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## **Public Opinion in Times of Conflict: Romanian Views of Israel in the Aftermath of the October 7 Events**

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the factors influencing Israel-related attitudes among Romanians in the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas-led terror attack on Israel. Using a national survey conducted in February 2024, we examine whether antisemitism, Islamophobia, self-identification as progressive or liberal, political orientation, and media consumption predict attitudes toward Israel among the Romanian population. The main findings show that people holding antisemitic attitudes are more inclined to develop negative attitudes towards Israel. Islamophobia proves to be a significant predictor of positive attitudes towards Israel; negative views of Islamist groups are correlated with stronger support for Israel. Individuals' self-identification as progressive emerges as another significant predictor of positive attitudes toward Israel. Interestingly, media consumption does not significantly predict positive attitudes towards Israel, underscoring the more substantial role of ingrained prejudices in shaping people's views of Israel. These findings enhance the understanding of public attitudes during international conflicts or high-profile events and provide insights for policymakers, strategic communication (stratcomm) practitioners, educators, and human rights advocates aiming to reduce prejudices and encourage balanced discourse during turbulent times.

**Keywords:** Israel-Hamas conflict, antisemitism, islamophobia, political orientation, media consumption

### **1. Introduction**

From population growth, poverty, and migration to social inequality, climate change, and armed conflicts, the contemporary world faces mounting instability. Wars rooted in local and regional histories fuel insecurity and devastate communities. On October 7, 2023, Hamas,

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the Palestinian political and military movement governing parts of Gaza, launched coordinated terror attacks on Southern Israel. Israel responded with ground operations in Gaza, thus being the trigger of an ongoing war, whose impact transcends regional borders (Ahn, 2025; Mier y Teran, 2024). The conflict is of high importance as it undermines fragile economic and social stability, reverberates through the Western world and beyond it, fuels radicalization in Muslim communities, and revives historical grievances, among other things (Antonakaki & Ioannidis, 2025; Felbab-Brown et al., 2024).

Global reactions to the conflict reflect deep polarization. Democratic countries and Israel's Western allies condemned Hamas as a terrorist organization, expressing solidarity with Israel (Casert, 2023). Some Arab states also criticized Hamas while calling for peace (Hamzawy, 2023), whereas others, such as Qatar, Syria, and Yemen, framed Hamas' actions as legitimate resistance to Israel's violations of Palestinian rights (Khalil, 2023). Israel's initial response was seen as self-defense, even though support declined rapidly. Data show an 18.5-point drop in Israel's net favorability between September and December 2023, with declines in 42 of 43 surveyed countries (Gordon, 2024). The United States remain the only wealthy country with net positive views of Israel. As revealed by Pew Research Center (2023) reports, there are deep domestic divisions (Silver et al., 2024). Gallup data (Brenan, 2025) indicate shrinking sympathy: 46% of Americans support Israelis, 33% Palestinians, the narrowest gap recorded. The partisan divide has widened, in the sense that only 33% of Democrats viewing Israel favorably compared to 83% of Republicans.

In Europe, a YouGov Eurotrack survey (Smith, 2023) found Germany most pro-Israeli and Spain most pro-Palestinian. Few Europeans support Hamas attacks (4% in Britain, 11% in France), while many deem Israel's retaliation unjustified. EU responses remain fragmented, reflecting historical divides over the Middle East (Missiroli, 2023). The International Crisis Group (2025) notes Europe is unlikely to adopt a unified stance, with key states like Germany supporting Israel while the EU does not employ economic pressure. Fragmentation generally stems from legacies of the Holocaust and colonialism, antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and political ideology (Bobako, 2018; Bunzl, 2007).

This conflict also unfolds in a highly complex and shifting communication environment. Especially during times of crisis and deep uncertainty, as this one, traditional media, social platforms, and alternative information channels play a central role in shaping public perceptions, amplifying competing narratives, and fueling polarization (Abdelaziz, 2025). Misinformation, disinformation, influence operations, and selective framing of the topic contribute to fluctuating attitudes toward the conflict (Mazepus et al., 2023), while algorithmic amplification and echo chambers create segmented realities for different audiences (Garaschuk, 2024). Such dynamics make the analysis of media consumption patterns very relevant for understanding shifts in public opinion (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020), particularly in societies where trust in media varies widely and is generally at very low levels (Buturoiu et al., 2022).

While the Ukraine war continues, Europeans also fear further destabilization, rising energy costs, refugee waves, and terrorism. Understanding why some people support and others reject Israel during the Israel-Hamas war is especially important in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where geopolitical dynamics differ. While surveys like YouGov Eurotrack (Smith, 2023) provide insight into European attitudes, no academic studies explain such views in CEE.

Against this background, this article addresses that gap by analyzing Romanian attitudes toward Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict, by means of a nationally representative survey

of 1,000 respondents, conducted in February 2024. It examines how antisemitism, islamophobia, self-identification as progressive or liberal, political orientation, and news consumption shape these views. The focus on Israel reflects Romania's historical ties, including a significant community of Romanian Jews who emigrated during communism, and aligns with the broader academic trend of examining Israel-related attitudes.

## 2. Predictors of Israel-related attitudes

### 2.1 Antisemitism

Antisemitism is a polysemous concept that generated an impressive body of works overtime. It might designate a hatred of Jews spanning across cultures and history; a political movement and ideology that emerged in Central Europe at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and led to the Holocaust; a psychological category, ranging “from mild pejorative prejudice against Jews as different to the full-blown pathology of an exterminationist, paranoid hatred of Jews as a race”; or a mix of all these (Beller, 2015, pp. 1-2). While Beller's third definition references a psychological category, in this study we interpret it as a socio-psychological phenomenon, referring to historically ingrained prejudices embedded in collective memory and social attitudes rather than individual clinical pathologies. In our article, which investigates lay people's perception, we will mainly refer to it in its third meaning, as something deeply ingrained within Europe's psyche and history and, despite the lessons of the Holocaust, still infusing Europeans' belief system. According to the latest ADL Global 100 survey, carried out in 2024, 46% of the world's adults – about 2.2 billion people – now hold antisemitic attitudes, marking a record high and more than double the level from a decade ago. The same survey showcases that approximately half of the respondents in Eastern Europe (49%) harbor high levels of antisemitic attitudes. In general, Eastern Europe exhibits higher levels of antisemitic beliefs than Western Europe. Religious (i.e., fundamentalism, Christian worldview), social-psychological (i.e., authoritarianism, anomie), and sociodemographic (age, education, gender) factors might predict antisemitic reactions (König et al., 1997). It is also worth mentioning that 90% of the European Jews who participated in a recent survey consider that antisemitism is aggravating and that it constitutes the biggest issue they face in their lives (Burke, 2023). Moreover, crises of all types recurrently bring to the surface dormant negative ideas about Jews and lead to a rise of symbolic or concrete violence against them; for example, the current Israel-Hamas conflict generated a 300% rise in antisemitic incidents in Austria and 240% in Germany (Burke, 2023). In general, the frequency and intensity of these incidents, ranging from defamatory language to violent attacks on persons and property, closely follow the evolution of the long-running conflict between Israel and Palestine (Cohen-Abady et al., 2016, p. 95). Within the context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, emphasizing the suffering of the Palestinian population can contribute to perceptions of Israel as the advantaged and higher-status actor, and of Palestine as the disadvantaged party, exemplified by debates surrounding Israeli settlements (Ozer et al., 2025).

Although some scholars deny this perspective (for a discussion see Bobako, 2018; Staetsky, 2017), antisemitism might also specifically designate principled opposition to the state of Israel, manifested through actions and declarations aiming at stigmatizing, criticizing, censoring, and sanctioning its acts and policies or eroding the support it receives (Cohen-

Abady et al., 2016, pp. 94-96). Importantly, it is legitimate, and not inherently antisemitic, to criticize Israeli policies – just as one may criticize the policies of any state – when such criticism is grounded in factual analysis and does not rely on demonizing, delegitimizing, or applying double standards exclusively to Israel. In this sense, Sharansky (2004) famously highlights that antisemitism becomes evident when Israel, as the Jewish state, suffers “demonization, double standards, and delegitimization” (p. 3). It thus follows that individuals who foster antisemitic feelings may show increased hostility to Israel and that increased antisemitism leads to decreased support for Israel (Cohen-Abady et al., 2016, p. 110). At the same time, however, criticism of Israel – such as debates over whether its policies constitute apartheid or not – remains a central and legitimate topic in contemporary scholarship. Eminent scholars on both sides of this heated, weaponized debate do not necessarily engage in antisemitic rhetoric, and a significant part of the academic community, particularly Middle Eastern scholars, argue that certain Israeli policies are akin to apartheid (Lynch & Telhami, 2021). Hence, researching or arguing that Israel might employ apartheid-like practices should not, in itself, be conflated with antisemitism.

Kaplan and Small (2006) nonetheless demonstrate that anti-Israel views are a significant predictor for antisemitism, the latter increasing with the extent of anti-Israel sentiment observed. These correlations are reinforced by Staetsky’s study (2017), which approaches Britons’ attitudes toward Jews and Israel. Based on what he coins as an “elastic view”, Staetsky distinguishes between “hard-core negativity” towards Israel, that is, multiple anti-Israel attitudes exhibited readily and confidently (believing, for example, that Israel “is committing mass murder in Palestine”, “is deliberately trying to wipe out the Palestinian population”, and “is an apartheid state”), and “softer” negativity, that is, fewer, but multiple, anti-Israel perceptions, expressed in less certain terms. While showcasing that anti-Israel attitudes do not necessarily correlate with antisemitism, he also demonstrates that the intensity of a person’s anti-Israel views is a strong predictor for their antisemitic attitudes and that a significant minority of those who foster anti-Israel attitudes exhibit them alongside antisemitic attitudes (Staetsky, 2017, p. 5). At this level, it is important to emphasize that our study does not evaluate the legitimacy of specific criticisms of Israel, but rather examines how certain attitudes toward Israel may correlate with broader antisemitic predispositions.

In post-communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe, complex yet diffuse types of prejudice against Jews might still be encountered (for a detailed discussion, see Shafir, 2003). In Romania, for example, a 2021 survey for the Elie Wiesel Institute (Studio Twelve SRL, 2021) showed that, although the vast majority of respondents consider that the Jewish minority is important, 53% of them believe that Jews are only pursuing their interests, that it would be better for them to live in their own country (37%) or that they should be restricted in certain professions/occupations (30%). Furthermore, after the fall of the communist regime, the CEE countries underwent a complicated process of reconsidering their responsibility for the Jewish genocide during World War II. More precisely, they went from the former communist narrative of utter innocence, which presented them as passive bystanders, victims, or resisters during the Holocaust, while blocking all types of Holocaust memory or remembering to a painful confrontation with their active participation in the mass murders (Bartov, 2008, p. 569).

In this context, whose complexity largely exceeds the scope of our research, this article seeks to investigate Romanians’ antisemitic beliefs and how they shape their attitudes towards Israel in the context of the ongoing conflict with Hamas. We thus state that:

H1a: People holding hard antisemitic attitudes are more inclined to develop negative attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

H1b: People holding soft antisemitic attitudes are more inclined to develop negative attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

## 2.2. Islamophobia

A substantial body of work (Bunzl, 2007; Gidley & Renton, 2017; Meer, 2015, etc.) advances a reflection on antisemitism in its reciprocal relation with another major phobia of our times, i.e. Islamophobia, or indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions against Islam or Muslims (Bleich, 2011, p. 1582). As Veracini (2022, p. 98) puts it, both antisemitism and Islamophobia have grown in intensity in periods of socioeconomic crisis or important migratory flows; they both see Jews and Muslims respectively as unassimilable Others whose purpose is to subvert Western civilization; moreover, a widespread narrative sustains that the Jews are intentionally encouraging Muslims' migration to Europe to destroy its Christian stability and identity. Although Islamophobia developed as a concept only in the late 1990s, encompassing harmful rhetoric and actions directed at Islam and Muslims in Western liberal democracies, anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments and stereotypes cut across European history and culture. At present, Islam – mostly inaccurately perceived as a monolithic and static entity, with no differentiation between its various aspects and ideologies – impacts Europe's social, economic, and cultural stability through immigration and challenges to secular identity (Spektorowski, 2024). Furthermore, Muslim issues have become prominent over the last decades also due to political mobilization by populist and radical right-wing parties in Western Europe (Helbling, 2012, p. 3). Marion Lalisie, the European Commission's coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred, stated that Israel's attacks on Gaza have contributed to rising Islamophobia in Europe, warning against the normalization of anti-Muslim hate (Ersen & Sevencan, 2025). Since October 7, 2023 hatred toward both Muslims and Jews has increased, with stereotypes against Muslims intensifying. Lalisie emphasized the need for stronger recognition, policy, and awareness to counter anti-Muslim discrimination. Helbling (2012, p. 1) suggests that Muslims are increasingly discriminated against because of their religion, considered as "backward" or "violent". In Romania, where, according to the 2021 population census, 0,4% of the population observe the Islamic religion, Muslim communities have a long and well-established tradition. However, the 2023 European Islamophobia Report highlights that 68% of Romanians have a lack of trust concerning Muslims (39% do not accept becoming their relatives, 28% do not accept being their friends, and 19% do not accept them as co-workers) (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2024, p. 558).

At the level of public perception, there are very few studies assessing the impact of islamophobia on Europeans' attitudes towards Israel or Palestine. For example, research conducted in Norway (Hellevik, 2020) showcases that support for Israel in the Middle East conflict increases the probability of a high level of Islamophobia. It is thus important to assess this correlation in Romania, a CEE country where, in 2022, for the first time in its post-communist history, immigration, regardless of ethnicity, exceeded emigration (Santa & Coşciug, 2023). Following this line of reasoning, our second hypothesis states that:

H2: People holding Islamophobic attitudes are more inclined to develop positive attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

### 2.3. Political orientation

Political orientation shapes how individuals see themselves, interact with others, or think about power and social organization. Generally considered by social scientists as the most pertinent way of classifying political attitudes (see, for example, Feldman, 2003; Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990, etc.), the left-right distinction is based on a set of values and psychological dispositions, including needs for order, structure, and discipline, all of which are assumed to be higher among adepts of right-wing than left-wing ideology (Thorisdottir et al., 2007, p. 176). Today, however, this divide is complicated by the emergence of blue-collar conservatism (Lombardo, 2021). This refers to those segments of the working class that increasingly support conservative positions on national identity, immigration, family values, and law and order, even though their economic interests might align, in principle, more with progressive policies. This paradox reflects a prioritization of stability, tradition, patriotism, and community cohesion over financial and economic concerns, and has contributed to political realignments in Western democracies, in the sense that significant parts of the working class have shifted from left-wing to conservative parties.

Political orientation largely influences individuals' attitudes toward various events and social issues; hence, it may predict how people position themselves in the Israel-Hamas conflict. Multiple studies conducted in the United States (Abrams & Bernstein, 2022; Gries, 2015; Royden & Hersh, 2022; Rynhold, 2020) show respondents' attitudes vary dramatically with their political ideology. In general, conservatives tend to sympathize with Israel over the Palestinians, while liberals tend to adopt the opposite stance. A Pew Research Study (Silver et al., 2024) reinforces this polarization about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East: 34% of Democrats considered that Hamas' reasons for fighting Israel are at least somewhat valid, while 64% of Republicans claimed the opposite. Furthermore, Abrams and Bernstein (2022) also found that individuals who declared themselves as progressives are almost as pro-Palestinian as conservatives are pro-Israel.

In Central and Eastern European countries, attitudes toward the Israel-Palestine conflict are further complicated by specific features of the political system and affiliations. More precisely, given the relatively low stability during the democratic transition, the political spectrum in these countries is characterized by ideological inconsistencies (Konstantinov, 2024; Radkiewicz, 2017; Thorisdottir et al., 2007). In other words, the concept of left-right political identification cannot be transferred mechanically from Western to Eastern Europe (Wojcik et al., 2021), since in the former communist countries, the political orientation of citizens does not match the traditional, yet already shifting, Western left-right template. In this perspective, Konstantinov (2024, pp. 3-4) showcases that Bulgaria is a prominent case of ideological inconsistency, manifested at the political-elite level and the general electorate. In this country, left-wing parties increasingly embrace conservative and nationalistic values and right-wing ones defend socially liberal and progressive perspectives.

In Western societies, right-wing proponents share conservative beliefs characterized by resistance to change and acceptance of inequality, while left-wing orientation presupposes liberal attitudes such as open-mindedness, mental flexibility, and egalitarian beliefs (Chirumbolo et al., 2016; Jost et al., 2003). However, in Central and Eastern European countries, the relationships between resistance to change, acceptance of inequality, and political orientation may deviate significantly from Western countries (Konstantinov, 2024). In Romania, for example, the left-wing label relates to an ideologically conservative – and not progressive – political entity, namely the Social Democratic Party, the dominant left-wing party in Romania; its voters are mostly older, with traditional values and lower education

levels, less cosmopolitans and from less developed areas (Teodorescu & Sultănescu, 2016). The same authors note that people holding progressive attitudes, who tend to be more pro-Western, educated, and tolerant, with medium and high incomes, from urban areas and who, according to Western definitions, should embrace a left-wing position, support right-labeled parties that promise development and modernization. Their vote expresses their opposition to the Social Democratic Party, often accused in the public discourse of perpetuating a communist stance. In this perspective, scholars such as Comșa (2018) and Teodorescu and Sultănescu (2018) advance the idea that in Romania other political distinctions, such as communism vs. anti-communism, with its derivatives (anti-reformer vs. reformer, corruption vs. anti-corruption, pro- vs. anti-system, pro or against the Social Democratic Party), capture more accurately the specificity of political life. Furthermore, the Social Democratic Party is both left-wing (in theory, in programs, and partially in discourse) and right-wing (with a traditionalist, conservative, public mobilized by the party leaders' sometimes traditionalist overtones). Hence, in the Romanian context, it is possible that individuals who self-identify as progressive also hold socially conservative or traditionalist positions, while those adopting the label of liberal typically endorse economic liberalism, even libertarianism, alongside socially conservative views. This overlap between cultural conservatism and non-left economic preferences reflects the broader phenomenon of blue-collar conservatism (Lombardo, 2021) mentioned above, where identity and value-based considerations are prioritized. For the purposes of analytical consistency and comparability with international scholarship, we retain these designations and acknowledge their distinct and context-specific ideological connotations in Romania. Therefore, our third hypothesis is the following:

H3a: In the Romanian context, individuals who self-identify as progressive – understood here as socially conservative or traditionalist rather than left-leaning in the Western sense – are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward Israel during the Israel– Hamas conflict.

H3b: In the Romanian context, individuals who self-identify as liberal – defined as economically liberal but socially conservative compared to the Western meaning of liberalism – are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward Israel during the Israel– Hamas conflict.

In other terms, self-identified social conservatives or traditionalists tend to develop more favorable attitudes toward Israel.

#### 2.4. Media consumption

As shown by a significant body of works (Conesa et al., 2004; Jensen et al., 2024; Kosho, 2016; Lee, 2008, etc.), sources of information might influence people's attitudes toward different issues. In this vein, it is generally accepted that, as major information sources, the media convey knowledge and understanding of various aspects, while shaping societal attitudes and consequential behavior (Hoewe & Peacock, 2020; Kosho, 2016). During conflicts, the media are primary providers of news, interpretations, and images (Rai, 2000), particularly for individuals from distant cultural spaces. While there is an impressive amount of literature on media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, most of which focuses on Western media (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2014) and traditional news organizations (Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021), the relationship between media coverage of this aspect and public attitudes has been less approached. Empirical academic studies put forward mixed findings about the relationship between media exposure and attitudes toward the Israel-Palestine conflict (Becker, 2022; Han & Rane, 2011; Odeh, 2014; Ozohu-Suleiman & Ishak, 2012). Becker (2022) suggests that Americans' exposure to satire about the conflict has a limited but significant effect on attitudes.

More precisely, individuals who followed televised political comedy about the conflict were significantly less inclined to believe that their country is too supportive of the Palestinians and were marginally less inclined to consider that the Hamas response to the crisis goes too far or that the Israeli government is making a genuine effort to build peace. Furthermore, Ozohu-Suleiman and Ishak (2012) found that Nigerian and Malaysian viewers' dependence on major international news media (BBC World, Al-Jazeera English, CNN International, etc.) significantly predicted and explained their opinions on how each core issue of the conflict could be resolved. However, Han and Rane (2011) showed that the majority of the Australian public exposed to news about the Israel-Palestine conflict tended to identify with the Palestinian narrative of the conflict, even though the coverage itself was balanced. This showcases the audience's engagement with common or universal values based on concern with human suffering and reluctance to oppressive practices (Han & Rane, 2011, p. 66).

The proliferation of news sources made possible by the unprecedented development of social media often challenged mainstream media – such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television – objectivity in favor of competing narratives, which report events from a particular point of view (Evans, 2016; Shenhav, 2015). Furthermore, digital platforms' "information bombardment" raises important issues regarding consuming relevant and authentic information (Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021, p. 171), given that, in the absence of traditional gatekeepers, social media are more exposed to the propagation of misleading information (Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020) or toxic content (Salminen et al., 2020). During conflicts, the opposing parties attempt to generate content that supports their position "by undermining the democratic and inclusive characteristics of these platforms" (Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021, p. 171). For example, in the aftermath of Hamas' terror attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Brooking et al. (2023) showcased that the reality of the war appeared largely distorted within and across platforms, given the rapid spread of terrorist content on Telegram; the proliferation of false or unverifiable claims on X; the often one-sided content moderation decisions of Meta, with little consideration for Palestinian political expression; and deep confusion around TikTok. Thus, in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, mainstream media has become more relevant, due to its possibility to unmask the manipulation attempts, to professional reputation and credibility (Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021), and the ability to somehow moderate the toxicity of the content (Salminen et al., 2020).

As far as we could investigate, there are no (empirical or academic) studies testing a correlation between sources of information and attitudes in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. One can nonetheless refer to the latest Pew Research Center Report, from March 2024 (Silver et al., 2024), which highlights a generational divide in what concerns Americans' attitudes toward Israel's conduct in the war. More precisely, older adults, who prefer mainstream media as an information source (Statista, 2021), are about twice as likely as younger ones to consider that Israel's approach to the war is acceptable, while adults under 30, who largely rely on social media for news about the war, are the least likely age group to agree with Israel's response. In this context, it is important to investigate this correlation in the context of a CEE country, where prejudice, ignorance of history, and lack of information determined many Romanians to rally on social networks for pro-Hamas propaganda (Fati, 2023). In such a context, we state that:

H4a: People consuming news from mainstream media are more inclined to develop positive attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

H4b: People consuming news from social media are more inclined to develop negative attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

### 3. Methodology

Although some of the relationships in the above-mentioned hypotheses may appear intuitive, prior research cited shows they are not always linear or uniform across contexts. Thus, testing them empirically allows us to quantify their strength and assess whether they hold in the specific Romanian sociopolitical setting. Therefore, to test the above-mentioned hypotheses, we conducted a national survey using an online panel (N=1000), with soft quotas for gender, age, and education. Survey data was collected by Daedalus in 2024 (February 5-14). The mean age in the sample was 48.00 years ( $SD=15.15$ ). The sample comprises 52% women. In terms of education, the sample had the following distribution: 3.9% low educated people, 89.8% medium educated people, and 6.3% high educated people (a robustness model using the weighted dataset can be found in the Appendix).

#### 3.1. Method

To measure *Antisemitism*, we used Allington et al.'s generalized antisemitism scale (2022). In its initial form, this scale consisted of two six-item subscales, the Judeophobic Antisemitism (JpAs) subscale, which tests for endorsement of "classic" prejudicial attitudes towards Jews, and the Antizionist Antisemitism (AzAs) subscale, which tests for endorsement of related attitudes expressed about Israel and its supporters. However, in our research, these twelve items yielded two different factors, with eigenvalues of 4.05 for the first factor (loadings from .743 to .801) and of 3.46 for the second factor (loadings from .614 to .823), explaining 57.82% of the variance. For this research study, we labeled the first factor as "hard antisemitism" as it referred to people's beliefs that Israel has power and control over media, politics, and money. We labeled the second factor as "soft antisemitism" as it referred to prejudicial attitudes towards Jewish people and a generalized negative attitude towards Israel or Jewish people. The twelve items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "totally disagree" to 7 "totally agree", while the items in the second factor ("soft antisemitism") were reverse coded. Mean scales of the two factors were computed for both factors: hard antisemitism –  $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 3.50$ ,  $\alpha = .871$  – and soft antisemitism –  $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 3.50$ ,  $\alpha = .852$ . To rule out multicollinearity and autocorrelation, we computed Variance Inflation Factors (all between 1.03 and 1.44, well below the threshold of 5) and Durbin-Watson statistics (2.06 and 2.05, no significant), confirming no multicollinearity concerns and independent residuals; detailed results are provided in the Appendix.

To measure *Islamophobia*, we adapted the scale used by Uenal et al. (2021) to capture two components of Islamophobia, namely anti-Muslim prejudice and anti-Islam sentiment. Participants were asked to indicate, on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "definitely false" to 7 "definitely true", their agreement on ten items capturing various anti-Muslim and anti-Islam attitudes. The ten items loaded on one factor, with loadings ranging from .693 to .830 ( $\alpha=.926$ ,  $M=3.89$ ,  $SD=1.46$ ).

To measure *progressive attitudes in the Romanian context*, we adapted the scale of progressive values used by Proulx et al. (2023). Respondents rated their agreement with four items reflecting their tendency to self-identify with "progressive" values on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "totally disagree" to 7 "totally agree". The four items loaded on one factor, with loadings ranging from .617 to .844 ( $\alpha=.767$ ,  $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ).

*Political orientation* was measured by asking participants to place themselves on a scale from 0 (the left) to 10 (the right) on the political spectrum ( $M=5.12$ ,  $SD=2.67$ ).

To measure *mainstream media news consumption*, we asked participants to indicate, on a scale ranging from 0 to 7, how many days of the last week they watched news on political topics or issues of public interest from the following sources: television; radio; newspapers and magazines (including news websites); and news aggregators (e.g., Google News, Yahoo News, etc.). The items loaded on one factor, with loadings ranging from .758 to .803 ( $\alpha=.791$ ,  $M=2.77$ ,  $SD=1.97$ ).

To measure *social media news consumption*, we asked participants to indicate, on a scale ranging from 0 to 7, how many days of the last week they watched news on political topics or issues of public interest from the following sources: Facebook; YouTube; WhatsApp; Instagram; Facebook messenger; Twitter; Telegram; and TikTok. The items loaded on one factor, with loadings ranging from .621 to .818 ( $\alpha=.886$ ,  $M=1.56$ ,  $SD=1.69$ ).

We controlled for religiosity (i.e., frequency of going to the church) and socio-demographics (gender, education, and age). Robustness models that disaggregate media consumption by specific channels, such as TV, press, or individual social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, TikTok, Telegram), allowing us to test for distinct effects across sources are included in the Appendix.

To measure the *frequency of going to church*, we asked participants to indicate how frequently they go to church on a scale ranging from 1 (daily) to 7 (never or seldom) ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ). We used this measurement to cover the behavioral component of religiosity because, in some cases, the frequency of church attendance is associated with a stronger commitment to religious beliefs. *Gender* was measured by asking participants to indicate their gender by choosing from three categories: woman; man; other. *Education* was measured by asking participants to designate the highest level of education they have completed, using a 11-point ordinal scale. *Age* was measured by asking participants to indicate their year of birth.

## 4. Results

The main results (see Table 1) show that both forms of antisemitism (hard and soft) are significant predictors of Israel-related attitudes. Specifically, people holding stronger beliefs that Israel has the power and control over media, politics, and money (hard antisemitism) are also more inclined to develop negative attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict (H1a confirmed). At the same time, people with stronger prejudicial attitudes towards Jewish people and a generalized negative attitude towards Israel or Jewish people (soft antisemitism) are more inclined to develop negative attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict (H1b confirmed). Soft antisemitism is, in fact, the most significant predictor in our model. These results offer evidence towards the idea that antisemitic attitudes are powerful in shaping people's perceptions about Israel, especially during times of crisis. Antisemitic tropes or stereotypes or even conspiracy theories that Jewish people have control over global affairs and media act as forces that make people view Israel as a malevolent force, thus contributing to a negative attitude towards Israel.

Second most important predictor is Islamophobia. Results show that people holding Islamophobic attitudes are more inclined to develop positive attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict (H2 confirmed). This correlation could stem from the idea that those individuals with negative views towards Islamist groups (such as Hamas) may be more inclined to favor Israel and express solidarity with Israel in conflicts involving both groups.

Furthermore, in the Romanian context, individuals who self-identify as “progressive” are more inclined to develop positive attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict (H3a confirmed). This finding suggests that positive attitudes toward Israel are better explained by the tendency to identify with traditionalist values than by a Western-style progressive alignment. By contrast, while there is some indication that those who self-identify as “liberal” (economically liberal but socially conservative by Western standards) may also lean toward more favorable attitudes towards Israel, this relationship did not reach statistical significance in the model (H3b not significant). Neither form of news consumption accounts as a significant predictor of positive attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict (H4a and H4b not significant).

Furthermore, to assess the substantive importance of our predictors, we computed effect size statistics. The addition of key attitudinal predictors (antisemitism and Islamophobia) to the baseline model increased explained variance by  $\Delta R^2 = .192$  in the mainstream model and  $\Delta R^2 = .194$  in the social media model. These reflect large effect sizes according to Cohen’s (1988) benchmarks. Corresponding  $f^2$  values are .529 and .533, respectively, which indicate strong explanatory power.

Such results offer evidence about some predictors of Israel-related attitudes during the Israel-Hamas conflict, being among the first in the series of results about this crisis – at least in countries from Central and Eastern European region. The results contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of public attitudes in times of crisis and, thus, can be used as starting points in developing various types of policies in fields such as public communication, civic education, and hate-speech prevention.

Table 1. Ordinary Least Squares regression models predicting positive attitudes towards Israel during the Israel-Hamas war

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	3.933	.439		3.908	.439	
Hard antisemitism	-.125	.034	-.114**	-.136	.035	-.123**
Soft antisemitism	-.435	.040	-.383**	-.439	.039	-.386**
Islamophobia	.251	.035	.228**	.255	.035	.231**
Self-identification as progressive	.078	.038	.069*	.080	.038	.071*
Political orientation (0=left)	.027	.018	.045	.027	.018	.046
Mainstream news consumption	.026	.026	.031			
Social media news consumption				.049	.029	.053
Frequency of going to the church	.083	.034	.073*	.074	.035	.064*
Gender (1=male)	.185	.095	.058	.177	.095	.056
Education	.007	.053	.004	.012	.053	.007
Age	.100	.036	.086**	.116	.036	.099**
<b>Adj. R square</b>	<b>.338</b>	<b>.339</b>				

\*\*p < .01, \*p < .05

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined factors shaping Romanian public perceptions of Israel after the October 7 attacks, focusing on antisemitism, Islamophobia, and self-identification as progressive or liberal. The analysis revealed that both hard and soft forms of antisemitism significantly influenced negative views of Israel, with soft antisemitism having the strongest effect. Islamophobia was the second most important factor, positively correlating with support for Israel, likely due to perceived threats from Islamist groups (Hellevik, 2020). As previously noted, the Romanian usage of the terms progressive and liberal diverges from Western contexts, which helps to explain the nuances in our findings. Our analysis indicates that individuals who self-identify as progressive are more inclined to support Israel, as their values align more closely with pro-Israel attitudes. The Romanian case illustrates how local political semantics can invert typical Western ideological patterns in relation to Israel. By contrast, self-identification as liberal and media consumption patterns did not emerge as statistically significant predictors.

These findings highlight the impact of deeply rooted prejudices on public opinion. The prominence of soft antisemitism underscores the need to address subtle biases that may go unrecognized, while the association between Islamophobia and support for Israel reflects security-related perceptions. This has broader social implications for minority groups, as antisemitism and Islamophobia shape societal attitudes toward Jews and Muslims. Addressing these biases through education and public awareness campaigns can foster greater inclusion of such groups and social cohesion.

Although media consumption is often assumed to influence political attitudes, this study suggests entrenched prejudices play a more decisive role than exposure to specific news sources (Bârgăoanu et al., 2023). Media platforms still have responsibility for balanced reporting on sensitive issues such as antisemitism and Islamophobia, which can help counter prejudices and support a more informed public discourse.

Furthermore, these findings have important implications for stratcomm practitioners. Understanding the prejudices and ideological factors shaping attitudes gives communicators the ground to design more effective messaging strategies during crises. Stratcomm professionals can craft narratives that anticipate audience biases, address misinformation, and foster empathy by promoting inclusive dialogue. Strategic communication campaigns informed by such insights can help reduce polarization, build trust with diverse communities, and create proactive approaches to sensitive topics like intergroup relations and international conflicts. Moreover, these results highlight the necessity for stratcomm practitioners to collaborate with media outlets and civic educators to ensure accurate representations and counteract prejudice-driven narratives.

A few important limitations must be considered. The way the study is set up makes it difficult to prove that the factors being studied directly cause people to have certain attitudes toward Israel; instead, the study offers an overview of the potential variables predicting such attitudes. Furthermore, the study's focus on Romania may limit the applicability of the findings to other regions. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and encompass diverse geographical, social, and cultural contexts to validate and broaden these findings. Other important limitations are that this study: (1) did not take into account the direct impact of Israel's ongoing actions during the conflict or its long-standing stance on Palestinian statehood, and (2) did not account for Romania's specific foreign-policy context, including

its recognition of Palestinian statehood since 1988, which may themselves constitute significant drivers of public opinion dynamics and should be addressed in future research as well.

Besides limitations, this study successfully explored the factors shaping Romanian public perceptions of Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict, revealing the complex interplay of antisemitic, Islamophobic, and conservative/traditionalist attitudes in influencing public opinion. Studying the correlations of Romania-related sentiments during this conflict can enhance our general comprehension of public attitudes during times of conflict. This analysis can assist policymakers, stratcomm practitioners, educators, and human rights advocates in fostering a more inclusive and well-rounded dialogue on the conflict. Specifically, insights from this study are primarily intended to guide communication, education, and inclusion strategies rather than to suggest changes to Romania's established foreign-policy stance, which already recognizes Palestinian statehood.

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## Appendix

### Weighted model

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	3.371	0.36		3.314	0.358	
Hard antisemitism	-0.142	0.035	-0.126***	-0.166	0.036	-0.147***
Soft antisemitism	-0.439	0.04	-0.373***	-0.438	0.04	-0.372***
Islamophobia	0.248	0.035	0.225***	0.254	0.035	0.23***
Self-identification as progressive	0.19	0.038	0.162***	0.188	0.038	0.161***
Political orientation (0=left)	0.016	0.018	0.028	0.015	0.018	0.026
Mainstream news consumption	-0.008	0.024	-0.011			
Social media news consumption				0.053	0.027	0.062
Frequency of going to the church	0.122	0.033	0.111***	0.102	0.034	0.092**
Gender (1=male)	0.124	0.092	0.039	0.128	0.092	0.04
Education	0.079	0.026	0.088**	0.082	0.026	0.092**
Age	0.072	0.033	0.064*	0.082	0.034	0.073*
Adj. R square	0.389	0.392				

Note. \*p\* < .05, \*\*p\*\* < .01, \*\*\*p\*\*\* < .001

## Model 1: Mainstream media consumption detailed

	<b>Model 1: mainstream consumption by source type</b>		
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>
Constant	3.158	0.363	
Hard antisemitism	-0.152	0.035	-0.135***
Soft antisemitism	-0.432	0.041	-0.367***
Islamophobia	0.26	0.035	0.235***
Self-identification as progressive	0.165	0.039	0.141***
Political orientation (0=left)	0.007	0.019	0.013
Media consumption: TV	-0.01	0.024	-0.016
Media consumption: Newspapers	0.003	0.026	0.004
Media consumption: Radio	-0.023	0.023	-0.038
Media consumption: Internet	-0.023	0.023	-0.038
Trust in mainstream media	0.132	0.037	0.132***
Frequency of going to the church	0.097	0.034	0.088**
Gender (1=male)	0.112	0.093	0.035
Education	0.087	0.027	0.097***
Age	0.084	0.034	0.075*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.397		

Note. \*p\* < .05, \*\*p\*\* < .01, \*\*\*p\*\*\* < .001

## Model 2: Social Media consumption detailed

	Model 2: SNS consumption by source type		
	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	3.251	0.365	
Hard antisemitism	-0.176	0.037	-0.157***
Soft antisemitism	-0.443	0.04	-0.376***
Islamophobia	0.264	0.035	0.239***
Self-identification as progressive	0.117	0.039	0.1**
Political orientation (0=left)	0.018	0.018	0.031
Media consumption: Facebook	-0.049	0.024	-0.081*
Media consumption: YouTube	0.005	0.027	0.008
Media consumption: WhatsApp	-0.061	0.025	-0.104*
Media consumption: Instagram	0.072	0.025	0.116**
Media consumption: Facebook	0.014	0.024	0.024
Media consumption: Twitter	0.035	0.028	0.044
Media consumption: Telegram	-0.133	0.031	-0.16***
Media consumption: TikTok	0.069	0.025	0.111**
Trust in SNS	0.14	0.048	0.134**
Frequency of going to the church	0.098	0.033	0.089**
Gender (1=male)	0.104	0.091	0.033
Education	0.097	0.027	0.109***
Age	0.133	0.035	0.119***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.427		

Note. \*p\* < .05, \*\*p\*\* < .01, \*\*\*p\*\*\* < .001

Model 1: Mainstream media trust by source type

	Model 1: mainstream media trust by source type		
	B	SE	Beta
Constant	3.260	0.362	
Hard antisemitism	-0.151	0.035	-0.134***
Soft antisemitism	-0.444	0.040	-0.377***
Islamophobia	0.261	0.035	0.237***
Self-identification as progressive	0.159	0.039	0.136***
Political orientation (0=left)	0.007	0.018	0.012
Trust: TV	-0.054	0.028	-0.068
Trust: Newspapers	0.096	0.035	0.121**
Trust: Radio	0.056	0.035	0.066
Trust: Internet	-0.062	0.038	-0.074
Freq. news cons. mainstream	0.043	0.034	0.049
Freq. of going to the church	0.089	0.034	0.081**
Gender (1=male)	0.087	0.092	0.027
Education	0.094	0.027	0.105***
Age	0.072	0.034	0.064*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.402		

Note. \*p\* < .05, \*\*p\*\* < .01, \*\*\*p\*\*\* < .001

Model 2: SNS trust by source type

	Model 2: SNS trust by source type		
	B	SE	Beta
Constant	3.308	0.358	
Hard antisemitism	-0.154	0.038	-0.137***
Soft antisemitism	-0.449	0.039	-0.381***
Islamophobia	0.245	0.035	0.222***
Self-identification as progressive	0.146	0.039	0.125***
Political orientation (0=left)	0.026	0.018	0.045
Trust: Facebook	-0.020	0.041	-0.024
Trust: YouTube	0.031	0.041	0.037
Trust: WhatsApp	0.013	0.035	0.016
Trust: Instagram	-0.138	0.037	-0.171***
Trust: Facebook	0.090	0.042	0.109*
Trust: Twitter	0.145	0.043	0.180***
Trust: Telegram	-0.057	0.037	-0.060
Trust: TikTok	0.009	0.035	0.010
Freq. news cons. SNS	0.011	0.038	0.014
Freq. of going to the church	0.072	0.034	0.065*
Gender (1=male)	0.136	0.092	0.042
Education	0.103	0.027	0.116***
Age	0.081	0.034	0.073*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.434		

Note. \*p\* < .05, \*\*p\*\* < .01, \*\*\*p\*\*\* < .001

Table 2. The Result of VIF

	<b>VIF Model 1</b>	<b>VIF Model 2</b>
Hard antisemitism	1.123	1.177
Soft antisemitism	1.444	1.410
Islamophobia	1.173	1.176
Self-identification as progressive	1.298	1.296
Political orientation (0=left)	1.156	1.138
Mainstream news consumption	1.172	
Social media news consumption		1.193
Frequency of going to the church	1.062	1.109
Gender (1=male)	1.066	1.069
Education	1.025	1.020
Age	1.138	1.153