RIGHTWING ZIONIST MONEY & ITS INFLUENCE ON U.S. ELECTIONS

November 21st, 2022

Fiercely & unapologetically lobbying for Palestinian rights!

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ABOUT AJP ACTION

Americans for Justice in Palestine Action (AJP Action), an affiliate of American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), is a 501c4 nonprofit organization that lobbies Members of Congress and advocates for policies that support Palestinian human rights. We fiercely and unapologetically fight for Palestinian rights!

OUR WORK

Annual Palestine Advocacy Days

AJP Action annually organizes the Palestine Advocacy Days to educate students, community activists, and organizers on civic engagement and policy work exclusively on the challenges facing Palestine. The five-day event includes intensive advocacy training, public plenaries with Members of Congress and political experts, and concludes with lobbying meetings by advocates from across the country with their Representatives and Senators.

Advocacy Campaigns

AJP Action organizes action campaigns utilizing the latest available tools to lobby Congress on current issues in support of Palestinian rights.

Palestine Policy Memos

AJP Action issues congressional memos on a variety of issues related to Palestine, particularly on the policy front, to educate and inform Members of Congress on the best ways to advance policies that protect human rights.
Talking Points

AJP Action issues talking points for Members of Congress on specific legislation or emerging issues related to Palestinian rights, advising them on whether to support or oppose the bill or issue in question and how to make a compelling case for their position.

Congressional Endorsements

AJP Action endorses candidates for office whose positions toward Israel and the Palestinian people broadly align with our principles and our mission of ending Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people.

Palestine Congressional Scorecard

AJP Action issues the Palestine Congressional Scorecard which evaluates and grades Members of Congress in the House and the Senate on their record on Palestinian rights.

Lobbying

AJP Action regularly meets with government officials (i.e Congress, state and local elected officials, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of State, etc.). We work to oppose legislation and policies that further Israeli oppression and support legislation and policies that uphold and advance Palestinian rights. We also actively raise issues and concerns to government officials in order to keep them aware of Israel’s ongoing oppressive regime.

And much more...
Rightwing Zionist Money & its Influence on U.S. Elections

By:
Americans For Justice In Palestine Action
AJP Action

November 21st, 2022
“Those who criticized Israeli policy too loudly risked being tagged as ‘anti-Israel’ (and possibly antisemitic) and confronted with a well-funded opponent in the next election.”

- President Barack Obama

Executive Summary

The 2022 midterm elections were historic in many ways. The 2022 midterms saw the election of Maxwell Frost, the first “Generation Z” Member of Congress, Summer Lee, the first African-American woman elected to Congress in Pennsylvania, and Abdelnasser Rashid and Ruwa Romman, the first Palestinian-Americans to be elected to the Illinois and Georgia State House of Representatives. Races across the United States also saw the injection of millions of dollars from rightwing Zionist organizations into our electoral politics. Millions were spent to crush candidates deemed as ‘insufficiently pro-Israel’ and millions more were spent to punish candidates that intended to stand up for Palestinian rights. Although the right wing Zionist groups were able to defeat candidates in a few key races, they certainly did not win all battles. In fact, they failed to secure wins in key battles where they spent millions of dollars. In this paper, our research explores election spending by rightwing Zionist groups, the candidates most heavily funded by this money, and the impressive candidates who stood up to them and won.

Tip of The Iceberg

In 2022, rightwing Zionist organizations pumped tens of millions of dollars into elections across the United States to defeat Members of Congress and candidates who did not “fall in line.” The move marked a notable realization of power in American politics, and a shift to a strategy of public electioneering meant to drive support away from Palestinians and serve as a warning to other candidates that they may not object to Israel’s misconduct. In other words, if a candidate opposes Israeli apartheid and colonialism in any way, they will be challenged.

With this approach, AIPAC PAC Director Marilyn Resolenthal announced to supporters in an email last May that, as a result of their efforts, critics of Israel “faced insurmountable challenges to winning seats in Washington.” Collectively, through PACs and Super PACs, largely formed in just the past two years, rightwing Zionist groups would contribute more than $30 million to candidate campaigns and spend more than $40 million directly into elections to challenge and support candidates across the country. Altogether, the most extreme Zionist groups would spend a grand total of more than $70 million dollars to crush dissent and solidify a rightwing pro-Israel slant amongst members of the U.S. Congress. Their targets would range from vocal critics of Israeli apartheid such as Congresswoman Marie Newman (D-IL 3rd) to moderate Zionists who express reservations about Israel’s occupation like Congressman Andy Levin (D-MI 9th) and a range of candidates everywhere in between.

At the same time, candidates such as Summer Lee exposed the weakness of the rightwing Zionist campaign machine, overcoming the millions spent to defeat her.

The 2022 election cycle may have significant consequences for Palestinian advocacy in the 118th Congress. With rightwing Zionists seeking to crush dissent and undermine gains the pro-Palestine movement has made over the recent years, the fight for Palestinian rights will face new challenges.

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However, victories by candidates such as Summer Lee and the re-election of all but one cosponsor of H.R. 2590, the Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act—the Palestinian rights movement’s seminal bill, there remain bright signs of optimism. This paper examines in detail the millions spent in this election and their likely impacts going forward in the fight for Palestinian human rights.

**Contributions to Candidates**

Conservative pro-Israel contributions to campaigns are at record-highs, and it’s affecting the outcome of elections across the United States. In the 2022 midterm elections, rightwing pro-Israel groups collectively contributed more than $30 million to candidates in congressional races across the U.S.—more than triple the contributions of abortion rights, gun control, and environmental groups and individuals combined.

The level of contributions marks the 2022 midterm year as the biggest cycle ever for the pro-Israel lobby, contributing more than the 2020 presidential election cycle and the 2018 midterms—the two previous highest cycles on record.

The increase in spending and contributions was prompted by the growing support for Palestinians in Congress. Prominent, newly elected Members of Congress such as Reps. Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Andre Carson, and Cori Bush were speaking openly about the struggles faced by Palestinians and drawing support from across the United States. Congresswoman Betty McCollum’s H.R. 2590 was gaining momentum, growing from 24 in the 115th Congress to 32 total cosponsors for a bill that would for the first time restrict aid going to Israel. Members of Congress were being held to account for their support of Palestinians, including Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who voted “present” on a bill providing more than a billion dollars to Israel.

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3 Abortion right contributions to candidates totaled $2,136,044, environmental contributions totaled $5,074,506, and gun control contributions totaled $2,291,986 totaling $9,502,536. You can find the totals by opensecrets here: [https://www.opensecrets.org/527s/](https://www.opensecrets.org/527s/)

4 Note that these are only reported donations over $200 to candidates, are categorized by supporters, and do not represent all donations or election expenditures on a particular subject. The 2018 midterms was the highest midterm but less than the previous general elections for fundraising by pro-Zionist groups.
Highest Recipients of Contributions

The staggering increase in spending begs the question of which candidates received the most money. Remarkably, all ten of the highest grossing recipients of pro-Israel contributions were Democrats. Shontel Brown, a candidate for Ohio’s 11th district was the greatest recipient of pro-Israel contributions, followed by Haley Stevens. Both were candidates that ran in contested Democratic primaries against opponents the lobby deemed as ‘anti-Israel.’ A sentiment evident in a leaked email from former AIPAC president David Victor calling Rep. Stevens’ opponent, Rep. Andy Levin “the most corrosive member of Congress to the US-Israel relationship,” and in a tweet from AIPAC calling Nina Turner “anti-Israel.”

Candidates Glenn Ivey, Valerie Foushee, and Steve Erwin rank fourth, sixth, and tenth on the list, all received at least $400,000 in Zionist contributions. All three had the common denominator of running against a Democratic opponent that was deemed not sufficiently pro-Zionist or even considered pro-Palestinian. Reps. Elaine Luria and Josh Gottheimer respectively occupy the third and seventh spots on the list, the two representatives are champions zionist causes—regularly introducing legislation and releasing statements in support of Israel. Rep. Jeffries, who recently became leader of the Democrats, received the 8th most donations from pro-Israel groups. 2022’s donations represent a massive increase in pro-Israel contributions to Rep. Jeffries. Back in 2020, pro-Israel donations didn’t crack the top 20 industries that contributed to Rep. Jeffries’ campaign. However in 2022, pro-Israel funders were the second largest contributor to Rep. Jeffries’ campaign. Zionist groups likely increased their funding to Jeffries because of his anticipated appointment as Democrat leader in the House. Senators Schumer and Hassan are ranked fifth and ninth respectively.

5 https://twitter.com/EgSophie/status/1487071654123560962
6 https://twitter.com/aipac/status/1518695112632635393
10 Largest Recipients of Pro-Zionist Donations

1. Brown, Shontel (D-OH) - House
   $1,038,202

2. Stevens, Haley (D-MI) - House
   $790,729

3. Luria, Elaine (D-VA) - House
   $731,038

4. Ivey, Glenn (D-MD) - House
   $697,205

5. Schumer, Charles E (D-NY) - Senate
   $689,375

6. Irwin, Steven (D-PA) - House
   $687,367

7. Gottheimer, Josh (D-NJ) - House
   $548,262

8. Jeffries, Hakeem (D-NY) - House
   $459,670

9. Hassan, Maggie (D-NH) - Senate
   $436,625

10. Foushee, Valerie (D-NC) - House
    $429,305
Of the ten top recipients of pro-Zionist contributions, five; Brown, Rep. Stevens, Ivey, Irwin, and Foushee, ran against candidates deemed as ‘pro-Palestinian’ or ‘anti-Israel’ by rightwing Zionist groups. Of the five, only Rep. Stevens was an elected Member of Congress and had a legislative track record. The contributions indicate a pattern of rightwing pro-Israel contributions being targeted against pro-Palestinian candidates instead of supporting pro-Israel candidates. This meaning the quality of the candidate being funded and their platforms likely mattered less to AIPAC and it’s fellow rightwing groups, while the positions of their opponents mattered more.

Contributions by Party

The trend of contributions continues when we expand our analysis from the top-ten recipients to the total contributions by party. This election, pro-Israel organizations donated to Democrats at twice the rate of Republican candidates, collectively contributing $20 million to Democrats compared to $10 million to Republicans. Democrats also received a higher average contribution of $62,651 compared to Republicans’ $31,215. Republican Senate candidates were the exception, raising more than Democrats by receiving an average of $36,505 more than their Democratic counterparts.

The disparity indicates that rightwing Zionist groups give to Democrats to counteract the growing influence of pro-Palestinian members of the Party. Currently, 32 Members of Congress, all of whom are Democrats, are cosponsors of H.R.2590—A bill that would restrict U.S. aid from being used for the: (1) military detention, interrogation, abuse, or ill treatment of Palestinian children; (2) seizure, appropriation, or destruction of Palestinian property and forcible transfer of civilians in the West Bank; or (3) unilateral annexation by Israel of West Bank. After the murder of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli military forces in May, it was a sizeable minority of Democrats that advocated for accountability in Abu Akleh’s murder. Nearly-half (24) the U.S. Democratic Senators urged President Joe Biden to investigate the murder of Abu Akleh and several letters were led in the House, including a letter signed by 57 Democrats urging President Biden to investigate Abu Akleh’s murder. No Republicans led similar efforts.

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8 https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/summary.php?cycle=2022&ind=Q05
Independent Super PAC Spending

As contributions to political candidates have grown significantly over recent election cycles, data shows that so too has independent “Super PAC” spending. Right wing pro-Israel groups founded one of the first major pro-Israel Super PACs, the Democratic Majority for Israel Super PAC (DMFI) in 2019, while The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) took its first foray into electioneering and launched the United Democracy Project Super PAC (UDP) in 2021. Cumulatively, the two super PACs spent $40,277,175 to influence elections in the 2022 midterm elections; a substantial increase from the $6 million that was spent in the 2020 presidential election cycle.  

Outside Spending by Party

In addition to contributions, spending is markedly up from prior years for outside spending in Congressional races. UDP’s website states that it is “an organization comprised of American citizens—Democrats, Republicans and Independents.” An analysis of the organization’s campaign spending shows otherwise. All of UDP’s spending went to influence Democratic candidates, and all in primaries, with little spending on Republican races. Reporting also shows a near parity between negative and positive ad spending (spending for a candidate and spending against). So while UDP claims to be an organization for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, in reality, the organization has only campaigned in Democratic primaries and sought to influence Democratic candidates and elections.

12 https://www.fec.gov/data/committee/C00799031/?tab=sumary
13 https://www.fec.gov/data/committee/C00710848/?cycle=2022
14 https://www.uniteddemocracyproject.org/
15 https://www.opensecrets.org/outside-spending/detail?cmte=C00799031&cycle=2022
What Did They Spend Their Money On?

The enormous spending raises the question of what that money was spent on. According to a critical issues poll in May of this year, more Democrats support Palestine than Israel. Additionally, Democrats support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement at nearly a rate of 3:1. And when asked about laws to penalize Americans for choosing to engage in BDS against Israel, the response from Americans was resounding: Two-thirds of Americans — including 52% of Republicans, 82% of Democrats, and 74% of independents expressed that they oppose such laws.

The trend is even more stark when comparing the importance of Israel to other voter issues, such as the economy, healthcare, and our Democracy. J Street’s 2022 National Jewish Voters Survey found that only 4 percent of Jewish voters marked Israel as one of the two issues that were most important to them in deciding their vote for Congress. This means that even among registered Jewish voters, a Demographic that is often associated with support for Israel, U.S. support for Israel ranks low as a determining factor for their vote.

Israel simply does not motivate Americans to vote. Moreover, Israel is not something most Americans, let alone Democrats, support. The feelings of ambivalence ranging to opposition by Americans is a reality that’s not lost on Zionists, as evident by the actions they’ve taken in this most recent election. The Zionist-funded advertisements that hit the airwaves against the likes of Summer Lee don’t mention Israel at all.

For example, an advertisement launched by UDP on Apr 22, 2022, attacked Summer Lee for not supporting President Biden’s infrastructure bill in 2021 and accused her of being “more interested in fighting Democrats than getting results.” While an advertisement on Nov 1, 2022 in the final days of the election accosted Summer Lee for her support for ‘defund the police’.

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16 Q13A. 11% of Democratic respondents said they favored Israel, meanwhile 16% stated they lean toward Palestine. 74% stated that they lean toward neither side.
17 Q15. 15% and 28% (43%) of Dems responded they strongly or somewhat support the BDS movement. Meanwhile only 8% and 7% (15%) said they somewhat or strongly oppose the BDS movement.
18 https://criticalissues.umd.edu/sites/criticalissues.umd.edu/files/May_BDS_Questionnaire%20with%20results.pdf
20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_ObKIRKZhE
21 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2cuyktTMQo
Meanwhile, a DMFI PAC ad launched in July promoted Glenn Ivey and his support for gun control, abortion, and public school investments, notably ignoring all-things related to Israel. At launch, AIPAC’s UDP ‘super PAC’ did not even mention Israel in its mission statement.

**Pro-Israel Spending Trends**

Does the increase in pro-Israel spending signify an increase in spending across the country? FEC filing data shows that is not the case. Collectively, pro-Israel groups spent $40 million on direct involvement in elections through super PACs across the United States and contributed more than $30 million to the campaigns of candidates across the country. However, that spending and those contributions were not spread out across the United States, instead the increase in spending was hyper focused against vulnerable Democrats that were deemed as not sufficiently pro-Israel.

AIPAC invested heavily in Michigan’s Democratic primaries earlier this year, spending over $8 million through its super PAC, United Democracy Project. Their main target was Democratic Rep. Andy Levin who eventually lost to Rep. Haley Stevens in a bitter primary. Other right-wing Zionist groups with deep ties to AIPAC, including DMFI, Urban Empowerment Action PAC, and Pro-Israel America PAC, also made substantial financial investments in Michigan races. The rightwing Zionist lobby spent over $10 million altogether across the state’s 11th, 12th, and 13th congressional districts, far outpacing any other interest group or the fundraising from the candidates themselves.

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22 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnO6VDyjBWg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnO6VDyjBWg)
24 [https://theintercept.com/2022/08/02/michigan-primary-andy-levin-results-aipac/](https://theintercept.com/2022/08/02/michigan-primary-andy-levin-results-aipac/)
In Ohio’s 11th District, incumbent Rep. Shontel Brown won with 66 percent of the vote defeating Nina Turner, the former co-chair of Sen. Bernie Sanders’ 2020 presidential campaign. The result was heavily influenced by money from DMFI pouring in. Last year, DMFI PAC spent just under $2 million on ads supporting Brown and attacking Turner. The AIPAC-aligned Pro-Israel America PAC gave Brown’s campaign more than half a million dollars. This year, Brown’s campaign was propelled by outside pro-Israel groups that claimed Turner “stokes division” and painted her as an “anti-Israel” candidate. Brown’s reelection campaign was again backed by AIPAC and DMFI, which is funded by $2 million from an oil and gas heir, along with a super PAC funded by a cryptocurrency billionaire. United Democracy Project, an AIPAC political action committee, spent more than $280,000 on the race this summer, including more than $198,800 on ads attacking Turner. DMFI PAC spent more than $1 million on the race in April of this year, including more than $312,000 on ads against Turner.

A similar story unfolded in Maryland’s 4th Congressional District starting in mid-June when AIPAC spearheaded an unprecedented onslaught of outside spending. Their super PAC, UDP, spent $6 million on television spots, mailers, and other media knocking Donna Edwards over thinly sourced claims about constituent services. Some of that spending also funded glowing spots on Ivey, whose name recognition heavily lagged Edwards’s in the early days of the race. Other pro-Israel organizations pitched in about $1 million more. The result was one of the most expensive congressional primaries in history, with nearly all of the money coming from outside the district over the course of only a few weeks. Ivey came out with 51 percent of the vote to Edwards’s 35 percent.

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25 https://theintercept.com/2022/05/03/ohio-primary-elections-nina-turner-shontel-brown/
26 https://theintercept.com/2022/07/20/aipac-maryland-donna-edwards-glenn-ivey-democrat/
Conclusion

The 2022 midterms have been a game-changer. With their back against the wall and a growing insurgency advocating for a free Palestine in Congress, AIPAC et al are doing everything they can to create a chilling effect. They’re hoping to bully their way and scare Members of Congress from advocating for Palestinian human rights. In a way, their actions this last election are an admission that they’re losing. Despite all of their millions of dollars, their massive lobbying efforts, and their countless high-profile connections, it is becoming harder and harder to deny the truth of what is happening in Palestine. Palestinians are living under an immoral and reprehensible system of Apartheid and every day more and more Americans are seeing and understanding that truth.

And yet, despite their best efforts, there remain Members of Congress that will continue the fight for Palestinian rights. Summer Lee’s race is a testament that candidates can stand up to AIPAC’s smears and bullying and still win. Moreover, of the 32 cosponsors of H.R. 2590, all that ran for re-election won, bar for Marie Newman. The core of pro-Palestinian Members still remains in Congress. Congress Members like Reps. Tlaib, Omar, Carson, McCollum, Pocan, and Bush remain in Congress and continue to fight for a fair and just foreign policy on Palestine.

As we head into the next Congress, AJP Action will continue to advocate for Palestinians in the halls of Congress, the White House, and across the country. Activists will continue to take to the streets to demand for freedom and justice for Palestine, and to hold those responsible for their oppression to account. We are confident that the future belongs to those who defend the values of freedom, justice and equality, because they stand on the right side of history. “Dark money” may deceive many in the meantime, but it will not stop the truth from eventually coming to light, and from justice ultimately prevailing with our diligent and dedicated struggle.