

**To:** J Street  
**From:** Jim Gerstein  
**Date:** July 20, 2011

*Summary Findings*  
*National Survey of American Jews*

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As J Street launches its Two-State Summer Campaign, the results of a national survey of 800 American Jews show that Jewish public opinion firmly backs the objectives of the effort. In fact, a broad majority of Jews support a comprehensive agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that includes a demilitarized Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with mutually agreed upon lands swaps, and there is overwhelming support for an active U.S. role that involves the United States putting forth a peace plan proposing borders and security arrangements.

This survey, conducted July 7-12, 2011, also indicates that President Obama continues to enjoy tremendous support with Jewish voters, who remain a loyal base constituency for the President and the Democratic Party. Jews overwhelmingly favor the President over both Mitt Romney and Michele Bachmann in head-to-head match-ups, and people who contributed money to the 2008 Obama campaign report that they will return as contributors in 2012. The President may be headed into a close general election with the national electorate, but (as Gallup also suggested recently) this is simply not the case when it comes to Jewish voters.

In addition to examining the role of the United States in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and President Obama's political standing, this survey also looked at attitudes toward the United Nations and the anticipated U.N. vote on recognizing a Palestinian state. These results highlight the complexities that often emerge in Jewish public opinion, and reveal some notable differences between younger and older Jews.

Finally, the one area in the survey which shows nearly the broadest agreement is Jews' willingness to disagree with other Jews – nearly 80 percent think Jewish community events should allow the participation of Jewish organizations that criticize certain Israeli government policies.

**Support for Active American Leadership**

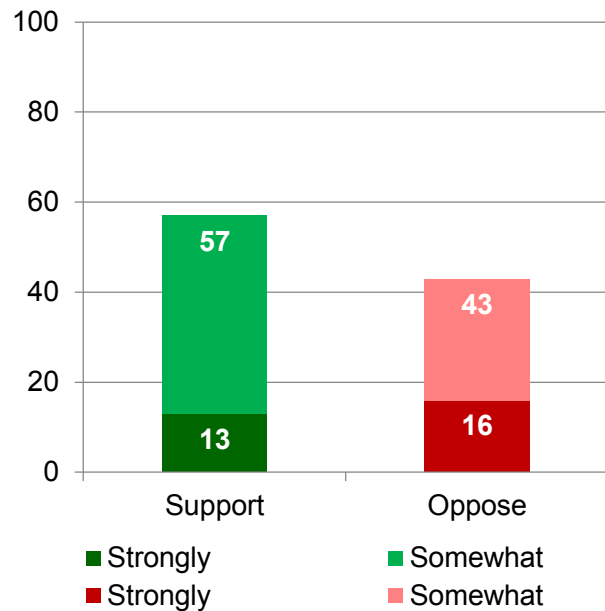
As we have observed in several surveys conducted over the past three years, American Jews clearly want the United States to play an active role in helping the parties resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. This support (83 percent) for the principle of American leadership has held

steady since our first J Street survey in July 2008, and remains strong when adding specifics such as the U.S. putting forth a peace plan that proposes borders and security arrangements (70 percent support) or the U.S. publicly disagreeing with *both* Israelis and Palestinians (67 percent support). Despite this support, it is critical to understand that backing for an assertive U.S. role falls dramatically if Israel is seen as the sole target of criticism or disagreement (44 percent support).

When presented with a comprehensive peace agreement that follows the parameters reported from talks during the Barak and Olmert Administrations, Jews support the agreement by a 57 to 43 percent margin. The result is noteworthy given the specific mention of language that recently raised an uproar among many Jewish organizational leaders – that is, establishing borders based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed upon land swaps – and other controversial elements such as Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees.

**As you may know, on a few occasions during the past 10 years, Israeli, Palestinian, and American negotiators came close to reaching a final status peace agreement but ultimately fell short. The details of that agreement include:**

- A demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza
- Internationally recognized borders based on the borders that existed in 1967, with mutually agreed land swaps that allow for most Jewish settlers in the West Bank to be inside Israel while the Palestinians get comparable land areas in return
- Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem become part of the new Palestinian state while Israel retains control of Jewish neighborhoods and the Western Wall in Jerusalem
- International forces to monitor the new Palestinian state and border crossings
- Financial compensation for Palestinian refugees while allowing some refugees to return to Israel if they meet specific family reunification criteria and the Israeli government approves



**Complex Attitudes toward United Nations**

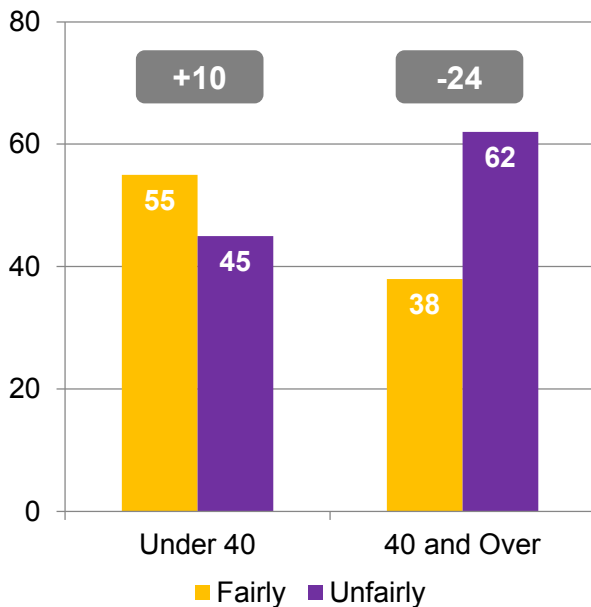
Jewish attitudes toward the United Nations are evenly divided (37 percent favorable / 40 unfavorable / 20 percent neutral), and Jews express some complex views toward the U.N. Overall, 67 percent of Jews believe the U.N. plays an important role in promoting peace and security, social progress, better living standards, and human rights; however, only 28 percent

think the U.N. does a good job in these areas. When it comes to Israel and the U.N., a large majority (57 percent) feels the U.N. treats Israel unfairly.

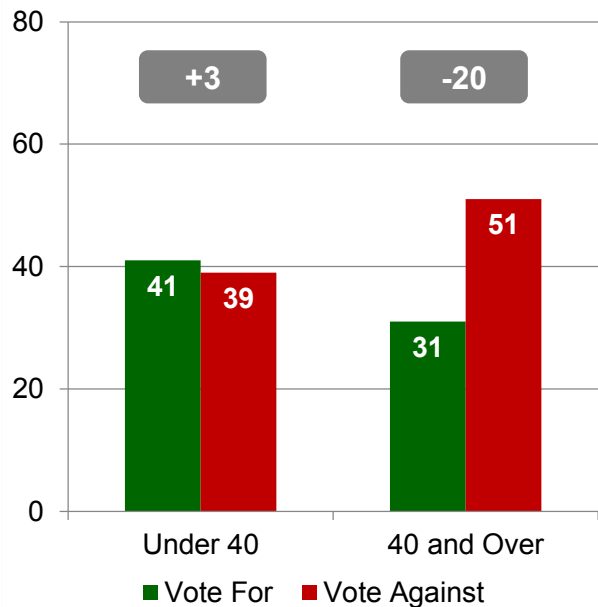
As the anticipated U.N. vote on recognizing Palestinian statehood approaches, Jewish public opinion is still forming. Nearly half of Jews (47 percent) want the United States to vote against recognizing an independent Palestinian state in the U.N., while 34 percent want America to vote for recognition and 18 percent are undecided.

The most notable finding about American Jews and the issues surrounding the U.N. is the *major differences between younger and older generations*. Among Jews under 40 years-old, the U.N. is seen in a positive light (47 percent favorable / 26 percent unfavorable). This contrasts sharply with the negative views of Jews who are 40 and older (32 percent favorable / 46 percent unfavorable). These diverging views extend to the issues relating to the U.N. and Israel, as 55 percent of younger Jews think the U.N. treats Israel fairly and only 38 percent of older Jews think the U.N. treats Israel fairly. On the question of whether the United States should vote in the U.N. to recognize an independent Palestinian state, younger Jews split evenly (41 percent think the U.S. should vote for recognition, 39 percent think the U.S. should vote against) and older Jews decisively oppose recognition (31 percent think the U.S. should vote for recognition / 51 percent think the U.S. should vote against).

**Thinking about Israel and the United Nations, overall do you think the United Nations treats Israel fairly or unfairly?**



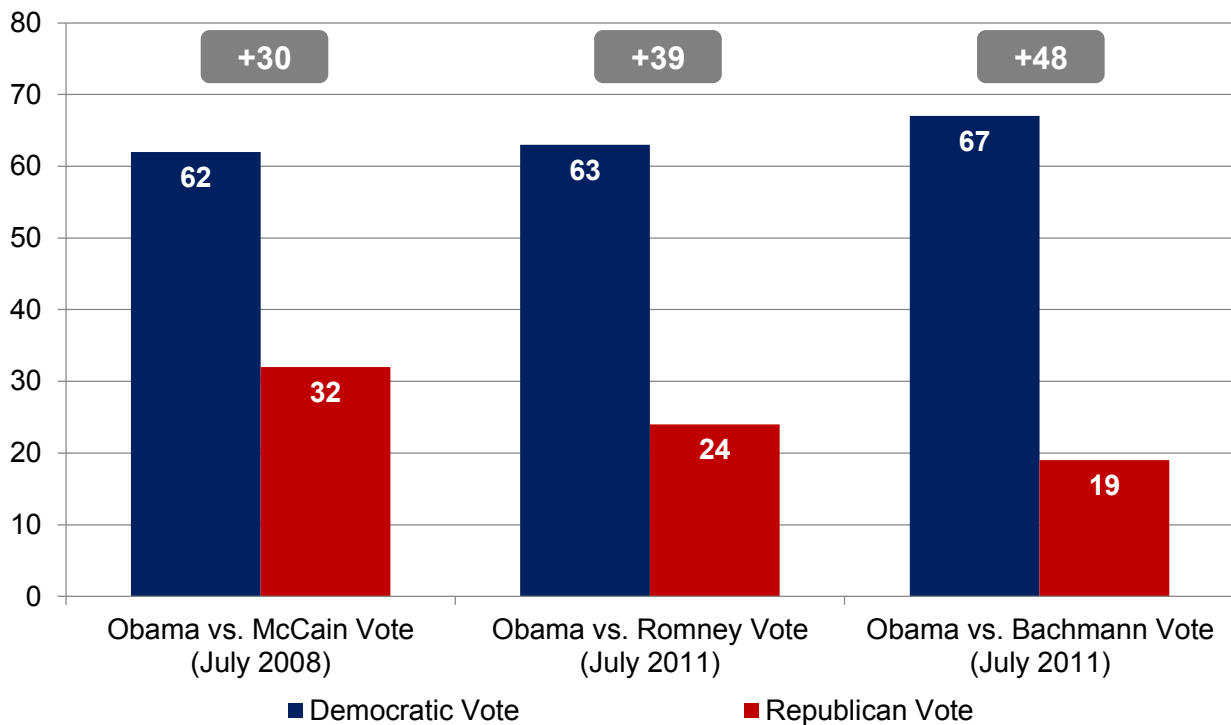
**Do you think the United States should vote for or against recognizing an independent Palestinian state?**



## President Obama Retains Impressive Support

As the 2012 election approaches, President Obama faces serious challenges in the road to re-election. But one challenge he does not face is with Jewish voters, who continue to strongly support the President even as their perceptions of the country’s direction worsen. ABC News Political Director Amy Walter wrote [this week](#) about this phenomenon as it relates to the overall electorate, when she pointed out the “cognitive dissonance” between Obama’s overall job approval and the level of economic despair across the country (and poor assessments of the President’s handling of the economy). This gap between a pessimistic outlook for the country on the one hand, and support for President Obama on the other hand, is even more pronounced with Jewish voters – only 34 percent think the country is headed in the right direction, his approval on handling the economy is 51 percent, his approval on handling the Arab-Israeli conflict is 44 percent, but his overall job approval is 60 percent. This job approval is unchanged since our November, 2010 and March, 2009 surveys, and is 14 points ahead of his approval with the broader American public – a consistent gap throughout the Obama presidency.

In a horserace with the two leading Republican candidates for 2012, President Obama leads both Mitt Romney (63 to 24 percent) and Michele Bachmann (67 to 19 percent) by overwhelming margins. It is important to note that these results are comparable to the results from the July, 2008 J Street survey when Barack Obama led John McCain 62 to 32 percent.



As was the case in the summer of 2008, history has shown that base constituencies regularly underperform until the end of an election and ultimately break toward their party in their final vote. After allocating the undecided voters by party identification, the “simulated vote” in this survey shows Obama beating Romney 70 to 27 percent and Bachmann by a margin of 73 to 23 percent.

While the strong support among Jews for President Obama may not surprise most political observers who recognize that Jews are a progressive Democratic constituency focused heavily on the domestic agenda, there has been much written about the potential decline in Jewish campaign contributions to President Obama. Setting aside the silliness of this proposition given the record fundraising amounts reported by the Obama campaign in the latest FEC filing, the survey shows that most Jewish contributors (82 percent) to the 2008 Obama campaign will continue to contribute to the 2012 reelection campaign. It is clear that Jewish political contributors are not inclined to change their donation behavior – regardless of their party allegiance – and the only difference between Republican and Democratic Jewish donors is that many more Jews report contributing to Obama (16 percent) than McCain (4 percent) in 2008, reflecting the nearly 4-to-1 vote margin cited in the 2008 exit polls.

### **Conservative Critics Lack Jewish Support**

In order to fully understand Jewish support for Democrats and President Obama, it requires recognizing that American Jews intensely oppose the conservative alternative. Whether it is Glenn Beck (10 percent favorable / 66 percent unfavorable) and the Tea Party movement (12 percent favorable / 74 percent unfavorable) or President George W. Bush (16 percent favorable / 73 percent unfavorable) and the Republican Party (18 percent favorable / 67 percent unfavorable), the most identifiable names and institutions associated with conservative American politics fail to gain any traction with American Jews. While some of these conservative voices – most recently in the form of Glenn Beck’s Knesset visit and Michele Bachmann’s extremely unusual step of mentioning Israel in her announcement speech – have gone out of their way to express their solidarity with Israel, their efforts and political identities lack basic credibility with most Jews.

	Favorable	Unfavorable
Bill Clinton	66	22
Barack Obama	56	34
Benjamin Netanyahu	50	20
The Democratic Party	49	33
The Republican Party	18	67
George W. Bush	16	73
Mitt Romney	16	60
Michele Bachmann	12	57
The Tea Party Movement	12	74
Glenn Beck	10	66

### Jewish Community and J Street

Efforts to prevent Jewish critics of Israeli government policy from participating in Jewish community events directly contradict the beliefs and values of most American Jews. When asked if groups like the JCC or Jewish Federations should allow Jewish organizations that publicly criticize certain Israeli government policies to participate in events sponsored by the Jewish community, 79 percent responded that they should allow these groups to participate.

This belief holds steady (77 percent) when presented with J Street’s perspective about opposing policies like settlement expansion in the West Bank and with J Street’s critics’ perspective that J Street’s criticism undermines Israeli security and that “just calling itself pro-Israel does not make J Street pro-Israel.” Notably, these results are very similar among Jews who belong to a synagogue (74 percent think J Street should be allowed to participate) and Jews who do not belong to a synagogue (79 percent think J Street should be allowed to participate).

### Conclusion

As J Street organizes efforts to support President Obama’s call for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it ought to proceed with the confidence that most American Jews share the view that the U.S. should play an active role to lead the two parties to a peaceful resolution of the conflict along the lines articulated by the President. And when the next Presidential speech or push for peace takes place and the usual biennial voices rise to claim that “*this is the election*” when Republicans will make major gains with Jewish voters, it is necessary to keep perspective and remember that President Obama’s Jewish support is strong and consistent while his conservative critics have little or no standing at all with most Jewish voters.

## **Methodological Note**

Gerstein | Bocian | Agne Strategies designed the questionnaire for this survey of 800 self-identified adult American Jews, conducted July 7-12, 2011. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent; the margin of error in the split samples is +/- 4.9 percent. GBA Strategies contracted the research company Mountain West Research Center and Opinion Outpost to administer the survey by email invitation to its web-based panel, which is regularly updated and consists of nearly 900,000 Americans.

Conducting reliable and affordable surveys of American Jews is a challenging task due to the small number of Jews as a proportion of the overall United States population. Advances in technology and sophisticated web-based panel techniques have greatly helped researchers seeking to gain a trustworthy understanding of small populations, such as American Jews, and web-based panels are a rapidly growing method across numerous audiences that are difficult to reach by traditional land line telephone surveys.

It is important to note that the demographics (such as denomination, synagogue attendance, age, region) and political measures (party identification and presidential job approval) in this survey are listed in the survey results and reflect those in other surveys of American Jews, including Gallup's aggregation of Jewish results in its daily tracking surveys, the 2008-2010 American Jewish Committee Annual Surveys, and the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey.

Survey results and crosstabs are posted at [jstreet.org](http://jstreet.org).