What lessons will the Democrats take from this election about Israel and antisemitism?

written by Lahav Harkov | 11.11.2024

Israel played an outsize role in American politics in the last year, with protests accompanied with antisemitic harassment and sometimes violence across the country, a Muslim voters' movement not to vote for Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris, and the issue may have played a role in Harris's choice of vice president.

Harris lost Dearborn, Michigan, the city with the highest Arab-American concentration, which usually votes blue, but was the epicenter of the "uncommitted" campaign to punish her for the Biden administration's position on Israel.

Her results in the Jewish community is less clear; a major exit poll showed her doing receiving 79% of the Jewish vote – the best result since 2000 – but it did not include California and New York, the states with the largest Jewish populations. A poll in New York showed Trump getting 43% of the Jewish vote, when typically 20-30% of Jews vote Republican.

What lesson will the Democrats learn about Israel and antisemitism from the poll results?

It's clear that trying to have things both ways when it comes to those areas was not a viable strategy.

Providing Israel with aid and touting the justice of its war against Hamas and Hezbollah, but also publicly complaining about Israel every day does not satisfy either political side. Decrying harassment of Jewish students but also shoehorning Islamophobia into every statement about antisemitism, while also saying that the protesters have the right ideas only emboldens the antisemites.

Polling is clear that Americans on the whole are more pro-Israel than pro-Palestinian and oppose antisemitism. Yet, as we saw in the last year, the

Democratic Party's left flanks has different views about Israel and the validity of antisemitism complaints.

If the Democrats decide they need to shore up the base, then they may lean more heavily into their criticisms of Israel, its prosecution of its wars against Iranian proxies and its continued presence in Judea and Samaria, and calls to reevaluate military aid may become more commonplace.

If the Democrats decide that they need to bring in more undecided voters, the party mainstream may stop trying to pander to anti-Israel voices and once again full-throatedly own up to their policy of support for Israel in this war. That does not mean there will not be disagreements between Democrats and the current right-wing Israeli government, but there could be a change in tone.

That being said, it is important to remember that Americans generally don't vote on foreign policy. It would be going too far to say that Israel policy lost Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris the election, and therefore those policies will not be a top priority in the party's post-election post-mortem.

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