

What Florida's Election Results Reveal About Jewish Support for Trump

You couldn't trust the pundits and spinmeisters before the election, and you still can't trust them after the votes came in.

The chattering class, especially the segment focused on the Jewish audience, predicted a resounding rejection of Donald Trump by American voters. They were wrong. Now that the votes have been counted, many of the same prognosticators are claiming Clinton trumped the Donald when it came to Jewish voters. Wrong again.

How can that be? Hillary Clinton received approximately 70 percent of the Jewish vote, but that is among the lowest percentages of the Jewish vote that a Democrat has received in decades. The only other time in recent history that a Democratic presidential nominee received fewer Jewish votes was in 2012, following Barack Obama's first term.

Many pro-Israel American Jews were dismayed by Obama's conscious distancing of Washington from Jerusalem, as well as the public disrespect directed toward Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during Obama's first term. That disappointment translated into a deep dip in the Jewish vote for Obama's second run, as his 78 percent share of Jewish votes in 2008 plunged to 69 percent in 2012. In addition, Romney's warm personal relationship with Netanyahu guaranteed the former Massachusetts governor's pro-Israel credentials. Those two factors translated into a relatively strong 30-percent turnout of Jewish votes for the Republican nominee that year.

Given the wild card of Obama's tumultuous relationship with

Israel, a more accurate understanding of the Jewish vote in 2016 is yielded by discounting the 2012 election. The new calculus reveals a potentially strong Jewish vote for Trump—and Florida, a hotly contested state that Clinton was favored to win but ultimately lost, supports this analysis.

Experienced political strategist Dan Rodriguez, founder and CEO of the MGR Group, spent the run-up to Election Day and the big day itself in Florida. In the aftermath of the election, he has been traveling to boards of elections in heavily Jewish voting districts. He explained that from raw data, Jewish votes are difficult to distinguish because they get lumped in with white votes. Yet Clinton “received only 32 percent of the white votes (into which Jewish votes are lumped) in Miami-Dade [County], whereas Obama took 37 percent,” Rodriguez told me. In addition, he said, “voters 45 or older, a significant portion of whom are Jewish, went strongly for Trump, 56 percent to Clinton’s 42 percent.”

Marilyn Parmet, a Jewish Republican in her late 50s who lives in West Palm Beach, Florida, knew something the pollsters and pundits didn’t know. She was out on the streets in her community waving a “Jews Choose Trump” sign at rallies and next to busy intersections.

“At one mid-October rally at The Fairground in West Palm Beach, at least a hundred people came up to me and asked to take pictures with the sign. I knew then that there were so many Jews who weren’t saying it out loud, but who were going to vote for Trump,” she said.

Parmet’s comments hint at the possibility that the perceived national trend of a “hidden” vote for Trump, a trend that stumped many pollsters, may extend to Jewish voters in Florida. She believes that when the final votes are tallied, they will reveal that more than 30 percent of Florida Jews cast their ballots for Trump.

J Street's Spin

Despite Trump's win, the leftist Jewish lobby group J Street claimed victory for its causes and candidates, claiming that the 2016 election cycle "demonstrates the political space that exists for a Middle East policy that puts diplomacy first." But the numbers belie J Street's claims.

What is significant about J Street's analysis is not its conclusion—which was that 70 percent of American Jews voted for Clinton—but its failure to put the results in context.

J Street's poll—conducted by GBA Strategies' Jim Gerstein, a former J Street board member—also heralded that Jewish voters' ranking of 13 priorities revealed that Iran was considered the least important priority on the list. In the J Street poll, Israel came in 9th on that list of priorities.

But J Street's Iran finding, which dovetails nicely with the group's strong lobbying for the Iran nuclear deal, is inconsistent with much of what others involved in Jewish-focused campaigning describe.

Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC), said it "defies logic" to claim that American Jewish voters did not oppose the Iran deal when so many campaigns this election season, especially ones geared towards Jewish voters, emphasized the dangers of the Iran deal. Brooks pointed to campaigns with which the RJC was involved, noting the anti-Iran deal ads that ran for Republicans including Pennsylvania's Sen. Pat Toomey, Arizona's Sen. John McCain, and Florida's senator, Marco Rubio—all three of whom were re-elected.

Opposition to the Iran deal within the organized Jewish community achieved a level of unity unseen since the days of the movement to free Soviet Jewry. Nearly every major Jewish organization from far-right to center-left opposed the Iran deal, as did every major Israeli political party. Just about

the only poll which concluded that a majority of American Jews supported the Iran deal was commissioned by J Street.

Pew's View From the Pews

The Pew Research Center's preliminary analysis of the 2016 vote by religious affiliation shows 24 percent of American Jews voting for Trump and 71 percent for Clinton. The numbers show Trump's 24 percent Jewish support falling in between Romney's 30 percent in 2012 and McCain's 21 percent in 2008.

The Pew analysis also offers a longitudinal view of the evangelical Christian vote. The largest religious cohort voting for Trump was white, born-again/evangelical Christians, at an all-time-high of 81 percent. Pew began collecting information on that specific demographic in 2004, when the cohort produced 78-percent support for President George W. Bush, followed by 74 percent for McCain in 2008 and 78 percent for Romney in 2012.

Laurie Cardoza-Moore—founder and president of Proclaiming Justice to the Nations, a pro-Israel evangelical organization—said that during this election cycle, evangelical churches undertook a major push to encourage their members both to vote in general and to vote specifically for Trump. Cardoza-Moore would know, as she is also the representative to the United Nations for the World Council of Independent Christian Churches, which represents 44 million congregants.

"We were appalled that the numbers did not turn out for Mitt Romney four years ago," Cardoza-Moore said. "This time we saw that religious freedom was hanging in the balance."

Cardoza-Moore explained that the relationship "is front and center for our members," citing the biblical verse Genesis 12:3, which states, "I (God) will bless those who bless you (Israel), and whoever curses you I will curse."

"Well, we've been cursed these past eight years [under

President Obama],” she laughed, “so please, God, give us our blessings now.” {eo}

Lori Lowenthal Marcus is a journalist and lawyer who writes about the Jewish state and Jewish communities worldwide.

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