



Pro-Israel Money in Politics

A Nexus Issue Brief for Policymakers

This campaign season has many wrestling with how to talk about several tough issues without evoking antisemitic tropes. This series of issue briefs from the Nexus Project is designed to help ensure that complex issues can be debated thoroughly and clearly, while maintaining important sensitivity.

As voters demand greater transparency about who funds their elections, “pro-Israel” spending has become one of the most visible examples of outside money in primaries, and candidates across the ideological spectrum are being asked whether they accept those dollars. Done well, that conversation makes a credible case for campaign finance reform, accountability, and sound U.S. policy in the Middle East. Done poorly, it traffics in centuries-old antisemitic tropes about Jewish money, control, and dual loyalty — alienating and endangering Jewish voters, undermining the policy argument, and giving bad-faith actors a reason to dismiss legitimate criticism as bigotry.

CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Free Speech and Association Is for All in a Democracy

All groups with a shared identity or set of interests have a right to advance their aspirations — a right at the heart of American democracy. All individuals, including Jewish Americans and pro-Israel Americans, are entitled to organize around shared identities, values, or interests and advocate collectively in the political process. Through this principle, identity-based communities — like labor unions, religious groups, or civil rights organizations — can organize, lobby, and participate in elections, including by making or supporting campaign contributions through lawful structures such as PACs.

2. Critique Conduct, Not the Community

Credible criticism of any organization should focus on its policies, actions, and tactics — those are fair game. But singling out pro-Israel spending as uniquely corrupting collapses a broader Citizens United-era problem that cuts across sectors, from pro-Israel and pharma to crypto and tech. Keep the critique grounded in conduct, not identity, and don’t refer to specific groups as anti-American foreign agents — that is a form of dual-loyalty antisemitism.

If you’re citing a dollar figure, say where it originates and which organizations are included. The source of record is the FEC, usually accessed through OpenSecrets, which breaks figures out by PAC. Aggregator totals from Track AIPAC or USCPR Action lump together Jewish groups across the political spectrum. A blended “pro-Israel lobby” number isn’t a coherent thing; presenting it as one obscures what pro-Israel spending actually looks like and feeds antisemitic tropes.

3. Call Out Incidents of Antisemitism

It is no secret that many social media posts and replies to pro-Israel candidates, particularly Jewish ones, are filled with grotesque antisemitic imagery. Click on any Track AIPAC tweet, and you'll see it followed by torrents of hooked-nose caricatures, Nazi imagery, "puppet master" framing, and other well-trodden antisemitic rhetoric. It's important to condemn these, even when they are levied at a candidate or organization you oppose.

FRAME THE ISSUE CONSTRUCTIVELY

1. Words Matter: Steer Clear of Terms Like "The Lobby"

Age-old and contemporary conspiracy theories alleging that Jews exercise nefarious control over public life are potent, dangerous, and bigoted. As with any form of prejudice, terms can be evocative, even harmful, and should be chosen with care. "The lobby," "the Israel lobby," "the pro-Israel lobby," "Jewish donors," "Israel-firsters" — these are vague, they can imply a unified Jewish power bloc, and they can flatten an entire community's diverse positions. They also feed into age-old antisemitic tropes about Jewish power and control. Further, the organizations often lumped together hold opposing positions on nearly every contested U.S.-Israel policy question. When criticizing specific policies promoted by lobbying or fundraising efforts, name the specific PAC, super PAC, or donor network.

Name the organization. Don't say: "*The Jewish lobby*" • "*Jewish money*."

2. Start with the Right Facts: Don't Rely on Aggregated "Pro-Israel Lobby" Totals

Projects like Track AIPAC report dollar figures that aggregate contributions from opposing Jewish-associated organizations into a single "pro-Israel lobby" number. Their own methodology confirms that multiple groups, such as J Street, are included in the same total as AIPAC, despite holding vastly different policy positions. They also fold in donations from individuals who have previously given as little as \$200 to Israel-related causes. Using these figures collapses a diverse, largely Jewish political landscape into a single bloc, misrepresents donor politics, and tags your campaign with the reply-thread discourse that follows.

Do not amplify or share such misinformation. Disaggregate the number, or don't cite it. And don't reshare articles or commentary that may cross the line into bigotry or stereotypes.

A NOTE ON TRACK AIPAC AND AGGREGATOR PROJECTS

Track AIPAC's methodology aggregates AIPAC with a variety of left-leaning Jewish organizations, such as J Street — which opposes AIPAC on Gaza and more — into a single "pro-Israel lobby" total. A candidate "red-carded" for that money may have received nothing from AIPAC and may not support AIPAC's policies.

The discourse the project generates is deeply problematic. Reply threads under Track AIPAC posts are consistently among the most openly antisemitic spaces in current political social media — Nazi-era caricatures, explicit slurs, the full visual vocabulary of 20th-century anti-Jewish propaganda. Amplifying or quote-tweeting these posts associates your campaign with that environment. This topic is pervasive enough in modern political discourse that you do not need their messages, graphics, or engagement to make your point.

Regardless of intention, Track AIPAC’s “pro-Israel lobby” framing is currently the primary vector pushing legitimate AIPAC criticism into trope-laden territory. To criticize any individual organization well:

- Cite the FEC or OpenSecrets, which break contribution figures out by PAC.
- Name each organization and its specific contribution.
- Skip the “red card” graphics — the reply threads come with them.
- When confronted with a Track AIPAC number, disaggregate it on the record.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

If You’re Rejecting Money

Be specific about what you’re rejecting (name the PAC) and explain the policy reason. If you are talking about their use of dark money, pair the decision with support for broader campaign finance reform — that keeps the frame about democracy, not about any one community.

If You’re Being Attacked

Super PACs commonly mount attacks based on unrelated issues. That is a deliberate strategy; while common for independent expenditures, it is also fair game to critique as a principle. Your response needs to do two things at once:

- **Name the spending and the real reason for it.** For example: *“UDP has spent \$X against me. They’re running ads about crime, but the reason they’re in this race is my cosponsorship of Block the Bombs.”*
- **Call out the disingenuous framing.** For example: *“They’re running crime ads because they can’t win a public argument about why American taxpayers should fund offensive weapons being used in Gaza.”*
- **Do not engage in antisemitic tropes.** Critique the spending, the strategy, and the policy — never the identity, loyalty, or motives of Jewish donors or Jewish voters. Phrases that invoke shadowy money, dual loyalty, or outsized Jewish influence are off-limits, even when you’re the one being attacked.

Strong sample language

“UDP is spending millions to defeat me with ads that have nothing to do with their core issue. That’s a choice. They’re running those ads because they can’t make their actual case to my constituents — which is that I voted to condition offensive military aid to Israel on compliance with international law. I stand by that vote, and voters should know the ad is a distraction from it.”

Don’t Treat “Zionist” or “Pro-Israel” as Donor Categories

The demand to “refuse Zionist money” or “pro-Israel money” has become common in progressive organizing, and it may reach your campaign. The underlying concern — that wealthy donors disproportionately influence U.S. policy on Israel — is legitimate. The frame is not. Treating “Zionist” as a disqualifying donor category is the same aggregation error as treating “pro-Israel lobby” as a single bloc: it collapses opposing politics, functions in practice as identity-based

exclusion, and replaces specific policy disagreement with a litmus test that would preclude accepting money from a very wide swath of the American Jewish community.

"I don't evaluate donors by their personal views on Zionism — including the ones I disagree with. I evaluate them by what their money is actually doing in our politics. I'm not accepting contributions from AIPAC's PAC or UDP because of the positions they've taken on Gaza and the tactics they've used in Democratic primaries. I apply the same standard to any donor — pro-Israel or otherwise — based on what they're funding, not who they are."

If You're Handed a Track AIPAC "Red Card"

Don't defer to the figure — correct it. The card cites an aggregated "pro-Israel lobby" total that almost certainly includes other liberal Jewish donors. Disaggregate on the record: *"I received \$X from AIPAC. The remainder comes from donors whose politics are close to mine. Bundling those together misleads voters."*

APPENDIX: TROPES TO AVOID — AND WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD

Trope	Why It's a Problem	Say This Instead
"Jewish money in politics"	Centuries-old stereotype of Jews acting as a unified force and using wealth to manipulate governments.	<i>"[Name] super PAC spending"; "political contributions."</i>
"The lobby" / "the pro-Israel lobby" as a singular entity	Collapses multiple organizations with opposing politics into one bloc — the definition of the conspiracy trope. A spreadsheet behind the aggregation doesn't change that.	<i>Name the PAC.</i>
"Dual loyalty" / "Israel-firsters"	Falsely accuses Jewish Americans of being more loyal to a foreign country than to the U.S.	<i>"[Group]'s positions align closely with the current Israeli government's."</i>
"Puppet masters" / "pulling the strings" / "hidden hand"	Classic antisemitic imagery, explicit in Nazi propaganda. Common in reply threads beneath aggregator posts. Never share, quote, or engage.	<i>"[Group] has significant political influence through traceable, public contributions."</i>
"Blood money" / "bloody hands"	Echoes blood libel — the ancient trope accusing Jews of the murder of children.	<i>"I won't accept support from a PAC backing the prosecution of this war in Gaza."</i>
"Foreign agent" framing applied to AIPAC	AIPAC is an American 501(c)(4). Calling it a foreign agent is the dual-loyalty trope applied to an organization.	<i>"PAC X's political positions align with the Israeli government's; that's the substantive critique."</i>
Nazi imagery, hooked-nose caricatures, Stars of David on money	Literal Nazi propaganda iconography. Appears routinely in reply threads under aggregator posts. Never share, quote, or engage.	<i>Use data visualizations, FEC filings, photos of politicians at events.</i>

QUICK-REFERENCE TALKING POINTS

On rejecting AIPAC funds

"I'm not accepting AIPAC money because I disagree with the organization's policy positions — not because of who donates to it. I apply the same standard to any outside PAC whose positions I disagree with."

On the broader pattern

"Pro-Israel super PAC spending is part of the same dark-money problem we see across American politics. The solution isn't singling out one sector. It's the DISCLOSE Act, overturning Citizens United, and campaign finance reform."

On criticism vs. antisemitism

"Criticizing the Israeli government or the policy of pro-Israel organizations is not antisemitism. Using tropes about Jewish money, Jewish control, or dual loyalty is. Part of good citizenship is steering clear of stereotypes and language that can harm an entire identity group. I hold myself to that distinction."

On Track AIPAC and aggregator totals

"Track AIPAC aggregates AIPAC and J Street — organizations with opposite positions on many critical issues — as well as any donor who has given to pro-Israel or Jewish causes, into a single "pro-Israel lobby" total. That aggregation is how a legitimate transparency conversation slides into a trope. I cite the FEC directly and name the PAC. When reporters ask about a Track AIPAC number, my first question is: which organizations are in that total, and what is the AIPAC-specific figure?"

About The Nexus Project

The Nexus Project is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to combating antisemitism while protecting democratic values and free expression. We do not take positions on, or support, political parties or political entities. If there are additional topics you would like to see the Nexus Project tackle in this series, please contact Kevin Rachlin, Vice President of Government Relations & Washington Director, at kevin@nexusproject.us.