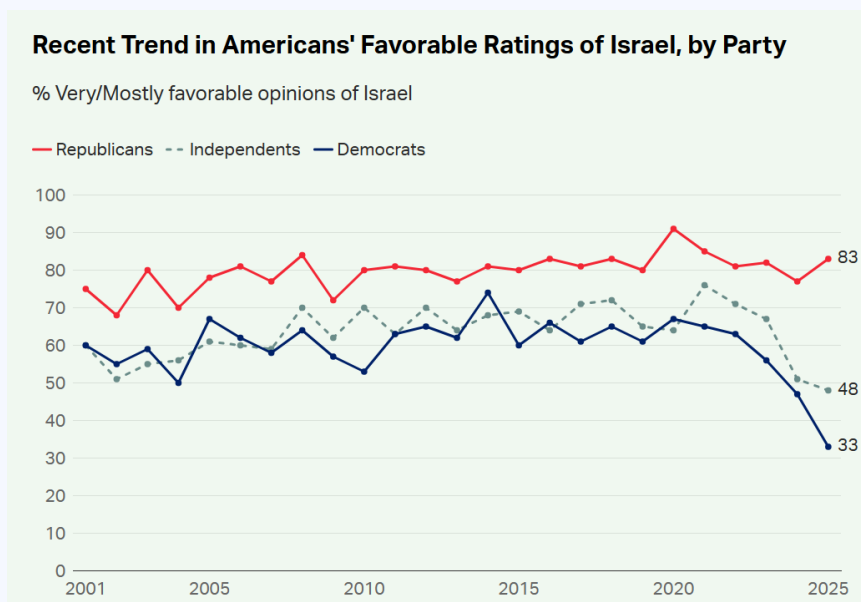


## Danger Zone: Collapsing Support for Israel Among Democrats

Theodore Sasson | No. 1965 | March 23, 2025

The partisan divide over Israel in US public opinion has reached unprecedented levels. According to a benchmark survey released earlier this month, only one-third of Democrats compared to over four-fifths of Republicans have a favorable view of Israel. The rapidly expanding gap is the result of several long-term trends: the declining religiosity of the American public, increasing partisan competition across most issues areas, and a growing generational divide in attitudes about Israel. The war launched by Hamas in October 2023 has intensified party polarization, which now threatens US support for Israel in the medium and long-term. The case of Ukraine, which similarly became a locus of party competition prior to the suspension of US military assistance, should serve as a warning to Israel.

In early March, a leading public opinion research firm, Gallup, [released results from its annual World Affairs survey](#), conducted February 3-16. The news for Israel is alarming to put it mildly. Just 54% of US adults held a very or mostly favorable opinion about Israel, a four point drop from last year and the lowest level recorded since 2000. By way of comparison, 80% of US adults held favorable views of Canada, Japan, Great Britain and Denmark. 61% held favorable views of Egypt.



Source: Gallup

The drop in average favorability masks an even more dramatic widening of the partisan divide: 83% of Republicans compared to 48% of Independents and 33% of Democrats expressed favorable views toward Israel. The 50-point gap between Republicans and Democrats is the

largest ever recorded by the Gallup survey. It reflects a modest increase in favorability among Republicans and a sharp 14-point drop among Democrats from the same time last year.

The survey's findings on the sympathies of US adults for [Israelis versus Palestinians](#) were equally stark. Among US adults who identify as Republicans, 75% sympathized more with Israelis and 10% more with Palestinians. Among Democrats, the proportions were reversed: 59% expressed greater sympathy for Palestinians and just 21% for Israelis.

The partisan divide over Israel began in the wake of Al Qaeda's September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon and widened over the course of Israel's periodic wars against Hamas in Gaza. Three overlapping and mutually reinforcing trends have driven down pro-Israel sentiment, and the decline has been accelerated by the current war. In the following sections, we examine the significance of each of these trends.

### **Declining Religiosity**

In the United States, pro-Israel attitudes have always been partly tied to religious sentiment, based on the Biblical ties of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and prophecies of their return. Over recent decades, evangelical Christians have become more pro-Israel and more likely to identify with the Republican party. The share of [Americans who identify as Christian](#), however, has declined, from 78% in 2007 to 62% in 2024. During the same period, the religiously unaffiliated—the “nones”—increased from 16% to 29%, and also became much more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Gallup describes the dynamic as a “[double whammy](#)” for Israel support—an increase in size of a group that is increasingly likely to be sympathetic to the Palestinians. Over time, these dynamics have also accelerated the partisan divide, as [religiously unaffiliated Americans](#) are much more likely to identify as Democrats.

### **Ideological Polarization**

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the major parties included conservative and liberal factions. During the Clinton years, however, liberals increasingly clustered within the Democratic party and conservatives within the Republican party. Since the Obama administration, moreover, ideological polarization has intensified, with [Democrats increasingly liberal and Republicans increasingly conservative](#). The growing partisan gaps are evident on most issues, including, for example, [immigration, abortion, global warming and gun control](#).

Ideological polarization has been accelerated by the political process which filters candidates for national office through highly partisan party primaries. It has also accelerated due to the increasing disdain among voters for the political leadership of the opposing camp. Particularly salient in this regard has been Republican voters' disdain for Barack Obama and Joe Biden, and Democratic voters' disdain for Donald Trump. Support for Israel had long been an exception to these partisan dynamics—one of the few remaining bipartisan issues, particularly among party elites. This has been partly true because American Jews—who are the most pro-Israel segment of the US public—are also a key voting block and major source of donations for the Democratic party. Israel's immunity from partisan competition has, however, apparently come to an end.

## **Generational Gaps**

Whereas pro-Israel sentiment has held steady among older adults it has declined among middle-aged adults and declined sharply among younger adults. For example, the [Pew Research Center](#) reports that 76% of Americans aged 65 and older have a favorable opinion of the Israeli people compared to just 46% of Americans under age 30. (In the younger age group, 60% held positive views of the Palestinian people.) The erosion of support for Israel has been most severe among younger Democrats, and younger Americans on the whole are more likely to vote Democrat. Both dynamics contribute to the widening partisan divide.

The collapse in support among younger and more liberal Americans is related in part to generational coming-of-age experiences and political movements within the United States. Younger generation Americans matured into adulthood during Israel's recurrent wars against Hamas in Gaza, and in the context of progressive social movements that cultivated solidarity with formerly colonized and oppressed peoples, especially Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. The relevance of these movements to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been taught in American universities, particularly in the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, in the guise of post-colonial theory. Among Millennials and Gen Z Americans, each round of conflict with Hamas—particularly the wars in 2014 and 2021—catalyzed increased sympathy for Palestinians. The election of Israel's far right government in 2022 contributed further to the alienation of liberal young adults.

## **The Israel-Hamas War**

The converging trends related to declining religiosity, ideological polarization and generational change have been catalyzed and accelerated by the war Hamas launched on October 7, 2023. In a [Pew Research Center](#) survey in September 2024, 50% of Democrats compared to 13% of Republicans thought Israel's military actions against Hamas had "gone too far." This sentiment was undoubtedly reinforced by mass media and social media coverage of the war, which featured dramatic images of Gazan suffering and Israeli aggression. Moreover, since the 2024 US presidential election, Benjamin Netanyahu has cemented close ties with Donald Trump, causing the disdain Democratic voters feel for Trump to attach ever more tightly to Israel. (In that same Pew survey, just 14% of Democrats compared to 50% of Republicans expressed confidence in Netanyahu.)

The war's contribution to Israel's deteriorating standing among Democrats has historical precedent. In the aftermath of the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, Democrats' favorability toward Israel dropped 14 points, from 74% favorable prior to the war to 60% favorable several months afterward. Israel's standing among Democrats only partly recovered in the ensuing years. It began the current steep decline in the context of the 2021 Gaza war and since the election of Israel's "full right" government.

## **Assessment**

The case of Ukraine should serve as a serious warning sign. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy received a bi-partisan hero's welcome in the United States when he addressed a joint session of Congress in 2022. Since then, partisan competition has resulted in huge gaps

in how Democrats and Republicans think about Ukraine. According to Gallup's recent World Affairs survey, Democrats are 30-points more likely than Republicans to express a favorable opinion toward Ukraine. According to a separate survey administered by Gallup in December, [Republicans are 44-points more likely](#) to favor a quick end to the war even at the cost of Russia keeping the territories it seized. These divergent attitudinal trends set the stage for last month's sudden reversal of US policy toward Ukraine, punctuated by the dramatic Oval Office confrontation and subsequent suspension of US military assistance.

In the case of Israel, support among Democratic members of Congress has begun to waver. Until now, Democratic Senators and Members of Congress have mostly continued to support Israel despite opinion trends among Democratic voters. This has been true partly because Congressional Democrats tend to be older, and partly because of their need to retain the support of American Jews. The tension between the policies and rhetoric of the party leadership and the sentiments of the party base were displayed during the Democratic Party Convention last August. Although grass roots activists sought to draw attention to the Palestinian cause, the party leadership, led by Kamala Harris, stage-managed the Convention to display support for Israel and embrace of the party's Jewish voters. However, this show of support among party elites has been eroding lately. In November, one-third of Democratic Senators voted in favor of laws proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders to halt most kinds of arms sales to Israel. In January, Senate Democrats blocked a law to sanction the International Criminal Court for actions against Israel's political leadership.

The dangers of diminished US support, particularly as it reflects long-term and deeply rooted trends, cannot be overstated. Israel needs the support of the global superpower for the foreseeable future, certainly beyond the 2026 midterm elections and next presidential term. During that period, the Democratic party will likely regain control over the House of Representatives and could win back the Senate and the presidency. If current trends continue, rank and file members of Congress will almost certainly include more critics of the US-Israel alliance and more members for whom it is simply not a priority. A future Democratic president would pay a much higher political price for supporting Israel's diplomatic and security needs. Moreover, to the extent Americans no longer view Israel as a valued ally, the climate for American Jewish life will worsen.

### **Recommendations**

The diminished support cannot be reversed by another visit by Prime Minister Netanyahu to the White House or Congress. (Indeed, Gallup's record low numbers were collected during and immediately after Netanyahu's recent visit.) A much broader strategy must be undertaken by the Israeli government to increase the likelihood of a continued US-Israel alliance. Such a strategy should include the following five components:

1. A major national initiative in public diplomacy is long overdue. A budget of [\\$150 million](#) has reportedly been promised for this purpose, representing a 20-fold increase over typical funding levels.
2. Alongside public diplomacy, Israel must relate to the need to retain the support of the American people through policy measures. Democrats need to be persuaded that

Israel embraces diplomacy alongside military power, seeks a negotiated solution in its conflict with the Palestinians, and remains a democratic country with strong institutions and an independent judiciary.

3. Israel should pursue bilateral security agreements with the United States that leverage the Republican administration's political support and bind future governments to the US-Israel alliance.
4. Israel should pursue an expansion of the Abraham Accords to include Saudi Arabia and possibly Lebanon, and regional security arrangements that address its immediate needs and provide flexibility for the future.
5. Israeli universities, arts and culture organizations, and civil society groups should seek ways to ramp up their engagement with their American counterparts. Like any democracy, Israel is much more than its government, and strengthening civil society ties will be critical to restoring Israel's standing in the United States.

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