

# JEWES

## Religion in the Public Square:

Attitudes of American Jews  
in Comparative Perspective

*Survey II*

Steven M. Cohen



*The opinions expressed in this report  
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# **Religion in the Public Square:**

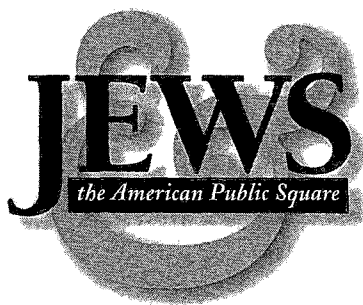
## **Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective**

### **SURVEY II**

*Follow-up Survey of American Jewish Attitudes  
Toward Religion in the Public Square,  
In the Aftermath of the Lieberman Nomination  
September/October 2000*

Sponsored by The Center for Jewish Community Studies  
Investigator: Prof. Steven M. Cohen  
The Hebrew University

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JEWS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE is a three-year project of communal dialogue, research and publication devoted to exploring the relationship between the faith and culture of American Jews and their civic engagement. Initiated by a major grant from THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, the project seeks to foster greater public understanding among both Jews and non-Jews of the role of religion in America's ongoing public conversation.

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# INTRODUCTION

This survey is a follow up to an extensive survey of American Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes toward religion and the public square released in June 2000. In August 2000, Peter Steinfelds, writing about the initial study in *The New York Times*, suggested that JEWS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE commission a second survey to gauge the impact of Sen. Lieberman's nomination and campaign on Jewish opinion. Our first study showed quite clearly that American Jews, far more than their non-Jewish counterparts, had deep suspicions about letting religion play too great a role in American public life. How would Sen. Lieberman, chosen in part for his public persona as a traditional moralist, affect American Jews? Would his dramatic use of religious rhetoric and traditional moral themes alter Jews' abiding discomfort with public religion? To answer these questions, Prof. Steven M. Cohen of the Hebrew University prepared a follow-up questionnaire. During September and October 2000 over 1300 respondents, all of whom participated in the first survey, responded to it. A concise analysis of the relevant data is presented here.

Although the survey did not detect any dramatic shifts in attitude, one can detect some interesting variations. On certain issues, such as the involvement of churches and synagogues in political matters or support for tuition vouchers, both Jews and non-Jews seem to have become more skeptical. The data arguably show an increased wariness, at least among Jews, regarding the presence of religion in public affairs. The high visibility of religion in the campaign may have occasioned a small backlash. Far from having moved them toward more tolerance for religion in public life, Sen. Lieberman's campaign seems to have convinced many Jews to continue to oppose it.

I would like to thank Prof. Cohen for his preparation of these materials under the pressure of a pre-election deadline. I would also like to thank THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS for their support of JEWS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE. The findings expressed in this study are the views of its author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Trusts.

Alan Mittleman, Director  
JEWS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE

# Religion in the Public Square:

## Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective

American Jews reacted highly favorably to the nomination of Sen. Joseph Lieberman as the Democratic candidate for Vice-President. Nevertheless, they remain as committed as before the nomination to the strict separation of Church and State. More than others, they seek to keep religion out of public life in general, and politics in particular. In fact, if anything, the over-time evidence points to a possible small intensification of separationist attitudes among American Jews (and Gentiles) following the Lieberman nomination.

These findings emerge from a survey of a national sample of American Jews (N= 837) and a demographically adjusted sample of non-Jews (whites only, fewer Southerners, more highly educated than the American population generally; N = 501) in September/October, 2000. The same respondents answered a comparable mail-back survey in February, permitting a comparison of over-time trends. (The response rates in the fall were 84% for Jews and 73% for the Gentile respondents. All those receiving the fall questionnaire had responded to the previous survey in February.)

Jews more enthusiastically welcomed the Lieberman nomination than Gentiles. At the same time, Jews remain insecure about their acceptance in American society, perceiving antisemitism substantially more frequently than Gentiles. More than Gentiles, they oppose candidates expressing fervent religious commitment in public, even when expressed by a candidate as admired as Sen. Joseph Lieberman.

### *In particular ...*

With respect to seven questions on religious accommodation/separation in the public schools (Table 1), both Jews and Gentiles today register small changes from the February baseline findings. However, the changes are non-uniform (in both directions). For example, slightly fewer respondents support vouchers for private and parochial schools (declines of five percentage points for Gentiles and just two points for Jews), but somewhat more (three and five percent for Gentiles and Jews respectively) support allowing students to say non-sectarian prayers at sporting events (a practice that the Supreme Court recently held to be unconstitutional). Most critically, Gentiles remain far more

accommodationist (i.e., less separationist) than Jews. For example, 85% of Gentiles as compared with 49% of Jews favor a moment of silence for public school students to pray if they want to.

**TABLE 1 Support for Religious Accommodation in the schools among Gentiles and Jews. (Percent who favor selected policies)**

	GENTILES FEB.	GENTILES SEPT.	JEWS FEB.	JEWS SEPT.
Allowing schools to display the Ten Commandments	65%	58%	38%	34%
Allowing school students to say non-sectarian prayers at sporting events	69%	72%	28%	33%
Allowing non-denominational prayers to be read in the classroom	59%	53%	20%	20%
Allowing schools to set aside a moment of silence each day for students to pray if they want to	84%	85%	48%	49%
Allowing schools to teach Christmas carols, as long as they also teach Hanukah songs	77%	73%	56%	55%
Providing government aid (vouchers) to families for tuition in private, non-religious schools	40%	35%	24%	22%
Providing government aid (vouchers) to families for tuition in private schools, including religious schools	43%	38%	22%	18%

In questions about religion in public life (Table 2), the results also point to relative stability. To illustrate, both Gentile and Jewish respondents hold essentially the same views as in the previous survey toward the need for more laws governing moral behavior, the availability of abortion, and the desirability of Congress opening its sessions with a prayer. On all these matters, more Gentiles express accommodationist or "conservative" views than Jews, not surprising in light of Jews' continued greater self-identification as liberals and as Democrats. For example, fully 75% of Gentiles approve of Congress opening with a prayer as contrasted with just 31% of Jews.

With respect to excluding churches/synagogues and organized religion from politics, or the related matter of the desirability of increasing the influence of religion in American life, small changes among both groups emerge. Both Jews and Gentiles express somewhat less support for such religious institutional involvement in politics than they did in February, although the differences from one survey to the next are small. For example, the proportions supporting the view that churches and synagogues should keep out of political matters grew from 36% to 42% among Gentiles, and from 44% to 49% among Jews.



**TABLE 2** Support for expression of religion in public life among Gentiles and Jews. (Percent who favor selected policies or agree with selected attitudes)

	GENTILES FEB.	GENTILES SEPT.	JEWS FEB.	JEWS SEPT.
Democracy in the US works better if Americans are religious	42%	45%	11%	13%
There's too much separation of Church and State in America		41%		9%
I am worried that we're going to reduce the separation of Church and State.		32%		47%
We need more laws governing our moral behavior	45%	46%	28%	27%
I am pleased when political leaders affirm their belief in God	70%	68%	30%	37%
It's good for Congress to start sessions with a prayer	71%	72%	28%	31%
Religion should play an important role in shaping American values	76%	75%	51%	44%
Abortion should be generally available to those who want it	58%	59%	88%	90%
I would like to see organized religion stay out of politics	56%	60%	88%	88%
It's OK for the Right to Life movement to use religion in the debate on abortion	42%	41%	15%	19%
It's OK for a city government to put up a manger scene on government property at Christmas	80%	80%	43%	35%
It's OK for a city government to put up candles on government property for the Jewish holiday of Hanukah	79%	77%	46%	37%
Television, newspapers, magazines and radio are fair in their treatment of very religious people	46%	39%	43%	44%
Clergymen can discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit	30%	32%	34%	32%
Churches and synagogues should keep out of political matters	36%	42%	44%	49%
I think the influence of religion in American life is increasing	20%	21%	30%	35%
I would like to see the influence of religion in American life increase	65%	62%	30%	26%

The survey also questioned respondents about their views of the national election campaign (Table 3). Jews are somewhat more engaged in following the campaign from a variety of news sources. More Jews than Gentiles said the outcome is very important to them (64% versus 52%), and by a small margin, more had made a financial donation to a party or campaign.

**TABLE 3 Engagement in the Presidential campaign.**

	JEWS	GENTILES
<i>I have been obtaining news about the race for President from:</i>		
TV news broadcasts	93%	88%
TV convention coverage	46%	34%
Newspapers	83%	74%
News magazines	31%	24%
Friends	28%	20%
Other sources	22%	25%
I have followed the news about the race for President very closely.	31%	19%
The outcome of the election for President is very important to me.	64%	52%
I have made a financial donation to a political party or electoral campaign since June.	12%	10%

Jews lean heavily toward the Democrats (Table 4). The Gentiles are divided between Bush and Gore, though lean slightly toward Gore, reflecting their special demographic character in this study. (The Gentile sample was constructed to resemble Jews in terms of their regional and educational distributions.) In contrasting their September voting intentions with those they recalled prior to the selection of Vice Presidential candidates, both groups reported a small inferred shift in favor of the Democrats (eight points among Gentiles and eleven points among Jews). Jews have strong favorable impressions of Gore and Lieberman, and largely unfavorable impressions of Bush and Cheney (Table 5). On balance, Gentiles report favorable impressions of all four candidates. For both Jews and Gentiles, Lieberman garners the largest ratio of favorable to unfavorable impressions.

**TABLE 4** Voter intentions & attitudes toward the presidential candidates.

		JEWS	GENTILES
<i>I will vote for:</i>	George Bush	10%	33%
	Al Gore	72%	39%
	Ralph Nader	2%	2%
	Pat Buchanan	0%	0%
	Undecided	16%	26%
<i>George Bush's selection of Richard Cheney for Vice President made the Republican ticket more appealing to me.</i>		8%	22%
<i>Al Gore's selection of Joseph Lieberman for Vice President made the Democratic ticket more appealing to me.</i>		68%	31%
<i>Before the Vice Presidential candidates were selected, I was planning to vote for:</i>	George Bush	12%	36%
	Al Gore	63%	34%
	Ralph Nader	2%	1%
	Pat Buchanan	0%	0%
	Undecided	23%	29%

**TABLE 5** Favorable and unfavorable impressions of the candidates

	JEWS	GENTILES
<i>Favorable/unfavorable impression of:</i>		
George Bush	13% / 64%	39% / 36%
Al Gore	75% / 12%	46% / 30%
Ralph Nader	20% / 38%	13% / 40%
Pat Buchanan	1% / 84%	6% / 58%
Richard Cheney	12% / 49%	29% / 26%
Joseph Lieberman	77% / 5%	39% / 15%

Jews are far more disturbed than Gentiles by the high profile of religion in the presidential campaign, both globally and with respect to specific actions of each of the four major candidates (Table 6). For example, almost four times as many Gentiles as Jews approve of Richard Cheney's support for prayer in schools (59% versus 16%), and a similar ratio among Gentiles and Jews supports politicians speaking about their faith in public (52% versus 16%). Concerning Lieberman's references to God and quoting from the Bible, twice as many Gentiles as Jews expressed approval.

**TABLE 6 Attitudes toward candidates' expressions of faith.**

	JEWS WHO APPROVE	JEWS WHO DISAPPROVE	GENTILES WHO APPROVE	GENTILES WHO DISAPPROVE
Politicians speaking out against sex and violence in movies and on TV.	66%	19%	74%	14%
Politicians speaking about their faith in God and quoting the Bible in public.	16%	62%	52%	31%
George Bush's proclamation of "Jesus Day" in Texas.	3%	90%	24%	45%
Al Gore's comment that he never makes a major decision without asking himself what Jesus would do.	10%	67%	42%	30%
Joseph Lieberman's references to God and quoting from the Bible in his speech in Tennessee after being selected by Gore.	21%	52%	45%	29%
Richard Cheney's sponsorship of a constitutional amendment to permit prayer in schools.	16%	69%	59%	23%
Religion in the campaign disturbs me.	53%	25%	30%	45%

Few Jews or Gentiles are prepared to criticize him Lieberman for being too liberal or too conservative (Table 7). Although, by small margins, more Jews think he is too conservative, and more Gentiles think he is too liberal.) Both groups see Lieberman as more of an asset than a liability to the Gore campaign, and even more Jews than Gentiles hold that view.

Both groups, on balance, are happy that a Jew was nominated for high office (84% of Jews, 45% of Gentiles) and especially a religious Jew (55% and 39% respectively), but the differences between Jews and Gentiles are instructive.

Among Gentiles, the positive reactions to a “religious Jew” as a candidate are almost as frequent as those to “a Jew” being nominated (39% versus 45%). Among Jews, however, a substantial gap separated the very large extent of happiness over a Jew being nominated with the more limited enthusiasm they express for a religious Jew (55% versus 84%). The results suggest that a substantial number of Jews are happy that a Jew was nominated, but they did not feel especially happy that he was a religious Jew. In contrast, very few Gentiles expressed this configuration of sentiments. The majority of Gentiles who are happy that a Jew was nominated, are also especially pleased that he is a religious Jew.

**TABLE 7 Attitudes toward Joseph Lieberman.**

	JEWS	GENTILES
Many potential voters for Gore were turned off by his choice of Lieberman as his running mate.	20%	16%
Gore’s choice of Lieberman improved his chances of victory in November.	52%	36%
I might have voted for Gore, but I won’t now because I don’t like his running mate.	1%	5%
The Lieberman nomination has brought a large amount of financial donations to the Democratic campaign from Jewish supporters.	24%	21%
Lieberman’s religious commitment enhances his moral stature.	64%	53%
Lieberman is too conservative.	13%	7%
Lieberman is too liberal.	6%	11%
I was happy that a Jew was nominated for high office.	84%	45%
I was especially happy that a religious Jew was nominated for high office.	55%	39%

**TABLE 8 Political identification.**

	GENTILES FEB.	GENTILES SEPT.	JEWS FEB.	JEWS SEPT.
Identifies as a liberal	19%	19%	32%	31%
Identifies as a conservative	33%	31%	21%	17%
Party identification: Republican	34%	34%	14%	12%
Party identification: Democrat	31%	33%	59%	64%

Jews retained the same levels of concern for antisemitism in America (Table 9) as they did in February (although presumably, such concerns have risen since the outbreak of violence in Israel). The only noticeable change in their views seems to be an increased assessment of antisemitism among Southern Baptists and possibly declining concern for antisemitism among Fundamentalist Protestants (Table 10).

**TABLE 9** Views on antisemitism in American society.

	JEWS FEB.	JEWS SEPT.	GENTILES SEPT.
Antisemitism is currently not a serious problem for American Jews	9%	10%	16%
Virtually all positions of influence in America are open to Jews	31%	30%	48%
I have worried about antisemitism expressed after the nomination.		64%	32%
I have become more open to the idea that religion can play a helpful role in life.		26%	40%
A more religious America means a more antisemitic America	30%	38%	17%
Jews would be better off in a more religious America	11%	8%	21%

**TABLE 10** Perceptions by Jews of antisemitism among selected groups. (Entries are percent who think most or many members of the group are antisemitic.)

	JEWS FEB.	JEWS SEPT.
Southern Baptists	47%	63%
Fundamentalist Protestants	59%	51%
Blacks	36%	40%
Conservatives	31%	31%
Catholics	30%	32%
Republicans	25%	28%
Mainstream Protestants	23%	26%
Hispanics	21%	18%
Liberals	7%	5%
Democrats	6%	5%

The survey asked Gentiles (Table 11) for their views on the prevalence of antisemitism in the U.S. (not asked of them in February). Fewer Gentiles than Jews perceive antisemitism or express concern about the issue. Twice as many Gentiles as Jews (40% versus 22%) believe that Jews have been fully accepted in America. Following the Lieberman nomination, twice as many Jews as Gentiles worried about antisemitism (64% versus 32%; Table 9).

Significantly, very small numbers of Jews or Gentiles endorse statements seemingly critical of Jews, even those that may have some empirical plausibility. For example, hardly anyone (Jew or Gentile) would agree that Jews dominate an entertainment industry that promotes freedom from all sexual restraint (6% and 9%).

Majorities of both groups (with small differences between them) think that Jews need not abandon their practices or their observance to succeed in American society (Jews: 60%; Gentiles: 66%). At the same time about half (more among Jews, fewer among Gentiles) are not sure that Jewish politicians are hurt by their being Jewish.

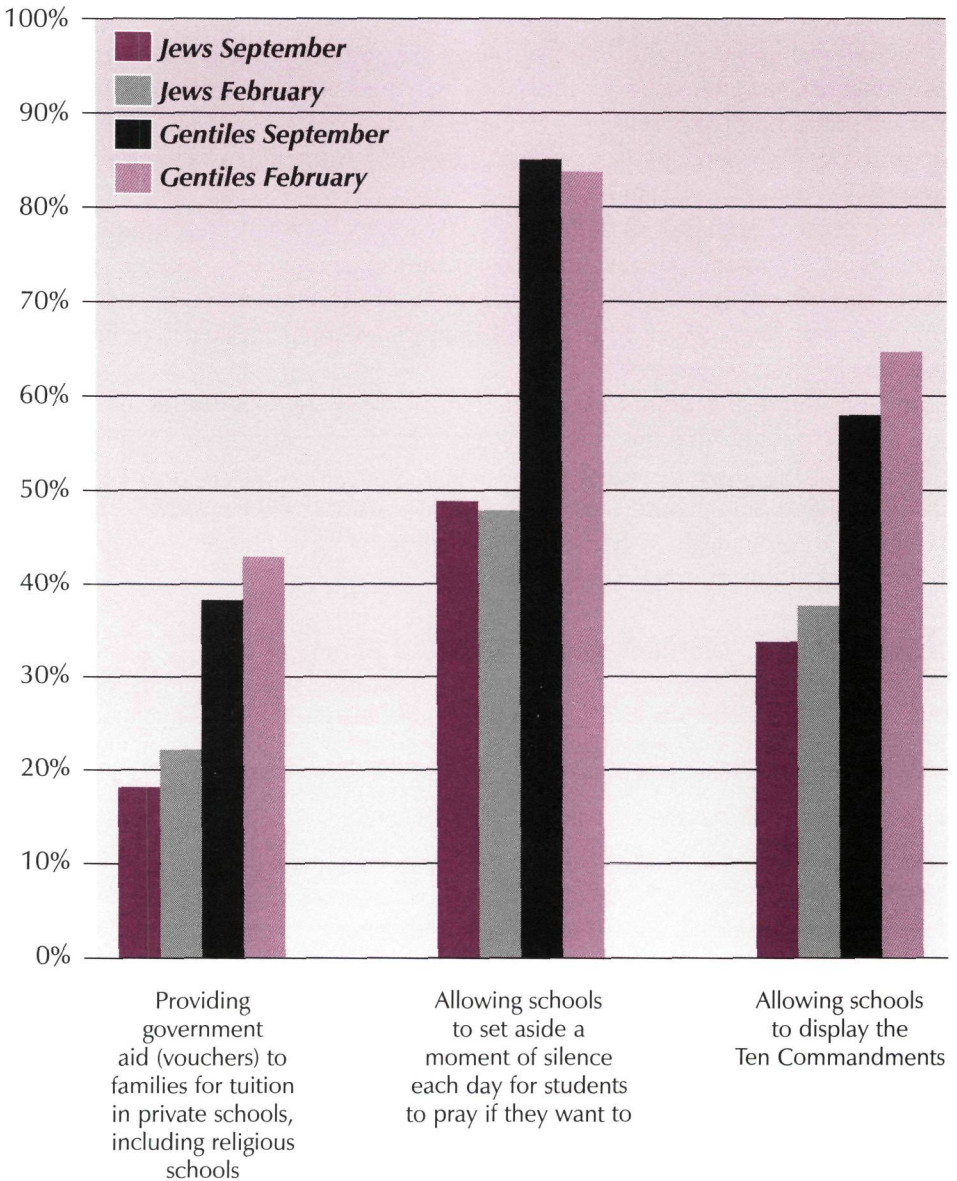
In sum, the results point to ongoing and relatively stable attitudes among Jews and Gentiles since the earlier survey in February. More than Gentiles (then and now), Jews are liberal, Democratic, and separationist on matters of Church and State. Moreover, more Jews were positively moved by the Lieberman nomination. In addition, more Jews than Gentiles are concerned with antisemitism in American society.

**TABLE 11 Attitudes toward Jews and Judaism.**

	JEWS	GENTILES
Jews no longer need to abandon the practices of their faith in order to succeed.	60%	66%
Jews have been fully accepted in America.	22%	40%
Antisemitism in America has declined to levels lower than they were thirty or forty years ago.	32%	44%
Jews can be observant and still do things like other people.	70%	70%
Being a Jew is no longer seen as a significant political liability for politicians.	43%	58%
Orthodox Judaism is obsessed with ritual to the exclusion of matters of the spirit.	23%	11%
Jews are at the forefront of every movement for sexual liberation.	9%	5%
Jews dominate the entertainment industry that promotes freedom from all sexual restraint	6%	9%
Many leading Jews in America are devoid of religious sentiment, if not openly hostile to religion.	12%	8%

# CHART 1

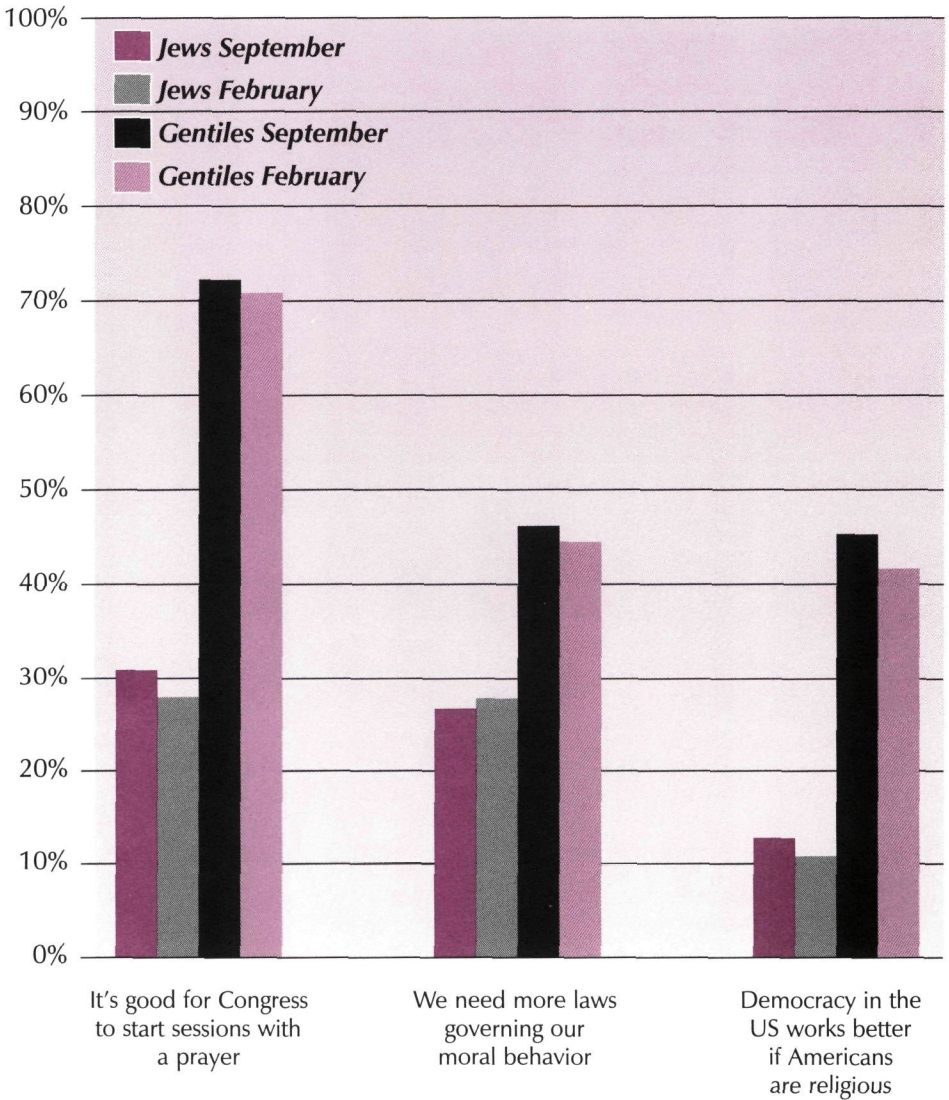
(PERCENT WHO FAVOR SELECTED POLICIES)





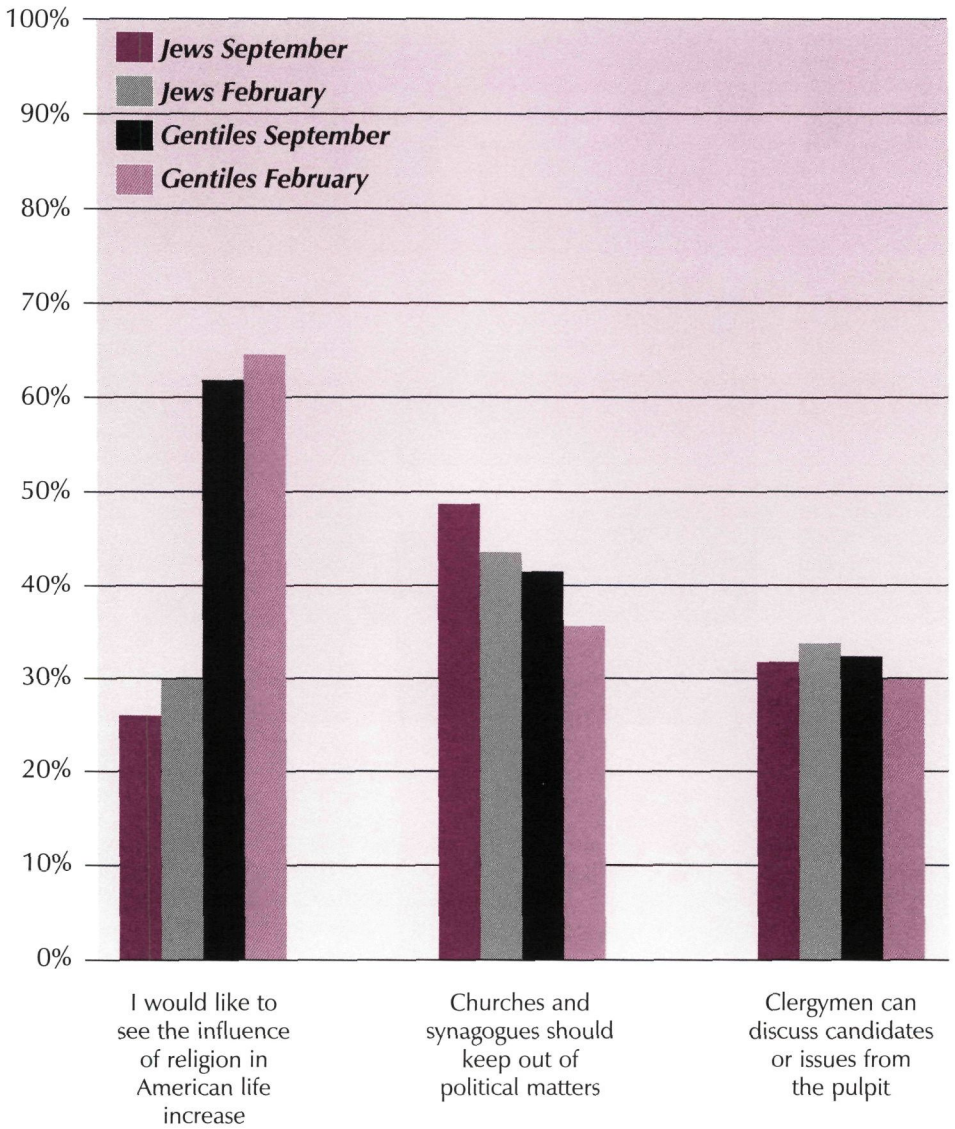
# CHART 2 Support for expressions of religion in public life among Gentiles and Jews.

(PERCENT WHO FAVOR SELECTED POLICIES OR AGREE WITH SELECTED ATTITUDES)



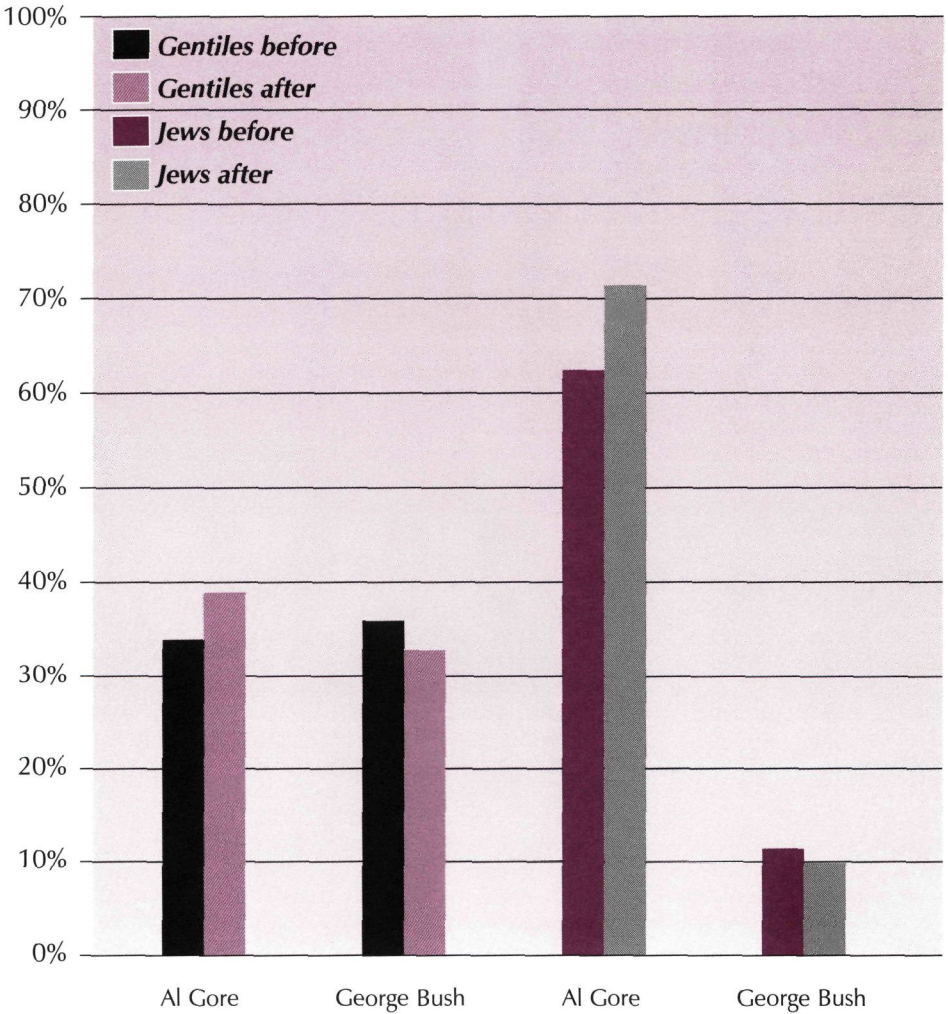
# CHART 3 Support for expressions of religion in public life among Gentiles and Jews.

(PERCENT WHO FAVOR SELECTED POLICIES OR AGREE WITH SELECTED ATTITUDES)

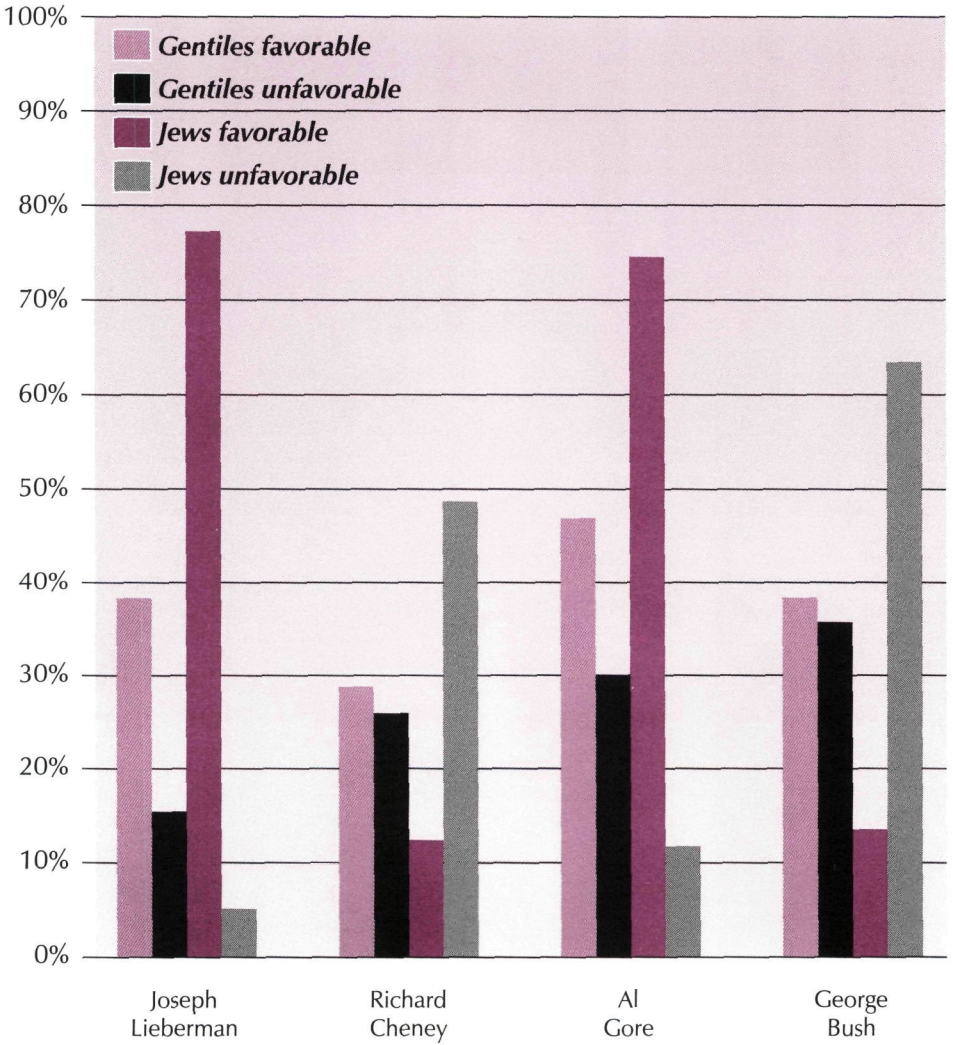


# CHART 4 Voter intentions and attitudes toward the presidential candidates.

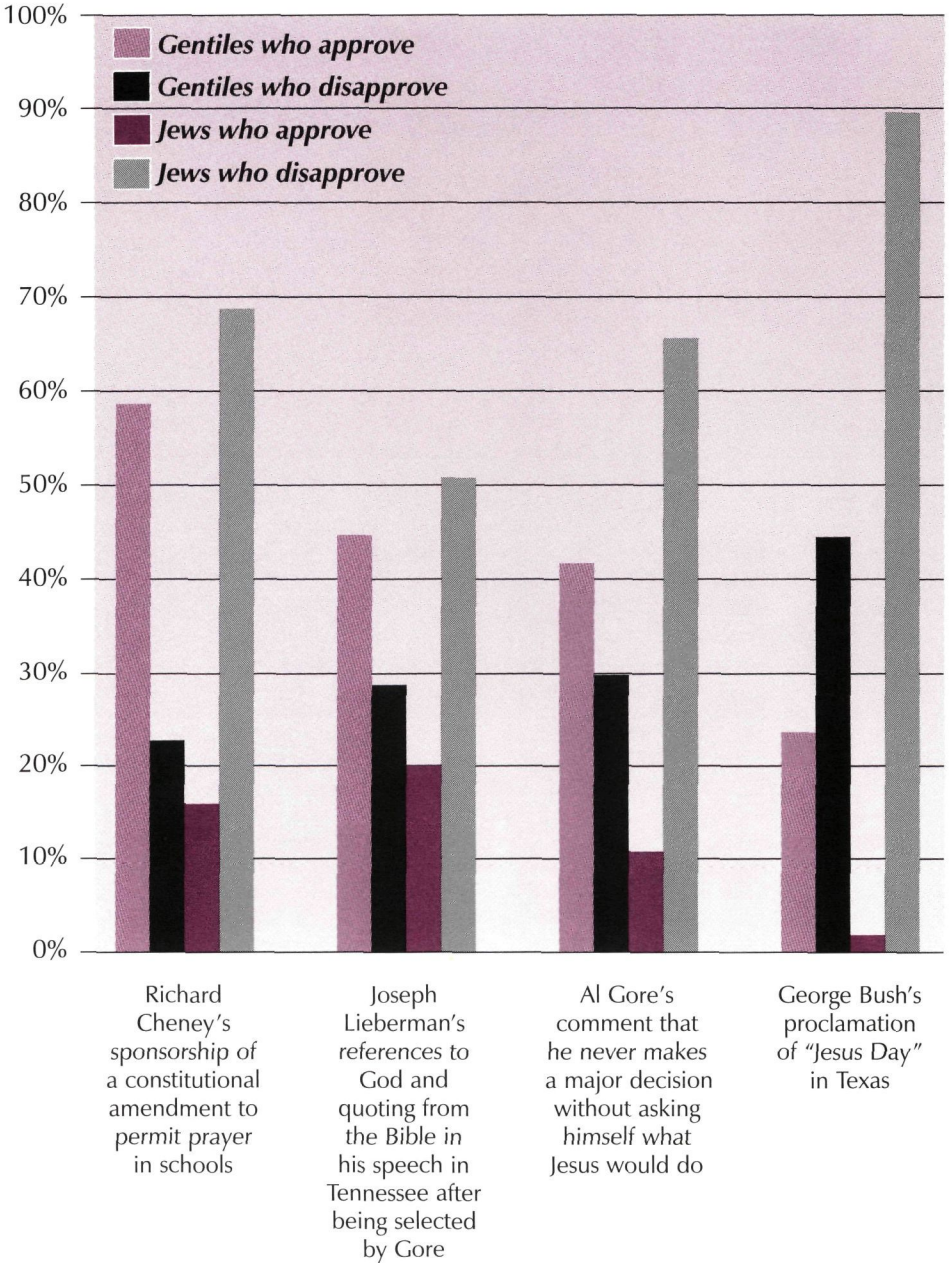
(BEFORE AND AFTER THE NOMINATION OF JOSEPH LIEBERMAN)



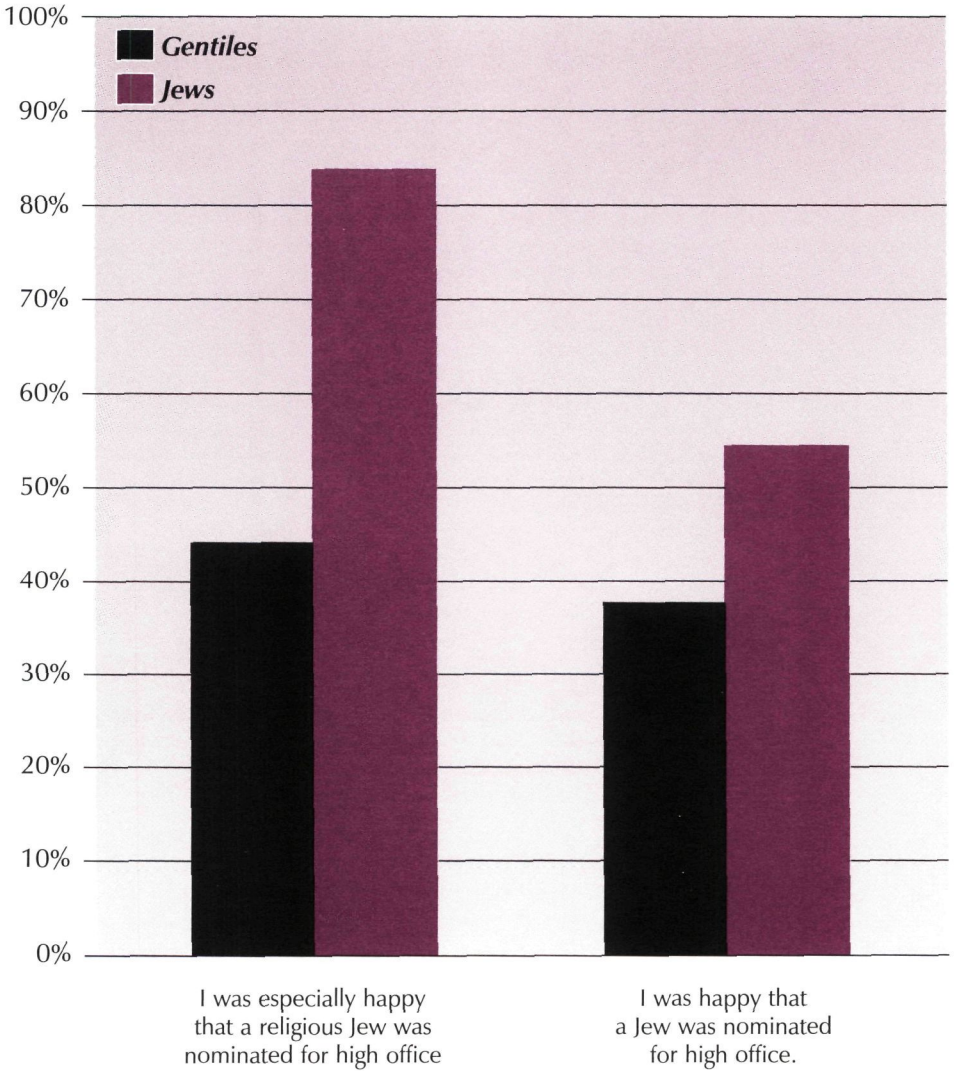
**CHART 5** Favorable and unfavorable impressions of the candidates.



# CHART 6 Attitudes toward candidates' expressions of faith.



# CHART 7 Attitudes toward Joseph Lieberman.



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