



The Radicalization of the Democratic Party

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המכון לאסטרטגיה ציונית הוא גוף עצמאי הפועל למען שמירת צביונה היהודי והדמוקרטי של מדינת ישראל על פי עקרונות מגילת העצמאות.

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Abstract

This paper charts the changing attitudes towards Israel within the American Democratic Party. The paper surveys the historically close relationship between the party and American Jewry which endured throughout the 20th century, as well as almost universal support in the party for the special bond between the United States and Israel.

The paper then moves to consider the context in which that universal support has begun to crumble and to investigate the change in rhetoric by prominent Democrats. This section looks at the cooling of relations between the United States and Israel during Barak Obama's presidency, as well as anti-Israel rhetoric which is voiced by several prominent figures in the party such as Bernie Sanders, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib.

The next section of the paper investigates the changing attitudes towards Israel within the Democratic grassroots, with opinions being divided between the 'moderate' mainstream of the party and the more 'liberal' wing, which is where the bulk of anti-Israel sentiment is coming from.

The next chapter looks at the historic support of American Jewry for the Democratic Party and asks what impact, if any, changing attitudes towards Israel will have on the Jewish vote.

At this point the paper turns to examine the causes for the change in attitudes towards Israel among liberal Democrats.

The paper focuses on how radical left-wing ideology frames the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the impact that this has on shaping negative views about Israel. Changing demographics within American society are also assessed for

their impact on discourse about Israel within society as a whole and the Democratic Party in particular.

In concluding, the paper offers suggestions for how negative attitudes towards Israel and narratives often put forward by radical liberals can be challenged and how Israel and its advocates can reshape discourse about the country among the American left.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rapid radicalization of the Democratic Party's stance on Israel. Lately, the topic has received more attention due to the outright support of the Palestinian cause over that of the Israeli's by freshman congresswomen Rashida Tlaib, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, and Ilhan Omar, a stance that has rarely been vocalized in the United States congress. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar both are proponents of BDS and favor a one-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, specifically the dissolution of Israel as a Jewish state. The Democratic leadership sparked further controversy when Omar insinuated that American support for Israel is nurtured by money from pro-Israel lobbyists, a comment which was condemned for being anti-Semitic. While the Democratic Party has been shifting to the left, the gap between the party's leadership and its newly

elected members speaks to a larger cultural shift taking place in the United States as a whole.

As a result of the United States government's two-party system, factions have grown within each party so that as many ideologies as possible can be advocated for. Within the Democratic Party, there are several factions, however for the purpose of this paper, only two will be discussed: moderate Democrats and liberal Democrats. Liberal Democrats are more likely than moderate Democrats to support same-sex marriage, legalized abortion under any circumstances, opposition to the death penalty for murder, a government-run healthcare system and legalized marijuana. These viewpoints address issues under-privileged communities are facing, illustrating that this faction of the Democratic Party sees itself as an advocate for those who are oppressed in

America. With respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more Democrats sympathize with the Israeli cause than the Palestinian, however more liberal Democrats sympathize with the Palestinians than the moderate Democrats.

Within the last 15 years, more Democrats are supporting what used to be mainly liberal democratic causes. As the number of liberal Democrats increases, moderate Democrats have been voted out of the house of representatives and replaced by younger, more progressive and diverse candidates. The midterm elections of 2018 resulted in the election of the most racially, and ethnically diverse congress in the history of the legislature. Since the goal of the party is to advocate for the under-privileged, the influx of members of minority communities into the United States government will only advance this narrative even further. This is

significant for the United States government's relationship with Israel because, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become increasingly viewed in the same terms as race-related issues in the United States. Members of the far-left within the Democratic Party have come to see the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the colonization of the Palestinian people by the Jewish people. As most American Jews are Ashkenazi, it is easy to see Jews in Israel as the white man versus the indigenous population. The election of Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar in the 2018 midterm elections reflects the changing views of Israel by American citizens.

As Democrats have continued to waver in their support for the government of Israel, the line between anti-Semitism, and fair criticisms of a far-right leaning government has grown less and less clear. This seems to be a challenge not

just for the American political system. The Democrat's British counterpart, the Labour Party, has recently been scrutinized for severe allegations of anti-Semitism following radical statements in regard to the government of Israel. Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour party since 2015, has been labeled an anti-Semite by many, even his fellow party members. According to a BBC article from February 2019, eight members of the British Labour Party left the party over Corbyn's handling of the anti-Semitism allegations.

When the topic of Israel is brought up in the United States congress, the balance between avoiding anti-Zionist rhetoric and engaging in productive dialogue regarding the Israeli government is difficult to adhere to. This is what the Democrats have begun to experience, while the polarization

of the topic has led the Republican Party to virtually unanimously support Benjamin Netanyahu's government. So far, this polarized debate over Israel has not seemed to affect United States policy in practice as the United States Senate remains in strong support of Israel. In January 2019, for instance, the Senate voted in favor of a bill that allows states to make support for BDS illegal under federal statute 74-19.

The radicalization in the Democratic Party raises questions as to potential changes in the voting patterns of its Jewish supporters. Historically, the Democratic Party has been the political safe haven of the majority of American Jews, with about 70% of them supporting Democratic candidates to date. The liberal values of American Jews have been aligned with the Democratic Party for most of their history in the

United States, and the party's approach to United States government's desirable treatment of Israel has been mostly compatible with theirs. However, as the Democratic Party has gradually been harshening its attitude towards Israel, it has left Jewish Democrats in a complicated place, wanting to be advocates for the oppressed while also supporting their Jewish homeland. While massive abandonment of the Democratic Party by Jews seems improbable, cracks in the loyalty to the party may emerge.

This paper will discuss the attitude of the Democratic Party in the United States towards Israel and how it has changed in the last 18 years to being less unshakably pro-Israel. It will then discuss whether there has been an effect on Jewish members of the Democratic party and whether they have also become increasingly critical of Israel as the party as a

whole over the examined period. This paper will then finally explore the social reasons for this shift, focusing on the increased prevalence of the idea of intersectionality within the Democratic Party and the emergence of new organizations stressing the alliance of different types of oppression like BDS. This paper will argue that as the Democratic Party has moved further to the left, it has become more aligned with all oppressed peoples, while further sympathizing with the Palestinians, and consequently, less with the Israelis.

This research will be conducted through looking at polls, surveys, published articles from contemporary political science journals, and published scholarly articles in topics relating to this shift within the Democratic Party. In addition, articles published by major news sources will be used to

supplement the research. Statements and speeches made by politicians from the past and present will be compared to show the evolution of the shift over time.

2. Historical Background

The Democratic Party has historically been the political party that American Jews have consistently voted for. Since the 1924 Presidential Election, not a single Democratic candidate lost the majority of the Jewish vote.¹ For American Jews, the first half of the 20th century was characterized by peak levels of anti-Semitism. The majority of Jewish immigrants settled in New York City where, particularly during the great depression, they experienced tremendously high levels of poverty and squalid living and working conditions. Private schools, camps, universities, resorts and companies all imposed restrictions and quotas on the number of Jewish members allowed and public assaults on Jews were frequent in major cities.²

¹ Maisel, L. S. (2001). **Jews in American politics**. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 153.

² Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, **The Jews in America**, The Atlantic, September 2007. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/09/the-jews-in-america/306273/>

Following Israel's establishment in 1948, President Harry Truman's Democratic Party was considerably more supportive of the young state than the opposing Republican Party. The establishment of a Jewish state following the tragedy of the holocaust fit into the party's contemporary agenda of advocating for oppressed peoples both domestically and abroad. The Republican Party, for its part, opposed the idea on the grounds that a Jewish state in the middle of the Arab world would cause instability in the region.

Decades later, the Reagan administration of the 1980's opened the door to a new era of American support for Israel; an era defined by bipartisanship. For the Democrats, Israel remained a refuge for all the oppressed Jews of the world. Jews were still sometimes barred from private spaces but

overall, anti-Semitism had decreased to a far less degree than before. For the Republicans, Israel was a vital military ally in an increasingly complex region of the Middle East.

However, bipartisanship concerning Israel began to crumble in the years to come. The breakdown of the Oslo Accords in the early 1990's, which were seen in the United States as a breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian relations, has driven the debate surrounding Israel in the United States congress to both ends of the political spectrum. Ever since, Israel has come under scrutiny from the far left as it has been accused of war crimes, humanitarian issues and high levels of racism against the Palestinians. The American right has responded with an increasingly pro-Israel stance and continually condemns the left for its criticisms, drawing into question whether they are overly-critical of the Israeli government, or anti-Semitic.

In America today, there are no quotas for admittance of Jews to universities and Jews are not barred from private companies, clubs or resorts. There is still some violence but to a far less degree than what existed earlier, mainly coming from far-right extremists.³ Today American Jews have been able to achieve upper class status and significant wealth. There are a number of Jewish Americans in public office, however there is yet to be a Jewish president.

³ Anti-Defamation League, **Anti-Semitism in the US**. Retrieved from: <https://www.adl.org/what-we-do/anti-semitism/anti-semitism-in-the-us>

3. Shift in the Rhetoric of Politicians

Although changes in support has been gradual, the transition in rhetoric and policy coming from the Democratic party can be traced to President Barack Obama, who was well known for his unfriendly attitude to Israel. Historically, previous presidents have been more inclined to blame the Arab countries for their faults in the conflict more than Israel. During Obama's presidency, he and Netanyahu had a precarious relationship at best as a result of Obama's efforts to improve the United States' standings with the Arab world. In contrast with the Bush administration, Obama attempted to be more impartial because he believed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the origin of all the malicious activity in the region and that Israel could and should be more flexible and willing to compromise with the Arab and Muslim populations. Additionally, Obama refused to accept

the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Although these were significant developments in the deterioration of the United States-Israeli relationship during Obama's presidency, they did not compare to the effects of the implementation of the Iran Deal in 2015 aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear weapons. Under this agreement, Iran promised to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow international inspections in return for the lifting of economic sanctions which were damaging Iran's economy. Netanyahu vehemently disagreed with this deal and came to speak to the United States Senate in order to express his disdain.

Perhaps the most natural successor of Obama in respect to Israel is Bernie Sanders. In the 2016 Democratic primary against Hillary Clinton, Sanders made it clear that he did not approve of Israeli actions towards the Palestinians. He was

far more critical of the Israeli Defense Forces and Israel than previous presidents or candidates up for election. Sanders repeatedly addressed the loss of civilian lives in Gaza and on a number of occasions said that Israel was disproportionate in its defense against the Palestinians. In 2014, Sanders abstained from voting on Senate Resolution 498 which expressed support for Israel as it defended itself against “unprovoked rocket attacks” from Hamas. Sanders was one of the 21 members who did not sign the resolution. Furthermore, Bernie Sanders consistently indicated a desire for the United States to spend less on its military assistance package to Israel and instead, to spend more on quality-of-life issues in the Palestinian territories. During the primary debates, when asked about Israel foreign policy, Bernie Sanders kept pushing Hillary Clinton to discuss whether

Israel was responsible for the reprehensible conditions Palestinians live in.

Sanders is running for president again and has become even more vocal now about his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and even more so pro-Palestinian. During an appearance on CBS, Sanders implied that, if he is elected president, military aid to Israel might only be given with conditions.

While it has not been uncommon for American politicians to criticize Israel's policies, regardless of party affiliation, it is unprecedented that an American politician would imply that the mere existence of the State of Israel is illegitimate. That changed during the 2018 elections, when the three Democratic congresswomen, Ilhan Omar, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib were elected to office. In

2018, CNN commentator Marc Lamont Hill called to “free Palestine from the river to the sea” in a speech at the UN which is a phrase that has been used by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations. It implies the removal or destruction of the state of Israel. Representative Rashida Tlaib condemned CNN for firing the commentator for these words. Rashida Tlaib also made comments about American Jews having dual loyalty for Israel and America. Additionally, a post-it note that read “Palestine” was found over a map of Israel in her office.

Following in Tlaib’s footsteps, in February 2019, Ilhan Omar tweeted that support for Israel in the United States Congress was “all about the Benjamins”.⁴ This suggested that the pro-Israel lobby was buying off American politicians

⁴ Mike DeBonis & Rachel Bade, **Rep. Omar apologizes after House Democratic leadership condemns her comments as ‘anti-Semitic tropes’**, The Washington Post, Feb 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/02/11/its-all-about-benjamins-baby-ilhan-omar-again-accused-anti-semitism-over-tweets/>

to support Israel, which plays into a prominent anti-Semitic trope in regard to Jews controlling politics through money. Back in 2012, she tweeted that “Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel.”⁵

Another high profile United States representative, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez made statements in regard to United States funding towards Israel, arguing that as long as Israel is imprisoning Palestinian children, the United States should cut military and economic aid to Israel as a method for the United States to oppose extreme Israeli human rights violations of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

These statements from within the Democratic party have received widespread media attention, not so much because

⁵ JPOST Editorial, **Ilhan Omar’s antisemitism has consequences**, The Jerusalem Post, Feb 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Ilhan-Omars-antisemitism-has-consequences-580355>

of the United States government's traditional pro-Israel approach, but more so due to the statements' aggressive flavor. New York senator, Chuck Schumer, has been quick to label these criticisms as anti-Semitic as he mentioned in his speech at the AIPAC annual convention earlier this year. After Omar made a statement suggesting that Israel's supporters have an "allegiance to a foreign country,"⁶ Democrats made plans to pass a resolution condemning anti-Semitism, however the response to her comments has created great controversy within the Democratic Party. Other prominent Democrats, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, have criticized the party for not denouncing the malicious and often Islamophobic rhetoric that Omar has faced in retaliation. Ocasio-Cortez has been accused in the past of

⁶ Karen Zraick, Ilhan **Omar's Latest Remarks on Israel Draw Criticism**, The New York Times, March 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/us/politics/ilhan-omar-israel.html>

making anti-Semitic statements, but she argues that she is only criticizing Israeli government policy and United States support for it.

This rhetorical shift in the Democratic Party was countered by veteran Democrats like New York senator Chuck Schumer, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm. In early 2019, they created a new political group called “The Democratic Majority for Israel”⁷ in order to boost the Democratic Party’s support for Israel that seems to be getting lost in the shuffle of anti-Zionism.⁸ Additionally, during the 2018 elections, Nancy Pelosi, a strong advocate for Israel, reclaimed her former position as speaker of the house. She has been a perennial speaker at AIPAC, along with Chuck Schumer,

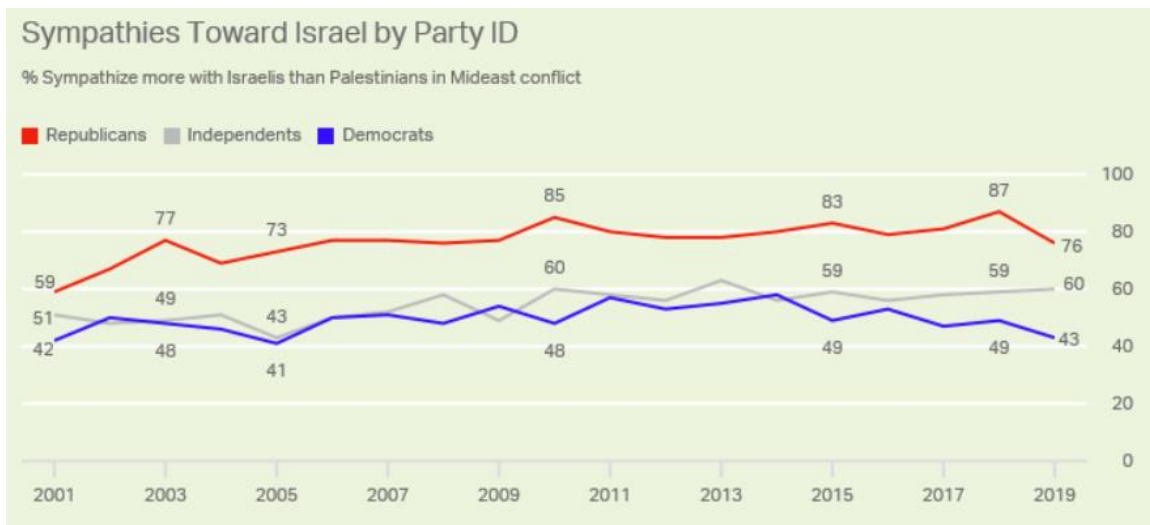
⁷ official website: <https://demmajorityforisrael.org/>

⁸ Dershowitz, A. (2019). **Defending Israel: The Story of My Relationship with My Most Challenging Client.** All Points Books.

who has also been one of Israel's strongest allies within the Democratic Party.

4. Shift in the Sentiments of the Public

Looking at the Democratic Party as a whole, there has not been a significant change in the party's sentiments towards Israel in the last 18 years, however changes stand out when far-left groups and moderate groups are differentiated. According to a Gallup poll, since 2001, Republican sympathies toward Israel has increased from 59% to 76% while Democratic sympathies toward Israel has remained similar from 2001, only increasing from 42% to 43%.⁹

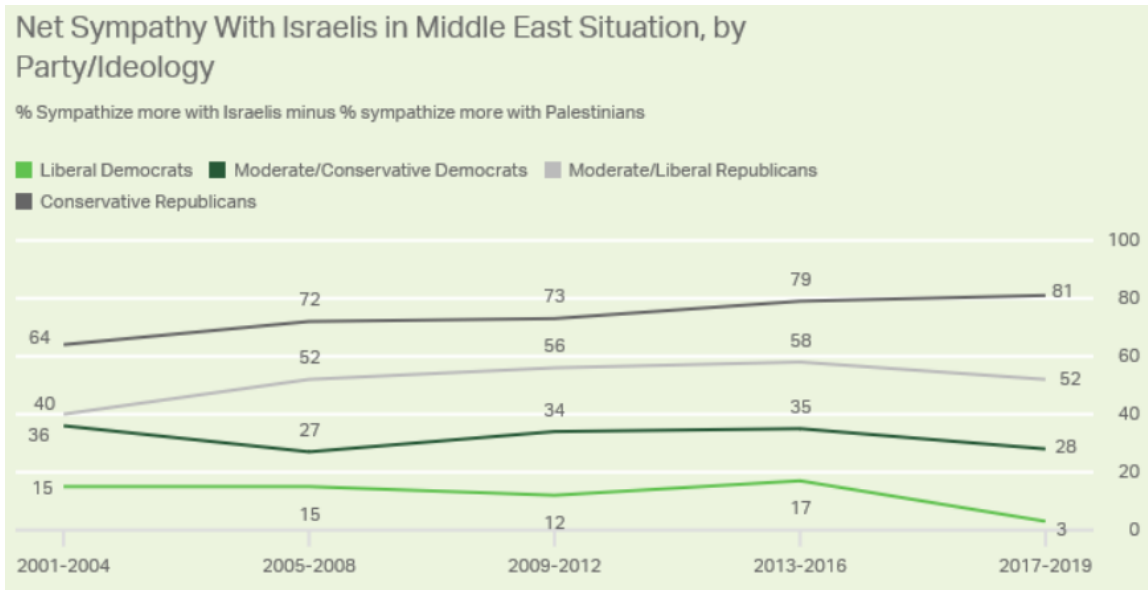


⁹ Lydia Saad, **Americans, but Not Liberal; Democrats, Mostly Pro-Israel**, Gallup, March 2019. Retrieved from: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/247376/americans-not-liberal-democrats-mostly-pro-israel.aspx>

The Gallup poll, beginning in 2001 until 2019, divided liberal Democrats, moderate Democrats, moderate Republicans and conservative Republicans. It concluded that since 2001, support for Israel has increased from 64% to 81% among conservative Republicans, whilst among liberal Democrats it has decreased from 15% to 3%. Moderate Democrats and moderate Republicans have remained between 28% approval and 52% approval, although approval in moderate Democrats has consistently been lower than approval in moderate Republicans.¹⁰ This illustrates that liberal Democrats are by far the most disapproving political

¹⁰ Ibid.

group of Israel and the number who hold a favorable view of Israel has decreased considerably over the past 20 years.

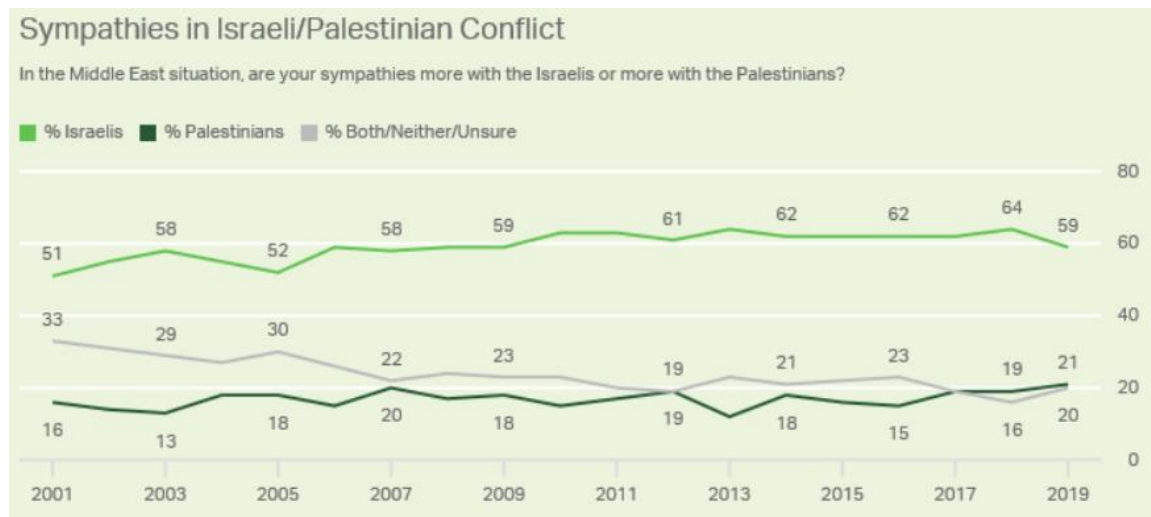


The correlation between liberal political affiliations and holding negative views towards Israel is also reflected in the attitudes of Jewish Democrats. According to a Pew research from 2018, 25% of Democratic Jews said they are very emotionally attached to Israel, 40% are somewhat attached, 25% are not very attached and 10% are not at all attached. So, it is fair to assume that of the 40% that are “somewhat

attached to Israel”, and of the 25% that are “very emotionally attached to Israel,” there is also a significant percentage that have followed the trend of liberalization within the Democratic Party.

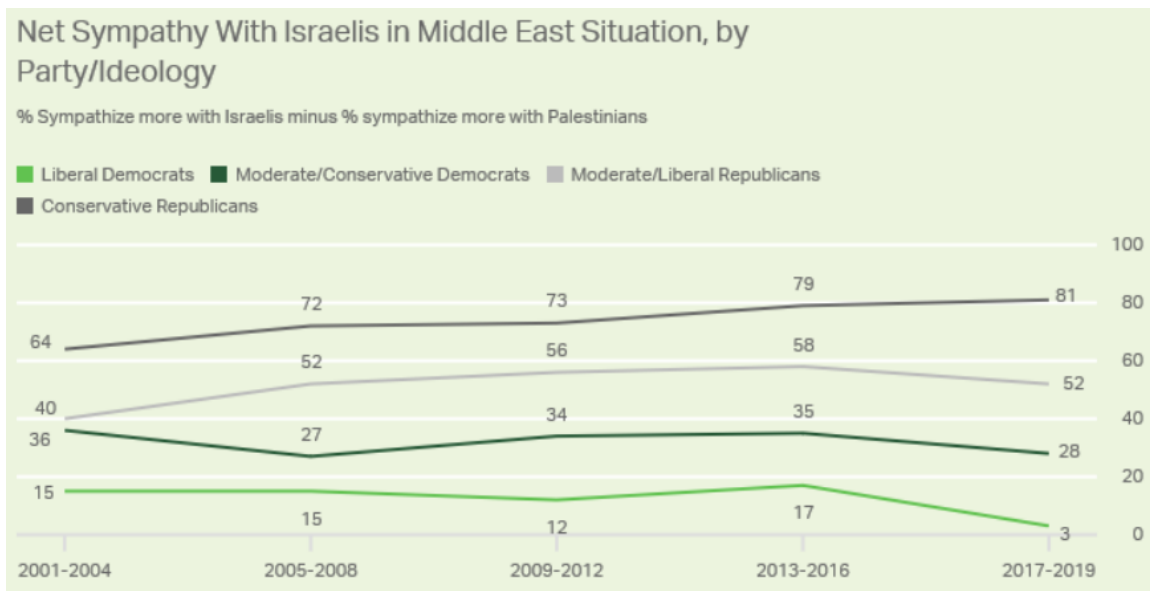
A Gallup poll from March 2019 explored how “Pro-Israel” each party is. The survey question was “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or the Palestinians?” In 2018, the total percentage (partisan affiliation not specified) of those sympathizing with Israel over the Palestinians reached its peak of the eighteen- year study at 64%. In 2019, total percentage sympathizing with Israel fell to 59%. Those who were unsure or didn’t sympathize with one side over the other was 20%, virtually

the same as the amount who sympathize more with the Palestinians (21%).



When the survey was given to members of each party, 76% of Republicans said they sympathize more with Israel, but only 43% of Democrats shared that view. Among the most significant of the findings of this survey, was the decline in liberal Democrats' sympathy toward Israelis over Palestinians. One of the questions divided responses by liberal/moderate in both parties. From 2016, 17% of liberal

Democrats who responded to the survey sympathized with Israelis. In the 2019 rendition of the survey, that percentage fell to just 3%. For moderate Democrats sympathy towards Israel fell from 35% to 28% in the same time frame.



5. The Prospects of Jews Shifting Their Political Affiliations

The existence of this rift within the Democratic Party could potentially have a profound isolating effect on Democratic Jews. For the percentage of those Democrats that consider themselves pro-Israel, the polarization of the debate surrounding Israel could leave them abandoned by the Democratic Party's strong liberal voices. However, it seems unlikely that there is a significant number of Jews on the far left who would actually vote against the Democrats because of the recent shift in position on Israel.

Having said that, there is a slim possibility that Israel will be the deciding factor for a small number of Jewish Democrats in upcoming elections. This has happened before, to a degree. The largest shift in the Jewish vote from the Democratic Party to the Republican took place in the 1980

presidential election, wherein Ronald Reagan defeated incumbent president Jimmy Carter's reelection bid. Occurring around the same time was the rise of evangelical Christianity, a sect that strongly believes that the land of Israel must belong to the Jewish people in order for the second coming of Jesus to occur. This is significant because of the Evangelical's political influence within the Republican caucus, and more specifically, in the election of Ronald Reagan.

The Reagan administration of the 1980's opened the door to a new era of American support for Israel. Reagan's ability to attract the Jewish vote can be addressed, in part to Reagan's emphasis of providing security for Israel. 39% of American Jews voted for Reagan in that election. This is in contrast to the 30 percentage points or less that Republicans usually

receive from Jewish votes in presidential elections and is second only to Eisenhower who received 40% of Jewish votes in the 1956 presidential election.¹¹

From the success Reagan found among Jewish voters, the Republican Party thought that emphasizing Israel's security on the campaign trail was the perfect strategy to attract the Jewish vote, but this was not the case. Reagan received only 31% of the Jewish vote in his successful reelection bid in 1984.¹² Clearly, an emphasis on staunch protection of Israel, while important to American Jews, will not alone shift the Jewish vote to the right. Efforts to do so have become routine for Republican candidates in the past few decades, but those efforts mostly consist of a strong emphasis on the United States' commitment to Israel's security.

¹¹ Maisel, L. S. (2001). **Jews in American politics**. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 153.

¹² Ibid.

Jewish Voting Patterns in Presidential Elections, 1916-2000

Year	Democratic Candidate (percentage of Jewish vote)	Republican Candidate (percentage of Jewish vote)	Other Candidate (percentage of Jewish vote)
1916	55	45	
1920	19	43	38 (Debs)
1924	51	27	22 (LaFollette)
1928	72	28	
1932	82	18	
1936	85	15	
1940	90	10	
1944	90	10	
1948	75	10	15 (H. Wallace)
1952	64	36	
1956	60	40	
1960	82	18	
1964	90	10	
1968	81	17	2 (G. Wallace)
1972	64	34	
1976	64	34	
1980	45	39	15 (Anderson)
1984	67	31	
1988	64	35	
1992	80	11	9 (Perot)
1996	78	16	3 (Perot)
2000	79	19	1 (Nader)

6. Reasons for Radicalization in the Democratic Party

To understand what is driving the radicalization of attitudes towards Israel in the Democratic Party, it is necessary to look at the worldview and ideology which informs those on the radical/far-left, in particular how Israel and Zionism are conceptualized. In common with far-left narratives throughout much of the Western World, Zionism is increasingly portrayed by liberals within the Democratic Party not as the national liberation movement of the Jewish People, but as an imperialist and colonial enterprise that involves the colonization and dispossession of an indigenous people (the Palestinians) by 'white' foreign settlers (the Israelis).

6.1. Oppressors-oppressed distinction

This worldview draws parallels between Zionism and the return of the Jewish People to Israel and the history of European colonialism and settlement in places such as the Americas, Australia and Africa. Furthermore, it rests on the notion that the world can be neatly categorized into a binary of 'oppressor vs. oppressed'. This view essentially oversimplifies and reduces world history of recent centuries to one in which 'White Europeans' set out to invade, dominate and colonize 'non-white', indigenous 'people of color'. In the context of American history, white settlers were the colonizers and the Native Americans the colonized, whites were the slave-owners and blacks were the slaves, whites were the discriminators and those of color the discriminated against. The natural conclusion of this worldview is that those of white, European heritage are

privileged and play the historic role of oppressor, whilst those of color, such as those of African, Native American or non-White heritage are underprivileged and play the role of oppressed – without regard for individual or localized circumstances or variables.

The impact that this worldview has on informing liberal opinion about the Arab-Israeli conflict is that the actors involved in the conflict – the Israelis and Palestinians – are placed into the mutually exclusive "oppressed vs. oppressor" binary in order to fit the predetermined narrative. This type of language has been exploited by newer, more radical and anti-Israel members of the Democratic party in order to present the conflict as entirely a race issue in which the 'white' Israelis oppress the 'brown' Palestinians. For example, Democrat congresswoman, Rashida Tlaib, claimed

in an interview with Britain's Channel 4 News in 2018 that on a visit to Israel and Disputed Territories her mother was "shifted into a line with all the other brown people".¹³ Whether the experience Tlaib recounts is based on fact or not, the language she uses to describe it is a deliberate attempt to reduce the Arab-Israeli conflict from a long and complicated conflict between two competing peoples and national identities to a human rights issue in which 'white' Israel is oppressing 'brown' Palestinians. Such simplified manipulations of reality of course fail to make any mention of the fact that over half of Israel's Jewish population is 'brown' and has its roots in Middle Eastern countries, or the fact that the security measures which Tlaib alluded to are put in place by Israel not because Palestinians are 'brown' and

¹³ "Channel 4 News. Rashida Tlaib interview on Palestine, Trump's America and becoming the first Muslim congresswoman", Youtube. Aug, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aLngZBmtlg>

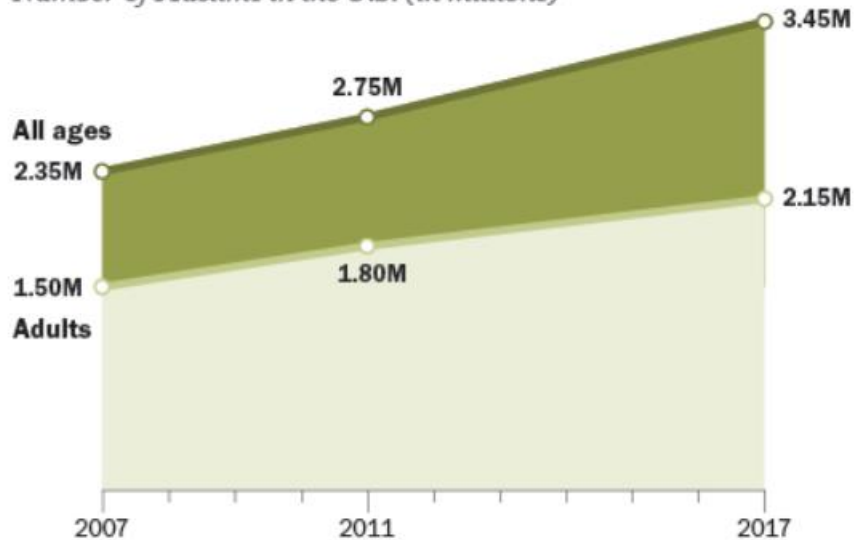
considered racially inferior, but as a result of a long and persistent history of acts of violence and terror perpetrated by Palestinian nationalists against Israelis.

It is perhaps important to mention here that Rashida Tlaib is herself a Muslim of Palestinian origin and this too is symbolic of the changing attitudes towards Israel in the Democratic Party. Over recent decades, America, like much of Western Europe, has seen an increase in inward migration from Muslim countries. In the decade from 2007 to 2017 alone the number of Muslims in the United States grew from around 2.3 million to over 3.4 million. It is estimated that by 2040, the number of Muslims in the United States will overtake the number of Jews.¹⁴

¹⁴ Besheer Mohamed, **New estimates show U.S. Muslim population continues to grow**, Pew Research Center, Jan 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>

Number of Muslims in the U.S. continues to grow

Number of Muslims in the U.S. (in millions)

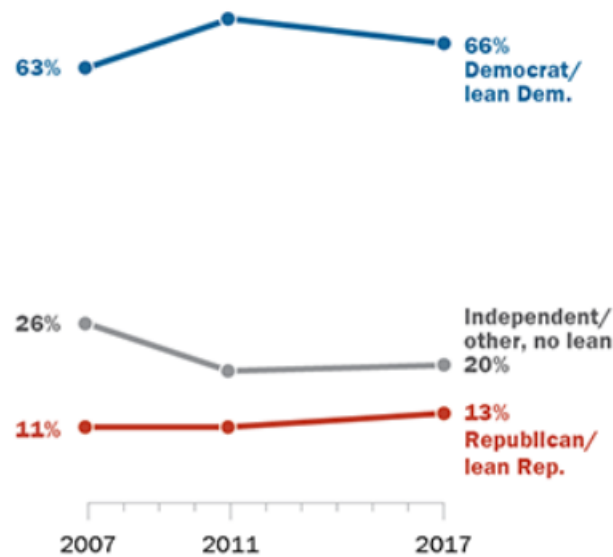


Whilst it would be a great generalization to say that all Muslims support the Palestinian cause, given their shared religious, cultural and often linguistic heritage it is reasonable to assume that most Muslims are more sympathetic to the Palestinians than they are to the Israelis. They are also likely to be more sympathetic to the 'oppressed-oppressor' narrative as a result of the history of European imperialism in the regions from which many of

them originate.¹⁵ It comes as no surprise therefore that American Muslims are also overwhelmingly more likely to be Democrats than Republicans (66% vs. 13%).¹⁶

Stable share of U.S. Muslims identify with or lean Republican

% of U.S. Muslim adults who say they are ...



All of these demographic trends mean that Muslim narratives – influenced by political thought in the countries

¹⁵ Peter Beinart, **What Happens To Israel When There Are More Muslims In America Than Jews?**, Forward, Jan 2018. Retrieved from: <https://forward.com/opinion/national/391500/what-happens-to-israel-when-there-are-more-muslims-in-america-than-jews/>

¹⁶ Besheer Mohamed, **Republicans account for a small but steady share of U.S. Muslims**, Pew Research Center, Nov 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/06/republicans-account-for-a-small-but-steady-share-of-u-s-muslims/>

that they or their parents came from – are gaining more exposure in United States political discourse, particularly on the left, and will continue to do so, especially with the arrival of flag bearers such as Rashida Tlaib or Ilhan Omar to Congress.

The framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a struggle between "the oppressor and the oppressed", coupled with the changing demographics detailed in the last paragraph are contributing to a discourse on the left that sees Israel unreservedly as the oppressor. This has not always been the case, however. As mentioned earlier, upon gaining independence in 1948 Israel enjoyed relatively high levels of support among Democrats in the United States, as well as those on the left elsewhere. Given that Israeli independence came just three years after the end of the Holocaust, for many

on the left the establishment of a Jewish Homeland was seen as achieving justice for an oppressed people in the aftermath of brutal and unrestrained oppression. As Israel won more and more victories over its neighbors, however, and its existence became more secure, opinion on the left began to change, particularly in the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967. Israel began to be viewed not as a safe haven for an oppressed people or as the justly restored state of a long-exiled indigenous nation, but as a strong military power, backed by 'imperialist' Western powers, that was 'oppressing' the true indigenous Arab people that were now under its control. It did not matter that Israel's enemies sought its destruction, that the wars and battles it was engaged in were to ensure its own survival, or that Israel had consistently shown a willingness to compromise over territory in the interest of peace. The very fact that it had fought those

battles and won, had catapulted it straight out of the 'oppressed' camp and into the reviled status of 'oppressor' in the minds of many on the left.

Reducing discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to one of oppressed vs. the oppressor has also become a tool to delegitimize and shut down any justification for Israel's claims and case. For example, the security barrier built between Israel and Palestinian areas of the West Bank is framed solely as a tool by which Israel viciously oppresses and discriminates against Palestinians, rather than being seen through a more nuanced lens as an inconvenient and sometimes painful security measure that has been put in place by Israel to prevent attacks on its civilians by Palestinian terror groups. Anyone who tries to put Israel's case forward and introduce nuance into the debate is shouted

down and delegitimized as a supporter of oppression and examples of this have been played out across United States college campuses in recent years.¹⁷ It is in this climate that those on the left who subscribe to the oppressor vs. oppressed worldview are becoming increasingly radicalized in their view as it allows no room for balance, nuance or a 'grey area'.

6.2. Intersectionality

It is perhaps important to note that the view of Israel as a Western colonial imposition on the Middle East has long been the Arab and Islamist narrative of the conflict, yet over recent decades it has been exported to the far-left in both Europe and increasingly the United States in part as a result of increased immigration from that part of the world. This

¹⁷ Cary Nelson and David Greenberg, **Students are shouting down pro-Israel speakers – and silencing free speech**, The Washington Post, Dec 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/students-are-shouting-down-pro-israel-speakers--and-silencing-free-speech/2016/12/07/9211c3b8-bbd7-11e6-91ee-1adddfe36cbe_story.html

brings us to another ideology driving anti-Israel attitudes: intersectionality. Feeding on the oppressors-oppressed distinction, intersectionality is the theory that any number of social identities or statuses (such as sex, gender identity, race or sexual orientation) can overlap to contribute to greater oppression being experienced by an individual or group.¹⁸ An example of this could be that whilst all African-American people in the United States could claim to belong to the 'oppressed' in light of the history of slavery and segregation, given the perceived patriarchal nature of society, black women have a greater claim to oppressed status since it is claimed they suffer oppression both on

¹⁸ Crenshaw, K. (1989). **Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine**, feminist theory and antiracist politics. u. Chi. Legal f., 139; Crenshaw, K. (1990). **Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color**. Stan. L. Rev., 43, 1241.

account of their race and their sex. In this sense their race and their sex are said to 'intersect'.

Intersectionality effectively seeks to create bonds of solidarity between groups that are perceived to be oppressed.

The impact this has on attitudes towards Israel on the left is that groups who would otherwise have no apparent interest in a far away conflict, are adopting a narrative that puts their own perceived experiences of oppression in direct relation to the perceived oppression of the Palestinians. It is in this vein that there has been a growth in seemingly unrelated radical left groups, many of whose members have political sympathies in the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, taking a radically anti-Israel stance, apparently because of their support for other causes. For such groups, such as feminists, LGBT groups and Black empowerment groups, if

the Palestinians are the oppressed, then the supposed oppression they face at the hands of the Israelis is part of a larger global system of oppression which oppresses women, LGBT people, and people of color. It follows that members of these groups have an obligation to stand with the Palestinians. For example, the anti-Israel "Jewish Voice for Peace" organization states that its "struggle against Israeli occupation, apartheid, and racism" is "bound up with our analysis of its intersection with the struggles of students of color, student survivors of sexual assault, and all others who on campus fight against oppression".¹⁹ Whilst few would disagree that the sexual assault of a student on campus or the discrimination of a person based on the color of their skin are terrible and unjustifiable, to make an equation between

¹⁹ Jewish Voice for Peace, **JVP Student Network Statement on Intersectionality**, Jan 2016. Retrieved from: <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/jvp-student-network-statement-on-intersectionality/>

these things and the Arab-Israeli conflict is simply to strip the conflict of its unique context and historical background. By stripping situations, events and relationships across different geographical areas of their context, intersectionality has little basis in reality.

Despite this, in recent years intersectionality has become a tool used by those on the left to mobilize people around causes that they are not related to and would otherwise feel largely apathetic about. For example, in an article for 'Jewish Currents', darling of the liberal Democrats and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders made the rather dubious claim that "the struggle against anti-Semitism is also the struggle for Palestinian freedom".²⁰ Sanders' appeal to intersectional narratives is clear; fighting anti-Semitism in the United

²⁰ Bernie Sanders, **How to Fight Antisemitism**, JewishCurrents. Nov 2019. Retrieved from: <https://jewishcurrents.org/how-to-fight-antisemitism/>

States is the same as supporting the Palestinian cause, and if you support the former then you must also support the latter. Once again, we see how such claims of intersectionality completely ignore historical context and reality. Sanders makes a moral equivalence against anti-Semitism in the United States and what he terms the 'struggle for Palestinian freedom'. What he fails to recognize is that whereas anti-Semitism in the United States spreads hatred against Jews because they are Jews, the situation of the Palestinians is the consequence of their own leadership's refusal to compromise with Israel throughout the last seventy decades, as well as the constant use of violence and terror attacks against Israelis.

In its attempt to universalize all perceived oppression and discrimination, intersectionality fails to distinguish between

those who suffer oppression and persecution through no fault of their own, and those whose suffering is at least in part a consequence of their own decisions and actions.

7. Conclusions

In this paper we have charted the close relationship between the Democratic Party and American Jewry that endured throughout the twentieth century. This was demonstrated by consistently high levels of Jewish support for Democratic candidates in elections from the 1920s onwards. For their part, combating anti-Semitism and supporting Jewish equality in American society fitted the Democrat pursuit of social justice and equality for all. In a similar vein, the establishment of the State of Israel was championed by the Democrats as righting a historical wrong done to a displaced and oppressed people, particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust and centuries of anti-Semitism persecution.

Whilst Jewish support for the Democrats remains incredibly high and the close relationship with Israel is still cherished by the Democrat mainstream, in the first two decades of the

21st century we have started to see a shift. Amongst younger and more liberal Democrats, attitudes towards Israel, and even towards American Jews, are changing. Attitudes towards Israel on the liberal left are increasingly formed through the prism of American race relations. Accordingly, stemming from the 'oppressor vs. oppressed' narrative, among this section of the Democratic party Israel and Jews are increasingly seen as part of the 'white' oppressor, whilst the Palestinians and Muslims are portrayed as part of the 'black' oppressed. At best this is a woeful simplification of the place of Jews in global history and the centuries of anti-Semitism persecution. In framing the Arab-Israeli conflict as 'oppressed vs. oppressor', Palestinian violence against Israelis is downplayed, and even justified, whereas all Israeli actions of self-defense are vilified as aggression.

Linked to this 'oppressor vs. oppressed' narrative is the idea of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a tool used by the far-left to rally people behind causes that are of little actual concern to them. In this way we have seen anti-Israel sentiment on the left of the Democratic Party being linked to socially liberal and progressive views on entirely unrelated issues (such as the rights and equality of Black Americans, LGBT equality and women's rights). This narrative in particular has been given a voice within the American political establishment since the election of liberal Democrats, such as Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, to Congress in 2018. These women play on the fact that they are female, from ethnic minorities and, in the case of Tlaib and Omar, Muslim, to garner support for their political viewpoints, particularly their anti-Israel stances. It is among such voices that

criticism of Israel frequently crosses from legitimate criticism of a country's government and policies into overt anti-Semitism.

Changing demographic patterns also play a part in the shifting attitudes towards Israel within the more radical parts of the party. The Muslim population of the United States is increasing rapidly, and is set to overtake the number of Jews in the coming decades. Muslims are overwhelmingly likely to vote Democrat and whilst it would be a huge generalization to state that all of them bring anti-Israel or even anti-Semitic views, as their presence within the party grows, so too are voices which sympathize with the Palestinians. This in turn means we are likely to see increased anti-Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric such as that

already coming from those such as Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar.

If Israel and its advocates are to push back against this rising tide of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric on the liberal left, discourse and advocacy must be adapted to challenge the narratives which are driving the changes. Liberal Democrats are holding increasingly negative views of Israel because, in their worldview, Israel is categorized as a 'white', 'colonialist' imposition on a 'black', 'colonized' region. This narrative is false and can be challenged by pointing to the long history of anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews in Europe which, if we are to borrow the oppressed-oppressor theory, places Jews firmly as 'oppressed' and not 'oppressors'. Similarly, that over half of Israel's Jewish population is of Middle Eastern and North African origin can be utilized to challenge

the image held by many in the United States that Israeli Jews are a 'white' people. Characteristics which highlight the Jewish People's indigeneity to the Levant should also be stressed, such as the Hebrew language and the presence of Jewish history and ancient sites throughout the region.

Finally, the narratives of intersectionality which attempt to universalize the Arab-Israeli conflict as a human and civil rights issue akin to the struggles of other minorities in the United States can be challenged by highlighting the long and bloody history of Palestinian violence against Israelis and Jews that stretches back to before the modern state was founded. By challenging claims of intersectionality in this way, it will become clear to at least some on the left that Israel's security measures and military operations which impact negatively on wider Palestinian society are

conducted not because Palestinians are an oppressed people who are persecuted on account of their religion, their skin color or their culture, but simply because Israel has a real and pressing need to protect its people from violence and terror attacks.

In short, whilst increasingly negative views of Israel are held on the left, it would be a mistake for Israel and its supporters in the United States to view the liberal wing of the Democratic Party as a lost cause. Whilst their conception of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict may be false and based on misconceptions, mistruths or outright lies, many in the liberal Democrat wing are driven by a genuine desire to stand up for justice, peace and human rights. Israel advocacy must address these people in this language if it is to start regaining their hearts and minds.