Israel Affairs

ISSN: 1353-7121 (Print) 1743-9086 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fisa20

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To cite this article: Isabell Schierenbeck, Lisbeth Aggestam & Arne F. Wackenhut (20 Jan 2026): Identity, homeland and transformative events: diaspora mobilisation among Jews and Israelis in Sweden, Israel Affairs, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2025.2512412

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2025.2512412

Published online: 20 Jan 2026.

ISRAEL AFFAIRS
https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2025.2512412

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Identity, homeland and transformative events: diaspora mobilisation among Jews and Israelis in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

This article problematises four interlinked concepts: diaspora identity, diaspora mobilisation, the idea of a "homeland", and the role of transformative events. We explore how diasporas identify with and respond to significant events in their homeland, assessing whether specific identities align with particular strategies of mobilisation. The study contributes novel data on two underexplored groups – Swedish Jews and Israelis residing in Sweden – and how each group responded to the judicial reforms and, more forcefully, to Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The study builds on written material (news articles, op-eds) and in-depth interviews with diaspora group members, diplomats, and politicians.

KEYWORDS Diaspora; identity; mobilisation; Swedish Jews; Israelis

Introduction

This article investigates how diaspora communities engage with and respond to transformative events in their homeland, focusing on identity formation and mobilisation strategies. The article addresses two key questions: *How do diasporas identify with – and in some cases, (re)imagine – the homeland during transformative events? Are specific diasporic identities linked to certain mobilisation strategies?*

The aim is to study how Swedish Jews and Israelis in Sweden perceive and (re)negotiate their connection to Israel during transformative events. Focusing on these two groups offers an interesting analytical perspective for examining how diasporas navigate layers of national identity, kinship, and belonging. The concept of "Swedish-Jewish diaspora" is complex. First, Sweden has a long Jewish presence, and the Jewish population is recognised as a "national minority" with a special status that is codified in law. Second,

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many Swedish Jews do not share the same ties – emotional, familiar, or otherwise – to Israel that might exist among other more recent diaspora communities in Sweden with much closer ties to their ancestral homelands, such as Kurds, Turks, or Israelis for that matter. While Jewish culture and identity in Sweden have received scholarly attention, there is a notable research gap concerning Swedish Jews' relationship to Israel, as well as the Israeli diaspora's experiences in Sweden. By investigating both groups, this article sheds new light on how "homeland" perceptions shape identity and mobilisation across communities variably connected to Israel.

Drawing on scholarship on diaspora politics and transformative events,[1] we conceptualise such events as critical junctures that can reshape the diaspora-homeland relationship at both the international, state institutional and societal levels. Transformative events can spark heightened political engagement, prompting diaspora members to consider, reassess, or strengthen their ties to the homeland. In this study, we focus on two such events in Israel: (1) the judicial reforms initiated by the Israeli government under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in January 2023 (a domestic political issue), and (2) the 7 October 2023 attack by Hamas on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza (a foreign policy crisis with profound regional and global ramifications). This within-case comparison of two events enables us to assess how different types of transformative events (one primarily domestic, one encompassing foreign policy and security dimensions) interact with diaspora identities and mobilisation strategies.

Diaspora communities are increasingly active as civil society actors in many countries. These actors may seek to influence government policies that are significant to their community – both in their country of residence and their country of origin. We argue that diasporas represent a new type of transnational civil society actor capable of challenging traditional internal-external state boundaries. Moreover, we posit that diaspora identities often entail a distinct sense of kinship and belonging, with multiple national, binational, and global networks facilitating different mobilisation strategies. While existing literature extensively covers how transnational diasporic actors influence development, migration, and homeland politics,[2] comparatively less attention has been given to their mobilisation on issue of importance to them in the country of residence.

Our theoretical approach builds upon the extant scholarship on diaspora entrepreneurship and diaspora politics but with a more focused exploration of how different types of transformative events affect diaspora identities and subsequent mobilisation strategies.[3] We emphasise the intra – and inter-diasporic dynamics and focus on the diaspora identity and the potential (re) mobilisation of the identity. We are thus interested in understanding the role of a transformative event in this process and more precisely, how a certain

understanding and link to the homeland impact the choice of mobilisation strategies.

The study contributes new empirical data on two underexplored groups – Swedish Jews and Israelis residing in Sweden – and their responses to the judicial reforms and, more prominently, to the 7 October 2023 attack and the ensuing war in Gaza. While there is a general scarcity of scholarship addressing Swedish Jews from this perspective, research on the Israeli diaspora in Sweden is virtually nonexistent. To our knowledge, this study is among the first to examine how these two events in Israel have mobilised both the Jewish and Israeli diaspora groups more broadly. By moving beyond the traditional focus on homeland-oriented politics, our analysis reveals how diaspora communities negotiate identity and mobilisation within the country of residence. The findings reveal a range of identity expressions among the respondents, as well as shifts in these identities following the events in Israel – particularly after the 7 October attack. Furthermore, the study uncovers evolving intra-diasporic dynamics and underscores the transnational nature of belonging, including how Israel is understood as the "homeland". These findings contribute to the broader scholarship on diaspora identity formation and political engagement, illustrating the complex interplay between domestic and international politics within a transnational context.

Conceptualising diasporas

The Jewish diaspora was, traditionally, considered to be the oldest diaspora.[4] However, as Rogers Brubaker noted almost two decades ago,[5] there has been a "diaspora explosion" – outlining a large-scale proliferation of the term not only in academic research but also migrants' lived experiences, government policies, practices and institutions.[6] While "diaspora" as an analytical concept is contested, most definitions tend to include at least three key characteristics: (i) a history of migration and dispersion, (ii) a continued homeland orientation, and (iii) the maintenance of a distinct cultural identity in relation to other groups.[7] Accordingly, we conceive of diasporas, on a foundational level, as transnational communities with a shared origin who reside permanently outside of but maintain attachments to their ethnic or religious ancestral homeland through various transnational linkages, which may include sending remittances, investing in, or remaining engaged in the politics of their homeland.[8,9]

How then should we understand the characteristics outlined above when applied to Swedish Jews and Israelis in Sweden? Experiences of migration and dispersion differs significantly between the two groups. The Jewish presence in Sweden dates back to the 18th century, with successive waves of Jewish migration primarily from Europe. These include migration from

Central Europe (18th century), Eastern Europe (end of 19th century), during the Second World War, and from communist regimes – particularly Poland – in the 1950s.[10] In contrast, the Israeli community in Sweden is much more recent with most individuals arriving during the past few decades. Thus, the notion of a "continued homeland orientation", or the role of Israel in their lives, is bound to be distinctly different between the two groups.

For Israelis in Sweden, the relationship to Israel tends to be more immediate and tangible. The Hebrew language, along with frequent, if not daily, contact with friends and family in Israel stand in contrast to many Swedish Jews, whose relationship with Israel tends to be more distanced and varied. A recent survey on the impact of 7 October and the consequences for Swedish Jews and their relationship with Israel shows that a majority of Swedish Jews are ambivalent. They express sympathies for both Israelis and Palestinians, support a two-state solution, and voice concern over perceived anti-democratic developments in Israel. A smaller group of Swedish Jews share a deep identification with Israel, and express unconditional support for the Jewish state. Conversely, a small group adopts a highly critical stance towards Israel, distance themselves from Israel and show solidarity with the Palestinians and the people of Gaza. These variations underscore the diverse understandings of "homeland orientation" among Swedish Jews.[11]

In his work, Ilan Zvi Baron explores the significance of Israel for diaspora Jews, and concludes that it is best understood as part of a "Jewish identity tool-box".[12,13] He argues that " ... Israel, ideationally, emotionally, politically, and so on, matter of the ways (or senses) though which Jewish identity is constructed, understood, and experienced, but they do so heterogeneously."[14] This aligns with Mirjam Katzin and Pontus Rudberg's findings, which highlight that "there exist a range of differing narratives, emotional responses and political perceptions".[15,16] Baron suggests that this relationship can be understood as a form of political obligation, transnational in character that is activated through the politics of belonging.[17]

However, it is important to acknowledge that the question of "being" or "belonging to" a diaspora is neither self-evident nor fixed in either time or space. We consider diasporas as a socially and discursively produced, reproduced and mobilised identity.[18] This entails that "diasporas are created through discourses about transnational belonging to a political community'[19] – that is, the idea of a population residing physically outside of the country of origin yet being considered as "inside the nation".[20] Numerous origin countries like China, Rwanda or Turkey devote significant economic and political resources to engage with what they consider their respective diaspora populations – seeking

to maintain if not actively nurture a diasporic identity amongst emigrants and their descendants.[21] However, in light of the fluidity and negotiated nature of (diasporic) identity, one also needs to consider community members' self-identification as belonging – or not belonging – to a particular diaspora.

Diasporic identities often persist across generations but tend to exist alongside with or in parallel to host-country-related identities; a phenomenon commonly described in terms of either "in-betweenness"[22] or "multi-sited embeddedness".[23] Even though levels of transnational engagement may decline somewhat in the post-migration generation(s), significant events, such as popular uprisings, often reverberate through diaspora communities, as evidenced by the "Arab Spring" or the 2022–2023 Jina (Mahsa) Amini protests in Iran.[24] Such homeland-related events may have a notable effect on affected communities and result in a foregrounding if not rediscovery of diasporic identities.[25]

Research on Sweden's Jewish population has a long track record and has largely focused on Jewish culture and identity, the historical presence, and trajectory, of Jews in Sweden from the 17th century, including Swedish policies towards Jews and Jewish refugees during the Second World War, minority rights with a focus on the preservation of language (Yiddish), and more prominently, anti-Semitism in Sweden and the impact on the Jewish population.[26] There is little research, if any, on the Jewish population and their relationship to Israel, and none on the Israeli diaspora in Sweden; how they negotiate identity, mobilisation within the country of residence, and intra-diasporic dynamics. One exception is the recent report referred to above, *Antisemitism in Sweden after 7 October*, and, particularly, the chapter on consequences of 7 October for Swedish Jews.[27,28]

Diaspora mobilisation and activism

It is not uncommon for diaspora communities to remain engaged in the economic, social or political development of their respective countries of origin. Considering that certain homeland-related conflicts, such as the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, can extend well into diaspora communities, a phenomenon referred to as "transported conflicts",[29] it should come as little surprise that diaspora groups' homeland-related political engagement transcends well beyond the aforementioned channels and may well materialise in and focus on the host country context – seeking to effect desired outcomes more indirectly. This could include a whole host of different strategies and practices such as lobbying policy-makers, funding campaigns, or advocating for issues to influence policy in both host and home countries – approaches commonly used by all kinds of civil society actors.[30] Much of this

research has been centred on the United States, where prior research has, for instance, focused on the "Israel lobby" and its foreign policy impact.

However, a growing research interest from a European perspective can be noted as a result of an increasingly diversified population with multiple kinships and belongings.[31] Maria Koinova's prominent work on socio-spatial positionality and "diaspora entrepreneurs" in the case of the Albanian, Armenian, and Palestinian diasporas in several European contexts, including Sweden, is an important contribution.[32] The comparative design (Swedish Jews and Israelis) in this article contributes to this research and allows for an in-depth investigation of diasporic identities and mobilisation strategies.

The scope, forms, and efficacy of diasporic actors' homeland-oriented mobilisation is conditioned by a set of structural as well as agential factors.[33] Here, national and transnational opportunity structures set certain boundaries within which diaspora groups operate – making some strategies more or less feasible.[34] Certain agential factors, such as a group's organisational capacity, internal cohesion, the presence of competing diaspora groups, or their status as a majority or minority group in the country of origin may further advantage or disadvantage certain forms of (contentious) claim-making.[35] Understanding the dynamics of diaspora mobilisation therefore necessitates a careful consideration of not only state-diaspora relations but also intra – and inter-diasporic dynamics. Mobilisation initiatives may originate from multiple actors across various spheres, including domestic, regional, and/or global arenas. Thus, it is important to not only include agential factors but to examine their interplay with political opportunity structures when investigating diasporic agency and mobilisation.[36]

In relatively permissible opportunity structures, well-resourced and well-connected diaspora groups may adopt strategies of "inside lobbying" to make their voices heard – e.g. through activities that directly seek "to influence political outcomes through direct interactions with policy-makers'.[37] Through such inside lobbying, actors are able to gain direct access to policy makers and may be able to build long-lasting relationships with relevant state-level decision makers and officials. However, this form of lobbying does not generate much public exposure and is generally less visible to supportive members.[38] Less well-resourced groups with lower organisational capacities – for instance, in terms of staff, expertise or legitimacy – may lack such direct access and therefore resort to "outside lobbying" that more indirectly seeks to influence policy-makers through the mobilisation of public opinion.[39] Such outside lobbying could include classic forms of street activism, like demonstrations, protest marches or signature collection campaigns, but also various forms of online activism on, for instance, social media. However, here it is important to bear in mind that diasporas groups, just like any other civil society actor, often tend to pursue a multi-pronged approach that combines both direct interactions with policy-makers (i.e. inside lobbying) with other

and more conventional forms of mobilisation to influence public opinion and build up additional pressure (i.e. outside lobbying).[40]

Method and research design

The study employs a within-case comparative design, focusing on two communities – Swedish Jews and Israelis in Sweden, and their responses to two transformative events: (1) the judicial reforms initiated by the Israeli government in 2023, and (2) the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, followed by the subsequent war in Gaza. Below we elaborate on the case selection and the research design rationale, followed by an overview of the data collection and analysis.

Case selection and context

The Swedish Jews and the more recent Israeli diaspora in Sweden have distinct historical trajectories, diasporic experiences, and attachments to both Sweden and Israel as previously pointed out. Importantly, since 2000, Swedish Jews have held the status as a "national minority", under the Swedish National Minorities and Minority Languages Act (2009).[41]

The Jewish population in Sweden is today estimated to about 15,000–20,000 persons, with around 7,000 affiliated with a Jewish congregation.[42,43] The four largest Jewish congregations are located in Stockholm (4,500 members), Gothenburg (1,000), Malmö (500), and Helsingborg (100), with the Jewish congregation in Stockholm being at the centre of Jewish life in Sweden. The congregations span over the three main branches of Judaism: Reform/Progressive, Conservative, and Orthodox.[44] In contrast, the Israeli community in Sweden is more recent and considerably smaller, numbering about 1,000 individuals, most of whom reside in the Stockholm and Gothenburg metropolitan areas.[45] They have often immigrated because of marriage, education, and do not tend to be members of the Jewish congregations in Sweden, a point we will return to.

The Official Council of Swedish-Jewish Communities (*Judiska Centralrådet*, JC) acts as the official representative of the Jewish community. Other relevant organisations are the European Jewish Congress (EJC) and the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the latter of which has a representative in Stockholm. In contrast to larger and more frequently studied Jewish and Israeli diaspora communities in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany, the Swedish context remains underexplored and thus merits detailed examination.

The two transformative events were selected for their relevance to diasporic engagement and their connection to core Swedish foreign policy principles and Sweden's long-standing engagement in the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict.[46] The first event concerns the judicial reform proposals introduced by the Israeli government on 4 January 2023. These proposals were widely criticised as undermining Israel as liberal democracy and sparked a broad protest movement both domestically and among the Jewish diaspora in Europe, the US and beyond.[47] The second event is the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza, which has turned into a highly contested issue globally. This event also contributed to a surge in anti-Semitism affecting Jewish and Israeli diasporas in Sweden, and beyond.[48] To conclude, while the judicial reforms can represent an internal political struggle over Israel's democratic system and what kind of state Israel should be, the Hamas attack is perceived as an existential threat to the Israeli state itself. Both events, however, have generated significant concern and mobilisation within the Jewish and Israeli diasporas, albeit in different ways and at different scales.

Data collection and analysis

Our study is based on 25 semi-structured interviews: 15 with members of the Swedish-Jewish and Israeli communities in Sweden, and 10 with diplomats and politicians from across the political spectrum. The inclusion of policy-makers aimed to gain insight into how diaspora mobilisation strategies are perceived and interpreted by institutional actors. The Swedish-Jewish respondents – an equal mix of men and women across generations – were purposively selected for their leading positions within the Jewish communities and/or for being prominent opinion-makers. Israeli respondents, predominantly male and also spanning generations, were selected following the snow-balling principle, due to the community's lack of formal organisation. Most had either immigrated for marriage and stayed long-term, or arrived more recently (within five years) for work, particularly in the high-tech sector. The interviews were conducted in Swedish or English at locations chosen by the respondents.

Additional data sources included opinion pieces from major Swedish newspapers and social media platforms, and participatory observations. Interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face in Sweden between January 2024-March 2025, transcribed by a research assistant, and analysed using combination of inductive and deductive coding. While the analysis was guided by theoretical concepts such as identity and mobilisation, the inductive approach allowed for empirical grounding and refinement of these categories during the research process. All interviews were anonymised to protect participants' identities. The project was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.

Diasporas as actors – identities and mobilisation strategies

Our analysis is structured around three distinct, yet partly over-lapping, analytical themes: diasporic identities; issues and claims; and, finally, actors, networks and strategies.

Diasporic identities

A key question we raise in the study is how the respondents view themselves as diasporic actors and how they handle the majority versus minority status that is part of the diaspora existence. Four types of diasporic identities were identified in the material: (a) Swedish-Jewish, (b) Israeli (Swedish-Jewish), (c) historic diaspora, and a (d) fluid "cosmopolitan" identity. While the two first categories strongly emerge from the data, the two last identities are less distinct, but still observed from the material.

Many respondents emphasise a Swedish-Jewish identity, highlighting the long-standing presence of a Jewish community in Sweden. Although connections to Israel are mentioned, the primary identity remains Swedish-Jewish. As one respondent notes: "Of course, most Jews have a very strong connection to Israel. However, most of us are not from there, maybe a thousand years ago, but not today" (Respondent #1). This identity is deeply rooted in the historical experience of being a minority and constitutes an integral part of the Swedish-Jewish identity. As another respondent explains: "We have thousands of years of experience living as a minority. We have a minority identity" (Respondent #2).

For the Israeli diaspora, the Swedish identity plays a secondary role, instead the focus is on an Israeli versus Jewish identity. One respondent belonging to this group states: "The first years I didn't want to have anything to do with them [the Jewish congregation]. I'm not religious" (Respondent #3). Hebrew is the unifying language for the Israeli diaspora, while Yiddish as a minority language holds a special status for some Swedish Jews. During the interviews, Swedish-Jewish representatives reflect on these differences underscoring the fact that members of the Israeli diaspora also tend to be "very secular" and "not everyone understands the concept of a Jewish congregation or why one should be part of a Jewish congregation" (Respondent #1, also #4; #5; #16; #24). More importantly, Swedish-Jewish respondents stress the status as a national minority as something that is very distant for the Israeli diaspora, as stipulated by one of the representatives: "We pursue a minority policy. We try to strengthen Jewish life. They [Israelis] find it very difficult to understand what it is like to be a minority" (Respondent #1). Thus, the minority versus majority experience is a clear distinction between the Swedish Jews and the Israeli diaspora, and, as we show later in the article, impacts the issues and strategies the two communities pursue.

Some of the Swedish-Jewish respondents highlight their deep roots in the diaspora, predating the establishment of Israel. Some respondents argue that life in the diaspora is in fact the "normal" life for Jews; where Jewish culture, religion and history evolved, while living is the exception (Respondent #9; #18). Interestingly though, a newer and more fluid transnational identity has emerged among Israelis who recently settled outside Israel. These individuals maintain a cosmopolitan identity without significant engagement with their new country of residence or the old Jewish diaspora. Instead, they see themselves primarily as Israelis with an international, transnational, identity (Respondent #3; #4; #18; #23, #24, #25).

Importantly, 7 October marked a significant turning point in Jewish identity. While the judicial reform protests did not bring the two groups closer to each other, the Hamas attack on Israel to some extent did. The event fostered increased contact and joint manifestations across the different groups (Respondents #1; #2; #3; #4; #5; #8; #15; #16). The respondents refer to it as a critical juncture within the Jewish diaspora in Sweden, but also regarding perceptions of Israel as the ancestral homeland. One respondent reflects: "I do think it has shaken the Jewish group to realize that we might not be safe anywhere. It has brought us together: that both groups feel we need each other" (Respondent #8).

We can conclude that the respondents exhibit a diverse set of diasporic identities. While Swedish Jews show a firm connection to Sweden, the Israeli diaspora has stronger ties to Israel. Additionally, there are those who identify strongly with the historical connotations of the Jew as the "first diaspora", or a modern "cosmopolitan" diaspora. Each of these two identities are strongly linked to transnational experiences, yet in different ways.

Issues and claims

Analysing the influence of the Swedish Jews in Sweden reveals a focus on local Jewish life and questions of anti-Semitism rather than engagement with Israeli politics, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One respondent highlighted: "I am not an Israeli embassy. The Israeli Embassy deals with issues related to Israel" (Respondent #8). Their primary concern is preserving Jewish identity and religious practice in Sweden, unless anti-Semitism arises from criticism of Israel (Respondent #1; #2; #5).

> The Jewish congregation in Sweden has had a position for quite some time, like many other congregations in other countries, that we do not interfere in Israeli domestic politics. The distinction we have made in Sweden is that we interfere and make statements when criticism of Israel turns into anti-Semitism. In other words, when Israel's right to exist is questioned (Respondent #1).

This position of non-interference in Israeli politics is echoed in interviews with state officials and politicians (#6, #9). This stance of not taking a more active role in Israel-related matters can partly be explained by the diverse views on Israel within the Jewish community itself (Respondent #1; #2; #5; #8; #16). For instance, to the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October was mentioned during the November Pogrom commemoration – some congregations allowing for the first time the Israeli flag to be flown – causing rifts within the Jewish and Israeli communities (Respondent #4; #16). Similarly, tensions between community members emerged during the protests against the judicial reforms in Israel. The Jewish congregation in Gothenburg saw the current and previous chairs exchange oppositional views on the topic in the local Jewish community newsletter (Respondent #1; #2; #5; #18).

The risk that internal debate and criticism can be used for anti-Zionist purposes represents another reason for non-involvement (Respondent #2; #16). Some respondents believe that as a minority in Sweden, critique of the Israeli government should be left to Israeli citizens (Respondent #1; #2; #4; #16). As one respondent stated: "It is not really our business, as non-citizens of Israel, to have views on how to build the democratic institutions in Israel" (Respondent #5).

However, the Hamas attack and rising anti-Semitism have heightened Swedish Jews' awareness of their connection to Israel (Respondent #1; #3; #4; #8). Some respondents interpret this event as an attack on Jews generally: "Many people perceived it as an attack on Jews, not just Israelis. So, it was just as much an attack on us. It might just as well have been us" (Respondent #8). As a result, there has been a shift towards raising and advocating for issues directly related to Israel and the war in Gaza, such as the Israeli hostages in Gaza, UNWRA-funding, and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Some respondents suggest that this shift within the Jewish community has been evolving for a longer period, predating 7 October 2023, describing it as a trend of "an ongoing Israelization of Jewish life in Sweden" (#17). This is in accordance with the findings of Greene and Shain's (2016) study on the Israelization of British Jewry, showing that a rich Jewish life detached from Israel is almost impossible in today's UK. In addition, our study shows that Israelis engage more actively with issues like the judicial reform protests in Israel, influenced by their generally liberal, secular backgrounds and concerns about upholding what is considered universal values, such as democracy and the respect for minority rights within an Israeli context (Respondent #3; #4). However, despite their concerns about Israeli politics, for instance, about the right-wing government in office, the Swedish-Jewish diaspora typically refrains from public criticism due to their minority status (Respondent #1; #2; #9; #18).

However, critical views of Israel are expressed by certain opinion-makers within the diaspora. For instance, a former congregation chair stressed the importance of acknowledging the link between Israel and the Jewish diaspora, particularly with the war in Gaza that had a tremendous impact on the Jewish diaspora with a steep rise in anti-Semitism.

> We are deeply concerned about our common future in Sweden, because we currently see a fertile breeding ground for prejudices, conspiracy theories, and violent extremism targeting Jews, especially in environments where there is a risk that Jews in general are conflated with the dark forces in Israel that pursue apartheid policies and are largely responsible for what is happening now.[49]

In summary, the findings point to different claims and issues being of importance to the Swedish Jews and the Israeli diaspora. While issues related to Jewish life in Sweden are the primary focus for Swedish Jews, the interview material indicates a growing involvement in issues related to Israeli politics, in particular, the war between Israel and Hamas.

Actors, networks and strategies

Swedish Jews use different channels, strategies and tactics when trying to address issues of importance to them. The long history as a minority in Sweden, often persecuted or discriminated, constantly forced them to navigate this status and instilled the importance of building long-lasting alliances with representatives from the majority culture over time. One respondent reflects on this historical perspective:

> It has been a long Jewish tradition since we are a minority, we are a small group in the society, and the only way to survive, or to have influence, is to build alliances with others, and to accept a subordinated position (Respondent #9).

The interview material shows that they use institutionalised democratic channels within the political system to raise concerns (inside lobbying), as confirmed unanimously by representatives from the group, politicians, and civil servants in Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As one diplomat notes:

> Their impact on Swedish foreign policy, from my perspective, is mainly through the proper diplomatic or democratic channels. They target the parties and then there is an indirect impact on us. (Respondent #6).

The political representation of the Swedish-Jewish community in parliament is less evident compared to other diaspora groups, like the Assyrian, Iranian and Kurdish communities who have MPs actively engaged in questions related to their country of origin. One of the diplomats interviewed noted: "I don't know if there is anyone, who could be described as part of the Jewish diaspora in the parliament. I am not sure that the strongest pro-Israel

members of parliament are Jews" (Respondent #6). Instead, there are members across the various political parties who are repeatedly mentioned as strong supporters of the Swedish-Jewish community, and/or leaning towards pro-Israeli positions, mainly from the Liberals, the Christian Democrats, and the Swedish Democrats (Respondent #1; #4; #7; #8; #12; #13; #14; #15).

Transnational organisations, like European Jewish Congress (EJC) and World Jewish Congress (WJC), are an asset for the Jewish community due to their presence in Brussels. From their strategic location, they can bring the voice of the Swedish-Jewish community to relevant EU institutions, and other multilateral bodies. However, in doing that, the representatives of the transnational organisations repeatedly stress that it is very important to respect the needs and the expectations from the national communities (Respondent #8, #22, #23). In particular, the rotating Presidency of the European Council is of great importance and gives an opportunity for closer collaboration between the local Jewish communities and WJC (Respondent #23).

These "inside channels", which are an integral part of civil society activism, are frequently mentioned by Swedish-Jewish respondents due to their long-standing presence in Swedish society and politics. In contrast, "outside channels", such as street demonstrations are employed less often. This may partly be because of the Jewish experience of being a minority at risk and the increase in anti-Semitism, thus, avoiding external exposure. Nonetheless, outside channels are occasionally employed, for example, the "*Kippavandring*" (Kippah Walk) in Stockholm together with members of parliament and Jewish representatives, or a manifestation in the southern city of Malmö during the Eurovision initiated by one of the local Swedish-Jewish opinion makers (Respondent #1; #4; #8; #15). As a matter of fact, members of the Israeli diaspora and the Jewish youth movement (JUS) have deployed various "outside" mobilisation strategies, such as op-eds in leading Swedish newspapers (Stavrou 2024ab), pitching a tent for the Israeli hostages in the pro-Palestinian student camps in Gothenburg, or on the eve of the anniversary of the Hamas attack on Israel, when posters were put up in the major cities of Sweden drawing attention to the one-year of captivity of the hostages in Gaza. Another example of outreach activities is the invitation of the Israeli civil society organisation "Standing together" to Stockholm and Gothenburg in February 2024, and the hosting of a "Peace meeting", open to the public, jointly hosted by Friends of Standing together in Sweden (established by Swedish Jews and Israelis), and Bilda, the Christian study association for youth.

To influence public opinion in Sweden, writing op-eds, and engaging in other media, is expressed as important by the respondents (Respondent #1; #3; #7; #8; #14; #15; #17; #18). On some occasions, this is accomplished with the support of one of the transnational associations – for instance

when the issue at stake concerned critique of the Israeli government as was the case with the judicial reforms. In this context, one respondent remembers that:

> We could not act that much upon the legal reform because it was an internal political issue in Israel. They had voted and it was their government. In the end, the chairman [of WJC] wrote an article in which he expressed something like: ´Talk to each other and work this out!' (Respondent #8).[50]

In sum, the interviews show that the Swedish-Jewish representatives use proper institutionalised democratic channels within the political system to raise concerns. Interestingly, there is not much interaction between the Jewish diaspora and pro-Israel advocacy groups. Still, the groups employ similar tactics: They work within democratic channels, seek to identify relevant politicians to contact, and turn to the media when needed. In situations when certain issues are harder to address, they leverage transnational organisations to express discontent with either the country of origin or residence. However, also outside channels are deployed, but then to a greater extent by representatives of the Israeli diaspora and the Jewish youth movement.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that diaspora identities significantly shape the mobilisation strategies of Swedish Jews and Israelis in Sweden. Our analysis identified four distinct identity types within these communities, each influencing both their claims and mobilisation strategies. Historically, the identity as a national and long-standing minority has resulted in the Jewish community mainly addressing issues of importance to Jewish life in Sweden, rather than questions related to Israel as the "ancestral" country of origin. However, there are differences between and within the communities. While the Swedish Jews foremost identify with its minority status in Sweden and are less inclined to criticise the Israeli government, the Israeli diaspora – being more homogenous and oftentimes closely connected to Israel and the experience of being a majority – engages more actively in these debates. Conversely, those with stronger Israeli and cosmopolitical identities are more inclined to address issues related to domestic Israeli politics or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite the argument that they belong to the diaspora with no right to vote in Israeli elections.

The comparison between the two transformative events reveals that these boundary distinctions of identity are not fixed. While the data on the judicial reforms shows little engagement between the diaspora communities, the 7 October Hamas attack and the subsequent war in Gaza served as a transformative event – a critical juncture – that bridged the

gap between these different identities and altered previously established mobilisation patterns about what role the "homeland" ought to play in diasporic life. The rise in anti-Semitism in Sweden in parallel with the conflict has contributed to a reconfiguration of how Swedish Jews and Israelis in Sweden perceive their roles. Our study shows increased collaboration across identity lines, including joint manifestations, shared advocacy, and a growing use of transnational networks. This represents a shift from primarily national-level engagement to a multi-level and multi-scalar approach, especially among groups that previously operated in more siloed ways. The reason for seeking support and assistance from transnational organisations and networks outside of the Swedish context is the experience of being an exposed minority, something that has been heightened in the case of the war between Israel and Hamas. This allows external networks and alliances to play a potentially greater role in the shaping and formation of strategies and repertoires of diaspora politics aimed at influencing politicians and policymakers. The findings suggest that the situation in the shared country of origin (like the 7 October) and the country of residence (the increase in anti-Semitism) have had an impact not only on what issues diasporas focus on but also if, how and with whom the group seeks support and mobilise.

The analysis also points to the Swedish Jews' longstanding presence in Swedish society, alongside the permeability of the Swedish political system, which allows Swedish Jews to rely to a greater extent on the "inside channel". Thus, the Swedish-Jewish representatives as well as the advocacy groups works with, and inside, the institutionalised political system, to seek to influence policies. The Swedish Jews, as a small and less visible community, are in frequent contact with certain well-recognised politicians invested in the support for Jewish life in Sweden, and for instance with a strong track record of advocating for human rights and against anti-Semitism, or with an outspoken pro-Israeli agenda. However, our study further suggests that the Israeli diaspora and Jewish youth movement also are using new tactics, such as "outside channels", including joint manifestations and mobilisations, showing a relational realignment between the two groups despite the complexity and various contestations present within the two communities.

Importantly, these developments are not unique to the Jewish or Israeli diasporas. Similar dynamics are visible in other diaspora communities reacting to major significant events, such as the broader mobilisation in response to Sweden's decision to apply for full NATO membership and the Jina (Mahsa) Amini protests. Our study thus contributes to a broader understanding of how diasporic communities reconfigure identities, strategy, and alliances in response to external political contexts – particularly when events in the homeland intersect with experiences of vulnerability in the host country. It remains to be seen if the two events, the judicial reforms and, more prominently, the Hamas attack on

Israel on 7 October and the wars that followed, will have a long-term effect on when and how Swedish Jews and Israelis identify, interact, and mobilise in the future. Thus, future studies should focus on the diverse set of strategies, networks and alliances employed between and within diaspora groups, and how certain events (in the host or home country) might result in unforeseen and sudden shifts in diasporic identity and engagement.[51]

Notes

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50. He bought advertising space in the New York Times.
51. For instance, in an on-going comparative research project we argue for a systematic and focused comparison between the Assyrian, Jewish, Kurdish, and Palestinians diaspora in Germany and Sweden.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the funding from the Swedish Research Council (Grant number: 2021-01-011). We also want to thank Clara Knaepper Bohman for her valuable research assistance. We are grateful for comments we have received in seminars where this paper has been presented, including at the Annual International Studies Association Convention in San Francisco 2024, and the Swedish Middle

Estern and North Africa annual conference at Lund University in 2024. Finally, two anonymous reviewers provided invaluable comments to improve the final version of this text.

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CRediT: **Isabell Schierenbeck:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Lisbeth Aggestam:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Arne F. Wackenhut:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The author received financial support for the research, writing and publication of this article from the Swedish Reseach Council [Grant number 2021-01-011].

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Respondent #2, Representative Jewish diaspora, Stockholm, 19 January 2024.
Respondent #3, Representative Israeli diaspora, Stockholm, 24 January 2024.
Respondent #4, Representative Jewish diaspora, Göteborg, 29 January 2024.
Respondent #5, Representative Jewish/Israeli diaspora, Göteborg, 23 January 2024.
Respondent #6, Diplomat, Stockholm, 12 February 2024.

Respondent #7, Representative Israeli advocacy group, Stockholm, 12 February 2024.
Respondent #8, Representative Jewish diaspora, Stockholm, 21 February 2024.
Respondent #9, Representative Jewish diaspora, 29 February 2024.
Respondent #10, Politician, Stockholm, 29 January 2024.
Respondent #11, Diplomat, Stockholm, 29 February 2024.
Respondent #12, Politician, Göteborg, 11 March 2024.
Respondent #13, Politician, online, 13 March 2024.
Respondent #14, Politician, online, 13 March 2024.
Respondent #15, Representative Jewish diaspora, Malmö, 17 April 2024.
Respondent #16, Representative Jewish diaspora, Malmö, 18 April 2024.
Respondent #17, Representative Jewish diaspora, Malmö, 18 April 2024.
Respondent #18, Representative Jewish diaspora, Göteborg, 30 May 2024.
Respondent #19, Diplomat, online, 13 June 2024.
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Respondent #22, Representative Israeli diaspora, Göteborg, 11 March 2025.
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Respondent #24, Representative Israeli diaspora, Göteborg, 19 March 2025.
Respondent #25, Diplomat, Stockholm, 26 March 2025.