

How Trumpism 2.0 Reshaped New York's Haredi Political Landscape

In the 2024 U.S. election, most American Jews voted for the Democratic candidate, just as they always do.

But the ultra-Orthodox communities seem to have entrenched themselves firmly in the Trump camp, for reasons that go beyond Israel



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An ultra-Orthodox Jew walks past a shop in New York. Credit: Etan Nechin

NEW YORK – At Gottlieb's, a restaurant nestled in the heart of South Williamsburg's Satmar community, conversations buzzed around the election. "Are you happy Trump won?" a customer named Yos asked the waiter, who responded with a silent nod.

Nearby, four men cracked open a bottle of brandy and discussed their businesses. "He'll be good for us," one remarked, while another shrugged, "I make a living no matter who's in charge."

When I joined the conversation and asked Yos why he voted for Trump, he replied, "He tells it like it is."

One of the patrons at the restaurant mentioned that Gottlieb's had been set to host Trump for a campaign stop in October. However, fate intervened when the establishment's owner unexpectedly passed away just hours before Trump's anticipated visit. "Poor guy, he was young," someone said. "He was in his seventies," the other said. "Seventies is young," someone replied.

These conversations, though brief and often hesitant from a community wary of speaking with outsiders – especially the press – are telling.

While Kamala Harris is thought to have secured over 70% of the overall Jewish vote, the Haredi community's support for Trump



Local magazine enthusiastically reports on Trump's plans, Boro Park, New York. Credit: Ethan Nechin

has been nearly unanimous, marking a significant and lasting shift that began in 2016. In Williamsburg, support for Trump reached nearly 90%; in Borough Park, it was over 70%; and in Crown Heights, the center of the Chabad community, it approached 70%.

Mark Trencher, founder of Nishma Research, which focuses on studies within the Orthodox Jewish community, explains that most polling about Haredi Jews tends to be inaccurate.



Ultra-Orthodox Jews walk around Boro Park. Credit: Ethan Nechin

"The main issue is that most polls do not differentiate between Haredi and Modern Orthodox groups. While Orthodox communities, on average, show about 65% support for Trump, in Haredi communities, that number surpasses 90%."

At Korn's, a bakery down the block, when I asked about the election results, the seller behind the counter told me, "I mean, Trump or Harris? This wasn't even a choice," he said. When I asked why, the seller raised his fist, "he's strong and can get things done."

Split Ticket

Traditionally, the Haredi community in New York has registered as Democrats, in part because the majority in the city council and state assembly have been Democrats for decades. Factors such as the pandemic, controversies surrounding school funding, and a growing alignment with conservative policies – such as Agudath Israel's public call to vote "No" on Proposition 1, which was on the ballot to ensure reproductive rights for all New Yorkers – have contributed to the Orthodox communities' increasingly public alignment with Republican ideals.

Naftali Moster, publisher of Shtetl, a Haredi investigative magazine, says that Trump has a "Haredi mentality: Succeed at all costs, unrefined speech, disdain for elites, especially academia. It makes him relatable to a lot of people."

Moster explains that in the past, Haredim had a general inclination toward conservatives. But what Trump did was draw people in through his populist personality and brought them deeply into the party, "to the point where they now find themselves immersed in political thoughts and principles as well."

"For the first time, grand rabbis are competing for the attention of their followers with political figures. Ten or fifteen years ago, it was very uncommon for an average Hasidic man to donate to a politician. Now, you see regular people donating, going [to] and organizing rallies. This kind of enthusiasm was once reserved for their religious leaders," Moster says.

The shift is notable. In 2020, the Satmar rabbi of Kiryas Joel (Aaron Teitelbaum) publicly condemned Trumpism as a harmful influence. Yet, during this election cycle, he reportedly shifted course and endorsed Trump.

At the rally at Madison Square Garden, which was criticized for having racist and antisemitic overtones, there was a notably large and visible contingent of Haredi men and members of the broader Orthodox community.

While supporting Trump holds limited practical impact in heavily Democratic-leaning New York State, Republican candidates in local races have capitalized on the Trump wave to gain traction among Orthodox communities.

Republican Mike Lawler's reelection victory was, in part, due to support from the approximately 30,000 Orthodox voters in his district. The sway of the Haredi community was so notable that both Lawler and House Speaker Mike Johnson paid a visit to the Satmar rabbi in Kiryas Joel, a Haredi town situated on the west side of the Hudson.

Trencher of Nishma Research highlights that the two primary appeals of Trump to the Haredi community are his stance on Israel and fear of progressivism. "The average Haredi spends half of Shabbat reading newspapers. They are incredibly knowledgeable but also susceptible to confirmation bias. Although the progressive wing of the Democratic Party represents only about 15%, media coverage often amplifies this perceived threat."

And while some argue that Israel doesn't play a role in the Haredi vote, Trencher says they're wrong.

"Haredim have a strong connection to Israel. Nearly everyone knows or is related to someone living or studying there. While their rejection of Zionism is largely theological, they still care deeply about Israel and recognize its significance."

The sentiment was evident at a local wine store in Boro Park, where a group sampled Kosher wine. Some customers picked up on my Israeli accent. One said, "I go every year, but not since the war."

When I asked about how Trump's presidency can affect Israel, he said, "Trump is good for Israel. With him, Israel can win."

As I walked outside, I noticed a local magazine resting on a wine barrel by the entrance. Its front page featured a photo of Trump with the headline "Back in Business," a mention of the 30th yahrzeit of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, and a photo of Meir Kahane with the slogan "Kahane was right."

"Even if you speak to anti-Zionist sects like Satmar, they cite emotional connection to Israel as a major factor in their political decision-making," Trencher said.

Maybe Democrats will take notice

In Crown Heights, the hub of the Chabad movement, the atmosphere is markedly different. Here, there is no hesitation in showing support for Israel; Israeli flags are often seen hanging from balconies.

While some do not classify Chabad as Haredi, Trencher explains that he includes them in his polls. "We do consider them Haredi-Chasidic, but we categorize them separately because they are less insular than other Haredi communities."

Interest in these elections was higher than ever before. A group of local Chabad activists, known as the Jewish Future Alliance, spearheaded the largest voter turnout in the neighborhood's history.

To encourage voter turnout, 5,000 postcards were sent to eligible but unregistered or infrequent voters, resulting in hundreds of new registrations. Articles from Crown Heights elders were featured in neighborhood magazines.

Yaacov Behrman, who declined to say who he voted for, told Haaretz, that "the message was clear: vote after October 7 to show we matter, regardless of whom you vote for." Behrman noted that he personally sent multiple emails to his list of over 7,000 recipients. "Fun fact," Behrman adds, "the oldest voter was 101. Or just say over 100. She'll be mad if we mention her real age."

When discussing Trump's appeal, Behrman notes that support for him is increasing among various minority groups, not just Jews. "Most fair-minded New Yorkers want the same things: to raise our families in health, security, and financial stability." However, he argues that "these values don't seem to align with the direction that the socialist wing of the Democratic Party is taking."

Moster argues that the public alignment of Haredi communities with Trump, even in a blue state, may paradoxically strengthen their position with the Democratic statehouse and local municipalities.

"Their growing influence could lead Democrats to court their favor, balancing strategic demands with grassroots loyalty to values. This positioning also strengthens their leverage for funding and political maneuvering at both state and federal levels."

Trencher believes that, contrary to public perception, the Haredi vote isn't driven solely by pragmatism but also by values and concerns, particularly regarding Israel. "If JD Vance runs in 2028, for instance, and campaigns on an isolationist agenda that appears to harm Israel, their votes might change."