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Soviet Refugees Flock to the Republican Party

In one of the most remarkable and unexpected political demographic developments, the 700,000+ Russian-American refugees who came to the United States in the 1980s are demonstrating their ideological and pragmatic affinity with the GOP, particularly in New York City, where the beleaguered GOP is a true minority party, having only a marginal place in city government, as 46 out of 51 NYC Council seats are held by Democrats.

As this immigrant community is coming of age in the United States, in what sociologist Miles Gordon describes as the stage of Structural Assimilation (the second of seven stages in assimilation, in which newly-arrived peoples enter the host society's institutions, after adopting its cultural and social norms), it is finally beginning to assert its political identity and flex its political muscle. In a city where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by an over 5:1 ratio, according to NYC Board of Elections statistics, the flight of this demographic group to the Republican Party represents a rare golden opportunity for the GOP to increase its presence in city government.



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Several factors account for this development. Russian-Americans recall with fondness and warmth former President Ronald Reagan, who as part of his heroic and dignified efforts to bring about the fall of the Soviet Union, permitted the emigration of thousands of persecuted Russian Jews and evangelical Christians to the United States in the 1980s, under the provisions of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which had previously been passed in 1974, under the Ford Administration. The amendment, named after U.S. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington State and Representative Charles Vanik of Ohio, both Democrats, facilitated the release of thousands of refuseniks, persecuted Christians, political prisoners, and Soviet Jews.

The Amendment's provisions call for the denial of Most Favored Nation status to countries with non-market economies that restrict emigration; permanent trade relations can only be established if the President determines that such a country does not restrict the emigration of its citizens, although these provisions have been all but forgotten, as permanent trade relations were established with Vietnam,



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and the People's Republic of China was granted Most Favored Nation status, by [a Congressional act sponsored by Former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Cal.).

Most of the Russian-American immigrants to the United States are Jewish, and had been the subject of many "Free Soviet Jewry" organized protests from the American Jewish community throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with figures such as Nathan Sharansky at the center. (After Reagan's death in June 2004, Sharansky wrote a letter to Nancy Reagan, stating, "Former President Reagan changed the march of history and the fate of millions of people because he was one of the few, outstanding leaders who brought about the collapse of the Soviet Empire.") [According to former activist Mark Levin](#), "The benefits the struggle for Soviet Jewry derived from Reagan's crusade against the "Evil Empire" were not incidental; for Reagan, Soviet Jewish freedom was central to the struggle."

Also responsible for the liberation of the Russian Jewish community was Republican Senator Chic Hecht of Nevada, who, prompted by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the last [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#), met with Reagan prior to the Reykjavik Conference in October 1986, and successfully convinced him to deliver the names of over 1200 Soviet Jews to Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan's efforts singlehandedly resulted in the liberation of oppressed Soviet Jewry.

Aside from remembering with fond admiration Reagan's undying support for the liberation of Soviet Jewry, which had long been repressed and subject to Marxist philosophy, which derides Jews as "capitalist hucksters," according to Karl Marx's odious anti-Semitic treatise [On the Jewish Question](#), the community also perceives ideological similarities between the contemporary Democratic Party and the USSR Communist Party, whose modern-day incarnation, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), espouses the same anti-Semitic attitudes as Marx, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Albert Makashov, CPRF Duma Deputy General, who has called for the [expulsion of Russian Jews](#) and "Palestinian Rights." Makashov has also met with racist skinhead leader [David Duke](#), who has condemned the John Birch Society, believing it to be "nothing more than a CIA/FBI/ADL front."

According to [Soviet Jewish refugee Arkadiy Fridman](#), an entrepreneur in Staten Island, N.Y., his community has rejected the big-government, welfare-state approach of the Democratic Party, which reminds them of the persecution they fled from. Fridman says, "the Democrats are going in an absolutely different direction," focusing on 'income redistribution' and rich-versus-poor 'class war.' It's too socialistic. It's very painful for us to see."

Fridman, like most other Soviet émigrés, identifies Democratic Party policy goals and economic principles with Marx's Social Conflict Theory and historical materialism, which posit that "the written history of all society is the history of class struggle." According to this view, society is defined by perpetual conflict between the "haves" and "have-nots," as "oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes," according to the [Communist Manifesto](#).

Likewise, Michael Petrov, president of the Digital Edge data management firm in Staten Island, notes that in his opinion, the Democrats are "micro-managing the economy," and that "Government is affecting small business more and more. It's the same as what's happening in Russia." Petrov identifies Democrat-supported policies restrictive of business as fundamentally akin to the Soviet Union's brutal centrally-planned command economy, where the state controlled and owned the means of production, assets, and investments, resulting in massive inefficiency, corruption and socioeconomic stagnation, with an eye toward the "just allocation" and the "redistribution of wealth."



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The Republican Party establishment in New York City, to date, has been successful at courting Russian-American voters. With the support of Republican State Senators Hugh Farley, John Bonacic, Frank Padavan, Martin Golden, Dale Volker, Dean Skelos, and others, [2009 legislation](#) seeking to make available extensive voting materials in Russian translation passed overwhelmingly. Former Staten Island Borough President Guy Molinari also says that he has noticed that most Russians tend to vote Republican, and his namesake club, the Molinari Republican Club, has courted a group of local Russian-American entrepreneurs, the Citizens Club, which counts Fridman, a former Soviet army officer, and Petrov among its membership.

Research indicates that in 2004, Republican President George W. Bush earned 75% of the Russian Jewish vote, and even Democratic pollster Mark Marshall has identified a “GOP proclivity” among the Russian community. A 2004 [Election Day Survey](#) conducted by the American Jewish Committee in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania found that the 75-25 split in favor of Bush among the community was accounted for by the fact that most Russians believed he had “strong leadership qualities.” The [survey](#) also found that John Kerry garnered support from only 18% of registered respondents, and that New York Russian Jews heavily approved of Republican handling of the war on terror (84% approve, 9% disapprove) and the war in Iraq (55% approve, 27% disapprove).

Los Angeles, California, is also home to a smaller Russian Jewish community where the GOP has also successfully made inroads. Si Frumkin, a Holocaust survivor, who is editor of the local Russian-language Panorama newspaper, says that when he and other Soviet refugees came to the United States decades ago, they were “shocked” by the fact that most American Jews were left-leaning. He also notes that at a 2004 Bush-Cheney fundraiser in the San Fernando Valley, six out of fifty [volunteers were Russian Jews](#), and he notes that while many American Jews were shocked to hear Reagan call the Soviet Union an evil empire, “immigrant Jews knew it was an evil empire. When you go to a party now where the vodka flows, people stand up for America and love America and are real flag-wavers.”

The refugee community has found itself at odds with the American Jewish establishment, which is overwhelmingly secular, irreligious, and liberal. According to Alex Koifman, an immigrant from Belarus, the American Jewish Committee, particularly its Boston head, Larry Lowenthal, is far removed from the needs and concerns of the Russian community. According to an interview published in the [Wall Street Journal](#), Koifman believes that the liberal Jewish establishment’s fetish with issues such as abortion rights, gay rights, and the separation of church and state is misguided and distant from the concerns of émigrés such as himself. Koifman says, “Since when are these concerns [abortion, gay rights, and church-state separation] concerns that are specific to the Jewish community? These are the Left’s concerns.”

Koifman also recalls that after Lowenthal published an op-ed in the establishment publication *Boston Jewish Advocate*, stating that American Jews are “the most liberal” and “least religious” demographic, about [100 Russian Jews sent in emails condemning Lowenthal](#) for making “outrageous statements on behalf of people he doesn’t represent.”

These developments are indicative of one blatant phenomenon in American politics; the Russian Jewish community is fundamentally a dystopian community, which has suffered through the inevitable persecution and fundamental grief that accompanies the failed experiment of Marxist utopianism. Like the Cuban Americans and Vietnamese Americans, who have suffered under the bitter yoke of communist oppression, the Russian Americans find themselves supporting those who have demonstrated a long and proud history of promoting the free market, individual freedom, and fighting



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communist oppression the world over.

While the Cuban and Vietnamese communities have run conservative candidates such as U.S. Senator-elect Marco Rubio and California Congressional Candidate Van Tran, the Russian community has run candidates in city and local elections in New York City, such as City Council candidate [Oleg Gutnik](#), a local obstetrician born in the Kazakh SSR who ran on Republican and conservative lines. Gutnik says that Democratic Party control of NYC government “reminds me of the old days in the Soviet Union,” and touts his Reaganite roots, writing, “if the Soviet government disliked an American politician so much, he must be a great man,” and “I was a Reaganite before I was even an American.” Gutnik also believes that “Government and bureaucracy are not the answer to society’s problems,” and that “Reagan stood his ground, talking about freedom, liberty and individual worth. The USSR acted like a bully. Reagan called their bluff, and the Kremlin fell apart — very quickly.”

Other Republican Russian-Americans to run for [local office](#) include prosecutor Arthur Gershfeld, who ran for the NYC Assembly, and won 32% of the vote while campaigning for only a month prior to the election; and attorney Alexander Kaplan, who ran for the same Assembly seat two years later, claiming 40% of the vote.

Commenting on the Molinari Republican Club’s efforts to reach out to the Russian community, Diane Savino, who represents Staten Island’s largely African-American North Shore community in the NYS Senate, and is a member of the Democratic and ACORN-linked Working Families Parties, says that the community’s affinity for the GOP’s message of fiscal restraint and individual freedom is “understandable,” and admits that the community leans Republican because “They have different thoughts on what communism and socialism mean, and they are a little more sensitive to it.” She nonetheless clings to her contention that “you can’t compare the policies of the Democratic Party with communism. It’s absurd.”

Unfortunately, for Ms. Savino, most of those who actually experienced the horrors of communism on a firsthand basis would debate that contention.

State Senator Savino’s office was reached for comment on this story, and has yet to reply.



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