

To: J Street

From: GBA Strategies

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2018 Post-Election Jewish Survey Findings *National Survey of Jewish Voters*

As sharp and divisive polarization continues to define American politics, an election night survey shows that American Jews remain deeply entrenched in the Democratic Party.¹ From immigration to health care to Israel, Jews identify with Democrats on culture, values, and policy both in the domestic and international realms.

In fact, the Trump presidency has led Jews to vote even more Democratic than at any time since we began our election night Jewish polling in 2010. For the past 8 years, we have seen a consistent bloc of 28-31 percent of Jews who vote for the Republican Congressional candidate, regardless of the political shifts impacting the broader American population during the turbulent elections of 2010, 2012, and 2016 when the political pendulum swung rapidly. But Trump, the rise of anti-Semitism, and the politics of the past two years have significantly altered the Jewish political landscape.

American Jews voted for the Democratic candidate by a margin of 76 to 19 percent in the 2018 election, marking an increase for the Democrat by 16 net points compared to 2016 (when the Democratic candidate won the Jewish vote by a margin of 70 to 29 percent).² The Jewish reaction to the Trump presidency and the major events that have taken place over the past two years is clear: American Jews do not like Trump's policies, and they intensely dislike this President (18 percent favorable/74 percent unfavorable) whose rhetoric on race and immigration drives Jews even further away from Republicans. American Jews are more concerned about anti-Semitism in the age of Trump, and ***a shocking 72 percent even state that Trump's comments and policies are "very or somewhat" responsible for the shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.***

The survey findings on Israel-related questions are also very striking. Jewish voters remain emotionally attached to Israel, but they express concerns with Israeli government policies toward the Palestinians, and they overwhelmingly believe that someone can criticize Israeli

¹ GBA Strategies conducted a national survey of 1,139 Jewish voters on November 6, 2018. In addition to the base sample of 903 Jewish voters, GBA conducted an oversample of 236 Millennials (ages 18-34 years) who voted in the election (for a total of 436 Millennials). The methodology for this survey is detailed at the end of this memo. The full survey results can be accessed at jstreet.org.

² At the time of this writing, exit polls show the Jewish vote favoring Democrats 79 to 16 percent.

policy and still be “pro-Israel.” American Jews strongly support the United States playing an active role to help Israelis and Palestinians resolve the conflict, even if it means publicly disagreeing with both parties (64 percent). By a 71 to 28 percent margin, Jewish voters support the Iran agreement – and Republican campaign ads attacking supporters of the Iran agreement made voters *more likely* to support the Democratic candidate.

Key Findings – Political Landscape

- **Jewish voters think the country is headed in the wrong direction, and they think Trump is doing a bad job as President.** Views on the country direction are extraordinarily negative (26 percent right direction/74 percent wrong track), and Trump has an extremely low job approval (25 percent approve/75 percent disapprove, including 64 percent who *strongly* disapprove). Trump’s job approval among Jews is significantly worse than his approval with overall U.S. electorate (44 percent approve /54 percent disapprove in the national exit polls), and contrasts sharply with the pattern that took hold under President Obama when Jews consistently rated the President’s job approval 13-15 points higher than it was among the general population.
- **American Jews are a liberal constituency that identifies with the Democratic Party and strongly opposes the Republican Party.** Half of Jews describe themselves as liberal (35 percent) or progressive (16 percent), compared to 13 percent who consider themselves politically conservative. These political values are reflected in Jews’ partisan identity: 71 percent say they are Democrats, 21 percent Republican, and 9 percent Independent. Jewish voters are highly engaged politically, and 78 percent say they will vote in the 2020 Presidential primary – 62 percent in the Democratic primary and 16 percent in the Republican primary.

Key Findings – Issues Environment

- **Issue priorities have shifted for Jews in 2018, reflecting the events and public debate of the past two years.** Similar to the overall U.S. population, the economy has receded as the top concern, and Jews’ top issue in 2018 was health care (43 percent cite it as one of their top 2 issues deciding their vote). Gun violence (28 percent) was the second biggest priority, followed by Social Security and Medicare (21 percent), the economy (19 percent), and immigration (18 percent). Israel remains toward the bottom of the priority list (4 percent, which is a decline from 9 percent in 2016 and places it at 12th on a list of 14 issues.

- **Attitudes toward the Iran agreement are still positive, and Jewish voters do not like Trump’s decision to withdraw from it.** The agreement receives 71 percent support/28 percent opposition among American Jews, which is a notable improvement since 2016 when it was 63 percent support/37 percent oppose. Jewish voters strongly oppose Trump’s withdrawal from the agreement (33 percent support/67 percent oppose).
- **Advertising against Congressional candidates who supported the Iran agreement backfired against Republicans.** Several Republican campaigns ran ads attacking Democratic candidates for supporting the agreement, and 16 percent of Jewish voters report seeing some ads or mail pieces on this. Among those who saw ads or mail, 49 percent said it made them *more likely* to support the Democrat, compared to just 29 percent more likely to support the Republican, and 21 percent no difference. As a low priority issue (only 1 percent cite Iran as top 2 issue determining their vote) and with strong support for the agreement, political advertising against the Iran agreement is not effective with Jewish voters.

Key Findings – Israel

- **Even though Jews do not vote on Israel, they undoubtedly have a strong emotional attachment to it.** Israel is important to American Jews, and 65 percent report that they feel very (32 percent) or somewhat (33 percent) emotionally attached to it. In other words, Israel is a “threshold” issue for Jewish voters – they very much care about the country and a candidate must pass a threshold of being sufficiently supportive of Israel, and voters then move to other issues that impact them on a daily basis.
- **American Jewish attitudes toward Israel are positive and nuanced.** On a range of measures, Jews express increasingly positive feelings for Israel alongside concern about Israeli government policies and falling support for Prime Minister Netanyahu:
 - ***Rising positive feelings toward Israel.*** Overall, American Jews feel a little more positive toward Israel in recent years, and 26 percent of Jewish voters say they feel more positive toward Israel than they did 5-10 years ago, compared to 19 percent who feel more negative and 55 percent about the same. It is important to note that there are notable differences by age, and Jewish Millennials are evenly split, compared to Jews 35-64 years (+6 more positive) and Jewish seniors (+11 more positive).³

³ A full analysis of Jewish Millennials and comparisons by age will be released soon.

- ***Mixed feelings toward Prime Minister Netanyahu.*** The Prime Minister’s favorability fell from +30 in 2014 to +12 in 2016, and it has now dropped to a 9-year low of +3 (35 percent favorable/32 percent unfavorable). Further reflecting the divided feelings toward Netanyahu, 32 percent believe that his policies have helped Israel’s relationship with the U.S., compared to 31 percent who believe his policies have hurt relations with the U.S. and 35 percent who say that his policies have had no impact on relations.
- ***Concern over settlements and Palestinians.*** A large majority believes that Israel should suspend construction of settlements outside the core settlement blocs (49 percent) or suspend all construction of settlements in the West Bank (27 percent). More people say that Israeli government policy toward the Palestinians has made them feel more negative (29 percent) than positive (17 percent) about Israel.
- ***Israeli policy toward the non-Orthodox population alienates American Jews who are paying attention.*** Approximately, one-third of Jewish voters (35 percent) have heard a great deal (14 percent) or good amount (21 percent) about Israeli policies on who can pray at the Western Wall, who can perform marriage ceremonies, who can grant divorces, and who can convert to Judaism. Among those who have heard about these policies, 22 percent say it has made them feel more positive about Israel, 50 percent more negative, and 28 percent no different.
- **There is no ambiguity about whether it is acceptable for people to be critical of Israeli government policies.** Most American Jews (84 percent) think someone can be “pro-Israel” even if they criticize the government’s policies. This finding is consistent with our long-standing finding that Jewish voters want the U.S. to play an active role in helping resolve the conflict, even if it means public disagreements with Israelis and Arabs (64 percent) or exerting pressure on both parties (60 percent) to make the compromises necessary to achieve peace.
- **There is a broad consensus for a detailed and comprehensive final status agreement along the lines of where negotiations left off.** When presented with a final status agreement that includes a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, a return to the 1967 borders with land swaps, Jewish neighborhoods and the Western Wall in Jerusalem remaining under Israeli control while Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem become part of the new Palestinian state, financial compensation for Palestinian refugees, and some return of refugees to Israel, 78 percent of Jewish voters support the agreement. This is a significant improvement from 2016 (70 percent support) and consistent with the last mid-term election in 2014 (76 percent support).

Key Findings – Trump Impact and the Republican Party

- **While the Trump Presidency has been marked by high profile events such as the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, separation of children and parents at the U.S.-Mexican border, and the shooting in Pittsburgh, American Jews raise several alarms about the Trump era.** Large majorities say they are more concerned about the following issues since Trump became President: anti-Semitism (81 percent), anti-immigrant sentiment (80 percent), racism (79 percent), and right-wing extremism (79 percent). These issues go to the core of Jewish values and the American Jewish experience, and it is particularly striking that 78 percent believe that anti-Semitism has risen over the past few years.
- **Trump’s leadership of the Republican Party has consequences for the GOP, which is increasingly alienated from American Jews.** Major figures in the Republican Party and those identified with President Trump have extremely poor favorability ratings among Jewish voters: 9 percent favorable/66 percent unfavorable for Mitch McConnell, 12 percent favorable/67 percent unfavorable for Jared Kushner, and 16 percent favorable/73 percent unfavorable for the Republican Party. Most notably, the Republican Party favorability is a net 8-point drop from 2016, and the worst rating the Party has had in the 10 years that we have been asking this question.

Concluding Note

As Democrats win a clear majority in the House (driven by suburban gains) and Republicans increase their seats in the Senate (driven by red state pick-ups), the 2018 election reinforces the cultural and political divide in the United States. Trump supporters in rural America and Trump opponents in the cities and suburbs are highly energized and living in different bubbles. Amid this divide – and the deeply polarized politics that accompany it – American Jews have aligned even further with the Democratic camp.

The movement of Jews toward Democrats is rooted in Trump’s incendiary rhetoric and policies. But the movement also reflects American Jews’ policy differences with Trump, and his embrace of Netanyahu does not mitigate his Jewish opposition – partly because his dog whistles to extremists are acutely heard by Jews too, and partly because Jews simply don’t share his hawkish positions.

With the mid-term election completed, we can expect political attention to immediately turn to the 2020 election. The 2018 Jewish vote – and the dynamics underlying it – is a strong indicator that American Jews will be looking for a clear alternative to Trump, and candidates should enter the 2020 campaign knowing that Jews

support American policy that returns to Obama’s multilateral efforts on Iran, as well as American leadership that pushes Israelis and Palestinians toward peace.

GBA Strategies designed the questionnaire for this national survey of American Jews who voted in the 2018 general election. The survey was conducted November 6, 2018, and included a base sample of 903 self-identified Jewish voters. The base sample is subject to a margin of error of +/-3.3 percentage points. GBA Strategies contracted the research company Mountain West Research Center to administer the national survey by email invitation to its web-based panel, which is regularly updated and consists of over 14 million Americans.

GBA Strategies also conducted an oversample of 236 Millennials (for a total of 436 Millennial interviews). Among the oversample, 136 interviews were conducted by the web-based panel. An additional 100 Millennial interviews were conducted by landline and cell phones, calling a random sample of registered voters 18-34 years-old with distinctive Jewish names. Due to time constraints, the phone survey did not include all the questions as the web-panel.

In both the web-panel and telephone samples, respondents were asked at the beginning of the survey whether they consider themselves Jewish, using the same question wording as the 2013 Pew Research Center’s study, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans.”

The full survey results, including full question wording and crosstabs are available at jstreet.org.