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## DECLINING US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL: FROM BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS TO GENERATIONAL FRACTURE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2026, US-Israeli relations will remain strategically close, but a key long-term shift is underway: broad US public legitimacy for Israel is eroding, especially among Democrats and younger cohorts.

Polling data indicates a sharp decline in Israel favorability and growing opposition to additional military and economic aid, with signs that skepticism is spreading beyond Democratic voters.

In the short term, policy change will likely remain limited due to entrenched elite consensus and institutional ties, but extraordinary or escalatory support is becoming increasingly politically costly.

Over time, declining public legitimacy and shifting strategic priorities may contribute to a gradual erosion of US diplomatic and military backing, with wider implications for regional security.

### KEYWORDS:

US-Israel relations, public opinion, alliance, MENA region, America First

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Im Jahr 2026 bleiben die USA und Israel strategisch eng verbunden, jedoch zeichnet sich ein langfristiger Wandel ab: Die breite gesellschaftliche Legitimation Israels in den USA erodiert, insbesondere unter Demokraten und jüngeren Alterskohorten.

Umfragen zeigen einen deutlichen Rückgang der Israel-Sympathiewerte sowie eine wachsende Ablehnung zusätzlicher Militär- und Wirtschaftshilfe – mit Hinweisen darauf, dass sich der Trend über das demokratische Lager hinaus ausweitet.

Kurzfristig bleiben politische Kurswechsel unwahrscheinlich, da Elitenkonsens und institutionelle Verflechtungen fortbestehen; außergewöhnliche Unterstützung wird jedoch zunehmend politisch kostspielig.

Langfristig kann die sinkende öffentliche Legitimation in Kombination mit veränderten strategischen Prioritäten zu einer schrittweisen Erosion der US-amerikanischen diplomatischen und militärischen Rückendeckung führen – mit erheblichen Folgen für die regionale Sicherheitsordnung.

### KEYWORDS:

Beziehungen zwischen den USA und Israel, öffentliche Meinung, Bündnis, MENA-Region, America First

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# DECLINING US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL: FROM BIPARTISAN CONSEN- SUS TO GENERATIONAL FRACTURE

Since the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Israeli war on Gaza, US domestic support for Israel has declined dramatically. Once believed to be an unshakable alliance, US support for Israel has long rested on multiple reinforcing pillars, including cross-party elite alignment, institutionalized military-security ties, and a perceived strategic alignment in the MENA region. However, another key pillar of sustained US backing, namely broad public legitimacy, is now eroding at a staggering rate. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs has been tracking public sentiment toward Israel in the United States since the 1970s. Last year's polling indicated a sharp decline in favorability, especially among Democrats (Smeltz & El Baz, 2025). Their average favorability rating toward Israel on a scale from 0 to 100 had hovered around the 55 mark for the past five decades, whereas it is currently sitting at a meager 41. The decline has been less pronounced among Republicans and Independents, though a modest drop is nevertheless observable. Various other polls conducted in the United States confirm this trend.

## A SHARP DECLINE IN PUBLIC FAVORABILITY

A Pew Research Center survey from early October 2025 found that 59% of Americans now hold an unfavorable view of the Israeli government, up from 51% in early 2024 (Van

Green et al., 2025). A New York Times/Siena poll from late September 2025 found slightly more voters siding with Palestinians than with Israelis in the Middle East conflict for the first time since the Times began asking voters about their sympathies in 1998. This marks a stark reversal from the aftermath of October 7, when the vast majority of Americans sided with Israel (Lerer & Igielnik, 2025). Consequently, a majority of American voters now oppose sending additional economic and military aid to Israel (Lerer & Igielnik, 2025). While this reversal is predominantly driven by Democratic voters, the trend is also clearly observable among younger Republicans. While 79% of Republicans over 65 sympathized more with Israelis than Palestinians, only 40% of Republicans under 44 agreed (Lerer & Igielnik, 2025). This suggests a likely long-term erosion of Republican voters' favorability toward Israel as well.

The war in Gaza has acted as an accelerant, crystallizing trends that were already underway. A growing number of respondents in the polls cited above indicate that they believe Israel is going too far in its campaign against Hamas and/or is deliberately targeting civilians. One might therefore assume that favorability ratings could revert closer to their historical mean if a ceasefire in Gaza were to hold throughout 2026 and public sentiment were to cool accordingly. However, this report argues that the current shift reflects a more fundamental and lasting change in public opinion for several reasons. The first indication of durability is its

bipartisan nature. Such cross-party convergence is highly unusual in the extremely polarized political environment of the United States, where individuals tend to evaluate policy positions primarily along party lines rather than on their substantive merits (Jost et al., 2022). When negative shifts in attitudes emerge simultaneously across partisan divides, they are therefore far more likely to reflect a durable reconfiguration of underlying beliefs than a transient, event-driven reaction.



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Second, the shift in sentiment within both parties is more pronounced among younger cohorts, further indicating long-term durability. Third, and most importantly, the recent scrutiny Israel has faced extends well beyond its actions in Gaza. A growing number of political opinion leaders in the United States have begun to critically assess pro-Israel lobbying groups, most prominently the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Prominent Democratic politicians, many of whom had counted AIPAC as their all-time top donor, including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, have recently refused further donations from the group as it has become an increasingly toxic brand in Washington (Karni, 2025). For a senior politician operating within the money-driven logic of US politics to distance themselves from their long-standing top donor is a highly unusual and risky step that strongly suggests a deeper and more lasting shift in sentiment.

## THE REPUBLICANS' "AMERICA FIRST" CHALLENGE

Republicans, meanwhile, are grappling with their own process of intra-party readjustment. The apparent contradiction between the America First doctrine and the special status Israel continues to receive under the current administration is increasingly being exploited by actors seeking to challenge the status quo. A young and openly extremist political commentator, Nick Fuentes, has become a focal point of this dynamic. In what has been described as a MAGA civil war, an internal party conflict has emerged over the limits of free speech, alleged right-wing cancel culture, and the platforming of openly extremist figures. The traction gained by Fuentes' statements prompted Republican Senator Lindsey Graham to remark at the Republican Jewish Coalition Leadership Summit in November 2025 that he belongs to the "Hitler sucks wing of the Republican Party" (Forbes Breaking News, 2025). Even Laura Loomer, an influential far-right activist and Trump confidante who is herself Jewish, argued on social media that the Republican Party has "a Nazi problem" (Suter, 2025). As influential actors such as the Heritage Foundation, J.D. Vance, and Donald Trump ultimately sided implicitly or explicitly with those advocating the continued platforming of Fuentes, the latter appears to have prevailed in this internal struggle. This development points toward a growing tolerance of open antisemitism within the Republican Party. This evolution poses clear challenges for Israel, since these currents are not merely reputational liabilities but often reflect an ideological hostility to Zionism and to Israel's place within US foreign policy (Sargent, 2025).

## STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES AND OUTLOOK

In the short term, the policy consequences of this shift in US public opinion are likely to remain limited. Changes in mass sentiment typically require several electoral cycles to translate into concrete foreign policy adjustments, particularly in a relationship as institutionally entrenched as that between the United States and Israel. Nevertheless, even in the near term, extraordinary or escalatory forms of support for Israel, such as last year's US strikes on Iran, are becoming increasingly politically costly and therefore less likely. Given that the overwhelming majority of political elites within the current US administration, as well as most Republican members of Congress, remain firmly pro-Israel, American support for Israel is not immediately at risk. This elite consensus is further reinforced by strategic and economic considerations, including US interests in the post-war reconstruction of Gaza. Yet as US priorities shift toward great-power competition and as regional alignments evolve, Israel's strategic value is no longer taken for granted. Israel's exceptional status in US foreign policy has long also rested on the perception of closely aligned regional interests. Today, that alignment appears less automatic and increasingly contested. A likely stress test for the partnership will be the next renewal point for US multiyear military assistance to Israel in 2028. Perhaps anticipating this moment, or "reading the writing on the wall," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated in a January interview with *The Economist* that Israel would not seek a full renewal of the annual \$3.8 billion security aid package, and that he ultimately aims to reduce Israeli dependence on the United States to zero (Eichner, 2026).

Over the longer term, should the trend outlined above persist, Israel may face a gradual erosion of

military and diplomatic backing from Washington. Such a development would carry potentially profound implications for the security architecture of the wider Middle East and North Africa region. The Israeli government appears acutely aware of this risk and has increasingly focused



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its efforts on regaining support among younger Americans. In this context, Netanyahu's intervention in the debate surrounding the sale of TikTok to a pro-Israel consortium is revealing. Appealing to conservative influencers, he described social media as "[...] the most important weapon [...] to secure our base of support in the US" (Frenkel & Myers, 2025). This underscores the extent to which the battle for American public opinion has become a strategic priority for Israel.

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