

What Does It Mean To Be Pro-Israel?



Introduction (10 Minutes)

Who's in the Room

Why We're Here

Group Agreements (Suggested)

- Speak honestly from your personal opinions and experiences
- Listen fully and "hang in there" when you hear something challenging
- Share airtime and don't interrupt others
- Avoid personal attacks – focus on critiquing ideas
- Try not to make assumptions about other peoples' beliefs or motives – instead, talk with them and test your assumption
- If someone speaks in a small group or one-on-one, assume the comment is confidential unless they give you permission to share it
- Make the most of this chance to learn from each other

Part I: Personal Level (20 Minutes)

First Impressions

Personal Connections

Say a few words about your personal connection to Israel. Why do you care about Israel and what happens there, and why do you choose to devote energy to these issues? What from your personal experience has led you in this direction?

Part II: National Level (20 Minutes)

Chait-Yglesias Debate at the J Street Conference

Video clips at <http://vimeo.com/7300781>.

- Chait lays out his position (Minute 4:52-6:02)
- Yglesias lays out his position (Minute 10:10-11:48) *(Pardon the camera problem!)*

Discuss questions in large group:

Chait and Yglesias articulate very different definitions of what it means to be pro-Israel. Do you agree with Chait's claim that being pro-Israel means believing that Israel is the more sympathetic party in the Middle East situation? Do you favor Yglesias' broader definition that anyone who supports Israel's continued existence should be able to claim the term pro-Israel? Or do you take a different approach from either of them?

What do Chait and Yglesias agree on? What voices are not represented in the two-person debate? (optional question)

In your opinion, what approach to being "pro-Israel" is most constructive toward a peaceful, secure future for Israel and the Middle East, and why?

Optional Video Clip: Which position is more constructive for achieving a negotiated settlement? (Minute 17:30-23:15).

Part III: Campus Level (30 Minutes)

Forward Article

Students quoted in "On Campus, a Divide over 'Pro-Israel,'" by Josh Nathan-Kazis in *The Forward*, November 4, 2009, <http://forward.com/articles/118315/>:

Ari

"If 'pro-Israel' means agreeing that Israel has a right to exist and wanting to do good things with the state, then we're pro-Israel," said Ari Fine, president of JSC [at Carleton Collegel. But "people had different connotations about what the word actually meant."

Jonathan

When asked whether the fact that his organization calls itself pro-Israel turns off some Jewish students, Jonathan Sachs, president of the University of Maryland's Terrapin Students for Israel, laughed. "No, absolutely not," he said. Sachs, who calls his group a "moderate pro-Israel voice," thinks that students misunderstand the term pro-Israel. "Being pro-Israel, in my opinion, means that you understand the importance of Israel to the United States, to the Jewish people and to the world in general, and the contributions that Israel is making as a world citizen," he said. "The way that [pro-Israel] has been stigmatized is unfair."

Roey

"It's an empty word. It's lost all meaning," said Roey Kruvi, an Israel-born junior at University of California, Berkeley, and leader of Kesher Enoshi, a campus group that works on social justice issues in Israel. "Those terms usually raise more questions than they answer."

Aimee

"Any time you make a statement to a student, you essentially have 10 seconds before they stop listening," Mayer said. Mayer says that when she is speaking publicly about the group, she decides based on the audience when to mention the phrase. "The pro-Israel term is usually in there, but it's usually around second 11 or 12," she said.

Then discuss the following questions in the large group, making sure everyone has an opportunity to join in the conversation:

What strikes you here? Do any of these quotes surprise you or make you think about something differently?

Which statement(s) resonate(s) with you most and why? Which reflect the way members of your group on campus relate to the term "pro-Israel"?

Why do you think there are such differences surrounding the term?

Do you think "pro-Israel" should encompass all the things we listed at the start? What could you do without, and what would you like to hold on to?

Next Steps on Our Campus

What can we do on our campus to demonstrate that there are multiple ways of being pro-Israel, and that a broad debate is beneficial?

Closing (5 Minutes)