Israelis believe country 'morally obligated' to Diaspora Jews

Survey shows Israelis blame government, not American Jews, for Kotel Crisis; economic support seen as greatest asset provided by US Jewry to Israel – while security ranks low

The vast majority of Israelis believe Israel is morally obligated to Diaspora Jews, but disagree about what that means in practice, according to a survey conducted ahead of the country's upcoming elections. Additionally, when asked about the Western Wall crisis, the number of Israelis who viewed Israel's government as responsible more than doubled those who said US Jewry was to blame.

The findings show a great consensus among Jewish Israelis, Left, Right and Center, with 95 percent of them agreeing Israel has a moral obligation to maintain its relationship with Diaspora communities in general, and specifically with the American Jewish community. However, only 57% of Israelis believe the relationship is currently in a good place.

When asked who was responsible for the crisis around the cancelation of the Kotel (Western Wall) compromise, 32% blamed the Israeli government, compared to 13% who held the American Jewish community at fault. An additional 21% said both sides shared the blame, and the responsibility.

Jay Ruderman, President of the Ruderman Family Foundation, said: “The relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community is a strategic one. The consensus on this topic bridges the political divide: 95 percent of the respondents, from all parties, view Israel's relationship with the Jewish People as important. With elections around the corner, Israelis must demand politicians talk about this issue and commit to strengthening the relationship.”

Ruderman added, “Some 90% of Israelis understand the American Jewish community is a strategic asset for Israel in a multiple fields, from economy and security to moral values. I look forward to the day Israel’s public discourse reflects this understanding.”

The Ruderman Family Foundation commissioned the survey, and it was conducted by the Dialogue polling company. It also checked the attitude Israelis had towards actively supporting the relationship with American Jewry. Asked whether the State of Israel should fund programs aimed at strengthening that relationship – such as Taglit-Birthright and MASA – 77% agreed. Interestingly, among voters of Meretz and United Torah Judaism (two parties on opposite political sides) a significantly lower approval rate of 46% and 47% was registered. Additionally, 52% of Israelis said it was important for them that their party hold the Diaspora portfolio in the next government, that number increases significantly among the supporters of Likud (61%), Labour (66%), and Kachol Lavan (62%).

The survey also showed differences in how Israelis value the American Jewish community. Nearly 35% of Israelis see it as an economic asset to Israel, while 21% think its greatest value is in the diplomatic field, and only 13% see it as being important for Israel’s security. Also, 20% of the respondents said US Jewry was a moral asset to Israel.