The Impact of the Presidency of Donald Trump on American Jewry and Israel

Steven F. Windmueller
Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/casden

Part of the Jewish Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/casden/12

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
The Impact of the Presidency of Donald Trump on American Jewry and Israel

The Jewish Role in American Life

An Annual Review of the Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life
The Impact of the Presidency of Donald Trump on American Jewry and Israel

The Jewish Role in American Life

An Annual Review of the Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life

Volume 19

Steven J. Ross, Editor
Steven F. Windmueller, Guest Editor
Lisa Ansell, Associate Editor

Published by the Purdue University Press for the USC Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life
## Contents

### FOREWORD

vii

### EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

ix

---

*Gary Phillip Zola*

Consonance or Dissonance: American Jewry in a Post-Trump Era  
1

*Michael Berenbaum*

Donald Trump and the Jews: Bad for America, Bad for the Jews, Wonderful for the Netanyahu-Led Government of Israel and Potentially Dangerous to Israel's Future  
15

*Morton A. Klein and Elizabeth A. Berney, Esq.*

Trump: Friend Extraordinaire to Israel and the Jewish People  
37

*Adam Basciano and Shanie Reichman*

The Jewish Community and Younger Generations: Challenges, Opportunities, and Long-Term Impacts of the Trump Era  
93

*Saba Soomekh*

The American Jewish Community: A Divergence of Political Perspectives  
113

*Gilbert N. Kahn*

Orthodox Jews and Trump  
131

*Ehud Eiran*

Seeing Mar-A-Lago from Jerusalem: Perceptions of President Trump in Israel  
165

*Rob Eshman*

How the Jewish Press Saw 45  
181

*Mark Mellman*

Why Donald Trump's Vision Repelled American Jews  
195

*Matthew Brooks and Shari Hillman*

They Said It Couldn't Be Done: Historic Achievements of President Donald Trump  
211
Dan Schnur
Trump and the Jews: What Did We Learn?

Steven F. Windmueller
Reflections on Donald Trump's Presidency and American Jewry

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

ABOUT THE USC CASDEN INSTITUTE
We are still at an early point in making any full assessment of the presidency of Donald J. Trump. It is not too early, however, to make some preliminary observations about the impact his four years in office has had on American Jews and Israel. The writers assembled here were contacted two years ago by volume editor Steven Windmueller and represent voices across the political spectrum, ensuring that the relationship between the Trump presidency and American Jews is presented from a wide cross-section of opinion and analysis.

Since assuming the directorship of the Casden Institute six years ago, my goal has been to create programs and publications that shed light, not heat, on topics at the forefront of American Jewish culture and identity. To that end, we have assembled a volume that presents a multitude of viewpoints ranging from staunch Trump defenders to equally staunch Trump critics. Our contributors include academics, journalists, lobbyists, activists, and pollsters who represent a spectrum of opinions on the 45th president’s impact on the national and international level. We asked only one thing from our authors: write what you wish but treat those on the other side of your argument with respect. I believe we have achieved this goal and it is my hope that our readers will appreciate the diversity of views that makes this a truly unique publication.

I wish to thank our volume editor, Steven Windmueller, for the hard work he has put in assembling such an impressive array of voices willing to write critically about the last four years. My thanks also go to Marilyn Lundberg Melzian, our wonderful longtime volume production editor.

Steven J. Ross  
*Myon and Marian Casden Director*  
*Dean’s Professor of History*
Editorial Introduction

by Steven F. Windmueller

Any effort that seeks to unpack a unique political moment in time, even as this period is still unfolding, represents a significant challenge. This book is precisely about capturing a particular phenomenon, Donald Trump’s impact on the American political story and the US-Israel relationship. His countercultural performance reflected his uniqueness, as his Presidency would uproot many of core norms and practices of contemporary politics. His American nationalism would run counter to the traditions of American political culture in the post-Second World War era. Nor is Trump’s imprint complete as he continues to be a force both within the Republican Party and beyond. His politics have unleashed a new style of activism and behavior that is likely to have a significant impact on the American political psyche well beyond his presence.

In many ways this book project represents a snapshot in time as we try to unravel the imprint of a President on our nation in general, and more directly its Jewish community. Each of the contributors to this venture came to the project with a particular perspective and that is as it should be, for surely Donald Trump leaves no one without a defining judgment.

I am grateful to the Casden Institute, its director Professor Steven J. Ross and to its associate director Lisa Ansell, for their willingness to tackle this controversial and complex subject matter and their personal encouragement and support in completing this initiative. Similarly, I am particularly appreciative to Purdue University Press, its director, Justin C. Race, graphic Christopher J. Brannan, and especially to copyeditor, Marilyn Lundberg Melzian of USC, for their professional guidance and input.

Our writers represent a diversity of viewpoints. Accordingly, our goal was to identify the multiplicity of voices that reflected the range of reaction
both inside the Jewish community and from Israel in connection with the 45th President.

My appreciation extends to each of these individuals for offering their reflections and insights. Together this volume, I believe, represents some of the primary thinking about the Trump Presidency.

American academics such as Michael Berenbaum, Gilbert Kahn, Dan Schnur, Saba Soomekh, and Gary Zola provide their respective insights on this four-year time frame, drawing from their distinctive disciplines and their respective research expertise. Employing modern Jewish history, Professor Berenbaum explores this President against the backdrop of anti-Semitism, the Shoah, and other defining contemporary moments, while offering a deeply personal perspective on the Trump Presidency. Dr. Gilbert Kahn adds the important dimension of the distinctive role played by American Jewish Orthodoxy in connection with this President. Dr. Saba Soomekh, who combines her expertise as a communal professional with her social science and academic credentials, introduces some critical observations about how Donald Trump was received by an array of different Jewish audiences, including the Persian community. Professor Dan Schnur, a prominent columnist and academic, shares some insights on how this Presidency played out for independent voters. My HUC colleague, Professor Gary Zola shares an important and insightful historical perspective in connection with our 45th President.

Israeli political scientist, Ehud Eiran, adds his own particular orientation as he explores the unique and significant relationship that this President enjoyed with the State of Israel and with Israeli society.

Indeed, the particular contribution of Mark Mellman, one of this nation’s most prominent political researchers and public opinion experts, adds an additional important layer of statistical and analytical data to this conversation.

The Forward’s National Editor, Rob Eshman, provides a journalistic assessment of how this President was covered, analyzed and understood by the Anglo-Jewish media.

I am appreciative of Matt Brooks and Shari Hillman, representing the Republican Jewish Coalition, for their important and respective partisan perspectives in connection with this Presidency.

Shanie Reichman and Adam Basciano add a distinctive Millennial voice to this research effort, as they explore how the Trump White House was understood by a particular generation of Jewish activists and what his tenure may mean for this age cohort as we move forward.
Thanks to Morton Klein and Elizabeth Berney for their specific reflections on the value-added that they believe was created by this President’s contributions to the State of Israel and to America’s Jews.

I am grateful to several of my colleagues from HUC and across the LA community for their thoughtful reflections and suggestions in connection with the content and scope of this volume. But most specifically I want to acknowledge my wife, Michelle Pearlman Windmueller, for encouraging me through this enterprise and providing to me her sustaining love and supportive energy!

This unique, American story continues to unfold, even as this volume is set to appear. Both the Presidency of Donald Trump and the on-going implications of Trumpism are today an important centerpiece of the American political scene. Hopefully, we have collectively captured a moment in time, giving particular attention to the important and continuous roles that Jews are playing in the American political arena. But even beyond the Jewish story, the Trump phenomenon is and will be very much a part of the American historical narrative.

Steven F. Windmueller, PhD
Professor Emeritus, Jack H. Skirball Campus
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles
Jack H. Skirball Campus of HUC-JIR, Los Angeles
Consonance or Dissonance: American Jewry in a Post-Clinton Era

by Gary Phillip Zola

Nearly twenty-five years ago Jonathan D. Sarna, the prominent American Jewish historian, asserted that a “cult of synthesis” constituted a “central theme in American Jewish culture.” The “cult of synthesis,” Sarna explained, describes the long-standing and widespread conviction among American Jews that the ideologies of Judaism and Americanism reinforce one another. In short, the vast majority of American Jews believe that there is nothing in Judaism that runs contrary to Americanism and, conversely, America’s democratic values and ideals are completely consonant with Judaism’s ethical and spiritual teachings. If it is Jewish, it is American—and vice versa. For most American Jews, this belief has long been axiomatic.¹

According to sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman, this fusing of Jewishness to Americanness served as an effective “adaptation technique” by which Jews unconsciously ignored the boundaries that separate Jewish and non-Jewish life in America. Fishman referred to this ideological permeability as “coalescence”—a blend of Jewishness and Americanness that results in a “united Jewish whole,” i.e., American Jewish ethnicity.²

Over the course of American history, however, there have been times when Jews have been forced to confront manifestations of ideological dissonance that disrupt the coalescence impulse and cause Jews to worry that the American-Jewish alloy might ultimately be nothing more than a chimera. These events understandably correspond to periods in American history that have witnessed an upsurge in Judeophobia and/or antisemitism. On such
occasions, American Jews experience a crisis of confidence in the aspirational consonances of Judaism and Americanism.

In 1815, for example, Secretary of State James Monroe informed Mordecai Manuel Noah that his commission to serve as consul of Tunis had been revoked. Monroe justified the recall by informing Noah that when he had been appointed, “it was not known that the Religion which you profess would form any obstacle to the exercise of your Consular functions. Recent information, however, on which entire reliance may be placed, proves that it would produce a very unfavourable effect. In consequence of which, the President has deemed it expedient to revoke your commission.”

Monroe’s explanation greatly distressed journalist and educator Isaac Harby, a friend of Noah’s from Charleston. In a passionate letter to Monroe, Harby chastised the secretary for blaming the president’s decision to recall on Noah’s religion. Harby urged Monroe “to erase the sentence in [his] letter” that justifies the recall based on Noah’s Jewishness. “Strike it from the records of your office!” Harby fumed. He feared that Monroe’s “dictum” would become a “precedent,” which could then result in such justification becoming the law of the land. Were that to happen, Harby warned Monroe, America would have defaulted on the Constitution’s guarantee of “free exercise” of religion for every US citizen. Should that occur, Harby concluded, American Jews would have no alternative but to “abandon their country forever, and seek an asylum on some foreign shore, among rocks and deserts, if liberty there holds her residence.”

A similar fear arose during the Civil War, when the National Reform Association spearheaded an attempt to amend the Constitution so that America would formally declare itself a Christian nation. As this Christian Amendment Movement gained traction, many Jewish leaders expressed fear that such an amendment would be disastrous for the future of American Jewry. If the Constitution made Christianity the state religion, then American Jews would once again be forced to wear “the shackles” that characterized their lives in an “enslaved Europe.” The publisher of The Israelite, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, warned his readers to “look out!” for fear that those advocating a Christian nation amendment could actually “give us trouble.” Wise’s journalistic competitor, Isaac Leeser, editor of The Occident, similarly assailed the advocates of the amendment who, he wrote, were “digging the grave of religious liberty and social equality” in America.

Examples such as these pepper the overwhelmingly happy history of Jewish life in America. Whenever incidents that challenge the synthesis of
Americanism and Judaism occur, Jews strive to meliorate the dissonance to ensure that America remains faithful to the lofty ideals enshrined in its founding documents.

Philip Roth’s alternative history, *The Plot Against America* (2004), constitutes a fictional illustration of this phenomenon. In this novel, Roth takes his readers back to the decade leading up to World War II, a period that many historians characterize as the highwater mark for antisemitism in America, when the anti-Jewish rhetoric emanating from the likes of Henry Ford, Father Charles Coughlin, and Charles Lindbergh unnerved American Jewry. Roth’s concept accurately reflects the fears that gripped the American Jewish community during those turbulent years. Although many Jews defiantly counterattacked in public, others quietly worried that America might decide to embrace Hitler’s frightful ideology. Could America become a fascist state that would depredate its Jewish citizens?

In 1934, the US House of Representatives established the McCormack-Dickstein Committee (1934–37) to investigate the ways that “foreign subversive propaganda entered the U.S. and the organizations that were spreading it.” The fear that American democracy was being subverted intensified with the publication of Arthur Derounian’s (a.k.a. John Roy Carlson) 1943 bestseller, *Under Cover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America—The Amazing Revelation of How Axis Agents and Our Enemies Within Are Now Plotting to Destroy the United States*. Those who read this book wondered if the array of underground Nazi agents and antisemitic plots that Derounian documented might succeed in toppling American democracy and replacing it with a system of government that would make America inhospitable to the Jews. *The Plot Against America* imagines just such a development.

Roth’s fictional account envisages how America might have looked had Charles Lindbergh defeated Franklin Roosevelt to become America’s thirty-third president. In discussing his work, Roth later claimed he tried to remain “as close to factual truth” as possible, with one major alteration—a Lindbergh presidency. *The Plot Against America* enables “America’s Jews to feel the pressure of a genuine anti-Semitic threat.” Readers enter a dystopian America where Jews experience religious oppression and government-sponsored programs aimed at coercing them away from Jewish identification and practice.

There is a misty familiarity between the alternative history Roth imagines and the real-life events that America has experienced since June 16, 2015, when Donald Trump declared himself a candidate for the presidency. The Trump years have been riddled with “America First” populist rhetoric that highlighted
themes of ultra-nationalism, nativism, authoritarianism, denigration of empirical fact, and messaging that spurs fear and distrust. This ideological brew is commonly referred to as “Trumpism,” a sociocultural phenomenon that has provoked bitter partisan divisions throughout American society.

One of Roth’s fictional characters, Rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf, becomes an enthusiastic supporter of Lindbergh and, much to the dismay of many in the Jewish community, the rabbi plays a prominent role in helping the aviator capture the presidency. Although Roth imagined a character of Bengelsdorf more than a decade before Trump’s ascendancy, the idea that a Jewish leader might campaign for the real Lindbergh back in the 1930s might strike some as incredulous. Yet for Jews who consider Trump and “Trumpism” an anathema, Bengelsdorf serves as a fictional incarnation of American Jews who have enthusiastically embraced ideas that most American Jews find odious.

Even if we have no record of Jews defending the real Lindbergh in the 1930s, there was a cadre of prominent Jews who championed the Red Scare movement, which rose to prominence after World War II. Although the major Jewish organizations in the United States made their opposition to communism unmistakable, they simultaneously distanced themselves from the tactics of Senator Joe McCarthy and his high-profile investigations and hearings concerning communist infiltration in the American government.  

In addition to the well-known role Roy Cohn and G. David Schine played in the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954, McCarthy’s Jewish supporters organized the American Jewish League Against Communism in 1948. Rabbi Benjamin Schultz, an ordinand of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, served as the League’s executive director. In August of 1954, nearly two thousand of the League’s supporters gathered at the Astor Hotel in New York to hear McCarthy and Cohn speak. Time Magazine reported on the event, memorializing some of the speeches that were heard that evening, some of which seem remarkably contemporary in tone and content. For example, one young collegian, George Reisman, confidently informed the assembly that:

Roy Cohn and Joe McCarthy will be redeemed when the people have taken back their government from the criminal alliance of Communists, Socialists, New Dealers and the Eisenhower-Dewey Republicans.

McCarthy’s antisemitic proclivities, recently detailed in a new biography, did not seem to concern Cohn, Schine, Schultz, Riesman, or many other Jewish boosters who gathered that night to support the work of the American Jewish
League Against Communism. The crowd gave Schultz a huge ovation when he called McCarthy “My Hero.”

It is not difficult to cite other examples of Jews who took political positions that ran contrary to the sensibilities of most American Jews. Mississippi Senator Theodore Bilbo, a notorious bigot who referred to Jews as kikes and made blatantly antisemitic statements on the floor of the US Senate, nevertheless had Jewish supporters across the state. At one point in his career, Bilbo’s campaign manager was a Jew, who calmly explained to his rabbi that when the senator disparaged Jews, he was taking aim at New York Jews, certainly not the Jews of Mississippi!

These illustrations, too, are clear examples of the “cult of synthesis” and the coalescence instinct that has consistently animated the character of Jewish life in America. Even though the past provides us with a helpful perspective on present-day circumstances, ever-changing contexts remind us that historical precedents do not enable us to forecast the future with confidence. *The Plot Against America* is historical fiction; the insurrection of January 6, 2021, was an unprecedented assault on democracy that has intensified Jewish communal worries about the durability of American democracy and the future of Jewish communal life in post-Trump America. As one American Jewish historian noted: “We will have to confront the fact that the Jewish story in the United States is still being written, and progress is not its inevitable conclusion.”

In the wake of the Trump presidency and the lingering effects of Trumpism, we can itemize four broad categories of concern that have become salient within the organized Jewish community. As we noted above, many of these issues have identifiable historical antecedents. Yet these four disconcerting subjects generate disruptions to the deeply engrained tendency for American Jews to harmonize Americanism and Judaism:

I. ANTISEMITISM

According to a recent survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), nearly sixty percent of Jewish Americans confessed to feeling less safe in the United States today than they did ten years ago. The upsurge in antisemitic incidents, particularly the horrific and widely viewed episodes that occurred in Charlottesville, Pittsburgh, and Poway, have resulted in American Jews—perhaps for the first time in American history—reporting a generalized
fear of being attacked while attending Jewish events or while they are in Jewish institutions. These anxieties have catapulted internal security and communal safety issues to the top of the American Jewish agenda, a phenomenon that would have been hard to imagine a decade or two ago.

The ADL survey also reveals that a significant number of American Jews have encountered “antisemitic comments, slurs or threats” on social media. A large portion of those who have experienced antisemitic incidents personally say they have trouble sleeping, and a notable number believe that anti-Jewish harassment in America has affected their lives financially. These are troubling statistics that strongly suggest we are living through a period that future historians will characterize as a high tide of American antisemitism.\(^{15}\)

### II. FAITH IN THE DURABILITY OF AMERICA’S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

The vitality of American democracy became a pertinent topic during the Trump era. Institutional norms have been abrogated and core principles have been questioned. Many have postulated that there is no longer a broad public consensus as to what American democracy means. On the one hand, intensified partisanship in the chambers of Congress have convinced many Americans on both sides that their government may no longer be capable of responding effectively to their basic needs. The government’s disunified response to the COVID-19 epidemic reinforced these concerns.

On the other hand, heated disagreements over issues such as voting rights, free and fair elections, and even the meaning of the Constitution itself have led many to conclude that our current system of government must seriously consider itself in jeopardy from those who are promoting authoritarian populism and militant extremism in America. “Domestic extremism,” one expert recently warned, “is the greatest threat to the homeland—yet it’s not getting nearly enough public attention.” Two leaders of a major Jewish philanthropic foundation framed the issue in the starkest of terms: “Myriad disputes rage on the policy front, but deepening cracks in our democratic norms and institutions transcend these debates and represent a genuinely existential threat to America.”\(^{16}\)

American Jews have long recognized that the vitality of Jewish life pivots on the nation’s commitment to the democratic ideals in the Declaration of
Independence and the US Constitution. Fealty to the durability of democratic institutions and norms is an inviolate commitment for the vast majority of American Jews, who believe that “the future of our democracy and the sustainability of the American Jewish experiment” are inextricably linked.17

III. COSMOPOLITANISM VS. TRIBALISM

The Trump era has been characterized by intense expressions of loyalty to party, religion, or ethnicity. This tendency, frequently dubbed “tribalism,” has influenced every element of American society, including the Jewish community. Over the last half of the twentieth century, most American Jews prioritized liberal, universalistic values over particularism, believing a society that is fair and just for all will enable Jewish life to flourish. Yet a significant (and some say growing) minority of Jews insist that universalism and liberalism inevitably have led to Jewish identity’s fading into the mist of general culture. The only way to strengthen Jewish life in America, particularists contend, is to dedicate themselves primarily to “ideas aimed at strengthening Jewish continuity in the U.S.”18

The founders of the American republic worried about the human tendency toward tribal loyalty, especially regarding political parties. They realized that if thirteen colonies filled with a culturally and ethnically diverse population ever hoped to achieve unity as a nation, universal ideals would need to supersede tribal loyalties. Little wonder why George Washington warned in his Farewell Address that the “spirit of party” was democracy’s “worst enemy” in that it “kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection.”19

Here again, the current cultural tensions pitting long-standing American Jewish commitment to universal values against Jewish tribalism disrupts the harmonization of Americanism and Judaism, as tribal loyalty elevates the interests of the ethnic group or political party over that of the common good. This dialectic places the American Jewish community in an awkward spot, struggling to find a balance between the particularistic interests of the Jewish people even as it looks out for the good of the whole community. American Jews must now try to find the equipoise between defending the rights of all minorities—opposing what de Tocqueville famously described as “the tyranny of the majority”—while preserving its own vibrant identity. This contemporary dilemma was well expressed thousands of years ago by the sage Hillel: “If I am not for
myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?” The Trump era has pushed American Jewry to recalibrate its allegiance to universalism with its own particularistic needs and interests.

IV. CHALLENGING ASSAULTS ON REALITY

There is nothing unusual about politicians making false statements to the public. Misleading and even bold-faced lies are part of the warp and woof of the political process. Yet the Trump era has broken entirely new ground in this realm by repeatedly contravening empirical truth or, as one critic put it, “Trump’s lies were different. They belonged to the postmodern era. They were assaults against this or that fact, but reality itself.”

The drift toward “truth decay” also bears directly on the future of Jewish life in America. As Arnold Eisen recently observed, “The well-being of religious and ethnic minorities like the Jews particularly depends upon devotion to getting the facts right, lest those who wield power might hold unchallenged sway over the depiction of how things are and should be.” Belief in wild conspiracy theories, incessant dissemination of misinformation, gaslighting, and refusal to accept the validity of empirical data illustrate that many people are willing to accept lies that reinforce their beliefs over truths that challenge them. Much of Jewish history reminds us of the dangers of “truth decay.” One needs merely to recall the many malevolent canards leveled at Jews over the centuries—Deicide, Host Desecration, Judensau, Blood libel, well-poisoning, carnality, global conspiracies, the Nazi Holocaust—to prove conclusively “how easily the truth can be manipulated . . . by those with power.”

American Jews and all minorities have a stake in maintaining American civil society, which is now threatened by a culture infected with strains of irrationality and flights of fancy. This, too, is a legacy of the Trump years, and the organized Jewish community will need to be front-line advocates for fact-based data and credible information to maintain civil society.

In 2005, on the 350th anniversary of Jewish communal life in America, President George W. Bush noted that “The story of the Jewish people in America is a story of America.” Six years later, then-Vice President Joe Biden made a very similar observation: “Jewish heritage, Jewish culture, Jewish values are such an essential part of who we are that it’s fair to say that Jewish heritage is American heritage.”
American Jews have long embraced such statements as immutable facts of life in America. Yet the durability of American Jewry’s unfaltering belief in the consonance of Americanism and Judaism will ultimately pivot on two inscrutable contingencies: the extraordinary tradition of Jewish communal resilience in the face of adversity and, also, American democracy’s ability to withstand the schismatic societal dissonance that produced the Trump presidency and its lingering consequences.
Notes


8. For more on this subject, see Aviva Weingarten, *Jewish Organizations’ Response to Communism and to Senator McCarthy* (Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

9. It is likely that the Columbia University student mentioned in the article, George Riesman, is the prominent American economist. Riesman served on faculty at Pepperdine University and became a leading proponent of economic objectivism. See profile at Mises Institute, accessed April 27, 2021, https://mises.org/profile/george-reisman.


14. These four issues are identified as the ways in which the Trump Presidency has changed America. See Michael Dimock and John Gramlich, “How America
Consonance or Dissonance: American Jewry in a Post-Trump Era


17. Ibid.


Bibliography


*Israelite* (February 19, 1864): 268.


Donald Trump and the Jews: Bad for America, Bad for the Jews, Wonderful for the Netanyahu-Led Government of Israel and Potentially Dangerous to Israel’s Future

by Michael Berenbaum

In September 2016, two months before Donald Trump was elected, I published an article entitled With Gratitude to Donald Trump.1 In it I wrote:

No one compares to Adolf Hitler. He was incomparably evil. Nothing in American politics compares to Nazism. Nothing, not now—and hopefully never!

And yet, I am grateful to Donald Trump because he has made my job of explaining the rise of Nazism and political support for Hitler so much easier.

Permit me to explain:

When I would tell my students that many of Hitler’s supporters did not regard themselves as antisemites or racists, they would look at me quizzically. “How could they not?” they asked. After all, Hitler made no secret of his antisemitism. He spoke of it openly, directly, and repeatedly. He did not use dog whistles but said what he meant and meant what he said.

When I would mention that many did not believe that he would carry out what he had been saying, they were skeptical. After all, he had
repeated his threats against the Jews time and again, how could they believe that once in office he would not follow through? When we would learn that some of his voters were put off by his antisemitism but liked other parts of his platform such as his strong nationalism, his return to national pride, his attacks on the ineffective Weimar Republic and their leaders, his anger at German humiliation with the defeat of World War I and the foreign imposition of the Versailles Treaty. They craved his projection of strength and decisiveness after what many had viewed as ineffective leadership from the German political class.

My students would protest. But he was antisemitic and racist, and you are telling me that his supporters did not regard that as disqualifying? They roll their eyes when I tell them that had he not been an antisem-ite he might have gotten even more support.

I would mention that when Hitler came to power with a minority of seats in a coalition cabinet, his political partners assured one another and the President that once in office he would be forced to moderate and move toward the center. They would whisper: "He knows nothing, and we are men of experience—seasoned, reasoned, disciplined and informed. We can control the man and force him to bend to our will."

They would look at me skeptically. Given what they know happened shortly after Hitler took office, they wondered: how could they have been so sure, how could they be so misguided?

When I would describe the reasoning of Germany’s Conservative political leadership: better to bring this angry man and his angry hordes inside the tent looking outward than outside the tent continually raging, my students would throw up their hands in frustration: how could they be so naïve as to imagine that the rage would not continue? And once in power, how could it become institutionalized, bureaucratized, legalized? Couldn’t they understand that power would only embolden the Nazis and that such power would only entice them to use it effectively and cruelly?

And finally, when I would say that no one in Hitler’s inner circle could stand up to Hitler, no one could tell him to stop and cut it out, change direction and that Germany did not have, at least not after the
Emergency Decrees of March 1933, the checks and balances and the separation of powers that restrained the exercise of power.

I would show them two pictures, one of Hitler receiving a briefing from his Generals in 1939—when the wars were proceeding well for Germany, he listened attentively to what they were telling him—and another in 1942, when Hitler was making decision after decision that brought them to defeat, as the Generals listened obediently to what he was instructing them. My students would ask timidly, did the man have no friends, could no one tell him the truth?

Again. Hitler was Hitler and Trump is Trump. No equivalence is possible. Trump does not have a coherent vision—positive or negative—to implement. He only has himself and his sense of self-aggrandizement.

And yet now my students now will have much easier time understanding how things happen. Everyone hears Trump's tirades against Muslims and Hispanics—Mexicans in particular—and hear his promises of exclusion and deportation, but for too many that simply does not disqualify him.

They do not regard themselves as racists and could not imagine themselves to be. Some are uncomfortable, if not distraught, because of his racism, yet other aspects of his program appeal to them: America First, the “lousy” trade deals, the reversal of globalization, the restoration of American greatness, the hatred of the political class—Washington that evil, awful place—and the promise of American jobs.

My students will now be able to see first-hand how the wise men of Germany could be so mistaken. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan condemned the Republican nominee's statements about an Indiana-born Federal Judge as racist and speaks with rightful respect about Gold Star mothers and fathers whose children died in the service of our nation. He is not in favor of excluding Muslims or deporting Mexicans but supports his party's nominee because Trump will advance Conservative causes and appoint a Conservative Supreme Court.

I do not know what he is feeling in his heart of hearts but if I judge by his actions, I presume that he believes he, and not Trump, can set
the agenda; that the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and the Senate can moderate Trump and negate the racist and un-American aspects of his agenda.

I have no such confidence. I suspect that the Presidential nominee of the Republican Party believes that he will bend the Ryans and McConnells to his will just as he broke 15 other candidates for President and made the toughest of them, Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, look like a lap dog, taking scraps off the master’s table.

While I have no confidence in Republican leadership who delude themselves and the nation with the notion that they will triumph in a contest of ideas; and while I am appalled by the so-called “religious leaders” who want to make the nation more Christian (Jesus preached a gospel of compassion and human dignity, gratitude and grace, he reached out to the widow and the orphan, the stranger and the dispossessed) while they support a man who is the embodiment of values antithetical to religiosity.

I do have confidence in the American people who, no matter how angry, will reject the politics of exclusion and bigotry and vote for inclusion and decency. I pray that I am not deceiving myself.

Let me conclude with a story: many years ago Steven Spielberg and I met with a man who spent the meeting telling Spielberg how important he was. When the meeting concluded, and we stepped outside Spielberg turned to me and said:

“What was that about?”

“He wanted to tell you how important he was,” I answered.

He said: “I know he is important, otherwise I would not have met with him.”

I said: “He has a big ego.”

Steven corrected me immediately. “No, he has a small ego in need of enlargement. I have a big ego as do you and we need not enlarge it at another’s expense.”
I keep remembering that story whenever I hear Trump speak of size of hands, of private parts, of his height and fortune. Only a man with a small ego in need of enlargement would become obsessed by size.

Beware of such a man and most especially so such a man preaching such a philosophy.

That is what I wrote more than four years ago; what about now after his presidency ended—thankfully, blessedly?

CRISES AND THE LOSS OF COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD:
As the President left office unwillingly at 12:00 noon on January 20, 2021—the day I first drafted this piece—the nation he led was living through at least seven simultaneous crises.

- A health crisis
- An economic crisis
- A social justice crisis
- A climate crisis
- A leadership crisis
- A democracy crisis
- A crisis of truth

And we were failing, pulling apart rather than together, muddling through without direction, with indecision and misdirection. We were on a roller coaster tweet by tweet, attack by attack.

A Hasidic Story: A disciple came to his master and said: “Rebbe, the water in our town is poisoned, whoever drinks from the water will go mad yet if we do not drink from the water we shall die. What Rebbe are we to do?”

The Rebbe instructed him to bring some paint and make a mark on his forehead. And then he made the same mark on his own forehead. “When you look at me and see the mark and when I look at you and see the mark. Remember we are mad.”
The worst thing is to accept the madness as normalcy and not know it.

We were living through madness, the degree of such madness has come out and will come out over time by those who were close to former President Trump to the end, even as it has repeatedly come out by those who left his orbit. The degree of madness can also be noted by the number on op-ed writers, Conservative and Liberals alike, who used a return to normal in their title on Inauguration Day. But the ultimate mistake would have been to accept “the new normal” as a given in our national life.

I share the verdict on Trump offered by George Packer in *The Atlantic* “America under Trump became less free, less equal, more divided, more alone, deeper in debt, swampier, dirtier, meaner, sicker, and deader. It has also become more delusional.”

The former President pulled us apart when we are in this together and can only grapple with these crises together.

Easiest of examples: Others wearing a mask protects my health, my wearing a mask protects their health. We cannot get out of the health crisis alone; we are responsible for one another and we need to be responsible for one another.

Similarly, my getting a vaccine is essential to your health not just my own and your getting a vaccine protects my family and me as well.

Now that vaccines have been developed, we need to trust the science—apolitical science, peer reviewed science—science, uncompromised by politics and politics that is respectful of science.

Only if we trust the science will people take the vaccine and only if we take the vaccine will we get to a post-Covid world. Any politicizing of the science, any muzzling of the scientists, prolongs the health crisis as people will not trust the Vaccine, not take the Vaccine. Then children will not be able to return to school, parents to work, businesses to open, people to travel and socialize, Christians to their Churches, Muslims to their Mosques, Jews to our synagogues.

And if we cannot get out of the health crisis, we cannot get out of the economic crisis.

The pandemic has exacerbated the gap between the haves and the have nots. Those of us who work from home have found that we are productive remotely but those who cannot, are unemployed or forced to choose between personal safety and economic survival. We have a two-tiered system and those at the top of the tier have endured, albeit not without discomfort and confinement, while elsewhere there is despair and desperation, hopelessness, and hunger. Our political system deepens the divide, exacerbates the tension.
Many Jews are torn by the Social Justice Divide—Black Lives Matter—as a movement, versus Black lives matter as a cause. BLM’s initial platform included statements on the Palestinians and Israel that alienated many supporters of Israel. Their cause is a very different matter.

No lives matter unless all lives matter, unless Black lives matter.

We should understand the cry and the fear of people of color! Injustice because of race persists and is far deeper than many Americans are willing to accept. They have only become even deeper under the Trump presidency with its politics of White grievance.

I can empathize with my Black neighbors from the Jewish experience. It was not long ago that Jews in need could not go to police, that pogroms were at best tolerated by authorities, often encouraged by them. When my son is stopped for a driving infraction, he does not fear for his life; but I can easily imagine the conversation between a Black father and mother and their teenage son proudly holding his Driver’s License. I was proud when he received his driver’s license. I did not experience that memorable moment of adolescence as a potential death sentence. There is justice in the cries we hear about Floyd George, Brianna Taylor, Daniel Prude, Trayvon Martin, and so many others. Their cause is just because the situation is rotten and there is no doubt that there is systematic racism in the police force. The solution is clearly not to defund the police but to improve the police. I am not alone in believing that the cries of “defund the police” or cancel “ICE” cost the Democrats many votes in the 2020 election. It was a foolish policy and a needless distraction.

Imagine for a moment what might have happened in the January 6, 2021 insurgency in the Capitol had been by people of color instead of White men and women. How would the police have responded? How quickly would have the National Guard been mobilized, how rapidly would lethal force have been used. Contrast the scene with the march outside the White House last summer and the tactics the police and National Guard used the open a path for the President to have his photo op in front to the Church.

American Jews should be for law and order rooted in social justice, tolerance, and mutual respect. We should be against violence of the right and violence of the left. Stability and tranquility are in the most basic interest of the American Jewish community. Instability invites antisemitism, fuels antisemitism.

While the handling of the Covid crisis did not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews, all were treated to the former President’s incompetence, unwillingness to use the tools of government in a systematic and disciplined way to
address the crisis, false promises, disregard of scientific evidence, optimism unwarranted by reality, ridiculous predictions based on whimsy, quack cures, and finally total abrogation of his responsibilities as President. It was a sad display of how critics thought President Trump might respond in a moment of actual—not manufactured —crisis. He must be given credit for the creation of the vaccine and little credit for anything else. Hundreds of thousands have died needlessly. The United States has some 4% of the world's population and 20% of the infections. This too was clearly abnormal, dare one say delusional. We rounded a corner as he promised many times—and went smack into a wall.

WHY DID ANTISEMITISM INCREASE DURING THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY?

American Jews are rightfully concerned with the rise of antisemitism. Some basic understanding is required. Consider this paradox: according to the Pew Survey, Judaism is the most admired religion, yet antisemitism is on the rise. How are we to make sense of this?

Another paradox: There is also a significant gap between how Jews perceive themselves in North America and Israel and how they are perceived by others.

In North America Jews are perceived as a privileged part of the white majority, meritorious insiders—an odd situation for a community that is approximately 2% of the population in the United States and considers itself a minority. This sense of privilege and power blinds some on the left to antisemitism or gives them the self-serving excuse not to disqualify antisemites from representational role in leftist movement. Their reasoning: if Jews are privileged, they cannot be victims of hatred.

For the extreme right, Jews are not White as White nationalism is White Christian nationalism. And Jews have been a significant beneficiary of and disproportionately responsible for weakening White Christian power.

Many Jews in America have forgotten—or never knew about—the quota systems, housing discrimination, exclusionary clauses, glass ceilings, and worse antisemitic conditions that plagued the immigrant community and their children until they successfully asserted their rights and were perceived by others as having earned those rights in the post-World War II period. Jews are seen by many others, especially by minorities of color, as privileged whites, not naturally inviting sympathy or empathy, but envy and anger at their privilege.
The rise in antisemitism did not happen on its own. It has occurred in a climate in which all sorts of hatreds are on the rise. And despite Donald Trump's wealth, privileges and reaching the highest office in the land, the former President hates many individuals and groups and feels himself the victim of multiple conspiracies out to get him. He was a sore winner in 2016 and a sore loser in 2020. He has espoused hatred, condoned hatred, inspired hatred. His language is combative, he is most comfortable speaking of enemies rather than opponents. He revels in incivility; indeed, he celebrates it and is celebrated by some for it. Over the past several years he has been either the chief creator or a significant influencer of the climate of hatred and disquiet, conditions dangerous to Jews as well as other groups.

_Those who hate, now feel empowered to express their hatred_, and for four years the country moved from crisis to crisis so large segments of the population felt insecure, the country felt unstable.

_The former President polarized the nation_, Red States and Blue States. Polarization divides and excludes. Jews have historically thrived in a stable society and in this society. Neither in tone nor in attitude, neither in policy nor in personnel was the United States stable under the leadership of Donald J. Trump. The instability of a President driven by deep and unfulfilled personal needs and visions of aggrandizement was felt throughout the nation and especially in his political party.

Those who feared not only Trump's authoritarianism but also his lack of commitment to democracy found that the President's post-election behavior vindicated their long-held nightmares. More often than not, Jews do not thrive in authoritarian situations and Jews have thrived under democratic governments.

It is useless to debate whether Donald Trump was and is an anti- semite; it is abundantly clear that he has fueled the flames of antisemitism. Antisemites felt vindicated, even empowered, even called upon. Responding to the President's call to action, they did not hesitate to wear openly antisemitic paraphernalia into the Capitol or the streets of Charlottesville. I presume that even in this polarized society, we can all agree that an Auschwitz staff shirt is manifestly antisemitic.

Trump has reenforced—if I am charitable, I can say unknowingly reenforced—basic antisemitic stereotypes of Jews.

- **Jews control by their money**: In an address to the National Jewish Republican Coalition, he said: “You're not going to support me even though I'm the best thing that could ever happen to Israel. It's
because I don’t want your money.” He employs Jews as his lawyers and accountants. Roy Cohn and Michael Cohen were his fixers. In the end he needed Jewish money. The late Sheldon and Miriam Adelson were the chief financial supporter of his election and reelection efforts.

- **Jews are loyal only to Israel:** He accused American Jews who vote for the Democrats of being disloyal to Israel and introduced Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the National Republican Coalition as “your Prime Minister” clearly reinforcing the antisemitic trope of dual loyalty, misperceiving American Jews relationship to Israel.

- He has engaged in **conspiracy theories** that single out Jews. Remember the accusation that George Soros was funding the caravans invading the United States just prior to the 2018 election? We heard words such as “the system is rigged, the election stolen.” He accepted support and endorsed candidates who advanced conspiracy theories, openly antisemitic ones. In his post-Presidency such support continues even to such figures as Marjorie Taylor Greene.

- On the debate stage with tens of millions of Americans watching **he failed to call out White Supremacy**, which the FBI regards as the greatest threat to social stability and domestic violence and the ADL considers as the great threat to Jewish security in the United States. After January 6, even some right-wing Republican Jews—at least for a time—have recognized its dangers. He claimed that there were “very fine people on both sides” in Charlottesville where openly antisemitic demonstrators endangered Jews.

- In his forced and long delayed statement asking the Capitol invaders to go home peacefully, he spoke of his love for them, without condemning the racism and antisemitism in the people he had summoned to Washington. These men and women felt called by the President, inspired by the President, embraced by the President. They were his people.

Permit me to digress so as not to portray the Jewish condition in dire terms: while incidents of antisemitism rise, the major institutional supporters of antisemitism are on the decline.

Two examples of institutions that are no longer in the business of spreading antisemitism are the Roman Catholic Church and the Communists. The Roman Catholic Church ended its campaign of blaming Jews for Deicide in
the post-Holocaust era with Nostra Aetate (Vatican II), initiated by Pope, now Saint John XXIII. Pope John Paul II, now Saint John Paul II, recognized the State of Israel, declared antisemitism anti-Christian, and apologized for the antisemitism of Christians—not of Christianity—and Pope Francis indicated that no missionary activity should be taken toward Jews, as their covenant with God remains in force. These attitudes have been reinforced by liturgical changes and supported by priestly gestures. Jewish-Roman Catholic relations are the best they have ever been since the advent of Christianity.

The fall of Communism eliminated a second source of antisemitism and Russia itself is headed by a leader who, however difficult and perhaps dangerous to Israel and the rest of the world, has a warm feeling toward Jews—a product of his fond childhood memories of the Jewish neighbors whose gracious hospitality he enjoyed.

On the other hand, the rise of radical Islam, the preaching of some Imams and the antisemitism that comes from certain Arab and Muslim countries—with the support given them by the United Nations and by those who oppose Israel—counteracts the positive institutional changes that emerged toward the end of the twentieth century. On the Moslem front there is some good news as the strategic alliance between Israel and Sunni Muslims will, if it endures over time, diminish Muslim antisemitism.

What accounts for the dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents and expressions? Three factors seem persuasive. First: there is less self-censorship across the board. Today, the expression of all hatred is permissible, including Jew-Hatred/antisemitism. Expressions of hatred are regarded as a mark of authenticity. When Barack Obama was elected president, the expression of racism in America increased dramatically, whether masked as criticism of his policies, his behavior or as direct racism. In the 2016 election, hatred of immigrants, Mexicans and Muslims was fueled by the rhetoric of the Republican campaigns for all offices, and especially Donald J. Trump’s presidential campaign. After his election, the policies and tone of his administration weakened the general sense of civility in American national discourse and destroyed its moral compass. The vociferousness of White Supremacists has added to the toxicity of the atmosphere. The President serves as a role model, if he can espouse hatred and anger so too can his supporters.

Second: social media empowers an avalanche of vitriol and the opportunity for anonymous expression, giving it a megaphone to spread hatred of ethnic minorities and classes. The voices of all haters are reinforced in their views by the communities they form, which are multiplied by a Malthusian-like
progression. This has particularly affected journalists and other prominent public figures who, immediately after publishing their work, are subjected to hatred and death threats online and in their emails, giving individuals as much power as “institutions” that spread hatred. Their offices have also been targeted by bomb threats. The former President’s venom expressed in Tweets was an inspiration to copycats.

Third: social networks allow haters to reach out to each other, to reenforce and strengthen each other’s views, to organize, to feel a sense of belonging. A generation ago, Jewish defense organizations believed that quarantining hatred was an effective strategy. It cannot work today. Social networks offer a sense of belonging and community to the haters locally, nationally, and globally. In our world of atomization and isolation one dare not underestimate its importance. President Trump’s use of these social networks was essential to his power and his magnetism. Being suspended from these platforms, almost as much as completing his presidential term has offered us some respite from turmoil.

On the far right, antisemitism is often a key part of the agenda and a significant target of their rage. “The Jews will not replace us” has become a mantra, a symbol of the erosion of White Christian dominance. It is not credible that Jews who constitute some 2% of the American population will replace White Christian society, so what is meant by that? In a meritocracy Jews have broken the glass ceiling and can now be found disproportionately at the center of American power. And Jewish organizations, individuals and philanthropists support causes that encourage immigration and equality, that break barriers of gender and race.

HAS SUPPORT FOR THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT LED TO GREATER SECURITY?

To be fair, President Trump has been an ardent and honored supporter of the Israeli government. The long overdue gesture of moving the Embassy to Jerusalem and the opening of diplomatic relations with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and other Arab countries are welcome steps. The Trump/Kushner program recognized that the strategic alliance between Sunni Moslems and Israel could become overt and diplomatic relations could be achieved. Even those who, like myself, were repulsed by the Trump administration, must concede that this was a significant accomplishment.
I personally am less impressed than most of my fellow Jews by the importance of the Embassy opening in Jerusalem. My response was and is: “So what? Please hold your attacks for a moment as I stray from a fundamental Jewish consensus. I lived in Jerusalem when it was a divided city. I have seen the wall dividing Jerusalem at the edge of Jaffa Street. I remember Mamilla when it was not a luxury mall, but a slum filled with poor people, workman’s shops, and auto repair places. I participated personally in dismantling the Mandelbaum Gate, collecting the refuse in my distinguished career as a garbage truck driver. I remember standing on Mount Zion and viewing the Old City on Tisha B’Av 5726 (1966) when entry to Jews, even American Jews was forbidden, and we would have to prove that we were not Jews to crossover. I remember going to the Kotel the next year on Shavuot 5727 (1967) with 100,000 or more jubilant Jews, religious and secular, men and women who celebrated the return to the most sacred of Jewish spaces. So, I need no lectures on Jerusalem as one city.”

Yet why was this recognition so important to Israel?

- The Knesset is in Jerusalem.
- The Prime Minister’s Home and Office is in Jerusalem.
- The Foreign Ministry is in Jerusalem.
- The President’s home is in Jerusalem.
- The President Egypt Anwar Sadat spoke at the Knesset in Jerusalem.
- Presidents of the United States have spoken at the Knesset in Jerusalem.
- Every diplomat presents his/her credential to the President of Israel in Jerusalem.
- Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis have visited Israeli leadership in Jerusalem.

In short, why should anyone care that the American Ambassador or any other Ambassador had to travel an hour or an hour and half to reach Israeli leadership in their offices? Only Israel’s and the Jewish people’s abiding sense of insecurity—abnormality—made this a big deal. In retrospect it was not even a big deal, certainly not as big a deal as the State Department long and ever so confidently predicted it to be, in the Arab and Muslim world. It further weakened the Palestinian whose leadership is pathetically tired, weak, divided, and
corrupt. Long ago, it ran out of ideas and imagination. But a weak Palestinian leadership does not necessarily bode well for Israel. Desperate people do desperate things. And tranquility within Israel has been dependent on cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces.

Yet it would be hard to argue that Israel is significantly better off today, more secure today than on January 20, 2017, even with all its economic prosperity, military superiority, even with its new sources of water and energy. Its major weakness is internal.

Israeli society is also facing its crises of leadership, four elections, non conclusions, dysfunctional unstable governments, a Prime Minister facing criminal charges, distrust of its basic institutions, the police, the Courts, the Parliament and the Ministries, religious divisions, ethnic divisions, Arab-Jewish divisions, Jewish-Jewish divisions all within Israel among Israelis. The pandemic, which divided society deeply, has demonstrated the gulf between the Haredi world and Israeli society. I run a business that is partially based in Israel, so I am in daily contact with Israelis, family, friends, business associates and scholars, and I hear their frustration, their anger. The presence of radical racists—followers of Meir Kahane, celebrator of Baruch Goldstein—in the Knesset has not strengthened Israel; their presence was made more tolerable by the Trump administration. After the most recent battle between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs, citizens of Israel both, have demonstrated the urgency of moderation and peaceful co-existence. Israel will have to address, the Jewish people will have to address, such Jewish racism.

Iran has only gotten stronger under the Trump/Netanyahu alliance. It now has the capacity to operate freely over Iraqi, Syrian, and Lebanese territory. The abrogation of the Iran agreement, against the advice of many American and Israeli security officials—but not Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald J. Trump—has sped the process of its potential nuclearization and if there was not a military option during the Trump/Netanyahu alliance, there is even less of a chance for such an option today.

Israel has grown militarily stronger as its neighbors have grown weaker, and it is further strengthened by the discovery of energy and the desalination of water. Its greatest strength, however, lies in the talent of its citizens, well prepared for a globalized world. Its existential threat may not be the Ayatollah's of Iran but the disintegration of internal coherence and trust. In President Rivlin words, there are the tribes of Israel but not the nation of Israel. And even a united Jerusalem is city more divided than at any time since 1967.
One can argue that the unconditional support of the Trump administration has empowered racist forces in Israel. Prime Minister Netanyahu allied himself with Kahanist elements of the Israeli political spectrum and empowered their entry in the Knesset, the long-held dream of their founder Meir Kahane.

I share the belief of many Israelis and most liberal Jewish supporters of Israel at home and abroad that Israel cannot remain a Jewish and democratic state while maintaining control over the Arab population of the West Bank—Judea and Samaria if that is the nomenclature you prefer. Therefore, there is no solution that is somehow not a two-state solution. The de-emphasis on the two-state solution, Israel’s several-day dalliance with annexation, only weakened Israel. The Trump/Kushner plan remained agnostic regarding the two-state solution, it did nothing to advance it; such agnosticism, such formal neutrality, empowered the annexationists and further divided Israeli society. It also allowed the settlers to respond with violence of their own toward their Palestinian neighbors. Weakening the already weakened Palestinians did not strengthen Israel. It only made the Palestinians more desperate and some on the Israel right more arrogant.

THE ANTISEMITIC MURDERS AND THEIR AFTERMATH TOLD US SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THE PRESIDENT AND ABOUT AMERICAN SOCIETY

Jews have been murdered again and again over the past four years. Obviously, the Tree of Life massacre in Pittsburgh was the most prominent example. I would like to focus not on the event but on its aftermath. Did anything “good” come out of the horrific massacre of eleven people praying in Pittsburgh?

Civil Society held. The mayor was there, police went into the building to save Jewish lives and Pittsburgh protested. The World Series began with a moment of silence in memory of the Pittsburgh 11. The Pittsburgh Penguins, the city’s professional hockey team, and the Pittsburgh Steelers, its football team, wore Jewish stars along with their traditional logos. One hundred members of the Steelers—football players, owners, coaches, and management—came to the funeral of two murdered brothers to express solidarity. They were honoring two simple men who loved their fellow congregants and cared for the synagogue. Priests came to the synagogue, so did ministers, pastors and, perhaps more important than all, even Imams.
Joanne Byrd Rogers, the 90-year-old widow of Fred Rogers, came out to speak out against the hatred that caused the nightmare. She and her husband, the legendary and towering moral figure in American society, a man who shaped our children’s lives by teaching them our best values, lived in Squirrel Hill, Mr. Rogers’ [actual] Neighborhood. Joanne Byrd Rogers, his 90-year-old widow, came out to speak out against the hatred that caused the nightmare. Sadly, she died in January 2021.

Newspaper editorials condemned the crime. Reporters covered it everywhere. Pittsburgh born journalists who left to work in other cities came home to write their stories and defend civil society. The Pittsburgh Gazette’s front page was emblazoned with the Hebrew words of the Kaddish.

Most importantly, American Muslims contributed more than $200,000 to the Tree of Life Congregation and the families of those who were murdered. This gave people hope that a more moderate version of Islam is developing in the United States and that there are Muslims who understood that civility is the cornerstone of interreligious discourse and a basic requirement of mainstream American religious life.

**Jewish Lives Matter.** The message was clear. Hatred cannot win out. We are better than this—perhaps not! But we must be better than this. African Americans, who behaved admirably in the aftermath of the Pittsburgh murders, expressing solidarity, praising the Squirrel Hill community for its openness and its respectfulness of a diverse community, should not be blamed if they wondered to themselves when Black lives would matter as much Jewish lives to Americans.

And yet there were two significant silences that must be noted.

**First: then-President Donald Trump could not bring the American people together after a crisis.** Unlike his predecessors, Ronald Reagan after the Challenger disaster, Bill Clinton after the Oklahoma City bombing, George W. Bush after 9/11, and Barak Obama after Sandy Hook, Connecticut and Charleston, South Carolina, Donald J. Trump was not—and is not—capable of uniting the nation. His words were divisive. He blamed the synagogue victims for being unarmed and stood mute in the Tree of Life synagogue with his wife and his Jewish daughter and son-in-law. He did not say a word. And everyone felt relieved that he did not say a word.

Second: the Israeli government, represented by Ambassador to the United States Ronald Dermer and Minister for Diaspora Affairs Naftali Bennett, also stood mute. Because they were so beholden to the volatile American President,
they could not dare to risk provoking his anger and vindictiveness. It is quite possible they had nothing to say.

Most American Jews did not want a repeat of the insensitive Israeli behavior after the terrorist attacks on French Jews represented by the Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Kasher murders. The Prime Minister of Israel came to Paris to march in a parade of European leaders condemning antisemitism. He then addressed the French Jewish community at a synagogue and invited his Jewish audience to “come home” promising them that Israel would protect them.8 Yet at the same time, from different podiums, he indicated Israel faced existential threats from a nuclearized Iran.

He and his government also insisted that the four victims of Hyper Kasher supermarket attack be buried in Israel at the same moment the French President was accepting responsibility for them as Frenchmen. The French President said that “France without its Jews is not France,” therefore reasserting that the Jews are an integral part of the nation and not an alien presence on European soil. Prime Minister Netanyahu said in effect: Jews belong in Israel not in France. A message from the Israeli Prime Minister or his envoys telling people to make Aliyah would not have been well-received by Pittsburgh’s Jews and non-Jews alike. American Jews would have responded poorly to such a call.

The President and the government of Israel would have known how to respond if the killer was a Muslim or a leftist outraged by Israel’s behavior toward the Palestinians. But Israel is led by a rightist government reticent to receive refugees of any color, passes discriminatory laws against them and deports them. Neither they nor the then-President of the United States could deal with an Alt-Right White Supremacist shooter outraged by HIAS, a Jewish organization with a mission to help refugees. Their mantra: “Once we helped immigrants because they were Jews. Now we help immigrants because we are Jews.”

A COUNTRY DIVIDED, A COMMUNITY DIVIDED
Donald Trump’s presidency has left the American Jewish community deeply divided. According to most pollsters American Jews voted 3 to 1 for President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. against Donald J. Trump. Biden’s percentage among Orthodox Jews was lower. J Street with its leftist leanings puts the percentage of Jews at 77%. The National Jewish Republican Coalition, with its Republican allegiance maintained that there was 6% increase in Jews voting for Trump.
The divide among American Jews is also reflected in adherence to Covid-19 protocols which were flaunted in the Haredi community, whose leadership joined with the Roman Catholic Church to overturn restrictions and even some limitations on attendance at religious worship services. New York State tried to accommodate the need for a minyan by restricting gatherings to ten persons or less. I stress the Haredi community because some modern Orthodox rabbis stressed the traditional Jewish teaching of dina d’malchuta dina, the law of the land is the law and pikuach nefesh docha Shabbat, one may violate the Sabbath to save a [Jewish] life. Most Haredi schools and Yeshivas remained opened, often in defiance of governmental mandates, as did many Orthodox schools. In Los Angeles, Orthodox schools redefined themselves as camps but continued as schools, in open defiance and blatant disregard of health safety protocols. And the Haredi community in the United States and in Israel has been disproportionately affected. They began to regard the democratic government of the United States and of Israel in almost the same way that they had regarded Czarist Russia, as openly hostile to Jews, seemingly forgetting that these were health measures designed to protect the population, forgetting that Haredi Jews—and their leadership—were dying and suffering in disproportionate numbers precisely because these restrictions were not observed.

Donald Trump’s presidency has left Israeli Jews and American Jews more deeply divided. Support for Donald Trump was overwhelming among the Israeli Jewish population. Each time the leadership of Israel praised Donald Trump, named a town after him, revered him as a savior—one seemingly ardent supporter of Trump foolishly compared him to Herzl—many American Jews cringed. Something must be wrong with Israel and Israelis if they so admire Trump. Viewing Trump’s behavior and Israel’s and Israelis’ adulation, one wondered if in their heart of hearts, the Israelis do not wish the United States well and truly don’t understand or care about America and American Jews except to the degree that they donate to and are politically useful to Israel. They seemed to disregard the damage to the US’s standing in the world and to America society, taking a singularly short-term attitude of “what’s in it for me, now!” The Trump presidency left many younger American Jews more alienated and less identified with Israel, more perplexed by its values and direction.

Donald Trump’s presidency has left non-Orthodox Jews more alienated from Orthodoxy and more alienated from Evangelical Christians, not because they are more religious and we more secular, but precisely because they portray themselves as religious and celebrate the most anti-religious President in memory and condone sacrilegious policies.
I write as a religious Jew. Daily prayer and daily Torah study, Sabbath observance are essential to my life.

The Torah teaches: “Remember the stranger for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt.” As the grandson of immigrants who came to the United States with nothing but hope, I am naturally inclined to favor immigration. It saved my parents from the Holocaust and allowed me to be born in freedom. As a student and teacher of the Holocaust, I have spent decades protesting that the gates of America were closed to Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. I have taught about “paper walls” used to exclude Jews, about the abandonment of the Jews by American political leadership, about the MS St. Louis turned away from the shores of Miami. How can I honestly argue that the gates of the United States should have been opened for refugees in the 1930s, to a country recovering from the Great Depression, but closed in 2017–20 when we had an unemployment rate of under 4%?

The prophet Micha said: “It has been told to you, oh human, what is it that the Eternal seeks from you? That you do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Humility is the essence of religiosity and Donald Trump is the least humble of men. I have not seen an act of mercy that Trump performed as President.

Proverbs proclaims: “Let strangers praise you and not your own mouth” (Proverbs 27:2). Trump was a morally repugnant man, without an ounce of compassion, without grace or personal decency, without the capacity to empathize. He advanced policies that divided families, deliberately separated parents from their children—and didn’t even bother to keep track of where the parents were—put children in cages, attacked immigrants, comforted the comfortable, and afflicted the afflicted including widows and orphans. He demonstrated personal cruelty. If this person, this presidency could be supported by Orthodox Jews and the Evangelical Christians then something is deeply wrong with their religiosity. I don’t want a faith that leads to such a praxis.

So, after four long years, I conclude reluctantly, sadly, that Trump was bad for America, bad for the Jews, bad for the American Jewish relationship to Israel and Israeli Jews, and to each other, wonderful for the Netanyahu-led government of Israel, and potentially a danger to Israel’s future.

And the blessing I recited at 12 noon on January 21, 2021, was “Blessed be [the Lord] who has freed us of this punishment.” Thanks God it’s over. Let the rebuilding, the healing begin.
Notes

Bibliography


President Donald Trump is deservedly beloved by many Jews, especially, but not only, in the pro-Israel and Orthodox Jewish communities. The reasons for this sentiment include that President Trump implemented his tremendous, lengthy list of pro-Israel promises (described in this essay), raising devoted American Jews’ spirits. Further, young Jews benefited from Trump’s executive order and his administration’s pro-active steps to protect beleaguered American Jewish students from anti-Semitic harassment on college campuses.¹

Trump’s inclusive American patriotism encompassed Jewish Americans and all Americans, as exemplified in these Torah-inspired words in Trump’s inaugural address: “When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice. The Bible tells us how good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.”²

Trump’s basic philosophy towards Israel and the pro-Israel community was embodied in his simple, powerful declaration during a March 2016 campaign speech: “When I become president, the days of treating Israel like a second-class citizen will end on day one.”³ For the Jewish people accustomed to being accorded “second class citizen” status, this was an incredible breath of fresh air. Most significantly, President Trump recognized the Jewish people’s rights to and historical connection to the Land of Israel, including Jerusalem, the Golan and Judea/Samaria. Trump thus respected the Jewish people’s historical claim, US and international law, and the commonsense positions and binding commitments made to the Jewish nation by much earlier US presidents.
and Congress. Trump thus rejected hostile presidents’ (especially Obama’s and Carter’s) and United Nations’ efforts to repudiate and undermine Israel’s basic sovereign rights and the US-Israel alliance.

Trump moreover stood with Israel against Iran’s genocidal mullahs, the Palestinian Authority’s incitement and payments to murder Jews.

I. THE ROOTS OF TRUMP’S PHILOSEMITISM

American presidents’ philosemitism is often developed at an early age. A prime example is young Abraham Lincoln’s upbringing by old school Calvinists who held the Jewish people and Bible in esteem. Lincoln’s schoolbook, the English Reader, favorably depicted Esther’s bravery and defeat of Haman. Lincoln had a Jewish circle of friends and supporters. As president, Lincoln promptly countermanded an antisemitic order, and planned to visit the holy land after completing his presidential term.

Trump’s affinity for the Jewish people and Israel was similarly deep-rooted. Donald’s father Fred donated land, financing, and continuing support for a Brooklyn synagogue whose congregants included many Holocaust survivors. The Trumps (including Donald) and the Rabbi’s family remained lifelong friends.

In February 2005, when David Friedman’s father, Rabbi Morris Friedman, died, a severe snowstorm required David Friedman to sit shiva alone. Donald Trump traveled for three and a half hours through the storm to sit shiva with Friedman, even though Friedman was then simply another attorney for Trump’s business. This kindness marked the beginning of the Trump-Friedman friendship. Throughout the Trump presidency, Friedman served as a superb US Ambassador to Israel. Trump was the Grand Marshall of the 2004 Salute to Israel Parade.

Trump supported his daughter Ivanka’s conversion to Orthodox Judaism, and speaks adoringly about her “beautiful Jewish babies.” Trump also spoke warmly about observance of the Jewish Sabbath: “I have great respect for [the Shabbat traditions] . . . [It’s actually a beautiful thing to watch . . . In a very hectic life, it really becomes a very peaceful time.”
II. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY’S DIVIDED REACTION
Caring pro-Israel Jews were deeply pained when sincerely philosemitic President Trump was outrageously defamed as comparable to a “Nazi” by his political opponents (especially then-candidate Biden), and by leftwing Jewish groups, including the Democratic Jewish Council of America.\footnote{It is an enormous tragedy that groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which is headed by a former special assistant to President Obama, and leftwing Reform movement and J Street also participated in maligning one of the greatest friends of the Jewish people and opposed many of Trump's pro-Israel, pro-Jewish policies.}

The pro-Israel community marveled at President Trump’s strength and accomplishments in the face of ceaseless attacks. Activist Jewish leaders formed “Jews Choose Trump,”\footnote{The pro-Israel community marveled at President Trump’s strength and accomplishments in the face of ceaseless attacks. Activist Jewish leaders formed “Jews Choose Trump,” “Jews for Trump,” and “Jews Choose Four More Years PAC,” to support the president. Large crowds showed up at “Jews 4 Trump” rallies, and car and boat parades. Many prayed to G-d to protect the President Trump from the malicious efforts to destroy him and his legacy.} “Jews for Trump,”\footnote{Large crowds showed up at “Jews 4 Trump” rallies, and car and boat parades.} and “Jews Choose Four More Years PAC,” to support the president. Large crowds showed up at “Jews 4 Trump” rallies, and car and boat parades.\footnote{Many prayed to G-d to protect the President Trump from the malicious efforts to destroy him and his legacy.} Many prayed to G-d to protect the President Trump from the malicious efforts to destroy him and his legacy.

III. A GOLDEN ERA—AND ITS FUTURE IMPACT
The Trump presidency was a golden era for the Jewish people. But frighteningly, the Biden administration appears to be hell-bent on rapidly dismantling many of President Trump’s pro-Israel and Jewish civil rights policies.\footnote{The Trump presidency was a golden era for the Jewish people. But frighteningly, the Biden administration appears to be hell-bent on rapidly dismantling many of President Trump’s pro-Israel and Jewish civil rights policies.} In July 2020, then-candidate Biden appeared together with Islamist radicals opposed to Israel’s existence at the “Million Muslim Votes Summit” and promised to reverse a long list of Trump’s pro-Israel policies.\footnote{In July 2020, then-candidate Biden appeared together with Islamist radicals opposed to Israel’s existence at the “Million Muslim Votes Summit” and promised to reverse a long list of Trump’s pro-Israel policies.} Upon obtaining the presidency, President Biden appointed a slew of high-level officials who are hostile to Jews and Israel and who seek to appease Iran. These include appointees who justified violence against Jews, arranged for boycotts against pro-Israel organizations, and organized anti-Israel demonstrations.\footnote{Upon obtaining the presidency, President Biden appointed a slew of high-level officials who are hostile to Jews and Israel and who seek to appease Iran. These include appointees who justified violence against Jews, arranged for boycotts against pro-Israel organizations, and organized anti-Israel demonstrations.} These appointees promptly set about carrying out Biden’s promised troubling agenda.

Fortunately, at least a few of President Trump’s accomplishments—such as moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, will likely remain intact. Shortly after President Biden took office, the Senate overwhelmingly (97 to 3) passed an amendment to keep the US Embassy in Jerusalem.\footnote{Fortunately, at least a few of President Trump’s accomplishments—such as moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, will likely remain intact. Shortly after President Biden took office, the Senate overwhelmingly (97 to 3) passed an amendment to keep the US Embassy in Jerusalem.} Even where it may not succeed, there is Congressional and other pushback against Biden’s reversals of Trump’s pro-Jewish, pro-Israel accomplishments.
For instance, after Biden’s Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the US will rejoin the antisemitic,\(^{25}\) Israel-bashing United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC),\(^{26}\) which Trump and his UN ambassador, Amb. Nikki Haley, had courageously left, forty-four Congressmembers immediately signed a letter, led by Texas Rep. Chip Roy, aptly calling Biden and Blinken’s plan to rejoin the UNHRC “morally reprehensible.”\(^{27}\) Congressman Roy also introduced legislation to prohibit using taxpayer funds for the UNHRC.\(^{28}\)

Other sensible pro-Israel Trump policies, overturned by the Biden administration, will nonetheless live on as the ideals that millions of Americans and American Jews will aspire to return to.

IV. TRUMP UNDERSTOOD THE REAL IMPEDIMENTS TO MIDDLE EAST PEACE—THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY, RADICAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM AND IRAN

President Trump demonstrated that peace can best be achieved by standing with Israel and other Middle Eastern allies, instead of by appeasing enemies and terrorists. Trump promised during his inaugural address, “We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones, and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth.”\(^{29}\)

A. The PA

Trump understood and acted upon the fact that the real impediments to peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority ("PA") are the PA’s incitement and “pay to slay” payments rewarding Arab terrorists for murdering Jews and Americans: Trump demanded that PA dictator Mahmoud Abbas end incitement and payments to terrorists\(^{30}\); signed the Taylor Force Act;\(^{31}\) and stopped the flow of US tax dollars to the Palestinian Authority (PA), so that US moneys would no longer facilitate those gruesome payments.\(^{32}\)

Worrisomely, in April 2021, Biden announced $235 million in aid to the Palestinian Arabs,\(^{33}\) over Israel’s strong objection, without requiring the PA to end its “pay to slay” payments. ($150 million will flow through UNRWA—see item B. below.) In addition, Biden sent $15 million to the Palestinian Arabs in March 2021.\(^{34}\) Further, in late May 2021, after Hamas launched 4,340 rockets at Israel in two weeks, and the PA incited pogroms by Israeli-Arabs on their
Jewish neighbors, including breaking into Jewish homes, and burning Jewish schools and synagogues, Biden’s Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the US is “in the process of providing more than $360 million in urgent support to the Palestinian people,” including millions of new funding to the PA and Gaza. US tax dollars will thus once again enable the PA’s heinous payments to Jew-killers (likely in violation of the Taylor Force Act), and UNRWA’s support of Hamas.35

President Trump also promised to close the PLO Mission in Washington if the PA/PLO failed to stop “pay to slay” payments, and followed through with his promise when the PA continued to financially reward murdering Jews and Americans.36 Further, President Trump’s Vision for Peace insisted upon the sensible prerequisite for a peace deal, that the Palestinians must stop financially compensating and incentivizing violence, and end all programs that teach hatred of Jews and Israel, including school curricula and textbooks.37

In addition, Trump appropriately down-graded the US consulate in Jerusalem, which had catered to the Palestinian Authority, into a division of the US Embassy. The consulate was an insult to Israel’s sovereignty in Jerusalem: no other country has a US consulate catering to a non-sovereign group. Unfortunately, in late May 2021, Biden’s Secretary of State stated that the administration will re-open the insulting US consulate.38 Biden’s campaign promises also included re-opening the PLO mission, even though doing so would violate US law.39

B. UNRWA
Trump also appropriately cut off funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (“UNRWA”)—the corrupt UN agency that teaches generations of Arabs to hate Jews and Israel; employs Hamas terrorists; perpetuates phony “Palestinian refugee” status among descendants who are not legitimate refugees; and stores weapons for Hamas in Gaza.41 UNRWA’s fraudulent practices have been documented since its outset.42 A recent US report found that there are only 20,000 Palestinian Arab refugees in the world—fewer than UNRWA’s bloated 33,000 employees, and far less than the 5.3 million such refugees that UNRWA fraudulently claims by padding the numbers. Similarly, Lebanon’s census found that UNRWA massively inflated (tripled) the actual number of Palestinian Arab refugees in Lebanon, even under UNRWA’s expansive refugee definition.44 As noted above, unfortunately Biden promptly restored funding to UNRWA.
C. Iran
The Iran deal (the JCPOA) paved Iran’s way to nuclear weapons and increased Iran’s financial support for its terror proxies and activities. Iran moreover violated the deal from day one—and the deal was an existential threat to both the United States and Israel.

In January 2018, Trump gave Iran a last chance to fix the Iran deal’s fatal flaws. In May 2018, after no corrections to the deal or Iran’s behavior occurred, President Trump appropriately withdrew from the disastrous Iran deal and announced, among other things, that:

“iran remains the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism, and provides assistance to Hezbollah, Hamas, the Taliban, al-Qa’ida, and other terrorist networks. . . . Since the JCPOA’s inception, . . . Iran has only escalated its destabilizing activities. . . . Meanwhile, Iran has publicly declared it would deny the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to military sites in direct conflict with the Additional Protocol to its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. In 2016, Iran also twice violated the JCPOA’s heavy water stockpile limits. This behavior is unacceptable, especially for a regime known to have pursued nuclear weapons in violation of its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. . . .”

Soon thereafter, President Trump announced that “the United States has launched a campaign of economic pressure to deny the regime the funds it needs to advance its bloody agenda.”

Trump proved that “maximum pressure” Iran sanctions in fact work: these sanctions dramatically reduced Iran’s military expenditures and funding of its terror proxies, thereby reducing the proliferation of terror. The sanctions also placed the US in a position to obtain a far better nuclear deal, if the US properly maintained those strong sanctions as leverage.

Moreover, instead of putting “daylight” between Israel and the administration (as Obama did), President Trump frequently discussed with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu their “continued close coordination on countering the malign influence of Iran.”

Trump also made the Middle East safer for US forces, Israel, and our other allies via the US’ targeted killing of designated terrorist and IRGC leader Qasem Soleimani—who had murdered hundreds of Americans, Jews, and others. At the time Soleimani was assassinated, Soleimani “was plotting imminent and sinister attacks on American diplomats and military personnel.”

While it is unknown whether the US had any role in the targeted
assassination of chief Iranian nuclear terrorist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, this too
saved an enormous number of American, Jewish, and other lives.\textsuperscript{52}

President Trump also showed that the American people cherish our ally
Israel and oppose appeasing Iran’s dangerous mullahs. At virtually every rally,
Trump elicited huge cheers from the massive crowds there when he proudly
recalled moving of the US embassy to Israel’s capital Jerusalem and ending the
disastrous Iran deal.\textsuperscript{53}

Unfortunately, Biden gave top posts in his administration to Obama’s
top Iran deal negotiators, including Wendy Sherman,\textsuperscript{54} Robert Malley,\textsuperscript{55} John
Kerry,\textsuperscript{56} Jake Sullivan,\textsuperscript{57} and William Burns.\textsuperscript{58} The Biden administration then
promptly began talks to lift sanctions on Iran and re-enter the original deleteri-
ous Iran deal.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{D. Israel’s Right to Self Defense}

The Trump administration strongly affirmed that “Israel absolutely has a sov-
earign right to defend itself”\textsuperscript{60}—and took no actions to undermine that right.
Pres. Biden also voiced support for Israel’s right to defend herself. However,
Biden is believed to have exerted enormous pressure on Israel to prematurely
discontinue efforts to demolish Hamas’ and Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s terror
infrastructure in Gaza; Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi reportedly
acknowledged during the Israeli cabinet meeting agreeing to the ceasefire that
Israel no longer had sufficient international support to continue the opera-
tion.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{V. TRUMP AFFIRMED ISRAEL’S LAWFUL RIGHTS TO HER LAND}

\textbf{A. Trump’s Pre-Inaugural Battle to Stop
Obama’s Push for Anti-Israel UN Resolutions}

Donald Trump’s first major, courageous presidential battle on behalf of the
Jewish people occurred in December 2016, while Trump was still president-
elect. Trump and his transition team—including General Michael Flynn,
Jared Kushner, and David Friedman—vigorously lobbied member nations
of the United Nations Security Council (unfortunately unsuccessfully) to try
to stop the passage of extremely anti-Israel UNSC Resolution 2334.\textsuperscript{62} Leaked documents revealed that the lame duck Obama administration (including John Kerry and Susan Rice) worked with the PLO to orchestrate UNSC Res. 2334.\textsuperscript{63}

On December 22, 2016, President-elect Trump spoke with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and persuaded Egypt (which was the original nominal sponsor of UNSC Res. 2334) to withdraw the resolution that day.\textsuperscript{64} However, the next day (December 23), New Zealand, Malaysia, Venezuela, and Senegal re-introduced the resolution. UNSC Res. 2334 was adopted on the same day, due to the Obama administration’s behind-the-scenes maneuvers in collaboration with the PA,\textsuperscript{65} and abstention to enable the resolution to pass.

UNSC Resolution 2334\textsuperscript{66} falsely and outrageously—and in violation of international law—declared that Judaism’s holiest sites, including the Temple Mount, Western Wall, Jerusalem’s Old City and its Jewish Quarter, the Mount of Olives and its 2,500-year-old Jewish cemetery, as well as Hadassah Hospital, Hebrew University, and the historic Jewish heartlands of Judea and Samaria, are all "occupied Arab land." UNSC Res. 2334 also promoted BDS (anti-Israel boycotts, divestment and sanctions), and falsely claimed that Jewish homes in the above-listed historic Jewish areas "have no legal validity, and constitute [. . .] a flagrant violation of international law."

As the International Legal Professor Eugene Kontorovich notes, the UN Security Council has no authority to make or interpret international law.\textsuperscript{67} Resolutions such as UNSC 2334 are moreover null and void because they contradict binding international law discussed below, including the British Mandate, the Anglo-American Treaty of 1924, and UN Charter Article 80—which prohibit the UN (and others) from ceding the Jewish people’s land to any other entity.

UNSC Res. 2334 was widely condemned.\textsuperscript{68} The US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed\textsuperscript{69} a bipartisan resolution strongly condemning UNSC Res. 2334.\textsuperscript{70} Senator Tom Cotton stated: “This cowardly, disgraceful action cements President Obama’s richly deserved legacy as the most anti-Israel president in American history. This resolution hurts the prospects for a secure and just peace by targeting Israel for building homes in Jerusalem, its own capital, while not specifically addressing Palestinian incitement of and financial support for terrorism.”

Unfortunately, despite UNSC Res. 2334’s legal invalidity, UNSC Resolution 2334 continues to enable economic boycotts against Israel and has been a potent propaganda tool to delegitimize the Jewish state and falsely delegitimize 700,000 innocent, devoted Jews, who live in the historic Jewish
homeland, as “flagrant” violators of international law. The resolution also placed Trump in a position at the outset, in which Trump would have an uphill climb to undo serious damage done by Obama.

Shortly after passing UNSC Resolution 2334, Obama tried to orchestrate an even worse UN resolution, to impose parameters that would force establishing a Palestinian Arab state on the suicidal-to-Israel 1949 Armistice Lines. The 1949 Armistice lines are where the fighting stopped, after six Arab nations invaded Israel in 1948, killed over 6,000 Jews, and seized lands guaranteed to the Jewish state, including the historic Jewish areas of eastern Jerusalem and Judea/Samaria. The armistice agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbors specifically stated that the Armistice lines have no precedential effect.

The 1949 Armistice lines are also called the “1967 lines,” the “pre-1967 lines,” and “the green line,” and were aptly called “Auschwitz lines” by dovish Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban, because these lines would leave Israel with an indefensible waist of less than 9 miles across. Then-Governor George W. Bush famously commented during a 1998 helicopter ride over the area: “In Texas, we have driveways longer than that.” The “Protectors of Israel” (HaBithonistim) organization, comprised of 1,700 high-ranking Israeli officers and security professionals, explain that Israel’s retention of Judea/Samaria is vital for Israel to be able to defend herself. The indefensibility of the 1949/pre-1967 lines is precisely why those who wish to destroy Israel seek to push Israel back to these lines.

After Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon learned that the Obama administration was trying to enact this second disastrous resolution, Israel successfully sought a Russian veto. The Trump transition team’s General Flynn called Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Russia decided to veto the resolution, forcing Obama to abandon it. The Obama administration then engineered baseless criminal charges against patriot General Flynn, regarding his phone calls with Ambassador Kislyak.

B. Background on Presidential Commitments and Policies Regarding Israel’s Sovereign Rights
A very brief review of key past presidential policies regarding Israel’s sovereign rights is helpful for putting the Trump era into perspective. President Trump halted recent presidents’ (especially Carter’s and Obama’s) efforts to undermine the pro-Israel policies and rights guaranteed to the Jewish people by US
and international law. Trump thus restored Israel’s lawful rights affirmed by predecessors such as Presidents Adams, Cleveland, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Truman, LBJ, and many others.

Early US Presidents were sympathetic to restoring the Jewish nation in her homeland. President John Adams wrote to a member of the Spanish Portuguese synagogue in New York that he wished he could be at the head of “a hundred thousand Israelites . . . & marching with them into Judea & making a conquest of that country & restoring your nation to the dominion of it. For I really wish the Jews again in Judea an independent nation.”

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson pre-approved the Balfour Declaration. Wilson’s pre-approval was a pre-requisite for Britain’s issuance of the declaration embracing the reestablishment of the Jewish homeland. President Wilson later told his friend Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (a former Zionist Organization of America president), “How proud I am that because of the teachings instilled in me by my father, it has been my privilege to restore the Holy Land to its rightful owners.” Moreover, regarding anti-Zionist Jews who opposed the Balfour Declaration, Wilson stated: “My waste-basket is big enough to take care of all such letters.”

In 1922, President Warren Harding signed the Lodge-Fish resolution, also approving the establishment of the Jewish homeland in the area of the former Ottoman Empire referred to as Palestine, which included Israel within the “green line” as well as Judea/Samaria and all of Jerusalem and Jordan.

In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge signed and the US Senate ratified the Anglo-American Treaty of 1924, which reiterated and consented to the 1922 British Mandate for Palestine. The 1922 Mandate (and the Anglo-American Treaty of 1924) recognized “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine”; designated the area (including Judea/Samaria and Jerusalem) as a “sacred trust” for “reconstituting” the Jewish homeland; and made the Mandatory (Britain) responsible to “secure the establishment of the Jewish national home,” and “for seeing that no Palestine territory shall be ceded or leased to, or in any way placed under the control of, the Government of any foreign Power.”

In 1945, President Harry Truman agreed to the UN Charter, which, in Article 80, preserved intact all rights granted to the Jewish people under the Mandate, even after the Mandate would expire in 1948. Article 80 prohibits the UN from transferring rights over any part of Palestine to any non-Jewish entity, such as a “Palestinian state.” UN resolutions (such as UNSC Res. 2334) that contradict the Charter are thus void.
In June 1967, Israel regained territories (Judea/Samaria and eastern Jerusalem) that Jordan illegally seized and held for nineteen years, from 1948–67, after six Arab nations invaded Israel in 1948. President Lyndon Johnson promptly declared that Israel was entitled to “recognized boundaries and other arrangements that will give them security against terror, destruction, and war,” and that an Israeli withdrawal to the 1949 Armistice lines “is not a prescription for peace but for renewed hostilities.”

Johnson and his Ambassador to the United Nations, Arthur Goldberg made certain that unanimously-adopted UN Security Council Resolution 242 guaranteed Israel “secure and recognized borders” and did not require Israel to withdraw from all territories that Israel liberated in the defensive Six Day War.

President George W. Bush, in his April 14, 2004, letter to Israel’s prime minister, reiterated Israel’s entitlement to “secure and recognized borders,” and affirmed that, “In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers [Jewish communities in Judea/Samaria], it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949.”

C. Carter and Obama Attempted to Undermine Israel’s Sovereign Rights

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter ran roughshod over the policies and the binding international legal rights enshrined in the forgoing agreements. Carter’s State Department legal adviser, Herbert Hansell, authored the infamous “Hansell letter,” which wrongly claimed that Israeli civilian “settlements” (Jewish homes and communities) in the “West Bank,” Gaza, the Golan, and Sinai were in “occupied territories” and were “inconsistent with international law.” (Jordan renamed Judea and Samaria the “West Bank” after Jordan illegally seized and occupied Judea/Samaria and eastern Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967.)

By its own terms, the Hansell letter’s conclusions that Israel’s presence in Judea/Samaria and Gaza was an “occupation” expired when Israel signed peace agreements with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Yet anti-Israel activists continue to cite and attempt to resuscitate the Hansell letter’s false claims that Jewish communities in the Jewish homeland are illegal and an “occupation.”

Subsequent administrations disagreed with the Hansell letter. Reagan flatly stated, “I disagreed when the previous [Carter] Administration referred to them [settlements] as illegal, they’re not illegal.” Reagan also noted that the first hurdle to peace was the refusal of Arab nations to recognize Israel’s right to exist.
However, even before he orchestrated UNSC Resolution 2334, Obama tried to delegitimize the right of Jews to live in the Jewish historic heartlands which are guaranteed to Israel under international law and are essential to Israel’s security. In his infamous June 2009 Cairo speech, Obama stated that “[t]he United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements,” and falsely complained about Israeli “occupation.” In another notorious speech on May 19, 2011, Obama again falsely complained about “occupation” and called for pushing Israel back to the Auschwitz lines, saying: “we believe the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps.” Similarly, at his 2016 speech at the United Nations, Obama called for Israel to “recognize [. . .] that it cannot permanently occupy and settle Palestinian land.”

The Obama administration even condemned Israel for approving apartments in Jerusalem—calling them “settlements.” Obama also refused to honor the George W. Bush administration’s 2004 agreement approving natural growth within the existing area of “settlements,” and instead demanded a stop to all building of Jewish homes in “settlements.”

Obama also instigated or maintained numerous additional biased policies to undermine Israel’s sovereignty—including not moving the US embassy to Jerusalem; re-issuing anti-Israel Clinton-era product labeling guidelines; supporting antisemitic EU labeling guidelines; attacking the pro-Israel portions of a Congressional trade law; and not allowing Americans born in Jerusalem to list “Jerusalem, Israel” on their passports. At a White House meeting in 2011, Obama urged leaders of America’s fifty major Jewish organizations to “search their souls” about Israel’s seriousness for peace—thereby wrongly placing the onus for the lack of peace on Israel—at the same time that the Palestinian Authority continued to pay terrorists to murder innocent Jews. Trump changed all this.

D. Trump Reinstated and Effectuated American Support for Israel’s Sovereign Rights
The Trump transition team’s efforts to block the Obama-orchestrated anti-Israel UN resolutions was only the first of many Trump administration efforts to reinstate and implement American support for Israel’s sovereign rights.

(1) Jerusalem Recognition/US Embassy Move: In December 2017, President Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and directed the move of the US Embassy to Jerusalem. Trump’s announcement affirmed that
Israel was entitled to the sovereign rights enjoyed by all other nations, saying: “Israel is a sovereign nation with the right like every other sovereign nation to determine its own capital. . . . It was 70 years ago that the United States, under President Truman, recognized the State of Israel. Ever since then, Israel has made its capital in the city of Jerusalem—the capital the Jewish people established in ancient times.”\(^\text{102}\)

Trump’s announcement occurred twenty-three years after Congress overwhelmingly passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995,\(^\text{103}\) which recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and called for moving the embassy to Jerusalem no later than 1999. Throughout those twenty-three years, Congress passed additional laws calling for presidents to comply with the Jerusalem Embassy Act—\(^\text{104}\) and yet US presidents repeatedly waived implementing the Jerusalem Embassy Act.\(^\text{105}\)

Following Trump’s announcement, the US Embassy opened in Jerusalem in a record six months, on May 14, 2018, the seventieth anniversary of modern Israel’s independence.\(^\text{106}\) Trump’s move received significant bipartisan support,\(^\text{107}\) and demonstrated that US policy should not be determined by radical Islamist terrorist threats. Trump also encouraged and welcomed other nations’ moves of their embassies to Jerusalem.\(^\text{108}\)

(2) Passports: Showing further respect for Israel’s sovereign capital, the Trump administration allowed Americans born in Jerusalem to finally list “Jerusalem, Israel” on their US passports—voluntarily becoming the first administration to comply with the law Congress passed in 2002 requiring the State Department to allow Americans born in Jerusalem to list their birth country.\(^\text{109}\) (In 2003, the ZOA initiated the first case for an American seeking to have “Jerusalem, Israel” listed on his passport, and fought long legal battles challenging the Bush ’43 and Obama administrations’ refusals to comply with the passport law.\(^\text{110}\)

(3) Golan Recognition: The Golan Heights’ Jewish history dates back to biblical times continuing through the ninth century CE. Thirty-eight ancient synagogues’ remains were found there. In the 1880s, Jews purchased large tracts of land and farmed in the Golan. The Golan was guaranteed to the Jewish people in the British Palestine Mandate; but then, without authorization, England traded the Golan to France in return for British rights to Iraqi oil fields.\(^\text{111}\) Syria (created in 1946 from the French Mandate) used the Golan to launch deadly attacks on Israel. Israel recaptured the Golan in 1967. The Golan provided the buffer that saved Israel from being entirely overrun by Syria’s invasion of Israel in the surprise 1973 Yom Kippur War. Today, Israeli
sovereignty in the Golan enables Israel to defend against Iranian, Hezbollah and other terror groups’ attacks from southern Syria. Israeli sovereignty over Israel’s portion of the Golan is thus historically warranted, stabilizing, and a security necessity.112

On Purim (March 21), 2019, Trump cheered the pro-Israel community by announcing, “After 52 years it is time for the United States to fully recognize Israel’s Sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and Regional Stability!” 113 Five days later, with Israeli Prime Minister at his side, Trump formally recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, noting that “Iran, terrorist groups in Southern Syria, including Hezbollah, continue to make the Golan Heights a potential launching ground for attacks against Israel. Very violent attacks. Any possible future peace agreement must account for Israel’s need to defend itself from Syria, Iran, and other regional threats.” 114

Alarmingly, the Biden administration promptly unraveled and refused to confirm US recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan. Instead, Biden’s Secretary of State Blinken stated that “legal questions” about the Golan are “something we’d look at” if the situation in Syria changes.115

(4) Recognizing Judea-Samaria Communities’ Legality: In November 2019, Secretary of State Pompeo announced that the Trump administration was reversing the Carter and Obama administrations’ attempts to delegitimize the legality of “settlements” (Jewish communities in Judea-Samaria). Secretary Pompeo further explained, “After carefully studying all sides of the legal debate, this administration agrees with President Reagan. The establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law. . . . [C]alling the establishment of civilian settlements inconsistent with international law hasn’t . . . advanced the cause of peace.” 116

Pompeo’s announcement was a vital development. As international Law Professor Eugene Kontorovich wrote, Israeli settlements do not in fact violate international law, and the Trump administration’s recognition of this fact busted the baseless “occupation myth” employed by Israel’s detractors.117

The Trump administration also ended the Obama administration’s antisemitic policy of condemning Jews for building homes in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Jewish homeland.

(5) Visits to Judean Winery and the Golan: In November 2020, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo’s visited the Psagot Winery in Benjamin in the Judean Hills near Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. These visits underscored Israel’s sovereign rights to Judea-Samaria and the Golan and
counteracted the delegitimization of Israel’s rights. Secretary Pompeo tweeted, “Enjoyed lunch at the scenic Psagot Winery today. Unfortunately, Psagot and other businesses have been targeted by pernicious EU labeling efforts that facilitate the boycott of Israeli companies. The US stands with Israel and will not tolerate any form of delegitimization.”

(6) Scientific, Industrial and Agricultural Research in Judea-Samaria and the Golan: During a ceremony at Ariel University in Samaria, Israel in October 2020, US Ambassador David Friedman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed three revised scientific, industrial, and agricultural research cooperation agreements that removed previous restrictions on funding scientific projects in Judea, Samaria, and the Golan Heights. The Trump administration thereby recognized that scientific knowledge and cooperation between the US and Israel should not be limited by artificial boundaries that deny Israel’s sovereign rights.

(7) Trump’s Vision for Peace: A few months after the Trump administration recognized that “settlements” are legal, the newly unveiled Trump “Vision for Peace” or “Peace to Prosperity” plan likewise recognized Judea-Samaria as “territory to which Israel has asserted valid legal and historical claims, and which are part of the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people.”

The Trump peace plan further acknowledged that UN Security Council Resolution 242 did not legally require Israel to provide the Palestinians with 100% of pre-1967 territory, and that Israel has already withdrawn from 88% of the territory Israel (re-)captured in 1967.

Trump’s “Vision for Peace” moreover insisted that Israel would not need to uproot any settlements, and that the 97% of Israeli settlements would be incorporated into contiguous Israeli territory (with the remaining 3% of Israeli “enclaves” connected via roads).

Trump’s peace plan also acknowledged the Jewish people’s long religious and historical connection to Jerusalem; praised Israel “for safeguarding the religious sites of all” for the past fifty years; recommended that peaceful worshippers of all faiths—including the Jewish people—should be permitted to pray on the Temple Mount (Judaism’s holiest site, now under control of the Jordanian Wakf), and stated that “Jerusalem will remain the sovereign capital of the State of Israel” and should remain an undivided city.

Numerous other positive aspects of Trump’s “Vision for Peace” also moved the “peace paradigm” away from the disastrous, suicidal-for-Israel parameters that Obama tried to impose, and went a long ways towards recognizing Israel’s rightful sovereignty and security needs.
There were, however, several drawbacks to the Trump plan. The Trump plan’s conceptual maps only allocated 30% of Judea-Samaria to Israel (half of Area C—the area now under Israeli jurisdiction) and left some key roads under Arab control. This would have allowed a Palestinian Arab state to build hostile communities surrounding certain Jewish communities in Area C—even though Areas A and B, which are under Palestinian Authority control, have plenty of open space available for Arab growth. Fortunately, the maps were merely “conceptual” and remained subject to negotiation.

The Trump plan also conditionally recommended some form of Palestinian Arab state—and virtually any such state would likely end up as a terror launching pad. Fortunately, the peace plan also set forth important conditions that the PA had to meet before such a Palestinian Arab state could be negotiated—including ending the PA’s incitement and “pay to slay” payments to murder Jews.

Despite such drawbacks, the Trump plan was far better than the parameters that Obama tried to impose—which disastrously tried to carve off all of Judea-Samaria for a Palestinian-Arab terror state, with only agreed-to swaps. Moreover, the Trump peace plan’s acknowledgement of the legal validity of Israel’s capital, territory, and Jewish communities helped end the delegitimization of Israel’s rights.

(8) Trump’s Respectful “Facilitator” Role: The Trump administration also respected Israeli sovereignty by only acting as a facilitator. The administration made it clear that the parties could take, leave or negotiate Trump’s Vision for Peace. This was a stark contrast to the previous administrations’ attempts to impose parameters that would endanger Israel’s security.

(9) Labeling Regulations: The Trump administration also reversed Clinton and Obama-era labeling regulations that had discriminated and facilitated boycotts against Israeli products made in Judea-Samaria, harming 500,000 Jews living in these areas, Jewish businesses, and all employees (both Arab and Jewish) of these businesses. The Trump administration’s new guidelines properly allowing products from Israeli territories in Judea Samaria (Area C and H2) to be labeled “Made in Israel.”

Sadly, shortly after Biden took office, six leftwing Jewish groups, including J Street and New Israel Fund (“NIF,” which funds groups that boycott and demonize Israel), urged the Biden administration to rescind the non-discriminatory pro-Israel Trump labeling regulations, and to re-enact the harmful Obama regulations. ZOA promptly spearheaded a letter to the Biden administration from thirty-one authentically pro-Israel Jewish and Rabbinic
organizations calling for maintaining the Trump “Made in Israel” labeling regulations.\textsuperscript{134}

The labeling issue is unfortunately endemic of certain leftwing Jews’ harmful attempts to turn the clock back to the era when Jews and Israel were “second class citizens,” and to undermine the pro-Israel community’s efforts to maintain the Trump administration’s pro-Israel advances.

10 \textbf{Standing Up for Israeli Sovereignty by Condemning and Combating PA’s Instigation of Illegitimate ICC Investigation of Israel}: The Trump administration strongly and repeatedly condemned the Palestinian Authority’s filing of phony “war crimes” charges against Israel at the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the ICC’s politicized, illegitimate attempts to assert jurisdiction over Israel (and over the US).\textsuperscript{135} The ICC’s assertion of jurisdiction violated Israeli and US sovereignty. The Rome statute that created the ICC limits the ICC’s jurisdiction to parties to the Rome statute. Israel and the US are not parties. Trump’s Secretary of State Michael Pompeo noted: “A court that attempts to exercise its power outside its jurisdiction is a political tool that makes a mockery of the law and due process.”\textsuperscript{136}

The Trump administration also took action to combat the Palestinian Authority’s and ICC’s abuses: In September 2018, the US ended the waiver that had allowed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)’s office in Washington, D.C. to remain open (and thus required the PLO office to close), in part because the PLO took no steps to negotiate with Israel, and in part because of “Administration and Congressional concerns with Palestinian attempts to prompt an investigation of Israel by the International Criminal Court.”\textsuperscript{137}

Also, in June 2020, the Trump administration announced that it was imposing economic sanctions and visa restrictions against ICC personnel investigating the US or America’s allies (Israel). That announcement described the ICC’s lack of due process and corruption, and noted:

We’re also gravely concerned about the threat the [ICC] poses to Israel. The ICC is already threatening Israel with an investigation of so-called war crimes . . . Given Israel’s robust civilian and military legal system and strong track record of investigating and prosecuting wrongdoing by military personnel, it’s clear the ICC is only putting Israel in its crosshairs for nakedly political purposes. It’s a mockery of justice.” “More than 300 members of Congress—Republicans and Democrats alike—recently sent me letters asking that the United States support Israel in the face of the ICC’s lawless, politicized attacks. That’s what the US is dead set on doing, and with good reason. They’re a trusted
and wonderful partner and a buttress of American security. If a rogue
court can intimidate our friend or any other ally into abrogating its
right to self-defense, that puts Americans at risk as well.\textsuperscript{138}

In March 2021, Biden’s Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the
US “firmly opposes and is deeply disappointed by” the ICC’s decision to inves-
tigate Israel.\textsuperscript{139} Fifty-three US Senators then signed a bi-partisan letter urging
the Biden administration to do more—to use the “full force” of America’s influ-
ence against the ICC’s illegitimate investigation of Israel, and “to defend Israel
against discriminatory attacks in all international fora.”\textsuperscript{140}

But, unfortunately, in April, Biden revoked the US sanctions on ICC per-
sonnel, thus ending a key enforcement action needed to stop the ICC’s unlaw-
ful investigation of Israel.\textsuperscript{141} It is also concerning that during his campaign,
Biden promised to re-open the PLO office in Washington D.C.—another move
which would undermine efforts to stop the unlawful PA/PLO ICC investiga-
tion of Israel.\textsuperscript{142}

\textbf{(11) Peace Agreements:} The Abraham Accords that the US brokered
between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan were also an im-
portant step in recognizing Israeli sovereignty, as well as enhancing regional
stability, peace and a united front against. Secretary Pompeo tweeted: “I am
highly confident that many, many more nations will choose to do the right
thing and recognize Israel as the rightful homeland of the Jewish people.”\textsuperscript{143}

Following the signing of the initial accords, the Trump administration
also facilitated agreements and MOUs establishing diplomatic, trade, telecom-
munications, and other relations and forms of cooperation between Israel and
her Arab neighbors.\textsuperscript{144}

\textbf{(12) Standing Up for Israel at the United Nations:} During Trump’s
presidency, the US consistently voted with Israel, and stood up for Israel’s
sovereign rights at the United Nations. In addition, after trying to reform the
UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)—which spends its time passing res-
olutions bashing Israel and denying Israel’s sovereign rights, while ignoring
real human rights’ abusers, the Trump administration appropriately withdrew
from the UNHRC. (As noted earlier, the Biden administration unfortunately
announced plans to rejoin the UNHRC.)
VI. TRUMP’S VITAL PRO-ISRAEL APPOINTMENTS

Personnel is policy. In the mid-1880s, President Grover Cleveland fired an anti-semitic US consul to Jerusalem, Selah Merrill, and eventually replaced him with an American Jew, Henry Gillman, who supported Jerusalem’s Jewish community. Cleveland also appointed Jewish, Zionist consul Oscar Straus to the Ottoman Empire to help protect Jewish (and Christian) communities in Jerusalem. President William McKinley re-appointed Straus to the same position.

Over a century later, President Trump’s appointment of David Friedman as US Ambassador to Israel restored having a friendly-to-Israel Jewish diplomat represent the United States in Israel, after years of less-than-friendly or even hostile US ambassadors to Israel. Indeed, at the conclusion of Trump’s and Friedman’s terms in office, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said: “there was never a better ambassador than David Friedman in establishing the deep ties between Israel and the US, in correcting the diplomatic injustices that were created over the years in global diplomacy regarding Israel and in establishing the status of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and many other things some of which have yet to be told.”

But sadly, American certain leftwing Jews tried to derail David Friedman’s confirmation as ambassador and continued to condemn Friedman’s pro-Israel positions throughout his term. The Reform movement wrote a public letter that urged Senators to vote against Friedman, condemned Friedman’s wish to follow the law by moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem, and called Friedman’s understanding of Israel’s sovereign rights “extreme views.” The anti-Israel group J Street also ran a vicious “Stop Friedman” campaign.

Friedman’s opponents also organized and featured in their “Stop Friedman” campaign a letter by five former US ambassadors to Israel (Dan Kurtzer, Thomas Pickering, Edward Walker, Jr., James Cunningham, and William Harrop) condemning Friedman. ZOA quickly responded, by sending a letter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, detailing those five former ambassadors’ hostility to Israel, inexperience, and sympathies for Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

Another key Trump appointment was his US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, who eloquently spoke out on Israel’s behalf. This revived the days of assigning strong US pro-Israel champions to the United Nations, such as President Lyndon Johnson’s appointment of Arthur Goldberg; President Gerald Ford’s appointment of Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan; President Bush’s appointment of Ambassador John Bolton; and President Ronald Reagan’s appointment of Jean Kirkpatrick.
Trump made numerous other strong pro-Israel appointments and nominations, such as Ambassadors Ric Grenell (who pushed German businesses to comply with sanctions on Iran), John Bolton and Elan Carr; Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; NSA Robert O’Brien; Jared Kushner; Dr. Sebastian Gorka; Steve Bannon; General Michael Flynn; Jason Greenblatt; Special Representative for International Negotiations Avi Berkowitz; and many more. Such appointees were a stark contrast to other administrations’ too-often hostile-to-Israel appointees.\textsuperscript{151}

VII. TRUMP’S STRONG OPPOSITION TO ANTISEMITISM, NEO-NAZIS, WHITE SUPREMACISTS, ETC.—AND THE CHARLOTTESVILLE HOAX TRAGEDY

Certain media outlets, political opponents and Jewish groups repeatedly falsely painted President Trump as a neo-Nazi- and white-supremacist-sympathizer. Tragically, to this day, many people, including many in the Jewish community, believe this defamation, and do not know the truth that President Trump frequently specifically condemned and denounced neo-Nazism, the KKK, white supremacists, and antisemitism, in the strongest possible terms—and took strong action against these scourges.

A. Trump Protected Jews Suffering From Antisemitism on College Campuses

For years, university and government officials did little to address growing antisemitic harassment of Jewish and pro-Israel students on college campuses. While perpetrators of attacks and harassment against other minority groups were swiftly disciplined, similar attacks were often ignored or downplayed when the victims were Jews or pro-Israel students.

Amcha Initiative’s database of almost 4,000 antisemitic campus incidents, from 2015 to early 2021, reveals that the anti-Israel hate group, Students for Justice in Palestine (“SJP”), and its allies perpetrated most such incidents.\textsuperscript{152} Similarly, over the past seventeen years, ZOA’s Center for Law and Justice (which provides free legal services to Jewish and pro-Israel students who are attacked and harassed) received hundreds of complaints about SJP’s attacks.

The Trump administration dramatically stepped up enforcement of Jewish and pro-Israel students’ rights to a harassment-free environment, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq. (“Title VI”).
In 2018, the US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (“OCR”) re-opened a seven-year-old case against Rutgers University, which alleged that Jewish students were subjected to a hostile environment in violation of Title VI. OCR agreed to also review Rutgers’ current environment, and to use the helpful IHRA definition in its assessment. OCR also obtained groundbreaking agreements with University of North Carolina (UNC) and Duke University, to take specific steps to address antisemitism on their campuses.

President Trump also issued an extremely helpful “Executive Order on Combating Antisemitism” declaring “the policy of the executive branch to enforce Title VI against prohibited forms of discrimination rooted in antisemitism as vigorously as against all other forms of discrimination prohibited by Title VI.”

Trump’s executive order also required enforcement agencies to consider the helpful International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (“IHRA”) working definition of antisemitism. This definition accurately addresses how antisemitism is expressed today, by recognizing that Jew-hatred can be camouflaged as anti-Israelism or anti-Zionism.

We are concerned that the Biden administration will revert to the pre-Trump days of not addressing discrimination against Jewish students. Biden’s new Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, Kristin Clarke, has a long history of antisemitic and anti-Israel activity. She invited Tony Martin to speak at her college, after he wrote a conspiracy book falsely accusing Jews of dominating the slave trade. Martin’s speech denounced Jewish tradition and the Jewish people and called the Talmud’s sages “the earliest racists”—and then Clarke stated that Martin’s speech was based on “indisputable fact.” Clarke recently condemned Israel for denying entry to promoters of anti-Israel boycotts, violence and Hamas; “proudly” supports Linda Sarsour (who calls throwing rocks at Israelis “the definition of courage”); condemned the Trump administration for leaving an anti-Israel UN group; supported required classes that teach white children that they are privileged oppressors; and more.

B. Trump Deported the Last Nazi War Criminal in the US

In 2018, the Trump administration implemented a 2004 order to deport the last known Nazi war criminal from the United States, Jakiw Palij. Previous administrations failed to deport Palij for fourteen years after the US courts
issued his deportation order. Palij was an armed guard at the Trawniki Labor Camp, where 6,000 Jewish children, women, and men were shot to death in one of the single largest massacres of the Holocaust. The White House announcement noted that: “To protect the promise of freedom for Holocaust survivors and their families, President Trump prioritized the removal of Palij,” and encouraged the public to come forward if they knew of others who had committed war crimes and then lied to enter the United States.159

Deporting Palij was a difficult process, involving tough negotiations by US Ambassador to Germany Ric Grenell, propelled by President Trump. This would not have been undertaken by a president who had Nazi sympathies.

C. Accord With Arab Nation to Combat Antisemitism

Following the Abraham Accords, the Trump administration, led by US Department of State Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism Elan Carr, also brokered a groundbreaking Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) on Antisemitism with Bahrain, “to eradicate antisemitism and promote respect and peaceful coexistence between Arab and Jewish people through education and programs.” Special Envoy Carr explained that the MOU “is groundbreaking in that it is the first time in history we are seeing Arab partners formally join the United States in combatting antisemitism and the delegitimization of the State of Israel, and employing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. This partnership will build a future of tolerance, harmony, and peace for generations to come.”160

D. The Charlottesville Episode: Trump in Fact

Combated Neo-Nazism and Antisemitism

The Charlottesville episode was a stunning example of defamation of a president who in fact opposed, repeatedly denounced, and combated antisemitism, neo-Nazism, and white supremacy. Trump’s opponents shamelessly falsely accused him of calling neo-Nazis “very fine people.” But, in fact, Trump had made it clear that the phrase “very fine people on both sides” merely referred to people with differing views as to whether a statue should be removed. In the very same breath as his statement that there were “very fine people” on both sides of the statue removal protest, President Trump said: “I’m not talking about the neo-Nazis and the white nationalists, because they should be condemned totally.”161
Trump also took strong actions to combat the Charlottesville neo-Nazis, etc. He ordered opening a top-priority civil rights investigation into the murder of Heather Heyer; made good on his vow to hold those involved fully accountable; signed and publicly supported S.J. Res. 49, the Charlottesville Joint Resolution, which specifically “reject[ed] white nationalists, white supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and other hate groups”; and again specifically denounced neo-Nazis and other hate groups at Charlottesville, saying:

Racism is evil. And those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans. . . . We will spare no resource in fighting so that every American child can grow up free from violence and fear.

Yet, the Charlottesville calumny defaming President Trump ran amok. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued a press release falsely claiming that “President Trump went beyond the pale today in equating racist white supremacists in Charlottesville with counter protesters who were there to stand up against hate.” (ADL, which is now headed by a former Obama administration official, also wrongly blamed President Trump for emboldening extremists to make bomb threats against Jewish institutions—when the bomb threats were actually made by a disturbed Israeli teenager; opposed ardent friend-of-Israel Mike Pompeo’s nomination and wrongly accused Pompeo of anti-Muslim bigotry; and signed joint letters with radical Islamist groups CAIR, MPAC, and ISNA and Iranian regime lobbyist NIAC.)

Then-candidate Biden’s campaign launch “soul of the nation” video repeated the “very fine people on both sides” statement out-of-context, and falsely claimed: “the president of the United States assigned a moral equivalence between those spreading hate and those with the courage to stand against it.”

The Jewish Democratic Council of America (“JDCA”) also released a video ad, retweeted by JDCA Executive Director Halie Soifer, which falsely portrayed President Trump as a “hater” who endangers Jews’ future, accompanied by Nazi swastikas and Charlottesville and Holocaust imagery. The JDCA also retweeted a post accusing President Trump’s campaign of “similarities to the uprising of Hitler.” We believe that these posts were appalling.

The ubiquitous repetition of the Charlottesville lie could very well have cost Trump the election. In retrospect, in addition to all his other efforts, Trump should have mounted a major advertising campaign to set the record
straight, and to call out those who falsely painted this most philosemitic of presidents as an antisemite and neo-Nazi/white supremacist sympathizer.

Sadly, the left also falsely maligned other strongly pro-Israel officials in the Trump administration as antisemites and neo-Nazi sympathizers. As Rabbi Heshie Billet said, in his article debunking the false Nazi claims leveled at Trump adviser Dr. Sebastian Gorka, “To smear an innocent man is immoral and politically dishonest.”

The Charlottesville calumny may have concerning future consequences. False accusations of antisemitism against those who combat antisemitism can have a chilling effect on our best friends. Will public officials continue to go out of their way to stand up for Israel and the Jewish people, if some Jewish groups respond by falsely accusing those officials of being neo-Nazis?

E. Trump Made Numerous Additional Strong Statements Opposing Antisemitism

In addition to his substantive efforts to combat antisemitism and the statements cited above, President Trump made numerous other statements opposing antisemitism, neo-Nazism, and white supremacy, in the strongest possible terms. For instance, immediately after the Pittsburgh massacre, President Trump made one of the strongest statements against antisemitism ever uttered by a world leader, saying: “The vile, hate-filled poison of anti-Semitism must be condemned and confronted everywhere and anywhere it appears. There must be no tolerance for anti-Semitism in America or for any form of religious or racial hatred or prejudice.”

And in his 2019 State of the Union address, President Trump denounced Iran’s shouts of “Death to Israel” and the Pittsburgh massacre, and made this stirring vow to confront every instance of antisemitism: “We must never ignore the vile poison of anti-Semitism, or those who spread its venomous creed. With one voice, we must confront this hatred anywhere and everywhere it occurs.”

And during an address at the Israel American Council, alongside Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism Elan Carr, Trump repeatedly condemned antisemitism, including saying: “Throughout history, anti-Semitism has produced untold pain, suffering evil, and destruction. We must not ignore the vile poison or those who spread its venomous creed. My administration is committed to aggressively challenging and confronting anti-Semitic bigotry in every resource and using every single weapon at our disposal.”
And, in his remarks when signing his Executive Order on Combatting Anti-Semitism, President Trump declared: “With one voice, we vow to crush the monstrous evil of anti-Semitism whenever and wherever it appears. And we’re working very hard on that. (Applause.) And I can tell you that—that we have a lot of people in government working very, very hard on that, and we appreciate their work.”175

And there are many more examples.

CONCLUSION
Prior to Donald Trump’s presidency, several US administrations had been tightening a vise around Israel’s neck, producing fear and worry among many pro-Israel Americans. Prior administrations also did little to counteract the harassment of Jewish and pro-Israel students on college campuses. Then along came Donald Trump—who kept his promise, that when he became president, “the days of treating Israel like a second-class citizen will end on day one.”176

President Trump’s numerous demonstrations of friendship and support for the Jewish people, Israel, and Israel’s sovereign rights were truly extraordinary. We believe that history will ultimately recognize Donald Trump as one of the greatest presidents ever for the Jewish people, Israel and America.

At least some of Trump’s policies and philosophy will last in the coming years. But the next few years will be marked by many battles to try to prevent Trump’s friendly policies from being reversed. We will then need to work hard to reinstate President Trump’s pro-Israel and pro-Jewish policies as soon as possible.
Notes


5. Ibid., 4.

6. Ibid., passim.

7. Ibid., 116–18.


22. Ibid.


29. Trump, “The Inaugural Address.”


32. Ibid.


34. Ibid.


39. Ibid.


46. Ibid.


50. E.g., “Readout of President Donald J. Trump’s Meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel,” Trump White House Archives, September 26,


20. 2021, https://zoa.org/2021/05/10443188-zoa-concerns-raised-that-israel-un-
der-pressure-agrees-to-ceasefire-with-hamas/.


li-conflict/leaked-document-claims-un-anti-settlement-resolution-orchestrated-
by-us-pa-co-op-476736.

64. Nichols, “Flynn, Kushner Targeted Several States.”

65. “Leaked Documents Claim UN Anti-Settlement Resolution Orchestrated by US, PA Co-op.”


.org/2017/01/26/leading-intl-legal-scholar-kontorovich-emphasizes-zoa-new-
york-event-us-embassy-move-jerusalem/.

condemning-unsc-resolution-2334-and-kerry-speech/.


islam-speech-filled-with-lies-and-proposal-of-hamaspa-terror-state-endangers-
in; UNSC Res. 2334.

72. “Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement, April 3, 1949,” Article VI.8, stated: “The provisions of this article shall not be interpreted as prejudicing, in any sense, an ultimate political settlement between the Parties to this Agreement.” https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfado-
cuments/yearbook1/pages/israel-jordan%20armistice%20agreement.aspx. Likewise, the “Israel-Egypt Armistice Agreement,” February 24, 1979, Article V.2, stated: “The Armistice Demarcation Line is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to rights, claims and positions of either Party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestine question,” https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/for-
eignpolicy/mfado-
cuments/yearbook1/pages/israel-egypt%20armistice%20agreement.aspx. And the “Israel-Syria Armistice Agreement,” July 20, 1949, Article II.2,
likewise stated: “It is also recognised that no provision of this Agreement shall in any way prejudice the rights, claims and positions of either Party hereto in the ultimate peaceful settlement of the Palestine question, the provisions of this Agreement being dictated exclusively by military, and not by political, considerations,” https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/israel-syria%20armistice%20agreement.aspx.


80. David G. Dalin and Alfred J. Kolatch, The Presidents of the United States & the Jews (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 2000), 139; also quoted


90. Herbert Haskell, “Letter from State Department Legal Advisor Concerning Legality of Israeli Settlements in Occupied Territories,” April 21, 1978, reprinted by Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/state-department-legal-advisor-concerning-the-legality-of-israeli-settlements. (Hansell said that the state of occupation would end if Israel and Jordan entered into a peace treaty. Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1994, but the Hansell letter was not updated [ibid.].)

92. Ibid.


96. Rosen, “Israeli Settlements.”


102. “Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem.”


121. Ibid., 8, 11–12.

122. Ibid., 11–12.

123. Ibid., 15.
124. Ibid., 16.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid., 16–17.
129. Ibid., 34–35.


156. Ibid.

157. “Nominee for Asst. Attorney General for Civil Rights Division Kristin Clarke is

158. Ibid.


162. “S.J.Res.49—A joint resolution condemning the violence and domestic terrorist attack that took place during events between August 11 and August 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia, recognizing the first responders who lost their lives while monitoring the events, offering deepest condolences to the families and friends of those individuals who were killed and deepest sympathies and support to those individuals who were injured by the violence, expressing support for the Charlottesville community, rejecting White nationalists, White supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and other hate groups, and urging the President and the President’s Cabinet to use all available resources to address the threats posed by those groups,” September 14, 2017, https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/49.


166. Ibid.; see also “ZOA Letter to Sen. Foreign Relations Committee Endorsing Mike

167. Ibid.


176. Begley, “Read Donald Trump’s Speech to AIPAC.”
Bibliography


“Census Finds UN Figure of Palestinians in Lebanon Massively Inflated.” i24 News.


Trump: Friend Extraordinaire to Israel and the Jewish People


“President Donald J. Trump Is Reimposing All Sanctions Lifted Under the Unacceptable


“S.J.Res.49—A joint resolution condemning the violence and domestic terrorist attack that took place during events between August 11 and August 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia, recognizing the first responders who lost their lives while monitoring the events, offering deepest condolences to the families and friends of those individuals who were killed and deepest sympathies and support to those individuals who were injured by the violence, expressing support for the Charlottesville community, rejecting White nationalists, White supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and other hate groups, and urging the President and the President’s Cabinet to use all available resources to address the threats posed by those groups.” September 14, 2017. https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/49.


archives.gov/briefings-statements/support-president-trumps-decision-recognize-jerusalem-israels-capital/.


The Jewish Community and Younger Generations: Challenges, Opportunities, and Long-Term Impacts of the Trump Era

by Adam Basciano and Shanie Reichman

Former President Donald Trump’s rise to power and his four years in office forever changed America and its many disparate communities. His hallmark disruptive and extreme approach to politics, norms, and governance brought some groups together to comprise his electoral base, while others were driven ever more apart and fragmented. Witnessed across these communities, however, were widening generational rifts between older and younger age cohorts which may prove to be one of the most enduring aspects of Trump’s legacy—with the American Jewish community being no exception. The Jewish community experienced unspeakable tragedy and the sharp politicization of formerly safe issues believed to once be free from politics. All of this contributed to feelings of communal and intellectual “homelessness”—amidst a backdrop of rising civic empowerment—among younger generations.

Throughout the following pages, we will explore how Trump’s words, actions, and policies uniquely affected these young Jewish Americans. In referencing their relationship to the wider Jewish community, we aim to identify the sources of various divisions and trends, while also arriving at potential solutions to the broader challenges at hand of building stronger communities, inclusive institutions, and leadership continuity.

Finally, as co-authors, our analysis is guided by our personal and professional work in the Jewish community and across American civic affairs. As the founding director and deputy director of a leading national young professionals...
community known as IPF Atid—launched near the onset of the Trump years through the Israel Policy Forum—we have enjoyed front-row seats to these unfolding trends and realities facing American Jews in their twenties and thirties. Our experience in Israel engagement and education spans dozens of cities and backgrounds, enabling us to interact with a multitude of organizations and a Jewishly diverse network of young North American Jews.

THE CHALLENGE AND THE PROBLEM
Through its institutions and investments, the organized Jewish community focuses significant attention and resources towards engaging rising generations of leaders and involved individuals. Our own work at Israel Policy Forum is no exception, as we coexist amongst dozens of other organizations conducting outreach and other efforts directed towards Jewish Americans in high school, on campus, and throughout their young adult lives upon entering the workforce. Not only do they regularly participate in programs and conferences like other age cohorts do in the community, these young professionals and newer generations of Jewish activists are additionally able to uniquely promote communal messaging, values, and even policy objectives through their robust advocacy networks. Most importantly, young people also represent the strength of the Jewish community of tomorrow. What might it mean then if the centers of gravity in these younger generations differ widely from those at the present helm of Jewish leadership?

Over the course of President Trump’s time in office, younger generations of Jewish Americans increasingly felt that they were without a natural home in the Jewish community. To be sure, many were attracted to certain networks and advocacy organizations with more defined agendas—whether it be social justice related or otherwise—yet few big tent communal spaces existed for young Jews, without their need to pass through a series of social, ideological or political tests. Few options were available for meaningful intellectual or educational engagement, as more extreme ideological groups grew in relevance, size, and distinction—while those closer to the center struggled to compete against these loud voices on both sides of the political spectrum. Alexandra Stabler, a friend and peer of ours who is active in Jewish and activist circles in Los Angeles, summarized it well in 2018 when she wrote that “nuance is being squeezed out of the conversation.”"1
Speaking to the treatment of Israel over the past four years and beyond in the American Jewish community, John Ruskay notes the dire impact of missing the mark with young people. He writes, “Having been denied space or time to grapple with these and other [Israel] issues in their day schools, synagogues, congregational schools, Jewish summer camps, or Israel trips” young students are often led to be “angry,” “bewildered,” and “betrayed.”\footnote{2} In part due to Trump’s omnipresent personality and his distinctive ability to evoke strong emotions that often created partisan divisions, it became increasingly difficult to develop, express, and discuss nuanced perspectives on policy issues such as Israel or even antisemitism.

The divides that Trump created or exacerbated ran along both partisan and generational lines. The majority of Jews, an already overwhelmingly Democratic constituency, perceived him to be a dangerous leader who trafficked in antisemitism and waged a relentless assault on liberal values. On the other hand, many Republicans truly viewed him as a “messiah” who reinvigorated their political party and specifically bolstered support for Israel, with some in the Orthodox community employing that exact term. Generationally, the question of supporting versus opposing Trump can also be viewed through a values-driven lens. Polls have indicated that older Jews respond more strongly to appeals to the Jewish people’s history of persecution, leading them to often focus more narrowly on what will immediately protect Jewish lives. Younger Jews are drawn instead to Jewish values and wisdom that compel them to promote fights against injustice, broader universalist values, and a commitment to \textit{tikkun olam}—including on issues pertaining to Israel.\footnote{3} Specifically, 55% of those over fifty years old indicated that self-preservation was the most convincing reason to engage politically, while 58% of those 18–34 listed Jewish wisdom as the primary impetus.\footnote{4}

Notably during the Trump Presidency, many young Jews were experiencing overt antisemitism in the US for the first time in their lives. The year 2019 had the highest record of hate crimes against Jews since groups such as the Anti-Defamation League began keeping track decades prior. What most increased was not harassment or vandalism but physical assaults by 56%.\footnote{5} Instead of being limited to Orthodox neighborhoods, as was often the case with antisemitic assaults in the past, this time the community saw large scale shootings, such as the tragedy at the Tree of Life (conservative) synagogue in Pittsburgh, as well as many other hate crimes at universities across the country. In 2013, fewer than 40% of young Jews said antisemitism was prevalent in America, whereas in 2018, 64% indicated that they had experienced discrimination for being Jewish.\footnote{6}
While it will take additional time and research to understand the long-term effects of this spike in antisemitism on younger Jews—as well as to Trump’s causal role in the spike itself—the example does help tell the story of being a young Jewish American during and following the Trump years. Watching neo-Nazis chant “Jews will not replace us” during the 2017 Charlottesville alt-Right march—only to soon thereafter hear President Trump’s statement of there being “very fine people on both sides”—represented a game-changing moment for younger Jews and their American experience.7 One year later, it was not as much Jewish unity that followed the massacre in Pittsburgh, but rather a re-energized debate over Trump, his inflammatory approach, and the ever-expanding presence of his Israel policy. In the days following the tragedy, then Israeli Education and Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett arrived in the United States to pay respect for the mourning community—only for his prepared remarks and subsequent tweets to nearly exclusively focus on defending Trump against any allegations of culpability and by reminding audiences about his support for Israel.8 Bennett even openly questioned the ADL’s data that indicated a surge in antisemitism.9 Where could young Jews turn to for values-driven, nuanced engagement?

With regards to our own friends, family, and peers, anecdotally we observed many who were inspired to be more involved in Jewish causes and political advocacy as a result of antisemitic events taking place during the Trump years. We also observed others in Progressive circles combine this relatively new sense of marginalization to further ignite their social justice and anti-racism efforts, especially as they witnessed other ethnic groups and social causes come under attack during Trump’s presidency. However, even with an issue as important and unifying as antisemitism, there lacked a non-partisan central address for young Jews to gather and mobilize. At the time of this writing in 2021, a major debate is taking place over the very definition of what constitutes antisemitism, with various organizations lining up behind slightly contrasting schools of thought. As we have briefly touched on already, what further challenges a united front against antisemitism and has been an even more difficult topic to organize around is the case of Israel.
A CASE STUDY OF ISRAEL AND THE “IPF ATID” PROGRAM
There is no better arena than the conversation around Israel education and engagement to better understand these American Jewish generational dynamics and their potential long-term ramifications. Part of the reason is that on one hand, Israel has historically served as a central organizing principle for the American Jewish community across cities and between generations. However, like antisemitism, Donald Trump’s efforts to score political points would come at the expense of opening the floodgates to politicizing Israel issues by a number of actors beyond any reasonable precedent. Further, his overt fondness of the Jewish state and close embrace with Prime Minister Netanyahu created a perception that the government of Israel shared the entirety of the President’s values and outlooks. Whereas young Jews may have avoided speaking to their non-Jewish peers about Israel for most of their lives, suddenly it was at the forefront of political discourse, and they were being forced to take a stance on complex issues like the status of Jerusalem and the peace process. It not only became difficult for younger Jewish generations to identify as pro-Israel while standing defiantly against President Trump, but also ideologically “safe” institutional spaces became few and far between for much needed support, guidance, and community. Furthermore, polls as early as 2013 indicated that young Jews were already trending towards opinions beyond conventional pro-Israel policies and outlooks. One in four young Jews polled by Pew in 2013 believed the US was too supportive of Israel, compared to just six percent of American Jews over fifty.\(^\text{10}\)

Organizations struggled to maintain their bipartisan, or nonpartisan, approach to embodying pro-Israel values given how the same bipartisan commitments were no longer being reflected by leaders either in Israel or the United States. For example, President Trump accused American Jews of being “disloyal” to Israel and perpetuated the notion that one can either stand by every decision Prime Minister Netanyahu makes or risk being labelled an enemy of Israel. At the same time, established Jewish leaders and organizations who spent decades advocating for certain policies feared that they would be seen as less pro-Israel than the US president himself, particularly following the Jerusalem embassy move. Over time and in the eyes of young Jews, it became increasingly difficult for organizations to distance themselves from the President and his actions.

In the aftermath of these events, young Jews lost out on important avenues for engagement, growth, and community. In addition, given how active organizations had become on social media with statements responding
to the news of the day and what seemed like daily stories about Israel in the media, younger generations unfortunately did not see their values upheld by these large Jewish legacy institutions who were cheering on President Trump’s actions. The debate and struggle to counter Israeli annexation over portions or all of the West Bank near the end of Trump’s presidency brought this reality to the forefront. A June 2020 commentary piece in the *Forward* from a millennial leader summarized it well by stating that “Mainstream groups are caught in a trap of their own making, stuck between their values and current events,” and that the community “must meet this moment by creating a healthier Jewish ecosystem.” Ultimately, annexation did not progress out of the halls of the Knesset, but together these dynamics helped further a sense of political and communal homelessness for younger Jews that we continue to witness today, particularly associated with (but not limited to) Israel.

In more ways than one, our work at IPF Atid (*Atid* meaning “future” in Hebrew) can be seen as an answer to these overarching questions and challenges. In July of 2017, this program was officially launched through a series of volunteer-led educational programs and communal gatherings beginning in Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC. Hundreds of millennial American Jews attended our early events, expressing to us their gratitude and enthusiasm for convening spaces where diverse and honest perspectives could interact and learn from one another—even if just in the focused areas of Zionism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and two-state solution.

Less than four years later, despite a relatively small professional team in New York working alongside us, IPF Atid has convened over 250 programs and initiatives in over forty communities nationwide. Primarily through an individual leadership development approach, we have trained and engaged 150 rising young leaders—who have since published dozens of op-eds, cultivated numerous organizational partnerships, and created a new abundance of inclusive, values-driven communal spaces for their peers. Reaching thousands of interested young professionals in-person each year and many more on social media, IPF Atid’s offerings range from large policy briefings to intimately facilitated dialogues that focus on timely substantive themes and utilize non-partisan, intellectually grounded content.

Beyond the quantitative metrics are the very human and relatable stories we frequently encounter, many of which offer glimpses behind the curtain of these generational and communal rifts. Many younger Jews come from other networks, whether synagogues or advocacy organizations, where they did not feel comfortable bringing their full perspective and opinions given various
ideological constraints and certain negative undertones present in those spaces. Many young leaders expressed that they had intentionally disengaged from Israel, and perhaps Jewish life altogether, before finding IPF Atid, because they did not feel there was a truly non-partisan home for those who love Israel, identify as Zionist, and yet also have serious critiques of recent Israeli policies. Too often individuals were either socialized to not ask questions about Israel’s more troubling policies or to downplay their Zionism (on the left). Others involved in our work, however, remain highly engaged in other various organizations that work alongside our own—in part helping to bring our values and approach to other parts of the Jewish community. These empowered and connected individuals are raising up their own voices, and communities, to better instill more effective and inclusive frameworks, norms, and cultures for engaging other Jewish Americans who otherwise may not feel welcomed or comfortable.

It remains true until today that many young Jews have moved to more politically extreme or rigid positions in connection with Israel, with some organizing or embracing relatively new grassroots movements that reflect views beyond the current mainstream Jewish community. On the right side of the spectrum, there are those who unabashedly supported former President Trump’s positions and rhetoric, particularly around opposition to a Palestinian state and the greenlighting of various Israeli policies. Those on the left were primarily motivated by calls for peace and justice for the Palestinians living under Israeli control. The vast numbers of those who did not neatly fit into either of these camps, however, represent an untapped center of young Jews, who are subject to disengagement entirely unless opportunities are made available to them. While some of them may indeed seek a relatively lower policy threshold to their Israel engagement, our experience indicates the advantage and potential of intellectually stimulating, values-driven work.

For better or for worse, the Trump years brought many issues like Israel to the forefront of national attention that served to motivate particularly young people to become involved in some capacity. Unfortunately, in the American Jewish context, this demand for engagement was not effectively or adequately supplied, in part given how the approach to Israel from many organizations was also representative of their treatment of other important issues. By avoiding complex topics, not offering intellectual or meaningful engagement, and not pursuing a values-driven agenda detached from political motives, spaces were not created and opportunities were missed. In sum, the community faces an uncertain future in its leadership continuity, as the Trump presidency—
coupled with wider American societal trends to be explored below—has dramatically reoriented the American Jewish environment.

**THE AMERICAN CONTEXT**

The success IPF Atid experienced throughout the Trump years not only reflected dynamics unique to the Jewish community but to American civic affairs more widely. As we know, young Jewish Americans do not live in a vacuum. Shifts in popular opinion towards hot button political issues, increasing levels of activism, and new media channels are just a few of the key factors amplified during the Trump years that together contributed to a new reality for young people. In understanding that these trends alter the way an emerging generation views the world and its place within it, the implications for the Jewish community will likely linger for years and decades to come—exposing challenges as well as opportunities for the community’s leadership and institutions.

In the spring of 2016, the Harvard Institute of Politics reflected on the rising politically engaged class of 18- to 29-year-olds by stating that younger Americans are “sending a strong message” to the country and that “they care deeply about the future, but are concerned that the current state of our institutions and our politics are not sufficient to meet our nation’s challenges.” By 2020, civic engagement and electoral participation proved to be specifically important. Tisch College at Tufts University estimated a ten percent jump in youth voter turnout from four years earlier. In the summer of 2020, a different Tufts survey of 18- to 24-year-olds observed that a remarkable 84% believed that young people have the power to change the country. While data specifically pointing to young Jewish voter trends and beliefs is not as robust, it can be extrapolated that their participation rose in conjunction with their wider national age cohort.

As we look to the future, among younger Americans, we can anticipate a certain level of burnout and the potential waning of civic involvement. However, other signs point to an incredibly energized and more politically aware community of younger leaders, including among Jewish activists.

Regarding the national issues motivating this heightened interest in political activism, it is not surprising that the top issues, beyond the coronavirus, for young Biden voters going into the 2020 election were two matters especially under attack by the Trump administration: racism and climate change.
In connection with the former, more than one in four young people nationwide attended a march or demonstration during the #BlackLivesMatter protests of 2020—doubling the 2018 numbers and representing five times more than those whoprotested in 2016.16 The high levels of engagement around social justice issues and institutional racism are particularly interesting in the context of young Jewish Americans. Rising antisemitism has reminded young Jews that their Judaism makes them a potential target of discrimination and attack. This provides many with even more reason to be committed to the fight against racial inequality and systemic racism.

Secondly, it remains to be seen what effect, if any and how drastic, these new generational policy priorities will have on young Jews and their involvement with US foreign policy and Israel. While some will argue that this dichotomy is not mutually exclusive, others may merge their domestic focus against racial injustice with their foreign affairs interests. In practice, the majority will likely direct their attention and resources away from Israel towards a finite list of more highly prioritized concerns—exposing an even greater need for Jewish institutions to adjust its approach if it wishes to find success in engaging around key issues such as Israel. Pew’s 2020 survey of American Jewry confirmed a continuation of the trends described earlier from its 2013 portrait, in which two-thirds of Jews over sixty-five answered that they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to the Jewish state, compared to 48% of the younger cohort.17 These trends are also not limited to young Jews but are part of a national shift. Younger Evangelicals, polled in 2021 by the University of North Carolina, showed a drastic decline from 75% to 34% in their support for Israel over the 2018 to 2021 timeframe.18

Any discussion on the behaviors and trends of younger generations would be incomplete without mentioning social media and the growing dominance of the digital world. As of 2018, 95% of young Americans thirteen to seventeen years old owned or had access to a smartphone, and nearly 100% of them indicated their regular use of one of the seven major social media platforms.19 Only amplified by the pandemic’s recent mandate on social distancing and indoor activity, young and old Americans alike turned to these new platforms in 2020 for news, education, and socializing, among most other facets of daily life. This meant that communal fixtures—whether they be synagogues, federations, or advocacy groups—had to adapt to these new realities. With in-person programs on hold, it also enabled both individuals and small groups to quickly create online followings with little overhead resources required. These new realities, coupled with the Pew data, suggested younger Americans were
already less trusting of key religious and business leaders—further indicating an uphill battle for existing Jewish organizations in trying to reach and engage younger Jews.20

Finally, historical moments and narratives are converging that offer important insights for the future of young Americans—namely the grim fact that most young Americans have now experienced two distinct economic crises during their formative adult years. The current coronavirus epidemic has wreaked economic havoc for individuals across the United States, and young people are at the tip of the iceberg. In April of 2020, unemployment rose to 30% for those sixteen to nineteen years old and 24% for twenty to twenty-four—with numbers even worse for minorities and women.21 As of July of that same year, 52% of Americans between eighteen and twenty-nine were living with family—surpassing the Great Depression for the highest mark in American history.22 Speaking to the severity and potential longevity of this economic fallout, the Population Reference Bureau reflected four months into the pandemic that “making sure these young adults have the resources they need to cover their basic needs and access educational, employment, and training opportunities . . . will be an ongoing challenge” for policymakers in the coming years and decades.23

Dating back to the Great Recession of 2008, studies have pointed to the negative long term socioeconomic outcomes for “recession graduates” and those young people forced to drop-out of college.24 As early as 2012, Pew reported that at least seven in ten young people believed it was harder to find a job, save for the future, pay for college, or buy a home, when compared to their parents’ generation.25 Now representing the largest generation in the American workforce, millennials and their economic misfortunes have translated to shifts in lifestyle.26 For instance, this age cohort trails previous generations at the same age in terms of life style choices, including living in a family unit, getting married, and having kids.27

Though not insurmountable, the challenges these generational realities pose for the Jewish community’s future are particularly relevant and formidable. Organizations focused on reaching young families, for instance, must adjust to couples meeting and having children later in life. For the foreseeable future, institutions and gathering spaces writ large must adapt to the impact of these new economic, political, and societal realities on Jewish graduates and young adults.
PATHS FORWARD AND REMEDIES FOR THE FUTURE

The ultimate legacy of Trump on young Jews in America is in fact a question impacting the future of the Jewish community for decades to come. The divisions he took advantage of within communities and around policy issues, while some previously in existence, intensified the partisan debate and wider societal environment. As a result of these past four years, we are seeing an empowered generation of attentive young activists who have been called to action and challenged to become meaningfully engaged.

Jewish unity, as envisioned and embodied most notably by umbrella organizations, is often described as a lofty ideal and as a necessary means of advocacy. However, a key question facing the American Jewish community’s identity in the twenty-first century is whether it will continue to survive in such a singular form—or will the communal system eventually fragment itself into smaller clusters organized into subgroups, emphasizing more minute policy differences? The discussion and treatment around Israel again offers a helpful microcosm, given the perception in some communities that a political divide can manifest itself in the form “J Street synagogues” versus “AIPAC synagogues.” Or alternatively, in the aftermath of the divisive Trump years, will younger Jewish voices and the new organizations and coalitions that they have created instead rise to the forefront in uniting disparate ideologies—serving to build an inclusive and fulfilling community that subsequent generations of young Jewish Americans would want to call home?

Offering prescriptive ideas for how the community can begin proactively overcoming these challenges is an exercise that requires long-term strategic thinking and a commitment to engaging new voices. It will also demand incumbent leaders to be willing to take risks and in some cases, relinquish certain practices and controls in the service of greater adaptability, transparency, and continuity.

In terms of organizational professionals, younger Jews working in the community should be empowered to be bold and innovative rather than constrained by previous norms and communal practices. In most scenarios, they are the ones not only pursuing ways to effectively integrate and engage their peers in valuable opportunities, but they are also the best candidates for eventually replacing the executive leadership class of today. These professionals must be encouraged to think creatively and collaboratively in their work with young lay volunteers, who in turn should also be elevated into important roles within institutions and communities in order for them to be fully a part of the necessary solutions and strategies. Finding and cultivating these
forward-looking young lay leaders represents immense hidden value and are essential to the Jewish community’s future.

Moving forward, communal institutions will also critically need leadership structures to be representative of the entire American Jewish community. Specifically, elevating and integrating women, multi-ethnic identities, and other minority voices will ensure stronger and more durable outcomes, processes, and decisions. More broadly, the overall approach must be focused on the future, rather than fixated on history, if the community indeed seeks to engage the leaders of tomorrow. Briefly applying this perspective to our Israel case study, contemporary Diaspora relations and approaches with the Jewish State continue to recall images of older (mostly male) Ashkenazi organizational figureheads meeting with Israeli politicians in fancy penthouse apartments and boardrooms. If one were to imagine future bridge building and Israel engagements that connects younger diverse American Jews with their Israeli counterparts in more deeply substantive ways, we can begin to understand how such an alternative vision can be effective and helpful.

In short, cultivating values-driven policies, practices, and spaces will reap greater communal rewards over short-term politics and decision-making. Such an intergenerational approach to communal deliberation, implementation, and growth would only help further these ideas and the overall health of the community by empowering the next generation.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is not our opinion that the enduring legacy of the Trump years on young American Jews is and will all be doom and gloom. In identifying certain sources and dividing lines vis-à-vis the American Jewish community and its younger generations, it is our hope to have made clear the various pieces of the puzzle that can be gathered, organized, and rebuilt for the years and challenges to come. Some organizations and individuals have already begun taking these trends and realities in stride, yielding impressive results and building ideologically inclusive communities for young Jews who desperately seek but often cannot find such spaces. A primary challenge will be continuing to learn, scale, and proactively engage with these ever-changing dynamics occurring across the American and Jewish contexts—especially as the key question remains over the enduring presence of President Trump and Trumpism itself.
Indeed, one can easily forge the argument that Trump’s divisive approach made the American Jewish community worse off in terms of its effective reach, unity, and future. However, by his ultimately serving to bring trends to the forefront, it became harder for leaders and institutions to downplay or disregard these shortcomings that had been building and looming beneath the surface for years prior. In this regard, the path ahead may be grueling and difficult, but the work is both charted and necessary for the long-term. Fortunately for the existing leadership class of the American Jewish community, they are not alone in answering and addressing these big questions—as their previous investments have undoubtedly succeeded in instilling strong values and leadership in younger generations. Numerically and by virtue of an inevitable generational transition to gradually take hold throughout the coming century, it will ultimately become the task of these emerging, young, and energetic Jewish Americans to forge such a vision and direction.
Notes


4. Ibid., 21.


13. “Election Week 2020: Young People Increase Turnout, Lead Biden to Victory,” Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts


16. Ibid.


Bibliography


———. “Poll: Young People Believe They Can Lead Change in Unprecedented Election Cycle.” Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

The American Jewish Community: A Divergence of Political Perspectives

by Saba Soomekh

No other politician has stoked so much political division within the American Jewish community as Donald Trump. While some see him as a significant danger to American Jews, blaming him for heightening antisemitism on the far right and turning Israel into a partisan issue, others view him as the champion of American Jewry, punishing antisemitism on the far left, and advocating for Israel on the world stage. What makes writing about Trump and his relationship to the Jewish community so difficult is that all of the above statements are true. There are many shades of gray when it comes to Trump, antisemitism, his relationship with American Jewry, and Israel.

The United States does not have a monolithic Jewish community with uniform concerns. Polls have shown that 95% of American Jews support Israel,1 and 79% believe that a thriving state of Israel is vital for the long-term future of the Jewish people.2 The issue of Israel’s security in the world and America’s support for Israel is important to many American Jews. President Trump has expressed the belief that he has a great record on Israel, and many Israelis and American Jews agree with this view. Throughout his presidency, Trump repeatedly expressed his commitment to Israel and his intention to take a friendlier approach toward Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In 2017, Trump announced the official US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and then moved the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In March 2019, in a move hailed as “historic” by Israel’s prime minister, he recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, seized from
Throughout his presidency, Trump had been extremely critical of the Palestinian Authority’s “pay for slay” policy. In 2018, Trump signed into law the Taylor Force Act, which suspended US aid to the Palestinian Authority as long as it continued to implement the existing prisoner payment policy. The legislation was named in honor of Taylor Force, a West Point graduate who had served tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan and was stabbed to death by a Palestinian terrorist while with a Vanderbilt University tour group in Israel.

The Trump administration took the stance of protecting Israel at the United Nations and expressed frustration that the Palestinian Authority would not engage in peace talks with Israel. Historically, the US was the UN Relief and Works Agency’s (UNRWA) largest single donor. Trump cut aid to UNRWA from $360 million to $60 million in 2018, and reduced it to zero in 2019, saying the agency needed to make unspecified reforms and called on the Palestinians to renew peace talks. Cutting UNRWA funding has been widely interpreted in both Israel and Palestine as a blunt move by the US to unilaterally sweep aside one of the main sticking points in peace negotiations—the right of return of Palestinians. By slashing its budget, Palestinians believed Washington was attempting to delegitimize their refugee status and that of their descendants.

The US and Israel disagree with UNRWA on which Palestinians are refugees with a right to return to the homes they fled following the 1948 war. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously called for UNRWA’s funding to be cut gradually and its responsibilities transferred to the UN’s global refugee agency, the UNHCR, arguing that UNRWA “perpetuates the Palestinian problem.” Right-wing Israeli and US politicians have long argued the organization created in 1948 to service Palestinian refugees had become a stumbling block to the peace process because of its decision to confer refugee status on the descendants of the more than 750,000 Palestinians who fled their homes during Israel’s War of Independence. They believe UNRWA artificially inflates the numbers of refugees.

Israel, and many American Jews, believe that the United Nations is biased against Israel. The Anti-Defamation League website states:

"The international body has a continuing history of a one-sided, hostile approach to Israel. After decades of bias and marginalization, recent years have brought some positive developments for Israel to the UN. Nonetheless, the UN’s record and culture continue to demonstrate a predisposition against Israel. Successive Secretary Generals have acknowledged this an issue for the institution. Indeed,"
in a meeting in April 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon acknowledged to ADL leaders that Israel has been treated poorly at the UN and that, while some progress has been made, this bias still remains an issue. Secretary Ban stated this view publicly during his visit to Israel in August 2013. “Unfortunately, because of the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict, Israel’s been weighed down by criticism and suffered from bias—and sometimes even discrimination,” Ban said in response to a question about discrimination against Israel at the UN. “It’s an unfortunate situation,” Ban said, adding that Israel should be treated equal to all the other 192-member states. In his first public address to a Jewish group, Secretary General Antonio Guterres told the World Jewish Congress in April 2017: “As secretary general of the United Nations I consider that the State of Israel needs to be treated as any other state.” And in August 2017, he stated that calls for Israel’s destruction are a form of modern-day anti-Semitism.

Throughout Trump’s presidency, the administration pushed for reform at the world body, opposing anti-Israel resolutions and actions by the United Nations and its affiliated agencies. During Nikki Haley’s two-year-tenure as envoy to the United Nations, the Trump administration withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council and the UN educational and scientific agency for adopting positions it deemed to be hostile to Israel. In her opening testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meeting, Kelly Knight Craft, who served after Haley as United States Ambassador to the United Nations from 2019 to 2021, said: “Without U.S. leadership, our partners and allies would be vulnerable to bad actors at the UN. This is particularly true in the case of Israel, which is the subject of unrelenting bias and hostility in UN venues. The United States will never accept such bias, and if confirmed I commit to seizing every opportunity to shine a light on this conduct, call it what it is, and demand that these outrageous practices finally come to an end.”

In 2018, Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, reiterating Republican arguments against the deal: that it does not address the threat of Iran’s ballistic missiles or its malign behavior in the region, and that the expiration dates for the sunset clauses open the door to an Iranian nuclear bomb down the road.

Netanyahu lauded the withdrawal as he had been one of the world’s most vocal critics of the Iran deal, saying it cleared the way for the Islamic Republic to acquire a nuclear bomb. He described Trump’s decision to pull out of the agreement as “historic.” He commented: “Israel thanks President Trump for
his courageous leadership, his commitment to confront the terrorist regime in Tehran, and his commitment to ensure that Iran never gets nuclear weapons, not today, not in a decade, not ever.” Israel was not the only country that supported America’s withdrawal from the JCPOA; Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain swiftly backed Trump’s decision to reimpose sanctions on Tehran, reflecting their concern about Iran’s ballistic missile program and support for militant groups.

Like Netanyahu, many Iranian American Jews in Los Angeles supported Trump because of his dealings with Iran and his “pro-Israel” stance. For instance, Philip Mehdipour writes that the “Iranian-American Jewish community, in which he is a part of, has elevated President Trump into a messianic figure.” While there is no polling data on the Iranian Jewish community, which comprises less than 100,000 people, Mehdipour writes that he has found that support for Trump is strong among both older-generation and younger generation Iranian Jews born in America. Mehdipour offers reasons as to why Trump is attractive to Iranian American Jews: Iranian Jews are fairly traditional in their religious beliefs and in their support for Israel; he is seen as a “pro-Israel” president; he exited the Iran deal, killed the commander of the Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani, and recognized the Golan Heights.

Journalist Karmel Melamed refutes Mehdipour’s oped. He writes:

In his piece Mehdipour picks and chooses certain segments of Southern California’s Iranian Jews to make the false claim that all of the community is Republican, but he conveniently leaves out the very viable segment of the community that are Democrats. He also conveniently leaves out the Iranian Jewish community’s positive history with Democrats and the Carter administration. . . . All of the facts and the Iranian American Jewish community’s history show that the community has both passionate Republicans and Democrats members among its ranks. To pigeon-hole the Iranian American Jews by claiming they all follow one particular political party does a disservice to the community and insults the community members who do not follow one party over the other.

In 2019, California State University, Los Angeles produced the Los Angeles Voter Study. Sixty-eight first- and second-generation Iranian Jews were interviewed; 20% identified their political party as Democrat while 30% identified with being Republican; 44% said that they are independent. What this data shows is that like the larger American Jewish community, immigrant American Jews also are divided in their feelings for Trump.
Like many US administrations before, the Trump administration attempted to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through their peace plan, officially titled “Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People.” Many journalists and pundits were quick to point out that the peace plan was one sided towards Israel. The New York Times wrote that this plan “would give Israel most of what it has sought over decades of conflict while offering the Palestinians the possibility of a state with limited sovereignty. Mr. Trump’s plan would guarantee that Israel would control a unified Jerusalem as its capital and not require it to uproot any of the settlements in the West Bank that have provoked Palestinian outrage and alienated much of the world. Mr. Trump promised to provide $50 billion in international investment to build the new Palestinian entity and open an embassy in its new state.”

Journalist Bret Stephens does not refute that the Trump peace plan favored Israel, writing Trump “offered a peace plan for an eventual Palestinian state that clearly tilted toward Israel. The plan later provided the pretext for the Abraham Accords, after the UAE offered Israel a peace deal in exchange for Benjamin Netanyahu backing off from his pledge to annex parts of the West Bank.”

American Middle East analyst, author, and negotiator, Aaron David Miller, writes that Trump clung to the image he tried to cultivate as the most pro-Israel president in history. In a speech in 2019, Trump said: “The Jewish State has never had a better friend in the White House than your president.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed, telling the president earlier that year that Trump had been “the greatest friend that Israel has ever had in the White House.” However, Miller argues that while Trump was certainly helpful to Netanyahu, he did little to promote Israel’s security and long-term interests. Instead, he writes, “Trump’s approach to Iran—withdrawing the United States from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal—and his faulty approach to the Israel-Palestinian peace process have degraded Israel’s security, not enhanced it. Iran is ramping up its nuclear program, while prospects for progress, let alone a resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict remain remote.”

One of Trump’s significant diplomatic accomplishments before leaving office was the Abraham Accords, which marked the first public normalization of relations between Israel and Muslim countries since agreements with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994. Traditionally, Arab states did not publicize their dealings with Israel in part because of the Arab Peace Initiative, drawn up by Saudi Arabia in 2002. In that accord, Arab nations endorsed the idea of normalizing ties with Israel, but only if the Israelis ended their occupation and
Saba Soomekh gave the Palestinians a state of their own.24 Although that has not happened, in August 2020, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain agreed to normalization. Following the UAE and Bahrain, Sudan formally agreed to normalize ties with Israel and join the broader diplomatic realignment in the Middle East two months later. And in December 2020, Israel and Morocco agreed to normalize their relations in the Israel-Morocco normalization accords. In the space of five months, the Trump administration secured normalization agreements between Israel and several Muslim states, while no agreement had been made between Israelis and Palestinians.

Although many American Jews and Jewish organizations hailed the Abraham Accords, others criticized it for failing to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself. Specifically, progressive journalist Jeffrey Goldberg writes that, if normalization causes “Israel to avoid coming to terms with the reality that its continued control over the lives of millions of Palestinians threatens its democratic nature, then both the Palestinian aspiration of nationhood and the Israeli dream of a free and strong democratic haven in the Jewish ancestral homeland could be victims of this agreement.”25

However, not everyone is happy when it comes to Trump and Israel. A 2018 survey by the non-partisan American Jewish Committee found that 57% of US Jews “disapproved” of Trump’s handling of the US-Israel relationship.26 They feared that Trump had made support for Israel a wedge issue in American politics. Aaron David Miller writes that “Trump has damaged the bipartisanship on which the durability of the US-Israel relationship depends. To secure his base, which includes evangelical Christians and right-leaning Republicans, and driving a political wedge within the American Jewish community, Trump has tried to make the GOP the go-to party for Israel while demonizing Democrats, cynically remarking in 2019 that ‘if you vote for a Democrat, you are very, very disloyal to Israel and to the Jewish people.’”27

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE PRESIDENT
While many American Jews support the state of Israel, this does not mean that they prioritize Israel over American politics. Moreover, many American Jews are more concerned about Trump’s domestic policies than his Middle Eastern ones. Polling shows that the Israel of today, for better or worse, carries less political weight for younger American Jews than domestic US concerns.28
Many within the Jewish community disagreed with the Trump administration regarding deportation, detention of children, the border wall, tariffs, detention of refugees, and treatment of Dreamers; many were also concerned about the rise of antisemitism under Trump.

Another area of tremendous concern is that the US Jewish community has experienced near-historic levels of antisemitism since 2016. According to the 2019 American Jewish Committee (AJC) Survey of American Jewish Opinion, 65% of American Jews at that time thought they were less secure than a year prior. When asked in a 2020 AJC poll if antisemitism was a problem in America today, 88% of Jews surveyed said that it was; 82% of those surveyed said that antisemitism had increased in the past five years. Clearly the American Jewish community feels that antisemitism is getting worse in America, and with good reason as racism and antisemitism was evident at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in 2017:

The demonstration was suffused with anti-black racism, but also with antisemitism. Marchers displayed swastikas on banners and shouted slogans like “blood and soil,” a phrase drawn from Nazi ideology. As Jews prayed at a local synagogue, Congregation Beth Israel, men dressed in fatigues carrying semi-automatic rifles stood across the street, according to the Temple’s president. Nazi websites posted a call to burn their building. As a precautionary measure, congregants had removed their Torah scrolls and exited through the back of the building when they were done praying.

Beyond the shocking images of white men shouting Nazi slogans, a further shock came two days after Charlottesville, when Trump condemned “hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides.” This suggested equivalence between the white supremacist demonstrators and their counter-protesters shocked politicians and public figures in both parties, who quickly criticized Trump’s unwillingness to condemn neo-Nazis and the KKK. “It’s very clear that the people marching in Charlottesville felt very supported by the shape of the public statements made by President Trump,” according to University of Chicago historian David Nirenberg.

Jonathan Greenblatt, National Director of the ADL, argued that the backlash against Trump’s comments has not been about politics, but about recognizing a pattern of antisemitism. He provided examples of this pattern, such as the Holocaust Remembrance Day statement that did not mention Jews; Trump retweeting the conspiratorial meme of Hillary Clinton and the Star of David during his campaign; and the infamous Nazi salute and shouts of “Hail
Trump!” at an alt-right conference following the election. After Charlottesville, a number of advocacy groups urged Trump to fire his then chief strategist, Steve Bannon, in part based on Bannon’s role in heading Breitbart, which he called a “platform for the alt-right.” Greenblatt described all these as signs that, at best, the White House did not take antisemitism seriously enough. At worst, he believed, the Trump administration was indulging bigotry so as not to alienate some supporters.34

Trump’s pattern of dog-whistling to the far-right was again demonstrated in the Presidential election debate in September 2020, when he was asked by the moderator, Chris Wallace, and by his opponent Joe Biden, to condemn white supremacists for inciting violence at anti-police brutality demonstrations across the country. Trump instead placed the blame on the “left wing” and Antifa. When pressed again by Wallace and Biden to denounce hate groups such as the Proud Boys, Trump’s response was “Proud Boys—stand back and stand by.” Trump’s refusal to denounce White supremacists and his specific mention of this group drew immediate celebration from members of the Proud Boys. Images of an updated Proud Boys logo featuring the President’s “stand by” remark in the group’s signature yellow and black swiftly circulated online.35

In addition to the “stand by” comment which because a rallying cry for the alt-right, Trump also refused to denounce the antisemitic far-right movement QAnon, a conspiracy theory centered on the baseless belief that Trump was waging a secret campaign against enemies in the “deep state” and combating a child sex trafficking ring that, per the QAnon lore, was funded by Soros and “the Rothschilds,” and run by satanic pedophiles and cannibals.36 In August, 2020 Trump tweeted support for then congressional candidate Marjorie Taylor Greene, a believer of the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory who has been criticized for racist and antisemitic comments, following her Republican primary victory in Georgia. Trump tweeted “Congratulations to future Republican Star Marjorie Taylor Greene on a big Congressional primary win in Georgia against a very tough and smart opponent,” Trump said on Twitter. “Marjorie is strong on everything and never gives up—a real WINNER!”37 Once again, by supporting antisemitic candidates and failing to confront his supporters for peddling antisemitism, he sanctioned their ideology permeated with antisemitic canards.

Trump, knowingly or unknowingly, also appropriates antisemitic accusations when he speaks publicly off the cuff. His relationship with Jews is both philosemitic and antisemitic. He has internalized antisemitic stereotypes about Jews and appears to appreciate them for these bigoted reasons. In August 2019, he said that Jewish people who vote for Democrats were either ignorant or
disloyal as he railed against congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, who have been critical of the US-Israel alliance. “I think Jewish people that vote for a Democrat—I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty,” Trump told reporters during an Oval Office meeting with the president of Romania. Charges of disloyalty have been used for centuries to attack and murder Jews. Trump claimed that Democratic Jews are “disloyal” to Israel. What is interesting is that this is an inversion of the traditional dual loyalty trope, which charges that Jews are more loyal to their fellow Jews or Israel than to their home countries. Trump, by contrast, was arguing that Democratic Jews were insufficiently devoted to other Jews or to Israel—that they were not strong enough dual loyalists. In other words, he criticized American Jews for not conforming to the antisemitic stereotype. AJC CEO David Harris said the president's comments are “shockingly divisive and unbecoming of the occupant of the highest elected office. American Jews—like all Americans—have a range of political views and policy priorities. His assessment of their knowledge or 'loyalty,' based on their party preference, is inappropriate, unwelcome, and downright dangerous.” AJC called on President Trump to stop such divisive rhetoric and to retract his disparaging remarks.

Some might argue that Trump did attempt to tackle the issue of antisemitism, by signing the executive order in December 2019 that made Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act apply to antisemitic acts. This executive order takes indirect aim at the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement that has generated intense controversy on college campuses. Title VI bans discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs and activities, such as colleges and universities, that receive federal funding. The executive order will extend the ban to discrimination based on antisemitism. The draft order suggests that those charged with enforcing Title VI consider the definition of antisemitism adopted by International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which states: “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” Many in the Jewish community praised Trump for signing the executive order and addressing antisemitism on college campuses, with the Republican Jewish Coalition calling Trump “the most Pro-Israel President in American history” and saying that he has “shown himself to be the most pro-Jewish president as well. Today's order will have a real, positive impact in protecting Jewish college students from anti-Semitism.”
Others have instead argued that Trump should apply the same intolerance for antisemitism when it stems from the far right and his own party. Trump has been accused of contributing to the environment of antisemitism and only fighting the danger when it comes from the left. What many in the Jewish community wanted him to do is de-weaponize and depoliticize antisemitism and call it out whether it comes from the left but also from the right.

One could argue that not only has Trump refused to call out antisemitism by his followers, but he has also actively encouraged it, as displayed in the tragic incident leaving another indelible stain on Trump’s presidency—the attempted coup at the US Capitol by domestic terrorists on January 6, 2020. In what some have referred to as the darkest in American history, thousands of Donald Trump’s supporters waved Confederate flags, hung nooses, and paraded white supremacist, antisemitic symbols as they violently breached the US Capitol. Trump’s opponents believe they were encouraged and instructed by Trump to incite violence against US federal lawmakers in his quest to overturn the 2020 Presidential election results. After weeks of refusing to concede and making false claims that the election was stolen from him, Trump urged his supporters to head to the Capitol to protest. In a rally ahead of the vote, he urged them to have a “strong” response and stated that the protests would be “wild.”

Trump now holds the notorious and embarrassing distinction of being the first American president to be impeached twice, as ten members of his party joined with Democrats in the House to charge him with “incitement of insurrection” for his role in egging on a violent mob that stormed the Capitol. More members of his party voted to charge the former president than in any other impeachment. Even Senate Republican Mitch McConnell, who shied away from public rebuke of Trump in the past, explicitly blamed him for the deadly riot at the Capitol, saying the mob was “fed lies” and that the Trump and others “provoked” those intent on overturning Democrat Joe Biden’s election victory.

Trump’s passive rhetoric on January 6th echoed his comments in connection with Charlottesville. As bipartisan pressure mounted on Trump to condemn the violence and urge the Capitol protesters to disperse, he called on his supporters to be “peaceful” and “go home” but did so while repeating his false claim that the election was stolen from him. Trump said to his followers: “I know your pain. I know your hurt, but you have to go home now,” in the video which was eventually taken down by Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. “We can’t play into the hands of these people. We have to have peace. So go home. We love you. You’re very special.”
The attempt by a US president to overthrow the American government was unprecedented in American history; also unprecedented was the response of nonpartisan Jewish human rights groups such as the ADL and AJC in demanding that a sitting president be removed from office. These Jewish non-profits remain very committed to being non-partisan and observing their 501c3 status. However, the events of January 6 and Trump’s role in it, along with the violent antisemitic and racist images from that day, were too powerful to ignore. This prompted the ADL to release a statement on January 8, 2020, stating “In our over 100 years of history, ADL has never called for the President of the United States to be removed from office, but what occurred on Wednesday was inexcusable. It will forever be remembered as one of the darkest days of American democracy and it makes unambiguously clear: President Trump is unfit for office and needs to be removed. Racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and so many other forms of hate were on full display as extremists perpetrated violence and sedition. We must root out this evil if we are ever to heal as a nation.”

On January 13, AJC released a statement supporting the impeachment of Donald Trump, asserting that his actions “disqualify[ed] him from continuing to occupy the highest office in the land.”

While Jews who were critical of Trump were not surprised by the insurrection and his support for it, the real question should be how do Jewish Trump supporters view the events that unfolded on January 6th? If many Trump supporters vote for Trump because they think he is good for Israel, isn’t a strong, democratic America “good for Israel?” While Trump has exited the world stage—for now—the far-right groups who supported him, with their antisemitic and racist ideology, are sadly now a part of the American landscape.
Notes

1. This statistic originates from an article by Gallup Senior Scientist Frank Newport, written in August 2019.
4. “Pay for Slay” is a controversial policy in which the Palestinian Authority compensates those who serve time in Israeli prisons, including for violent attack. The policy has long been denounced by Israel and its supporters as giving an incentive to terrorism because it assures would-be attackers that their dependents will be well cared for. And because payments are based largely on the length of the prison sentence, critics say the most heinous crimes are the most rewarded (Adam Rasgon and David M. Halbfinger, “Seeking Restart with Biden, Palestinians Eye End to Prisoner Payments,” The New York Times, November 19, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/19/world/middleeast/biden-palestinian-prisoner-payments.html).
8. Ibid.
13. Ibid.


18. Ibid.


27. Miller, “Trump Was Great for Netanyahu.”


32. Green, “Why the Charlottesville Marchers Were Obsessed with Jews.”

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.


37. Ibid.


42. This executive order takes indirect aim at the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement that has generated intense controversy on college campuses. Title VI bans discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs and activities, such as colleges and universities, that receive federal funding.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.


Bibliography


Kampeas, Ron. “US Jewish Groups Express ‘Outrage,’ ‘Disgust’ at DC Violence, Criticize


Orthodox Jews and Trump

by Gilbert N. Kahn

The Orthodox Jewish community is the smallest group among American Jews, yet it has become much more vocal and visible today than at any time in its history. This community, according to the 2013 Pew Research Center Study, represents only 10% of American Jews. It is generally suggested that the Orthodox communities are growing faster than the other denominations and their religious affiliations today, especially among those forty and younger who are remaining far more stable than previously. Even considering the higher birthrate within the Orthodox community, moreover, it still is unlikely that Orthodox Jews constitute more than 15% of American Jews.

The Orthodox community is clearly divided into two distinct groups: modern Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox (charedim). In political terms, historically, the voting behavior among the charedim has been generally monolithic and predictable. They almost always vote as a solid bloc. On the other hand, modern Orthodox Jews have been far more independent minded and their political preferences on many issues may vary greatly; nevertheless, as will be explained, like most American Jews, Orthodox Jews for generations have voted largely in step with the rest of the Jewish community. They mostly have supported Democratic candidates at all levels, from local city council members to President. Beginning in the 1980 presidential election, however, when Ronald Reagan was victorious, an increasing bloc of Orthodox Jews began voting for Republican candidates. While initially it was gradual, it has grown over the past several decades. In the 2016 and especially in the 2020 elections, this shift became significant.
There is empirical data to corroborate this shift as well as extensive impressionistic and anecdotal information. Together this will elaborate a clear explanation of why and how Orthodox Jews—unlike the consistent 70% of the larger Jewish community—became outspoken supporters of Donald Trump. In the November 3, 2020, election, it has been widely reported that, over 70% of the American Jewish community voted for Joe Biden for President. At the same time reports indicate that approximately 70% of those who identify as Modern Orthodox voted to re-elect President Donald Trump while over 90% of the charedi community did as well. Within the entire Jewish community, among the approximately 30% of those who voted for Trump, the various denominations of Orthodox Jews constituted approximately two thirds of that vote.

Jews today represent less than 3% of the American population, yet Jewish voter turnout is consistently amongst the highest of any ethnic, religious, or racial group in the nation, despite representing such a small percentage of the total voters. Jewish political clout also is magnified because of the large number of Jews who reside in a small number of key large electoral vote states (New York, California, New Jersey, Illinois, and Florida). Of these states, Jewish presence in key swing states such as Florida as well as Pennsylvania and Michigan give Jewish votes even more weight. (During the Senate run-offs in Georgia in January, for example, calculations were even made as to the potential ballot box power the 120,000 Jewish voters in Georgia might have to keep or turn one of the two seats. There were some specific analysts who sought to determine how critical an increase in an already high Orthodox turnout in Atlanta might be for the Republican candidates.

High Jewish turnout also translates into increased political power in states with smaller Jewish populations despite their relatively small total numbers. In analyzing voting behavior and voter turnout, precinct by precinct, even without exit polls, scholars know that throughout the country there is a correlation between services and resources that are delivered to a particular community as a measure of local, state-wide, or national voting clout and/or financial support.

The 2020 elections—despite the caveat of pandemic polling which made many more objective evaluations of voter behavior suspect—confirmed, nevertheless, many of the assumptions concerning the voting behavior of the Orthodox Jews in the Trump-Biden election.

The expectation of a high Jewish turnout, for example in a charedi enclave often will be translated into political support from various Jewish
denominations’ support for a party. As will be explained, there are number of key variables which clearly influence the Orthodox Jewish voting and which are different from many of the key factors which affect the rest of the Jewish community. To reiterate, Orthodox Jews’ affection for Donald Trump and their ballot box support in 2020 did not emerge out of nowhere. At the presidential level, Orthodox Jewish support for Republican presidential candidates had been growing for 50 years.

WHO ARE THE ORTHODOX?
In considering the voting behavior and political activities of Orthodox Jews it is essential to understand that like all racial, religious, or ethnic groups in the United States, Orthodox Jews are not monolithic. Charedim act differently than do the Modern Orthodox.[1] This is true with respect to how they engage in the modern world; how they respond to public events; as well as their demands and needs. They have different views on the role of Government, and how they view the political process. Even on issues about which both groups may care deeply such as federal funding for parochial education, specific views even among Orthodox Jews may not necessarily be identical.

Dealing with the charedim, for example, their approach to Israel is much simpler than within the modern Orthodox community where there are a number of nuanced approaches. Charedim, for example, have very limited interest in Israeli domestic politics or even foreign policy. They want a government that protects them and that provides adequate social services. Israeli charedim, therefore, want their brethren and sisters in the US to support whatever US leader will best guarantee them these services. Specifically, they seek a Government in Israel that provides for their needs and services and does not interfere with their lives and with their institutions. They seek the greatest Government support for their schools and welfare institutions, and their best tax arrangements. Lay leadership receives advice from their Rabbinic leaders (the Rebbe, and his religious counselors) who determine what political leader and party is best for their interests. Since the ultra-religious parties in Israel know that they will not lead a coalition government, their leaders seek generally to bolster support for their particular religious party.

This thinking generally has enabled the charedi leadership to negotiate the best deal for their communal interests. This community continues to prefer
to operate as the old *stadlanut* (Court Jews) model of centuries ago. There is another aspect to the *charedi* voting behavior. Women generally vote as their husbands instruct them as do the children. (They resemble a model which was prevalent among all Americans around seventy years ago.) In these communities, the pronounced preferences of the community leader, usually the Rabbi or *rebbe*, makes known his preferences through his aides. In almost all elections, there is only a minor deviation among the members in *charedi* voting precincts.12

Within the modern Orthodox community most of them are religious Zionists to varying degrees. Their interest in the existence of the State of Israel is not exclusively for a country to exist preparing for the coming of the Messiah. It is composed largely of individuals who support the Government of Israel and recognize Israel as their homeland and expression of Jewish national identity. A sovereign Jewish State is the fulfillment of millennia of Jewish dreams and aspirations. All Jews feel a deep connection to their Israeli brothers and sisters on a personal, emotional, historical, religious, and familial level. Religious Jews in the Diaspora, however, express an additional bond because of religious practice, more than do secular Jews. They accept their obligation to fulfill a religious commandment—if possible—to elevate their religious life spiritually by living in Israel. They view Israel as the fulfillment of many of their religious goals and duties. Politically, religious Jews thus support an expansive role of the Israeli Government, domestically and regionally. There are many Orthodox Jews who believe that Israel has a right to extend its sovereignty to include all of Israel’s biblical borders.13 It, therefore, seeks a Government in Washington which will be consistent with a more irredentist regime in Jerusalem which could fulfill these dreams.

In the minds of both of these groups President Donald Trump and his Administration was the true affirmation of their goals. This was true in terms of the virtual carte blanche support he extended to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s right-wing Governments. It was also manifested in several policy decisions which Trump made which were consistent with the general predisposition of Orthodox Jews. Specifically, President Trump’s decision to move the US Embassy to Israel’s capital, Jerusalem; US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the international disputed Golan Heights; and support for Israeli “annexation” of territory on the West Bank. They also saw the Trump “peace” proposal as largely a plan drafted by the Israelis and given birth to by the President’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner. These decisions as well as the Abraham Accords were extremely well received almost without any criticism within the Orthodox
Orthodox Jews and Trump community. This despite the fact that there were many Israeli political leaders who took serious issue with many of these decisions. As a result, supporting a second Trump term—strictly based on his perceived “outstanding” support for Israel—was totally obvious for them. Furthermore, in late October 2020, thirteen major charedi Orthodox rabbinic leaders wrote a letter in support of Trump because of his of “his support for religious entities.”¹⁴ Mispacha magazine reported that 56% of the charedim voted for Trump in 2016 as did 29% of the modern Orthodox. Nishma was predicting those numbers to increase from 68–90% among charedim and to 36–65% among the Modern Orthodox in 2020.¹⁵ (Many throughout the Orthodox world were very pleased with Trump’s sensitivities to religious needs and practices as much as his support of Israel.)

**ISRAEL**

There is a need to understand how this attitude of Orthodox Jews towards Israel has become a key variable of differentiation among the various denominations within the Jewish community. Orthodox Jews relate differently than other denominations in their attitudes towards the State of Israel in their entire world. It has a primacy within their political priorities as Jews although living in the United States. While all Jews recognize the place and importance of Israel for the Jewish people and in Jewish history, for the non-Orthodox community these are facts.

Absent rabid anti-Semitism and outright attacks on Jews, Israel is not an active component in their daily life. For all the various Orthodox groups, however, the land of Israel is an integral part of their religious being as well as their theology.¹⁶

Anecdotally, American Jews to varying degrees appeared to support many of Trump’s policies vis-a-vis Israel. There was disagreement about timing, necessity, and politicization of these decisions, but they were not all seen as inherently bad.¹⁷ For example, moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem was long advocated by both Democrats and Republicans. It was first championed by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan at the Democratic National Convention in August 1980. The Jerusalem Embassy Act was enacted by a Republican controlled Congress in 1995 and signed into law by a Democratic President, Bill Clinton. Republican and Democratic Presidents avoided implementing this law for political reasons and perceived geopolitical negotiating purposes.
President Trump made an alternative political calculation when he moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on May 14, 2018, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Israeli independence.

Unlike the larger Jewish community, which was more nuanced, the large portion of the Orthodox community applauded Trump’s policies towards Israel unconditionally, even his withdrawal from the Iran accords. They were especially delighted with the visibly warm relationship that he exhibited towards Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. For many Orthodox Jews, these would be the only factors upon which they would base their decision for whom to vote. For the much larger segment of the American Jewish community—despite the fact that they too generally support Israel—the 70% support for Biden was based in many instances on their dislike of President Donald Trump for a host of other, non-Israel related-reasons. They rejected his America First foreign policy as well as the substance of most of his domestic and social agenda. Most of them viewed Trump as a racist, a misogynist, and a supporter of white supremacy.¹⁸

For many American Jews there were much further concerns. They had grave fears of where his authoritarian governing mode might take the country if he received a second term. Some also believed that the sympathetic views which were attributed to Trump vis-à-vis the Jewish community were not genuine. Many Jews believed that Trump’s perceived courting of Jews was based on his strong support in some of the wealthier segments of the Jewish community; first among many was the late Sheldon Adelson.¹⁹ Trump’s exaggerated support for Israel was based, according to many Jews as well as non-Jews, on his continued courting of the evangelical Christian community. According to many this was even more important than the fact that Ivanka Trump converted to Judaism and now was part of a recognized modern Orthodox family.

The real question is how this apparent division among American Jews occurred and what were the primary motivations which facilitated its development. There also is a need to consider the size of the gap between the American Orthodox community and the rest of the larger Jewish community. Is it based strictly on Orthodox perceptions that Donald Trump and the Republican Party are better for Israel? Furthermore, there is a need to assess what might be the consequences of this split in the American Jewish community with respect to long-term Jewish support for the State of Israel, the attitudes of future American Governments towards Israel, and the cost and/or benefits of this condition for American Jews and US-Israel relations.
BACKGROUND

Orthodox Jews’ voting patterns and this community’s affiliation and support for Donald Trump did not suddenly occur in 2017. The Orthodox community’s political engagement on multiple levels evolved historically later, and differently than the general Jewish community. They had different priorities that constrained some Orthodox Jews from joining earlier in political advocacy and participation. They were largely much more parochial in their issues and concerns while the general Jewish community was more general and universal in its participation. Finally, how and when did the Orthodox community develop a more classic form of political advocacy that was already part of the behavior in the non-Orthodox Jewish community? All Jews have an attachment to Israel based on Judaism’s theology together with an historical attachment to the Holy Land. This theological understanding is based on Judaism's understanding of Jews’ relationship with God. Among the major faiths, Jews possess a sense of peoplehood that is unique, and it manifests itself as an outgrowth of the biblical narrative of God choosing Abraham and his descendants as His chosen people. At the same time Jews also have an historical attachment to the land which the Bible records when God gave this land to his chosen people. None of the other major faiths—Christianity and Islam—have an existential relationship with the Holy Land similar to Judaism. The other major monotheistic faiths have a sense of history with respect to the Holy Land as a place where Jesus and his disciples walked, performed miraculous events, or where Mohammed experienced holy visions. None of these faiths, however, articulate a national commitment to the land itself as does Judaism.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century as nationalism spread throughout the world, Jews underwent two simultaneous experiences. They experienced a growing sense of attachment to the country within which they resided—as did all citizens throughout Europe. At the same time an emerging group of Jewish leaders, rabbis, intellectuals, and communal figures began to express their national identification not exclusively in terms of their allegiances and commitment to the country within which they resided, but also an increased yearning to transfer their national feeling to the land to which they always had dreamed and prayed to return. Thus, the Zionist Movement also evolved in the middle of the of the nineteenth century as the articulation of and movement for, a national renewal in the land of their ancient forbears.20

The small community of Jews in Palestine in the nineteenth century lived mainly in the cities—of Jerusalem, Hebron, and Tiberias where they had
resided for centuries. There the Ottoman Turks had permitted them to remain. Most of these Jews were religious and traced their ancestry back for centuries in the Holy Land. Today, these Jews generally would be identified as charedim. The new Zionist groups who were motivated by the nationalist spirit and who came to Palestine, also had come from religious communities. As a result of religious emancipation and the growing political and social reform movements, most of these early Zionist pioneers were already or were becoming predominately secular Jews. These Zionists now sought to express their national identity by creating their own homeland in Palestine.

During the years preceding World War I approximately 70–75,000 Jews arrived in Palestine. As the clouds of war began to pass over Europe, approximately 30,000 made their way to the Holy Land. The new aliyah was composed predominantly of nationalists, secularists, and socialists. There continued to be religious-Zionists among them who were also idealists and socialists as well as a small, continuing emigration of charedim. By the time Nazis came to power Jewish emigration to Palestine had increased to about 30,000/year until the Arabs uprisings began and the British mandatory government closed down Jewish immigration. Hitler’s rise to power and the growing threat that he represented drove as many Jews in Western and Central Europe as possible to try to escape the feared Nazis. At the same time the British Mandatory authority was being pressured by the Arabs’ leadership to control and finally cease Jewish entry into Palestine. Jews seeking to escape the Nazi onslaught now found themselves unable to obtain refuge in Palestine. The inability of European Jewry to escape Hitler in time and their failure to find a welcoming haven contributed significantly to the eventual extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis.

Following World War II large segments of the remnants of European Jewry made their way from the Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Europe to Palestine in the years just prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. They came because it was their historical home and because they could. This time for most of the Jews it was not an expression of nationalism or religious theology, rather it was their only sure option. They hoped to find a community of Jews and to avoid further persecution. Meanwhile the Jewish communities in the Diaspora prayed for their safety but felt politically powerless.
JEWISH ACTIVISM

Jewish political activism aside from the ballot box evolved slowly, especially among American Orthodox Jews. Jews were of two minds on political action; were they to speak out on all public issues which affected them as American citizens, employing the perspective of the Jewish tradition and its values (*tik-kun olam*) or were they only to be public in their advocacy on issues which directly impacted Jews and the Jewish community? For example, were fair wages, hours, and unions as important an issue for Jews seeking to make it in this country as not needing to work on the Sabbath? It was the critical impact of the end of the Second World War and later the establishment of the State of Israel which would transform Jewish activism.

Over the next several decades, participation by American Jews, which had been largely impotent or at best ineffective on behalf of Jewish domestic or global concerns, would start to evolve. Many Jews supported the Civil Rights movement by participating in sit-ins, boycotts, marches, Southern voter registration drives, as well as financially. By the mid-1960s they also were actively participating in the anti-Vietnam War protests and moratorium marches.

It was following the 1967 Six Day War, that contemporary Jews learned not only how to use the ballot box, but also how to engage in political activism. Today, Jews across the religious and political spectrum have become their own best advocates for the causes and issues about which they care. This includes the Modern Orthodox community as well the *charedim*. It can be seen, for example, in Jewish engagement in legal church and state questions as well as in aid to parochial schools.

ENTERING AMERICAN POLITICS

The activist Jewish community—and especially within the Orthodox world, did not evolve over night. As with most immigrants, when Jews came to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century they were largely lost in the new, large metropolitan areas. Most of these cities, especially along the East Coast, were politically controlled by Democrats. The large city political bosses greeted the new arrivals becoming the first friends that many of the “green-horns” made in the *Die Goldene Medina*. These smart city bosses understood the potential political benefit they could reap in befriending immigrants. Treat the newcomers well and the political pay-back would be real. If Democratic
Party leaders and their rank and file facilitated immigrants’ entre and acclimation, then communal, civic, and political support would follow. Democratic leaders helped the immigrants obtain jobs, housing, schools, social services, etc. When the opportunity presented itself, Jews, like most immigrant groups expressed their appreciation to the Democratic Party by consistently voting for their benefactors.25

In addition, Jews like many Americans, viewed the Democratic Party as the group most concerned with economic, social, and political values that aligned with Jewish interests. Democrats helped them with health care needs, worker alliances, unions, and physical protection. Many Jews coming from Russia and Eastern Europe had already flirted with socialist ideas and understood the potential security that the labor movement and unionists could provide for them and their families.

Meanwhile, some of these new Jews rapidly became financially very successful. They began to question whether the Democratic Party would adequately protect their growing wealth and financial self-interest. This segment of the Jewish community was also among those who most rapidly assimilated. By the early part of the twentieth century some of the new, more affluent arrivals were accepted by the members of “Our Crowd” and moved to the Republican Party.26 They also moved out of their Orthodox religious world and created and/or joined the growing Conservative and Reform denominations. The largest percentage of American Jews, however, remained politically loyal to and affiliated with the Democratic Party.27

The picture of Jews seeking to escape Hitler prior to the Shoah and those Jews in the DP Camps after the war, traumatized world Jewry; but it had no effect on Jewish affection for the Democratic Party. In fact, Jews had been overwhelmingly supportive of FDR and the Democratic Party for having saved them during the depression and having led the allies to victory in Europe. Much of the more recent discussion and debate which questioned Roosevelt’s decisions not to bomb the railroads leading to some of the concentration camps and other potential strategic actions only began to emerge in the 1970s.28

In the aftermath of the War, in addition to trying to absorb physically and emotionally the victims of the Holocaust, the birth of the State of Israel began to emerge as the key political issue on the Jewish agenda. For American Jews, the vote by the Truman Administration in favor of partition of Palestine in November 1947 at the UN meeting in Flushing Meadows, New York, only solidified Jewish attachment and appreciation for the Democratic Party. This vote was followed most dramatically by the decision of President Harry
Truman to recognize the new State of Israel within minutes of its official inception on May 14, 1948.29

AMERICAN JEWS AND POLITICS
Throughout this period and even through the 1960s, Democratic Jewish support remained constant and across all denominations. While there were always Jewish leaders and rabbis who supported the Republican Party, they were not significant in numbers. These Republicans also spoke from the moderate to even left of center on political issues, especially regarding social issues. During this period, there were elected Jewish Republicans including Senator Jacob Javits, large donors like Max Fisher, and prominent rabbis such as Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver; but these were the exceptions.

Jewish advocacy and pro-Israel lobbying was very low-key until the 1967 Six Day War when it would indeed change dramatically. Immigration to Israel from the US had been inconsequential and most of those who went to Israel came from the left-wing, socialist, secular Jewish backgrounds. Most of the leaders as well as the staff of major national and local Jewish organizations also were Democrats. The Jewish defense organizations were staffed by Jews for whom their religious involvements were secondary to their communal work. Annual fund-raising dinners for most Jewish organizations rarely were kosher and at the annual Washington AIPAC (The American-Israel Public Affairs Committee) Policy Conference, even into the 1980s, it was a challenge to gather a minyan for religious services. All of this would gradually change as Orthodox Jews became more involved.

The Six-Day War galvanized Diaspora Jewry. In America, Jews were now prepared to speak out, identifying as Jews, and standing up as proud supporters of Israel. Having watched the growing civil rights movement develop into a national political force, they now sought to translate the lessons they had witnessed to mobilize the American Jewish community to demonstrate on behalf of their self-interests, and especially in support of Israel. The American Zionist movement thrived and immigration to Israel among America Jews grew dramatically, across all religious denominations.30 In addition, religious Zionists—not charedim—would walk and march in the streets, now unabashedly wearing kippot for the first time. As early as the 1972 Nixon campaign, Nixon’s name was appearing in Hebrew on kippot, baseball caps, and even tee shirts.
Many in the Jewish community, the preponderance of whom were non-Orthodox, also became actively engaged in the anti-Vietnam War movement. The strategy and techniques of the anti-war mass protests also provided a critical lesson for the Jewish community. As the Soviet Jewry Movement emerged in the early ’70s, the Jewish community had a set of models to copy in their advocacy now on behalf of Soviet Jewry. American Jews were able to convert a parochial Jewish issue into an extremely effective universal one. For many demonstrating and marching on behalf of Soviet Jews had the benefit of combining support of human rights with being anti-communist. The right of Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union grew rapidly into a major political cause in which all religious denominations could unify. It also became a bi-partisan issue. The development of the Soviet Jewry Movement as well as the 1973 Yom Kippur War was a catalyst for a growing wave of aliyah of American Jews. At the same time, none of these events had a major effect on Jewish voting. With the exception of Ronald Reagan in 1980, over 75% of the Jewish community consistently was still voting for Democrats even in presidential elections. (See Appendix A.)

At this time, something else began to develop within the religious Zionist community. Orthodox Jews were becoming wealthier and with this new status were becoming the economic equals of their Reform and Conservative co-religionists. For all Jewish denominations, the commitment to social justice, equal rights, separation of church and state, were issues that needed to be protected—as they affected all Jews—within the Democratic Party. The wealthiest Jews seeking to protect their wealth supported lower taxes, a position more readily insured by the policies of the Republican Party. As a result, some religious Jews felt secure in leaving the umbrella of the Democratic Party. This also contributes, in part, to the 1980 Reagan inroads.

ORTHODOX JEWISH ACTIVISM
Unlike the other religious streams as well as most uncommitted Jews, Orthodox Jews stayed out of Jewish communal and organizational life. The preferred to stay more closely involved with their synagogues, yeshivot, Jewish day schools, and separate Jewish social service agencies, while letting all other issues be handled by the rest of the Jewish community. Political lobbying on behalf of the needs and concerns of Orthodox Jews—charedim as well modern orthodox—generally were handled below the radar.
Beginning in the early 1980s, not only was the modern orthodox community growing in size and affluence, but they were also beginning to express a stronger identification with Israel, spurred in part by the success of the post high school gap year program in Israel. Where once all denominations had successful Israel summer programs, it was the Israeli yeshivot programs for boys and girls which developed special or parallel study programs for a year or two for American high school graduates. It followed in a period after the Yom Kippur War where many of these children’s parents already had developed their own heightened personal attachment to Israel.

This connection manifested itself in numerous ways. As these religious Jews became more financially successful, they could afford to visit Israel on a regular basis. Such trips became an integral part of their family life routine. While Israel always sought to attract more and more Jews to make Aliyah, it was the religious Jewish community which combined their nationalist identification with Israel with their desire to express their religious solidarity with the country and its people. Many of these Diaspora Jews now purchased second homes in Israel or holiday apartments. (This was a phenomenon that many European Jews had already adopted as they preferred going to Israel rather than to Florida for their warm weather vacations.)

Coinciding with this affluence and expression of identification with Israel came the establishment of “American”-style programs for the “gap” year. Jewish day schools and yeshivot recommended that before their graduates go off to college, they spend a year—or two—taking a “gap” year in Israel. In many cases this experience created a very strong yearning on the part of this younger generation to seriously consider moving to Israel after they completed their education, if not before. Their decision also affected the extent to which many of these young people were in fact fulfilling their parents’ own dreams. In many cases, some of their parents—who were still in their prime, productive, working years—took their children’s decisions to heart and moved to Israel themselves or purchased a family apartment there as a later retirement investment home.

Religious Jewish families, therefore, were developing a growing personal connection to Israel. They sought to ensure that Israel would not be politically or strategically challenged. Their political needs in the US in many cases became focused on seeking political allies whom they believed would best secure their financial success in America, their future investment in Israel, and protect their children living in Israel from any danger. This became a frequently unexpressed driving force for their engagement in pro-Israel political
activity in the US. They attached themselves to or created pro-Israel advocacy groups which appeared to be the most committed to protecting these goals.

Practically, religious Jews now saw the opportunity to engage in political activity working with candidates and political parties upon whom they believed they could rely on most to help them secure their goals. They had observed the effectiveness of political engagement and political action over the years by the non-Orthodox segments of the Jewish community. While they generally agreed with most of their activities, religious Zionist groups added their own more parochial sensitivities to these more general considerations. Religious Jews who had generally not engaged in political lobbying or public pro-Israel advocacy began to form political action committees and to engage in political action with their own particular added agenda. They formed their own PACs, planned their own lobbying trips to Washington with kosher food being arranged to be served by outside Orthodox caterers—something that was unheard of at the time on Capitol Hill.

The Modern Orthodox community quickly transitioned to a conventional stage of Jewish advocacy both on domestic policy as well as on the pro-Israel agenda. If one examines the activity only of AIPAC, it is readily apparent the extent to which AIPAC leadership and staff reached out to Orthodox Jews and their synagogues for increased membership as well as financial support. As the support of the religious Jewish community increased in its engagement and generosity even as they learned to donate taxable dollars to a Jewish organization, AIPAC recognized this community’s engagement by bringing some of these Orthodox members into leadership positions. Where there once were a mere handful of Orthodox Jews who attended AIPAC conferences or wore kippot, there now were multiple religious services which were programmed into the conference schedule. The percentage of modern Orthodox Jews now attending skyrocketed. This was by no means exclusively a function of the fact that AIPAC had moved significantly more to the right politically, but it certainly did make the Orthodox community more comfortable. This growing Orthodox participation and engagement undoubtedly helped to reinforce AIPAC’s rightward move as it was now supporting a more right-wing Israeli Government led by Prime Minister Menachem with Ronald Reagan now as the US president.
JEWISH VOTING BEHAVIOR
Political activism within the Orthodox community was also translated at the ballot box. Support for Donald Trump by between 65–90% in various segments of the American Orthodox community in the 2020 election was not an instant response. It was an outgrowth of many years of drifting in that direction. Republicans had cultivated American Jews for years and had consistently failed. With the arrival of the candidacy on Ronald Reagan some Republican analysts had discerned that at least a segment of the Jewish vote could be brought into the Republican camp for economic reasons. In addition, now Republicans being supportive of Israel could be seen as part of an overall pro-Israel strategy involving the Evangelical Christian community—one of the Republicans key growing constituencies. Both the Evangelicals and the Orthodox groups would eventually become key strong supporters of the Trump Administration’s approach to the Middle East.

Among Orthodox Jews the trend had grown steadily as domestic and economic policy plus the primacy of support for Israel became paramount in their voting considerations. Jews, for example, were enamored by President Bill Clinton’s warm affection for his “chaver” (friend) Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin. On the other hand, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s sour personal relationship with President Barack Obama drove Bibi to dismiss criticism he received from many Democrats as well as segments of the Jewish community for his decisions concerning Iran. Specifically, it was suggested that Netanyahu’s decision to accept Republican House Speaker John Boehner’s offer to address a joint session of Congress while circumventing the President was an Israeli affront to the American political system. While Obama and Netanyahu had differing views on how to address the Iranian nuclear threat, dismissing the etiquette of US politics was a questionable challenge to American governmental norms. What it did accomplish for Netanyahu, and thereby for many American Jews, especially those in the Orthodox community, was to bind Netanyahu’s geopolitical views with those of the Republican Party. It also enabled some in the Orthodox Jewish community who already disliked Obama or who held anti-Obama views based on their racial prejudices, to effectively give them political cover.

The perception that the Republican Party was more hardline on global issues than the Democrats evolved in the post-Vietnam era. President Reagan would gain credit for the final blow against Communist Russia and President Bush (41) would preside over the US’s new relationship with the former Soviet Union, but Democrats in the Clinton era were still considered an integral
part of a strong US foreign policy. Since 1967 US support for Israel had been
consistent, albeit not without intermittent challenges. In fact, Republicans
historically had been much more ambivalent and less supportive of foreign
aid, economic or military. President Clinton’s level of support for Israel was
as consistent as Reagan’s, and considerably more forthcoming than Bush I.42
Jewish voting, including at the presidential level, remained overwhelmingly
pro-Democratic, although Reagan did achieve a temporary breakthrough for
Republicans.43

The 2000 elections featuring Al Gore and the first Jew on a national tick-
et, Joe Lieberman as his running mate, maintained the traditional high level of
support for the Democrats from the Jewish community. After 9/11, more con-
ventional Middle East politics were grossly disrupted with support for Israel
receiving only minor attention.

The drop off in George W. Bush’s re-election campaign (2004) against
John Kerry was not significant while Senator John McCain in 2008 ran strongly
against Obama within the Jewish community. In 2012 Mitt Romney did as well
as Trump did in 2020. The Obama contests were notable because of the spe-
cific anti-Obama vote among some Jews, especially among Orthodox voters.
Nevertheless, it did not move the needle significantly in the big picture or alter
the general pattern of Jewish voting dramatically. In fact, even Trump’s victory
in 2016 did not demonstrate significant Jewish support for him as much as
representing an anti-Hillary vote.44

CONCLUSION
It is difficult to project the depth of Orthodox support for Republicans nor does
it explain the rationale for their support of Donald Trump. There are no stud-
ies yet whether any drift to Republican presidential candidates, at least among
the modern Orthodox Jews, has led them to switch their party registration or
support Republican candidates down the ballot. Jews have known for years, as
AIPAC always has preached, that while Presidents come and go, most of the
Members of Congress remain in DC for decades. Congressional Democrats
had a much longer history of support for the survival of the State of Israel and
for the concerns of American Jews than did their Republican counterparts.45

As noted above, some Orthodox Jews’ initial motivation to support
Republicans came from a perception that their growing wealth would be
better protected and taxed less by Republicans. In addition, Orthodox Jews in 2020 expressed some ideological concern about the progressive wing within the Democratic Party. Others fear that the extreme right wing—many of whom were active Republicans and stanch Trump supporters—present at least as great a threat to Jews in the US. White supremacists, natsivists, and QAnon followers, are at least as serious a threat to Jews as the Squad, a few progressives, and even the BDS supporters. There continues to be a growing acceptance within the Orthodox community of the value in building a pro-Israel alliance with the Evangelicals; something which is not well received by the larger Jewish community. Most American Jewish leaders and organizations find the Evangelical Christians’ domestic agenda incompatible with their vision for progress on domestic issues in the United States, which is not the case among most the Orthodox groups.56

Finally, Orthodox Jewish attachment to Israel has become an overwhelming, driving force in how they vote. It is not only whether a candidate is seen as “good for the Jews” but rather whether the candidate is “good for Israel.” Many of these voters, and perhaps even more of their children, believe and even plan to move to Israel—eventually. Potential aliya, therefore, could influence voting preferences as American Jews consider their own future. This fact will also affect the attitudes of the larger Jewish—non-Orthodox—community. It will also impact Jewish giving but none of these changes are likely to occur overnight. The Trump vote was a clear statement confirming all these considerations; however, how they will evolve in 2024 or even in 2022 remains unclear.
Appendix A

Presidential vote by religious affiliation and race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>McCain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant/other Christian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Catholic</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Catholic</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other faiths</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiously unaffiliated</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

White, born-again/evangelical Christian n/a n/a 21 78 24 74 21 78 16 81 7
Mormon n/a n/a 10 80 n/a n/a 21 78 25 61 1

Note: “Protestant” refers to people who described themselves as “Protestant,” “Mormon” or “other Christian.” In exit polls, this categorization most closely approximates the exit poll data reported immediately after the election by media sources. The “white, born-again/evangelical Christian” row includes both Protestants and non-Protestants (e.g., Catholics, Mormons, etc.) who self-identify as born-again or evangelical Christians.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of exit poll data. 2004 Hispanic Catholic estimates come from aggregated state exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool. Other estimates come from Voter News Service/National Election Pool national exit polls. 2012 data come from reports at NBICnews.com and National Public Radio. 2015 data come from reports at NBICnews.com and CNN.com.

Appendix B: U.S. Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record (1916–Present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Candidates</th>
<th>% of Jewish Vote</th>
<th>% of National Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Hughes (R)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilson (D)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Harding (R)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cox (D)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debs (Socialist)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Coolidge (R)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Davis (D)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LaFollette (P)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Hoover (R)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smith (D)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Hoover (R)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roosevelt (D)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Candidate (Party)</td>
<td>Orthodox Jewish Vote</td>
<td>Total Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Landon (R)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roosevelt (D)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Wilkie (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roosevelt (D)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Dewey (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roosevelt (D)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Dewey (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Truman (D)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wallace (Progressive)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Eisenhower (R)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stevenson (D)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Eisenhower (R)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stevenson (D)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Nixon (R)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kennedy (D)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Goldwater (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johnson (D)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Nixon (R)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humphrey (D)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wallace (Independent)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Nixon (R)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McGovern (D)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Ford (R)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carter (D)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Candidate 1</td>
<td>Votes 1</td>
<td>Candidate 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Reagan (R)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Carter (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anderson (I)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Reagan (R)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Mondale (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Bush (R)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Dukakis (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bush (R)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Clinton (D)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perot (I)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Dole (R)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Clinton (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perot (I)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Bush (R)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Gore (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nader (I)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Bush (R)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Kerry (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>McCain (R)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Obama (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Romney (R)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Obama (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Trump (R)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Clinton (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020^</td>
<td>Trump (R)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biden (D)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Copyright 1998-2021 American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise.

American Jews tend to favor Democratic candidates, with 71% of Jewish voters choosing Democratic candidates on average and 25% choosing Republicans since 1968.

* - Number as percentage of popular vote
^ - There were no reliable polls immediately after the election. The usual sources—the National Election Pool and the Associated Press—did not post Jewish voting results. Partisan groups reported different results consistent with their support or opposition to Trump. The figure used here is from an American Jewish Committee poll take prior to the election. “Findings of the 2020 AJC Survey of American Jewish Opinion: Presidential Politics,” AJC, October 19, 2020.

Various news sources.

Copyright 1998-2021 American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Some Grade School (1-8)</th>
<th>Some High School (9-11)</th>
<th>High School Graduate</th>
<th>Technical/Vocational School</th>
<th>Some College or Community College</th>
<th>4-year College Degree (Bachelor's)</th>
<th>Some Post Graduate Work</th>
<th>Post-Graduate Degree (Masters, MBA, JD, MD, PhD)</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>14.60%</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
<td>21.90%</td>
<td>36.50%</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>Prefer Not to Say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-elect Donald Trump</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>66.00%</td>
<td>27.70%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given money to a political campaign or political cause</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>33.00%</td>
<td>64.60%</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a letter or petition about a social or political issue</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>76.10%</td>
<td>22.80%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a political protest, march, or rally</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
<td>67.30%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion about Israel</td>
<td>Generally Pro-Israel and Supportive of the Current Government's Policies</td>
<td>56.90%</td>
<td>31.60%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Political Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Liberal</th>
<th>Some-what Liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Some-what Conservative</th>
<th>Very Conservative</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
<th>Pre-fer Not to Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
<td>29.50%</td>
<td>30.80%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Views on Affordable Care Act

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Favorable</th>
<th>Total Unfavorable</th>
<th>Total Don't Know/ Prefer Not to Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>24.70%</td>
<td>67.30%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Same Sex Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Agree</th>
<th>Total Disagree</th>
<th>Total Don't Know/ Prefer Not to Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>38.70%</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

1. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of two former graduate students, Aliza Schluselberg Balis and Lauren Romano, who helped with both the research and the technical review of this chapter.

2. See “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013, https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/. Many earlier studies suffered from a problem of having no data to correlate with, thus some of these assertions admittedly are only anecdotal.

3. The problem with voting data within both segments of the Orthodox community is that Jews represent such a small sample of the American voters that they frequently are not measured at all in exit polling or voting studies. They are almost never broken down among religious denomination. For many years, even the American Jewish Committee's regular studies of American Jews used an extremely small sample in measuring Orthodox Jews and almost never sought to distinguish among the various types. See Appendix C.

4. The best data available on Jewish political behavior and voting has been produced by the American Jewish Population Project (AJPP) in the Steinhardt Social Science Institute at Brandeis University. Their Jewish Electorate Institute is a non-partisan resource on Jewish voters. They have produced exceedingly good material about Jewish voting trends and identification, but they have no definitive breakdown by religious affiliation. They have developed data by congressional districts which is helpful but there is no specific subset of religious preferences, which is very difficult to confirm, except in certain charedi precincts. As will be explained, the unique character of voting in 2020 further complicates obtaining the best data. AJPP also used a very meta-analysis methodology which, among other things, enabled them to weight and poll data and surveys. See AJPP, “Vote! American Jews at the Ballot Box,” September 2020, https://ajpp.brandeis.edu/documents/2020/estimatingthejewishvote.pdf, as well as their post-election February 2021 analyses.

   The AJPP relies on Edison Research for their data which is generally accepted to be the most accurate and which employs the best methodology. Their sampling and analysis was superior. This article has used their material except when so indicated. Edison demonstrated that American Jews have supported Democratic candidates in every election since 1972. See “U.S. Election Exit Poll Analysis: The Jewish Vote,” Edison Research (blog), August 30, 2019, https://www.edisonresearch.com/u-s-election-exit-poll-analysis-the-jewish-vote/. It is worth noting that this was despite the fact that of all the 2020 Democratic candidates Joe Biden had the strongest record of support for Israel and on Jewish issues.

5. The Associated Press reported that Biden received 68% of the vote and Trump
got 31%. The Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA) reported that the Republican Jewish Coalition suggest that Donald Trump received 30.5% of the Jewish vote. A poll commissioned by J Street said that Joe Biden received 77% of the Jewish vote. See JTA and the Times of Israel, November 17, 2020. See NPR Staff, “Understanding the 2020 Electorate: AP VoteCast Survey,” NPR, May 21, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2020/11/03/929478378/understanding-the-2020-electorate-ap-votecast-survey.

6. There is a fundamental methodological problem analyzing a small subset of an already small subset of a large population. Despite this fact, there have been many efforts made to determine accurately Jewish voting behavior. In addition, the 2020 election presented unique problems for all pollsters aside from the seriously growing skepticism on the part of voters about polls. The coronavirus complicated matters specifically because exit polling was clearly impacted by the large scale of early voting as well as widespread use of mail-in voting. Precinct by precinct analysis suffers from this as well. While modern Orthodox Jews live in relatively tight proximity to each other, they do not approach the closeness of living quarters among the charedim, but in both groups, data is suspect. For further corroboration of this problem, see Samuel J. Abrams work for the American Enterprise Institute. Abrams observed in December that it will probably take months at least before we are able to truly assess the results from the 2020 election (Samuel J. Abrams, “What We Know about Jews and the November Election,” AEI, December 3, 2020, https://www.aei.org/politics-and-public-opinion/what-we-know-about-jews-and-the-november-election/).

7. See Appendix B. There is a significant shift which occurred among Black voters when Barack Obama was on the ticket in 2008 and 2012. There also was an increase in pro-Trump support among Latino voters, especially among certain segments of this population. Overall, the consistency and the percentage turnout among Jewish voters continues to be in place.

8. An interesting observation was made concerning several states where Jews are significant voting blocs. In Pennsylvania, where there are over 275,000 adult Jews, in 2016 Trump carried the state by 46,000. Assuming that one third of the Jews in Pennsylvania voted for Trump, that accounts for more than 900,000 votes. Had Hillary Clinton succeeded in flipping half of those Trump Jewish votes, she could have carried Pennsylvania. In Florida, the numbers are even larger where there are 722,000 adult voters.

9. There was some consideration as to whether an increase in Orthodox Jewish votes could have been crucial to ensure that one or more of the Senate seats would have remained red in the run-off. The last study of Atlanta Jews, done in 2006, indicated that there were 120,000 Jews in metropolitan Atlanta. The assumption is that the Jewish population today is over 130,000. While 50% of the Jews in Georgia are unaffiliated, the Orthodox Jewish institutional growth has been very significant since the late 1990s. See Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities (Jackson, MS:
Orthodox Jews and Trump


10. It is critical to understand that all data, especially exit polls, need to be qualified. Among voters who opted for in-person Election Day voting the data is fine. The problem was that it is very hard to obtain reliable numbers concerning voters who voted early and/or those who voted by mail or what percentage of the overall Jewish vote they represented. Accurate sampling was exceedingly complex and questionable.

11. For the purposes of uniformity and simplicity throughout this article the terms *charedim* or *charedi* will be used to refer to all ultra-Orthodox communities, except where there are specific distinctions, for example, between Hasidim and Yeshivish. Similarly, the term Modern Orthodox will be used without drawing distinctions among various degrees of Orthodox.

12. To see details one can examine, for example, voting precincts in the Brooklyn sections of Borough Park and Williamsburg, as well as in Rockland County, New York.

13. The most recent March 23 Israeli election gave six seats in the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) to the Religious Zionist Party. This party is an amalgam of extremist right-wing religious Zionists many of whom are from the settler movement. They include a group which traces its roots back to the leadership of the American Rabbi Meir Kahane, the founder of the Jewish Defense League, who moved to Israel in 1971 and himself became a member of the Knesset. There remain devoted followers and supporters of his *Kach* Party in America as well as in Israel. They all generally support a Greater Israel spreading from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. See Tovah Lazaroff, “Israel Elections: Bezelel Smotrich Defies Expectations, Wins 6–7 Seats,” The Jerusalem Post, March 23, 2021, https://www.jpost.com/israel-elections/israel-elections-bezalel-smotrich-defies-expectations-wins-6-7-seats-662961.


It identifies attitudes and political preferences of Jews including ninety-nine self-identified Orthodox Jews, of whom five identified as Chabad.

16. There is anecdote reported often about Orthodox Jews that when they picked up their daily New York Times they immediate paged through the news section hoping that there was no negative news story about Israel in the morning paper. Eventually some of the modern Orthodox community ceased reading the Times.

17. The Israel Policy Forum, which is not a left-wing group but is seen as left of center, presented a full picture of the implications and consequences of the decision to move the US Embassy. See “IPF Statement on President Trump’s Remarks on Jerusalem,” Israel Policy Forum (press release), December 6, 2017, https://israelpolicyforum.org/2017/12/06/ipf-statement-president-trump-s-remarks-jerusalem/.


19. Adelson was reported to have contributed more than half a billion dollars to Trump campaigns and Republican political committees since the 2016 campaign See Brendan Cole, “Sheldon Adelson Gave Trump and Republicans over $424 Million Since 2016,” Newsweek, January 12, 2021, https://www.newsweek.com/sheldon-adelson-donald-trump-republicans-donations-1560883.

20. Beginning with the socialist labor Zionist Moses Hess (1812–75) and the political Zionist Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) Zionism evolved in the last half of the nineteenth century. They were followed by the cultural Zionist Ahad Ha’am (Asher Ginsberg) 1856–1927 and the religious Zionist, first chief rabbi of Palestine, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook (1865–1935). These thinkers together with others all sought now to transfer their religious training and nationalist fervor to the creation of a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine.

21. While most were not religious, there were some religious Zionists even among the early immigrants (olim).

22. The Charedim, unlike all the other immigrants, did not seek to create a new country in Palestine for Jews. They believed that Jews were not permitted by God to create a new homeland for Jews in the Holy Land, absent the advent of the Messiah.

23. Arab pressure on the British Government to close Palestine to Jewish immigration plus the immigration barriers in the US forced the Jews to flee the Nazis to the East or to go into hiding to avoid being captured and sent to the death camps.

24. Yiddish for the Golden Land which the new immigrants were seeking.
Orthodox Jews and Trump


26. Term made popular by Stephen Birmingham to refer to the Jews, most of whom came to United States in the nineteenth century from Germany. They were largely financially very successful and also become leaders in the Reform Movement in America. See Stephen Birmingham, *Our Crowd* (New York: Harper, 1967).

27. This was manifestly true as well as Jews moved around the country, after first establishing themselves largely on the East Coast. Even as Jews went from being peddlers to shopkeepers, haberdashers to small businesspeople in the small and middle-sized towns and cities in the South and Mid-West, they still remained Democrats. (At that time as well, it was the Democratic Party which ran most of the southern political machines.) See among other sources, the classic work of V. O. Key, *Southern Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950).


30. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, based on statistics supplied by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, emigration to Israel from the US/Canada went from 700 in 1966 to 6,419 in 1969 to 7,158 in 1970 and 8,122 in 1971. There is no breakdown by religious affiliation but at that time aliyah was very diverse. See “Total Immigration to Israel by Select Country by Year (1948–Present),” Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org total-immigration-to-israel-by-country-per-year.


32. Reagan's overwhelming electoral victory in 1980 was attributed to numerous factors, many of which help to explain the significant increase in Jewish support for a Republican candidate. These included general dissatisfaction with President Jimmy Carter, the Iranian hostage crisis, and Reagan's personal charisma.

33. At its height Yeshiva University itself reported that they had approximately 600 hundred students in Israel in their first or second gap year. Multiple sources reported that across all denominations at its height there were 12,000 American students spending one or two years studying in Israel. See S. Daniel Abraham Israel Program, Yeshiva University, https://www.yu.edu/israel-program/about-us.
34. Jewish Newspapers, such as the Jewish Chronicle in Great Britain, featured ads in this period reflecting this swing. The British always looked for sun in the winter. Visitors to Israel in the winter also reported regularly that one encountered many more European tourists than Americans.

35. Initially, especially in Jerusalem, there was a building boom of new high-rise buildings with all the desirable American amenities. As they were bought up and even more luxurious villas were built, many Jerusalemites even objected to the fact that builders were making a fortune in the construction of apartments and homes which were occupied only for two to four months in a year.

36. The Mid-Manhattan Political Action Committee and The Five Towns PAC, for example, both came out of the memberships of modern Orthodox Synagogues in the early 1980s and years later would be absorbed into NORPAC, which also began as an Orthodox political action committee. They also predate the establishment of the Orthodox Union’s Advocacy Center in Washington.

37. One of the first US Senators to arrange kosher meals for an Orthodox pro-Israel political action committees on their visit to lobby on Capitol Hill was a young Democratic senator from Delaware named Joe Biden.

38. Orthodox Jews, like many novices who enter the world of political campaigns and lobbying learn very quickly that political giving and campaign contributions are not tax-deductible contributions. AIPAC, as did other lobbying groups, created political education arms as well as other tax-deductible branches in addition to their political operations.

39. See Appendix B.

40. There are even numerous stories about who rode in Air Force I to the funeral of Yitzchak Rabin and which politicians were denied a seat on the plane. The kerfuffle over how House Speaker Newt Gingrich was bumped from the plane remains one of the longer lasting unresolved political mysteries.

41. The 2020 Nishma Research survey which sought to analyze Orthodox voters for Trump and Biden indicated that Biden supporters were three times more concerned about “racial inequality and race relations” than were Trump voters. For Trump voters, “racial equality” ranked twenty-sixth out of thirty-five issues, while for Biden voters it ranked seventh out of thirty-five. Only 8% of Orthodox Biden voters said “taxes” was a critical factor for them versus 42% of Trump supporters (Nishma Research, West Hartford CT, November 17, 2020).

42. In September 1991, President Bush railed out against AIPAC and Jews from all over the country who had assembled in Washington to seek US Government support for the resettlement of Soviet Jews who were now being permitted to emigrate to Israel. President Clinton developed a very warm and unique relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, despite the fact that Rabin was never noted for having an especially warm side to his personality.
43. Some have attributed Reagan's electoral success as also a function of many Jews’ dissatisfaction with President Carter, despite the Camp David Accords.

44. In this regard many of these Jews responded to Hillary Clinton with a similar disdain that she generated among suburban housewives, blue collar unionists, and some Hispanics. For many it was less about supporting Trump than about being anti-Obama and anti-Hillary. It is curious to consider how Joe Biden would have done among Jews had he, not Clinton, been the 2016 nominee.

45. At least part of this explanation was that Jews generally lived in states with large populations and large cities. These were and continued to be Democratic strongholds.

Bibliography


Seeing Mar-A-Lago from Jerusalem: Perceptions of President Trump in Israel

by Ehud Eiran

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Though initially an unknown quantity to the public and relevant elites, President Donald Trump gained much popularity in Israel. This approach resulted from the US’s longstanding public support among Israelis and the President’s Israel-specific policies, mostly on territorial issues and concerning Iran. In the last months of Trump’s presidency, Israelis grew even more appreciative, as the President seemed to have played a crucial role in a dramatic upgrade of Israel’s relations with four Arab countries. Support for the President, however, was not uniform. He was more popular among right-wing Israeli voters than left-wing voters and more popular among Israeli-Jews than Israeli-Arabs.

The rest of this paper is organized into three sections. First, I review the change over time in Israeli approaches to President Trump based on polling data and statements by public figures. Here I also show internal differences among Israelis regarding the levels of support the President has enjoyed. In the second section, I analyze the sources of the high levels of support for President Trump in Israel and explain what drove some in the country to oppose him. In my conclusion, I draw broader insights regarding internal trends in Israel, American-Israeli relations, and Israeli-diaspora relations.
As the US election in 2016 drew near, the Israeli public slightly preferred the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton. Probably, on account of the positive image her husband, Bill Clinton, enjoyed in Israel. A survey conducted close to the elections by the Geocartography Knowledge Group showed that 37% of respondents preferred a Hillary Clinton presidency, while only 34% preferred a Donald Trump presidency. This early poll further revealed that patterns of support were drawn along ethnic lines. Israeli-Arabs were more likely to support Ms. Clinton as compared to Israeli-Jews. Support was further organized along ideological lines: A small majority (59%) of the right-wing ruling Likud Party voters preferred a Trump presidency, while 68% of the left-leaning Labor Party wanted to see Ms. Clinton elected President.¹

Once elected, however, and throughout his presidency, Donald Trump was highly popular in Israel. Indeed, Israel was one of the few countries in the world, in which the public saw him in a favorable light for the duration of his presidency. A 2017 Pew Poll showed more than 50% of Israelis polled had confidence in President Trump’s leadership,² by 2019 Pew the figure had risen to 71%. Israelis were the most supportive not only of the President in general, but also of his specific policy initiatives. Polling showed that Israelis, (alongside some Eastern Europeans) were the most supportive among foreign nationals, of six foreign policy steps taken by President Trump.³ This support continued into the election campaign.⁴ A September 2020 survey by the Mitvim Institute showed that 50% of Israelis wanted to see Donald Trump win the elections, while only 21% preferred Joseph Biden. The September 2020 Mitvim survey showed that 39% of Israelis preferred that the Trump peace plan would remain the US blueprint, even in a Biden presidency, whereas only 28% wanted President Biden to present his own outline.⁵ Here again, the internal Israeli divisions were evident: among Israeli Jews, 77% preferred a Trump presidency, and among the right-wing Likud voters, the percentage rose to 80%.⁶ An October 2020 poll showed a plurality of Israelis, some 38.9%, believed that a Biden Presidency would weaken Israeli-American relations.⁷

Israel’s elected leadership was not shy in expressing its support and admiration for President Trump. In a January 2020 press conference, Prime Minister Netanyahu called President Trump: “the greatest friend Israel has ever had in the White house.”⁸ Earlier, Israel named a settlement in the Golan Heights and a future train station in Jerusalem, after the President. Wherever possible, Prime Minister Netanyahu, highlighted his appreciation to the
President and his close associates. For example, in June 2020, Prime Minister Netanyahu offered lavish praise to the President’s son-in-law, and Middle East emissary, Jared Kushner, in order to deflect leaks that he did not hold him in high regard. Among other things, the Prime Minister stated that he has: “absolute confidence in the abilities of Jared Kushner, who had already made a great contribution to peace in the Middle-East.”

Liberal Israelis were less impressed with the President. Yael Patir, a leading left-wing voice in Israel and the former representative of JStreet in Israel, suggested in September 2020 that it is “shameful that there is no political leader in Israel that challenges the assumption that Trump is a friend of Israel, after he had contributed to decrease in Israeli security. First and foremost, regarding the Palestinians, and secondly, with reference to Iran and in particular, its nuclear project. Even “providing air” [legitimizing] in Joe Biden’s words, white supremacist movements and anti-Semitic approaches is against Israeli security, and against the safety of American Jews. I feel people do not understand this enough here.”

Nadav Tamir, former foreign policy advisor to President Peres wrote similarly, in 2020, that: “From [possible] annexation [of the West Bank] to Iran, the president’s Mideast policies have been severely detrimental to Israel, while diminishing the standing of our most important strategic ally both on the international stage and in the region—not the actions of a true friend.”

WHY WAS TRUMP SO POPULAR IN ISRAEL?
President Trump’s popularity among most Israelis drew on two separate but somewhat interrelated sources: (1) A general strong pro-American sentiment in Israel; (2) concrete policy steps the President initiated, that seemed, in the eyes of most Israelis, to support the Jewish State’s political and strategic interests.

PRO-AMERICAN SENTIMENT IN ISRAEL:
The Israeli public and many of its elites view the United-States most favorably. Washington has been Israel’s closest ally since the late 1960s and had extended political, military and political assistance for decades, including during challenging moments such as the massive American airlift during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The alliance is further based on a shared view of the Middle East and indeed the world, including close cooperation during the cold war against
the USSR and its regional allies. The US is also home to the second largest Jewish population in the world (following Israel), and Israelis accept that the opportunities extended to American Jews created the safest and most rewarding diasporic experience in Jewish history. Although traditionally Zionist ideology gave preference to residing in Israel and the negation of the Diaspora, by the early twenty-first century, some 500,000 to 800,000 Israelis reside in the US.\textsuperscript{12} Israeli elites and the media laud those of them who had done well such as actress Gal Gadot,\textsuperscript{13} and Nobel laureate Arie Warshel.\textsuperscript{14}

Many in Israel’s elite have close personal and professional experiences in the US. Prime Minister Netanyahu spent much of his early years in the US. He would become a naturalized American citizen and later graduate from MIT. Fellow right-wing leader, Naftali Bennet is the son of Israeli Americans and held his US citizenship until his election to the Israeli Parliament.\textsuperscript{15} The Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, Benny Gantz and Gabi Ashkenazi, had close working ties with the US armed forces during their tenure as the Chiefs of Staff of the IDF, and they were both awarded the US Legion of Merit. The same is true of other Israeli officials and elites, as many Israeli academics are trained in the US and much of Israeli high-tech sector is geared toward the US market. Polling data indicates a high level of support for the United States among Israelis. In a 2019 Pew poll, 85\% of Israelis said they view the United States favorably. This compared to a global median of 54\% support for the United States. Here, again, there are some internal differences: 94\% of Israeli Jews held a positive view of the US, while only 38\% of Israeli-Arabs held a similar view.\textsuperscript{16}

The cumulative effect of this warm sentiment in Israel towards the United States, is that most American presidents have been popular among Israelis. Popularity has varied, but the baseline was already a warm posture towards the leadership in Washington.

\textbf{TRUMP’S ISRAEL-RELATED POLICIES}

Since his election, President Trump—who saw himself as a great friend of Israel\textsuperscript{17}—made a number of policy decisions that were deemed by most Israelis as favorable to their country. These decisions were made in the context of the Iranian nuclear challenge and Israel’s territorial aspirations in the Golan Heights and the West Bank (including Jerusalem). Against the background of Israeli fears about Iran developing a nuclear bomb,\textsuperscript{18} the Israeli government
was thrilled when in 2018 President Trump withdrew American participation in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). The American assassination in January 2020 of Qasem Suleimani, a senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officer, was similarly viewed favorably by the Israeli security establishment and the Israeli public, despite concerns about a possible Iranian retaliation against Israeli targets. Suleimani was believed to be the main instigator of Iranian subversive activities in the Middle East. President Trump was further supportive of Israeli territorial aspirations regarding three specific issues. He recognized Israel’s rule over Jerusalem and moved the US embassy there. The President’s peace plan reflected, in effect, support for Israeli extension of sovereignty into parts of the West Bank. Other policy moves—such as his choice for the American Ambassador to Israel—reflected a warm embrace of the settler movement in the West-Bank. Finally, President Trump proclaimed in 2019, American recognition of Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

During the fall and early winter of 2020, President Trump won further support from Israeli elites (including factions generally opposed to him) for his role in advancing significant upgrades in Israel’s relations with four Arab nations (UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco), and the hopes—based on Trump’s statements, that Saudi-Arabia would follow shortly. Ironically, the semi-clandestine evolution of closer Saudi-Israeli relations during Trump’s era was driven, at least in part, by Saudi concerns that the United States under Trump is a less reliable ally, compared to past administrations.

Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed the sentiment of many Israelis when he stated in December 2020 that the accords with the four Arab nations: “Brought a great excitement to Israel . . . none of these breakthroughs would have been possible without the leadership of President Trump and his team. So, I say again: Thank you President Trump.”

Some of President Trump’s other policy moves that advanced Israeli strategic interests earned respect for him among professionals, gained somewhat less public attention, as they occurred very close to the US election and beyond. These included, most notably, the October 2020 launch of an Israeli-Lebanese negotiation track to resolve both countries’ long-standing conflict over their maritime boundary and the mid-January 2021 inclusion of Israel as part of US Central Command.
CONCLUSION

Contrary to global trends, President Donald Trump was very popular in Israel. His popularity drew on two major sources. First, the warm feelings most Israelis harbor for the United States. Second, the President undertook steps that supported Israeli goals most notably regarding territorial issues (which are more Israeli right-wing goals) and Iran’s nuclear and regional plans. In connection with territorial issues, his recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem and the corresponding decision to move the American embassy there, and his decision to acknowledge Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights won Trump many supporters among the conservative Israeli community. With regard to the Iranian challenge, the President’s actions in pulling the US out of the JCPOA and in ordering an attack on a senior Iranian military officer, Qasem Suleimani, who had spearheaded Iranian operations in the region, were highly regarded by that same community.

As has been noted, support for the President was not unanimous. Israeli Jews were more supportive in comparison to Israeli-Arabs. Right-wing voters were more supportive of the President compared to left-wing voters. Moreover, Israelis were aware of the President’s shortcoming. In June 2020, Chemi Shalev, a journalist, summarized this dichotomy: “[John] Bolton’s book highlights the severity of the cognitive dissonance that the alliance with Trump has inflicted on Israeli public opinion. Israelis have crafted an artificial disconnect between the deluge of reputable accounts of Trump’s misdeeds, from cuddling up to dictators to his mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic and the mass protests . . . and his pro-Israelis policies, which most perceive as a manifestation of justice, morality and diplomatic wisdom.”

President Trump’s positive image in Israel, leaves us with three insights. First, his popularity among Israeli Jews can be contrasted against his lack of popularity among American Jews. According to an October 2020 AJC poll, 75% of American Jews planned to vote for the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden. As other chapters in this volume suggest, during his presidency, numerous American Jews voiced their concerns about various domestic aspects of his Presidency. The gap between the support the President enjoyed in Israel and the lack of support among American Jews reminds us that these two large centers of Jewish life have, at times, a dichotomous world view. Israeli-Jews were driven by their national interests, while American Jews were driven by their values and political preferences in the context of American society. This contrasts somewhat with Israel’s self-identification as the national state of the Jewish people and with the Israeli assumption that Jews in the Diaspora should
consider Israel’s interests as they vote. Moreover, this gap might further add to Israel becoming a divisive issue within the American Jewish community, a trend some scholars, such as Dov Waxman, have referenced.\textsuperscript{36} Second, the distinctive differentiations in levels of support for the President in Israel suggest an identification between Israel’s right-wing and the US Republican party, and between Israel’s left-wing and America’s Democratic party.\textsuperscript{37} Historically, Israel’s approach was more bipartisan. However, for more than a decade now, under the leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu, Israel’s right wing sees itself as closely aligned with the Republican party. This is evident also on the cultural level, as Israel’s right-wing intellectuals draw much of their inspiration from the cultural positions of American conservative thinkers and politicians. Finally, it remains to be seen how the Trump legacy will be understood over time in Israel. If his presidency would be seen in hindsight as the beginning of American decline in world affairs or as the period where legitimized anti-Semitism would gain traction within the American public sphere, Israelis might feel differently in the future about the Trump era. Alternatively, if future presidents will abandon the warm support the US had extended to Israel over the last fifty years, Trump’s favorable image might further intensify.

In the immediate future, Israeli assessments of President Trump’s approach to Israel will be contrasted with President Biden’s bilateral and regional policies. Israelis will be looking to see if the Biden Administration is going to alter his focus in favor of a different type of US Middle East policy, and specifically, if he would move to unwrap part of what Trump pushed to achieve. Early indications offer a mixed picture. Occupied by the internal challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, and larger foreign policy issues such as China, the Biden administration signaled early on that the Middle East and Israel are not as central as they have been in the Trump-era. For example, President Biden called Prime Minister Netanyahu only about a month after he assumed office, while former President Trump called his Israeli counterpart, two days after he assumed office in 2017.\textsuperscript{38} The administration indicated that it will keep some of the Israel-related Trump policies, such as the embassy move to Jerusalem, but will revise others, most notably, its willingness to re-engage Iran in an effort to reach an agreement regarding Teheran’s military nuclear program.\textsuperscript{39}

Official Israel was generally cautious in passing judgment on the Biden administration, though Prime Minister Netanyahu delayed calling Joe Biden after he was elected. The Israeli public was (after the elections and before the inauguration) concerned. A November 2020 survey showed that almost 75% of Israelis expected the incoming Biden administration to be less friendly or
far less friendly to Israel compared to the outgoing Trump administration. This concern was more pronounced among Jews (over 80% of them shared this sentiment), whereas among Israeli-Arabs only 43% held a similar view.\textsuperscript{40}

As these elite and public assessments evolve, they will take into account not only the agenda that was set by the former President, such as the status of Jerusalem, and an Iran deal; but is also expected to include the way in which the Biden administration will handle new issues such as Washington’s support for Israel in the International Criminal Court, or new developments in Israel’s relations with China.
Notes


9. Moarn Azulai and YNET Staff, “Bolton: Netanyahu Doubted Kushner; the Prime Minister’s Office: We Have Full Confidence in Him,” June 18, 2020, https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5750597,00.html.


26. White House, Proclamation on Recognizing the Golan Heights as Part of the State of Israel, March 25, 2019, https://il.usembassy.gov/proclamation-on-recognizing-
the-golan-heights-as-part-of-the-state-of-israel/.


Primary Sources


Newspapers, TV sources, and posts


Polls


Secondary Sources


The Trump Administration put a funhouse mirror in front of the American Jewish community. What we saw was recognizably us, but it wasn’t quite how we see ourselves, or how we would like others to see us.

And for four years, just like in a funhouse, there was no escaping the image. Everywhere we turned, there we were: Jews occupied at least twenty influential roles in the Trump administration. Identifying the Jews among the White House menagerie, assessing how they fit into the tribe—their backgrounds, their connections, their level of observance—reconciling their positions and actions against the outlook and policies of the larger, largely liberal Jewish community—all that became an ongoing job, if not obsession, of the American Jewish press.

But the press did more than just report. It played a crucial role in helping Jews adjust to what for many was a confusing and shocking sight. Shocking, because so many of the policies these Jews and their boss stood for were anathema to the largely Democratic American Jewish community and scores of their Republican Jews as well. Confusing because some of these same Jews took leadership roles in shaping Trump’s policies toward Israel, many of which found high levels of support among a majority of American Jews.

“For Jewish liberals, Trump is an ally of antisemites and a proto-authoritarian whose character and conduct, statements mark him as a unique threat to democracy. They can’t understand why even one Jew would consider voting for him,” wrote Jonathan Tobin in Haaretz just after Trump’s election. “… By contrast, Orthodox Jews, and the small number of non-Orthodox who identify
as political conservatives, do regard support for Israel as a litmus test issue. Trump’s historic support for Israel seals the deal for them.”

This discovery, description and deliberation over Trump and his friends, families and allies took place across all general media and social media, of course. (In general, what happens in the Jewish press is a mirror of what happens in larger general media. This shouldn’t come as a surprise, as synagogues follow the same trends as churches, and Jewish philanthropy reflects larger patterns in American philanthropy.) The New York Times\(^5\) covered the Jewish heritage of Stephen Miller’s family, for instance, and Newsweek and AP\(^6\) ran pieces on the Jews and Trumps.

But it was the American Jewish press that covered it most assiduously, and that’s my main focus here, because the coverage tells a larger story about how Trump forever changed how American Jews see their community, indeed, it transformed their very sense of community. The Trump years deepened the divides between opposing Jewish camps\(^7\) and arguably put an end once and for all to the enduring myth of Jewish unity. “Now that the four-year nightmare appears over . . . it is time for self-evaluation in the Jewish community to restore relations with friends, family, fellow Jews and other casualties of the Trump era (error),” wrote Rabbi Barry Silver in the Florida Jewish Journal.\(^8\)

I wasn’t at the center of this drama but I was certainly an involved spectator. When Trump descended the escalator to announce his candidacy for President of the United States, I was editor-in-chief and publisher of The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles.

At the time, the Jewish Journal was one of about forty-five American Jewish newspapers. These serve Jewish readers in various cities and regions, as Jewish community news broadsheets, papers and, now, web sites, have done since before the American Revolution (1675, to be exact, with the publication of the Gazeta de Amsterdam).\(^9\) Their pages are devoted mostly to local communal news, but many also feature opinion pieces by local columnists and national and international news, syndicated through the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Local Jewish papers—again, reflecting larger trends —have faced downsizing and even closure as a result of digitization and the loss of print advertising revenue. Their numbers, readership and influence have shrunk considerably even in the past few years. (The Jewish Journal, which I ran for seventeen years until 2016, ceased print publication in 2020 and its online traffic has dropped well below its 2016 levels.\(^10\))

The COVID-19 pandemic was a coup de grace to many local Jewish publications,\(^11\) but most still made it through the Trump administration
How the Jewish Press Saw 45

before folding. The largest American Jewish news sites—forward.com, jta.org, tabletmag.org—and their even-larger English-language Israeli counterparts—jerusalempost.com, haaretz.com and timesofisrael.com—covered the Trump administration with the same fervor as the general press, gaining more readers in the process, and serving, as news media sources so often do, as the first rough draft of the history of Trump and American Jewry.

Early in Trump’s presidency, three storylines captured most of the Jewish media’s attention: Trump’s Jewish family members and close associates, his flirtation with white supremacists, and his uncritical embrace of Israel and its then-government. “American Jews are watching the beginning of Donald Trump’s presidency with both fear and hope,” read a lead story (syndicated through JTA) in the Crescent City Jewish News.

No president in history has closer familial ties to the Jewish community, Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt pointed out in a discussion hosted by The Jewish Journal in Los Angeles. “The notion of having Jewish children who are shomer Shabbos in the first family is pretty remarkable,” he said.

Large and local Jewish media ran lists of his Jewish family and close associates: his daughter Ivanka’s conversion to Judaism through an Orthodox rabbi, his son-in-law Jared Kushner’s religious family, their two children—Trump’s Jewish grandchildren!

There were profiles of Trump’s lawyer David Friedman, who would ultimately be picked as Ambassador to Israel, his Senior Advisors Jason Greenblatt and Stephen Miller, and full-throated defenses of his policies in columns and letters to the editor.

“I and over 70,000,000 other loyal, patriotic Americans, Jews included, did not ‘surrender to an autocrat,’” wrote one letter writer in the Jewish Press of Pinellas. “We voted for Donald Trump and his ego to follow through on every promise that he made during his campaign.”

Indeed, for the duration of Trump’s presidency his supporters and sometimes his associates used the Jewish press through op-eds and letters to advance the claim that Trump was good for the Jews.

These were juxtaposed against anxious coverage and opinion columns on Trump’s affinity for white supremacists and what Trump advisor and campaign manager Stephen Bannon called the “alt right.”

“Donald Trump has a white supremacist problem” was the headline of an editor’s column I wrote in the Journal on Feb 24, 2016, well before his election. I detailed Bannon and Trump’s connections to and winking support of various white power leaders and web sites, and stated a paradox that seemed obvious.
“Does Trump understand he is inspiring the very people who want to see his grandchildren dead?” I wrote. “Does he remember the 2014 attack on a Jewish Community Center in Kansas that left three people dead, perpetrated by a devoted contributor to the Vanguard News Network, the same network that refers to Trump as its ‘Glorious Leader’? Why is Trump not publicly rejecting them? Why is he not backtracking on the divisive racial comments he’s made, the ones that bring these lowlifes and rejects firmly into his camp?”

Some of the early voices in the Jewish press opposing the Republican nominee came from Jews on the right. Ben Shapiro, who would eventually become a staunch Trump supporter, wrote a scathing anti-Trump screed which I made the Journal’s cover story on March 1, 2016, “Why the Republican Party is Dying?” The symptom of its death, Shapiro asserted, is Donald Trump.

“Why is Donald Trump winning?” he wrote. “What is driving millions of Americans into the arms of a personally authoritarian ignoramus . . . The distinction between being a pig and being politically incorrect is a real one. But Trump and his supporters have obliterated the distinction—and that’s in large part thanks to the pendulum swinging wildly against political correctness.”

The worst fears that Trump stoked rather than stifled these voices became a reality on August 12, 2017, at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where a white supremacist mob marched with torches chanting “Jews will not replace us!” and engaged in a rampage that left one peaceful counterprotester dead.

That day’s violence dominated the Jewish news cycle for months, with over three dozen stories appearing in The Forward alone. JTA Reporter Ron Kampeas’ first person account, “The Day the Nazi Called Me Shlomo,” appeared in most Jewish papers around the country. So did Trump’s equivocating condemnation of the neo-Nazis, the reaction of his Jewish senior economic advisor Gary Cohn (“Gary Cohn Reportedly Considered Quitting Following Charlottesville,” read a New York Jewish Week headline).

Jews who were willing to give the new President a chance to be “presidential,” and distance himself from the most worrisome aspects of his campaign had their worst fears realized in Charlottesville.

Their dread deepened as the administration’s policies reflected the agenda of the far-right. This was especially true on immigration, an issue that an American Jewish Committee survey found a large number of Jews supported.

Confounding American Jews further was the fact that Trump’s point man on immigration policy was also one of his high-profile Jewish advisors, Stephen Miller.
Jewish media spent a lot of time and space trying to figure Miller out. I wrote a long piece that appeared in the Jewish Journal of August 16, 2016, “Stephen Miller, Meet Your Immigrant Great-Grandfather.”

I spoke of my surprise at finding out in a passing reference in a *Politico* story about Miller’s Jewish LA roots. That set me on a genealogical search.


“‘Imagine living in a place where armed Cossacks ride through the streets, looking to cripple or kill you,’ Chapter 3 begins.

And so it was Wolf Lieb Glotzer and his wife, Bessie, sought to flee “dreary, scary” Antopol, in Belarus. On Jan. 7, 1903, Wolf arrived in New York aboard the German ship S.S. Motke with $8 in his pocket. He was eventually joined by his son, Natan, a tailor, and his brother Moses, who had arrived earlier, having escaped conscription in the czar’s army. On a visit to Uncle Moses, Natan stopped in Johnstown, Pa., and fell in love with the place. He found work as a tailor and soon bought the shop.

You know the rest. Glossers expanded. More family, including brother Sam, joined in, and Glosser Bros. eventually grew into a chain of dozens of stores, becoming a beloved part of the community before eventually closing. And so it was: Sam Glosser begat Isadore, whose grandson is, yes, Stephen Miller.

By becoming Trump’s anti-immigrant avatar, Miller demonstrates that in America, truly anything is possible: The great-grandson of a desperate refugee can grow up to shill for the demagogue bent on keeping desperate refugees like his great-grandfather out.

To me, Miller’s story raised central and urgent questions about Jewish identity, and evidently it struck a chord: the story was viewed by millions and echoed and reposted in other Jewish media, featured also in the best-selling biography of Miller by journalist Jean Guerrero. Follow-up stories appeared in which Miller’s own family members criticized him, calling his actions shameful—a very public family fight within the “family” of Jewish readers. Was Miller rebelling against his Jewish immigrant roots? How could a Jew do such a thing? What did his past roots have to do with present policies? Did being “Jewish” imply or even require certain ways of approaching the world, or was there room even for Jews whose policies seemed anti-Jewish? As one
columnist in a Florida Jewish paper put it, “Has Stephen Miller Betrayed His Jewish Roots?”

The outrage that Miller stirred with his immigration policies was reflected in the Jewish press, as was the dismay over Trump’s proximity to white supremacists. Following the mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, most commentators in the Jewish press, as well as most news stories, placed some culpability for the shooting on the atmosphere of hate and anti-immigrant intolerance that Trump stoked.

This negative coverage was in sharp contrast with the coverage Trump and his Jewish advisors received in the Jewish press on another subject: Israel. Trump’s early embrace of Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, full-throated support of the Israeli government, recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and of the Golan as part of Israel, and the normalization agreements Trump oversaw between Israel and three Arab nations received considered but largely positive coverage.

The positive headlines called Trump “A Dream Come True on Israel,” and even the most negative headlines the peace deals generated did not go beyond what Ori Nir wrote in The Forward, “Peace with the UAE is Fabulous, But Israel’s Existential Problem Is at Home.”

The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle, the hometown Jewish paper of the city where the worst massacre of Jews in American history took place, ran an op-ed during the 2020 election, entitled, “Why I Am Voting for Donald Trump,” and citing his support of Israel.

The swarm of negative and positive coverage in the Jewish press should not be mistaken for an even split among the American Jewish electorate over Trump. He was and remains deeply unpopular among American Jews, getting only 28% of the Jewish vote in the 2020 election.

This was not a simple difference of opinion. As with the electorate at large, the split was visceral, primal. The anti-Trumpers couldn’t believe the pro-Trump Jews were even Jewish. (“Jewish Twitter’s Credo: ‘Stephen Miller is a White Nationalist’ read a Forward headline.”

The pro-Trumpers attacked anti-Trump Jews (and Jewish journalists) as antisemitic, anti-Israel, or, as Ambassador David Friedman did, as kapos. “there is a deep vein of anti-Semitism that is running through today’s Democratic Party,” Miller told JTA.

In short, Donald Trump became a defining marker of Jewish identity. Jewish media, or what was left of it by 2020, reported and reflected on all aspects of the Trump administration. Editorial pages praised, or at least parsed,
his stands fairly on Israel, while taking him to task for other policies and statements. The headline of one editorial in the Detroit Jewish News in praise of the Iran deal summed this stance up best, “Wrong Man? Right Decision!”

The coverage, good and bad, shows an American Jewish community roiled by the reality of its own ideological extremes: a community that lauds some of the policies of a President it otherwise loathes, and that, since Trump, can no longer look in the mirror and see one simple image reflected back.
Notes

15. Boris Epshteyn, “Donald Trump Is the Most Pro-Jewish.”


Bibliography


Why Donald Trump’s Vision Repelled American Jews

By Mark Mellman

Most American Jews were never likely to admire Donald Trump, but the strong distaste for the former President was overdetermined.

First, Trump was a Republican. In the hyperpolarized society in which we live, that alone would have been sufficient to set a mostly Democratic community against him.

Second, Trump embraced a policy agenda that was anathema to a majority of American Jews. On immigration, guns, choice, healthcare, civil rights, the environment, and a host of other issues, Trump’s views were diametrically opposed to those of the majority of American Jews.

Perhaps most important though, by word and deed Trump undermined the pluralist democracy that has made America a safe haven for Jews and instead unleashed a powerful strain of antisemitism.

Some believed Trump’s support for Israel, itself subject to critique, should have been sufficient to make up for these great failings. It wasn’t.

JEWS AS DEMOCRATS
Nearly three-quarters of Jews (71%) identify as Democrats, with just a quarter (26%) assuming the Republican mantle and the remainder identifying with neither party. Jews’ affinity for the Democratic party is about twenty points higher than that of the electorate overall.¹
In a nation beset by hyperpolarization, partisanship does more to structure political attitudes than any other attribute. When even the interpretation of facts like the state of the economy, the spread of disease, and the science of climate change are importantly determined by partisanship, it should be no surprise that attitudes toward a political figure like Donald Trump comport quite strongly with citizens’ party identification.

Thus, among Jews, a group where Democrats predominate, Trump’s standing, as measured by his approval rating, has lagged fifteen to twenty points behind its level among the public as a whole.\(^2\) Pew’s poll found just 27\% of American Jews approving of Trump’s performance while 73\% disapproved.\(^3\)

When votes were counted in 2016, and again in 2020, only about a quarter of Jews cast ballots for Trump. Just Blacks, Latinos, gays, and atheists gave Trump’s opponents margins as large (or larger) than did America’s Jews.

Pegging the exact level of Jewish support for, and opposition to, Trump is problematic. In the past, analysts treated the exit polls conducted by a consortium of media outlets as canonical. Over time, however, these surveys demonstrated a series of biases, and with the increase in early voting, by mail and in person, large parts of the sample were just “polls,” not exit polls, conducted as voters left the booth. Moreover, in 2020 the media consortium’s sample of Jews was too small for them to even publish results.

In the last couple of cycles, competitors to the media pool emerged, particularly VoteCast by the University of Chicago’s National Opinion Research Center, used by the Associated Press and Fox News. A very large sample academic survey, the Cooperative Election Study (CES) housed at Harvard, also provides insight into Jewish voters.

In addition, partisan organizations in the Jewish community—the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC) and J Street—did their own surveys around election day (which are not in fact exit polls at all, despite the organizational branding), each of which tended to validate the views of its sponsor.\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Biden</th>
<th>Trump</th>
<th>Margin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VoteCast</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>+39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>+41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Street</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>+30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJC</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>+55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>+41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perhaps not surprisingly, the average of these four data sources comes quite close to the results produced by the non-partisan sources. While some uncertainty remains, it seems reasonable to conclude that Biden garnered about 69–70% of the Jewish vote, while Trump picked up 29–30%, which means the now-President did eighteen points better among American Jews than among Americans overall, while Trump did about nineteen points less well.

If Trump had only been a Republican, in the words of the Passover hymn “Dayenu,” it would have been enough for him to earn the enmity of the community. But there was more!

JEWS AS LIBERALS
Jews are not just partisan Democrats; they also tend to be ideological liberals. In the broadest sense nearly two-thirds of Jews identify themselves as liberal, while just 29% claim to be conservatives and fewer than 10% place themselves squarely in the middle.

But Jewish liberalism extends beyond group identification to a variety of policy preferences. For example, over 80% of Jews are pro-choice, about thirty points more than Americans overall. Jews are fifteen to thirty points more likely than other Americans to favor allowing gay marriage, legalizing marijuana, and increasing the minimum wage.

Jews are similarly more likely than others to believe corporations don’t strike a fair balance between making a profit and serving the public interest and to recognize that blacks and other minorities do not receive equal treatment in the criminal justice system.

Jews are also far more likely than other Americans to support immigration. Some nine in ten Jews supported DACA, the program to grant citizenship to “Dreamers” brought to the United States as children, and were twenty points more likely than other Americans to favor increasing immigration into the US.

Donald Trump’s pro-gun, anti-choice, anti-immigration, anti-environment, anti-LGBTQ, racist agenda was guaranteed to elicit antipathy from American Jews. And it did. Seventy-six percent disapproved of the way Trump handled immigration and 77% disapproved of his approach to race relations.

Had Trump only presented his hard-right agenda, dayenu; it would have been enough to earn the antipathy of American Jewry, but there was more.
THE JEWISH COMMITMENT TO PLURALIST, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Historians and sociologists have long debated which food metaphor more aptly describes America’s unique experience with ethnicity.

Alexis de Tocqueville’s less famous predecessor as a French chronicler of American life, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, first gave voice to the melting pot theory, defining Americans as “that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a Frenchwoman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who leav[es] behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.”

Of course, de Crèvecoeur ignored African Americans, brought to this land in chains and long legally prevented from “melting” into the “new race” he saw.

Popularizing the phrase, however, was left to Israel Zangwill, labeled the “Dickens of the Ghetto,” whose 1908 play, based on Romeo and Juliet, was titled “The Melting Pot.” The protagonist, a Russian Jewish immigrant whose family was murdered in the Kishinev pogrom, falls in love with another Russian émigré, the daughter of a Cossack, only to find that her father was the Tsarist officer who led the massacre that killed his family.

In contrast to Shakespeare’s version, these differences produce only a temporary rupture in the couple’s relationship because America’s melting pot creates new and different beings, unmoored to the prejudices of the past. In the words of Zangwill’s protagonist, “Here she lies, the great Melting Pot—listen! Can’t you hear the roaring and the bubbling? . . . what a stirring and a seething! Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian—black and yellow—Jew and Gentile—Yes, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross—how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame . . . God is making the American.”

President Theodore Roosevelt attended the Washington opening of “The Melting Pot” and later wrote, “That particular play I shall always count among the very strong and real influences upon my thought and my life.”

Not everyone shared Zangwill and Roosevelt’s enthusiasm for immigrants shedding their uniqueness in a homogenizing American melting pot, least of all many of the immigrants and their descendants.

Stanford historian Carl Degler may have first used the tossed salad
metaphor, writing in 1959, “[S]ome habits from the old country were not discarded; in those instances, the children of immigrants even into the third and fourth generations retained their differences. In view of such failure to melt and fuse, the metaphor of the melting pot is unfortunate and misleading. A more accurate analogy would be a salad bowl, for, although the salad is an entity, the lettuce can still be distinguished from the chicory, the tomatoes from the cabbage.”

At the same time, sociologists like Nathan Glazer were also urging us to move “Beyond the Melting Pot” to the tossed salad, seeing each group retaining a distinct identity and cultural characteristics, while contributing to a unified whole.

The food metaphors didn’t stop there, with some scholars critiquing both concepts, arguing instead for “America as chocolate fondue. . . . Our different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are the strawberries, pineapple, and cherries, the graham crackers and cookies. . . . Then we are dipped in America. . . . We are coated in America. Because Americans can and do come from all ethnicities and races, we all look like Americans.”

Whatever one’s metaphorical or culinary preferences, underlying them all are consistent principles. These characterizations make clear that we are a nation of immigrants that welcomes others to join us.

All suggest a commitment to pluralism, in which our diversity is not merely tolerated, but valued. Whether we are homogenized in the melting pot or tossed in the salad or dipped in the fondue, we are all equal, with equal standing to make democratic decisions. In short, we are part of what was once a unique experiment and is still far from a universal achievement: America is a (small “I”) liberal, pluralist democracy.

As any celebrant of Jewish holidays and every reader of the Passover Haggadah is aware, this has not always been the Jewish experience. “In every generation they rise up to destroy us.” But not in America.

In the Muslim East, Jews suffered social and legal disabilities, as well as special taxes, but were generally accepted and protected until the 1940s, when they suddenly found themselves unwelcome in the lands that had been home since their exile from Judea two thousand years before. Only the newly created State of Israel was ready to accept them.

Over the centuries, Christian Europe was even worse. Restrictions on places of residence and lines of work, expulsions, massacres, and pogroms culminated in a revolutionary attempt to finally rid the world of Jews—the Holocaust.
By contrast, America has been uniquely hospitable to Jews precisely because it is animated by a commitment to liberal, pluralist democracy. Our country has not always lived up to that commitment—we Jews have faced antisemitism, African Americans endured chattel slavery, Jim Crow and systemic racism, Native Americans were killed and dispossessed from their lands, while our treaties with them most often observed in the breach.

But Jews would not have flourished in America, nor would other peoples have made progress, in a nation that was not committed to liberal, pluralist democracy.

George Washington summed up these ideals in his famous letter to the Newport, Rhode Island Synagogue: “The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.” All citizens enjoy freedom of religion and equality in the eyes of the law.

More significant though, Jews and others are not merely accepted, but embraced. Continued Washington, “It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens. . . .”

Again, our country has not always lived up to these ideals, and we have seen putative leaders vying for power as enemies of those values. But Donald Trump was the first major party candidate to run, and the first president to govern, whose defining political project was to uproot the very values, mores, and commitments that had rendered America not just a safe haven, but indeed, a pluralist heaven, for Jews.

To quote a Republican operative describing a campaign from which Trump drew inspiration, “We created a hate campaign. We put all the hate groups into one big pot and let it boil.” Trump took it a step further. He did not just allow it to boil, he applied the heat required to make it boil. Exploitation of grievance and the mobilization of resentment, or in the words of one-time GOP strategist Kevin Phillips, “knowing who hates who,” was the lodestar of the Trump campaign and his Presidency.

Trump had dabbled in racist politics for nearly thirty years before he ran for president. Among his first forays into the political arena involved purchasing full page ads in New York newspapers demanding the death penalty
for five teenagers of color, falsely accused of a brutal attack on a Central Park jogger. Trump's ad attacked Mayor Ed Koch, a death penalty supporter, who had urged New Yorkers not to turn to hate in the aftermath of the assault. In reply, Trump's ad proclaimed, "I want to hate these muggers and murderers. They should be forced to suffer and, when they kill, they should be executed for their crimes."

A few years later, in an effort to stop an Indian casino which might compete with his own, Trump took out ads featuring needles and other drug paraphernalia, that asked, "Are these the new neighbors we want? . . . The St. Regis Mohawk Indian record of criminal activity is well documented."

And of course, there was his long, single-minded effort to promote racist birther charges against President Obama.

So, by the time Trump descended the escalator at Trump Tower announcing his candidacy and labeling Mexican immigrants drug smugglers, criminals and rapists, he was already well practiced in the art of stoking racial resentment at the expense of pluralist politics.

His Jewish children and grandchildren notwithstanding, Trump was always ready with casual antisemitic quips. At a Republican Jewish Coalition meeting during his first campaign, he tossed off a few. "Is there anyone in this room who doesn't renegotiate deals? Probably 99% of you. Probably more than any room I've ever spoken in." And, "Stupidly, you want to give me money . . . But you're not going to support me because I don't want your money. You want to control your own politicians."

A campaign ad featured Hillary Clinton with piles of cash. Superimposed on both was a Jewish star and inside were the words, "The Most Corrupt Candidate Ever."

He coddled white supremacists and antisemites because he recognized they were doing his bidding, building his campaign organization. After a reporter published an unflattering profile of Melania Trump and was deluged with antisemitic attacks, including death threats, Trump was asked to rebuke the attackers. "I don't have a message for the fans" he replied coldly.

When white supremacists marched in Charlottesville shouting "Jews will not replace us" and killed a counter-protestor, Trump saw "very fine people on both sides." White supremacist leaders understood Trump's words "as an endorsement." When Trump branded himself "a nationalist," another antisemitic hate leader crowed "THE FIRE RISES," as Trump kept the pot boiling.

Hate speech begets hateful acts.

Penn State Professor James Piazza examined the relationship between
politicians’ hate speech and acts of domestic terrorism across 126 countries from 2006 to 2017 and found, “Violence climbs when politicians speak with hate . . . a lot.”

Researchers Griffin Sims Edwards and Stephen Rushin focused on US data and found Trump’s “election was associated with a statistically significant surge in reported hate crimes . . . even when controlling for alternative explanations. In addition, they demonstrated that counties where Trump garnered the most votes also experienced the largest jumps in hate crimes.

A trio of Texas professors analyzed Anti-Defamation League data concluding that counties where Trump held rallies in 2016 saw a 226% increase in hate crimes compared to similar counties where rallies did not take place.

Trump’s own hate speech gave aid and comfort to America’s antisemites. From 2015 to 2019, antisemitic incidents jumped to nearly a record high, according to the ADL. Why? In part because Trump legitimized their rhetoric and normalized their views, while giving license to their behavior.

The man who massacred eleven at a Pittsburgh synagogue aped President Trump when he wrote, hours before the attack, “HIAS [formerly the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.” Earlier he’d written, “Open your Eyes! It’s the filthy evil jews [sic] Bringing the Filthy evil Muslims into the Country!!”

Can one draw a direct causal line from Trump to the Pittsburgh shooting or the record rise in antisemitic incidents? No. But do most Jews think there is a connection? Absolutely yes, and with good reason.

One poll found 73% of Jewish voters believe they are less secure than they were, 71% disapprove of the way President Trump handled antisemitism, and some 60% percent say the President bears at least some responsibility for the Pittsburgh and Poway synagogues shootings. An American Jewish Committee survey found the number of Jews calling antisemitism a very serious problem doubled between 2016 and 2017. By 2020, 75% of Jews said there was more antisemitism in the US than there had been five years before.

In pulling down the guardrails of democracy, in attacking the norms of pluralism, in legitimating hate, Trump has made America less inviting, less safe for its Jewish community. He might be forgiven for being a Republican, even a conservative one. But for undermining the welcome and well-being of American Jewry he will forever carry a mark of Cain.
TRUMP AND ISRAEL

Some American Jews felt Trump’s trespasses should be forgiven in light of his strong support for Israel.

First, this is a decidedly minority view. As noted above, American Jews exhibit a strong dislike of Trump, seeing him as a purveyor of antisemitism. Moreover, upon reflection, it is clear that Trump’s pro-Israelism was largely symbolic, doing little to advance the concrete interests of the Jewish State.

Consider the major moves for which he is lauded. Did he deepen intelligence cooperation with Israel? Obama had already done that. Did he expand US military assistance? Obama had already done that.

Personally, I’m glad he recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. But in noting that the US was not making any statement about the final status of the Holy City in negotiations with the Palestinians, the Trump Administration made certain the impact did not venture beyond the symbolic.

I’m also glad Trump recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights from which the country formerly known as Syria waged war against Israel on several occasions with a strategic advantage. But Trump made this move after Syria had already disintegrated, and at a point when literally no one was seriously discussing its return in any event.

Then there is Iran, where Trump won plaudits from some for bluster, but left Israel more exposed to nuclear danger. The fact is simple and incontrovertible: Iran was closer to a nuclear weapon the day Trump left office than on the day he became president.

Whatever one’s views about the Obama Administration’s JCPOA, Trump was foolish to withdraw from the agreement, especially without a plan, or even the intent, to forge a better deal. Early on in his Administration, the Iranians, clearly worried about the effect of his sanctions, offered to negotiate a stronger agreement. Trump would have none of it. He was simply going to wait for a call from the Ayatollah to discuss terms. Needless to say, it never came, and if it had, given his dangerous dalliance with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, we can surmise that Trump would have been completely out-negotiated.

Meanwhile, Trump had so alienated our allies that they were unwilling to join him in insisting on a continuation of the conventional arms embargo against Iran, an unforced error which handed the Iranian military a win.

Which brings us finally to the Abraham Accords, a truly historic set of agreements which happened on Trump’s watch, but for which he deserves only backhanded credit. By leaving Israel and the Sunni states out of its Iran diplomacy, the Obama Administration created a perceived need for self-reliance
on the part of Iran’s regional adversaries. Trump reinforced this perception mightily by abandoning a decades-long alliance with the Kurds on the basis of a telephone call from the anti-American dictator in Turkey.

Shaken by Trump’s betrayal, by his dismissal of long time European allies, and by his apparent willingness to cave to North Korea to secure a photo-op, Israel and the Sunni States understandably concluded that they could no longer truly count on the US. Self-reliance dictated alliance with an adversary that posed no threat (Israel), against an enemy that was both hostile and threatening (Iran). And if the Sunni leaders could wangle some goodies from the Americans in the bargain, why not. So, while Trump and his son-in-law worked to negotiate the agreements, they were ripe in part because Sunni leaders feared his erratic policy making.

In short, Trump’s self-styled exertions on Israel were not sufficient to elicit a level of appreciation from an American Jewry whose antipathy to Trump was dictated by his partisanship, his ideology and by taking square aim at what had always made America great, for us. All the more so because he did relatively little of substance to advance Israel’s interest.

When all was said and done, Jewish support for Biden and opposition to Trump were over-determined. Most American Jews are Democrats in a hyper-partisan environment, liberals in a period when issues are salient, and committed to liberal pluralism, when its fundamentals were under attack. Trump stood loudly and strongly against all of those commitments, earning him the enmity of American Jews, and many others.
Notes


6. Ibid.


9. Ibid.


17. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.


32. Ibid.


Bibliography


Grohsgal, Dov, and Kevin M. Kruse. “How the Republican Majority Emerged.” The
Why Donald Trump’s Vision Repelled American Jews


They Said It Couldn’t Be Done: Historic Achievements of President Donald Trump

by Matthew Brooks and Shari Hillman

NECESSARY INTRODUCTION
The present volume is intended to examine the impact of Donald Trump’s presidency on American Jews, a thin slice of history that is being written very close in time to the events it describes. Just weeks ago, as of this writing, the certification by Congress of Trump’s 2020 election defeat was interrupted by a violent riot at the US Capitol. That day rocked the nation, eclipsing for a time our memories of the previous four years. However, it would be a disservice to history to define all of the Trump presidency by the post-election acrimony that culminated in that moment, or to forget the real accomplishments that came before it.

This essay will focus on the remarkable successes of the Trump administration in those policy areas of particular concern to the American Jewish community. Specifically, we will examine President Trump’s Middle East policy, his support of religious liberty, and his efforts to combat anti-Semitism in the US. After more than thirty years in the political arena, as a cycle-tested and battle-tested veteran of partisan politics, I can honestly say that no President in my memory managed to accomplish so much so quickly in these areas of interest. It is important to record and reflect upon that history here.

Matt Brooks
Washington, DC
February 15, 2021
AN UNUSUAL PRESIDENT
Donald Trump ran for President as a political outsider and remained an outsider for the next four years. His election was an expression of popular dissatisfaction with government overreach and cronyism. His administration promised to do things differently and in notable ways, it did.

The innovative thinking began at the top. As a businessman, an entertainer, and the first president from New York City since Teddy Roosevelt, Donald Trump brought a very different sensibility to his term in office—that of a pugnacious, tenacious businessman willing to go against conventional wisdom to get things done. This sensibility infused his policy making with regard to the Middle East, to great success. He also brought his creative problem-solving attitude to his policies supporting religious liberty and fighting anti-Semitism.

The implementation of Trump’s innovative policies would not have been possible without the hard work of a talented and committed team. The President surrounded himself with creative thinkers, people he trusted to bring his ideas to fruition. Senior Advisor to the President Jared Kushner took an unprecedented leadership role in developing and executing the administration’s Middle East policy. Assistant to the President and Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt was a central player in the creation of the “Peace to Prosperity” plan. US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman knew Israel and its leaders well; he strengthened the US-Israel alliance. Avi Berkowitz, who joined the White House staff as an aide to Jared Kushner, ably took on significant responsibilities in Middle East policy after Jason Greenblatt left the administration. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was an experienced leader who played an integral role in the administration’s Middle East policy making. Pompeo’s senior policy advisor, Brian Hook, helped shape the historic Abraham Accords. And Ambassador Nikki Haley was an indefatigable advocate and defender of Israel at the United Nations. Each of them contributed significantly to the impressive results of US policy in the Middle East.

The COVID-19 pandemic undid some of President Trump’s successes—in economic policy, especially—but his Mideast diplomatic triumphs and his support for freedom and security for the Jewish community continued. The American Jewish community, historically a majority-Democrat constituency, significantly increased its vote for Donald Trump in 2020. Trump received 30.5% of the Jewish vote, a six-point gain over 2016 and the highest percentage for any Republican presidential candidate since 1988. He won a historic 43%
of the Jewish vote in Florida, one of the most important battleground states in the country. This support from Jewish voters came in part because of his successful record on these key issues for the community.

MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The State of Israel, the national homeland of the Jewish people and the modern expression of Jewish peoplehood and national self-determination, holds a special place in the hearts of all Jews, including American Jews. Support for Israel as a legitimate, permanent state in the Middle East and its security and economic development are key issues of concern to the American Jewish community. In this area, President Trump represents an unprecedented figure, the most pro-Israel president in history. His policies in the region challenged conventional wisdom and transformed the diplomatic landscape. The Jewish community is indebted to him for the substantive and meaningful benefits his policies brought about for Israel.

Presidential administrations in the last fifty years, whether their policies were more pro-Israel or less, stayed within the bounds of the conventional wisdom about the Middle East, which held that: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the primary conflict in the region and must be solved before other regional issues could be addressed; recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moving the US embassy there would “inflame the Arab street” and lead to violence; US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over territories Israel had won in war would lead to further regional war; and the US had to act as an “honest broker” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and not side too much with Israel, lest we lose leverage with Arab countries and their supporters in the UN.

The Obama administration held to this accepted truth too, but with a twist. President Barack Obama wanted to take the US out of its traditional active role in the Middle East and focus on domestic policy issues, such as Obamacare, that would “fundamentally transform” America. His administration saw Iran as the regional player with the power to balance Saudi Arabia and deal with fractious countries such as Iraq and Syria. Pulling the US farther away from Israel (letting the “daylight” in) would make it easier for the US to withdraw from its Sunni allies and from the region in general. Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was part of this wrong-headed strategy.
As we shall see, the Trump administration broke with the generally accepted assumptions about the region and reversed Obama’s Iran policy. The result was not more war between Israel and her neighbors, but more peace; not a stronger Iran, but a weaker one.

*Jerusalem*

Let’s begin with a little history. In October 1995, Congress adopted the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act,⁹ which mandated that Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of Israel and the US Embassy in Israel should be established in Jerusalem no later than May 31, 1999.

However, the law included a waiver clause allowing the President to suspend the provisions of the law for six months, “if he determines and reports to Congress in advance that such suspension is necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States.” The waiver could be renewed at the end of each six-month period. The bill passed with overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate but became public law without the signature of President Bill Clinton, who worried about its effect on the peace process.¹⁰ Clinton and every subsequent President used the waiver to push off the embassy move for more than twenty years.¹¹

On December 6, 2017, President Trump issued a declaration recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel and ordering that the US Embassy to Israel be moved to Jerusalem.¹² The declaration said:

> The foreign policy of the United States is grounded in principled realism, which begins with an honest acknowledgment of plain facts. With respect to the State of Israel, that requires officially recognizing Jerusalem as its capital and relocating the United States Embassy to Israel to Jerusalem as soon as practicable.

> Now, 22 years [after passage of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995], I have determined that it is time for the United States to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This long overdue recognition of reality is in the best interests of both the United States and the pursuit of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

> . . . I have also determined that the United States will relocate our Embassy to Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This action is consistent with the will of the Congress, as expressed in the Act.¹³
There was opposition to the President’s declaration from public policy, academic, and media voices who warned that the Palestinians would riot, Arab states would take offense, and any chance for a peace deal in the region would be lost.\textsuperscript{14} In reality, the “Arab street” failed to explode. Alexia Underwood wrote at Vox.com: “Palestinians held a general strike, and four protesters died during clashes with Israeli soldiers. Thousands protested in Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, and elsewhere. But the protests were short-lived and mostly peaceful. The massive violent reaction people feared never came. Indeed, neighboring Arab countries’ reactions in recent months have been fairly muted.”\textsuperscript{15} Leaders in Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, and Iran said the expected things condemning Israel and the change in US policy,\textsuperscript{16} but that was the sum of their response.

When the embassy opened, the threatened strong worldwide reaction once again failed to materialize. The fear that moving the US embassy would result in widespread violence and perhaps even war, a fear that had prompted American presidents to waive the legislative demand for such a move for twenty-two years, proved unwarranted in 2018.

Notably, with the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the establishment of the US embassy there,\textsuperscript{17} the Trump administration moved beyond words to concrete actions, actions that demonstrated America’s strong support for the legitimacy and security of the State of Israel. They also showed that the US would be a reliable friend and partner with Israel, which enhanced the image of the US in the region as a strong state that could be trusted.

\textit{The Golan Heights}

The conventional wisdom about Israel and the Middle East took another blow in 2019, when President Trump took the further step of recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Another brief review of history is in order here.

Israel captured the strategically important Golan Heights from Syria during the 1967 war and it remained in Israeli hands after the 1973 war. It was held as a disputed area administered by Israel. Subsequent diplomatic efforts to resolve the area’s status through a negotiated peace agreement between Israel and Syria failed, but the border has been quiet since 1974.

Holding the Golan Heights gives Israel a vantage point for observing military movements within Syria, provides an important security barrier between Israel and Syria (and between Israel and the Iranian and Hezbollah forces now entrenched on the border), and protects the sources of much of Israel’s fresh water supply.\textsuperscript{18}
In 1981, the Israeli Knesset passed the Golan Heights Law, which extended Israeli “law, jurisdiction and administration” to the residents of the Golan Heights. The international community did not recognize this change. US policy held that changes to the status of territories won in war must come about through direct negotiations rather than unilateral declarations.

President Trump overturned that policy with a tweet. He announced his decision to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights on Twitter on March 21, 2019: “After 52 years it is time for the United States to fully recognize Israel’s Sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and Regional Stability!” Days later, on March 25, the President signed the proclamation, which laid out the security reasons for Israel’s continued control of the area:

The State of Israel took control of the Golan Heights in 1967 to safeguard its security from external threats. Today, aggressive acts by Iran and terrorist groups, including Hizballah, in southern Syria continue to make the Golan Heights a potential launching ground for attacks on Israel. Any possible future peace agreement in the region must account for Israel’s need to protect itself from Syria and other regional threats. Based on these unique circumstances, it is therefore appropriate to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed gratitude for the President’s action, also on Twitter, writing, “At a time when Iran seeks to use Syria as a platform to destroy Israel, President Trump boldly recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Thank you, President Trump!”

Here again, the international community responded negatively to the new US policy. Britain, Germany, France, and the European Union criticized the action when it was announced. The Palestinian Authority and the Arab League condemned the US action; Turkey called the US recognition “unacceptable” and threatened to take action against it at the UN. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates also rejected the declaration.

As one scholar put it, “This change of posture over a highly disputed and strategically valuable territory between Israel and Syria is being met with delight, disapproval and indifference by various sides in the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, echoing reactions to an earlier US move—to treat Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.” That is to say, everyone said the expected things, but there was no explosion of violence or terrorism within Israel and no armed conflict from its neighbors.
Perhaps this relatively quiet reaction indicated that President Trump’s gesture was seen as symbolic rather than substantive. But like the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, the recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights was a potent symbol, one that bolstered the Arab world’s perception that President Trump meant to stand with Israel, in word and deed, and supported Israel’s long-term security.

“Peace to Prosperity” Plan
President Trump had long promised that he would present a plan for Mideast peace, the “deal of the century” that would end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On January 28, 2020, the President unveiled the results of years of work by his senior advisor, Jared Kushner, and his team, including White House advisors Jason Greenblatt and Avi Berkowitz, as well as US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and State Department Senior Policy Advisor Brian Hook.30

The “Peace to Prosperity” plan broke the mold of US policy and the conventional wisdom about the Middle East with a roadmap for the Israelis and Palestinians that offered hope for real peace, real prosperity, and real stability. It took into consideration the security needs of both sides, definitions of territory, self-determination, and sovereignty, and difficult issues such as refugees, Jerusalem’s status, prisoners, water, and Gaza.

President Trump’s “vision” for peace31 offered a four-year plan toward recognition of a contiguous Palestinian state holding 70% of the West Bank and encompassing 97% of the Palestinians in the West Bank. It included a four-year freeze on Israeli settlements in areas that would become part of the Palestinian state. It called for both parties to recognize the State of Palestine as the nation state of the Palestinian people and the State of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. Among other things, Palestinians would explicitly commit to nonviolence, undertake to dismiss actions against Israel, the US, and their respective citizens in the International Court of Justice and other tribunals, and terminate the paying of salaries to terrorists in Israeli prisons and to the families of deceased terrorists, the infamous “Prisoner and Martyr Payments” better known as “Pay to Slay.”32

In the Trump administration plan, Jerusalem’s existing security barrier in the eastern part of the city would demarcate the border between the capitals of Israel and the State of Palestine, both in Jerusalem.33 Palestinian refugees (as registered by UNRWA) would be eligible for resettlement in the State of
Palestine, integrated in the countries in which they currently reside, or resettled in Organization of Islamic Cooperation member countries who agreed to participate in Palestinian refugee resettlement. The plan further established a path to significant economic investment and growth for the Palestinians, including $50 billion in new investments that could create up to a million new jobs in the new State of Palestine over 10 years. The plan included opportunities for the future State of Palestine to use and manage earmarked facilities at the Haifa and Ashdod ports. It also provided for increased Palestinian access to quality healthcare.

The lofty goal of Trump’s “vision” was to terminate the claims of each side against the other and finally end the conflict. It provided a workable path to that goal that would have enhanced the lives of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples for generations. It demanded concessions from both sides and offered much to both parties.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately hailed the proposal as “a great plan for Israel, it’s a great plan for peace.” It came as no surprise to veteran observers of the region when the Palestinians rejected the Trump plan outright.

Once again, the Trump administration had broken with conventional wisdom, designing a peace plan that creatively navigated many difficult issues. It stepped away from leaving the contentious “final status” issues to direct negotiations between the parties, because the Palestinians had made it clear that such negotiations were not possible in the foreseeable future. The Trump administration went ahead and developed an innovative proposal that tackled all the relevant issues with realistic and feasible steps toward a lasting, peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

During his term of office, President Trump moved from acting on a legislatively defined requirement to recognize Jerusalem and move the US embassy there, to recognizing Israel’s logical claim of sovereignty over a vitally important strategic area that bordered a hostile state. The release of the long-promised “Peace to Prosperity” plan broke new ground in the way difficult issues were handled.

The Jordan Valley

What followed next represented a stunning break with past US policy: Prime Minister Netanyahu announced his intention to extend Israeli sovereignty in areas of the West Bank and Jordan Valley, in accordance with the “Peace to
Prosperity” plan, and the Trump administration promised its support for such a move. US policy had never before countenanced the unilateral extension of Israeli sovereignty in those areas.

In a May 2020 interview, US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman said that US government was ready to recognize the extension of Israeli sovereignty in disputed areas when: 1) the exact areas had been mapped out; 2) the Israelis agreed to a building freeze in those parts of Area C that weren’t included in the extension of sovereignty map; and 3) the prime minister agreed to negotiate with the Palestinians on the basis of the Trump plan. The US would then recognize the Israeli government’s extension of sovereignty to the named areas. Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he would bring his plan up for Cabinet consideration on July 1. For various reasons, including the coronavirus pandemic, that date came and went without action by the Israeli government.

**The Abraham Accords**

But there was even bigger news to come, foreshadowed by the unprecedented attendance of three Arab ambassadors—from the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman—at the White House presentation of the “Peace to Prosperity” plan.

On August 13, President Trump announced that Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had agreed to the full normalization of relations in a US-brokered deal that would be called the Abraham Accords. In order to reach this deal with the UAE, Israel agreed to suspend its plans to extend Israeli sovereignty in parts of the West Bank and Jordan Valley. The historic American declaration of support for Israel’s plans had clearly been taken seriously by other regional actors and had given Israel a meaningful bargaining chip in its diplomatic efforts to reach agreements with moderate Arab states.

On September 11, 2020, President Trump hosted a phone call between the leaders of Israel and Bahrain, who agreed that their countries would also fully normalize relations. Four days later, on the White House lawn, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed the Abraham Accords with Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani. The agreement was a major foreign policy achievement for the Trump administration. While Israel had long had quiet ties with Sunni Gulf states, the Abraham Accords marked only the third and fourth times that Israel and an Arab state had established full relations, after the Israel-Egypt peace treaty (in 1979) and the Israel-Jordan accords (in 1994). The public, formal accords
opened the door for mutually beneficial cooperation in investment, tourism, security, technology, energy, healthcare, and other areas.\textsuperscript{49}

Within a few weeks, Serbia and Kosovo (a predominantly Muslim country) announced that they had reached an economic normalization deal that included provisions concerning Israel. Both countries agreed to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Serbia pledged to move its embassy to Jerusalem. Israel and Kosovo formally recognized each other, and Kosovo promised to open a diplomatic office in Jerusalem as well.\textsuperscript{50} In October, Sudan, another Muslim-majority country, announced that it would join the Abraham Accords, and did so in January.\textsuperscript{51} In December 2020, Israel and Morocco normalized their relations in a separate agreement.\textsuperscript{52}

This cascade of agreements between Israel and Arab/Muslim states put to rest decades of conventional wisdom. In particular, it soundly refuted the words of then-Secretary of State John Kerry, who insisted with complete confidence in 2016:

There will be no separate peace between Israel and the Arab world. I want to make that very clear to all of you. I’ve heard several prominent politicians in Israel sometimes saying, well, the Arab world’s in a different place now, and we just have to reach out to them and we can work some things with the Arab world, and we’ll deal with the Palestinians. No. No, no and no . . . . There will be no advance and separate peace with the Arab world without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace. Everybody needs to understand that. That is a hard reality.\textsuperscript{53}

With President Trump’s leadership, the signers to those agreements took the Palestinian issue out of the equation and made a separate peace. In so doing, they repealed the Palestinian veto that had prevented the diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation in the region that would have bettered the lives of millions of people. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a serious humanitarian, security, and peace issue, but the intransigence of Palestinian leaders over the fifty years since the 1967 war finally separated the Palestinian issue from peace between Israel and the moderate Arab states. With these agreements, Israel was made stronger, the anti-Iran alliance was likewise made stronger, and US credibility was heightened in the region.

The Abraham Accords were a stunning achievement for President Trump and his team, a truly historic moment. President Trump, Jared Kushner, Avi Berkowitz, and David Friedman were all later nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for their contributions to these groundbreaking agreements.\textsuperscript{54}
Relations with the Palestinian Authority

President Trump’s strong and consistent support for Israel did not endear him to Palestinian leaders. Neither did the President’s strong stance against terrorism and the funding of terrorism. In March 2017, President Trump invited Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to the White House, but the visit never took place. When Trump announced the “Peace to Prosperity” plan in January 2020, Abbas cut off all ties with US.

President Trump executed steps legislated by Congress to downgrade US relations with, and financial support for, the Palestinian Authority because of the PA’s support for terrorism and incitement to violence. The Trump administration: 1) stopped funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); 2) canceled most US aid to PA security services; 3) closed the US consulate in Jerusalem that served as a de facto embassy to the Palestinians; and 4) closed the Palestine Liberation Organization office in Washington, DC.

Another significant action came in 2018, when President Trump signed into law the Taylor Force Act, a bill that was strongly supported by the American Jewish community. The law was named for Taylor Force, a US Army veteran and Vanderbilt University graduate student from Texas, who was murdered while on a trip to Israel in March 2016. A Palestinian man from the West Bank city of Qalqilya went on a stabbing spree at the Jaffa waterfront, killing Taylor Force and injuring eleven others, including Force’s wife, before he was shot by police. The relatives of the attacker receive monthly payments in accordance with PA law. The Palestinian Authority spends about 8% of its budget on payments to convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons and the families of dead terrorists, with higher payments for those who had killed more Israelis in their attacks. This “Pay for Slay” system is a moral outrage. The Taylor Force Act was an expression of the American people’s anger that their tax dollars were going to the Palestinian Authority and helping it make these blood payments to terrorists. The Act required that the US withhold aid to the Palestinian Authority until those payments cease. The Trump administration withheld that aid.

As of this writing, “Pay for Slay” continues. But President Trump’s decisiveness in holding the Palestinian leadership accountable for the violence they incite and reward was very meaningful to the American Jewish community.

Iran Policy

President Trump’s Iran policy was intended to weaken Iran and prevent it from becoming a nuclear power and an existential threat to Israel. It remains one of
his most important contributions to security and stability in the Middle East and marks another area where his policies aligned with the interests of the American Jewish community.

Candidate Donald Trump made a campaign promise to take the US out of the dangerous, ill-conceived Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), President Obama’s Iran nuclear deal. The deal ended most economic sanctions on Iran, giving the Iranian regime a 150-billion-dollar boost without actually preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The deal had no real enforcement mechanisms, allowing the Iranians to cheat, and had sunset clauses that took the brakes off altogether after just a few years. The deal further excluded discussion about or action against Iran illegally developing advanced ballistic missiles, supporting terrorism, or engaging in human rights abuses against its citizens. It placed Iran within arm’s reach of nuclear weapons that would make it a malignant hegemon in a strategically vital region of the world, as well as an existential threat to our ally Israel.

President Trump’s determination to quit the JCPOA got a boost in April 2018, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed that Israeli intelligence agents had smuggled out of Tehran a trove of some 100,000 nuclear program-related documents. The documents proved that Iran had lied for years about the program and in 2003 was on the verge of mastering key technologies for making nuclear bombs. The Iranian archive showed that the regime was determined to preserve its past nuclear weapons research in order to restart it in the future. The Iranian government never gave up their commitment to developing nuclear weapons. The JCPOA was built on a foundation of Iranian lies and never could have achieved its stated purpose.

President Trump delivered on his promise and withdrew the US from the deal in May 2018. In a speech explaining America’s Iran policy in the wake of that withdrawal, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the US would impose unprecedented and painful financial pressure on the Iranian regime if it did not change its course and that the US would work to deter Iranian aggression in the Middle East.

Secretary Pompeo also offered twelve basic requirements for a new agreement with Iran on nuclear and regional issues. He called on Iran to be transparent about its previous nuclear weapons research and to permanently and verifiably abandon such work forever; give the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) “unqualified access” to all sites in the country; stop supporting terrorist groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic
Jihad; and end its threats to destroy Israel, end cyberattacks, and stop threatening international ships.71

Over the next two and a half years, the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” policy against the Iranian regime included sanctions on individuals and entities involved in most major sectors of the Iranian economy, such as the financial and banking sector72 (cutting off Iran’s financial access to international banks); coal, petroleum, and petrochemicals;73 shipping and ports;74 iron, steel, aluminum, and copper;75 construction, manufacturing, textiles, and mining;76 and arms proliferation and military materiel.77 The sanctions applied to Iranian nationals and to foreign nationals and entities doing business with Iranian counterparts. The US even sanctioned Iran’s Supreme Leader, Iran’s foreign minister, and other state officials,78 and froze all of their property in the US or in the possession of US persons.

President Trump’s unflinching sanctions policy had the desired effect of weakening the Iranian regime. In addition, the US took other actions designed to weaken Iran’s ability to project its power by supporting terrorist groups in the region. In January 2020, the US killed Iran’s top general, Qassem Soleimani, the man who masterminded Iran’s proxy wars in the region. The Defense Department said Soleimani was killed because he “was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region.”79 Soleimani was the second most important government official in Iran and his death was a serious blow to the regime’s violent plans.80

President Trump’s policies had a significant impact on Iran. Iran’s economy declined under the strong financial sanctions. In mid-2019, inflation in Iran was over 37% and 12% of working-age citizens were unemployed.81 Iran’s currency has fallen sharply against the dollar.82 These changes were painful for the Iranian people, but they also curbed Iran’s abilities to conduct its malign activities in the region. The killing of Soleimani contributed to that, as well. It should be noted that humanitarian aid, including COVID-19 relief aid, has always been permitted to enter the country through aid organizations, primarily Doctors Without Borders (MSF). Occasionally, Iran itself has sometimes stopped that aid, as it did in March 2020.83

The Trump administration’s Iran policy did not lead to war, did not allow Iran to attain nuclear weapons, and did not cause a collapse of American power and diplomacy in the international arena. It did weaken a corrupt and evil regime and it blunted the threat that Iran posed to Israel, to the moderate Arab states in the region, and to US interests.
United Nations
President Trump’s outspoken support for Israel was carried out in the public diplomacy arena through the prominent role given to former Governor of South Carolina Nikki Haley as US Ambassador to the United Nations. Ambassador Haley made sure that America’s unwavering support for Israel was expressed in every possible venue and at every level of the UN. She was extremely effective and was one of the most popular members of the Trump administration in the Jewish community; she was a sought-after speaker for communal events and was greeted like a rock star wherever she appeared.

Ambassador Haley spoke out strongly whenever anti-Israel bias was expressed in the language and policies of the UN. The UN Human Rights Council, in particular, maintained a consistently anti-Israel agenda. After US efforts to reform the Council proved unsuccessful, the US withdrew from it in June 2018.84

Ambassador Haley, working as a trusted advisor to the President and representing his policy priorities, was an important figure in her own right and a key player in the very effective—if unconventional—US public diplomacy in the Trump administration.

Religious Liberty
President Trump made defending religious liberty a key element of his administration’s efforts. This took many forms, but for the Jewish community, the most relevant and meaningful administration actions had to do with guaranteeing equal treatment under the law for religious individuals and institutions, encouraging school choice, and funding security grants and disaster relief for Jewish institutions.

Specific examples of Trump administration action that enhanced religious freedom for American Jews include:

- Choosing Betsy DeVos to head the Education Department, where she encouraged policies to expand school choice.85

- Signing a May 2017 Executive Order that directed federal agencies to “vigorously enforce federal law’s robust protections for religious freedom” and to guarantee fair and equal treatment under the law for religious individuals and institutions that speak about “moral or political
issues from a religious perspective.” A directive and guidance issued by Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia offers one example of how this executive order was implemented across the federal government.87

- Instructing the Attorney General of the United States to issue a legal guidance memorandum to federal agencies regarding how to respect and support religious liberty. The memorandum set out principles of religious liberty, defined freedom of religion, and laid out what government may not do with regard to religious belief, actions, and institutions. It also clarified guidelines for implementing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993.88

- Implementing programs authorized and funded by Congress to provide grants to nonpublic schools, synagogues, and other communal institutions for acquiring and installing security-enhancing infrastructure such as fences, lights, video surveillance, and blast-resistant doors and windows, as well as training and other security assistance.89

- Issuing Treasury Department regulations that protected state-sponsored tax credit scholarship programs from changes to state and local tax calculations.90

- Updating guidance for the Federal Emergency Management Agency to make houses of worship eligible for FEMA funding for rebuilding after a disaster just as other nonprofit institutions like museums and libraries are.91

FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM
The world’s oldest hatred, anti-Semitism, continues to cause pain and suffering to the Jewish people year after year. President Trump stood with the Jewish community in times of grief and took action to combat anti-Semitism in this country and abroad.

President Trump strongly and consistently denounced and condemned anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic attacks, including the shootings that killed eleven people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh92 (October 2018) and one person at the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California93 (May 2019),
the stabbing attack in Monsey\textsuperscript{94} that resulted in one death\textsuperscript{95} (December 2019), and the shooting at a kosher grocery store in Jersey City that killed three\textsuperscript{96} (December 2019).

Hours after the Pittsburgh shooting, President Trump told supporters at a rally in Illinois that it was a “monstrous” attack and said that we must all work together “to extract the hateful poison of anti-Semitism from our world.” He said, “This was an anti-Semitic attack at its worst. The scourge of anti-Semitism cannot be ignored, cannot be tolerated, and it cannot be allowed to continue. It must be confronted and condemned everywhere it rears its ugly head. We must stand with our Jewish brothers and sisters to defeat anti-Semitism and vanquish the forces of hate.”\textsuperscript{97} A few days later, President and Mrs. Trump visited the synagogue in Pittsburgh to pay their respects.\textsuperscript{98}

After the Poway synagogue shooting, the President said, “Our entire nation mourns the loss of life, prays for the wounded and stands in solidarity with the Jewish community. We forcefully condemn the evil of anti-Semitism and hate, which must be defeated.”\textsuperscript{99}

Even earlier, in February 2017, after Jewish community centers were targeted with a wave of bomb threats (that turned out to be hoaxes perpetrated by a young man in Israel\textsuperscript{100} and a former journalist from Missouri\textsuperscript{101}) the President said, “The anti-Semitic threats targeting our Jewish community and our Jewish community centers are horrible, are painful and they are a reminder of the work that still must be done to root out hate and prejudice and evil.”\textsuperscript{102}

During his term in office, President Trump repeatedly condemned the evil of anti-Semitism and expressed his support and empathy with the Jewish community. He also took action to raise the level of government response to anti-Semitism and to fight anti-Semitism through executive action.

\textit{The IHRA Working Definition of Anti-Semitism}

The Trump administration used the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism, which significantly expanded the illustrative examples of anti-Semitism. Among those examples are classic anti-Semitic tropes such as demonizing and stereotyping Jews or Jewish power, denying the reality and scope of the Holocaust, and accusing Jews as a people for being responsible for the real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group. The IHRA definition also includes anti-Israel statements and actions as manifestations of anti-Semitism, such as denying the Jewish people’s right to self-determination, holding Israel
to standards of behavior not demanded of any other democratic nation, comparing Israeli policy to that of the Nazis, and holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel.\textsuperscript{103}

The Trump State Department began using the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism in 2016.\textsuperscript{104} Kenneth Marcus, assistant secretary for Civil Rights at the US Department of Education, adopted that definition in his work to combat alleged discrimination against Jewish students on college campuses.\textsuperscript{105}

In December 2019, President Trump took the historic step of issuing an Executive Order that gave Jewish students protection from discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The order stipulated that discrimination against Jews as members of a national group that shares common religious practices would be considered a violation of Title VI and instructed that the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism should be considered in the enforcement of Title VI.\textsuperscript{106} This executive action gave greater protection and support to Jewish students on American college campuses, who often face a hostile anti-Israel environment because of professors and student groups that oppose the existence of Israel, call for violence against Israel and Jews, and support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement that seeks to delegitimize the Jewish state.

**Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism**

President Trump nominated a very experienced and talented former Los Angeles County Deputy District Attorney, Elan Carr, to serve as the State Department’s Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. Carr served with distinction, directing US policies and projects aimed at countering anti-Semitism around the world. His work included raising awareness and communicating strategies to combat online anti-Semitism, promoting efforts to combat anti-Semitism in the Middle East,\textsuperscript{107} and encouraging wider international adoption of the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{108} In January 2021, President Trump signed into law legislation to elevate the US State Department’s Special Envoy to Combat Anti-Semitism position to an ambassadorship. The Special Envoy would then report directly to the Secretary of State and the position would require Senate confirmation.\textsuperscript{109}
JEWISH VOTE IN 2020

In the 2020 election cycle, the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC) developed and implemented the most sophisticated, data-driven outreach operation ever in the Jewish community. In addition to its efforts in support of seventy-two Republican candidates for the US Senate and House, the RJC focused on targeting Jewish voters in the crucial battleground states of Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania in support of President Trump. The RJC’s record number of 2,075 Victory Team volunteers made over 500,000 Jewish outreach calls to identify, persuade, and turn out Jewish voters for absentee ballot, early voting, and in-person voting in the targeted states. Get-out-the-vote (GOTV) outreach was also conducted via peer-to-peer texts (nearly 150,000 texts sent) and emails (over 200,000 emails sent), as well as by sending close to a million pieces of direct mail to targeted homes.\textsuperscript{110} Starting in 2019, the RJC ran a series of television and digital ads, including half a million dollars’ worth of ads in Florida\textsuperscript{111} alone during the last weeks of the campaign. Overall, the RJC invested some $10 million in the 2020 cycle.\textsuperscript{112}

Those efforts contributed to President Donald Trump receiving an impressive percentage of the Jewish vote. Nationwide, Trump received 30.5% of the Jewish vote, a six-point gain over 2016\textsuperscript{113} and the highest percentage for any Republican presidential candidate since 1988. In the key battleground state of Florida, according to AP VoteCast,\textsuperscript{114} Trump received a historic 43% of the Jewish vote. Polls conducted by the RJC showed that Jewish voters were critical to Trump’s victory in Florida.\textsuperscript{115}

Clearly, the RJC’s efforts alone do not account for these numbers. During his four years in office, President Trump earned the respect and support of Jewish voters because of his policies, especially those policies touching on key issues for the American Jewish community such as his support for Israel—with the historic result of the Abraham Accords—and his commitment to religious liberty and the fight against anti-Semitism.

CONCLUSION

For the American Jewish community, the years of the Trump presidency were, with apologies to Charles Dickens, the best of times and the worst of times. There was astonishment and appreciation for his historic policy successes, such as the Abraham Accords, and moments of disappointment and dismay.
at his failures. Both the good and the bad of the Trump presidency arose out of Donald Trump’s “outsider” status and mentality. He broke through conventional wisdom and changed long-standing policies, often to tremendously positive effect. Unfortunately, the political polarization in the Jewish community, exacerbated during Donald Trump’s term in office, is an impediment to rendering a just verdict on his presidency today. Fifty or one hundred years from now, one hopes, historians will be able to render a clear, dispassionate account of the history and legacy of the Trump years.
Notes


13. Ibid.

14. For example: Gregory Khalil, “Moving the Embassy to Jerusalem Would Likely
They Said It Couldn’t Be Done: Historic Achievements of President Donald Trump


17. President Trump’s decision to move the embassy also raised the fraught question of just where in Jerusalem the new US embassy could be located. While pundits worried about geopolitical considerations, the Israeli government was concerned that there were few places in the city that could accommodate the security, construction, and traffic requirements for a new US embassy. And yet, just over six months later, President Trump kept his promise. A renovated former US consular compound officially opened as the US embassy on May 14, 2018, just days before Israel’s 70th Independence Day. The new embassy satisfied both the practical and political concerns. It sits partly on a small piece of land that was no-man’s land, “between the lines” of the armistice maps that Israel and Jordan drew at the end of hostilities in 1949. (See Michael Lipin, “US Opening Jerusalem Embassy on Territorial Anomaly,” *VOA News*, May 13, 2018, https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/us-opening-jerusalem-embassy-territorial-anomaly.) That quirk of geography meant that the embassy is neither wholly in West Jerusalem nor in East Jerusalem, technically, but it is on land that has always been in Israel’s possession. (See Isabel Kershner, “A Quiet Jerusalem Neighborhood Gets a U.S. Embassy, and a Spotlight,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/26/world/middleeast/jerusalem-us-embassy.html.) It was an apt metaphor for the Trump administration’s Middle East policy: unexpected, unorthodox, and balancing competing requirements with creativity.


24. Ibid.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.


31. Ibid.


34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.


40. The Oslo II Accord divided the West Bank into three administrative sections: Areas A, B, and C. Area C was defined in the Oslo II Accord as areas of


48. Ibid.


50. Deb Riechmann, “Serbia, Kosovo Normalize Economic Ties, Gesture to Israel,” AP,


60. Karen DeYoung and Loveday Morris, “Trump Administration Orders Closure of


71. Ibid.


74. Ibid.


81. Nasser Karimi and Mohammad Nasiri, "Iranians Say Their 'Bones Breaking' under
92. Campbell Robertson, Christopher Mele and Sabrina Tavernise, “11 Killed in


113. NPR, “Understanding the 2020 Electorate.”

114. AP VoteCast survey, “Florida Voter Surveys: How Different Groups Voted.”

Bibliography


Public Address by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. “After the Deal: A New Iran


“Secretary Kerry in a Conversation at the 2016 Saban Forum.” US Department of State


Trump and the Jews: What Did We Learn?

by Dan Schnur

Ever since Donald Trump first descended in the glass elevator in his eponymous tower to announce his candidacy for president in 2015, it has been commonly observed that Trump has been as much a symptom of the populist and pugnacious rage that fueled his campaigns as a cause of those sentiments. Trump didn’t create the working-class uprising, the rural and exurban resentments, and the grassroots anger that reshaped the nation’s political landscape over the course of his presidency. But whether intentionally or intuitively, he tapped into those emotions and channeled them toward the political leaders of both parties effectively enough to propel himself to the White House.

Similarly, the internal conflicts and identity crisis that have divided the American Jewish community in recent years were not created by Trump. But the disagreement between those Jews who still thought of Israel and the Middle East as their most important voting issue and the majority of the community that has moved on to domestic social and cultural issues as the primary motivations for casting a ballot had been evident long before his emergence on the political scene and was ripe for his exploitation. Just as Trump’s efforts to mobilize his supporters created one of the most polarizing political environments in American history, Trump intensified and widened the already-considerable divisions between American Jews throughout his presidency.

Trump’s two campaigns did not have much of an impact on the overall distribution of Jewish voting patterns in recent history. Research by the Jewish Virtual Library showed that he attracted between one-fifth and one-quarter of the Jewish vote in his elections, almost identical to the amount of support achieved by George W. Bush in 2004 and John McCain four years later. (Mitt
Romney was able to attract roughly 30% of the Jewish vote in 2012—the first time a Republican candidate had reached that threshold since the Reagan-Bush era of the 1980’s, but mainly because of Barack Obama’s prickly relations with Israel government leaders.) As was the case with the broader electorate, the intensity of feelings among both Trump’s supporters and opponents was extremely high. This has led to deeper divisions, increased anger and animosity, heightened partisanship, and less interest in finding common ground. The need for healing is just as strong in the American Jewish community as in the electorate as a whole.

Both sides of this divide naturally blame the other for this gulf, and attempting to apportion responsibility for the increased rancor is of little value. It may be a better use of this space to explore the root causes for these differences, reflect on how they grew throughout the Trump years, and perhaps remind ourselves why we should be more incentivized to seek reconciliation. In this chapter, I will attempt accomplish all three of these goals by examining the motivations that led different factions of the Jewish community to prioritize international or domestic policy, identify how Trump’s actions affected these sentiments among both groups, and to survey the nation’s political landscape to remind us of how precarious the place of American Jews remains in this volatile and polarized environment.

I. ISRAEL COMES FIRST—BUT NOT FOR EVERYONE
For the better part of a generation, large majorities of Jewish voters have paid more attention to domestic policy rather than issues related to Israel. (By 2020, a study by the Ruermta Foundation showed that only 4% of Jewish voters identify Israel as their first or second-most important election issue.)

Some of this is based on the belief that most (but not all) candidates in both major parties can be counted on to support Israel’s needs when necessary. But much is also based on the growing cultural divide between American and Israeli Jews, as evidenced by controversies in recent years regarding conversions of the non-Orthodox, the role of female rabbis and regulations for prayer at the Western Wall.

Of greater concern is the possibility that the diminished interest in Israel among Jewish voters here is simply the passage of time. The existential threat to Jews that led to the creation of Israel seems less real to many whose experience
with anti-Semitism is limited to news reports and history books. So, it is not surprising that the attitudes of American Jews are much different than our Israeli counterparts when it comes to issues of safety and security.

As they see Israel's existence as becoming more secure, the American Jewish community has shifted its attention to domestic policy. Polling from the Jewish Electorate Institute at the outset of the most recent presidential election showed issues like health care, gun safety and white supremacy as their most important policy priority. Of the sixteen issues included in the survey, Israel ranked dead last. By the fall of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic had understandably become the issue of greatest concern to American Jews. Other policy matters, including the low ranking of Israel, had not changed.

It's important to note that most American Jews still consider themselves to be strong supporters of Israel. But there is an increasing divergence of opinion on what exactly that means. For the first decades of the existence of the modern state of Israel, the Jewish state was seen as a valiant underdog fighting for survival in a hostile Middle East. But for most of the twenty-first century, a view of Israel as the aggressor has spread throughout the United States, including large numbers of American Jews who no longer feel comfortable defending the actions of the Israeli government.

As Bibi Netanyahu became an increasingly polarizing figure, a sizable portion of the American Jewish community began to consciously define their support for Israel as separate and distinct from their sentiments about Netanyahu. Consequently, they described their support for Israel in the context of more accommodationist measures than Netanyahu and his allies were willing to take. It remains to be seen if that philosophical conflict will continue now that Netanyahu has left office.

But a sizable number of American Jews have not shifted their thinking as it relates to Israel's safety and security. While many of Israel's neighbors no longer harbor the belligerence that fueled wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973, the growing menace of Iran's nuclear threat, as well as that country's sponsorship of terrorist activity throughout the region represents an equally existential threat in the eyes of most Israelis and many American Jews. Nor is it lost on them that while many Arab states now maintain more polite and respectful relationships with Israel, a deep strain of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism still exists within the populace of these nations.

These two schools of thought among American Jews have most often collided on issues relating to Israel-Palestinian relations and Iran's nuclear capacity and broader regional intentions. Both of these issues had roiled the
Jewish community in this country long before Trump’s election, and while there is no need in this chapter to recount the fierce debates in this country over the fate of Gaza and the West Bank, or the negotiations that led to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the simmering acrimony on these issues created a fertile landscape for Trump to exploit in his outreach efforts to Jews, evangelical Christians and other supporters of Israel when he entered the presidential campaign.

However, it is worth noting that those American Jews who are most likely to support Netanyahu’s approach on these issues are also those who rank Israel as a higher priority than the broader Jewish community here. Even if more American have determined that Israel is a less important voting issue for them, those who are more emotionally invested in Middle East policy tend to carry a disproportionate amount of influence in these discussions. These voters have tended to be older, more religious, and disproportionately immigrants themselves (mostly from Israel, Iran, Russia, or Eastern Europe), according to surveys done by The Associated Press’s VoteCast and the Pew Research Center. And they devoted themselves much more fully to these debates than most younger and secular members of the community.

Netanyahu long understood the benefit of a smaller but more committed support base. Trump learned that lesson quickly as well. While there was never any realistic path for him to significantly increase his share of the Jewish vote in 2020, let alone achieve an actual majority, Trump did recognize the considerable benefits that came with a more motivated pro-Israel cohort in his re-election campaign.

II. TRUMP AND ISRAEL—AND AMERICA

Upon assuming the presidency, Trump quickly began to move on two tracks that were of direct relevance to American Jews. For the minority who did emphasize Israel in their political thinking, Trump’s statements and actions in the Middle East could not have been more pleasing. Most notable, of course, was his decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, a step that had been promised by presidents of both parties for many years but had never been actually accomplished before Trump. He also recognized the long-disputed Golan Heights as an official part of Israel, proposed a peace plan between the Israelis and Palestinians that was lauded by Netanyahu and quickly rejected by
Palestinian leaders, and facilitated the formalization of relationships between Israel and several Arab Gulf states.

Most important to this portion of the Jewish electorate, though, was Trump's fierce opposition to the Iran nuclear agreement. From the time he took office, Trump was unrelenting in his criticism of the deal. For over a year, his advisors successfully prevented him from walking away. But by 2018, Trump officially withdrew from JCPOA, leaving the treaty's other signators to try to keep it intact. As Iran has continued to work toward nuclear capability, the split in this country about whether to re-enter negotiations with Iran has become even more pronounced. For Trump's strongest supporters, his fight against a nuclear agreement was an ideal symbol of his commitment to their goals.

But on the domestic front, Trump's conduct had exactly the opposite impact on most American Jews. The president's attempt to create a moral equivalency between “both sides” of the Charlottesville riot early in his term was widely denounced by Jewish leaders, and many Jews also blamed Trump for encouraging nationalist and nativist behavior among hard-right activists that they felt often veered into anti-Semitism. Similar criticisms were regularly leveled against him for an ongoing series of statements that were widely regarded as racially insensitive toward members of other underrepresented communities. (Although many of Trump's supporters are equally convinced that many left-leaning and minority voters have blurred the line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, raising temperatures on both sides even higher. More on this later in the chapter.)

Trump's policy actions were frequently non-starters for the largely progressive Jewish voting bloc, who opposed the president for his actions on climate change, immigration, health care, abortion rights, same sex marriage, and many other domestic issues. Jewish public opinion was especially virulent against Trump in the aftermath of the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor, when the country struggled through a racial reckoning as protests erupted across the nation. American Jews have historically been strong defenders of civil rights, and the debates over criminal justice, public safety, and race relations pitted the majority of the Jewish community against Trump once again.

The result was predictable. For those voters who prioritized Israel as a top-level issue, Trump's support became much more intense. For those who placed more importance on domestic policy, their opposition to the president grew even stronger. But as is the case across much of America, the divide between the nation's Jews became louder, angrier, and far more difficult to repair.
III. THE INCENTIVE FOR UNITY

Now that Trump has completed his term in office, but by no means removed himself from the political fray, the question is how the Jewish community moves forward. Long-standing differences of opinion between those who chose to place more emphasis on Middle Eastern issues or domestic policy have only deepened, and the growing levels of suspicion and distrust between these two factions makes the path back toward unity much more challenging.

But it has never been more necessary. The American Jewish community faces two serious threats in the form of two distinct forms of anti-Semitism, one from the far fringes of the political left and the other from the outliers on the extreme right. But as both of these menaces steadily gain converts within each of the nation’s two major political parties, our own internal divisions prevent us from effectively confronting either.

It has become increasingly difficult to ignore the growing vehemence of the anti-Israel voices that populate the populist wing of the Democratic Party. It has become just as hard to discount the most virulent voices of intolerance among alt-right Republicans. The majority of both parties’ loyalists would stand with Israel and protect the rights and safety of American Jews. But the red-blue chasm that separates Democrats and Republicans has fueled such scorched-earth animosity on both sides that partisans on the left and the right are far too willing to tolerate the inexcusable excesses of those who just happen to share their party registration.

The question is whether Jewish voters—just as polarized as the rest of the electorate—are willing to call out the extremists in their own party ranks. It’s important for Republican Jews to criticize those who advocate for economic boycotts against Israel. It’s just as necessary for Jewish Democrats to castigate the voices of race-based nationalism and prejudice. But it’s not that hard. The challenge is to move beyond the selective outrage that inspires our anger only against those in the other party rather than against those on both the right and the left who would endanger our community and our homeland.

Will Jewish Republicans join the rest of the community in denouncing the other purveyors of hatred on the far right who use the cover of conservative populism to engage in age-old ethnic and religious tropes against Jews and other underrepresented communities? Will the majority of American Jews who are registered Democrats be willing to push back against progressive (and even more difficult) minority leaders who use debatable but legitimate criticism of Israel as an excuse to resurrect odious and age-old stereotypes that have caused the persecution of Jews for centuries?
I wish I was more confident in answering either of those questions in the affirmative. In a better and less bitterly partisan country, being willing to even occasionally set aside loyalties to our preferred political parties to stand together on behalf of a shared faith and history would seem like an achievable goal. But the polarization that has overwhelmed American politics in the twenty-first century distracts us from the urgency of this common purpose. It blinds us from being able to see these twin threats for the danger they are. And it muffles our voices as we try to speak out against the haters who imperil our history, our heritage, and our future.

Hyper-polarization and the accompanying enmity that it creates have poisoned American politics. But given the innumerable challenges that the Jewish people have overcome in the past, we should be able to look past these distractions and concentrate our attentions on such seminal threats. But that means taking on both Proud Boys and BDS’ers when they demean us, and calling out both Q-anon and ethnic studies extremists when they try to erase us.

IV. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY’S CHALLENGE ON A POLARIZED LANDSCAPE

The biblical tale of David and Goliath may help us understand the predicament we face—from two very different perspectives. For most of recorded history, not just since 1948 but going back to biblical times, Jews have always seen ourselves as David, carrying our sling into battle against malicious and outsized opponents. After thousands of years as the underdog, we’ve earned that status many times over. But many liberals see us as Goliath, and the more we protest the unfairness of that designation, the more alienated they become.

On the other side of the fence, many conservatives regard us as the little guy. They like being Goliath and don’t have much incentive to make room for us at the giant’s table. The result is that on a hyper-polarized political and societal landscape, it often feels like neither of the main combatants believe the Jewish community belongs on its side. David thinks we’re Goliath, and Goliath thinks we’re David. Both liberal and conservative extremists believe us to be a problem, an irritant or a target. Sometimes, they see us as convenient collaborators and generous supporters. They rarely see us as true allies or friends.

The partisan alignment among American Jews and the reasons behind those leanings are familiar. A portion of the community gravitates toward
Republicans because of issues relating to the economy and to Israel. A large majority favor the Democrats—often because our centuries of outsider status manifest as a commitment to social justice and helping the disadvantaged.

Regardless of party registration or ideological preference, each of us must make a compromise when we cast our ballots. Most Republicans do not support the anti-Semites who marched in Charlottesville, VA, but voting for a GOP candidate enlarges the platform on which alt-right haters stand. Most Democrats do not believe Jews control the world economy but electing a Democrat of any ideological stripe furthers the reach of those who stand against Israel and its children.

Such are the limitations of a two-party system that most of us scarcely consider the sacrifice such tradeoffs require, if only because there is no alternative. Vote for a pro-Israel politician in either party and we also empower the anti-Semitic fringe that shares that candidate’s registration. We’ve resigned ourselves to the fact that elevating those who hate us—from the far right or the far left—is a necessary evil to thwart the even more despicable haters among the opposition.

This leads to a sort of selective outrage in which we ignore the worst excesses of the outliers in our own party and instead concentrate solely on the sins of our opponents. There’s no intellectually honest way for a Jewish Republican to defend Marjorie Taylor Green, or a pro-Israel Democrat to stand up for Ilhan Omar. So why bother trying? It’s much easier and much more cathartic to direct our anger toward those who both hate Jews and disagree with us on health care reform or offshore oil drilling. However, selective outrage toward the opposition also means selective silence toward our putative partisan allies—and our silence gives them strength.

The result is that the Jewish community has become just as polarized as the broader electorate, even though such balkanization works against our own interests as a community. We allow both parties to exploit our support when we can be helpful and marginalize us whenever the loudest and angriest voices on the far left and far right make demands at our expense.

The political gymnastics Democratic House leadership performed to avoid a vote on an anti-BDS resolution would be comical if it were not so appalling. But it has nothing on the rationalizations and excuses leading Republicans offered when Donald Trump’s administration invited known anti-Semites to the White House. And finding members of Congress willing to criticize both these outrages rather than taking the easy way out and targeting their fire solely toward the other party’s cowardice is no easy task.
Republicans are full-throated in their support for Israel because Zionism resonates with their non-Jewish voters, too. (A 2017 poll by LifeWay Research effectively evaluates the views of evangelical Americans on issues related to Israel and the politics of the Middle East.) But the reservations of their Jewish supporters are largely ignored on domestic, social, and cultural issues such as abortion rights and same-sex marriage that motivate conservative grassroots activists. On the other hand, Democrats can commit fully to those same domestic policy matters knowing their loyalists—both Jewish and not—are in strong agreement. However, they must be much more cautious regarding Israel because of the animosity many progressives harbor toward Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government.

The result is that Jewish voters on both sides largely are taken for granted. Democrats and Republicans know their Jewish supporters—and donors—will remain loyal and will vote in large numbers. Both parties’ leaders have become proficient at proclaiming Israel should not be a partisan issue, even as both sides assiduously work to ensure that its side is seen as a more effective partner for the Jewish state. Because twenty-first-century elections are won by motivating the party’s ideological base, placating the anti-Zionist progressives and the alt-right nativists almost always take priority over addressing the needs of American Jews.

Political parties address our goals only when they don’t conflict with the demands of the hardliners, because we don’t threaten to switch sides or stay home. As the two main parties continue to move further from the political center, the need to cater to their true believers continues to grow, and the importance of Jewish voters on both sides continues to shrink.

There are many reasons to rebuild our nation’s political center that have nothing to do with either Israel or Judaism. A functioning government capable of confronting and resolving our most pressing challenges is foremost among them. Young people today read stories in history books about former President Ronald Reagan and former Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill working across party lines to save Social Security, or former President Bill Clinton and former Speaker Newt Gingrich teaming up to balance the budget. But for millennials who grew up in an era of scorched-earth partisanship, they may as well be learning about the butter churn or the eight-track tape player. They don’t doubt these things ever existed; they just dismiss them as ancient artifacts—from a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

Growing up in that far-away galaxy, I learned at a young age that the essential difference between politics and football is that in politics, victories
come between the forty-yard lines. People make progress and solve problems when principled progressives and equally principled conservatives come out of their ideological end zones and move closer to midfield. What ideologues de-ride as the “mushy middle” is the space where successful leaders on both sides can achieve many of their goals by realizing they must allow their opposite numbers to achieve some of their goals, as well. They understand progress is not the enemy of perfection, but a way of moving closer toward it.

For American Jews, a revitalized political center would mean we no longer would be held hostage to the agents of intolerance that control the agendas of both major parties. When Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez minimizes the horrors of German death camps, honorable centrists in both parties will denounce her conviction, the same way they will condemn political strategist Steve Bannon when he flirts with the Nazis’ modern-day descendants across the globe.

Excusing the bad behavior of a fellow partisan is easy to justify when pledging allegiance to a political party comes before allegiance to a flag or the principles of fairness and tolerance the flag represents. When we remember there are good people on the other side of the fifty-yard line, too—people who may disagree on how to solve a community’s problems but agree on the need to work together to resolve those problems—it becomes much easier to call out the haters in our own ranks and move forward without them.

Most Jewish voters will never feel at home in a party of extremists—whether that extreme is on the far left or the far right—but the zealots are growing in strength and numbers. The same potion of economic inequality, social media provocation, and radical populism drives an impatience with traditional politics and hatred toward “outsiders” like us. Our incentive to assist in the efforts to create a common ground on which leaders from both sides can come together is not just so we can help repair a broken political system; it’s to build a political home for ourselves—one where we can feel welcome and truly belong.

The concept of belonging is one that doesn’t come easy to us. We’re much more accustomed to marginalization and persecution, so we’re naturally suspicious that assimilation can be a slippery slope toward loss of our hard-won identity. Throughout history, the worst oppression the Jewish people have faced originated with the ideological outliers on the far right or the far left, which gradually infected the mainstream.

Building a bulwark against those extremists by strengthening a bipartisan center is both necessary self-protection and smart politics—but it can’t
happen until our community decides to stop being manipulated by the two political parties to achieve their goals, and start using them to achieve ours.

V. THE NEED FOR ALLIES

Even if American Jews are able to set aside our differences for the sake of these far-reaching goals, our path forward is still far from assured. Jews account for only about two percent of the nation’s population, and our most committed detractors are well-ensconced within the bases of both major parties. Successfully confronting these challenges will require the Jewish community to do a much better job of making friends and building coalitions within which we can work. That will require identifying other Americans with similar—but not identical—goals on both ends of the political spectrum.

First, we must confront the reality that our relationships with other minority communities have badly withered in recent decades. American Jews have a rich and admirable history as loyal allies to the African-American community through decades of the struggle for civil rights and as strong supporters of Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders in the fights over immigration reform. Jewish community leaders played a critical role in the formation of the NAACP in 1909. In the years immediately after World War II, Jewish and African-American efforts forged broader relationships that allowed them to jointly build support for stronger protections against discrimination and bigotry. In the 1960s, Jewish civil rights advocates joined the Freedom Riders movement to travel to the deep south to rally opposition to Jim Crow laws. Tragically, two Jewish activists, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, along with their African-American colleague James Chaney, paid the ultimate price when they were abducted murdered by the Ku Klux Klan near Philadelphia, Mississippi, as a result of their participation in voter registration efforts. But over the past generation, those close ties have all but evaporated.

The disrepair into which these relationships have fallen can be seen in the fight over ethnic studies requirements for high school and college students that has taken place in the California State Legislature and elsewhere. The broad support among elected officials representing minority communities for legislation that would have either ignored or marginalized the Jewish experience reflects the lack of strong ties and useful communications channels between California Jews and our counterparts from communities of color. There was a
time when Jewish leaders prioritized these relationships, but in the absence of consistent attention, these bonds have dramatically weakened. Legislation like this is the predictable result.

Similar reminders of these tensions emerged during protests against police misconduct in the summer of 2020, the treatment of Jewish women on the part of the planners of national and regional Women's Marches in recent years, and the struggles over state and national Democratic Party platform planks regarding Israel and the Middle East. I referenced the anti-Zionist attitudes that are heard frequently among many liberal activists earlier in this chapter, as well as the frequency with which those criticisms of Israel often ooze across the line of policy debate into anti-Semitic vitriol. But the acceptance of these stereotypes among many minority community leaders is evidence of the need for American Jews to engage in more purposeful and consistent outreach efforts.

Discussing the increased evidence of anti-Semitism in communities of color does not excuse for a single moment the equally vile threat against American Jews that emanates from ultra-conservative zealots. As I also stated earlier, the ease with which nationalism transforms itself into nativism presents a clear and present danger to Jewish communities in the US, Europe and elsewhere. But the bigotry we face from the right does not relieve us of the burden to improve our efforts at building bridges on the left.

But while there are ample examples of prejudice and intolerance on the extreme right-leaning fringes, there are also many potential supporters and defenders of Jews in most conservative communities. Evangelical Christians and other religious conservatives not only share our commitment to Israel but to a range of social justice matters as well. After the Tree of Life tragedy and similar atrocities committed against Jewish people and our houses of worship, Christian leaders stood with us to denounce these acts of terrorism. An equally important aspect of our search for allies relies on our ability to become more comfortable working with those who agree with us on some issues but not all.

Finding ways to reach out to those who disagree with large majorities of American Jews on seminal issues like abortion rights, gun control, and marriage equality will be a very difficult task. For some of us, it will simply not be possible. But a community the size of ours cannot survive without partners and limiting our potential allies to only those who agree with us on all matters of public policy will bring little progress. Disagreements on these issues might not be pleasant but isolating ourselves to a degree to which we can no longer protect our families and communities from the menace of anti-Semitism would be even worse.
The challenge for our community in this new era is to show the same tolerance and respect for those who adhere to other cultural traditions as we hope to receive from them. A real alliance requires us to stand with liberals and conservatives, Muslims and evangelicals, with those who worship in a different manner but whose faiths share the same fundamental underlying moral foundation with ours. It won’t be easy, but our survival depends on this type of outreach, tolerance and mutual respect.

VI. THE CHOICE AT HAND

Such is the balkanized state of our electorate and our society that the obstacles to such efforts are greater than at any time in recent history. Those political and cultural divisions have dramatically deepened in recent years, and the tools of technology have made it extremely convenient to avoid crossing path with anyone with whom we disagree.

The members of the Jewish community who do not have the luxury of self-sequestration are our next generation of leaders, college students who venture onto campuses where they are forced to confront the voices of intolerance in a way that most of us can avoid. We have left it to a group of brave teenagers and early twenty-somethings to take the front lines in this fight while the rest of us remain at a safe distance from the fray. This is not only morally questionable but raises questions about the Jewish community’s future when our young people come of age in environments where they are left to their own devices to decide how to stand up for their heritage in the face of such unrelenting hostility. If we do not demonstrate to our children and grandchildren that such relationship-building is beneficial, they are unlikely to seek out such opportunities when they complete their education and assume positions of responsibility in Jewish community organizations.

In the meantime, this unwillingness to engage with potential allies leaves us exceedingly vulnerable. And while it is more cathartic to vilify those who protest, pray, or vote differently than we do, surely it is worth expending additional effort to see with which of those “others” we can find enough common ground from which to build reliable partnerships.

The alternative is even less trust, more divisiveness, more anger and more hatred. How disappointing if the legacy of this ugly era in American politics
would be to keep the Jewish community here even more divided and more endangered than ever before. And how much worse would it be if we knew it had been within our power to avoid that fate and had simply chosen not to bother.
Reflections on Donald Trump’s Presidency and American Jewry

by Steven F. Windmueller

The Trump victory in 2016 evoked among American Jews an extraordinary set of responses. Among Jewish members of the GOP, one could find a range of reactions, depending on their specific ideological orientation and the political space they held within the world of Republicanism. Indeed, there was a degree of excitement and anticipation on the part of the new President’s supporters, while a level of caution operated among other Republican Jewish players, uncertain and uncomfortable about his personal behavior as well as certain policy directions being introduced by the new administration.

Within Democratic Jewish quarters one could find a heightened level of pessimism and even fear combined with a determined resolve to push back against an array of Trump initiatives that were seen in conflict with liberal social priorities. As liberal Jews began organizing in order to challenge many of the initiatives scheduled to be introduced by the new administration, Jewish Republicans emerged to defend many of the President-elect’s policies.1

Writing at the time of his 2016 election, I concluded:2

The election of Donald Trump as this nation’s 45th President represents a different moment in American history. . . . The political climate in the United States has spawned a new wave of racist, anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic rhetoric. The imprint of social media on the political and cultural environment warrants further consideration. . . . The political campaign culminating in the 2016 election has left a level of discomfort and fear within this nation, and most
Steven F. Windmueller
certainly within the Jewish community. Many American Jews are troubled by the nature of the political discourse that is unfolding. . . . The health of our democracy must remain the primary focus. If this environment of distrust and hate is allowed to fester, we face a potential scenario of civil disorder and the threat of violence.

INTO THE PRESENT
The seeds set in 2016 would continue to define and shape the political landscape encompassing the four year tenure of Donald Trump. November 3, 2020, represented more than a date; it signaled for this nation, and more directly for Jewish Americans a defining moment. If they were Trump supporters, it was an opportunity to acknowledge the President’s leadership and more directly, his role as a defender and promoter of the Jewish State. Indeed, for those who opposed 45, this was all about reclaiming this country, as they viewed this President as fundamentally problematic to the wellbeing of this nation and our democracy. These two distinctive and competing perspectives contributed to the “great Jewish political divide.”

Political conviction served as a driving political sentiment in asserting support for or expressing opposition to this President. While we note the mixed levels of support for President Trump, as expressed in the 2020 exit polls, the intensity of feelings in connection with Donald Trump were particularly significant and defining.

I have argued elsewhere that “Jewish voting patterns may undergo significant change at those times in which Jews sense that their self-interests are being challenged, and that it is essential for them to re-evaluate their political position within the society.” In 2020, the majority of Jewish voters believed that the Trump Presidency raised more threatening challenges to the welfare of this society and its democratic institutions and norms than the benefits accrued by the President’s actions on behalf of Israel and other specific Jewish policy considerations.

Above all else, the Trump Presidency energized Americans, no less the Jewish community. The fact that 66.7% of eligible voters cast ballots in 2020, the highest percentage in more than a century, should point to this intensity of engagement that defined this administration.
BUILDING A JEWISH VOTER TYPOLOGY

We are all creatures of our environment. Our respective political cultures reflect our particular social orbits, belief systems and particular loyalties. Our political identities are shaped and influenced by our broader general beliefs about our society and our place within it. Certainly, our cultural experiences, personal values, and historical encounters inform and help to frame how we see and engage with politics.

Politics is an extension of who we are. All of the social forces acting upon us serve to define our political outlook. *I hold that the quest to assimilate drives all of these forms of political engagement for Jewish Americans.* Fundamentally, we operate in the secular environment either conscious or unconsciously with a particular desire to blend in, to be “American”! This is an abiding behavioral characteristic for humans, and most certainly for minority cultures operating in a democratic society.

Within the Jewish political context, we know that religious affiliation, ethnic orientation, generational status, and one’s urban-suburban status are all key influencers in shaping voting patterns. Voters ask different questions when making political choices and in thinking about their options.

For some of us, our self-interests politics, our nationalism involves an alignment of our Judaism with our Americanism. Patriotism encompasses an abiding belief that being a “loyal American” is joined with one’s Jewish identity. For these political actors, a central question: “Is it good for the Jews?” These players are often defined as “identity voters” and articulate their politics through their self-interests as Jewish Americans. Their political identity begins with whom they are, as it represents an extension of themselves. In turn, they translate their love of Israel as an extension of their American patriotism. Their political identity is reflected in the interplay of this dual connection.

For these activists Israel is an extension of their American story. For this voting sector, Judaism frames their political identity and supports their civic behavior and beliefs. For others, Israel has specifically replaced their religious identity. The Jewish State serves to reinforce their political orientation and most certainly their specific and unique passion to view Israel’s political well-being as part of their Americanism.

For these “Jewish patriots” they see the left as more dangerous to the interests of the United States and Israel than extremists on the right. Criticism of Israel, for example, as expressed by political adversaries on the left, be they Jews or non-Jews, is clearly seen as potentially problematic, undermining the case for Israel and ultimately, the security and viability of the Jewish State. They
view certain forms of dissent as not only anti-Semitic but in some cases identify such political assertions as “unpatriotic”.

A second cohort of Jewish Americans draws its political identity from a different relationship and reading of how they connect their Judaism in relationship with their Americanism. While they generally hold to the notion that support for Israel reinforces their overall conservative political orientation, their politics begin with a defined political philosophy involving small government, a heightened regard for Constitutionalism, and an abiding belief in capitalism, among other political principles. In some cases, these “Jewish Conservatives” critique Democrats as misreading the principles of liberalism, and more directly, the roles and responsibilities of government. Along with their fellow Conservatives, they hold personal liberties and religious freedoms to be profoundly important to their understanding of American values. It is important to note that a number of deeply-embedded “red state” Jewish voters held profound differences with Donald Trump both on policy matters and in connection with the President’s performance style. As such, these “Never-Trump Republicans” parked themselves outside of the Party in 2016 and again in 2020, unwilling to lend their support.

In this sector another subgroup involves Religious Values Voters, individuals (including many Orthodox Jews) whose politics align with the Evangelical wing of the Republican Party.

A third body of Jewish voters, who come to their politics from a totally different frame of reference, might best be identified as “universal” Jewish voters. This group’s liberal instincts, supported by their connection with and belief in the prophetic tradition, inform and nurture their activism as well as their political orientation. Similar to their counterparts, their center-left liberalism is uniquely aligned with their understanding of Judaism. Their abiding question: “Is it good for America, for my community?” These voters frame their political agenda from the outside-in. In turn, the case for Israel is framed in association with their broader American view of the world. Whereas “identity” Jewish voters begin with the particular, these liberal activists operate from a broader or universal perspective.

By contrast with their opponents, this cohort sees the Jewish right as seeking to close off or at least narrow the debate around Israel. While they may view critics of Israel on the left as problematic, they view the threats emanating from the political right as the existential danger point to Jews and to this nation. “Radicalized” Jewish voters comprise a fourth sector. This group has deep roots within the American political story. Their political left perspectives are
in part borne out of an earlier generation of new Americans who brought their ideas about Socialism and Communism, when first arriving in this country from Eastern Europe. These current “Jewish Lefties,” sometimes referenced as “red-diaper babies,” generally dismiss the more parochial questions introduced by other Jews in favor of a more global agenda, “Is their politics good for humanity and the world?” Today, these activists can be found among the Progressive wing within the Democratic Party. In line with their own world view, their politics in connection with the State of Israel are generally more critical and challenging.

A fifth sector involves the “Independent” Jewish voter, who may hold no formal party affiliation or tends to move among the policy options and candidate choices. Their independence may be tied to any number of factors, their Libertarian inclinations, their distrust of political parties and ideological certainties, or their belief that the political environment may best be served by a condition of disruptive politics, where candidates have to constantly “prove” their value and worthiness to serve. Interestingly, young voters tend to embrace this particular label in greater numbers than previous generations. As one of their initial questions, this sector may probe: “How as a society are we doing, and can we do better?

These different political camps all begin by framing questions that begin outside of themselves, whereas a sixth group of voters operate from a fundamentally different paradigm. These folks, Jewish or otherwise, begin their political focus from a purely economic perspective. They pose the question, “What’s good for me?” They disregard traditional political labels, hold minimal party or ideological loyalties, and in place of such definitions operate from a place of individual advantage or choice. This sector is described by some political analysts as “Gilded Voters.” Taken from the earlier nineteenth century Gilded Age, this class of voters defines its political interests from a particularly narrow, self-serving base-line. Their abiding question most likely would be “Will this or that political administration serve me better?”

Capturing Jewish political behavior at times maybe compared to “herding cats!” as Jews are so deeply embedded in the American political environment, where their individual values and personal stories weigh deeply in defining and shaping their particular inclinations and passions. The Trump Presidency, and more directly the 2020 election, harnessed each of these political expressions.
THE UNSETTLED POLITICAL LANDSCAPE
The changing character of the American politics were not only shaped by the Trump Presidency. How Jewish voters reacted to the growth of the progressive wing inside the Democratic Party represented one of these new Jewish political challenges. Indeed, even as some Jews embrace progressive policies and its candidates, others expressed specific concerns related to the anti-Israel positions endorsed by some within this camp, along with other policy proposals emanating from this sector that mainstream Jewish voters found problematic.

Correspondingly, the growing presence within the Republican Party of right-wing candidates, along with efforts on the part of alt-Right and white supremacist groups to identify with this President and his actions alarmed parts of the Jewish electorate. Of particular concern was the apparent unwillingness by Donald Trump to forthrightly distance himself from such expressions.

THE STREET
The summer of 2020 brought more than 26 million individuals to the streets of this nation, including many Jewish Americans. This heightened level of civic activism was in response to the tragic deaths of Black Americans at the hands of local police. The emergence of Black Lives Matter as a voice of activism and organizing triggered an internal Jewish debate around anti-Semitism and anti-Israel expressions in connection with certain BLM actions and proposals. What should be the Jewish response in connection with these initiatives? This issue added yet another element to the already deep divide that one could find among Jewish voters.

VOTER TEMPERAMENT
The Jewish Electorate Institute introduced two studies, one in February of 2020 and the second in September assessing Jewish voter sentiment: 

- 67% of Jewish voters disapprove of President Trump's job performance. This is about 15% higher than the American electorate as a whole.
- 70% of Jewish voters view Joe Biden in favorable terms, more than 20% higher than the American electorate.
• Biden overwhelmingly leads President Trump on every issue, including Israel.

• Kamala Harris matches Biden in favorability among Jewish voters.

• 90% of Jewish voters said the federal government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic is an important issue to consider when deciding which candidate to vote for.

• A majority of Jewish voters believe that Trump deserves the greatest blame for the spread of coronavirus, and less than a quarter of Jewish voters trust Trump on the federal government’s response to the coronavirus.

• More than 80% of Jewish voters believe the rise of anti-Semitism and white nationalism are very important issues to consider when deciding which candidate to support. Nearly two-thirds of Jewish voters trust Joe Biden more on anti-Semitism, and one quarter of Jewish voters trust Donald Trump.

• Most Jewish voters feel less secure than they did four years ago, and a majority believe they will be less safe if Trump is reelected.

• 88% of Jewish voters self-identify as pro-Israel, and a majority of Jewish voters are critical of at least some of the current Israeli government’s policies. Democratic and Republican Jewish voters identify as pro-Israel at the same level.

• Jewish voters prioritize domestic policy issues over Israel when asked which issues are most important. Less than one-fifth of respondents said Israel is one of the most important issues when deciding which candidate to support.

• The Israel-UAE agreement had no effect on a majority of Jewish voters’ view of Donald Trump. Jewish voters trust Biden more than Trump on Israel.

• Unlike other constituencies, most Jewish voters plan to vote BEFORE election day AND feel comfortable with non-in-person voting methods.

To better understand the political orientation of American Jewish voters, a core set of issues resonate with this voting constituency.
ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE JEWISH VOTE
When examining this chart (“Rated Importance of Selected Issues”), in fifth position, one finds reference to “anti-Semitism.” Over the past four years, this issue has taken on a heightened concern for American Jews. Every national study references this phenomenon as a significant issue for Jewish Americans. How may it impact voting? Once again, the political divide defines how Jews understand this question. Republican Jews increasingly reference “left wing” anti-Semitism, while Jewish Democrats point to “right wing” hate.

THE SUPREME COURT AND JEWISH VOTERS
In this same chart the eighth item is, “Supreme Court Justices.” The passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the fall of 2020 represented no small matter for many liberal Jewish voters, who placed particular value on the policy outcomes and legal decisions of the Court. Issues such as immigration and refugee policy, civil rights and affirmative action, abortion rights, church-state separation, and health care are seen as core to Jewish liberal political interests. The decision to accelerate the nomination and selection process for a new justice, introduced by the President and supported by the Republican-controlled Senate would add another dimension to an already divisive and intensive election cycle.
UNPACKING JEWISH POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

While Jews represent a relatively small voter cohort, accounting for 1.8% of the population, their geo-political presence is particularly significant. Seventeen major population centers account for 66% of all Jewish Americans, with 75% residing in eight states (California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Massachusetts), with these states accounting for 188 electoral votes. If one were to also include the seven states containing between 100,000 and 200,000 Jews, Texas (176,000); Virginia (151,000); Ohio (148,000); Georgia (129,000); Connecticut (118,000); Arizona (107,000); and Colorado (103,000), the combined electoral vote count would be 300 (with 270 necessary to win the election).

Another way to understand this geo-political reality is that a majority of the Jewish vote is situated in the one hundred most urban populated counties in the nation. Joe Biden in 2020 would carry 527 counties including these large metropolitan centers; by comparison, Donald Trump won every other county (2,586) in America.

AGE AND OTHER FACTORS IN DEFINING THE JEWISH VOTE

As an older ethnic religious cohort, Jewish voting priorities, as an example, focus on health care and social security policies. As noted above, American Jews are older than other white ethnic constituencies. In the United States, 20.6% of the general population is sixty-five or older, yet among Jews, 26% are part of this older cohort. While 45.8% of all Americans are aged eighteen to forty-four, among Jews that figure is 41%. Within that category, only 10.5% of Jewish Americans are between eighteen to twenty-four years of age.

Most polling studies confirm that Jews are more liberal than the American electorate as a whole, 41% to 23%. Jews are three times as more likely to hold a graduate degree than other US citizens. Yet, while 31% of the general electorate define themselves as “non-religious,” nearly one-half of Jewish voters identify as such.

POLITICAL FUNDRAISING AND JEWISH DONORS

While there isn't specific data available at this time concerning the 2020 campaign and Jewish political giving, there is supporting information in connection
with the significant financial role involving Jewish donors to political causes and campaigns.

In 2012, as an example, 71% of the $160 million that Jewish donors gave to the two major-party nominees went to President Obama’s re-election campaign; 29% went to Mitt Romney’s campaign, according to our analysis of campaign contributors, which used a predictive model to estimate which donors are Jewish based on their names and other characteristics. This ratio of support mirrors how Jewish voters cast their ballots in 2012.15

Maybe the most impressive statistic is this one: 50% of all campaign dollars donated to the Democratic Party are from Jewish funders, while 25% of donations to the Republican Party are provided by Jewish contributors.16 Take as an example, among the top fifty donors to the 2016 campaign, eleven of the top fourteen Democratic Party contributors were Jewish, while nine of the top thirty-six Republican supporters identified as Jews.17

SOME CLOSING REFLECTIONS
The Trump Presidency both created and drew upon a new political dynamic within this society. A new form of political edginess has defined this moment. The very core of America’s social fabric appears to be coming apart. Civility has left the public square, partisanship has trumped patriotism, and communalism has given way to self-aggrandizement. Sadly, hate and distrust are the new protocols. When conspiracy and mythology replace reason and meaning, a society loses its credibility and credence. To be clear, these unsettling conditions were not singularly the product of the Trump Presidency but rather seems to have been embellished by this President and his allies.

With the release of the 2020 Pew Study on American Jews (May 2021), it is possible to confirm the deep divisions one finds among Jewish Americans.18 While six in ten Jews believed that President Trump was friendly to Israel, those numbers did not translate into votes for him in November 2020. In fact, three quarters of Jewish respondents disapproved of this President’s job performance; by contrast, 65% of Jews had approved of President Obama’s service to this nation. As the Pew report confirms, American Jews are the second most Democratic constituency in this nation, with only African Americans (86%) demonstrating a higher affinity. 50% of all Jews describe themselves as “liberal” or “leaning liberal,” only 16% identify as “conservative.” Indeed, in the 2020 Study three-quarters of Orthodox Jews indicated that they were Republicans;
by contrast, the 2013 Pew Study noted that 57% supported the Republican Party. The voting patterns of American Orthodox Jews compare favorably to those of white Evangelical Christians.

The general disapproval of Trump extended to his handling of specific issues. Only about a quarter of Jewish adults rated Trump’s handling of immigration as excellent (14%) or good (10%). By contrast, three in four Jews identified his policies in this area as only fair (7%) or poor (67%). The Study noted that even fewer Jews gave Trump high marks for his policies on the environment (19%).

In the aftermath of this moment, “Trumpism” operates as the extension of 45’s influence and impact on this nation. It embodies a set of ideas concerning the American political story, just as it permits Donald Trump’s presence to be an ongoing phenomenon in influencing the political landscape.

In an age where politics has assumed the role of religious belief and practice, liberal American Jews, among others, have taken on a political ideology that seeks to define Trumpism as counter-cultural to the spirit and intent of American democratic values. As Jonathan Tobin concludes: “For Jewish liberals, Trump is an ally to anti-Semites and a proto-authoritarian whose character and conduct, statements mark him as a unique threat to democracy. They can’t understand why even one Jew would consider voting for him.”

With reference to this new uncertain and unsettling state of affairs, I previously suggested:

Is what Jews are experiencing today in this society simply a momentary blip as part of their American journey or does it suggest that there are deeper, more troubling elements to this current scenario? Jews have been ripped from their place of security in other societies by external events and social unrest. Are we to understand that what is unfolding within this nation around race and class, immigration and religious tolerance represents something equally as unsettling?

While this project is centered on President Trump’s distinctive impact on Jews, this political era in American history contains a number of other transformative elements, some of which the former president embraced, while others would play out as part of the counter-cultural response to his presidency. The rise of American nationalism and the resurgence of populism energized the Republican base, just as it empowered Donald Trump. Racial consciousness, intersectionality, and economic and social justice considerations represented issues that empowered the political left.
In connection with American Jewish political behavior, the Trump era represents a new and uncharted moment. The Jewish political mindset is being reset in the aftermath of this cultural revolution, as we find Jews both re-configuring their personal relationships and re-assessing their political options and choices!

This point in time also finds the Jewish community caught in a particularly challenging and uncomfortable political condition:²²

As we have shifted from a period of American liberalism to a time of political populism, deep fissures are dividing Americans in general and Jews in particular. In the aftermath of November, Jewish political differences may never have been more pronounced, as Jews debate and disagree over what defines their vision for America and how they understand their self-interests in this new political reality. There is a new type of angst amongst America’s Jews. A fundamental political sea change appears to be underway. As America’s social fabric is being tested, new strains of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism have emerged globally and at home. These attacks are being launched simultaneously by the extreme right and left, creating a particularly challenging moment.

Following the Trump Presidency, how Jews both understand American society and their connection to it is being renegotiated.
Notes


9. Ibid.


12. Ibid.


Bibliography


Steven F. Windmueller

jewish-population-approaches-7-million-implications-for-the-2020-us-presidential-election/.


About the Contributors

**LISA ANSELL** is Associate Director of the Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life at the University of Southern California. She received her BA in French and Near East Studies from UCLA and her MA in Middle East Studies from Harvard University. She was the Chair of the World Language Department of New Community Jewish High School for five years before coming to USC in August 2007. She currently teaches Hebrew language courses at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. She also serves as the USC ambassador for academic partnerships in Israel.

**ADAM BASCIANO** is the co-founder and National Director of IPF Atid, Israel Policy Forum's young professionals' network. In this role, he develops the strategy behind programs and campaigns to further American awareness, understanding, and support for a future two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He maintains close ties with millennial leaders and policy figures throughout North America, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories, and his writings have been published in The Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Forward*, and other media outlets. He is involved as a volunteer leader with the Millennial Action Project, Heart of a Nation, and the New York Jewish Agenda. He previously interned on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Mayor of Tel Aviv’s International Relations team, and at AIPAC. He served as a Research Assistant for two years on the book, *Thou Shalt Innovate: How Israeli Ingenuity Repairs the World* (Gefen Publishing House, 2018). In 2021, he was recognized by the New York Jewish Week’s “36 Under 36.” Adam received his BA in International Relations from Colgate University and is currently pursuing his master’s degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He resides in New York City and plays amateur baseball in the Bronx.

**MICHAEL BERENBAUM** is a Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Sigi Ziering Institute: Exploring the Ethical and Religious Implications of the Holocaust. He was Project Director overseeing the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the first Director of its Research Institute. He is former President and CEO of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and was Managing Editor of the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. His work in film has been recognized with Emmy and Academy Awards and he has created museums in several US cities and on three continents. He is the author and editor of twenty-two books.
ELIZABETH A. BERNEY, ESQ. is an attorney and the National Director of Research and Special Projects for the Zionist Organization of America (“ZOA”), the oldest pro-Israel organization in the United States. Liz assists ZOA’s defense of Israel and the Jewish people, including by writing US Supreme Court amicus (“friend of the court”) briefs; co-authoring op-eds; and representing ZOA in media appearances, synagogue speeches, panels, and debates. Liz also represents ZOA at the World Zionist Congress, the Zionist General Council, the Keren Kayemet L’Israel-JNF Board, the European Conference on Countering Antisemitism, the American Zionist Movement (AZM) Board, AZM Policy Committee and AZM Area Elections Committee. She is also on the board of Ariel University in Samaria, Israel. Liz is a graduate of Cornell University and the University of Chicago Law School. Prior to joining ZOA, Liz worked at Manhattan Law firms on diverse matters, including consumer safety, corporate fraud, and international legal cases involving foreign governments. Liz helped negotiate the Swiss Banks Holocaust assets case settlement and formulated legal theories for the German Banks Holocaust assets case. Liz ran for US Congress, and was a presidential surrogate debater and speechwriter. Liz also plays violin in the ZOA annual gala’s klezmer group, and a community orchestra.

MATTHEW BROOKS serves as Executive Director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, an organization dedicated to enhancing ties between the Jewish community and the Republican Party. He began his political career in College Republicans while a student at Brandeis University, went on to manage the Jack Kemp for President campaign in Massachusetts, and became the Political Director of the Republican Jewish Coalition in 1988. After a leave of absence from the RJC to serve as the National Field Director for the Victory ‘88 Jewish Campaign Committee, Matt was appointed Executive Director of the RJC in 1990. Matt was twice selected (in 2006 and 2008) by the Jewish Forward as one of the 50 most influential Jews in America. Matt has been a frequent guest on CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC and has been quoted extensively in publications such as The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and other major newspapers. Matt has a BA in Political Science from Brandeis University. He received an MBA at Georgetown University in March 1996

EHUD EIRAN is a Senior Lecturer (US Associate Professor) of International Relations, University of Haifa, Israel. Dr. Eiran held research appointments at Harvard Law School, Harvard’s Kennedy School, and Stanford’s Department of Political Science. He also held visiting teaching appointments at the Departments of Political Science at MIT, and at UC Berkeley. Prior to his academic career, Dr. Eiran held a number of positions in the Israeli civil service including as Assistant to the Prime Minister’s Foreign Policy Advisor. He is the author of two books and some fifty scholarly articles, book chapters, and policy briefs, as well as numerous op-eds, mostly in American and Israeli outlets.
ROB ESHMAN is the National Editor of The Forward. Prior to that, he served as Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles for seventeen years. He is a frequent opinion contributor to the Los Angeles Times and a visiting professor at USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism.

SHARI HILLMAN serves as Information Director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, with responsibility for the organization’s publications, member communications, website, and information technology. She has guided both communications and technology for the RJC since 1987. Shari holds a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service (BSFS) from Georgetown University, focused on Middle East studies, and an MA in political science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

GILBERT N. KAHN is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Kean University in Union, New Jersey. His academic interests concentrate on US decision-making in both domestic and foreign policy in the Middle East. He recently delivered a paper at the 33rd annual conference of the Association of Israel Studies on the subject “The Rising Political Engagement and Influence of American Orthodox Jews on Israel-Diaspora Relations.” Some of Dr. Kahn’s other work has also focused on how the Holocaust influences decision-making and decision-makers, as well as their responses to contemporary anti-Semitism. He writes a regular blog, Kahntensions; has appeared frequently as a political commentator and analyst on television and radio; and is a regular contributor for a wide variety of publications. Professor Kahn also has extensive political consulting experience both within the Jewish community as well as in general in political campaigns and lobbying.

MORTON A. KLEIN is National President of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). The national Jewish weekly, The Forward, named Morton Klein one of the top five Jewish leaders in the US today. The US Department of State has awarded Klein a “Certificate of Appreciation” “in recognition of outstanding contributions to national and international affairs.” Morton Klein worked in three administrations as an economist in Washington, DC. He has served as a biostatistician at UCLA School of Public Health and the Linus Pauling Institute of Science and Medicine in Palo Alto, Calif., having worked closely with two-time Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling. Mr. Klein was also a lecturer in mathematics and statistics at Temple University. The Wall Street Journal called Klein heroic and the most credible advocate for Israel on the American Jewish scene today.” The New York Times, in a profile called “Public Lives,” called Morton Klein, “a man who ferrets out anti-Semitism wherever it is, a rare voice from the outset in the American Jewish community against the Oslo Accords, and an iconoclast who is a prolific speechmaker, writer, and Congressional lobbyist.” His scientific research on nutrition and heart disease was cited by Discover Magazine as one of the Top 50 Scientific Studies of 1992. Mort Klein has testified before the US Congress.

**MARK MELLMAN**, as former President of the American Association of Political Consultants and CEO of The Mellman Group, is one of the nation's leading public opinion researchers and communication strategists. His clients include leading political figures, Fortune 500 companies, and some of the nation's most important public interest groups. Doonesbury labeled Mellman a “Prince of Polling.” Mellman also serves as President of Democratic Majority for Israel, an organization of leading party figures dedicated to ensuring Democrats' success and the party's continued support for a strong US-Israel relationship. Mellman received his undergraduate degree from Princeton, and graduate degrees from Yale University, where he teaches in the Political Science department.

**SHANIE REICHMAN** is the founding IPF Atid Deputy Director at Israel Policy Forum, based in New York City. In this role, Shanie oversees the program's national leadership network, including its six-chapter communities and Charles Bronfman Conveners Program—training volunteers and developing initiatives that advance Zionist values and pragmatic policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Her writings have been published in *The Forward*, the *Jerusalem Post*, and *International Policy Digest*, and she currently serves on the advisory council for the Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding, as the Deputy Communications Director for Young Professionals in Foreign Policy (YPFP) New York Chapter, and as a mentor with Girl Security. Shanie graduated from CUNY Queens College with a degree in Political Science and Urban Studies. Previously, she interned for the human rights team at the Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN and at Hillel International's Office of Innovation.

DAN SCHNUR is a Professor at the University of California, Berkeley’s Institute of Governmental Studies, Pepperdine University’s Graduate School of Public Policy, and the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School of Communications, where he teaches courses in politics, communications, and leadership. Dan serves as a board member for the LA Holocaust Museum, as an advisor to the Los Angeles Jewish Federation, and as faculty advisor to USC’s Trojans for Israel student advocacy group. He also oversees a young professionals leadership program designed to create stronger relationships between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish communities for the 30 Years After Iranian-American Jewish community organization.

SABA SOOMEKH is a lecturer at The Academy for Jewish Religion-CA, where she teaches Religious Studies and Middle Eastern History courses. Dr. Soomekh teaches and writes extensively on World Religions, Women and Religion, intersectionality and its impact on the Jewish community, and the geo-politics of the Middle East. In the summer of 2019, Dr. Soomekh was a Scholar-in-Residence at Oxford University with the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy. Professor Soomekh is the editor of the Casden Annual (Vol. 13) Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America and the author of the book From the Shahs to Los Angeles: Three Generations of Iranian Jewish Women between Religion and Culture (SUNY Press, 2012). Dr. Soomekh was the Exhibition Coordinator of the exhibition at the Fowler Museum at UCLA entitled: “Light and Shadows: The Story of Iranian Jews.” She was a consultant and participant for PBS’s documentary “Iranian Americans.” Dr. Soomekh is involved in numerous interfaith and intercultural projects, and she is a consultant for numerous schools and universities in Southern California focusing on creating honest dialogue about cultural issues.

STEVEN F. WINDMUELLER is an Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Studies at the Jack H. Skirball Campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles. Prior to coming to HUC, Dr. Windmueller had served on the staff of the American Jewish Committee, directed the Albany (NY) Jewish Federation and the JCRC (Jewish Community Relations Committee) of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation. During his tenure at the College, Dr. Windmueller served for ten years as the Director of its School of Jewish Nonprofit Management and in 2005 was named to the deanship of the Los Angeles campus. Between 2012–2014, he was invited to teach classes both at USC and Nanjing University (China). The author of four books and numerous articles, Professor Windmueller holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania. His research has been primarily focused on Jewish communal trends, anti-Semitism, and Jewish political behavior.

GARY PHILLIP ZOLA is the Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience and Reform Jewish History at Hebrew Union College-
Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati, as well as the Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA). President Barack Obama appointed Dr. Zola on three separate occasions (2011, 2014, and 2017) to serve as a member of the US Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad, an independent agency of the Federal government. In addition to serving as editor of The Marcus Center’s biannual publication, The American Jewish Archives Journal, his most recent published volumes include *We Called Him Rabbi Abraham: Lincoln and American Jewry* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2014) and *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader* (co-edited by Marc Dollinger; Brandeis University Press, 2014).
The American Jewish community has played a vital role in shaping the politics, culture, commerce and multiethnic character of Southern California and the American West. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, when entrepreneurs like Isaias Hellman, Levi Strauss and Adolph Sutro first ventured out West, American Jews became a major force in the establishment and development of the budding Western territories. Since 1970, the number of Jews in the West has more than tripled. This dramatic demographic shift has made California—specifically, Los Angeles—home to the second largest Jewish population in the United States. Paralleling this shifting pattern of migration, Jewish voices in the West are today among the most prominent anywhere in the United States. Largely migrating from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the East Coast of the United States, Jews have invigorated the West, where they exert a considerable presence in every sector of the economy—most notably in the media and the arts. With the emergence of Los Angeles as a world capital in entertainment and communications, the Jewish perspective and experience in the region are being amplified further. From artists and activists to scholars and professionals, Jews are significantly influencing the shape of things to come in the West and across the United States. In recognition of these important demographic and societal changes, in 1998 the University of Southern California established a scholarly institute dedicated to studying contemporary Jewish life in America with special emphasis on the western United States. The Casden Institute explores issues related to the interface between the Jewish community and the broader, multifaceted cultures that form the nation—issues of relationship as much as of Jewishness itself. It is also enhancing the educational experience for students at USC and elsewhere by exposing them to the problems—and promise—of life in Los Angeles’ ethnically, socially, culturally and economically diverse community. Scholars, students and community leaders examine the ongoing contributions of American Jews in the arts, business, media, literature, education, politics, law and social relations, as well as the relationships between Jewish Americans and other groups, including African Americans,
Latinos, Asian Americans and Arab Americans. The Casden Institute’s scholarly orientation and contemporary focus, combined with its location on the West Coast, set it apart from—and makes it an important complement to—the many excellent Jewish Studies programs across the nation that center on Judaism from an historical or religious perspective.

For more information about the USC Casden Institute, visit www.usc.edu/casdeninstitute, e-mail casden@usc.edu, or call (213) 740-3405.