

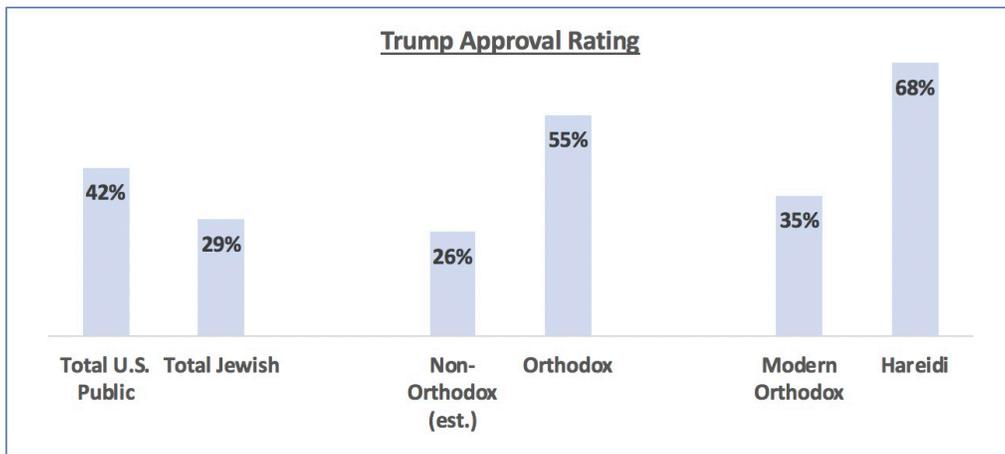
American Orthodox Jewry is often viewed as a single, undifferentiated mass, with little or no appreciation of the extent of the diversity within the group. Conventional wisdom has it that Orthodox Jews are conservatives who vote Republican, while the rest of U.S. Jewry leans strongly Democratic and Liberal. But it turns out, this is a big misperception which has resulted from the fact that political surveys tend to clump all Orthodox Jews together. There is a lot more to the story, as a Nishma Research just-completed survey of 1,264 American Orthodox Jews reveals.

It's true that Orthodox Jews are conservative. 54% of all Orthodox Jews surveyed identify as Republican/Conservative, while 33% are Democrat/Liberal. And yet, there is huge variation within Orthodoxy. Hareidi Jews — sometimes called ultra-Orthodox — lean strongly right, with 65% identifying as Republican/Conservative and just 33% as Democrat/Liberal. But Modern Orthodox Jews — those Orthodox Jews who incorporate higher levels of secular education into their observant lives — overall lean quite notably to the left, with 52% identifying as Democrat/Liberal and just 37% as Republican/Conservative.

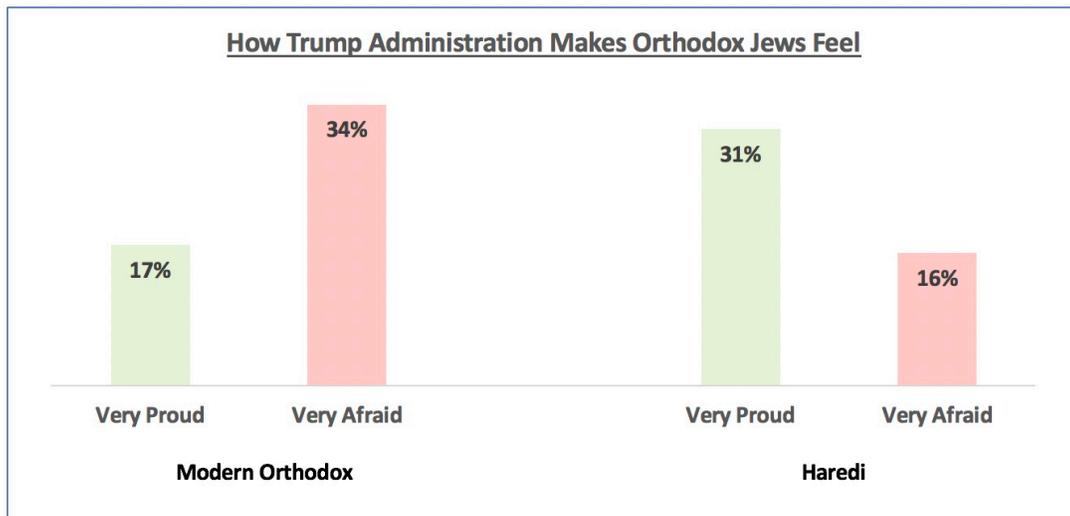
Unsurprisingly, these leanings correlate with how people voted in 2016. Among all Orthodox respondents, Trump defeated Clinton 51% to 40%, with 9% voting other. But this obscures two conflicting landslides: Among Hareidi Jews, Trump beat Clinton 66% to 24%, while among Modern Orthodox, Clinton beat Trump 61% to 32%.

And this is reflected in the President's approval rating in the Orthodox community. Overall in the U.S., Trump's recent approval rating has hovered around 42%. According to Gallup, the total U.S. Jewish population gives Trump a notably less favorable rating of 29%. This total Jewish population is comprised of relative few Orthodox Jews (11%) and many more non-Orthodox (89%).

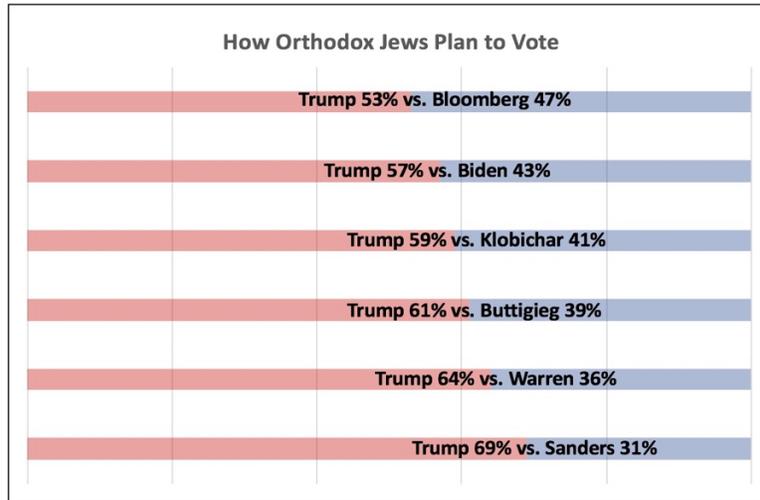
Our survey supports this finding, showing that Trump is viewed favorably among all Orthodox Jews with an approval rating of 55%. But we see the same divide when you drill down into the divisions within Orthodoxy, with 35% approval among Modern Orthodox Jews and 68% approval among Hareidi Jews.



Meanwhile, one in four (25%) Orthodox Jews says the Trump Administration makes them feel very proud, and about as many (23%) say they feel very afraid. But again, the results vary widely within Orthodoxy.



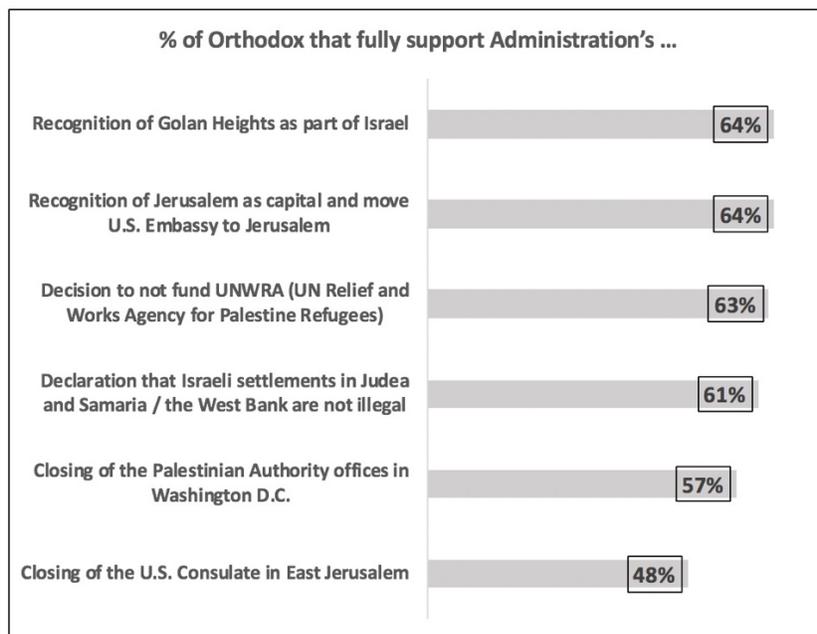
When it comes to the 2020 election, all Orthodox Jews prefer Trump to every candidate running for the Democratic ticket by an average margin of 20% (Trump 60%, Democrats 40%). Michael Bloomberg comes closest to Trump, garnering 47%, followed by Biden at 43% and Klobichar at 41%. But again, we see sharp differences within Orthodoxy. The Modern Orthodox would always vote against Trump, except when his opponent is Sanders, where the vote splits 50/50).



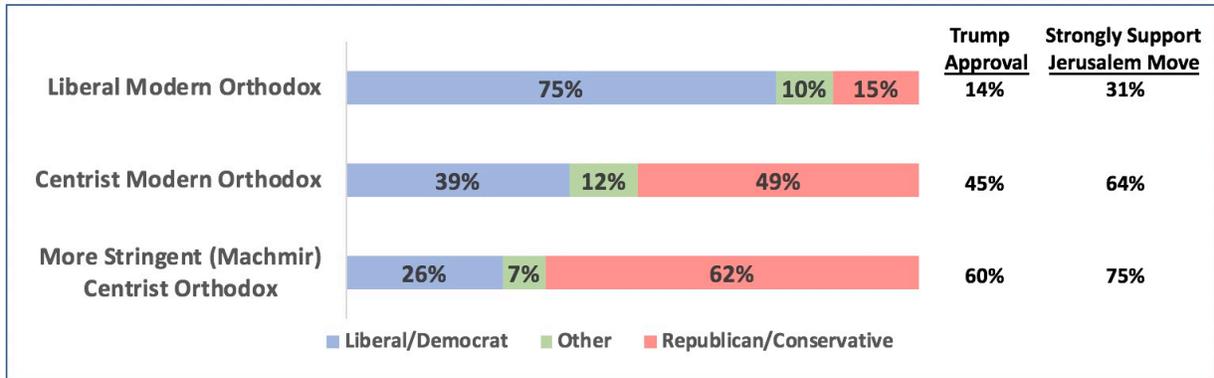
“Haredi Jews overwhelmingly prefer Trump to all Democratic candidates,” Dr. Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee observed. “Given Haredi numerical preponderance within American Orthodoxy and given projections of their future demographic growth, the likelihood is that Orthodox Jews (as a total group) will prefer conservative Republican candidates in the years ahead.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is broad approval (71%) of Trump’s treatment and actions affecting Israel across all of Orthodoxy — even the Modern Orthodox, who generally disapprove of Trump. The same number of Orthodox Jews, 71%, said that candidates’ views on Israel are a critically important or very important factor in their deciding for whom to vote, and for one in four Orthodox Jews, it is essentially the decisive factor in determining their vote.

Still, Israel is not the single decisive issue for any Orthodox Jews. Among Haredi Jews, just 31% said it was the single decisive issue, which is even lower among Modern Orthodox Jews at 18%.



Even more interesting is the correlation between political ideology correlates and religious orientation or self-identification. For example, approval of Trump ranges from 14% on the left (“Liberal Modern Orthodox”), to 45% in the center (“Centrist Modern Orthodox”), to 60% on the right (“more stringent/machmir Centrist Orthodox”).



There are a few other interesting findings. For example, Trump’s Orthodox approval rating is 13% higher for men than women — 61% vs. 48% — which is identical to the gender gap found in recent overall U.S. population surveys. And his approval increases with age. President Trump’s approval rating among all Orthodox is 46% for ages 18-44, rising to 52% for ages 45-54, and rising further to 68% for those 55 and older. Views vary hardly at all by income or educational levels, but Baalei Teshuvah (those who became observant/Orthodox at bar or bat mitzvah age or later) give Trump a 40% approval rating, compared to 56% among those who were raised observant. This tracks with the finding in our 2019 study of baalei teshuvah, that they often keep liberal views after becoming Orthodox.

“These very important findings demonstrate that it is hazardous to generalize about the Orthodox community’s political leanings,” concludes Dr. Dov S. Zakheim, former U.S. Undersecretary of Defense. Looking at Orthodoxy as a unified group hides the huge differences between the Modern Orthodox and Hareidi communities. The differences between the two groups are larger than those between blue states and red states.

To that end, it is our hope that this study will help us to better understand the diverse group known as “Orthodox.”

This research was done to help answer such questions. Nishma Research accepted no funding for this research and covered all of the costs. The political questions employ the language used in the major national political surveys, and we added questions relating to Israel (which are not included in most political surveys).

Mark Trencher is founder and president of Nishma Research (www.nishma.com), which conducts research in the Orthodox community.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.