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The Situation and Dynamics
of the Jewish People

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Foreword Dennis Ross and Stuart Eizenstat

JPPI's Annual Assessment offers a stock-taking on whether the developments of the last year have affected the reality of Israel and the Jewish world positively or negatively along five different measures: geopolitics, intra-communal relations, resources, identity, and demographics. This year, with an eye to the needs of a new government in Israel, the Institute is providing an assessment for 2021. The assessment does not just provide a portrayal of the realities and the very real challenges they present, but it also offers a number of practical recommendations — and these are especially timely for a new government.

Once again, we are reminded that Israel is a democracy in which the government is changed peacefully through elections. That principle was challenged in the United States leading to the assault on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021, but America's institutions prevailed. Nevertheless, the level of partisan polarization is deeply troubling for the ability of the US government to meet America's challenges at home and abroad. A substantial majority of Republicans who voted for President Trump in 2020, support his contention that President Biden was elected because of widespread voter fraud, notwithstanding numerous recounts, audits and court decisions to the

contrary. There has been a proliferation of laws either passed or proposed by Republican elected officials, which they argue are meant to ensure greater election integrity, but their Democratic opponents argue are aimed at voter suppression of minority voters. In Israel, too, notwithstanding rhetoric so threatening it triggered an unusual warning from the head of the Shin Bet, the institutions prevailed and there has been a peaceful transfer of power. Given the wide representation within the new Israeli government — including an Arab party and parties from the right, center, and left — it will be interesting to see if Israel faces less of a partisan divide than currently exists in America.

As the Assessment points out, the new Israeli government faces a daunting series of challenges internationally and within Israel, including:

- Surging antisemitism driven increasingly by those on the left, who have been fueled by the Gaza War and who seek to undermine Israel’s legitimacy and right to self-defense. When combined with growing right-wing antisemitism, the net effect as indicated in a recent Pew Research Center survey, is that over half of American Jews feel less safe today than they did five years ago;
- Proliferating threats from Iran and its proxies in which Israel could face simultaneously threats from the northern and southern fronts — something that

almost emerged in the conflict in Gaza with Hamas as missiles were fired from Lebanon at two different junctures and an Iranian drone was launched into Israel from Syria;

- Growing questions about the potential for diverging approaches with the United States for dealing with Iran and the Palestinians;
- Increasing concern about the relations with the American Jewish community, and America more generally, given elements in the progressive wing of the Democratic party who hold views sharply critical of Israel and who are clearly influencing younger non-Orthodox American Jewry, who feel less emotionally attached to Israel than older American Jews;
- Troubling social and economic consequences of COVID which seem to be promoting the increased potential for exacerbating inequality and income disparity, factors that may give additional impetus to populism and the political instability it produces;

and worrying manifestations of internal Jewish polarization within Israel and America that are tearing at the fabric of Jewish life.

To address these and other problems, the assessment offers a number of compelling recommendations that we urge the new government to consider carefully and act on, for example:

- On antisemitism, the Israeli government needs to develop a single, integrative body with the means to assess the nature of the threat, how and where it is evolving, and to act to pre-empt or counter it. There must be no diffusion of effort, focus, or resources devoted to this rising threat. (The model here could be what JPPI recommended, and the Israeli government adopted, for dealing with the BDS movement years ago — namely, give one ministry the responsibility to bring all of Israel’s means together in one place to manage the response. In that case, it was the Ministry of Strategic Affairs that became the focal point of all Israeli political, legal, diplomatic, and intelligence responses to BDS.)
- On managing the relationship with the United States and the Biden administration, there must be a strategic dialogue on Iran, the Palestinians and the Abraham Accords, with the aim of minimizing differences and misunderstandings and to avoid surprises. (While not in the assessment, and if the JCPOA is resumed with roughly the same parameters as the 2015 agreement from which the Trump administration withdrew, Israel should focus, in the dialogue with the US, on how best to take advantage of the time until 2030. That is when the key limitations on the Iran nuclear program lapse, and Israel’s aim with the United States should be to enhance deterrence of Iran and dissuade it from going for a threshold nuclear weapons status.)
- On growing gaps with the Democrats in general, and progressives in particular, there needs to be active outreach to show the commitment to bipartisanship but also targeted efforts especially with liberals and progressives by their liberal and progressive counterparts in the new Israeli government. Efforts on both tracks are essential. Recent polls indicate that over 70% of American Jews voted for Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. Israel has paid a heavy price for the close identification of the Netanyahu government with the Trump administration. Combined with its very limited efforts at outreach to the broad range of American Jews, the Netanyahu government, even if it did not intend it, did much to alienate liberal and progressive Democrats from Israel. The new Israeli government will need to initiate a serious policy of outreach to Democrats and Independents, and not just Republicans, if it is to retain the bipartisan support Israel has maintained since its founding in 1948. Israel cannot allow itself to become seen as an arm of either political party.
- On polarization among the Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, particularly among young, non-Orthodox American Jews, and the widening gaps between the religious and the secular, the new government should intensify policies to integrate

the Haredi sector into Israeli life and should not only do more to reach out to the Diaspora digitally but also promote measures to encourage the formation of non-religious Jewish identity.

The challenges may be real, but the new Israeli government has a chance to put its stamp on policies that recognize the nature of the dangers of the threats and offer a pathway for dealing with them.

Stuart Eizenstat and Dennis Ross

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Policy Recommendations

Jewish organizations should monitor signs of a trend toward the “Europeanization” of antisemitism in the United States. (page 26)

The Israeli government should entrust the response to antisemitism to a single integrative body with powers and implementation capabilities (page 26)

Utilize the formation of the new Israeli government, whose composition differs from its predecessors, as an opportunity for renewed dialogue with disenchanted American and American-Jewish subgroups (primarily liberals) (page 22)

Efforts to integrate the Haredi sector in Israeli national life should be increased. (page 18)

The new government should encourage measures that foster the development of a non-religious Jewish identity (page 26)

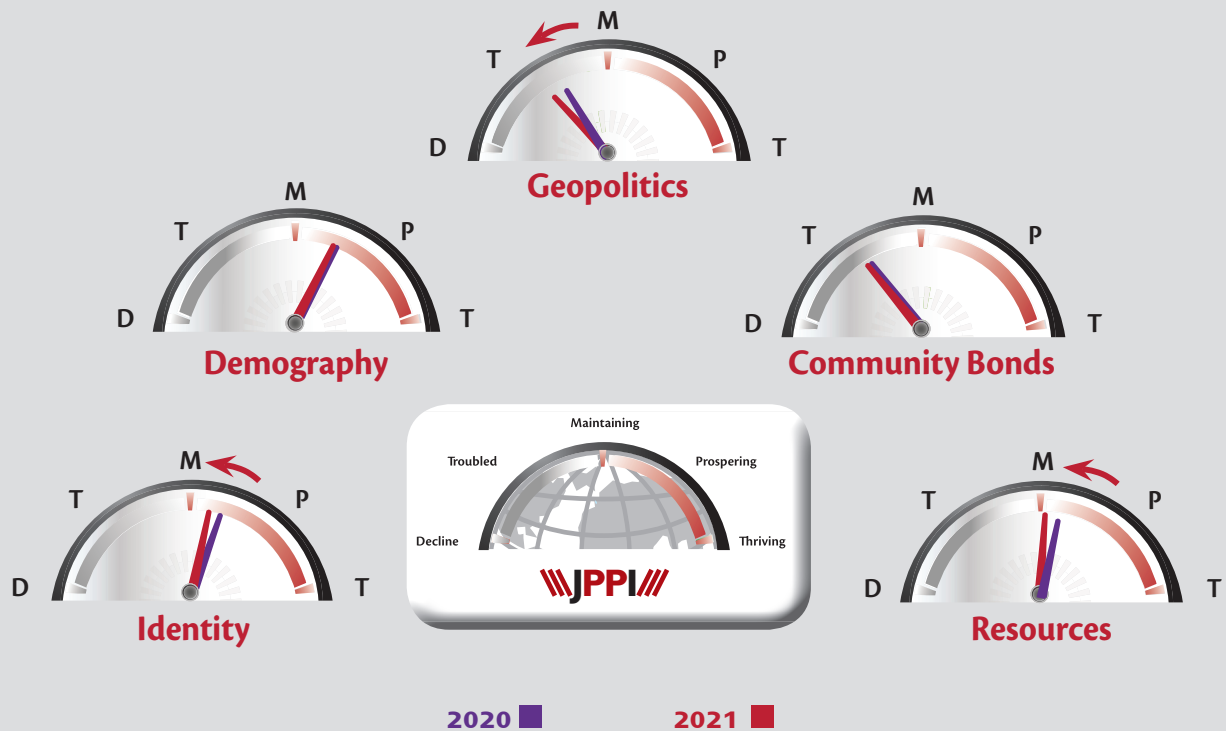
Reassess the criteria of the Law of Return, as well as the Law’s implications for the nature of today’s Aliyah (page 30)

TRENDS

3

Integrated Net Assessment: Five Dimensions of Jewish Well-Being

Key Drivers Affecting the Jewish People in 2020-2021



TRENDS

This year the Jewish people contended with, and were affected by, developments in several main areas:

Political changes: Amid great political turbulence, the past year brought changes of leadership in both the US and Israel – the homes of the world’s two largest Jewish communities. These governmental changes affect the resilience of the Jerusalem-Washington-American-Jewry triangle.

Antisemitism: Political polarization on both right and left, and the growing power of extremist factions, have led to a rise in the number of antisemitic incidents. This phenomenon intensified particularly during and after Israel’s Operation Guardian of the Walls in Gaza. The beginnings of a “Europeanization” of antisemitism is discernible in the US and could drive a trend toward the isolation of American Jews.

The COVID-19 pandemic: Jewish communities worldwide (and the State of Israel) are facing yet another wave of the pandemic. It is too early to tell how this will affect global efforts to return to a normal commercial and social existence. One can see Jewish communal changes in response to the pandemic – in particular, a shift to remote activity. These changes will likely have a long-term impact on the format of the communities and their activities.

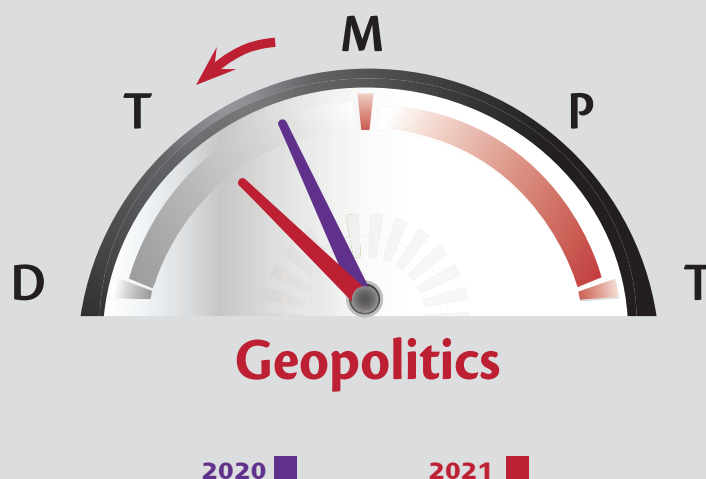
Geopolitics: Israel continues to face two major security and diplomatic challenges. In the Iranian arena, the Biden administration is seeking to return to the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA), to Israel’s displeasure. In the Palestinian arena, the past year witnessed another round of violence between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Beyond that, the pandemic and other factors have undermined stability in many Middle Eastern countries.

Polarization and society: Polarization deepened markedly in Israel this year. Arab Israeli rioting, mostly in the mixed cities, and Jewish counter-rioting, testified to the relative fragility of relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis. Tensions also ran high between Haredim and non-Haredim, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of the Mount Meron disaster.

Jewish identity: Data from the United States indicate widening cultural gaps between different segments of the Jewish population, particularly among the younger generation. A rise in the population share of Orthodox Jews, and a concomitant rise in the percentage of “Jews of no religion” (Jews who identify as cultural or ethnic Jews), is creating a reality of widely divergent beliefs and behaviors between Jews from different groups. At the same time, the share of “mainstream” American Jews, who had been the core of the community during its boom years in the 20th century, has declined.

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Geopolitics



The geopolitical environment Israel navigates is affected by both the change of US presidents and the change of government in Jerusalem. Israel may find itself harmed by measures taken by the new US President, Joe Biden, both those reflecting divergence from Donald Trump's foreign policy, (relating particularly to the Iranian and Palestinian issues, the international order, and international institutions), and those that perpetuate Trump's foreign policy approach (prioritization of domestic issues, aversion to military engagement, reduced presence in the Middle East). In the Iranian arena, Israel faces a thorny dilemma: how to deflect the nuclear threat without slipping into a crisis with Washington. Deepening political polarization,

and a growing tendency in the Democratic Party's progressive wing to criticize Israel and refrain from supporting it, pose a challenge to American Jews and to Israel. Escalating tension between the great powers (the US vis-à-vis China and Russia) sharpen Israeli dilemmas and may drag it into the role of pawn in an inter-power conflict. At the same time, economic and political crises, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, have caused instability and problems of governance in many Middle Eastern countries, and exposed them to the danger of descending into violence. To sum up, despite the historic achievement of last year's Abraham Accords, there has been no turning point that promises a solution to the

fundamental strategic problems facing Israel: the security threats (Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria) and failure to resolve the Palestinian issue.

Based on the above, we have moved the Geopolitics gauge needle in a negative direction.

Trends and recommendations

Preserving the relationship with the US (and with American Jewry) should be a supreme objective, one entailing scrupulous management, integration, focus, and coordination between Israel's governmental systems.

Explanation: The changes in US foreign policy ushered in by the new president pose significant challenges for Israel. The overwhelming importance to Israel of its relationship with the US and with American Jewry makes it essential that the Israeli government manage its disagreements with the Biden administration in a cautious, respectful, and intelligent way. Israel must reach understandings with the US while avoiding a crisis. Most of the geopolitical analysis presented herein relates to this issue.

Cultivate bipartisan sympathy for Israel.

Explanation: A problematic trend underscored by the recent confrontation with Hamas is the erosion of American bipartisan support for Israel. This development, which has emerged against the background of deepening internal American polarization, constitutes a strategic risk for Israel and the Jewish people (all the more so as it has been accompanied by a surge in antisemitic

incidents). The intensification of anti-Israel sentiment in Congress, and the pressure exerted on the president by the progressive wing of the Democratic Party to harden his stance regarding Israel on various issues, should not be ignored. The fact that 70% of US Jews support the Democratic Party, and a portion of them agree with some of the criticism directed at the Israeli government, and that a trend of alienation from the Zionist enterprise among some the younger generation of Jews – increasingly threaten the resilience of the strategic triangular relationship: Jerusalem-Washington-American Jewry.

Measures that would spark Palestinian unrest should be avoided where possible, and efforts should be made toward constructive dialogue with the Palestinian Authority.

Explanation: President Biden has renewed talks with Abu Mazen, restored aid to the Palestinian Authority, and announced his intention to reopen the consulate in Jerusalem that had formerly coordinated US ties with the PA (President Trump had closed the consulate). The prevailing view is that Biden will not push for the rapid achievement of a permanent agreement, as he does not believe the sides are ripe for that, but he is definitely expected to step up demands that Israel improve its treatment of the Palestinians and refrain from creating facts on the ground that would hamper future implementation of the two-state solution (i.e., establishing settlements beyond the settlement blocs adjacent to the 1967 borders, or actions in East Jerusalem that would be deemed provocative).

5

Material Resources



Israel is currently in the process of approving a state budget, after three years of political instability in which it was not possible to formulate an agreeable budget. The budget reflects Israel's stable economic situation and includes a substantial number of reforms and investments in various initiatives and infrastructure. This year the Israeli economy also benefited from increased investment in high-tech, and especially the cyber sector, which has taken on greater importance due

to the pandemic-fueled shift toward remote communications. However, the budget negotiations are taking place in the midst of a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in a climate of political pressure: the narrowness of the coalition gives every Knesset member the power to torpedo the budget. In the global arena, pent-up demand from the coronavirus year, savings amassed during the pandemic, and heavy (deficit) spending by the government will create incentives for significant short-term

growth. At the same time, there is growing concern about the possibility of inflation. We have slightly moved the Material Resources gauge needle in a negative direction this year, based on two phenomena observed during the pandemic. One is the decision-making and implementation difficulties exhibited by the political echelon in some Western countries, and especially Israel and the United States. The other is the widening of already-substantial economic gaps between different groups, and a worsening of employment disparities.

Trends and recommendations

Efforts to integrate the Haredi sector in Israeli national life must be deepened.

Explanation: Relations between Israeli Haredim and the country's non-Haredi majority are characterized by perpetual tension, which is now on the rise. The tension stems from a lack of consensus on fundamental matters of state culture – from the (non-Haredi) majority's disapproval of Haredi reliance on economic assistance funded by other segments of society, and from the fact that the Haredim generally do not serve in the IDF. During the pandemic, yet another source of tension was the refusal of some segments of Haredi society to abide by governmental health guidelines. Tension also resulted from the Mount Meron disaster on Lag B'Omer, in which over 40 people were killed. The Haredi public's emergence as a numerically and socially significant factor in the Jewish world necessitates cooperation between Haredi

leaders and the leaders of other Jewish sectors. This is the case regarding the Haredi sector's integration in Israeli national life (national service, economic contribution, social and political integration), and also regarding its further integration in the leadership of Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

The COVID-19 pandemic widened socioeconomic gaps that need to be addressed.

Explanation: In Israel and elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated processes that widen socioeconomic disparities between different sectors, with education and vocational training as primary contributing factors. In Israel, paradoxically, the average wage rose during the crisis, as most jobseekers (those who were dismissed or placed on furlough) belonged to the lower socioeconomic sectors to begin with. Similar problems were observed in many other nations, with disparities widening not just between sectors within individual countries, but also between wealthy and less wealthy countries. In light of these developments, the government must comprehensively address disparities in Israel, both in order to improve the status of the country's less affluent populations, and to keep Israel from plummeting on the global prosperity scale.

Investment in strengthening Israel's cyber sector must continue.

Explanation: The fact that the digital sphere emerged stronger from the pandemic underscores the importance of the high-tech sector in general, and the cybersecurity industry

in particular. This growing importance, along with an upsurge in cyber warfare and cybercrime, drove a dramatic rise in investment in Israeli cybersecurity companies this year (Israel is regarded as a global power in this field). The continuing worldwide trend toward digitization will likely sustain demand for Israeli products, contribute to Israel's relatively rapid recovery from the pandemic-spawned economic slowdown, and bolster

Israel's status as an economic powerhouse and knowledge hub.¹ This strong showing gives Israel media and diplomatic leverage as many other countries would like to benefit from its technology and knowhow. However, as evidenced by the recent scandal involving the NSO Group, it is very important that Israel carefully manage the export licenses granted to firms active in the offensive cybersphere.

1 See: "As Cyber Wars Escalate, Israeli Tech Gains an Edge," Sophie Shulman, Calcalist, April 2, 2021, <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctech/articles/0,7340,L-3902572,00.html>

6

Community Bonds



The COVID-19 pandemic caused a forced distancing between Jews, both within individual communities and between different communities. At the same time, political and social polarization also affects Jewish population groups, making it difficult for them to engage in dialogue. At the same time, the antisemitic discourse prevalent in many countries is bringing communities together, based on a shared interest

in curbing the phenomenon. Israel's recent change in government presents an opportunity to turn a new page in inter-community relations on several different levels, as the cumulative impact of previous governments fades. Within US Jewry, the share of Jews with weak ties to Israel is growing.

Based on the above, we have left the Community Bonds gauge unchanged.

Trends and recommendations

Israel should (to the best of its ability) assist in preventing further polarization within American Jewry.

Explanation: The Pew report, *Jewish Americans in 2020*, points to an alarming trend within US Jewry: a growing polarization in regard to Judaism and Jewish identity, particularly among the younger generation. This widening polarization is a significant departure from the American Jewish identity of the 20th century and may be characterized as follows: 1) an Orthodox Jewish identity; and 2) “Jews of no religion.” According to the data, it appears that Jews of no religion do not hold the “sacred” commitment to Jewish continuity and solidarity. There are also signs that the Haredim are moving in the direction of factionalism, with only those who adhere to Halacha, being considered “true Jews.” If these trends continue to deepen among the younger generation of Jews, polarization will increase and cooperation within the US Jewish community will become harder. Israel can play a role in helping the American community find ways of reversing this trend; at the same time, it should avoid measures that could exacerbate the polarization.

The formation of the new government should be utilized as an opportunity for renewed dialogue with disengaged (mostly liberal) sectors within American Jewry.

Explanation: Studies by the Pew Research Center and the Jewish Agency indicate an erosion of the sense of connection young non-

Orthodox Jews in the United States feel to Israel (the US significantly differs from other Jewish communities around the world, whose ties to Israel seem to be strengthening). This erosion stems from a variety of factors, not all of which are subject to the government’s control, and many of which cannot be addressed by the government. However, the erosion can also be traced to Israel’s image as shaped by its governments of the past decade. The new government has the opportunity to correct this image through measures already undertaken that will change the status quo on matters of religion and state, as well as through dialogue.

The US communities should employ educational means to strengthen young Jews’ identification with the Zionist narrative.

Explanation: New data and controversial statements made over the past year point to the existence of a sizeable, and likely growing, group of young American Jews who question the very existence of a Jewish nation state. This development constitutes a strategic problem in Israel-Diaspora relations, and must be urgently addressed, first of all via the means available to the organized Jewish community and, where necessary, with Israeli assistance. It is worth noting that increasing reports of such a trend may also sabotage the sense of connection young Israelis feel toward American Jewry.

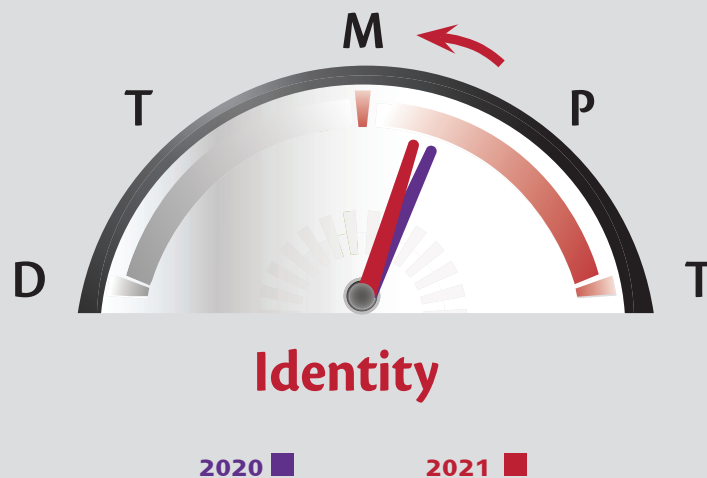
Israel should devote thought and resources to strengthening digital/remote interaction with Diaspora Jews.

Explanation: The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend toward online activity. In a number of areas, there seems to be no going back. In the Jewish world, such a development could affect the way organizations and movements conduct themselves. For example, joint learning, conferences, and content-based events may continue to be held virtually. Institutions involved in strengthening Israel-Diaspora relations should therefore prepare for the possibil-

ity that there will be no “return to normal” in terms of visits, gatherings, and other events on the same scale as in the past. Thus, in parallel to preparing for the earlier norm, these institutions should also devote some energy to identifying and initiating other options for deepening the relationship. The digital dimension actually opens up many possibilities for continuous, trans-continental interaction.

7

Identity and Identification



The pandemic affected Jews' engagement with community activities this year. It lowered the level of physical involvement, while driving an increase in the digital supply of Jewish cultural offerings, though without significantly enlarging the circle of participants. It will take more time to determine whether, and to what degree, Jews will return to their earlier activity pattern once the pandemic has ended. It also became clear this year, from new data on American Jews,

that within the younger generation there is a gap between those whose identity has a strong practical dimension (primarily in the Orthodox-Haredi community), and a rapidly growing population of "Jews of no religion" whose practical affiliation is much weaker.

Based on the above, we have slightly moved the Identity and Identification gauge needle in a negative direction.

Trends and recommendations

Jewish organizations (and the Israeli government) should monitor signs of a trend toward the “Europeanization” of antisemitism in the United States.

Explanation: In order for antisemitism in North America to be monitored in a systematic and integrative way, an effort must be made to identify trends that have contributed to the marginalization of European Jewish communities. This year, JPPI has been calling attention to problematic European trends of the past few decades that can now be discerned, though at lower intensity, in the United States. It is necessary to assess the relevance of each of these trends as a metric of potential communal decline, adapt each of them to the American context, and establish a basis for determining their direction and pace. This effort will have technical components (monitoring, data mining, and the like), but first there must be agreement on definitions so that measurements taken in different places can be compared.

The Israeli government should entrust the response to antisemitism to a single integrative body with powers and implementation capabilities.

Explanation: A rise in antisemitic incidents was recorded this year in many places around the world, including the United States. The situation

requires Israel to increase its involvement in dealing with the phenomenon and to establish a governmental authority with the appropriate tools for multidisciplinary action. In addition to monitoring antisemitism levels and assessing the nature of the threat, the authority would develop uniform indicators for evaluating the phenomenon in the various arenas in which it manifests. Per its assessment, the authority would set comprehensive policy, launch action initiatives (vis-à-vis governments, Jewish communities, and other relevant entities), coordinate their implementation with the parties involved, and monitor their efficacy. The authority would advance projects in the spheres of education, law/legislation, diplomacy, public relations, new media, Jewish community security, and more.

The new government should encourage initiatives that foster the development of a non-religious Jewish identity.

Explanation: Data collected this year by JPPI indicate that a large majority of Israeli Jews want Israel to be a “Jewish state.” However, only a minority of them feel that Israel should remain “as Jewish as it is today,” while the majority want Israel to be “more Jewish” (37%) or “less Jewish” (23%).¹ The data show that those at the secular end of the spectrum tend to want a “less Jewish” state, while the traditionalist to religious/Haredi end of the spectrum desire a “more Jewish”

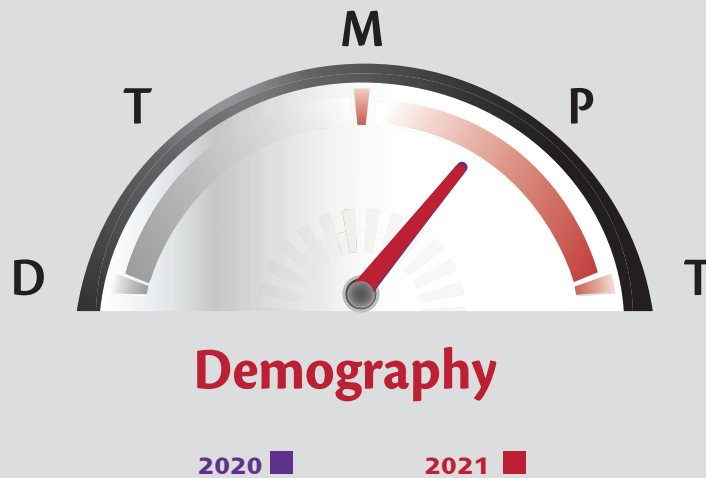
1 See: The 2021 Israeli Pluralism Index: Consensus and Disagreements, Shmuel Rosner, Noah Slepkov, Professor Camil Fuchs. The Jewish People Policy Institute, April 2021.

state. As we understand it, this situation stems from an identification of the state's Jewishness with religiosity, which both drives polarization and undermines the (not-religion-based) sense of Jewish commonality shared by all Israeli Jews.

In an era when religious practice and belief can no longer serve as an "identity glue" for the entire Jewish public, broad-consensus initiatives to strengthen non-religion-based elements of Jewish identity should be encouraged.

8

Jewish Demography



The past year was defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis period will likely have long-term ramifications with regard to family planning, childbearing, and migration. A new survey of US

Jewry arrived at a larger population estimate than in the past (the figures are disputed).

We have left the Jewish Demography gauge unchanged.

Trends and recommendations

There are over seven million Jews in the US, but the numbers are subject to interpretation.

Explanation: The Pew Research Center determined, through a comprehensive survey, that there are currently some 7.5 million people in the US who identify as Jews, most of them “by religion,” with a quarter identifying as “Jews of no religion.”¹ JPPI holds that 200,000 children of dual identity (Jewish + another religion) should be subtracted from this figure, for an estimated US Jewish population of 7.3 million. A more conservative estimate, which excludes “Jews of no religion” who have only one Jewish parent, would bring the total down to six million.² The new US Jewish population estimate indicates substantial growth compared with the estimates of the late 20th century. It primarily reflects shifts in group identity and a sense of security in identifying as a Jew in contemporary America. The estimate indicates that, in contrast to what we previously thought, the American Jewish population is not declining or eroding; it is expanding. The population increases in Israel and the US, the world’s two largest Jewish communities, affect the estimated population size of world Jewry, bringing it to 16.5 million.

A more conservative estimate would put the global Jewish population at 15.2 million.

The criteria of the Law of Return, as well as the Law’s implications for the character of today’s aliyah, must be re-examined.

Explanation: Half of today’s olim come from the former Soviet Union, especially Russia and Ukraine. Over two-thirds of those immigrating to Israel are eligible for Aliyah under the Law of Return are not halachically Jewish. This being the case, and in light of other cultural and demographic developments underway in the Jewish world, JPPI reaffirms its recommendation that the criteria of the Law of Return, which currently allows the adult grandchildren of Jews to enter Israel, be reassessed. The current ideologically diverse government, which represents a range of positions and approaches, is actually well-positioned to reach a consensus-based, non-polarizing outcome – the kind of outcome best-suited to the present situation.

Israel should re-examine and improve its methods of encouraging Aliyah.

Explanation: Over the past year, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aliyah to Israel dropped precipitously.³ In light of this, a comprehensive examination of ways to encourage Aliyah and improve absorption methods would seem to be in order. Twenty thousand olim arrived in Israel in 2020, compared with 33,000 the previous year – a decline of 40%. This occurred despite optimistic forecasts for a wave of Jewish immigration spurred by growing antisemitism and drawn by the appeal of Israel’s economy. In light of this, a comprehensive examination of ways to encourage Aliyah and optimize absorption is required.

Endnotes

- 1 Pew Research Center. 2021. Jewish Americans in 2020. Washington, D.C.
- 2 This is the estimate of the demographer Sergio DellaPergola, which also appears as a reference in the Pew study itself.
- 3 The data for Israel are based on various publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics, in particular the Statistical Abstract of Israel and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics.

IN-DEPTH ANALYSES

9

The Geopolitical Arena: from the Trump Era to the Biden Era

Key Points

- **A double vulnerability:** Following the change of US presidential administrations, Israel has become vulnerable to measures reflecting both change and continuity in American foreign policy.
- **The global chessboard:** Growing tension between the superpowers (the US vis-à-vis China and Russia) sharpens Israel's dilemmas and could turn Israel into a pawn in inter-power conflicts.
- **The Iran threat:** Israel faces a diplomatic-security dilemma on the Iranian front: how to repel the nuclear threat without sliding into crisis with Washington?
- **The triangular relationship:** Growing polarization and demands by the Democratic Party's progressive wing for action against Israel pose challenges to American Jewry.
- **The Middle East:** Economic and political crisis, driven in part by the coronavirus pandemic, is plunging many different countries into a vortex of instability, governance problems, and potential descent into violence.

Introduction

The new Israeli government took office in June 2021 under a looming question mark about its life expectancy. The two preceding years, during which four elections were held, were marked by political instability that undermined Israeli resilience and deterrence. Although we cannot know how long the Bennett-Lapid government, which rests on a tiny parliamentary majority, will last, there is much greater clarity regarding the seriousness of the tasks at hand. The still-present, still-threatening COVID-19 pandemic poses significant domestic economic, social, and health challenges. At the same time, the geopolitical arena – regional and international – poses equally difficult external challenges for Israel. A reminder of this was the recent round of fighting with Hamas (May 10-21, 2021), during which 4,360 rockets were fired at Israel, with the first barrage targeting Jerusalem. The bloody confrontation was accompanied by violent incidents between Jews and Arabs, which erupted first in Jerusalem but then spread to other mixed Israeli cities. The eventuality that Israel would be faced with a multi-front attack, with the possibility of civil unrest among Arab Israelis becoming more tangible than ever (for more on these events, see page 59).

The security and diplomatic challenges faced by Israel stem from a number of interrelated hot spots: Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and regional hegemony; the fragility of the Palestinian arena; the chronic instability of the Middle East, superpower competition. All of these challenges

exist against the background of the change of US presidents, which may signal shifts in American foreign policy in areas that affect Israel's resilience and the strength of the strategic triangle: Jerusalem-Washington-US-Jewry.

American foreign policy

Donald Trump's presidency accelerated the erosion of the influence of the liberal-democratic ethos on the world order and its institutions. Trump showed no interest in maintaining the status of the US as leader of the free world, which promotes the values of democracy and human rights. With little regard for the United States' Western allies, he showed no interest in alliances or in the cultivation of international institutions; he abandoned the Iran nuclear agreement, left European leaders with major questions about his commitment to NATO, withdrew from the climate agreement, and terminated support for the World Health Organization. Trump did not disapprove of dictators; he rejected the "ideology of globalism," preferring instead the "doctrine of patriotism." He made it clear that he would not interfere in the domestic affairs of countries that violate human rights, and did not condition his support for them on democratic reforms.

Since the US presidential transition (January 2021), it has become clear that President Joe Biden aims to reverse the course set by his predecessor on a number of foreign policy issues. On other matters, despite differences in style and rhetoric, Biden remains aligned with Trump's

policies. Biden has affirmed that American diplomacy should once again emphasize the values of freedom, human rights, and respect for the rule of law. He argues that the “defining question of our time” is the struggle between the autocratic and the democratic worlds, and that the central mission of the US is to help democracy win. He has promised to refortify the global democratic camp, declared that the US is once again fulfilling its role as a world leader, affirmed the US commitment to defending NATO allies (Article 5), and pledged renewed US involvement in international organizations.

True to his promises, Biden returned the US to the climate agreement; renewed American support for the World Health Organization; is working to return the US to the Iran nuclear deal; has returned to the UN Human Rights Council; is lifting the sanctions Trump imposed on the International Criminal Court (which early this year approved opening an investigation against Israel on suspicion of war crimes); has publicly recognized the Armenian genocide; has attacked China for oppressing its Muslim Uyghur minority and violating the rights of Hong Kong residents; has accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of interfering in the 2020 US elections, and called him a “murderer”; has warned Russia of “devastating consequences” should opposition leader Alexei Navalny die in prison (the Biden administration has been unequivocal in contending that Navalny was poisoned by the Russian security services); and is tightening sanctions against Moscow over its aggression and human rights abuses.

However, like his predecessor, Biden is also prioritizing American internal challenges, and harnessing foreign policy to help address domestic distress. He, too, is seeking to bring American troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan by the end of the year, but a failed implementation of the withdrawal from Kabul in mid-August could lead to long-term consequences. Images of Afghans trying to hold on to American evacuation planes and falling from great heights to their deaths have led to a widespread analogy between this retreat and the humiliating images of the American abandonment of Saigon in 1975. The bottom line is that after 20 years of engagement in Afghanistan, 2,300 American soldiers were killed and over a trillion dollars invested in occupation and rehabilitation, the Taliban have taken over the country. The Afghan military, trained and equipped by the US, has vanished as if it never existed. Biden’s promise that the United States will once again play a leading role in the global arena and that issues of democracy and human rights will be re-emphasized in US foreign policy has come under a resounding question mark. The strategic vacuum left by the American abandonment of the Middle East was not absent from the threat assessment submitted to the president in mid-April, according to which “Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, and Pyongyang have demonstrated the capability and intent to advance their interests at the expense of the United States and its allies [...]” The shocking images of the evacuation from Afghanistan may intensify this trend.

As a realist leader experienced in assessing the international power balance, Biden does not delude himself that the current world order can function under exclusive American hegemony; he aims for sober management of inter-power competition. Secretary of State Antony Blinken defined this approach as follows: “[The United States will be] competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be.” Faced with the challenge posed by China and Russia in their efforts to expand their spheres of influence, Biden is working to strengthen such regional alliances

Focusing on domestic affairs while striving to avoid military involvement in the Middle East could lead to an erosion of Israeli deterrence

as NATO and the Quad (the US, Japan, Australia, and India) that aim to obstruct China’s efforts to dominate the South China Sea. Biden’s ambition to mobilize Europe alongside the US in contending with China and Russia is not easily realizable. The European nations do not underestimate the power, or the geopolitical cards held by Beijing and Moscow. Thus far, 139 countries have joined the Belt and Road Initiative, expressing the world’s recognition of China’s economic might and a desire to do business with it. Economic considerations also undergird Germany’s insistence on advancing the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project with Russia, ignoring Washington’s disapproval. Germany even managed to persuade Biden not to threaten

project participants with sanctions (May 2021).

Like his predecessor Trump, Biden views the challenge posed by China’s growing economic and military power as the organizing principle of American foreign policy. China is coping with the sanctions imposed by Washington by reducing its economic dependence on the United States. This could erode the element of interdependence that has helped maintain stable relations between the two superpowers. Although Biden depicts the confrontation with China (and Russia) as an ideologically charged struggle (democracy versus autocracy), he knows that the more the US steps up tough measures against Chinese and Russian violations of liberal-democratic norms, the less willing they would be to cooperate on global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, free trade, nuclear arms proliferation, global warming, and calming conflict hotspots. Biden is well aware that the solutions he wishes to advance in the face of these challenges require cooperation and recognition of the power of Beijing and Moscow. This awareness is reflected in his decision, immediately upon taking office, to extend the American-Russian START treaty on nuclear nonproliferation by five years.

Israel, from Trump to Biden

Israel could find itself imperiled both by Biden’s moves **reflecting disengagement** from the Trump administration’s foreign policy (especially regarding Iran, the Palestinians, and attitudes toward the world order and

international institutions), as well as by moves **reflecting continuity** (subordinating foreign policy to domestic challenges that take priority, reluctance toward military involvement, reduced presence in the Middle East, and the confrontation with China).

The character of the world order during the Trump era provided a regional and international environment that allowed the Israeli government to act with fewer restraints. In a world order that increasingly legitimized the use of force and in which the discourse on the values of democracy and human rights was shunted aside, Israel faced fewer restrictions on its use of force in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and other arenas, and less criticism of its settlement policy in Judea and Samaria. It also faced less pressure from the International Criminal Court in the Hague and fewer abusive, but increasingly ineffectual, resolutions of a weakened UN.

The Biden era, with its emphasis on human rights, may lead to some uncomfortable consequences for Israel: Jerusalem may be required to side with the US in a way that would undermine its relations with other superpowers; a similar demand may arise with respect to other countries that show friendship toward Israel, but whose rulers have drifted from democratic norms (such as Hungary). In addition, as President Biden seeks to reinforce the status of international institutions and refrains from providing Israel with unconditional support – including the automatic veto in the Security Council – Israel

may find itself under pressure and subject to unfavorable decisions (this past April's Human Rights Watch statement that Israel is guilty of "crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution" could spur additional declarations of the same kind).

The erosion of the place of liberal values in the world order that characterized the Trump era also helped to push the Palestinian issue off the international and regional agendas, and thus facilitated the normalization process with countries in the region (the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco). The return of the Palestinian issue to the agenda will reduce the flexibility of Arab rulers in their open relations with Israel.

Even in areas where Biden appears to be continuing along the path laid out by Trump, a negative trend, unfavorable to Israel, can be identified: focusing on domestic affairs while striving to avoid military presence or involvement in the Middle East, creates a vacuum that draws Russia and China into greater involvement in the region, and could lead to a gradual erosion of Israeli deterrence and the power attributed to it. An expression of this alarming reality is reflected in recent remarks (June 7, 2021) by General Kenneth McKenzie, commander of the United States Central Command, in which he warns of Iranian subversion, and notes that Russia and China are deepening their involvement in the region, based on a sense that the US is reducing its presence there.

The Iranian threat

Neither the harsh sanctions imposed on Iran, nor Iran's problematic economic situation (major water shortage, power outages, violent demonstrations, labor strikes), have halted progress on the country's nuclear program or prevented its regional subversion –palpable in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq. The election of Ebrahim Raisi (June 19, 2021) as president, a loyalist of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and known to be directly responsible for the mass execution of opposition figures, does not herald moderation (senior representatives of Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad sat in the front row of Raisi's swearing in ceremony). Indeed, at the time of writing, Iran does not seem to be in hurry to reach understandings that would allow the US to return to the nuclear deal (JCPOA).

Israel believes that the Biden administration's intention to return to the JCPOA, if implemented without significant amendments, will bring Iran closer to military nuclear capability, lift the levers of economic pressure on it, and encourage its aggressive pursuit of regional hegemony. According to the JCPOA, in 2030 most of the restrictions on Iran will expire (as early as 2023, restrictions on ballistic missile development, imposed by the Security Council in Resolution 2231, will be eliminated). However, Iran has not complied with the agreement since it was abandoned by the United States, and is now operating advanced centrifuges, enriching uranium to 60% (the deal

allows a level of 3.67%) and producing uranium metal (essential to the core of a nuclear bomb). According to Secretary Blinken, this could reduce Iran's "breakout time" for amassing enough fissile material to produce a nuclear weapon to a matter of weeks.

Washington's desire to return to the JCPOA could limit Israel's military freedom of action in the face of the Iranian threat, as an Israeli move would be interpreted in the US as an attempt to torpedo its policy and even drag it into violent confrontation with Iran. Paradoxically, instead of American power helping Israel undermine Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Iranians may benefit from Washington's desire to reach an agreement with them, as that would motivate the US to block Israeli action. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, have made it clear that Israel opposes an American return to the JCPOA, or any softening of sanctions against Iran, in the absence of meaningful amendments to the agreement. Israel argues that it must utilize a variety of measures to not only halt Iran's nuclear program, but also its development of advanced ballistic missiles and aspirations to regional hegemony. In the meantime, it is not clear that the US accepts Israel's position and seems willing to delay efforts to obtain amendments until after resumption of the deal.

Military actions against Iran attributed to Israel amplify the possibility of deteriorating into widespread military confrontation. In Iran's

eyes, Israel is responsible for the assassination of the father of the Iranian nuclear program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh (November 27, 2020); for damage to Iranian tankers carrying oil to Syria; for cyber-attacks; and for sabotage of the uranium enrichment facility at Natanz (April 11, 2021) – all in addition to ongoing attacks on Iranian forces and its allies in Syrian territory, on the supply of advanced arms to Hezbollah and the facilities designed to upgrade the accuracy of the missiles it possesses. Iran is making good on its threats to respond to Israeli attacks and has struck Israeli-owned tankers (an incident from late July, the first to cause loss of human life, was recognized by the US and the UK as an Iranian operation).

The development of the Israel-Iran conflict has been affected by Biden administration decisions that directly pertain to the Iranian arena, but also by US actions in the superpower arena. American hostility toward China is motivating Beijing to deepen ties with Iran and extricate it from the isolation and sanctions imposed on it. This is evidenced by a \$400 billion economic and military cooperation agreement promising Chinese investment in Iranian infrastructure, and the supply of Iranian oil to China, for a period of 25 years (March 27, 2021).

The bottom line is that Israel is facing a torturous dilemma: how to reach an understanding with the US that would keep the Iranian nuclear threat at bay without sliding into crisis with its main ally.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

President Biden is not reversing Trump's decisions to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, to move the US Embassy there, or to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights (Secretary Blinken has affirmed that, in the absence of a reliable Syrian partner, Israeli control over the Golan is acceptable to the US, regardless of the area's legal status). Nevertheless, and despite the fact that the Palestinian issue is not high on the president's list of priorities, his policy on that issue differs from that of his predecessor.

Trump closed the American consulate in Jerusalem where US ties with the Palestinian Authority had been coordinated, stopped aid to UNRWA, closed the PLO mission in Washington, imposed sanctions on senior ICC personnel, and proposed a plan for a permanent agreement under which the whole of Jerusalem would remain under Israeli sovereignty, and Israel would annex 30% of Judea and Samaria (in exchange for the transfer of Israeli territory equivalent to 15% of the size of the area to the Palestinians). Biden has ignored Trump's plan, renewed aid to the Palestinians and to UNRWA, removed the sanctions imposed on ICC personnel, is considering reopening the PLO office in Washington, and has announced his intention to reopen the consulate in Jerusalem.

The Biden administration has indicated that its attitude toward settlement activity, and in particular toward Israeli annexation intentions, would not be tolerant as in Trump's day. The more deeply engaged the administration

becomes with the human rights discourse in the international arena (the Democratic Party's progressive wing constantly pushes in this direction), the less legitimacy there will be for a reality in which Israel continues, in the language of its critics, to "rule over another people lacking national and political rights." Biden's efforts to breathe life into the transatlantic alliance are also expected to strengthen Europe's ability to influence the Palestinian issue in a way that would not be consistent with Israeli policy (though Europe itself is having trouble formulating a

The World Bank estimates that the cost of repairing the damage caused in Gaza by Operation Guardian of the Walls will be close to half a billion dollars

uniform policy, and in view of the rise of conservative right-wing elements on the continent, Israel has been afforded the backing of several European capitals).

According to assessments from within and outside the administration, Biden's approach to the Palestinian issue will primarily be to avoid descent into violence,

by insisting that the status quo be maintained and that no facts on the ground (i.e.: settlements) be created, which, in his view, would harm the chances for a future resolution based on the two-state principle. This limited approach stems both from the Biden administration's priorities and its assessment that the parties are not ripe for final agreement negotiations that would end the conflict. Indeed, the Palestinian side is divided and its leadership is weak and lacks public support (Fatah), or it opposes the very

recognition of Israel (Hamas). At the same time, there are deep ideological gaps within the current Israeli governing coalition; its survival requires its members to refrain from political steps toward a permanent arrangement with the Palestinians. The right-wing component of the government rejects the idea of an independent Palestinian state, while the center-left parties will reject any attempt to advance annexation or settlement expansion in territory beyond the blocs. However, while Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has so far, like his predecessor, refrained from engaging in talks with PA President Abu Mazen, other ministers in the new government are renewing contact with the Palestinian leader.

The challenge of containing the conflict with no political resolution on the horizon is exacerbated by the precarious economic situation in the territories, which worsened in past year due to a reduction in international aid and the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation of those residing in the Gaza Strip is particularly dire. The World Bank estimates that the cost of repairing the damage caused in Gaza by Operation Guardian of the Walls will be close to half a billion dollars. In the wake of the recent round of fighting, nearly two-thirds (62%) of Gaza residents have been declared food insecure and about half of the labor force is unemployed.

The 14-year split between Fatah (in the West Bank) and Hamas (in Gaza) is now compounded by a rift within Fatah, which deepened in advance of the elections that were planned for May 2021

(though not held). Abu Mazen, having failed to unite the various forces, canceled the elections in fear of a Hamas victory, which maintained a united list (he blamed Israel for having refused to permit elections in East Jerusalem). The Fatah rift, and the war of succession that is escalating due to perceptions that the aging Abu Mazen is nearing the end of his term of office, contribute to the strengthening Hamas in Judea and Samaria. This trend intensified following the round of fighting in May. The Palestinian public regards Hamas as the winner of the recent confrontation, as the defender of Jerusalem and the Muslim holy sites, and as one who deserves to lead the Palestinians (veteran pollster Dr. Khalil Shikaki calls this a “paradigm shift” in Palestinian public opinion).

The triangular relationship

Within the triangular Jerusalem-Washington-US Jewry relationship – a strategic resource and a critical force multiplier for the strength of Israel and the Jewish people – there are trends that threaten to weaken its resilience. These trends are of paramount importance as the United States, home to a thriving community that amounts to between a third and a half of the Jewish people, is the sole power on which Israel can rely. President Biden’s desire to fortify the liberal dimension of the present world order could reveal tensions in the Jewish world: a flourishing Diaspora Jewry depends on the values of the liberal-democratic system. A society that is not committed to those values

will tend to generate greater hostility toward its Jewish minority and be less likely to mobilize in its defense. By contrast, Israeli Jews, who are a majority in their country, tend to place greater emphasis on majority rights.

These gaps were evident in the run-up to the US elections in late 2020. While most Israeli Jews wanted Trump to be reelected, a majority of American Jewish voters (about 70%) wished to see him defeated. A large swath of American Jewish public expresses dissatisfaction with major elements of Israeli policy – a situation aggravated by US ideological polarization, which makes it increasingly difficult to maintain bipartisan sympathy for Israel. This constitutes a strategic risk for Israel and for the Jewish people (which is accompanied by a significant escalation in antisemitism – see page 71 for further discussion).

Only a third of US Jews feel the Israeli government is making a sincere effort toward peace with the Palestinians

During Operation Guardian of the Walls, President Biden reiterated Israel’s right to defend itself, and acted within the Security Council to give the IDF the time it needed to complete its mission. But one must not ignore the increasingly critical atmosphere toward Israel in the Congress (including, in some cases, anti-Israel statements), or the pressure exerted by the progressive wing of the Democratic Party to harden the stance

on Israel and change policy toward it. Severe criticism of Israel is also highly prevalent in American academia.

The remarks of the US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, reflect a significant different spirit from that of the Trump era: “We urge all parties to avoid actions that undermine a peaceful future. This includes avoiding incitement, violent attacks, and terrorist acts, as well as evictions – including in East Jerusalem – demolitions, and settlement construction east of the 1967 lines. And critically, all parties need to uphold and respect the historic status quo at the holy sites.” Senator Bernie Sanders, one of the most prominent among the left wing of the Democratic Party (and a Jew) referred to the Netanyahu government as “racist” and has called for a halt to weapons sales to Israel if used in a manner that violates human rights. His declaration that “Palestinian Lives Matter” is a coinage that is becoming accepted in progressive circles, according to which there is a parallel between the fate of Palestinians and the fate of blacks in the United States.

A substantial number of elected Democratic politicians feel that there has been a significant shift in party’s electorate with regard to Israel: a tendency toward an increasingly anti-Israel orientation in parallel to increased support for the Palestinians. The criticism voiced by Senator Bob Menendez regarding Israeli conduct during the recent confrontation with Hamas is particularly significant in this context, as Menendez is known to be a loyal supporter of

Israel. The main concern of Israel’s supporters in Washington is that the anti-Israel trend in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party – which is still a minority, albeit a vocal and assertive one – will seep into the mainstream. The danger is illustrated by the controversial decision by the Ben & Jerry’s ice cream company to stop selling its products in the settlements (the firm’s Jewish founders, Bennett Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, claimed, in a *New York Times* op-ed, that “this act can and should be seen as advancing the concepts of justice and human rights, core tenets of Judaism”).

Many American Jews who support the Democratic Party felt that the Netanyahu government “gave up” on them. Netanyahu’s right-hand man in the US, former Ambassador Ron Dermer, Netanyahu’s right hand in the US Former Ambassador Ron Drummer did indeed claim that “The backbone of Israel’s support in the United States is the Christian evangelicals ... you have to spend a lot more time appealing to evangelical Christians than to Jews, who felt rejected, may find themselves in a tense dilemma between their support for President Biden and their concern for Israel’s well-being. An American Jewish Committee survey found that 55% of US Jews support the president’s policy on Iran, while 32% oppose it. Former Israel Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon (Likud) addressed this dilemma bluntly: “The American Jewish leadership will have to choose between their support for the agreement with Iran or their support for Israel’s position.”

A similar dilemma will also arise regarding the Palestinian issue, if and when a dispute emerges between Jerusalem and Washington. A recent Pew Research Center survey indicates that only a third of US Jews feel that the Israeli government is making a sincere effort toward peace with the Palestinians. Among Jews who support the ruling Democratic Party, only 20% share this view. The Bennett-Lapid government has declared its intention to repair the rifts between Israel and American Jewry, to work to restore bipartisan support for Israel, and to manage any disputes with the Biden administration in a quiet, respectful way, not defiantly. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid addressed these issues on his first day in office. Noting the importance of bipartisan US support for Israel, he said that “the outgoing government took a terrible gamble, reckless and dangerous, to focus exclusively on the Republican Party and abandon Israel’s bipartisan standing.” Lapid also affirmed his commitment to changing the discourse with Diaspora Jewry: “The support of Christian evangelicals and other groups is important and heart-warming, but the Jewish people are more than allies, they are family. Jews from all streams, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox, are our family. And family is always the most important relationship, and the one that needs to be worked on more than any other.”

The coming months will reveal the extent to which these theoretical positions will be translated into action. The most significant test in the geopolitical sphere involves division on fundamental issues, chief among them the Iranian threat and the Palestinian question.

The Middle East – threats and opportunities

The Biden era is increasingly understood in the Middle East as one that attaches relatively little importance to the region, and in its renewed emphasis on issues of democracy and human rights. US energy independence has freed it from reliance on Mideast imports and is pushing the focus of American foreign policy on the strategic challenge posed by China, and on economic opportunities in Asia. This trend is deepening the strategic vacuum in the Middle East, which is drawing in Russia and China, countries that lack sentiment for Israel and that are seeking to amass achievements in the inter-power competition with the United States. Russia continues to reinforce its presence in Syria and is even establishing a sphere of influence in Lebanon. The discovery of the rich gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean has intensified Russia’s economic interest in the region and added yet another strategic tier that has the power to provoke conflicts, push the formation of alliances, and also deepen interest in overcoming divisions and advancing cooperation.

China sees the Middle East as a vital source of energy and a developing market for its products. The massive Belt and Road Initiative, which is channeling Chinese investment in large infrastructure projects, is making China a significant, powerful player in the region. The more intense the inter-power confrontation becomes, the more Israel will have to be attentive to the demands of the Biden

administration which, like its predecessor, disapproves of Israel's burgeoning economic ties with China, particularly in fields related to defense technology and knowhow (China has become Israel's second-largest trade partner). Israel's close relationship with the US may provoke Chinese antagonism and turn the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into an issue that, for China, is a pawn on the chessboard in dealing with the United States. Operation Guardian of the Walls drew harsh Chinese criticism of Israel, and the Chinese foreign minister

The Middle East is characterized by instability and the constant danger of deterioration into violent clashes between Israel and Iran, Hezbollah, Syria, and the Palestinians

chose to personally chair a special Security Council meeting on the issue (May 16, 2021), both to stress China's commitment to the Palestinians and the Arab world, and to confront the US over its support for Israel. The Chinese foreign minister tweeted during the operation: "The US claims that it cares about the HumanRights [sic] of Muslims. But it turns a blind eye to the sufferings

of Palestinian Muslims."

The threat posed by Iran is spurring the Sunni Middle Eastern states to inter-Arab cooperation (a noteworthy summit brought Egyptian, Jordanian, and Iraqi heads of state together in Baghdad this past June). But it is also deepening security cooperation and normalization with Israel, as reflected in the historic Abraham

Accords between the Gulf states and Israel (this new attitude was revealed in Saudi Arabia's decision to allow one of its athletes to compete, for the first time, against an Israeli athlete in the Tokyo Olympics).

The Middle East region is characterized by chronic instability and the constant danger of deterioration into violent clashes between Israel and Iran, Hezbollah, Syria, and the Palestinians. The region is saturated with conflicts and sociopolitical trends that undermine its stability. The negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region (a drop in oil and gas revenues, a tourism freeze, a decline in remittances by foreign workers in the Gulf states) compounded the region's more fundamental ills – war, terrorism, floods of refugees, humanitarian crises, stagnant economies, corruption, unemployment, and governmental failure. Tunisia, the sole nation whose "Arab spring" left a real mark, disappointed those for whom it had saw it as evidence of the Middle East's march toward a future of freedom and democracy. Following widespread public protests against the government (among Tunisian youth the unemployment rate is 40%), President Kais Saied suspended Tunisia's parliament, fired its prime minister, and seized power (July 25, 2021).

Against this background, the following developments of the past year are relevant to Israeli resilience:

Syria – President Assad, who controls 70% of Syria's territory, won 95% of the votes in the elections held on May 27, 2021. Neither the

Western countries nor the Syrian opposition recognized the election results, meaning that the chances of those results bringing political or economic relief to a country ravaged by civil war are not high. Syria is divided into four enclaves, with the dominant element in each of them relying on at least one foreign state: Russia, Iran, Turkey, or the United States. Russia, which is pressuring the Arab League to reinstate Syria as a member, is driven by considerations that could make it hard for Israel to attack Iranian targets in Syria. Indeed, recent reports suggest that Russian advisers are helping Syrian air defenses intercept Israeli missiles fired at Iranian targets.

Lebanon – The country that was once a symbol of modernity and prosperity is in a particularly deep economic crisis. Within two years, Lebanese currency lost 90% percent of its value, half of its citizens have slipped into poverty, and its infrastructure is collapsing. The ability of the political system to deal with these challenges is minimal, among other things, due to Hezbollah's opposition to economic or governmental reforms that would harm the organization's status or its revenues. Without a commitment to the necessary reforms, the international aid Lebanon so badly needs will not be forthcoming. The chaotic situation has enticed Iran to deepen its influence via Hezbollah, and to establish a military presence near Israel's northern border. Hezbollah apparently has no interest in another war with Israel, and the organization's spokesmen even say so openly – but in a situation where the state is crumbling,

an unplanned or unintended escalation could occur. In such a case, Israel would face an organization of trained fighters that possesses 140,000 missiles and rockets, some of them precision guided. The IDF is preparing for such a deterioration and is readying itself to deploy ground forces deep into Lebanese territory in order to neutralize Hezbollah's missile arsenal.

Jordan – The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the kingdom's ongoing economic crisis (Jordan is dependent on American aid – 1.5 billion dollars per year). The country's unemployment rate has climbed from 15% to 25%, with one out of every two young Jordanians jobless. Criticism of the king has permeated the younger generation of the Bedouin tribes that form the mainstay of the Hashemite Dynasty. In early April 2021, the Jordanian government claimed to have uncovered a conspiracy against King Abdullah II involving Prince Hamzah, who was temporarily placed under house arrest. Relations between Israel and Jordan have been in crisis over the past year: a visit to the Temple Mount by the Jordanian crown prince was cancelled, Jordan refused to allow Prime Minister Netanyahu to fly through its airspace on his way to the UAE, and, in response, Israel delayed approving the supply of additional water to Jordan during an especially severe water shortage. The Bennett-Lapid government is working to turn a new page in Israeli-Jordanian relations, and a secret meeting took place between Bennett and King Abdullah II in Amman. In an open meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers (July 8, 2021), it

was agreed that an additional 50 million cubic meters of water would be sold to Jordan.

Saudi Arabia – Washington has hardened its stance toward Saudi Arabia and allowed the publication of an intelligence report that places responsibility for the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi on the shoulders of senior officials in the kingdom, including Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. The US has imposed sanctions on the suspects and is restricting the sale of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia to keep them from being used in the war in Yemen. A diminished US presence in the region, and a harsher Biden administration stance toward the Saudi government and other autocratic regimes, could have contradictory consequences: On one hand, they might strengthen these countries' interest in relying on Israel's capabilities; on the other hand, they might be drawn to strike agreements with Iran. Indeed, the Saudi Crown Prince has openly acknowledged a desire for dialogue with Iran, and there have been numerous reports of such a dialogue, which could fracture the regional front against Iranian aggression in which Israel has an interest.

Turkey – Erdoğan's aggressive policies in the international arena, and the involvement of Turkish forces in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Azerbaijan, have not helped in addressing the country's domestic economic challenges. The same is true of Turkey's diplomatic confrontation with the US, reflected in the purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia, in contravention of Turkey's NATO membership (a move by

Erdoğan that led to US sanctions and Turkey's removal from a program to develop the next generation of F-35 stealth jets). The economic crisis, the change of administration in the US, the ruling party's declining popularity, and concern for the results of the next elections (June 2023) are leading Erdoğan to reverse his confrontational approach. This year he has initiated dialogue with Egypt to normalize the unstable relations between the two countries; he has also employed conciliatory language toward Israel ("The time has come to end the rivalries and seek friends"), and made a congratulatory phone call to then Israeli President-elect Isaac Herzog (July 12, 2021).

Nevertheless, Erdoğan is having a hard time sticking to the conciliatory line. During a trip to Northern Cyprus, he announced the reopening of the abandoned town of Varosha and called for a two-state solution to the conflict on the island (a solution that is unacceptable to the international community, which advocates a federal arrangement). In light of these moves, Israel was quick to declare its full support for Cyprus, a testament to the growing strategic axis between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, as well as an expression Israeli concern about a possible Turkish military presence near its shores.

The transition from the Trump era to the Biden era could potentially ignite significant areas of disagreement between the United States and Israel. The two main geopolitical issues that may be at the heart of a dispute are the Iranian

threat (nuclear and regional), and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Confrontation between Jerusalem and Washington can, of course, be expected to come at a significant price, including an escalation of tension between Israel and American Jews, and an erosion in the strength of the strategic triangular relationship: Washington-Jerusalem-US Jewry. Smart and prudent management of Israeli foreign policy vis-à-vis the Biden administration has now become a challenge of the highest order.

10

The Jewish People 2021: COVID-19, Society, Identity

Key Points

- Processes related to the Covid-19 pandemic, social and cultural developments, Israeli policy, and political polarization are driving an upsurge in antisemitism around the world.
- The pandemic caused the Jewish world to move online in many spheres – a situation that could have a major impact on Jewish communal life and culture.
- There is a new Israeli government based on a very small Knesset majority, trying to survive through constant compromise between the different elements of the coalition characterized by large ideological rifts.
- The American Jewish community continues to grow, and is becoming more culturally, ethnically, and ideologically diverse, with fewer commonalities between its subsectors.
- There is a widening ideological and attitudinal gap within the younger generation of American Jews between the growing population of “Jews of no religion” and the growing population of Orthodox Jews, with a concomitant decline in Jews’ sense of attachment to Israel.

Introduction

This year's JPPI Annual Assessment considers myriad trends in many different areas of life, all of which have an impact, whether primary or secondary, on the Jewish people. The COVID-19 pandemic, the potential consequences of which were explored at length in last year's Assessment, remains a global reality, and as such affects the Jewish people. Some measure of clarity has been achieved on a number of levels with regard to those consequences, but there is no real certainty about whether humanity is on the way to getting the virus under control. Uncertainty still surrounds the pandemic's long-term impacts on the global economy, employment and education patterns, the healthcare system and medical research, fertility and migration, and culture and tradition.

A number of developments in other spheres with implications for the Jewish people reflected continuity no less than change this year. In Israel, a prolonged political crisis led to a fourth round of elections within two years. These elections demonstrated, to a large extent, that the conflicting priorities of Israel's various ideological and political camps make it very hard to form stable coalitions under widely acceptable leadership. However, the end result of the complex negotiation process was a change of government, and a ruling coalition based on a small Knesset majority whose members are ideologically polarized but determined, at this stage, to bridge the gaps and

sustain a pragmatic and stable government. This government includes, for the first time in Israeli history, an Islamic-Arab party that has de facto decision-making power like any other party in the coalition.

Another round of fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza ended quickly but revealed cracks in Jewish-Arab relations within Israel, as well as Israel's problematic standing in public opinion around the world and among certain groups in the United States. The confrontation ignited a wave of antisemitic rhetoric and actions in many countries, including against American Jews with greater intensity than in previous years.¹ In Europe, various processes – themselves continuations of trends observed in the last decade – continued to push Europe's Jewish minority into a state of isolation and seclusion.

One development that sharpens earlier trends was noted in a new Pew Research Center survey of Jewish Americans – the largest Jewish community outside Israel. New data released by Pew indicate that the American Jewish community has grown, even if there is debate over the reasons for the growth and the rate of growth. The debate is rooted in a more substantive discussion about who should be included in the community and considered, or counted as “Jewish.”² Along with this growth trend, the community is becoming more polarized, and it has become difficult for some elements to see themselves as sharing a fate with other Jews.

The coronavirus pandemic and its impact

The pandemic forced both Jews and non-Jews to quickly adapt to a new and variable reality of unknown duration, sometimes on short notice.³

Practices such as mask-wearing, working from home, social distancing, everyday life lived within the narrower family unit, digital meetings, and more, became routine. The pandemic's influence was evident in the professional, interpersonal, cultural and leisure spheres, and more. It was also evident in all areas of Jewish life: in dwindling in-person interaction between Jews, in the halting of travel to Israel, in joint learning, prayer, holidays celebrated without extended family or community circle, and the like. Israel, like other countries, witnessed a temporary economic slowdown, and restrictions on everyday activities were imposed to varying degrees. The education system was disrupted; schools did not operate continuously or regularly for more than a year.

Judaism is a culture that is essentially group based. In the Diaspora, where Jews are a (usually small) minority, the communal aspect of Jewish life is critically important in the social and demographic contexts. Regarding the former, the pandemic damaged social relations by impeding the ability to maintain a shared communal life. It forced people into social distancing and quarantine – in contrast to Jewish life which is based on closeness and convergence. The change wrought by the pandemic was sudden and dramatic. As with other faiths and their places of worship, synagogues in the US and

other countries ceased their operations in brick-and-mortar buildings and switched to digitally enabled remote prayer. Many prayer quorums, especially in Orthodox communities, moved to backyards and parking lots. Jewish students did not come to Israel. Community centers halted their physical operations and moved most of their activity to online formats. Israeli *shlichim* (emissaries) could not function normally in Diaspora communities. Jewish educational institutions had difficulty maintaining normal schedules.

Jews were, however, observed to engage in considerable geographic movement, sparked by extraordinary considerations. Latin American Jews found ways to enter the US to get vaccinated. Exact numbers are hard to obtain, but it appears that many thousands made their way north from pandemic-decimated and vaccine-poor countries to places where one could be inoculated. A similar phenomenon could be seen in several other communities. It was reported, for instance, that many Sephardic Jews in the Turkish community went to Spain and Portugal to be vaccinated.⁴

And, of course, quite a few Jews with Israeli passports who live far from Israel traveled there for the vaccine, and then returned abroad.

At the time of this writing, August 2021, it was too early to predict when and how the COVID-19 pandemic would end. Israel was one of the first countries in the world to vaccinate most of its citizens and to resume near-normal life, thanks to a fruitful dialogue between the Israeli government and Albert Bourla, the Jewish

CEO of Pfizer (who was invited to light a torch at Israel's Independence Day ceremony). But Israel is still proceeding cautiously in recognition of the need to continue living with the pandemic, which is intensifying due to new, vaccine-resistant variants or declining vaccine efficacy. In other countries the vaccination process has been slower. The US, home to the largest Jewish community, is moving ahead relatively quickly with vaccination, but not as rapidly as Israel. This is the situation everywhere in the world. One way or another it is clear that a

The future of society and culture post-pandemic is long on speculation but short on certainty

return to normal life, not only within each individual country but at the global level, means closing gaps between countries so that professionals, shlichim, and tourists can move about freely.

The question of whether the pandemic is largely behind us is hard to answer.

Forecasts range from considerable optimism (improved vaccine efficacy will counter the disease's impact and neutralize it) to cautious pessimism (we will have to live with the coronavirus for many years to come). Even the debate now underway in various forums regarding the future of society and culture post-pandemic is long on speculation and controversy, but short on certainty.⁵

The big pandemics of the past sometimes had far-reaching implications for human conduct, but it must be said that the coronavirus

pandemic, for all its severity, does not compare to the Black Death of the 14th century, or to the Spanish Flu of the early 20th century, in terms of victim numbers or damage. However, even during the present pandemic and in its immediate wake, we could discern the outlines of change in activity patterns relevant to a focused discussion of the situation of the Jewish people in a number of areas.

One conclusion commonly reached by those engaged in speculation about the future is that the pandemic has accelerated earlier developments. In a general context, and probably also with regard to the Jewish world specifically, the most striking acceleration is that of the shift to digital/remote operations – in commerce, work and study, cultural activity, and more.

In this context, it should be noted that the pandemic is generating movement and countermovement. There is movement away from community (physical distancing), and there is movement toward community – sparked by the need for support in times of crisis and loneliness. Studies conducted in many different countries have shown that the pandemic is strengthening the family unit and family relationships, especially among the young.⁶

There is almost no dispute that in some areas of human activity, such as commerce and work, which before the pandemic were moving toward remote activity, there will be no going back precisely to the way things were before. Areas connected directly to the Jewish arena include joint learning, conferences and themed events,

and the work of organizations and companies with a decentralized presence (like a large proportion of Jewish institutions). The question of remote activity in the religious sphere remains open.⁷

In quite a few countries and societies, we can discern a tendency toward strengthened faith among people for whom religious activity is important, as well as a desire for more frequent participation in religious gatherings once the pandemic ends.⁸

A major change Jewish communities may face, should the return to in-person gatherings prove only partial, and if Jews are shown to prefer digital activity, is a decline in their value as providers of culture, content, and other “identity products.” The shift to digital content will make it possible to find all of these in the online marketplace, without having to rely on a community in the immediate vicinity. On the other hand, communities will have value, perhaps even added value, as providers of emotional safety nets for their members. Many mental health experts feel that the pandemic could potentially have long-term consequences for emotional resilience, especially among young people whose transition to independent adult life it obstructs.⁹

Jewish institutional membership numbers do not appear, so far, to have declined significantly during the pandemic. This applies to synagogues and to social and community organizations (it should be noted that in the US only a third of Jews say they belong to a synagogue, with a fifth participating in prayer services more than once a month). However, in many cases the meaning of institutional membership,

and the investment required of members, has changed. In fact, it seems that a main reason why there has been no significant erosion in membership is the decision taken by many institutions to completely waive, or significantly reduce, requirements for member financial participation in the institutions’ upkeep.¹⁰

The significance of such a decision during such a period is twofold: members weren’t required to pay, but neither were they able to come. Thus, the memberships continued but became weaker in terms of practical commitment.

Another aspect of the trend toward more extensive digital activity is the growing emphasis on the importance of the business sector involved in cyber security development.

There is a growing emphasis on the business sector involved in cyber-security development

This growing importance (along with the rise in cyber warfare and cybercrime) has led to a sharp jump in investment in Israeli cyber security firms (Israel is considered a global power in the field). As such, the continued trend toward digitization may help Israel recover relatively quickly from the pandemic-related economic slowdown and fortify its status as an economic powerhouse and knowledge hub.¹¹ This fortification also gives Israel an image boost and diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis the many countries interested in Israeli knowledge and tech (sometimes there are image problems as well, as in the NSO affair and the transfer of spyware to Saudi Arabia).¹²

As for the geopolitical arena (the main review of which can be found on page 35), most experts hold that the pandemic will weaken globalization processes, and countries will attempt to rely less on trade and cultural relations with other countries. However, the pandemic is inevitably also driving recognition of the need for global cooperation when there is a crisis that transcends national borders. According to Ivan Krastev,¹³ the pandemic has both exposed the failures of globalization and served as an agent of globalization. Past JPPI reports have discussed at length how globalization benefits Israel and the Jewish people by underscoring their comparative advantages and addressing their unique needs. We won't repeat those discussions here, but will mention a few possible implications of the retreat from globalization (especially should it prove rapid, as many experts anticipate), and its impact on the Jewish communities: a continued rise in antisemitism; a decline in tourism with its potential for face-to-face encounters; an erosion of Israeli willingness, and economic ability, to absorb Jewish immigration; greater Israeli-Jewish cohesion and a distancing from global Jewish peoplehood (the prevailing assessment is that post-pandemic conditions will strengthen territorial nationalism more than it will ethnic nationalism); and more.

Israeli sociopolitical trends

For several years, Israel has had trouble maintaining a stable government. This reality threatens to erode Israeli national resilience and the deterrence it projects to its enemies. This year witnessed a fourth round of elections within two years, which produced a new coalition and a new government that differs significantly from its predecessors, but rests on a small and unstable Knesset majority. At this point, it is difficult to predict how long this government will be able to withstand the prevailing Israeli reality, but it is worth looking at the innovations and challenges that accompanied its establishment along several axes.

The personal axis: partnership based on a common opponent. Opposition to Benjamin Netanyahu remaining prime minister after about a dozen years in office was the chief glue of the new government. During the latest round of elections, various parties announced that they would not sit in a coalition with Netanyahu as prime minister – whether because Netanyahu is facing criminal charges, or because their members felt that his tenure had gone on for too long, or because they thought that the prime minister had adopted a political culture of division, or because they felt that Netanyahu had prioritized his personal survival over the good of the nation. Without getting into the validity of these claims, the fact is that they led a significant number of parties and Knesset members to conclude that Israel would be better off with instability and additional rounds

of elections than with Netanyahu's continued premiership. Moreover, after the fourth round of elections, the anti-Netanyahu arguments led a sufficient number of parties to acknowledge that it would be better to form a coalition with ideological adversaries than to prolong the existing situation of a Likud-led government under Netanyahu.

The ideological axis: a perpetual exercise in compromise. In recent years, a polarized Israeli political discourse has led a number of parties, primarily but not solely on the right of the political map, to delegitimize other parties as partners, for ideological reasons. It is, of course, clear to begin with that a coalition made up of parties with no ideological consensus is a complex undertaking. But there is a difference between preferring a relatively homogeneous coalition and absolutely rejecting the idea of broadening the tent when necessary. The new government essentially represents an after-the-fact retreat from past delegitimizations, and an aspiration to partnership between ideological adversaries, in circumstances where concession and compromise are constantly required, and the demands of all coalition members must be taken into account. Thus, certain staunchly right-wing parties were forced to accept their failure to pass an extension of the Citizenship Law, which they view as a cornerstone of Israeli immigration policy, while parties that vehemently opposed that law sought to help pass it in a context of agreed-upon concessions. At least during these early months of the coalition, all of its members seem to be making a serious effort to maintain

harmonious relations, and not allow ideological differences to dismantle the partnership. However, these differences have not disappeared, and could potentially add yet another challenge to those facing the government, while frequently casting doubt on the government's ability to survive crises.

The Haredi axis: (temporary?) exclusion from power. Haredi relations with Israel's non-Haredi majority are marked by constant tensions that now appear to be on the rise (see also the Israeli Society Index, page 85). These tensions stem from disagreement on fundamental matters of state culture, from the non-Haredi majority's disapproval of the sparse Haredi contribution to the nation's economy, and from the fact that the Haredim generally do not serve in the IDF. The coronavirus pandemic brought another source of tension – the refusal of Haredi subgroups to abide by the governmental health directives. Tension also resulted this year from the Mount Meron disaster on Lag B'Omer, in which over 40 people were killed due to failed management of the site, which attracts hundreds of thousands of Haredim each year. Despite the large visitor numbers, Mount Meron had been subject to a kind of administrative autonomy in which the government and the police had trouble regulating activity at the site. A state commission of inquiry was appointed to investigate the disaster; the commission's deliberations will undoubtedly compound the already-existing tensions.

To all of the above one may, of course, add the Haredi sector's continued rise in population

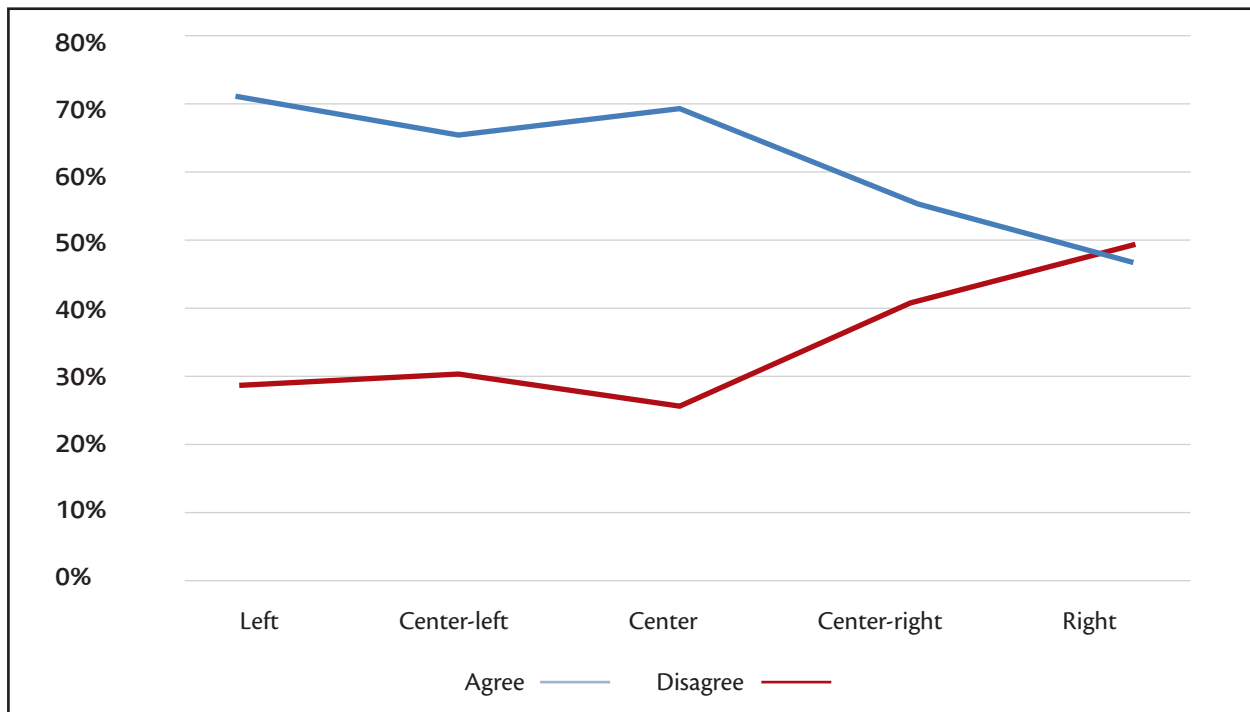
share, an outcome of high birth and retention rates. This demographic trend, which was also noted in this year's regular reports on Jerusalem's population makeup, creates a sense of urgency within the political echelon regarding the need to address the Haredi challenge. The new government, which was formed without the Haredi parties, appears to be treating the sector as a potential source of inter-party tension. For some, changing the rules of the game with respect to the Haredi sector is a top priority, which requires the use of governmental power – while others want to engage the Haredim in dialogue with a view toward more gradual change, without crises. The finance minister's July 2021 initiative to significantly cut child allowances for yeshiva students sparked intra-coalition tensions on this score, while re-introducing the topic of how Israel should cope with the challenge of a growing Haredi sector.

The Arab axis: active partnership. The change in dynamics of the political relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel is the most fascinating aspect of the recent rounds of elections and, perhaps, of greatest importance for the long term. The outcome of that changed dynamic was the formation of a government that depends on the votes of four Arab Knesset members belonging to the Islamic Movement – for the first time in the State of Israel's history. The inclusion of an Arab party in the ruling coalition (and the fact that even the Likud negotiated with the Ra'am party in an attempt to bring it into a different coalition) effectively shattered a glass ceiling that had made Jewish-

Arab governmental partnership very difficult to achieve, politically and attitudinally. This development appears to have driven a consciousness change both among Jews who had been accustomed to seeing Arab parties as illegitimate partners in governance, and among Arab Israelis whose representatives have until now preferred to operate on the fringes of the political arena.

However, this development also carries a measure of risk, which has already manifested in several crises during the coalition's early weeks. The reservations of Ra'am members prevented the extension of the Citizenship Law. Some expressed themselves in a way that raises questions about what would happen should Israel need to take security measures in Gaza. Statements by the head of the movement about the presence of Jews on the Temple Mount sparked controversy as well. As budgets and powers are transferred to the party, the opposition will certainly try to frame actions taken by Ra'am leaders in a way that could turn large swaths of the public against the party and against the coalition in which it participates (especially actions pertaining to the regulation of Bedouin settlement in the Negev). In other words: Ra'am's coalition membership could potentially demonstrate that Jewish-Arab partnership in the political arena is possible and beneficial to all those involved, but it could also ignite crisis and prove the prescience of those who hold that such a partnership, though meant to bridge wide gaps in how the vision of an Israeli state may be understood, is unfeasible.

There is a shared future for all Israelis, Arabs and Jews (Jewish respondents)



Source: Jewish People Policy Institute survey, 2021

The Arab Israeli riots

In addition to the political developments toward a Jewish-Arab partnership, May 2021 witnessed a severe and violent crisis in Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, which became known as the 2021 Arab Israeli Riots. This crisis drove home the fact that Jewish-Arab relations in Israel cannot be measured along a single developmental vector; any prediction of future trends must consider deep undercurrents and the possibility of unexpected turnarounds capable of undermining the desire of both parties to live in peace, prosperity, and security.

The May crisis coincided with a flare-up on the Gaza front, during which more than four thousand rockets were fired at Israel. During this time, violent incidents of various kinds occurred in Israel (including East Jerusalem): demonstrations, riots, arson, Molotov cocktails, stone-throwing, clashes with the security forces, and physical attacks, with casualties in some instances. This domestic front reflected negatively on Jewish-Arab relations, and its long-term outcomes will become clear only with time.¹⁵

The violent events within Israel during the period in question emerged in four stages.

They began with tensions in Jerusalem, and with confrontations over the Temple Mount and the Old City's Damascus Gate. They continued with Arab Israeli riots in mixed cities and other places, and with life-threatening attacks on Jews. Events of these kinds were observed in Jaffa, Lod, Akko, Ramle, Haifa, and at major intersections in the north and south of the country. These incidents undermined the sense of security of Jewish residents and caused serious damage to the fabric of coexistence. Police response to the riots was slow, which resulted in an escalation

Outbreaks of violence clearly demonstrated the real danger of a rapid deterioration of Arab-Jewish relations

of the rioting and reactions to it, including gunfire by Jews in self-defense. This was followed by retaliatory violence by Jews in a number of hotspots – Arabs were attacked, some of them innocent bystanders, and these incidents attracted wide attention. The events came to an end when the

Israel Police forces were supplemented by forces of the Border Police, and temporary curfews were imposed in some places.

Tensions have remained high in the mixed cities since calm was restored, and there is mutual suspicion (stronger on the Jewish side). Some Jews say that it will take a long time to restore a sense of partnership and security, and they demand that the state act to ensure their safety should further outbreaks of violence occur. Without entering into the complex and multifaceted question of what caused the recent

outbreak, the violence clearly demonstrated the very real danger of a rapid deterioration in Jewish-Arab relations to the point of “civil war” – a situation that would make life especially hard for an Arab minority, but would also exact a high price from the Jewish majority in terms of its sense of security, economic prosperity, and the need to take measures detrimental to the state's international standing and relations with other countries.

The American Jewish community

The large Jewish community of the United States was affected this year by a number of major events: first, the COVID-19 pandemic; second, a turbulent election season and change of administration; and third, a rise in antisemitism. For several years now, the antisemitism gauge has been showing a gradual rise in Jewish concern about more frequent antisemitic manifestations and – though not at the same pace – a certain actual increase in the number of incidents targeting Jews.¹⁶ Current data show that over half of US Jews feel less safe than in past years.¹⁷ Nearly half feel that there is currently “a great deal of antisemitism” in the United States (45%). Over half of US Jews noted at least one incident in which they personally observed antisemitism in action, though they were physically attacked in only a small minority of cases (5%); in most instances they were eyewitnesses (of graffiti or online posts). A focused analysis of antisemitism in the US and in all of the Jewish communities appears on page 71.

The most up-to-date information on the state of American Jewry comes from a comprehensive study by the Pew Research Center, eight years after its publication of a similar report. This work will serve as a major platform for discussion on the US Jewish community over the coming years. The report's main findings have been extensively covered by the American and Israeli press, but several of them are worth mentioning here as they herald long-term trends and have consequences for those tasked with making policy decisions on behalf of the Jewish people.

The number of Jews in America: As with the earlier Pew report, and reports from other sources, conditions unique both to the United States (separation of religion and state) and to the American Jewish community (Jews by choice), make it impossible to arrive at an agreed-upon and authoritative number of Jewish Americans. The Jewish population count is subject to debate, with gaps between the proposed figures reaching a million and a half people. These gaps stem from differing data collection methodologies, and from diverging ideas about where the “Jewish” tribe’s boundaries lie. A number of issues can be found in the Pew report that reflect these disagreements. Among them are the questions of whether Judaism is a religion (a large proportion of US Jews are not “Jews by religion”); whether Judaism can be “partial” (people identifying as “partly Jewish”); whether an individual’s decision to belong is enough, or whether there are shared and binding community criteria (relating to ethnicity and the process of joining); and more. (For a full

assessment regarding the number of American Jews, see page 94).

Looking at facts that are essentially undisputed: it is clear from the report that the intermarriage rate in the US among those who self-define as Jews is higher now than it was before 2000 (nearly 70% for today’s younger generation). This has implications for the community’s structure (many members of the community are not Jewish, or belong to households that are not made up entirely of “Jews”). It also has implications for the education of the next generation (at least half will be growing up in homes with one Jewish parent); for how the community is defined and its sense of cohesion (when there are many “grey-area” Jews who may or may not be accepted as members of the Jewish tribe); for relations with Israel and with other communities around the world (most of which adhere to more conservative membership criteria); for the quality of relations between “closed” and “open” subgroups within the American Jewish community; and more. One may also assume and expect that, as the years pass, the notable presence of non-Jews, of partial-Jews and of Jews of no religion will have a cultural impact on the character, consciousness, and customs of the community. This is especially true given the historical fact that, for most of

There are more Jews, but the commonalities they can agree upon – behavioral, ethical, ideological – are eroding

its history, the American Jewish community has been centered around the synagogue, and Judaism is regarded in the US as a religion, first and foremost.¹⁸

It should be noted that there is a US-wide trend toward weaker affiliation with religious institutions, which attracted considerable attention this year. Gallup, for the first time since its surveys on this topic were initiated (during the 1930s), found that the majority of Americans do not belong to a religious institution of any kind (47% belong).¹⁹ The trend toward declining religious-institutional membership has been in place for a long time, and has been accompanied by a steep rise in the share of “nones” – Americans of no religious affiliation.²⁰ However, a report from the summer of 2021 indicated a slowing of the trend toward religious non-affiliation (the unaffiliated currently account for a quarter of the US population).²¹

Identity and polarization: Without entering into all of the study data, it should be noted that US Jewry over the past few decades has been characterized by processes of expansion and diversification. That is, the community in its broader definition is both growing, and becoming less uniform. There are more Jews, but the commonalities between them, whether behavioral, ethical/ideological, or relating to knowledge levels or the degree of importance attached to Judaism, are eroding. This can also be seen in the testimony of the Jews themselves, who find commonalities with those of similar outlook, but often share little with other Jews.

The dwindling of commonalities is particularly apparent in the alienation between non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews.

As noted by Dr. Shlomo Fischer, the Pew study essentially reinforces the sense that two diametric developments pertaining to Jewishness and Jewish identity are emerging within the Jewish community: 1) An Orthodox Jewish identity, and 2) “Jews of no religion.” These developments are especially pronounced in the younger age groups and become more significant over time. Both represent significant departures from what characterized Jewish-American identity in the 20th century. American Jews who identify as Orthodox constitute 17% of all US Jews in the younger age groups (versus 10% of the total US Jewish population). Jews of no religion, a category requiring in-depth explanation that consists primarily of Jews whose ties to the Jewish community and to Jewish activity are very loose, constitute 40% of the youngest age groups (compared to 33% in the 2013 survey). It thus appears that these groups will be even more dominant in the future.

These two groups differ greatly in nearly every respect. Regarding mixed marriages, for instance: Among the Orthodox, the rate is 2%, while for Jews of no religion it is 79%. Attachment to Israel: Two-thirds of the Orthodox say they have much in common with Israeli Jews, while only 4% of Jews of no religion share that view. And further: 91% of the Orthodox say it is very important that their grandchildren be Jewish; only 4% of Jews of no religion feel the same way.

The two groups also differ in terms of what they see as the essence of Jewishness. The Orthodox mainly emphasize adherence to Jewish law: 83% feel that halachic observance is essential to Jewishness. But this determination isolates them. Only 15% of all Jews think that such observance is essential, and among Jews of no religion the share is just 5%. At the same time, few Jews of no religion think that Jewishness means being part of a Jewish community or perpetuating family traditions (12% and 24%, respectively). A common view is that American Jewish identity developed as a kind of “Jewish civil religion.” Although most American Jews are not personally religious, they show a normative commitment to Jewish solidarity. However, the Pew findings raise the possibility that this trend is leveling off, as the Jews of no religion do not feel this commitment to the same degree, while the Haredi-Orthodox, in contrast, are veering toward factionalism, which also distances them from the rest of American Jewry.

The report also highlights a gap between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox regarding relations between US Jewry and Israel, as well as a gap between the younger and older generations. These gaps are not new and have already been discussed; among other things, the question has been raised of whether the gaps are a lifecycle issue, or whether they may lead to long-term generational change. There is no unequivocal answer to this question in the report, which constitutes a snapshot of a given moment in time. Nevertheless, if we look at the data amassed over previous years, we can discern a

gradual decline among American Jews in the feeling that concern for Israel is an essential part of their Jewish identity.

Israel-Diaspora relations: All the developments discussed above may, of course, have ramifications for the Jerusalem-Washington-American-Jewry triangular relationship; trends are afoot that threaten to weaken its resilience (for more on the triangular relationship, see page 43). While most Israeli Jews hoped that Donald Trump would win the US presidential elections, most American Jewish voters (70%) wanted to see him defeated. Much of US Jewry has reservations with respect to Israeli policy (only a third feel that the Israeli government is making a real effort to reach a peace agreement), and this situation is worsening in the face of growing American ideological polarization, which poses a challenge for preserving US bipartisan sympathy for Israel.

During Operation Guardian of the Walls in Gaza, harsh criticism was voiced against Israel by several Jewish leaders. This criticism came at a time when many sectors of American society were taking a sterner tone toward Israel, especially those associated with the progressive wing of the Democratic Party (with which many American Jews identify). The criticism, of course, reflects the mood among various Israeli Jewish subgroups, but it also illuminates the attitude of Israeli Jews toward American Jewry. The more vehement and vocal the criticism, the greater the number of Israeli Jews who cease to see American Jews as reliable allies, and the greater the alienation between the communities.

A resonant article by former Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky and Professor Gil Troy expressed this possibility and echoed the impatience many Israeli Jews feel when faced with American Jewish criticism that sometimes borders on non-Zionism or anti-Zionism. “Admittedly, anti-Zionist Jews are a small fraction of American Jewry, wildly outnumbered by polls showing 70% to 80% of the American Jewish community supports Israel’s existence as a Jewish state. But at a time when 85% of American Jews also say that it’s ‘important’

Several members of the new government have a good grasp of Israel-Diaspora relations

or ‘very important’ for them to ‘stand up for the marginalized or oppressed,’ it is no wonder that for many American Jews, especially those in public spaces, Israel has become the ball and chain that endangers their standing as good progressives.”²²

Israel’s new government must attend to these challenges, many of which are rooted in fundamental differences in the structure of the communities and in the identities that they create – differences that lie beyond the scope of this work.²³

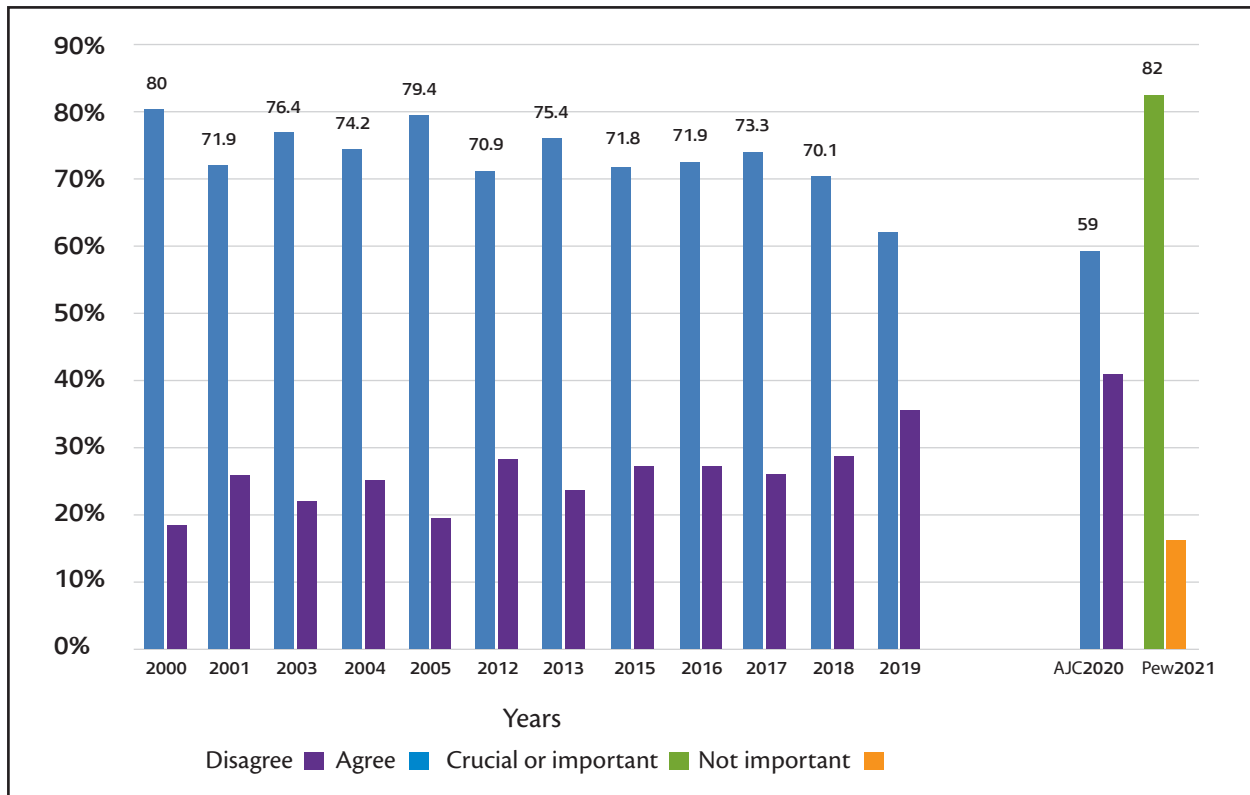
The present coalition embodies an opportunity to address at least some of them. Netanyahu’s longtime presence was marked by a number of crises, which Diaspora Jews, rightly or wrongly, lay to his charge (the Western Wall crisis is a key example, though not the only one). This is certainly true of American Jewry, but also

of many European Jewish communities.²⁴

The new government can at least try to “turn a new page,” even if no dramatic policy change is in the offing. It is worth noting that the last round of elections, which resulted in the new government, also highlighted the fact that most of the Israeli Jewish public currently identifies with the right-wing parties, and with right-leaning policies (especially on foreign relations and defense issues).

However, several members of the new government have a good grasp of Israel-Diaspora relations. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett served as Minister of Diaspora Affairs and is well acquainted with some of the topics of controversy between Israel and the Diaspora community leadership. The new Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Nachman Shai, formerly served as Senior VP and Director General of UJC Israel (now the Jewish Federations of North America), and is also well acquainted with US Jewish affairs. The mere fact that these figures, along with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and Israel’s new President, Isaac Herzog (until recently Chairman of the Jewish Agency) are now managing the dialogue with the leaders of Diaspora Jewry, should result in an immediate improvement in relations, beyond the sense of a new beginning that accompanies any change in government.

Concern for Israel is an important part of my Jewish identity (comparison of surveys)



Source: Jewish People Policy Institute processing of AJC surveys and the Pew 2021 survey

Developments in other communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has plagued Jewish communities around the world. The communities have been dramatically affected by the ways in which their home countries have addressed the new challenge. As noted above, Jews in many parts of Latin America (Brazil, which has been hit especially hard, and other countries) have sought refuge and vaccination in the United States. Elsewhere, as

in Australia, communities have been tested in terms of their ability to remain connected in the face of prolonged lockdowns (enthusiastic participation in online synagogue activity was reported in Melbourne).

A comprehensive study published early last year found that Europe, Turkey, and Russia are home to 1.3 million people who identify themselves Jews.²⁵ According to this study, the number of Jews in these areas has fallen drastically since the 1970s, due to the large-scale emigration of

Jews to Israel and North America after the fall of the Iron Curtain, but not solely for that reason. Even Western European countries witnessed a contraction of their Jewish populations by nearly ten percent. In many communities, such as that of Germany, only elderly Jews (on average) remain, and if these populations are not reinforced substantially over the coming decades, they will continue to dwindle numerically, and inevitably culturally as well.

The European communities are experiencing a continuation of trends familiar from past years, in which Jews self-segregate into their communities. This process includes elements of Jewish exclusion from general society, but it can also bolster the sense of a shared destiny and interdependence in those communities, as well as strong member commitment.²⁶ These trends especially evident as antisemitism erupted in several countries during Operation Guardian of the Walls, but other events called attention to it as well. French Jews were shocked by the light sentence given to a Jewish woman's murderer. In Belgium, a recent governmental decision translates into less protection for Jewish institutions; Jewish organizations have protested Belgium's intention of withdrawing the military presence near Jewish public and community buildings. In Poland, the community was forced to witness a bitter confrontation between their government and the Israeli government and major Jewish organizations, in the wake of legislation that makes it very difficult, or even impossible, for Jews to receive compensation for property stolen from them during and after the Holocaust.

A certain change for the better could be discerned in relations between the European governments and the government of Israel. This was the case during the conflict in Gaza, when the IDF was not subjected to harsh condemnation, and after the governmental transition in Israel, when several European capitals showed interest in repairing relations that had earlier been strained. Surveys continue to show that most European Jews do not see a future for their children on the continent, even if their everyday lives are marked by economic prosperity.

Summary

The main trends that have affected world Jewry this past year can be divided into two categories: internal dynamics relating to identity, self-definition, preservation of tradition, and the like; and dynamics pertaining to Jewish involvement with world events, which also have an impact on Jewish identity and cohesion.

The first category includes such matters as polarization between Jewish subgroups, the rising share of Jews of no religion, political instability in Israel, challenges affecting younger Diaspora Jews' attitudes toward Israel, and more. The present year has seen developments on these fronts, and the publication of new data; but for the most part trends have persisted with no dramatic change. This is true regarding the following issues: secular-Haredi relations in Israel; mixed marriages in the Diaspora; and questions pertaining to Israel's place in Jewish

identity, and how the religious component should be weighted compared with the cultural and ethical components (the exception is Israeli political stability – should the new government prove to endure in the medium or long term).

The other category includes issues such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued rise in antisemitism. Trends have begun to change this year on these matters, going beyond perpetuation of the status quo or affirmation of what was already known. The pandemic, after all, was a new element with which the Jewish world had never had to contend. Also, the antisemitic incidents in the US, and especially the manifestations of hate on the far left, undermined the community's sense of security.

In other words: the Jewish world is coping with its regular challenges while also facing new ones, first and foremost COVID-19 and rising antisemitism. This situation requires that the Jewish leadership as a whole display extreme caution in setting priorities. In particular, it is essential that the Israeli government and the Jewish institutions address urgent problems while avoiding the addition of yet more challenges to an already-overloaded agenda, especially those generated by intra-Jewish initiatives of the kind that spark new tensions.

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INDICES

11

Integrated Three-Dimensional Antisemitism Index

Key Points

- Starting in 2000 following a post-Shoah grace period, antisemitism has resumed in Europe and has led Jews to gradually distance themselves from political arenas and public debates. Seventy-one percent of them avoid public display of items that could identify them as Jewish, 35% avoid attending Jewish events, 38% consider emigrating because they don't feel safe as Jews, and 70% refrain from discussing Judaism or Israel with their work colleagues.¹
- Over the last five years, Canada and the United States have begun to see similar negative trends (in type if not magnitude or effect). There is a need to monitor these trends and mobilize resources to mitigate the possible threats they represent.
- More broadly, these trends reflect declining support for liberal pluralism. They are critical harbingers of growing illiberal forces (far-right, neo-Nazi, Islamist, far-left) attempting to exploit anti-Jewish prejudices to attack the liberal order. If Jews are not defended, the broader political order will become increasingly threatened.

Recommendations

- **Monitor** – To mitigate a possible “Europeanization” of Jewish life in America, we delineate a series of negative trends – observed in recent decades in Europe – that we recommend American Jewish institutions monitor. It may be noted that the monitoring indicators shift the focus from merely counting reported incidents to measuring social and political attitudes that either engender such incidents or are bound to them in a cycle of amplification and mutual intensification.
- **Focus** – The most important trend to watch is how the more extremist forces on both the right and left (far-right, neo-Nazi, Islamist, far-left) are influencing mainstream actors and advocating measures inimical to Jewish thriving.
- **Coordinate** – This year, once again, JPPI reiterates its recommendation for coordination between the Israeli government, prominent Jewish organizations, and Diaspora communities as part of the fight against antisemitism.
- **Israel** – We also re-emphasize the recommendation that Israel establish an integrative body to monitor and respond proactively to developments in the Diaspora
- **Diaspora** – The most effective tool to avoid social marginalization is building strong and effective coalitions with other threatened minorities as well as with those concerned about the future of liberalism. JPPI’s central recommendation is to redouble efforts in this direction. However, as explained below, in Europe (and perhaps the US as well) such efforts are far from simple to execute. At the same time, we recommend tightening the connection of Jewish institutions with the media and with companies that monitor social networks, as well as with government officials in key positions (including senior officials responsible for fighting antisemitism and promoting religious freedom).

Table 1. Level of Severity of antisemitism in different countries
(based on perceived discomfort among Jews)

	US	UK	Germany	France	Russia	Hungary	Sweden
Level of severity in 2021	M	C	IC	IC	M	C	HC
Level of severity in 2017	-	M	C	IC	M	C	HC

No concern To be Monitored Concern Increasing Concern High Concern Community in Danger

JPPI's *integrated index* for this year consists of three parts. We first list developments of note. As publications and conferences about antisemitism become more numerous, it is important to provide decision makers with a selection of key points and indicators that require attention. The second part of this report presents JPPI's customary three-dimensional table of indicators in selected countries.² In the third section, we outline cultural trends that have increasingly become part of the European environment with deleterious effects on Jewish life. The intention is to work toward a set of metrics to assess how similar or dissimilar the American experience is from Europe's in 2021 and going forward.

Part One Developments of Note

- The May 2021 violence between Israel and Gaza galvanized anti-Jewish hatred. Jewish communities worldwide have seen a spike in antisemitic incidents while protesters worldwide rallied in solidarity with the Palestinians. In Europe, this hostility manifested especially in an increase in antisemitic incidents by migrants from Arab countries. In the US, Jews were attacked, most visibly by pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Los Angeles, and targeted by a number of progressive groups, reflecting the fact

that antisemitism no longer stems mainly from the right. Jews are identified with Israel's actions. Progressive Jews in radical groups are pressured to condemn an Israel perceived as part of the systems of oppression.

- In the US, the Palestinian and other Arab minorities express their anti-Israel views more and more openly and gain more and more support from progressive actors on the Left. For these populations, the transition from anti-Zionism to antisemitism is fluid.
- These trends reflect the fact that antisemitism is once again part of the American social landscape. The Jewish leadership is required to monitor the situation to understand whether this is a new and permanent phenomenon (or perhaps a stopover on the way to a worse situation).
- Israel has lost the battle of narratives with young westerners over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even if criticism of Israel and antisemitism are basically two different phenomena, many antisemites disguise their anti-Jewish hatred as opposition to the right of Israel (the collective "Jew") to exist. The demonization that for centuries has been directed at the Jews is now – to circumvent the anti-hate legislation – directed at Israel. If as some surveys claim, 20% of young US Jews think that "Israel has no right to exist,"³ and a

large minority of them are not emotionally attached to Israel,⁴ there is concern that these youth will not assist organized Jewish institutions in their fight against BDS and other antisemitic movements in anti-Israel disguises.

- Malicious actors are using the internet and social media as propaganda tools to spread misinformation and alternative facts aimed at delegitimizing and demonizing the Jewish state. In parallel, data show an explosion of online antisemitic hate speech as Israeli-Palestinian memes spread across social media. This re-emphasizes the major role of the internet as a vector in the proliferation of hate speech and misinformation as well as being an amplifier of radicalization.⁵ Antisemitism and conspiracy theories associating Jews with the COVID-19 pandemic have been spread via social media of all types. The return to post-pandemic life has seen a recrudescence of physical attacks.
- As part of its rivalry with the United States, the state-controlled Chinese media has disseminated anti-Jewish messages tracing US pro-Israel policy to "the influence of wealthy Jews in the US and the Jewish lobby on US foreign-policy-makers."⁶
- Coalitions with other anxious minorities are difficult to achieve. The intersectionality discourse to promote wider cohesion among oppressed minorities works

against Jews who, through this lens, are counted among the white, wealthy, and privileged. Their requests for protection against discrimination and social exclusion encounter difficulties in being heard and regarded as valid.

- The success of the vaccination campaign in Israel, which flooded the media in early 2021, improved Israel's image among most of the general public in the West. Israel has been described as a successful country capable of calculated risks, making decisions, and acting on them. But there were harsh criticisms as well: Israel unfairly used its Jewish money to purchase the vaccine at higher than market prices to the detriment of other countries; Israel withheld the vaccine from West Bank and Gazan Palestinians.
- There has been a positive development in the European political arena. European politicians are becoming less critical of Israel and a few of them have even adopted a pro-Israel stand. A mix of economic, geopolitical, and domestic reasons can explain the progressive change.⁷ The change in attitudes toward Israel is influenced, among other things, by the increased identification of Israel as a significant technological partner for Europe and as a stabilizing geopolitical factor in the Middle East. Beyond that, a growing sense of threat from radical Islam in a context of mass migration from Arab countries also nurtured some

identification with Israel. The activity of pro-Israel elements, including visiting delegations of European parliamentarians and geopolitical experts, has also, to some extent, contributed to this positive phenomenon.⁸ Yet, the game is far from being won. Some top politicians have not hesitated to adopt a stance that goes beyond being anti-Israel to contest Israel's right to defend itself. In France, a top minister associated Israel with "apartheid" while another criticized Israeli military actions without mentioning the Hamas provocations that had triggered them. Such a political position, which denies Israel's right of to defend its citizens, is perceived by local Jewish institutions as "double standard" antisemitism and undermines the trust Jews had placed in the French government's previous commitment to protect them.⁹

- Another positive development: this year the IHRA definition of antisemitism received significant additional approvals and implementations. In addition, US President Joe Biden succeeded in having the No Hate Act passed into law, which addresses white supremacist violence in the country.

Part Two Selected Data

The three dimensions JPPI's Antisemitism Index looks at are: 1) antisemitic attitudes; 2) antisemitic incidents; and 3) Jewish confidence in their home countries to protect them. Despite

the fact that the first and second dimension has not changed significantly, the level of worry among Jews (the third dimension) spiked. This decline in confidence reflects the seriousness of the anti-Jewish incidents that occurred during the year (nonetheless the decline in numbers, which may in any case reflect the pandemic).

Table 2. Antisemitism in Western Europe and the United States in 2020

Data Point	General Trend	US	France	UK	Germany
Hold antisemitic views (%) ¹⁰	↔	11 (14) ¹¹	17 (17) ¹²	11 (12) ¹³	15 (16) ¹⁴
Hold antisemitic views, among Muslims (%) ¹⁵	↑	N/A	49 (83)	58 (54)	70 (62)
Violent assaults (incidents) ¹⁶	↓	31 [61] ¹⁷	44 [45] ¹⁸	97 [158] ¹⁹	40 [98] ²⁰
Total incidents (extreme violence, assaults, damage, desecration, threats) ²¹	↔	2,024 ²² [2,107]	339 ²³ [687]	1,805 ²⁴ [1,690]	1,999 ²⁵ [2,000]
Change from prior period	↔	-4%	-51%	8%	0%
Rate of incidents per 1,000 Jews	↓	0.36 [0.37]	0.7 (1.5)	5.7 (6.2)	17.2 (17.2)
Antisemitism is a very serious or fairly serious problem (%) ²⁶	↑	93 (85) ²⁷	95 (86)	75 (48)	85 (40)
Had a personal experience with antisemitism in past year	↑	51	85	95	90
Considered emigrating because they do not feel safe in their countries (%) ²⁸	↑	N/A	44 (46) ²⁹	29 (18)	44 (25)
Avoid places in their neighborhood because they do not feel safe there as Jews (%) ³⁰	↑	5 ³¹	35 (20)	68 (37)	35 (28)

Notes: Arrows indicate JPPI's assessment of general up and down trends across four countries. "↔" means no significant change within the range of precision available. Numbers without parentheses are for the year 2021/2020. Numbers in square brackets are from 2019, while those in parentheses are the most recent figures available. 'N/A' = not available. The last three questions were asked of Jewish residents in their respective countries.

Part Three

Is America becoming Europe?

With the Second Intifada at the dawn of the 21st century, a wave of antisemitism – a phenomenon that had largely disappeared from public discourse following the Second World War – reached Western Europe. Since then, antisemitism has once again resumed its place on the old continent albeit in new guises and with a different malignancy. In response, European Jews have initiated, to varying degrees, a process of self-segregation, morphing into an archipelago of ostensibly protected synagogues, hiding yarmulkes and other Jewish identifiers from sight. In 2019, most (around 90%) European Jews reported having witnessed antisemitic incidents.

Some of this antisemitism derives from traditional nationalist, far-right sources, notably in Eastern Europe, but it also stems from other sources in Western European political and social life. Antisemitic views are now embraced by the more mainstream left. Green parties, likely the future of Europe's left, tend to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement whose leadership aims to anathematize, delegitimize, and eliminate the Jewish state. German Greens regularly label Israel an 'apartheid' regime. Progressive Jews are singled out and asked to condemn Israel and Zionism to demonstrate their allegiance as part of the left. A poll of European Jews found that most incidents witnessed or experienced and considered to be antisemitic by them now

emanate from either Muslims or the political left – barely 13% of incidents were attributed to right-wing extremists.³²

This social marginalization has affected Jewish communal life. In France and Britain, those who identify primarily as Jews have left the progressive camp and moved to the right. Research shows that in 2021, young European Jews are closer to communal life than their parents are, and that altogether, European Jews are more observant today than 20 years ago.³³ Young Jews avoid entering political and public service careers. Orthodox Jews, historically a small sub-group, are projected to become the majority in Britain's Jewish community.³⁴

With antisemitism appearing increasingly violent, persistent, and pervasive, more and more Jews are investigating relocation. Over the last two decades, 100,000 Jews – more than 20% of the community – have left France, half of them for Israel and a similar number for other destinations. Among the remaining Jews in France – following past examples of other threatened diasporas – those who could afford it have moved to protected neighborhoods, distancing themselves from antisemitic, mostly Muslim, street violence.³⁵ The main single determinant factor of the sustainability of a European Jewish community appears to be the percentage of Muslims in the population.³⁶

Is America different?

In Europe, antisemitism pervades the public sphere, disseminating and inculcating negative stereotypes about Jews.³⁷ For 85% of European Jews, antisemitism is seen as the most pressing social and political problem in their country. Many Jews do not live free of worry for their own and their family's safety due to a risk of becoming targets of harassment and attacks. The very fact that special security measures are required to ensure the safety of Jewish communities points to a persistent, deep societal malaise.³⁸

Of course, America is different: the new continent has no history of state antisemitism. There is greater acceptance of Jews in America due to the nature of its culture (as an immigrant society both unity and identity derive from adherence to a set of ideas, moral norms, and civic values, not ethnic or linguistic adherences), its laws (greater respect for religious freedom), and its political system (the two-party federal system means Jews retain an important role in politics nationally and locally in a manner not common in Europe). Moreover, the Jewish cultural contribution to society is incomparably more significant in America than in Europe and is widely recognized as so. These factors provide American Jews with capacities to oppose and mitigate negative trends more effectively than their overseas brethren.

Yet today, American Jews perceive a rise in antisemitism with half saying they have observed antisemitic incidents over the past year. Most synagogues have considerably upgraded

security systems, a fact that was unimaginable a few years ago, and most US Jews worry about a possible return of anti-Jewish hatred. The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) has launched an unprecedented, coordinated effort to enhance the safety and security of the communal institutions. During the May 2021 Middle East conflict, antisemitic slogans were heard and Jewish individuals were beaten in the streets of New York City during an otherwise peaceful, pro-Palestinian demonstration. Neither the organizers nor the other demonstrators intervened to stop the attack. In July 2021, a young Chabad rabbi was stabbed in broad daylight in Greater Boston. Anti-Jewish sentiment is being expressed publicly in the United States. Is America becoming Europe? Not yet, but the sentence "America is different" is increasingly expressed with a question mark at the end.

Europeanization trends

While not yet comparable to the extent in Europe, in the US, too, Jewish groups are kicked out of LGBTQ pride and women's marches, progressive Jews are singled out and asked to distance themselves from Zionism to remain part of the left, and individual Jews are associated with Israel in a mental glide path undergirded with antisemitic tropes. In today's America, Jews are identified as white, wealthy, and privileged and so their requests for protection from discrimination often go unheard and building coalitions with other vexed minorities becomes increasingly difficult.

To mitigate a possible “Europeanization” of Jewish life in America, we delineate a series of negative trends – observed in recent decades in Europe – that we recommend American Jewish institutions monitor and frame potential mitigation measures. At this stage, these trends and indicators are presented solely as suggestions for further discussion. There is a need to assess their relevance as indices of deterioration in communal life, to calibrate them to the American context, and to set a baseline for examining trends. The intention is to work toward a set of metrics to assess how similar or dissimilar the American experience is to Europe’s in 2021 and going forward.

- (1) **The broad consensus against antisemitism has cracked.** The traditional broad political and public consensus in combating antisemitism has begun to break down. Behind this growing rift is a distortion and rewriting of historical facts relating to World War II and the memory of the Holocaust promulgated by political leaders on the right in the context of the anti-globalist discourse. In addition, antisemitism is manifested in the anti-Israeli and anti-colonialist discourse of political leaders on the left.³⁹ A methodology has already been successfully tested in five European countries to assess the rise of antisemitism in the mainstream public and political discourse, taking into account the number of occurrences of identified expressions.⁴⁰
- (2) **Demonization.** Caricatures of Israel and Jews in the media and academic circles has clearly contributed to an ideological justification for turning European Jews into near pariahs for those who wish to do so. Drawing on unconscious religious prejudices, Jews are singled out for blame and presented by far-left, far-right, and Muslim activists as part of the “oppression camp.” A quantitative study of caricatured expressions can be used to assess this negative trend.
- (3) **Double standards.** Drawing on Natan Sharansky’s famous conceptualization, a quantitative survey has already been successfully tested to address this phenomenon.⁴¹ Researchers drafted two versions of the same question, one asking respondents to apply a principle to a Jewish example and another to a non-Jewish example. If it turned out that, reacting to identical facts, respondents applied the principle more harshly to the Jewish example, the researchers inferred that the difference is evidence of antipathy toward Jews.⁴²
- (4) **Supporters of Israel are slammed as reactionary racists.** In Europe, media, academics, and politicians avoid expressing pro-Israel support to avert criticism. Because Zionism is perceived as a form of racist nationalism and anachronistic colonialism, people of goodwill who dare to advocate for Israel become, ipso facto, illegitimate and lose their credibility as serious and respectable observers. Therefore, few public intellectuals

are ready to endanger their careers in support of Israel.⁴³ It is worth systematic examination of whether a similar phenomenon also exists in the US, and to what extent.

- (5) **Jews are removed from civil society participation.** Gay pride parade organizers oust Jewish participants for displaying pride flags containing the Star of David. Women's marches have also sparked controversy with some organizers asserting that there is no room in feminism for those who support Israel. Moreover, Jews are held accountable for the actions and policies of the Israeli government. This is an example of a trend that is not currently tracked but could easily be incorporated in a system of indicators.
- (6) **Difficulty building coalitions.** As Jews are perceived by social justice activists as privileged and white, by definition outside of intersectional discourse, their requests for protection against discrimination and social exclusion encounter difficulties in being viewed as legitimate or even in being heard. Consequently, attempts to build coalitions with other minorities are coming up against intersectionality arguments.⁴⁴
- (7) **Jews move toward the conservative camp.** As Muslim minorities became more numerous in Europe, Jews who traditionally had identified with progressive values found they had no other choice than to move toward the conservative camp. In France in the 80s and in Britain more recently, a large share of the Jewish vote shifted from left

to right. Unlike the previously enumerated trends, this is relatively easy to measure.

- (8) **Downplaying the gravity of violent incidents.** To avoid igniting public unrest by violent elements within underprivileged minorities, politicians ask that Jews avoid publicizing acts of aggression. The more numerous these violent antisemitic elements are, the more politicians may be tempted to downplay their antisemitic violence. It must be ascertained whether such a trend is also increasing in the United States.

Directions for action

Reviewing the last great upwelling of antisemitic expressions and incidents in the United States, which followed the First World War, Jonathan Sarna noted US Jews employed three strategies that not only proved successful but laid some of the foundations for future community success: supporting each other; fighting back with the truth; and forming coalitions outside the community.⁴⁵ To perform as well a century later requires better awareness of the currents flowing in a considerably more complex environment. Recognizing the interconnected trends in Europe that have contributed to social marginalization of the Jewish communities should be part of the process of developing a systematic and integrated monitoring instrument. This effort will include technical components (monitoring, data mining, etc.), but first and foremost it requires agreement on definitions, which will allow extensive measurements in different places to be compared.⁴⁶

Endnotes

- 1 Antisemitism Overview of data available in the European Union 2008–2018, *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, November 2019 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/antisemitism-overview-data-available-european-union-2008-2018>
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- 29 In the two last decades, more than 20% of the core community have already relocated in Israel. Between 2012 and 2018, more than 25,000 French Jews (7.5% of the total community) relocated to Israel and thousands more migrated to the United States. This explains why the percentage of French Jews who are considering migrating has declined since the 2012 survey.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 AJC's 2021 Survey of American Jewish Opinion. American Jewish Committee. June 2021. <https://www.ajc.org/news/survey2020>
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- 36 2019 JPPI annual assessment report, <http://jppi.org.il/en/article/aa2019/indices/anti-semitismeurope/changes/#.YObKZTPiu70>
- 37 Eilam S. et al, Contemporary Antisemitism in the Political Discourse of Five Western European Countries: Germany, France, Britain, Spain, Ireland, INSS- JAFI, 2021. Contemporary Antisemitism in the Political Discourse of Five Western European Countries :Germany ,France, Britain ,Spain ,Ireland | INSS
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- 41 Sharansky, N. (2004). 3D test of anti-Semitism: Demonization, double standards, delegitimization. *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 16, 3-4.
- 42 Greene, J. P., Cheng, A., & Kingsbury, I. (2021). Education and Anti-Semitism. *Education Reform Faculty and Graduate Students Publications*. <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/edrepub/121>
- 43 <https://bariweiss.substack.com/p/april-powers-condemned-jew-hate-then>
- 44 It is worthwhile to mention that while coalitions with Muslims, black minorities are difficult to establish, there are promising opportunities for cooperation with Asian minorities.
- 45 Sarna, Jonathan D. "That Other Time Jews Were Hated in America — and 3 Lessons To Learn from It Now," *Forward*, November 2016.

- 46 SW Popper, D Shalmon, CA Small, M Tabory, and T Wolfson, "Evaluating Contemporary Antisemitism: A Framework for Collaborative Conceptualization, Measurement and Assessment", presented as a panel session organized by the Institute for Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy at the at the 6th Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, Jerusalem, March 2018.

12

The Israeli Society Index

The past year was tumultuous for Israel, marked by three major events: the continuing coronavirus pandemic and its consequences; a fourth round of elections within two years and the resulting change of government; and a round of fighting in Gaza, accompanied by violent confrontations between Jews and Arabs within Israel. Against the background of these occurrences, we present data gathered largely within the framework of the Jewish People Policy Institute's Pluralism Index, with some data from other sources as well.¹ The data relate to three main issues:

1. Internal agreements and contradictions in understanding Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.
2. Tensions between Haredim and non-Haredim in the Jewish sector.
3. A sense of partnership between Jews and Arabs against the background of the recent elections and unrest.

A Jewish and democratic Israel

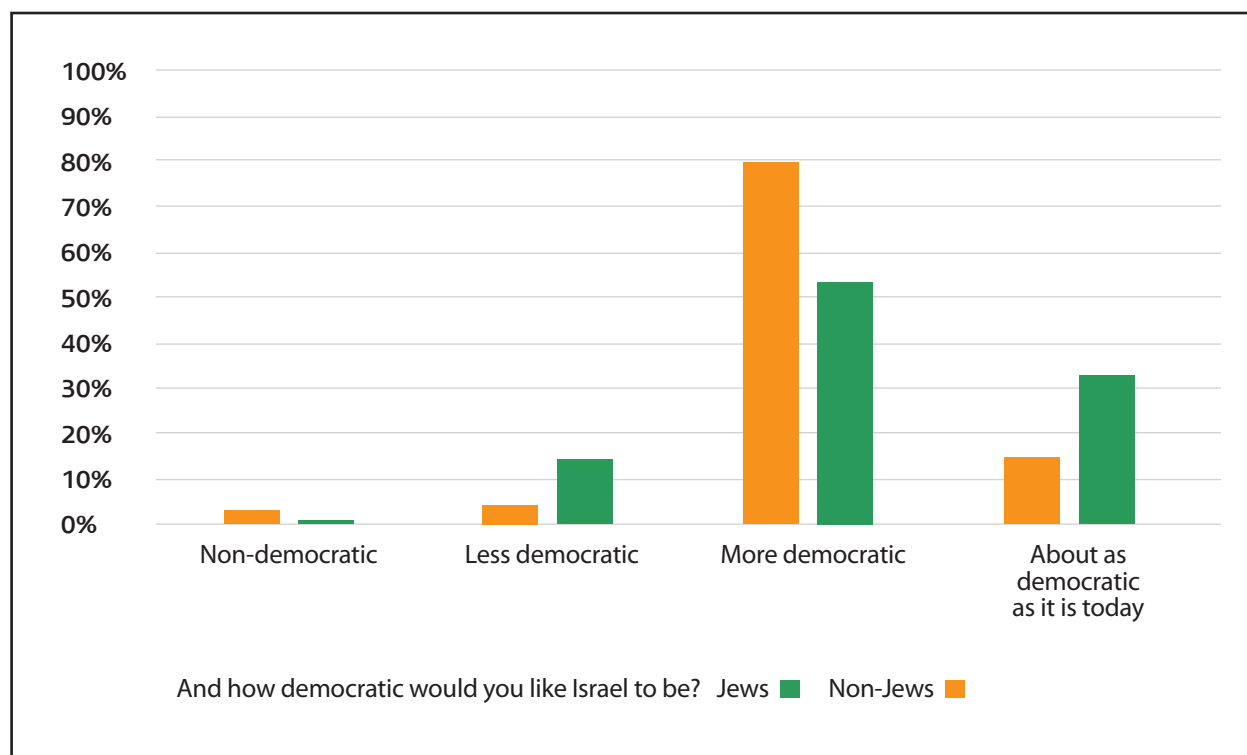
Among Israeli Jews, there is a near-total consensus on a general vision for Israel as the embodiment of “a Jewish and democratic state.” When we break this general vision down into its component parts, we can see many points of consensus about how the vision should be realized, along with quite a few disagreements. Furthermore, many Israelis express contradictory desires with regard to this vision when answering various questions. That is, the vision is not entirely a matter of consensus, and even where there is broad agreement it is not always consistent. For example: a large majority of Jews (84%) and of Arabs (90%) agree that in a democratic state there should be no discrimination against any group. But when Jews are asked about the Jewishness of the state, about four in ten say there should be legal preference for Jews over non-Jews (38%), which is seemingly at odds with not discriminating against minority groups.

INDICES

In fact, Israel's Jewish majority arrives much more readily at a decisive consensus about what the country's main "democratic" features should be, than about what its "Jewish" characteristics should be. Regarding democratic attributes, there is not much disagreement between Jews and non-Jews (primarily Muslim Arabs). Nearly everyone affirms that democracy means majority rule, prohibiting discrimination, and protecting human rights. The main dispute between Jews and Arabs over the question

of democracy concerns implementation. Most Jews (51%) feel that Israel already meets the requirements of a democratic state. By contrast, a third of Arab Israelis currently believe that Israel is not democratic, while another third feel that it is not democratic enough. Half of Israeli Jews want Israel to be more democratic (even if they think that the state already is democratic). Among Arabs, a decisive majority maintain that Israel needs to be "more democratic" (78%).

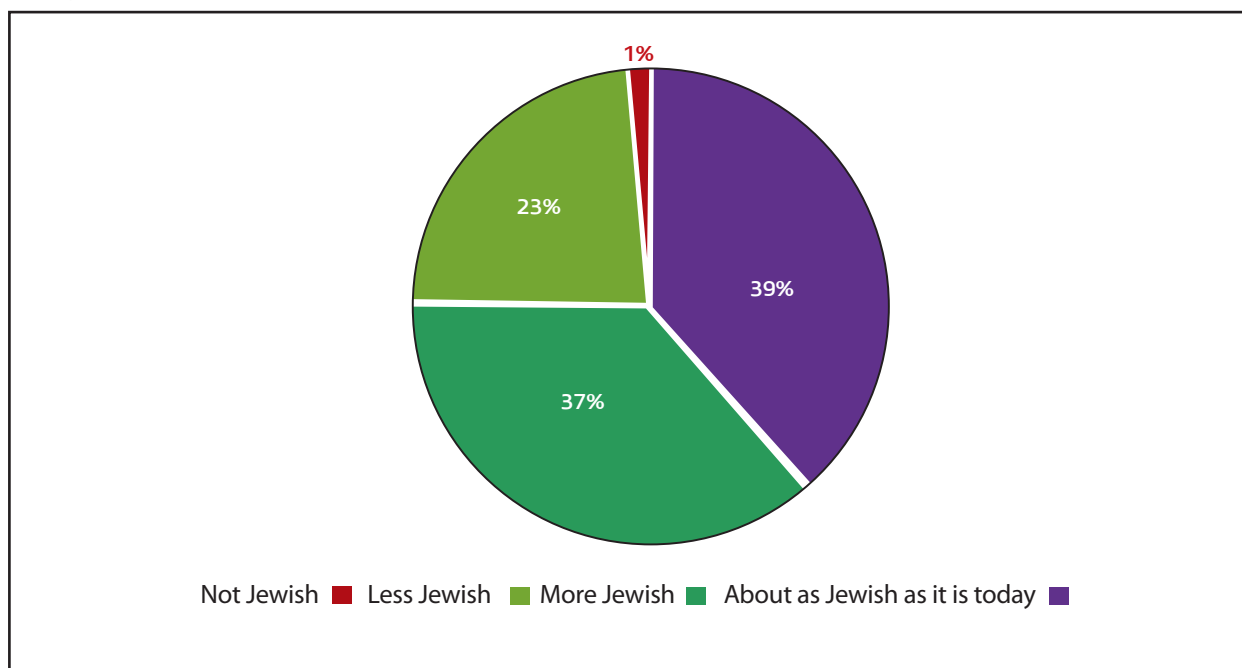
Graph 1. Jews and Arabs: How Democratic Should Israel Be?



When proceeding to questions about the Jewishness of the state, an attribute in which Arabs generally have no interest, gaps appear in the vision, with the sole areas of near-total consensus among Jews being the need for a Jewish majority (88%) and encouraging Jewish creativity and culture (74%). Elements such as mitzvah observance, or law based on Halacha, receive very little support, most of it coming from Haredim and, to some degree, from the non-Haredi religious [*dati*] public. As noted, a significant percentage of Jews expect a Jewish state to give legal preference to Jews (though the majority do not accept this position). The bottom line is that while most Jews see

Israel as a democratic state and want it to be as or more democratic than it is today, their attitude toward the Jewish state ideal is more ambivalent. The share of Jews who feel that Israel is already a Jewish state is high (59%), while the percentage of those who want Israel to maintain its present level of Jewishness is quite similar to the percentage who want the state to be as democratic as it currently is (39% versus 33%). However, there is a significant group, about a quarter of the Jewish population, who want Israel to be “less Jewish” than it is today, as well as an even higher share (37%) who would like the state to be “more Jewish” than it is at present.

Graph 2. Jews only: How Jewish should Israel be?



Relations between non-Haredim and Haredim

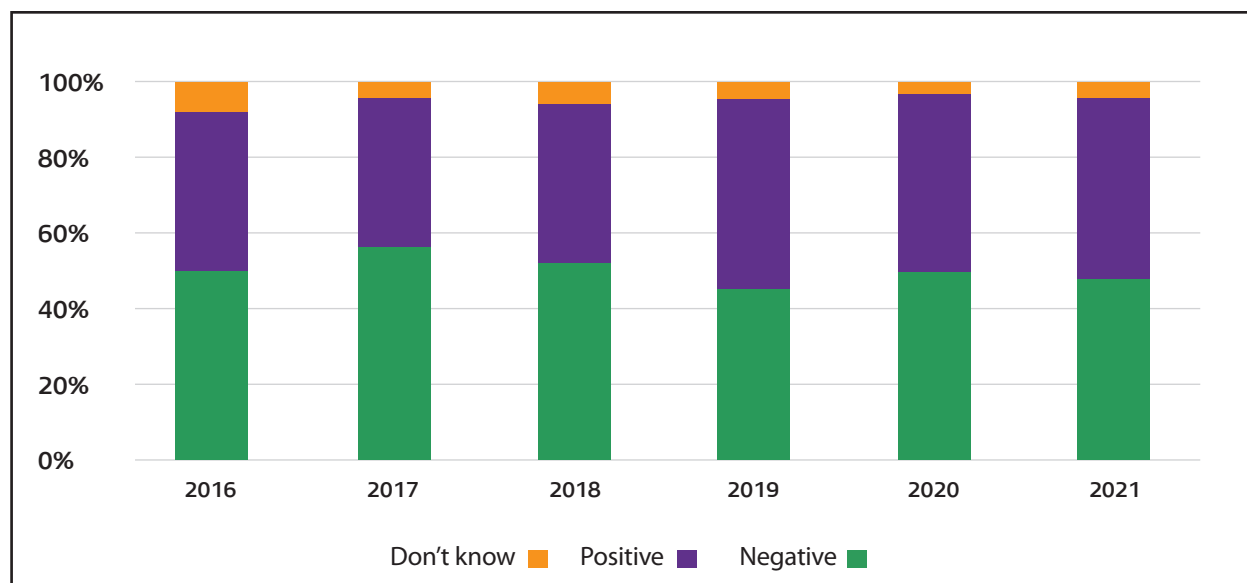
Over the past year, Israel witnessed several waves of preoccupation with relations between Haredim and non-Haredim, in the context of daily life (especially around COVID-19 and the Mount Meron disaster), politics (leaving the Haredi parties out of the coalition), and economic and other legislation (the Finance Minister’s decision to cancel child allowances for kollel students). These waves were sometimes marked by harsh sentiments – anger and powerlessness – on both sides (for more on these trends in Israel this year, see page 57).

During the year, several public opinion polls examined these relations, employing “soft” questions such as “To what degree do the Haredim contribute to the state’s prosperity?”

and questions of greater bluntness meant to directly assess “anger” or “hatred” toward the Haredi public. The survey findings suggest that the image of the Haredim among other Israelis is quite poor, with a significant percentage of Israelis expressing strong unsympathetic feelings toward them, to the point of “hatred.”

The following graph, based on JPPI surveys, shows that half of Israeli Jews feel that the Haredim make no positive contribution to the prosperity of the state, and that this situation has remained quite static in recent years (Arabs show even less sympathy for the Haredim). The combination of low esteem for the Haredi community’s value to Israeli society, and the sense of helplessness vis-à-vis the Haredi community’s political and organizational power, is what drives subsequent expressions of anger and hatred.

Graph 3. Haredi contribution to the state’s prosperity



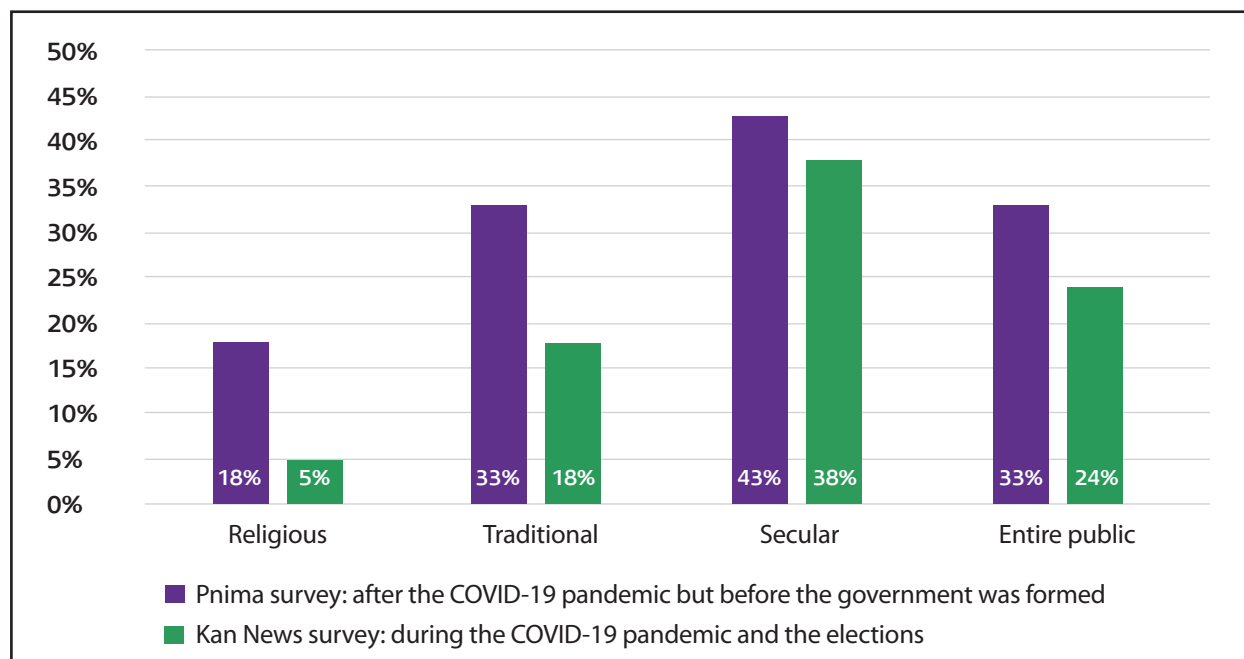
The next graph presents a comparison of two surveys that looked at non-Haredi Jews' "hatred" of Haredi Jews in Israel. The surveys were conducted at different times, which is important in this context.

One survey (by pollster Dudi Hassid for Kan News) was conducted during the election season – a period when polarization and social tensions naturally intensify. This was particularly evident in Israel's fourth round of elections in two years, which took place at a time when the peak of the coronavirus pandemic was fresh in people's minds. During the pandemic, there were frequent allegations (some of them justified, others exaggerated) regarding the conduct of the Haredi community, its rabbis and leaders, including their low levels of compliance

with the state health directives. Morbidity among the Haredim was very high, and the spotlight focused on them cast their leadership in a negative light (among other things, due to its ongoing refusal to impose discipline in the community's synagogues and close educational institutions).

The second survey was conducted (on behalf of the Pnima movement by pollster Mano Geva) after the new government had been formed – a government that does not include Haredi parties. It was conducted after the pandemic began to show signs of recurrence, but when there weren't public accusations leveled against the Haredi public. However, even during the weeks leading up to the second survey, a considerable number of incidents highlighted the ongoing conflict between

Graph 4. "Hatred" of Haredim within the Israeli public



Haredi and non-Haredi Israelis (for example, the aforementioned ministerial decision to cut child allowances, or the High Court’s ruling on gender segregation for Haredi students in academia). Nevertheless, as the data show, this period gave the impression of being somewhat less tense – even though the share of Israelis saying outright that they “hate” Haredim remained high.

Partnership between Arabs and Jews

Last year, we reported a dramatic rise in the share of Arab Israelis who define their primary identity as “Israeli,” and a concomitant sharp decline in the share who self-identify as “Palestinian.”² These findings were not reproduced this year, for reasons that are not entirely clear but may stem from methodological differences in sampling. The level of partnership between Jews and non-Jews in Israel was prominent in the public discourse this year, in the framework of the election campaigns. This round of elections shattered old norms by proving the practicability of Arab party membership in the ruling coalition. Concurrent with this development, the past year witnessed an outbreak of Arab violence, primarily in Israel’s mixed cities, during the Guardian of the Walls operation in Gaza. This outbreak greatly sharpened Jewish-Arab tensions, just as a political coalition with both Jews and Arabs was being formed (for more on this topic, see page 58).

Most public discussion on Jewish-Arab relations dealt with the question of active

Arab partnership and involvement in the political arena. In recent decades there has been a gradual but highly significant decline in Arab votes for “Jewish” parties, and a shift toward near-exclusive Arab support for parties affiliated with the Arab sector. Thus, most of the discussion took place between parties that directly target Arab voters. The sector’s main party, the Joint List, was challenged by Ra’am, a party associated with the southern faction of the Islamic Movement. Historically, the Arab parties have found themselves, whether unwillingly or by choice, excluded from negotiations to establish and ensure coalition stability. But Ra’am (as well as Arab mayors who have spoken out on these issues) has sought to operate as a party willing to trade its support in exchange for safeguarding the key interests of its constituents. This especially relates to focused and thorough measures to address the problem of violence in the Arab sector, as well as the allocation of budgets for education, construction, and healthcare. This approach ultimately led to the party’s inclusion in the new government. Ra’am, which has four coalition members, is a party without which the coalition would cease to exist and therefore holds great power.

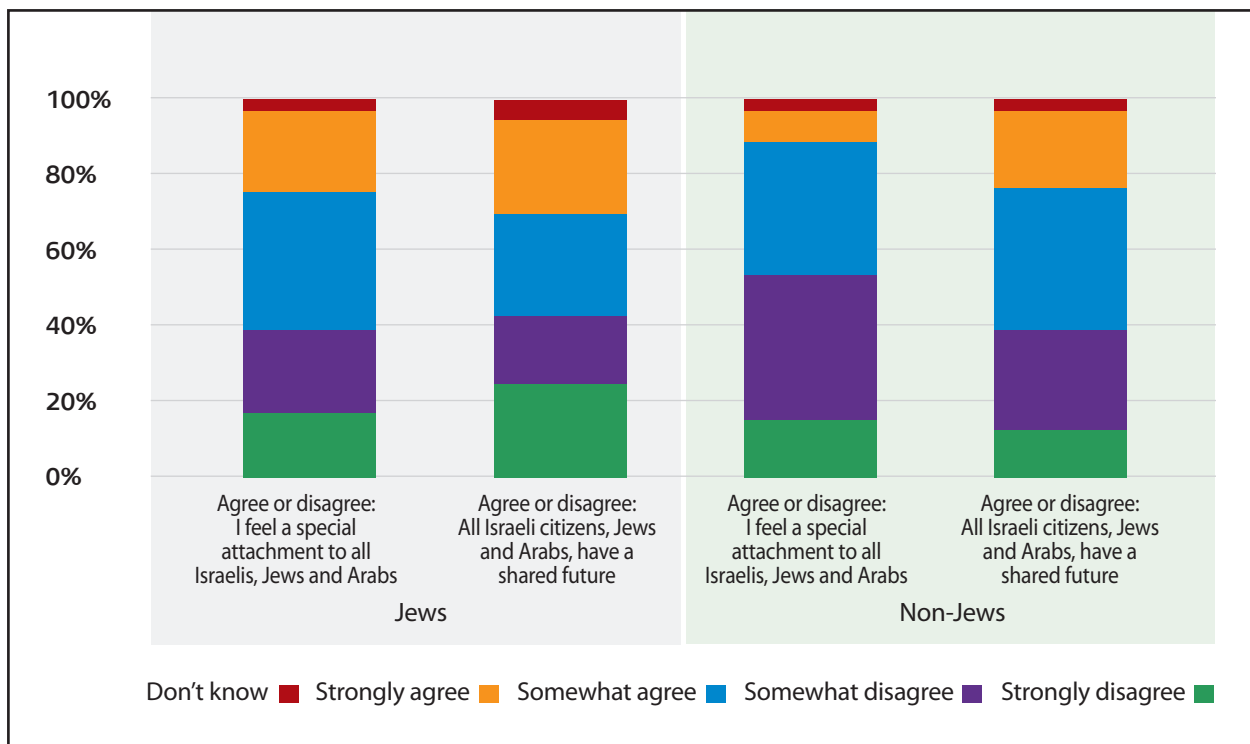
In JPPI’s 2021 survey, conducted a few months before the government was formed, both Jews and non-Jews were asked whether they see a “shared future” for all Israelis, Jews and Arabs, and whether they feel “closeness” to all Israelis, Jews and Arabs. The responses of Jews to this question are clearly split along political lines, with a higher sense of partnership among respondents who

self-identify as left leaning. Among non-Jews, Druze respondents express high-level agreement with the “shared future” statement.

Regarding the gaps between Jews in response to the “partnership” and “attachment” questions, an interesting phenomenon can be discerned. While nearly half of the respondents (49%) give the same answer to both questions, a significant percentage (25%) display what we call “hesitant attachment.” These are Jews whose attitude toward “partnership” is more positive than it is toward “attachment,” the difference almost always being one unit of the scale bar. For example: if they “strongly agree” with the

statement that there is a “shared future,” they only “somewhat agree” that there is “special attachment”; if they “somewhat agree” that there is a “shared future,” then they “somewhat disagree” there is a “special attachment” – and so on. A possible explanation for this partnership-attachment discrepancy: Jews realize that the Arabs are here to stay and that partnership is necessary, but they have trouble translating partnership into attachment, which has an emotional dimension. Among Arabs there is no discernible sense of “hesitant attachment”; 60% of Arabs gave the same answers to the partnership and attachment questions.

Graph 5. Partnership and attachment – Arabs and Jews



While the new government promotes Jewish-Arab cooperation in various fields, the events in Israel during Operation Guardian of the Walls brought a flood of renewed tension between the sectors. Some viewed the violence primarily as an eruption of socioeconomic frustration. Others tended toward a more dramatic interpretation of the unrest, seeing it as declaration that, as far as the Arabs are concerned, “[t]he artificial distinction between ‘Israeli’ and ‘Palestinian’ Arabs’ is no longer relevant. The bloody events of May 2021 thus underscore the need for Israelis to accept that the question of the 1967 borders is artificial. From the Palestinians’ perspective, including those Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship, the issue has always been, and remains, the 1948 borders.”³

Nevertheless, surveys conducted some time after the riots indicated no dramatic turning point in Israeli or Arab attitudes. Forty-three percent of Jews say that they consider Israel’s Arab citizens as “people who should be respected, but also suspected”; 31% see them as equal citizens; 20% as potential enemies, and 6% as unequal citizens. A majority of Jewish Israelis (64%) feel that the government should invest in the country’s Arab citizens.⁴ A survey conducted around the time of the riots found that Arabs are more willing to assume that the rioters – whether Arabs who initiated the events, or Jews who responded violently – are an extremist minority who do not represent the general public’s attitude. Among Jews, there is a consensus that the Jewish rioters were a small minority, but there is no consensus that the situation is the same for the

Arab rioters. Eight out of ten Jews agreed that the Jewish rioters were an extremist minority; four out of ten agreed that the Arab rioters were also an extremist minority.⁵

Endnotes

- 1 Pluralism Index 2021, available here: <http://jppi.org.il/he/article/index2021/#.YPZzqC0RrQ0>
- 2 Pluralism Index 2020, Jewish People Policy Institute. <http://jppi.org.il/he/article/index2020/#.YE92Ki0RrQ0>
- 3 See: Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel: Between Confrontation and Acceptance. David Koren, the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, May 2021. [Hebrew]
- 4 Research by the Institute for National Security Studies, June 2021, conducted by Zipi Israeli.
- 5 Survey by the Israel Democracy Institute, May 2021, conducted by Tamar Hermann and Or Anabi.

13

American Jewry: Demography and the Coronavirus

During the period between November 2019 and July 2020 the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of the American Jewish population. Among other things, the survey offers a glimpse of current US Jewish demographics, including population size, geographic distribution, and educational and economic attainment. These characteristics can be compared with those of the American population as a whole. During

the period in question, the Pew Research Center separately interviewed a large number of US citizens, including a sample of Jews, about how they were coping with the coronavirus pandemic. These two topics are the focus of the index presented here. Our concluding remarks address demography and COVID-19 from a global Jewish perspective, noting implications for future research.

Demographics

Population size

The new Pew survey found that, in 2020, there were 7.5 million people in the US who self-identified as Jewish. Three-quarters of them identify as Jews by religion, while another quarter identify as Jewish ethnically, culturally, or by ancestry.¹ We believe that 200,000 children of dual religious identity (Jewish and other) should be subtracted from this figure, making for an estimated 7.3 million Jews (Graph 1, Track 1).

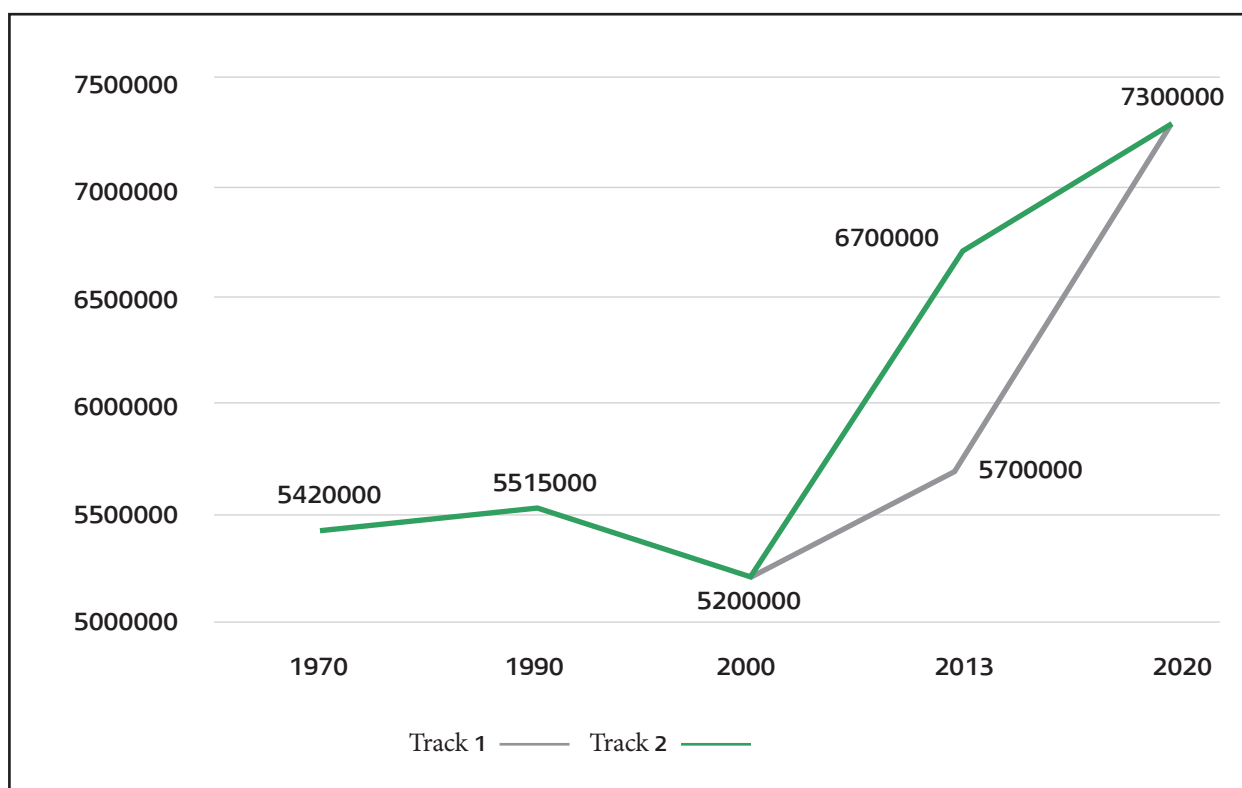
The previous Pew survey of American Jewry was conducted in 2013. This survey arrived at an estimated Jewish population of 5.7 million (per self-identification), with another million identifying as “partially” Jewish (with no other religious identity). Some argued at the time that these partial Jews should be included in the total US Jewish population, bringing it to 6.7 million (Graph 1, Track 2). The 2020 survey did not allow respondents a “partially” Jewish option; the only options were Jewish or not Jewish. We assume that many of those who in 2013 chose the partly Jewish option defined themselves as Jewish in the 2020 survey. The rest of the increase in the American Jewish population estimate can be attributed to differences in data-gathering methodologies (a phone survey in 2013 versus a combination of web and mail questionnaires in 2020), but also to several developments relating to demography and identity definition: (1) an increase in the share of Orthodox Jews, especially Haredi or ultra-Orthodox Jews, whose birthrate

is high; (2) an “echo effect” of a relatively large number of grandchildren of baby boomers entering the marriage and childbearing life stages; (3) growth in the share of mixed-couple offspring who are Jews; (4) and the addition of people of color to the ranks of American Jewry, including Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and mixed-race Americans; these latter Jews account for 8% of all US Jews.

We are aware that the new estimate attests to a substantial increase compared with late-20th century estimates. Only a small amount of this growth can be explained by births and a positive net migration rate (mainly from the FSU and Israel). Furthermore, it reflects changes in group identity, and in the degree of confidence with which people identify as Jews in the United States today. Sometimes, a growing number of antisemitic incidents can reinforce the desire to openly identify as Jewish.

It is worth noting that even those who favor a more restrictive definition of “Jewish” would have to agree that, in a departure from past assumptions, the number of US Jews is not declining or eroding, but rising. Professor Sergio DellaPergola, for instance, who holds that “Jews of no religion” should be included in the core American Jewish population only if they have two Jewish parents, reaches a US Jewish population estimate of 6 million.² Essentially, since 1970, from one survey to the next (except for the 2000 survey, which suffered from major methodological problems), the number of US Jews has been rising.

Graph 1. The US Jewish Population, 1970-2020



Source: National Jewish Population Surveys, 1970, 1990, and 2000; Pew surveys of 2013 and 2020.

It is also interesting to consider what the number of US Jews would be according to Halacha, or Jewish law, i.e., those born to Jewish mothers. This definition would apply to 87% of adult US Jews by religion, and to 70% of Jews of no religion – i.e., 4.8 million people. But apart from these, there are another 1.3 million Americans who do not identify as Jews but whose mothers are Jewish, making for a total of 6.1 million Americans who meet the halachic criteria for belonging to the Jewish people. This figure is 300,000 higher than the estimated number of adults (age 18 and over) who self-reported as Jews (regardless of their

mothers' religion of origin). At this stage, lacking access to the database, we cannot determine the number of children in the US whose mothers are Jewish; however, we believe that, given the rise in mixed marriages among Jewish women in recent years, the number of such children is not substantially different from the number of children whose parents reported them as being Jewish. Thus, the total US Jewish population, halachically defined, is 7.5 million.

Recognizing the validity of this relatively high number means being prepared to supply community services of various kinds to a growing

population. Even some of those whose Jewish identity is dubious may be interested in what Jewish organizations and institutions have to offer, including educational, cultural, and social services. Moreover, the Jewish community, at the national and especially local levels, should be prepared to welcome a greater diversity of members than ever before.

Geographic distribution

American Jews are not spread uniformly across the continent. The number of Jews in the various states and regions is determined by internal migration, immigrant destinations within the US, differential natural increase influenced by denominational affiliation (mainly Orthodox as opposed to non-Orthodox), and assimilation rates. After the share of Jews in the more established Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic communities declined in favor of Sun Belt localities in the South and West, recent years have witnessed a more moderate continuation of the trend. Currently, American

Jews are almost equally distributed between the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic (48%) and the South and West (52%). Although the largest share of Jews resides in such Northeastern/Mid-Atlantic states as New York and New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, the gap between those states and both the southern and western regions is small (Table 1).

US Jews can be found in large numbers in many different regions and states. This split is making it necessary for major organizations, institutions, and services to reorganize geographically. At the same time, a large presence across a large geographic expanse ensures Jewish vitality and cohesion, even in places where educational, cultural, and religious activities were once hard to find.

It should also be noted that the recent dispersion of Jews across the continent resembles the overall population distribution more than ever before (Table 1). It attests to the Jews’ successful integration in the general American society.

Table 1. Geographic distribution of Jews and of the general American population, 1970-2020 (in percentages)

	1970		2000		2020	
	Jews	All Americans	Jews	All Americans	Jews	All Americans
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Northeast	60	24	43	19	38	18
Mid-Atlantic	17	28	12	23	10	21
South	12	31	23	36	27	38
West	11	17	22	22	25	24

Source: National Jewish Population Surveys, 1970, 1990, and 2000, and the Pew surveys of 2013 and 2020.

Educational and economic attainments

Educational attainment is a salient feature of social success. The composition of the Jewish population has changed over the past few decades: older people with limited schooling have passed away, and their place has been taken by young high school graduates who have gone on to institutions of higher education. In the past five decades there has been a major decline in the share of Jews with a high school education or less, while the share of academic degree holders has climbed

– including Jews with advanced or professional degrees, e.g., law degrees (Table 2). At present, six out of ten American Jews hold academic degrees. It appears, however, that the Jews have exhausted their educational potential; the past two decades have seen almost no change in their educational status, while the American population as a whole has displayed a significant increase in the pursuit of higher education. Thus, the Jewish advantage in this sphere has grown smaller (though it is still quite marked).

Table 2. Educational attainment of Jews and of the general American population, 1970-2020 (in percentages)

	1970		2000		2020	
	Jews	All Americans	Jews	All Americans	Jews	All Americans
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
High school and lower	46	78	19	53	20	37
Some college	20	11	23	28	22	28
Bachelor’s degree	15	6	32	13	30	22
Master’s degree *and above	19	5	26	6	28	13

*Including professional degrees

Source: National Jewish Population Surveys, 1970, 1990, and 2000, and the Pew surveys of 2013 and 2020.

Data not shown here indicate that American Jews also enjoy high incomes. A quarter live in households with annual incomes of over \$200,000, compared with just 4% of Americans in general. More than half of US Jews live in households with annual incomes of \$100,000 or more, compared with a fifth of the American

population as a whole. At the opposite end of the income scale, only 10% of Jews have household incomes of \$30,000 per year or less, compared with a quarter of other Americans. It should be noted that Conservative and Reform Jews are more strongly concentrated in the higher income brackets than are Orthodox Jews.³

Endnotes

- 1 Pew Research Center, 2021. *Jewish Americans in 2020*. Washington, D.C.
- 2 See above, p. 52, on DellaPergola's estimates.
- 3 Pew 2020, p.201.

14

Israel Diaspora Index: Pre- and Post Covid-19

The coronavirus pandemic hit many communities in Israel and the Diaspora hard. Although the most common method for dealing with the pandemic was, and remains, quarantine and isolation, the unique challenges spawned new tools – particularly technological tools – that were previously unknown (or were in limited use). These tools allowed states and organizations to continue their routine activities while offering aid and support, developing collaborations, and other launching new initiatives.

The Jewish establishment's large organizations took steps to adapt and cope with the challenge. The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, local community leaders and major Jewish organizations provided support networks and a variety of resources to assist communities and individuals socially and economically impacted by the pandemic. This article

examines the main initiatives undertaken by Israel's official establishment to reinforce Israel-Diaspora relations, and also describes various trends in Israel-Diaspora relations.

Israel has two official bodies for whom a primary goal is to reinforce the Israel-Diaspora relationship: The Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs. There are also various organizations that maintain relations with the Diaspora under the umbrella of other government ministries (such as the Education Ministry). During the last year and a half, these two bodies have worked to adapt their ongoing programs and activities to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide new programs that address actual needs on the ground.

The Jewish Agency initiated several programs tailored to help and support Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Table 1 describes the most prominent of these.¹

Table 1. Jewish Agency initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic

The initiative	Budget	Scope of impact
Emergency loan fund to Jewish communities in crisis, to help them through the economic crisis by covid-19	\$10 million	26 countries
Virtual Jewish Programs- JAFI’s <i>Shlichim</i> (Israeli emissaries) engaged their communities with diverse online programming for all ages. JAFI also organized a live, virtual concert in March, and celebrated the Israeli Independence Day with online program		More than 400,000 people participated in a concert held in March 2020. Over 300,000 people took part in Israel Independence Day events in May 2020.
JReady – the Jewish Emergency Network A digital resource center that helps Jewish communities fortify their operations, build resilience, and prepare for any emergencies that may arise in the future	As of Aug. 2020: Total budget of \$1,057,000	By November 2020 communities were reached in at least 35 countries.
Emergency Support for Italian Jewry: The Jewish Agency has worked closely with local leadership to ensure the safety and needs of the local community	As of Aug. 2020: Total budget of \$230,000	
Aid to Ethiopian Jews, primarily members of the Falash Mura community who are waiting to come to Israel	As of Aug. 2020: Total budget of \$177,900	8,000 Falash Mura awaiting Aliyah
Aliyah and absorption: Expanding efforts and adapting the absorption process. Assistance with food, medicines, and other necessities during quarantine. Providing absorption services and consulting, subsidies to those who have not found employment	As of Aug. 2020: Total sum of \$958,440	As of Aug. 2020: 5,590 new olim arrived in Israel
Global Roundtable Initiative: JAFI, together with Israel’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, launched a forum of 30 leaders from major Jewish organizations worldwide to assess the damage caused in Jewish communities and prepare rehabilitation plan		

In addition to these, JAFI initiated several programs to provide assistance in Israel.

The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs also worked to enhance and adapt its activities to the pandemic period with an emphasis

on transitioning to a digital platform. The ministry received special budgets for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic totaling NIS 40,500,000.² Below are the most prominent initiatives promoted by the ministry:

Table 2. Ministry of Diaspora Affairs initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic

The initiative	Budget ³
Adapting and repurposing the formal Jewish education system in an online format.	NIS 38,500,000
Establishing an administration to advance activities in the informal education sphere.	\$4,000,000
Accelerating a global Jewish education network in cooperation with Herzog College (this program has been in existence for several years but has progressed significantly during the pandemic). The contract was signed in June 2021.	
Designing emergency training courses and enhancing community resilience, in cooperation with Mahut Israel. The project mainly included lectures by specialists in the mental health and crisis management spheres for community leaders around the world.	NIS 50,000
The “Connections” project, to enhance relations between Israelis and Diaspora Jewry.	NIS 8,000,000
Advancing “Our Common Destiny” project – a roadmap for the future of the Jewish people.	

It is important to note that larger and more established organizations also worked in the Diaspora to initiate programs aimed at assisting Jews throughout the world. The JCRIF, JFNA, JFN, large and small Jewish

federations, Jewish organizations such as Hillel and IsraAID, and many others, offered assistance – each according to its capabilities – with resources and initiatives to the benefit of many.

The Israel – Diaspora Connection

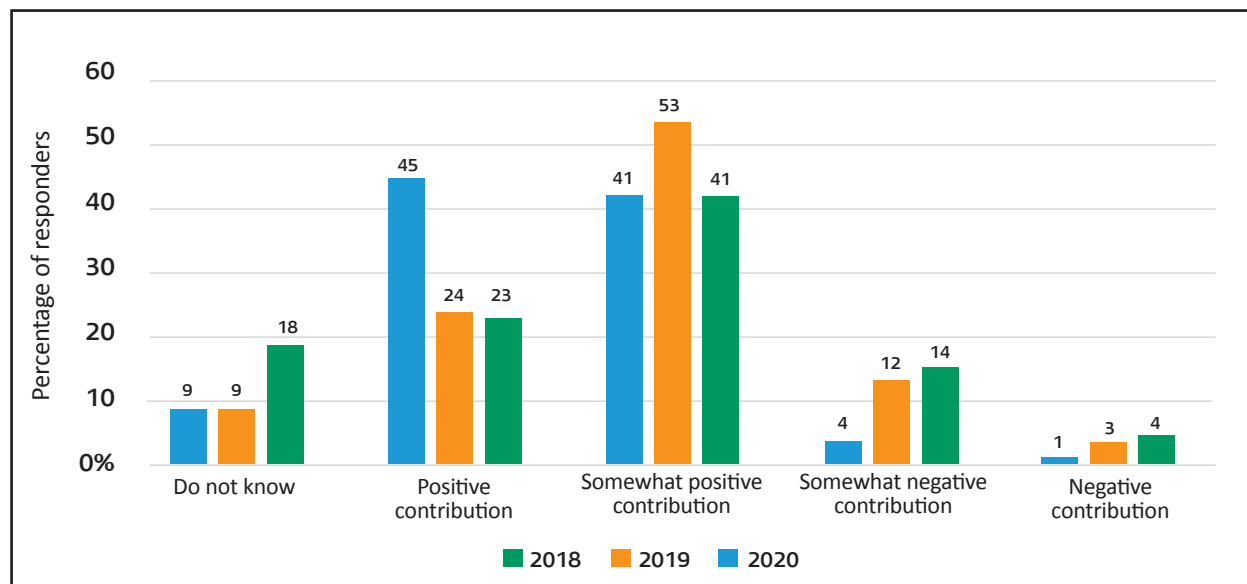
In order to try and look at the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in general, and the effect of steps taken by the various organizations vis-a-vis this relationship (with an emphasis on Jews in Israel and the United States), we will present several public opinion polls, particularly those that enable us to trace differences between the period before the crisis and the situation in more recent months.

Surveys of attitudes in Israel

There have been very few Israeli public opinion surveys regarding the attitudes of

Israelis toward Diaspora Jewry but let us mention two. JPPI’s Pluralism Index takes a yearly look at how Israelis perceive the contribution by Diaspora Jews to Israel’s success. Data from the index indicate a sharp rise in the percentage of Israelis who perceive Diaspora Jewry as contributing to Israel’s success (up from 23% in 2018 to 45% in 2020, when the pandemic began). The percentage of those who feel that the contribution of Diaspora Jewry is negative or somewhat negative dropped during the same time period (from 4% to 1% among those who see a negative contribution, and from 14% to 4% among those who see a somewhat negative contribution).

Graph 1. How Israelis perceive the contribution of Diaspora Jews to Israel’s success, 2018-2020



* In 2019 and 2020 a response to this question was not required. The distribution between the responses is only among those who chose to answer.

Source: Pluralism Index data processing, JPPI

In 2021, in the latter stages of the pandemic, two other questions were asked in the Pluralism Index survey. The first had to do with respondents' agreement with the statement that Jews in Israel and the Diaspora share a common future; 35% disagreed or didn't much agree with the statement and 62% agreed or highly agreed (3% said they didn't know). The second question looked at the attitude of Israeli Jews regarding the statement that Israel must be concerned about Diaspora Jews; 69% of respondents agreed with the statement, 20% disagreed, and 12% said they didn't know. These data show us that a small minority of Israeli Jews feel that Diaspora Jews make a contribution

to Israel. A somewhat greater majority feel that Diaspora and Israeli Jews share a common future, and that Israel must provide assistance to Diaspora Jewry.

We also looked at a survey of Israeli Jews conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC). The survey was administered in 2019 and again in 2021. Two questions relating to Israel-Diaspora relations were asked that allow us to gauge whether there was a change in the attitude of Israeli Jews over the two-year period. The first question was: "If we were to describe Jews in the US as family members (metaphorically speaking), would you describe American Jews as...."

Table 3. Responses of Israeli Jews to AJC survey questions on how they would describe US Jews (2019, 2021)

	2019	2021	Δ
Brothers	31%	24%	↓
First cousins	11%	18%	↑
Part of the extended family	36%	45%	↑
Not part of the family	23%	14%	↓

The data indicate a mixed trend. Regarding the closer relationship of "brothers" there was a decline (7.4%) regarding the more distant relationship of "part of the extended family," there was an increase (8.6%). However, there was also a decline (9.2%) among those who, encouragingly, claimed they were not part of the family.

For the purpose of comparison, we can look at the response to a similar AJC survey question asked of US Jews. In 2021, more Israelis considered Diaspora Jews to be close family while a higher percentage of American Jews did not view Israeli Jews as part of the family.

Table 4. Comparison between Israelis and American Jews on the question of how they describe each other (AJC survey, 2021)

	2021 Israelis	2021 American Jews
Brothers	24%	11%
First cousins	18%	15%
Part of the extended family	45%	46%
Not part of the family	14%	28%

Another question enables us to compare the period immediately prior to the pandemic with the current one concerns the importance of the prosperity and success of Diaspora Jews to the future of the Jewish people. The question was asked somewhat differently each time, but we can see that the percentage of respondents agreeing with this statement was almost unchanged. In 2019 the percentage was 74% and stood at 74.3% in 2021 (with 32.8% stating it is very important and 41.5% stating it is quite important).

The survey conducted in 2021 added another element to the picture of this relationship by asking why the prosperity of Diaspora Jewry was important. More than half of Israeli respondents selected answers that placed Israel at the center. For example,

36% responded that the main reason for needing a prosperous Diaspora Jewry was to promote their respective governments' support of Israel; 24% felt the reason was that Diaspora Jews donate money to Israel. Only about a quarter (27%) felt the desirability of a prosperous Diaspora Jewry related to the need for diversity, contributes to the strength of the Jewish people.

If we refer to the data from the two surveys, we see that Israeli Jews value Diaspora Jews, feel connected to them, and believe that they contribute to the State of Israel and to Judaism. However, except for a rise seen in the JPPI survey conducted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020), we see no indication that the crisis helped to reinforce relations between the communities or changed attitudes of Israeli Jews.

Surveys of attitudes in the United States

Although there are only a few surveys of Israelis examining the relationship with the Diaspora, three major surveys were recently published in the United States: The American Jewish Committee (AJC) survey, which is conducted annually and enables monitoring trends over time; the May 2021 Pew Research Centersurvey of Jewish Americans in 2020 (the previous survey, published in 2013, employed a somewhat different methodology); and a third survey conducted by JAFI, a one off, doesn't give us a way to look at trends before and after the pandemic but we can use it to sharpen the American picture, particularly in cases where there are discrepancies between the other surveys.

In JPPI's 2019 Annual Assessment we proposed several indicators to evaluate the

relationship between Israeli and Diaspora Jews; among them was the degree to which respondents agreed with the statement, "Concern for Israel is an important part of my Judaism." AJC Data indicate a continued erosion of agreement with this statement (in 2021, there was a slight rise, from 59% to 60%, but the percentage is still somewhat lower than in 2019 – 62%, and much lower than the 80% seen in 2000). Although there are some methodological issues with comparing the different surveys, the gaps in the responses to this question are noteworthy. JAFI's research suggests that the rate of agreement with this statement is even lower than seen in the AJC surveys. In contrast with these two, the Pew survey found that the degree to which respondents agreed with the statement was quite high, standing at some 82%. These significant discrepancies require further study.

Graph 2. Percentage of those responding to the statement that concern for Israel is a very important part of their Judaism (AJC 2000-2021, Pew 2021, JAFI 2021)

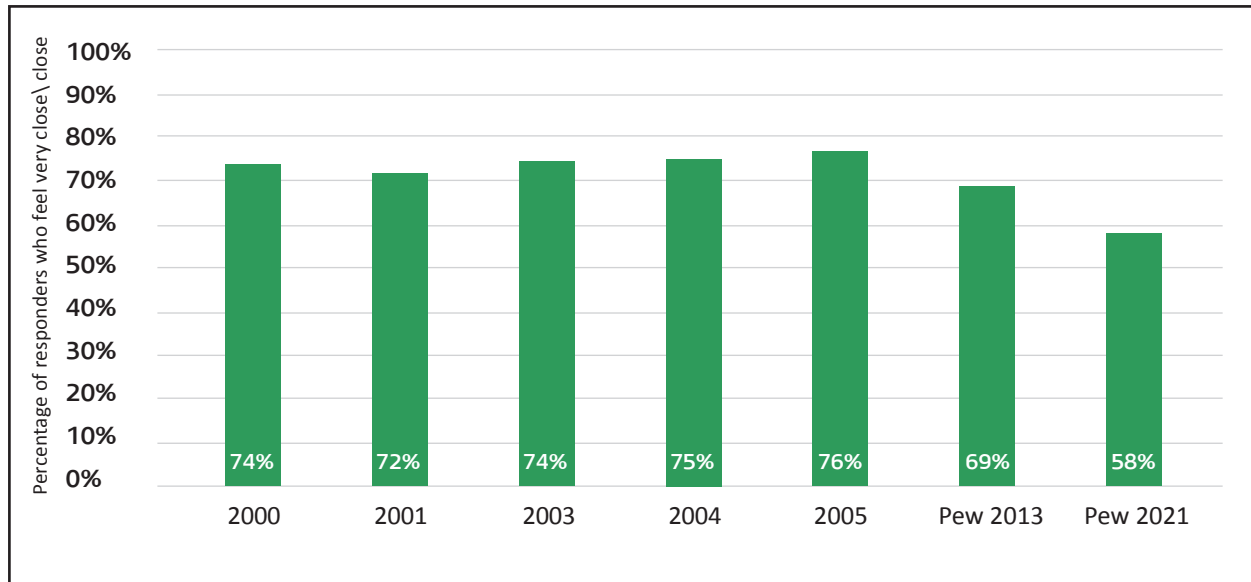


Source: JPPI processing of surveys by AJC 2000-2021, Pew 2021, and JAFI 2021

Another relevant question that was examined in the most recent Pew report touches on the emotional connection of American Jews to Israel. Although the question has not been asked on AJC surveys for several years, we can, nevertheless, look at the general trend using AJC and Pew data from previous years. In the 2021 Pew survey, 58% of respondents stated that they feel an emotional connection

(32%) or a deep emotional connection (25%) with Israel. In the 2013 Pew survey, the percentage was higher at 69% (39% felt an emotional connection and 30% felt a deep emotional connection). A similar question was asked on AJC surveys between 2000-2005 and yielded higher results. In 2000, the percentage of those who felt close to Israel was 74%; it was 76% in 2005.

Graph 3. Percentage of respondents feeling close to Israel (Pew 2013 & 2021, AJC 2000-2005)



Source: JPPI processing of surveys by AJC 2000-2005, Pew 2013 & 2021

Another AJC survey question looked at the importance of the respondents' concern for Israel to their Jewish identity. This year, as in previous years, we see a continuing erosion of connection to Israel as part of Jewish identity.

The percentage of respondents for whom concern for Israel was very important or somewhat important to their Jewish identity dropped from 80% in 2000 to 62% in 2019, before the pandemic, and to 60% in 2021.

Graph 4. Concern for the State of Israel as an important aspect of being Jewish, AJC 2000 - 2021



Source: JPPI processing of surveys by AJC 2000-2021

Generally speaking, in all of the surveys we can see that demographic variables, including age and position along the axes of Jewish tradition and political attitudes, have an impact on responses. This is a striking divergence of attitudes between younger and older cohorts. In actuality, comparing the new data to previous data indicates that the trend of erosion is actually observed among the older groups as well. One way or

another, the general picture is that among the Jews in Israel the situation is mixed, and perhaps indicates a slight rise in the feeling of closeness to Diaspora Jews. In contrast, among Diaspora Jews, the trend of a waning feeling of closeness, which was evident prior to the pandemic, is continuing.

Did the initiatives that were undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic prevent an even worse situation? Could better results

have been achieved? Has sufficient time elapsed to evaluate their full impact? We should be cautious about drawing solid conclusions based on the partial data at our disposal, but at this point in time there is no evidence that the numerous new programs have reversed the trend of erosion in Israel-Diaspora relations.

Endnotes

- 1 Data was provided by the Jewish Agency and processed by the Jewish People Policy Institute. Special thanks to Yael Raz, head of the Special Tasks and Emergency Division.
- 2 Budget development source: <https://next.obudget.org/i/budget/00045203/2020>
- 3 Data is taken from the Ministry's budget 2013-2021.

CULTURAL CURRENCY

16

New Relevance in the Traditional Space

In this chapter, as is the case every year, we describe a limited number of developments and trends within the framework of Jewish culture in its religious, theological, historical, and philosophical aspects. The selection here reflects the interests and biases of the writers in regard to what is important; it does not constitute a comprehensive survey of all that occurred in these fields in the past year.

The New Israeli Reform Siddur – *Tefillat HaAdam*

The Israeli Reform Movement has come out with a new siddur. Edited by Rabbis Dalia Marx and Alona Lisitsa, it attempts to address the general Israeli and non-Orthodox public and not only the members of the Reform movement itself. Thus, it adopted the title *Tefillat HaAdam*, which refers to a famous line from the Israeli

paratrooper Hannah Senesh's poem "Walking to Caesarea." According to Rabbis Marx and Lisitsa, it is meant to highlight to secular Israelis, who are familiar with this poem from school ceremonies on Holocaust Memorial Day, that prayer can be found in secular events and situations alongside standard religious ritual.

The prayerbook manifests a two-pronged dynamic: it is at the same time more traditional and more radical than previous siddurim. It includes many more traditional prayers than previous Reform prayerbooks and at the same time engages with issues of sexual orientation and gender in radical, even revolutionary ways. Thus, the siddur includes a congregational blessing (Mi Sheberach) for someone who comes out of the closet.

This new siddur represents a further attempt on the part of the liberal denominations in Israel to change the institutional format of religion in Israel. Israel follows a "Catholic" or Christian Orthodox pattern of religion and secularization. Under this pattern, secularizing forces oppose religion. They do not attempt to change existing traditional religion, rather they attempt to negate or abolish it and/or its influence and standing and to free areas of life from its dominion. The roots of the liberal denominations, in contrast, are in the "Protestant" pattern of secularization where religion itself changes and becomes more pluralistic and liberal. This pattern is characteristic of the United States. Thus, the liberal denominations in Israel are trying to erode Israel's historical "Catholic" pattern (the shul that I do not go to is Orthodox) and replace

it with a more "Protestant" one. They have had some success and they hope that the new siddur with its Israeli character and features will aid them in this endeavor.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (1948-2020)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (1991-2013) passed away from cancer in November 2020. Trained in philosophy at Cambridge, Oxford, and the University of London, Sacks was the leading philosophical and theological voice of Modern Orthodoxy for the past generation, certainly for the Jews of the Diaspora. Not only did he defend Orthodoxy in the modern world, but he showed the relevance and value of biblical and Judaic ideas for general and non-Jewish audiences globally. Receptive to contemporary philosophical ideas, he defended Jewish particularism upon the basis of multicultural theory and declared that as a result of the Holocaust the Jews had entered the post-modern condition. He asserted that the Holocaust demonstrated that history does not result in the moral progress of humanity.

Affirming that no one religious tradition could claim a monopoly on spiritual truth, he engaged in fruitful interreligious dialogue. While continuously affirming the authority of the Orthodox Halacha, he was able to cooperate with all denominations on matters that concerned the entire Jewish community. His essays on the weekly Torah portion showed the

relevance of the parsha for fundamental issues such as human freedom, creativity, and love and human relationships and had global impact. The recipient of many awards and academic honors, he was appointed a Life Peer with a seat in the House of Lords in 2009.

Sacks' life, thought, and career, illustrate the dual track development characteristic of contemporary Judaism. Sacks' writing is more "Jewish" and traditional than that of his predecessors – he presents more ideas, rabbinical figures, midrashim, halachic texts etc. than previous chief rabbis. At the same time, Sacks engaged with and utilized contemporary thought including trends, such as post-modernism and multi-culturalism, that at least, initially, were considered more radical and challenging to Orthodoxy (and other mainstream Jewish trends, including Zionism).

Sacks was a good example of the English writer Matthew Arnold's argument that the state establishment of religion is desirable so that a "bishop can become a statesman." That is, by being a public and state figure and not solely a religious one, religious leaders have to broaden their horizons and bring broad social and moral considerations into their teaching and decision making. As Chief Rabbi, Sacks was a notable public figure (though not a state official), and he provided a truly broad perspective on religion, ethics, and society.

Jewish Tradition and the Arts in Israel

Israeli arts exhibited something of a renewed interest in Jewish history and tradition this year. Two of the more notable works are *When God was Young* by the Israeli author of popular fiction Yochi Brandes and the film *Legend of Destruction* by Gidi Dar.

Yochi Brandes re-imagines biblical and Jewish historical scenes and situations to make them more relevant and attractive to an Israeli secular audience. While this often results in passionate storytelling, her interpretive slant is generally nationalist so as to bring the biblical or historical stories in accord with the dominant values of contemporary Israeli culture. Her latest book is not a novel, but rather a series of essays or meditations on the interaction of God and certain biblical figures. The basic argument, which repeats itself in almost every essay, is that God changes and evolves through his interaction with the biblical figures. This idea, which need not be construed as necessarily heretical, fits the biblical stories to the underlying values of Israeli secular nationalist culture. This culture, of course, revolted against the passivity and dependence on God that characterized the traditional Judaism of the Galut. By having the biblical characters influence God as well as being influenced by Him, she restores a sense of agency and activism to the biblical figures, in line with modern Israeli culture.

Gidi Dar's new film has evoked a lot of interest internationally because of its innovative formal

technique. It consists of 1500 still drawings of considerable artistry and beauty shown together with dialogue and a sound track. However, in Israel, its content also attracted considerable attention. It tells the story of the destruction of the Temple based upon the Jewish sources in the Talmud Bavli, Gittin 55b-59b and in the Eicha Rabbah midrash as well as the writings of Josephus Flavius. The very title, *Legend of Destruction*, discloses its intention. It is an Aggadah, not in the sense of a fairy tale but in the sense of a moral tale, as found in the Talmud. At the center of the story is the bloody strife among the polarized Jewish factions that ultimately weakened the Jewish resistance to the Romans and led to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. The film premiered two days before Tisha B'Av to packed audiences, largely of religious people. As many of the reviews showed, the nationalist message was not lost on the audience. They understood the film as addressing the anxiety underlying Israeli political culture – that the struggle between the polarized factions (left and right, religious and secular, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, Jews and Arabs) will undercut the viability of the state.

Biography: Rav Kook: A New Look

This year also witnessed the publication of the Hebrew version of Yehudah Mirsky's important English biography of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (Yale's Jewish Lives series, 2014). R. Kook served as the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael. He was the foundational theologian of contemporary Religious Zionism, and one of the most important Jewish theological voices of the modern period.

The publication of this Hebrew translation illustrates the virtues of cultural cross-fertilization. Written for an American audience with very little knowledge of this important figure, Mirsky had the freedom to expertly explore the many sided, multi-polar and radical nature of R. Kook's thought. In Israel, such exploration was constrained by R. Kook's identification with the stream of Orthodox religious Zionism and by the controversial identification of the Kook family with the settlements in the Greater Land of Israel (primarily Judea and Samaria, the West Bank.) Mirsky's well written volume brings an "American" perspective on R. Kook, greatly enriching the Israeli public's knowledge and understanding of this iconic figure.

Halacha and COVID-19

Two notable books on Halacha and the COVID-19 pandemic were published this year. One is *The Coronavirus Pandemic*, Volume 30 in Rabbi Asher Weiss's *Minchat Asher* responsa series. Rabbi Weiss is one of contemporary Judaism's most important and creative *poskim*, or legal arbiters. As the rabbi and posek of Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Medical Center, Weiss was familiar with coronavirus issues before most of his rabbinical colleagues. The book mainly addresses difficulties in fulfilling religious obligations due to social distancing and quarantine, e.g., how to blow a shofar while wearing a mask, or whether it is permitted to wave the lulav while wearing gloves. Unlike some Haredi leaders, Weiss emphasizes the obligation to preserve life, and the importance of complying with the directives issued by medical authorities. In contrast to Weiss's book, which focuses on the individual and the community, *National Disaster [Makat Medina]*:

State Halachot During the Coronavirus Crisis, published by the Torah and State Center in Nitzan (formerly in Gush Katif), deals with Jewish law at the national/governmental level. As such, the work reflects a key tenet of Religious Zionism, namely that the Jewish state in Eretz Israel should embody Jewish religious values and conduct itself accordingly. *National Disaster* explores, from a halachic standpoint, such issues as the degree to which the economy should remain open so as to avoid economic collapse, despite the risk of mass contagion and high mortality. Some of the articles in the collection also discuss Israel's responsibility to Diaspora communities. Although the book constitutes an interesting effort, there is a perceptible difference between discussions on such "classic" topics as Shabbat or kashrut, informed by a halachic literature spanning centuries, and explorations of state/governmental issues that are new to the world of Halacha.

Rabbenu Tam

Jacob ben Meir Tam (1100-1171) of Ramereau, France, known as Rabbenu Tam (per the description of his Biblical namesake – *tam* = whole/straightforward), is not a familiar figure to all Jews. But he was one of the great personages who shaped Torah study and halachic thought over the past millennium. A grandson of Rashi and one of the greatest of the *Tosafists*, or Ashkenazic medieval commentators on the Talmud, Rabbenu Tam revived the Talmudic dialectic and interpreted the Talmud by raising and resolving contradictions within it. A new intellectual biography by Professor Avraham (Rami) Reiner, ***Rabbenu Tam: Interpretation, Halakha, Controversy*** (Bar-Ilan University Press) illuminates additional aspects of Rabbenu Tam's legacy in the spheres of textual correction and the shaping of Halacha. This is the first attempt ever made at a complete intellectual portrait of the prominent Tosafist.

Ninety rabbinical and cantorial students from schools affiliated with the liberal streams of American Judaism signed a letter entitled *Sha'arei Dma'ot* ("Gates of Tears" – per Bava Metzia 59a), in which they accused the US Jewish leadership of supporting Israel's suppression of human rights and its apartheid regime in Judea and Samaria (the "Occupied Territories"). The signatories, who express solidarity with Palestinian suffering, note that they are "future leaders" of the American Jewish community, and that their views are rooted in Jewish ethics and tradition. The letter drew criticism from the dean of rabbinical studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, and from other prominent figures, who called it one-sided, lacking in empathy for Israel, and marked by an absence of *ahavat Yisrael*, or love for one's fellow Jews. However, the letter appears to represent a position commonly held by young American Jews who are involved in their community and invested in their Judaism.

Morality and
policy

14

Israel-Diaspora on the Screen and on the Page

Literature, Theater, Television, Film, Art

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to cultural upheavals over the past two years. Performing arts were not performed, new productions were postponed, and bookstores (in Israel) closed. This context must be considered when reading this chapter, which endeavors to discuss some highlights in the field of Jewish culture, in Israel and around the world. This collection is far from exhaustive, but it does shed some light on trends and developments in Jewish culture.

A Jewish Nobel laureate and developments in Israeli poetry

The Jewish-American poet Louise Glück won this year's Nobel Prize in Literature, joining a distinguished cadre of 117 laureates in literature to date. Sixteen Jews have won the Nobel in this category, including three women besides Glück: the poet Nelly Sachs, the author Nadine Gordimer, and the author and playwright Elfrieda Jelinek.

Glück's poetry is not identifiably Jewish. Rather, Glück draws extensively on Greek mythology, and her style is reminiscent of other English-speaking poets such as Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, and T. S. Eliot. However, one can discern in Glück's writings echoes of humanistic American-Jewish culture, which associates Judaism with the values of justice and freedom. Her poetry bridges the quotidian and the exalted, the personal and the universal. While exploring her own inner life, the natural world, the concrete and the fleeting, Glück also expresses yearning for an unseen sublimity, something that transcends the moment or the concrete reality of the poem.

Glück was born in 1943 to Hungarian immigrants, and grew up on Long Island, New York. She is a respected and award-winning poet who has enjoyed success since her first collection, *Firstborn*, appeared in 1968. She has published 11 other poetry collections, as well as collections of essays on poetry. One of her books has appeared in Hebrew, her Pulitzer-Prize-winning *The Wild Iris* (first published in 1992), but individual poems have been translated and published in poetry and literary journals, and in literary supplements. The fact that so many of Glück's poems have been translated into Hebrew, and the multiplicity of venues in which these translations have appeared, reflect a burgeoning interest in poetry among Israelis. Poetry is not an art form that naturally appeals to the masses, but its popularity in

Israel has grown over the past decade. Some will attribute this trend to broader societal developments, such as a greater emphasis on leisure and a rise in educational attainment, while others will ascribe it to technological advancement, as manifested in the flourishing of social media and the relative ease with which one can publish and self-publish.

The seminal event in the history of Israeli Hebrew poetry was the great revolution ushered in by the Likrat poetry circle, led by Nathan Zach (who died this year at the age of 89). Likrat rebelled against the previous generation of Israeli poets, dominated by Nathan Alterman. In 1959 Zach published an essay in the journal *Achshav* entitled "Thoughts on Alterman's Poetry," a subversive manifesto in which he proposed a new, alternative poetics. Zach and the Likrat poets objected to the pathos and the strict rhythm that then prevailed in Hebrew poetry, as exemplified by Alterman. From the time his *Achshav* essay appeared, and for many years thereafter, Zach's approach and his unique voice were preeminent in Israeli poetry. In the 2000s, however, younger poets such as Dory Manor, founder of the literary magazine *Oh!*, started returning to the classical forms of Hebrew poetry embraced by Alterman – to rhyme and meter. This new generation of poets has launched poetry journals, websites, and festivals such as the Metula Poets Festival, the Tel Aviv Poetry Festival, and others.

The blossoming of public television

This past year was a year of television. The lockdowns, social isolation, free time, and escapist yearnings reinforced an already-robust medium. Yet even against the background of a decades-long TV age and a year of mass binge-watching, Israel's (relatively) new public channel *Kan 11* made a particularly strong showing. At this past April's awards ceremony of the Israel Television Academy (similar to the American Emmys), *Kan 11* garnered 33 awards, leaving the other broadcast channels in the dust.

Kan began broadcasting in Israel four years ago. Its creation was accompanied by heated debate, controversy, and legal battles. The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation (IPBC) replaced the Israel Broadcasting Authority, which had been in operation since 1968 when Israel's first television channel was founded – a public channel with an obvious governmental orientation that until the 1990s was the country's sole channel. The main question regarding the creation of this new entity was whether a public channel is necessary in an era of extensive televised and digital offerings. This question is not unique to Israel: the UK, Germany, France, and other nations struggle with the issue of public-channel funding. In Israel, the fight for a public broadcaster was also a matter of partisan politics. Opponents of the channel argue that it does not faithfully represent all sectors and is aligned with a liberal

agenda and the political left, and cast doubt on whether its public funding is justified. As a rule, public channels are meant to make quality television programming available for free to the general public. The main emphasis is on content of public benefit, free of commercial considerations.¹ It has been widely argued in media scholarship that an effective public channel returns the investment in it, and ultimately contributes to economic growth.²

One of the goals of Israeli public broadcasting is to give expression to the country's unique multicultural character – without, of course, compromising on quality. This multicultural orientation is reflected both in the public channel's dramatic and documentary offerings, and in its roster of journalists, in which Haredim, Arabs, and other minorities are represented. A study that looked at the representation of women on Israeli television channels during the coronavirus pandemic found that women are underrepresented on expert panels. A comparative examination of the channels showed that representation was much more egalitarian in IBPC programming than in the commercial channel offerings.³ Additionally, the public channel's role in conveying information to populations in

Israeli public broadcasting aims to give expression to the country's unique multicultural character without compromising on quality

distress underscored its importance during the pandemic. Among other things, the channel aired news broadcasts for the hearing impaired, the cognitively impaired, the elderly, and more.⁴

This year, the channel also devoted airtime to a considerable amount of Jewish content.⁵ Of particular interest was the *New Jew* series about American Jewry. The four-part series, hosted by Israeli comedian Gur Alfi, asked: Who are the American Jews, and what is distinctive about their Jewish identity? It did this from an Israeli perspective – the perspective of those whose Jewishness is natural and self-evident by virtue of their being Israeli. For Israeli Jewish viewers whose familiarity with Jewish communities around the world is limited, the glimpse provided by Alfi was a refreshing surprise. Although the series may not have deepened their knowledge in a substantial way, it unquestionably sparked their curiosity and a desire to learn more.

A Book that sparked a Jewish conversation

Another Jewish creative work that deals with Israel-US Jewry relations is the novel *The Netanyahus: an Account of a Minor and Ultimately even Negligible Episode in the History of a Very Famous Family*. This novel, by the young author Joshua Cohen, has aroused great curiosity and become a much-discussed item on the American cultural scene (it has yet to be published

in Hebrew).⁶ The book addresses a variety of issues, but our discussion here will focus on its Jewish aspects. Two main figures are at the center of the novel: Professor Ruben Blum, a Jewish historian modeled on the renowned scholar Harold Bloom, who died in 2019 and who, ironically, himself wrote about literary intertextuality. The other protagonist is Professor Benzion Netanyahu, the famed historian and father of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. While Harold Bloom is the major identifiable inspiration for the Ruben Blum character, the Netanyahu character is a challenging blend of fiction and reality. Harold Bloom and Benzion Netanyahu met in real life; Cohen was inspired to turn that (negligible) encounter into a novel.

In Cohen's narrative, Netanyahu arrives at the (fictitious) Corbin College in 1960 as a candidate for a professorial post in the New York-based institution's history department. Professor Blum, the department's sole Jewish faculty member, is asked to host Netanyahu and to decide whether he should be given the position. Blum fears that, should he recommend hiring Netanyahu, he will be accused of giving preference to a Jew; on the other hand, should he nix the appointment, he might be accused of fearing the accusation of a pro-Jewish bias. This Catch-22 situation has been familiar and common to Jews throughout history when faced with crucial decisions. Overall, the Blum character (who bears the same name as the fictional

Jewish protagonist Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses*), represents the American Jewish journey from a community of Eastern European immigrants to the US cultural mainstream – with attention to the price paid by individual Jews for this personal-collective act of conquest.

The novel discusses Netanyahu's scholarship, with an emphasis on his historical approach and, hence, his political views with regard to Israel, antisemitism, and Jewish history (Netanyahu was known, among other things, as a scholar of the Spanish Inquisition). In an interview, Cohen explains that Israeli statehood was perceived by Benzion Netanyahu, as well as by Ze'ev Jabotinsky and other Revisionists, as a substitute for the Jewish religion. Religious ritual served to ensure Jewish survival during the exilic period, but the Jewish people's true destiny is the establishment of a Jewish state.⁷

The novel offers a kind of parodic dialogue between Netanyahu, who sees history as a political instrument, and the American Jewish historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi.⁸ Yerushalmi explored the challenge faced by the Jewish historian in modern times, namely the need to forgo myth and embrace fact.⁹ By contrast, Netanyahu (per Cohen's depiction) continued to live the myth and give new life to it. In a 1998 interview, Netanyahu noted that Jewish history is a history of holocausts, of destruction, and of the annihilation of Jewish communities in contexts of antisemitism. Notwithstanding its critical perspective and satirical tone, the novel

invites the reader to identify with Netanyahu and with the Zionist dream, as Taffy Brodesser-Akner notes in her review of the book for *The New York Times*.¹⁰ While she was reading the novel, Israel was engaged in a round of fighting with Hamas in Gaza, and the Jewish reviewer herself felt that identification in the midst of a sense of siege and an antisemitic/anti-Israel cultural climate.

Yizkor [in memoriam]

In 2020 two of Israel's greatest authors died – novelist Yehoshua Kenaz (1937-2020) and, shortly afterward, poet Nathan Zach (1930-2020). As with the recent deaths of such notable figures as Amos Oz, Amalia Kahana-Carmon, Haim Gouri, and Aharon Appelfeld, the passing of Kenaz and Zach marked the end of a literary generation and a literary era. The personal histories and oeuvres of these writers are intertwined with the history of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel. Born Harry Seitelbach in Berlin, Zach fled to Mandatory Palestine from Germany with his parents in 1936, after the Nazis came to power. Kenaz was born in Petah Tikva when it was still an agricultural settlement. He was associated with Canaanism, an ideology which held that Israelis should abandon Jewishness and the exilic mentality and merge with their Semitic surroundings.

Relations

Noa Tishby is a longtime Israeli resident of the United States, where she has enjoyed a successful acting and film production career. Tishby was responsible for the sale of the television series *In Treatment* to HBO in 2006 – the first instance of an Israeli drama becoming an American series. Tishby recently published a book entitled *Israel: a Simple Guide to the Most Misunderstood Country on Earth*. The book is both an intimate account of Israeli history and an attempt to address the conflicts that polarize Israeli society – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. The work offers historical, social, and cultural information about Israel, and strives to convey the great complexity of Israeli life and the Israeli situation to non-Israelis. Against the background of a trend toward distancing between American and Israeli Jews, Tishby's book stands out as an attempt to bridge existing knowledge gaps. It will be published this year in Hebrew as well.

Yiddish

Ver Vet Blaybn (Who Will Remain) (Emily Felder and Christa P. Whitney) is a documentary film about the great Yiddish poet Abraham Sutzkever, who died 11 years ago at the age of 96 in Tel Aviv. Along with the film *Black Honey*, released three years ago, *Who Will Remain* provides a taste of Sutzkever's distinctive poetry, which has been translated from Yiddish into many other languages, including Hebrew and English. The two documentaries also illuminate Sutzkever's extraordinary life story: the smuggling and concealment of Jewish books in the Vilna Ghetto (the Paper Brigade); the mystic faith in poetry that may have saved his life during the Holocaust; the daring rescue mission, with Stalin's involvement, in which a Russian aircraft was sent to extract Sutzkever and his wife from the city in which they were hiding and fighting for the partisans; his testimony during the Nuremberg trials; and his life as an anonymous Yiddish poet in Zionist Tel Aviv, a society alienated from its exilic past and from Yiddish culture.

Endnotes

- 1 It should be noted that Israel's media revolution of the 1990s, including the appearance of commercial channels, actually drove a rise in quality drama offerings. Although commercialization also led to a proliferation of (low brow) reality shows, the opening up of the market and the professionalization that took place caused the industry to flourish and was a major factor in the development of high-quality quality Israeli dramatic series.
- 2 Aviad Houminer-Rosenblum, "Like Brits", *Haaretz*, April 20, 2021.
- 3 Oren Frisco, Television (G), *The Seventh Eye*, July 2, 2020.
- 4 Ariana Melamed, "Kan 11, Don't Abandon Your Public Function," *Haaretz*, April 13, 2021.
- 5 For example: *Metir Agunot*, *Od Nipagesh*, *Rav Hanistar*, *B'lkvot Aron HaBrit*, *Rabenu*, *She'elaU'Teshuva*, *Sodot Mishpacha*, and *Aron HaShirim HaYehudi*.
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- 9 Yerushalmi, Y. H., 1982, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved.
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