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NYU poll: US Jews favor Obama 2:1

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American Jews favor Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama by a ratio of two-to-one, according to survey results being released Monday by researchers at New York University.

The data, taken from a nationwide poll conducted in early September, indicates that Jews as a group are 30 percent more likely than other white, non-Hispanic voters to support Obama.

Surprisingly, the poll found that gap widened to nearly 40% among Jews who rank Israel "very high" as a factor in their choice of candidate, indicating that Israel is a key issue for Jews across the political spectrum.

"Jews always look at candidates in their own camp as more sympathetic to their positions as Jews, so liberal Jews will tend to feel Obama is more pro-Israel than conservative Jews do," lead researcher Steven Cohen, a professor of Jewish social policy at Hebrew Union College, told *The Jerusalem Post*.

"In fact, liberal Jews have an argument about why McCain is bad for Israel, just as conservative Jews have an argument for why Obama is bad for Israel," he said. "There's a tendency toward cognitive consistency."

Nonetheless, support for McCain tracked support for Israel, with 58% of Jews who said Israel was very important favoring McCain.

Orthodox Jews - a category that encompasses Modern Orthodox and haredi respondents, Cohen said - were the likeliest to support McCain, with 73% indicating support for the Republican over just 27% for Obama.

Support for McCain was highest - 90% - among Orthodox Jews who said they socialized exclusively with other Jews, while only 60% of Orthodox respondents who said they had non-Jewish friends planned to vote for McCain.

Cohen said that while New York Senator Hillary Clinton might have had an easier time attracting Jewish voters than Obama has had, he did not believe large numbers of Jewish Democratic voters would change parties in November.

"I'm willing to speculate that Obama had a bit of a tougher time than Hillary - she's from New York, where most Jewish voters are, and she's familiar," Cohen said. "But if you look at the organized Jewish community, for years already you see that hardline pro-Israel Jews were arguing the Republicans were a better choice."

Yet even Jews who categorized themselves as conservative Republicans were far likelier to support Obama, with 7% indicating they planned to vote for the Democrat over just 1% of non-Jewish conservative white voters.

The difference was almost nil at the other end of the spectrum, where 97% of Jews who said they were liberal Democrats planned to vote for Obama, slightly more than the 96% of non-Jewish liberal Democrats.

Mark Mellman, a Democratic strategist, said Obama's recent surge in national polls and in states like Florida negated the possible electoral impact of a rightward swing among Jewish voters at the margin.

"The question in 2008 is, are we talking about 66% Jewish support for Obama or 75%? That's the range of difference," Mellman said. "In some years that could make the difference between winning and losing, but this year it's not likely to because so many other people are voting for Obama."

At the time of the survey, slightly more than half of all Jewish voters - 51% - favored Obama, while just 25% favored McCain and 24% were still undecided.

That translates into 67% for Obama versus 33% for McCain among those who had already made their choice - though Cohen estimated support for the Democrat among Jews at 75% today, based on his lead in more recent polls.

National polls released Sunday by Gallup and Reuters/C-Span/Zogby indicated a three-point lead for Obama, while an expanded Gallup poll of likely voters showed Obama as much as seven points ahead.

The survey, conducted by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, was conducted by Synovate, which contacted more than 1,500 Jewish respondents in September.

Another Synovate poll conducted on behalf of the American Jewish Committee in September indicated that 57% of Jews intended to support Obama, with 30% for McCain and just 13% undecided.

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