

Solid Support for Romney Among US Voters in Israel

American expatriates in Israel are lining up strongly behind Republican candidate **Mitt Romney**, in contrast to their fellow Jews back in the U.S., according to a survey.

It's an example of their different priorities and perceptions of U.S. policy.

While American Jews have long backed Democratic presidential candidates, American immigrants in the Jewish state are staunchly Republican. One recent survey estimated that more than four-fifths of expatriate voters here cast absentee ballots for Republican challenger **Mitt Romney**.

"I hope and **pray** that Romney will win and he will do what he says he will do," said Paula Markowitz, a Jerusalem resident originally from Teaneck, New Jersey. "(President Barack) Obama is no good for Israel, no good for the Jews, no good for America."

Most Americans who immigrate to Israel are religious Jews who tend to hold socially conservative views typical of Republicans. Their backing for Romney also reflects a general trend in Israel, where Obama is widely viewed with suspicion.

Obama's early gestures toward the Muslim world raised concerns in Israel, along with his decision to bypass Israel after delivering a landmark speech in neighboring Egypt in 2009. Since then, he has clashed with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a variety of sensitive issues.

"Most Israelis like Obama as a person but are very suspicious about his policies toward Israel, Iran, the Arab Spring, and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations," said Eytan Gilboa, an expert on American-Israeli relations at Bar-Ilan University.

“They don’t know much about Romney, but they feel he could better accommodate Israeli interests and causes.”

Obama’s staunch support for Israeli security has done little to change minds.

A survey by iVoteIsrael, a nonpartisan get-out-the-vote organization, found that 85 percent of American voters in Israel cast absentee ballots for Romney. The group polled 1,572 U.S. expatriates between Oct. 22 and 24, and said the survey had a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

Israel’s Republicans Abroad organization found the poll consistent with its own internal surveys. Israel’s Democrats Abroad said the survey was biased and unscientific.

According to iVoteIsrael, there are almost 160,000 potential voters in Israel. The group estimates that half of them cast absentee ballots this year, up from 20,000 in 2008.

“Jews tend to vote in America more than other communities, so it not’s surprising that when they come over, their turnout remains high,” said Eli Pieprz, the group’s director.

It is unclear what impact the American expatriate votes will have. Most immigrants come from the New York area, which appears to be solidly Democratic this year. But there are sizeable communities from swing states like Ohio and Florida.

In the United States, Obama won 78 percent of the Jewish vote in 2008, according to exit polls at the time. Recent polls show the president down as much as 10 percentage points because of economic and foreign policy concerns, but by and large, American Jews remain firmly in the liberal camp that backs Obama – unlike American immigrants in Israel.

Jerusalem resident Bryna Franklin, a former Democrats Abroad-Israel chair, appears in a pro-Romney ad, saying that the special relationship between America and Israel doesn’t exist

anymore.

“Forget that you voted for Democrats since you’ve been knee high to a grasshopper,” she says. “I’m urging American Jews to switch sides and vote for Romney as president.”

Kory Bardash, the co-chair of Republicans Abroad-Israel, said Franklin’s transition is one of many he’s seen in Israel over the past few years.

But Sheldon Schorer, a leading member of Democrats Abroad-Israel, claimed that American votes in Israel parallel the votes of Jewish voters in America.

“Sure, Obama and Netanyahu might not have a warm relationship, but whether they go out on double dates to the movies and eat Chinese food together isn’t of interest,” he said.

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