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day schools few and far between.

“There were two main reasons for the expansion of Jewish day schools in America,” he says. “One was a desire for more Jewish knowledge; and the other was the desire of Jewish parents to pull their kids out of public schools because of the racial situation — and that was especially true in the New York area.” Waxman was referring to the growing numbers of black children attending previously all-white public schools from the 1960s onward.

Another factor behind the growing stringency in the Modern Orthodox world, he says, was a fear of the “sex, drugs and rock’n’roll” culture outside. “We see a similar rise in fundamentalism in Christianity at this time, also in response to this culture — and so it wasn’t unique to Orthodox Jews,” notes Waxman.

But this rightward shift, he posits, may have gone as far as it can. “I think the impact of technology and the internet is so great that there is just so much you can do these days to free yourself of the influences of the outside world,” says Waxman. That could explain the forces pulling in the other direction within Modern Orthodoxy in recent years, he says — what he describes as pressure from those on the “left” side of the spectrum to grant greater roles to women in religious life and to demonstrate more acceptance to members of the LGBTQ community.

A study of the religious attitudes and affiliations of Israelis, published by Pew three years ago, found that

only half of Israeli Jews (54 percent) raised as religious Zionist — the rough equivalent of Modern Orthodox — still identified as such. Among the different categories of Jews in Israel, this was the group with the highest rate of attrition by far.

Although no such statistics exist about Modern Orthodox Jewry in America, Waxman believes the “dropout rate,” as he calls it, is just as high there. Which

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**Waxman: ‘The values that right-wing Republicans represent are interpreted by many Orthodox Jews to be similar to their own religious values.’**

would seem to suggest that the lurch to the right — at least in terms of religious observance — may not be having the desired effect of shielding the young from the outside world.

“Neither Orthodox Jews in the United States or in Israel are immune to the forces of larger society and culture,” says Waxman. “There are questions for which many Orthodox Jews don’t have satisfactory answers for young people growing up in today’s society. In Israel, we know that the dropout rate from Orthodoxy is increasing, and I have every reason to believe that the trend in the United States is not very different.”



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# How U.S. Orthodox Jews became Trump supporters

Sociologist Chaim Waxman pinpoints why so many Orthodox Jews have become right wing, and when it started

Judy Maltz

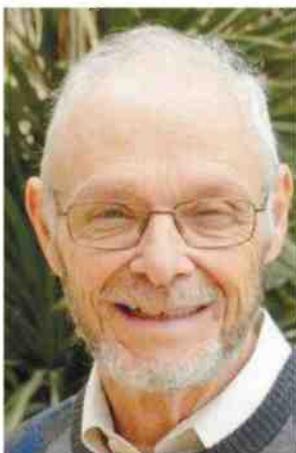
As a longtime observer of American-Jewish society, Chaim Waxman admits he did not fall off his chair when he learned just how many Orthodox Jews voted for Donald Trump in 2016.

"I was somewhat surprised, but not overly," says the former professor of sociology and Jewish studies at Rutgers University. "After all, many Orthodox Jews today feel they have a lot more in common with conservative Christians and right-wing Republicans than they do with liberal Jews who vote Democrat."

In his recently published book "Social Change and Halakhic Evolution in American Orthodoxy" (Liverpool University Press), Waxman examines the processes responsible for the rightward lurch of Orthodox Jews in America — with his focus on the tendency toward greater stringency in religious observance. But it is no coincidence, he says, that their politics are also moving in this direction.

According to a survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee, 54 percent of Orthodox Jews voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election. This compares with 24 percent of Conservative Jews; 10 percent of Reform Jews; 8 percent of Reconstructionist Jews; and 14 percent of those who identify as "just Jews."

This tendency among Orthodox Jews to go against the streams was already evident in a first-of-its-kind comprehensive survey of the American Jewish community conducted by the Pew Re-



Chaim Waxman

Tamar Warshavsky Markin

search Center in 2013. Roughly half of Orthodox Jews surveyed described themselves as political conservatives, with 57 percent saying they identified with or leaned toward the Republican Party. In their attitudes toward homosexuality, for example, the survey found that Orthodox Jews more closely resembled evangelical Christians than other Jews, with nearly six in 10 saying same-sex relations should be discouraged by society.

According to Waxman, support for the Republican Party among Orthodox Jews is a relatively new phenomenon. "It's something that seems to have begun in the last two presidencies," he tells Haaretz. "Under [President Bill] Clinton, the percentage of Orthodox Jews who voted Republican was still higher than non-Orthodox Jews, but the gap was certainly not as wide as it is today."

The Democrats tend to be seen as more critical of Israeli policy than Republicans, particular insofar as the occupation and set-



Supporters listening as Trump addresses the Republican Jewish Coalition in April. Erik Kabik Photography / Media Punch / Alamy Live News

tlement building are concerned. But Waxman does not believe this is the only reason Orthodox Jews are embracing the GOP.

"Israel plays a role, no question about that — but it's beyond that," he says. "The values that right-wing Republicans represent are interpreted by many Orthodox Jews to be similar to their own religious values."

And Trump has certainly repaid the favor, appointing Orthodox Jews to some of the top positions in his administration. These include his son-in-law Jared Kushner, who holds numerous portfolios; his former

bankruptcy lawyer David Friedman, now serving as ambassador to Israel; and another former lawyer, Jason Greenblatt, who recently stepped down as key architect of the White House Middle East peace plan (aka the "deal of the century").

## The growth of yeshivas

Waxman was raised in the ultra-Orthodox enclave of Borough Park in Brooklyn and attended strict Orthodox yeshivas growing up. He describes himself as Modern Orthodox, but adds

that he doesn't like labels. After retiring from Rutgers, where he was on faculty for more than three decades, he moved to Israel 13 years ago. Today he serves as chair of the department of behavioral sciences at Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem.

Modern Orthodox Jews in America, as his book notes, weren't always as religiously observant as they are today. Up until the latter part of the 20th century, for instance, it was common for Modern Orthodox synagogues to hold dinners and balls that included mixed-gender dancing. It was also

common for Modern Orthodox Jews to eat dairy or fish dishes at restaurants that had no kashrut supervision. Such practices would be frowned upon today.

In his book, Waxman attributes growing levels of observance among Orthodox Jews in America to greater knowledge about halakha (religious law), with this in turn being due to the proliferation of yeshiva day schools around the United States. Indeed, up until the latter part of the 20th century, it was common for children from Orthodox homes to attend public schools, with yeshiva