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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The evolution of home-state positions towards diaspora formation: Israel and its two diasporas

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Abstract

How do home-state elites react to emigrants who form diaspora communities abroad, and how do these attitudes change over time? The article explores these questions through an analysis of the discourse and policies of Israeli elites towards emigrants who created distinct diaspora communities and established ties with local Jewish diaspora communities between 1977 and 2023. The article highlights the important role that ethnic and national identities and the prospects of emigrants' eventual return play in such attitudinal shifts. The home state may initially see diaspora formation as harmful for precipitating emigration and obstructing repatriation and ethnic immigration. However, when it becomes clear that the return of many emigrants is unlikely, home-state elites may come to support and even promote the formation of new diaspora communities and their ties with older diaspora communities to offset emigrants' assimilation into their host society and increase their attachment to the home state.

KEYWORDS
case study, diaspora, emigrants, Israel, migration, other qualitative, transnationalism

INTRODUCTION

In January 2023, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated in Indore City the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* celebration – the festival commemorating overseas Indians and their contributions to their homeland. In his speech, Modi lauded the diaspora's role as 'India's brand ambassador', one that promotes the country's image and advances its progress.[1] This enthusiasm was a far cry from India's discourse throughout most of the 20th century, which sidelined emigrants and their descendants, framing many of them as deserters who had left for personal gain after receiving state-sponsored education. Since the late 1990s, however, New Delhi has increasingly recognized and mobilized overseas Indians as a resource capable of serving its interests abroad (Naujoks, 2013, 44–45).

India is not alone in this regard. More and more states have been changing how they speak of emigrants and co-ethnics abroad. In such diverse countries as China, Ireland, Mexico and New Zealand, officials who used to refer to emigrants as failures or defectors are now honouring them as patriots who help their homeland from afar (Collyer, 2013; Gamlen, 2013). As part of this transformation, state elites speaking to and about co-ethnics abroad increasingly apply to them the label *diaspora*, which in recent decades came to denote inclusion in the nation and positive ties with the homeland (Dufoix, 2017, 468–78). Within this global trend, there is much variation: different categories of émigrés receive different treatment at different moments. Particularly, states tend to adopt distinct policies towards recent emigrants and more established diaspora communities (Tsourapas, 2015). However, these groups are not always easily distinguishable or fixed: Recent emigrants may gradually create an organized diaspora community and develop ties with more veteran co-ethnic communities in the destination country.

In this article, I ask how home-state elites – defined as 'actors whose institutional roles afford them higher levels of influence over public policy', such as legislators, diplomats and civil servants (Kertzer & Renshon, 2022, 535) – understand and react to emigrants forming new diaspora communities and interacting with veteran ones, and how and why these positions shift. I do this through an analysis of change and continuity patterns in Israeli officials' political discourse about emigrants from the 1970s to the 2020s. The investigation focuses on *Jewish* Israeli emigrants, who form a large majority among emigrants from Israel (Gold, 2002, 27). Non-Jewish Israeli emigrants certainly exist, yet most elites do not regard them as part of the nation (Abramson, 2023, 9) and exclude them from diaspora-related discourse.

The analysis shows that most Israeli elites initially opposed diaspora formation and diaspora-diaspora relations, perceiving these processes as facilitating further emigration and discouraging Jewish immigration. Over time, however, some elites realized that many emigrants were unlikely to return regardless and that these processes helped them to retain their ethnic and national identities; accordingly, they grew progressively more tolerant. With time, additional factors – Israel's growing power and self-confidence, the emergence of influential Israeli diaspora organizations, the perception that Israelis and Jews abroad were rapidly assimilating, and the global rise of diaspora-governance norms – further drove Jerusalem to embrace and even actively promote the formation of new diaspora communities and their cooperation with local Jewish ones.

The Israeli case demonstrates that home-state positions towards the formation and consolidation of diaspora communities by emigrants and these communities' relations with co-ethnics abroad may play an important role in their general reaction to emigration. The article shows how these positions towards diaspora formation and diaspora-diaspora relations evolve as a result of domestic, international, transnational and global factors (see Burgess, 2020; Délano, 2011; Gamlen, 2019). One such factor, which is often overlooked by the existing literature, is states' interest in preserving the ethno-national identity of emigrants, which can promote the return of some émigrés as well as the immigration of some co-ethnics living abroad and also allows the state to tap the resources of emigrants. Hence, the article proposes a more nuanced understanding of states' changing stances towards emigrants, one that takes into account the different groups that home states claim as 'their' diasporas and how these groups come into being and engage with one another.

[1] *Hindustan Times*, 9 January 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230315061040/https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indian-diaspora-make-in-india-s-brand-ambassadors-pm-at-pravasi-bharatiya-divas-101673268310641.html. All the hyperlinks in this article were accessed on 16 March 2024.

In making these arguments, the article adds to the theoretical and empirical literature on home-state policies and discourses towards emigrants (Collyer, 2013; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003), diaspora engagement (Gamlen, 2019) and intra-diasporic politics (Adamson 2019). Researchers of these topics have theorized the ways state elites adopt different policies and attitudes towards different segments of their emigrant population based on such criteria as age, profession, religion, political views (Adamson, 2019; Arkilic, 2022a; Mahieu, 2019) and country of residence (Burmeister-Rudolph, 2023; Mylonas, 2013). Others have studied how home-state attitudes towards emigrants and their descendants transformed over time (Délano 2011) and how strategies of diaspora engagement and mobilization spread globally (Gamlen, 2019). Finally, some works explain the emergence of different diaspora communities living in the same destination country and oriented to the same homeland (e.g. Berg, 2022; Rubin & Rubin, 2014). I build on these studies' theoretical insights to show how home-state elites distinguish between 'emigrants' and 'diaspora', and how their reactions to the processes in which emigrants create diasporas and interact with older diasporas change over time. The analysis shows that home-state elites who treat distinct diasporic groups differently are concerned not only with these groups' ties to the home state and the implications of their remaining abroad (Tsourapas, 2015) but also with their ties to each other and the implications of their assimilating.

The article also enhances our empirical understanding of emigration from Israel. Existing works describe how Israeli political elites have changed their discourse about (and concomitantly, their policies towards) emigrants since the 1970s (e.g. Cohen, 2007; Mitelpunkt, 2022; Shpaizman, 2014). This article complements these works by focusing on the diasporic dimension of these processes – the evolving understanding of Israeli emigrants *as a diaspora* and Jerusalem's attitudes towards their interactions with veteran Jewish diaspora communities. Although there are many ethnographic or survey-based studies analysing Israeli emigrants' relations with Jews abroad (e.g. Aizencang Kane, 2021; Gold, 2002; Rebhun & Lev Ari, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2014), these works are primarily concerned with the emigrants' experiences. This article's state-centred perspective adds a necessary counterpart to these works.

In the next section, I provide the conceptual and theoretical framework for the article: the difference between emigrants and diasporas, the reasons that home states alter their positions towards both and the emergence of multiple diaspora communities oriented to the same state. The third section outlines the article's methods and data sources; more methodological details can be found in the online appendix. The fourth section traces changes over time in Israel's position towards emigration and emigrants, towards the formation of Israeli diaspora communities and towards their relations with local Jewish diaspora communities. In the Conclusion, I discuss how the article's findings can be generalized beyond the Israeli case study.

HOME STATES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS EMIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS

Emigrants and diaspora formation

The distinction between emigrants and diasporas warrants clarification. Emigrants are people who have left their country of residence for another country, even though they may still harbour ties to their old country (see Coutin, 2011, 4). A diaspora, however, is not merely a multiplicity of emigrants. The meaning of *diaspora* has been acrimoniously debated among scholars, but the term usually denotes established, multi-generational, enduring communities of co-ethnics who live outside the place they call their ancestral homeland, self-identify as a community, and maintain relationships with co-ethnics outside the homeland territory (Butler, 2001, 207–9). Emigrants construct diasporic identities and attachments through various practices and pass them on to their children (Mavroudi, 2007). A diasporic community, then, does not inevitably 'appear' but is formed through the mobilization of co-ethnics (Sökefeld, 2006). As relations among diasporas, home states and countries of residence change, or in response to momentous events in these contexts, the nature of emigrant mobilization may transform, making it imperative to study state-diaspora relations over time (Koinova, 2018).

Homeland-oriented organizations, activities and shared spaces are an important part of diaspora formation. They help to consolidate a sense of community, turning 'largely virtual imagined communities into more tangible communities of practice' (Van Gorp & Smets, 2015, 72–73). Community formation is key to maintaining ethnic identity, strengthening ethnic boundaries and slowing down assimilation processes (Kyeremeh & Arku, 2023; Takenaka, 1999). For this reason, home-state governments may establish or support diasporic organizations to strengthen identification with the homeland and thereby mobilize co-ethnics' loyalty and resources (Brinkerhoff, 2012; Gamlen, 2008). But home-state positions towards diaspora formation are not always enthusiastic initially, as discussed below.

Notably, *diaspora* is not only an analytical category but also a term that elites use strategically to construct a target population as an ethno-national community oriented to a common homeland (Abramson, 2023, 3–4). Such strategic uses of the term imply not only inclusion in but also duties to the home state. Governments increasingly use it to claim co-ethnics abroad as members of the national community who are then expected to assist their home state (Dufoix, 2017, ch. 9). As we will see, both senses of *diaspora* are significant in the case of Israel and its emigrants.

Changing home-state positions towards co-ethnics abroad

State discourse about emigrants may shift following developments in the origin country, destination country or elsewhere (Burgess, 2020, 24). The home state's domestic affairs, its relationship with co-ethnics abroad or with their country of residence (Délano, 2011, 10–11) or broader global trends of diaspora governance (Gamlen, 2019) may account for these changes.

Domestically, nation-building efforts in the home state may affect the discourse on emigrants (Adamson, 2019). When state elites believe that certain emigration flows undermine their nation-building goals or tarnish the state's image, they may stigmatize emigrants as adversaries of the national project (Solari, 2014) or present emigration as a demographic threat to the survival of the nation-state (Ragazzi, 2017, 113–15). At some point, however, governments may adopt a vision of 'the nation' that includes co-ethnics abroad and seek their loyalty and support (Boccagni, 2014, 121).

More instrumentally, home-state attitudes may be determined by a calculation of the perceived loss attributable to emigrants' departure and the perceived gain generated by their presence abroad (Tsourapas, 2015). Emigrants may be conceptualized as deserters depriving the country of skills essential to its development, whose acquisition may have been subsidized by the state (Naujoks, 2013, 44); as potential returnees who can catapult the home state's development (Weeks & Weeks, 2015, 126–28); or as loyal subjects capable of helping it from abroad (Ceccagno & Thunø, 2023). Governments may also view certain emigrants as security threats and penetrate diaspora communities to monitor or persecute dissidents abroad (Tsourapas, 2021).

Transnationally, an emigrant group's economic success may cause home-state officials to view it as an asset and accordingly shift from calling émigrés deserters to framing them as patriots and allies (Nyíri, 2001, 636–39). States may begin to show interest in emigrants once their number reaches a 'critical mass' or their presence abroad becomes permanent, so as to tap their knowledge and personal networks (Zhou & Liu, 2016, 43), maintain access to their resources (Brand, 2006, 15) or mitigate their criticism and improve the home state's image (To, 2014, 26; Tsourapas, 2015, 2194). The emigrants themselves may demand more recognition or rights, and the state may change its attitudes in response – especially if it relies on diasporic political or economic assistance (Barry, 2006, 52–53; Turner, 2008).

Internationally, changes in the state's relations with a particular country may affect its relationship with co-ethnics living in it, whom it sees as potential facilitators of its interests there (Arkilic, 2022b; Délano, 2011, ch. 4; Tsourapas, 2015). Globally, evolving norms may shape home-state positions. According to Gamlen (2019, 37–39), diaspora engagement became a 'viral' idea in the third millennium, advocated by the United Nations and other international organizations. Policy experts promoted the creation of a 'global migration regime' with diaspora outreach at its centre, preaching cooperation between countries on migration, which they associated with economic development.

Home states' diaspora-oriented institutions adopted and further disseminated these management models and 'best practices' (Gamlen, 2019, 184–239).

'Old' and 'new' diasporas

Diaspora engagement is not a one-size-fits-all relationship. Home-state elites often distinguish between co-ethnic groups and individuals, viewing some as assets and others as potential threats, based on such attributes as ethnicity, religion and political leaning (Arkilic, 2022a, ch. 5; Böcü & Baser, 2022; To, 2014, 47). The historical context of migration may play a crucial role in this distinction (Ragazzi, 2017). Emigrants from the same country do not necessarily form a single, unified community. Different processes of migration in different historical moments and through different places produce disparate diasporic identities and varying ties to the ancestral land (Chan, 2015, 109–10). Recent emigrants or their offspring may be absorbed into existing diasporic communities in the country of destination (Van Hear, 1998, 47), or they may instead evolve into a distinct community, even when the two groups share a common ethnicity and regard the same territorial unit as their homeland. Social interactions between such communities vary, as does their support for the home state's government (Berg, 2022; Min, 2013).

Accordingly, disparate home-state discourses and policies may be directed at recent emigrants and more established diaspora communities, as illustrated in Gerasimos Tsourapas's study of Egypt. Cairo adopted distinct policies vis à vis emigrant groups whose presence abroad was deemed 'temporary' and those whose diasporic status was considered 'permanent' (Tsourapas, 2015, 2197). In Egypt's case, however, 'temporary emigrants' referred to Egyptians living in Arab countries, even for generations, whereas the category of 'permanent emigrants' described Egyptians in Western states, including recent arrivals (Tsourapas, 2015, 2198–99).

This distinction, then, merits further empirical investigation, especially in cases like Israel's, in which purportedly 'temporary' emigrants eventually become a 'permanent' diaspora alongside a pre-existing 'permanent' diaspora. Although the Israeli diaspora is a relatively new phenomenon, veteran Jewish diaspora communities were formed by immigrants from regions outside Israel/Palestine, such as Europe and North Africa, where Jews had lived for centuries. By now, many such communities have existed for generations in the Americas and other places. As a result, these communities are socially, culturally, religiously, ideologically and linguistically different from the emergent communities of Israeli emigrants and their descendants, even though members of both groups view themselves as part of the Jewish people, and many of them regard Israel as their ethnic, national and religious homeland.

As studies in different destination countries indicate (e.g. Gold, 2002; Porat, 2018; Rebhun & Lev Ari, 2010; Remennick, 2019), members of the Israeli diaspora cultivate a uniquely Israeli-Jewish identity, maintain their own Hebrew-language organizations and Israel-oriented practices and harbour a more intimate relationship with Israel, in which they have actually lived. Yet some emigrants or their children may at some point assimilate into Jewish diaspora communities in their adopted country. Many others frequently interact with these communities, participate in their activities and organizations, send their children to their educational institutions and work with or for local Jews.[2] As will be shown, Jerusalem's positions towards these processes changed considerably over time.

DATA AND METHODS

In terms of home-state positions towards emigrants and diaspora formation, Israel makes an 'extreme' case study – which is important for the theoretical understanding of a phenomenon (Gerring, 2007, 101–2) – because of the central place emigrants have occupied in its public discourse since independence (Mitelpunkt, 2022; Yehudai, 2020).

[2] In some countries, such as Mexico, Israeli emigrants did not form a distinct diaspora community. In these cases, however, they do not identify as members of the existing Jewish community and remain unaffiliated (Aizencang Kane 2021).

As Amit (2019, 7) argued, the Israeli discourse on emigration has been 'abnormal', constructing emigrants as 'a national problem' and creating widespread 'emigration anxiety'. Studying change and continuity patterns in this discourse, then, can help us understand other, less extreme cases of home-state changing positions towards emigration-related issues. Further, Israel-diaspora relations make a paradigmatic case of state-diaspora relations as they are remarkably continuous and intensive, such that other states view them as a role model of diaspora engagement and mimic Jerusalem's diaspora-oriented policies, strategies and institutions (Abramson, 2023, 2–3; see also Gamlen, 2019, 229).

To investigate how Israeli elites viewed, framed and engaged with the emerging Israeli diaspora, I employed discourse analysis. Studying discourses helps us understand how social actors create meanings, attach them to things and produce a set of possibilities and constraints – courses of action that are socially constructed as either possible or impossible, right or wrong (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, 12). As the article's emphasis is on elite positions, the discourse analysis focuses on parliamentary discussions, which not only teaches us how elites see emigrants and diasporas (e.g. Abramson, 2023; Artan, 2022) and how they conceptualize the nation (Boccagni, 2014, 132) but also inform policies and institutions (Collyer, 2013, 20; Gherghina et al., 2022, 488).

For these reasons, I created a database of discussions at the Knesset, Israel's parliament, concerning emigrants and emigration. The elites who participated in these discussions not only produced a particular discourse about emigrants; they also described Israel's actual policies and actions towards them. These reports help us understand when and how discourse translates into practice, an important part of discourse analysis (Milliken, 1999, 236). In other words, the analysis focuses on the evolution of discourse about emigrants, as well as the consequences of this discourse, such as the development of diaspora-oriented organizations and projects.

The analysis begins in 1977, the year in which Israel's discourse towards emigrants began to change (Cohen, 2007), as discussed below. Additionally, the Knesset's Committee for Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs (henceforth 'Immigration Committee') was established in 1977 and tasked, among other things, with addressing the perceived problem of emigration,[3] making this year a useful starting point both theoretically and practically. I annotated the records of nearly 300 sessions of the Knesset plenary and committees in which members of Knesset (MKs), bureaucrats, diplomats and other officials debated emigrants and emigration and then organized and coded these documents using the personal knowledge management software Obsidian, which allowed me to review the evolution of emigrant-related discourse, policies and practices over time and across themes.

To understand the broader context and consequences of these debates and policies, I incorporated additional sources into the analysis. As diplomats stationed in other countries are important actors in state-emigrant relations, I searched the Israeli State Archives for pertinent Ministry of Foreign Affairs files. To learn more about issues mentioned in the parliamentary data, I turned to press sources; secondary literature and websites and publications of major emigrant organizations, Israeli government agencies and think tanks. The online appendix includes more information on my case selection and how the data were gathered, organized and interrogated, as well as the complete list of codes used for the analysis. All translations from Hebrew are mine.

ISRAEL'S EVOLVING RESPONSE TO ITS DIASPORAS

Israel traditionally views itself as a country of *immigration*. Its 1948 independence was followed by a massive influx of Jews into the country. Legislation made it easy for Jews and increasingly difficult for non-Jews to enter and settle (Kranz, 2016). By promoting Jewish immigration, Jerusalem sought to fulfil its declared responsibility for persecuted Jews worldwide and realize the ideal of 'ingathering of the exiles' – all Jews should live in the Land of Israel. The main motive for encouraging immigration, however, was pragmatic – to ensure a stable Jewish majority vis à vis the Arab Palestinians (Segev, 1998, 95–98).

[3] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 5 July 1977, 2–4.

Against this backdrop, Jewish *emigration* was seen in a very negative light. Still, between 1948 and 2020, around 756,000 Israelis left the country permanently.[4] During Israel's first decades, political elites demonized such emigrants as 'traitors' and 'renegades' (Amit, 2019), fearing that they might deter Jews in their destination countries from moving to Israel (Yehudai, 2020, 24–25). Consequently, Israelis were required to obtain an exit permit to leave the country (Yehudai, 2020, 71–77). Although this restriction was lifted in 1961, the negative attitudes towards emigrants persisted and were reflected in elite discourse during the 1970s and 1980s.

Alarm and denigration: 1977–1988

Tensions over emigration from Israel came to a head in the mid-1970s. Israeli citizens, disillusioned with their government's performance before and during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, left the country in droves, stirring strong and emotional denouncements from government officials (Mitelpunkt, 2022, 882–83). In 1976, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin famously called emigrants 'the fallen among the weaklings' (Cohen, 2007, 271), using language that delegitimized not only the act of emigration but the émigrés themselves.

Rabin's slur notwithstanding, a gradual change in elite attitudes towards emigrants started around that time. A grave financial crisis, social and cultural fragmentation and loss of public trust in the state coincided with the rapid liberalization of Israel's economy, contributing to this discursive shift. Although Israeli leaders and the media continued to condemn emigration as a national problem, they displayed growing understanding towards individual emigrants, portraying them as talented patriots who could not find adequate employment in Israel and sought a better life elsewhere (Cohen, 2007, 272–73). Notably, this discourse was mostly reserved for successful, loyal émigrés; others continued to be scorned and delegitimized (Mitelpunkt, 2022, 890–98). However, even the former were often publicly denounced. Health Minister Ya'akov Tzur (Alignment), for example, reminisced that when meeting successful emigrants who had become 'dear to us', he still scolded them that 'there is no justifiable reason for emigrating'.[5]

Given officials' animosity towards emigration, it is not surprising that they were deeply unsettled by the emergence of Israeli diaspora communities and organizations. For these elites, diaspora formation mitigated the material and spiritual hardships of migration, prompting chain migration and making return less probable. In 1977, Immigrant Absorption Minister David Levy (Likud) decried emigrants who 'cultivate and sustain a dangerous absorbing unit', providing newcomers with both material and moral support by helping them find jobs in destination countries and validating their decision to leave Israel.[6] Six years later, Immigrant Absorption Minister Ya'akov Tzur lamented the coalescence of 'a new community of Israelis' whose members established Hebrew-language media organizations, celebrated Israeli holidays, consumed Israeli culture and invited friends from Israel to join them.[7]

Emigrants' relations with veteran Jewish communities were likewise framed as dangerous to Israel's interests. In 1979, MK Roni Milo (Likud) criticized emigrants for providing diaspora Jews with an excuse not to immigrate to Israel.[8] In 1988, MK Avner-Hai Shaki (National Religious Party) remarked that 'every emigrant means bad publicity for the State of Israel' in terms of Jewish immigration.[9] Israeli officials and diplomats frequently tried to dissuade local Jewish communities from welcoming Israelis, viewing such actions as legitimizing and easing emigration (Cohen, 1986, 159). During a visit to Montreal in the early 1980s, one diplomat recommended to local Jewish leaders that they not help Israelis integrate into their community institutions, as 'we are interested in their return to Israel, not their integration over there'.[10] In 1982, MK Dov Shilansky (Likud), a deputy minister in charge of emigration issues at the Prime

[4] See online appendix, Section 3, for more demographic details.

[5] Knesset, Plenary, 23 January 1990, 1765.

[6] Knesset, Plenary, 19 December 1977, 813.

[7] Knesset, Plenary, 18 November 1985, 483.

[8] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 4 October 1979, 7.

[9] Knesset, Plenary, 13 December 1988, 140.

[10] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 12 July 1983, 10.

Minister's Office, condemned Jewish communities and Zionist organizations abroad that legitimized emigration by promoting Israelis to leadership positions.[11] By the end of the decade, however, Israel's stance began to shift.

Gradual acceptance: 1989–2010

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the discussion surrounding emigration assumed a less urgent tone amid the massive influx of Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants into Israel. Between 1989 and 1994, some 800,000 immigrants – including many skilled professionals – entered the country following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, alongside around 20,000 immigrants from Ethiopia (Hacohen, 2001, 182–85). Issues related to the newcomers' absorption, housing, employment, education and religion (many were not considered Jewish in Orthodox religious law) dominated public discourse and parliamentary debates. Emigration, which not long before had been widely denounced as an imminent threat to the nation, was relegated to a secondary position. It was hard to accuse emigrants of depleting Israel's pool of talent when so many skilled immigrants were struggling to find jobs in Israel.

Meanwhile, the strengthening of Israel's economy and the initial success of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations alleviated the country's sense of existential threat, contributing to greater tolerance for emigration. Global trends of diaspora outreach were another important factor in this shift. Israeli elites, like their counterparts in other countries (Gamlen, 2019, 191), started to view emigrants as a transnational resource they could utilize – either in the form of skilled returnees contributing to national development or, increasingly, as loyal citizens supporting the homeland from outside (Cohen, 2007, 274–76). According to Immigration Committee Chair Colette Avital (Labour), this change was facilitated by the fact that some emigrants or their children were attaining influential positions in their adopted countries' government, media and business circles, which rendered them more attractive.[12] Further, as the number of Jewish immigrants to Israel decreased in the 2000s, Jerusalem began to view emigrant communities as an important source of immigration, which required courting rather than alienating them (Shpaizman, 2014).

In keeping with these shifts, Israeli elites increasingly accepted the formation of Israeli diaspora communities and their relations with local Jewish communities. The main argument in favour of these processes was that they would help to maintain ethnic boundaries. Many officials were concerned about emigrants' assimilation into their host society, and especially the assimilation of their children, who lacked a community framework like the one older Jewish communities had.[13] Fearing that assimilation would rule out any chance of eventual return, more and more Israelis believed that the formation of Israeli diaspora communities offered a partial antidote. While still portraying the anticipated return of emigrants as their main objective, they presented the diaspora option as a lesser evil than assimilation: during the emigrants' (hopefully temporary) stay overseas, such communities could preserve and even strengthen their Jewish and Israeli identities.

Thus, for example, Ran Ronen-Pekker, Israel's general consul in Los Angeles, suggested in 1989 that as most emigrants were not expected to return, Israel should endeavour to maintain their children's Jewish and Israeli identity, 'with the ultimate goal being bringing back the majority of Israelis'.[14] In 1993, Nadia Prigat of the Immigrant Absorption Ministry reported that her ministry supported Israeli youth movements abroad for the same reason.[15] In 1998, Tourism Minister Moshe Katsav (Likud) expressed satisfaction that 'Israeli colonies in Europe and in America' celebrated both Jewish and Israeli holidays, which attested to their relationship with Israel and Judaism. However, Katsav cautioned that these emigrants' ties to Israel might eventually wane, making it imperative to encourage their return.[16]

[11] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 5 January 1982, 9.

[12] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 18 November 2003, 3.

[13] For an early discussion, see Knesset, Plenary, 29 December 1980, 1011–1019.

[14] Ronen to Foreign Minister, 16 August 1989: Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ISA/MFA), 10137/16.

[15] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 18 January 1993, 4.

[16] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 23 February 1998, 3–4.

Indeed, these years saw what MK Avital called 'the beginning of a certain nurturing' of Israeli diaspora communities.[17] Most notably, Jerusalem established 'Israeli Houses' in cities with a large emigrant population, which organized and sponsored Israel-related communal events (Cohen, 2007, 275). These centres' main purpose, however, was to encourage and facilitate repatriation.[18] Although Israeli elites became more open to exchanges with the diaspora, they still expressed a wish for its eventual dissolution. Both official discourse (Ginnane, 2021, 214–19) and public opinion (Mitelpunkt, 2022, 898–99) distinguished acceptable emigrants, who lived abroad temporarily to study or to work for Israeli state institutions or private firms, from unacceptable ones, who had left for good.

As the power and influence of the Israeli diaspora grew, so did its legitimacy as a permanent community. It was in the third millennium that Israeli elites finally acknowledged its enduring nature. By the mid-2000s, they began to view Israeli communities abroad as partners that could help Israel from afar, whether or not they planned to return. In 2004, MK Avital expressed her wish for the 'normalization' of Israel's relations with what she already called 'the Israeli diaspora'.[19] In 2010, Immigration Committee Chair Danny Danon (Likud) commented that even though Jerusalem wanted to help emigrants return, it also sought to cooperate with Israeli diaspora communities, 'which are an important tool for us'.[20]

Positions towards Israeli-Jewish relations also changed during that period, gradually but significantly. In the late 1980s, some officials realized that driving a wedge between Jews and Israelis was not only futile but also counterproductive, diminishing both communities' attachment to Israel. These officials perceived the erosion of Jewish identity as the greater evil that would render emigrants completely lost to Israel, either as returnees or as remote allies. They saw the rise of Israeli diaspora communities and their cooperation with Jewish diaspora communities as averting this outcome.

Israeli diplomats abroad, who personally witnessed the development of Jewish-Israeli ties and the rapid alienation from Israel of unaffiliated emigrants, promoted this view. In 1989, Ronen-Pekker, the consul general in Los Angeles, proposed that Jerusalem revise its policy of keeping Jews and Israelis apart and personally initiated talks between leaders from both communities.[21] Even in countries with tiny Israeli diasporas such as Finland, diplomats recommended similar measures.[22] In 1990, the Israeli embassy in the Hague advised Jerusalem to invest its limited resources in the pro-Israel Jewish community rather than in the Israeli one, as this support would also benefit Israeli children attending Jewish schools and youth programs.[23]

These diplomats' views were soon echoed by Israeli politicians and administrators. In 1989, Immigration Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz (Shas) defied his government's policy during a visit to Los Angeles, arguing that Israelis who could not be persuaded to return 'should be encouraged to be part of the Jewish community' and thus to retain their Jewish identity.[24] In 1993, Uzi Narkiss, head of the Jewish Agency's delegation to North America, concurred that 'the Israelis should connect to the local Zionist federations, or else they will disappear'.[25] Nadia Prigat of the Immigrant Absorption Ministry similarly supported 'opening the Jewish communities to Israelis, so that they will maintain their Jewish identity'.[26]

By the turn of the century, more and more officials advocated stronger Israeli-Jewish ties abroad. In 2004, Jewish Agency Chairman Sallai Meridor urged Jerusalem to develop a 'national strategy' addressing the issue.[27] In 2008, the

[17] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 18 November 2003, 3.

[18] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 14 February 1994, 8.

[19] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 13 December 2004, 9.

[20] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 10 December 2010, 2.

[21] Ronen to Jerusalem, 20 November 1989: ISA/MFA, 10137/16.

[22] Helsinki to Jerusalem, 27 August 1990: ISA/MFA, 10137/16.

[23] The Hague to Jerusalem, 15 August 1990: ISA/MFA, 10137/16.

[24] *Jerusalem Post*, 29 November 1989.

[25] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 29 June 1993, 2–4.

[26] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 29 June 1993, 9.

[27] Knesset, Immigration Committee,13 October 2004, 3.

Immigration Committee, chaired by MK Michael Nudelman (Kadima), called upon the Israeli government to encourage relations between young Israelis abroad and local Jewish communities.[28] In the subsequent decade, Israel fully adopted these recommendations.

Permanence and partnership: 2011–2023

The legitimation of emigration in Israel has become more widespread in the 2010s and 2020s. Although Jerusalem is still nominally committed to the 'ingathering of the exiles' ideal, and emigrants are still seen as deserters to some degree (Amit, 2019, 10; Mitelpunkt, 2022, 899), many officials accept that some emigrants will never return. No longer do they pressure them to repatriate, choosing instead to recognize them as part of the nation.

This acceptance of the diaspora's permanence reflects the global shift of home states towards embracing co-ethnics abroad and copying each other's engagement strategies (Gamlen, 2019, ch. 8). In line with these trends, Israeli officials increasingly invoke the buzzword *diaspora* to legitimize emigrant communities as a potential asset. This shift was illustrated in 2011 when the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, created in the late 2000s as part of the global trend of diaspora engagement and originally aimed at the veteran Jewish diaspora rather than Israeli emigrants (Gamlen, 2019, 59), declared its intentional use of the term 'Israeli diaspora' to symbolize a new and positive attitude towards the latter.[29]

Israel's new approach was demonstrated the following year with the establishment of a special parliamentary subcommittee tasked with reexamining Israel-diaspora relations. MK Einat Wilf (Independence Party), a political scientist who had earned her degrees in England, France and the United States, headed this committee. Wilf recommended that Israel follow India's example in thinking of emigrants as a resource it could utilize rather than as people it had lost.[30] She argued that, although the Israeli government's 'historical DNA' called for repatriating all emigrants, return was not a viable option for many. Nonetheless, these émigrés could now contribute to Israel more than ever, given technological advancements in communication and transportation. Hence, Wilf called on the government to invest in maintaining a relationship with such emigrants even if they did not intend to return.[31]

Still, some officials, especially those responsible for supporting Jewish immigration, had reservations about this new paradigm. In 2011, the Immigrant Absorption Ministry launched a controversial campaign calling on Israelis in the United States to return before they or their children assimilated and lost their Jewish and Israeli identity. With slogans such as 'Before Hanukkah turns into Christmas, it is time to return to Israel', the campaign raised the ire of veteran Jewish communities, which saw it as demeaning.[32] In 2012, Yaakov Hagoel of the World Zionist Organization remarked that, although emigrants were now viewed as 'a clearly legitimate Israeli diaspora', Israel should still aim to bring them all back.[33] In 2013, Immigrant Absorption Minister Sofa Landver (Yisrael Beiteinu) said that Israel should do everything in its power to repatriate emigrants because maintaining Jewish identity abroad was impossible.[34] In 2020, Immigrant Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata (Blue and White) similarly declared, 'We, of course, always want to bring [the emigrants] back home'.[35] MK Yehiel Bar (Labour) expressed this ambivalence in 2013:

> Okay, you emigrated, you have made your choice… [but] you are a part of this people, [so] demonstrate how you belong to it, how you contribute to it. Even when you are there, we are not disconnected from

[28] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 2 January 2008, 17.

[29] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 7 December 2011, 26.

[30] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 3 January 2012, 5.

[31] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 3 January 2012, 14

[32] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20120210020516/https://www.smh.com.au/world/israel-forced-to-remove-insulting-ads-in-us-20111205-1ofg0.html.

[33] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 29 May 2012, 20–21.

[34] *Makor Rishon*, 4 September 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20230726114025/https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/11/ART2/504/483.html.

[35] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 17 June 2020, 3.

> you, we are not too angry with you – we are a bit angry, but not too much, we do not see you as betraying the nation.[36]

Emigrants themselves, however, adopted an unapologetic approach regarding their choice to leave Israel. The Israeli American Council (IAC), the largest Israeli diaspora organization, framed emigrants as 'Israeli Americans' who cared about Israel and united Israeli and US Jews around shared goals (Gold, 2022, 5). Supported by Republican megadonors Sheldon and Miriam Adelson (herself an Israeli emigrant), the IAC's power and influence were evidenced by the attendance at its annual conferences of senior Israeli and US officials, including US President Donald J. Trump in 2019.[37] IAC director and co-founder Shoham Nicolet described Israel's new position in a 2018 interview:

> Suddenly, the State of Israel changed its attitude towards us, and the American Jewish community followed suit. Suddenly, the president of Israel comes here, to our community centre in Los Angeles … The prime minister of Israel and right-wing and left-wing ministers treat Israelis in the US differently – it changes the dynamics. From a persecuted community, which is only called upon to return to Israel, we have become a strategic asset.[38]

Calls for return have indeed become increasingly rare. In his recorded greeting for the IAC's 2016 national summit, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud) complimented emigrants, saying that 'the geographic distance between our countries doesn't reflect the closeness of our ties'. Netanyahu, himself a former emigrant to the United States, encouraged his audience 'to continue fighting for Israel in America'. He made no mention of the possibility of returning.[39]

Because Israeli elites now accepted the diaspora's permanence (while still paying lip service to the unrealistic idea that all emigrants should eventually return), they condoned its existence, and many even argued that Israel should actively create and support diasporic organizations. Minister of Diaspora Affairs Yuli Edelstein (Likud) commented in 2011 that since emigrants were in danger of losing touch with Israel, Jerusalem should devise 'models that would maintain these people for us' in the hope that 'one day, they will return'. Edelstein mentioned wealthy émigrés, well-established in their country of residence, who had lost touch with Judaism and Israel because, unlike local Jews, they did not participate in any diasporic organization.[40] In 2012, Hagay Elitzur of the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs explained that his ministry's vision regarding emigrants consisted of three stages: first, coalescing them into a distinct Israeli community; second, cultivating Israel's ties with this community; and third, promoting mutually beneficial cooperation between this diaspora and Jerusalem. Israel was still at the community-building stage, said Elitzur, who did not discuss repatriation.[41] During a public event at the IAC 2023 national summit, Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli (Likud) remarked that in his opinion, 'the most significant role' of the Israeli diaspora was 'to be a vivid community' that explained Israel to local Jews and fought antisemitism in the United States.[42] At no point during that event did Chikli mention repatriation.

As Chikli's statement suggests, during the 2010s and 2020s, Jerusalem became increasingly involved in the establishment and encouragement of Israeli-Jewish diasporic relations. In 2011, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs declared its intention to bolster such ties.[43] Soon, it found willing partners in these efforts. The 2010s were characterized by

[36] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 21 October 2013, 4–5.

[37] IAC, 2019 Speakers, https://www.israeliamerican.org/summit/speakers/2019

[38] *Makor Rishon*, 3 December 2018, https://www.makorrishon.co.il/judaism/96731/.

[39] "2016 IAC National Conference - Greeting from Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZANbFKBxBc.

[40] Knesset, Plenary, 20 December 2011, 61.

[41] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 3 January 2012, 17.

[42] "Min Amichai Chikli at the 8th Annual IAC National Summit," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wL2A517_-D0.

[43] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 7 December 2011, 26.

growing participation of non-state actors in Israel's migration governance, including think tanks in Israel and diaspora organizations abroad (see Cohen, 2021). These actors promoted tighter connections between the Israeli and Jewish diasporas. In a 2012 meeting, for example, the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem-based think tank, advised the government to cultivate the Israeli identity of emigrants and their children within the framework of veteran Jewish communities.[44] The Los Angeles-based Israeli Leadership Council (which a year later would become the IAC) described Israeli emigrants as a potential bridge between the state and Jewish communities abroad.[45]

This chorus of suggestions resulted in a shift in policy. In recent years, government-sponsored programs aimed at the Jewish diaspora have sought explicitly to include Israeli emigrants as well. One prominent example is the Mosaic United initiative, co-funded by the Israeli government and Jewish philanthropists, which finances Jewish education abroad.[46] The 2015 agreement founding the organization underscores Jerusalem's goal of having a distinct Hebrew-speaking Israeli diaspora in collaboration with Jewish diaspora organizations.[47] Mosaic United's *Yisraelim* (Israelis) program seeks to establish 'a better connection between Jewish communities abroad and local Israelis through a[n] approach tailored to the population's unique needs'.[48] In 2023, Mosaic United joined the Israeli Community Europe organization and local Jewish communities to establish Israeli centres in Athens and Barcelona, with the goal of promoting Jewish-Israeli collaborations.[49]

Such partnerships notwithstanding, intra-diasporic relations remain fragmentary. In May 2023, Immigration Committee Chair Oded Forer (Yisrael Beiteinu) lamented that overseas Israeli communities 'often do not manage to be a part of the Jewish communities', resulting in Israel 'losing' the children and grandchildren of unaffiliated emigrants.[50] Indeed, a survey of Israeli emigrants found that only 41% of them participated in a Jewish community in any way.[51] Although Israeli elites now predominantly support bringing together the Israeli and Jewish diasporas, they see this goal as unmet.

It appears, then, that the legitimization of Israeli emigrants – not merely as individuals but specifically as a *diaspora community* with its own organizations, leadership and interests, which interacts with older Jewish communities – is all but complete. When speaking to domestic audiences, some politicians, especially those tasked with Jewish immigration, may still defend the 'ingathering of the exiles' idea. In practice, however, Israel is currently interested in admitting only a small portion of highly skilled returnees (see Cohen, 2016). As for the rest, their choice to live abroad is no longer stigmatized insofar as they maintain their Jewish identity and support Israel.

CONCLUSION

As Israel's case illustrates, home-state positions towards diaspora formation are dynamic and context-dependent, evolving over time in reaction to domestic, transnational, international and global developments. As emigrants congregate, build communal organizations, help other compatriots integrate into receiving societies and fraternize with the 'old' diaspora, home-state elites who oppose emigration may grow wary, seeing these communities as encouraging and perpetuating the departure of populations deemed important. With time, however, they may realize that

[44] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 3 January 2012, 19.

[45] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 10 January 2012, 17.

[46] *Jerusalem Post and Mosaic United*, 25 November 2021: https://web.archive.org/web/20230418101708/https://www.jpost.com/judaism/mosaic-united-the-most-significant-jewish-org-you-dont-know-686992.

[47] Agreement between the Government of Israel and Jewish Future Initiative Ltd., 24 November 2015, 35–36, https://foi.gov.il/sites/default/files/%D7%97%D7%95%D7%96%D7%94%20%D7%94%D7%99%D7%95%D7%96%D7%9E%D7%94.pdf

[48] Mosaic United, "*Yisraleim*," https://mosaicunited.org/pillars/yisraelim/.

[49] Mosaic United, 15 February 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230219235240/https://mosaicunited.org/new-centers-for-israelis-abroad-in-barcelona-and-athens/.

[50] Knesset, Immigration Committee, 15 May 2023, 19.

[51] *Ynet*, 27 April 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230429220517/https://www.ynet.co.il/judaism/article/hjsykmsx3.

most emigrants are unlikely to return and begin to value the contribution of a community organizational framework to maintaining ethnic and national identity among emigrants and encouraging them to help the home state from afar.

Although the article lends empirical weight to Tsourapas's (2015, 2197) claim that states treat recent emigrants and established diasporas differently – and that the prospects of emigrants' return play an important part in this distinction – it also adds nuance to his thesis by taking into account relations *between* emigrants and existing diasporas as well as temporal changes in home-state positions towards these interactions. In doing so, it points to the dynamic nature of state-diaspora relations, in which differentiated discourses, policies and practices towards new and old diasporas shift and evolve. Although Tsourapas and other scholars (e.g. Burgess, 2020; Délano, 2011) focus on changes resulting from domestic political calculations and international economic and geopolitical interests, this article points to the importance of identity-based factors beyond, and in conjunction with, material ones. Israeli elites began to support diaspora formation when they realized that the likely alternative was not repatriation but assimilation. The discourse analysis shows that the maintenance of Jewish identity was initially embraced predominantly as necessary for ethnic return; only later, with the global dissemination of diaspora-engagement norms, was 'diaspora' conceived as a way to mobilize emigrants' resources without repatriation.

Analysing a single case, such as Israel, allows for a thorough and contextualized interrogation of empirical evidence, resulting in more accurate and detailed findings. At the same time, to ensure generally applicable theoretical findings, comparative research is advised (Gerring, 2007, 48, 76–85). Additional cases of home-state positions towards diaspora formation and diaspora-diaspora relations over time may uncover additional variations.

One such case is Yugoslavia, whose government categorized emigrants into different groups based on the time of their emigration (which presumably correlated with their political positions) and adopted distinct policies towards each group. Belgrade, like Jerusalem, tried to hinder contacts between recent emigrants, who were considered politically hostile to Tito's regime, and the supposedly loyal 'old emigration' to prevent the former from influencing the latter. When a third diaspora of 'workers temporarily employed abroad' emerged in the 1960s, the regime used diaspora organizations and diplomatic missions to surveil its members and maintain their loyalty (Ragazzi, 2017, 38–44).

Even a cursory comparison between the Israeli and Yugoslav cases yields interesting insights. In both cases, 'new' emigrants were initially denigrated as ideologically corrupt, whereas the 'old' diaspora was praised and courted; but although Israel eventually changed its attitude and embraced both diasporas, Yugoslavia kept securitizing the 'enemy migration' and sequester it from the other diasporas. Although Israeli emigrants were vehemently denounced for betraying the Zionist ethos, they were never persecuted and were absolved upon their return. Non-Jewish Israeli emigrants were usually ignored, whereas Jewish ones were repeatedly encouraged to return, attesting to the fact that for Israel, in contrast with Yugoslavia, the chief objection to diaspora formation was the act of emigration itself, not what provoked it. This difference underscores the need to contextualize the historical circumstances of diaspora formation, including the main motives for the migration flows that produced the diaspora – economic for most Israeli emigrants; political for much of Yugoslavia's so-called enemy migration – and the emigrants' previous ties with the home-state regime.

In addition, Israel changed its attitudes towards diaspora formation when it accepted the permanence of emigration, devising ways to benefit from the new, enduring diaspora. Yugoslav elites, too, realized in the 1970s that return was unlikely for many emigrants and began to treat the 'desirable' diaspora communities as part of the nation by managing and politically indoctrinating them. Like Jerusalem, Belgrade endeavoured to maintain these communities' national identity through diaspora organizations such as schools and media outlets, while also promoting return migration and supporting the reintegration of returnees (Zimmerman, 1987, ch. 5).

Yugoslavia, of course, did not have a chance to develop these practices fully, as it disintegrated before diaspora governance became a global fashion. Nonetheless – and despite the differences between the cases in terms of home-state regime, national ethos, emigrants' ethnicity and religion and the causes of migration – this brief comparison demonstrates how home-state positions and policies towards emigrants in general and "new" and "old" diasporas in particular change when diaspora is recognized as a permanent phenomenon. Specifically, home states' acceptance of the irreversibility of diaspora formation plays an important role in the evolution of their positions towards diaspora

communities. A further probe into such cases can yield more insight into the role that ethnic, national and religious identities play in these attitudinal shifts.

Finally, by tracing not only official policy towards emigrants but also the language Israeli elites used when discussing them, the article highlights the uneasy relationship between idealism and pragmatism in state-diaspora relations. Despite the moral revulsion of many Israelis at the phenomenon of emigration, they found the idea of emigrants or their children leaving the Jewish people even worse, perhaps because of the seeming irrevocability of assimilation. This perceived long-term threat to the nation justified policies that had previously been seen as discouraging return and thus harming state interests. As it became clear that return was often unlikely in any case, the formation of new diaspora communities abroad and their affiliation with veteran diaspora communities came to be seen as a silver lining capable of allaying the erosion of Jewish identity. In other words, these elites' foremost concern was to keep emigrants inside the nation even if they lived outside the state. This interplay between lofty national ideals and practical realities characterizes many states' attitudes and policies towards emigrants and diasporas (Supplementary material 1), (Supplementary material 2).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that could be perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in The Knesset Records at https://main.knesset.gov.il/Pages/default.aspx. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: - Committee for Immigration, Absorption, and Diaspora Affairs, https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Committees/Immigration/Pages/CommitteeProtocols.aspx - The Knesset's Plenary records, https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/plenum/pages/sessionitem.aspx?itemid = 543133

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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