

# BLACK AND JEWISH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS A House Undivided

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*Contrary to the growing public impression that the African-American and Jewish communities no longer share common values and interests, an analysis of voting patterns in the 103rd Congress found that black and Jewish members of Congress are closely allied on basic issues of concern to their communities. This alliance has continued in the first months of the 104th Republican-dominated Congress in which both Jewish and African-American members opposed the items in the Contract with America in much greater percentages than did members of the House overall.*

As part of its long-standing interest in black-Jewish relations, the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress) initiated an analysis of how Jewish members of the House of Representatives voted on key issues of concern to the African-American community and how African-American members of Congress voted on issues of special concern to the Jewish community.

This examination was undertaken for several interrelated reasons. A number of recent controversies have suggested a breakdown in relations between blacks and Jews. Well-publicized controversies concerning Louis Farrakhan, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, and Leonard Jeffries have led some to conclude that Jews are no longer committed to supporting the black community's agenda and that blacks are no longer committed to supporting the Jewish community's agenda. There is a growing public impression that these two communities no longer share common values and interests. Is this indeed the case, or is it a falsehood perpetuated in part by those interested in exacerbating conflict between these historic allies?

We recognize, of course, that a study of voting patterns of members of Congress is not a definitive answer to that question. African-American and Jewish members of Congress do not formally represent those

communities; they represent the people of the Congressional districts who elected them. Nonetheless, we believe this analysis is an important reflection of the shared concerns of the two communities. In the African-American community in particular, members of the Congressional Black Caucus are widely recognized as national leaders. In both cases, there is a close working relationship between the communities and the members of Congress, and in both cases, for the most part, the members' positions are in line with those of their communities. For example, Jewish members of Congress, like American Jews in general, have tended to be among the strongest supporters of church/state separation, whereas African-American members of Congress, like African-Americans in general, have tended to be among the strongest supporters of programs to benefit low-income households.

## ANALYSIS OF VOTES OF JEWISH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON ISSUES OF SPECIAL CONCERN TO THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

### Methodology

In an analysis of how Jewish members of Congress voted on issues important to the black community, a critical methodological

problem is how to determine the issues for examination. Focusing on the wrong ones would obviously lead to incorrect or misleading results.

Fortunately for our researchers, this problem was overcome by an analysis published by the Washington-based Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. The Joint Center, a prominent black-led think tank that is highly regarded for its political and economic analyses that focus on the black community, recently published a "report card" examining how certain representatives voted on 10 key issues during the 103rd Congress in the latter part of 1993 and 1994. The 102 members of Congress chosen for the report represent constituencies with at least 15 percent black residents. On the issues covered, the Joint Center concluded that the votes "of most of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) were relatively uniform."

From a methodological viewpoint, it is a major advantage that the votes to be analyzed were chosen by an organization active in the black community and not by a Jewish organization. Had the latter been the case, the issues would more likely be subject to skepticism by readers who concluded that the choices may be biased in one direction or another. A second major methodological advantage of having the votes chosen by another institution is that doing so facilitates our own work, since we are required neither to choose the particular issues on which we will focus nor the specific votes that are the subject of analysis.

It should be noted that this study analyzes votes from the 103rd Congress. The 104th Congress, which took office in January 1995, has seen a radical reshaping of the political picture in Washington, as the Republican party gained control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Although it is too soon to make any firm conclusions about voting by African-American and Jewish members in this new era, some preliminary thoughts are included at the end of this analysis.

### **Findings**

These ten issues appear in the report card of the Joint Center: funding private schools, college loan default exemption, Brady bill, alternatives for sentencing young people, expansion of prison construction and limiting parole, low-income housing, CBC's alternative budget, military spending cuts, and statehood for the District of Columbia (Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

Jewish members of Congress were far more likely to support votes by the Congressional Black Caucus than the other members of the House of Representatives. Of the ten votes in question, 42 percent of the non-Jewish, non-black, and non-Hispanic members (hereinafter referred to as non-minorities) of the House of Representatives voted in a manner consistent with the overwhelming majority of the CBC. For the Jewish members of Congress the figure was 72 percent, a figure substantially higher than that for the non-minorities. It is worth noting that for both the Jewish and Hispanic delegation, an average of 72% of their votes were consistent with the actions of a majority of the Congressional Black Caucus.

On issue after issue, the Jewish representatives voted in a manner similar to the members of the Congressional Black Caucus. For example, 100 percent of the Jewish (32 members) and black (35 members) members voted in support of promoting low-income housing. For the non-minority members of the House, the figure was 69 percent.

It is important to note that there is no formal, organized caucus of Jewish members. The 32 Jewish members do not vote as cohesively as do the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, in large part because there is a significantly higher percentage of Republicans among the Jewish members (4 of 32, or 13 percent) than among the

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<sup>1</sup>In all but two of these ten cases, a vote for the bill or amendment was consistent with action taken by the overwhelming majority of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Table 1. Votes of Special Concern to the African-American Community

Issue	Roll Call Number	Vote	CBC Position
National Service (HR 2010)	379	(1993) 275-152	Y
Low Income Housing (HR 2668)	389	(1993) 309-106	Y
Military Spending Cuts (HR 2401)	412	(1993) 160-272	Y
Educational Choice (HR 1804)	494	(1993) 130-300	N
Gun Control/Brady Bill (HR 1025)	564	(1993) 238-189	Y
Sentencing Alternatives (HR 3351)	584	(1993) 238-179	Y
DC Statehood (HR 51)	595	(1993) 153-277	Y
CBC Alternative Budget (HconRes 218)	54	(1994) 81-326	Y
College Loans (S 2004)	102	(1994) 283-136	Y
Prison Construction (HR 4092)	124	(1994) 377-50	N

Congressional Black Caucus (1 of 39, or 3 percent).<sup>2</sup> Twenty-two of 39 CBC members (56 percent) voted with the Caucus every time they voted. Only one member, the Caucus's lone Republican, voted with the Caucus less than 70 percent of the time.

#### Education Issues

Ninety percent of the Jewish delegation and 97 percent of the black delegation voted against federal funding of private schools, including parochial schools. The figure for the non-minority members of the House was 64 percent. In addition, 94 percent of Jewish representatives and 100 percent of black delegates voted for an extension of the exemption from student loan ineligibility for historically black colleges, institutions that enroll many loan-dependent minority students. This position was supported by 61 percent of non-minority voting House members.

#### Areas of Disagreement

There were two major disagreements between black and Jewish members of Congress; these concerned building more prisons and the CBC alternative budget. However, even on these issues, the percentage of Jewish votes in support of action by the Congressional Black Caucus was far higher

than the percentage of votes by the non-minority members.

Of the ten issues reviewed, the bill increasing federal grants to states for prison construction revealed the most disagreement between Jewish members and the CBC. Sixty-six percent of the Congressional Black Caucus voted to oppose this bill in contrast to 13 percent of the Jewish delegation; this was the lowest level of agreement between the two delegations. However, the 13 percent was more than double the 5 percent support figure of the non-minority delegates.

The second major issue on which there was substantial disagreement was the CBC's alternative budget, which was supported by 97 percent of the black representatives and 22 percent of Jewish representatives. However, the latter figure was again more than double the 9 percent for the non-minority representatives.

#### Analysis

How then does one explain why the voting pattern of the Jewish members of Congress differed so dramatically from the rest of the non-minority House members? It is clear that the difference is not explained by the Jewish members having a black constituency. Most Jewish members of Congress have relatively few black constituents. Using Joint Center data, only 5 of the 32 members have a black constituency of 15

<sup>2</sup>One Jewish member is an Independent.

percent or higher. For the rest of the House of Representatives, only 24 percent had a black constituency that was a minimum of 15 percent of the population.

More relevant is that, of the 32 Jewish representatives, 27 or 84 percent were members of the Democratic Party (one of the five non-Democratic Jewish members of Congress is an Independent). For the 39-member black delegation, 97 percent or all but one were Democrats. The high Jewish representation in the Democratic party is certainly not surprising. For two generations, exit poll after exit poll and survey after survey have demonstrated that there is a much higher identification by American Jews with the Democratic party than with the Republican party. Since party voting is still more common than crossover voting, the higher identification of blacks and Jews as Democrats explains much of the similarity in their voting. That does not, however, detract from the central finding of this report. The fact that most Jewish members of Congress (and most American Jews) and most African-American members of Congress (and most African-Americans) choose to identify as Democrats is significant in and of itself. That party identification reflects shared values and common concerns.

A further indication that this is the case becomes apparent when one separates out the Jewish Republican members of the House and examines the voting by Jewish Democrats. When this is done, we find that an average of 78 percent of the Jewish members of Congress voted in a manner consistent with the CBC. For the non-minority Democratic House members, the figure is 73 percent.

### **Conclusion**

Our findings demonstrate that Jewish support for actions by the Congressional Black Caucus was very high. The 72 percent average of support for those issues exceeded the 49 percent average of the total House and the 42 percent average by the non-minority members of the House.

## **ANALYSIS OF VOTES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON ISSUES OF SPECIAL CONCERN TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY**

### **Methodology**

Selecting votes of special concern to the American Jewish community presented a different challenge. Rather than relying on an outside organization, AJCongress selected ten votes to represent the priority concerns of the community.

The following issues are covered: foreign aid (three votes), school prayer (three votes), "educational choice," the death penalty, gun control (the "Brady bill") and the Bosnian arms embargo (Table 2).<sup>3</sup> The focus on foreign aid and school prayer reflects the priority placed by the Jewish community on those two issues. The other issues, which enjoy broad support within the American Jewish community, were legislative priorities for AJCongress in this session of Congress.

In order to facilitate comparison between votes of special concern to the two communities, we have followed the criteria used by the Joint Center in selecting votes for inclusion. Only recorded floor votes were used, for example, rather than co-sponsorship of legislation. That means that issues that were not debated on the House floor, such as health care, or that were passed by voice vote, such as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, are not included.

### **Findings**

On vote after vote, black members of Congress supported the Jewish community position in significantly larger percentages than did other members of Congress. Although the average House member voted in support of the AJCongress position 53 percent of the time, the average CBC member sup-

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<sup>3</sup>It is worth noting that the Joint Center included two of the same votes—on educational choice and the Brady bill—in its selection of votes of concern to the African-American community.

Table 2. Votes of Special Concern to the American Jewish Community

Issue	Roll Call Number	Vote		AJCongress Position
Foreign Aid (FY 94)	240	(1993)	309-111	Y
Educational Choice (HR 1804)	494	(1993)	130-300	N
Gun Control (HR 1025)	564	(1993)	238-189	Y
School Prayer (HR 1804)	30	(1994)	367-55	N
School Prayer (HR 6)	75	(1994)	345-64	N
School Prayer (HR 1804)	85	(1994)	195-232	N
Death Penalty (HR 4092)	107	(1994)	111-314	Y
Foreign Aid (FY 95) (HR 4426)	208	(1994)	337-87	Y
Bosnia Arms Embargo (HR 4301)	222	(1994)	244-178	Y
Foreign Aid (Conference Report) (HR 4426)	376	(1994)	341-85	Y

ported the AJCongress position 79 percent of the times they voted.<sup>4</sup>

*Foreign Aid*

Probably no issue enjoys a greater consensus within the Jewish community than support for foreign aid. Our study included three foreign aid votes and clearly demonstrated the overwhelming support of the members of the CBC. On the three votes, 94 percent of CBC members supported the AJCongress position, a percentage significantly closer to the 97 percent of Jewish members supporting foreign aid than the 74 percent of non-minority members and the 78 percent of the House overall voting with the AJCongress position.

*School Prayer*

Our study included three votes concerning school prayer, which the Jewish community has traditionally opposed as a violation of the wall of separation between church and state. We have long argued that people who care deeply about religion should be among those in the front lines of opposition to government-sponsored or organized prayer.

<sup>4</sup>The average Jewish member voted with the AJCongress position 76 percent of the time, reflecting the higher percentage of Republicans in the Jewish contingent. (Among Jewish Democrats, the average support score was 82 percent.)

The members of the CBC overwhelmingly agree. On the three votes, 60 percent of the CBC members voting supported the AJCongress position, more than twice the overall House score of 28 percent. Thus, the percentage of the CBC voting against school prayer was significantly closer than the overall House percentage to the 61 percent of Jewish members and the 69 percent of Jewish Democratic members, who voted with the AJCongress position.

Two of the school prayer votes were particularly interesting. The closest, and probably most important, of the votes we examined was Roll Call vote #85, a motion to recommit a major education reform initiative to conference. The debate was intense, and the motion was turned back by a 195-232 margin. Overall, 54 percent of House members voted against the motion to recommit (and in support of AJCongress's position). Every CBC member save the Coalition's lone Republican voted against the motion. *If CBC members had voted for the motion in the same percentage as the non-minority members of the House did, the motion would have been approved, and the bill, in all likelihood, would have died in conference.*

On Roll Call vote #75, which was an up or down vote on an amendment that would have withheld federal funds from any school district that prohibited "voluntary constitutionally protected" prayer, the

AJCongress-supported position drew only 64 votes in the House (16 percent). In contrast, 42 percent of CBC members supported that position.

#### *Educational Choice*

On educational choice, both black and Jewish members overwhelmingly opposed an amendment that would have authorized \$400 million for demonstration projects, including school choice plans, and required 25 percent of federal education funds to be spent on school choice programs, including private and parochial schools. The amendment was defeated in the House, with 97 percent of CBC members and 90 percent of Jewish members voting against the amendment (and in support of the AJCongress position), far ahead of the 64 percent score for the non-minority members of the House.

#### *Death Penalty*

CBC members also supported the AJCongress position on an amendment that would have replaced the numerous death penalty provisions in the crime bill with the penalty of life in prison without parole. Although the amendment was defeated by a vote of 111-314, 86 percent of the CBC members supported it, as did 41 percent of the Jewish members (44 percent of the Jewish Democrats).

#### *Gun Control*

Support for the Brady bill, which mandated a five-day waiting period before the purchase of a handgun, was all but unanimous. Only two Democrats joined the CBC's lone Republican member in voting against the bill. This result is not surprising—crime is an issue on which blacks and Jews, who tend to live in urban areas, have clear-cut common interests.

#### *Bosnia Arms Embargo*

There was one exception to the pattern of CBC support significantly outstripping that

of the overall House membership—the vote on lifting the Bosnian arms embargo. Lifting the embargo was supported by 58 percent of the full house and only 47 percent of the Congressional Black Caucus members, whereas 72 percent of the Jewish members voted to lift the embargo.

#### *Analysis: Effect of Party Affiliation*

One possible explanation of the support demonstrated by members of the Congressional Black Caucus on issues of concern to the Jewish community is that such support is simply a function of the overwhelmingly Democratic membership of the CBC. A closer analysis shows that this is not so and that in nearly every case CBC support ran significantly higher than support by non-black Democratic members of the House. The average support score for non-CBC Democratic members was 64 percent, in contrast to the 79 percent support score for CBC members (Table 3).

#### **Conclusion**

It has long been known that members of the Congressional Black Caucus, as a group, support foreign aid in general and aid to Israel, in particular, in overwhelming numbers. What is important about this study is that it demonstrates conclusively that that support is seen on the full array of issues of concern to the Jewish community.

The support of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus for the Jewish community's traditional defense of the wall of separation between church and state is particularly striking. In this study, this support manifests itself in the tremendous differential between CBC support and overall House support for the various school prayer proposals. Among the likely reasons for this phenomenon is the fact that members of minority groups share the experience of feeling apart from the mainstream and will work to see that public schools do not foster divisions along racial or religious lines.

*Table 3. Relationship between Party Affiliation and CBC Support on Votes of Special Concern to the American Jewish Community*

Issue	Full House Support %	House Dems Support %	w/o CBC Support %	CBC Support %
Foreign Aid 1	74	81	81	83
Ed. Choice	70	100	100	97
Gun Control	56	73	69	92
School Prayer 1	13	22	19	41
School prayer 2	16	26	24	42
School Prayer 3	54	88	87	97
Death Penalty	26	41	33	86
Foreign Aid 2	79	90	88	100
Bosnia Arms	58	47	47	47
Foreign Aid 3	80	91	89	100
<b>Average</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>79</b>

**SUMMARY**

Contrary to the growing impression that blacks and Jews no longer share a common core of interests and values, this study demonstrates that black and Jewish members of the U.S. House of Representatives are closely allied on basic issues of concern to their respective communities. Although this may be somewhat surprising to a public that is frequently apprised by the media of hostility between these communities, it is in fact but a continuation of the cooperation that has existed for generations.

This is not to say that there are not communal differences on some issues and events. What this study demonstrates is that there is enough agreement between our communities to conclude that the frequent reports of the death of black-Jewish cooperation are incorrect and that there are areas of harmony that can serve as part of the foundation to bring us closer together. While building on this agreement will not produce the bold newspaper headlines that regularly announce the appearances of various bigots, it is that work that will revitalize a partnership that has done so much for our communities and for the nation.

**POSTSCRIPT: THE 104TH CONGRESS' FIRST 100 DAYS: PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF BLACK/JEWISH COOPERATION IN CONGRESS**

The aftershocks of the November 1994 election, which brought the Republican party to power in the house of Representatives and the Senate, are still being felt. A very preliminary analysis of key votes thus far in the 104th Congress shows that the alliance between African-American and Jewish members of Congress remains strong and may even be stronger than it was during the 103rd Congress.

In the critical votes during the 104th Congress's much-vaunted "First Hundred Days," on issues addressed in the House Republican's "Contract with America," African-American and Jewish members were far more likely than other members to vote against the "Contract" issues. Again, partisanship plays a role—most black and Jewish members are Democrats, and Democrats were more likely to oppose the "Contract" than were House members overall. Yet, party identification reflects the shared concerns of the two communities.

On the Balanced Budget Amendment vote (Roll Call vote 51, January 26, 1995), for example, although 69 percent of all House members supported the Amendment, the percentage of support from the Jewish members (32 percent) was less than half that, and only 8 percent of blacks supported it. On legislation to make it more difficult for prisoners on death row to have their appeals heard (Roll Call vote 109, February 8, 1995), well over two-thirds of the full House supported the legislation, whereas under half (46 percent) of the Jewish members and just a few of the African-American members (2 percent) did so.

This pattern is repeated on most other votes during the First Hundred Days. In general, both Jewish and African-American members opposed the items in the Contract with America by far larger percentages than did overall members of the House. In nearly every case, a far higher percentage of black members opposed the items than did

Jewish members. It seems that although both African-American and Jewish members of Congress are increasingly in the minority, the African-American community is particularly isolated.

The early days of the 104th Congress have seen an increase in consultation and coordination between African-American and Jewish members of Congress. Most tellingly, they joined together to force the House leadership to rethink a proposal to slash foreign aid in general and to devastate aid to Africa, in particular. Despite the fact that aid to Israel (and Egypt) was "held harmless," Jewish members joined their African-American colleagues in opposing the bill.

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