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American Jewish Voters Align With Administration's Mid East Policies

Election Night Poll finds support for limiting Israeli settlement expansion, for further US leadership to resolve Israeli-Palestinian conflict

WASHINGTON— Large majorities of American Jewish voters support a two-state solution and favor limits on Israeli settlement on the West Bank, a new poll finds.

The election night poll commissioned by J Street shows American Jewish voters broadly backing the Obama administration on three major points of contention with the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: settlement expansion, the role of the US in Israel-Palestinians negotiations, and diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Nearly twice as many American Jewish voters say that Netanyahu's policies have hurt Israel's relations with the US (40 percent) than have helped it (21 percent).

The poll, conducted by Gerstein/Bocian/Agne Strategies, finds Jewish voters strongly supporting US diplomatic leadership in the Middle East and President Obama in taking additional steps to assert such a role.

The poll results, including the full survey, crosstabs and a summary of findings , are available at 2014.jstreet.org .

“American Jews, who remain strongly connected to Israel, are also deeply concerned about the policies of the Israeli government,” said J Street's president, Jeremy Ben-Ami. “Not only do they line up more with the US government on critical issues, they fear that the Netanyahu government's policies are harming the US-Israel relationship.”

Eighty percent of Jewish voters say that Israel should suspend settlement construction either in all of the West Bank (28 percent) or in areas outside the core settlement blocs (52 percent).

“This poll should be a wake up call for the Israeli government. If they choose to go forward with unlimited settlement expansion throughout the West Bank, they will find that American Jews, whose support is so crucial, are not with them,” said Ben-Ami.

Chief among the Obama administration's criticisms of the spate of recent Israeli settlement announcements is the damage that they do to the prospects of achieving a two-state solution, which the President has put at the top of his foreign policy agenda in his second term.

Like the administration, Jewish voters remain strongly supportive of a resolution of the conflict that establishes a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza (80 percent). They say that a two-state solution is necessary to strengthen Israel's security and ensure its Jewish, democratic character (78 percent) and that it is an important national security interest for the United States (75 percent). When presented with the specific details of what a two-state resolution might look like, based on formulations on which Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have come close to agreement several times in recent years, 76 percent support these terms.

Closely tied to their support for a two-state solution is Jewish voters' belief that the US should play an active role in helping the parties to resolve the conflict (85 percent). They would strongly back the US putting forward its own draft agreement and asking Israelis and Palestinians to return to negotiations based on those parameters. (77 percent).

Support for an active US role in peace negotiations falls only slightly to 72 percent if it means publicly stating disagreements with both sides. Approval falls further to 48 percent if it means stating disagreement with only Israel.

Jewish voter support for US diplomatic leadership extends to far-reaching support for ongoing negotiations with Iran, as they approach the November 24 deadline. Contrary to the position taken by the American Jewish establishment, 84 percent say that they would support a deal currently under negotiation by the P5+1, which would restrict Iran's enrichment of uranium to civilian purposes, put in place full-time inspectors to ensure Iran is not developing nuclear weapons and reduce sanctions as Iran demonstrates compliance.

The poll finds that American Jews, like the rest of the electorate, cast their votes with the economy and other bread-and-butter issues in mind. Nationally, only eight percent identify Israel as decisive in how they vote, ranking it tenth on a list of 14 issues behind the economy (44 percent), healthcare (31 percent) and Social Security and Medicare (20 percent).

Overall, American Jews remain a solid Democratic voting bloc, with 69 percent voting for Democratic congressional candidates over 28 percent for Republican candidates. Looking ahead to 2016, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton far outpaces prospective Republican challengers, leading former Florida Governor Jeb Bush (69:24) and Kentucky Senator Rand Paul (71:22).

“The 2014 Jewish vote once again demonstrates that American Jews are a base Democratic constituency that supports the Obama Administration’s efforts to reach an agreement with Iran and to help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” the pollster Jim Gerstein said. “While Prime Minister Netanyahu has recently raised questions about American values, the data clearly show that American Jewish values closely align with the actions of the Obama administration.”

President Obama remains significantly more popular with Jewish voters than with the general population. His approval rating among Jews (57 percent) is 15 points higher than it is among Americans as a whole.

“Given the election results, it is likely that President Obama will have more room to maneuver on foreign policy than he does domestically,” noted Ben-Ami. “If he chooses to seize the opportunity to put forward a vision for how to finally end this conflict, American Jews will back him.”

GBA Strategies designed the questionnaire for this national survey of American Jews who voted in the 2014 general election. The survey was conducted November 4, 2014 and includes 800 self-identified Jewish voters. The survey is subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. GBA Strategies contracted the research company Mountain West Research Center to administer the survey by email invitation to its web-based panel, which is regularly updated and consists of nearly 900,000 Americans.

Respondents were screened at the beginning of the survey when they were first asked for their religion and then, if they did not identify themselves as Jewish by religion, they were asked again if they considered themselves Jewish.