

Notes on U.S. Jewish Opinion of Israel, Zionism, and Antisemitism

Unsurprisingly, the most consistent American Jewish opinion polling is about Israel. But the reader should be warned: polling on this topic is a mind numbing journey of loaded questions and ideological incoherence. The intent is that the reader comes away from this supplement with a more nuanced understanding of American Jewish opinion on Israel, Zionism, and antisemitism.

First, on the war in Gaza itself, [Pew Research](#) found that 89% of American Jews believe that Israel has a right to strike back at Hamas in Gaza, although a sizable minority (33% of Jewish adults, including 42% of Jews aged 18-34) agree that “the way Israel is carrying out its response to Hamas’ October 7th attack” is unacceptable. The same poll showed that 13% of Jews think Biden was too favorable towards the Israelis while 18% said Biden was too favorable towards the Palestinians (the remainder said they were either unsure (23%) or think Biden “struck the right balance” (45%)). Majorities of American Jews support sending both humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in Gaza (61% vs. 20%) and military aid to Israel (74% vs 14%), but [J-Street’s polling](#) shows that 62% of American Jews would have supported halting some offensive military aid to Israel “until Prime Minister Netanyahu agrees to an American proposal for a ceasefire” to return the hostages.

More broadly, [J-Street](#) found that American Jews were split 51% to 49% on the question of whether the U.S. should be “a fair and even-handed broker” in the conflict rather than always being on “the side of Israel” in negotiations. While we note in the article that 92% of Jews consider themselves to be pro-Israel according to the [Manhattan Institute](#), the [J-Street](#) poll found that 90% of Jews agree that “someone can be critical of the Israeli government” while still being pro-Israel.

This brings us to the equally important question of what, in relation to Israel, American Jews actually believe crosses the line into antisemitism. Once again, polling from [J-Street](#) provides some insight, showing that while some acts like “praising October 7th” are almost universally viewed as antisemitic, only 29% and 41% of American Jews agree that “criticism of how Israel is conducting the war in Gaza” and “saying Israel committed war crimes” are antisemitic, respectively. Interestingly, even

though 87% of Jews think “opposing Israel’s right to exist” is antisemitic, only 54% thought the same about “opposing Zionism” — a seemingly contradictory result since “Zionism” and Israel’s “right to exist” are often imbued with synonymous meaning.

J-Street November 2024 Poll: Asked respondents to “indicate whether you believe the following are or are not antisemitic”	Yes, it is Antisemitic	No, it is not Antisemitic
Criticism of how Israel is conducting the war in Gaza	29%	71%
Saying that Israel is committing war crimes in the war with Hamas	41%	59%
Praising the October 7th terrorist attacks	94%	6%
Opposing Zionism	54%	46%
Opposing Israel’s right to exist	87%	13%
Pro-Palestine protests on college campuses in Spring 2024	78%	22%
Donald Trump’s statements about Jews	65%	35%

Nationally, no poll of Jewish American opinion on “Zionism” exists, but Brandeis/SSRI local community surveys in [Los Angeles \(2021\)](#), [Greater Chicago \(2020\)](#), [Greater Portland, OR \(2022\)](#), and [Northeastern Pennsylvania \(2024\)](#) do ask the rather blunt question “do you consider yourself to be a Zionist?” We can then compare these to international studies, where the same question was asked of Jews in [Australia \(2024\)](#), [Great Britain \(2024\)](#), and [South Africa \(2019\)](#), finding that self-reported “Zionism” is much lower in the U.S. than in other Anglophone countries.

However, functionally identical questions receive very different responses. Jews in [Los Angeles](#), for example, overwhelmingly agree that “Israel must exist as the refuge for the Jewish people now and in the future” and must be “the nation-state of the Jewish people” even as they were evenly split on explicit Zionist self-identification. The same phenomena is found in the local survey of [Chicago Jewry](#), with 80% of Jews agreeing that “it is important for Israel to be a Jewish state” even as only 40% self-identified as Zionist. In any case, it is not exactly clear what American Jews think “Zionism” actually means, which makes any analysis significantly more difficult.

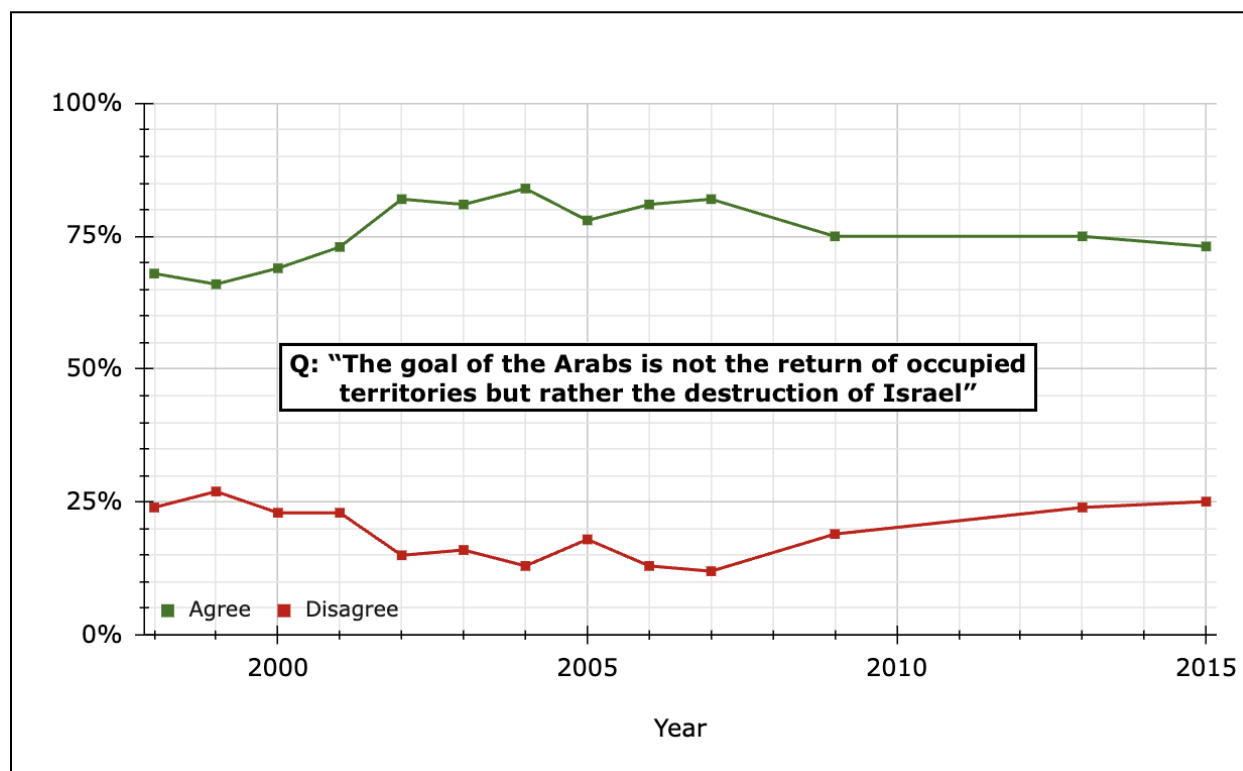
Community	Year	Lead Investigator	J-Pop	% Explicitly Zionist
Australia	2024	A. Markus, Monash Uni.	116,967	77%
South Africa	2019	D. Graham, JPR	52,300	69%
Great Britain	2024	J. Boyd, JPR	294,323	65%
Los Angeles, CA	2021	Aronson et al., Brandeis	564,700	42%
Greater Chicago, IL	2020	Aronson et al., Brandeis	319,600	40%
Northeastern PA	2024	Aronson et al., Brandeis	5,500	39%
Greater Portland, OR	2022	Aronson et al., Brandeis	56,600	26%

2021 Los Angeles, CA Survey of Jewish Adults	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	No Opinion or Not Sure	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Consider myself to be a Zionist	24%	18%	25%	11%	23%
Important for Israel to be the nation-state of the Jewish people	61%	18%	8%	6%	6%
Important for Israel to exist as a refuge for the Jewish people, now and in the future	74%	14%	6%	3%	3%

2020 Greater Chicago, IL Survey of Jewish Adults	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	No Opinion or Not Sure	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Consider myself to be a Zionist	20%	20%	23%	13%	24%
Important for Israel to be a Jewish State	58%	22%	8%	7%	5%

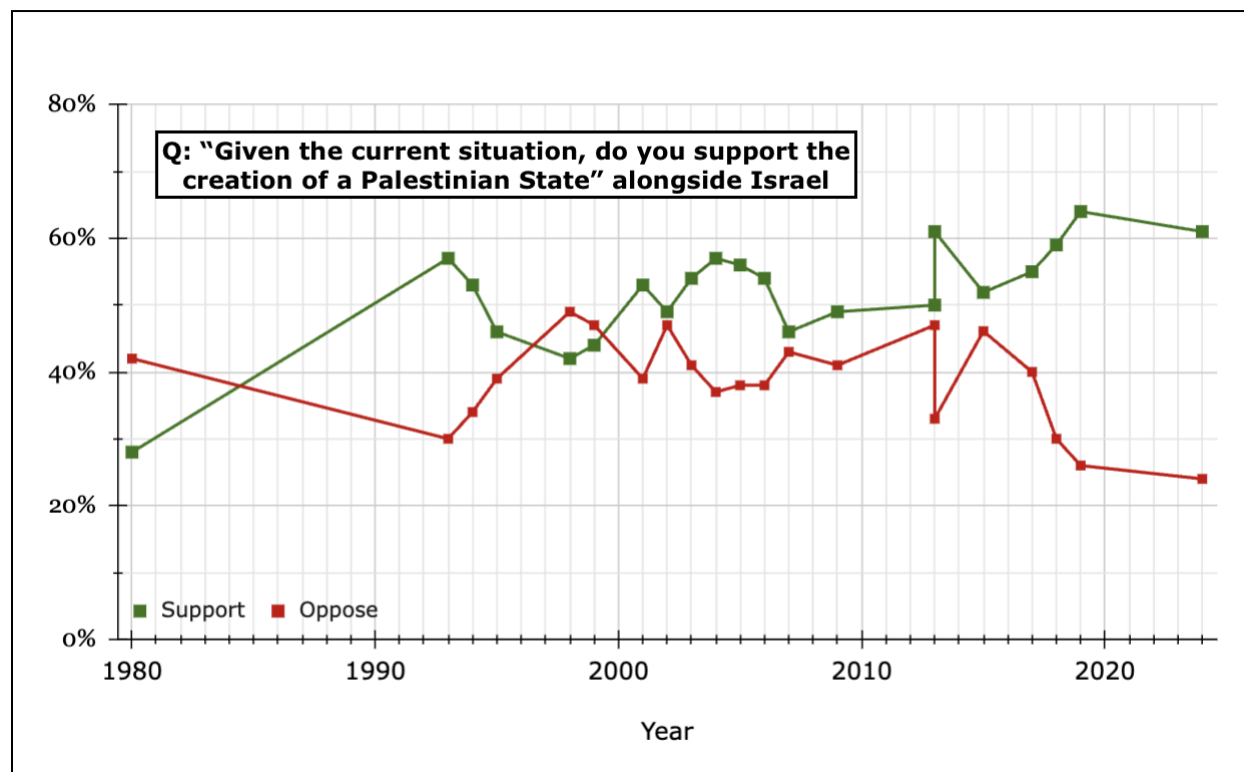
Now, despite these potentially contradictory positions, most American Jews are still favorable to the Israeli narrative of the conflict. This is best seen in polling from the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which shows that supermajorities of U.S. Jews agree that “the goal of the Arabs is not the return of occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel.” Now, this is clearly a loaded question (e.g. who are “the Arabs” and what does “return of occupied territories” entail), but respondents’ answers indicate broad sympathy for the narrative that forces hostile to Israel are driven primarily by irredentist nationalism rather than concern for the Palestinians.

Local surveys of Jewish communities in the [San Francisco Bay Area \(2017\)](#) and [Greater Rochester, NY \(2019\)](#) provide further insight, showing that while increasingly large numbers of Jews sympathize with the Palestinians, very few Jews hold a *solely* negative opinion of Israel. This is borne out on views on the conflict itself, with data collected from AJC polling between 1980 and 2021 (plus an analogous poll from the Jewish Electoral Institute in 2024) showing that the portion of U.S. Jews respondents who “favor the creation of a Palestinian State” alongside Israel has increased from 28% to 61% in the past four and a half decades. When, in 2022, Jews in the [San Francisco Bay Area](#) were asked what their preferred outcome to the Israel-Palestine conflict looked like, an overwhelming majority said that they wanted to see a two-state solution, with only slim minorities supporting the status quo or a one-state solution in favor of the Palestinians.



2017 SF Bay Area, CA Universe of Jewish Adults	Israel much more	Israel somewhat more	Both, neither, or not sure	Palestinians somewhat more	Palestinians much more
Q: "What side do you sympathize more with: Israel or the Palestinians?"	33%	10%	49%	4%	4%

2019 Greater Rochester, NY Universe of Jewish Adults	Very Positive	Mostly Positive	Mix of Both Pos. & Neg.	Mostly Negative	Very Negative
Question: "All things considered, what are your feelings towards Israel today?"	31%	33%	30%	3%	1%



2022 San Francisco Bay Area, CA Universe of Jewish Adults	Q: "On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which of the following is closest to your own opinion?"
"There should be two countries, where Israel and Palestine exist as two separate and independent nations"	62%
"There should be a single country for both Jews and Palestinians, recognizing this could mean there may no longer be an independent Jewish country"	12%
"The current situation should continue, in which Israel exists as a Jewish country and the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have their own government with limited authority"	14%
"Creating Israel caused an injustice to the Palestinians and the entire country should be given back to the Palestinians"	2%

Taken together, the above polling suggests that it is difficult to interpret American Jewish opinion on Israel as a coherent policy platform. It rather appears that Jews give different answers about Israel

depending on the specific tone and wording of a question, suggesting that Jewish voters may be more responsive to the “vibes” of Israel policy than actual substance.

Disclaimer: The author’s attempt to explain what, in general, constitutes American Jewish opinion should **not** be taken as either an endorsement or rejection of those views.