

Beto O'Rourke Talks to Haaretz About Annexation, Two-states, Netanyahu and Trump

Democratic presidential candidate says a two-state solution should be a U.S. policy goal

[Danielle Ziri](#) New York

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Former Texas Congressman and Democratic party Presidential Beto O'Rourke speaks to a crowd during a campaign stop in Muscatine, Iowa on March 14, 2019. AFP

NEW YORK — If elected president in 2020, Democratic candidate and former Congressman Beto O'Rourke would not allow Israel to be a partisan issue, he told Haaretz on Wednesday.

O'Rourke spoke to Haaretz at [Congregation Beit Simchat Torah](#), the LGBTQ synagogue in Midtown Manhattan, as he was touring the synagogue's weekly legal clinic — [where](#)

[volunteers help asylum seekers](#) prepare and file their applications to the U.S. government.

“Certainly the president is trying to [turn Israel into a partisan issue]; I don't think he'll be successful in that,” he said. “Certainly Prime Minister Netanyahu has tried to do that [with] the lack of respect that he showed to President [Barack] Obama, the partisan politics in which he's participated here in the United States.

“But we don't have to accept that, and I don't,” O'Rourke added.

O'Rourke has previously faced criticism for his handling of the Israel issue, especially after [he voted against a 2014 resolution to fund Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system](#). On the whole, though, the 46-year-old Texan lawmaker is preaching a return to former U.S. positions.

Commenting on the upcoming election in Israel and Netanyahu's [campaign promises to annex the West Bank](#), the presidential hopeful reiterated his support for a two-state solution.

“I would do everything I could to work with Prime Minister Netanyahu if he is in power and if I am lucky enough to serve as president, and to support the U.S.-Israel relationship,” he said. “But that is not mutually exclusive to ensuring that the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people is not compromised or undermined or ended all together, functionally and for all practical purposes, as an annexation would do.”



Beto O'Rourke poses with members of the Jewish Beit Simchat Torah congregation, New York City, September 4, 2019 Danielle Ziri

The two-state solution, O'Rourke added, should be "the goal for the United States when it comes to Israel and the Palestinian Authority."

He continued: "It is the only way that I think you achieve those goals of human dignity and security, self-determination and the safety that people should be able to depend on in their day-to-day lives."

During his visit to CBST on Wednesday, O'Rourke sat down with asylum seekers to hear their stories and asked what he could do to make the asylum-seeking process "easier" for them.

The CBST legal clinic is held in partnership with the New Sanctuary Coalition, a network of houses of worship around the New York area that are offering sanctuary for undocumented immigrants.



Beto O'Rourke speaks to asylum seekers at a legal clinic run by Jewish Congregation Beit Simchat Tora, New York City, September 4, 2019 Danielle Ziri

Dozens of synagogues like CBST have joined the New Sanctuary Coalition to help undocumented immigrants at risk of being rounded up for deportation as Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids are conducted nationwide.

The Jewish community in general [has been at the forefront of efforts to push back against ICE](#), staging protests nationwide and blocking entrances to ICE detention centers and facilities.

Seeing the legal clinic work at CBST and hearing the stories of immigrants and Jewish volunteers was “a really powerful experience,” O’Rourke told Haaretz.

“I do think there is something that is extraordinarily resonant and powerful in the stories I was told here, the work that this community is doing,” he said. “The support that is being provided here, the mentorship programs that we've heard about — but also calling everyone's attention to the injustice that is occurring In this country, and how it's connected to other historic injustices, I think that’s really important and very powerful.”

O’Rourke is averaging about 2 percent in Democratic polls and has faced pressure to drop out of the presidential race and run instead for the Senate next year. He has ignored those calls, focusing his campaign message on targeting President Donald Trump.



Danielle Ziri
Haaretz Correspondent

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