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Jews Overwhelmingly Support President, Rebuffing Conservative Efforts to Turn Israel into Wedge Issue

Election-Night Polls of Jewish Voters Show Strong Backing for President, Democrats and Two-State Solution

WASHINGTON – An unprecedented campaign to sway the historically loyal Jewish Democratic voting bloc, backed by tens of million dollars, failed dramatically, according to election-night polls of Jewish voters nationally and in Florida and Ohio.

President Obama's 70 percent of Jewish support, compared to Mitt Romney's 30 percent, deals a crushing blow to the hopes of right-of-center donors and activists who hoped to turn Israel into a partisan wedge issue to damage the president and Democrats. These efforts to turn support and pursuit of peace between Israelis and Palestinians into a political third-rail for American Jews proved futile, nationally and in key swing states. In Florida and Ohio, the president captured 68 percent and 69 percent of the Jewish vote, respectively.

Election-night polling conducted by GBA Strategies and sponsored by J Street found not only that Jewish Americans continue to be a strong base Democratic constituency but also that support remains strong for active US leadership to achieve a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The polls offer the only scientifically driven examination of the community's voting preferences, priorities and opinions on Israel on Election Night 2012. Nationally, 800 Jewish voters were surveyed. 600 Jewish voters were surveyed in both Florida and Ohio. The results and the full methodology, including the surveys and cross tabs, are available at 2012.jstreet.org

"The five-year-long effort to portray Barack Obama as weak on Israel or as having in some way abandoned traditional support of Israel in his pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has failed," said Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of J Street, a pro-Israel, pro-peace organization that advocates for US leadership to achieve a two-state solution.

President Obama's Jewish vote share is solidly in line with the average 70 percent support garnered by Democratic presidential candidates since 1972, when exit polling began. In the extremely close 2012 elections, where Obama saw a 3 percent drop within the overall electorate, Jewish Americans remained a reliable Democratic voting bloc, with only a 4 percent decrease in their support for the president in 2008.

American Jews overwhelmingly approve of President Obama's job performance (67 percent), far outpacing the rest of Americans (50 percent, *Washington Post-ABC*, 11/4/12).

When it comes to the president's handling of the Arab-Israeli conflict, 73 percent support his policies.

The right-of-center attacks by casino mogul Sheldon Adelson, the Republican Jewish Coalition and the Emergency Committee for Israel, among others, reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of both how Jews vote and where they actually stand when it comes to Israel.

Like the rest of the electorate, American Jews cast their votes with the economy and other bread-and-butter issues in mind. Nationally, only 10 percent identified Israel as decisive in how they vote, ranking it sixth behind the economy (53 percent), healthcare (32 percent) and Social Security and Medicare (23 percent) and other domestic issues. In Florida and Ohio, the results were similar, with only 14 percent and 9 percent, respectively, citing Israel as one of their top two voting priorities.

"For Jewish voters, Israel is a threshold voting issue; once candidates demonstrate that they are supportive of Israel, voters move on to consider other issues that more directly affect their daily lives," the pollster Jim Gerstein said. "The 'Israel threshold' is an easy threshold to pass, and misleading attacks to paint Obama as anti-Israel lacked credibility and failed across the country."

American Jews are, in fact, moderate in their views on Israel. They strongly support a two-state solution that establishes a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem (79 percent), believing that it is necessary to strengthen Israel's security and ensure its Jewish democratic character (81 percent) and that it is an important national security interest for the United States (81 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, 72 percent support these terms.

Eighty-one percent of Jews believe that the United States should play an active role in helping the parties to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Support falls only to 69 percent if that means the United States publicly states its disagreements with both the Israelis and the Arabs. To that end, Jews strongly back two concrete US diplomatic initiatives: the US putting forth a peace plan that proposes border and security arrangements (76 percent) and the appointment of former President Bill Clinton to serve as a special Middle East peace envoy (84 percent).

On the issue of how to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, a plurality of Jews support (47-35 percent) giving sanctions and diplomacy more time to work before setting redlines that, if crossed would trigger an American attack.

Despite intense right-of-center efforts designed to sow doubt about the President's pro-Israel credentials among American Jews, majorities nationally (53-31 percent) and in Florida (56-31 percent) believe that President Obama would be better than Romney in supporting Israel. The president would also do a better job than his opponent in handling Iran, by a margin of 58-26 percent nationally and 61-30 percent in Florida.

The Ohio survey did not ask the questions about whether Obama or Romney would do a better job on issues. Instead, the comparison was made between Senate candidates Sherrod

Brown and Josh Mandel. Ohio Jewish voters believe that Brown, who received 71 percent of the Jewish vote share, would do a better job handling Israel (52-29 percent) and dealing with Iran (54-27 percent).

In Ohio, while a barrage of television advertisements and mailers assailing the president's positions on Israel were widely seen (73 percent), 22 percent said that the attacks had actually made them more inclined to support President Obama, while 63 percent reported that the attacks made no difference. Likewise, a controversial television ad about Iran that ran in Florida featuring Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was viewed by 45 percent of those polled, 27 percent of whom said the ad made them more likely to support Obama and 56 percent of whom said it had no effect on their vote.

"These polls lay bare the fact that the Jewish vote was not up for grabs, and certainly not over the president's handling of Israel," said Ben-Ami. "Hopefully now, the president and his political allies will recognize that they have the political backing and space to assertively pursue the best interests of Israel, the United States and the Middle East through an active effort to achieve a two-state solution."

Jim Gerstein has decades of experience studying Jewish voting patterns and has conducted annual polls of Jewish voters since 2008. He is a founding partner of GBA Strategies, and has conducted hundreds of focus groups and surveys across the United States and four continents. Earlier this year, he released a comprehensive report on Jewish voting behavior based on a review of polls by Gallup, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, and the Public Religion Research Institute. An executive summary of that report can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/b3rfs8h>

GBA Strategies designed the questionnaire for these three surveys, conducted on November 6, 2010. The national survey of 800 self-identified Jewish voters in the 2012 election has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent. 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.

The Florida and Ohio surveys of 600 self-identified Jewish voters each has a margin of error of +/- 4 percent and was conducted by landline and cell phone, calling a random sample of registered voters with Jewish names and people who self-identify as Jewish in consumer data that has been appended to the voter file.

In both the national and statewide surveys, respondents were re-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.