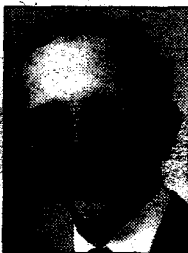


# Jewish Votes Still Matter

**J**oe, will you win the election?" a fellow congregant asked Sen. Joseph Lieberman, according to a probably apocryphal story making the rounds just before Nov. 7.

"*B'li nader*" — "without taking any vow" — he is supposed to have replied. Of course, the Hebrew phrase also carried with it a revealing second meaning in this closely contested election year. He could win handily, he knew, but only "without Nader."

Without Ralph Nader, America would have had its first Jewish vice president-elect on Nov. 7. Adding Nader's 2 percent of the vote back into the Gore column, especially in Florida, would have transformed a cliffhanger into a sure Democratic win. The pundits, at least in this respect, proved right: a vote for Nader, especially in a few closely contested contests, turned out to be a decisive vote for



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nation's largest Arab-American community, the idea that Arab voters might tip the balance in Bush's favor hardly seemed farfetched.

When the polls closed, though, the Arab bloc vote had failed to materialize. Not only did Al Gore win Michigan, thanks to a strong showing by organized labor, but Republican Sen. Spencer Abraham, a strong supporter of Arab causes and himself of Lebanese descent, went down to defeat. Whatever debts candidates owe in the wake of this disputed election, they are not to Arab Americans. As a political pressure group, their bark far exceeded their bite.

By contrast, the Jewish vote did play a decisive role in the 2000 election. Jewish voters, according to the exit polls, voted for Gore at a higher rate than any other white ethnic or religious group. Gore also won a higher percentage of votes from Jews — fully 80 percent — than he did from Asians, Hispanics and even gay and lesbian

would prove to be. They expected that in the privacy of the voting booth their neighbors would vote their prejudices — against the Jewish candidate and his liberal presidential running mate. Lieberman, they feared, would then be blamed for the ticket's defeat, dampening the fortunes of Jews in national politics for decades to come.

As it turned out, however, those fears proved groundless. No known "anti-Semitic backlash" of any kind affected the race. Indeed, according to exit polls, only 8 percent of the electorate thought that Lieberman's religion made him a worse vice presidential candidate. The rest thought his religion had no effect one way or the other, or even made him a better candidate for the job.

In the 21st century, it seems, anti-Semitism hardly factors into contemporary American political life. Being a Jew — even a traditionally observant Jew like Joseph Lieberman — no longer poses an insuperable barrier to success.

Nervous Jews also worried that Arab-American voters would emerge this year as an important political voting bloc. Muslim organizations had boasted that Muslims were more numerous in America than Jews. Arab American Political Action Committee officially endorsed Bush, claiming that bin Laden was too strong a supporter of Is-

"We have the votes and are no longer sitting on the sidelines," one Arab American publicly warned.

Michigan, home of the

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Nor, as some feared, did Jews vote in large numbers for Nader. He received only 1 percent of Jewish votes, according to the exit polls, though some of the "no religion" and "other religion" voters who supported Nader may well have been of Jewish descent as well.

In any case, as so often before and again this year, Jews formed the anomaly in American politics: They earned like the wealthiest of America's voters, and voted for Gore like the most disadvantaged ones.

Further evidence of Gore's debt to America's Jews may be seen in the electoral college. More than two-thirds of the electoral votes that Gore won came from eight of the nine states with the highest overall percentages of Jewish voters: New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, California, Pennsylvania and Illinois. In some of these states, the Jewish vote arguably made the difference that helped carry Gore to statewide victory. Without these states, he would have lost in a landslide.

The only state with a large Jewish minority (4.2 percent of the population) that Gore failed to capture on Nov. 7, of course, was the one that became mired in dispute — Florida. But even there, the fact that the race proved so incredibly tight was heavily due to the Jewish vote. Those South Florida counties where Gore seemed best were precisely the ones where the bulk of Florida's Jews live.


For the Democrats, then, one critical lesson of the 2000 election is that Jews still matter. And for Jews, the critical lesson is that their fears are overblown. In four years' time, who knows? A Democratic presidential candidate — even a Jewish one — could easily carry



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