

Orthodox and Reform Jews in the United States

by [Petr Chylek](#) (June 2025)



Conflict (Jennings Tofel, 1952)

According to the Pew 2021 [report](#), the U.S. Jewish population is approximately 7.5 million. This number is divided among the three major congregations, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox, and those without congregational affiliation. Figure 1, column A, shows that about 37% of Jews identify as Reform, compared to 9% who are Orthodox. The Conservative population falls

between these two figures at 17%. This leaves 37% for Jews belonging to minor congregations and those who do not belong to any specific congregation, identifying simply as Jews. All data presented in the following two figures is sourced from the Pew report [1]. For many readers, it is easier to understand the stories depicted in the two figures than in 24 separate graphs and tables.

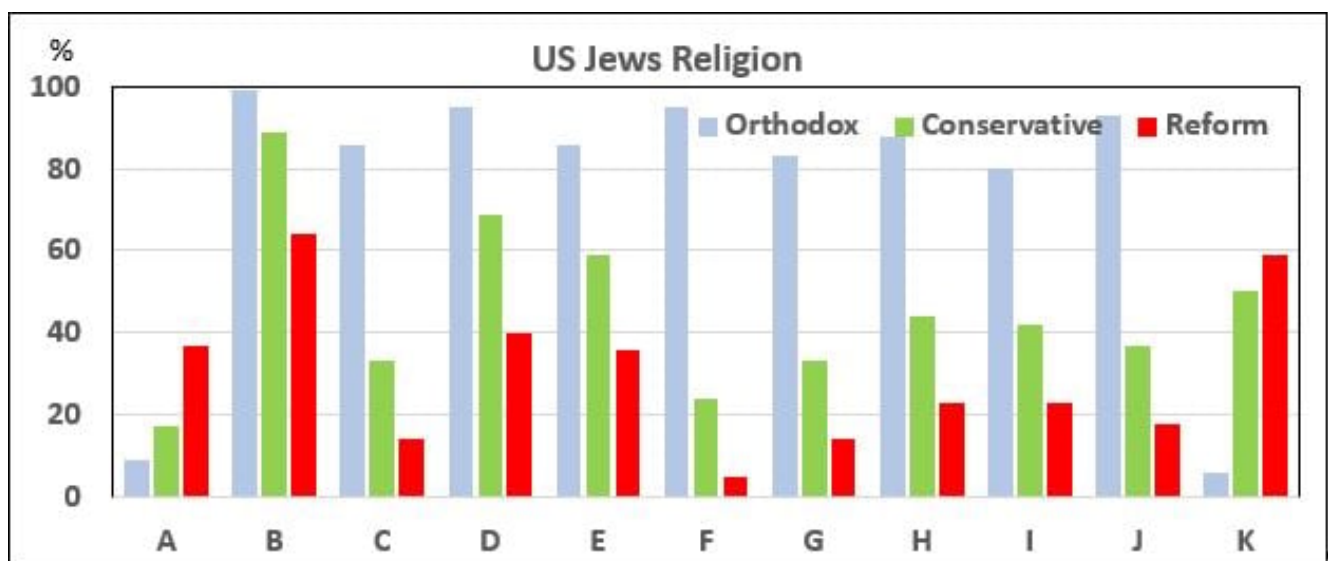


Figure 1

Figure 1: (A) Percentage of Jews, (B) Members of a Synagogue, (C) Religion is very important, (D) Being Jewish is very important, (E) Keeping Shabbat, (F) Eating kosher, (G) Attending services at least monthly, (H) Most friends are Jewish, (I) Helping other Jews around the world, (J) Believing in the God of the Torah, (K) Believing in other spiritual forces.

The column in Figure 1 shows the percentage of Jews who belong to one of the major congregations and identify as Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox. The second column indicates the percentage of individuals within a given congregation who are also members of a corresponding synagogue.

The columns from C to J in Fig. 1 illustrate the strength of the connection between members of a given congregation and the fundamental teachings of Rabbinic Judaism. As shown in those columns, Orthodox Judaism is closely linked to rabbinic teachings in every aspect. Conversely, the Reform movement demonstrates the least association with rabbinic teachings, averaging around 20%.

Rabbinic Judaism developed during the first five or six centuries of the Common Era (CE). After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish religion needed to transition away from animal sacrifices and Temple worship toward a more adaptable form for people dispersed across many countries. It was grounded in the teachings of the Torah and its rabbinic interpretation. During this period, rabbis composed the second Jewish sacred scripture, the Talmud, although they claimed this was also revealed to Moses together with the Torah.

The Reform movement began at the Pittsburgh conference in 1885 as an effort to modernize the Jewish religion in response to scientific progress and the evolution of humanity's consciousness, while retaining only the essential teachings of the Torah. Although the original intent was a radical departure from Rabbinic Judaism, with each subsequent Reform conference, the movement gradually returned closer to the original form of Judaism.

Column J in Fig. 1 shows the proportions of Jews in each congregation who believe in God as presented in the Torah and the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. While 93% of Orthodox Jews hold this belief, only 18% of Reform Jews do. In contrast, nearly 59% of Reform and 50% of Conservative Jews believe in other spiritual forces of creation, whereas only 6% of Orthodox Jews do (Fig. 1 column K).

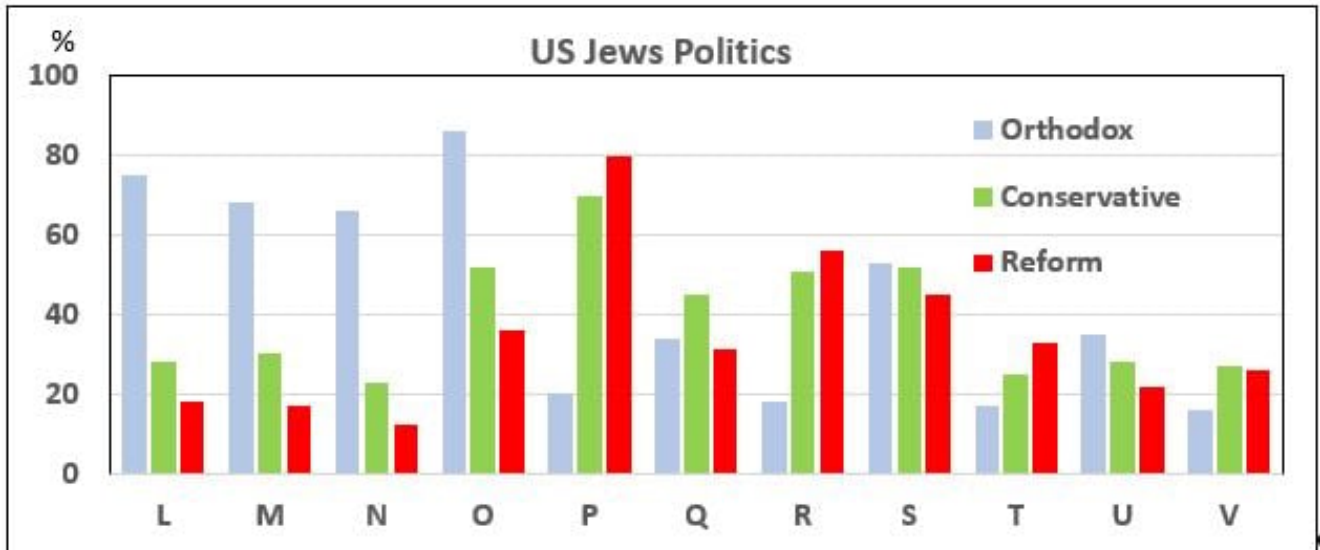


Figure 2

Fig. 2: (L) Identify with the Republican Party, (M) Approve of the current immigration policy, (N) Approve of the current environmental policy, (O) Approve of the current policy toward Israel, (P) Identify with the Democratic Party, (Q) Engage in political activities, (R) Perceive discrimination against Blacks, Muslims, and Hispanics, (S) Perceive discrimination against Jews, (T) Hold a college degree, (U) Live in a household with an income of \$50,000-\$100,000 (US average 32%), (V) Live in a household with an income greater than \$200,000 (US average 4%). The US averages provided in parts U and V were deduced for 2020 and are likely quite different in 2025.

The fundamental political reality can be expressed by columns L and P of Fig. 2. Seventy-five percent of Orthodox Jews and only eighteen percent of Reform Jews identify with the Republican Party. In comparison, eighty percent of Reform Jews and twenty percent of Orthodox Jews identify with the Democratic Party. Columns M, N, and O show the agreement or disagreement with the basic party policies. The Pew poll was conducted in 2020, the fourth year of the first term of President Donald Trump. We can assume that similarly inclined political results would be obtained today, during the first year of the second term of the same president.

The most significant differences between Orthodox and Reform Jews lie in their adherence to Rabbinic teachings. All major denominations of the Jewish population regard the Torah as the foundation of their ethical behavior. So why are the political affiliations of Orthodox and Reform Jews so different? They are nearly opposites.

All three basic congregations perceive approximately the same percentage (~50%) of discrimination against Jews (column S of Fig. 2); however, only Reform and Conservative Jews recognize a similar degree of discrimination against Blacks, Muslims, and Hispanics, with only 20% of Orthodox Jews acknowledging it (column R).

The last three columns of Fig. 2 pertain to education. As expected, a higher level of education, such as a college degree, results in a higher standard of living.

While Reform is the largest Jewish congregation in the U.S., only 14% of those who identify as Reform attend services at least once a month. In contrast, the Orthodox community boasts an 83% attendance rate at services at least once a month. Why is there such a difference? It seems that one group does not find what they seek in the services, while the other does. Of course, what the two groups seek are two different things. In any case, Reform rabbis seem to have some work to do.

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Petr Chylek is a theoretical physicist who was a professor at several universities in the United States and Canada. He has authored over 150 publications in scientific journals and was elected a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union and a Fellow of the Optical Society of America for his scientific contributions. He thanks his daughter, Lily A. Chylek, for her

comments and suggestions regarding the early version of this article.

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