

What do Jews in the UK think of Israel and its leadership, and how has this changed since October 7?

Dr Carli Lessof and Roy Shinar Cohen

September 2024



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Data in this report are drawn from the JPR Research Panel, designed to gather information from Jewish people aged 16 and over in the UK on a wide range of social and political issues, including aspects of their beliefs, behaviours and preferences. The paper assesses the views of Jews in the UK, based on surveys carried out in 2023 and 2024, alongside data collected by the Israel Democracy Institute, to assess perceptions of Israel's overall situation and approval of its leadership.

1 / Introduction

In August 2023, JPR published a report entitled 'What do Jews in the UK think about Israel's leaders and its future?'¹ That paper came out amid a public debate in Israel about its democratic governance, in light of the Israeli government's attempts to reform the legal system. However, the specific issue of Israel's democratic governance was overshadowed when, on October 7 2023, Hamas brutally attacked Israel, and Israel responded with a war that continues to this day. While circumstances have clearly shifted as a result, public perceptions of the country's overall situation and confidence in its leadership are more relevant now than ever.

This report addresses these issues by drawing on the most recent data on British Jewish opinion gathered through the JPR Research Panel, as well as time-series data from the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI). First, the paper shows how Israelis² and Jews in the UK view Israel's overall situation post-October 7 and assesses how these perceptions have changed over time. It then goes on to explore how Jews in the UK view Israel's current political leadership and whether this has changed over the past year. In this way, it explores some of the new data we hold on the attitudes of British Jews towards Israel post-October 7, much more of which will be released over the coming months.

¹ Boyd, J. and Lessof, C. (2023), *What do Jews in the UK think about Israel's leaders and its future?* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

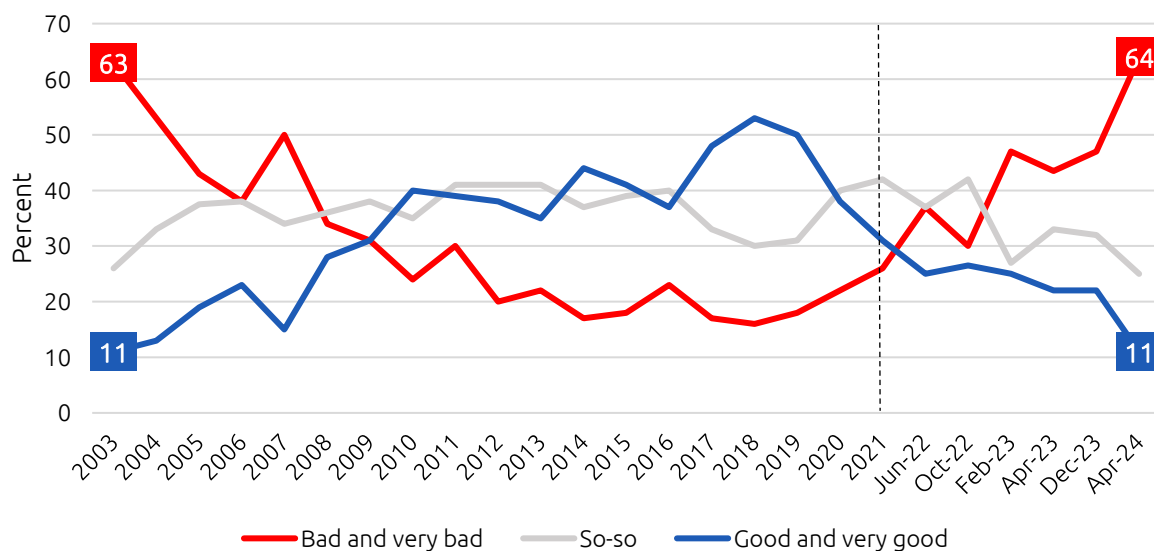
² Data about the attitude of Israelis (including both Jews and other ethnic and religious groups) are drawn from the Viterbi Family Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research at the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent research centre which focuses on gathering, analysing and preserving empirical data on Israeli society.

2 / How would you characterise Israel's situation today?

Israel has been fighting a multi-front war ever since the devastating October 7 attacks. The terrible loss of life on that day and the trauma surrounding the hostages are coupled with a war that has led to hundreds of Israeli civilian and military deaths, many thousands of Palestinian deaths, and unprecedented destruction in Gaza. It is unsurprising that, according to IDI data collected in April 2024, Israelis characterise their country's overall situation as the worst in over twenty years: 64% believe it is bad, while only 11% see it as good (Figure 1).

The current view of the situation is remarkably similar to the peak of the Second Intifada in 2003, when this data series began. Some fluctuation can be seen across time, with public attitudes influenced by crises and social turmoil, illustrated by the peaks after the 2006 Second Lebanon War, the 2011 social justice protests and, since 2021, the flare-ups in Gaza coupled with internal political strife. However, the current strength of negative views about Israel's situation is striking, with a nearly 20 percentage point jump in people who view the country's situation as bad in the year since April 2023.

Figure 1. How Israelis characterise Israel's overall situation, 2003-24

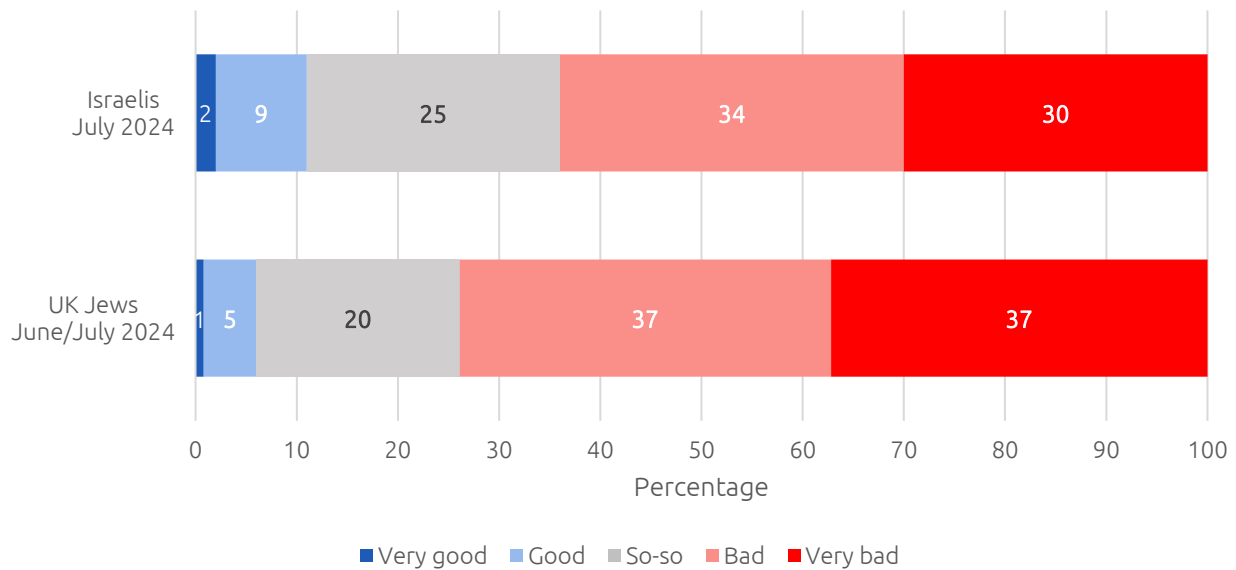


Israel Democracy Institute data. Question: "How would you characterise Israel's overall situation today?" [Response options: Very good; Good; So-so; Bad; Very bad]. Sample sizes vary; data to the left of the dotted line are spaced out annually; data to the right contain more frequent measures collected at irregular intervals.

The Jewish population in the United Kingdom has strong ties to Israel – four out of five Jews in the UK have at least one close friend or family member living there, and over three-quarters (77%) feel 'very' or 'somewhat' attached to the country. Indeed, such is the attachment to Israel that a common conception is that "Jews who do not live in Israel should not publicly criticise Israel's government or its policies." In practice, most Jews in the UK (70%) do not agree with this statement, and just one-quarter do (24%). Whatever their views, the community has watched the political turmoil and military conflict in Israel closely, and the past year has been uniquely challenging, with notable levels of anxiety about the conflict and loss of life, coupled with concerns about the rise in antisemitism closer to home.

Figure 2 below shows that, compared with the general population in Israel, Jews in the UK characterise Israel's current state more negatively than Israelis. In the UK, three-quarters (74%) of Jews describe Israel's situation as "bad" (37%) or "very bad" (37%) (shown in the red blocks, lower bar) compared with the equivalent figure for Israelis (64%) who characterise Israel's situation as "bad" (34%) or "very bad" (30%) (red blocks, upper bar). Overall, negative views are approximately ten percentage points higher in the UK than in Israel. Moreover, the share of positive views among the UK Jewish population (6%) is only half that of Israelis (11%).

Figure 2. How UK Jews and Israelis characterise Israel's overall situation, June and July 2024

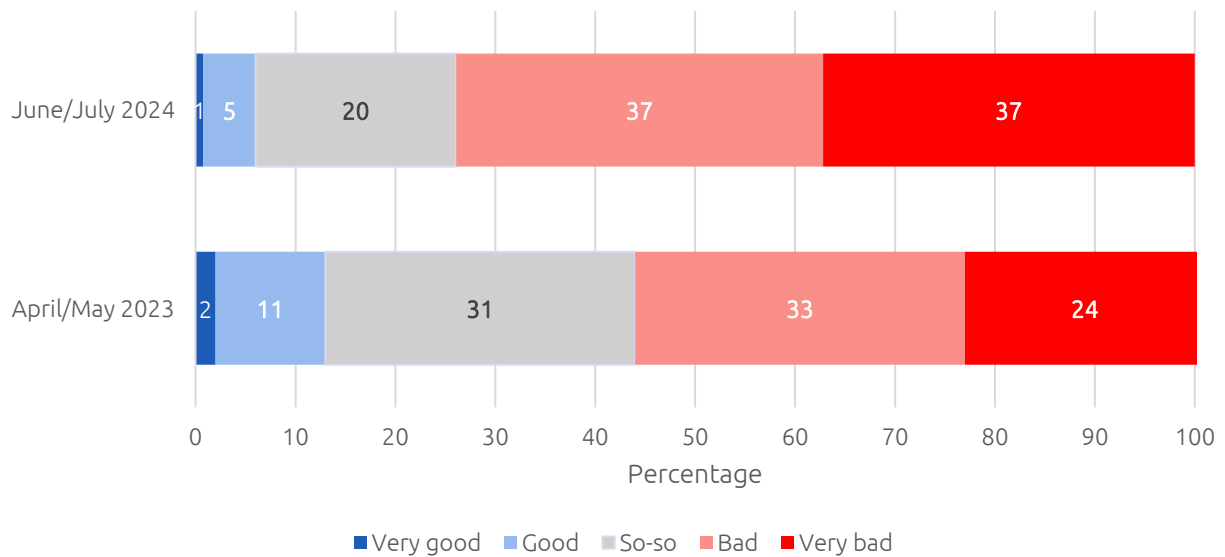


Question: "How would you characterise Israel's overall situation today?" Response categories as per the chart. Data about Israelis is based on the Israel Democracy Institute's Israeli Voice Index, July 2024 (n=750). UK data is from the JPR Research Panel, June-July 2024 (n=4,641).

The finding that over seven in ten (74%) Jews in the UK assessed the situation in Israel as bad or very bad in June/July 2024 is repeated in Figure 3 below (red blocks, upper bar), which also illustrates how views have changed in the UK since our previous survey in April/May 2023. This shows a substantial (17%) increase in negative opinions compared to the views of Jews surveyed in the UK one year earlier (rising from 57% to 74%, red blocks, lower bar). Moreover, the share of Jews who think Israel's situation is "good" or "very good" halved (from 13% to 6%) in the past year.³

³ This comparison is based on net figures from 2023 and 2024. Some of the change shown reflects compositional differences between the samples that may remain, even after weighting the data on key characteristics. Nevertheless, a similar pattern is seen when comparing 'complete cases', that is individuals who responded at both waves. For example, analysis of respondents to five panel waves shows a 16-percentage point increase in those who describe Israel's situation as 'bad' or 'very bad' and a 4-percentage point drop in those who describe the situation as 'good' or 'very good' (n=812).

Figure 3. How UK Jews characterise Israel’s overall situation, April/May 2023 vs June/July 2024



Question: “How would you characterise Israel’s overall situation today?” Data is from the JPR Research Panel: April-May 2023 (n=3,635); June-July 2024 (n=4,484).

The shift in attitudes in the past year is very likely associated with the October 7 attacks, the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, the extended conflict in the West Bank and Lebanon, and the worsening relationships with other regional actors. However, further research is needed to understand what aspects of Israel’s situation have driven this change in public attitudes. For now, we focus on how people’s assessments of the situation in Israel vary across different groups of Jews in the UK.

Many factors influence people’s views on this issue;⁴ there is a strong association between holding a positive view about the situation in Israel and political affiliation, gender, denomination, and whether the person identifies as a Zionist. For example, holding other characteristics constant, Jews who lean to the political right (based on voting intentions and voting in the recent UK election) are more than six times as likely than those who lean to the political left to have a favourable view of the situation in Israel, and men are three times as likely as women to have a positive view. People who identify as Zionist and Strictly Orthodox people are also more likely than other groups to do so. Conversely, certain groups are more likely to identify Israel’s situation as bad than others, including those who have a political leaning to the left, women, those belonging to Progressive synagogues and older people.⁵

⁴ Here, and later in this report, we use multivariate logistic regression to identify characteristics which are associated with viewing Israel positively or negatively. This enables us to identify factors which are statistically significant and to gain some understanding of the relative strength of each factor in explaining variation in attitudes, taking other factors into account. Strictly speaking, regression should only be performed where we have a random probability sample, but we are confident this approach provides useful evidence that is sufficiently robust to inform discussion.

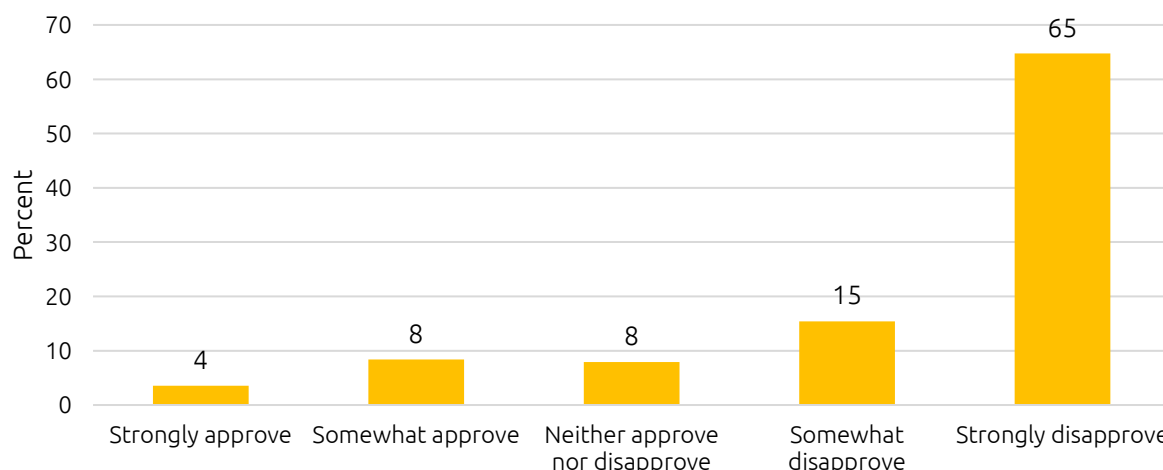
⁵ This is not entirely a mirror image of the groups who are likely to think Israel’s situation is good since our analysis includes people who answered they do not know and have no opinion.

3 / Views among the UK Jewish population about Israel's leaders

The gravity of Israel's current situation, reflected in the views of both Israelis and Jews in the UK, calls for a deeper analysis of attitudes towards Israel. Future reports will consider a range of issues, such as the state of Israel's democracy and perceptions of how Israel is prosecuting the war in Gaza. Here, we focus specifically on how Jews in the UK view Israeli leaders, including but not limited to its Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Strong leadership is essential in times of crisis, and it is important to understand the extent to which Jews in the UK think Israel has the leadership it needs to carry it through this challenging time.

Based on the most recent data from the JPR Research Panel, we found that among the UK's Jewish population, Netanyahu is very well known (95% have an opinion) but widely disapproved of (Figure 4). Among those who have an opinion about him (that is, excluding those who responded "Don't know" to the question), 80% either 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disapprove of Netanyahu, and just 12% strongly or somewhat approve. A common way to measure politicians' approval rating is net approval, calculated as the level of approval minus the level of disapproval. In this case, the net approval rating of Netanyahu is -68% (see also Figure 6).

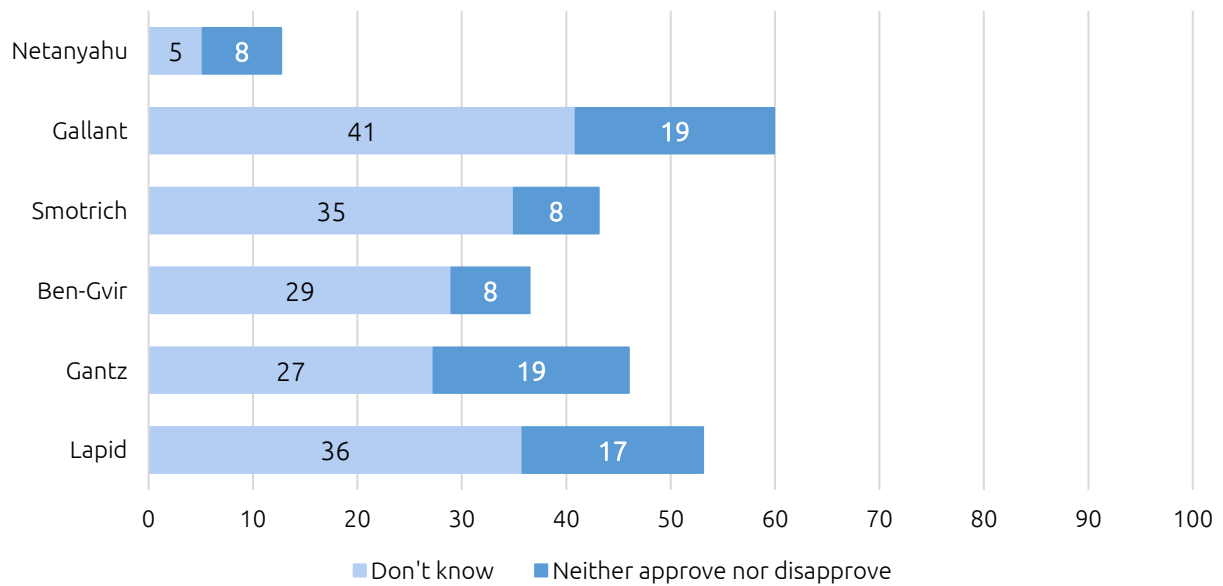
Figure 4. Approval of Netanyahu among the UK Jewish population, 2024



Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of these Israeli political leaders?" Data is from the JPR Research Panel June-July 2024 (n=4,356) and excludes "Don't know" (5%).

In addition to asking about approval or disapproval of Netanyahu, respondents were also asked about their opinions of other senior Israeli politicians: Minister of Defence, Yoav Gallant, Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, and former Minister of Defence and Deputy Prime Minister Benny Gantz. Figure 5 below shows that with the exception of Netanyahu, who is very well-known, considerable proportions of Jews in the UK lack the information they need to form a judgement about these politicians. Others respond neutrally, saying they neither approve nor disapprove, though there are more neutral opinions about Gallant, Gantz and Lapid than about Netanyahu, Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. Overall, these figures can be seen as a measure of British Jews' somewhat limited understanding of the details of Israeli politics and politicians.

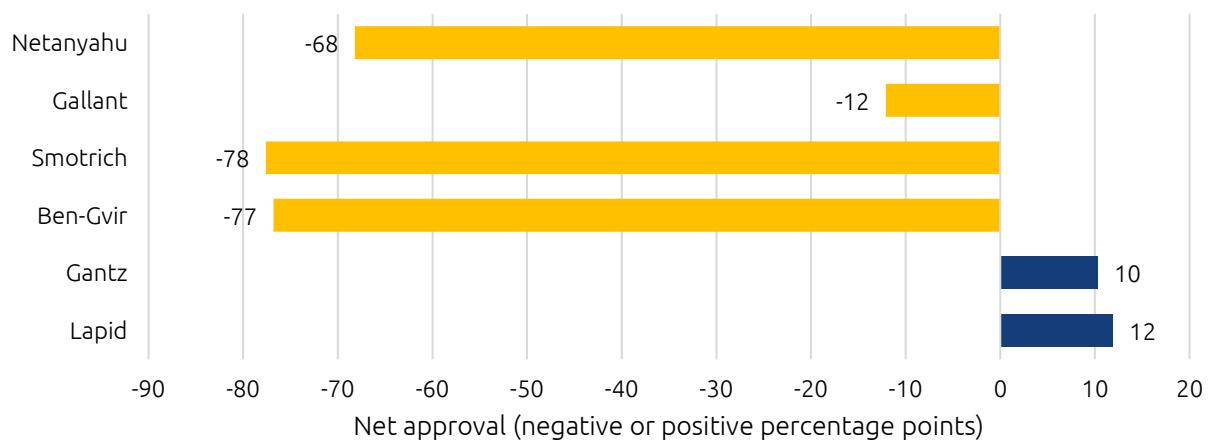
Figure 5. Proportions of Jews in the UK who do not know if they approve or disapprove of key political leaders, or who hold the 'neither approve nor disapprove' position



Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of these Israeli political leaders?" Data is from the JPR Research Panel June-July 2024 (n=4,641). Approve and disapprove responses are not shown.

The fairly high levels of 'don't know' or neutral responses also serve as a reminder that the net approval ratings (the percentage of those who approve minus those who disapprove) shown in Figure 6 below are based on those who give either a positive or negative opinion. As mentioned earlier, Netanyahu is both well-known and has a high disapproval rating (-68). Although Ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir aren't as widely known as Netanyahu (Figure 5), their net approval rating is lower (-78 and -77). Gallant, the least well-known of the politicians surveyed despite his prominent role in the war cabinet, also has a negative approval rate, but this is far more modest (-12). Of the six leaders presented, only Gantz and Lapid have moderately positive approval ratings (+10 and +12, respectively) among British Jews.

Figure 6. Net approval for Israeli politicians among UK Jews, 2024

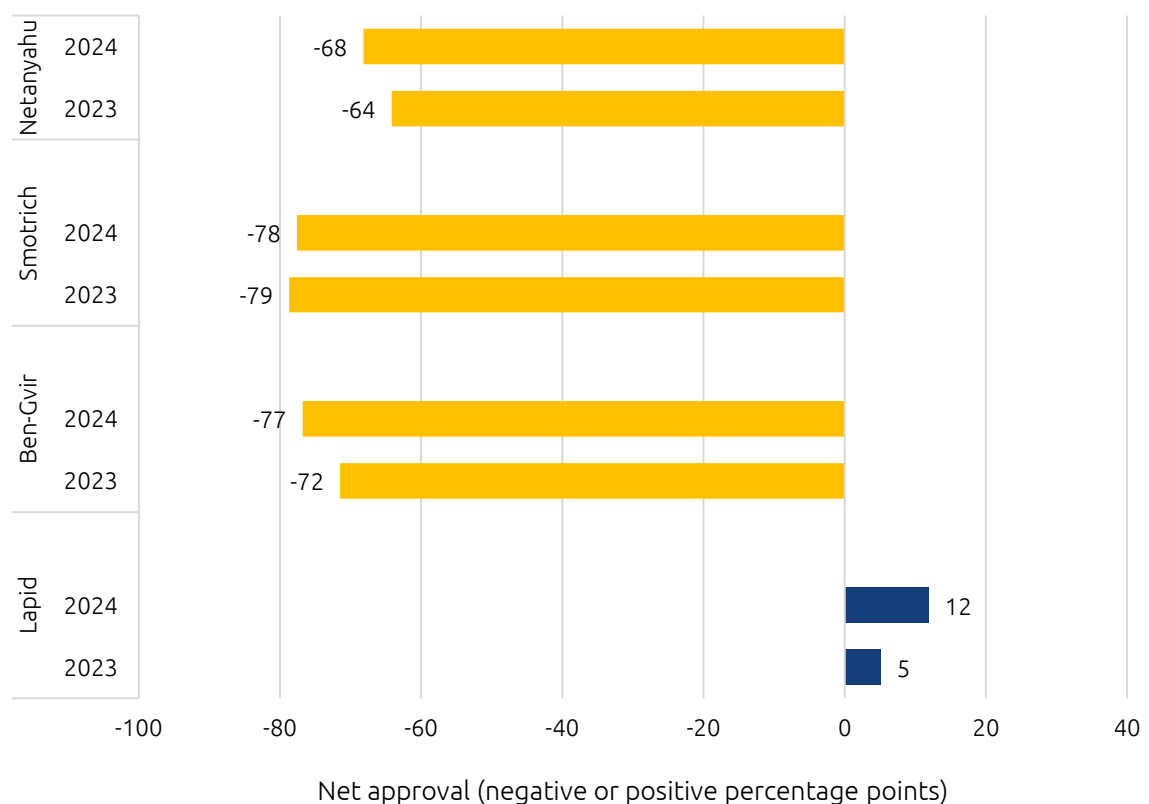


Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of these Israeli political leaders?" Data is from the JPR Research Panel June-July 2024 and excludes "Don't know". Netanyahu, n=4,356; Gallant, n=2,724; Smotrich, n=2,965; Ben-Gvir, n=3,189; Gantz, n=3,399; Lapid, n=2,970.

Although this was not shown in Figure 6, which focused on net approval, the most popular Israeli politicians among Jews in the UK were Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz (42% of all Jews in the UK who expressed an opinion, said they either 'strongly' or 'somewhat' approve of both of them). These politicians are at the centre-right of the political map and are known as some of the strongest challengers of Netanyahu (who, as shown in Figure 4, has an equivalent score of 12%). In contrast, the politicians with the lowest levels of approval are those to the furthest right of the political spectrum, Bezael Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, who have equivalent approval ratings of 5% and 6% respectively (not shown graphically).⁶

For four of the politicians, we can also compare views held in 2024 with those held a year earlier, in April/May 2023, a few months before the October 7 attacks.⁷ Figure 7 shows that net approval ratings for these Israeli politicians have not changed significantly. Again, focusing on those who gave an opinion, Lapid, the head of the opposition, is the only politician who has become more popular. In contrast, others have maintained a stable level or become slightly less popular. This relative stability contrasts with the fall in how Israel's overall position is perceived, as discussed earlier.

Figure 7. Change in UK Jews' approval of Israeli politicians 2023-2024



Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of these Israeli political leaders?" Data is from the JPR Research Panel: April-May 2023 and June-July 2024, and excludes "Don't know". The comparison is based on net figures at each wave. Unweighted base numbers for 2024 shown below Figure 6. Unweighted bases for 2023 are: Netanyahu, n=3,376; Smotrich, n=2,928; Ben-Gvir, n=2,506; Lapid, n=2,537.

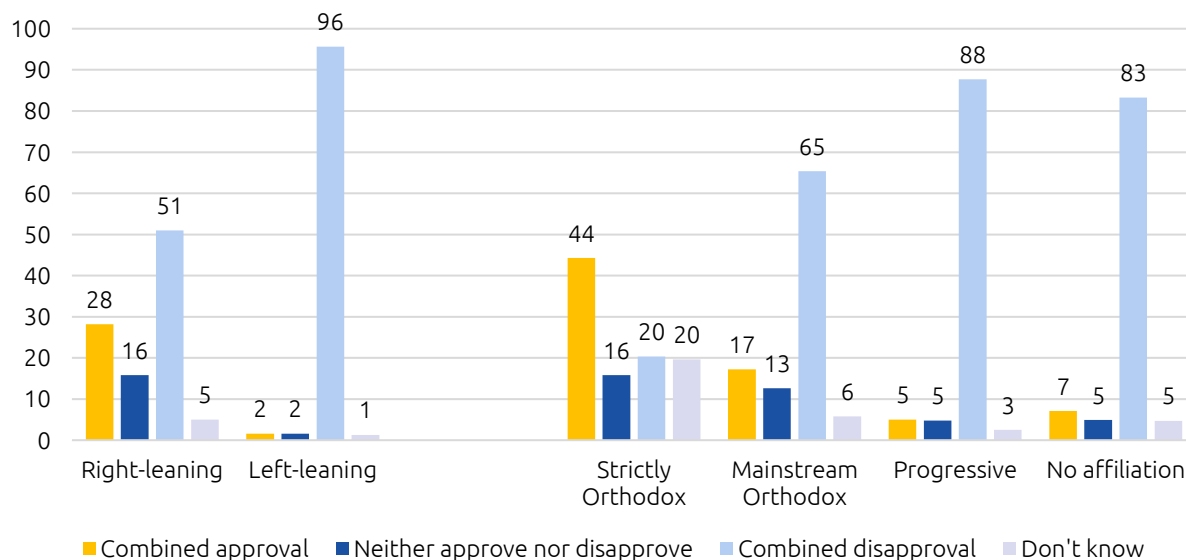
⁶ These figures are based on individuals who 'don't know' (light blue in Figure 5) but includes those who neither approve nor disapprove (dark blue in Figure 5).

⁷ In the survey in 2024, Gantz and Gallant were added because of their prominence in events since October 7.

4 / How views about Israeli leaders vary

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the attitude of Jews in the UK to Israeli politicians varies widely based on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (such as gender, geography and age) and their attitudes or beliefs (such as whether they identify as Zionists). Statistical modelling shows that the two characteristics that are most potent in explaining who approves or disapproves of the Israeli politicians examined, when all other factors are held equal, are the respondent's political leaning and their religious denomination. Figure 8 below illustrates the differences in levels of approval based on these two characteristics using the example of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Figure 8. Approval of Netanyahu by political leaning and denomination, UK 2024



Question: "Do you approve or disapprove of these Israeli political leaders?" Data is from the JPR Research Panel: June-July 2024. Base for political leaning excludes those ineligible to vote, who did not intend to vote, who preferred not to say or whose 'other' vote could not be recoded (n=3,209). Base for denomination (n=4,572).

Statistical modelling also helps us describe the scale of these differences. Jews in the UK who intended to vote⁸ in the 2024 election for either the Conservative Party or Reform UK, were over 22 times more likely to approve of Netanyahu than those who voted for all other political parties, which we loosely describe in Figure 8 as 'left-leaning'. This is not only true of Netanyahu. For example, right-leaning Jews were eleven times more likely to approve of Smotrich than those who were left-leaning. In terms of religious denomination, members of the Strictly Orthodox community were over three times more likely than other denominations, or those with no religious affiliation, to approve of Netanyahu, and over twice as likely to approve of Smotrich, while also being over twice as likely to *disapprove* of Lapid.

⁸ For those who responded to the June-July 2024 survey after the election, this is based on actual reported vote.

Because of the singular importance of Netanyahu as the longstanding Israeli Prime Minister, we extended the analysis of his ratings to include several additional attitudinal measures, including one that tapped directly into respondents' perceptions of his personal motivations. This analysis highlighted two factors that are strongly associated with disapproving of Netanyahu: believing Israel has not done enough to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza and believing Netanyahu is prioritising his self-interest over that of the State of Israel. Holding other factors constant, people who think Israel has not done enough to provide humanitarian aid are over fifteen times more likely to disapprove of Netanyahu. Similarly, people who believe that Netanyahu prioritises his self-interest are more than ten times more likely to disapprove of him. This suggests that in addition to policy-oriented disagreements which drive disapproval of Netanyahu, aspects of his personal standing also affect how he is perceived.

5 / Key findings

In summary, evidence from the latest survey of the JPR Research Panel shows that in June and July 2024, 74% of Jews in the UK viewed Israel's overall situation in a negative light, a figure nearly ten percentage points higher than Israelis' view of their country at a similar point in time. This is significantly worse than a year previously (when the equivalent figure among Jews in the UK was 57%), reflecting the crisis of October 7, the extended captivity of the hostages, and the ongoing war.

When it comes to Israel's leadership, Prime Minister Netanyahu is well-known (by approximately 95% of Jews in the UK) but a sizeable minority of Jews in the UK does not have an established view of other Israeli politicians. Among those who express an opinion about them, Netanyahu has a net approval rating of -68 (the difference between those who approve of him (12%) and those who disapprove (80%)); the hard-right ministers in his Government, Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir score even lower at -78 and -77 respectively. While no Israeli politician is very popular, those with the highest net approval ratings are former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, and former Minister Benny Gantz, at +12 and +10 respectively.

Certain factors are strongly associated with viewing Israel's situation more positively and approving of Netanyahu and other right-wing ministers. The Strictly Orthodox, men, and people who voted for right-wing parties in the last UK election were the most likely groups to hold these positions. Conversely, perceiving Israel's situation more negatively and disapproving of these politicians is associated with being more left-leaning, being from a Progressive denomination or none, and being a woman. In the latter part of this paper, we hinted at a range of attitudes and beliefs associated with the position respondents hold on Israel and its leaders, and we plan to explore these in more detail in future reports.

/ Methodological note

The JPR UK Jewish Population Research Panel is designed to explore the attitudes and experiences of Jews in the UK on a variety of issues. It contains over 12,000 individuals who are UK residents aged 16 or above who self-identify as Jewish. The data presented in this report are based on 4,641 individuals who responded to a JPR Panel Survey conducted between June 14 and July 14 2024. It is supplemented with data from an earlier wave of the panel, carried out in April to May 2023. Both surveys were completed online, by computer, smartphone or tablet, or in a handful of cases, by telephone. The questionnaires were developed by JPR, drawing on a range of existing surveys and were programmed in-house using Forsta software. The survey data were cleaned and weighted to adjust for the age, sex and geographical distribution of the Jewish population based on the 2021 Census, and on information about Jewish denomination based on a combination of administrative and JPR survey data. Statistical analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS. The results in this paper include multiple logistic regression; further details are available on request.

/ Acknowledgments

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/ About the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a London-based research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life. Web: www.jpr.org.uk.

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Roy Shinar Cohen was an Oxford University Q-Step intern at JPR in the summer of 2024. He is a student of Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Oxford. Prior to his degree he has worked as a research analyst for several organisations in Israel, where he researched Israel's geopolitical standing and its AI policy.