



APPROVED: November 4, 2025

Temple Beth El Policy on Political Activity and Nonpartisanship

Background and Purpose of Policy

The Johnson Amendment, in place since 1954, prohibits tax-exempt organizations, including houses of worship, from endorsing or opposing political candidates. While Congress has not amended the Johnson Amendment, the Executive Branch has made several attempts in recent years to weaken it, most recently the IRS in pending court proceedings.

This regulatory shift raises significant concerns. It opens the door for political donors to use houses of worship as vehicles for campaign activity, potentially eroding both church-state separation and public trust. It also risks turning synagogues into partisan spaces, undermining their role as spiritual homes for people across the political spectrum.

In response, we are proposing a board policy to reaffirm our commitment to nonpartisanship. This policy protects our legal status, preserves the unity and inclusivity of our congregation, and ensures that our moral and prophetic voice can be expressed in ways rooted in Jewish values without becoming entangled in partisan politics.

Purpose

Temple Beth El is committed to upholding our mission and vision and preserving the legal standing, moral clarity, and communal integrity of our congregation. We are building a sacred community rooted in relationships, Jewish values, respectful dialogue, and ethical action. Despite any partisan polarization beyond the walls of the synagogue, we reaffirm our identity as a house of learning, prayer, moral voice, and gathering—open to diverse viewpoints and committed to thoughtful civic engagement. This policy affirms our commitment to nonpartisan integrity, while preserving the prophetic voice of Judaism and the freedom to address moral issues with courage and care.

This policy is guided by three core objectives:

1. **To protect our legal status** as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit by complying with IRS regulations prohibiting political endorsements and partisan activities. The IRS may choose not to enforce the Johnson Amendment at this time, but the law remains unchanged by Congress.
2. **To promote the unity, trust, and resilience of our community** by ensuring Temple Beth El remains a welcoming, nonpartisan space for individuals of diverse viewpoints and perspectives.
3. **To safeguard our moral voice** by affirming our right and responsibility to speak on public issues grounded in Jewish tradition and our mission, without engaging in partisan politics.

Policy Overview



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Temple Beth El will not endorse, oppose, or financially support any candidate or campaign for elected office at the local, state, or national level. This applies to the institution as well as to clergy and professional staff when acting in their official capacity.

We draw a clear distinction between **prohibited partisan activity** and **appropriate issue advocacy**. The former includes any expression of support for or opposition to a political candidate or party. The latter includes engagement with moral and civic issues consistent with our mission, so long as such engagement is conducted in a nonpartisan, values-driven manner.

1. Institutional Policy

- Temple Beth El, as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, will not endorse, oppose, or financially support any political candidate or campaign.
- Temple facilities, communication platforms, programs, events, and resources may not be used to support or oppose any political candidate or party.
- The congregation may continue to engage in nonpartisan civic engagement, voter education, and issue-based advocacy consistent with Jewish values and our mission.
- Educational programming or civic forums must be nonpartisan and reflect diverse perspectives where appropriate.
- The Board of Directors affirms its responsibility to safeguard the neutrality of the institution and will support clergy and staff in upholding these boundaries.

2. Clergy and Professional Staff

- Clergy, staff, Officers, Directors, and members of Board committees (collectively, “Temple Leadership”) may not endorse or oppose candidates in their official synagogue roles or on synagogue platforms.
- Temple leadership retains the right to speak and act as private citizens, so long as they clearly state that they are speaking in a personal capacity and not on behalf of Temple Beth El when doing so.
- Temple leadership who use public platforms (e.g., social media) where they are publicly identified with Temple Beth El must take special care to clarify that political views are personal and not representative of the congregation.
- Temple Beth El acknowledges that the clergy are public figures whose private views may be misattributed to the institution. In such cases, synagogue leadership will support the clergy in clarifying boundaries respectfully and publicly.
- Clergy and staff retain full discretion to decline speaking invitations or appearances that could create the perception of political partisanship or violate this policy and to accept invitations that do not violate this policy.
- Congregants, donors, and lay leaders will be asked to refrain from pressuring clergy or staff to endorse or oppose candidates or parties in any Temple setting. Clergy or staff experiencing such concerns should be referred to the President, Executive Director, and/or the Executive Committee.
- Temple Beth El affirms the essential role of “freedom of the pulpit,” which allows clergy to preach, teach, and write about moral, ethical, and public issues rooted in Jewish values, even when such topics



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intersect with political debates. This right – reinforcing the prophetic voice from our bimah – is not subject to congregational approval.

3. Issue Advocacy vs. Partisan Activity

- Temple Beth El affirms the right and responsibility of our community to engage with moral and ethical issues rooted in Jewish values.
- Issue-based advocacy is permitted when it is aligned with our mission and does not promote or oppose any political candidate running for office or party.
- It is a sacred obligation to hold our elected officials accountable and to have our voices heard, and for this reason, the critique of the actions or positions of elected officials in the course of their serving in office is appropriate.
- We recognize that many ethical issues intersect with political discourse. We commit to navigating these intersections thoughtfully, taking care to mitigate any appearance of partisanship.
- Educational programming that explores civic, policy, philosophical, or ethical issues must respect diverse viewpoints and always avoid promoting any candidate, campaign, or party.

4. Clarifying Exclusion for Antisemitic or Hate-Based Rhetoric

Temple Beth El affirms that the prohibitions on partisan political activity in this policy do not prevent the congregation, clergy, or lay leadership from speaking out against rhetoric, conduct, or public positions that constitute or promote antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, or other forms of hate or incitement to violence.

When an individual who is a candidate for, or holder of, public office uses language or engages in actions that (a) explicitly or implicitly call for violence against Jews or other communities, (b) deny the legitimacy or right to safety of the Jewish people or the State of Israel, or (c) create a credible and imminent threat to the safety or dignity of Jews, the congregation retains the moral and ethical right, and in some cases the obligation, to name and condemn such rhetoric or behavior publicly.

Such statements shall:

- Be framed as moral or ethical condemnations of speech or conduct, not as endorsements or rejections of any candidate or party.
- Avoid language that instructs or implies how individuals should vote.
- Be issued with the approval of the Senior Rabbi, Clergy, President, Executive Director, to ensure consistency with this policy and the mission of Temple Beth El.
- Emphasize Temple Beth El's enduring commitments to safety, dignity, and the protection of all communities from hate and violence

5. Candidate Appearances and Election Timing



APPROVED: November 4, 2025

- Candidates for public office may not be invited to speak, lead, or participate in synagogue-sponsored events within 90 days of an election, regardless of format, unless all viable candidates are invited and provided equal opportunity.
- Candidate forums may be permitted only when all viable candidates are invited, equal time is allotted to participants, and the program is explicitly framed as a nonpartisan educational event.

6. Facility Use and Rentals

- Temple Beth El facilities may not be rented or used by political campaigns, candidates, or partisan organizations for events, meetings, or gatherings.

7. Social Media and Digital Communication

- Temple-affiliated digital platforms (e.g., websites, newsletters, livestreams, and official social media accounts) must remain nonpartisan and free from political endorsements or opposition.
- Clergy and staff may use personal social media to express political views, but must clearly state that they are speaking in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the congregation. When their affiliation with Temple Beth El is public, extra care must be taken to avoid the appearance of institutional endorsement.

8. Lay Leadership Conduct

- Lay Leadership is expected to uphold this policy when representing Temple Beth El publicly.
- Lay Leadership may not use their Temple roles or Temple platforms or spaces to express political endorsements or promote partisan viewpoints.
- Personal political views may be expressed outside of Temple roles, but care must be taken to avoid confusion between personal and institutional positions.

9. Governance, Accountability, and Conflict Resolution

- This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Directors at least every five years, or earlier in response to major changes in law, regulation, or communal needs.
- Questions about the interpretation or application of this policy should be directed to the Senior Rabbi, Executive Director, President, or Executive Committee.
- If a concern is raised about a possible violation, it will be reviewed by a designated working group, which may include the Senior Rabbi, President, Executive Director, or lay leader(s) appointed by the President.

10. Transparency and Implementation

This policy will be communicated to the congregation in writing and presented in an appropriate forum to promote clarity, alignment, and shared understanding. It will be included in board materials, onboarding



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documents, and staff handbooks. Clergy, staff, and lay leaders will receive training or guidance, as needed, to ensure consistent application.