**Survey says: Mitt Romney in good position for Jewish votes**

*[A recent survey reveals that, in vying for the Jewish vote, it is better to be a Mormon than a Christian.](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=1714" \t ") The data is welcome news for Mitt Romney, who after the suspension of Rick Santorum’s campaign is the only viable Republican challenger to Barack Obama.*

By Richard Baehr/JointMedia News Service

Jewish advocates for U.S. President Barack Obama are trumpeting the results of a new survey of Jewish voter preferences and issue identification. The [poll](http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Jewish-Values-Report.pdf), conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), surveyed approximately 1,000 Jews. On the question of presidential preference, 62 percent said they supported Barack Obama and 30 percent a Republican (now almost certain to be Mitt Romney after Rick Santorum finally withdrew from the race on Tuesday).

Kenneth Wald, a political science professor at the University of Florida, argued that Obama’s numbers were exactly in line with his poll numbers in a Gallup [survey](http://www.jpost.com/USPresidentialrace/Article.aspx?id=264709) conducted at a similar point in the race in 2008 (June 2008 to be exact):

“There’s absolutely no evidence in this survey of any substantial change in likely patterns of Jewish behavior this November,” said Wald, who participated in a press conference unveiling the findings of the PRRI survey.

In June 2008, Obama had just about wrapped up the Democratic Party nomination after a fierce battle with Hillary Clinton. Then-Senator Clinton consistently won a larger share of the Jewish vote than Obama in every Democratic Party primary that year. This time four years ago was also just after the release of the Reverend Wright tapes, which for a short period of time appeared to endanger Obama’s chances to be nominated. It was also before John McCain selected Sarah Palin to be his running mate. That choice, which served to solidify McCain’s support level with the Christian Right, hurt him with the Jewish community. In fact, Wald himself has argued in the past that the gradual shift of American Jews to the right abruptly ended in the early 1980s when the Republican party became more closely [identified](http://wwww.irishrover.net/archives/901) with the Christian Right.

Wald believes that history supports his claim. Beginning in the 1960s, Wald explained, Jewish voting became more centrist. He said that this trend resulted from a Jewish fear of affirmative action, a policy that Jews believed would lead to anti-Semitic quotas. Around 1984, however, Wald believes that the perceived threat changed. Continuing today, American Jews perceive the Christian Right as the most significant threat to a secular America. “Jews are uncomfortable with evangelicals as presidential candidates,” Wald stated.

The new PRRI survey has one startling statistic that I have not seen mentioned in any other report on the findings, which may contain some good news for Mitt Romney:

“When asked to rate Mormons on the same 100 point scale described earlier, American Jews on average, rated them at 47. The average rating for Muslims was somewhat lower at 41.4. By contrast, when asked to rate the Christian Right, American Jews report an average of 20.9, a score indicating that American Jews hold considerably unfavorable feelings towards members of the Christian Right, significantly more so than towards Mormons or Muslims.”

Jewish Republicans found something to cheer in the PRRI survey, in that Obama was favored by “only” 62 percent of American Jews, a significant drop-off from the 78 percent support level that he was credited with receiving in the national exit poll survey for the 2008 election.

But, arguably, the survey question on Jewish views of Mormons is even better news. Mitt Romney is Mormon, but he does not wear his religion on his sleeve, as Rick Santorum does. His personality and disposition are moderate. He projects an image of a successful businessman (which he was), and is far from anyone’s idea of a religious extremist or scold.

And more important, whether because they are a minority group themselves or for some other reason, Jews do not seem to view Mormons as part of the “Christian Right.” Oddly enough, the hostility of some on the Christian Right to Mormons might make Mormons more appealing to Jewish Americans. Mormons are certainly a conservative group by and large, as far as political beliefs, but due to their smaller numbers and concentration in just a few states, they do not appear to represent to American Jews the same threat to their secular values as the Christian evangelicals.

Like all surveys, including the exit poll from 2008, there is risk in reading too much into the results. Other than in 1980 when Jimmy Carter ran for re-election, Jews have given a significant [majority of their votes](http://www.shma.com/2012/01/the-jewish-vote-in-presidential-elections/) to Democratic candidates for president for almost a century. The 2008 exit poll included interviews with about 400 Jewish voters out of a national sample of more than 20,000. This suggests Jewish voters were under-represented in the [exit poll](http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/11/the_jewish_vote_in_2008_and_th.html) survey. The Jewish subgroup was also not a random sample of all Jewish voters, as PRRI attempted to create, and no margin of error was provided for interpreting the results of the Jewish subgroup in the exit poll survey. There is no way to know whether the Jewish subgroup contained an appropriate share of Russian Jews or Orthodox Jews, two groups within the Jewish community who tend to be more supportive of Republicans.

American Jews do not have an identical demographic (age) or affiliation pattern in each region or state. New York has a much higher Orthodox percentage of the Jewish population than other states. Nevada has a far lower percentage of the Jewish population affiliated with synagogues than other states. Florida has by far the highest percentage of the Jewish population in the over-age-65 category. California Jews tend to be more liberal than Jews in many other states. How New York Jews or California Jews vote in 2012 will have no impact on the eventual winner of the election. But Jews in Nevada, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, Colorado, and Virginia could tip a close race in these states if their voting pattern is slightly more or less for the Democratic nominee than in prior years.

For now, each party will take a survey, such as the PRRI poll, and make a case that they are doing well (or relatively well) in the Jewish community. Only in a close national election does the Jewish vote matter. This year it might.

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*Editor’s note: This column first appeared in* Israel Hayom *and is distributed with the permission of Richard Baehr.*