox and Lawless 2004). Once elected, women are held to much higher personal and professional standards, despite studies proving congresswomen work harder and are more productive than congressmen (Anzia and Berry 2011). Contrarily, female candidates have an advantage among female voters that similarly situated male candidates do not have with male voters, which can prove crucial in close races or low information elections. Women are not only more likely to vote for other women, but the gender of a candidate is a bigger determining factor in vote choice for female voters than for their male counterparts (Dolan 1998; Ekstrand and Eckert 1981; Erkel 2019; McDermott 1998; 2009b; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sigelman and Sigelman 1982).

Race and ethnicity are the other major demographic cues voters use. Similar to women, Black candidates are stereotyped as having more liberal ideologies and therefore more likely to be Democrats, and this perception is stronger among white voters (Lerman and Sadin 2016; McDermott 1998). However, negative stereotypes about people of color and racial prejudices cost minority candidates the support of voters when they have no other information to go off of (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstine 2020; Piston 2009). The effects observed here are most acute for Black candidates (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstine 2020).

Yet, as a result of group identity and similarity voting, minority candidates have a unique advantage if they are running in more racially diverse districts. As a result, Black and Latino candidates appear more frequently in congressional primaries when districts have a higher proportion of Black and Latino voters (Branton 2009). Black voters also project their own ideologies onto Black candidates, and support them at higher rates (Lerman and Sadin 2016). Intersectionality compounds these effects – for example, Black female candidates experience extremely high levels of support from Black women (Philpot and Walton Jr 2007).



Some research has also found evidence that the religious identity of candidates impacts how voters perceive their party identification as well as their desire to support them, but most of this research is focused on Christian and Catholic candidates (Layman 1997; McDermott 2007; 2009a). For example, voters associate Evangelical candidates with the Republican Party while Catholicism has been tied with both the Democratic and Republican parties over time as stereotypes about Catholics in the public eye have changed (Campbell, Green, and Layman 2011; McDermott 2007). The efficacy of religious cues is dependent on the voter's own religiosity, and using more overt religious signifiers can prove riskier to campaigns than more subtle ones (McLaughlin and Wise 2014). The role a candidate's specific religion plays in elections requires further examination into denominations beyond the majority religions, but the decreased sample size of minority religion voters and candidates limits this field of research.

These are not the only cues voters use. Voters also show a preference for candidates similar in age to themselves, and dependent on the electoral context, can have a larger effect than gender or racial similarities (Piliavin 1987; Webster and Pierce 2019). Beyond just demographic information, candidate characteristics seemingly detached from party or politics also create voter bias. This is most evident in nonpartisan elections,<sup>1</sup> where voters turn to more superfluous cues when unable to determine a candidate's party affiliation (Riggle et al. 1992). Specifically, traits like candidate appearance, occupation, ballot order, usage of a nickname, or likeability become influential factors for voters (Banducci et al. 2008; Byrne and Pueschel 1974; Campbell 1954; Patton and Kaericher 1980; Rapoport, Metcalf, and Hartman 1989; Stockley 2008).

### **“Ethnic” voting**

A distinct component to identity-based voting is bloc or “ethnic” voting among distinct

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<sup>1</sup> Which is why this paper focuses on primaries, as the partisan aspect is taken out of consideration.

racial, ethnic, or religious communities. This differs from the group identity and similarity voting behaviors previously mentioned, as it is more of a collective group process than an individual decision based on personal preference formation. For the purposes of examining the voting behavior of Jewish Americans, this theory is particularly relevant.

As defined by Wolfinger (1965), ethnic voting manifests in two ways: first, members of an ethnic group's tendency to show allegiance to a specific party is not only a result of their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics as it is for other similarly situated voters, and the second, which is of import here, is that group members will vote for the opposite party if that means voting for (or against) a candidate of a specific ethnic group. Many examples come to mind of these "ethnic" groups and their political homogeneity—Black, Jewish, and other minority voters have been reliably aligned with the Democratic Party since the mid-20th Century, while Catholics, a historically Democratic voting bloc, have been split down the partisan line since the 1970s with the rise of the Christian Right (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Schoenfeld 1968; Weisberg 2019). Voters use these types of historical patterns as the basis for many of the assumptions that allow them to determine candidate party affiliation from heuristic and demographic cues.

Still, as postulated by Wolfinger's second manifestation of ethnic voting, members of racial and ethnic groups show preferential voting treatment to members of their own groups and may prioritize this over party allegiance. Studies have found that Jewish, Catholic, Black, and Italian voters prefer to vote for members of their own groups, and will cross party lines to do so (Campbell et al. 1960; Legge 1993; Piliavin 1987; Sigelman and Sigelman 1982).

However, this theory may not be as relevant today for studying current Jewish American voting behavior as it would have been in decades prior. There exists a sort of assimilation theory

that claims that collective voting among ethnic groups is most present when said groups first arrive to America as a proletarian class of outsiders, and then diminishes as group members rise in socioeconomic status (Dahl 1963; Legge 1993). In the early days of this assimilation process, candidates can rely on the electoral support of their ethnic group solely as a result of group solidarity and community ties, without needing to campaign for their vote or make targeted appeals to their interests. But, once the group becomes more heterogenized in class status, and higher status members feel less attached to or more ashamed of their ethnic identities, candidates can no longer rely on the unconditional support of their own ethnic group. (Dahl 1963, 34-35).

While many political scientists disagree with this theory (see: Wolfinger 1965), there is a notable temporal element to group associations and their role in American electoral politics. In looking at elections in the 1950s and 2000s, McDermott (2009b, 614) demonstrates that between these two time periods, there is a “clear and substantial decrease in citizens’ use of groups as organizing principles in politics.” Group identity and “ethnic” voting is still present, but significantly less of a factor in how voters choose who to vote for. As such, it is possible that Jewish Americans, who are more assimilated within the country than they were in the past, do not prioritize voting for Jewish candidates at the same rate as they once did.

### **Negative stereotypes & Jewish candidates**

While cues function as positive signifiers to an ingroup member of a shared identity, cues can also work as negative primers to outgroup members or prejudiced individuals (Kevins and Lee 2022; Kuklinski et al. 1991). Minority groups are systematically underrepresented in American political institutions, and Jewish Americans have historically been no exception, though that is changing. As of 1974, there had been less than 100 Jewish members of Congress and governors, yet by 2010, that number rose to over 200 (Isaacs 1974; Stone 2011). Now,

Jewish members make up 6.2% of the current 117th Congress, while only constituting 2% of America as a whole (Pew Research Center 2021).

Americans view Jewish people as a “model minority” of sorts, stereotyping Jewish people as liberal, high earning, intelligent, and likely to be doctors, lawyers, or influential in the media sphere (Foxman 2010). But, even positive generalizations are still dangerous, and there are many other negative stereotypes. Throughout history, Jewish people have been seen by others as greedy, money obsessed, corrupt, cowardly, immoral, power hungry, amongst other things: the very traits most people would find most abhorrent in a politician or leader (Felsenstein 1999; Foxman 2010; Higham 1957; Vink 2013). The connection with wealth is specifically notable, as voters view richer candidates in a more negative light and are less likely to vote for them (Griffin, Newman, and Buhr 2020). This has significant effects: Berinsky and Mendelberg (2005) found that voters link acceptable political stereotypes about Jews, i.e that they are liberal, to unacceptable social stereotypes, i.e. that Jews are “shady.” Across the board, the activation of these informational cues hurt Jewish candidates’ chances at electoral success (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005).

## **Theory**

American Jews make up a distinct and self-recognized minority “ethnic” group in the United States, creating a group identity where a majority of its members share similar liberal political opinions and ideology (Cohen and Liebman 1997; Schoenfeld 1968, 170; Weisberg 2019, 76). There are certain topics, or valence issues, that Jewish voters tend to agree on uniformly; e.g. legislation protecting the separation of Church and State (Weisberg 2019, 77-78). Like all people, Jewish voters have an innate desire for representation, which manifests as a preference to see members of their own group, namely other Jewish people, elected to office.

Given the recent rise in Jewish congressional representation, I argue that this negative outgroup electoral bias has diminished over the last half century or so while at the same time ingroup preferential treatment has risen or stayed the same. As the salience of Jewish American religious identity has decreased over the last few decades in favor of a Jewish American cultural identity, there exists fewer divides between the three different branches of Judaism in regards to community ties (Cohen and Hill 2007). This is strengthened by Judaism's status as a religion of descent (defined by biological and cultural heritage) instead of one of assent (defined by a created set of beliefs and values, like Protestantism) (Morris 1996, 2021). On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are strong negative stereotypes associated with Jewish people, specifically against Jewish people in positions of power, and outgroup members are likely biased to vote against them. But, as new immigrant groups emerge, individuals prone to prejudice may refocus their negative attention on non-White passing groups and de-prioritize voting against Jewish candidates. This both conforms with and goes against the assimilation theory of ethnic groups: Jewish people, akin to other white passing immigrant groups, have become more assimilated into American culture and are seen less as outsiders by the majority white population, so they face less discrimination from outgroups in elections. Yet, Jewish people are not losing their attachment to their identities as they gain social capital, which has been the historical norm for most European immigrants, so they still feel a strong desire to vote for members of their own group (Sonenshein and Valentino 2000). One possible explanation may be that these other European immigrant groups are now several generations removed and no longer have the same strong cultural or familial connections to their home countries, but as a religion of descent, Judaism is inherently passed down over generations and is more deeply felt than an ancestor's national heritage.

My hypothesis then is as follows: **Candidates with Jewish signaling last names will receive a higher percentage of the vote in U.S. House primaries in districts that have a higher proportion of Jewish citizens.** This is a result of both ingroup preferences and outgroup biases towards Jewish candidates. However, the ingroup effects may be stronger due to the simple fact that Jewish people are more skilled at identifying distinctive Jewish names than non-Jews, which is the heuristic cue being used in this analysis to code for a candidate's Jewish identity. I also expect to see Jewish voters voting for seemingly Jewish candidates at the same or slightly higher rates, and non-Jewish voters voting for Jewish candidates at higher rates from the beginning to the end of the time period examined.

## **Data and Methods**

This research was conducted via the use of several different datasets. Data on House primaries were pulled from Pettigrew, Owen, and Wanless (2014) for 2002 to 2010, and Miller and Camberg (2021) for 2012 to 2018. I gathered population demographic data from the Census's 110th Congress District Demographic profile and David Paul's 2006 Jewish Population Survey for elections occurring from 2002 to 2010, and from the 115th Congress District Demographic Profile and Joshua Comenetz's 2014 Jewish Maps by CD for elections 2012 onwards. I removed runoff and limited elections to those with only two candidates where one candidate had a Jewish signifying last name and their opponent did not.

Within onomastics, it has generally been accepted that there are certain last names that are distinctly Jewish. This theory originated in the early 1940s, when psychologist Samuel Kohs created a list of 35 (later expanded to 106) "distinctive Jewish names" (DJNs) as part of an effort to recognize the efforts of Jewish soldiers during World War II (Fermaglich 2015).<sup>2</sup> Approximately 16% of Jewish Americans have one of these 106 names, and over two-thirds of that group have one of the original 35 names, based on an analysis of the National Jewish Population Survey (Lazerwitz 1986).

Compared to non-Jews, Jewish people are better at recognizing Jewish names and identifying Jewish people through physiognomic and behavioral cues, and have a natural proclivity to do so (Glenn 2002). Furthermore, antisemites are no better than less prejudiced non-Jews at identifying Jewish people via some of these means (Andrzejewski, Hall, and Salib 2009). Both Jewish people and non-Jewish people are able to use name indicators to some extent to make more accurate predictions than they would via other indicators (Andrzejewski, Hall, and

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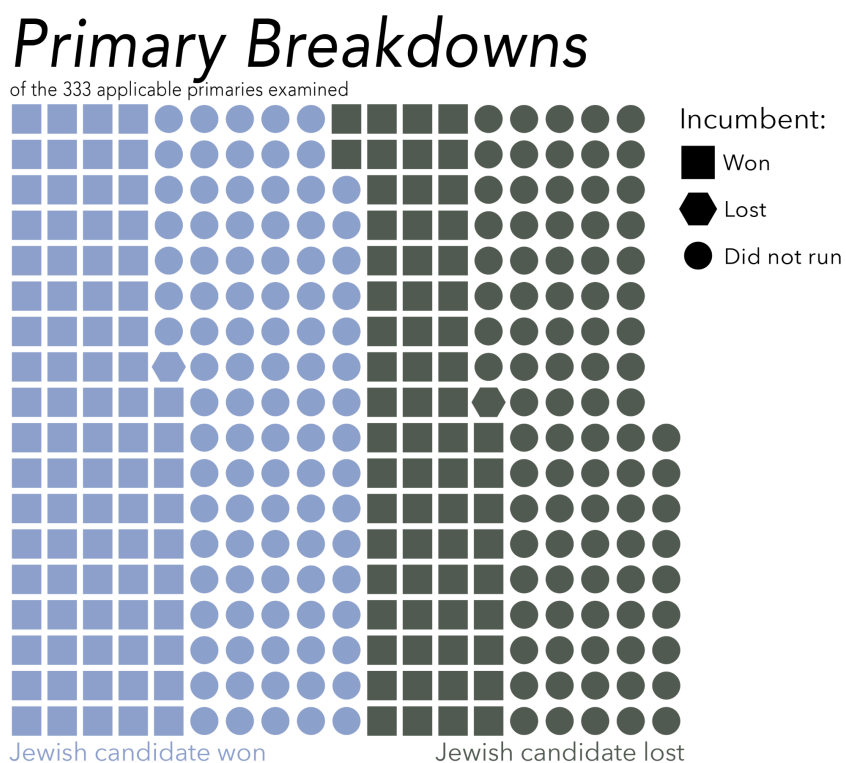
<sup>2</sup> See [Appendix Figure A1](#) for this list.

Salib 2009; Glenn 2002; Savitz and Tomasson 1959; Secord and Saumer 1960).

I was not able to produce a large enough sample of observations using only the list of 106 DJNs to identify potentially Jewish candidates. Therefore, I manually coded the last names of candidates who ran in primaries from 2002 to 2018, coding each name with a 1 (confidently assume candidate is Jewish), 0.5 (candidate is possibly Jewish), or 0 (do not think candidate is Jewish) by cross referencing Kohs' list, information on last name origins from Ancestry.com, Jewish genealogy records from Jewishdata.com, and my own personal judgment and experiences. In short, I coded for whether I believed a candidate had a Jewish signifying last name, or a "JSLN."

In all, I was left with 666 candidates from 333 elections, with 175 candidates coded with strongly Jewish names and 158 candidates with possibly Jewish names. The distribution of these elections and their outcomes is visualized in **Figure 1**. Candidates with Jewish names won 53.5% of the time and received an average vote share of 51.8%, both of which would seem to imply that these candidates fare better in terms of electoral outcomes.

**Figure 1: Primary breakdowns**





17.3% of the candidates were women, and of the candidates with JSLNs, 52.6% had strongly Jewish last names and 47.4% had potentially Jewish last names. Primaries were held in 216 districts across 42 states, and the number of primaries examined by year ranged from 23 (2014) to 49 (2010). A slight majority of the 333 primaries looked at were for open seats or for the Republican Party, as can be seen with other descriptive statistics found in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of variables**

Statistic	Min	Mean	Median	Max
Vote share	.139	49.982	50	99.861
JSLN	0	.381	.25	1
Female	0	.173	0	1
Democrat	0	.483	0	1
Incumbent	0	.224	0	1
Open seat	0	.553	1	1
% CD Jewish	0	2.102	.680	24.270
% CD white	18.171	79.131	83.086	96.896

## Methods

In addition to data visualizations, I examine the connection between JSLNs and vote share with a series of regression models that follow the general equation:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 JSLN_i + \beta_2 JewishPop_i + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i$$

The dependent variable  $y_i$  is vote share, which is the percent of the total votes a candidate received in their primary for the U.S. House of Representatives. The unit of analysis is each candidate, and the independent variables of interest for each candidate is whether they have a Jewish signifying last name ( $JSLN_i$ ) and the percentage of their congressional district's population that is Jewish ( $JewishPop_i$ ).  $\mathbf{X}_i$  represents a vector of other independent variables used as controls in [Models 2.3](#) and [2.4](#), which are the candidate's incumbency status ( $Inc_i$ ), gender ( $Female_i$ ), and party ( $Dem_i$ ), if there is no incumbent running in the primary ( $OpenSeat_i$ ), and the

percent of the congressional district that is white (*WhitePop<sub>i</sub>*). In **Model 2.4**, interaction terms are added between *JSLN<sub>i</sub>* and three of the other variables: *JewishPop<sub>i</sub>*, *WhitePop<sub>i</sub>*, and *Dem<sub>i</sub>*. The  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  terms are the regression coefficients of the respective independent variables, and  $\beta_0$  is the intercept.

## Findings

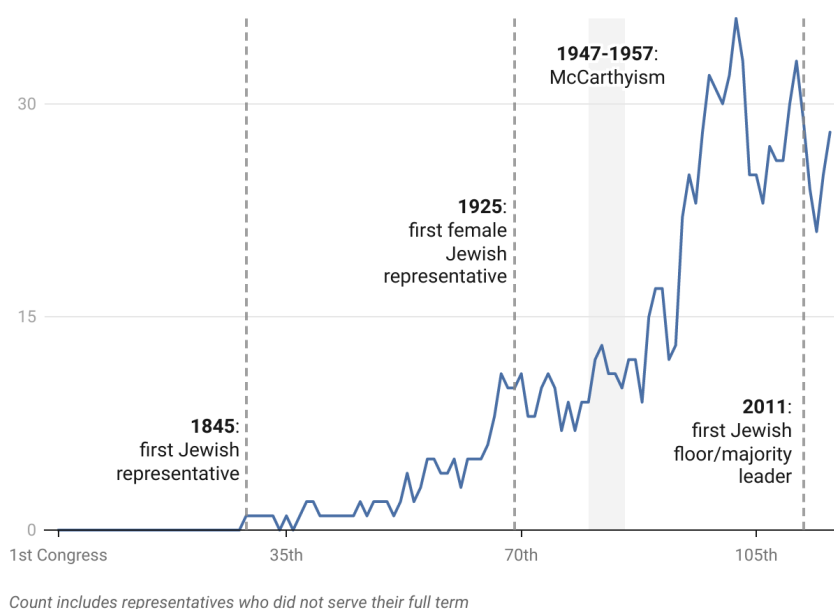
### Historical Trends

For the most part, it seems that voters have generally become more comfortable with the idea of electing Jewish candidates to higher office over time. **Figure 2** shows that the number of Jewish members of the U.S. House of Representatives has been growing since 1845, when Rep. Lewis Charles Levin (PA-01) of the Know Nothing party became the first Jewish member in either chamber of

**Figure 2: Jewish members of the House**

### Jewish members of the U.S. House of Representatives

By Congress number (up to the 116th term)

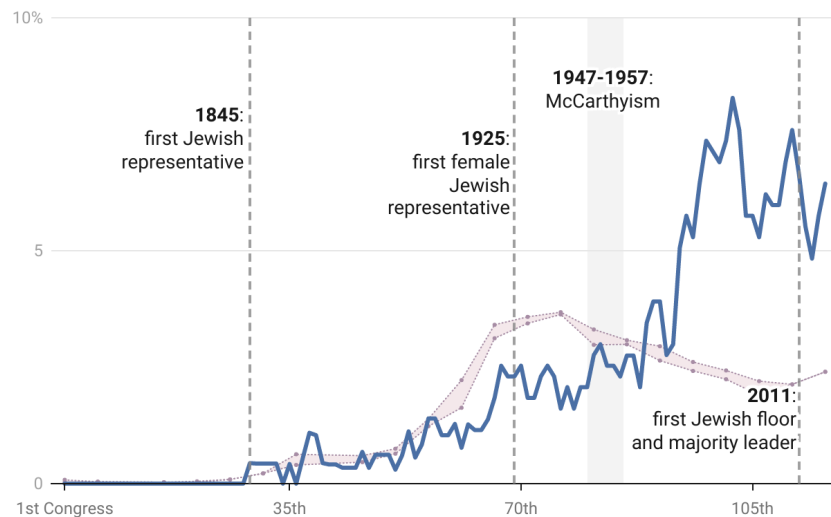


Congress (Jewish Virtual Library n.d.). However, this is not a result of larger Jewish populations or increases in the size of the House itself, as is shown in **Figure 3**. The American Jewish population share has actually been dropping in recent years, yet the proportion of house seats is rising.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This could potentially be a result of more Jewish candidates running for office, but no data or research on this topic could be found.

**Figure 3: Jewish population share in the House and overall****Share of U.S. House members and general population that is Jewish**

By Congress number (up to the 116th term)



*Numerator includes representatives who did not serve their full term, while the denominator does not*

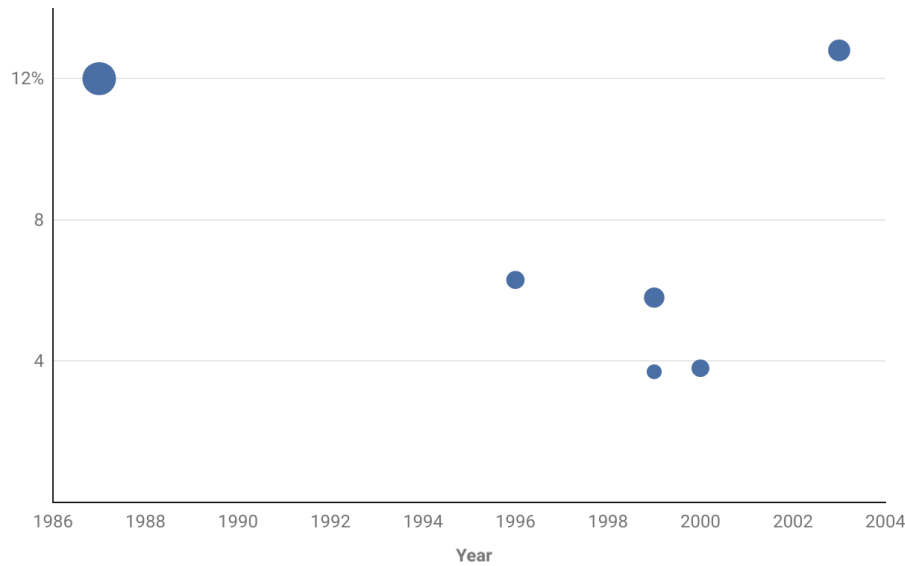
Various surveys over the years have asked respondents if they would vote for a qualified presidential candidate if they were Jewish, as depicted in [Figure 4](#) (Adams and Hunter 1988; American Jewish Committee and Gallup International Institute 1996; Bode et al. 2000; Odum Institute 1999a, 1999b; Pew Research Center 2003). There are some issues of comparability here given the varied methodologies and investigators of these surveys, but they overall show that a candidate's Jewish identity can be a determining factor for some voters – 12% of respondents in 1987 and 12.8% in 2003 said they would not vote for their party's nominated candidate if they happened to be Jewish. The latter, however, appears to be an outlier, as only about 5% of respondents to four other surveys conducted between 1996 and 2000 said the same. Beyond this, additional Pew Research Center surveys conducted in 2007 and 2016 support this conclusion, finding (respectively) that 10.6% and 10.2% of respondents would be less likely to support a candidate upon learning that they are Jewish. Yet, 8.6% and 7.7% of respondents would actually

be more likely to support a candidate who is Jewish. It seems then that for some voters, a candidate being Jewish is instead a positive characteristic.

**Figure 4: Americans who would not vote for a qualified Jewish presidential candidate**

**Percentage of Americans who would not vote for a qualified Jewish presidential candidate**

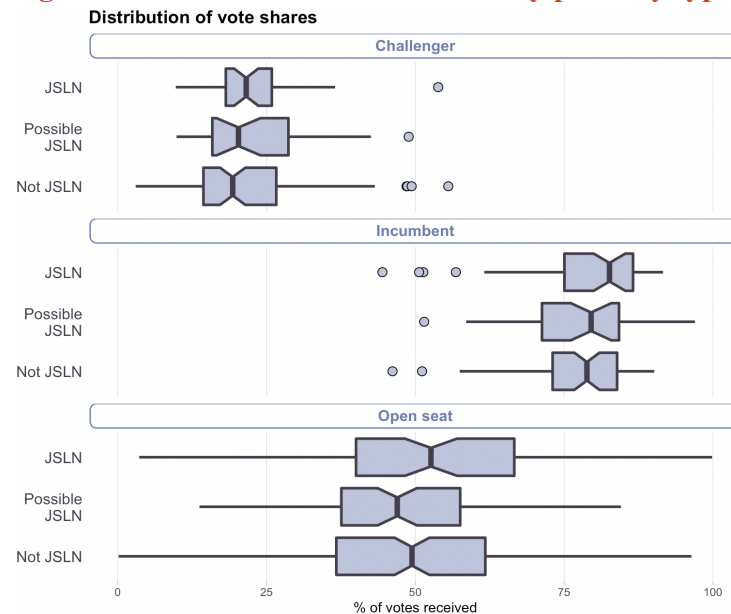
Based on 6 surveys conducted from 1987 to 2003; points sized by number of respondents



N ranges from 402 to 2498

On average, candidates with JSLNs had higher median vote shares than their counterparts, and this holds true when broken down into candidates who are challengers, incumbents, or running for an open seat, as visualized in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Distribution of vote shares by primary type**



However, there is significant overlap within the distributions, and the

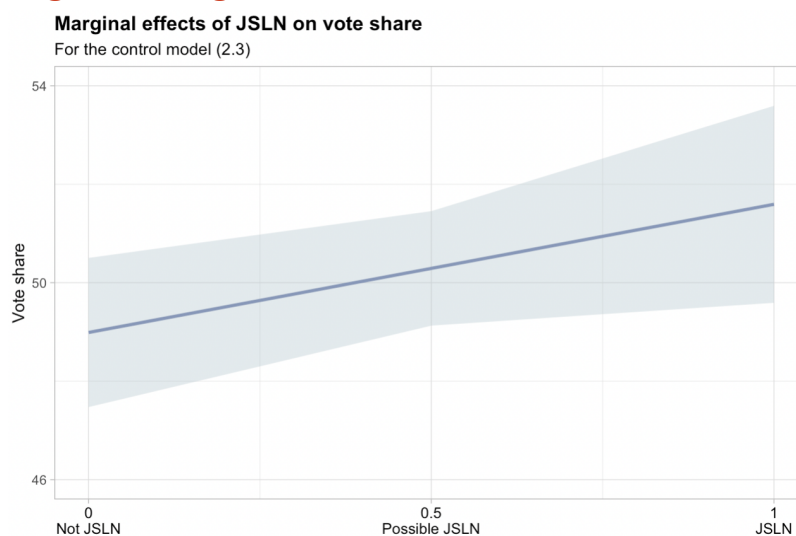
effect size is fairly small. As such, this does not provide concrete evidence that having a Jewish signifying last name is an electoral advantage.

## Regressions

I turn to regression models (see: [Table 2](#)) to further examine the relationship between more Jewish districts and preference for candidates with JSLNs. I run two bivariate regressions ([Models 2.1-2.2](#))<sup>4</sup> and find a statistically significant positive relationship between how Jewish a district is and increased levels of support for seemingly Jewish candidates: For each percentage point increase in the Jewish population of a congressional district, candidates with JSLNs increased their vote share by 0.848 percentage points, while candidates without JSLNs experienced a 0.85 percentage point decrease in vote share. While this aligns with my original hypothesis, it appears to be a result of omitted variable bias. This is evident upon examining the more complex models with additional controls and interactions ([Models 2.3-2.4](#)), where this relationship seems to disappear given as more information is added to the model.

In [Model 2.3](#), which does not have interaction terms, having a JSLN results in a statistically significant slight advantage that increases vote share for those candidates by about 2.6 percentage points. As can be seen in [Figure 6](#), while there is some overlap in the confidence intervals for the estimated vote share by candidate JSLN, it is undeniable that having a JSLN proves beneficial to House candidates. The CI is slightly wider when  $JSLN_i = 1$ , which indicates the effect size is more variable.

**Figure 6: Marginal effects of JSLN on vote share**



<sup>4</sup> These are visualized in a set of graphs in [Appendix Figure A2](#).

**Table 2 (Models 2.1-2.4): Multivariate linear regression models<sup>5</sup>**

	<i>Dependent variable: Vote share</i>			
	Biv. w/ JSLN <i>(2.1)</i>	Biv. w/o JSLN <i>(2.2)</i>	Controlled model <i>(2.3)</i>	Interaction model <i>(2.4)</i>
<i>Model number:</i>				
JSLN			2.603* (1.367)	-18.000** (7.761)
Female			6.357*** (1.541)	6.468*** (1.538)
Democrat			-.712 (1.180)	-1.443 (1.568)
Incumbent			55.724*** (1.709)	55.448*** (1.719)
Open seat			27.446*** (1.454)	27.212*** (1.457)
% CD Jewish	.848** (.368)	-.850** (.368)	-.064 (.167)	-.209 (.231)
% CD white			.005 (.039)	-.087* (.053)
JSLN * Democrat				1.932 (2.721)
JSLN * % CD Jewish				.306 (.352)
JSLN * % CD white				.239*** (.092)
Constant	50.064*** (1.510)	49.904*** (1.509)	20.329*** (3.451)	28.451*** (4.566)
Observations	333	333	666	666
R <sup>2</sup>	.016	.016	.624	.628
F Statistic	5.322** (df = 1; 331)	5.346** (df = 1; 331)	156.217*** (df = 7; 658)	110.808*** (df = 10; 655)

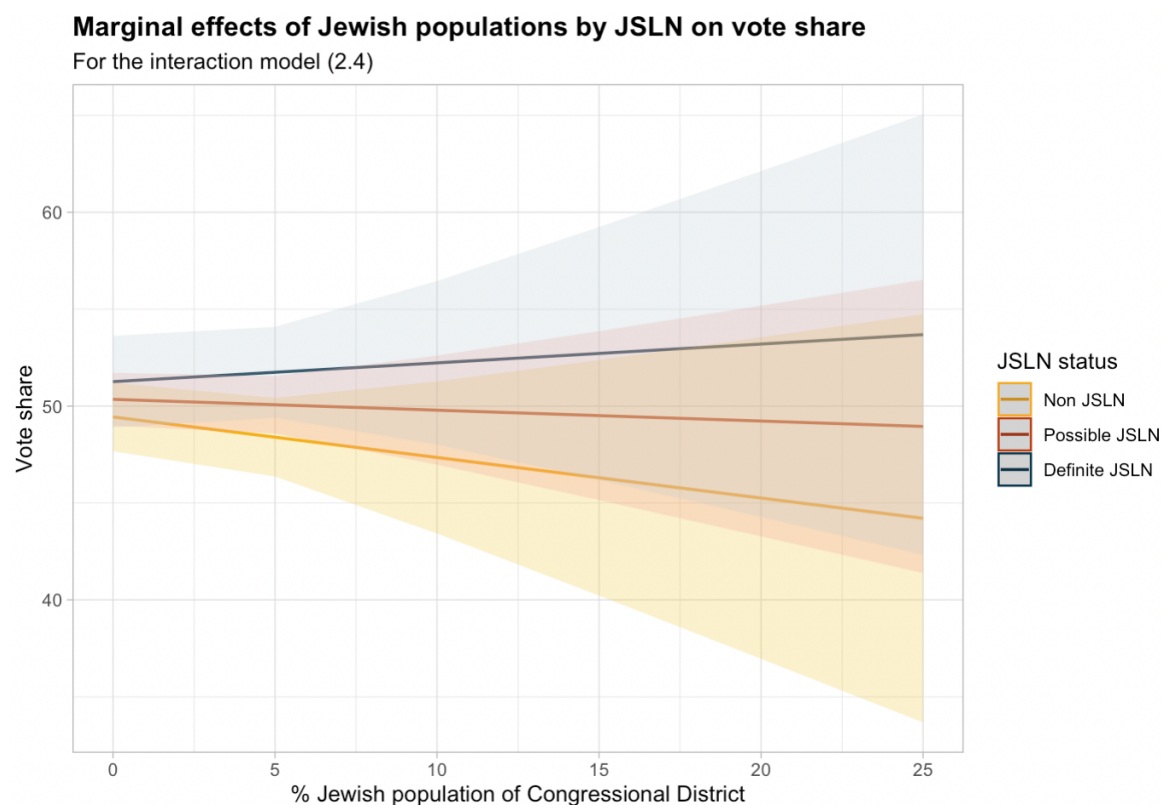
Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

<sup>5</sup> The coefficients are presented graphically in [Appendix Figure A3](#).

**Model 2.3**, the interaction model, reveals a preference among white voters for candidates with JSLNs. For every additional percentage point white a district is, the effect of having a JSLN increases by 0.152 percentage points. However, on the basis of whiteness alone, if a Republican primary was held in a district without any Jewish residents, a district would have to be over 100% white for a candidate with a JSLN to not be at a disadvantage, which is not feasible.

The coefficient for the interaction term between candidates having a JSLN and the percentage of the congressional district that is Jewish is not statistically significant (**Model 2.3**), so I am left with a null result on my original hypothesis that Jewish voters prefer candidates with JSLNs. In looking at the marginal effect plot in **Figure 7**, it is clear that there is simply too much overlap between the confidence intervals of three categories of JSLNs to draw any concrete conclusions.

**Figure 7: Marginal effects of Jewish populations by JSLN on vote share**



## Robustness Checks

To further confirm my results, I generated two linear mixed models – [Models 3.1](#) and [3.2](#), which can be found in Table 3. These models included random fixed effects for each specific primary, allowing the models to control for any sources of random variability that may have been caused by specific election years, candidates, districts, or other external forces that interfere with the models. [Model 3.1](#) confirms the findings of [Model 2.3](#), which it originates from: namely, there are positive effects on vote share for candidates who are women, have JSLNs, are incumbents, or are running in an open race. [Model 3.2](#) confirms those same effects in both directionality and statistical significance as [Model 2.4](#), and additionally corroborates that having a JSLN is more of an advantage in whiter districts. Furthermore, based on the marginal  $R^2$  values, it seems that around 62% of the variance in both of these models is explained by the fixed effects. Since my linear regression models without these fixed effects still come to the same conclusions, this is further evidence that my findings are backed by the data. However, there are still underlying sources of variability that may disrupt the non fixed modes, so caution is needed. It seems then that the conclusion of this analysis is that having a JSLN is an advantage in House races, especially in whiter districts, but there is no significant evidence to support the hypothesis that Jewish voters prefer these candidates.



**Table 3 (Models 3.1-3.2): Linear mixed models**

<i>Dependent variable: Vote share</i>									
Controlled model					Interaction model				
<i>Model number:</i> (3.1)					(3.2)				
Predictors	Estimate	CI	t	p	Estimate	CI	t	p	
Intercept	20.33	13.55–27.10	5.89	<0.001	28.45	19.48–37.42	6.23	<0.001	
JSLN	2.60	-0.08–5.29	1.90	0.057	-18.00	-33.24–-2.76	-2.32	<b>0.021</b>	
Female	6.36	3.33–9.38	4.12	<0.001	6.47	3.45–9.49	4.20	<0.001	
Democrat	-0.71	-3.03–1.61	-0.60	0.547	-1.44	-4.52–1.64	-0.92	0.358	
Incumbent	55.72	52.3–59.08	32.61	<0.001	55.45	52.0–58.82	32.26	<0.001	
Open seat	27.45	24.59–30.30	18.87	<0.001	27.21	24.35–30.07	18.67	<0.001	
% CD Jewish	-0.06	-0.39–0.26	-0.38	0.701	-0.21	-0.66–0.24	-0.90	0.366	
% CD white	0.01	-0.07–0.08	0.13	0.895	-0.09	-0.19–0.02	-1.65	0.099	
JSLN * Democrat					1.93	-3.41–7.27	0.71	0.478	
JSLN * % CD Jewish					0.31	-0.39–1.00	0.87	0.385	
JSLN * % CD white					0.24	0.06–0.42	2.59	<b>0.010</b>	
<b>Random Effects</b>									
$\sigma^2$	216.31				214.89				
$\tau_{00}$	0.00 <sub>race</sub>				0.00 <sub>race</sub>				
N	333 <sub>race</sub>				333 <sub>race</sub>				
Marginal R <sup>2</sup>	0.622				0.625				

## **Conclusion**

Antisemitism is on the rise in America at a rapidly increasing rate, making it more important than ever for Jewish Americans to be represented in political office (Hagen 2022). However, Jewish Americans are a rather small minority of the nation's population, and there is a need for more academic research done in regards to surrounding political behavior, which is partially the impetus behind this paper. By perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Jewish people, Jewish Americans are often depicted as cruel, evil, self-obsessed, powerful, and greedy individuals not fit to lead, and this has impacts. As this paper reveals, when controlling for various factors, candidates with names that appear to be Jewish face slightly improved odds in primary House elections.

There is a curious impact of the percentage white population of a congressional district on the vote share for candidates with JSLNs that is not clear from this analysis alone, and will require further research. Furthermore, future analysis could benefit from having data on the actual religious identity of candidates, not just what is assumed from their names, especially in the context of more major elections where candidate information is more widely known and publicized as part of the campaign. Doing so would allow future researchers to see whether actually being Jewish or just appearing to be Jewish is more impactful.

While I was unable to do so in this paper due to financial and time constraints, future research to truly estimate the impact of a JSLN on candidate performance would also benefit from a wide pool of respondents - both to determine what names appear "Jewish," and to present individuals with fake ballots wherein one candidate was a JSLN to see who they would vote for when given no other information.

This methodology I used to determine whether candidates had JSLNs was not without its flaws, and may be a source of error in this study. However, this analysis is more about whether voters perceive candidates as Jewish regardless of the actual religious identity of the candidates themselves, and future research could benefit from having a larger pool of people to sample on if they perceive candidates to be Jewish by their name or not. Also, first names were ignored in the interests of labor constraints, which may have resulted in some candidates being wrongly grouped, examples being Jewish people with clearly Jewish first names (e.g. Abraham, Levi, Naomi, etc.) who took their spouse's non-Jewish signaling last name or who are Jewish on their mother's side, but use their father's non-Jewish signaling last name.

It is also possible that the recent overrepresentation in Jewish members elected to Congress is a result of more Jewish candidates running, but I was unable to pursue this theory further as a result of time, labor, and data constraints. Future research would also benefit greatly from examining data over a larger period of time, as there is a clear temporal element here to Jewish electoral success that may be a result of assimilation, change in the salinity of stereotypes, or part of the broader trend observed by McDermott on the diminishing power of group organization on political processes (2009b).

This paper completes some early steps into the examination of Jewish American voting behavior, responding to the dearth of scholarly work done in the field. It also establishes the need for further research, by highlighting a strong yet unexplained trend overtime that has resulted in the growing overrepresentation of Jewish Americans in Congress. This is coupled with an unprecedented rise in antisemitism nationally over the last few years, threatening the lives and safety of Jewish Americans, leading this group to need political representation more than ever. This area of study is rich with potential, and hopefully more will be done on this topic soon.

Appendix

Figure A1: Samuel Kohs' list of 106 distinctive Jewish names

1. Abraham	27. Feingold	56. Katzman	85. Rothstein
2. Abrahams	28. Feinstein	57. Kohn	86. Ruben
3. Abrahamson	29. Feldman*	58. Lefkowitz	87. Rubenstein
4. Abramovitz	30. Finkelstein	59. Lerner	88. Rubin*
5. Abrams	31. Freedman	60. Levi	89. Samuels*
6. Abramson	32. Friedman*	61. Levin*	90. Schulman
7. Adelman	33. Ginsberg*	62. Levine*	91. Segal
8. Aronson	34. Ginsburg	63. Levinson*	92. Shapiro*
9. Bercovitz	35. Gold*	64. Levitt	93. Shulman
10. Berkowitz	36. Goldberg*	65. Margolin	94. Siegel*
11. Berman*	37. Goldfarb	66. Margolis	95. Silverman*
12. Bernstein*	38. Goldman*	67. Markowitz	96. Silverstein
13. Birnbaum	39. Goldstein*	68. Moskowitz	97. Straus
14. Blumberg	40. Gottlieb	69. Nathan	98. Strauss
15. Blumenthal	41. Greenbaum	70. Nathanson	99. Sugarman
16. Bornstein	42. Greenberg*	71. Perlman	100. Weinberg*
17. Brodsky	43. Greenwald	72. Pincus	101. Weiner*
18. Brody	44. Grossman*	73. Rabinowitz	102. Weinstein*
19. Cahn	45. Halperin	74. Rappaport	103. Weindraub
20. Caplan*	46. Halpern	75. Rosen*	104. Wexler
21. Cohen*	47. Halprin	76. Rosenbaum*	105. Zeitlin
22. Cohn*	48. Horowitz*	77. Rosenberg	106. Zuckerman
23. Eisenberg	49. Horwitz	78. Rosenblatt	<u>TOTAL</u>
24. Eisner	50. Hurwitz	79. Rosenbloom*	<u>Total</u>
25. Epstein*	51. Hyman	80. Rosenblum	<u>Most Frequent</u>
26. Feinberg	52. Isenberg	81. Rosenstein	
	53. Kahn*	82. Rosenthal*	
	54. Kaplan*	83. Rothman*	
	55. Katz*	84. Rothschild	

Figure A2: Candidate vote share by Jewish population

Candidate vote share by CD Jewish population

in 333 primary U.S. House elections from 2002-2018

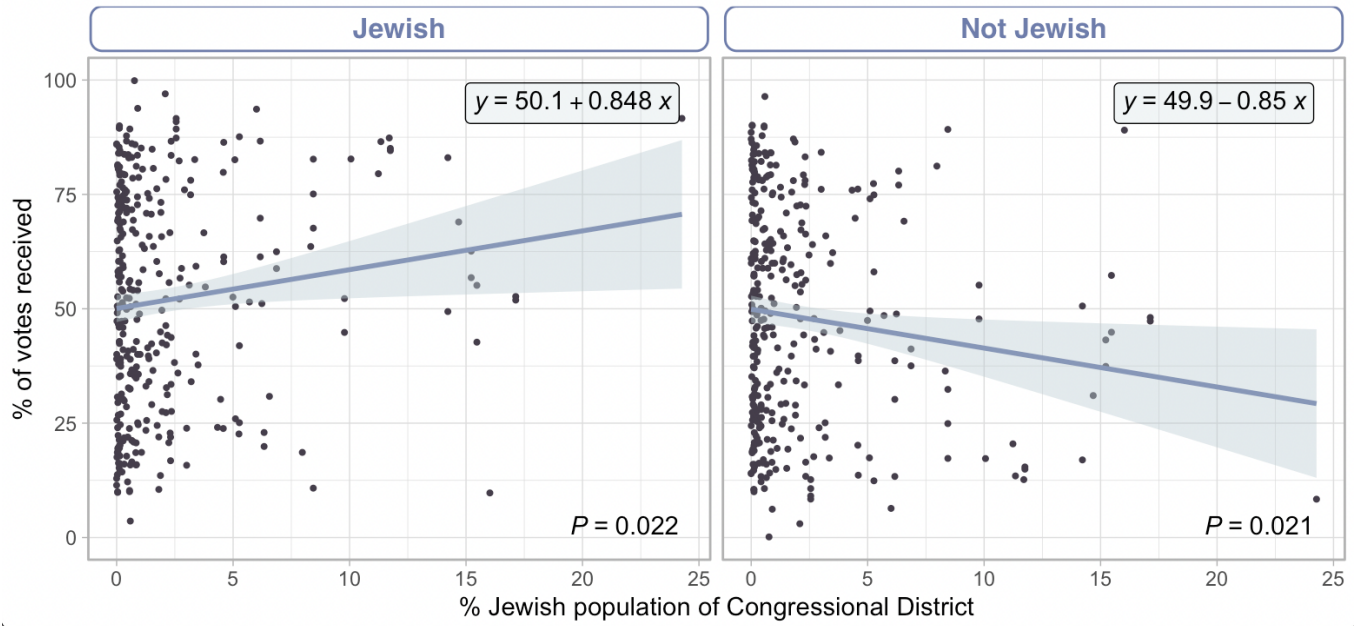




Figure A3: Impact of select independent variables on vote share

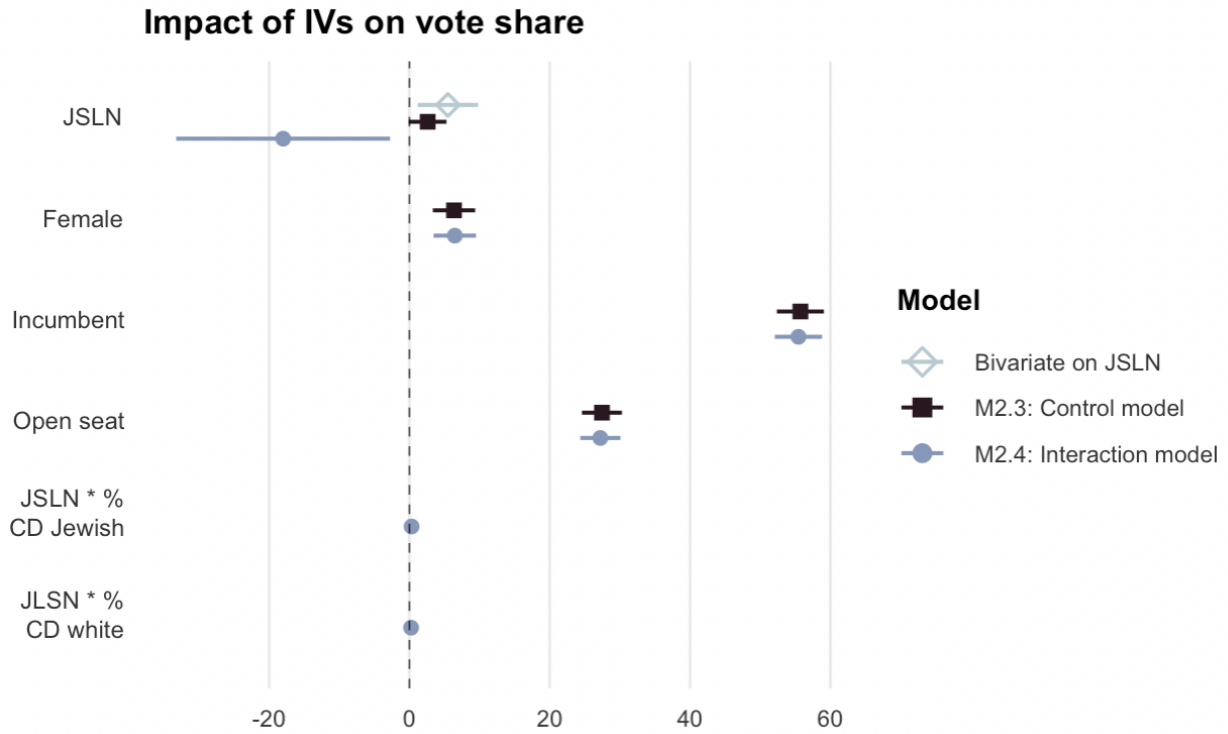
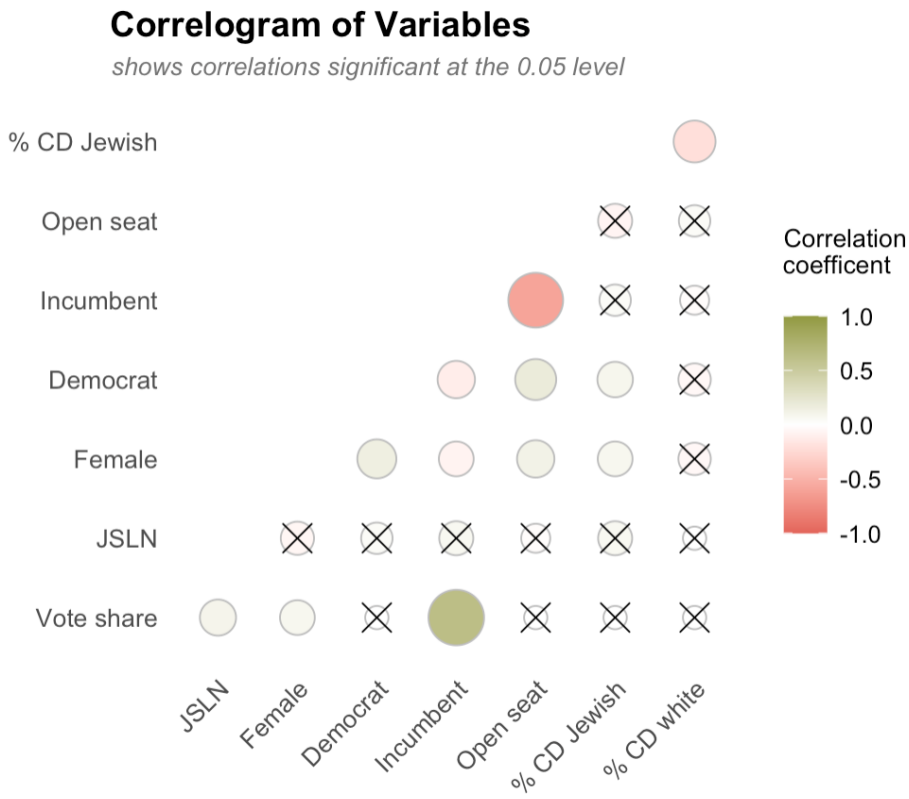


Figure A4: Correlogram of variables



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