



## **Jewish millennials view Israel differently — ignore them at your peril**

Kyle Fradkin

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Following President Trump's recent decertification of the Iran deal, the agreement's future is back on the Jewish community's radar. This evokes complicated feelings in me and many of my fellow millennials. As a pro-Israel, pro-diplomacy millennial, I felt deeply alienated by the way Jewish institutions handled the issue in the Bay Area and across the country in 2015.

A recent experience at a JCC provided a perfect illustration of the problem — and a glimmer of hope for a solution.

A few weeks ago, I participated in the annual Zionism 3.0 conference at the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto. I spoke on a panel about how millennials view and participate in the American Jewish conversation about Israel and Zionism. I planned to focus my remarks on how millennials are not joining establishment or legacy organizations in the same way our parents' generation did. These spaces are less welcoming for pro-Israel, anti-occupation Jews like myself. Helpfully, OFJCC CEO Zack Bodner provided a useful illustration of this during his opening remarks at the conference.

Recounting the debate over the Iran nuclear agreement in the summer of 2015, Bodner stated that he had only invited to the JCC speakers who opposed to the deal. That is, until it was brought to his attention that some in the community actually supported the agreement.

Despite the fact that Bodner eventually opened up the conversation on the JCC campus, his initial approach to the issue embodied the problematic reaction most American Jewish organizations had toward the Iran deal. Most Jewish establishment organizations vocally opposed the agreement, despite the fact that American Jewish support for the Iran deal was 20 percentage points higher than among the population as a whole. For those in my demographic — Jewish millennials — the numbers are even more dramatic.

According to a J Street poll from the summer of 2015, 66 percent of Jewish 18-29 year olds supported the Iran Deal. These figures track closely with a survey released during the initial debate over the Iran Deal by the libertarian Cato Institute. The survey shows that millennials favored the Iran deal at the time by 10 percentage points over the population as a whole and hold strong pro-diplomacy views on US foreign policy across the board.

It's no secret that many American Jewish institutions are driving away young American Jews with their hawkish positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the Cato poll suggests that our views on this issue are symptomatic of a broader, pro-diplomacy worldview. American Jews already tend to favor a two-state solution and diplomacy-first foreign policy, which is magnified among Jewish millennials. The Jewish establishment's tendency to embrace more hawkish politics is going to get more controversial, not less, as my generation continues to come of age.

Millennials in general, and Jewish millennials in particular, are far more likely to support the Iran deal and a two-state solution. They are also more likely to oppose worrisome trends like Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and American military overreach in the Middle East and beyond.

If Jewish institutions don't fundamentally rethink how they engage with millennials — in foreign policy and in other areas — we will be less inclined to affiliate with the organized American Jewish community.

To be sure, this isn't just about reaching out to millennials and American Jews for their own sake. American Jews support the Iran deal and diplomacy first-foreign policy because it's good for Israel and good for the United States. They support a two-state solution because it's the only way to ensure Israel's future as the democratic homeland of the Jewish people. Jewish organizations should echo these stances because they are good policy and they will be able to better engage vast swaths of the community.

Thankfully, despite what happened in 2015, there are some early signs that progress is being made. This time around, I am heartened by the response of many organizations in our community.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and the ADL's CEO, Jonathan Greenblatt, have voiced serious concerns about decertification. These responses far better reflect both reality and the views of my generation as well as American Jews more broadly. I hope they'll be echoed at the Palo Alto JCC and other institutions in the Bay Area.

It is encouraging to see these institutions side with facts over rhetoric. If the organizations that claim to speak for us start doing a better job at representing our values, I believe my fellow millennials will want to participate in these organizations with the same enthusiasm, passion and commitment as our parents and grandparents.