

Could Antisemitism Cost Kamala Harris the Presidency?

According to an Oct. 9 article in The New York Times by Shane Goldmacher, “There may be seven main battlegrounds in the race for the White House in 2024, all of which could prove crucial. But Pennsylvania stands apart as the state that top strategists for both Ms. Harris and Mr. Trump have circled as the likeliest to tip the election.”

In light of this observation, which is hardly novel, the obvious question is: Why, then, wasn’t Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro chosen as Harris’ vice presidential candidate? Wouldn’t he do a better job of delivering Pennsylvania to the Democrats? And overall, wasn’t he a much better choice than Tim Walz?

Now, I am neither a political pundit nor a pollster. And I am simply raising questions rather than making assertions, let alone dogmatic assertions.

But what if Trump wins the national election, and taking Pennsylvania was a key to that victory? (Again, this is not a prediction; these are questions.) What if choosing Gov. Shapiro for vice president would have secured Pennsylvania for Harris? And what if he was not chosen because of anti-Israel, anti-Jewish sentiments?

I’m not the only one to ask such questions.

Writing on Aug. 6 for the Forward, a liberal Jewish publication (actually, America’s oldest), Jacob Kornbluh stated,

Some say Harris’ decision to go with Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz was influenced by an aggressive social media campaign led by pro-Palestinian activists and progressives aimed

at keeping Shapiro off the ticket.

The Harris campaign has denied this. A Harris aide, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, called the claim “absurd.” and “absolutely ridiculous and offensive.”

Two weeks earlier, also writing for the Forward, a headline to Benjamin Cohen’s article asked, “Will Josh Shapiro’s Jewishness hurt or help a Harris ticket?” Yes, we were told, “The Pennsylvania governor is on the shortlist for vice president,” but, “Will antisemitism derail the nomination?”

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This was hardly an abstract concern.

Writing for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on Aug. 6, Ron Kampeas asked,

Is it weird that Kamala Harris chose Tim Walz to be her running mate instead of Josh Shapiro?

On Tuesday, as soon as the vice president announced that the Minnesota governor would be her running mate, critics of the choice began suggesting that she sidelined Pennsylvania’s governor because he is Jewish.

“Did Harris reject Shapiro just because progressives don’t like that he was Jewish?” tweeted Alan Dershowitz, the lawyer and gadfly who has said he is a Democrat but has frequently defended Donald Trump.

Maury Litwack, an Orthodox Union executive who focuses on education policy, tweeted, “Democrats: You can be excited about the Walz pick but also be sad that an outright antisemitic campaign was waged against Shapiro. Some soul searching is needed.”

Nonetheless, Kampeas ended his article by quoting Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., himself Jewish, dismissing the idea that “Jews were not welcome in their ranks.” Schumer responded to a post from conservative commentator Erick Erickson, who had tweeted, “No Jews allowed at the top of the Democratic Party.”

“News to me,” Schumer wrote.

Yet it is not only Jewish publications like the Forward and the JTA discussing these concerns.

An Aug. 2 headline on stated, “Some Jewish Democrats wonder if America is ready for a Jewish vice president.”

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The article, written by Edward-Isaac Dove, stated,

With Shapiro very much in contention in Kamala Harris’ rushed running mate search, the Democratic world – already divided over the politics of Israel in the wake of the October 7 Hamas attack – is wondering whether the US would really be ready for a Jewish vice president – and the first Black and South Asian woman president, who happens to be married to a Jewish man.

Also on Aug. 2, and writing for USA Today, Riley Beggin noted that, “As Harris nears a decision, some Democratic voters and organizers are urging her not to choose Shapiro because of concerns about his Israel stance and how he has handled the fallout from the Israel-Hamas war in the United States.”

The headline read, “Josh Shapiro’s vice presidential prospects spark debate over Israel policy, antisemitism.”

Then, on Aug. 7, also in USA Today, Joey Garrison and Rebecca Morin wrote, “Walz and his common-man persona got the nod

over Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, 51, whose popularity in his home state made him a strong option to help deliver what is widely seen as the most important battleground state of the election.”

Then why wasn't Shapiro chosen?

They continue,

Throughout the 16-day vice presidential selection process, Shapiro was seen as the betting favorite and the stage was literally set for a hometown pick, with Harris holding a rally in Philadelphia on Tuesday night to debut her selection. But momentum for Walz built in recent days from the left while progressive activists raised concerns about Shapiro's stance on Israel. Shapiro's defenders argued he was unfairly singled out because he is Jewish.

Obviously, Jews have played a prominent role in Democratic politics for years. And there have been more than a few Jewish Democratic presidential candidates, most prominently Bernie Sanders, Michael Bloomberg and Joe Lieberman (vice presidential candidate in 2000 as a Democrat before becoming an Independent). Few would seriously argue that the main reason Hillary Clinton defeated Sanders in the primaries was because he is Jewish. (For the record, both Howard Phillips and Marianne Williamson are Jewish too.)

And then there was Barry Goldwater, the famously liberal Republican candidate for president in 1964, who was crushed in the elections by the Democratic incumbent Lyndon Baines Johnson—and not, primarily, because he was Jewish. (Arlen Specter, formerly a Democrat, ran for president in 1996, but as a Republican.)

What is different today, however, is Israel's war in Gaza (and beyond) and the massive spike in anti-Israel sentiments throughout America, coupled with the Biden-Harris efforts not

to alienate Arab American voters. Given the potential importance of Pennsylvania in the elections, it is foolish not to consider concerns of an anti-Jewish, anti-Israel backlash as a main reason Shapiro was not chosen.

This is hardly a matter of playing the antisemitism card. In this case, it could well be real.

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