

BETWEEN IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY: AMERICAN JEWISH INTEREST GROUPS,
ISRAEL, AND THE ESCALATION OF WAR IN GAZA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how American Jewish interest groups' political orientations shape their claims about ethnic identity, particularly in response to the 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, the Gaza invasion, and U.S. student protests. It finds that: Right-leaning groups (e.g., AIPAC, ZOA) show strong, unquestioning support for Israel, seeing it as a key part of their Jewish identity. Left-leaning groups (e.g., JVP, J-Street) take a critical stance, emphasizing human rights and impartiality.

The research uses social media discourse to analyze how terms like "Jewish" and "Jewishness" are used politically. It concludes that political beliefs influence how diaspora members see themselves and their connection to Israel. Right-leaning groups link Jewish identity with support for Israel, while left-leaning groups focus on moral responsibilities to the oppressed, leading to polarization within Jewish communities and the U.S. The study shows how political actors manipulate identity claims to meet specific goals and suggests further research on diaspora identity perceptions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Israeli-Palestinian relations have a long and troubled history of conflict, violence, and destruction that predates the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (Mehvar, 2023). The relations between the parties to the conflict have changed throughout history and have experienced both stages of active conflict and periods of de-escalation, but in 2023, following the Hamas attack on October 7, the situation escalated into intense warfare (Rubin, 2023). The recent escalation of the conflict in the Gaza Strip has reignited the debates about the role of American Jews in the conflicts involving the state of Israel. While some right-wing pro-Zionist groups, like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and Zionists of America, argue that American Jews should unconditionally support Israel, more progressive Jewish groups advocate for a critical stance towards Israel and emphasize the importance of Palestinian human rights. These different political beliefs influence their political rhetoric, the language they use to describe the conflict, and the details they choose to emphasize or ignore.

It is fair to say that contemporary American society is significantly polarized along political lines, with self-categorization regarding political orientation influencing how this identity is presented. Since self-categorization is inextricably connected with pre-existing groups, individuals may perceive these groups as an "extension of themselves" and view any attempt to contest the positions of these groups as a personal attack. Consequently, during periods of open confrontation, ingroup solidarity is reinforced, and hostility toward members of the outgroup intensifies (Hanson, et. al., 2019: 380).

Diasporas are also do not stand aside and can either promote peace or hinder conflict resolution by fostering hate from afar. This is evident in the role of Jewish diaspora in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, especially since the Oslo Peace Process. In the U.S., Jewish organizations are divided, with both peace-seekers and hardliners, liberals who want to defend civilians on both sides, and hawkish nationalists who defends Israeli government in no matter what situations (Gertheiss, 2016).

This cleavage is not limited only to the political/ideological dimensions but goes deeper and influences the ways individuals perceive and define their self-identification. What is important here to mention is that since the study is focusing on interest groups (organizations) and not individuals, all the statements should be considered as claims on one's identity and not as a 'natural' manifestation of the individual self. Interest groups present rather an identity project, an assembly of values, beliefs, and ideologies that might not be fully accepted and shared even by the members of the particular group which they supposedly represent.

Rogers Brubaker warned us not to fall prey to the words and distinguish the categories of practice from the categories of analysis. In the case of American Jewish interest groups, it becomes more obvious since they tend to have significantly different approaches to defining their group identity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Are Jews in the US considering a 'diaspora'? The answer largely depends on the political orientation of specific organizations. Right-leaning groups maintain a traditional homeland orientation, viewing Israel as their 'homeland' and central to their self-identity. In contrast, left-leaning groups either do not emphasize Israel in their identity or define their identity through opposition to its policies. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) view collective identity similarly to individual identity, with unclear boundaries between them. Identifying as a pro-Israel individual is similar to being part of a pro-Israel group. People can hold multiple identities (decentering) and change their identification in different contexts (overdetermination). Group formation narrows these possibilities through 'chains of equivalence,' emphasizing certain identities while ignoring others. For example, a pro-Israel group might focus on military support, US-Israel relations, or the peace process, while overlooking internal disagreements. In this regard, being 'pro-Israel' is a 'moving' variable that can be contested by other groups who want to cement in the public discourse their definition of being 'pro-Israel'. Thus, group identity can obscure individual differences (Kiely, 2017: 43).

In this study, I will critically analyze the intersection between political orientation and claims about ethnic identity. I will demonstrate why the political beliefs of diaspora members

are of paramount importance when examining discourses surrounding diasporic identity in polarized multi-ethnic and multi-confessional societies. As a case study, I will examine four Jewish interest groups in the United States to illustrate the inextricable connection between identity and political orientation. This study will predominantly focus on the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023 and the subsequent Israeli response. Special attention will be paid to how these organizations utilize terms such as "Jewish," "Jewishness," and "being a Jew" to investigate how ethnic identity is employed in the political rhetoric of these interest groups.

Research questions:

1. How does political orientation/ideology influence the ways discourses about ethnic identity are shaped?
2. Which methods do they use to de-legitimize the discourse (value system) of their opponents?
3. Why ethno-religious category "Jew"/"Jewish" play such an important and noticeable role in public rhetoric?

List of organizations and sources:

Left/Center Left

- A. Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP)– the largest anti-Zionist Jewish activist organization in the USA.
- B. J-Street – moderate Jewish organization which promotes the protection of Palestinian rights, and has very critical perspective on Jewish right.

Right

- A. American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) – the largest and the most influential pro-Israel organization in the USA. Its primary mission is to strengthen Israeli-American relations.
- B. Zionists Organization of America (ZOA) – America’s first Zionist organization of widespread influence and public recognition.

This selection was offered by Osterbur & Kiel (2021); they based their classification on the question of how these organizations perceive a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They classify the left and the center-left as those who believe that a two-state solution is the best or one of the best solutions to the between Israelis and Palestinians. The right, contrary, sees the Two-state solution as the worst scenario due to its potential danger to the future security of Israel (Osterbur & Kiel, 2021: 200). Waxman (2016: 176) agrees with that classification; he adds 2 important parameters: the attitude towards Zionism and towards who is the main instigator of the conflict in Palestine (“who is at fault?”). According to him, the left considers Zionism as outdated and generally ‘evil’ ideology, whereas the right tends to support it. As for the root of the conflict, the left blames Israel; the right put the blame on the Palestinians alone.

Sources & Data selection: social media (Instagram). I will analyze posts from their official account in these social media planforms regarding Instagram covering the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October and the subsequent Israeli intervention. I will focus on the debates and discussion which were triggered ongoing war. Such as: Destruction of Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza and student protests on campuses.

Significance:

This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced dynamics between the American Jewish community and Israel, providing insights into the complex relationship that extends beyond geopolitical considerations to encompass identity, security, and diaspora politics. Utilizing the most recent sources, including the October 7 attack on Israel and the subsequent ground operation in the Gaza sector, this research will explore the interplay between ethno-religious diasporic identity and political orientation, and how these categories intersect. The study posits that political orientation can significantly influence both the self-perception of diaspora members and their relationship with their distant homeland.

2. CONTEXTUALIZATION:

2.1 The structure and origin of two discourses, Zionism vs Universalism¹

Since its inception, Zionist ideology has encountered numerous challenges, drawing criticism from various sectors of the political spectrum. Religious conservatives perceived Zionism as a threat to traditional Judaism, which they regarded as integral to their identity. Meanwhile, proponents of progressive ideologies such as liberalism and socialism viewed Zionism as undermining the equality of the working class, both Jewish and Gentile, and impeding social progress (Rabkin, 2016: 122-3). Zionists' apparent disregard for Judaism only deepened resentment within religious communities, a sentiment that persisted even after the establishment of the state.

As Avinery (2017: 12-13) points out, European Jewry in the latter half of the 19th century did not perceive the return to Palestine as a feasible or necessary endeavor; rather, it served as a symbolic element of their identity. Avinery (2017: 13) illustrates that Jews viewed this "return" in a manner akin to how Christians anticipated the Second Coming. Consequently, the emergence of a secular ideology that transformed this symbolic aspect of identity into a tangible political goal caused considerable perplexity among religious Jewish communities. The Zionist ideology embodies a certain duality: it rejects Jewish religious tradition while simultaneously appropriating Biblical narratives and traditional symbols to realize the religious prophecy of return in a secular-nationalistic context. This reinterpretation of the traditional biblical narrative of return was regarded by many as another manifestation of false messianism. Moreover, Zionism introduced a novel non-religious identity – national identity (Rabkin, 2016:123).

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a transformation in the attitude of Jewish communities toward Zionism. The growing popularity of antisemitic and racist ideologies,

¹ Parts of this chapter were taken from my previous works

along with brutal pogroms and political persecution by their governments, led to an increasing support for Zionism among European and American Jews. While American Jews show a moderate level of support for Zionist aims and objectives, Moshe Shertok cautioned Ben-Gurion in 1940 that despite a profound emotional connection and innate loyalty to the cause, the Jewish masses failed to turn these sentiments into real actions (Sachar, 1993: 1335). According to Sachar, this unwillingness to "return" can be attributed to the fact that American Jews identified primarily as citizens of the United States, where they had not encountered the same degree of hostility from both the government and non-Jewish populace (Sachar, 1993:1336-1337).

During the interwar period, Zionism experienced a surge in popularity among American Jews, driven by the escalation of anti-Semitism in Europe, particularly under Nazi rule. The arrival of Eastern European Jews, who felt less assimilated into American society and identified more with their ethnic roots, also contributed to the growing support for Zionism. However, opposition to Zionism persisted within the Jewish community, sparking debates. In the 1930s-40s, Zionist initiatives gained momentum, drawing increased backing from Jewish organizations and leaders. Nevertheless, some Reformist Jews hesitated to fully endorse Zionism, especially concerning support for Zionist military activities in Palestine. This hesitation led to a notable division within the Reformist Jewish community, highlighted in debates in 1941. The establishment of Zionist militias marked a transition from a traditional universalist ideology to one rooted in ethnic nationalism. The pivotal year of 1942 saw a significant split in the American Jewish community, with Reformist rabbis, led by Louis Wolsey, forming the American Council for Judaism (ACJ) to address the impact of Zionism on Reform Judaism. Under the leadership of Lessing J. Rosenwald and Rabbi Elmer Berger in 1943, the ACJ transformed into a secular anti-Zionist organization, attracting mainly middle- and upper-middle-class Reform Jews of German descent (Sachar, 1993, 1340-1; Kolsky, 1990, 1-3).

Throughout the 20th century, some political agendas managed to unite Jews in the persuasion of the common goal. In the first half of the century, the primal agenda of the Jewish communities in the US was combating Antisemitism and discrimination. In the late 50s and early 60s, Jews largely supported the civil rights movement assuming that the Jews could be secure as long as other minorities were no longer victims of discrimination. This concern with the destiny of the other minorities was motivated by the “Jewish self-interest” and not derived from consistent liberalism (Chanes, 2001: 101-102). However, the focus on domestic policy radically changed with the emergence of the Soviet Jewry movement and the Six-Day War in the late 60s, and Jews began to be concerned about international politics.

In the past, the European left and the United States' liberals were strongly supportive of Jewish causes, especially after the horrors of the Third Reich and World War II. This support was rooted in opposition to fascism and sympathy for the victims of the Holocaust. In Europe, being pro-Jewish was often linked with being against fascist and clerical (church-related) powers. After the war, both the left and centrist parties competed to show their support for Zionism and the victims of the Holocaust. Similarly, in the United States, being pro-Israel was popular among liberals, who saw it as part of a foreign policy aligned with liberal values, especially under Truman. They criticized the State Department's pro-Arab policy for supporting undemocratic regimes and saw it as a betrayal of American principles. Support for Israel remained strong among American liberals until the 1970s, with figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., and Adlai Stevenson being prominent supporters. Even figures from the Communist Party, like Paul Robeson, supported Zionist causes (Mead, 2022: 1276-1278).

Another reason of this support is the widespread violence and chaos in the postwar world, brutal conflicts between Israel and its neighbors, India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, and etc. silenced the problems of Palestinian refugees since the all attention was directed to other regions and wars. Moreover, for a long period, even the left did not consider Palestinians

as separate people; they were seen as Arabs who could just move to other “Arabic” countries in the region (Mead, 2022: 1281).

Before 1967, Israel was supported by leftists and was perceived as a “Spartan, socialist, anti-imperialist nation and very much an underdog in its constant battle with the surrounding Arab nations that sought its destruction” (Alterman, 2022: 22). Israel had a reputation of “the only democracy in the Middle East” which aroused sympathy from the American non-Jewish majority (ibid). But as Israel became associated with conservatism, liberals and leftists started sympathizing with displaced Palestinians, seeing them as underdogs akin to Black South Africans fighting apartheid. Despite this, secular American Jews remained notably liberal, viewing liberalism as a core part of their Jewish identity. However, the tension between supporting Israel and liberal causes, especially in the era of Trump, hinted at a potential shift (Alterman, 2022: 23)

After the 1967 war, the Palestinian issue gained more attention in Europe and the United States, as Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories changed perspectives. With other refugee crises diminishing and Israel integrating Jewish refugees from Arab countries, the Palestinian problem seemed more unique and alarming. Meanwhile, Jews appeared less as victims and more as oppressors. The political right's rise in Israel, especially with Likud Party victory in 1977, influenced how the left viewed Israel. Likud's shift towards nationalism and expansionism paralleled Thatcher and Reagan's rise in the West, leading the left to see Israel as aligned with capitalist interests. As Europe's focus shifted towards Third World conflicts, leftists sympathized with anti-capitalist movements in countries like Cuba and Vietnam. The U.S.-Soviet rivalry in the Middle East made Arab leaders like Assad and Hussein more appealing to radical leftists. Israel was increasingly viewed as a symbol of American capitalism, leading to a rise in anti-Zionism among left-wing movements. Rejecting Zionism became a way for younger radicals to distance themselves from what they saw as colonial ideologies. Some extreme factions even sympathized with terrorist groups (Mead, 2022: 1282).

The Six-Day War changed many things. The Palestinian cause, part of the Marxist-inspired "third world" revolutionary movement, gained traction alongside other anti-colonial movements like in Vietnam and Cuba. The Black-Jewish alliance, enduring since the Ku Klux Klan era, began to strain. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a civil rights organization, criticized Israel's actions, even suggesting involvement of wealthy European Jews like the Rothschilds in creating Israel. SNCC published articles and cartoons depicting Israel negatively, leading to Jewish complaints. SNCC's program director clarified that they criticized Israeli Jews, not all Jews. Former SNCC president Stokely Carmichael spoke against Zionism, aligning with Palestinian rights. These criticisms deeply affected many Jews, causing psychological distress and straining interracial relations (Alterman, 2022: 194).

Kiely (2017) examines the influence of the Israel lobby, officially recognized as lobby groups in the United States, during the Clinton administration. He suggests that the bias in American foreign policy towards Israel cannot be solely attributed to groups like AIPAC. Rather, it emerges from recurring themes that shape American identity, which inherently align with a pro-Israel perspective. AIPAC's influence is significant because it echoes and amplifies existing representations in foreign policy discourse, thereby reinforcing an Israel-centric view of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The pro-Israel stance of these groups is driven more by ideological factors than by ethnic or religious ones.

This perspective draws on prevalent American exceptionalism themes, depicting Israel as culturally, religiously, and strategically significant. It aligns with American exceptionalism's core concepts, emphasizing moral obligations, democracy, and defense of other nations. These representations link Israel to America's exceptional character, rooted in biblical imagery of a 'chosen people' and a 'promised land'. Understanding these connections in American exceptionalism is crucial for analyzing subsequent discourse on this topic (Kiely, 2017: 132–135).

This narrative became dominant among the Zionist Jewish organizations and media only after the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War in 1967. After this war, American Jews' perception of themselves, God, and Torah changed. Israeli leaders often spoke of their nation in terms of miracles, linking their experiences to biblical stories. This belief gained more literal meaning among both Jews and non-Jews. President Johnson, like Truman before him, saw divine intervention in Israel's creation and the return of Jews to the country. Secular Jewish leaders in America started using language of Divine intervention to explain Israel's military success, especially in capturing East Jerusalem with the Western Wall, a significant site for Jews. This belief in Israel's miraculous existence became central to Jewish American identity (Alterman, 2022: 181).

An article by Osterbur & Kiel (2021) analyzed the Twitter discourse between American-Jewish interest groups. They highlight the differences between how these organizations frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – while ‘progressives’ see it as a matter of human rights (universal), for right-wing groups it is a concern of national security and interests in terms of supporting Israel. They suggest that groups sharing similar frames tend to strengthen their identity together and negatively frame groups with different perspectives. Traditionally, negative campaigning involved methods like direct mail, advertisements, and television spots, but now social media has expanded these strategies.

Consequently, the aforementioned studies provide us with a certain understanding of how these two discourses are structured. AIPAC (right-wing & Zionist) tends to frame the current conflict between Israel and Palestine as a problem of Israel's national security; they emphasize both American and Israeli ‘exceptionalism’ and often use Biblical references to justify their policy. On the other hand, progressive anti-Zionist groups use more secular language and focus on the violation of human rights of Palestinians in the regions; they criticize Israeli settler-colonialism and find the very emergence of the state either debatable or unjust.

2.2 Right wing: Israel no matter what

The political right completely opposes the idea of a Palestinian state unless it's in Jordan or any other neighboring country. They reject the possibility of a two-state solution and believe Palestinians should have autonomy under Israeli rule at most. This opposition is rooted in suspicion of Palestinian intentions and the belief that the entire historical Land of Israel, including the West Bank, belongs to the Jewish people. The American Jewish right often emphasizes security reasons for maintaining control over the West Bank rather than religious or historical arguments. They advocate for Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank and are influenced by neo-conservative thinkers and organizations like the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (Waxman, 2016: 185).

The American Jewish right, influenced by neo-conservative beliefs, sees the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as part of a larger global struggle against Islamic extremism, especially after the 9/11 attacks. They view the hostility towards Israel as not just directed at Jews, but against Western values as a whole. Israel is seen as a bastion of democracy under attack by what they term "Islamofascism" (Waxman, 2016: 186). The "sister democracy" in the Middle East – a cliché widely used by representatives of the Israel Lobby and other interested parties to present Israel as the most similar to the US country and as the most loyal and relievable ally. Historically, AIPAC has been promoting the narrative presenting Israel as an important 'asset' of American foreign policy, framing this partnership as both mutually beneficial and inevitable due to the ideological similarities (Goldberg, 1990: 24).

Historically, American Jews have strongly supported Israel, seeing it as central to their identity and a symbol of Jewish resurgence. However, this support has often been more philanthropic than a personal commitment to moving to the "promised land" (Goldberg, 1990: 15-16). This steadfast backing has fostered unity within the American Jewish community. Over the past two decades, however, more American Jews have become critical of Israel's policies, particularly regarding the Palestinian conflict. This shift has sparked internal debates about

what it means to support Israel. Major American Jewish organizations, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), have faced criticism for suppressing this growing debate and being out of touch. New advocacy groups like J Street are challenging the established pro-Israel lobby. Despite international perceptions of American Jewish influence in the U.S. government, American Jews often feel overlooked by Israeli authorities, even though Israel recognizes their importance in mobilizing support and gaining recognition for its interests (Waxman, 2016: 43–50).

AIPAC struggled with lobbying for aid to the new Palestinian National Authority, which included former PLO members they once called terrorists. Many of AIPAC's main supporters were Republicans with ties to Likud politicians, making it difficult for them to support peace agreements. AIPAC's executive director compared supporting peace efforts to pulling teeth. While AIPAC members didn't publicly confront Israel's US ambassador, right-wing Jewish protesters sometimes did, making it challenging for him to advocate for Israeli-Palestinian peace in public settings. These incidents often became confrontational (Alterman, 2022: 373).

The common assumption that American Jews prioritize Israel in their voting decisions isn't entirely accurate. The CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, William Daroff, defended the US practice of giving \$3.8 billion in unconditional military aid to Israel annually. However, this stance contradicts the opinion of many American Jews, as recent surveys suggest a majority are not in favor of unconditional aid and would prefer restrictions on its use regarding Israel's occupation of Palestinians. Some even criticize Israel more strongly than community representatives like Daroff. Understanding American Jewish views on Israel has been difficult, with few reliable studies done on the subject. Polls typically focus on emotional attachment to Israel rather than specific policies. However, recent shifts in Israeli politics and strained relations with American Jewish institutions have led to questions about conditional aid, alternatives to the two-state solution, and the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement. These new questions reveal a polarized American Jewish

community, with a median position to the left of mainstream Jewish institutions. Still, interpreting poll results is challenging due to varying interpretations of terms like "Zionist" and differing levels of knowledge about Israel (Morganti, 2023).

Despite the frequent claim that Israel is a top concern for them during elections, this is not the case. Israel doesn't rank high on the list of political concerns for most American Jews. In reality, many of them rarely discuss or think about Israel, and a majority have never visited the country or possess in-depth knowledge about it (Waxman, 2016: 49–51). For example, according to Pew Research Center only 45% of Jews in America consider or care about Israel as an important element of their identity. However, this percentage drops to only 27% among non-secular Jews (Figure 1). However, pollsters and sociologists studying American Jews' views on Israel face challenges due to different interpretations of survey questions. For instance, the question about "emotional attachment" to Israel can be understood differently depending on how terms like "emotional attachment" and "Israel" are perceived. This ambiguity makes it hard to gauge opinions accurately. Matthew Boxer, a sociologist at Brandeis University, notes that survey questions, including those about "emotional attachment," have remained largely unchanged since the 1960s despite evolving contexts. Recent Pew Research Center surveys show that while a majority of American Jews still consider Israel important to them personally, there has been a decrease in emotional attachment since 2013. However, caution is needed when comparing results due to changes in survey methods (Morganti, 2023).

Most Jews say remembering the Holocaust, leading an ethical and moral life are essential to being Jewish

% of U.S. Jews who say _____ is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them

	NET Jewish %	Jews by religion %	Jews of no religion %
Remembering the Holocaust	76	81	63
Leading an ethical and moral life	72	81	47
Working for justice and equality in society	59	63	47
Being intellectually curious	56	58	49
Continuing family traditions	51	61	24
Caring about Israel	45	52	27
Having a good sense of humor	34	36	28
Being a part of a Jewish community	33	40	12
Eating traditional Jewish foods	20	23	11
Observing Jewish law (halakha)	15	19	3

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults. "Jewish Americans in 2020"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1 Pew Research Center Survey, 2020

Older American Jews tend to feel more connected to Israel

% of U.S. Jews who say they ...



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults. "Jewish Americans in 2020"

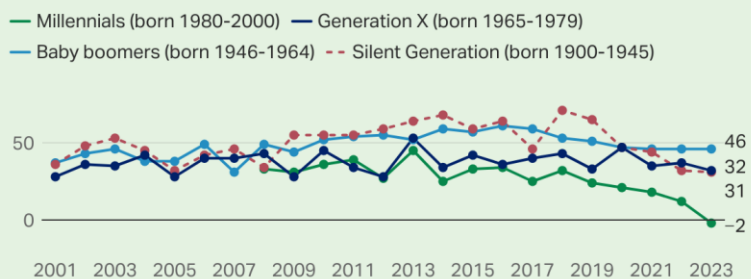
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2 Pew Research Center, 2020

The split is not only by religious affiliation but also by age, the younger generation is much less connected to Israel than the older one (Figure 2). Aforementioned surveys show the emergence of the ‘cleavage’ between Jewish people in the United States.

Net Sympathy for Israelis in Middle East Situation, by Generation

% More sympathetic toward the Israelis minus % more sympathetic toward the Palestinians



Results are in percentage points. Trend for adults in Generation Z (born 2001-2005) not shown due to low sample size.

Ages in 2023: millennials, 23-43; Generation X, 44-58; baby boomers; 59-77; Silent Generation, 78 and older

GALLUP

Figure 3 Gallup data, 2023

In March 2023, Gallup discovered that among Democrats², more sympathy was directed towards Palestinians than Israelis, with 49% versus 38%. This trend was especially noticeable across different generations. Baby boomers and Generation X showed a positive sympathy towards Israel, with a net level of +46% and +32% respectively. However, among millennials, there was a significant decline, with a net sympathy level of -2% for Israel compared to Palestinians (Figure 3).

This cleavage was also indicated by Brandeis University's Center for Modern Jewish Studies for Portland's Jewish Federation. Surprisingly, most adult Jews in Portland don't identify as Zionists and aren't strongly attached to Israel. Only 26% identify as Zionists, while 55% feel not at all or only minimally attached to Israel. Interestingly, more Portland Jews feel attached to Israel than identify as Zionists, possibly because attachment doesn't necessarily mean support. Despite many traveling to Israel, especially through Birthright, attachment remains low, suggesting Birthright's impact may be limited. The majority of Portland Jews prioritize Israel being a democratic state, but only 65% prioritize it being a Jewish state. This

² The majority of American Jews are Democrats, including 68% of Jews by religion and 77% of Jews of no religion. Just 26% of U.S. Jews overall identify with the Republican Party (Pew Research Center, 2021).

discrepancy might stem from discomfort with the term "Zionist" or a desire for Israel to provide refuge for Jews without necessarily being the center of Jewish life. Many don't believe Israel lives up to its values regarding human rights. Although some local congregations have become more supportive of Palestinian rights, the public stance of the Jewish Federation doesn't reflect the majority's views. Federation leaders have opposed those deviating from pro-Israel stances. Despite this, the Federation hasn't addressed the gap between its positions and the community's views (Beinin, 2023; Boxer & Brookner, 2023).

The polarization of the Jewish community sometimes leads to very controversial situations when even advocacy groups that fight against the common enemy – Antisemitism cannot fully and accurately represent the beliefs of the majority. In his 2022 book "It Could Happen Here," Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt criticized Ben & Jerry's founders, Cohen and Greenfield, for their decision to separate Israel and the occupied territories. Pro-Israel lobbyists pressured divestment from Unilever, Ben & Jerry's parent company, over this stance, despite most Americans, including 58% of American Jews, supporting restrictions on aid to Israel to prevent spending on settlements. The response aimed to intimidate companies facing similar pressure, as explained by William Daroff, CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Their efforts led Unilever to sell its Israeli operations to a local corporation servicing settlement, despite objections from Ben and Jerry.

American Jewish support for Israel has become very multifaceted. Many grapples with their emotional ties to Israel while disapproving of its government's actions, a conflict that intensified during the second Intifada³ and continues today. Some express support by donating to civil rights groups or promoting peace efforts, while others may finance Jewish settlements in occupied territories or right-wing political parties. Criticism of Israeli governments, once taboo, is now viewed as a way to express concern rather than hostility (Waxman, 2016: 108–116).

³ The Second Uprising, one of the largest Palestinian rebellions against Israel, happened between 2000 and 2005.

Up until the 1980s, it was discouraged for American Jews to speak out against Israel. However, this changed over time as Diaspora Jews began to feel more entitled to critique Israel. While there has been a shift in attitudes allowing more public criticism of Israeli policies, dissent is still restricted during wartime. Criticism of Israel has become more accepted, but it remains contentious within some circles of the American Jewish community. There are defined boundaries that exclude certain opinions, such as anti-Zionism, because it is associated with anti-Semitism, from acceptable discourse. This exclusion influences the community's identity and unity, particularly as support for Israel continues to be important amid changing social dynamics. The emergence of alternative advocacy groups has changed power dynamics in how Israel is perceived among American Jews, with limitations on discussing Middle East policy being more linked to representations of American identity, particularly shaped by the myth of American exceptionalism (Waxman, 2016: 130–140).

Moreover, according to (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008: 145):

“AIPAC and its affiliates within the pro-Israel lobby are successful in determining the direction of US foreign policy due to both financial clout and the lack of an alternative lobby, in favor of Arabs and Palestinians”

Although their book triggered a lot of debates about the power and influence of the Israel lobby in the US, some scholars and researchers, like historian Eric Alterman agreed that:

“Restricting or conditioning aid to Israel is completely anathema in Congress.... even as J Street’s polling found majority support for restricting aid among American Jews. After all, major pro-Israel organizations that claim to represent American Jews aren’t basing their agenda on a democratic vote.” (Morganti, 2023).

The dominance of established groups like AIPAC⁴ in shaping discourse on Jewish-American views regarding Israel faced challenges with the emergence of newer groups like J Street and Jewish Voices for Peace, altering the narrative. AIPAC is known to influence both average Americans and elected officials by convincing them that Jews unconditionally support

⁴ Key decision-makers of the AIPAC are “Likud-supporting hardliners” compared to the predominantly liberal majority of American Jews; this difference in political beliefs triggers hot debates among the Jews and Gentiles of America and eventually led to the establishment of alternative advocacy/lobby groups (Alterman, 2022: 443).

Israel (Morganti, 2023). In 2009, J Street was founded to represent a pro-Israel, pro-peace perspective, aiming to challenge AIPAC's influence by supporting different policies and providing alternative funding. In response, AIPAC excluded J Street from major Jewish organizations, claiming their views were outside the mainstream of the community. This led to a divide within the Jewish community as AIPAC's support for the right-wing government in Israel, particularly Prime Minister Netanyahu's policies, strained the relationship with President Obama and caused conflicts over issues such as settlements and peace negotiations with Palestinians. This alignment faced opposition within the Democratic Party, especially concerning Netanyahu's approach toward Palestinian rights (Waxman, 2016: 269–272; Bruck, 2014). AIPAC's annual conference attracts thousands of members and most members of Congress, featuring top American and Israeli politicians. Contrary to assumptions, AIPAC's supporters are not all staunch Republicans or neocons; the organization works with all parties. Many of its 100,000 members use AIPAC to connect politically with Israel and engage local politicians. AIPAC provides guidance, information on Israel, and tracks congressional votes, but it is not a political action committee and cannot collect or distribute campaign money. Despite accusations of influencing PAC money flow, no evidence was found. Israeli politicians seek AIPAC's support due to its lobbying effectiveness. AIPAC is just one voice among diverse American Jewish organizations, which also focus on advocacy, lobbying, and facilitation (Gertheiss, 2016: 111).

Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) was established in 1918. In the following decades, it mainly provided support to Zionist efforts in British Mandatory Palestine. In the 1930s, it lobbied American policymakers against British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. Wise appealed to President Roosevelt in 1936 to oppose British plans to limit Jewish immigration. The Zionist lobby, lacking grassroots support, relied on high-level connections of its leaders. They influenced Congress and engaged governors, churches, and trade unions to support Jewish statehood. In contrast, left-of-center groups like Americans for Peace Now

supported the peace process, while right-wing groups like the ZOA opposed it. Under Morton Klein's leadership in the 1990s, the ZOA criticized Israeli governments and actively worked to derail the peace process by lobbying Congress against U.S. financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority and to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem (Waxman, 2016: 290).

2.3 The Left: Human Rights & Anti-Zionism

The historical role of Jews in the political Left is notable, with figures like Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Léon Blum, and Emma Goldman standing out as theorists and activists. Additionally, Jewish communities were prominent in socialist and communist movements in places like revolutionary Russia, Warsaw, Amsterdam, Paris, Toronto, Buenos Aires, New York, and London. From around 1830 to 1970, there existed an informal alliance between Jews and the political Left, though not all Jews and Left groups were involved. This alliance was driven by a mix of self-interest and idealism or altruism on both sides. Many Jews saw in the progressive ideologies an opportunity to overcome millennia of prosecutions and oppression; alliance with the oppressed was considered logical for the community that experienced so many losses and horrors. Jewish engagement with the Left can be understood through several factors: class and ethnic oppression, Jewish cultural values, and Left support for Jewish equality. Many European Jews, including those in the USA, South Africa, and Britain, faced poverty and worked in labor-intensive jobs at the turn of the 20th century. Despite common misconceptions about Jewish affluence, most Jews were not wealthy or influential, and many struggled to survive. While some Jewish families achieved wealth, the majority worked in low-paying jobs or as artisans, facing significant economic hardship (Mendes, 2014: 5-6).

Three main political responses to antisemitism emerged: universalist socialists believed in a world where differences like religion and ethnicity would become unimportant through revolution, bundists aimed to create a modern Jewish identity alongside others in Europe while defending against antisemitism, and Zionists advocated for Jewish national self-determination

and military defense. Post-1967, the Palestinian issue reshaped left-wing views on Israel, with the rise of the political right in Israel contributing to this shift. The left increasingly saw Israel as aligned with capitalist interests, leading to a rise in anti-Zionism. However, all strategies against antisemitism failed. The Holocaust eradicated Bundism, Bolshevism couldn't prevent it, and Zionism didn't save European Jews in large enough numbers. Israel emerged not because Zionism won debates, but due to material transformations, like the Holocaust, Arab efforts to expel Jews from the Middle East, and international support from Soviet Union and other countries (Hirsh, 2018: 222-223).

The term "antizionism" changed after 1948 from a debate within Jewish circles to a program against an existing state. Some antizionists deny this reality, clinging to the hope of Israel's disappearance. Ethnic nationalism was prevalent in the post-colonial Middle East, not just in Zionism. Jewish concerns are often central in Jewish antizionism discussions, neglecting wider issues in the region. They focus on Israeli human rights abuses and challenge the supports that Jewish communities provide to Israel globally (Hirsh, 2018: 223).

The center-left in Israel criticizes aspects of the country's policies, such as the occupation of Palestinian territories, but still supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. They oppose discrimination against Arab citizens but don't challenge the fundamental idea of Zionism. However, the left goes further, seeking to transform Israel fundamentally and address what they see as systemic biases against Palestinians. Rooted in American Jewish peace activism, the left views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a universalistic lens, emphasizing Palestinian rights and criticizing Israel's historical and ongoing treatment of Palestinians. They argue that the conflict stems from Zionist colonization and ongoing oppression of Palestinians, advocating for justice and equality for all in the region (Waxman, 2016: 195-196).

Jewish left is extremely diverse, separating on Cultural Zionists, Post-Zionists⁵, and numerous other groups rooted in the Jewish socialist and Marxists movements across the globe (Waxman, 2016: 197). Many of these movements emerged from the Marxist tradition, for example, Jacqueline Rose (2007) uses methods of psychoanalysis to explore the popularity of Zionism, which according to her, is rooted in the trauma of the Holocaust and, thus, should be “cured” as any other disorder. She also frames this movement an “Messianic” rather than rational product of European modernity. Antony Lerman, a former director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, draws on psychology to explain current events, echoing Israeli psychologist Daniel Bar Tal's observations about Israeli Jews and applying them to British Jews. He suggests that Jewish consciousness is marked by feelings of victimization, siege mentality, blind patriotism, belligerence, self-righteousness, dehumanization of Palestinians, and insensitivity to their suffering. Lerman implies that Jews collectively reject facts and rationality. This portrayal, if from the far right, would be easily recognized as antisemitic. Critics of Israeli policies should argue politically, avoiding attributing a pathological inability to Jews. Rose, Churchill, and Lerman all suggest that Jewish upbringing fosters indifference to non-Jewish suffering, which they tie to Israel's actions in Gaza (Hirsh, 2018: 229).

The notion that Jews are a diasporic people, thus, they do not have to establish a national homeland is another factor significantly contributing to the separation from Zionism. This identity is not just a reaction to Israeli actions but also stems from a sense of belonging and comfort in the diaspora. Diasporism asserts that being in the diaspora is inherent to Jewish identity, emphasizing qualities like hybridity and universalism while rejecting nationalism. It's

⁵ Post-Zionism is the hope for the transformation of Israel and making it an equal home for all its citizens despite their ethnicity and origin (Adler, 1996: 7-8). Of course, not everybody agrees with such an optimistic statement. For example, Isi Leibler in the Jerusalem Post describes Post-Zionism as a threat to national security. Post-Zionism rejects Jewish nationalism and undermines the idea of Israel as a Jewish state. This trend involves altering national symbols and calling for Israel to be a state for all citizens, which questions the Law of Return and other core symbols. Post-Zionism, common in academia and media, fuels anti-Israeli campaigns, and its influence in education undermines Israel's heritage and values (Leibler, 2007).

not necessarily anti-Israel, but it seeks to decenter Israel from Jewish identities (Landy, 2001:41-42).

Another important fault line is looking at the history of Israel itself. In the 1980s, two groups, the "new historians" and the "critical sociologists," transformed the study of Israeli history, challenging its foundational narratives. The new historians focused on reexamining the military and diplomatic history of the 1948 War, seeking to challenge the traditional Zionist perspective. Meanwhile, critical sociologists explored broader aspects, including Zionism's connection to European colonialism and Israeli attitudes toward various groups such as Mizrahi Jews, Holocaust survivors, the Diaspora, and women (Likhovski, 2010: 5-8).

The left also supports conscientious objectors in Israel who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories and calls for stopping American military aid to Israel. These positions often lead to criticism and social isolation within the American Jewish community, but the left believes it's both a right and an ethical duty for American Jews to criticize Israeli policies, as reflected in the slogan "Not in My Name". (Waxman, 2016: 199).

The left's shift against Israel stemmed from disillusionment with the gap between the idealized Israel they were promised and the harsh realities on the ground. Israel's alignment with conservatism contrasted with academia's leftward trend, where liberals became the new conservatives and conservatives were scarce. On campuses, the humanities underwent a significant transformation since the previous generation's time. Many former revolutionary thinkers sought refuge in academia, aiming to understand past failures and train future activists. Most humanities professors shared Marxist-influenced views, criticizing the US and other Western nations for exploiting the oppressed. They connected knowledge with oppressive structures and advocated for dismantling and rebuilding education to reflect anti-racist and anti-colonial values. In this context, Israel was seen as akin to America, perpetuating misery and serving imperialist agendas under the guise of settler colonialism. This view became prevalent

on university campuses, where Israel became a central focus and subject of scrutiny (Alterman, 2022: 420).

Academic discourse significantly contributes to the ideological foundations of the Jewish left. Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1992) became a milestone in the humanities by challenging traditional perspectives on Western-Eastern relations and offering a critical postcolonial perspective on how the 'West' sees others. His concept of "Orientalism" examines how Western discourse, institutions, and ideologies supported imperialist actions. Drawing from various disciplines and languages, Said argued that Orientalism created a framework that justified Western domination over other cultures. He described it as a form of "power-knowledge," influenced by thinkers like Foucault and Gramsci, through which Western nations shaped beliefs both domestically and in the territories they colonized. Orientalism portrayed non-Western cultures as inherently inferior, justifying colonial violence in the name of progress. Since the perception of Israel as a progressive and antiimperialist political entity changed to the opposite after the 60s, Said's book became a 'handbook' on how Israel should be seen by the left or any other progressive individuals (Alterman, 2022: 423; Said, 1992).

Associating Zionism with European colonialism also implies including Jews under the umbrella category of 'Whiteness'. In this framework, Jews are considered to have and enjoy 'white privilege', which benefits them just due to their belonging to the higher status group. The power imbalance in Israel between Jews and non-Jews, thus, reinforces these privileges and does not allow outsiders to occupy important governmental and economic positions. However, these accusations can be seen as a new form of antisemitism that promotes radical anti-Israel narratives (Klaff, 2024: 20-21). In this framework, any attempt to contest this unjust system is justified since they are driven by the desire of the oppressed to live in a better, equal world. For example, Judith Butler used the term "armed resistance against a colonial power" to describe the October 7th attack (Starr, 2024).

Moreover, some scholars and activists oppose the very association of Jewish identity with Zionism, stating that the identity of the entire ethnoreligious community cannot be reduced to a single political ideology. For example, Judith Butler (2012) argues that while there is a Jewish tradition supporting justice and equality which criticizes the Israeli state, aligning with this perspective risks suggesting that only Jewish values hold ethical importance. She stresses that effective criticism of Zionism must prioritize broader democratic values over exclusive Jewish perspectives. Butler emphasizes the need to move beyond Jewishness as the sole framework for ethics and politics, advocating for a more inclusive approach that considers diverse traditions in the region. She acknowledges the legitimacy of Jewish critiques of state violence but cautions against viewing them as the sole basis for critique, urging consideration of multiple ethical and political traditions.

Noam Chomsky – probably one of the most famous public intellectual and academic in the world has a long history of debunking pro-Israel myth in American academy and beyond. He is a prominent critic of U.S. wars and Israel's treatment of Palestinians, has faced marginalization in most major U.S. media outlets due to his viewpoints. Chomsky's opposition to U.S. aggression and his critiques of Israel's actions have led to hostility and distortion directed towards him. Despite this, Chomsky has persisted in highlighting the injustices of Zionism, notably in his book *Fateful Triangle* (Chomsky, 2015; Solomon, 2023). In this book, Chomsky writes that the US and Israel are responsible for opposing peace in the region, while the Arabs have been trying to find a common ground for long-term peaceful coexistence (Chomsky, 2015: XV).

Eventually, the aforementioned cleavage led to the foundation of the anti-Zionist Jewish institution. Jewish Voices for Peace was created in 1996 by Noam Chomsky and Tony Kushner. Since its foundation the main aim of the organization has been to consolidate anti-Zionist Jews of America and to protest Israeli policy in Palestine which they describe as “severe human-rights violations that Israel engages in every day”.

Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) There are sharply contrasting opinions on Israel and its policies. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) supports Israel and views Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) as a radical anti-Israel group because of its endorsement of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). In contrast, JVP regards Israel as a fundamentally racist oppressor and advocates for a complete boycott of the country (Holmes, 2019). Initially focused on selective divestment, JVP has now shifted to fully endorsing the comprehensive BDS movement against all of Israel⁶, and attributing Palestinian violence to Israeli policies. The divergence in their perspectives on Israel creates an intriguing contrast in their approaches to news production on the same topic (Jewish Voice for Peace, 2018). Noam Chomsky, one of the few key founders of JVP, supports the claim that the American policy towards Israel is unjust and biased, since it cannot critically respond to Israel's sometimes brutal policy toward the Palestinians. He is also sure that this selective "blindness" toward Israel is the result of active lobbying work: an omnipresent pro-Israel lobby that can silence critical voices (Chomsky, 1983: 5-10).

J-Street is a center-left Jewish organization which was founded in the 2008 with a particular aim to challenge the omnipresent public domination of AIPAC with their rightish perspective on Israel and Palestine. The organization positioned itself as a moderate pro-Israel organization which seek to represent moderate Jewish voices (J-Street, Official website). They criticized Israel's policies towards Palestinians, advocating for a stronger American role in the peace process. J Street criticized the dominant voices in the pro-Israel lobby, particularly AIPAC, which it believed drowned out moderate perspectives. Led by Jeremy Ben-Ami, with political experience from the Clinton administration, and backed by notable financiers like

⁶ These beliefs are perceived as a new form of left antisemitism by some other Jewish activists, not necessarily mere pro-Zionists. For example, according to Alan Johnson (2024:4) "In short, that which the demonological Jew once was, demonological Israel now is: uniquely malevolent, full of blood lust, all-controlling, the hidden hand, tricky, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, uniquely deserving of punishment, and so on. This antisemitic anti-Zionism has three components: a program, a discourse, and a movement. First, a political program: not two states for two peoples, but the abolition of the Jewish homeland; not Palestine alongside Israel, but Palestine instead of Israel. Second, a demonizing intellectual discourse about Israel . . . Third, antisemitic anti-Zionism is a presence within the global social movement . . . to exclude one state – and only one state – from the economic, cultural and educational life of humanity: the little Jewish one."

George Soros, J Street differed from previous dovish Jewish groups by having its own political action committee (PAC), enabling it to endorse and raise campaign money for supportive politicians (Waxman, 2016: 299-301). J Street supports the two-state solution even against Israel's will. Recently, governments, organizations, and researchers have recognized diasporas as potential agents for peace, development, and democratization. Diasporas can act as "peace-makers" by highlighting human rights violations, lobbying for peace, and conducting reconciliation projects, both locally and with opposing diasporas (Gertheiss, 2016:19).

3. THEORETICAL & METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK:

3.1 Diaspora: Between Identity and Ideology

Diasporas are social groups that settle in another country and are internally diverse, with different interests based on factors like class, gender, generation, occupation, or religion. They're not solely defined by one factor like religion, class, gender etc.; for example, the Palestinian diaspora includes Christians and Muslims (Smith & Stares, 2007: 5–6). Different diaspora groups respond to war and its political impact diversely. Some diasporas engage in online activism during conflicts, utilizing social media to promote their narratives and influence outcomes (Chernobrov, 2022). In contrast, certain diasporas can exacerbate violence by financially supporting conflicts, leading to an escalation of hostilities (Mariani et al., 2018). Diasporas, like other political actors, can either contribute positively by promoting cooperation and moderate positions or negatively by fueling hostility or supporting extremist views. Their role depends on factors like their strength and organization in their host country, the issues at stake in the conflict, their ability to influence their home country, and international attention (Smith & Stares, 2007: 28).

Brubaker proposed thinking of diaspora as a way of acting and expressing identity, more like a tool or a statement. Diaspora, in this view, is primarily a practical concept used to assert identity, set goals, gather support, and evoke loyalty. It's not just about describing a community but about shaping it. People use diaspora as a way to define who they are and what they stand for. However, not everyone within a diaspora community necessarily adopts this diasporic identity. In fact, only a small portion might actively engage in diasporic practices, while others may distance themselves from such ties over time (Brubaker, 2005: 12).

Competition among members of the same diaspora is primarily driven by spatial effects, ethnic-specific labor markets, and consumption externalities (Basile et al., 2023). Additionally, factors such as maintaining links to the homeland, dual levels of identity, and preserving political, cultural, and religious interests contribute to competition within diaspora groups. The

competition dynamics vary across different diaspora groups based on their economic strength, influence in adopted countries, and relationships with their homelands (Paarlberg, 2019).

Some groups are highly politically united, with most members sharing the same partisan and policy preferences, while others have more dispersed political views. Reduced cohesion can result from external factors like class differences cutting across ethnic groups or internal factors like divisions within a religious group between orthodox and reformist members. American Jews are highlighted for their political unity, typically leaning towards the Democratic Party and holding liberal views. This trend has persisted for decades compared to the general American population, those with similar social status, and many other religious groups (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2017: 6).

3.2 The role of the interest groups within a landscape of public sphere:

Scholars agree that as media changes, our understanding of the public sphere should evolve too (Osterbur & Kiel, 2021). They argue that modern media, including social media like Instagram, has diversified the public sphere, creating multiple overlapping spaces where people interact and form opinions. Interest groups, aware of their audience, strategically engage in discourse within these spaces. Studying these interactions on platforms like Instagram or “X” (Twitter) helps us understand how interest groups shape public discourse. Instead of viewing them as a single entity, it's more accurate to see them as interconnected spheres within the larger Twittersphere (Osterbur & Kiel, 2021: 196–197; Habermas et al., 1974). According to Trenz (2009: 34):

“The public sphere is not simply an open space of free-floating discourse; it is always constituted as a representative order linked to particular institutions (mainly media) that confine public discourse in a particular way and with regard to a collective representation of the public”.

Viewing the public sphere as a form of self-representation of a social-political order, encompassing both participatory and representative elements. Trenz (2009:37) proposes "public connections" as a key part of the public sphere, emphasizing civic engagement and

shared problem-solving. They acknowledge that public communication is rooted in common culture and experience, implying a collective orientation to shared concerns.

The public sphere goes beyond mere networking; it involves reflexivity in communication, creating an image of itself. While direct interaction among individuals diminishes reliance on the public sphere, it remains crucial for imagining collective concerns when direct interaction is not possible. In modern communication, the public sphere fosters connectedness mainly through shared meaning and discourse (representation), rather than direct interaction (participation). Thus, the public sphere is characterized by virtual interaction and shared discourse, reflecting a change in society's representative order (Trenz, 2009: 37–38).

Early concerns about the internet creating a divide between privileged users and the less educated masses have largely been disproven. Instead, the internet has made information more accessible and empowered resource-poor groups to participate. However, contemporary critics worry about a different issue: the fragmentation of the public sphere. Digitalization of the public sphere had contributed to its de-structurization and fragmentation, traditional hierarchical medias gave a way to a new one, decentralized networks of actors (users which in the same time produce and share the content). They observe a lack of interaction between different user communities online, leading to the formation of separate "public sphericules," rather than a unified public sphere. The internet provides spaces for different identities to flourish but lacks a shared framework for social experience. This fragmentation could result in self-representations that claim to be public but lack genuine inclusivity (Trenz, 2009: 40).

Interest groups – organizations of individuals sharing the same values, beliefs, or interests which can be represented in a socio-economic benefit, political representation (an opportunity to shape or influence public policy) (Osterbur & Kiel, 2021: 197). According to Niche theory, long-term maintenance of the interest group might be reduced to a capability to access limited resources. Constant ability to have this access allows the group to have autonomy from the other political actors, thus their decision-making process stays more secure from the

extraneous influence and the group can exclusively serve its members (Gray & Lowery, 1996: 92).

3.3 Identity and self-victimization

Self-victimization is the core element of the debates over the Jewish identity in the diaspora; it not only influences the framing of current political debates but also the interpretation of history, including the Holocaust and the famous motto “Never Again”. Although we are dealing with an ethno-religious community that was traumatized by the Holocaust, the way they frame this event is different. There are several positions regarding how the holocaust should be remembered, involving competing narratives of "never again" – one emphasizing human rights and the other rooted in the Holocaust and Israel's role as a haven for Jews.

Sznaider (2021: 413-4) argues that there are only two ways how we can interpret “Never Again” – a famous ‘motto’ emphasizing the repetition of the Holocaust must not be repeated in the future – (1) way is to frame it as a human right issue, thus, we should never repeat such a brutal violation of human rights of any group or individual, (2) option is to put it in the historical narrative of the Jew-hatred that stems from Biblical traditions. The second option depicts the Holocaust as an ‘apotheose’ of this long history of prosecution, this narrative does not highlight the key differences between 19th-century secular anti-Semitism and the Medieval (Christian) narrative about Jews as a ‘Christ-killer’. These two approaches to interpret the “Never Again” represent two different competing political ideology with their own values, beliefs, and visions of the future. Framing the Holocaust as a human rights issue deprives the event from its uniqueness and allows comparison with other cases of genocide or other cases of serious human rights violations. The very existing discourse surrounding the memory of the Holocaust leaves room for binary interpretation of how this horrific event should be seen by future generations of Jews: human rights issue versus unique and the most tremendous attack on a certain group which cannot be even compared to anything which has ever happened. That is why, for

example, Masha Gessen's recent attempt to compare the war in Gaza with the Holocaust reignited debates about what the Holocaust was and how we should perceive it (Levitz, 2023). Gessen wrote about Germany's efforts to combat antisemitism and remember the Holocaust. On the anniversary of Kristallnacht, a message of "Never Again Is Now!" was projected on the Brandenburg Gate. The Bundestag considered a proposal to protect Jewish life, including measures like deporting antisemitic immigrants and opposing the BDS movement. German Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck urged Muslims to distance themselves from antisemitism. Germany has a history of regulating Holocaust remembrance and emphasizing its special responsibility for Jewish security, rooted in the concept of "Staatsräson" or state reason. This commitment to Israel's security is reiterated whenever the topics of Israel, Jews, or antisemitism arise in German discourse. Gessen's main argument is based on the idea that "Never Again" means that such a dreadful violation of human rights as the Holocaust should not be repeated, moreover any nation or ethnic group can be in charge of brutalities which can be compared to those the Nazis did, including Israel. By comparing victims of the Holocaust to the ones in Gaza, she debunks the pro-Israel beliefs claiming that Jewish victimhood is eternal and consistent and that Jews cannot be perpetrators of violence because they were victims of the Nazis (Gessen, 2023).

Mijić (2021) explores how self-victimization functions within social and psychological contexts, highlighting three main roles it plays in shaping group identity and boundaries:

Boundary Reinforcement: Self-victimization strengthens group boundaries by using past suffering to unite current members and connect them to previous generations. This creates a strong sense of "we-ness" within the group and clearly distinguishes them from other groups.

Moral Superiority: In post-conflict situations, self-victimization helps maintain a sense of moral superiority. It provides clear explanations of fault, portraying the group as defenders acting out of necessity and emphasizing their moral high ground over the opposing group (Mijić, 2021: 5).

Gaining External Support: Self-victimization is used to gain sympathy and support from outside parties. Groups depict themselves as the primary victims to garner international backing, often competing to highlight their suffering as superior. This aims to validate their victimhood through universal norms and values, despite shared suffering among conflicting groups (Mijić, 2021: 5-7).

In our context, self-victimization serves as a crucial element of Jewish-American identity (see Figure 1). The Holocaust and the historical violence against Jews shape their perception of reality. However, the memory of these persecutions is utilized differently by various groups: pro-Israel Jews view Israel as the sole safeguard against another Holocaust, while progressive Jews use the same historical memory to argue that Jews have a moral duty to support the oppressed (Alvin, 2006: 8–9).

Bar-Tal et al. (2009: 233) discuss victimization as a dynamic social process that assigns victim status through stages involving harmful acts, suffering, disowning self-responsibility, attributing causes, and specifying expected responses. They outline the minimum criteria for victimization, emphasizing perceived injustice and the need for social and external validation.

The concept then extends to collective victimhood, where ethnic groups experience harm due to their affiliation, even if not all members are directly affected. This sense of collective victimhood is rooted in shared beliefs about targeted harm and past traumas, which shape group identity and perceptions of new situations. These memories, often passed down generations, can fuel nationalism and influence reactions to contemporary conflicts, as seen in various global examples like the Serbian focus on the Battle of Kosovo during the Yugoslav wars. Collective victimhood is sustained by beliefs in the justness of one's goals, portraying opponents as wicked and oneself as moral. This belief system perpetuates conflicts by reinforcing a victim narrative, as seen in the Israeli-Palestinian and other global conflicts.

Implications of collective victimhood during conflicts include:

1. Shaping societal mindsets.

2. Creating enduring self-perceptions.
3. Triggering intense negative emotions.
4. Automatically arising in violent situations.
5. Influencing conflict experience interpretations.
6. Widening the gap between groups.
7. Sustaining a sense of threat.
8. Deeply affecting cognition and emotions.
9. Prompting defensive and retaliatory behaviors (Bar-Tal et al., 2009: 242).

3.4 Methodology

Discourse analysis:

Discourses are considered social practices that contribute to societal reproduction, including the reproduction of knowledge, ideologies, and social inequalities. They play a crucial role in various societal domains like politics, media, education, and law. Discourse analysis, therefore, not only examines language but also investigates its societal impact, contributing to understanding how social structures and inequalities are perpetuated through discourse (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009: 192).

Critical Discourse Analysis:

According to Laclau and Mouffe, discourse acts as a constituent of the social world with the help of a set of meanings. However, since they are recorded in an unstable natural language, any discourse is incomplete and fights with other discourses for the right to dictate its own rules for constructing language practices and constituting social norms through them (Narwaya, 2021: 3–4). Foucault (1971) emphasized that discourse acts as a method of subordination and control through external procedures of exclusion (prohibitions, critical assessments, etc.) and internal procedures of classification and ordering (comments, rules of “speaking”, etc.) (Foucault, 1971).

The analysis of the public debates of these organizations will be conducted via the implementation of the frameworks of discourse-historical approach with the focus on political legitimization and argumentation (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Joint use of methods of legitimization and argumentation in political or any other public communication can be classified as a form of propaganda, since the argumentation with the aim to convince the general public (*argumentum at populum*) may heavily rely on their emotions, which can be triggered via extensive usage of visual materials, personal stories, etc. (Walton, 1997). Legitimization in its essence is a form of discourse, which can be expressed in the form of hierarchical or horizontal relations, because the initiator of legitimization is the political elite, which seeks support among the ordinary population. However, despite the fact that the target of persuasion is people, legitimization occurs through reliance on existing laws, moral attitudes and institutions. Legitimization in this case is a form of persuasion, so political actors can claim that a certain policy is beneficial to the population or consistent with the law, in an emergency situation legitimization can occur through the claim that this particular policy will lead to the resolution of the situation (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997: 527–528).

In situations of active conflict, where losses are inevitable, political elites often legitimize their policies by arguing that these decisions minimize costs for their group (Hansson, 2015). This approach helps analyze the rhetoric of political actors as they focus on avoiding blame for policy failures or socio-economic disadvantages. During the “hot” phase of the Gaza Strip conflict, the fog of war hinders the global community's access to verified information about the conflict's progress, casualties, and civil infrastructure destruction. This lack of verified information creates opportunities for disinformation and the spread of fake news. Interest groups may exploit this confusion to protect their side and demonize the enemy. Hansson explains that political actors can frame certain harms as either unavoidable or perpetrated by the opposing side:

“Essentially, this involves making argumentative moves to manipulate (a) the perception of loss by proposing that there is little or no reason to blame anyone because little or no harm has been

done and (b) the perception of agency by proposing that harm has been done unintentionally, unknowingly, involuntarily or by someone else” (Hansson, 2015: 3).

4. METHODS:

First of all, I will give a historical overview of how American Jewish perceptions of Israel and U.S. policies have changed. In addition to a historical overview, I will critically analyze the ideological underpinnings of Jewish groups, namely right-wing Zionism and Jewish left-wing Progressivism, I will analyze existing works on the subject to show how these narratives have been used to advance a pro-Israel political agenda in the United States in the past.

I will then undertake a critical discourse analysis of these organizations' public writings on Israeli military actions after October 7, in order to identify the fault lines between the two discourses. Also, in this part I will focus on what methods selected organizations use to legitimize and delegitimize Israel's actions.

4.1 Limitations

Many of the aforementioned organizations tend to either ignore or avoid certain aspects of Israeli operations in Gaza that could portray the Israeli military in a controversial light. For instance, the destruction of a hospital was omitted entirely by both J-Street and the Zionist Organization of America, as it does not align with their respective narratives and rhetoric. Additionally, it is important to note that this study utilizes a limited set of data, which may not fully represent the entire spectrum of political discourse surrounding the current conflict in Gaza.

5. CASE STUDIES: DEBATES OVER OCTOBER 7 AND WAR IN GAZA⁷

5.1 Reaction on the attack

On October 7th, the JVS Instagram account published their official statement regarding the Hamas attack (Figure 4). The language used was neutral, deliberately omitting words such as ‘terror’, ‘Hamas’, or ‘massacre’. Instead, they attributed the attack to Israel's longstanding oppression of Palestinians, stating that “the root of violence is oppression,” thereby justifying Hamas's actions. They drew comparisons to South Africa’s apartheid regime and emphasized the U.S. support for Israel. The attack was depicted as a ‘lesser evil’, likening it to anti-colonial liberation struggles (Figure 4). Utilizing Hansson’s (2015) theory of Blame Avoidance, JVS's approach presents Hamas's actions as a form of justified resistance, downplaying the perceived severity in light of Palestinian suffering under Israeli control. In addition, JVP does not explicitly state their “Jewish” affiliation but distances themselves both from Israel and Jewish people.

⁷ Parts of this chapter were taken from my previous works

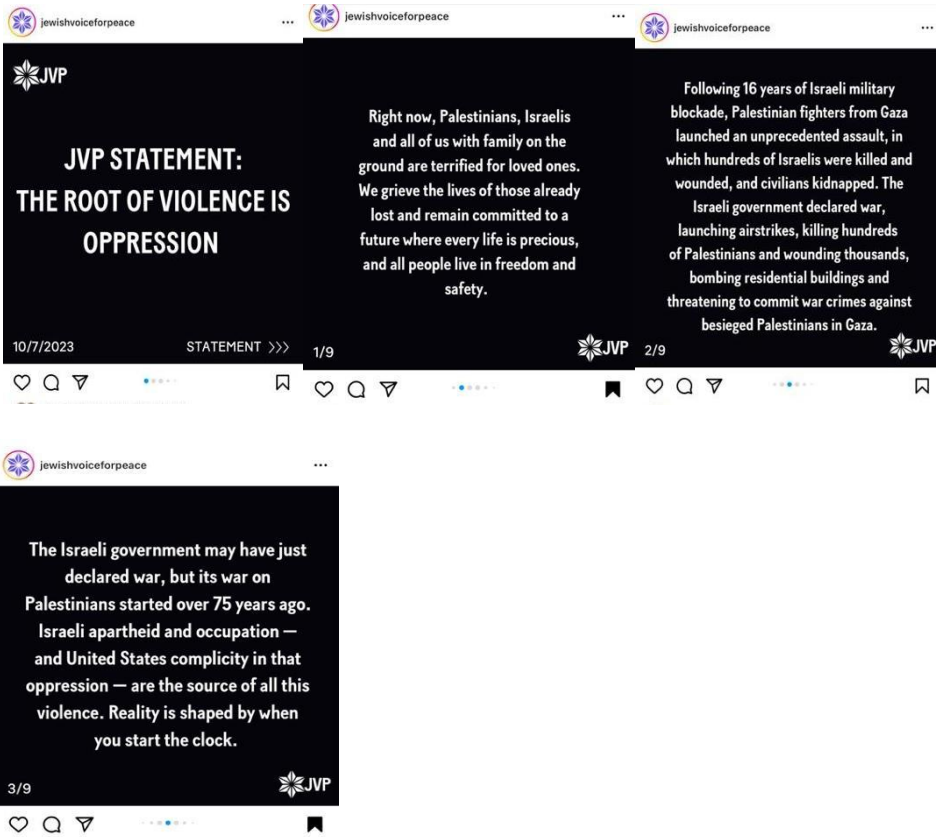


Figure 4 JVP, Statement, October 7

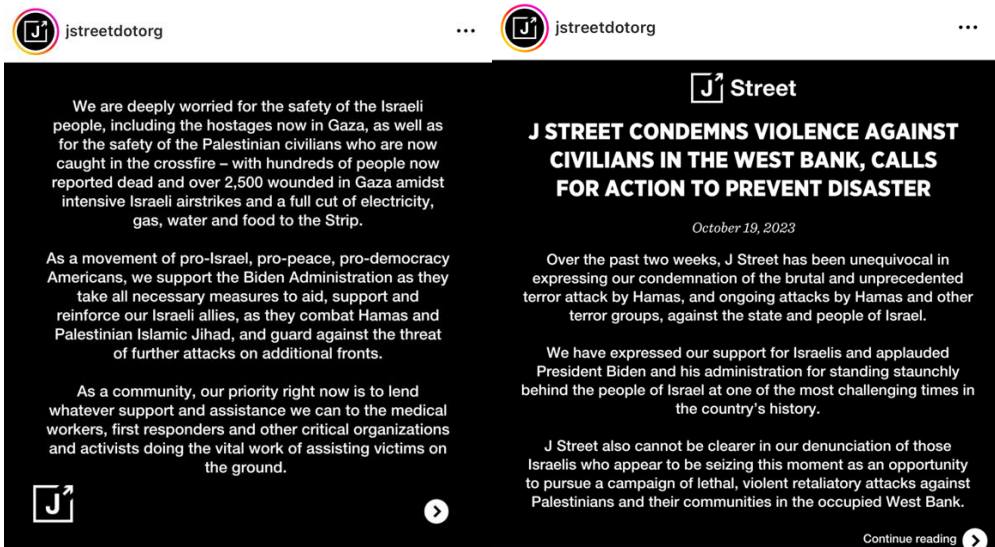


Figure 5 J-Street on October 7

Even though J-Street shares liberal beliefs, their public statement is characterized by a non-intrinsic character. They tend to focus on the victims of the conflict and condemn the perpetrators of violence. By mentioning their political orientation: “pro-Israel, pro-peace, pro-democracy Americans” - they put themselves in-between between both sides of the conflict, emphasizing humanitarian and patriotic concerns rather than ethnoreligious kinship (Figure 5, pic 3).

In contrast to JVS and J-Street, AIPAC did not release an official statement on October 7th but instead shared several news posts (Figure 6). AIPAC's Instagram campaign was characterized by minimal text. Their first post on October 7th read: “Backed by Iran, Palestinian

terrorists have launched an unprovoked invasion and large-scale attack on Israel. Terrorists from Gaza are entering Israeli homes and towns, murdering civilians including children, and abducting Israelis. America must #StandWithIsrael against terror” (Figure 6: pic 1). The message is explicit, using the term “Palestinian terrorists” rather than Hamas, potentially implicating all Palestinians and justifying Israeli responses. Similar to J-Street, AIPAC connects the United States to the conflict by stressing the American-Israeli alliance, employing phrases like “America must #StandWithIsrael against terror” to link the situation in Gaza with America’s broader efforts against terrorism, implying that the U.S. should support Israel against a shared adversary.

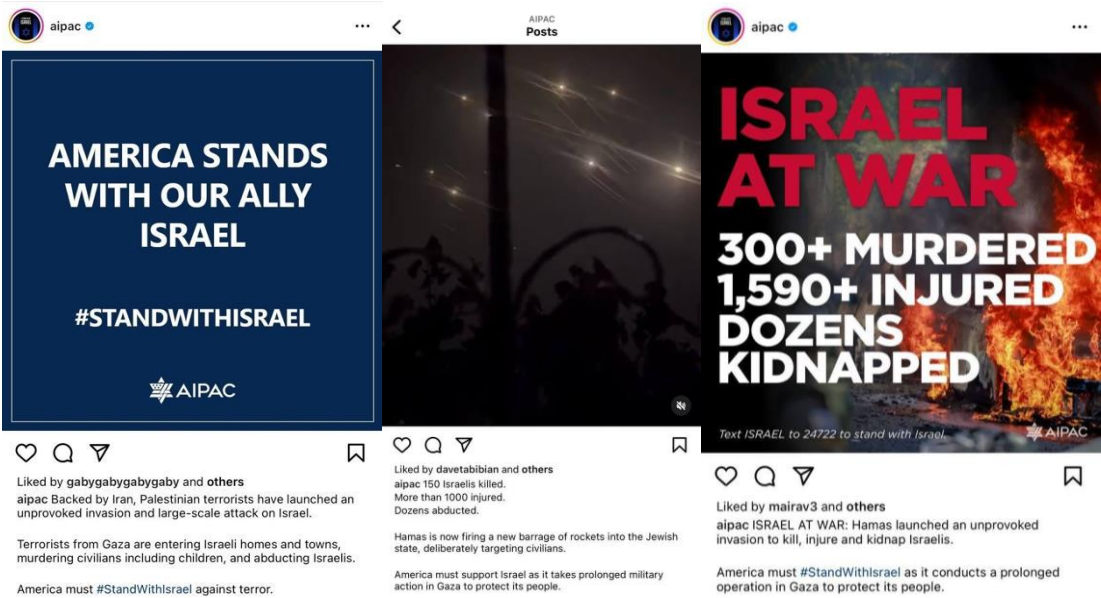


Figure 6 AIPAC, Instagram posts about October 7

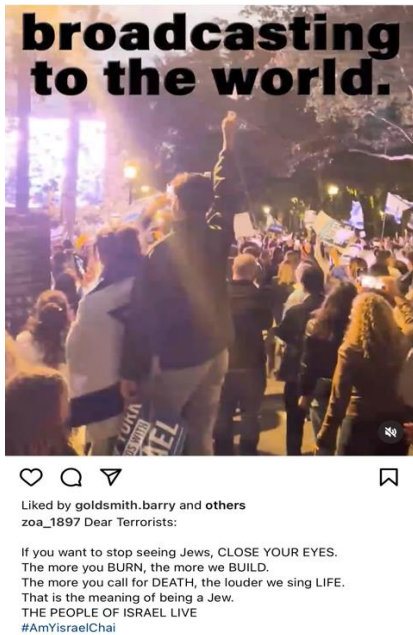


Figure 7 ZOA, Instagram post about October 7

As for the Zionists of America, their statement was short and straightforward (Figure 7). They equate this attack with other attacks on Jews, thus creating a narrative of continuity. What is interesting in their rhetoric is that they utilize the definition of being Jewish implying that resisting such horrific events is part of Jewish identity. Compared to the statements of the other organizations, a direct reference to the narrative of sacrifice and the ability to overcome trauma is postulated explicitly, making ZOA stand out visibly from other organizations.

5.2 Destruction of Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza

The explosion at al-Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza sparked significant controversy and allegations. Palestinian officials attributed the explosion to an Israeli airstrike, asserting it resulted in the deaths of 471 Palestinians. In contrast, Israel argued that the explosion was due to a failed rocket launch by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which denied any involvement. Forensic analyses suggested that the damage was inconsistent with an airstrike, pointing instead to a potential rocket failure. AIPAC emphasized Hamas's culpability, while Hamas accused Israel of genocide. The hospital, which had already sustained damage and was sheltering

civilians during heavy bombardment, became a focal point of intense debate over responsibility and the ongoing conflict (Ganguly, 2023).

JVP’s coverage of the hospital's destruction follows a similar pattern, framing it within the context of the prolonged conflict (Figure 8). They emphasize human rights violations and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, using these events to support their claims of ‘genocide’ and ‘apartheid’. However, their Instagram account omits mention of Hamas rocket attacks on Israel and does not acknowledge Israeli civilian casualties, thus presenting a one-sided view of the conflict.



Figure 8 JVP on hospital

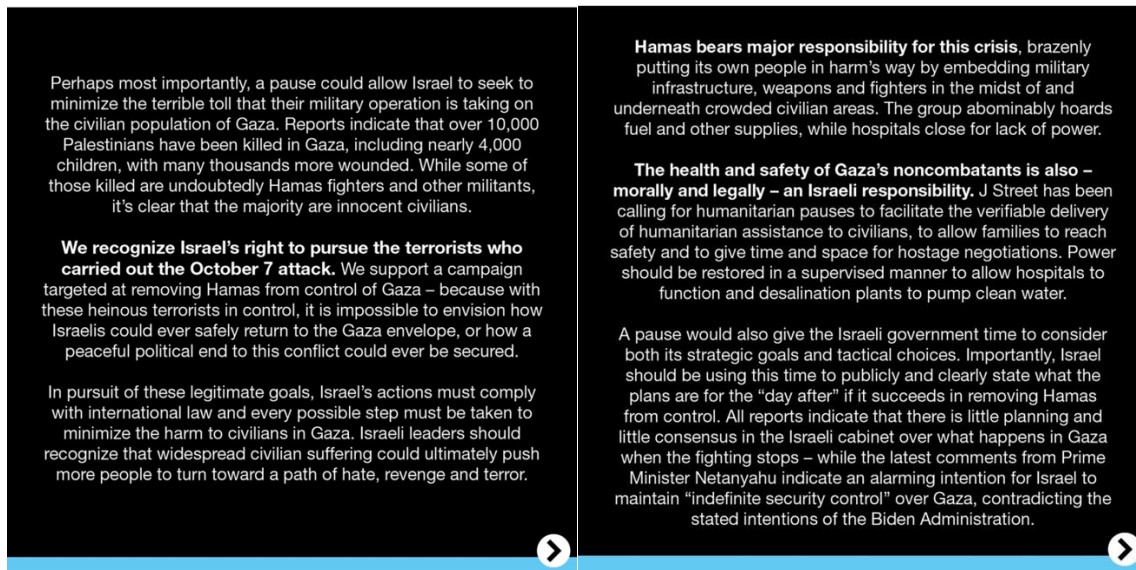


Figure 9 J-Street on Hospital

Unlike JVP, J-Street does not address the destruction of hospital – the most horrific and widely known episode of the Israeli operation in Gaza. However, they stated their dissatisfaction with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the number of casualties among the civilians. The first post begins by suggesting a pause in Israeli military operations to "minimize the terrible toll that their military operation is taking on the civilian population of Gaza." This selection of words acknowledges the hostile effects of Israeli actions while also implying a necessity or justification for these actions. By referencing the significant number of Palestinian casualties, including children, the post seeks to highlight the severe humanitarian impact and evoke empathy from the reader.

J Street further legitimizes Israel's actions by explicitly stating, "We recognize Israel's right to pursue the terrorists who carried out the October 7 attack." This statement places Israel's actions within the framework of self-defense and counter-terrorism. However, it also emphasizes that any military response must be targeted at removing Hamas from control of Gaza and must comply with international law, positioning J Street as advocating for a lawful and humanitarian approach. The call for minimizing harm to Gaza's civilians underscores a

moral and ethical stance, cautioning against actions that could exacerbate the cycle of violence and push more people towards extremism.

In the second post, J Street assigns primary blame for the crisis to Hamas, stating, "Hamas bears major responsibility for this crisis," and accusing Hamas of "brazenly putting its own people in harm's way." This language casts Hamas as reckless and morally culpable for the suffering in Gaza. At the same time, the post acknowledges Israel's responsibilities, emphasizing that the health and safety of Gaza's noncombatants are a moral and legal obligation for Israel. Advocacy for humanitarian pauses to enable safe access to essential services and supplies highlights J Street's commitment to humanitarian principles.

The posts also suggest that Israel should "consider both its strategic goals and tactical options," advocating for precision and minimal civilian impact in its operations. The critique of broader Israeli policies, including references to "belligerent statements from Prime Minister Netanyahu" and concerns about "indefinite military control" over Gaza, aligns J Street with a more restrained and humanitarian-focused approach. This balanced discourse aims to recognize the complexities of the conflict, advocating for both the legitimate security concerns of Israel and the humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians. Through this nuanced language, J Street positions itself as a moderate voice promoting security, compassion, and legal compliance.

AIPAC's primary strategy in addressing the hospital destruction is to justify Israel's actions. They stress the importance of understanding the full context before making judgments, attributing the hospital incident to Hamas (Figure 10: pic 1). AIPAC also seeks to undermine the credibility of the Gaza Health Ministry by depicting it as an extension of Hamas (Figure 10: pic 2). Additionally, they draw a parallel between the situation in Gaza and the events of 9/11, reinforcing the narrative of the U.S. and Israel as allied nations combating a common enemy. As for ZOA, they did not give any comment on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.



Figure 10 AIPAC on hospital

5.3 Student protests on campuses

Over 50 schools and universities have experienced unrest, with nearly 2,000 arrests and one canceled graduation ceremony. These are the most significant campus protests since the 1960s, triggered by the Israel-Hamas conflict. Pro-Palestinian protests have led to counterprotests and police clashes on over 30 campuses in the United States. The consensus is that students are striving to be heard by campus and national leaders. These protests triggered the number of debates among the different Jewish organizations and polarized the community (Kim, 2024).

JVP fully aligned with the student protests and strongly condemned the university authorities and the actions of the police (Figure 11). The organization also highlights the connection between Jewish identity and political activism, the memory of past traumas being used to legitimize support for oppressed Palestinians. Moreover, the rhetoric explicitly states that solidarity with the oppressed is part of Jewish identity.



The University does not care about students.

The militarization of our campus and invitation of outside agitators — the NYPD — threatens the safety of all students and our supporters.

It is crucial to remember that the majority of those who make up our movement, students of color, face disproportionate targeting and police violence. Where is your concern for their safety, Shafik?

The University continuously draws from the Israeli government's playbook by characterizing support for Palestine as a threat to the Jewish people and using it to justify brutality.

We reject this false narrative.

"Disruptions on campus have created a threatening environment for many of our Jewish students and faculty."

Columbia University Spokesperson Ben Chang
April 30, 2024

The people, united, will never be defeated.

Dispatching and abusing the tools of white supremacists with the purported goal of dismantling anti-Jewish hatred is illogical. The violent NYPD will not keep us safe, and neither will a draconian and incompetent university administration. The same ideologies and systems of white nationalism and supremacy that sustain antisemitism will never protect the Jewish people.

We understand that fascism and state violence has always been the greatest enemy of all oppressed people and reject any and all attempts to stifle our solidarity. The intifada was always global. We will rise up with our brothers and sisters across the globe.

WE ARE JEWISH STUDENTS SUPPORTING CAMPUS PROTESTS FOR GAZA.

Since October 7th, many of us have shown up to fight for Palestinian liberation as Jews: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi, practicing, secular, and everything in between. Many of us have friends and relatives who were killed on October 7th. Many of us have faced violence, arrest, and harassment for our participation in the movement for a Free Palestine.

The narrative that the Gaza solidarity encampments are inherently antisemitic is part of a decades-long effort to blur the lines between criticism of Israel and antisemitism.

It is a narrative that ignores the large populations of Jewish students participating and helping to lead the encampments as a true expression of our Jewish values.

ADD YOUR NAME: [BIT.LY/JSTUDENTSLETTERSIGN](https://bit.ly/jstudentslettersign)



"To be Jewish in a time of genocide means that you have a duty and a responsibility to speak up."

"The second that we start deciding that 'never again' means only 'never again' for some people, I think that we've lost the teachings from people who have survived genocide."

Bella Jacobs, senior at Pitzer College

Figure 11 JVP on student protests

JVP extends its critique to systemic issues, linking current actions to "the same ideologies and systems of white nationalism and supremacy that sustain antisemitism." This connection frames the immediate grievances within a larger historical and structural context,

portraying the problem as part of an ongoing struggle against systemic oppression and equate Zionism with the aforementioned movements. The post calls for solidarity among "all oppressed people" and promotes collective action, declaring, "We will rise up with our brothers and sisters across the globe." This inclusive language aims to unify various groups under a common cause. By referencing the intifada as "always global," JVP situates their struggle within a broader historical context of resistance against oppression. This not only elevates the current issues to a global level but also draws parallels with other anti-colonial and anti-oppression movements. Through these posts, JVP positions itself as a vocal critic of institutional policies and a champion of broader social justice issues, mobilizing support, challenging existing power structures, and advocating for systemic change.

Moreover, they re-emphasize the role of Holocaust memory in contemporary Jewish identity. "Never again" in this context is interpreted as meaning that genocide should never be tolerated again, thus making the moral claim that Jews, as victims of genocide, are morally obliged to stand in solidarity with the victims, even if the perpetrator of the crimes is the so-called Jewish state. Thus, this political statement can be seen as an example of inextricable connection between the notion of ethno-religious identity and political orientation: the very fact of belonging to a certain group imply supporting particular political believe. Consequently, the claim of ethnic identity can be used as justification for certain political actions in the rhetoric of the respected organization. Therefore, by connecting "Jewishness" with the progressive-anti-Israeli "ideology" they make a moral claim of what Jews as a community should do or believe in (Figure 11, pic 5).

As for the J-Street, they chose a very diplomatic strategy to back both sides. In their official statement, although they supported students and their rights to protest against the current political situation in Gaza and the ties between the United States and Israel, they also highlighted that the antisemitic rhetoric and violence against Jewish students were present at this campaign. In addition to that, the organization does not focus on Jewish identity in its

rhetoric, but tries to be detached and neutral on the issue of campus freedoms and American values (Figure 12).

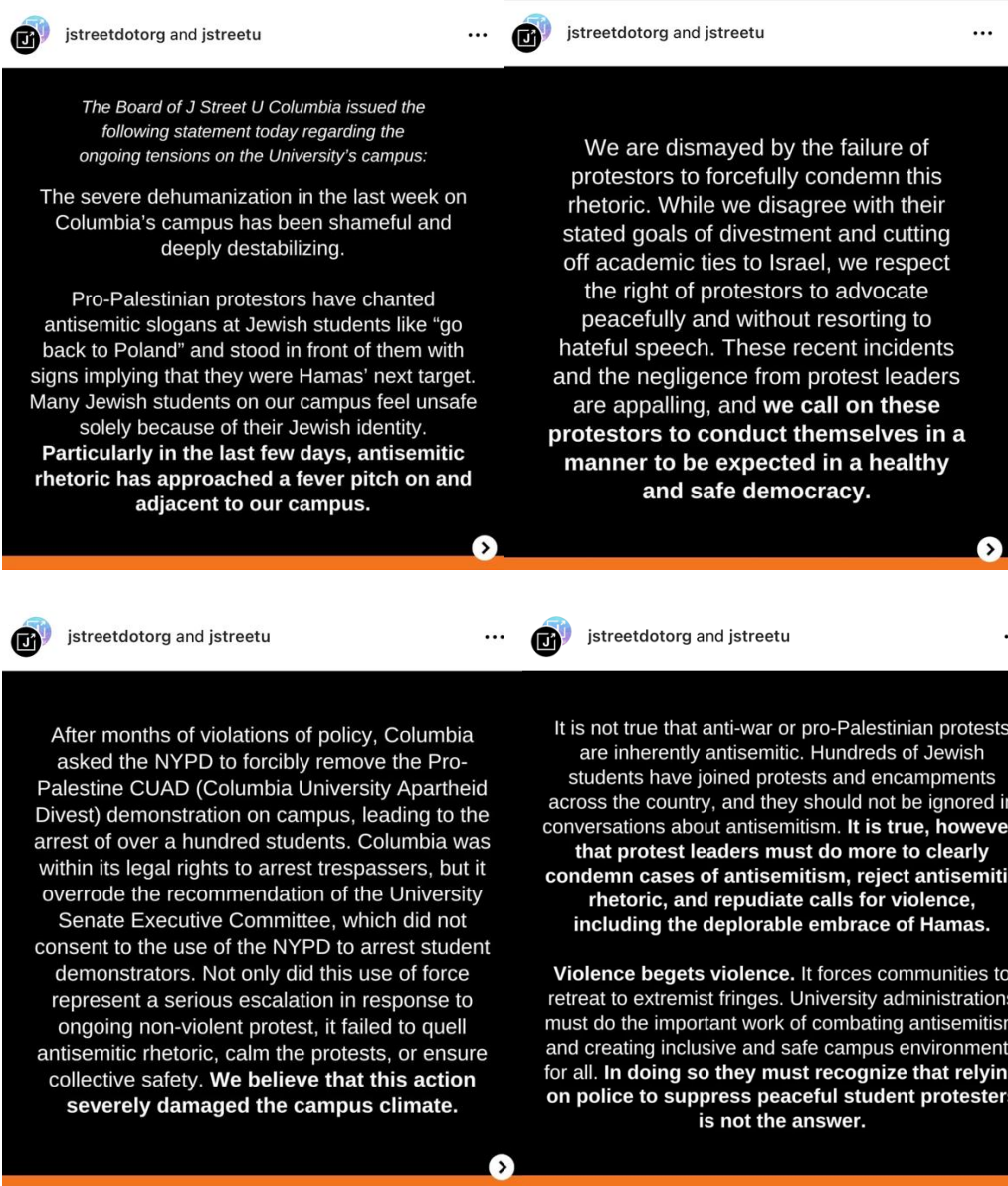


Figure 12 J-Street on student protests

Unlike the liberals, right-wing organizations tend to frame these campus activisms in a slightly different way. For example, AIPAC's main strategy is dehumanization of student activists and emphasis on their anti-Israeli beliefs (Figure 13). What is interesting here, is that despite their claims of loyalty and commitment to Jewish people, they do not condemn the antisemitic accidents which took place during the protests, but only focus on the things directly connected to the state of Israel. Moreover, they do not mention the fact that many of the

protesters are Jewish themselves. Therefore, they are trying to maintain the strict connection between “Jewishness” and the state of Israel: a claim on the importance of homeland orientation. The selection of words is also worth to be examined. In their rhetoric they use words like “democratic” and “Jewish”, the former is a continuation of the political cliché of “sister democracy” which is chosen to convince the Americans that the state of Israel is a similar country with likeminded people and alliance with whom is natural for the US: finally, the word “Jewish” is used here to support the claim of inherently antisemitic nature of the protests.

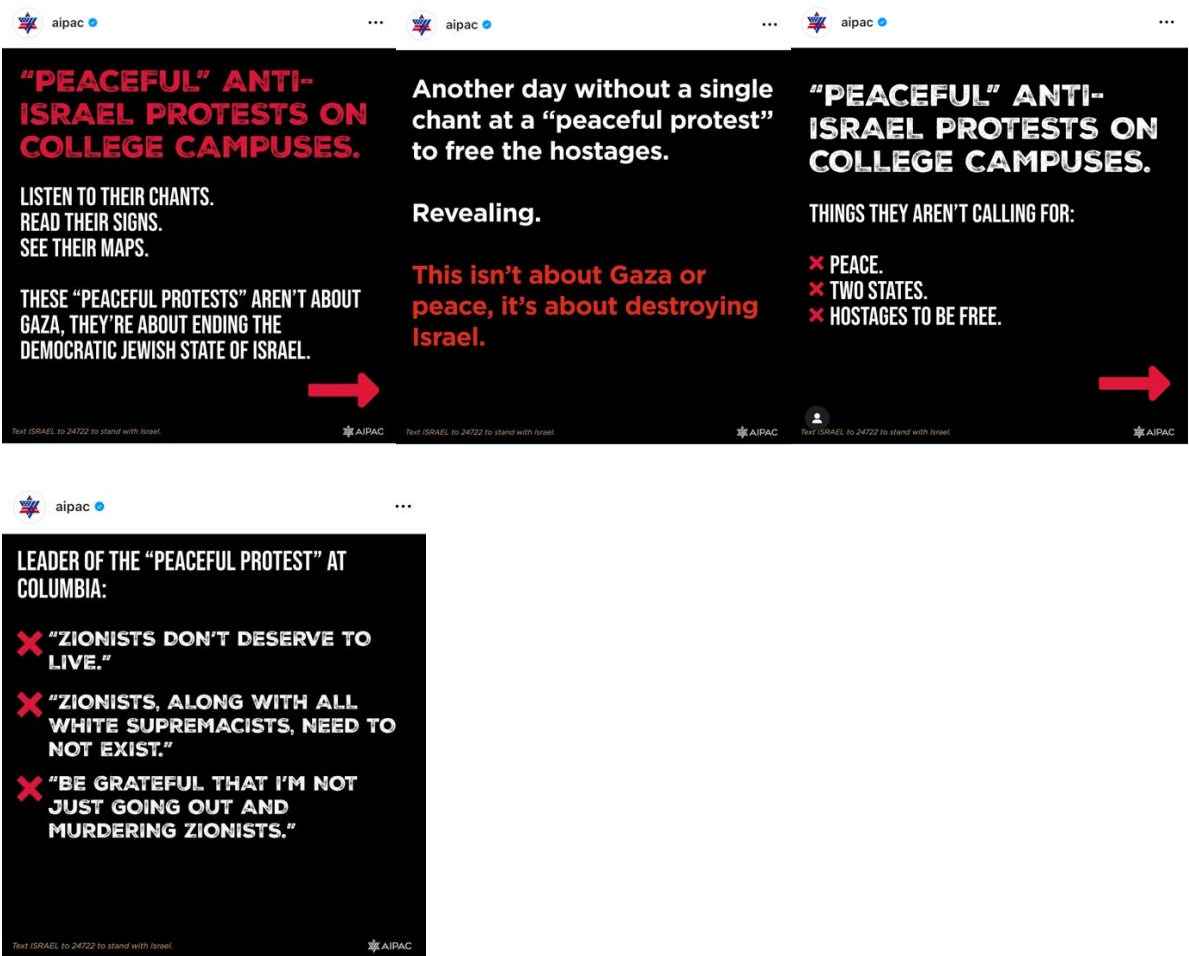


Figure 13 AIPAC on student protests

The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) takes their rhetoric even further by linking Israel not only with Jewish identity but also with the entire security of the West (Figure 14). This perspective aligns with the traditional neo-conservative view of Israel as a bastion of freedom and democracy in the Middle East, yet it adds another layer of significance. The text

employs metaphor and symbolism to convey its message, equating the phrase "Free Palestine" with "Kill the Jews." By interpreting a political statement as an incitement to genocide, the text frames pro-Palestinian sentiment as inherently antisemitic and violent. Similarly, the phrase "Globalize the Intifada" is translated to mean violence against a wide range of groups, thus expanding the perceived threat. This not only delegitimizes the political nature of the intifada (an uprising) but also amplifies fear by suggesting it targets various non-Muslim groups.

Hyperbolic language is prevalent throughout the text. Words like "terrorizing," "Holy War," "expanded to the entire world," and "Terrorism does not belong on college campuses" invoke a sense of extreme danger and urgency. This hyperbole is intended to provoke a strong emotional response, portraying the pro-Palestinian stance as a global existential threat. The assumption that supporting Israel is necessary for the "Free World" to remain free presupposes that Israel is a bastion of freedom and that its opponents are threats to global freedom. This dichotomy simplifies a multifaceted geopolitical issue into a binary struggle between freedom and oppression.

Finally, despite their evident nationalistic beliefs, they present Jewish identity in a comparatively global manner: implicitly linking Jews not only to the state of Israel but also to the West, suggesting that Jewish identity is inextricably connected with both Israel and the entire world. This unique perspective on ethno-religious identity exemplifies the transformation of national identities during active conflicts.



Liked by salon_girl and others

zoa_1897 "Free Palestine" means "Kill the Jews". It is not about Israel. Or it wouldn't be shouted while terrorizing American Jews on American campuses.

"Globalize the Intifada" means "Kill the Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Gays, Scientologists, etc." This is a call for a situation in which the Holy War against Israel will be expanded to the entire world.

Terrorism does not belong on college campuses or anywhere in the Free World. Support Israel if you would like it to remain Free.

Figure 14 ZOA on student protests

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

The study finds that the political orientation/beliefs of the diasporic interest group can influence the ways claims on ethnic identity are articulated. Political beliefs shape the assumptions that influence what role, for example, distant homeland orientation plays in the political rhetoric of a certain group. Moreover, the ideological orientation might influence the ways the perception of ethnic identities is framed: for example, a group can claim that the support of a certain policy follows ‘naturally’ from what it means to be a member of a group. Thus, these interest groups not only construct the notion of ethnicity (identity) but also combine it with existing political beliefs: being a member of a particular ethnoreligious group implies the support of a certain policy, and opposition to that policy can undermine their status of belonging to that group.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the aforementioned discursive claims represent only the positions of the particular organization and, thus, might not be fully supported by the general members of the ethnoreligious communities.

Furthermore, each of these groups presents a very specific identity claim uniquely intersecting with the political orientation. These identity claims not only influence the ways people should think about themselves and their communities but also how they ought to perceive current political events and memories of traumatic events. Hence, the communities’ memory of the historic trauma can be used to justify the violence by claiming that violence is the only way to avoid repeating that traumatic experience, or the focus can be shifted to solidarity with the victims through the actualization of the sufferings in the past – victims have a moral duty to stand with the oppressed but not the oppressors.

In this regard, the very fact of membership in a certain group can be perceived as a ‘motivation’ to actively participate in the ongoing conflict. However, the choice of the party to the conflict depends greatly on the political beliefs that were formed long before the unleashed conflict. The outbreak of war triggers the intensification of the ingroup solidarization making

the relations with the outgroup rather openly hostile than cooperative. Communities focusing on past victimization can fuel nationalism and influence contemporary conflicts. Collective memories of past traumas maintain a sense of woundedness and injustice, shaping a group's self-image and perceptions of new situations (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). In the aforementioned analysis, the study found that belonging to the group engaging in the conflict does not directly lead to the support of the side bonded by the ethnoreligious kinship, thus, belonging to one of the parties may rather indicate greater involvement in the conflict, but not backing for one of the parties.

The notion of self-victimhood plays an important role among the identity claims of the Jewish community in the US and elsewhere. The Holocaust and the history of violence toward Jews influence perceptions of reality. Pro-Israel Jews view Israel as the guarantee against another Holocaust, while progressives believe that Jews have a moral obligation to support the oppressed. As previous studies demonstrated Mijić (2021) self-victimization can benefit the community in a number of ways:

1. **Moral Superiority:** Self-victimization helps maintain a sense of moral superiority. It provides clear explanations of who is at fault, portraying the in-group as defenders acting out of necessity.
2. **Gaining External Support:** Groups use self-victimization to garner sympathy and support from outside parties, often portraying their suffering as superior to gain international backing.

Bar-Tal et al. (2009) explain that collective victimhood strengthens over time as society faces more harm and losses, deepening their sense of victimhood. This belief system, which includes victimhood, justness of goals, and delegitimization of the opponent, sustains conflicts. This dynamic is evident in various global conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian. Collective victimhood has significant implications during conflicts, shaping societal mindsets, emotions, and behaviors. It reinforces the self-image as victims, perpetuates a sense of threat from the

rival group, and influences interpretations of conflict experiences. This dominant discourse is used by both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where pro-Israel powers justify current policies toward Palestinians by invoking the memory of the Holocaust, paradoxically using historical vulnerability to legitimize modern violence.

Concerning the specific results of the study, AIPAC and ZOA consistently compare the Gaza conflict to American wars on terror, calling for U.S. intervention and protecting the Israeli government from accusations of brutality and human rights violations. Their political rhetoric is soaked in a notion of self-victimization with historical references to both the Jewish tragedies and the American ones. Despite the attention to the history of suffering, the collective memory about these events is weaponizing to justify the ongoing violence. Conversely, JVS frames the war as an 'anti-colonial' struggle, justifying Hamas's actions and focusing on international law while neglecting Israeli security. J-Street stands apart from both positions by trying to be pro-Israel while still defending liberal beliefs about the unacceptability of extreme casualties. These opposing narratives demonstrate a deepening divide, with each group dehumanizing the other and ignoring opposing viewpoints, as evidenced by the differing portrayals of the same events.

Lastly, the split between different organizations has a significant impact on how group identity is formed. The political orientation of these organizations can influence how history, memory, and group identity are used in public discourse. Rogers Brubaker (2005: 12) suggested thinking about diasporas as a way to shape the community or to provide a framework for thinking about it. This is true in our case, as each political diasporic organization proposes its own meaning and framework for how ethnoreligious identity should be perceived by community members. I argue that political orientation and beliefs can greatly influence the identity construction process. When multiple organizations have entrenched claims about what it means to be part of a group, serious discursive conflict can arise. As a result, resolving these existential issues becomes challenging, as overcoming the conflict would entail one discourse or view of identity being absorbed by another.

The findings of this study can potentially be applied to different cases in which the discourse of the ethnoreligious identity of a specific group is contested by various political actors claiming to represent the interests and the only 'correct' definition of what it means to belong to this group. The study proves that the discourses surrounding the very concept of identity are variable and impermanent, which leaves room for interested political actors to manipulate identity to achieve certain political goals.

Since the study focused only on the up-down process of identity construction the lack of empirical evidence from the 'field' – peoples' everyday perception of their identity and their opinions on how accurately favorable organization represents their identity, the scope of generalization is limited to these factors. However, the findings of that study can become the basis for subsequent research on both Jewish groups in the United States and other diaspora groups in other countries, time frames, and sociocultural contexts. As for future research, this study could be complemented by further research on how ordinary supporters of certain organizations interpret their identity and how this is reflected in their everyday lives.

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