

Why Many Americans Identify Jewish Americans with Israel: Suggestions for Reducing This Source of Antisemitism and for Better Measures of Antisemitism

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Abstract

Hostility toward U.S. Jews has increased since the beginning of the war between Israel and Hamas. Polling research suggests that at least part of this increase stems from perception of U.S. Jews as responsible for Israel's policies toward Palestinians, such that outrage against Israel's treatment of Gazans is generalized to U.S. Jews. The first section of this paper reviews connections of U.S. Jews with Israel that might lead some of the larger U.S. public to see U.S. Jews as responsible for Israel's policies, including polling data on U.S. Jews' emotional attachment to Israel, behavioral connections with Israel, and in-the-news examples of devotion to Israel. The second section offers psychological analysis of the power of these connections, the third section considers possible directions for reducing antisemitism in the U.S., and the fourth section advances research directions that might support better understanding and more effective targeting of antisemitism in the U.S. A concluding section summarizes the contributions of the paper and several important limitations.

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Introduction

Politically, three big changes have occurred since the October 7, 2023, beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. The U.S. public has turned against Israel's war on Palestinians; antisemitic incidents in the U.S. have increased; and attitudes toward U.S. Jews have become less positive. The challenge is to understand how these changes are related, but first it is necessary to specify the three changes.

A February 2026 Gallup poll of 1000 adult Americans found that 41 percent say they sympathize more with the Palestinians in the Middle East situation, while 36 percent sympathize more with the Israelis--a significant decline in sympathy for Israelis from 2022 Gallop polling that found 55 percent sympathizing more with Israelis and 26 percent

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sympathizing more with Palestinians (Vigers, 2026). A March 2026 Pew poll of 3500 adult Americans found that 60 percent have an unfavorable view of Israel--a significant increase in negative attitude from 2022 Pew polling that found 42 percent with an unfavorable view of Israel (Silver, 2026).

Antisemitic incidents in the U.S. increased at the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. In 2022 antisemitic incidents were stable at around 400 incidents per month. For January to September, 2023, incidents ranged from 400 to 500 per month; for October, November, and December, 2023, incidents ranged from 1500 to 2000 per month. In other words, antisemitic incidents in the U.S. tripled in the three months following the October 7, 2023, beginning of the Israel-Hamas war (Anti-Defamation League, 2025). The ADL coded a majority of 2024 incidents (58 percent) as containing elements related to Israel or Zionism.

The increase in antisemitic incidents in the U.S. after October 7, 2023, should not be a surprise. Feinberg (2020) found that, between 2001 and 2014, in weeks when Israel was engaged in a military operation resulting in at least 100 opposition casualties, intimidation and violent hate crimes against Jews increased by an average of 33 percent across the United States. It appears that IDF actions have consequences for U.S. Jews.

Parallel with increase in antisemitic incidents, polling data show change in attitudes toward U.S. Jews after October 7, 2023 (Telhami, 2024; Cohen, 2025). A May 2022 poll of 2091 U.S. adults (Telhami, 2024) asked "Would you say that, in general, the number of Jewish Americans strengthens or weakens American society?" Over half of respondents--59 percent--said "strengthen." A January-February 2024 poll of 1891 U.S. adults found fewer--43 percent--who said "strengthen." For respondents identified as Democrats, the 2022-2024 decline was from 71 to 50 percent saying "strengthen."

Negative actions and attitudes toward Jews are here understood as antisemitism. It is clear that antisemitic incidents in the U.S. increased in reaction to the Israel-Hamas war, and it seems likely that the parallel decline in attitude toward U.S. Jews was also related to the Israel-Hamas war. In other words, antisemitic attitudes and actions have increased as Americans turned against Israel's war in Gaza.

Cohen (2025) suggests three possible interpretations of this pattern. Antisemitism causes criticism of Israel ("new antisemitism"). Or criticism of Israel causes antisemitism. Or both directions of causality are at work.

If criticism of Israel causes antisemitism, an obvious possibility is that some Americans blame Jewish Americans for the continuing war in Gaza. A June 2025 ADL poll found that 27 percent of adult Americans strongly or somewhat agreed that “Jewish Americans need to answer for the actions of the State of Israel” (Anti-defamation League, 2025). The 27 percent represents a substantial increase since a 2019 ADL poll found that only 7 percent of adult Americans saw “American Jews as responsible for Israel’s actions” (Anti-defamation League, 2020).

This review aims to understand how and why many Americans might see U.S. Jews responsible for the actions of the State of Israel, actions that have killed over 60,000 Palestinians since the October 7, 2003, Hamas attack on Israel (Boundless Israel, 2025). Rather than ascribing this perception to old stereotypes, conspiracy theories, or “new antisemitism” (Cohen, 2025), this review identifies connections between U.S. Jews and Israel that might suggest that U.S. Jews support Israel’s policies toward Palestinians.

Current evidence does not show how many Americans are aware of these connections, or the contribution of each connection to feelings toward U.S. Jews. Rather the aim of this review is to advance the possibility that these connections may account for some of the increased hostility toward U.S. Jews since October 7, 2003. In particular, it is possible that these connections may help account for the 27 percent of Americans who believe that “Jewish Americans need to answer for the actions of the State of Israel” (Anti-defamation League, 2025).

The first section of this review identifies connections between U.S. Jews and Israel, the second section offers psychological interpretation of the power of these connections, the third section offers suggestions about how to combat antisemitism, the fourth section points to research needed to better understand and respond to antisemitism, and a Conclusion section sums up the contribution of the review and recognizes important limitations to the arguments advanced.

Connections between U.S. Jews and Israel

Polling of U.S. Jews usually includes both those who identify their religion as Jewish and those who identify themselves as ethnically or culturally Jewish but without religion

(agnostic, atheist, or otherwise religiously not affiliated). By this definition, U.S. Jews are estimated to number about 5.8 million adults, or 2.2 percent of 260 million adults in the 2020 U.S. census (Pew Research Center, 2020, Chapter 1).

The Jewish population of Israel is about 7.2 million; about two thirds are 18 or over, implying about 4.8 million adult Jewish Israelis (Drukman, 2025). Thus there are more Jewish adults in the U.S. than in Israel (5.8 million vs. 4.8 million). Including children, the total population of Israeli Jews may be greater than the total population of U.S. Jews (DellaPergola, 2024), but the focus here is on adults (18 and over) who are represented in polls and can influence elections and government policies.

U.S. Jewish Opinions of Israel

This section examines three recent polls of U.S. Jews that included opinions of Israel.

First is a Pew poll conducted November 19, 2019, to June 3, 2020. This online and mail poll of 4718 U.S. Jewish adults included 3,836 Jews by religion and 882 Jews of no religion (Pew Research Center, 2020): 57 percent said they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel; 82 percent said caring about Israel is either an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to me; 95 percent said that remembering the Holocaust is an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to me; 45 percent thought there is a lot of antisemitism in the U.S. today.

The second poll was conducted April 21 to May 1, 2025. This text-to-web poll of 800 Jewish voters in the November 2024 U.S. election (Jewish Voters Resource Center, 2025) found that 69 percent said they were very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel, 92 percent said someone can be critical of Israeli government policies and still be "pro-Israel," and 62 percent were very concerned about antisemitism in the U.S.

The third poll was conducted for the *Washington Post* from September 2 to September 9, 2025. This online poll of 815 Jewish Americans (Bendavid, Clement & Guskin, 2025) found that 56 percent said they were very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel, 76 percent thought that Israel's existence is vital for the long-term future of the Jewish people, and 47 percent thought there is a lot of antisemitism in the U.S. today.

The first thing to notice is that results for the April-May 2025 Jewish Voters Resource Center poll are different from results of the Pew 2020 poll and the *Washington Post* 2025 poll,

whereas results for the latter two polls are very similar despite the interval of five years between them. Screening for Jewish voters in the JVRC poll evidently produced a sample more emotionally attached to Israel (69 percent vs. 57 percent and 56 percent) and more worried about antisemitism (62 percent very concerned vs. 45 and 47 percent seeing a lot of antisemitism).

More important however is the larger agreement across polls that half or more of U.S. Jews are emotionally attached to Israel and worried about antisemitism in the U.S.

Individual Connections with Israel

This section examines behavioral measures of U.S. Jewish connection with Israel.

Nearly half of U.S. Jewish adults have visited or lived in Israel

A 2020 poll of U.S. Jews found that 45 percent of Jewish adults have been to Israel, including 19 percent who have visited once and 26 percent who have visited multiple times or have lived in Israel (Pew Research Center, 2020, Chapter 7). In a 2013 Pew poll, the percentage who had visited Israel was 43 percent (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Many U.S. Jews have participated in Birthright Israel

Birthright trips to Israel are free to Jews 18-26 years age who have not previously been in Israel. The program, supported by Jewish donors and the state of Israel, began in 1999 and has taken more than 900,000 young Jewish men and women to Israel from more than 70 countries (Birthright Israel Foundation, 2025). It is estimated that 70-80 percent of participants are from the U.S., that is, at least 630,000 U.S. Jews have participated (Stub, 2025). A 2020 survey of U.S. Jews (Pew Research Center, 2020, p.44) found that 28 percent of those with grown children reported that at least one child had participated in a Birthright trip to Israel.

Many U.S. Jews have Israeli passports

Exactly how many is not known, but some indications are available. In 2023, *Times of Israel* mentions approximately 200,000 in Israel with dual Israeli-American citizenship (Kellman, Santana & Koenig, 2023). In 2025 *Ynetnews* claimed 200,000 Israelis living in Los

Angeles; many will have added U.S. citizenship (Or-el, 2025). According to the *Washington Post*, the U.S. State Department estimated that 600,000 U.S. citizens were in Israel when Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023 (Abutaleb et al, 2023).

U.S. purchases of Israel Bonds doubled in the 20 months after Hamas attacked Israel

“Israel has raised a record \$5 billion through its US-based broker dealer, Israel Bonds, since the start of the war with Hamas, boosting its ability to finance the 20-month ongoing conflict. The amount is more than double that raised by Israel Bonds in similar time frames prior to the war, which started with the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7, 2023....” (Altstein, 2025).

Many U.S. Jews serve in the Israel Defense Forces

According to a 2019 report from the Congressional Research Service, individuals identifying as Jewish represented 0.4 percent of active-duty U.S. military (Kamarck, 2019, p.47). Given an active-duty U.S. military total of 1.34 million in 2019, the 0.4 percent translates to about 5400 Jewish men and women serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The active-duty total for 2025 was little changed at 1.32 million (Hatfield, 2025), so the estimate for Jewish members of the U.S. armed forces in 2025 remains about 5400.

The Washington Post (Hendrix & Rubin, February 2024) cites the Israel Defense Forces for an estimate of 23,380 American citizens “currently serving in Israeli ranks.” According to this report, “Though U.S. citizens make up less than 2 percent of Israel’s population, they account for almost 10 percent of the country’s war dead since the start of the ground invasion in Gaza.” U.S. citizens serving in the IDF include both those who have emigrated to Israel and IDF reservists living in the U.S. who were called up to fight in the Gaza war (Zahn, 2023). It is worth noting that the IDF does not accept foreign volunteers who are not of Jewish descent; U.S. citizens serving in the IDF must be Jewish (Pex, 2023).

It appears, then, that about four times as many U.S. Jews serve in the Israel Defense Forces as serve in the U.S. Armed Forces (23,380 vs. 5400).

Organizational Connections with Israel

This section offers a brief introduction to a very large topic: U.S. Jewish organizations that support Israel. These organizations generally agree with Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel, as the only Jewish state, “represents all Jews” (Vilkomerson, 2015).

Numerous Jewish organizations lobby for Israel in the U.S.

There are several influential descriptions of the Israel lobby in the U.S. (Bard, 2012; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007; Clifton & Lustick, 2026). This lobby is perhaps best described as an extensive network, but the number of organizations, think tanks, and political action committees counted as parts of the network is far beyond what can be represented here.²

The success of the Israel lobby is evident in the following report from the Congressional Research Service (2025, Table 1). “...as of January 2025, in constant 2024 U.S. dollars (inflation adjusted), total U.S. aid to Israel obligated from 1946-2024 is an estimated \$298 billion.” In 2024, in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel on October, 7, 2023, the total of U.S. Military and Missile Defense aid to Israel was \$12.5 billion. The U.S. decision to join Israel in attacking Iran in February 2026 may also be counted as a success of the Israel lobby.

Perhaps the most well-known and powerful lobbying group for Israel is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC, formerly American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs). According to the AIPAC website, “We stand with those who stand with Israel. The AIPAC PAC is a bipartisan, pro-Israel political action committee. It is the largest pro-Israel PAC in America and contributed more resources directly to candidates than any other PAC. 96% of AIPAC-backed candidates won their general election races in 2024.”

AIPAC lobbies Congress for support for Israel, and in 2022 originated two Political Action Committees that contribute directly to candidates seen as favoring Israel’s interests. AIPAC claims five million members and reported a 2023-24 expenditure of over \$80 million (Factually, 2025). It is worth noting that Christians United for Israel (<https://cufi.org/>), an evangelical organization, claims ten million members.

Polling data referring to the Israel lobby are scarce. The only instance identified is a 2006 Zogby poll (October 10 – 12) of 1035 likely U.S. voters. The question was: “Do you

² An overview is available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_lobby_in_the_United_States

strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the work of the Israel lobby on Congress and the Bush administration has been a key factor for going to war in Iraq and now confronting Iran?” *Strongly* or *somewhat agree* totaled 38 percent, *strongly* or *somewhat disagree* totaled 40 percent, and 22 percent were *not sure* (Zogby International, 2006).

It appears that, as long ago as 2006, many Americans were aware of the power of the Israel lobby. Current controversies over Israel’s policies in Gaza are likely to have given the lobby increased salience. Google Trends shows searches for “AIPAC” are about thirty times higher in 2026 than in 2022.³

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) supports a definition of antisemitism that conflates anti-Jewish with anti-Israel

“There are more than two dozen Holocaust museums in the U.S. They have welcomed tens of millions of visitors over the past several decades and helped create Holocaust curricula required in 26 states, reaching some 20,000 American schools. Their purpose—stressed in exhibitions, on web sites and in educational materials—is not just to teach about one of the darkest episodes of human history, but also to curb antisemitism, eliminate hate and nurture tolerance” (Rothstein, 2024).

“Two dozen” is an underestimate. Wikipedia lists over 60 Holocaust Museums in 15 U.S. states (List of Holocaust memorials and museums in the United States, 2026). What each museum conveys about Israel and the relation of U.S. Jews to Israel is an interesting question beyond the scope of this review. Here I focus on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C.

As Rothstein (2024) notes, a primary goal of the D.C. Museum is to curb antisemitism. The search function on the Museum website indeed produces 516 hits for “antisemitism” (compared with 1205 for “holocaust,” 758 for “Germans,” and 115 for “Israel”). In several places the Museum website describes antisemitism as prejudice against or hatred of Jews.⁴

³ https://trends.google.com/explore?q=%2Fm%2F018_n5&date=today%205-y&geo=US

⁴ e.g. <https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/what-is-antisemitism>

The Museum has gone beyond this definition to promote a working definition that includes eleven examples of antisemitism (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, nd). Examples 5-11 refer to Israel.

5. Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.

6. Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.

7. Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.

8. Applying double standards by requiring of it [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.

9. Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.

10. Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

11. Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Some controversial implications of this list can be noted. The sixth (Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel) defines reference to U.S. Jewish spies for Israel as antisemitism. The seventh (State of Israel a racist endeavor) defines Jimmy Carter's *Palestine: Peace not apartheid* (2006) as antisemitism. The tenth (comparing Israeli to Nazi policy) defines as antisemitism the opinions of 39 percent of U.S. Jews who believe that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza (Bendavid, Clement & Guskin, 2025). The eleventh (holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of Israel) defines as antisemitism the opinions of 27 percent of U.S. adults who in 2025 agreed that Jewish Americans need to answer for the actions of the State of Israel (ADL, 2025).

Taken together, the seven examples of antisemitism referring to the State of Israel may encourage the belief that the USMMH does not distinguish between the interests of U.S. Jews and the interests of the State of Israel. As a national museum created by U.S. Jews, with millions of non-Jewish visitors, the USMMH contribution to conflating U.S. Jews with Israel may be significant.

Vivid Examples of U.S. Jews Supporting Israel

This section identifies three kinds of in-the-news examples of U.S. Jews making unusual contributions to Israel.

U.S. Billionaires Supporting Israel

Twenty U.S. billionaires supporting Israel were identified by *Israel365News* (Forman, 2015). Ranked in order of wealth in 2015, the top twenty are Larry Ellison, Michael Bloomberg, Sheldon Adelson, Michael Dell, Leslie Wexner, David Green, Sam Zell, Robert Kraft, Ira Rennert, Donald Trump, Isaac Perlmutter, Daniel Gilbert, Haim Saban, Lynn Schusterman, Leon G. Cooperman, Ronald Lauder, Bernard Marcus, Henry Samueli, S. Daniel Abraham, and Paul Singer (Forman, 2015).

Two of these, David Green and Donald Trump, are not Jewish; Green is identified as Christian Zionist. Four of these wealthy individuals are cited for contributions to Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, which provides support and benefits to IDF members. Four are cited for contributions to Birthright Israel. Three are described as supporters of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu; two more are pictured with the Prime Minister. One of these individuals, Haim Saban, has been quoted as follows: “I’m a one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel” (Bruck, 2010).

There are more recent examples. *Truthout*, a left-leaning U.S. news organization, identified six U.S. Jewish billionaires as major donors to Friends of the Israel Defense Forces: Miriam Adelson (Israeli widow of Sheldon Adelson), Bernie Marcus, Haim Saban, Paul Singer, Larry Ellison, and Jan Koum (Seidman, 2024). The *Jerusalem Post* (Better, 2025) cited six U.S. Jewish billionaires for “a profound impact on Jewish life and Israel through investment and influence, in another year of unprecedented challenges to the Jewish state”: Michael Dell, Bill Ackman, Larry Ellison, Michael Bloomberg, Jan Koum, and Marc Benioff. The convergence in these identifications is not perfect but considerable.

William Ackman stirred controversy over his effort to publicize the names of pro-Palestinian students at Harvard University. The students Ackman focused on had signed a letter protesting Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. Ackman sought to ensure that his company and others would not “inadvertently hire” these students (Egan, 2024; Krupnick, 2025).

More recently, the Epstein files released by Congress have given a picture of Jeffrey Epstein’s charitable donations. He supported many Jewish causes and organizations, both in the U.S. and in Israel, notably including donation to Friends of the Israel Defense Forces (Lapin, 2026).

These are examples of high-profile U.S. Jewish billionaires who have been in the news for their support of Israel, both before and during the Israel-Hamas war. Media attention to these examples may contribute to seeing U.S. Jews as supporting Israel and the IDF.

U.S. Jews Convicted of Espionage for Israel

In the past twenty-five years, four U.S. Jews have pleaded guilty to spying for Israel: Ben-Ami Kadish (Johnson, 2008), Stewart Nozette (Wilber, 2012), Lawrence Franklin (Lichtblau, 2005), and Jonathan Pollard (Linzer, 2014). The Franklin and Pollard cases raised considerable furor in the U.S. and in Israel.

Franklin was sentenced to thirteen years in prison, and two senior officials of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (see above) were named as co-conspirators. Franklin's sentence was later reduced to ten months house arrest. The AIPAC officials lost their jobs and were indicted for gathering and disclosing classified information, but these charges were later dropped by federal prosecutors.

Pollard's case involved four Israeli agents named as co-conspirators, including Rafael (Rafi) Eitan, the Mossad spymaster famous in 1960 for abducting Adolf Eichman from Argentina to trial in Israel. Other Israelis named were Air Force Colonel Aviem Sella; Yosef Kagur, science attache in the Israel Consulate in New York City (to whom Ben-Ami Kadish reported, see above); and Irit Erb, a secretary in the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C.

Pollard was sentenced to life in prison in 1985, paroled in 2015, released from parole in 2020, and flew to Israel in a private plane provided by casino magnate Sheldon Adelson (Federman, 2020). On landing in Israel, Pollard received a hero's welcome that included Prime Minister Netanyahu greeting him on the tarmac at Ben Gurion Airport.

Efforts to pardon or parole Pollard continued throughout Pollard's years in prison. Leaders of Israel asked several U.S. presidents for clemency for Pollard but were turned down. Political luminaries in the U.S. also argued for clemency, again to no avail. Pollard's cause remained a sore spot in U.S.-Israel relations for thirty years.

Franklin's case and, especially, Pollard's case received enough attention in the U.S. that they may have contributed to perceptions of a strong connection between U.S. Jews and Israel.

U.S. synagogues sponsoring land sales in Israel and the West Bank

“Events promoting real estate investment in Israel and the occupied West Bank have been held across the New York area for years. But in recent months, an energized pro-Palestinian movement has drawn public attention to these events through rancorous protests outside synagogues that have hosted them. Supporters of Israel have rallied to defend the events and the synagogues where they are held. ... The pro-Palestinian demonstrators have succeeded in injecting into the city’s political debate the issue of West Bank settlements, which most of the world considers to be illegal, and local synagogues’ role in promoting them.” (Stack, 2026).

Palestinian protesters focus on the fact that the U.N. and many countries hold that Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal, suggesting that supporting sales of West Bank property to U.S. Jews should be illegal. Reports so far have not given any estimates of the number of years these sales ("Great Israeli Real Estate Event") have been going on, or of how many U.S. synagogues have sponsored these sales. But the controversy aired in the *New York Times* (Stack, 2026) has provided examples of U.S synagogues offering material support to Israel and to Israel’s acquisition of Palestinian land.

How a few unrepresentative examples can affect perceptions of a larger group is explored in the next section.

Analysis of Connections between U.S. Jews and Israel

This review has identified numerous connections between U.S. Jews and Israel. Polls find half or more of U.S. Jews feel emotionally attached to Israel. Many U.S. Jews have visited Israel, many have Israeli passports, many buy State of Israel bonds, many serve in the IDF. Many U.S. Jewish organizations lobby in support of Israel; the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. defines antisemitism to include criticisms of Israel. Several prominent Jewish billionaires in the U.S. have offered public support for Israel, a few Jewish individuals have been convicted of spying for Israel, and a few synagogues have sponsored land sales in Israel and Palestine.

Feelings, Behaviors, and Beliefs

The cited polls of U.S. Jews show affective connections with Israel: the majority of U.S. Jews feel “emotionally attached” to Israel. They care about Israel. In psychological terms, they identify with Israel (McCauley, 2001), that is, they feel positive emotions such as pride when Israel is succeeding and advancing (Nobel prizes, military victories), and negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and shame when Israel is failing or diminished (accused of apartheid or genocide).

The behavioral connections between U.S. Jews and Israel are substantial: visiting Israel, maintaining an Israeli passport, buying Israel bonds, serving in the IDF. These behaviors bring additional affective connections as friends and relatives are shared between the U.S. and Israel.

Like the National Rifle Association (NRA) or the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the Israel lobby tries to influence the membership and the votes of the U.S. Congress. Beyond the dollars that the Israel lobby brings to bear on elections and votes is a significant effort to influence beliefs about how support for Israel helps Americans. Here are the first three claims in this direction from the home page of the AIPAC website (aipac.org).

“Israeli expertise and technology helps protect the American homeland and our troops around the world.” “America’s partnership with Israel ensures our troops have access to cutting-edge technologies...” “The U.S.-Israel relationship supports over 255,000 American jobs.”

The feelings, behaviors, and beliefs of U.S. Jews toward Israel are the three components of an attitude (affect, behavior, cognition—the ABC model of attitude; American Psychological Association, nd). In other words, the feelings, behaviors, and beliefs of U.S. Jews convey a strong positive attitude toward Israel.

The Power of Holocaust Museums

The psychology of reminders of the Holocaust deserves separate attention. Already noted is that there are, in the U.S., at least 60 Holocaust Museums. The psychological value of these museums is two-fold. For U.S. Jews, the reminders of victimization and death are reminders of continuing and common threat that raise group cohesion (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Similarly, reminders of victimization and death only 80 years ago are a motive to support Israel as the most reliable safe-haven for Jews. Recall that a 2025 poll of U.S. Jews found 72 percent agreeing that “Israel’s existence is vital for the long-term future of the Jewish people” (Bendavid, Clement & Guskin, 2025).

For the 97 percent of non-Jewish Americans, Holocaust Museums are a claim on attention and support for the survivors of a massive injustice, including a claim on moral status and material resources (this psychology is sometimes referred to as “competitive victimhood”; Young & Sullivan, 2016). These claims of victim status stand behind the political power of accusing individuals and groups of antisemitism.

The Power of a Few Vivid Examples

It seems that a few examples of pro-Israel Jewish billionaires or pro-Israel Jewish spies should not affect perceptions or attitudes toward 5.8 million U.S. Jews. Nevertheless, humans suffer from a powerful cognitive bias to generalize from small and non-random samples to judgement about the population they come from. This bias, wryly named the “law of small numbers” (treating small samples as if they were large samples) has been found with individuals trained in statistics as well as with those innocent of statistics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1971).

There is another cognitive bias that can be joined with the law of small numbers: the vividness bias. In a widely used definition, vivid information is described as “likely to attract and hold our attention and to excite the imagination to the extent that it is emotionally interesting, concrete and imagery-provoking, and proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way” (Blondé & Girandola, 2016, p. 112). Studies of vividness have compared concrete vs. abstract information, pictures vs. no pictures, and—of special interest here—narrative vs. statistical information about a population. More vivid information has been found to be more persuasive in changing attitudes and behavioral intentions (Blonde & Girandola, 2016).

An example of the law of small numbers at work is the experience of Muslims and Arabs in the U.S. after the 9/11 attacks. The attackers were a were small and unrepresentative sample of 19 Arab Muslims, mostly from Saudi Arabia, but their effect on treatment of U.S. Arabs and Muslims was significant. The numbers of hate crimes attributed to anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bias were 26 and 260 in the 8½ months preceding 9/11; corresponding numbers in the 8½ months following 9/11 were 517 and 1502 (Disha, Cavendish & King, 2011).

Following the logic of small numbers bias and vividness bias, a few in-the-news examples of U.S. Jewish billionaires supporting Israel and U.S. Jewish spies for Israel can influence U.S. perceptions of the extent to which U.S. Jews support Israel. Similarly a few

examples of synagogues sponsoring land sales in Israel, especially land sales in the Occupied Territories, can influence perceptions of the extent to which U.S. synagogues support Israel.

Billionaires, spies, synagogues—a few examples of each can increase U.S. public perceptions of the extent to which U.S. Jews support Israel, Netanyahu, and the war in Gaza. If we ask why so many Americans believe that “Jewish Americans need to answer for the actions of the State of Israel,” these few examples may be part of the answer.

What Can Be Done to Reduce Hostility Toward U.S. Jews?

Some too-simple suggestions for reducing hostility to U.S. Jews would be the reverse of connections linking U.S. Jews with Israel. U.S. Jews might stop visiting Israel, stop purchasing Israel bonds, turn in Israeli passports, stop supporting organizations that lobby for increased support for Israel as the Israel-Hamas war continues, stop promoting definitions of antisemitism that include criticism of Israel, find and publicize Jewish billionaires who oppose further killing in Gaza.

Unfortunately, most of these suggestions are unrealistic in failing to recognize the strong and continuing attachment that U.S. Jews feel for Israel. The September 2025 *Washington Post* poll cited earlier found that 58 percent of U.S. Jews are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel.

Nevertheless, the same *Washington Post* poll found some respondents turning away from Israel’s policies in Gaza. The poll found that 39 percent of U.S. Jews believe Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. About a third of respondents said that the United States is too supportive of Israel. A key poll question was the following: “Do you approve or disapprove of the military action Israel has taken in Gaza?” Approval was 46 percent, disapproval was 48 percent. This result for U.S. Jews can be compared with 60 percent disapproval using the same question in a Gallup poll of all U.S. adults (Brenan, 2025).

Factions dividing U.S. Jews in relation to Israel

In short, U.S. Jews are strongly split on support for Israel’s military action in Gaza. About half disapprove of the killing in Gaza, about a third are even ready to call this killing genocide, and about a third believe that the U.S. is too supportive of Israel.

A powerful example of the split among U.S. Jews is the rise of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP; jewishvoiceforpeace.org). Founded in 1996 by Jewish undergraduates at University of California Berkeley, JVP was for years seen as a marginal left-wing advocacy group. The war in Gaza has lifted its appeal; in 2024 it claimed to be the largest anti-Zionist organization in the world, with 31,000 dues-paying members. JVP sees Israel as a colonial power with no regard for the human rights of indigenous Palestinians. JVP supports and participates in the activities of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement that tries to use economic pressure on Israel to improve treatment of Palestinians. In May 2024, JVP joined nine other organizations in launching the Break the Bonds campaign that demands that local governments, state governments, unions, pension funds, universities, and places of worship stop buying Israel Bonds.

Perhaps the best-known slogan associated with the JVP is: “Not in My Name.” This meme rejects attempts to use defense of Jews as warrant for Gaza killing, and rejects defining criticism of Israel as antisemitism. Whatever may be said against it, the existence of JVP, its activities, and its growth since the Hamas attacks of 10/7/2023, make it a strong argument against blaming all Jews for Israeli policies in Gaza. Increased attention to JVP should be welcomed even by U.S. Jews who disagree with JVP goals and tactics.

A further example of the split among U.S. Jews is J Street (jstreet.org), a pro-Israel lobby that, like AIPAC, rejects the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, rejects the Break the Bonds campaign, rejects attempts to reduce U.S. aid to Israel, and rejects reference to the war in Gaza as genocide. *The Washington Post* has described the difference between J Street and AIPAC as follows: “While both groups call themselves bipartisan, AIPAC has won support from an overwhelming majority of Republican Jews, while J Street is presenting itself as an alternative for Democrats who have grown uncomfortable with both Netanyahu's policies and the conservatives' flocking to AIPAC” (Terris, 2015).

J Street aims to support democracy, diplomacy, and a two-state solution in Israel-Palestine. Like AIPAC, J Street has a Political Action Committee that contributes to election campaigns for favored candidates. J Street also has a student organizing arm, J Street U, with chapters on college and university campuses.

Thus there are three different organizations representing U.S. Jews in relation to Israel. AIPAC is unconditionally pro-Israel, J Street is ready to criticize Israeli government policies,

and JVP takes criticism of Israel to accusations of genocide. These splits of opinion and action are evidence that U.S. Jews are not politically united, that not all U.S. Jews can be held responsible for Israel's policies in Gaza. These splits can be publicized to respond to the 27 percent of the U.S. public that believes "Jewish Americans need to answer for the actions of the State of Israel" (ADL, 2025). The argument must be that ONLY SOME Jewish Americans need to answer for Israel's actions.

The distinction is important because an antisemitism that targets all U.S. Jews will be counterproductive. Recall the continuing strong emotional attachment to Israel felt by many U.S. Jews. Political hostility toward all U.S. Jews would likely increase their commitment to Israel as safe-haven and undermine those who try to recognize Palestinian human rights.

Divided vs. Multiple Loyalties

A theoretical argument against the "divided loyalties" claim against U.S. Jews is that group loyalties are not a zero-sum game. The phrase "divided loyalties" implies a single quantity of loyalty that can be divided among different groups. The implication is that more loyalty toward one group means less loyalty to another. In theoretical terms the issue is group identification: whether more identification with one group means less identification with other groups. There is no evidence that group identification operates in this zero-sum fashion.

Rather identification with one group is largely independent of identification with other groups (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). More identification with my college football team does not mean less identification with my favorite professional football team. Campaigns against antisemitism should argue that more identification with Israel does not mean less identification with the U.S. These campaigns can argue that "divided loyalty" is a misnomer. The more accurate term is "multiple loyalties" and almost every American has these: ethnic, religious, regional, civic, and national loyalties whose intensities are more likely positively correlated than negatively correlated.

To sum up this section, the best argument against holding American Jews responsible for mass killing in Gaze is that any attribution to "Jewish Americans" assumes a unity and uniformity that does not exist. American Jewish opinion covers a range from Israel-right-or-wrong to Israel committing genocide. Ignoring this enormous variation of opinion is not only unfair and inaccurate, it can push more Jewish Americans toward safe-haven-Israel-right-or-

wrong. Paradoxically, Jewish Americans may need to advertise their differences for the good of all.

There is one more possibility for reducing antisemitic attitudes and actions. Perhaps peace and rebuilding in Gaza could reduce antisemitic incidents in the U.S. as quickly as these incidents increased in the months after the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. A 2025 national poll found that 39 percent of U.S. adults believed that attacks against Jews would stop if Israel declared a ceasefire (ADL, 2025).

Research Implications for Understanding and Combating Antisemitism

The starting point for understanding antisemitism is a definition that can be translated into measurement. The definition promoted by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum—prejudice toward or hatred of Jews—is a two-part claim in which neither prejudice nor hate is defined. A more straightforward definition is that antisemitism is a negative attitude toward Jews, that is, a combination of negative affect, negative behavior, and negative cognitions about Jews (the ABC model cited earlier).

In practice, measures of attitude are often reduced to a positive vs. negative measure of affect.

Antisemitism as Attitude

Antisemitism as attitude has often been measured with a “feeling thermometer” that runs from 0 to 100 with 0 meaning very negative, 100 very positive, and 50 neutral. Using this scale, the 2024 American National Election Studies (ANES) found that Jews were still rated highly with only a slight decline in warmth from 2020 to 2024, from the all-time high of 71.5 to 68.6 (Cohen, 2025). The feeling thermometer may be a less sensitive measure than asking if the number of Jewish Americans strengthens or weakens American society (Telhami, 2024). Recall that Telhami’s measure showed a sizeable decline in the percent saying “strengthen” from 59 percent in 2022 to 43 percent in 2024.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) uses agreement with negative stereotypes about Jews, including the following fourteen statements listed in order of endorsement in a 2022 national U.S. poll (ADL, 2023; percent endorsing *mostly* or *somewhat true*):

1. Jews stick together more than other Americans. 70 percent
2. Jews in business go out of their way to hire other Jews. 53 percent
3. Jews are more loyal to Israel than to America. 39 percent
4. Jews always like to be at the head of things. 38 percent
5. Jews do not share my values. 36 percent
6. Jews have too much power in the business world. 26 percent
7. Jews in business are so shrewd that other people do not have a fair chance at competition. 24 percent
8. Jews have too much control and influence on Wall Street. 24 percent
9. Jews don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind. 21 percent
10. Jews have too much power in the United States today. 20 percent
11. Jews are more willing than others to use shady practices to get what they want. 20 percent
12. Jews have a lot of irritating faults. 19 percent
13. Jews are not warm and friendly. 17 percent
14. Jews are not as honest as other businesspeople. 16 percent

Many of these statements appear to be exceptionless generalizations (“Jews always like to be at the head of things”), but research finds that virtually no one believes that such statements apply to 100% of the targeted group (Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995). A more realistic stereotype definition is “perceived probabilistic difference between groups.” Then the first statement, “Jews stick together more than other Americans,” is a stereotype measure because it compares Jewish Americans with other (non-Jewish) Americans. The second statement, “Jews in business go out of their way to hire other Jews,” is not a stereotype statement because it is a flat hundred percent generalization without any comparison. Only statements 1, 7, 11, and 14 compare Jews with “others.”

Another issue is that it is not clear that all of the statements are negative statements about Jews. Preferring your own people (statements 1 and 2) can be seen as positive, as can shrewdness in business (statement 7).

Still another issue is that several of these statements refer to disproportionate Jewish power: “Jews have too much power in the business world;” “Jews have too much control and influence on Wall Street;” “Jews have too much power in the United States today.” The issue

arises from the fact that Jews are over-represented in two categories of the powerful in America: business and politics.

According to *Forbes Israel* (Zehorai, 2025), there are 902 U.S. billionaires and 163 (16 percent) of these are Jewish. Sixteen percent is about seven times the 2.2 percent of U.S. adults who identify as Jewish (Pew Research Center, 2020, Chapter 1). In 2025 11 Jewish billionaires were among the 25 richest Americans, that is, 44 percent of the top 25 (Peterson-Withorn & Durot, 2025).

In the 119th Congress seated in 2025, 6 percent of Members (23 in the House, 9 in the Senate) are Jewish (Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life Project, 2025). Six percent is almost triple the 2.2 percent of U.S. adults who identify as Jewish.

It is important to note that these percentages are relatively small: 16 percent, 44 percent, and 6 percent are less than 50 percent. These percentages are too small to support claims that Jews control U.S. business or the U.S. Congress. But the over-representation of Jews in the top ranks of business and politics is a problem for using “too much power” items as measures of antisemitism. These statements of disproportionate power have a basis in fact.

In short, the ADL statements provide an inconsistent and complex measure of attitude toward Jews. Not all are obviously negative, not all are stereotype measures, not all are obviously false. A feeling thermometer or a “strengthen society” measure can provide a more transparent attitude measure. Social distance measures may also be useful, for example “Would you like or dislike if Jews became your neighbors?” (Bergmann, 2020).

Antisemitism as Hate

Hate is more and deeper than a negative attitude. I have a negative attitude toward smokers but I am not glad when I hear of smokers dying of cancer. That is, I do not feel negative identification with smokers.

McCauley (2024) has suggested that hate is a combination of negative identification and perception of a negative essence. Negative identification is a kind of inverse caring: when the hated is prospering, negative identification produces sadness, fear and shame; when the hated is failing or diminished, negative identification produces joy and pride. For antisemitism, negative identification means feeling glad when Jews are failing and feeling sad

when Jews are succeeding. Polling items asking emotional reaction to particular Jewish successes and failures can begin to measure positive and negative identification with Jews.

Psychological essentialism refers to the common human perception that every living thing has a deep-down, hidden essence that distinguishes it from others. Common groupings of living things are seen to share an ingroup essence: penguins, dogs, and humans have different essences. The perception of essence is an evolutionary anticipation of modern genetics: “The Ugly Duckling” is a tale of essence unfolding.

It is particularly easy to essentialize a group defined by blood descent (Gil-White, 2001). Israel’s “Law of Return” (passed 1950, extended 1970) offers citizenship for individuals (and their spouses, children, and grandchildren) who can show at least one Jewish grandparent (The Jewish Agency for Israel, nd). The State of Israel thus defines Jew and Jewish by descent. It seems likely, then, that research could show that many Americans—both Jews and non-Jews—see Jews as sharing a common essence.

Based on work by Bastian and Haslam (2006) and Rhodes and Gelman (2009), here are five items that can compose a perceived essentialism scale for Jews. *The character and abilities of Jews are in their blood. You are either a Jew or you are not; there is no middle ground—someone cannot be “a little” Jewish. Although Jews differ from one another in behavior and appearance, they are essentially very similar. All Jews share something deep that makes them Jewish. You can tell a lot about a person if you know that they are Jewish.*

The importance of measuring essentialist perceptions of Jews is that these perceptions go beyond negative attitude to begin testing the common idea that antisemitism means hatred of Jews. If non-Jews see a Jewish essence, and begin to see a negative essence, then negative attitudes and actions toward all Jews can be justified. Studying perceived essence in relation to Jews is the beginning of understanding antisemitism and the beginning of knowing how to combat antisemitism.

To sum up this section, simple attitude measures are likely to be more interpretable than ADL antisemitism measures, and research measuring negative identification with Jews and essentializing of Jews can expand our understanding of what antisemitism means—what hate means--and provide direction for interventions that might reduce antisemitism.

Conclusion

The aim of this review is relatively narrow: to understand how outrage against Israel's continuing war against Palestinians has been generalized to antisemitism targeting U.S. Jews. Connections of U.S. Jews with Israel are proposed as possible contributors to the observed increase in negative attitudes and antisemitic incidents since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. The logic of this proposal is that the strength of connections between U.S. Jews and Israel leads many Americans to blame U.S. Jews for Israeli actions that have killed over 60,000 Palestinians. Consistent with this proposal is the 2025 U.S. poll that found 27 percent of adults agreeing that "Jewish Americans need to answer for the actions of the State of Israel" (Anti-defamation League, 2025).

It is important that three quarters of Americans did not agree that Jewish Americans have responsibility for the actions of the State of Israel. This result means that rising antisemitism in the U.S. cannot be understood as Americans seeing American Jews as part of Israel simply because Israel is a Jewish state. Three quarters of Americans do not see American Jews as responsible for Israeli actions despite the fact that Israel is a Jewish state.

The connections between U.S. Jews and Israel are plausibly a source of American attitudes toward U.S. Jews as Americans have turned against the Israeli war in Gaza, but the linkage has not been tested. There is no research to say how many non-Jewish Americans are aware of each connection identified, except for one poll that found 38 percent of U.S. likely voters agreed that "the work of the Israel lobby on Congress and the Bush administration has been a key factor for going to war in Iraq and now confronting Iran" (Zogby International, 2006). There is no research showing a correlation between awareness of a particular connection and negative feelings toward U.S. Jews. For instance, the correlation between agreeing with "the work of the Israel lobby..." and negative feelings toward U.S. Jews is unknown.

Nevertheless, the contribution of this review is to raise the possibility that perception of strong connections of U.S. Jews with Israel, combined with U.S. public opinion turning against the continuing Israel-Hamas war, contribute to antisemitism targeting U.S. Jews. The best suggestion for intervening against antisemitism targeting all U.S. Jews is to publicize the

extent to which U.S. Jews are divided about the war—ranging from Israel right-or-wrong all the way to Israel committing genocide.

In trying to understand less positive attitudes and more antisemitic incidents in the U.S. in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war, the review has raised questions about how best to measure antisemitism, and about the possibility of measuring hatred of Jews as negative identification with perception of a Jewish essence. These questions suggest that psychological understanding of antisemitism is barely begun.

It is important to acknowledge that this review does not attempt to provide a complete understanding of antisemitism. No doubt there are individuals who dislike Jews because they are seen as greedy, clannish, and having too much control of business, finance, and politics (ADL, 2023). No doubt there are individuals who dislike Jews because ultra-orthodox Jewish communities have expanded into non-Jewish neighborhoods, leading to controversies over land use and school funding (Davis, 2024). No doubt there are individuals who dislike Jews because of some personal conflict experience with a particular Jewish individual (more “law of small numbers”). Connections with Israel and the Israel-Hamas war are only one possible source of negative attitudes and actions toward U.S. Jews.

Similarly, the review does not attempt to assess the implications of the larger war that Israel has been fighting, including not just the Israel-Hamas conflict but Israel’s wars against Hezbollah, Houthis, and Iran. These broader conflicts may be sources of American sympathy or condemnation for Israel, and so may contribute to less or more antisemitism targeting diaspora Jews in the U.S. Feinberg’s (2020) results indicate that holding U.S. Jews responsible for IDF actions is older and likely broader than Israel’s war with Hamas. Another limitation of this review is that it does not attempt to define prejudice. Definitions of antisemitism frequently refer to antisemitism as prejudice, but these definitions do not attempt to define prejudice or suggest how prejudice is more than or different from negative attitude.

Bodenhausen and Charyan (2025) provide a recent overview of the complexities of defining and measuring prejudice in the most recent *Handbook of Social Psychology*. They agree that prejudice is a kind of attitude, but do not offer their own definition of prejudice and do not suggest any empirical test for distinguishing prejudice from other attitudes. It is not clear that prejudice has objective definition. Prejudice may mean only a negative attitude

considered unjustified by an observer--a subjective definition not easily translated into measurement (c.f. Brigham, 1971).

Still another limitation of this review is that it does not attempt to understand how negative attitudes toward Jews are held by tens of millions of Americans, but antisemitic actions or incidents number only in the thousands (Anti-Defamation League, 2025). This is a perennial problem in terrorism research, where millions hold beliefs justifying terrorist acts but only a few individuals move to terrorism (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Just as extreme political belief is not a useful predictor of extreme political action, so negative attitude toward Jews is not a useful predictor of antisemitic actions. The implication is that fighting antisemitic attitudes is unlikely to produce strong reduction of antisemitic incidents. Perhaps peace in Gaza is the best chance for reducing antisemitic incidents in the U.S.

At a theoretical level, this review advances a view of antisemitism as an aspect of a particular kind of intergroup conflict—conflict between Jews and non-Jews. Intergroup conflict cannot be understood by studying only one side. Neither terrorism nor politicide can be understood by studying only the perpetrators (McCauley, 2020). Nor can antisemitism be understood by studying only Jewish views of attitudes and actions targeting Jews. Rather than assuming that these attitudes and actions emerge from fantasies, age-old stereotypes, or conspiracy theories, this review has sought the facts of connections between U.S. Jews and Israel—connections that may lead some Americans to see American Jews as responsible for the continuing Palestinian casualties of the Israel-Hamas war.

Numerous such connections have been identified, and there are three reasons to take them seriously. First, these connections offer a humanizing view of those hostile to Jews. Perhaps they are not all irrational victims of self-serving fantasies. Perhaps there is a real-world basis for seeing U.S. Jews responsible for Israel's actions in Gaza. Second, these connections offer new directions for research. How many Americans perceive these connections? Are these perceptions correlated with negative feelings or actions toward American Jews? And third, these connections--and especially perceptions of these connections--offer more realistic openings for fighting antisemitism than trying to fight fantasies, ancient stereotypes, and conspiracy theories.

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