

Majority of Jewish voters open to partial arms embargo on Israel

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(Unsplash photo by Brandon Taylor)

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More than a year after the October 7 Hamas attack, most Jews in the US are broadly supportive of Israel but harshly critical of its leadership and prosecution of the war on Gaza, according to an Election Day exit poll released on Thursday, even as they expressed deep concerns about antisemitism related to protests against the war.

Among the notable findings: 62 percent of Jewish voters would support the United States withholding shipment of some weapons to Israel until Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu agrees to a US proposal for an immediate ceasefire. Ratings for Netanyahu himself hit an all-time low, with 63 percent of those surveyed saying they had an unfavorable view of him, up from 59 percent in 2022, and 66 percent said they would like to see US sanctions against far-right ministers in his cabinet.

The finding on the withholding of weapons is notable because placing any conditions on US aid to Israel has long been a red line for leading Jewish groups including the one that sponsored the poll, J Street. (J Street has recently called for a [review of arms shipments](#), while still opposing any legislative restrictions on aid to Israel.) Antiwar protesters have over the past year called for a full arms embargo; the poll tested a narrower notion, in which defensive weapons like the Iron Dome missile defense system would still be provided but offensive ones like the 2,000-pound bombs used in the Gaza war would not.

Asked about such a partial embargo, 35 percent said they would strongly support it, and another 26 percent said they somewhat favored the idea, while 38 percent were opposed.

The questions were asked of 800 Jewish voters nationwide as part of a biennial election survey conducted by GBAO Strategies on behalf of J Street, the liberal pro-Israel lobby. It found that Vice President Kamala Harris won 71 percent of the Jewish vote and former President Donald Trump 26 percent.

While support for Harris dropped from the 77 percent of Jews who supported President Joe Biden four years ago, according to prior GBAO polls, she maintained the same share of the community's vote as past Democratic candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

"Despite this traumatic year, it didn't impact political beliefs and values," said Jim Gerstein, who conducted the survey. "We're back to a baseline measure of where Democrats perform."

One major shift was Trump's support among the Orthodox, which Gerstein said make up about 9 percent of the Jewish electorate: 86 percent voted for him this year, the poll found, up from 59 percent in 2020.

The survey also found that 87 percent of Jews in the US believed "opposing Israel's right to exist" is antisemitic—though 90 percent said it is possible to be critical of the Israeli government while remaining "pro-Israel."

The survey also found that “the future of democracy” and abortion were top issues for Jews. Israel and antisemitism ranked lower, but above healthcare, guns, and taxation.

On antisemitism, 94 percent of Jewish voters said that praising the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel was antisemitic, but 71 percent said it was not antisemitic to criticize how Israel was conducting the war in Gaza, and 59 percent said that it was not antisemitic to accuse Israel of war crimes.

The poll also included a question about AIPAC’s political endorsements, which included some pro-Israel Republicans who voted against certifying the 2020 election. More than 71 percent of Jewish voters said they did not approve of this, providing ammunition for J Street’s running feud with the pro-Israel juggernaut and underscoring what Jeremy Ben-Ami, the group’s president, said was evidence that US Jews care about much more than whether a politician backs Israel.

Ben-Ami said the survey’s findings showed widespread opposed to right-wing policies in both the US and Israel. “Both of these movements pose a fundamental threat to democracy, to our freedom, to our rights,” he said at a news conference Thursday.

On the breakdown of Jewish votes for Harris and Trump, the GBAO survey landed between results that have circulated since Election Day of two other major exit polls. One commissioned by a consortium of national news outlets polled voters in 10 swing states and found 78 percent of Jewish voters backing Harris, while a Fox News analysis of the Associated Press VoteCast poll, found 66 percent support for Harris among Jews.

Both of these polls were broad surveys of people in the US that broke out Jews as well as other religious and racial groups. Neither was meant to specifically study US Jews and therefore did not conform to best practices for ensuring that the sample of Jews accurately reflected what is known about the community’s demographics from other studies.

The GBAO poll matched the responses it received from 800 self-identified Jewish voters by denomination and other factors that tend to impact politics, likely making it a more reliable survey. Gerstein noted that while he works for Democratic campaigns, he had consistently touted the quality of his Jewish exit poll even when it showed his candidates performing worse among Jews than other exit polls.

A [fourth exit poll](#) conducted by the Honan Strategy Group in Pennsylvania on behalf of two Orthodox Jewish groups claimed to have found that Harris earned only 49 percent of the Jewish vote in that state and Trump 42 percent. Maury Litwack, who organized the poll, did not respond to a request for the full results or methodology Thursday, making it impossible to evaluate the quality.

GBAO also did a Pennsylvania survey of 400 Jewish voters, and found 75 percent of them voting for Harris versus 23 percent for Trump. The Fox News exit poll analysis said 74 percent of Jews in the Keystone State backed Harris. —The Forward