Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and his backers have unleashed an unprecedented drive to portray President Barack Obama as a shaky supporter of Israel, but the campaign shows few signs of swaying significant numbers of Jewish voters this November.

Opinion polls show Obama’s support remains strong among Jewish voters across the nation and in battleground states like Ohio and Florida, where Republican political action groups have poured millions of dollars into television and billboard ads attacking Obama’s support for Israel.

“I can’t remember a Republican campaign spending so much time trying to alienate Jewish voters from a Democratic candidate,” said Kevin Wagner, a political scientist Florida Atlantic University. “Usually it’s not worth their time. Clearly they think this has some potential.”

Jewish-Americans—a traditional base for the Democratic Party—make up between 2 and 4 percent of the U.S. electorate, but the group can punch above its weight in tightly contested states like Florida, a key swing state with around 600,000 Jewish voters.

Political action groups (PACs) backing Romney—who has accused Obama of throwing “Israel under the bus”—have bankrolled billboards in Florida reading “Obama...Oy Veh!”, using a Yiddish term of exasperation to direct passers-by to a website critical of the incumbent.

The Republican Jewish Coalition, backed by billionaire Romney supporter Sheldon Adelson, has undertaken a $6.5 million campaign targeting Jewish voters in Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

“The electoral calculation is certainly there” in the ads attacking Obama’s support for Israel, “though polls don’t seem to indicate the campaign having that large of an impact,” Wagner said.

Obama captured between 74 and 78 percent of Jewish-Americans’ votes in 2008, and a Gallup poll released earlier this month showed that 70 percent of Jews in the United States supported Obama, compared to 25 percent supporting Romney.
The American Jewish Committee released a poll of 254 Jewish voters in Florida this week, noting that 69 percent of respondents planned to vote for Obama, while 25 percent would choose Romney. The poll had a margin of error of 6 percent.

“Romney doesn’t have to win the Jewish vote” in Florida, Wagner said. “If he can get Obama into the low 60s, his chances are good.”

But Republicans’ portrayal of Obama as a questionable ally of Israel is unlikely to do the trick, said Kenneth Wald, an expert on religion and politics at the University of Florida. “For most American Jews, Israel is not the principle issue,” Wald said. “If there was a shooting war, things might be different. But right now under it’s really unlikely to persuade anyone who wasn’t already persuaded on these issues.”

Israel grabbed attention in the U.S. presidential election this week amid Obama’s decision not to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his visit to the United States for the UN General Assembly.

The decision “sends a message throughout the Middle East that somehow we distance ourselves from our friends, and I think the exact opposite approach is what's necessary,” Romney told CBS News in an interview.

In an interview with CBS News aired the same day, Obama was asked about pressure from Netanyahu on the White House to make decision about the possibility of military action to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

“When it comes to our national security decisions, any pressure that I feel is simply to do what's right for the American people,” Obama responded. “And I am going to block out any noise that’s out there.”

Obama opponents seized on the president’s use of the word “noise,” which echoed a quote from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in an interview with The Washington Post this week in which he said Israelis “would love to find a way for their own salvation by making a lot of noise.”

Obama said in his speech to the UN General Assembly this week that the United States would do what it takes to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Domestic social issues are much more important to American-Jewish voters than Israel, said Dylan Williams, director of government affairs at J Street, a Washington lobbyist group that advocates for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“They vote on the same things other Americans do: education, the economy, health care,” Williams said. “And on these issues, they are overwhelmingly progressive.”