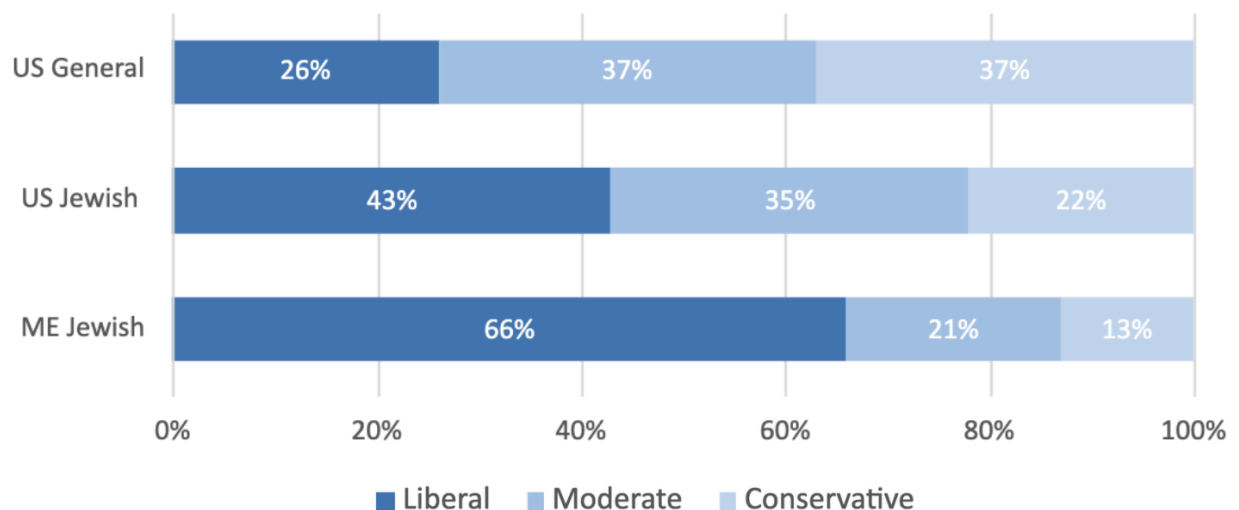


The Distinctly Liberal Political Orientation of Maine's Jewish Community

Quinlan Daly, JS 221: The Jews of Maine, May 18, 2026

A significantly higher percentage of Maine's Jewish community identifies as liberal compared to that of both the US Jewish population and the general US population, as can be seen in Figure 1. This paper analyzes political self-identification among Maine's Jewish community in comparison to the broader US Jewish population. It explores several factors that commonly affect political orientation to determine what role, if any, they play in the community's distinctly liberal stance. Furthermore, the paper examines a few potential hypotheses and discusses whether or not, and to what extent, they can explain this phenomenon. Lastly, qualitative data gathered from interviews with two liberal Jewish Mainers elucidates how they view the connection between their Jewish identity and their political identity. Synthesizing their personal testimonies with previously published research, this section explores how that connection may shape the distinct liberal identity of Maine's Jewish community.

Figure 1: *Political Orientation Breakdown by Population*



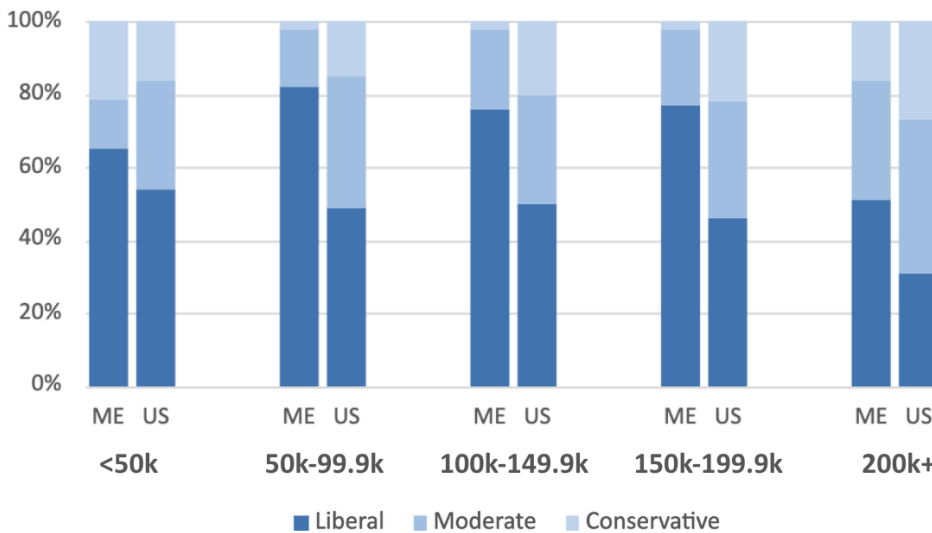
Note. Data for US General and US Jewish from *American Jewish Population Estimates 2020: Politics and Partisanship*, by Tighe et al., 2022, Brandeis University; and data for ME Jewish from *Jewish Maine: The 2024 Community Study [Data Set]*, by Boxer et al., 2025, Brandeis University.

Outside Factors

Several factors outside of religion often play a role in one's political views, such as income and education level, yet neither of these factors appear to answer the question of why Maine's Jewish community is so disproportionately liberal.

While not a universal rule, those with higher incomes tend to lean more conservative. Despite this, the income distribution of Maine's Jewish community does not seem to play a significant role in how liberal the community is. As can be seen in Figure 2, within every income bracket, a higher percentage of Jews in Maine identify as liberal compared to US Jews within the same income bracket. The data shows that, while Jews in Maine do somewhat follow the general trend of the higher income brackets containing more conservative people, a significant percentage of Jews in Maine still identify as liberal even within higher income brackets. Therefore, the high percentage of Maine's Jewish community who identify as liberal cannot be explained through any claims regarding the income distribution of Maine's Jewish community. Interestingly, political conservatism is more prevalent among low-income Jewish Mainers than it is in the broader U.S. Jewish population within the same income bracket.

Figure 2: *Political Orientation Breakdown of Maine and US Jews by Income Level*

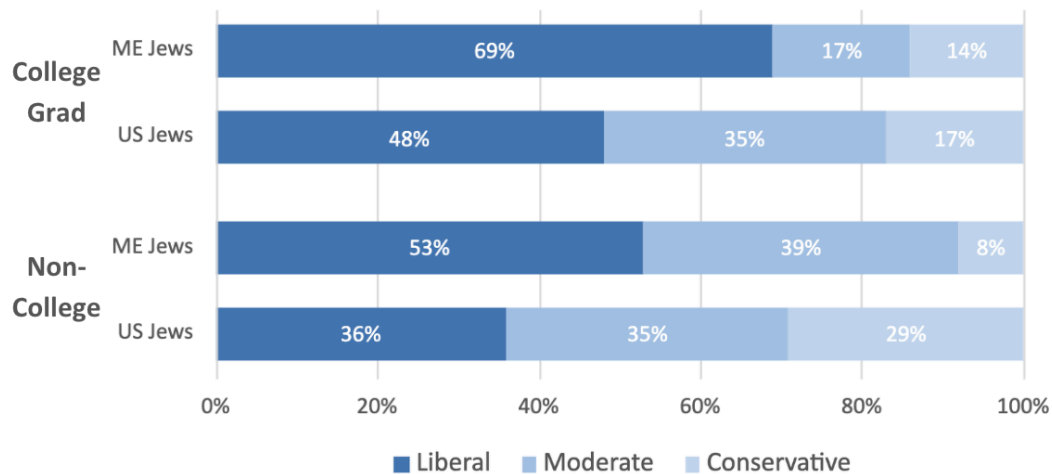


Note. Data for US Jews adapted from Jewish Americans in 2020 [Data Set], by Pew Research Center, 2021; and data for ME Jews adapted from Jewish Maine: The 2024 Community Study [Data Set], by Boxer et al., 2025, Brandeis University. Analysis and comparative cross-tabulation performed by the author.

Education level has emerged as one of the most significant predictors of political affiliation and voting behavior in the United States in the 21st century. Those with higher levels of education, specifically those who hold a 4-year college degree or higher, tend to lean more liberal while those without a 4-year college degree often lean more conservative (Pew Research Center, 2025). Education level, however, does not appear to be a key factor in how liberal Maine's Jewish community is. Within both the sub-group of Maine's Jewish community that have obtained a 4-year degree and the sub-group that have not obtained a 4-year degree, the percentage of people who identify as liberal is higher than the percentage of people who identify as liberal in the corresponding sub-groups of the US Jewish population, as can be seen in Figure

3. Furthermore, it is notable that liberalism is more prevalent among non-degree holding Jewish Mainers than among college educated Jews in the greater US.

Figure 3: *Political Orientation Breakdown of Maine and US Jews by Education Level*



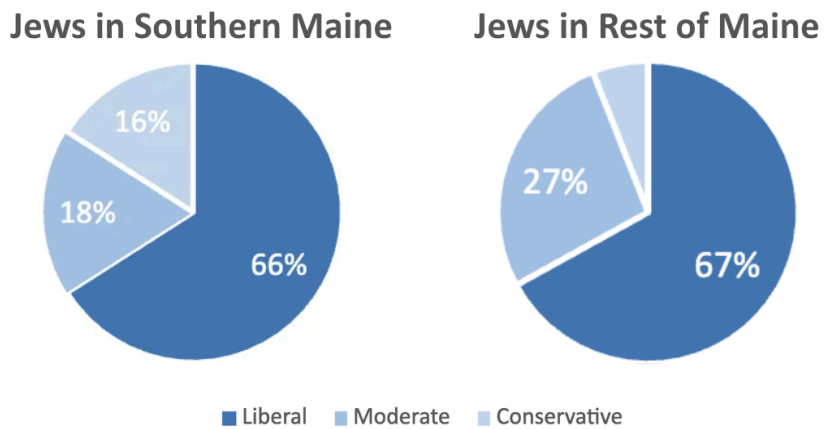
Note. Data for US Jews from *American Jewish Population Estimates 2020: Politics and Partisanship*, by Tighe et al., 2022, Brandeis University; and data for ME Jews adapted from *Jewish Maine: The 2024 Community Study [Data Set]*, by Boxer et al., 2025, Brandeis University. Categorization and analysis of ME Jews data performed by the author.

Initial Hypothesis

One might think that Maine's Jewish community is more liberal due to the general political climate of the surrounding area—particularly in Southern Maine (here defined as Cumberland, Sagadahoc, and York counties) versus Rest of Maine (the remaining thirteen counties). If the hypothesis that surrounding non-Jewish politics dictates Jewish political identity, one would expect that a higher percentage of Jews would identify as conservative in Rest of Maine. In reality, the contrary is true, as can be seen in Figure 4. A roughly equal percentage of

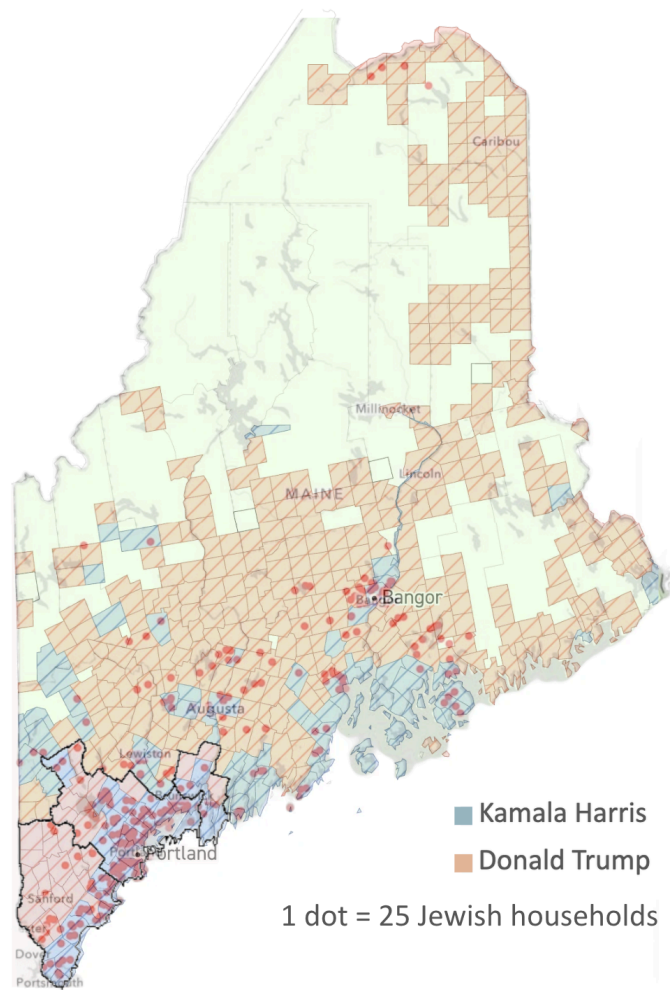
Jews in Southern and Rest of Maine identify as liberal, but higher percentage of Jews in Southern Maine identify as conservative as compared to those in Rest of Maine, sixteen percent compared to only six percent respectively.

Figure 4: *Political Orientation Breakdown of Maine Jews by Region*



Note. Data adapted from *Jewish Maine: The 2024 Community Study* [Data Set], by Boxer et al., 2025, Brandeis University. Analysis performed by the author.

Figure 5: 2024 Election Results and Jewish Household Density in Maine



Note. Election results map adapted from *Maine Election Results 2024: Live Map* [Map], by Politico; and map of Jewish household distribution adapted from *Jewish Maine: The 2024 Community Study*, by Boxer et al., 2025, Brandeis University. Image overlay and spatial synthesis performed by the author.

Figure 5 is a map of the rough distribution of Jewish households in Maine overlaid on top of a map of the 2024 presidential elections results. Each Maine town is shaded depending on which candidate won it, with Kamala Harris having won those that are blue and Donald Trump

having won those that are red. Each red dot on the map represents 25 Jewish households, however the distribution of them is an estimate and is not fully reflective of reality. The community study did not survey every single Jewish household in Maine, and beyond that some of the dots were placed approximately due to the lack of Jewish households in some parts of Maine.

As can be seen on Figure 5, Jews are more concentrated around the more liberal areas of Maine and around larger cities such as Portland and Bangor. It would be interesting to look at how the breakdown might change if it was possible to look exclusively at those who live north of Bangor, to see if Jews in who live in what is generally considered the more conservative part of Maine truly are less conservative or if the data is being skewed by more liberal hotspots such as Bangor and Augusta. Unfortunately this is not possible, as the Community Study was not able to release any more detailed location information for privacy reasons.

Potential Explanation

One potential explanation as to why such a large percentage of Maine's Jewish community identifies as liberal is Maine's denominational composition. The percentage of Jews who identify as Orthodox in Maine is smaller than the percentage nationally, as can be seen in Figure 6. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Figure 7, Orthodox Jews in the US tend to identify as politically conservative and only rarely identify as liberal. While these two factors may seem like they would combine to explain the distinct liberal leaning of Maine's Jewish community, they cannot fully explain it. When looking at the breakdown of political orientation for the US Jewish population, the percentage of people who identify as liberal only increases by two percent after removing the Orthodox population from the data (from 43.46% to 45.47%) while the percentage

who identify as conservative decreases by around two and a half percent (from 21.44% to 18.90%). Therefore it cannot be concluded that Maine's Jewish population is more liberal than the US Jewish population simply due to the lack of Orthodox Jews, as Maine's Jewish community is still more liberal than the than non-Orthodox US Jewish community.

Figure 6: *Jewish Denominational Identification in Maine and the United States*

	Maine Jews	US Jews
	%	%
Orthodox	3	9
Conservative	16	17
Reform	23	37
Other denomination	5	4
No denomination	53	32

Note. Data for US Jews from *Jewish Americans in 2020*, by Pew Research Center, 2021; and data for Maine Jews from *Jewish Maine: The 2024 Community Study*, by Boxer et al., 2025, Brandeis University.

Figure 7: *Political Ideology of US Jews by Denomination*

	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	No answer
	%	%	%	%
Orthodox	9	26	60	4
Conservative	39	36	23	2
Reform	55	37	8	<1
No denomination	61	29	10	1

Note. From *Jewish Americans in 2020*, by Pew Research Center, 2021.

Alternatively, rather than a lack of Orthodox Jews, this trend may have more to do with the prevalence of Jews who identify with no denomination. Fifty-three percent of Maine Jews say they do not identify as any denomination compared to only 32% of US Jews. This is significant because, as seen in Figure 7, across the US those who identify with no denomination are the most likely to identify as liberal. It is hard to dive much deeper into the data surrounding those who identify as "No denomination" as the options for denomination vary from survey to survey and therefore it is difficult to be confident that data and conclusions can easily translate from one survey to another.

Interviews and Qualitative Data

Stepping away from quantitative data, interviews with two Jewish liberals in Maine shed light on some other potential answers as to why Maine's Jewish community is so distinctly liberal. Sam Zager, a member of the Maine House of Representatives, and Rachel Ackoff, the campaigns director for the Maine People's Alliance, both sat down to discuss their experiences and how they view the connection between their Jewish identity and their political identity.

One factor that was brought up was feeling like an outsider while growing up due to being Jewish. These experiences have allowed for greater empathy and solidarity with others who face oppression, which, in turn, have influenced their values and by extension their political identity. These values often end up leading individuals to align more with the label liberal, as many view the core of the liberal political philosophy to be centered around societal equity, equal protection under the law for all, and utilizing government intervention to support marginalized groups. Furthermore, a study has found that when observing others' suffering, liberals exhibited a significantly stronger neural empathy response as compared to conservatives (Zebarjadi, 2023).

These findings reinforce the relationship between facing discrimination due to being Jewish and identifying as liberal, and indicate the connection is not confined to subjective reports of empathy but has an objective neural basis.

One specific Jewish text both Ackoff and Zager mentioned having an effect on their political identity is Pirkei Avot 2:16, which says "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it." This passage resonated with both of them due to its reinforcement of the idea that, while it is not one person's obligation to fix everything, that does not mean anyone can simply walk away from problems. Instead, each individual has a duty to do what they can for the betterment of their community and the world. For Rachel Ackoff, it's "...really helpful to me in realizing that the struggle is long, but I got to stick with it."

Lastly, Zager mentioned that Judaism's teachings of the value of the collective has shaped his political identity, explaining that "'Judaism teaches us the importance of the collective...certainly individuals have responsibilities, but also we exist as part of a community and I approach political questions similarly, that we are better together.'" This holds particularly true in Maine, where the community is small and tight-knit. There is a stronger call to be conscientious of how one's words and actions will impact others, as information and knowledge of other's behavior quickly spreads throughout the small community. Ackoff spoke on how Maine's Jewish community being smaller affects people's political identities, saying "There's a desire for people to stay in relationship with each other—not offend people, not make permanent enemies—to have differences of opinions, but folks are generally trying to stay in community with each other in Maine." This desire to maintain amicable relationships, even between those with vastly differing views, promotes constructive dialogue as opposed to heated conflicts. Psychological research has shown that not only is such dialogue more productive than conflicts

(Anderson, 2026), but such civil conversations can result in greater attitude depolarization and an increased likelihood of viewpoint changes than many believe (Kardas et al., 2025). Broad national trends that typically draw many Jews toward liberal politics, combined with the preference within Maine's Jewish community for civil discourse, potentially helps to explain why the community within Maine is so distinctly liberal. Because many Jews in Maine already identify as liberal, such an emphasis on polite dialogue may serve as a catalyst for shifting the political opinions of more conservative members of the community, thereby increasing the percentage who identify as liberal.

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