

Conflict in Israel and Gaza: Heightened feelings of insecurity among Jews in the UK

Dr David Graham and Dr Jonathan Boyd

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/ Introduction

This is JPR's second report on the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza. In our first one, entitled *Conflict in Israel and Gaza: What do Jews in the UK think?*,¹ we examined the attitudes of Jewish people in the UK towards the conflict – in particular, whether respondents approved of the way Israel's government acted during it, and the extent to which respondents believed the government to have been motivated by military or political considerations. In this report we switch the focus to examine how the conflict affected Jewish people in the UK. While the background to the conflict is discussed in the first report, once hostilities began, they garnered extensive media attention, which, as we show here, provoked considerable unease among many Jewish people.²

In reaction to the war, large pro-Palestinian demonstrations took place in London,³ and a notable spike in antisemitic incidents was recorded in the UK and elsewhere.⁴ Most notoriously, a convoy of pro-Palestinian demonstrators drove through several London suburbs with large Jewish populations, using loudspeakers to broadcast antisemitic abuse.⁵

In July 2021, two months after the conflict ended, we asked our survey respondents (self-identifying Jews living in the UK, aged 16 and above) whether public reactions in the UK to the conflict had affected them as Jewish people living in Britain. To this end, they were asked to reflect on two contentions.

The first explored the extent to which they felt blamed for the events occurring in the Middle East – i.e., whether they felt non-Jewish people held them responsible, as Jews, for the actions of Israel's government. Such feelings could be subjective, based on an actual experience of being personally blamed for the conflict, or more objective, based on a general

¹ Graham D. and Boyd J. (2023). *Conflict in Jews and Gaza: What do Jews in the UK think?* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

² Examples include, McKernan B. '[Israeli strike destroys Gaza tower housing media organisations](#)', *The Guardian*, 16 May 2021 (viewed 3 April 2023); *BBC News*, '[Israel reinforces Gaza border as conflict rages on](#)', 14 May 2021 (viewed 3 April 2023).

³ Couzens, Jo. '[Thousands protest in London over Israel-Gaza violence](#)', *BBC News*, 15 May 2021 (viewed 3 April 2023); Johnston, I. '[Israel-Gaza: London protesters take to streets in support of Palestine](#)', *The Independent*, 16 May 2021 (viewed 3 April 2023); '[Israel-Gaza conflict: Thousands march in London to demonstrate against Gaza violence](#)', *Sky News*, 15 May 2021 (viewed 3 April 2023).

⁴ Parveen, N. '[Gaza conflict led to record rise in UK antisemitic attacks, charity says](#)', *The Guardian*, 5 August 2021 (viewed 3 April 2023); Williams, T. '[Israel-Gaza violence 'fuelled rise in UK campus antisemitism'](#)', *Times Higher Education*, *Times Higher Education*, 19 January 2023 (viewed 3 April 2023); Winer, S. '[Ministry report highlights backlash against world Jewry over 2021 Gaza conflict](#)', *The Times of Israel*, 24 January 2023 (viewed 3 April 2023); [The month of hate - Antisemitism & extremism during the Israel-Gaza conflict, CST, 2021](#)

⁵ The Jewish Chronicle, 2021 '[Convoy tours north London with speaker shouting 'F**k the Jews, rape their daughters''](#)' 16 May 2021 (Viewed 3 April 2023); CST 2021, op. cit.

feeling of unease. Whether real or imagined, what was being measured was a sense of alienation, of being marked out or stigmatised as ‘other’ for actions over which they had no control, based solely on their Jewishness. Such ‘guilt by association’ is a classic motif in all forms of racism, including antisemitism.

Research conducted in 2018, unrelated to any particular outbreak of conflict, found that a majority (74%) of Jewish people in the UK felt blamed by non-Jewish people in the UK “for anything done by the Israeli government,” because they were Jewish.⁶ In this analysis, we are able to focus on a particular event in the Middle East – the May 2021 Israel-Gaza War – and measure how popular reactions outside the Jewish community impacted Jewish people in the UK in that specific context.

The second indicator examined whether public and media criticism of Israel during the conflict made our survey respondents feel that Jews are not welcome in the UK. While recent research has shown that Jewish people in the UK are certainly not leaving or experiencing any kind of ‘exodus’ from the country,⁷ other studies have nevertheless found that a sizable minority of UK Jews (29%) have *considered* emigrating from the UK because they “don’t feel safe living [here] as a Jew.”⁸

This second contention is arguably stronger than the first one insofar as the emphasis shifts somewhat from the individual (*I* feel blamed because *I* am Jewish) to the collective (*Jews in general* are not welcome). However, again, it may be based on a subjective or objective assessment by the respondent, an actual experience or an imagined feeling, prompting the respondent to conclude that Jews are not welcome in the country. Whichever pathway respondents had travelled along to reach this conclusion, justified or not, the feeling itself can be deeply unsettling, affecting their overarching sense of security and how they perceive their place in British society. There is a long history of Jews being marginalised on racist grounds, so any sense that something similar may be in evidence will almost inevitably be experienced as antisemitic.

As with our first report, JPR is not attempting to make a judgment on the discourse that took place in the UK during or after the conflict, but rather to understand how Jews in the UK felt about what they experienced in the country at that time, and how they interpreted it.

⁶ See: FRA 2018, *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism: Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU*, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2018), p.44. The specific question asked: “Do you ever feel that people in the UK accuse or blame you for anything done by the Israeli government because you are Jewish?” Response options: “All the time” (11%); “Frequently” (22%); “Occasionally” (41%); “Never” (26%).

⁷ Staetsky, L.D. (2017). *Are Jews leaving Europe?* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research; Staetsky, D. (2023). *Jewish migration today: What it may mean for Europe*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

⁸ See FRA 2018, p.39., op. cit. The question asked: “In the past five years, have you considered emigrating from the UK because you don’t feel safe living there as a Jew?” Response options: “I did emigrate but have returned to the UK” (1%); “I have considered emigrating but I have not yet done this” (29%); “I have not considered emigrating” (65%); “Prefer not to say” (5%).

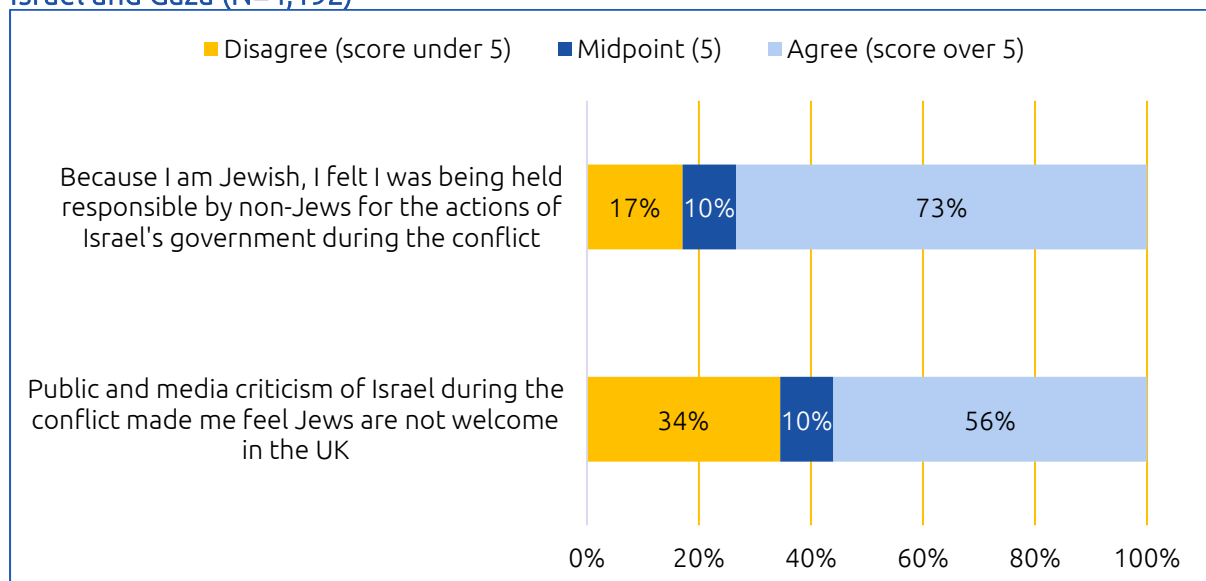
/ Key findings from the survey

Examining the two contentions

The two contentions were phrased in the form of statements, and responses were registered on a scale marked from 0, indicating strong disagreement, to 10, indicating strong agreement. The first statement was “*Because I am Jewish, I felt I was being held responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel’s government during the conflict.*” JPR found that almost three out of four respondents (73%) agreed with this statement, i.e., a large majority of UK respondents felt they were being held responsible for Israel’s actions simply because they were Jewish (Figure 1).

The second statement was “*Public and media criticism of Israel during the conflict made me feel Jews are not welcome in the UK.*” For this contention, JPR found that over half (56%) of respondents said they felt Jews were unwelcome in the UK. This figure should be understood in the context of the survey showing that 92% of respondents hold a UK passport, 82% describe their ethnic group as ‘white,’ and the fact that, according to the 2021 Census, 80% of Jews living in England and Wales were born in the UK. While the data reflect perceptions at a particular time and in a particular context, this result is striking given how welcoming the UK has been to Jewish people in recent generations.

Figure 1. The attitudes of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza (N=4,192)[^]



[^] Results exclude ‘Don’t know’ responses, 4.4% for the first statement (...held responsible) and 3.0% for the second statement (...not welcome).

Question: “*In May of this year [2021], conflict broke out between Israel and the Palestinians. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding that conflict by ticking a number between 0 and 10, where 0 is strongly disagree and 10 is strongly agree.*” (statements as per chart).

To be clear, the overwhelming majority of Jews in the UK had no more say or influence over the conduct of Israel’s government during this conflict than anyone else in the country, so any blame attached to them, because they are Jewish, is nonsensical. Even among the small proportion of Jews in the UK who hold Israeli citizenship,⁹ their influence is obviously limited

⁹ Graham, D. (2015). *Britain’s Israeli diaspora: A demographic portrait*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

– they have no more control over the actions of the Israeli government than British citizens have over those of the British government. Indeed, in JPR’s first report on this conflict, we demonstrated that one in three (33%) Jewish people in the UK *disapproved* of the way Israel’s government handled the conflict militarily, and more than two in five (42%) felt that Israel’s government was motivated primarily by political rather than military reasons.¹⁰ Yet, as we show here, a substantial majority of Jewish people nonetheless felt they were being held responsible for Israeli government actions by non-Jews simply because they were Jewish.

In fact, the strength of Jewish feeling about these statements is somewhat understated in Figure 1 since it does not show the complete distribution of responses across the scales. Excluding the small proportion of ‘Don’t know’ responses (see note to Figure 1), as many as 19% of respondents selected the highest score on the scale (i.e. 10) indicating they agreed in the strongest possible way with the first contention, i.e. that they felt they had been held personally responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel’s government. Similarly, 14% scored 10 for the second contention indicating that one in seven respondents felt, in the strongest terms, that British Jews were not welcome in the UK.

Why might we see a broader level of agreement on the first contention than the second? Arguably, the ‘test’ in the first contention – *I felt I was being held responsible* – sets a lower bar than the test in the second one: the criticism *made me feel Jews are not welcome in the UK*. Feeling blamed for something individually is of a different order to feeling that Jews as a whole are no longer welcome in the country. Where relevant, in the following analysis we therefore refer to the second contention as being the more severe or strident of the two.

Which Jewish subgroups were most likely to feel more strongly about the two contentions?

A convenient way to assess which Jewish subgroups were the most likely to agree or disagree with the two statements is to calculate the mean (or average) score for each of the two 0-10 scales (excluding ‘Don’t know’ responses). The overall mean score for whether respondents felt they were being held responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel’s government was 6.9, i.e. well above the midpoint (5.0) in the direction of agree. The mean score for whether respondents thought popular criticism of Israel during the conflict made them feel that Jews are unwelcome in the UK was 5.7, i.e. not quite as strong agreement but still above the midpoint.

Were certain subgroups of Jewish people more likely to say they felt blamed or unwelcome in the UK than others? This can be answered by comparing the overall mean scores for the statements with the mean scores for such groups.¹¹

Sex, age and education

In terms of sex, Jewish women were more likely than Jewish men to agree both with the contention that they felt they were being held responsible by non-Jews for the conflict, and the contention that they felt Jews were unwelcome in the UK due to the public and media criticism of Israel (see Appendix for details).

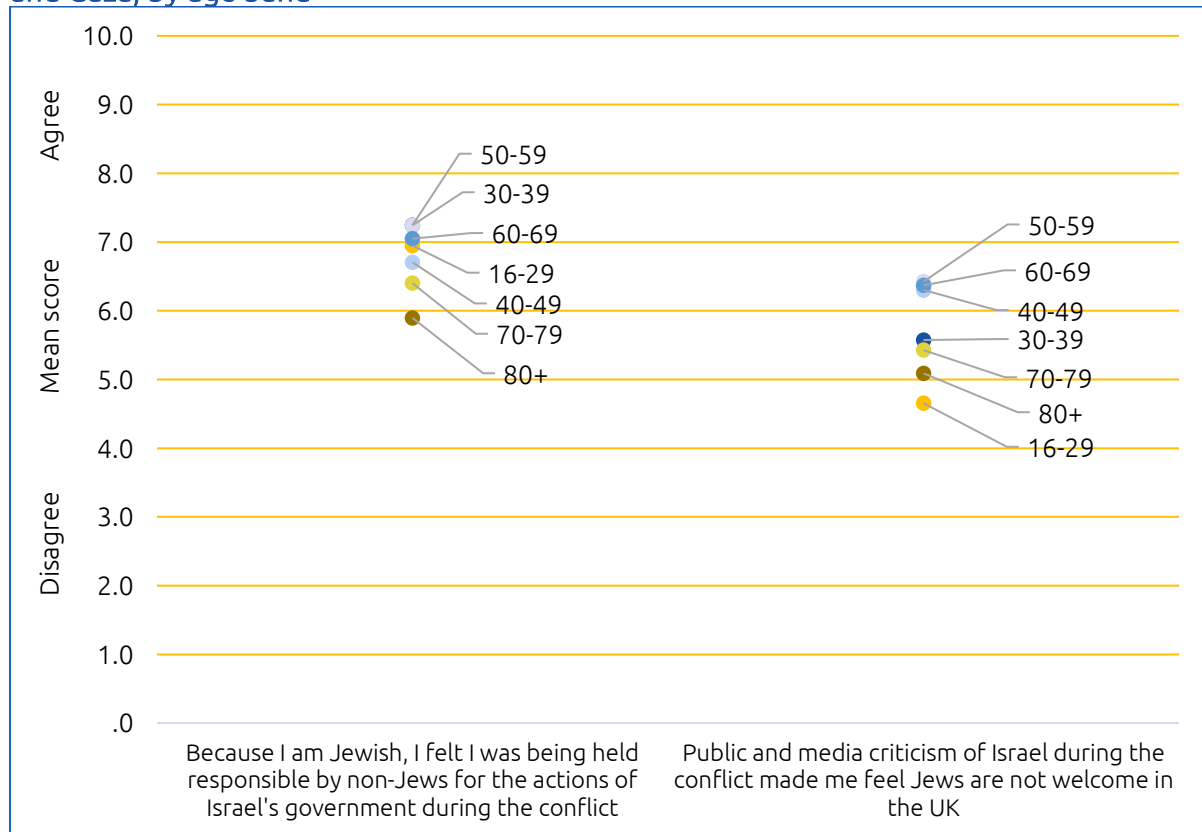
However, looking at different age groups, no pattern is discernible (Figure 2). Whilst this suggests that age is not an important predictor of Jewish attitudes for either contention, more detailed statistical analysis (see page 12), shows that age becomes important after

¹⁰ Graham and Boyd, 2023 op cit.

¹¹ All of the scores are summarised in the Appendix on page 14.

taking other variables into account. One noteworthy observation at this point is that the youngest respondents, aged 16-29, were the least likely to say they felt Jews were unwelcome in the UK; indeed, with a mean score of 4.7 towards disagree, this was the only age group where the average score was below the mid-point (i.e. 5.0) on either contention. Yet this is all the more striking as 16-29 years olds are twice as likely as all others to have experienced a verbal antisemitic attack.¹²

Figure 2. The feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, by age band



In terms of feeling held responsible by non-Jews (the first contention), there is almost no difference between those educated to degree level or above, and those who do not have such qualifications (6.9 degree v 6.8 no degree). By contrast, JPR's first report on this conflict, and findings about UK Jewish attachment to Israel more generally, have noted that higher educational attainment tends to be associated with weaker levels of Israel attachment.¹³ In terms of feeling that Jews are unwelcome in the UK (the second contention), there is again little difference (although it is statistically significant), with those educated to degree level being slightly less likely to feel this than those without a degree (5.6 degree v 6.1 no degree) (see Appendix). Nevertheless, neither of these contentions appears to be strongly related to the strength or weakness of respondents' feelings of attachment to Israel, at least not directly.

¹² 14% of people aged 16-29 said they had personally experienced a verbal antisemitic attack in the calendar year 'so far' (seven months) compared with 7% for all other respondents (this is previously unpublished data from the survey). We focus specifically on verbal antisemitic attacks rather than physical ones, as the number of respondents who had experienced a physical antisemitic attack is too small to allow for meaningful analysis in this instance.

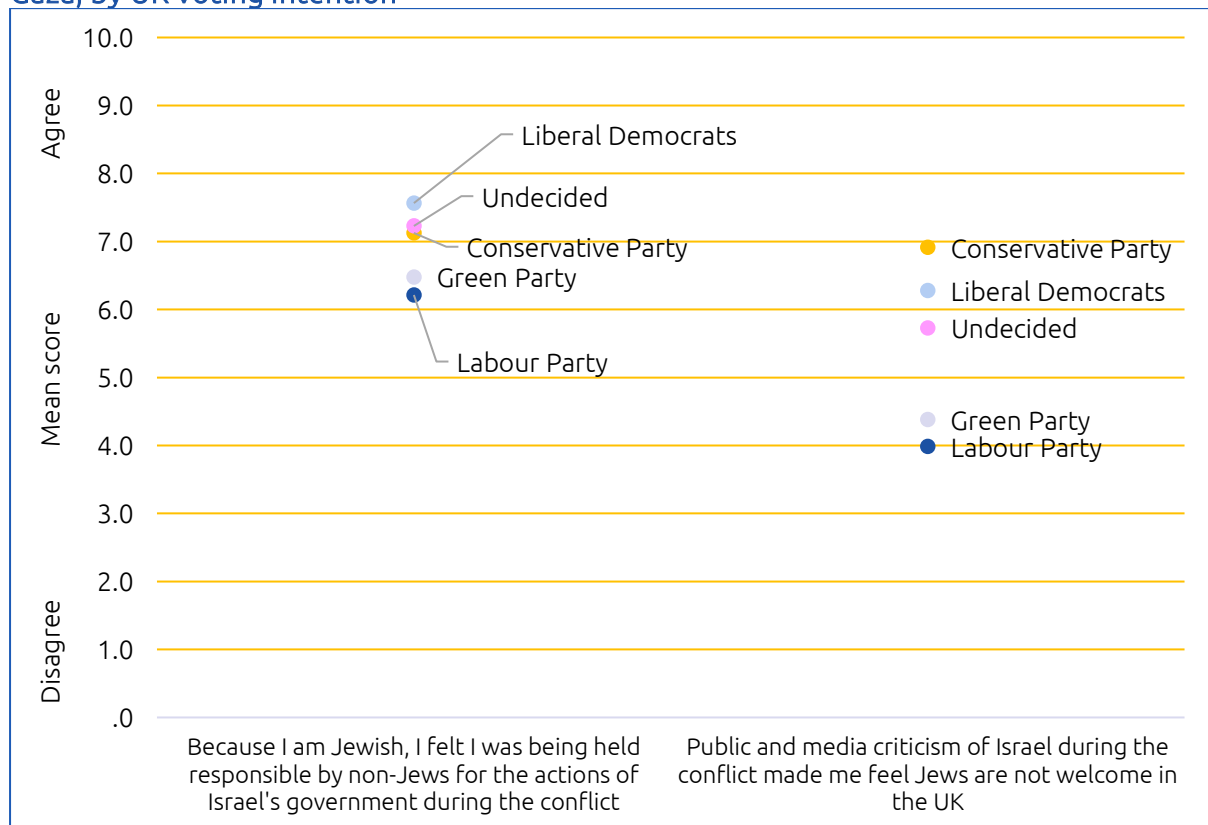
¹³ Graham and Boyd 2023 op cit.; Graham, D. and Boyd, J. (2010). *Committed, concerned and conciliatory: The attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research; Pew Research Centre, (2020), *Jewish Americans in 2020*.

Voting intentions

Turning to respondents' UK voting intentions, we observe patterns that are closer to what we might expect to see based on existing research about Israel than we observed above regarding education and age. In terms of the second contention about whether or not respondents felt Jews were unwelcome in the UK, there is a clear distinction between those with left-leaning positions and those in the political centre or on the right. Respondents supporting the right-of-centre Conservative Party or the more centrist Liberal Democratic Party were much more likely to say that they felt Jews were unwelcome in the UK because of public and media criticism than respondents supporting the left-of-centre UK Labour Party or Green Party (Figure 3).

While there is also a left/right split in terms of feeling held responsible for the actions of Israel's government (the first contention), the spread of values is far narrower than for the second contention, and the ordering is also largely as expected, albeit that Liberal Democrat supporters are found to agree slightly more strongly than Conservative Party supporters. Although UK Labour Party supporters have the lowest mean score, i.e. they are most likely to disagree with the contention that non-Jews hold them responsible for Israeli government actions, their mean score is 6.2, still well within the agreement side of the scale (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, by UK voting intention



Question: "If a general election were held tomorrow, how would you vote?"

Many studies have highlighted the importance of political stance in predicting Jewish people's attitudes towards Israel. Indeed, one of the key findings of JPR's [first report](#) on the May 2021 conflict was the relative importance of UK voting intention when it came to support for Israel's government during the war. But in the present context, the relationship is more complicated.

On the one hand, we see that political stance correlates with the sense that Jews are not welcome in the UK – right-leaning respondents were more likely to agree with this than left-leaning respondents. On the other hand, political stance is rather less sensitive to determining which Jewish sub-groups are more likely to feel blamed by non-Jews for Israel’s actions.

Thus, political stance appears to be more weakly associated with the first contention than the second one. Why might that be? One explanation is that *any* Jewish person may be confronted about the conflict, for example in the workplace or in a social situation, not because of their political opinions, but simply by virtue of their Jewishness. Non-Jews may casually associate them with it, perhaps in a similar way to how Muslims can sometimes be casually associated with Islamist terrorism. This type of guilt by association or collective blaming was demonstrated very publicly during the conflict by the pro-Palestinian convoy which travelled through north London neighbourhoods with sizeable Jewish populations shouting antisemitic abuse from loudspeakers in a very deliberate, provocative and intimidatory way.¹⁴ These individuals were clearly and blatantly blaming UK Jews in general. This stands in contrast to the situation with the second contention, that public and media criticism of Israel ‘made me feel that Jews are not welcome in the UK’, i.e. that Jews *in general* are unwelcome. Here, the respondent is invited to reflect on how criticism of Israel impacts on their general view of the place of Jews in British society rather than how it impacts on them personally. As such, it is a more generic contention that is arguably more likely to be influenced by one’s political views than their specific experiences. This may contribute to the clearer and wider distribution of opinion we see in Figure 3. As has been shown in previous research, leftist Jews tend to take a more open view of critical media coverage of Israel than rightist Jews, even if they disagree with it.¹⁵

Experience of antisemitism

We also explored whether Jewish people’s views on the extent to which they regarded antisemitism to be a problem in the UK correlated with their positions on the two statements. In this instance we observe an association with both contentions. The larger a problem respondents felt antisemitism was in the UK, the more likely they were not only to say that they felt blamed by non-Jews for Israel’s actions, but also to say that they felt Jews are unwelcome in UK (Figure 4, overleaf). Indeed, this is the strongest relationship of all those measured for both contentions. Even so, the spread of positions is again notably wider for the second contention about feeling Jews are unwelcome in the UK than for the first contention about being held personally responsible. It suggests that Jewish people who already feel that antisemitism is a problem in the UK are more sensitive to criticism about Jews and Israel and, consequently, are more likely to view any further criticism through a lens coloured by such thinking.

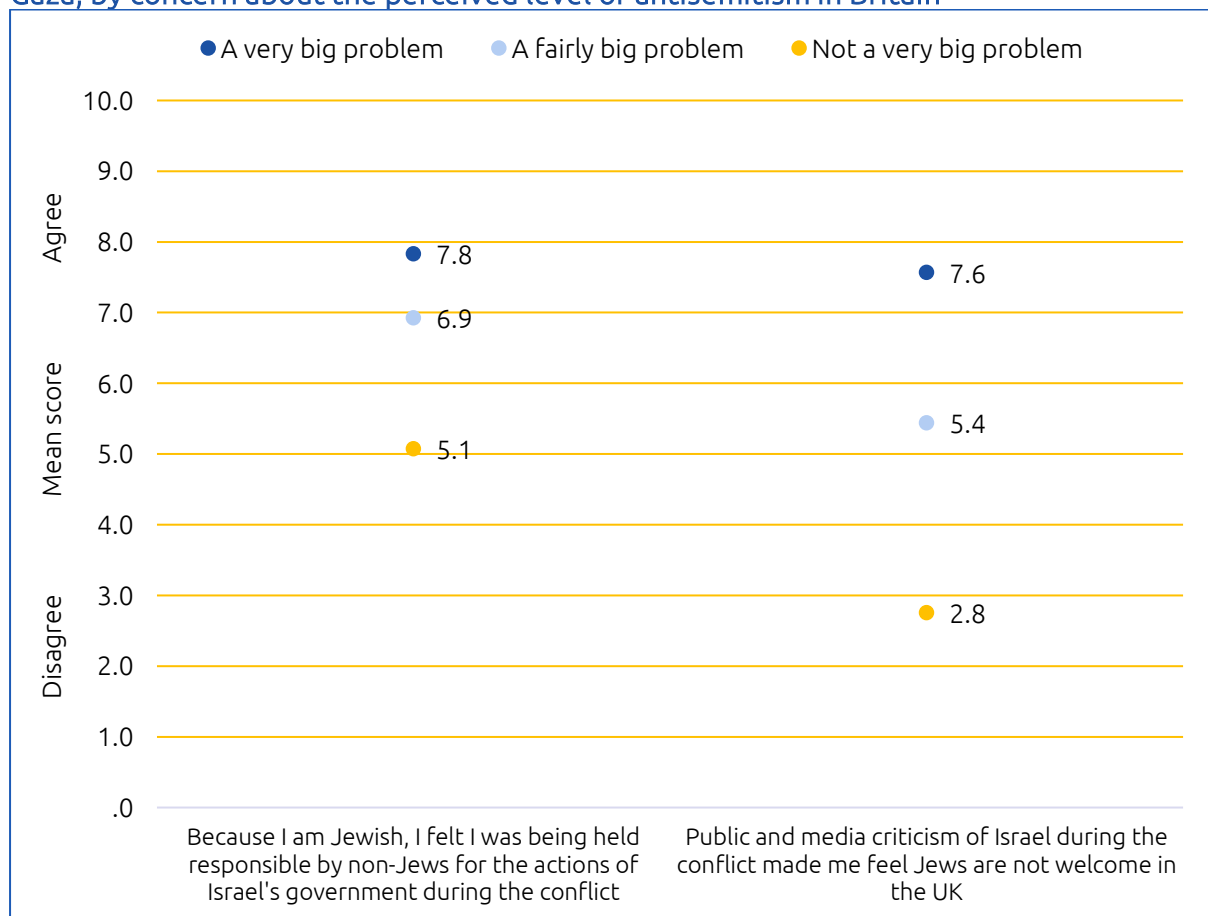
Therefore, we also see that those who had personally experienced a verbal antisemitic attack in the previous twelve months were more likely than others to agree with both contentions.¹⁶ Those who had experienced a verbal attack were more likely to say they felt non-Jewish people held them personally responsible (8.1 if experienced an attack v 6.7 if not), and to say that they felt that Jews were unwelcome in the UK due to public and media criticism of Israel (8.3 if experienced an attack v 5.4 if not). Again, we see a wider range of opinion on the second statement than the first. (The number of respondents who reported experiencing a physical antisemitic attack was too small to analyse from a statistical point of view.)

¹⁴ *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2021, op. cit.

¹⁵ Graham, D. and Boyd, J. (2010). *Committed, concerned and conciliatory: The attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

¹⁶ A similar question asking about experiences of a verbal antisemitic attack ‘during calendar year 2021’ (i.e. the previous 7 months) showed almost identical results.

Figure 4. Feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, by concern about the perceived level of antisemitism in Britain*

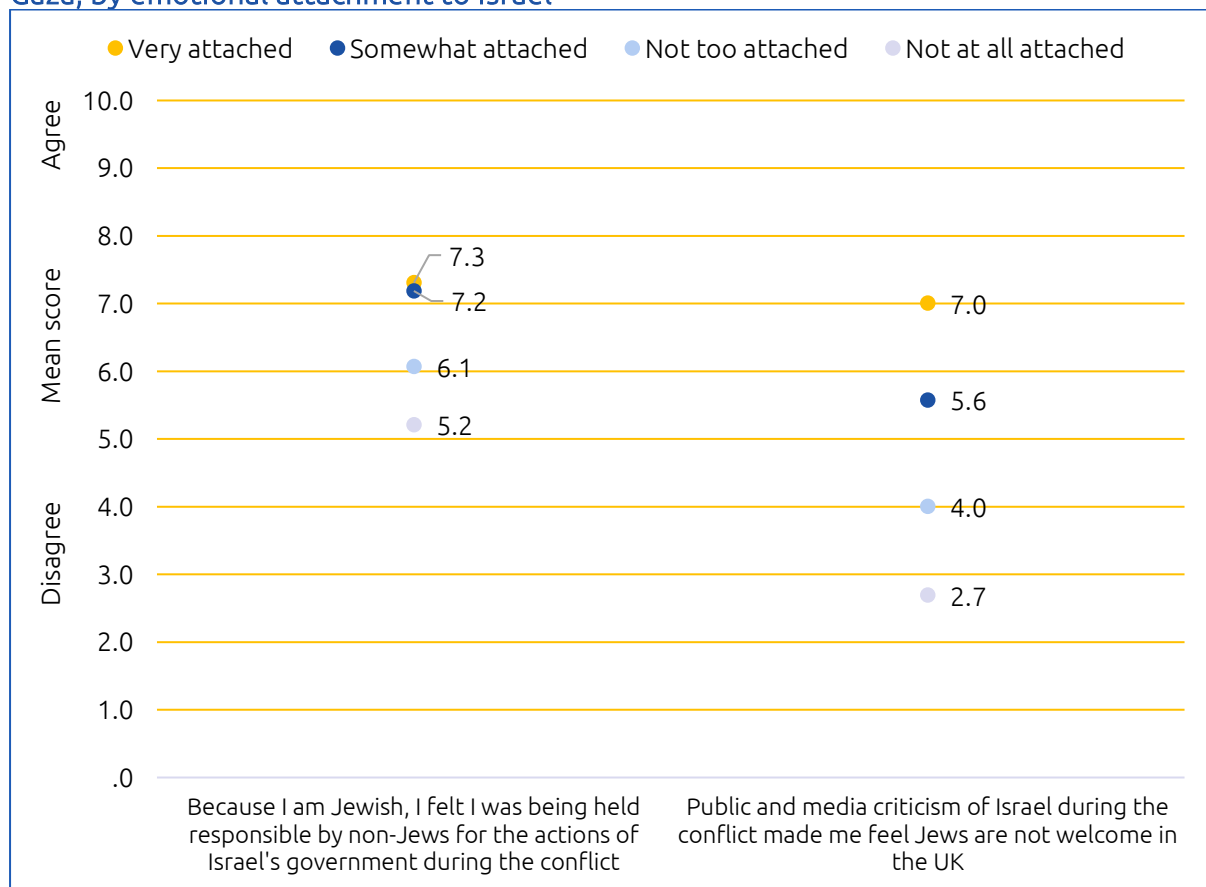


Question: "To what extent do you think the following are problems in the United Kingdom? 'Antisemitism.'" (* Note that too few respondents said it was 'not a problem at all' for statistical significance, so results for that option are not included in the chart).

Attachment to Israel

In JPR's first report on the May 2021 conflict, the strength or weakness of respondents' feelings of attachment to Israel were found to be the most important predictor of their attitudes, independent of all other variables. In this analysis we also see a close association between attachment to Israel and the two contentions. The more closely attached a person feels to Israel, the more likely they are to agree with both, but again, the spread of values is greater for the second contention than the first. Nevertheless, even those who are 'not at all attached' to Israel have a mean score of 5.2 (just over the mid-point towards agreement) on the first contention i.e. that they feel non-Jews hold them, as Jews, personally responsible for the actions of Israel's government (Figure 5). However, on the second contention, only those who are 'somewhat' or 'very attached' to Israel said that media criticism of Israel made them feel Jews are not welcome in the UK; those who were 'weakly' or 'not at all' attached to Israel tended to disagree with this contention. Thus, we again see a clear link between Jewish people's relationship with Israel and the way they interpret public discourse on Israel in the UK.

Figure 5. Feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, by emotional attachment to Israel



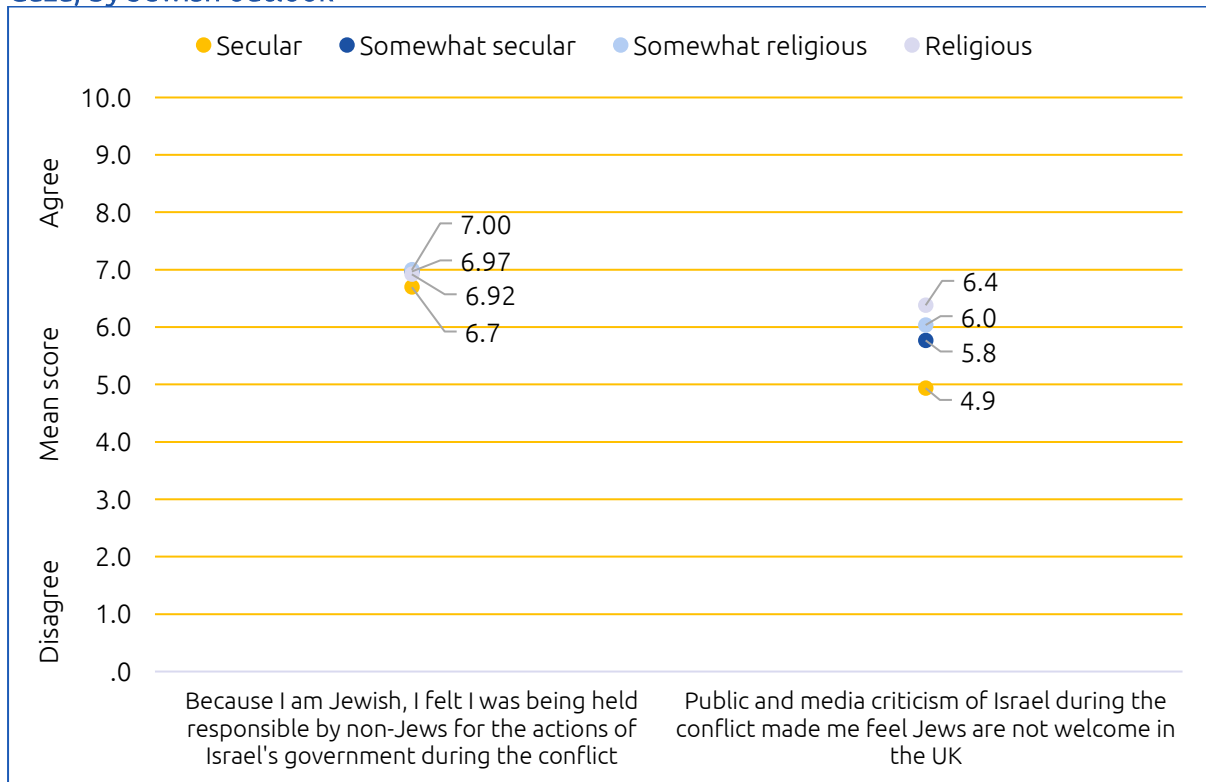
Question: "How emotionally attached are you to Jewish?"

Jewish identity

Finally, we examined Jewish identity in this context. Respondents were asked about how they self-identify in terms of their Jewish outlook, on a scale running from 'religious' to 'secular'. Previous studies have shown that this scale reveals significant differences in attitudes and experiences of Jews depending on where they situate themselves. However, in this instance we do not detect any relationship at all between Jewish outlook and the first contention about being held responsible by non-Jews for Israel's actions (Figure 6, overleaf). However, there is a relationship with the second contention about feeling that Jews are not welcome in the UK. The more religious respondents are, the more likely they were to equate criticism of Israel with an unwelcoming environment in the UK for Jews, and vice versa.

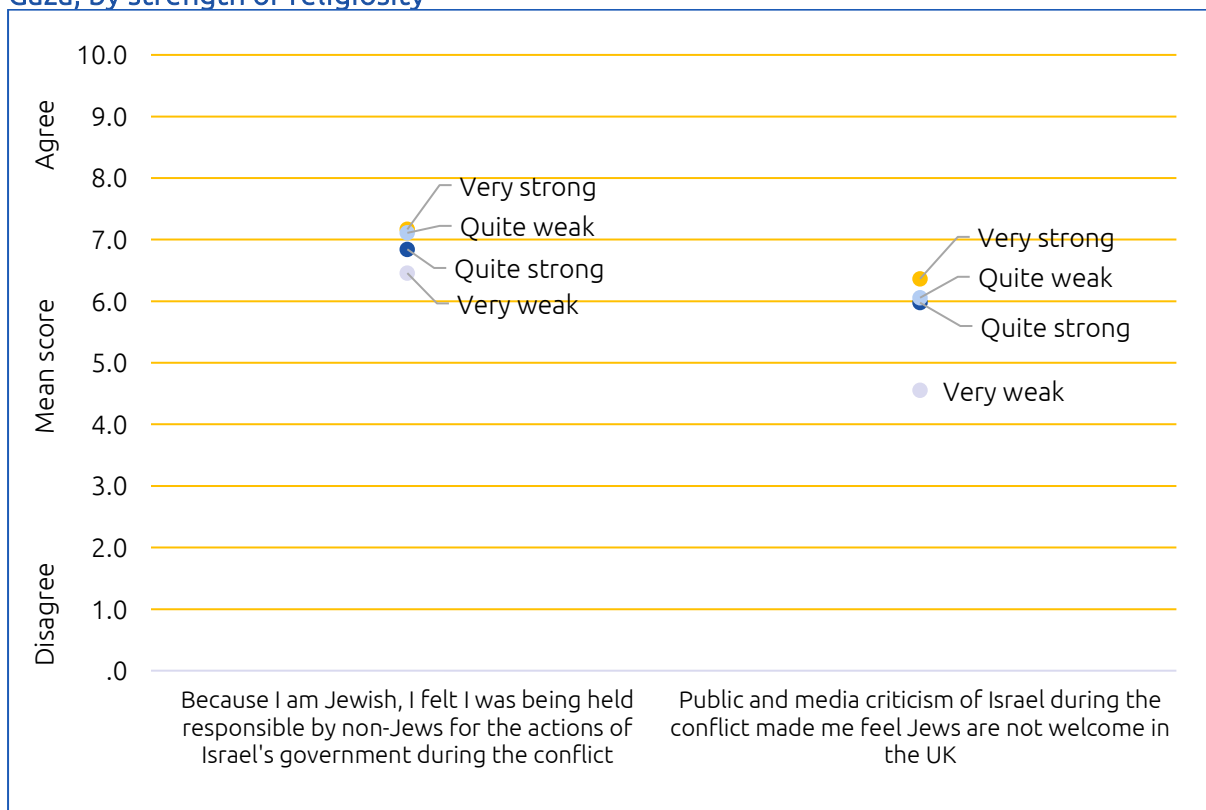
We see similar, though not identical, results when the data are analysed in terms of self-described Jewish religiosity, a 4-point scale running from 'very strong' to 'very weak'. Religiosity exhibits a weak relationship with the first contention, but a stronger relationship with the second (Figure 7, overleaf). But here it is those with 'very weak' religiosity who stand out, being far less likely than others to say that media criticism makes them feel that Jews are unwelcome in the UK. The very weakly religious are the only group with a mean score on the disagree side of the scale (4.6), with very little difference between everyone else.

Figure 6. Feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, by Jewish outlook



Question: "When it comes to your outlook, how do you regard yourself?"

Figure 7. Feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, by strength of religiosity



Question: "How would you describe your current level of religiosity?"

/ Key drivers of opinion

Drawing these findings together, what are the key drivers of Jewish people's feelings about how this conflict affected them?

We have shown that several variables are related to the way in which Jewish people responded to the two contentions about the May 2021 war in Israel and Gaza. But which of these variables is the most important, or predictive, of their responses? To assess this, we used linear regression analysis to enable us to statistically isolate independent relationships between the variables and each contention.

Regarding the first contention – *Because I am Jewish, I felt I was being held responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel's government during the conflict* – we found the strongest predictor is **the extent to which respondents felt antisemitism is a problem in the UK**. This means that, independent of the other variables measured, a person's perception of the level of antisemitism in the UK most strongly predicts how likely they were to feel that non-Jews held them personally responsible for the actions of Israel's government. If they felt antisemitism was a problem in the UK, they were more likely to feel that non-Jews held them responsible. This is also independent of whether or not they had actually experienced a verbal antisemitic attack. The next most important predictor of the first contention was respondents' **level of emotional attachment to Israel**, with stronger attachment predicting a greater likelihood of people feeling non-Jews hold them responsible for Israel's actions, again independent of other variables. The third most important predictor here was **age**: the younger respondents were, the more likely they were to say they felt non-Jews held them responsible. This is surprising given the very weak relationship observed between the two variables (see Figure 2 on page 6). However, it is important to note that the overall statistical 'fit' of this model was relatively low (R square=.17), indicating that most of the variables tested were not very discriminatory and that other factors, perhaps psychological ones not tested here, may have been driving the way respondents' viewed this contention.

In terms of the second contention – *Public and media criticism of Israel during the conflict made me feel Jews are not welcome in the UK* – the two strongest predictors are the same as for the first contention. The strongest independent predictor was again respondents' perceptions of antisemitism, specifically **the extent to which they felt antisemitism was a problem in the UK**. And the second most important independent predictor was their level of **emotional attachment to Israel**. But unlike the first contention, the third most important predictor is **recent experience of a verbal antisemitic attack** (note again that data on physical antisemitic attacks could not be tested for statistical reasons). Also, the overall statistical 'fit' of this model was much better than for the first contention (R square=.40), indicating that the variables examined were better at predicting Jewish people's feelings about this harsher contention.

It is also worth noting which variables were found to be weaker predictors of these sentiments: Jewish religiosity and political stance. This is interesting because many studies have found that these factors, in particular, tend to be predictive of a wide range of attitudes, especially of those towards Israel. This underlines the fact that the feelings of vulnerability and insecurity that the conflict engendered among Jews in the UK were only weakly related to their Jewish identity in this respect, or their political leaning. This is because when Jews are collectivised and singled out as 'Other', their personal beliefs become increasingly irrelevant.

Finally, we saw that the spread of response values was consistently wider for the second contention about feeling that Jews are not welcome in the UK than for the first contention about feeling individually blamed by non-Jews for the actions of Israel's government. This means that the variables we examined were more successful at discriminating between respondents on the second contention than on the first. Why might this be the case? In part

the reason is technical: the spread of values on the first contention is highly skewed towards one end of the 11-point scale whereas this was less so for the second one. But it may also be the case that the different emphasis in the second contention about feeling Jews in general are not welcome in the UK, provided broader interpretive scope; other factors, such as personal politics, could come into play which were less relevant in the context of the first contention, which is worded far more personally.

/ Concluding remarks

Two months after the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza, JPR investigated the impact of this event on Jews in the UK by asking them to respond to two contentions. On the first of these, *"Because I am Jewish, I felt I was being held responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel's government during the conflict,"* we found a very high level of agreement: almost three out of four (73%) UK Jews agreed with the statement. On the second, and arguably stronger contention, *"Public and media criticism of Israel during the conflict made me feel Jews are not welcome in the UK,"* more than half (56%) of UK Jewish adults agreed.

These results make it very clear that public responses to the May 2021 conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza, a war in which UK Jews had no direct role nor any control over, nevertheless made many Jews in the UK feel vulnerable and insecure in their own country. For some, this was due to direct experience of an antisemitic attack – certainly, there was a spike in antisemitic incidents at the time. However for many, these feelings of discomfort and insecurity were not due to any direct harm the conflict exposed them to, taking place as it did more than 3,500km away, but rather by a perception that despite being innocent bystanders, they felt singled out for blame by some in the non-Jewish public. The fact that almost three quarters of UK Jews said they felt blamed for the conflict and over half said that public and media criticism prompted them to feel that Jews are welcome in the UK is an arresting finding at the very least, which sheds light both on the tone in which the Israel-Palestinian conflict is sometimes presented and discussed during these types of flare-ups, and how Jews across the UK experience the related discourse.

Most Jewish people feel some sort of affinity with Israel simply because it is an important, even central part of their Jewish identities. Consequently, Jews tend to be sensitive to what other people say about it. This closeness impacts the way they perceive and interpret commentary about Israel, and in times of conflict such commentary can be confronting and feel particularly personal. As was seen in these data, it made little difference how religious or politically engaged Jews were to how they perceived and experienced the public mood. They felt uncomfortable, anxious or vulnerable largely irrespective of their background.

This is not the first time we have seen such results.¹⁷ But the main concern is that it did not take much to shift the atmosphere beyond conventional critical commentary about Israel towards the emergence of an atmosphere that felt intimidatory and hostile to UK Jews. The findings in this study should serve as a caution to the mainstream media and leaders in wider British society, as well as to the public at large, about the dangers of equivalising the actions of Israel's government with Jewish people in the UK, especially when tensions flare up in the

Middle East. UK Jews are innocent bystanders who can all too easily feel scapegoated for the actions of Israel's government and, as has been documented, subsequently find themselves under verbal or even physical attack as a result.¹⁸ Any suggestion of guilt by association is prejudicial, and constitutes a red line that should never be crossed.

¹⁷ FRA 2018, op cit.

¹⁸ CST 2021, op cit.

/ Appendix – Summary of mean scores for each statement

The feelings of Jewish people in the UK regarding the May 2021 conflict in Israel and Gaza: summary of the mean scores for each statement and N values (unweighted N=4,323) Variable		Because I am Jewish, I felt I was being held responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel's government during the conflict	Public and media criticism of Israel during the conflict made me feel Jews are not welcome in the UK	N
Overall mean score		6.9	5.7	4,323
Sex	Male	6.5	5.3	1,737
	Female	7.2	6.0	2,380
Age	16-39	7.1	5.0	418
	40-59	7.0	6.4	1,200
	60+	6.6	5.8	2,681
Qualifications	Degree	6.9	5.5	3,274
	No degree	6.8	6.1	885
Antisemitism (To what extent do you think the following are problems in the United Kingdom?)	A very big problem	7.8	7.6	1,636
	A fairly big problem	6.9	5.4	1,978
	Not a very big problem	5.1	2.8	552
Thinking about your experiences in the calendar year 2020, did you personally experience any type of antisemitic incident(s) directed at you because you are Jewish?	A verbal antisemitic attack	8.1	8.3	261*
	No	6.7	5.4	3,940
And thinking about your experiences during calendar year 2021 so far, have you personally experienced any type of antisemitic incident(s) because you are Jewish?	A verbal antisemitic attack	8.0	8.2	234*
	No	6.8	5.4	3,967
If a general election were held tomorrow, how would you vote?	Conservative Party	7.1	6.9	1,580
	Labour Party	6.2	4.0	789
	Liberal Democrats	7.6	6.3	406
	Green Party	6.5	4.4	138
	Undecided	7.2	5.7	926

Table continued on the next page...

Variable (continued)		Because I am Jewish, I felt I was being held responsible by non-Jews for the actions of Israel's government during the conflict	Public and media criticism of Israel during the conflict made me feel Jews are not welcome in the UK	N
How emotionally attached are you to Israel?	Very attached	7.3	7.0	1,929
	Somewhat attached	7.2	5.6	1,390
	Not too attached	6.1	4.0	607
	Not at all attached	5.2	2.7	292
Aliya	0 - Extremely unlikely	6.5	4.9	2250
	1	6.7	4.7	590
	2 or above (towards more likely)	7.5	7.0	1378
When it comes to your outlook, how do you regard yourself?	Secular	6.7	4.9	848
	Somewhat secular	7.0	5.8	1,157
	Somewhat religious	7.0	6.0	1,596
	Religious	6.9	6.4	617
How would you describe your current level of religiosity?	Very strong	7.2	6.4	440
	Quite strong	6.8	6.0	1,666
	Quite weak	7.1	6.1	1,519
	Very weak	6.5	4.6	593
Synagogue member	Yes, I am a synagogue member	7.0	6.0	3,391
	Although I am not a synagogue member I do belong to/attend a synagogue	6.3	5.4	121
	No, I am not a synagogue member	6.8	5.3	316
Synagogue membership type	None	6.7	5.2	495
	Strictly Orthodox	6.8	6.1	136
	Central Orthodox	7.1	6.5	1,799
	Sephardi	7.4	5.8	103
	Masorti	7.9	6.7	484
	Reform	6.9	5.5	786
	Liberal	6.6	4.3	347
Other	6.2	5.0	136	

* The rate of reporting a verbal antisemitic attack is 54% higher in the January to July 2021 period (234 in 7 months) than in the January to December 2020 period (261 in 12 months). While this is indicative of the May 2021 spike recorded by the CST (2021, op cit.) we only have aggregate, rather than monthly, incident-based, values here.

/ Methodological note

The data for this survey were collected using the JPR research panel. This is a sample of Jewish people from across the United Kingdom who have agreed to participate in JPR surveys as part of an ongoing relationship with JPR. The panel is designed to explore the attitudes and experiences of Jews in the UK on a variety of issues. It is open to anyone living in the UK aged 16 or above and who self-identifies as being Jewish 'in any way at all'. The sample size for this wave was 4,152.

The questionnaire was developed by JPR. In addition to questions about the conflict in Israel and Gaza, it also asked panellists about a range of other issues such as how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting different aspects of their lives. The survey was programmed in-house using Conformat software and formed part of a wider panel recruitment process. It was completed online, by computer, smartphone or tablet, from 23 July 2021 to 1 September 2021. Respondents were offered an opportunity to win one of five £100 shopping vouchers as an incentive to complete the survey.

The survey data were cleaned and weighted to adjust for the age, sex and Jewish identity of the Jewish population of the UK based on 2011 Census data and synagogue membership data collected separately by JPR. Details of the methodology used in the first round of this survey (summer 2020), which are also applicable to the 2021 round, can be found [here](#).

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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 influence Jewish life positively. Web: www.jpr.org.uk.

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