

MEMO

To: Sentinel Action Fund Stakeholders

From: Jessica Anderson

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Focus Groups: Voter Perspectives on Religious Freedom and the Rise in Jew Hate

In August, we conducted three focus groups in Michigan to understand voter views on religious freedom and the rise of Jew hate and the impact on the 2026 midterm election. We asked voters specific questions about Abdul El-Sayed, Mike Rogers, the Iran war, attacks on Jews in America, aid to Israel, Christianity in America, and more. For a wider view of these issues, we also conducted three additional focus groups outside of Michigan, in North Carolina.

In Michigan, the fight on these issues has arrived and voters are already thinking about them as they head into the 2026 elections. They are seeing radical Democrats, Islamic extremism, and a rise in Jew hate and threats to religious freedom that are not abstract. They are tangible, vote determinative, and create legitimate fear. Accordingly, we see the imperative of voting Republican to protect religious freedoms as primed to play out in Michigan this cycle.

In North Carolina, concerns about socialism outrank concerns about Islamic extremism. On socialism, they were more likely to view the problem as a “loud minority” of Democrat politicians. Voters understand that tensions on religious issues are on the rise and they feel the pressure building, but it has not reached criticality in their life. They know there has been an increase in religious violence against Christians and Jews and are angered by Democrats’ failure to condemn the rhetoric that enables it.

In both states, voters acknowledge that Christianity and Judaism were a net good for America. On Islam, voters pointed to Sharia Law as a reason for incompatibility with American values. Michigan Voters specifically noted that Muslim Americans vote “to elect their own” and consolidate power.

Another commonly cited threat to religious freedom was the woke/LGBTQ agenda, whose tenets one cannot contradict at work, public schools, or in mainstream society. Americans can live their faith, as long as it is a private affair and does not challenge Hollywood values.

Voters overwhelmingly agreed that Republicans are more likely to defend Christians, Jews, Israel, and religious freedom. **The center-right can and will move toward voting for Republicans on these issues, particularly in states and races where Democrats nominate extreme candidates.** Several North Carolina voters noted they had not considered these issues much when voting before, but confronted with the conversation, it will now affect how they vote.

Michigan

Groups: Jewish Voters, Evangelical Voters, Republican Voters

- Abdul El-Sayed winning the primary has put these issues in the forefront of voters' minds.
- Voters increasingly see the Democrat party as an Islamic-socialist alliance.
- Evangelical voters' concerns regarding religious freedom relate to social pressure, workplace retaliation, and government coercion. For Jewish voters, the issue is one of physical safety.

- Republicans are alarmed by what they have seen from the left, whom they see as pushing a harmful agenda when it comes to antisemitism and Israel as a whole.
- Voters in every group cited Dearborn and the push for Sharia Law as tangible fears.
- Jewish, evangelical, and most Republican voters saw opposition to Israel as antisemitism.
- Several Jewish voters expressed that this would be the first time they vote Republican, for Mike Rogers. Several said they disliked Trump personally, but feel like he has stood by Israel.

Moderator: *"Who's pushing the anti-Jewish message?"*

Evangelical Voters: *"The left. Islamic groups."*

Exchange from Evangelical Group: *"You have a candidate running for Congress that can't stand the Jews... Antisemitism is almost like a norm now, politicians are afraid to say stuff about it... They'll say Israel's not a legal state."*

Jewish Voter: *"I never in my wildest dreams would have thought I'd consider [voting Republican], but it's leaning towards that because I really don't like [Abdul El-Sayed] at all."*

Jewish Voter: *"Our democracy doesn't feel threatened by the Christians, it doesn't feel threatened by the Jews. But there's a large section of popular radicalism that's popping up that does threaten exactly what America is here in Detroit, in NYC... [from] radical Muslims."*

Republican Voter: *"I think there's a small faction of Democrats with a very strong voice right now that seem to be anti-Judaism, or Christianity. But if you're looking at the progressive Democrat Party, it seems to be the very squeaky wheel right now."*

Evangelical Voter: *"Christianity always gets bashed, period, and nobody cares about that."*

North Carolina

Groups: *Swing Voters, Evangelical Voters, Republican Voters*

- They are aware of rising threats to religious freedom but feel them less acutely than Michigan voters. They are angered by the left's failure to condemn violence and extreme rhetoric but are less certain that it's affecting their state today. However, they do fear it eventually could.
- Voters' larger fear is the rise of socialism in the Democratic party. However, many voters rejected that most Democrat politicians were socialist, saying it's just a "loud vocal minority."
- Voters are not ready to call Roy Cooper a far-left extremist or a socialist.
- North Carolina voters largely did NOT see opposition to Israel as a form of antisemitism. This is in contrast to Michigan — one can speculate that Michigan voters are more likely to have seen HOW the Left protests Israel, and seeing the Left's tone leads a voter to view it as antisemitism.

Republican Voter: *"Legally I think we are the most free country in the world. I think culturally because these issues have become so charged I think people feel less free to express themselves, so they're more inclined to keep it to themselves."*

Evangelical Voter: *"What did they expect when they voted Mamdani in? Did they think he was just going to be welcoming to every group of people? Now they're paying for it. Jewish people are dying."*

Evangelical Voter: *"Had I thought about religious freedom going to the voting booth? No, because I still believe we have religious freedom... It's incremental, a gradual concern now."*