

Peoplehood Pulse

Turning to Education in a Time of Change

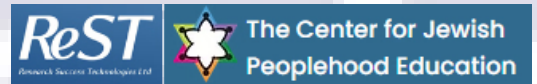
Jewish Leaders Working to Sustain Mutual Responsibility and the Israel-Diaspora Relationship Amid Rising Antisemitism and Political Uncertainty

ENTER: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance

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Research Success Technologies

& The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education



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ENTER

The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance
היוזמה לקידום עמיות יהודית

From the podcast Unholy: Two Jews on the News, December 20, 2025

"What you need are people who will both attain and also give you a sense of hope that things actually can be better and that the world is not only about the enemies outside us, but also about the agency within us." Rabbi David Wolpe

"And to that agency, I mean, you did say that Jews need to kind of ask for help and that we need a strategy. When you look at the ideal strategy, what would that be?" Yonit Levi

About the Peoplehood Pulse

The Peoplehood Pulse, an initiative of ENTER: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance, is a research effort aimed at **enhancing discussions about Jewish Peoplehood and *areivut haddadit* (mutual responsibility) among Jewish leaders**. The Pulse surveys were launched in 2024 with the objective of assessing key challenges facing Jewish communal leadership and fostering collective dialogue on Jewish belonging, community cohesion, and ideological pluralism.

The first survey, conducted in mid-2024, provided key insights into leadership responses following the October 7th Hamas attack, exploring how Jewish leaders engaged with their constituencies amid rising polarization, particularly in relation to Israel, campus activism, and internal communal discourse. The full report, American Jewish Leaders Holding Communities Together Post-October 7, is available for download [here](#).

- Building on prior findings, the 2025 Pulse examines how national Jewish leaders are responding to polarization and crisis after October 7. The leaders who answered are sharply critical of both the American and Israeli governments, above all Israel's handling of its relationship with Jews outside Israel, and concerned about rising antisemitism. At the same time, they are investing to sustain the relationship between American Jews and Israel, working to strengthen their communities from within, and turning to education that builds knowledge and belonging to the Jewish People.

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Foreword

I have spent my career as a Jewish educator, and the years since October 7th, 2023, have taught me how much that work has changed. There are things I once said to young Jews without hesitation that I can no longer say in the same way. The questions they bring me now, about Israel, about antisemitism, about what it means to belong to the Jewish People, no longer arrive one at a time. They arrive together, tangled, and they want answers I am still working out myself.

For years I have argued that Israel education is not, in the first place, about Israel. It is about the person sitting in front of you, young or old, and about how large a place Israel holds in the way that person understands their own Jewish life. Education of this kind carries values, and a community always works to pass what it believes to the next generation, so education cannot pretend to be neutral. Being values-laden in that sense is not the same as being partisan. Education turns partisan when it hands people the conclusion they are supposed to reach, or lines them up behind a party or a government, instead of giving them what they need to judge for themselves. The moment it does that, it stops teaching and starts recruiting, and people can tell the difference.

I read the findings in this report as an educator, and what I find in them is recognition. Senior leaders who have given their careers to the relationship between American Jews and Israel describe, in their own words and from their own vantage, the conclusion I keep arriving at myself, that the way through the post-October 7th moment runs through education. Not education that hands anyone the right answer about Israel. Education that builds the knowledge and the confidence to work out our own relationship with Israel, and to stay in the room with other Jews who have reached different conclusions.

Doing nothing is not a neutral choice. The Jews we decline to teach will learn about Israel anyway, from social media and from algorithms built far from any Jewish community and answerable to no one. I see the leaders in this survey reckoning with the danger that our communities will form their relationship with Israel without us, and I see the educators and funders I work alongside turning toward the same work. The institutions and donors that rarely align are aligned now, and that alignment will not last forever. I am glad that ENTER's Pulse survey shows the importance of education as the way through this moment.

— David Bryfman
CEO, The Jewish Education Project

A Turning Point for American Jewish Leaders

For decades, the leaders of America's mainstream Jewish organizations built their work on the assumption that being Jewish and being American exist in harmony. They could be openly, publicly Jewish, and Israel fit naturally within that sense of belonging.¹ These leaders held two beliefs in particular.

The Israeli government acts in the interest of the Jewish People as a whole.

Jews who live outside Israel support the Israeli government, with the belief that the government acts for the Jewish good.

The American government reliably supports Israel and the concerns of Jews at home.

Being Jewish and being American exist in harmony, without inherent contradiction.

As long as both beliefs held, these leaders could build Jewish community and strengthen ties to Israel with confidence. Since October 7th, 2023, rising antisemitism, a change in the American administration, and the conduct of both governments have shaken both beliefs at once. These leaders now face new challenges regarding what it means to be Jewish, how to relate to Israel, and how to respond to antisemitism.

To hear how they are reading the moment, the Peoplehood Pulse 2025 survey, an initiative of ENTER, asked senior leaders what is working, where communal resources should go, and what the Jewish People most need to get right.

Survey sample and response

Two hundred twenty-six contacts representing 168 unique organizations received the survey. Forty-three respondents representing 40 unique organizations completed the survey (19% response rate). The survey was fielded from August 20 to October 20, 2025.

Respondents are the heads of Foundations (28%), national advocacy organizations (16%), Federations (16%), and Jewish education organizations (12%). The sample also includes leaders from Jewish Community Centers, media outlets, youth movements, and denominational bodies.²

The leaders who responded offer a window into the views of senior leaders within mainstream American Jewish organizational life—politically center-left, denominationally diverse, and professionally committed to strengthening Jewish communal life.³

- **Politically:** 51% of Pulse respondents identify as liberal or very liberal, 43% as moderate, and 5% as conservative. The sample leans well to the left of the American Jewish public overall, where 16% identify as conservative—and 24% among synagogue members.
- **Religiously:** Respondents span the denominational spectrum, with the largest shares identifying as Conservative (28%), Orthodox (25%), Reform (15%), or "Just Jewish" (15%).

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1. Jonathan Woocher described a civil religion among American Jews, the shared beliefs and practices that animated organized Jewish life after the Second World War. Franklin Foer has called the decades after the 1967 Six-Day War a golden age, when American Jews could be openly Jewish and fully American at once and support for Israel grew inseparable from communal belonging. See Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (1986), and Foer, "The Golden Age of American Jews Is Ending," *The Atlantic* (2024).
 2. The sample is largely drawn from foundations, federations, and advocacy organizations rather than congregational or Jewish educational leadership. Few respondents directly manage local institutions such as synagogues, day schools, or supplementary schools. Heads of seminaries, rabbinical associations, and congregational bodies are also underrepresented.
 3. Research on American Jewish communal institutions likewise finds that organized leadership is drawn from this broadly liberal milieu, with studies of federation and community relations council leaders showing political preferences that fall within "a fairly narrow range" of moderate to liberal orientations. See: Laurence A. Kotler-Berkowitz and Lawrence Sternberg, "The Politics of American Jews: Cohesion, Division, and Representation at the Institutional Level," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 12, nos. 1–2 (Spring 2000): 5–42.

Commitment to Israel Amid Political Concern

The leaders surveyed are very critical of both the American and Israeli governments. 88% of the leaders view the Trump administration unfavorably, and 93% view the Israeli government unfavorably. The negativity covers most policy areas:

- On the Israeli government, the most negative area is the leaders' views of the overall approach of the Israeli government to the relationship between Israel and Jews outside of Israel, of which 86% disapprove, 9% approve, and 5% have a mixed opinion.
- When asked to assess the Trump administration's response to antisemitism, 66% disapproved, 14% approved, 20% had a mixed opinion.

Despite the high levels of disapproval, the leaders describe a stance Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove calls 'critical loyalty,' a commitment to Israel that holds firm even through sharp disagreement with its government.

"Critical Loyalty": A Public Voice for What Survey Respondents Describe

Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove, senior rabbi of Park Avenue Synagogue in New York, has articulated a version of the position the Pulse survey respondents describe. He calls on American Jews to 'redouble' their investment in synagogues, schools, camps, and lay and professional leadership, so that a resilient and knowledgeable Jewish community can sustain a mature, ethically serious relationship with Israel. This includes moments of sharp disagreement with Israeli government policy. For Cosgrove, such critical loyalty is not a departure from Zionism but its necessary renewal.

** Elliot J. Cosgrove. 2024. For Such a Time as This: On Being Jewish Today. New York: Alfred A. Knopf; Elliot J. Cosgrove. 2024. "Forging a New Vision of American Judaism and American Zionism." Hadassah Magazine, September.*

In line with Cosgrove's call, the leaders responding to the Pulse survey call for investment in education and leadership as the foundation for engagement with Israel. When the survey asks about strengthening the relationship between American Jews and Israel, the leaders remain committed, even as they express concern about the policies of both governments.

Disapproval targets Israel's government, not the relationship

Leaders' disapproval targets the current Israeli government's policies, especially its approach to the relationship with Jews outside Israel, where 86% disapprove. Their disapproval does not extend to the relationship itself.

Eighty percent chose Israel as a priority

When asked to select areas most urgently needing investment, 80% of leaders chose at least one of the two Israel-related options, either 'Israel's Security' or 'Israel & Diaspora Relations,' in the immediate (2025) or ten-year timeframe.

Ninety-five percent are professionally engaged with Israel

95% select at least one Israel-focused policy area as important, including Israel-related concerns as important for constituents, selecting Israel connection as a local focus, or naming Israel-Diaspora relations among national priorities.

Three Leadership Orientations for this Moment

When asked what the Jewish community most needs to get right now to ensure collective flourishing, thirty leaders offered written responses. We grouped these responses into three orientations based on their primary emphasis. Some responses touched on multiple strategies, but each was assigned to the theme most emphasized.

Question: In your view, what is the most important thing the Jewish community needs to get right at the present time to ensure we thrive as a people?

Hold Governments Accountable

Five leaders emphasize naming what has gone wrong and speaking clearly about both governments' failures.

"Honest appraisal of the damage done to the reputation and standing of Israel and Jews everywhere as a result of the dreadful mishandling of the war on Hamas. That damage includes the spiritual damage done to Jews whose faith in Israel is shattered."

"Recognize how we're being used by the Trump Administration for purposes that are entirely counter-productive to Jewish safety in the long term."

Strengthen Solidarity

Eleven leaders emphasize holding the community together by addressing division and working for unity.

"Deepening our sense of camaraderie with and obligation to all Jewish communities around the world across our differences."

"Greater empathy and unity among our community and less polarization and demonization."

"Gaza, and addressing gaps in priorities between older and younger Jews, particularly around Israel."

"Connections between Israelis and Americans must be strengthened."

Build Communal Capacity

Fourteen leaders emphasize investing in education, leadership, and the infrastructure needed for resilience.

"Stopping obsessing over things beyond our control (Israeli government policy, socio/political conflict and division in the USA, people eager to hate others, starting with us), and focusing on what we can control—our lives and our communities."

"Reimagining Jewish and Israel education to create proud, confident and engaged Jewish leaders to take us into a thriving future."

"Telling our story about who we are historically and in the world. We are a people. A multi racial extended family with an open adoption policy rooted in the land of Israel and contributing disproportionately to the betterment of humanity through our communities worldwide."

"We can't be defined by victimhood and antisemitism."

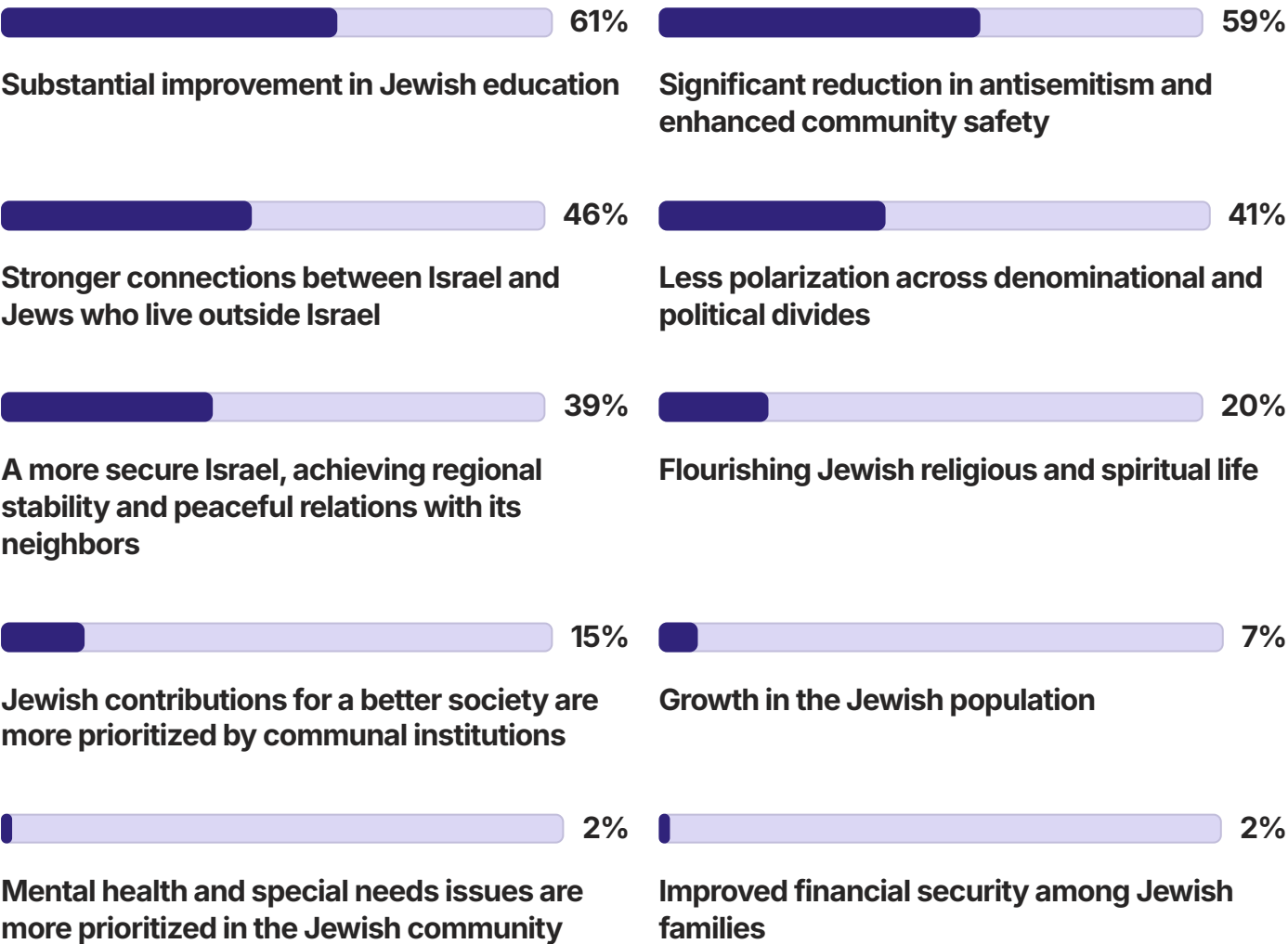
- Whether these leaders emphasize accountability, solidarity, or building communal capacity, they all agree that the Jewish community must develop its own capacity to thrive rather than relying on the American and Israeli governments.

Prioritizing Education, Security, and Israel-Diaspora Relations

When asked which areas most urgently need greater investment, the leaders responding to the survey prioritized education, security, and Israel-Diaspora relations.

Areas that dominated earlier eras of communal investment now fall toward the bottom of these leaders' stated priorities. Economic security drew 2%, a priority of an earlier era when federations focused on immigrant aid and welfare. Demographic growth drew 7% and tikkun olam programs 15%, priorities of the 1990s and first decades of the 21st century, an era shaped by concerns about Jews drifting away from Jewish life, intermarrying, and losing connection.

From your perspective, which of the following areas most urgently, in 2025, need greater investment or attention for American Jewry today? Select up to three.



Peoplehood Education as the Path Forward

The senior Jewish leaders' three orientations share the stated goal of investing in education as a top priority.

- ❏ **What should be taught?** Leaders who emphasize accountability want room for honest criticism, while those who emphasize solidarity want to deepen connection.

ENTER: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance proposes peoplehood education as a way forward.

Peoplehood education encourages acquiring knowledge about Israel, while engaging in active discussion about Israel's history, society, politics, the relationship of Jews living outside of Israel to the country and more. The goal is to enable shared knowledge, a commitment to Israel as a shared project of the Jewish People, while each person develops their personal opinions.

Engaging Israel through peoplehood

Many Jews hold critical or conflicted views about Israel while remaining committed to the good of the Jewish People.

The need for Jewish knowledge

Jews cannot identify deeply with a people they know little about. Jews who know their history, their texts, and Jewish life today have something real to connect to.

Pluralism is principled, and has boundaries

Pluralism cannot be unlimited without losing coherence. Jews hold a wide range of views.

- **Inclusion:** A community that treats that diversity as a strength welcomes people who hold these different views and gets to know what each person actually believes.
- **Boundaries:** Each community also decides on its limits, by asking whether a person stays committed to the Jewish People and its future according to the community's values.

- ❏ **Develop a Peoplehood Education Vision.** ENTER: The Jewish Peoplehood Alliance supports Jewish communal leaders seeking to nurture commitment to Israel and the Jewish People, while enabling each Jew to formulate their opinion from a place of shared Jewish knowledge and recognition of the need for both inclusion and boundaries.

The leaders responding to the survey are working to make sense of a changing environment and to develop educational frameworks and policies for the good of their Jewish communities, drawing on areivut haddadit, the mutual responsibility Jews hold for one another.

The Pulse survey is meant to feed that discussion, and ENTER welcomes the institutions and leaders who want to advance it.