



SELECTED PRESS CLIPPINGS

March – June 2014

1. The New York Times

“Israel Reaches Out to the Diaspora” By Ethan Bronner, March 15, 2014

2. The Jerusalem Post

“Israel’s Democracy Struggle Affects Diaspora Identity” By Sam Sokol, May 22, 2014

“Think Tank to Cabinet: Give ‘enhanced status’ to Non-Orthodox Jewish Streams in Israel” June 22, 2014

3. JTA

“Survey: U.S. Jews Want More religious Pluralism in Israel” May 22, 2014

“Israel Must Reflect all Jewish Values, Think Tank Tells Government” June 26, 2014

4. The Jewish Daily Forward

“American Jews Want More Pluralistic Israel” May 22, 2014

“Diaspora Uneasy with Israeli ‘Jewish Democracy’” By J.J. Goldberg, May 23, 2014

“Diaspora Wants Religious Pluralism in Israel – Official Study also Finds Fear among Europe Jews” June 26, 2014

5. Ynet

“Diaspora Jews Want Democratic, Pluralistic Israel, Study Finds” May 21, 2014

The Jewish People Policy Institute
(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

Givat Ram Campus | P.O.B. 39156 Jerusalem 91391
Tel: 972-2-5633356, Fax: 972-5635040



info@jppi.org.il
www.jppi.org.il

המכון למדיניות העם היהודי
(מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ

קמפוס גבעת רם | ת.ד. 39156 ירושלים 91391
טלפון: 02-5633356. פקס: 02-5635040



- 6. Berman Jewish Policy Archive (BJPA)**
“Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry” May 21, 2014
- 7. The New York Jewish Week**
“Doubts Cloud Israel’s Diaspora Push” By Gary Rosenblatt, May 21, 2014
- 8. Jewish Journal**
“World Jews Want a ‘Jewish and Democratic Israel’ That Isn’t Too Different from the One Israelis Want” By Shmuel Rosner, May 22, 2014
- 9. The Jewish Press.com**
“Reform, Assimilated Jews Want Voice in Israeli Affairs” May 22, 2014
- 10. Kosher Press.com**
“Diaspora Jews Favor More ‘Inclusive Jewishness’ in Israel, Says Think Tank”
March 19, 2014

”Israel Must Reflect All Jewish Values, Think Tank Tells Government” June 26, 2014
- 11. San Diego Jewish World**
“Diaspora, Israeli Jews Weigh Israeli Democracy” March 16, 2014
- 12. One Community Chronicle (New Zealand)**
“JPPI Released a Report Last Week” May 22, 2014
- 13. Haaretz**
“Diaspora Jews and Israel: Between Distance and Despair” By Samuel Heilman, May 22, 2014

“American Jews and the Israeli Right: The End of a Beautiful Friendship?” By Chemi Shalev, May 23, 2014

“American Jews are Running Out of Patience with Israel” By Ori Nir, May 28, 2014
- 14. I24 News**
“Diaspora Jews Want Israel ‘to End the Occupation’” May 21, 2014

MARCH 15, 2014

Sunday Review | NEWS ANALYSIS

Israel Reaches Out to the Diaspora

By **ETHAN BRONNER**



In recent years, Beit Shemesh, a city of 80,000 near Jerusalem, has become the scene of conflicts between secular and ultra-Orthodox Israelis. Its population is about evenly split between the two groups. Credit Rina Castelnovo for The New York Times

OVER the past two weeks, Jewish leaders outside [Israel](#) quietly gathered in seminar groups to grapple with a thorny question: how to ensure that Israel is both a Jewish and a democratic state.

While the debate is not new, the discussions — 40 of them, including some in New York, London, Atlanta, Paris and Sydney, Australia — were significant and unprecedented. First, they come at a crucial time in Middle East peace

talks with Israel demanding, quite unsuccessfully, [Palestinian](#) recognition of its Jewish identity. Second, they followed the introduction of a right-wing bill in the Israeli Parliament (set aside for now) aimed at making sure that in conflicts between Jewish and democratic identities, Jewish would win. And third, they were the result of a request for help from Israel, signaling a little-noticed shift in the relationship between the Jewish state and the Jewish world. In the past, signed checks were welcome, advice not so much.

The change is a result of several things. Over the last few years Israel has become the world's largest Jewish community (of the roughly 13 million Jews in the world, just over six million are in Israel and just under six million in the United States) and, along with its recent wealth and might, that has put it in a very different position. It is, for the first time, the senior partner in the Jewish world. It feels more comfortable asking for help and more aware of the need to support Jews abroad rather than demand immigration to Israel. With American Jews intermarrying more, reaching out to them is also a way of strengthening them as an asset.

That is why the Israeli government contributes to programs like Birthright, which brings young Jews for a free visit that has been shown to increase levels of attachment to Israel and Judaism. Over the next five years the Israeli government will spend \$1.4 billion on a range of initiatives to strengthen Jewish identity abroad and Jewish connections to Israel and vice versa. The Mossad spy agency also invests in surveillance and protection of Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union and parts of Latin America.

The request to world Jewry for help in defining the nature of the Israeli state came from Ruth Gavison, an Israeli law professor who has been asked by Tzipi Livni, the justice minister and top peace negotiator, to formulate a constitutional basis for the country's description of itself as Jewish and democratic. By asking for the input of Jews abroad, most of whom are Americans, Professor Gavison is subtly stacking the deck in favor of democracy and the rights of minorities. As Dov Maimon, an Israeli scholar and public policy expert, put it, "We in Israel are more tribal and becoming more so every year. In America, Jews are more secular and democratic."

The seminars involved several dozen political and rabbinical leaders in each Jewish community. They were led by Shmuel Rosner, an Israeli journalist and book publisher employed by the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank that seeks to bridge Israel with world Jewry. (He is also a contributing opinion writer to the International New York Times.) He said the debates were often difficult.

"They were searching for that elusive thing that combines peoplehood, nation, religion, culture and shared history," he said. "Diaspora Jews don't like religion as it is practiced in Israel because it is dominated by the ultra-Orthodox. But the national element is also problematic because they are other nationalities and don't want to cast doubt on that."

Stuart Eizenstat, a former senior American diplomat who is co-chairman of the institute, said that he was struck by how uncomfortable some participants

were in the discussion he took part in near Washington. “Most American Jews go to Israel and want to identify with the Jewish homeland but they haven’t been forced to come to terms with these issues,” he said.

With 20 percent of Israel’s population non-Jewish and hardly any agreement among the other 80 percent on the meaning of “Jewish” (Is it a religion, a culture, an ethnicity?), there are challenges in all directions. Democracy, after all, is about principles of neutrality and equality; Jewishness is about particularity and group affiliation. Since for most Israelis the very point of Zionism is Jewish political sovereignty, one obvious concern is how to ensure equality for non-Jews. Should the law of return, granting instant Israeli citizenship to Jews, remain on the books? Should the national anthem, which speaks of a “Jewish soul yearning,” be more inclusive? And, again, what is Jewish? For ultra-Orthodox Jews, who believe in daylong Torah study — nearly 10 percent of the population and growing rapidly — the answer is different from that of a secular laborer.

THE issue was a lightning rod for debate leading up to Parliament’s passing landmark legislation on Wednesday [phasing out exemptions from military service](#) for many ultra-Orthodox students. For most Israelis, this legal change is a way of spreading the national burden more evenly and bringing the ultra-Orthodox into the mainstream. But Moshe Gafni, an ultra-Orthodox politician, expressed much of his community’s contempt when he said of the law, “Today Israel lost the right to be called a Jewish state.”

The American Jews who gathered to discuss Israel overwhelmingly felt that the Palestinians should be required to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. The Palestinian view is that the 20 percent of Israel that is Palestinian would officially face second-class status, and any hope for a recognition of the Palestinian right of return to pre-1948 homes in what is today Israel would be lost. That is a key question facing Secretary of State John Kerry as he prepares a peace framework.

Professor Gavison, who has also consulted with Israeli and foreign constitutional experts and will prepare her report for Minister Livni in the coming months, has indicated that she is not convinced this issue can be solved through legal definition. But she will certainly include the views of Jews abroad. As Avinoam Bar-Yosef, an Israeli who is president of the Jewish People Policy Institute, put it, “American Jews want a more open and pluralistic Israel, with attention to minority rights for Arabs and acceptance of different forms of Judaism. Like us, they are trying to define the rights of non-Jews and how to deal with the Jewish symbols of the state. Their input will make an important difference.”

Ethan Bronner is the deputy national editor and a former Jerusalem bureau chief for The New York Times.

The Jerusalem post, May 22, 2014

'Israel's democracy struggle affects Diaspora identity,' study finds

By [SAM SOKOL](#)

05/22/2014 02:25

Jews in the Diaspora tend to be critical of Israel's religious status quo, but support the national use of Jewish symbols, according to JPPI paper.

The tension between Judaism and democracy in Israel affects young Diaspora Jews' devotion to their own identity, according to a study released Wednesday in Jerusalem by the Jewish People Policy Institute.

The survey of Diaspora attitudes toward issues of religion and state was conducted by the JPPI on behalf of Hebrew University law professor Dr. Ruth Gavison, who is herself examining constitutional arrangements dealing with the State of Israel's Jewish and democratic character at the behest of Justice Minister Tzipi Livni.

Israel's Declaration of Independence defines Israel as a Jewish and democratic state but the phrase is ambiguous and has been the subject of contentious debate among Israelis for decades.

According to the paper, an abstract of which was publicized by JPPI earlier this year, Jews in the Diaspora tend to be critical of Israel's religious status quo, but support the national use of Jewish symbols.

JPPI researchers conducted a series of seminars with Jewish leaders in multiple countries in order to canvas the views of the Diaspora.

Report author and JPPI senior fellow Shmuel Rosner has previously admitted that, as such, the final research can be characterized by selection bias, with more highly engaged Jews taking part and a distinct lack of youth participation.

Most participants in the survey expressed support for Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, although the inherent ambiguity of this formulation allowed for a broad range of views as to its exact meaning in practice.

Despite some who expressed a marked preference for one of the two sides of Israel's character at the expense of the other, the JPPI found that "the dominant view was [a] desire to see an Israel that is both Jewish and democratic, and the assumption that such a combination is certainly possible, despite the tensions involved."

"Assertions that Israel should be 'only Jewish' or 'only democratic' are outside the consensus view of Diaspora Jews," JPPI found.

Speaking to the press about the report, JPPI President Avinoam Bar-Yosef said that “North American Jews are basically, and for clear reasons, more liberal than Israelis. But even as they urge a completely democratic and liberal approach to Israel’s Arab minority – and believe that their civil rights and opportunities should be enhanced – they feel, at the same time, a deep commitment to Israel as a Jewish state and endorse its continued use of Jewish iconography, such as the flag and national anthem – ‘Hatikva.’” The Diaspora encourages Israel to adopt a pluralistic approach with respect to all the Jewish religious streams. They wish to feel as ‘at home’ in Israel as they do in their own communities.

This is an important element in their support,” he said.

Diaspora Jews tend to conflate Jewish values with democratic ones, causing them to see any actions that would “erode” liberal democratic norms as seen through a western lens as “detrimental to Judaism and to the definition of Israel as a Jewish state,” he said.

“If Israel is not a liberal democracy, its attractiveness to many Diaspora Jews will erode,” the report asserted, citing a majority of leaders polled as stating that Israel must become more pluralistic and accepting of non-Orthodox denominations.

Jewish leaders indicated they believe that Israel’s approach to Judaism is “likely to affect the degree of the young generation’s devotion to its Jewish identity, and at the same time is likely to affect attitudes of non- Jews toward the Diaspora Jews who live among them,” the report said.

“Jews in communities all around the world seem to agree that Israel’s Orthodox monopoly is not compatible with it being Jewish and democratic,” the report expanded, explaining that to many world Jews the “rejection of certain Jewish ways of practice makes Israel less Jewish... [as well as] less democratic.”

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, a senior leader of the Conservative movement, [recently declared](#) that Jewish unity was being directly threatened by Israeli policies regarding non-Orthodox denominations.

Rosner, despite the issues raised by his report, indicated that there is a considerable engagement with Israel by Jews abroad and described his findings as “positive and optimistic, contrary to dismal reports we hear about distancing of Diaspora Jews from Israel.”

The JPPI report found that aside from objecting to the Orthodox monopoly over religious life and the imposition of religious norms on civil society, Jewish leaders abroad support bolstering Jewish identity by strengthening Israelis’ knowledge of Jewish traditions, history and values.

The research points to a Diaspora that has grown more aggressive in expressing its discontent with Israeli policies, which are seen as having an impact on the security and well-being of Jewish communities around the world.

While Israel should not “allow any external influence [to] determine [or] dictate its decisions,” Gavison told The Jerusalem Post that it is important to “ask people about their opinions. You want to have more information so the decisions you make are more informed.”

Jews who are highly engaged with Israel “are part of the conversation” and it is important to take their views into consideration before recommending how, if at all, to “entrench” a specific interpretation of Jewish and democratic as a Basic Law, she said.

“One of the issues about the entrenchment in law is that an entrenchment tends to fossilize and this is something that should be taken very seriously,” Gavison cautioned.

“Whatever you do in terms of law should not stop conversation but allow conversations, both among Jews and between Jews and Arabs. This is the key concern.”

Gavison, who was careful to note that she was committed to examining the issue of how to balance Israel’s two identities critically, not allowing her own personal views to affect her analysis, asserted that Judaism and democracy can in fact strengthen each other.

“The terms are sufficiently ambiguous and rich to suggest that the relationship between Jewishness and democracy in the identity of Israel is not only not contradictory but in fact self reinforcing,” she said.

According to Gavison there is a “major agreement between Jews in Israel and abroad that Jewish and democratic captures the identity of Israel in the most adequate way.”

Her job, she explained, is to examine “whether this should be entrenched in a Basic Law and in what form.”

“I want to emphasize that the two questions are very different.

You can affirm the identity of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and say a lot of things about the importance of maintaining and affirming this identity without taking a particular stand about the question of constitutional entrenchment. Constitutional entrenchment has features that are institutionalized and are more complex than the substantive question of the identity of Israel,” she said.

Responding to the JPPI report, Jewish Agency chairman Natan Sharansky said that in the coming days the government will approve new arrangements for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall as well as allocating a budget for Israel’s World Jewry Joint Initiative.

The WJJI will more than double Israeli spending on projects intended to strengthen the identity of Jews abroad

Think tank to cabinet: Give 'enhanced status' to non-orthodox Jewish streams in Israel

JPPI responds to feeling of disenfranchisement felt by some due to orthodox Rabbinate's monopoly over life status issues such as marriage.



Women of the Wall prayerers at the Western Wall Photo: Hadas Parush

The Jewish People Policy Institute presented its annual report to the cabinet on Sunday, issuing a series of recommendations for government action, including granting an expanded role to non-orthodox denominations and streamlining the immigration process for European Jews.

The think tank, based out of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, recently issued another high profile report in which it asserted that the internal Israeli conflict over the balance between its Jewish and democratic natures affects young Diaspora Jews' devotion to their own identity.

Sunday's report -which was presented by JPPI president Avinoam Bar-Yosef alongside co-chairs and former US ambassadors Dennis Ross and Stuart Eizenstat- also called for a more vigorous Israeli policy in combating delegitimization.

Jerusalem should "adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy for the war against the international phenomenon of de-legitimization of Israel," the JPPI recommended, specifying that there should be a focus on "certain Western European countries that constitute a dangerous international incubator for the phenomenon and whose governments even provide, directly or indirectly, millions of dollars in funding de-legitimization organizations."

Ties with countries without a prior history of anti-Semitism, especially in Asia and the subcontinent, should be pursued with vigor, the report added.

JPPI also recommended that Jerusalem seek to deepen and institutionalize its ties with diaspora communities by establishing what it called a "permanent Jewish people dialogue mechanism for coordination on Israeli decisions that affect the Diaspora and on decisions taken in the Jewish world that affect Israel."

Such a mechanism would allow for the preservation of Jewish unity in an age of free choice in which Jews have multiple options for self-definition and communal affiliation and would ensure the participation of the next generation of Jews. Such a strategy, JPPI believes, is important because of declining communal affiliation among younger Jews.

Even those who are communal engaged, the report stated, citing recent research by the Pew Research Center, “feel disenfranchised religiously in the Jewish State they so strongly support,” especially due to the orthodox Rabbinate’s monopoly over life status issues such as marriage, divorce and conversion.

Despite an increase in the overall population of American Jews, the largest diaspora community, the report stated, “the birthrates of the Jewish population are at best at simple replacement levels, compared to the more rapidly growing general population.”

Both on its own merits and as a means of strengthening ties with the Diaspora, the JPPI recommended that the government “enhance the status, the role, and the level of official participation of the non-Orthodox Jewish streams (including secular streams) in the religious life of the state, in order to strengthen and underscore their pluralistic character, including the egalitarian.”

The cabinet recently approved the World Jewry Joint Initiative, a long-term multi-billion Shekel plan for funding Jewish identity programs in the diaspora.

Despite recent announcements touting an increase in funding for aliyah efforts in Europe, including a tens of millions of Shekels allocated during Sunday’s cabinet meeting to a new joint World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency initiative, the JPPI report called Israel’s efforts to encourage immigration from the continent “far from adequate.”

Barriers to French Jews finding employment in Israel must be removed, the report stated, and “the number of emissaries in France needed to handle the growing interest in Aliyah has not kept pace with the need.”

As such, it recommended that Israel establish an administration under the aegis of the Prime Minister’s Office responsible for the advancement of western European aliyah in order to “focus the efforts of the various national and government bodies charged with Aliyah promotion, the Aliyah process, and immigrant absorption.”

All matters pertaining to western European immigration should be concentrated under “a single integrated umbrella, with a single information system and a computerized information- management system, and by redefining the Aliyah and absorption continuum,” the JPPI contended.

At the end of the day, the JPPI asserted, “Israeli demographics appear favorable because of higher birthrates and increased potential of Aliyah from Europe,” while “Jewish identity, especially in the United States, is tending somewhat negatively because of a weakening sense of ‘belonging and commitment’ to the Jewish people among the younger demographic.”

“A decision was made to continue dialogue between Diaspora communities and Israel, and Prime Minister Netanyahu endorsed JPPI’s initiative to explore, in the next year, the parameters, representatives, and subjects for discussion,” Bar Yosef stated after the cabinet meeting.



Survey: U.S. Jews want more religious pluralism in Israel

May 22, 2014 5:37am

(JTA) — U.S. Jews want Israel to remain a Jewish and democratic state, but also accommodate non-Orthodox Judaism, according to a survey.

The conclusions from a survey conducted by the Jewish Agency's Jewish People Policy Institute were released Thursday. In reaching the conclusions, the institute held discussions and seminars with Jewish groups across the United States, and sent out questionnaires and analyzed external research.

The survey also found that U.S. Jews disagree with Israel's handling of religion and state matters, including recognizing only Orthodox marriage and granting authority to the largely haredi Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. U.S. Jews also said Israel should ensure that all its citizens have equal rights while still maintaining its Jewish character.

In terms of Israel's relationship with its neighbors, the survey found that U.S. Jews recognize that Israel exists in a hostile region but believe that regional security threats should not justify its disregarding human rights or democratic values. They also said Israel should strive to end its control of the Palestinians.

The survey's results are "positive and optimistic, contrary to dismal reports we hear about the distancing of Diaspora Jews from Israel," said Shmuel Rosner, an Israeli journalist who co-headed the project. "The report also indicates that there is a strong need throughout the Jewish world for a deep connection with Israel."

JTA, June 26, 2014



Israel must reflect all Jewish values, think tank tells government

June 26, 2014 6:36am

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Diaspora Jews believe that Israel must reflect all Jewish values, The Jewish People Policy Institute told Israel's Cabinet in a report.

The 10th annual Assessment of the Situation & Dynamics of the Jewish People was presented to the Cabinet on Sunday by JPPI president Avinoam Bar-Yosef alongside co-chairs and former U.S. ambassadors Dennis Ross and Stuart Eizenstat, the independent policy think tank's co-chairs and former U.S. ambassadors.

The non-Orthodox majority in the Diaspora feels religiously disenfranchised by Israeli policy; is critical of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate's monopoly on personal-status issues such as conversion, marriage and divorce; and expects that Israel better respect and reflect religious pluralism, Eizenstat told the Cabinet.

The institute conducted some 40 seminars in the Diaspora on the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel in creating this year's assessment. In addition to the seminars in dozens of communities in the United States and Canada, as well as Europe and Latin America, there were questionnaires and analysis of other research.

"Diaspora Jews do not see a contradiction between Israel as a Jewish state and Israel as a democratic state. They see the two as complementary," the report [said](#).

"As Israel ponders changes to its Basic Laws, it should consider carefully the views of the Diaspora to assure it does not compromise standards of equality and tolerance, which our study found crucial for Diaspora Jews. World Jewry fully appreciates the difficulties Israel faces in a hostile region with major security threats, but a majority of Diaspora Jews does not see this as a justification for Israel lowering its own principles of democracy and adherence to human rights."



American Jews Want More Pluralistic Israel: Poll
Back End of Occupation and Peace With Palestinians



GETTY IMAGES

Israel We Want: Americans Jews want to see Israel become more accepting of non-Orthodox denominations.

By [JTA](#)

Published May 22, 2014.

A survey found that United States Jews want Israel to remain a Jewish and democratic state, but that Israel's Jewish character should also accommodate non-Orthodox Judaism.

The survey, put out by the Jewish Agency's Jewish People Policy Institute and released Thursday, was conducted by holding discussions and seminars with Jewish groups across the U.S., as well as by sending out questionnaires and analyzing external research.

The survey found that U.S. Jews also disagree with the state's handling of religion and state matters, including Israel's recognizing only Orthodox marriage and granting authority to the largely haredi Orthodox rabbinate. U.S. Jews also feel, according to the survey, that the state should ensure that all citizens have equal rights while still maintaining its Jewish character.

In terms of Israel's relationship with its neighbors, the survey found that U.S. Jews recognize that Israel is located in a hostile region, but feels that regional security threats should not justify Israel's disregarding human rights or democratic values.

U.S. Jews feel that Israel should strive to end its control of the Palestinians.

The survey's results are "positive and optimistic, contrary to dismal reports we hear about distancing of Diaspora Jews from Israel," said Shmuel Rosner, an Israeli journalist who co-headed the project. "The report also indicates that there is a strong need throughout the Jewish world for a deep connection with Israel.



Diaspora Uneasy With Israeli 'Jewish Democracy'

By [J.J. Goldberg](#)

The Jerusalem think tank set up by the Jewish Agency in 2002, the Jewish People Policy Institute, appears to have dropped a bombshell into the middle of Israel's political hothouse with a [new report](#) (PDF) it released May 21 on Diaspora attitudes toward Israeli democracy.

The report, titled "Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry," is based on a six-month series of discussions and seminars involving several hundred community leaders, rabbis, academics and writers around the world. The discussions — about 40 of them, most lasting a day or two — are distilled into an 80-page summary with another 78 pages of appendices.

The process was set in motion when Prime Minister Netanyahu asked Justice Minister Tzipi Livni last year to draft a bill defining Israel's identity as a Jewish homeland that would pass constitutional muster. Livni asked legal scholar Ruth Gavison to come up with a reading of what the idea of a homeland of the Jewish people worldwide actually means to Jewish people worldwide. Gavison, in turn, asked JPPI.

And here we are.

Like most JPPI publications, it's a carefully constructed work, filled with on-one-hand-on-the-other-hand formulations to illustrate the broad range of agreement and disagreement. Still, the report says the agreements were greater than the disagreements, and what the community leaders had to say won't make Israel's leaders very happy.

JPPI offers a one-page summary [here](#). Haaretz reporter Judy Maltz offers a more detailed summary [here](#). And the report's co-author, JPPI fellow Shmuel Rosner, does his usual excellent job of capturing the essence in his Jewish Journal column [here](#).

But the bottom line is this: the consensus among the people they spoke to — admittedly a highly selective sampling of elites — is that most Diaspora community leaders believe Israel should be both Jewish and democratic, that one should not be given precedence over the other. To the extent that the two poles are in tension, the consensus is that it's a healthy tension that benefits the society. Only the extreme right and extreme left, the report's authors say, favor privileging one value over the other. Unfortunately, there's also consensus that both values are seen as embattled, on the defensive in Israel, and it's making it harder for Diaspora Jews to relate to Israel.

The leaders JPPI spoke to are troubled. Not only do they believe that they have a right in principle to speak out and voice their opinions on what goes on in Israel; they say they have a direct interest in the outcomes of Israel's debates, because the outcomes in Israel affect the lives of Jews in the Diaspora.

Israel's Jewish identity is defined in ways that exclude the Jewish identities of most Diaspora Jews because of the Orthodox monopoly on religious issues and the growing ethnocentrism in the political and social realms. Israel is an important focal point, both symbolic and real, for Jewish life around the world. If the Judaism it projects is one that excludes or alienates most Diaspora Jews, that hurts the future of Jewish life outside Israel.

As for the strength of Israel's democracy, that carries a double edge. First, the perceived weakening of Israel's commitment to democracy — internally and in the fact that it governs several million Palestinians under military rule — troubles Jews who view democracy and human rights as fundamental values. It drives them away from Israel at a time when both Israel and the Jewish communities want ties to be stronger. Secondly — and this is perhaps the report's most controversial finding — the image of Israel in the broader society increasingly rebounds onto the image, and hence the security, of local Jews. To the extent that Israel is perceived negatively, Jews are perceived negatively. France is only the most extreme example.

It's true, as Queens College-CUNY sociologist Samuel Heilman writes in a stinging [Haaretz op-ed](#), that the Jews consulted in the report are hardly representative of the broad mass of Jews in America, Brazil, Australia and the other countries probed. These are leaders of the established Jewish institutions, would-be opinion-makers and professional thumb-suckers.

But that's just the point. JPPI went and convened what essentially turns out to be that dreaded creature, the Jewish establishment. These are the Jews who are mostly intimately and passionately connected to Israel. If this is what they think, imagine what the folks in the pews think, to say nothing of the broader mass who generally don't even bother to show up. Israel-Diaspora relations could be starting to look like the Western Antarctica ice sheet, not so much breaking in two (if only) but crumbling into lots of little pieces, each of which will drift off and melt. Chemi Shalev does a pretty good job [here](#) of describing the dangerous, combustible state that the Israel-Diaspora relationship is entering.

It's a sobering state of affairs. It's certainly not what Bibi wants to hear, particularly now when he's embattled on every front. And the sad thing is, as so often happens when he finds himself painted into a corner, he did it to himself.

I'll have more to say about it in the next few days.



Diaspora Wants Religious Pluralism in Israel: Report

Official Study Also Finds Fear Among Europe Jews

By [JTA](#)

Published June 26, 2014.

Diaspora Jews feel that Israel must reflect all Jewish values, The Jewish People Policy Institute told Israel's Cabinet in its 10th annual Assessment of the Situation & Dynamics of the Jewish People.

The report was presented to the Cabinet Sunday by JPPI president Avinoam Bar-Yosef alongside co-chairs and former U.S. ambassadors Dennis Ross and Stuart Eizenstat. JPPI is an independent policy planning think tank.

The non-Orthodox majority in the Diaspora feels religiously disenfranchised by Israeli policy, is critical of the Orthodox Rabbinat's monopoly on personal status issues such as conversion, marriage and divorce, and expects that Israel better respect and reflect religious pluralism, Eizenstat told the Cabinet.

The institute conducted some 40 seminars in the Diaspora on the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel in creating this year's assessment. In addition to the seminars in dozens of communities in the United States and Canada, as well as Europe and Latin America, there were questionnaires and analysis of other research.

"Diaspora Jews do not see a contradiction between Israel as a Jewish state and Israel as a democratic state. They see the two as complementary. As Israel ponders changes to its Basic Laws, it should consider carefully the views of the Diaspora to assure it does not compromise standards of equality and tolerance, which our study found crucial for Diaspora Jews. World Jewry fully appreciates the difficulties Israel faces in a hostile region with major security threats, but a majority of Diaspora Jews does not see this as a justification for Israel lowering its own principles of democracy and adherence to human rights," the report said.

Another finding of the institute is that European Jews feel under siege. The institute called on the cabinet to ease the process of aliyah from Diaspora communities, especially from France, including making it easier to transfer professions to Israel.

The institute also criticized the government for not providing a budget to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs to work to counter delegitimization of Israel in the international community.

"As important as it is to be sure to draw all of the resources of the Israeli government together to tackle the challenge of de-legitimization, Israel's policies must also take into

account the effect they have on the international community and how some seek to exploit them," Ross said.

JPPI President Avinoam Bar-Yosef said after the Cabinet meeting that, "A decision was made to continue dialogue between Diaspora communities and Israel, and Prime Minister Netanyahu endorsed JPPI's initiative to explore, in the next year, the parameters, representatives, and subjects for discussion."

Ynet, May 21, 2014



Diaspora Jews want democratic, pluralistic Israel, study finds

Extensive research project by Jewish People Policy Institute shows Diaspora Jews want Israel to respect religious diversity and minorities, view democracy as integral value within Judaism.

Sara Miller

Published: 05.21.14, 19:25 / [Israel Jewish Scene](#)

Israel must strengthen its democratic values, work toward ending its rule over the Palestinians and loosen the Orthodox grip on religious Jewish life in the country, a study of the expectations of Diaspora Jewry has found.

The study by the Jewish People Policy Institute, a prestigious Israeli think-tank focusing on the development of the Jewish people, questioned Jews around the world on their view of Israel.

The key findings of the study, presented Wednesday by the project's joint leader Shmuel Rosner, said that Diaspora Jewry also wished for Israel to "avoid imposing religious norms on its mostly secular civil society", while at the same time increasing the knowledge of its citizenry about "Jewish history, traditions, and values".

Rosner told Ynetnews that he believes Israeli leaders should take heed of the findings. "If Israel is the 'nation state' of the Jewish people - it should take into account the views of, well, Jewish people," he said.

The study showed that Diaspora Jews believe they have the right to voice their opinions on "issues being decided in Israel", given that policy decisions made in Israel "have an impact on Diaspora Jews' security and wellbeing."

The project also found that Diaspora Jews are increasingly willing to criticize Israel, in particular on matters of Jewish identity. They also advocated closer consultations on certain issues between Israel and the Diaspora, which, they said, would strengthen the bond between the two entities.

With regards to Israel's political systems, the report states that the majority of Diaspora Jewry does not see a dichotomy in Israel being both Jewish and democratic, and in fact, views this as the ideal state, even with the potential for "tensions" that this entails.

The report goes on to state that many Diaspora Jews even see democracy as an intrinsically Jewish value, and any erosion of Israel's democracy would not only have a negative impact on Judaism, but also on the affinity Diaspora Jews feel for Israel.

The study found that because they are a minority in their countries, Diaspora Jews place great importance on the rights of minorities in Israel, as well as on human rights in general. Furthermore, the report said, Diaspora Jews do not view the Jewish state's perilous security situation "as justification for lowering the high values bar Israel is expected to maintain." In the same vein, the report states that in the eyes of the Jews in the rest of the world, "regional reality also does not grant Israel immunity from criticism."

In his background paper, Rosner noted that "on issues relating to the Jewish nature of the state, Israel has to deal with events that demand a temporary judgment – should Women of the Wall be allowed to pray at the (Western Wall) plaza. It must also deal with the long-term and more central repercussions of Jewish marriage. Currently, Israel only offers a religious path to marriage.

For Israeli Jews, it is an exclusively Orthodox path controlled by the official rabbinate. Continuing this regime because it makes the state more 'Jewish,' or ending it to make Israel more 'democratic' both have significant implications for the Jewish and democratic future of the state."

The study was based on seminars, questionnaires and conferences involving Jewish communities around the world, which were then presented and discussed during a two-day conference in New York in March.



Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry

By Shmuel Rosner, Inbal Hackman

Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), May 21, 2014

This report is based on direct study of the views of Jewish groups with a significant connection to Israel. This was accomplished by initiating some 40 discussion groups and seminars with the participation of engaged Jewish community members around the world, through questionnaire responses, and analysis of research on the full spectrum opinions on the subject, including those of Jews who are distanced from Israel and/or organized Jewish life in the Diaspora.

The project, exploring the views of Diaspora Jews on the issue of Israel's identity as a "Jewish and democratic state," found that these views have characteristics similar to those of the Israeli public. The idea that Israel should be a "Jewish and democratic state" creates a conceptual framework that encompasses the views of the majority of Diaspora Jews (even though they give a wide variety of answers to the question of what precisely a "Jewish and democratic state" is). Assertions that Israel should be "only Jewish" or "only democratic" are outside the consensus view of Diaspora Jews.

Criticism heard in the Diaspora on aspects of Israel's conduct in Jewish matters is often based on arguments rooted in democratic values, just as criticism of aspects of Israel's conduct in the democratic field are often based on arguments rooted in Jewish values. This shows the high correlation between the two concepts as perceived by the majority of Diaspora Jews.



Doubts Cloud Israel's Diaspora Push Practical, ideological questions hover over big-money project to fortify Jewish identity.

Wed, 05/21/2014
Gary Rosenblatt

The Israeli government is about to finalize a major initiative intended to inspire, engage and empower Jews around the world. At a cost of up to several hundred million dollars annually over the next six or seven years, it seeks to promote Jewish identity throughout the diaspora, particularly among young people.

The move marks a new level of the paradigm shift in the Israel-diaspora relationship, a dramatic transition from one that saw the diaspora giving (money) to now receiving (Jewish connections), and to Israel taking on the role of benefactor rather than schnorrer.

So why are American Jewish communal and professional leaders greeting the news with more skepticism than enthusiasm?

Most likely because the project, formally known as The Joint Initiative of the Government of Israel and World Jewry, is still more of a concept than a reality. And there are still major issues to be resolved, like, for starters, where will the money come from, who will decide how it's spent and what exactly will it be funding?

"Most successful projects begin with a Big Idea," one veteran Jewish communal professional told me the other day, "and then you go out and convince organizations and philanthropists to fund it. This is the opposite." He said that the PMI plan calls for raising large sums of money – one-third from the Israeli government, one-third from Jewish federations and philanthropists and one-third from fees for service – and then convening an array of diaspora and Israeli leaders to decide what to do with it.

In truth the initiative has been public since last summer when an impressive group of Israeli and diaspora leaders, experts and funders met to discuss how to translate an idea – strengthening the connection between Israeli and diaspora Jews – into reality. The consensus was to focus on “transformative and immersive” programs like Jewish teen summers in Israel; educators to personally engage Jewish students on campus; and opportunities for post-college young adults to connect with each other and the community.

Led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett and Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky, the initiative formed seven “content teams” that produced a document to define a strategy. It sets the stage for serious collaboration between Israeli and diaspora partners. A series of consultations in recent months deepened the dialogue and engaged more than 2,000 Jews from around the world who shared ideas through online discussion.

This attempt seems both grander and more serious than previous ones along these lines because it is being driven by an Israeli government prepared to open its coffers, not some outside think-tank. Some say Jerusalem’s motive is based on a sense of responsibility to preserve and sustain Jewish peoplehood around the world. Others, more cynical, say it is an act of self-interest, pointing out that a shrinking diaspora with fewer committed Jews weakens Israel’s clout in Washington and elsewhere.

I suspect the purpose for the initiative is a combination of both.

‘The Next Big Jewish World Start-Up’

Bennett, who serves not only as minister of diaspora affairs but also as minister of the economy, is direct in describing the problem as he sees it.

“We’re at an inflection point,” he told me in an exclusive phone interview a few days ago. “What has worked for years [in engaging diaspora Jews] is not working anymore, especially among younger people. We see a drifting away, with some losing their desire to have a strong Jewish identity. So we see this strategic initiative as the next big Jewish World Start-Up.”

He said that he and other Israeli leaders approach this project “very humbly – we don’t have the answers as to what needs to be done. It has to be a partnership, not with Israel dictating. We have to put our money where our mouth is.”

This is a marked change in Israeli thinking, he acknowledged, given that “many Israelis see the diaspora, and especially American Jews, as either a source of aliyah or a wallet [for financial support].” Noting that a goal of the Joint

Initiative is “to strengthen connections between diaspora and Israeli Jews,” he said that a key element is “getting a gradual buy-in from Israelis.”

At a time when Israel has incurred the biggest budget cut in its history, Bennett said, it is a sign of true commitment that the state is prepared to “invest for the future of the Jewish people around the world ... which means that taxpayers in Tel Aviv and Haifa” will be contributing to this effort.

Not surprisingly, there are those in Israel who argue that it is misguided, if not unethical, for Israel to put aside serious funding for the diaspora when it has chronic social welfare needs and a declining educational system at home. And some American Jewish leaders question the Joint Initiative on ideological and/or practical grounds. Yehuda Kurtzer, president of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, opposes the idea of Jerusalem dictating diaspora identity. He wrote on The Times Of Israel website that “the multimillion-dollar plan uses the guise of an altruistic and philanthropic effort to essentially obliterate the self-defined and idiosyncratic identity of American Jewry, and to replace it with a version better aligned to [Israel’s] own self-interest.”

Kurtzer and others also question whether the Jerusalem government and Jewish Agency, neither of which is known for its organizational skills, should be driving the project.

Not to mention the serious issue raised over where “new” money for major projects will come from – given that the federation system is struggling to meet financial goals for existing programs at home and abroad.

‘Don’t Sit On The Sidelines’

Naftali Bennett remains upbeat. He acknowledges that “we will face political problems” in providing funds for the diaspora, but insists, “we will get this done.”

He said that the beauty of the project is “you get a threefold return on your money,” with the matching funding from the government, funders and service fees. He asserted that the Joint Initiative will be a true partnership and that it will be driven by “a lean, energetic and flexible leadership,” yet to be determined, and “operating at high-tech speed, not government speed.”

His overall response to skeptics was “join us, don’t sit on the sidelines. I don’t have all the answers, but together, with creative energy and investment, big things can happen.”

Filling in on some of the details, Hagay Elitzur, who serves as the day-to-day point person on the Israeli team, said that the idea is to start small and build

out; experiment and see what works. Funds would also go to existing programs that are successful, like Birthright Israel and Masa, which offer short and long-term stays in Israel for young adults, as well as Hillel efforts on campus.

“We know we have to prove ourselves,” he said. “We will start with pilot programs” and expand from there, involving funders on a “pay-to-play” basis, with decision-making based in part on levels of commitment.

It’s easy to see why veterans in the Jewish communal world have their doubts about this much-lauded initiative, given the “fuzziness” of it at this point, in the words of one professional. “Everything depends on what they end up doing,” says a major federation exec, though there is a kind of circular logic at play here; the Joint Initiative advocates insist that more participation will lead to more creativity and success.

Jewish And Democratic

Aside from the fact that the initiative is geared only to young people at this point, there also seems to be lag in addressing a growing concern among young diaspora Jews: Is Israel living up to its mandate to be a Jewish and democratic state?

A new report from the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), an Israel-diaspora think tank, finds wide agreement among Jews here and in Israel that being both Jewish and democratic is desirable and possible for Jerusalem. But the report, “Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry,” also notes that there is a strong connection between the feelings of young Jews about Judaism and their feelings about Israel.

“Their growing assertiveness in expressing criticism of Israel was conspicuous,” the report says, “particularly on subjects related to Israel’s Jewish identity.” That would include dissatisfaction with the Orthodox monopoly over Jewish life, and frustration over the continuing occupation as inconsistent with values of democracy and human rights.

Further, diaspora Jews want a voice in these matters, in part because “Israel’s policy and its world image have an impact on diaspora Jews’ security and wellbeing,” according to the report.

The Prime Ministers Initiative is significant, and potentially historic, in that it seeks to be a true partnership in expanding and creating programs to educate diaspora Jews about Jewish identity and strengthening the ties of Jewish peoplehood worldwide.

But as the JPPI report indicates, the initiative needs to define partnership beyond dollars and programming. The more Israeli society reflects and responds to the democratic impulses of young diaspora Jews – while educating them about the reality of life in the Mideast and the limits it creates – the more hope there is for strengthening the Israel-diaspora bonds that have become frayed.



World Jews Want a “Jewish and Democratic Israel” That Isn’t Too Different from the One Israelis Want

by Shmuel Rosner

Yesterday, the [Jewish People Policy Institute](#) released its special report, "Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry" – a report of which I'm the principle author (and head of project, together with Ambassador Avi Gil). We had a small gathering at the JPPI, with Head of the Jewish Agency Nathan Sharansky and Prof. Ruth Gavison as speakers. The JPPI project was initiated to supplement the work of Prof. Gavison on the Jewish and democratic nature of Israel. Prof. Gavison was appointed by the Minister of Justice to investigate the need for a new "constitutional arrangement dealing with Israel's identity as a 'Jewish and democratic' state". She believes, as we do, that JPPI's project sets an important precedent in attempting to inject the perspectives of Jewish communities around the world into a principally "Israeli" discussion.

The report is long, and our six months of work, which included dozens of seminars in Jewish communities around the world, can't be summarized fully in a short post. Yet, in the short introduction to the project we attempted to give our readers an encapsulated version of the main themes that have emerged from this endeavor. With the permission of my JPPI superiors, I post this introduction here and invite you to take a look at the full report on [JPPI's web site](#). I'm quite certain that this isn't the last word on the timely topic. Here we go:

At a time of frequent bickering over specific policies, language, and conduct, and in an era where strife and disputes get the limelight, which creates a (mis)impression of unbridgeable fissures, JPPI's project on world Jewry's views regarding the Jewish and democratic character of Israel concludes on a positive note: Jews around the globe support Israel and see their connection to it as important and enduring. Israel is – and could be even more so – a positive and inspiring common denominator for world Jewry. Non-Israeli Jews have a vision for Israel that is much more aligned than it is disputed. Moreover, the vision of Diaspora Jews for Israel is often similar to that of Israelis themselves.

Surely, there are gaps in interpretation and emphasis of needs and goals that should not be ignored. There are differences between non-Israeli communities and

individuals, and between them and the Israeli Jewish public. It is also quite possible that this project's methodology contributed to the relative harmony we found (we dedicate a chapter to explaining the strengths and limitations of JPPI's process). Still, this report will leave you with the impression that the overall objective of a majority of Jews is to work jointly in building a "Jewish and democratic" state. A state that is safe, moral, economically and culturally prosperous, and markedly Jewish.

Jews around the world did not initiate this discussion. They were invited and encouraged to take part in the internal discussion currently underway in Israel. Yet those Jews who came to the table – representatives of dozens of communities around the world that differ in shape, size and character – did so with gusto. They understood the significance of the discussion for Israel, and were quick to demonstrate that what's important for Israel is also important for them. In JPPI-initiated seminars from Brazil to the Netherlands, France, Britain, Canada, the United States, and Australia, Jews delved into the nuanced questions presented to them as stakeholders. "This is very personal, this is about me," a New York participant said when talking about the Jewishness of the Jewish state.

Indeed, the issue of Israel's Jewish nature is the one the world Jewish community strongest messages in this report: If Israel wants to be "Jewish and democratic" in a way that speaks to non-Israeli Jews, it needs to first modify its understanding of what being "Jewish" means to many millions of Jews today – and find a way to be more inclusive of them. In every discussion JPPI conducted, in every community and every setting, Jews challenged Israel's current interpretation of "Jewish." At the conference in Glen Cove, the culmination of the discussions, one of the most dramatic moments was when a Conservative woman spoke about her struggle with Israel's religious reality. "Our support of Israel is unambiguous, it's wall to wall," she said, "but I want to know there is a place for me there where I can put on my Tallit every morning. May I do that in the State of Israel and not have things thrown at me? Will the government arrest me? Is there a place for me in Israel?"

Israel's implementation of Jewishness was challenged because – the way world-Jews see it – for Israel to be truly deserving of the title "Jewish," it needs to be a place where more Jews can feel comfortable in expressing their type of Judaism. It was also challenged because – to Diaspora Jews – not being inclusive and tolerant of other types of Judaism makes Israel less "democratic."

Non-Israeli Jews are not blind to the difficulties Israel must overcome, nor to the dangers it must face as it strives to retain its Jewish and democratic character. They also reject false allegations against Israel's democracy – one notable example from JPPI discussions is the almost-unanimous rebuff of the attempts to present the Law of Return as an impediment to Israel's democratic nature. But they set a high bar for Israel on democratic values: 'Jewish' and 'democratic' alike are binding terms to them and mandate sensitivity to minorities and respect for human rights. As discussants were asked to look at the text of Israel's national anthem, Hatikvah, and the difficulties it poses for non-Jewish Israelis, they struggled with their instinctive attachment to it, coupled with the understanding that it is, indeed, somewhat exclusionary of non-Jewish minorities. The conclusion reached about Hatikvah was

somewhat murky in many of the discussions: keep Hatikvah but be “sensitive” about it. Currently, many Jews believe Israel is less than meticulous in properly keeping to values that protect human rights, or with showing the proper sensitivity when circumstances necessitate and justify a deviation from strict interpretation of these values.

There is a certain quality of moderation to the findings presented in this report. Just as political views and religious affiliations accurately foretell the position of Israeli respondents to public opinion surveys on the Jewish-democratic spectrum, the same is true for Jews around the world. Jews on the political far-right and on the political far-left can at times "dismiss the question [of what's more important, Jewish or democratic] as too obvious to warrant deliberation." Far-right leaning groups stress "the priority of Israel's Jewish [character] over its democratic character," and far-left leaning groups regard "Israel's Jewish character as anachronistic." But the majority of Jews at the center want to have it both ways, and believe it is possible to do so. They thus find the questions related to tensions and contradictions between 'Jewish' and 'democratic' "quite difficult to answer." Frequently, their answers hedge around tensions and keep the formulation of having both values at the same stand intact. For many Jews, some of the appeal of the formulation 'Jewish and democratic' is in its vagueness. The more they delve into attempts to exact its meaning, the more some feel the need to opt-out in disagreement. "Vagueness is good for Israel. Leave it unclear. Don't define Judaism. Judaism has never been a fixed entity. It's always been grey," a discussant said in a Washington DC JPPI seminar. One message, however, was conveyed throughout the process with no ambiguity: Jews around the world would like to be consulted by Israel on matters of importance to them, and many of them believe that these consultations should have more impact on Israel's policies.

Reform, Assimilated Jews Want Voice in Israeli Affairs

Thursday, May 22nd, 2014

Reform Jews and a left-wing Israeli journalist said Israel must bow to Palestinian terror, sanction non-halachic “Judaism” and give foreign Jews a vote in Israeli state matters or risk abandoning their support.

According to a report issued Wednesday by the Jewish People Policy Institute, Diaspora Jews believe the words “democracy” and “Judaism” are interchangeable synonyms. Democratic values are considered “Jewish values.” Thus, actions that erode Israel’s democratic values are seen as detrimental to Judaism and to the definition of Israel as a Jewish state.

Diaspora Jews also feel Israel must end its “control” over the Palestinians, presumably by abandoning sections of the Land of Israel, in order to maintain Israel’s democracy. However, the report does not mention the possibility that the PLO, led by Holocaust denier Abu Mazen, does not actually want peace, but rather aims to keep foreign aid money flowing via farcical “negotiations” with Israeli leaders.

The report also fails to mention the historic and religious Jewish connections to the places Diaspora Jews are only too happy to let go, as well as the fact that less than five percent of Jewish tourists to Israel visit the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem or Shilo, the ancient home of the mishkan before the Holy Temple was built by King Solomon.

Democracy. Regardless of the Facts

The report also notes that although Diaspora Jews recognize the fact that Israel faces challenges that do not always allow the country to follow Jeffersonian democratic principles, they don’t really care. Author, journalist Shmuel Rosner also fails to mention inconvenient statistics, such as continued Palestinian Arab emigration from Judea and Samaria, as well as the significant drop in Palestinian Arab birthrates in recent years. According to demographer Yoram Ettinger, these factors have led to an increase for the Jewish majority in the Land of Israel over the past decade.

“It is clear that many Diaspora Jews recognize the difficulties and constraints Israel faces given the regional hostility and security threats. At the same time, the majority does not consider this reality, and the fact that Israel’s neighbors do not adhere to principles of democracy and human rights, as justification for lowering the high values bar Israel is expected to maintain,” the report says.

Notably, the 139-page report in Hebrew does not mention the words “aliya” or “immigration”. This is presumably because Rosner did not want to offend Diaspora Jews who prefer to express their Zionism by putting spare change in blue Jewish National Fund tzedakah boxes and with annual checks to local Jewish federations.

Instead, Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State: Perspectives from World Jewry asserts “the right of Diaspora Jews to express their views on issues being decided in Israel was a central topic of discussion,” as well as a demand that Israel consult with Diaspora Jews

“on a regular basis” because Israeli policies and actions have an impact on the wellbeing of Jews around the world.

It should also be noted that the report does not include, either by Israeli authorities or Diaspora Jews, to draft Jewish teenagers from outside Israel to serve in the IDF, or to perform volunteer national service.

Lastly, the report includes a Diaspora demand that Israel abandon civil standards governing the functions of state. Couched in terminology about the Orthodox “monopoly” over Jewish life in Israel, Rosner appears to support the isolation of a majority of Israelis who want to live their lives in accordance with basic halachic standards. Instead, he proposes “giv(ing) equal standing to all Jewish streams” on civil matters such as marriage, divorce and conversion.

Instead, Rosner apparently prefers Israeli state support for intermarriage (no longer even a matter of contention for non-halachic streams of “Judaism”, as well as the breakdown of divorce standards that will avoid a future problem of mamzerim, or children born from adulterous unions. A vast majority of Israelis would prevent their children from marrying these individuals.



Diaspora Jews favor more ‘inclusive Jewishness’ in Israel, says think tank

MARCH 19, 2014

Jews in the Diaspora tend to be critical of Israel’s religious status quo, but support the national use of Jewish symbols.

That was one of the findings of a white paper that the Jewish People Policy Institute issued this week, detailing the views of Jewish leaders from around the world on the tension between Israel’s Jewish character and its democratic one.

Even as they have confronted rising intermarriage rates and steadily declining communal affiliation at home, American Jewish organizations have become more assertive in their demands for change in Israel’s religious climate, including vocal support for egalitarian prayer group the Women of the Wall and for changes in conversion and marriage laws.

The JPPI paper came as the result of a call by Justice Minister Tzipi Livni to poll Diaspora Jewry on the issue of Israel’s fundamental identity as a state. Senior JPPI fellow Shmuel Rosner, who wrote the paper, based it on the results of a number of seminars that took place worldwide. Organizing many of the seminars in the US were local Jewish federations.

Livni had tapped Hebrew University law professor Ruth Gavison to compose “a constitutional arrangement dealing with the State of Israel’s Jewish and democratic character” as a counterbalance to various proposals under consideration in the legislature. Gavison then turned to the JPPI to engage Diaspora Jews in what the think tank is calling an “unprecedented process to impact Israel’s character.”

The resulting project, “Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry,” sought to define the parameters within which Israel can legitimately consider itself both Jewish and democratic.

A final report is slated for presentation to Gavison by the end of the month.

In his paper, Rosner admitted that there was a distinct element of selection bias in the groups participating in the discussion process, with more highly engaged Jews taking part and a distinct lack of youth participation.

Diaspora Jewry's conceptions of the state can differ significantly from those of their coreligionists in Israel, he added, writing that "Jews outside Israel face an environment that is markedly different for Judaism than in the Israeli context."

"For many Jews the very essence of 'liberal democracy' is highly compatible with their understanding of 'Jewish values,'" and "defining a state as 'Jewish' without it being a liberal democracy would be an anathema," he wrote.

While some Jews whom JPPI polled indicated that it would not "make much sense" to compare the American context to Israel's, there was a general consensus that "Israel's democracy is lacking because of the enforcement of Orthodox behavioral norms on civil society, which is mostly secular," the think tank found.

Diaspora Jews expressed widespread cross-denominational dissatisfaction with Israel's Chief Rabbinate, with strong opposition to the country's lack of civil marriage and "unease with attempts to enforce other religiously based behaviors" such as banning leaven during Passover and requiring that businesses close on Shabbat.

However, there was also a general consensus favoring the use of the Jewish calendar on a national level, the use of Jewish symbols such as the Star of David on the flag, and references to the Jewish soul in the national anthem.

Overall, Rosner wrote, "world Jews tend to want the expression of Israel's Jewishness to be inclusive of all Jews, and to not limit personal choice."

Nonetheless, he hedged, a "significant portion of world Jews accepts the notion that Israel lives under 'special circumstances,' which may justify an interpretation of constitutional values different from their own."

On the whole, it seems that while world Jewry is split on these issues, there is a definite trend toward changing the religious status quo.

Dialogue with Jewish leaders in the Diaspora regarding issues of Jewish identity has become increasingly common over the past year. Public figures including Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett and Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky have all consulted closely with Jews abroad in formulating their new World Jewish Joint Initiative, a wide-ranging program for stemming the growing tide of assimilation.

On Tuesday, Rabbi Uri Regev of religious equality NGO Hiddush expressed appreciation for the JPPI initiative.

“I wholeheartedly welcome the process of engaging Diaspora leadership in discussing the existential challenges facing the State of Israel, and congratulate Minister Livni on this historic initiative,” he told The Jerusalem Post. “In doing so, she has already gone beyond the recent tactical moves made by Prime Minister Netanyahu, Minister Bennett and Sharansky, which have yet to tackle the real heart of Israel’s identity dilemma.”

Calling the report “highly encouraging,” Regev – a strong proponent of civil marriage and official recognition of non-Orthodox conversions – said it “comes at a time when there is greater discussion and a greater move toward Diaspora involvement with Israeli counterparts in advancing religious freedom and equality for all Jews.”

Orthodox Rabbi Seth Farber, director of the ITIM Advocacy Center, likewise praised the JPPI project, telling the Post that it “represents a reasonable effort to try and come to some sort of global definition of the vitality of a Jewish state for all the Jewish people.”

However, not everyone was convinced that Israel needed to redefine itself by enshrining either a more Jewish or a more democratic character in law.

“I believe that it’s possible to maintain a balance between Jewish and democratic through dialogue and compromise, and no drastic steps are needed to define the state as one over the other,” said American-born Yesh Atid MK Rabbi Dov Lipman.

The Orthodox community in the US has also expressed opposition to importing American Jewish mores into Israeli life.

“The ‘multi-winged’-bird model of Judaism has wrought indescribable damage to... the unity and integrity of the Jewish people in America,” Rabbi Avi Shafran of the ultra-Orthodox Agudath Israel told the Post. “To think that strengthening such ‘religious pluralism’ in Israel will somehow bode well rather than tragically for a state that aspires to the epithet ‘Jewish’ is beyond misguided.”

Kosher press, June 26, 2014



Israel must reflect all Jewish values, think tank tells government

JUNE 26, 2014

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Diaspora Jews feel that Israel must reflect all Jewish values, The Jewish People Policy Institute told Israel's Cabinet in its 10th annual Assessment of the Situation & Dynamics of the Jewish People.

The report was presented to the Cabinet Sunday by JPPI president Avinoam Bar-Yosef alongside co-chairs and former U.S. ambassadors Dennis Ross and Stuart Eizenstat. JPPI is an independent policy planning think tank.

The non-Orthodox majority in the Diaspora feels religiously disenfranchised by Israeli policy, is critical of the Orthodox Rabbinate's monopoly on personal status issues such as conversion, marriage and divorce, and expects that Israel better respect and reflect religious pluralism, Eizenstat told the Cabinet.

The institute conducted some 40 seminars in the Diaspora on the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel in creating this year's assessment. In addition to the seminars in dozens of communities in the United States and Canada, as well as Europe and Latin America, there were questionnaires and analysis of other research.

"Diaspora Jews do not see a contradiction between Israel as a Jewish state and Israel as a democratic state. They see the two as complementary. As Israel ponders changes to its Basic Laws, it should consider carefully the views of the Diaspora to assure it does not compromise standards of equality and tolerance, which our study found crucial for Diaspora Jews. World Jewry fully appreciates the difficulties Israel faces in a hostile region with major security threats, but a majority of Diaspora Jews does not see this as a justification for Israel lowering its own principles of democracy and adherence to human rights," the report [said](#).

Another finding of the institute is that European Jews feel under siege. The institute called on the cabinet to ease the process of aliyah from Diaspora communities, especially from France, including making it easier to transfer professions to Israel.

The institute also criticized the government for not providing a budget to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs to work to counter delegitimization of Israel in the international community.

“As important as it is to be sure to draw all of the resources of the Israeli government together to tackle the challenge of de-legitimization, Israel’s policies must also take into account the effect they have on the international community and how some seek to exploit them,” Ross said.

JPPI President Avinoam Bar-Yosef said after the Cabinet meeting that, “A decision was made to continue dialogue between Diaspora communities and Israel, and Prime Minister Netanyahu endorsed JPPI’s initiative to explore, in the next year, the parameters, representatives, and subjects for discussion.”



Diaspora, Israeli Jews weigh Israeli democracy

Posted on 16 March 2014.

JERUSALEM (Press Release)—For two days last week (March 11 – 12), Jewish and Israeli community leaders, heads of major organizations, leading figures from academia and government officials past and present met quietly in Glen Cove, Long Island under the auspices of the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) to discuss recent geopolitical developments in the Middle East and the nature of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state from the standpoint of the Diaspora.

A number of important recent events and trends informed the gathering's deliberations including U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's forceful effort to bring an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the P5+1-Iranian negotiations, which may conclude with a compromise endorsed by the free world and rejected by Israel; possible emerging frictions between Israel and the U.S. administration, which may affect relations between the two largest Jewish communities – in Israel and North America; and, the initiative of Israel's Ministry of Justice to consider legislation on Israel as a Jewish and democratic state at a time when different ideological groups within Israel hold conflicting views.

Ambassador Dennis Ross, co-chairman of JPPI stressed that the threats and instability rampant in the Mideast have created numerous common interests between Israel and the U.S. and noted that American Jewry has a strong role to play in combating the threat of a nuclear Iran.

Co-chair Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat focused on the need to strengthen pluralism in Israel. "Diaspora Jews are committed to Israel and they should feel accepted no matter what stream of Judaism they practice," he said at the gathering.

Discussions on the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora regarding Israel as a Jewish and democratic state was prompted by a request by Israel's Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni to law professor Ruth Gavison to explore a constitutional basis for Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Professor Gavison turned to the Jewish People Policy Institute for help in gauging attitudes about these issues throughout the Diaspora.

JPPI's preliminary findings found that a majority of the participants in the discussion support preserving Jewish symbols of the state such as "Hatikva" and the Israeli flag, while at the same time they want to ensure that Israeli Arabs enjoy full rights as a minority community.

A copy of the JPPI background paper on this issue can be found [here](#).

President of the Jewish People Policy Institute Avinoam Bar Yosef stressed the great importance of ongoing consultation with the Diaspora. "A government that sees Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people must share the Diaspora's decisions on issues they hold dear, including the Jewish character of a democratic state," notes Bar Yosef.

The JPPI preliminary findings that were presented at the Glen Cove meeting is the culmination of a process in which the Institute held seminars in 40 communities worldwide. Participants were asked to examine questions concerning the character of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. The process was led Shmuel Rosner and Avi Gil, senior fellows at the Institute.

The full report on World Jewish attitudes toward Israel as a Jewish and democratic state will be submitted towards the end of March.

The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) is an independent policy planning think tank based in Jerusalem. The mission of the Institute is to ensure the thriving of the Jewish People and the Jewish civilization by engaging in professional strategic thinking and planning on issues of primary concern to world Jewry.



The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) released a report last week on the views of world Jewry concerning Israel's character as a Jewish and democratic state.

Following Justice Minister Tzipi Livni's appointment of Professor Ruth Gavison to explore the constitutional anchoring of Israel's Jewish and democratic character, Prof. Gavison turned to the Jewish People Policy Institute for help in gauging attitudes on this issue throughout the Diaspora.

JPPI conducted discussions and focus groups around the world and convened Jewish and Israeli community leaders, heads of major organizations, and academics to solicit and assess Diaspora opinion on these issues.

Avinoam Bar-Yosef, JPPI's President and Founding Director said, "North American Jews are basically, and for clear reasons, more liberal than Israelis. But even as they urge a completely democratic and liberal approach to Israel's Arab minority – and believe that their civil rights and opportunities should be enhanced – they feel, at the same time, a deep commitment to Israel as a Jewish state and endorse its continued use of Jewish iconography such as the flag and national anthem, Hatikvah."

"The Diaspora encourages Israel to adopt a pluralistic approach with respect to all the Jewish religious streams. They wish to feel as "at home" in Israel as they do in their own communities. This is an important element in their support," said Bar-Yosef.

At a time when different ideological groups within Israel hold conflicting views, JPPI's report finds:

The vast majority of Diaspora Jews feel close to Israel and hold a vision of the Jewish and democratic state that is not much different from the vision Israelis have of their country.

However, Jews around the world are critical of how Israel interprets and handles "religion and state" matters, including marriage, the role of the rabbinate, and religious legislation.

Diaspora Jews deem it crucially important that all Israeli citizens, including those belonging to minority groups, have full rights. Nevertheless, support for preserving the Jewish character of the state, such as adhering to the Jewish calendar and Jewish symbols, is strong.

Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky, who attended the briefing, noted that in a few days the government of Israel will approve new arrangements at the Kotel and funds for

strengthening Jewish identity abroad.

Professor Ruth Gavison, who accepted the report at the briefing, stressed the importance of hearing the views of Diaspora Jewry on these issues and maintaining a dialogue with them.

Shmuel Rosner, one of the project's heads at JPPI, said he believes the report's findings are "positive and optimistic, contrary to dismal reports we hear about distancing of Diaspora Jews from Israel. The report also indicates that there is a strong need expressed throughout the Jewish world for a deep connection with Israel.

However, "the Diaspora expects and encourages Israel to give full equality to all its citizens including minorities. When it comes to minority rights, the Diaspora feels that Israel must exercise more care – they expect that all Israeli citizens, including its minorities, will have equal rights and opportunities. Regarding the criticism about state control over religious legislation, the report shows that these issues are sharp, coherent and clear —Diaspora Jewry has reservations about the way things are handled. Equality in society and pluralism are essential," he said.

The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) is an independent policy planning think tank based in Jerusalem. The mission of the Institute is to ensure the thriving of the Jewish People and the Jewish civilization by engaging in professional strategic thinking and planning on issues of primary concern to world Jewry.

Haaretz, May 22, 2014

HAARETZ

Diaspora Jews and Israel: between distance and despair

The JPPI report tell us much about the well-aired opinions of the Diaspora's elite - but fails to engage with the expanding minority of Jews who care less and less about Israel.

By [Samuel Heilman](#) | May 22, 2014 | 6:10 PM

What is there to learn from the [recently released](#) Jewish People Policy Institute report on “Jewish and Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry?”

First, some good news: The researchers found that the views, as they perceived them, of Diaspora Jews and the Israeli “public” have similar characteristics. That alone is noteworthy, since a growing chorus of voices has suggested that the gap between these two is growing and that portends a future that could lead to irreconcilable differences at best, or separation at worst.

A second bit of not quite as good news is that a majority of the Diaspora Jews still hold fast to the ideal of Israel being both Jewish and democratic. What makes this not quite as good is the fact that the Jews, wherever they are, may not always agree on the meaning of what is Jewish or what democratic – so holding this opinion may not be quite as meaningful or optimistic as researchers would like it to be.

Now before I continue, I should point out that the JPPI report is not based on the result of a random or even a targeted social survey – in contrast to [last year's Pew study](#) or other national Jewish surveys. It is rather a report of the views of a select group of people who participated in JPPI-sponsored “discussions.” This included “senior representatives of Jewish leadership in the United States, rabbis, public intellectuals, and academics” who were invited to participate in some “40 discussion groups and seminars.” In other words, elites, opinion-leaders, the usual suspects. If you believe their judgments are representative of Diaspora Jewry and that they matter more than a broader sample of world Jewry – including those who are young or not engaged in the Jewish world – you will be more impressed than I with the results reported. But if not – and given the significant number of increasingly unaffiliated and marginally affiliated character of American Jewry, as well as the exponential the growth of the so-called “Nones” who belong to none of the usual Jewish organizations and associations in the ranks of

Diaspora Jewry – you might take the findings with a grain of salt. This report tells us something about elite opinion in the Diaspora – and you decide how much it matters what it is.

Among these elites there is an awareness that in the seventh decade of Israel's existence, there may be deep tensions between democratic and Jewish ideals and that any state or society that tries to be fully both of these may be living on the horns of a dilemma. This is particularly the case if its numbers of Jews do not grow as fast as the numbers of other ethnic groups in its population; or even if those Jews whose demographic growth is most vibrant turn out to be among a group of Orthodox Jews who have powerful misgivings about democracy and an absolutist view of what is Jewish; a situation that might well describe Israel in 2014.

In the face of rising Jewish nationalism and fundamentalism, as well as a feeling of being surrounded by implacable foes (shown to have the highest rate of anti-Jewish attitudes in the [recent ADL survey](#)), there are significant numbers who might once have believed in the ideals of being both Jewish and democratic but now feel that these ideals need some revision. That is hinted in the JPPI report, in the criticism emerging among some in the Diaspora who addressed just such attitudes. I refer to findings that Diaspora Jews expect that “Israel be pluralistic,” “avoid imposing religious norms,” “put an end to the Orthodox monopoly over Jewish life and give equal standing to all Jewish streams,” “strive... not to rule over Palestinians,” and other such views that may strike some of the rising number of nationalists and religious fundamentalists as naïve at best or dangerous at worst. With all due respect to the authors of this report, this is not news.

The view of the JPPI-consulted Diaspora Jews is that “Israel's character has significant influence on how ‘Judaism’ is regarded around the world by Jews and non-Jews.” They think therefore that how their Judaism is perceived is often not in their own hands but in the hands of a state and society over which they have less and less influence.

But even if this is true for the people on the JPPI panels, it is worthwhile recalling that, as my colleague Steven M. Cohen has [recently reported](#), people who say “I'm Jewish but I don't identify Judaism or anything else as my religion,” now constitute 20% of all Jewish adults – and that number is growing in the American Diaspora (and maybe other Diasporas) to as much as 33% of those aged 18 to 29. Are these Jews going to care how or if Israel's character reflects on Judaism? Are they going to focus on Israel as having some special significance for them? Do they care if they are heard in Israel? The report's assertion that “changes to Israel's character have the potential to impact the way Israel relates to Jews around the world,” may be the opinion of these elites, but I fear it lags behind a reality that suggests that to many Jews in the years ahead Israel may not matter quite as much.

The supporters of Taglit/Birthright (and I am one of them) are saying as much themselves. No doubt the effort to bring as many young people to Israel is, if nothing else, an effort to make what Israel is and what happens there of importance to more young

Jews of the Diaspora. Were it not the case, we would not need to bring all these kids; they'd come on their own.

A truly useful JPPI report would have been one that managed to get the opinions of those Jews in Diaspora who are not among the engaged and informed – we know already what this latter group think since they've been publicly expressing those opinions for years. We need to know about the people who do not care, and then to figure out how we can make them care, and what they care about. In the meantime, we have Taglit.

Samuel Heilman holds the Harold Proshansky Chair in Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center and is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York.

Haaretz, May 23, 2014

HAARETZ

WEST OF EDEN

by Chemi Shalev

American Jews and the Israeli right: the end of a beautiful friendship?

Ever since Menachem Begin wowed the late Rabbi Schindler four decades ago, American Jewry has been captivated by Likud pathos, symbolism and sense of victimhood, but things are beginning to change.

By [Chemi Shalev](#) | May 23, 2014 | 12:40 AM

The unexpected election of [Menachem Begin](#) as prime minister in 1977 shocked American Jewry. Begin, the Revisionist and “terrorist,” with his Eastern European mannerisms and his Middle Eastern supporters, was the ideological rival of Zionist icons such as Ben Gurion and Golda and looked nothing like mythological heroes Moshe Dayan or Paul Newman’s Ari Ben Canaan. Outside of a small coterie of jubilant American supporters from his pre-State Irgun days, Begin’s election sent most of the Jewish establishment into panic mode.

But it didn’t last long. Seeking to quell the fears, the late Reform leader Alexander Schindler, then Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, came to Jerusalem for an urgent conference with Begin. Schindler, a liberal on both religious and peace-related matters, went into the meeting worried but came out wholly enchanted. “He was the first Israeli leader I’d met for whom it was more important to be a Jew than an Israeli,” he would say later. “For Yitzhak Rabin we were mere pawns, but Begin really cared.”

This was the start of the beautiful friendship between American Jewry and the Israeli right that has lasted since then until not too long ago. Begin’s successor Yitzhak Shamir lacked his predecessor’s pathos, charisma or appreciation for Diaspora life, but he was a master tactician who oversaw the right-wing’s gradual takeover of both the Conference of Presidents and AIPAC. The two organizations became the principal political spokespersons for the Jewish community, adhering to a straightforward Israel right-or-wrong policy, which usually translated into bending over backwards for Likud governments while going through the motions when Labor was in power.

Shimon Peres, now a venerated elder statesman who is slated to receive a Congressional Medal of Honor next month, spoke in those days in European, not American, and could not enlist American Jews to his side at times when it mattered most: They helped Shamir undercut Peres's 1986 London Agreement with King Hussein as well as delay and diffuse diplomatic moves by George Schultz and James Baker, while expressing only tepid support for the [Oslo Accords](#) and Labor's reconciliation with [Yasser Arafat](#).

American Jews felt comfortable with the [Likud](#)'s free market capitalism and were swept away by the right wing's emphasis on symbols and emotion: Shamir and his successors knew they could whip up American Jewish enmity towards Labor or the American administration by routinely invoking "eternal Jerusalem" and sinister plans to carve it up. Likud leaders were closely aligned with the sense of victimhood felt by many contemporary Jewish leaders who were either Holocaust survivors, children of Holocaust survivors or Americans who felt guilty about their parents not having done enough to rescue Holocaust survivors.

This was a generation whose views had been formed by heroic historical milestones, from the establishment of Israel through the Six Day War to the fight for Soviet Jewry. And when the effects of these events began to wane, militant Islam reared its head in a wave of horrific suicide bombings in Israel and the Twin Towers catastrophe in New York. The Jewish community enlisted wholeheartedly in the war on terror and the battle against the Axis of Evil and repressed the ongoing occupation and Israel's gradual lurch to the right.

But now there is a gradual changing of the guard, one generation going and the next arriving, with some Jews losing interest in Israel and others their faith in its leaders. The more moderate and liberal parts of the Jewish community are at a juncture, perhaps even in a moment of crisis, to which many factors contribute, of which I will shortly mention four: the political polarization in America which pushes the Jewish right rightwards and expels the left altogether; the strengthening of liberal views and the growing tendency to see Israel's rightward move through them; the animosity of many American Jews towards reactionary conservatives and, by association, their embrace of Israel; and the perception that Israel and AIPAC are openly intervening in U.S. politics, fighting the Obama Administration, for which they voted, and trying to push America toward an unpopular war with [Iran](#).

Most Israeli and Jewish leaders are no longer denying the sounds of icebergs breaking and temperatures heating up. The Reform and Conservative campaign against Orthodox dominance in Israel is growing ever more militant while organizations such as [J Street](#) challenge the Israeli government's traditional hold on American Jewry's positions and statements. In synagogues, campuses and JCC's, fierce and emotional battles are fought between right and left that not only challenge the status quo but also create a sense of unease and foreboding.

The impressive new report published this week by Shmuel Rosner and Avi Gil of the Jewish People Policy Institute on Diaspora Jewry's attitudes towards the concept of Israel as "a Jewish and democratic state" asserts that "the vision of Diaspora Jews for Israel is

often similar to that of Israelis themselves.” But even this report, based as it is on a dialogue with figures who are mostly part and parcel of the Jewish establishment, makes it abundantly clear that Israelis and American Jews are on two separate ships sailing in opposite directions. The more that Israel champions its Jewish identity and diminishes its democratic obligations – as a majority of members of the current ruling coalition are wont to do – the more the moment of a serious breach with American Jews draws nearer.

The government is also feeling the tectonic shifts, but instead of taking a close, hard look in the mirror, it is pinning all the blame on assimilation, intermarriage and lack of proper Jewish education. Against this backdrop the “Joint Initiative of the Government of Israel and the Jewish People” was established and it is being greeted with a mix of appreciation for the new attitude, skepticism about the prospects for raising the necessary funds - and suspicion that what troubles the government most is not that Jews are drifting away from Judaism but that they are distancing themselves from the increasingly nationalistic tendencies of Israel under their helm. “If they plan to waste hundreds of millions of dollars to persuade American Jews that ‘settlements are good,’ they best keep their money at home,” one seasoned Jewish leader told me.

Slowly but surely, the knots are coming full circle: 37 years after they discovered each other, a sizeable chunk of American Jews who care about Israel are no longer willing to defer to the right, whether they are in Jerusalem, Washington or New York. Two of my colleagues at Haaretz have played a significant role in this process: [Peter Beinart](#), whose “Crisis of Zionism” took the Jewish left by storm, and [Ari Shavit](#), whose “[My Promised Land](#)” invigorated Jewish centrist moderates who reject the Palestinian narrative, but nonetheless believe that current Israeli policies and continued occupation will end in tragedy.

What seems to be missing, from a political perspective, is an Israeli partner. J Street’s [rejection](#) by the Conference of Presidents, for example, was barely noticed or protested in the Israeli media or in its political circles. To find new avenues and to create new partnerships with disgruntled American Jews, the Israeli left must change its perspective and reorder its priorities, invest time and effort and attention and most importantly - locate a charismatic interlocutor who can talk to American Jews in a language they understand.

Begin had that, as does Netanyahu. But while the prime minister continues to talk with the same eloquence and same American accent as before, the dynamics of extended relationships are affecting many American Jews: they no longer bother to listen.

Haaretz, May 28, 2014

HAARETZ

American Jews are running out of patience with Israel

While Israeli politicians flip the finger at the world to score points with right-wing voters at home, they are alienating Israel's most important, loyal allies: Progressive U.S. Jews.

By [Ori Nir](#) | May 28, 2014 | 6:20 PM

Lately, American friends are asking me whether Israeli leaders are thinking straight, whether they realize how unreasonable their statements sound here in Washington, and how odd some of their policies seem.

These are people who support Israel, who genuinely care about its wellbeing, who follow the news from Israel with genuine concern, and who cannot comprehend what seems to them like self-destructive behavior. Behavior such as stepping up settlement construction while President Obama and Secretary Kerry are trying to advance peace for Israel; or publicly bad-mouthing and humiliating America's secretary of state. Not to mention discriminatory practices and vile statements against non-Orthodox Jews; government tolerance of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox discriminatory practices against women; blatantly bigoted, racist and xenophobic statements by senior officials, and an endless flow of words and deeds that are inconsistent with liberal American values.

This frustration is not all new, and to a large extent it's being tempered by all that is good and beautiful about Israeli society and culture, but there is a growing discontent with the news from Israel. It is particularly evident in Washington, where the policy community desperately wants to be reassured that Israel is still a dependable, sane and stable peace-seeking ally.

Recent weeks provides a wealth of examples. Israel's Economy Minister, Naftali Bennett, [told](#) Haaretz that Kerry's peace initiative is "suicide" for Israel and boasted, "We saved the country" by sabotaging Kerry. Later, in a Wall Street Journal article, Bennett laid out his plan for annexing almost two-thirds of the West Bank. He had the audacity to write that "annexing Area C would limit conflict by reducing the size of the territory in dispute, which would make it easier to one day reach a long-term peace agreement."

Then there was Prime Minister Netanyahu's reported [threat to fire Tzipi Livni](#), his cabinet minister responsible for negotiating with the Palestinians, because she met with Palestinian President Abbas.

And then there was the way Israeli officials reacted to the killing of the two Palestinian teenagers in the West Bank town of Bitunia. Automatic flat-out denials before an official investigation was even launched, [accusations of forgery](#), conspiracy theories, and not a shred of concern at what seems to have been an avoidable loss of two young lives. Foreign Minister Lieberman [rejected Washington's request](#) to investigate the incident, calling the request “hypocrisy.” Why hypocrisy? Because 170,000 people were killed in Syria, Israel's top diplomat explained.

The middle finger that Israeli politicians are flipping at the world may score points with right-wing voters, but it is poking the eye of Israel's most important and most loyal allies: Pro-Israel U.S. opinion leaders, primarily progressive American Jews.

A new [study](#) by the Jerusalem-based Jewish People Policy Institute explores the dissonance that diaspora Jews experience (the study obviously focused on American Jews) when their values – and particularly what they consider “Jewish values” clash with [official Israeli policies](#). The study focuses on the question of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and it presents the discord in light of the way in which non-Israeli Jews perceive Israel as Jewish and democratic and their wishes to enhance its Jewishness, its character as a democracy, or both.

The study therefore neglects to highlight the bafflement – sometimes even the horror – among many American Jews (and other supporters of Israel) as they realize that many Israeli leaders have ceased to actively pursue peace as a critical national security objective and that many Israelis have ceased to cherish it as a value. Many American Jews who are uncomfortable with some of Israel's more controversial policies and practices are willing to accept them as long as Israel pursues peace.

Without a credible peace process, those policies and practices that seem to fly in the face of Jewish values and of the perception of Israel as a democratic state, become much harder for American Jews to stomach.

Israel's government should pursue peace with the Palestinians first and foremost because it is a key national security interest of Israel's citizens. But when the government dismisses or even thwarts peace efforts it ought to consider the impact of this conduct on another major Israeli national security asset – the pro-Israel community in the United States. No Israeli government should take that community's support for granted.

Ori Nir, formerly the Washington bureau chief of Haaretz and the Forward, is the spokesperson of the Washington-based [Americans for Peace Now](#), the sister-organization of Israel's Peace Now movement.



Diaspora Jews want Israel 'to end the occupation'

Study finds world Jews believe the fragile security situation is 'no justification for lowering high values'

Diaspora Jews want an Israel that is both "Jewish and democratic"; an Israel that is not occupying another people; an Israel that treats all of its citizens equally, and an Israel that understands that it cannot be immune to criticism, a new study, published Wednesday, found.

Jerusalem-based think-tank Jewish People Policy Institute's study, entitled "Jewish & Democratic: Perspectives from World Jewry," found that Jews around the world want to see an Israel in which democratic values are considered "Jewish values," and where Orthodox monopoly over religion is eliminated.

According to the JPPI study, "actions that erode Israel's democratic values are seen as detrimental to Judaism and to the definition of Israel as a Jewish state. If Israel is not a liberal democracy, its attractiveness to many Diaspora Jews will erode."

In other words, Diaspora Jewry wished for Israel to "avoid imposing religious norms on its mostly secular civil society", while at the same time increasing the knowledge of its citizenry about "Jewish history, traditions, and values."

The study also noted that Diaspora Jews believed they have the right to voice their opinions on 'issues being decided in Israel,' given that policy decisions made in Israel "have an impact on Diaspora Jews' security and wellbeing."

"Paradoxically, one of the reasons that Jews today feel free to pass criticism on Israel is because the security and stability of the country seems guaranteed," the study added.

Diaspora Jews also placed great importance on the rights of minorities in Israel, as well as on human rights in general, given their own minority status in their home countries.

The study noted that Jews around the world also believed that Arabs are not treated as equal citizens in Israel. "The belief that Israeli Arabs do not enjoy full equality was widely held," the report's authors wrote.

One of the main expectations of Diaspora Jews of Israel was that it should "strive for a reality in which it does not rule over the Palestinians," while stressing that Israel is not doing enough to improve the situation.

Furthermore, the report said, Diaspora Jews do not view the Jewish state's fragile security situation "as justification for lowering the high values bar Israel is expected to maintain."

"Jews in many communities are critical of Israel's Palestinian policy and are not convinced that Israel has made a sincere [effort] to improve the situation," it noted.

Diaspora Jews expect Israel to abide by higher ethical standards than its neighbors in the region, and the "continued 'occupation' erodes belief in the Israeli democracy."

The report was prepared by JPPI senior fellows Shmuel Rosner and Avi Gil and based on international seminars held earlier this year, which were attended by Jewish leaders, professionals, rabbis, philanthropists and activists.