

DEBATE 1: Tackling the Concrete Tensions Between "Democracy", "Zionism," and "Judaism"

Israel's Jewish identity is a dominant issue. Many are concerned that Israel's actions or policies and its world image have an impact on Diaspora Jews' security and wellbeing. However, the discussion has a strong tendency to be negatively-charged, overly biased and lacking foundation in consistent facts.

There are two majority opinions who generally see these values as harmonious/in agreement with each other: those who see Israel's democratic identity arising from the state's Jewish foundations, and those who emphasize the opposite arrangement. Criticism heard in the Diaspora on aspects of Israel's conduct in Jewish matters is often based on arguments rooted in democratic values, just as criticism of aspects of Israel's conduct in the democratic field are often based on arguments rooted in Jewish values.

1. The regional reality does not grant Israel immunity from criticism. Should Diaspora Jews recognize the difficulties and constraints Israel faces given the regional hostility and security threats when expressing criticism?
SUGGESTED POSITIONS: **YES OR NO**
2. Some say Israel faces a "double standard" when being criticized, others say no such standard exists and/or that Israel should be treated differently. How important is the fact that Israel's neighbors do not adhere to principles of democracy, and arguably of human rights, as justification for lowering the high values bar Israel is expected to maintain?
SUGGESTED POSITIONS: **IMPORTANT OR NOT IMPORTANT**
3. Israel has preserved a democratic, multi-party framework and a free and open society. Yet Israel has been pressured and maligned by foreign and domestic pressures more powerfully than other countries. Despite all its flaws, it is in Israel that free political discourse is maintained. What accounts for this difference?
SUGGESTED POSITIONS: **RELIGION-BASED OR DEMOCRACY-BASED**

DEBATE 2: Diaspora Jews and Israel's Democratic Identity

Israel's identity is examined by those living outside of Israel in accordance with the following premises:

1. Israel's character has significant influence on how "Judaism" is regarded around the world by Jews and non-Jews. For example, it is likely to affect the degree of the young generation's devotion to its Jewish identity, and at the same time is likely to affect attitudes of non-Jews toward the Diaspora Jews who live among them.
SUGGESTED POSITIONS: **AGREE/TRUE OR DISAGREE/FALSE**
2. Diaspora Jews are members of a minority group in their home countries; in Israel, Jews are the majority. This distinction is relevant to the great importance that Diaspora Jews attach to minority rights in Israel and to human rights in general.
SUGGESTED POSITIONS: **AGREE/TRUE OR DISAGREE/FALSE**

TO CONSIDER: Since democratic values are considered "Jewish values" by a large percentage of the Jewish world, "actions that erode Israel's democratic values are seen as detrimental to Judaism and to the definition of Israel as a Jewish state". Just as Italy is the nation-state of the Italian people and France is the nation-state of the French people, Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people.

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The debate over Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state showed that Diaspora Jews have a variety of expectations of Israel, including: (ARGUE **FOR** OR **AGAINST** EACH OF THESE STATEMENTS)

- That Israel be pluralistic;
- That Israel strive for a reality in which it does not rule over the Palestinians;
- That Israel put an end to the Orthodox monopoly over Jewish life and give equal standing to all Jewish streams;
- That Israel avoid imposing religious norms on its mostly secular civil society;
- That Israel prevent dissipation of its Jewish character by strengthening its citizens' knowledge of Jewish history, traditions, and values.