

MEMO Published January 1, 2024 · 7 minute read

The Politics of Israel and the Palestinians and Talking Points for Democrats

Third Way



Background

For decades, Democratic office holders and voters were mostly unified in their backing of Israel, with less focus on the plight of Palestinians. But for the last few years, that dynamic has shifted. For a time after October 7, there was a spike in sympathy for Israel. But during the Gaza War, support for Israel, especially among Democrats, declined precipitously:

- **Sympathy:** As recently as 2021, Democratic voters were a bit more sympathetic toward Israelis than Palestinians. In 2022, support was even, but by 2025, it was 21-59% in favor of Palestinians. ¹ Democrats affirm Israel's right to exist (85%) ² and acknowledge the persecution of Jews and the need for a strong Jewish state for safety (67%), ³ while holding critical views of Israel's government ⁴ and its treatment of Palestinians. ⁵ Only a small minority (20%) fully support the Israeli actions as necessary for security. ⁶

Public research from September 2025 shows similar patterns. Democrats were substantially more likely to say they are extremely or very concerned (72%) about Israeli military strikes killing Palestinian civilians in Gaza, ⁷ and most Democrats (60%) say the Israeli government has gone too far, ⁸ up 15 points since December 2023. But this research did not distinguish between support for Israel and support for the Netanyahu government.

- **Conditioning Aid:** A September 2025 Third Way poll of likely Democratic primary voters found that 56% support “conditioning aid to Israel by putting restrictions on how the aid can be used,” including 65% of self-identified moderates. ⁹
- **Demographic Shifts:** Anyone experiencing coverage of the war on social media would see Israelis as the perpetrators of atrocities. For example, “for every pro-Israel post that appeared on TikTok in September 2025 there were roughly 17 supporting Palestinians,” according to Cybersecurity for Democracy. ¹⁰ For these and other reasons, just 23% of 18-to-29 year olds support economic and military aid for Israel. ¹¹

Given these changes in public opinion, moderates running for office must chart a careful path. Defining oneself simply as “pro-Israel” won’t work anymore. But these issues matter enormously to the US. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and has been a steadfast ally in a dangerous region for more than 60 years. It is a safe haven for Jews at a time of rising global antisemitism. And Israel is the largest recipient of US aid (though the Israeli government has called for phasing the aid down as Israel’s defense industry and economy have matured). As a result, its security and its conduct are both vitally important

to America and Americans. And since the fate of the Palestinians is inextricably bound up in those questions, that is vital as well.

Democratic candidates must acknowledge both the very real threats to Israel's security and that of Jews worldwide and the profound shortcomings of the Netanyahu government. The talking points below seek to establish a principled middle ground between "Israel can do no wrong" and "anti-Zionism."

Talking Points

The State of Israel

- **Israel has a right to exist and defend itself:** Israel must exist as a Jewish and democratic state with secure boundaries. ¹² Calls for "Palestine to be free from the river to the sea" and "globalize the Intifada" are tantamount to demanding the end of Israel, ¹³ which would risk the lives of millions and eliminate the refuge for Jews as global antisemitism rises. ¹⁴ And it denies a key piece of the identity of millions of American Jews.
- **"Anti-Zionism" is too often a mask for antisemitism:** Antisemitism has been skyrocketing on both right and left, often under the guise of "anti-Zionism." ¹⁵ And it's global, as is clear from the UN resolution equating Zionism with racism. ¹⁶ Left-wing antisemites should get the same firm rebuff and contempt as right-wing "groypers."
- **The current Israeli government is terrible:** Netanyahu has presided over a disastrous government. He is credibly charged with corruption. ¹⁷ And, like Trump, he has supported attacks on the judicial system ¹⁸ and the press ¹⁹ and has fired independent government gatekeepers. ²⁰ Worse, he has included in his senior ranks extremists who have called for violence against Palestinians. ²¹ But like America under Trump, a dreadful government doing horrible things is not an excuse for demonizing an entire nation.

Gaza and the West Bank

- **Hamas started the war and committed hideous war crimes:** The war in Gaza was started by Hamas, a terrorist organization. On 10/7, they perpetrated the deadliest, most barbaric attack on Jews since the Holocaust. ²² Hamas committed further war crimes by using sexual violence as a weapon of war ²³ and by taking more than 250 hostages—including Americans—and using civilians as human shields. ²⁴ The group murders and terrorizes its own people in the streets of Gaza. ²⁵

- **I will not accuse the Jewish state of genocide:** While the question of whether Israel's actions violated the precise language of the international covenant against genocide is debatable, ²⁶ I believe it did not. *Genocide* is an intentional effort to eliminate an ethnic group. That is what is happening to the Rohingya in Myanmar. It's what happened in Darfur and in Rwanda. And it's what happened to Jews in the Holocaust. Mass death in war is horrible and often illegal, but it is not always genocide. ²⁷ ²⁸
- **Israel is credibly accused of violating the laws of war in Gaza, and the civilian suffering there was—and remains—unacceptable:** While Israel had the right to respond militarily, the war went too far and relief for civilians has been too slow. ²⁹ The ongoing scenes of devastation and hunger in Gaza are appalling, and the toll on civilians is indefensible. ³⁰ Israel should appoint an independent commission to review the government's conduct of the war. And while Hamas does steal some of the aid, Israel should provide immediate and substantial relief to civilians: food, shelter, medicine, fuel, and electricity as a first step in an accelerated reconstruction process. (To be sure, Israel is being held to a higher standard than states that have committed crimes against civilians in wartime. But as a democracy, an ally, and our biggest aid recipient, Israel should be able to meet that standard.)
- **The Netanyahu government must not annex or reoccupy Gaza or the West Bank, and it must stop the violence:** Palestinians willing to live peacefully with Israel should take the lead in governing Gaza. And the Palestinian Authority (PA), however imperfect, must continue to run the West Bank. I strongly oppose annexation, which the Knesset has endorsed, ³¹ because it would be bad for both Palestinians and Israelis. And I oppose all violence in the West Bank, from either side. ³² I call on the Netanyahu government to crack down on illegal settlements and stop offering tacit support for settler violence and on the PA to stop its tacit support for those who murder Israelis.

The United States's Relationship to Israel and the Palestinian People

- **Our partnership with Israel is vital to the United States:** It is a core strategic interest to have a stable democracy in the heart of a volatile region. Israel provides us crucial intelligence and counterterrorism support on adversaries like Iran and groups like Hezbollah, and it provides vital technological innovation that helps keep us safe. It is the only place in the Middle East where LGBTQ, women, and minorities are safe to live freely. Israel must be preserved as a cornerstone of US foreign and defense policy.
- **Israel must use our aid responsibly:** As the Obama Administration noted in its Memorandum of Understanding, ³³ as the top recipient of US aid, Israel must use our

weapons appropriately. I will work to ensure that the Israeli government stays within the bounds of US law.

- **I oppose Donald Trump’s insane vision for Gaza:** Trump’s fantasy of turning Gaza into the “Riviera of the Middle East” would require the displacement of two million Palestinians. ³⁴ The idea is not only preposterous, it is a moral abomination.
- **I support full regional normalization:** Palestinians and Israelis must be able to live in peace and security. The best path to that end is a resolution of their conflict that involves the major players from the entire region. Israel should be able to normalize relations with all its neighbors, and they should work in partnership to build a successful Palestinian state alongside Israel.

ENDNOTES



- 1.** Brennan, Megan. “Less Than Half in U.S. Now Sympathetic Toward Israelis.” Gallup, 6 Mar. 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/657404/less-half-sympathetic-toward-israelis.aspx>. Gallup asked, “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?” In 2021, 43% of Democrats said Israelis, while 38% said Palestinians. In 2022, 40% said Israelis, and 38% said Palestinians. In 2025, 59% said Palestinians and only 21% said Israelis.
- 2.** Change Research (nationwide survey of 1,572 registered voters, conducted 6-10 Nov. 2025). “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree: Israel has the right to exist. 85% of Democrats agreed.
- 3.** Ibid. “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree: Given that Jews were persecuted for most of history, they need a safe place in the world and a strong state to defend them.” 67% of Democrats agreed.
- 4.** Ibid. “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree: I feel critical of the Israeli government, but I sympathize with the Israeli people.” Among Democratic respondents, 81% said they agreed.
- 5.** Ibid. “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree: Israel stole Palestinian land and displaced the Palestinian people.” Among Democratic respondents, 82% said they agreed.
- 6.** Ibid. “Please indicate whether you agree or disagree: The Israeli government is doing what is necessary to protect their people’s safety, and I fully support them.” Only 20% of Democrats agreed.

- 7.** Van Green, Ted, et al. “Concerns about the Conflict between Israel and Hamas.” *Pew Research Center*, 3 Oct. 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/10/03/concerns-about-the-conflict-between-israel-and-hamas/>. 72% of Democratic respondents said they were extremely or very concerned by Israeli strikes killing Palestinian civilians.
- 8.** Ibid. “Thinking about Israel’s current military operation against Hamas, is Israel going too far, taking about the right approach, or not going far enough?” Today, 60% of Democrats say Israel’s current military operation against Hamas is going too far, while 7% say Israel is taking about the right approach and 3% say it is not going far enough. Two years ago, 45% said Israel was going too far, 18% said it was taking the right approach, and 8% said it was not going far enough.”
- 9.** *Third Way & Global Strategy Group*. Survey of 1,400 Democratic presidential primary likely voters, 18–26 Aug. 2025. “Which of the following approaches do you agree with more? Fully restricting aid to Israel; conditioning aid to Israel by putting restrictions on how the aid can be used; or providing aid to Israel with no restrictions?” Overall, 56% of likely Democratic presidential primary voters supported conditioning aid to Israel, while 32% supported fully restricting aid. Among likely Democratic voters who identified as moderates or centrists, 65% supported conditioning aid to Israel, 16% supported fully restricting aid, and 18% supported providing aid with no restrictions.
- 10.** Radway, Elizabeth, and Laura Edelson. “Updating Our Israel/Gaza Analysis 2 Years On.” *Cybersecurity for Democracy*, 2025, <https://cybersecurityfordemocracy.org/updating-our-israelgaza-analysis-2-years-on>. Cybersecurity for Democracy found that roughly one pro-Israel post appeared for about every seventeen pro-Palestine posts, as opposed to one for every twenty we found two years ago. The average pro-Palestine video received about 11,500 views, compared with roughly 2,400 for pro-Israel videos, a difference of nearly five-to-one.

- 11.** *The New York Times* and Siena College Research Institute. *New York Times/Siena National Poll: Registered Voter Crosstabs*. 2 Oct. 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/10/02/polls/times-siena-poll-registered-voter-crosstabs.html>. The *New York Times* asked respondents whether they support or oppose providing additional economic and military support to Israel. Among voters aged 18–29, 23% said they support providing additional economic and military support to Israel, while 68% said they oppose it.
- 12.** United Nations. “*Charter of the United Nations*.” 26 June 1945, Article 51. <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml>. As a member of the United Nations, Israel retains an inherent right to self-defense, especially against an armed attack.
- 13.** American Jewish Committee. “*The State of Antisemitism in America 2024: AJC’s Survey of American Jews*.” <https://www.ajc.org/AntisemitismReport2024/AmericanJews#37>. The majority (64%) of Jewish adults (18 and over) consider the statement “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free,” to be antisemitic.
- 14.** American Jewish Committee. ““*The State of Antisemitism in America 2024: AJC’s Survey of American Jews*.” <https://www.ajc.org/AntisemitismReport2024/AmericanJews#37>. The majority (85%) of Jewish adults (18 and over) consider the statement “Israel has no right to exist” to be antisemitic.
- 15.** Federal Bureau of Investigation. *FBI Crime Data Explorer*. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>. From October 2023 to January 2026, single-bias anti-Jewish hate-crime incidents reached 4,489.
- 16.** United Nations General Assembly. “Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: Zionism as Racism – GA Resolution.” *United Nations*. 10 Nov. 1975 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-181963/>.
- 17.** Kingsley, Patrick. “*The Netanyahu Corruption Trail, Explained*.” *The New York Times*. 30 Nov. 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/netanyahu-corruption-trial-pardon.html>

- 18.** Cook, Steven. "Israel's Judicial Reforms: What to Know." *Council on Foreign Relations*. 26 July 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/israels-judicial-reforms-what-know>.
- 19.** Levush, Ruth. "Israel: Government Authorizes Temporary Shutdown of Al Jazeera's Broadcasting in Israel." *Global Legal Monitor, Library of Congress*, 6 May 2024.
- 20.** Kingsley, Patrick. "Netanyahu's Move to Fire Shin Bet Chief Reflects Wider Push for Control." *The New York Times*. 17 Mar. 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/17/world/middleeast/israel-netanyahu-shin-bet-firing.html>.
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- 22.** Human Rights Watch. "I Can't Erase All the Blood from My Mind." *Human Rights Watch*, 17 July, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/17/i-cant-erase-all-the-blood-from-my-mind/palestinian-armed-groups-october-7?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- 23.** United Nations. "Civilians in Israel and Palestine 'Cannot Be Abandoned,' Says Top UN Official on Sexual Violence in Conflict." *The United Nations Office at Geneva*, 11 Mar. 2024 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147477>.
- 24.** Human Rights Watch. "October 7 Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes by Hamas-led Groups." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/17/october-7-crimes-against-humanity-war-crimes-hamas-led-groups>.
- 25.** A Palestinian scholar at the Atlantic Council, who lost 35 members of his extended family and his childhood homes in the Gaza war, wrote that he "holds Hamas primarily responsible." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/06/20/hamas-gaza-palestinians-terrorism/>

- 26.** The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory found in September 2025 that “Israeli security forces committed four of the five genocidal acts defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>
- 27.** Goda, Norman J.W., and Jeffrey Herf. “Why It’s Wrong to Call Israel’s War in Gaza a ‘Genocide.’” *The Washington Post*, 3 June 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/06/03/israel-gaza-genocide-allegations/>
- 28.** Chotiner, Isaac. “The Holocaust Historian Defending Israel Against Charges of Genocide.” *The New Yorker*, 20 Aug. 2025, https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-holocaust-historian-defending-israel-against-charges-of-genocide?_sp=7f950306-8e87-438d-bd37-7ceff3174783.1770927801324
- 29.** Frankel, Julia. “Aid deliveries into Gaza fail to meet ceasefire terms, analysis shows.” PBS. 10 Dec. 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/aid-deliveries-into-gaza-fail-to-meet-ceasefire-terms-analysis-shows>.
- 30.** “Gaza Strip: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for 16 October – 30 November 2025 and Projection for 1 December 2025 – 15 April 2026.” *IPC – Integrated Food Security Phase Classification*, 19 Dec. 2025, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159820/?iso3=PSE>.
- 31.** Sokol, Sam. “Knesset votes 71-13 for non-binding motion calling to annex West Bank.” *The Times of Israel*. 23 July 2025. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/knesset-votes-71-13-for-non-binding-motion-calling-to-annex-west-bank/>
- 32.** Kingsley, Patrick, Fatima AbdulKarim, and Natan Odenheimer. “With Arson and Land Grabs, Israeli Settler Attacks in West Bank Hit Record High.” *The New York Times*, 14 Aug. 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/14/world/middleeast/west-bank-israel-settler-attacks.html>.

- 33.** “FACT SHEET: Memorandum of Understanding Reached with Israel.” *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, 14 Sept. 2016. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/14/fact-sheet-memorandum-understanding-reached-israel>.
- 34.** Keath, Lee. “Trump doubles down on plan to empty Gaza. This is what he has said and what’s at stake.” *Associated Press*. 12 Feb. 2025. <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2025/trump-doubles-down-on-plan-to-empty-gaza-this-is-what-he-has-said-and-whats-at-stake/>.