

diaspora—people who live outside Israel but have religious, ethnic or national ties?

They collected data from a carefully designed survey of more than 2,000 and submitted the findings for peer review in December 2022. Months later, the paper was returned for edits.

On Oct. 7, 2023—just as the revised paper was resubmitted—the study's backdrop twisted into one of unprecedented horror. That day's deadly Hamas-led attack on Israel and capture of more than 240 hostages triggered a punishing response in Gaza by Israel's military. As a result, tens of thousands have died in a war that plunged Palestinians into a humanitarian crisis and set off impassioned reactions worldwide.

On Oct. 15, UC Merced Professor Anil Menon and his co-authors learned [their paper](#) was approved by the *American Journal of Political Science*. It was published five months later; the American Political Science Association honored the paper as the best on [human rights](#) presented at its annual conference.

"We wrote our findings in as clinical a manner as we could, talking just about what we found," said Menon, a member of UC Merced's Department of Political Science.

The study found that criticism from Jewish Americans is better received than from Americans, but only in one regard—a perception of their reproval being well-intentioned, of having Israel's best interests at heart. Overall, critics within Israel had a clear advantage over Jewish Americans or other Americans.

This indicates that people living abroad but with ties to Israel could be effective voices for outside groups and human rights agencies struggling to make headway in regions of deeply rooted social strife. As an

example, the study cites U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, a vocal supporter of the Israeli state but an equally outspoken critic of Israel's settlement practices and mistreatment of Palestinians.

"We wanted to see if diaspora members could be intermediaries for constructive conversation," Menon said. Indeed, he and his co-authors found that the diaspora could have a unique role in such conversations, rather than being branded strictly as insiders or outsiders.

Menon's two co-authors, Yehonatan Abramson and Abir Gitlin, are a professor and doctoral candidate, respectively, at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Abramson specializes in diaspora politics. That, combined with Menon's interest in the effects of historical trauma, led to this study.

The survey of Jewish Israelis, conducted in fall 2021, asked respondents to characterize a disapproving statement as coming from various inside or outside sources. The statement: "Israel has a responsibility for the dismal condition of the Palestinians. Many of them live in extreme poverty, which exacerbates their humiliation and frustration. As a (type of person), I say that Israel must act to change this reality."

Respondents evaluated the critic and the criticism on a sliding scale. Is the critic knowledgeable? Well-intentioned? Is the statement irritating, disappointing, or threatening? To what extent do they agree with the statement? To what extent is it constructive and intended to help Israel?

Broadly, the study showed Israeli criticism from an Israeli is better received than from a non-Israeli. Critics from the diaspora have a slight advantage over other foreigners, thus blurring any binary judgment of reprobation from an insider vs. an outsider.

The study also demonstrated that due to human rights discourse

involving Israel being deeply politicized, criticism from non-Israelis produces a [public opinion](#) backlash, reducing internal support for improving treatment of Palestinians. The researchers note this doesn't imply critics are speaking out in vain.

"Our findings suggest those concerned about human rights should not avoid shaming altogether," the study says. "Rather, shaming by insiders perceived as credible, respected, and caring could be more effective."

Menon said he and his partners are conducting and analyzing follow-up surveys. War hardens opinions on both sides—a "rally around the flag" effect he expects to see in data from a post-Oct. 7 world.

"We live in extremely polarized times, making persuasion difficult," he said. "When engaging in a polarized issue like the Israel-Palestinian conflict, if you tag someone as belonging to a camp, you might not hear half of what is being said."

More information: Yehonatan Abramson et al, Whose critique matters? The effects of critic identity and audience on public opinion, *American Journal of Political Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12846](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12846)

Provided by University of California - Merced

Citation: A study examined reactions of Jewish Israelis to human rights criticism; then Oct. 7 happened (2024, July 31) retrieved 1 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-reactions-jewish-israelis-human-rights.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.