

American Jewry Is Changing: What Israel Must Do to Preserve the Partnership

Ted Sasson and Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American Jewish community contributes greatly to Israel's national security and societal resilience. It sponsors a powerful network of advocacy organizations that help garner support for Israel in the US diplomatic and security arenas. It donates vast sums to promote Israeli arts, science, medicine, education, and social welfare. It contributes to the mosaic of cultures that shape Israeli society. For these reasons and more, a strong and pro-Israel American Jewish community is a vital strategic asset for the State of Israel. However, several trends indicate that the community is weakening, and its support for Israel is eroding.

These changes include:

- **Large-scale disaffiliation** from the organized Jewish community, related to broader trends of secularization and assimilation. Although the American Jewish community has increased in size, the growth has been greatest among the least engaged parts of the community.
- **Weakening Jewish communal institutions**, as evidenced by declining synagogue membership, plummeting supplementary school enrollment, and shrinking donor rolls to federation campaigns. New institutions and organizations are regularly established, but the overall trend is toward fragmentation and erosion of organizational capacity.
- **Declining participation in Israel-based experiential programs**. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Gaza after October 7, 2023, tens of thousands fewer young Jewish adults from the diaspora visited Israel over the last five years than would otherwise have been expected.
- **Increasing division over Israel** amid widespread criticism of its conduct in the war in Gaza, especially regarding the large number of civilian casualties, paucity of humanitarian aid, and related policies in the West Bank. Overall,

emotional attachment to Israel, especially in the younger generation, has reached its lowest level in decades.

- **Growing polarization between right-wing and liberal factions** in the Israel advocacy arena, with both moving toward more extreme positions. As a result, the overall influence of the advocacy network has diminished, as the opposing camps increasingly cancel out each other's impact.

These changes in the American Jewish community are taking place within a broader society that has become increasingly politically polarized and more critical of Israel. The growing criticism of Israel in the US polity both reflects and contributes to greater antisemitism, with manifestations intensifying on both the left and right. As a result, the American Jewish community is deeply challenged not only by its own institutional weakening and division but also by an external environment that has grown exceedingly hostile.

The rapid unfolding of antipathy toward Israel in US politics and society is a major threat to the US–Israel alliance. In the near term, American Jews remain an important bulwark supporting the alliance, especially among liberals and Democrats. However, further erosion of US Jewish support for Israel could help pave the way for the Democratic Party to turn fully against the alliance.

In the medium and long term, a diminished US Jewish community would also have economic costs for Israel. The informal networks that greatly facilitate Israel's scientific and industrial development would weaken. The philanthropic flows that benefit Israel's nonprofit sector would diminish. The greatest damage, however, would likely be the most difficult to quantify: An American Jewish community that is less supportive of Israel would leave Israel more isolated globally, less capable of extending soft power, and less confident in its role as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

ISRAEL'S CURRENT PRACTICES AND POLICIES

Israel relates institutionally to diaspora Jewish communities through a variety of government ministries and third sector organizations. Its programs of support for American Jewish life include legacy initiatives of the Jewish Agency, comprising more than 2,000 emissaries to federations, summer camps, and colleges, as well as over 100 region-to-region and city-to-city initiatives. Israel also contributes funding and support to Taglit-Birthright Israel, the organization that brings diaspora Jewish young adults on educational tours of the Jewish state. The program's extraordinary reach and proven impact have made it a substantial factor in Jewish continuity in the United States. Long-term programs in the Masa framework, including yeshiva, gap year, and study abroad programs, have also demonstrated significant and enduring impact.

At the same time, Israel's policies on a range of issues have strained relations with American Jews, especially the liberal majority. Policies regarding religious pluralism have been a perennial source of discord. More recently, the Netanyahu-Levin judicial overhaul has divided not only Israelis but also American Jews, largely along similar religious and political lines. Over the last two years, moreover, large sections of the American public were alienated by Israel's actions and policies in the Gaza war, which also raised deep concerns among many Jewish Americans. During interviews conducted for this report, many Jewish leaders expressed frustration that the views and experiences of American Jewry were not considered by Israeli policymakers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Growing evidence suggests that the American Jewish community faces profound communal challenges and that its support for Israel is weakening. Primary responsibility for the vitality and continuity of American Jewish life lies with American Jews themselves, their organizations, and their philanthropies. The State of Israel, however, should contribute as best it can to these efforts

and work to foster resilient ties between the Jewish state and the world's largest diaspora community. Drawing on 50 interviews with key informants in the United States and Israel, this report offers policy recommendations and initiatives in the areas of diplomacy, education, politics, and planning.

Diplomatic Sphere

1. Restore Israel's Standing with the US Public

Israel must undertake a comprehensive effort to rehabilitate its reputation in the United States. This effort should begin by reconsidering some of the more radical policies of the current government that have alienated many US voters and American Jews. In the future, Israel should refrain from actions that seriously harm its democratic character, and should pursue actions in the diplomatic arena to expand the Abraham Accords and open a renewed dialogue with the Palestinians.

In parallel, Israel should launch a comprehensive new approach to communications and public diplomacy. A revitalized public diplomacy should proactively articulate Israel's case, be well funded, and staffed by people with a sophisticated understanding of the diverse American publics. It should include not only strategic communications but also initiatives of exchange and cooperation across diverse spheres of higher education, science, law, arts, and sport. In addition, social and cultural bonds must be reestablished.

2. Restore Israel's Standing within the American Jewish Community

Pro-Israel sentiment has declined not only among the general public but also within the American Jewish community. Although many American Jews have applauded Israel's resilience and supported its conduct of the October 7 war, others have become more critical, aligning with claims that Israel has committed war crimes and expressing a declining emotional attachment to the Jewish state. A program of targeted outreach to the Jewish community should be included as part of the broader overhaul of public diplomacy. This

engagement should be conducted by all sides in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to hear and understand a wide range of perspectives.

Educational Sphere

3. Restore Israel Experience Programs to Scale

Over the last quarter of a century, Israel-based experiential education has proven an effective means of outreach to more assimilated segments of the American Jewish community. Yet, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war, participation in these programs has been severely curtailed. Israel should support Taglit-Birthright Israel and other providers of short-term Israel experiences—including the new RootOne program for teenagers—to rebuild capacity as quickly as possible.

4. Make Israel a Global Center of Higher Education

At the same time, long-term educational frameworks should be significantly expanded. These frameworks include gap-year programs and university-based study abroad, dual-degree, and full-degree programs. The main obstacles to expanding these programs—marketing, costs, and quality—all can be overcome with sustained investment. A reasonable goal would be to enroll 10,000 American Jewish young adults annually in gap year programs, matching the number of Israelis participating in national service and pre-military academy programs. In parallel, full-degree and dual-degree undergraduate and graduate programs taught in English should also be expanded, with the aim of establishing Israel as a world center of higher education for the Jewish people.

5. Expand Opportunities for Israelis to Learn about American Jewry

Israelis express a strong sense of kinship with diaspora Jewry and a desire to nurture the relationship. This affective orientation, however, exists in tension with a generally limited knowledge of diaspora Jewish life, including in the

United States. Study tours to US Jewish communities should be expanded and made routine for Israeli elected officials and a widening circle of opinion shapers, including journalists, university presidents, business leaders, and heads of medical and cultural institutions. Additionally, the state should initiate broad-based education about diaspora Jewry within Israeli high schools, pre-military academies, service programs, and the IDF, as well as through civil society initiatives. Broad public exposure to American Jewish life through television, film, and other media should also be encouraged and supported.

Political Sphere

6. Extend Dialogue to a Broad Spectrum of Pro-Israel Advocacy Groups

The declining influence of Israel advocacy organizations is a consequence of both macrosocial trends, largely beyond the control of communal institutions, and internal divisions between right, center, and liberal camps. Although the political diversity is one reason for the diminished clout, it does have a silver lining, as it ensures that most American Jews have outlets in which to advance their priorities, and it enables the pro-Israel network as a whole to engage with most factions in the increasingly polarized polity of the United States. As rolling back the clock to the days of a unified pro-Israel lobby is impossible, Israeli governmental and non-governmental actors should engage with all organizations of the pro-Israel network while encouraging organizations on the right and left flanks to moderate their more extreme positions.

7. Improve Mechanisms of Consultation with American Jewish Leaders

Just as Israel should reach out to a broader spectrum of advocacy organizations in the United States, it should also seek to expand opportunities for American Jews to express their views within Israel's governmental bodies. Several avenues exist for institutionalizing and regularizing the representation of American Jews. These include establishing a formal body under the auspices of the

president of Israel, and formalizing the participation of major diaspora Jewish organizations within a number of Knesset frameworks (e.g., the Committee on Immigration, Absorption and Diasporas). Another option would be an interparliamentary committee of members of Knesset and heads of major global Jewish organizations. None of these frameworks should entail voting rights for non-Israelis.

In addition, there is a need to establish a professional body within a cabinet-level ministry (e.g., Foreign Affairs, Strategic Affairs) that would advise the government at the highest level and on an ongoing basis, with assessments of the implications of its decisions for diaspora Jewry.

Planning and Funding

8. Establish a National Strategy on Antisemitism

Although Israel is a signatory to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), it is among the few signatory nations without a national strategy to combat antisemitism. By adopting such a policy, Israel would demonstrate its commitment to fighting antisemitism under the 2018 Nation-State Law and its solidarity with diaspora Jewish communities. Israel's national strategy on antisemitism should focus mostly outward, on ways of holding other nations and non-governmental organizations accountable for combating antisemitism and on emphasizing measures best undertaken by a sovereign state rather than by diaspora organizations. It should also assess the ways Israel's policies may have contributed to the capacity of antisemitic actors on both the right and the left to win new audiences and expand their influence. Finally, the strategy should be formulated in consultation with diaspora Jewish organizations, remain as politically neutral as possible, and be developed for implementation across successive Israeli governments.

9. Create a Framework for Long-Term Funding and Planning

Israel's governmental and nongovernment organizations working on issues related to American Jewry operate with very little common strategy and unpredictable funding streams. To effectively implement the initiatives outlined in this report, long-term planning, improved coordination, and predictable funding are required. Multi-year funding should be allocated for public diplomacy, Israel-based experiential and higher education, and education for Israelis about diaspora Jewry. Funding should also be allocated for development and implementation of a national strategy on antisemitism. All such funding should be accompanied by provisions that mandate regular consultations among key governmental and non-governmental bodies for the purpose of coordination and strategic planning.

CONCLUSION

Israel benefits from a strong and flourishing American Jewish community that continues to support Israel's core national interests. However, the American Jewish community shows many signs of internal weakening and a deteriorating social position, and its near-consensus support for Israel can no longer be taken for granted. This report sets out a national strategy aimed at contributing to the vitality of the community and ensuring its future ties with the State of Israel. Israel's alliance with the American Jewish community is a national security asset and is core to its purpose as a democratic nation-state of the Jewish people. With vision, investment, and hard work, Israel can make a vital contribution to the American Jewish future and to the alliance between the world's largest two Jewish communities.

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the American Jewish community has been an indispensable contributor to Israel's national security and societal resilience. The community has played a key role in US public life, helping to shape how Americans as a whole think about Israel and the US public interest. It has supported a powerful network of advocacy organizations that promote the US–Israel alliance, including the diplomatic and security assistance that proved essential during the October 7 war. It has raised vast sums for the Israeli nonprofit sector, contributing significantly to social welfare, science, medicine, arts, and higher education. It has also contributed to the mosaic of Jewish cultures that shape Israeli society, helping to bolster liberal values and religious pluralism.

Israel has long relied on a strong and flourishing American Jewish community and expects to do so well into the future. Yet American Jewry is undergoing changes that are damaging communal life, eroding support for Israel, and threatening the future of the Israel–American Jewish community partnership. These changes include large-scale disaffiliation, weakening communal institutions, deepening divisions over Israel, and diminishing political influence. Moreover, they are occurring in an American society that is becoming more antisemitic and less friendly toward Israel. Taken together, these developments point to an American Jewish community in a state of flux, whose uncertain future represents a significant strategic challenge for Israel.

Israel has limited sources of influence. It cannot, on its own accord, change the trajectory of American Jewry. It should, however, contribute and offer support wherever it can. Since its founding, Israel has imbued many American Jews with feelings of pride and confidence and has served as a source of meaning and purpose for members of the community. Since the turn of the millennium, Israel has also become an important site of formative educational experiences. The American Jewish community needs these contributions more than ever, and Israel should seek to deepen these contributions in the years ahead.

Israel should also seek to avoid causing unnecessary harm. In recent years, Israel's war policies and public diplomacy have alienated a large portion of the American public and many American Jews. Israel's actions on the issue of antisemitism have occasionally alienated Jewish organizations. Additionally, some of Israel's actions on matters of religion and state—including limited recognition of non-Orthodox denominations—continue to rankle many American Jews.

This report describes the changes American Jewry is undergoing that cloud its future and diminish its capacity to contribute, as it has in the past, to Israel's national security. The opening sections examine trends in demography, communal institutions, attitudes toward Israel, the Israel lobby, and the broader American political and social context. The report then focuses on Israel's existing policies and practices in relation to the American Jewish community. Finally, the report recommends policies and practices that Israel should embrace so as to contribute as much as possible to strengthening American Jewish life and American Jews' contributions to Israel's national security.

The report is geared primarily to Israeli policy makers, government officials, and civil society leaders. It builds on work done at INSS in recent years, including a major study and book by Assaf Orion and Shahar Eilam, *The American Jewish Community and Israel's National Security* (2019), as well as ongoing research of the US–Israel Research and Policy Group. It is also based on a comprehensive review of current research and data about American Jewish life, and 50 interviews with key informants—including communal leaders and heads of major organizations in the United States, and the professional leadership of government ministries and third-sector organizations in Israel.¹

1 We are grateful to colleagues who read and commented on drafts of this work: Pnina Sharvit Baruch, Andrew Cushnir, Shahar Eilam, Laura Gilinski, Galia Granot, Itai Hacham, Anat Kurz, Gil Preuss, Jay and Shira Ruderman, Eldad Shavit, Laura Shaw Frank, and Akiva Tor. Thanks also to Ela Greenberg for editing the manuscript, and to our research interns, Lotem Buginim and Atara Levian. We are especially indebted to the dozens of leaders, experts, and officials who were interviewed for this project.

TRENDS IN AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE

The American Jewish community is undergoing profound changes with implications for its future and its contributions to Israel's national security. This section examines major trends in the demography of American Jews, as well as developments in their communal system, attitudes about Israel, and the Israel advocacy network. The section concludes with a discussion of the changing context for Jewish life in the United States, particularly the rise of antisemitism and Israel's deteriorating standing in the public arena.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Although demographers disagree on some of the numbers, there is broad agreement that the Jewish population in the United States is growing. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), the American Jewish population grew in tandem with the overall US population, from 6.7 million in 2013 to 7.5 million in 2020. The estimate includes people who have Jewish parentage and identify Judaism as their religion, as well as people who have Jewish parentage, identify with no religion but say they identify as Jewish by culture, ethnicity, or family background (see Figure 1). The figure does not include individuals who identify with a religion other than Judaism, or who do not identify as Jewish in any way, regardless of their parentage.² Brandeis University's [American Jewish Population Project](#), reports similar findings, estimating that the Jewish population grew from 7,160,000 in 2015 to 7,479,100 in 2019.³

2 This approach to counting Jews—including the distinction between “Jews by religion” and “Jews of no religion”—has been used in most major demographic surveys of American Jews, including those of the Pew Research Center, the National Jewish Population Surveys, and of Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies.

3 See Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, “American Jewish Population Project,” Brandeis University, 2019. Israeli demographer Sergio Della Pergola challenges the validity of estimates of Jews of no religion that include offspring of intermarriage, arguing that in many cases the survey responses of such individuals merely acknowledge parentage without signaling belonging. But Della Pergola's estimates, which exclude offspring

Figure 1. Estimates of American Jewish Population

	2013	2020
Jewish by religion (JBR)	4.2 million	4.2 million
Jews of no religion (JNR)	1.2 million	1.5 million
Children	1.3 million	1.8 million
Total US Jews	6.7 million	7.5 million

Note. Taken from Pew Research Center reports.

One factor in population growth is immigration. During the last half century, hundreds of thousands of Jews came to the United States from the former Soviet Union, Europe, South America, and Israel. In 2020, three in ten Jews in the United States were either first or second-generation Americans: 11% with recent origins in Europe, 10% in the former Soviet Union, 5% in Latin America, and 3% in Israel.⁴

Another factor contributing to population growth is the sustained high rate of intermarriage, combined with the retention of most offspring of intermarriage—a relatively new phenomenon. The intermarriage rate, as reported by Pew, has steadily increased since the 1980s, reaching 61% for marriages conducted between 2010 and 2020.

The math that shapes the contribution of intermarriage to population growth is simple. Marriages between Jews and non-Jews create twice the number of households as marriages between Jews. All things being equal, when more than 50% of the offspring of intermarriages identify as Jewish, intermarriage becomes a driver of population growth. This is what seems

of intermarriage who do not identify Judaism as their religion, also show population growth, from 5.7 million in 2013 to 6 million in 2020. See Sergio Della Pergola, “According to Whose Numbers? Assessing the Pew Research Center’s Estimate of 7.5 Million Jewish Americans,” *Contemporary Jewry* 43 (2023): 229–249.

4 Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020,” May 11, 2021. See also Steven J. Gold, “Jewish Migration to the United States and the Changing Demographics of American Jewry,” in *The State of American Jewry*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (NYU Press, 2025).

to have occurred during the 2000s and 2010s. Pew’s 2013 national survey reported that among the Millennial generation, 59% of Millennials born to intermarried parents identified as Jewish in adulthood, compared to much lower percentages among the offspring of older generations of intermarriage.⁵

What caused the change? One study based on the Pew data attributes the increased likelihood that adult children of intermarriage identify as Jewish to changes in how they were raised. According to this study, children of intermarriage who are part of the Millennial generation were more likely than their counterparts in earlier generations to have been raised as Jews and to have received formal Jewish education. These differences explained their increased propensity to identify as Jewish in adulthood.⁶ The increased exposure of Millennial-generation children of intermarriage to Jewish education was the result of deliberate policy choices. Liberal denominations, synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, and programs such as Taglit-Birthright Israel launched outreach initiatives to intermarried families, helping to keep a large share of these families within the Jewish community.

The higher rate of Jewish identification among the offspring of intermarriage, however, does not in itself guarantee Jewish continuity. The offspring of intermarriage who identify as Jewish are as likely as not to be loosely affiliated “Jews of no religion.” Moreover, adult children of intermarriage are also much more likely than offspring of two Jewish parents to eventually intermarry themselves.⁷ The question of Jewish continuity is therefore not fully resolved

5 Theodore Sasson, “New Analysis of Pew Data,” *Tablet Magazine*, November 11, 2013. This finding was validated in the Pew Research Center’s 2020 survey; see Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

6 Theodore Sasson, Janet Aronson, Fern Chertok, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, “Millennial Children of Intermarriage,” *Contemporary Jewry* 37, no. 1 (2017). In the Pew 2020 study, 59% of children in intermarried families were being raised Jewish in some way.

7 On how intermarriage shapes participation in Jewish life, see Michelle Shain, Leonard Saxe, Fern Chertok, Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, and Theodore Sasson, “Beyond Welcoming,” Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2019.

but rather deferred and, to a great extent, depends on the future decisions of mixed-faith parents and their children.

The effects of population growth through intermarriage, however, are already evident in the denominational breakdown of American Jewry. The offspring of intermarriage who identify as Jewish are more likely than the offspring of two Jewish parents to report no denominational affiliation. Over the past quarter century, the share of denominationally unaffiliated Jews has steadily increased.⁸ In the Pew 2020 study, moreover, denominationally unaffiliated Jews skewed young: 41% in the 18–29 group, compared to 22% in the 65 and older group (See Figure 2).

Another rapidly growing segment of the population is the Orthodox, who comprise 17% of the 18–29 age group, compared to just 3% of the 65 and older group. The Reform and Conservative denominations, which still comprise a majority of the Jewish population, skew older. Scholars describe the demographic dynamic as the “shrinking of the center”—a kind of denominational polarization.⁹

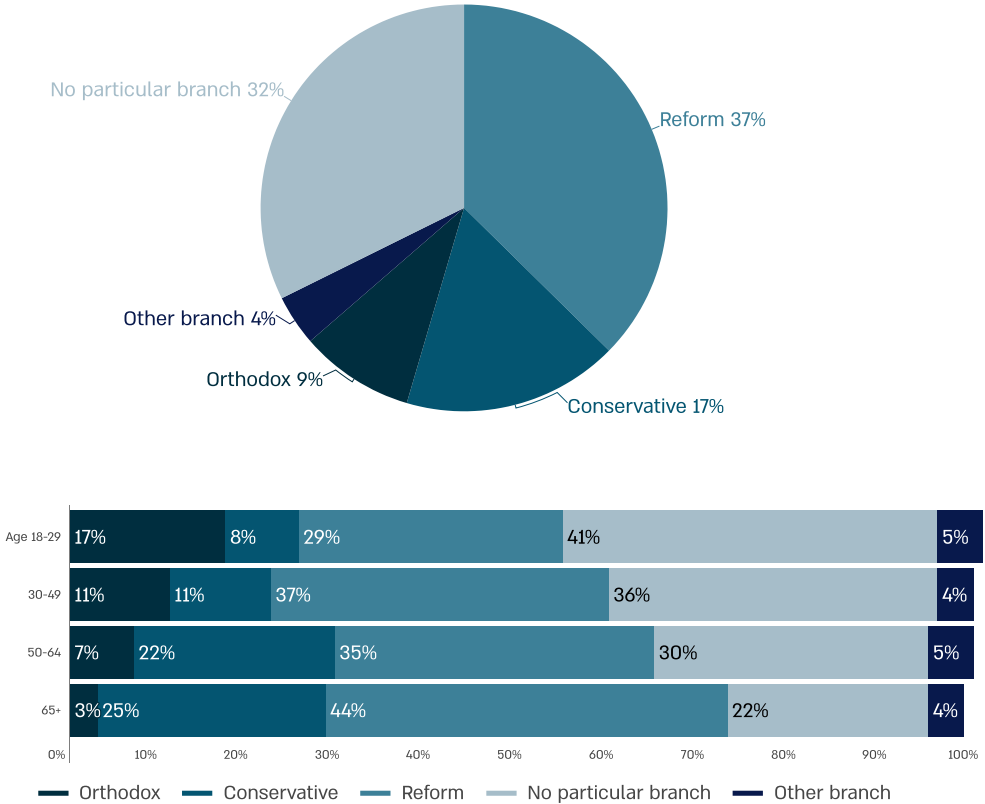
Polarization has also intensified in the political arena. Orthodox Jews, who remain a minority within American Jewry, increasingly identify as Republicans and as political conservatives, while non-Orthodox Jews continue to identify as Democrats and liberals. These partisan preferences were evident in the 2024 presidential election: An estimated 74% of Orthodox Jews voted for Donald Trump, compared to 75% of Conservative and 84% of Reform Jews who voted for Kamala Harris.¹⁰

8 For example, 32% of respondents were reported as denominationally unaffiliated in the Pew 2020 survey, up from 20% in the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000–2001.

9 Steven M. Cohen, “The Shrinking of the Jewish Middle,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 114 (2014). See also Ariela Keysar, “The Hollow Middle,” *Contemporary Jewry* 43, no. 2 (2023).

10 Jewish Electorate Institute, “New [Poll](#) Shows Jewish Americans Overwhelming Support for Harris, Democrats,” December 4, 2024.

Figure 2. Denominational Affiliation According to Pew 2020 Study
Percentage of American Jews who are...



Those who did not answer are not shown.

Finally, American Jews continue to stand out for their high levels of socioeconomic achievement. They are more likely than most Americans to hold advanced degrees, earn high incomes, be married, and live in major metropolitan areas.¹¹ Jewish young adults continue to attend top universities in high numbers, although they now comprise a sharply declining share of

11 Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

undergraduates at the most prestigious institutions. This decline is partly the result of initiatives meant to diversify student bodies combined with a tendency of most American Jews to self-identify as white.¹²

INSTITUTIONAL TRENDS

The capacity of American Jews to define and achieve communal aims—including those that relate to Israel—flows from both their organizational strength as well as their standing in American society.¹³ American Jews support a vast array of communal organizations serving a wide variety of needs. Despite the continued emergence of new organizations and mechanisms for coordination, the overall trend has been toward a weakening of the institutional system.

Federations and Foundations

The federation system, established in the early 20th century, is comprised of more than 100 organizations that raise and allocate funds on a local level. These range from small operations with a limited number of employees and annual revenues of a few million dollars to large metropolitan organizations that employ hundreds of professionals and raise hundreds of millions of dollars annually. The local Jewish agencies they support provide a wide range of social welfare, recreational and educational services, including retirement homes, Jewish community centers, summer camps, and day schools. Nationwide, the federation movement is led by the umbrella organization, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA).

During the 2000s and 2010s, the federation system as a whole raised about \$2 billion annually, making it the largest philanthropic network in the United States. By several measures, however, the system weakened during this period.

12 Rose Horowitch, “College-Age Jews Are Heading South,” *Atlantic Monthly*, August 26, 2025.

13 J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power* (Addison-Wesley, 1996).

The number of individual donors dropped significantly; the system's total revenue failed to keep pace with inflation; and the share of funds collected for general purposes (allocated according to communal priorities rather than the preferences of individual donors) declined.¹⁴

This malaise was partly reversed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The federation network proved its unique capacity to respond to nearly unprecedented emergency conditions that included extended closures of local Jewish institutions, layoffs throughout the Jewish nonprofit sector, and emergency medical and social welfare needs. The system's renewed capacity enabled a rapid and large-scale response to the October 7 war, and to the spike in antisemitism that accompanied it.¹⁵

At the same time, the federation system has increasingly been complemented by private foundations that are active in the Jewish nonprofit arena. These foundations fund local institutions such as synagogues and schools while also providing substantial "risk capital" for innovative initiatives that operate on a national and global basis. Private foundations have launched and supported outreach initiatives such as Taglit-Birthright Israel, One Table, PJ Library and Moishe House, as well as national initiatives focused on particular causes, such as environmentalism, democracy, social justice, and LGBTQ inclusion. The growth of private foundations has enabled the Jewish nonprofit system to innovate and respond to emerging challenges, especially disaffiliation, while also increasing the influence of individual donors and private wealth in communal decision-making.¹⁶

14 The number of donors to federation campaigns dropped from about 900,000 in 1989 to about 800,000 in 1994, 500,000 in 2009, and 400,000 in 2013—the last year for which published data are available. See Theodore Sasson, "Continuity and Change in the American Jewish Organizational Ecosystem," in *The State of American Jewry*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (NYU Press, 2025).

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

Synagogues and Schools

The organizational system also includes synagogues, schools, and other educational institutions. Non-Orthodox (mostly Conservative and Reform) synagogues and schools have been hard hit by disaffiliation and by the overall secularization of American society. The share of American Jews who maintain synagogue membership has generally declined, and many Conservative and Reform synagogues have closed their doors.¹⁷

Meanwhile, afternoon Hebrew school—the mainstay of Jewish education for many generations—has experienced steep retrenchment. Despite the increasing size of the Jewish population, the number of children enrolled in these supplementary educational frameworks *decreased*—from 230,000 in 2007 to 135,000 in 2020.¹⁸ The intensity of these schools generally declined as well during that same period, from programmatic models that entailed multiple sessions per week to models that entailed just one weekly session.

Orthodox Jewish institutions, on the other hand, have generally undergone rapid growth. The number of Orthodox day schools increased from 676 in 1998 to 906 in 2019, an increase of more than 30%. During the same period, the number of children and teenagers attending these Orthodox day schools and yeshivot—mostly serving an ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) population—increased by 50% from about 200,000 to about 300,000.¹⁹

17 Ibid.

18 The Jewish Education Project, “A Census of Supplementary Schools in North America,” 2023. Additional evidence of declining enrollment in supplementary schools can be gleaned from community surveys. For example, in Denver, the share of Jewish children enrolled in supplementary education dropped from 41% in 2007 to 21% in 2018; in Chicago, from 35% in 2010 to 19% in 2020; in Cincinnati from 52% in 2008 to 21% in 2018. Community surveys can be accessed through the Berman Jewish Policy Archives (<http://www.bjpa.org>).

19 Mordechai Besser, “A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States,” Avi Chai Foundation, 2020.

Summer Camps, Youth Programs, and Israel Experiences

Among the non-Orthodox majority of American Jews, informal education has generally proved more resilient than afternoon Hebrew school. In 2024, 189,000 children and teenagers attended Jewish summer camps, including about 76,000 who attended overnight camps, up modestly from about 70,000 in 2010 (with about 3,000 Israelis attending Jewish summer camps as staff and counselors).²⁰ Although the duration of camp stays has generally grown shorter as costs have risen, overall participation has recovered and even surpassed the pre-COVID-19 period. Denominational youth-movement participation, however, has declined, with major organizational retrenchment among the leading Reform (NFTY) and Conservative (USY) networks. In contrast, the pluralistic youth organization BBYO reports substantial growth and seems to have picked up some of the slack.

During the 2000s and 2010s, Israel-based study and travel became an increasingly important aspect of Jewish education. Whereas in the 1980s and 1990s, fewer than 10,000 American Jewish teenagers and young adults visited Israel annually within the framework of an educational program, by the 2010s the numbers had risen above 50,000.²¹ The key driver of this phenomenon has been Taglit-Birthright Israel, which provides young adults 18–26 with a fully-subsidized 10-day experience in Israel. More than 500,000 American Jewish young adults have participated in the program. According to the Pew Research Center’s 2020 survey, those numbers represent about 20% of all American Jewish adults aged 18–46 (i.e., the age group that has been eligible to participate).²² Other programs that contributed to the surge

20 Foundation for Jewish Camp, *Census Report: State of Jewish Camps in 2024, 2025*; see also, Steven Cohen, Ron Miller, Ira Sheskin, and Berna Torr, “Camp Works: The Long-Term Impact of Jewish Summer Camps,” 2011.

21 Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (NYU Press, 2014).

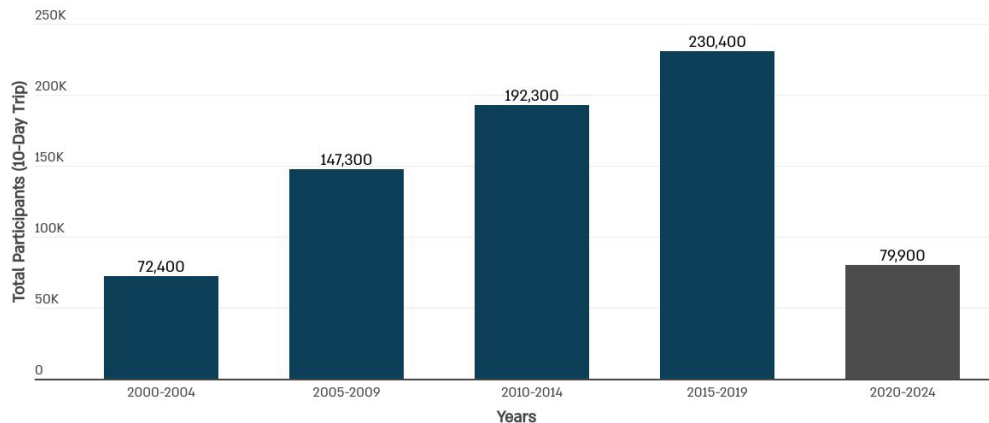
22 The program’s reach among non-Orthodox Jews is 25%, and 28% of older adults report that one of their children has participated. See Leonard Saxe, Graham Wright, and Shahar

in Israel travel include Onward Israel and Masa, both providing longer-term Israel experiences, and RootOne, which supports teen travel.

The surge in participation in Israel-experience programs ended abruptly, however, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The field began to recover in 2022 and 2023 and was then again disrupted by the October 7 war. All told, tens of thousands fewer American Jewish young adults have visited Israel through a formal educational framework than would have been expected if not for the pandemic and the war (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Taglit-Birthright Israel Participation, Global*

(*US Jewish participation comprises 60%–70% of total)



On college campuses, Hillel and Chabad student organizations have expanded and have become prominent features of university life. During the 2000s, Hillels doubled the size of their professional staffs and budgets and expanded to more than 500 universities and colleges. Chabad grew from 36 campus centers in 2000 to 207 in 2022.²³ The increase in antisemitism related to the war has had contradictory effects on participation in campus-based Jewish life: Many students have been newly motivated to attend Jewish

Hecht, “What We Can Learn From Pew’s Jewish Americans in 2020,” *Contemporary Jewry* 43 (2023): 321–341.

23 Elizabeth Redden, “The Allure of Chabad on Campus,” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 6, 2022.

activities, while a smaller share have been motivated to stay away.²⁴ Overall, campus-based Jewish life stands out as one of the bright spots in the Jewish communal landscape.

Fundraising for Israel

Another bright spot is the field of fundraising. Although Israel has joined the ranks of highly developed nations, American Jews continue to make important philanthropic contributions. In the United States, more than 1,200 organizations raise funds for causes in Israel, including hundreds of “American Friends” organizations that support partner institutions and nonprofit organizations in Israel. In 2023, the most recent year for which reliable data are available, US-based Jewish organizations transferred \$4.1 billion to Israeli nonprofit organizations. That figure includes emergency funds that were raised in the final quarter of the year, after the October 7 attack. The overall trend has been steadily upward. In 2020, US-based Jewish organizations transferred about \$2.8 billion, and in 2015 about \$2.1 billion, in inflation-adjusted dollars.²⁵

The federation movement continues to raise funds for its major Israel-based partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The JFNA campaign, which is the contemporary successor to the United Jewish Appeal, contributes to a shrinking share of those organizations’ budgets.²⁶ During the war, however, the JFNA emergency campaign raised nearly \$1 billion.

24 Eitan Hersh and Dahlia Lyss, “[A Year of Campus Conflict and Growth](#),” Jim Joseph Foundation, 2024.

25 For the purposes of comparison, all figures have been calculated according to the dollar in 2023. See Jamie Daniel Levine, Galia Feit, and Osnat Hazan, “Giving to Israel: American Institutional Philanthropy to Israeli Nonprofits 2015 – 2023,” NYU Wagner and Institute for Law and Philanthropy, Tel Aviv University, 2025; Eric Fleisch and Theodore Sasson, “The New Philanthropy: American Jewish Giving to Israeli Organizations,” Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2012.

26 The United Jewish Appeal raised an estimated 80% of all dollars donated to causes in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s. By 2012, following the proliferation of American Friends

The funds raised by American Friends organizations and the JFNA system flow to Israeli nonprofits in health care, scientific research, higher education, the arts, Jewish education, and social welfare. During the war, American Friends groups that support IDF soldiers reportedly transferred hundreds of millions of dollars, as well as a significant volume of personal protective gear.²⁷ Overall, Israeli nonprofits receive about half of their philanthropic support from the United States.²⁸

ATTITUDES ABOUT ISRAEL

How American Jews think and feel about Israel is a key factor shaping the community's myriad contributions to the state. Overall, most American Jews feel a strong emotional connection to Israel, and the community as a whole is more supportive of Israel than any other American group. This continues to be the case even after substantial erosion of support (as discussed below).²⁹

Long-Term Trends

American Jews' attachment to Israel had been trending downward prior to Hamas's October 7 attack. Long-term trends can be determined from the annual surveys of the American Jewish Committee, which has polled American Jews consistently since the late 1980s. The survey includes a standard question: "Do you agree/disagree with the following statement: "Caring about Israel

groups, the share declined to about 20%. See Eric Fleisch, *Checkbook Zionism* (Rutgers University Press, 2024); and Fleisch and Sasson, "The New Philanthropy."

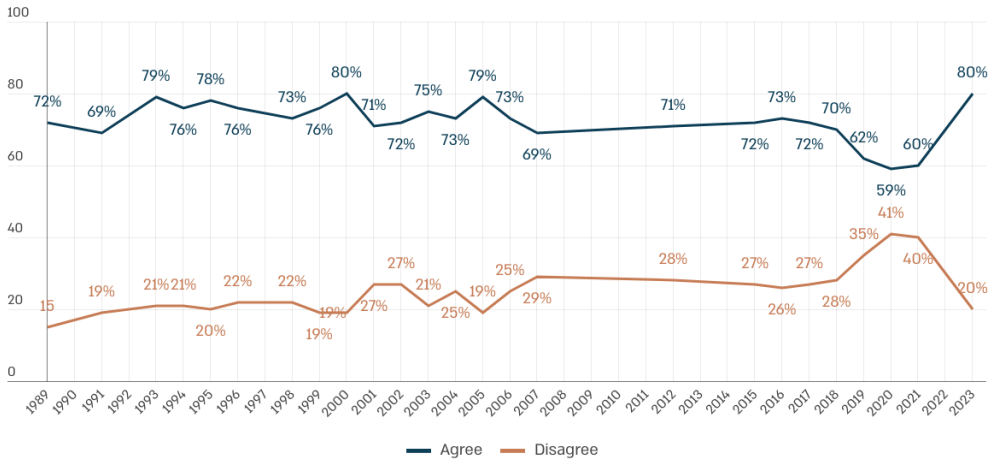
27 Asaf Elia-Shalev, "Why Israeli Battlefield Commanders Are Violating IDF Rules to Solicit Donated Gear," *Times of Israel*, June 17, 2024.

28 Daniel Levine, Feit, and Hazan, "Giving to Israel," 1.

29 This is evident, for example, in a Pew Research Center survey published in April 2025. In that survey, 73% of Jews expressed a favorable opinion of Israel, compared to 57% of Protestants, 45% of Catholics, and 28% of religiously unaffiliated respondents. Asked about the Israel–Hamas war, 93% of Jewish respondents indicated that the war was "important to them personally," compared to 58% of Protestants, 56% of Catholics, and 47% of religiously unaffiliated respondents. See Pew Research Center, "US Views of Israel and the Israel-Hamas War," April 2025.

is an important part of my Jewish identity.” Figure 4 presents the trend data for this question.

Figure 4. “Caring about Israel is an important part of my Jewish identity.”



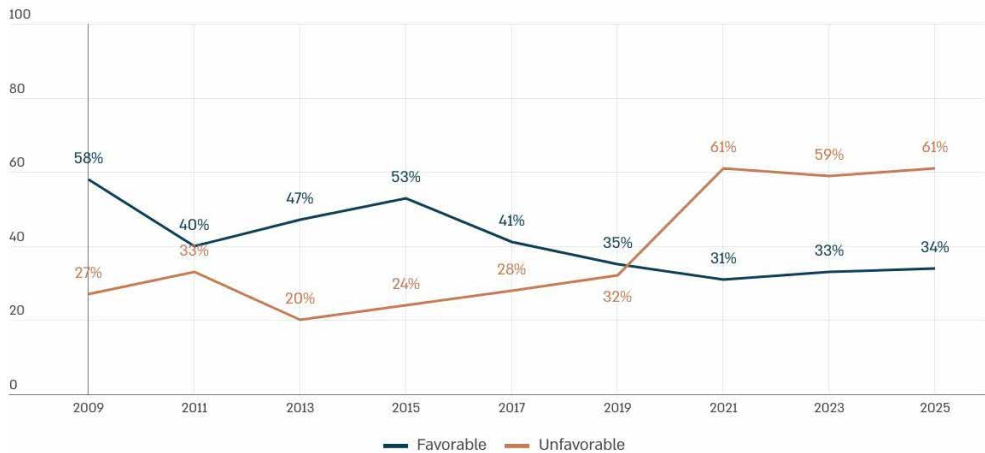
Note. Taken from AJC time series, compiled from published surveys.

The AJC survey results show stability in the 1990s, increased alienation from Israel (“disagree”) during 2000–2003, corresponding to the Second Intifada, and further alienation during 2018–2020, coinciding with the first Trump administration and a succession of indeterminate elections in Israel. After October 7 and the onset of the war, alienation dropped sharply to near its historic low, where it remained throughout the first year of the war. This pattern of periods of stability interrupted by sudden shifts in attachment suggests greater responsiveness to political events rather than an unfolding of slower moving demographic changes, although both dynamics are likely at work.

American Jewish views of Israel’s long-serving prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu follow a largely similar trajectory. Between 2009 and 2019, the share of American Jews who expressed an unfavorable opinion of Netanyahu ranged from 20% and 32%. Between 2019 and 2025—a period that included Netanyahu’s campaign pledge to annex the West Bank, the 2021 Gaza War,

the judicial overhaul, and the prime minister’s criminal trial—the share expressing an unfavorable view of him increased sharply to between 59% and 61%, although no shift in post-October 7 attitudes has been observed regarding Netanyahu personally (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. American Jewish Voters' Favorability Toward Netanyahu



Note. Taken from Jewish Voters Resource Center, based on GBAO polling data, May 2025.

Policy Attitudes

On matters concerning Israeli government policies, Reform, Conservative, and unaffiliated Jews tend to support liberal and centrist positions, whereas Orthodox Jews tend to support more conservative or right-wing positions. This pattern is evident, for example, in relation to a two-state solution for the Israel–Palestinian conflict, which non-Orthodox Jews tend to support, and Orthodox Jews generally oppose. Similar divides were evident regarding the Iran nuclear deal negotiated during the Obama administration (mostly supported by non-Orthodox Jews and opposed by Orthodox Jews) and the

judicial overhaul pursued by the current Netanyahu-led government (non-Orthodox Jews are mostly opposed while Orthodox Jews tend to support).³⁰

Age is also an important factor shaping American Jewish attitudes toward Israel. Young adults tend to express lower levels of emotional attachment to Israel than their older counterparts and are more critical of Israel's policies toward Palestinians. These generational differences were evident, for example, in a survey conducted in 2021 by the Jewish Electorate Institute, which asked respondents to evaluate a number of statements about Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Forty-three percent of respondents under age 40, compared to 27% of respondents over 64, agreed that "Israel's treatment of Palestinians is similar to racism in the US." Thirty-eight percent of respondents under age 40, compared to 13% of respondents over 64, agreed that "Israel is an apartheid state."³¹

The War in Gaza

Across age groups and denominations, a strong majority of American Jews supported Israel's aims during the first year of the war in Gaza. For example,

30 The "Iran nuclear deal" refers to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). For findings on Jewish opinion regarding the JCPOA, see Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020," May 11, 2021. For findings about the two-state solution and the judicial overhaul, see Jewish Electorate Institute, "National Survey of Jewish Voters," September 15, 2022, and Jewish Electorate Institute, "National Survey of Jewish Voters," June 23, 2023. On generational and denominational differences in attitudes about Israel, see Dov Waxman, "The Changing American Jewish Relationship with Israel," in *The State of American Jewry*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (NYU Press, 2025).

31 Jewish Electorate Institute, "National Survey of Jewish Voters," July 13, 2021. Notably, age differences in emotional attachment to Israel have been a feature of surveys of American Jews since the 1970s. Generally, emotional attachment within age cohorts has increased over the life course, such that yesterday's disaffected young adults have become today's pro-Israel seniors. Such a pattern, however, is unlikely to hold in the future, given increasing partisan polarization and Israel's deteriorating position in US public opinion overall. See Theodore Sasson, Benjamin Phillips, Graham Wright, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, "Understanding Young Adult Attachment to Israel: Period, Lifecycle and Generational Dynamics," *Contemporary Judaism* 32, no. 1 (2012): 67–84.

in a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in February 2024, 89% of Jewish respondents described Israel's reasons for fighting Hamas as valid, compared to 74% of white evangelical Christians (who were the next most pro-Israel group) and 58% of Americans overall.³² Notably, American Jews were also among the demographic groups most likely to support humanitarian aid for Palestinians civilians in Gaza.³³

At the same time, generational differences have also remained pronounced. For example, in the same Pew survey, 26% of respondents aged 18–34 were opposed to US military aid to Israel, compared to just 8% of respondents aged 65 and older. Similarly, 42% of the younger respondents described Israel's conduct in the war as “unacceptable,” compared to 29% of the oldest category of respondents.

During the peak of the pro-Palestinian mobilization on US campuses, throughout the spring semester of 2024, while most Jewish students identified with Israel, a minority identified more with the Palestinians. In a high-quality survey of US university students, the political scientist [Eitan Hersh](#) found that 33% of Jewish students attended a protest or event in support of Israel, while 17% attended a protest or event in support of the Palestinians.³⁴ A survey of [Columbia University](#) students found that one-third of Jewish students either participated in pro-Palestinian protests or generally favored the Palestinian side in the conflict.³⁵

Finally, as the war approached the end of its second year, amid extensive news coverage of hunger in Gaza, killings of Gazans seeking food aid, and Israel's military assault on Gaza City, criticism of Israel's war policies surged.

32 Becca A. Alper, “How US Jews are Experiencing the Israel-Hamas War,” Pew Research Center, April 2, 2024.

33 Laura Silver et. al, “Views of the Israel-Hamas War,” Pew Research Center, March 21, 2024.

34 Eitan Hersh and Dahlia Lyss, “A Year of Campus Conflict and Growth,” Jim Joseph Foundation, September 3, 2024.

35 Columbia University, “Student Belonging and Exclusion Survey Report,” June 2025.

A September 2025 survey of American Jews conducted by the firm SSRS on behalf of the [Washington Post](#) reported that nearly half of respondents (48%) disapproved of Israel’s military conduct of the war, up from 33% in a comparable question in the 2024 Pew survey. Nearly four in ten respondents (39%) thought Israel’s actions in Gaza should be categorized as genocide; more than six in ten (61%) said they believed Israel had committed other (presumably lesser) war crimes.³⁶

In the *Washington Post* poll, a majority of respondents (59%) said that Israel had not done enough to ensure adequate food aid to the people of Gaza. At the same time, very large majorities (above 80%) expressed concern for Israeli hostages and soldiers, as well as about the threat Hamas still posed to Israel. A similarly large majority expressed concern about civilian deaths in Gaza.

The rising criticism over Israel’s conduct in the war appears to have affected broader attitudes toward the Jewish state. In the *Washington Post* survey, 59% of respondents expressed support for continued US military aid to Israel, down from 74% in the 2024 Pew survey. Just 56% of respondents reported feeling very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel, which is a low level by historical standards.³⁷ Among respondents ages 18–34, only 36% felt emotionally attached, compared to 48% of respondents ages 18–29 who felt emotionally attached in the 2020 Pew Survey.³⁸ Yet despite the growing

36 Naftali Bendavid, Scott Clement, and Emily Guskin, “Many American Jews Sharply Critical of Israel on Gaza,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 2025.

37 In annual surveys conducted by the American Jewish Committee between 1989 and 2007, between 65% and 75% reported feeling “close” to Israel. See Theodore Sasson, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, “Trends in American Jewish Attachment to Israel,” *Contemporary Jewry* 30 (2010).

38 Other surveys conducted toward the end of the second year of the war similarly reported rising criticism and declining emotional attachment. For example, according to surveys conducted by the polling firm GBAO for the [Jewish Voter Resource Center](#), attachment to Israel increased from 72% prior to October 7, to 82% in the months immediately afterward, and then trended back downward over several surveys to 69% in summer 2025. According to another survey of Jewish Americans conducted by IPSOS for researchers

criticism and disaffection, more than three-quarters of respondents said that Israel’s existence is vital for the long-term future of the Jewish people.³⁹

Overall, although American Jews remain strongly connected to Israel, there is evidence—in the *Washington Post* poll, the annual surveys of the AJC, and our own interviews—of increasing alienation over the last decade, particularly among liberals and young adults. This alienation has unfolded alongside, and most likely in response, to swings to the political right in both US and Israeli politics. The war in Gaza prompted a widespread, albeit temporary, surge in feelings of connection. By the time the war had reached its two-year anniversary, criticism of Israel had mounted, and feelings of emotional connection had dropped to well below their prewar levels. The conclusion of the intensive phase of the war—which currently is under a ceasefire since October 2025—may provide the conditions for a halt or even reversal of the negative trends.

ISRAEL ADVOCACY

The network of Israel advocacy organizations, often known colloquially as the “lobby,” has far-reaching significance for both American Jewry and the State of Israel, despite not being a strictly Jewish set of organizations. The lobby mobilizes large numbers of pro-Israel activists and raises increasing sums of money for pro-Israel candidates for Congress. Its overall influence in the political arena, however, appears to be waning, due to growing partisan divisions over Israel, internal fragmentation within the lobby itself, and changes in the larger ecosystem of campaign finance and management.

Although the organizations that comprise the lobby were established years earlier, the lobby only gained stature and influence in the aftermath of the Yom

at the University of Rochester, 53% of respondents disapproved of Israel’s military campaign in Gaza, compared to 16% that approved and 31% that neither approved nor disapproved. See James Druckman and Bruce Fuller, “[Jewish Americans Worry About Antisemitism but View Trump’s Attack on Universities as Disingenuous.](#)”

39 Bendavid, Clement, and Guskin, “Many American Jews Sharply Critical.”

Kippur war, as the US–Israel alliance grew in importance for both countries.⁴⁰ Over the last half century, the lobby’s largest organizations developed a basic division of labor. AIPAC mobilizes a grassroots membership that numbers in the millions, with representation in every US congressional district with the aim of promoting bipartisan support for Israel in Congress. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations serves as a representative body of national Jewish groups with the aim of communicating a unified stance to the White House and executive branch. The American Jewish Committee serves as the community’s diplomatic arm, with missions throughout the world as well as regional offices across the United States. Finally, the network of Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs) cultivates partnerships with other religious and ethnic communities and advances the interests of American Jews at the state and municipal levels of government.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the lobby was widely regarded as one of the most influential political advocacy networks in the United States. Among its most enduring accomplishments has been the close security cooperation between the United States and Israel, including annual US military assistance to Israel and a commitment to preserving Israel’s qualitative military edge in the region. The lobby has also focused on maintaining US diplomatic support for Israel which has been especially vital given the deep antagonism toward Israel within the United Nations. For decades, the lobby spoke on behalf of American Jews in a mostly unified way by limiting its agenda to core issues in the bilateral relationship.

Conflicts in Israeli society and within the American Jewish community over the Oslo Accords, however, proved impossible for the lobby to contain. In the 1990s, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA)—which had been a

40 The lobby has provided generations of American Jews with a critical role and sense of purpose, enabling them to contribute to Israel’s national security. For a recent discussion of the importance of Israel advocacy in the identities of American Jews, see Noah Feldman, *To Be a Jew Today* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024).

relatively minor partner in the mainstream lobby—came out strongly against the peace agreement, advocating in Congress against the pro-Oslo stance of the Israeli government. In the years since, the ZOA, joined by other groups on the right, has advocated for Jews’ right to settle in the West Bank and Gaza and for other policies favored by the Israeli right.⁴¹

The lobby also expanded on the liberal side of the political spectrum with the addition of J Street in the late 2000s. J Street, built on a foundation established by several liberal forerunners, advocates for a two-state solution to the Israel–Palestine conflict. J Street defines itself as “pro-Israel” and describes its political program as serving Israel’s best interests as a Jewish and democratic state. The organization—and other smaller groups on the center-left—reach American Jews who are disaffected by Israel’s right-wing government but remain committed to supporting Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Indeed, these organizations often make the case that they help establish a boundary between the liberal pro-Israel camp and the left-wing anti-Zionist camp.⁴²

Today’s Israel lobby thus includes a large centrist faction, which prioritizes a close, bipartisan US–Israel alliance focused on shared diplomatic and security interests, and more ideologically committed factions on the right and liberal flanks. The centrist organizations are by far the best funded, largest, and historically the most influential. The groups that comprise the right-wing and liberal camps, however, increasingly “give cover” to politicians seeking to advance a wide range of causes, enabling them to claim to speak in the name of the Jewish community.⁴³ In some circumstances, the plurality

41 J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Addison Wesley, 1996).

42 The boundary is guarded from the other side as well. Some chapters of the left-wing Democratic Socialists of America prohibit their members from affiliating with J Street, as it defines itself (and which they also define) as a Zionist organization.

43 Theodore Sasson, “The Politics of Israel,” in *Contemporary Israel*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (NYU Press, 2016).

of voices has had the effect of canceling one another out. For example, in 2015, AIPAC and other centrist lobby organizations pulled out all the stops to prevent the United States from joining the JCPOA (the Iran nuclear deal). J Street, however, supported the deal, enabling the Obama administration to adopt it over the objections of both Israel and AIPAC.

Over the course of the October 7 war, the right and liberal flanks of the lobby adopted stances that were more extreme. The ZOA advocated for the military conquest of Gaza and the restoration of Jewish settlements there. J Street championed a law proposed by US Senator Bernie Sanders that would ban some future arms sales to Israel.⁴⁴ Thus, in the context of the war, the wings of the lobby each moved a notch further away from the center, increasing the extent of polarization.

Despite the division, AIPAC and the organizations of the center were prominent actors throughout the war. They mobilized support in Congress for more than \$18 billion in military aid, supported US vetoes in the United Nations Security Council, and ultimately nurtured a climate of opinion that helped support President Trump's decision to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. In the electoral arena as well, AIPAC sought to exercise influence. During the 2024 national elections, the organization donated more than \$100 million to pro-Israel incumbents and challengers and worked to unseat two members of the progressive "squad" who were especially vulnerable in that election cycle.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, as opposition to Israel's management of the war increased, a growing number of Democratic elected officials sought to distance themselves from AIPAC, announcing that they would not accept the organization's support in the future.⁴⁶ Among Democrats, support for J Street as an alternative to AIPAC has increased.

44 Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis, Chuck Freilich, and Theodore Sasson, "Implications of the US Senate Vote on Limiting Arms Sales to Israel," INSS Insight, December 18, 2024.

45 AIPAC began for the first time to directly fund candidates for public office in 2022.

46 Annie Karni, "Democrats Pull Away from AIPAC," *New York Times*, October 2, 2025.

Finally, during the war, Jewish anti-Zionist groups gained a great deal of media coverage and significantly expanded their memberships. The organizations [IfNotNow](#) and Jewish Voice for Peace became staple features of pro-Palestinian protests in major US cities and university campuses. At several institutions, Jewish Voice for Peace was banned alongside Students for Justice in Palestine for violating university rules and codes of conduct.⁴⁷

Thus, overall, the Israel lobby continues to exercise power and influence, but its capacity to shape developments in the electoral and legislative arenas is limited. The deepening divisions in the major parties over Israel, described in the next section, have created headwinds that are difficult, if not impossible, for the lobby to overcome. The divisions within the lobby over Israeli policies further limit its capacity to exercise influence. In this challenging context, it is perhaps not surprising that in September 2025, President Trump commented in an interview with the [Daily Caller](#): “Twenty years ago, Israel had the most powerful lobby I have ever seen. No politician could voice even the slightest criticism. Today, this is no longer the case.”⁴⁸

THE AMERICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

During the first half of the 20th century, in the wake of mass Jewish immigration to the United States and the rise of fascism in Europe, American Jews were at times the focus of antisemitic campaigns and discrimination. After the Second World War, antisemitism generally moved to the dark margins of the polity, and support for Israel became a cornerstone of US policy in the Middle

47 On the Jewish anti-Zionist left, see Marjorie Feld, *Thresholds of Dissent* (NYU Press, 2024).

48 While the political power of pro-Israel advocacy organizations appears to be waning, the influence of major Jewish donors affiliated with the Republican and Democratic parties may be increasing. For example, President Trump singled out Miriam Adelson, a major campaign donor, as having shaped his approach to the Gaza war. See Brendan Cole, “How Miriam Adelson Shaped Donald Trump’s Israel Strategy,” *Newsweek*, October 14, 2025.

East. In recent years, however, Israel's standing in the American public has deteriorated, fractures in political support have opened up, and antisemitism has increased—with all three trends accelerating during the October 7 war.

Public Opinion About Israel in the United States

The American public had long been distinguished globally by its pro-Israel sentiment. In decades of public opinion surveys, this support has been evident across a variety of measures. In recent years, however, and particularly since the onset of the October 7 war, it has deteriorated. In parts of the US public, support has collapsed, and Israel has become a source of antipathy.

In a [Gallup survey](#) conducted in February 2025, just 54% of American adults held a very or mostly favorable opinion about Israel, a four-point drop from 2024 and the lowest level recorded since 2000. By way of comparison, 80% of American adults held favorable views of Canada, Japan, Great Britain, and Denmark, while 61% held favorable views of Egypt. Other major benchmark surveys reported similar declines in Americans' favorability toward Israel. For example, in March 2025, the [Pew Research Center's global survey](#) reported that just 44% of Americans held a positive attitude toward the Jewish state.

The survey data tracking support for military aid to Israel and sympathy for Israelis versus Palestinians also show a historical turnaround. According to a [New York Times survey](#) conducted in September 2025, a slim majority of Americans opposed further military or economic aid to Israel. Moreover, Americans were more likely to express sympathy for the Palestinians (35%) than for Israel (34%), also a first.⁴⁹

The data reflect an increasingly negative appraisal among Americans of Israel's conduct in the war against Hamas. The intensification of negative attitudes toward Israel—and the shifting sympathy of most Americans from Israel to the Palestinians—seem to have been in response to news and images

49 Lisa Lerer and Ruth Igielnik, "Americans' Support for Israel Dramatically Declines," *New York Times*, September 29, 2025.

of death, hunger, and dislocation among Gazans, some of which were pushed in a concerted campaign by pro-Palestinian entities, and to statements by some Israeli ministers calling for the destruction of Gaza's cities and the forced migration of its inhabitants outside of the Gaza Strip.

The data also indicate several long-term trends. First, 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, however, the share of Americans who identify as Christian has declined, and the share of the religiously unaffiliated—the “nones”—who are less favorable toward Israel has increased.⁵⁰

Second, the dynamics of political polarization are driving down support for Israel among Democrats and increasing the partisan divide. Throughout most of the 20th century, the major parties included conservative and liberal factions. In recent decades, however, liberals increasingly clustered within the Democratic Party and conservatives within the Republican Party, and partisan gaps in attitudes across a wide range of issues have increased, with Democrats becoming increasingly liberal and Republicans increasingly conservative. Support for Israel had long been an exception to these partisan dynamics—one of the few bipartisan issues—particularly among party elites. This had been true partly because American Jews—who have been the most pro-Israel segment of the US public—have also been a key voting bloc and major backer for the Democratic Party.

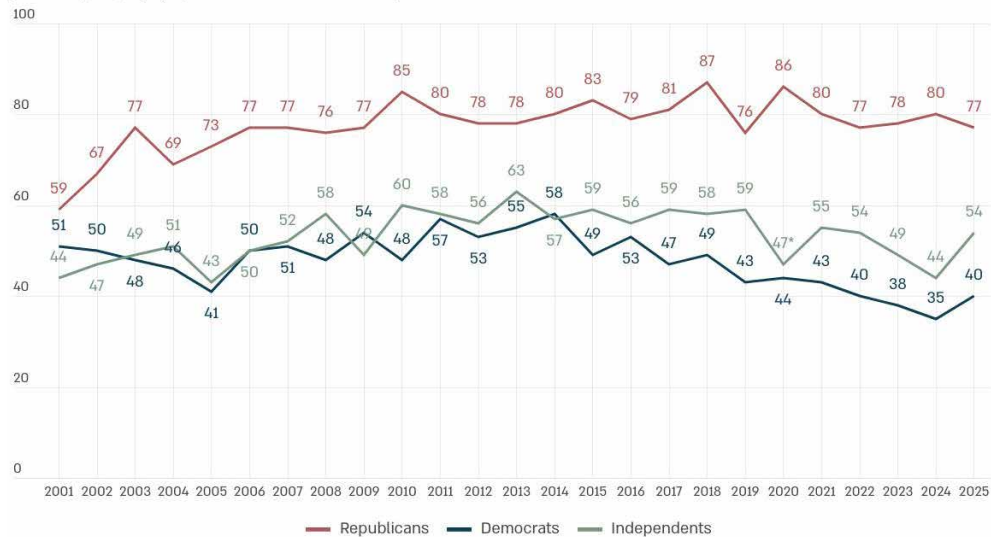
Israel's immunity from partisan competition, however, diminished after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks on September 11, 2001. In the years following, Republican support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—and for Israel, a perceived ally in the broader “war on terror”—increased. Democrats, in contrast, responded with increasing ambivalence to the ensuing wars, which were initiated under a Republican president, and their support for Israel generally

50 Frank Newport, “Support for Israel in the US Hampered by Declining Religiosity,” Gallup, June 21, 2024.

declined.⁵¹ The partisan divide widened during the presidencies of Obama and Trump during his first term, partly due to controversies surrounding the perception of Israeli meddling in US politics in favor of the Republican Party, and partly due to the mapping of domestic racial tensions onto the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Figure 6 shows the growing partisan divide as reflected in responses to a standard Gallup survey question: “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or Palestinians?” In 2001, prior to the 9/11 attacks, the partisan divide was a scant 8 percentage points. By 2024, it had increased to 45 points, with 80% of Republicans expressing greater sympathy for Israel compared to just 35% of Democrats.⁵²

Figure 6. US Sympathy Toward Israel by Political Party, 2001–2025

Gallup: U.S. Middle East Sympathies by Party ID, 2001-2025
(Percentage saying sympathies lie more with Israelis)



51 See Amnon Cavari and Guy Freedman, *American Public Opinion Toward Israel: From Consensus to Divide* (Routledge, 2021).

52 Jeffrey Jones, “US Views of Israel, Ukraine and Mexico Most Divided by Party,” Gallup, February 2025.

The third long-term trend shaping attitudes toward Israel is a growing generational divide. Whereas pro-Israel sentiment has held steady among older adults, it has declined among middle-aged adults and sharply dropped among younger adults. Indeed, Israel is facing a veritable [generational cliff](#).⁵³ For example, the Pew Research Center in 2024 reported that 76% of Americans aged 65 and older had 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, but it has also been reported among younger Republicans and even white evangelical Christians, the most pro-Israel group outside American Jewry.⁵⁴

The collapse in support among younger Americans is related to generational coming-of-age experiences, political movements in the United States, and changing media habits. Younger 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 oppressed and formerly colonized peoples, especially Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. The putative relevance of these movements for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been taught in American universities and secondary schools, particularly in the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. 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 also contributed to the alienation of liberal young adults. Finally, as the war unfolded, images of Gazan suffering proliferated

53 Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis, "Why Younger Americans Are Less Supportive of Israel," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 6, 2025.

54 On declining support for Israel among younger Republicans, see Laura Silver, "How Americans View Israel and the Israel-Hamas War at the Start of Trump's Second Term," Pew Research Center, April 8, 2025; see also Shibley Telhami, "Young Republicans and Evangelicals Are Less Sympathetic With Israel. Why?" *Critical Issues Poll*, University of Maryland, September 29, 2025.

on social media that is heavily consumed by younger Americans (including TikTok and Instagram)—a phenomenon abetted by influence campaigns.⁵⁵

The convergence of trends relating to the religiosity, political polarization, and generational change set the stage for the collapse in pro-Israel sentiment that occurred during the October 7 war. The long-term character of these trends suggests that Israel's deteriorating position in US public opinion will not be quickly or easily reversed.

Party Fractures

Bipartisan support for the US–Israel alliance has always been a major priority of AIPAC and other large centrist advocacy organizations. For many decades, such bipartisan support was readily achieved and rested on the view that Israel, as a regional power, protects American interests, offsets Russian (previously Soviet) influence, and counters Islamic radicalism. Mainstream leaders in both parties viewed Israel as a model ally of the United States because it fights its own wars without demanding US “boots on the ground” and provides valuable technology and intelligence. More broadly, such leaders viewed Israel as a country that shared many common values with the United States, including free institutions and democratic governance. In the American government today, the bipartisan approach is still championed by figures such as Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (Democrat, New York) and Senator Lindsey Graham (Republican, South Carolina).

In recent years, however, each party has begun to fracture over Israel. In the Republican Party, an isolationist faction has gained influence, particularly within the ranks of President Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement. Catalyzed by the US debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan, the isolationists oppose “forever wars” and foreign policy strategies that seek to accomplish regime change. They hold Israel responsible for having persuaded

55 Sheera Frenkel and Steven Lee Myers, “Americans' Views of Israel-Gaza War Shift Alongside Changing Social Media Posts,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2025.

the Bush administration to launch the war in Iraq, view pro-Israel advocacy organizations (particularly AIPAC) with great suspicion, and warned against US participation in the 12-day war against Iran. The isolationist camp includes podcasters Steve Bannon and Tucker Carlson as well as prominent political figures such as Vice President JD Vance. Some in this camp are increasingly open in their embrace of [antisemitic conspiracy theories and stereotypes](#). In November 2025, Carlson hosted Nick Fuentes, perhaps the leading antisemitic voice in the United States today, on his podcast. Although some figures in the Republican Party, including the leadership of the Republican Jewish Coalition, vigorously protested, others, such as the president of the Heritage Foundation (an influential conservative think tank), rushed to Carlson's defense.

On the Democratic side, the breakaway group is comprised of the party's left-wing "progressives," exemplified by figures such as Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the mayor of New York City, Zohran Mamdani. The progressive faction shares the view, championed by the isolationist right, that Israel has drawn the United States into unnecessary and costly wars in the Middle East. The left group also views Israel, particularly under its right-wing governments, as the rejectionist party in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and as a perpetrator of crimes against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. As leaders within the progressive left, they champion Palestinian rights as a plank in a broader constellation of causes, including racial justice, climate action, LGBTQ rights, and labor rights, among others. Among Democratic Party elites, the progressive anti-Israel faction remains a small minority. However, among the Democratic electorate, these voices are gaining popularity and influence as perceptions of Israel turn increasingly negative. Moreover, whereas in the past such views would have been disqualifying for an otherwise attractive candidate in the Democratic Party, in light of the election of Zohran Mamdani in New York, this is clearly no longer the case.

In the Republican Party, white evangelical Christians have provided major support for Israel and will likely continue to do so in the near and medium term, moderating the impact of intra-party divisions. In the Democratic Party, mounting hostility in the party base is more likely to translate into a major policy shift, especially if the Democrats regain Congress or the White House in upcoming election cycles. (In July 2025, a majority of Senate Democrats supported legislation—meant to be symbolic—restricting arms sales to Israel.) Even if policy positions toward Israel do not change radically under a future Democratic majority, pro-Israel forces are likely to face higher hurdles in securing support that was once taken for granted. As noted, American Jews mostly vote for the Democratic Party and hold key roles as funders, strategists, and party officials. Their feelings about Israel will therefore play a critical role in shaping the future direction of the party.

Rising Antisemitism

Antisemitism in the United States has been increasing in recent years and surged in the context of the October 7 war. The Anti-Defamation League’s tabulation of antisemitic incidents provides one window into the phenomenon. In 2024, [the ADL counted](#) 6,552 incidents of harassment, 2,606 cases of vandalism, and 196 incidents of assault—an overall increase of 344% compared to five years earlier and 893% compared to ten years earlier. In 2024, for the first time, the majority of antisemitic incidents (58%) were related to Israel or Zionism.⁵⁶

56 The ADL expanded its definition of antisemitism to include some expressions of anti-Zionism following the October 7 Hamas attack, partly accounting for the increase; see Noah Feldman, “The New Antisemitism,” *Time Magazine*, March 11, 2024. But other sources of data also point to surging antisemitism. The FBI, for example, reports increasing incidents of hate crimes targeting Jews and that Jews experience a higher incidence of hate crimes per capita compared to any other US group. See Editorial Board, “Antisemitism Is an Urgent Problem,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2025. On how Jewish students experience antisemitism on university campuses, see Hersh and Lyss, “A Year of Campus Conflict and Growth.”

The wave of antisemitism emanates partly from the political right. Right-wing antisemitism includes conspiracy theories about Jewish control of the banks and media and plots to undermine the white or Christian character of the United States (e.g., the so-called “replacement theory”). This kind of rhetoric was behind the murders at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 2018 and at Chabad in Poway, California, a year later. It was also on display in the group chat, since leaked to the press, of a young adult leadership group of the Republican Party.⁵⁷ Antisemitic theories are a staple of social media and, indeed, have begun to surface in the output of AI chatbots such as Grok, a fact that testifies to the ubiquity of such narratives in the web-based materials that AI is trained to mimic.

Antisemitism has also surged on the far left, especially in the guise of anti-Zionism. Antisemitic rhetoric from the left often depicts the Jewish state as singularly evil. The claim that Israel perpetrates genocide against Palestinians, for example, [dates to the 1970s](#) when it was a staple of Soviet propaganda. In the US social discourse, the depiction of Zionism as a form of genocidal racism gained ground in the 2000s and 2010s and has circulated widely, particularly through the activism of the pro-Palestine movement and in the context of the contemporary war. In 2025, the extreme rhetoric paved the way for political violence by pro-Palestinian assailants, including murders of Israeli embassy employees in Washington, DC, a deadly firebombing of a solidarity march in support of the Israeli hostages held in Boulder, Colorado, and an attack on the home of Jewish and pro-Israel Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro.⁵⁸

Antisemitism on the left has also been expressed in the view that American Jews are a privileged white group and not deserving of recognition as a minority

57 Jason Beeferman and Emily Ngo, “I Love Hitler: Leaked Messages Expose Young Republicans Racist Chat,” *Politico*, October 14, 2025.

58 Atchalta, “October 8 ‘Conceptsia’ & the Playbook to Fighting Antisemitism in America,” September 19, 2025, <https://www.atchalta.com/post/october-8th-conceptsia>. See also Ted Sasson and Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis, “American Jews Are Divided on Trump’s Antisemitism Policy,” INSS Insight, July 13, 2025.

within the framework of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. This latter form of left-wing bias against Jews meant in practice that Jewish students, confronted with surging anti-Zionism and antisemitism in the wake of the October 7 war, often faced institutional indifference, notwithstanding the existence of vast university apparatuses established for the enforcement of antidiscrimination policies.⁵⁹

The second Trump administration has made combating antisemitism from the left a centerpiece of its domestic policy, with the administration's policies focusing to a large degree on institutions of higher education. Actions taken or threatened include attempts to deport pro-Palestinian activists and impose reforms on universities deemed hostile to Jewish and Israeli students. These measures have included enormous cuts to research funding, particularly at Harvard, Columbia, and other elite institutions; a ban on visas for international students at Harvard; and hefty negotiated settlements worth hundreds of millions of dollars. American Jews have responded to these initiatives with [ambivalence](#). On the one hand, they have expressed alarm about rising antisemitism and the well-being of Jewish and Israeli students on university campuses. On the other, they have viewed the Trump administration's actions with suspicion, regarding such actions as primarily aimed at weakening liberal institutions and the rule of law, and at scoring points for conservatives in the culture war. They have expressed concern that the president's decision to target universities and DEI programs in the name of combating antisemitism could generate backlash against the Jews.⁶⁰ Finally, they have noted the president's reticence to challenge antisemitism coming from the political right, and indeed his defense of Tucker Carlson following the interview with Nick Fuentes.

59 See, for example, Nicholas Confessore, "The University of Michigan Doubled Down on DEI. What Went Wrong?" *New York Times*, October 16, 2024. See also Harvard University, "Final Report: Presidential Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Bias," April 29, 2025.

60 Sasson and Ben Sasson-Gordis, "American Jews Are Divided on Trump's Antisemitism Policy."

AN AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IN FLUX

To summarize: the American Jewish community is in flux and faces an uncertain future. The dynamics of secularization and disaffiliation are weakening Jewish institutions and limiting Jewish education for a majority of the youngest cohorts. Alienation from Israel is increasingly evident, stemming from longstanding trends as well as more recent criticism of Israel over its conduct in the war against Hamas in Gaza. Deep divisions within the Jewish community, spanning the political spectrum, on issues concerning both the United States and Israel, have reduced Jewish political power. The external environment is increasingly challenging due to rising anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism, which are contributing to a sense of political dislocation and homelessness among the liberal and centrist majority.

The changes afoot in the American Jewish community pose significant challenges for Israel. In the near term, the threat is greatest in the political arena, especially among Democrats and on the liberal side of the political spectrum. In the current political moment, American Jews are a critical bulwark against the collapse of Democratic Party support for the US–Israel alliance. To the extent that liberal American Jewish support for Israel diminishes, the risk of alienating the Democratic Party as a whole increases. In the American two-party system, the loss of the Democratic Party will eventually translate into a political crisis for Israel, threatening the core of the US–Israel alliance. In the medium and long term, the cost for Israel of a declining American Jewish community will also be economic. The informal networks that greatly facilitate Israel’s scientific and industrial development will likely weaken. The philanthropic flows that benefit Israel’s nonprofit sector will likely diminish. But the greatest damage will be the most difficult to quantify. A diminished American Jewish community will leave Israel more isolated in the world, less capable of extending soft power, and less confident in its global role as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

ISRAEL'S CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Throughout much of the 20th century, Israelis were focused on the massive projects of state building, and the state's relationship to diaspora Jewish communities garnered relatively little attention. Israelis largely expected their fellow Jews overseas to immigrate or, failing that, provide unconditional financial and political support. Over time, Israel's economy and society grew, and diaspora Jews increasingly looked to the Jewish state as a source of identity and purpose. In that context—and alongside the growth of a large Israeli diaspora community—a new perspective took hold. Increasingly, Israelis expressed concern for the welfare of diaspora Jews and readiness to engage in mutual support outside of major crises.

This new orientation was codified in the 2018 Nation-State Law, which, aside from its controversial domestic provisions, holds that the “State shall act in the Diaspora, to strengthen the affinity between the State and members of the Jewish People [and] to preserve the cultural, historical and religious heritage of the Jewish People among the Jews of the Diaspora.”⁶¹ It is also reflected in the opinions of ordinary Israelis as measured in public opinion surveys. In an INSS survey conducted in April 2025, 88% of Israelis described the relationship with American Jews as “important.” Similarly, in a survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute in 2021, 75% of Israelis agreed that a “thriving diaspora” is vital to the future of the Jewish people.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Institutionally, Israel relates to the diaspora through a loosely coordinated network of government agencies and third-sector organizations. The most important governmental bodies are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism; the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption; the Knesset Committee on Immigration, Absorption and

61 See Article 6 of the Nation-State Law.

Diasporas; the Office of the President; and the quasi-governmental Jewish Agency for Israel.

Among the important NGOs are Taglit-Birthright Israel, and a wide range of smaller organizations, including, for example, the Jewish People Policy Institute, the Hartman Institute, ENTER: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance, and many others. The community of Israeli professionals who staff diaspora-facing organizations is increasingly well-networked through social media and other mechanisms. All told, there is a strong ecosystem of organizations, including governmental and non-governmental entities, supporting Israel's engagement with the American Jewish community.

PROGRAMS OF SUPPORT

Israel's programs of support for American Jewish life include legacy initiatives of the Jewish Agency, including more than 2,000 emissaries to federations, summer camps, and colleges, and many dozens of region-to-region and city-to-city partnerships. These programs are the cornerstone of Israel's relationship to American Jewry and have been renewed over the years in a variety of ways. They are highly valued by the communities, organizations, and institutions they serve and constitute important connective tissue between Israel and American Jewry. More recently, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism has begun providing grants to support Jewish day schools, and the Ministry is exploring ways to support supplementary education.

Israel's most important programmatic partnership with American Jewry has been Taglit-Birthright Israel, the organization that brings diaspora Jewish young adults on educational tours of Israel. Over the last quarter-century, Birthright—which receives about 30% of its funding from the State of Israel—has reached more than 500,000 American Jewish young adults and contributed substantially to American Jewish life and the Israel–diaspora relationship. The strongest evidence of impact comes from Brandeis University's "[Jewish Futures Project](#),"

a panel study of several of the program's early cohorts.⁶² In 2024, the research group completed the seventh wave of the study, reporting on thousands of panelists who applied to join a trip between the years 2001 and 2009 (i.e., 15 to 25 years prior). The sample included panelists who participated in a Birthright trip and panelists who applied but did not participate, mostly because they could not secure a spot. As in previous waves of the study, the new report documents a strong and enduring impact. Among non-Orthodox respondents who were married or in a long-term relationship, Birthright participants were 37% more likely than nonparticipants to be partnered with someone Jewish. If they had children, participants were 14% more likely to be raising them Jewish and 60% more likely to be providing formal Jewish education (either supplementary instruction or day school). They were also 35% more likely to feel connected to Israel and more likely to engage in a wide range of Jewish practices.⁶³ The program's impact and reach have made it a substantial factor in Jewish continuity in the United States.⁶⁴

Long-term programs in the Masa framework, including yeshiva, gap year, and study abroad programs, have also demonstrated a significant and enduring

62 As a panel study, "The Jewish Futures Project" surveys the same respondents repeatedly over time to see how their views hold or change.

63 Many of Birthright's enduring effects were an indirect result of the program's impact on spousal choice—although not all of them. See Sasha Volodarsky, Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, and Leonard Saxe, "L'Dor V'Dor: Birthright Israel's Impact Across Generations," Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, February 2025.

64 The Jewish Futures panel study is the most stringent test of the program's impact. The study's findings are aligned with a large number of evaluation studies of short-term impact. Notably, a recent study of the applicants to the summer 2024 trips, which operated during the October 7 war, reported comparable impact on emotional attachment to Israel among participants who identified politically as conservative, moderate, and liberal. See Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, and Leonard Saxe, "Connection, Solidarity and Activism: The Experience of Birthright Israel's Summer 2024 Cohorts," Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, May 2025.

impact on numerous levels of Jewish identity and communal engagement.⁶⁵ Such programs are especially important as arenas for the cultivation of future Jewish communal leadership. In recent years, alongside gap year, study abroad, and internship programs, several Israeli universities have added dual degree and full degree undergraduate programs in English that serve many Jewish students from the diaspora.

Philanthropic and Israeli governmental investment in long-term programs has been modest, however, and the number of participants, although increasing, has not yet begun to reach its potential scale.⁶⁶ However, as noted, Israel-experience programs have dramatically reduced their numbers since the COVID-19 pandemic and war.

CONTENTIOUS POLICIES

The policies of Israel's government—and how Israel communicates about its official policies—also shape how American Jews relate to Israel. Israel's policies and laws regarding religion and state and religious pluralism, mostly enshrining Orthodox practice concerning matters of personal status such as marriage and divorce, have been a source of strain with American Jewish organizations, particularly those representing liberal Jewish movements. At the same time, Israeli governments have until now resisted pressure from Israel's religious parties to modify the status quo on conversion, which mandates recognition of conversions to Judaism that are conducted abroad by non-Orthodox rabbinical courts. Maintaining the status quo in relation to conversions conducted abroad has been an important contribution to global Jewish peoplehood and the alliance with American Jewry.

65 Long-term programs generally attract young adults with extensive Jewish educational backgrounds, confounding efforts to isolate program impact. For an example of a study of the Masa Israel Experience that addresses this challenge, see “Israel Immersion: The Key to a Strong Jewish Future,” Impact NPO, 2022.

66 “Participation of Diaspora Jewish Youth in Volunteering and Social Leadership in Jewish Communities and in Israel,” Ruderman Family Foundation, January 2024.

Recent Israeli court rulings have required official recognition of conversions conducted in Israel as well—a move opposed by the state rabbinate. Other sources of strain concern the management of the Kotel plaza, which remains fully under Orthodox supervision; the still painful withdrawal by a former Netanyahu government from an agreement to facilitate an egalitarian prayer space at the Southern Wall of the Temple Mount; and occasional legislative drives to modify the Law of Return to curtail the immigration rights of the grandchildren of Jews who are not themselves Jewish. These issues—and others that touch on religious pluralism—have generally receded into the background in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the struggle over the judicial overhaul, and the October 7 war. They are perennial issues, however, that stem from the reality that most American Jews continue to identify with liberal Jewish denominations, whereas most Israeli Jews who are religious tend to identify as traditional or Orthodox.

The Netanyahu-Levin campaign for the judicial overhaul launched in 2023 divided Israelis, and the familiar fractures were reproduced in diaspora Jewish communities. Most American Jews, who identify as liberals, embraced the viewpoint of the Israeli opposition, holding that the proposed reforms would eliminate checks and balances on the power of the ruling coalition and weaken Israeli democracy.⁶⁷ Because this interpretation of the judicial overhaul tended to predominate in the US public discourse, the reform campaign damaged Israel's reputation as a liberal democracy.

Israel's policies to combat antisemitism, although intended to protect diaspora Jews, have in a few instances caused a rift with diaspora Jewish groups. One case in point, as reported extensively in the Jewish press, was the decision of the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism to invite representatives of European far-right parties to an international conference on antisemitism. The decision prompted most American Jewish organizations to cancel their participation in the event, which in their view

67 Jewish Electorate Institute, "National Survey of American Jews," June 2023.

was more likely to rehabilitate the standing of antisemites than serve as a vehicle for curtailing their influence.⁶⁸

Finally, Israel's policies during the October 7 war—as well as how Israel communicated about those policies—alienated large segments of the American public and raised deep concerns among many American Jews. These concerns resulted from strategic and tactical decisions of the government, particularly in relation to limitations on humanitarian aid, the death toll among Gazan civilians, and settler violence in the West Bank. These concerns also reflect a lack of success on the part of the Foreign Ministry and other public diplomacy bodies to effectively communicate Israel's actions, and the way the conversation was dominated by extremist statements of government ministers. Israel's decisions on how to proceed with the war and how to communicate about it were viewed by many of the Jewish leaders with whom we spoke as a driver of mounting anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism in the United States.⁶⁹

68 Michael Starr, "ADL Pulls Out of Israeli Conference on Combating Antisemitism," *Jerusalem Post*, March 19, 2025. In October, the Ministry's invitation of UK far-right leader Tommy Robinson to Israel triggered similar backlash among leaders of UK Jewry.

69 Several of our interviewees further commented that they regard Israel's conduct of the war as evidence of a disregard for the well-being of diaspora Jews.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Israel's commitment to the flourishing of the American Jewish community stems from its strategic interests and core values. Strategically, Israel has benefited from a strong Jewish community in the world's preeminent superpower. In the future, Israel will continue to look to the United States for diplomatic and military partnership, as well as deep collaboration in diverse fields of science, industry, academia, art, and culture. The American Jewish community, through its advocacy organizations and myriad additional forms of social, cultural, and intellectual influence, helps to secure the US–Israel alliance. American Jewish support is especially critical in “blue states” and in the leadership of the Democratic Party, where American Jews exercise significant influence and where Israel's current standing is most precarious.⁷⁰

American Jews also contribute to Israel's national security directly, in ways that are unrelated to their influence within the United States government. American Jews support thousands of Israeli nonprofit organizations, and their donations comprise a large share of the total revenue of Israel's nonprofit sector. American Jews also invest in Israeli business enterprises and network with Israeli scientists, entrepreneurs, and investors. Throughout the war, thousands of Americans came to Israel to volunteer and show support. These contributions strengthen Israeli society and national resilience. The Israeli public, moreover, views the success of the Jewish diaspora as a value in itself, which expresses their commitment to Jewish peoplehood.

And yet, as we have shown, American Jewry is in a state of flux, with significant signs of communal weakening and decline. The American Jewish

70 Some Israeli officials—including former ambassador Ron Dermer—have argued that evangelical Christians, rather than American Jews, are the cornerstone of US support for the Jewish state. This approach ignores the limited reach of evangelicals within the Democratic Party where American Jews continue to exercise significant influence.

community's strong and longstanding ties to Israel show signs of weakening as well, especially in the younger generation.

The American Jewish community—and its still powerful philanthropies and communal organizations—bears primary responsibility for the American Jewish future. They have greater capacity than Israel to shape the future of Jewish education and religious and communal life, and they have the responsibility to act. Their job, moreover, has become more challenging, as rising antipathy toward Israel in the American public and ideological anti-Zionism on the left have tarnished a key element of American Jewish identity and created a new obstacle that must be overcome in a broad effort to renew American Judaism and strengthen ties to the Jewish state.

While this report focuses on recommendations for Israel, we recognize that American Jewish rabbis, educators, communal professionals, donors, and activists have a critical role to play. We encourage efforts to shore up Israel education in schools and summer camps; promote, fund, and facilitate Israel-based experiential education; and combat the delegitimization of Israel in the public arena. We also encourage American Jews to contribute to Israel's ongoing debate about the future of the state, including engagement with issues concerning religion and state, the shape and function of democratic institutions, and the future of the conflict with the Palestinians.

As we have shown, Israel also has a strong interest in the flourishing of American Jewry and in their connection to the Jewish state. In the sections that follow, we focus on policies and strategies that Israel should adopt. The recommendations emerged through our interviews with key informants in the United States and Israel. They include initiatives in the areas of **diplomacy, education, politics, and planning**. Although each is valuable in its own right, we believe that together these policies and strategies will contribute synergistically to the strengthening of the American Jewish community and its alliance with the State of Israel.

Diplomatic Sphere

1. *Restore Israel's Standing in the US Public*

As long as the war against Hamas in Gaza continued, Israel's capacity to rebuild support in the American public was limited. Now that the war has wound down, Israel must undertake a comprehensive effort to rehabilitate its reputation. Such an effort must begin with consideration of some of Israel's domestic and foreign policies. Rebuilding support for Israel in the United States, and in the American Jewish community, will be an uphill battle, if not impossible, without pivots away from some of the more extreme policies advanced by the current government. Israel must refrain from actions that seriously harm its democratic character, including substantial weakening of the independence of the courts and tolerance for the violence of extremist settlers in the West Bank. It must also take initiatives in the diplomatic arena to try to expand the Abraham Accords to include Saudi Arabia and other neighboring powers, and open a new dialogue with the Palestinians offering a pathway to a secure end to the conflict. Such diplomatic initiatives will speak to US Republicans who question Israel's strategic value and responsiveness to US foreign policy priorities, as well as Democrats who would like to see evidence that Israel remains a country that pursues peace.

In conjunction with these policy moves, Israel must launch a comprehensive new approach to communications and public diplomacy. The new campaign should be coordinated either by a point person in the Prime Minister's Office or by the Foreign Ministry. It should proactively make Israel's case in the US public arena, among centrist Democrats as well as Republicans, and focus on young adults and college students. The campaign must be adequately funded and staffed by people with a sophisticated understanding of the diverse American publics and an eagerness to reach all target audiences.⁷¹ Finally, it should include not only public communications but also initiatives

71 For a detailed analysis of where Israel's public diplomacy strategy went wrong and a blueprint for change, see Akiva Tor and Ofir Dayan, "Israel's Deteriorating Image as a

of exchange and cooperation in diverse spheres of higher education, science, law, arts, and sport. The deep weave of social and cultural bonds must be reestablished.

2. *Restore Israel's Standing in the American Jewish Community*

Pro-Israel sentiment has declined not only in the US public but also in the Jewish community. Although many American Jews approved of Israel's management of the October 7 war, others became increasingly critical, aligning with claims that Israel committed war crimes and registering declining emotional attachment to the Jewish state. A program of specific outreach to the Jewish community should be included as part of the broader overhaul of Israel's public diplomacy. Although a minority of American Jews have hardened their negative attitudes toward Israel, a sizeable majority remains eager to see the best in Israel, understand the rationale behind the state's policies and practices, and lend their support. By engaging in open dialogue with American Jews, Israel can mitigate the wartime strains on the relationship.

The government should appoint a point person and staff to coordinate outreach to the American Jewish community, either assigned to the Prime Minister's Office or the Office of the President. A program of outreach and dialogue can be jointly implemented with the Jewish Agency for Israel. It should be conducted on all sides in a spirit of humility and out of a genuine desire to hear and understand diverse perspectives. Israelis and diaspora Jews experienced the two-year multi-front war in sharply different ways based on divergent security situations, political cultures, and media environments. Tolerance for divergent viewpoints must be a given.

The initiative to rebuild the relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community should engage diverse professional arenas, including journalism, higher education, arts, medicine, and scientific research. It should

National Security Threat: A Program for Revitalizing Israel's Public Diplomacy," INSS, January 2026.

also include ample opportunities for collaborative projects and shared initiatives organized by nonprofits, through city-to-city and region-to-region partnerships, and new professional and scientific frameworks. These initiatives should be launched by Israel but can ultimately be funded through public-private partnerships that draw on philanthropic support.

Educational Sphere

3. *Restore Israel Experience Programs to Scale*

A long-building wave of secularization, disaffiliation, and assimilation is reshaping and weakening the American Jewish community. The primary responsibility for addressing the crisis rests with American Jewish organizations and philanthropy. However, over the last quarter-century, Israel-based experiential education has played a central role in the identity formation of American Jews. In general, such programs have proven effective as a means of outreach to more assimilated sectors of the American Jewish community and contributed significantly to American Jewish continuity in the context of high rates of intermarriage.

Yet, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war, the number of participants in such programs has plummeted, and tens of thousands fewer American Jewish young people have visited Israel in an educational framework than would have done so had the field operated at its full capacity. The gap in participation across several age cohorts will prove damaging to American Jewish communal life. The Israeli government should support Taglit-Birthright Israel and other providers of short-term Israel experiences—including the new RootOne program for teenagers—to build back capacity as rapidly as possible. Taglit seeks to bring 200,000 diaspora Jewish young adults (mostly Americans) to Israel over the next five years. This would have been a very reasonable goal prior to the shocks of the pandemic and the war and should be embraced as a national priority.

4. *Make Israel a Global Center for Gap Year and Higher Education*

At the same time, there is an opportunity and need to increase long-term educational frameworks in Israel. Such frameworks include gap-year programs and university-based study abroad, dual-degree and full-degree programs in English. The aim is to grow the future leadership cadre of American Jews, fostering a critical mass in each age cohort that is deeply knowledgeable about and committed to Israel and the Jewish people.

The main barriers to expanding the field for gap-year and university-based programs are marketing, cost, and program quality. Pilot initiatives to increase participation in gap-year programs show that when these barriers are reduced, enrollments increase.⁷² Co-funding by the government of Israel and Jewish federations in the United States can reduce costs and establish local partnerships for recruitment. A reasonable goal would be to have 10,000 American Jewish young people in gap-year programs annually, matching the number of Israelis participating with public support in national service and pre-military academy programs. University-based full-degree and dual-degree programs taught in English should also be expanded, with the aim of making Israel a world center of higher education for the Jewish people, as well as strengthening scientific ties between Israeli and US academia.

5. *Expand Opportunities for Israelis to Learn about American Jewry*

In survey after survey, Israelis express a strong sense of kinship with diaspora Jewry and a desire to nurture the relationship. This affective orientation, however, exists in tension with a generally low level of knowledge about diaspora Jewish life, including American Jewry. The lack of familiarity with the American Jewish community pertains especially to non-Orthodox religious practices and liberal Zionist political orientations. It leads to a common and widespread underestimation among Israelis about the centrality of Jewishness and Israel in the identities of American Jews. These knowledge gaps weaken

72 See, for example, Elliott Abrams, *If You Will It* (Wicked Sons, 2024).

Israel's capacity to effectively nurture its relationship with the world's largest diaspora community.

For many years, JFNA and, often, the Ruderman Family Foundation organized study tours to American Jewish communities for members of Knesset and journalists. Such tours should be expanded and made routine so that most Israeli elected officials and a wider range of journalists have the opportunity to learn firsthand about American Jewish life. Study tours should also be organized for an expanding circle of opinion shapers, including senior government officials, university presidents, business leaders, and heads of medical and cultural institutions.

We also recommend expanding education about the diaspora to all Israelis. This can be done by building on the Jewish Agency's training program for public school principals. New educational units about diaspora Jewry could be developed and taught in Israeli high schools, pre-military academies, service programs, and the IDF. Civil society organizations should be encouraged and enabled to conduct programs about diaspora Jewry, drawing on the contributions of Israel's large network of olim. Finally, broad public exposure to American Jewish life through television, film, and other media should be supported, for example, on the model of the highly acclaimed mini-series, "The New Jew."

Political Sphere

6. *Extend Communication Across the Spectrum of Pro-Israel Advocacy Groups*

As we have seen, pro-Israel advocacy organizations are losing influence in the corridors of power in the United States. The weakening of the lobby is a result of macrosocial trends over which communal organizations have little control, and also of the lobby's own political divisions. On the positive side, the broad spectrum of advocacy organizations from the right to the center, and onward to the liberal camp ensures that all American Jews who define

themselves as supporters of Israel have outlets for advancing their priorities and feeling represented.

The smaller organizations on the flanks, moreover, are able to wield political influence in a targeted fashion within the United States' increasingly polarized polity. Organizations such as J Street, for example, exercise influence within the Democratic Party, where AIPAC's influence is diminishing. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Zionist Organization of America is able to court support from circles that likely view AIPAC as too centrist or liberal.

Israeli governmental and non-governmental actors should seek to counter the centrifugal tendencies in the field of Israel advocacy while continuing to benefit from its capacity to engage diverse publics. This can be accomplished by maintaining open communication and cooperation with all factions of the pro-Israel advocacy network while challenging the diverse array of organizations to observe some basic boundaries that reflect Israel's core national interests.⁷³

Israel has much more to gain than lose from working with a wide range of advocacy organizations across the political spectrum, recognizing that some will continue to criticize Israeli policies from the right or left as they seek to advance the priorities of their American Jewish supporters. The reality of the partisan political dynamics in the United States and the divisions in the American Jewish community over Israeli policies make a return to a relatively unified lobby an impossibility. Israel must adapt to the new reality and can benefit from the possibilities that it creates in the current climate.

73 Such big tent principles might include: 1) preserving the US–Israel special relationship and working to strengthen it over the long term as a vital shared national interest; 2) safeguarding Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state, in accordance with its Basic Laws and founding documents; 3) protecting Israel's security by maintaining its qualitative military edge (QME), as per existing US Congressional commitments; and 4) respecting the democratic process in Israel by giving serious and respectful consideration to the positions of Israel's elected governments and the viewpoints of the Israeli electorate.

7. Improve Representation of American Jewish Concerns in Decision-Making

Just as Israel reaches out to a broader spectrum of advocacy organizations in the United States, it must also seek to expand opportunities for American Jews to express their views and interests within Israel's decision-making bodies.

American Jews participate in a number of quasi-governmental "national institutions" (e.g., World Zionist Congress, Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency) and are represented through the Israel-based offices of a number of major Jewish organizations (e.g., AIPAC, AJC, JFNA). In addition, top American Jewish leaders have informal means through which they communicate with Israeli officials as the need arises. Nevertheless, the existing frameworks of consultation have failed to adequately provide for the representation of the views, needs, and interests of American Jews. Such failure was on display, for example, when most major American Jewish organizations canceled their participation in an international conference convened by the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism because of the invitation extended by the Ministry to European far-right political parties. It was also on display throughout the war in the failure of the government to address the concerns of large sectors of the American Jewish public regarding humanitarian aid, harm to non-combatants, and settler violence in the West Bank.

Institutionalizing and routinizing the voice of American Jewish leaders in decision-making centers of the Israeli government will likely influence some policy decisions. Also importantly, it will address the feeling of many American Jewish leaders, as expressed in our interviews, that diaspora Jewry is invisible to Israel's political leadership.

There are several possible frameworks for institutionalizing and routinizing representation of American Jews, including a formal body under the auspices of the president of Israel, and regular participation of major diaspora Jewish organizations in the meetings of existing committees of the Knesset (e.g., the Committee on Immigration, Absorption, and Diasporas). Another possible

framework would be an interparliamentary committee of members of Knesset and heads of major global Jewish organizations. These suggestions are for frameworks for dialogue and voice—not voting, which is a right that should be reserved for Israeli citizens whether Jewish or not. Such new frameworks should be fully developed and established by the incoming government.

The interests and concerns of diaspora Jewry can also be integrated into Israel’s decision-making through the activities of Israeli public servants. We believe there is a need to establish a professional body within one of the cabinet-level ministries (e.g., Foreign Affairs, Strategic Affairs) that will advise the government, at the highest level and on an ongoing basis, regarding the consequences of its decisions for diaspora Jewry.⁷⁴

Planning and Funding

8. *Establish a National Strategy on Antisemitism*

Over more than two years of war, antisemitism has intensified throughout Europe and North America. In the United States, it has quickly spread from the far-left and right margins of the polity into the mainstream. Israel has a legal responsibility under the 2018 Nation-State law to seek the welfare of Jews who have been targeted on account of their Jewishness. It does so through a variety of governmental bodies that monitor threats, collect and analyze data, and issue reports. Government and non-governmental organizations also provide security training and assistance for diaspora Jewish communities. These activities, however, are spread across several agencies and ministries and operate with little planning or coordination.

74 The proposal to extend the mandate of Knesset committees to meet regularly with diaspora Jewish leaders is advanced in the Jewish People Policy Institute’s 2025 Annual Assessment. The proposal to establish a professional body within a key ministry to assess the impact of government decisions was advanced in Assaf Orion and Shahar Eilam, editors, *The American Jewish Community and Israel’s National Security* (INSS, 2019).

Indeed, although Israel is a signatory to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), it is among the few signatory nations that have no national strategy to combat antisemitism. By adopting such a strategy, Israel can demonstrate its commitment under the Nation-State law and its solidarity with diaspora Jewish communities.

But in contrast to other IHRA signatories, Israel's national strategy on antisemitism will focus mostly outward, on ways to hold other nations and NGOs accountable for countering antisemitism. In this, Israel can focus on strategies that are best undertaken by a sovereign state rather than by diaspora organizations. Israel's national strategy on antisemitism, however, should also assess the ways Israel's policies may have enabled antisemitic actors on the right and on the left to win new publics and expand their influence. It should also examine how Israel's major policy choices regarding democratic institutions, rule of law, and national security affect the power and reach of antisemitic movements abroad and insist that these consequences be considered by Israeli policymakers.

Finally, a national antisemitism policy should be formulated in consultation with diaspora Jewish organizations. It should be non-partisan, politically neutral, and developed for implementation across a succession of Israeli governments. It should also encourage cooperation across the numerous bodies of the Israeli government and NGOs that address issues related to antisemitism.⁷⁵

9. *Create a Framework for Long-Term Funding and Planning*

More broadly, Israel's governmental and non-governmental organizations working on issues related to American Jewry operate with very little common strategy and unpredictable funding streams. To effectively implement the initiatives outlined in this report, long-term planning, improved coordination,

75 The Jewish People Policy Institute is developing a draft strategy, which might serve as a model.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

and predictable funding are required. Multi-year funding should be allocated for public diplomacy, Israel-based experiential and higher education, and education for Israelis about diaspora Jewry. Funding should also be allocated for the development and implementation of a national strategy on antisemitism. All such funding should be accompanied by provisions that mandate the convening of regular consultations among key governmental and non-governmental bodies for the purpose of coordination and strategic planning.

CONCLUSION

Israel relies on a strong and flourishing American Jewish community, one that continues to support Israel's core national interests. Yet, as we have documented, the American Jewish community shows many signs of internal weakening and deteriorating social position, and its near-consensus support for Israel can no longer be taken for granted. It is in Israel's best interest to take the actions that are within its power to reverse these damaging trends.

A comprehensive Israeli strategy must begin in the domain of national policy: Israel must restore its reputation in the United States as a country that embraces democracy and rule of law, balances military prowess with diplomatic initiative, and seeks security and peace with its neighbors. Alongside domestic, regional, and global policies that advance these values, Israel must revitalize its public diplomacy and prioritize dialogue with the American Jewish community.

Israel must redouble its efforts to contribute to the education and identity formation of teenage and young adult American Jews, particularly through Israel-based programs that have a strong record of success. Alongside restoring short-term programs to maximum capacity, Israel should seek to become a global center for higher education for the Jewish people. By once again making an educational experience in Israel a rite of passage, Israel can help consolidate American Jews' robust support for the generation to come.

Israel must increase knowledge about and sensitivity to diaspora Jewish life among Israelis. It can do this through initiatives focused on elites and the general public, and through new governmental bodies established to ensure that diaspora Jewish voices are audible within the halls of government. It must also engage in respectful dialogue with the American Jewish community and with the full range of pro-Israel advocacy organizations working in the United States, extending from the center-right to the center-left.

CONCLUSION

Finally, Israel must develop a planning, funding, and coordinating capacity equal to the importance of the tasks at hand. Israel needs a national strategy on antisemitism, which ought to be developed in concert with diaspora Jewish organizations. The educational initiatives we recommend must be adequately funded with multi-year budgets that enable long-term planning. The various government and non-governmental bodies that comprise Israel's Jewish peoplehood ecosystem should be more effectively coordinated.

Israel's alliance with the American Jewish community is a national security asset and central to its purpose as a nation-state of the Jewish people. With vision, investment, and hard work, Israel can make a vital contribution to the future of American Jewry and to the alliance between the world's two largest Jewish communities.

The Jewish community of the United States is a valuable national security asset of the State of Israel. Over the years, including during the Gaza war, American Jews have helped to secure essential diplomatic and military support for Israel in the United States and have raised much-needed funds for Israeli civil society and nonprofit organizations. The capacity of American Jews to provide such support in the future, however, is called into question by a range of developments, including a weakening of American Jewish communal institutions, growing divisions over Israeli policies, and rising antisemitism and hostility toward Israel in the broader American society. This policy memorandum describes the changes afoot in the American Jewish community and recommends policies that Israel should adopt to help strengthen American Jewry, rebuild its broad support for Israel, and solidify the partnership between the Jewish state and the world's largest diaspora community.

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