

The campaign to boycott Israel

May 2019



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The movement to boycott Israel is an international network of organisations and individuals that campaign against Israel and oppose dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

The movement's formal goals include a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to pre-1967 Israel. The movement's founders reject a negotiated two-state solution and Israel's right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people. They view Israel as an 'apartheid state' established through 'settler colonialism'.

The boycott movement is active in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and South Africa, especially in trade unions, churches and in universities.

Opponents of Israel boycotts believe that they damage peace making by perpetuating a false picture of the conflict; demonising the Jewish claim to national self-determination; promoting an unrealistic, radical, and dangerous solution to the conflict; and opposing normalisation between Israelis and Palestinians. They also argue that these components frequently lead to defamation and hate speech being used towards Jewish Israelis and supporters of Israel.

The British Government opposes boycotts of Israel and has implemented measures and regulations to prevent public sector organisations from pursuing bans on investment and trade in Israel. Bilateral trade between Israel and the UK is booming. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is close to several organisations in the UK that are central to the movement to boycott Israel. He has also called for a freeze on arms sales to Israel.

European governments oppose boycotts of Israel, which has strong diplomatic, economic and military relations with most European governments.

Though some Israeli politicians have warned about the potential impact of the boycott movement, and some international corporations have been pressurised into divesting from Israeli companies, the impact of boycotts has so far been limited and sporadic. This is primarily because much of Israel's output consists of technology and high-grade industrial products, which are harder for bottom-up consumer

campaigns to target, and not easily substituted. Attempts to convince performers to boycott Israel have had very limited success. Some high-profile artists have refused to perform in Israel, but artists such as Radiohead, Tom Jones, Guns N Roses, Britney Spears, Take That and others have appeared in Israel since 2017. The Giro D'Italia bike race began in Israel in 2018 and Madonna will be attending this year's Eurovision Song Contest in Tel Aviv.

While attempts to impose blanket boycotts on Israel have largely failed, there are increasing attempts to distinguish between Israel and the West Bank and to implement boycotts on products from Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Israel's response to boycotts has been led by the Strategic Affairs Ministry. It seeks to expose the pro-boycott activity of NGOs funded by European governments and has called for their funding to be cut and for more legislation to prevent boycotts in the US and Europe. Israel has also enacted its own anti-boycott legislation.

While right and centre-left parties in Israel condemn boycotts, there is disagreement over the best way to fight it and opposition politicians have criticised some government policies as counterproductive.

INTRODUCTION

[Israel will host the Eurovision Song Contest on 19 May 2019](#) and activists have called on participants to boycott the event. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) said the BBC, songwriters and performers should withdraw from the contest, to avoid being "complicit in Israel's ongoing violations of Palestinian human rights". Some British cultural figures such as Vivienne Westwood, Peter Gabriel and Mike Leigh signed a letter calling on the BBC to cancel its coverage.

Stephen Fry, Sharon Osbourne, Marina Abramović, pop mogul Scooter Braun and others last week [signed a letter opposing any boycott of Eurovision](#). Their letter states that calls to boycott are "subverting the spirit of the contest and turning it from a tool of unity into a weapon of division", adding that: "We believe the cultural boycott movement is an affront to both Palestinians and Israelis who are

working to advance peace through compromise, exchange, and mutual recognition. While we all may have differing opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the best path to peace, we all agree that a cultural boycott is not the answer.” Last year’s winner, Netta Barzilai said: “Boycotting is preventing light from being spread and when you boycott light, you spread darkness, that is what I think. I believe in a dialogue, I believe in protest, let’s have it, but boycotting isn’t the answer ... it’s all about building bridges, it’s all about celebrating diversity, being all these people from all these places on the same stage and saying ‘hey, we’re all the same and we’re celebrating all these ethnicities and all these kinds and types of music.” She added: “It shouldn’t be political, it’s a disaster if it will be.”

[This paper examines the political movement to boycott Israel](#) including its policies, strategies and how effective it has been. The paper also analyses how governments in Israel, the UK, North America and Europe have responded to it.

SECTION 1: WHAT IS THE BOYCOTT MOVEMENT?

[The BDS \(Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions\) Movement is an international network of organisations and individuals promoting a range of measures against Israel, Israeli organisations, companies, cultural bodies and Israeli citizens.](#) Its activity ranges from disrupting performances by Israeli performers in the UK, urging banks and pension funds to withdraw investments from Israel, campaigning for governments to end arms sales and purchases, to withdraw from trade agreements with Israel, and calling for the expulsion of Israel from international forums such as the UN and FIFA.

[The movement’s founders reject a negotiated two-state solution and Israel’s right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people.](#) Whilst the movement claims to be “a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality”, its organisers do not believe in a negotiated two-state solution, but rather in replacing Israel with a single Arab majority state (which they call the ‘one state solution’). [Omar Barghouti, Co-Founder of the BDS Movement](#), who himself studied at Tel Aviv University and completed a Master’s degree in Philosophy in 2009, said that: “Definitely, most definitely we oppose a Jewish

state in any part of Palestine. No Palestinian, rational Palestinian, not a sell-out Palestinian, will ever accept a Jewish state in Palestine.”

[The movement’s formal goals include Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the “right of return”](#) for Palestinian refugees and their descendants – who the movement counts as numbering over 7 million people – to the State of Israel. This latter demand would jeopardise the existence of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people and runs counter to the ‘two states for two peoples’ principle of the two-state solution.

[The boycott movement believes that Israel is an ‘apartheid state’ and established through ‘settler colonialism,’](#) [arguing](#) that: “Israel has implemented a regime of institutionalised racial discrimination and systematic oppression over the Palestinian people that meets the UN definition of apartheid.” The claim that Israel is a ‘settler colonialist state’ has been echoed by many such as [Ilan Pappé](#) at Exeter University [and others](#). Boycott activist [Michael Warschawski has written that](#): “For us Zionism is not a national liberation movement but a colonial movement, and the State of Israel is and has always been a settler colonial state. Peace-or better yet, justice-cannot be achieved without a total decolonisation (one can say de-Zionisation) of the Israeli state. The by product of these definitions is that Israel needs to be dismantled.” Another founding member of the movement, Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, [has called](#) for using terms such as ‘settler colonialism’ and ‘apartheid’ as new legal frameworks to advance the right of all Palestinians to freedom and justice.

[An integral component of the movement’s strategy is to oppose normalisation of relations between Israelis and Palestinians](#) and instead cause Israel’s isolation and eventual collapse, in the manner of apartheid South Africa. A position paper adopted by the [Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel](#) (PACBI) states that organisations should: “Refuse to take part in whitewashing Israel’s public image and therefore reject any Israeli-Palestinian meetings that do not recognise our inalienable rights, and explicitly aim to resist Israel’s occupation, colonisation and apartheid”. It adds that: “Israeli-Palestinian meetings that are not committed to such principles give a false picture of equality between the two parties by ignoring and legitimising Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people. We will not contribute to any event that un-

dermines our rights or portrays Israel as anything but what it really is: an apartheid state.”

The boycott movement officially traces its origins to a 2005 call by a coalition of 170 Palestinian organisations, though it was given impetus by the 2001 Durban anti-racism conference where representatives of 3,000 NGOs called on “the international community to impose a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state”. (Philip Mendes explains that the Conference was distinguished by “the most appalling manifestations of overt anti-Semitism such as praise for Nazi Germany, and widespread circulation of the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion”.) There is a long history of campaigns to boycott and delegitimise Israel. The Arab League promoted a global economic boycott after Israel was founded in 1948, and the Soviet Union sponsored a global anti-Zionist propaganda and diplomatic campaign for many decades.

The Palestinian coordinating body for the BDS campaign worldwide is the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), which includes a large number of Palestinian civil society groups such as the PACBI, the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, General Union of Palestinian Workers, Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, Palestinian NGO Network, Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition, General Union of Palestinian Teachers, General Union of Palestinian Writers, Union of Palestinian Farmers, Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign - Stop the Wall, Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) and others.

The Israeli Government claims that some BDS groups have active links to terrorist groups. Yossi Kuperwasser, former head of the research division in the IDF Military Intelligence division and Director General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs has written that some of the groups constituting the BNC are branches of terrorist organisations, especially PFLP, the Marxist Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Kuperwasser adds that Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine functioned as the joint command during the Second Intifada and has among its members Hamas, Islamic Jihad, PFLP, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Another Israeli intelligence organisation has presented evidence that activists of the Palestine Return Centre (PRC) are connected to Hamas.

In the UK, boycott activities are led by several political campaign groups including the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the PRC, War on Want, and Friends of Al Aqsa, and supported by some trade unions. These groups campaign for organisations to implement boycotts of Israel and to divest their pension funds from Israeli investments, as well as to engage in direct action to disrupt Israeli cultural or commercial activities in the UK.

The Palestinian Authority’s (PA) position regarding boycotts is ambiguous. Its official position is still to support a negotiated two-state solution, and it relies on Israeli economic and security cooperation. In 2013, during a trip to South Africa, PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas said he rejected boycotts of Israel: “No, we do not support the boycott of Israel. But we ask everyone to boycott the products of the settlements. Because the settlements are in our territories. It is illegal. But we do not ask anyone to boycott Israel itself. We have relations with Israel, we have mutual recognition of Israel.”

At the same time, since 2011, the Palestinian leadership has turned away from a negotiation strategy in favour of “internationalising” the conflict by seeking to isolate and weaken Israel in the international arena. The PA seeks to benefit from the international isolation of Israel which boycott campaigns contribute to. The 27th PLO Central Committee Conference, named ‘The Steadfastness and Popular Resistance Conference,’ decided in 2015 to advance boycott as an element of popular resistance and advocated support for the BDS campaign, and representatives from the PLO and Fatah attended the 6th Conference of the Palestinian BDS National Committee in Ramallah in March 2019.

But the BDS Movement has criticised the PA for its relationship with Israel. Some in the BDS Movement see the PA as a “subcontractor of Israel”. Omar Barghouti recently called for pressure to be exerted on the PA and various other sectors of Palestinian society to end all forms of normalisation with Israel, including security coordination, economic cooperation and what he called “cultural normalisation,” “tourism normalisation” and “media normalisation” (which he clarified means opposition to the appearance of “members of the Zionist media” on Arab media, and opposition to the participation of Palestinians in programmes

where Israelis also appeared).

Other individuals, organisation and political parties, which do not necessarily share the BDS movement's ideological agenda, have called for more specific moves, such as boycotting settlement goods, stopping arms sales to Israel, or divesting from businesses that operate in the West Bank.

SECTION 2: BOYCOTTS IN ACTION

2.1 Boycotts

The BDS Movement defines boycotts as [involving the withdrawal of support for Israel and Israeli and international companies](#) as well as Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions that are deemed as being “complicit” or “involved in the violation of Palestinian human rights”.

Driven by its anti-normalisation component, boycott activities have included picketing and disrupting performances by Israeli performers in the UK, including the (ethnically mixed) Batsheva dance company (2012), the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (2011), the Jerusalem Quartet Performances (2010 and 2015), and the Habima theatre company's performance of Merchant of Venice in Hebrew at the Globe (2012). Shows by Israeli student dance company Pola and theatre company [Incubator](#) at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2014 were cancelled after boycott activists organised demonstrations outside their shows and led performers and venues to fear for their safety.

High profile artists performing in Israel are also routinely subject to campaigns of intimidation by pro-boycott activists, which include among their ranks a small number of well-known cultural figures such as Roger Waters.

The Boycott movement also pickets and intimidates Israeli speakers and their audiences on university campuses, in attempt to prevent them from being heard. In 2017, a screening of a pro-Israel documentary at the University of California, Irvine, drew protesters who blocked the exit paths and chanted, “Long live the intifada,” which prompted attendees to fear for their safety and call campus police. Students for Justice for Palestine, a boycott supporting group, has disrupted dozens of Israeli speakers at US universities, including one

focused on indigenous communities in the Middle East (UCLA); a speech by Israel's Consul General in New York, Dani Dayan (Columbia University); a lecture by Shany Mor, an Associate Fellow at the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities, on the topic of “Compromise and Representation” (Bard College); and a lecture by George Deek, an Arab-Israeli diplomat in Israel's Foreign Ministry (UC Davis).

Prominent examples in the UK include violent protests at an event at King's College London in 2016 targeting former Israeli intelligence chief and current peace campaigner Ami Ayalon. Ayalon, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute, former Head of the Israel Security Agency between 1995 and 2000, and joint author with Palestinian Professor Sari Nusseibeh of a peace initiative called ‘The People's Voice’ in support of a two-state future, was disrupted when protestors forced their way into the building, breaking a window. Other violent disruptions of Israeli speakers have occurred with Hen Mazzig, a gay former IDF commander (UCL), Israeli Deputy Ambassador Alon Roth Snir (Essex) and Israeli Bedouin diplomat Ishmael Khalidi (Edinburgh).

PACBI also campaigned against an event in March 2019 at the London School of Economics (LSE) entitled ‘[Towards a New Generation in Palestine & Israel](#)’. The speakers at the conference, which was organised by LSESU Voices of Israel-Palestine included Israeli and Palestinian journalists, academics, and grassroots peace activists including: Palestinian Huda Abuarquob, Regional Director of the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), a leading supporter of Women Wage Peace, and an active leader in grassroots Palestinian initiatives focused on women's empowerment and people-to-people diplomacy; Alon-Lee Green, the founding National Director of Standing Together, a progressive grassroots movement mobilising around issues of peace, equality and social justice; and Sana Knaneh, Development Director at the UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum.

Explaining its call to boycott, [PACBI](#) argued that the conference “effectively seeks to reduce over 70 years of Israel's settler-colonialism and apartheid to a ‘conflict’ resulting from a lack of understanding that could be eliminated through dialogue between two equal parties. This unethical act of false equivalence normalises the unjust status quo.”

Although pro-boycott groups deny they are antisemitic, Palestinian Civil Society groups who support the BDS Movement have rejected the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism and [called for others, including the Labour Party, to reject it](#). The [definition](#), which provides contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life and also explicitly emphasises that “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic”, was described by the BDS Movement [as a definition that](#) “deliberately conflates hostility to or prejudice or discrimination against Jews on the one hand with legitimate critiques of Israel’s policies and system of injustice on the other.” The BDS Movement further argues that the ‘discredited’ definition is a [false, anti-Palestinian definition](#) of antisemitism, claiming it attempts to erase Palestinian history, demonise solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality, suppress freedom of expression, and shield Israel’s far-right regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid from effective measures of accountability in accordance to international law”.

[Activists have also been linked to antisemitic discourse](#) with two separate reports by [David Hirsh](#) and [David Collier](#) providing examples of the PSC tolerating antisemitism, and Hirsh also [detailing](#) how “old antisemitic tropes, including blood libel and conspiracy, have a tendency to emerge, recycled, out of the boycott movement,” explaining how “Israel is portrayed as a blood-thirsty child-murdering state... it is said that Jews were behind the slave trade; it is said that the Rothschilds financed the state of Israel by stealing diamonds from South Africa; it is said that Israel steals and trades in body parts; it is said that Israel is genocidal like the Nazis; it is said that Israel controls politics and the media around the world.” A PSC rally that took place on 11 May 2019 – and which Corbyn and Shadow chancellor John McDonnell gave messages of support – included placards such as “Israel provokes anti-Semitism” and images of the Star of David with a swastika, as well as others such as “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” and those claiming that “Israelis execute Palestinian children”. Glyn Secker, Jewish Voice for Labour’s secretary, accused members of the Jewish leadership of crying wolf over antisemitism and argued that their campaign “over allegations of antisemitism against Corbyn and the left was

‘to silence Israel’s critics’”. The PRC has organised events chaired by Jenny Tonge, who has previously questioned why the Jewish people have been persecuted through history and suggested Israel had harvested organs in Haiti. The negative impact of boycott campaigns in the UK and the US is felt most acutely by the local Jewish community and Jewish students. A poll in 2015 found that 70 per cent of British Jews consider Israel to be an important part of their Jewish identity, and 90 per cent supporting its right to exist as a Jewish state.

[Jewish students on American campus have complained of being demonised](#) and fake eviction notices have been put on their doors by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at Rutgers University (October 2013), Harvard University (March 2013), North eastern University (February 2014), UC Berkeley (March 2015) University of Michigan (December 2013), Florida Atlantic University (March 2012) Ohio State University (October 2014) and Claremont College (March 2016). The notices declared that the students’ residence was scheduled for demolition in three days and added that the use of eviction notices against Palestinians by Israeli authorities is part of “the state of Israel’s ongoing attempts to ethnically cleanse the region of its Arab inhabitants and maintain an exclusively ‘Jewish’ character of the state”. There is debate over whether Jewish students were specifically targeted. Some SJP groups, such as the Stony Brook University chapter, have even [called for](#) the expulsion of Jewish groups on campus, likening Israel supporters to Nazis and White Nationalists. They said: “We ask the university: if there were Nazis, white nationalists, and KKK members on campus, would their identity have to accepted and respected? Then why would we respect the views of Zionists?”

2.2 Divestment

[The divestment campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investments](#) from all Israeli companies and from international companies deemed by the movement to be “involved in violating Palestinian rights.” In the UK, the PSC, War on Want, the Campaign Against the Arms Trade and the Quakers have urged local councils to divest from companies involved in what they call ‘Israel’s illegal occupation.’ The PSC has also claimed that HSBC is a major shareholder in companies supplying

weapons to Israel and has called for the bank to sever ties with companies selling weapons to Israel.

2.3 Sanctions

Sanctions involve campaigning for governments to cease purchases and sales of military equipment with Israel, cancelling trade deals and free-trade agreements with Israel and expelling Israel from international forums such as the UN and FIFA. For example, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and South African Federation of Trade Unions ([SAFTU](#)) have called for a comprehensive arms embargo against Israel as have [several Spanish municipal councils](#). In a letter to FIFA's chair [the Palestinian BDS Committee argued that](#) "there is no option for FIFA other than to suspend the Israeli Football Association to maintain its consistency and credibility ... an occupation which is fundamentally racist against Palestinians and which displays all the characteristics of apartheid should not be accommodated by FIFA".

SECTION 3: THE BOYCOTT MOVEMENT IN THE UK

3.1 The Conservative Government and the Labour Party

In September 2018, Prime Minister [Theresa May said](#): "There can never be any excuses for boycotts, divestment or sanctions: they are unacceptable and this government will have no truck with those who subscribe to them."

[The Government has introduced anti-boycott regulations](#). In February 2017, the UK Government updated the revised best value statutory guidance to include guidance on the subject of procurement boycotts to make it clear that public authorities should not implement or pursue boycotts other than where formal legal sanctions, embargoes and restrictions have been put in place by the government. The guidance requires: "Local authorities by law to treat suppliers fairly and in line with the British government's policies." It means no council can boycott any country or industry unless restrictions have already been put in place by the government. This follows rules set by the World Trade Organisation requiring all member countries to "treat suppliers equally and without prejudice".

[The Government has also issued guidance on divestment by council pensions funds](#), arguing that councils should not "pursue investment policies that are contrary to UK foreign policy or UK defence policy". A challenge by the PSC – which claimed it was unlawful – won in an initial court case but was subsequently defeated in the Court of Appeal although in January 2019 the Supreme Court granted the PSC permission to appeal the Court of Appeal's decision.

[Bilateral trade between Israel and the UK is booming, totalling approximately \\$10.5bn in 2018](#). The Conservative Government has actively promoted bilateral economic and cultural relations and in February 2019, the UK and Israel signed a new UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement which ensures continuity of trade between the two countries after Brexit. [British Secretary of State for International Trade, Liam Fox said](#) that the agreement protects existing preferential market access for important Israeli products, such as pharmaceutical products – Israeli companies are major suppliers to the NHS, particularly in generic medicine – adding that "Britain's relationship with Israel is stronger than it has ever been with record levels of bilateral cooperation in trade and investment between our two nations". In a farewell interview, UK Ambassador to Israel [David Quarrey](#) pointed to three consecutive years of record bilateral trade figures adding that the UK is Israel's biggest trade partner in Europe and Israel's biggest investment destination in Europe with over 340 Israeli companies operating in the UK.

[The Labour Party leadership comes from a political tradition that supports BDS, but official Labour policy does not endorse boycotts](#). Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Labour shadow ministers have expressed sympathy for boycotts of Israel. [Kate Osamor, the shadow development secretary, publicly backed the BDS movement](#), by tweeting that boycotts "work to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians". The Labour leader has expressed support for boycotts; when [attending a conference in Belfast in 2015](#), Corbyn said he thought the boycott campaign was "part and parcel of a legal process that has to be adopted", adding that: "I believe that sanctions against Israel, because of its breach of the trade agreement, are the appropriate way of promoting [the] peace process." Corbyn was also a long standing patron of the [PSC](#) and has spoken at events and attended

trips organised by the PRC – both of which support and promote boycotts of Israel.

Since Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party, he has used different language. In December 2017, a spokesperson for Corbyn said the Labour leader [“is not in favour of a comprehensive or blanket boycott,”](#) adding: “He doesn’t support BDS. He does support targeted action aimed at illegal settlements and occupied territories.” Shadow Foreign Secretary [Emily Thornberry](#) has said boycotts of Israeli products are “bigotry against the Israeli nation”. Jon Lansman, the founder of pro-Corbyn activist network Momentum, has also said he opposes a boycott of Israel but he does boycott settlement produce.

[The Labour Party has however called for a freeze on arms sales to Israel.](#) The Labour Party Conference in September 2018 adopted a motion which urged “an independent, international investigation into Israel’s use of force against Palestinian demonstrators; a freeze of UK Government arms sales to Israel; and an immediate unconditional end to the illegal blockade and closure of Gaza”. In January 2019, [in a letter to Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt,](#) Emily Thornberry asked him to confirm that: “If Israel does engage in escalating acts of aggression against Iran, including inside Iraq, then it will be in breach of the rules governing the UK arms export regime, and that the sale of arms to Israel for use in those acts of international aggression will therefore be suspended.” And in March 2019, following a report by the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry about the death of Commission of Inquiry highlighted the killings of at least 189 Palestinians during Hamas’ Great March of Return at the Gaza border [Corbyn tweeted](#) that: “The UK government must unequivocally condemn the killings and freeze arms sales to Israel”. Party insiders also believe a boycott of settlement produce could soon be adopted as a formal Labour Party policy.

3.2 Universities:

[The National Union Students has passed policy in support of BDS.](#) However, this was not passed by the main Annual Conference of NUS but agreed in June 2018 by the NUS National Executive Council (NEC), a smaller body elected by the Annual Conference. The NEC motion said NUS would: “continue to support the Palestinian-led call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions of Israel, along

with civil society, human rights organisations, and trade unions, until it complies with basic tenets of international law.”

[About 15 of 130 individual student unions in the UK have passed motions support a boycott of Israel,](#) (although this has little practical impact as Student Unions don’t control academic interaction with Israel). In 2018, a boycott motion at Cardiff University was defeated while one at the University of Leicester passed.

[In 2015 the board of Universities UK, representing British universities, issued a statement opposing boycotts](#) saying: “The board of Universities UK wishes to confirm its previously stated position that it is firmly opposed to any academic boycott of Israeli universities.”

In 2010, 38 Nobel laureates denounced the call for an academic boycott of Israel as a step which is “antithetical to principles of academic and scientific freedom,” and which “may well constitute discrimination by virtue of national origin”.

3.3 Local Councils:

[Nine of 407 local councils in the UK have a boycott policy.](#) Leicester, Tower Hamlets, Swansea and Gwynedd in North Wales have passed motions to boycott settlements and West Dunbartonshire, Clackmannanshire, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council and Mid Ulster District Council have adopted broader policies to boycott Israel. There have been no proposals of this nature debated in any UK local councils outside Northern Ireland since just after Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

3.4 Trade Unions:

[The Trade Union Congress supports a boycott of Israeli companies that are “complicit in the occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories” but has emphasised their opposition to this being extended to all of Israel.](#) Two of the largest Trade Unions, Unison and [Unite](#) have passed similar motions to “vigorously promote a policy of divestment from Israeli companies”, adding that a “boycott of Israeli goods and services will be ‘similar to the boycott of South African goods during the era of apartheid’”. Both Trade Unions have also suspended relations with the Israeli trade union federation, the Histadrut.

3.5 Churches:

British churches have adopted different approaches to boycott. During a visit to Israel in 2013, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said: “The clear policy of the Church of England and my own personal opinion is that the State of Israel is a legitimate state like every other state in the world, and has a right to exist in security and peace with internationally agreed boundaries.”

The Quakers are heavily involved in the UK part of the ‘Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel’ (EAPPI), which recruits and despatches observers to several Palestinian towns and villages to monitor the interaction between the Palestinian inhabitants and the IDF, and [have stated](#) that: “While Quakers in Britain is not a member of the full Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement and does not advocate for BDS, we do support the right of organisations and citizens to engage in such democratic and legitimate means of non-violent protest.” A settlement boycott policy was passed in 2011, and in 2018 the Quakers announced that the church will not invest any of its centrally-held funds in companies “profiting from the occupation of Palestine”.

The Methodists passed a settlement boycott in 2010 and subsequently passed a moratorium delaying any further debate on boycotts of Israel, saying in the meantime they should support projects which promote peace and improve economic conditions in the region. Theological justification for boycotts of Israel is drawn from the cross denominational [Kairos Palestine Document of 2009](#) which declares that “the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights” and calls on “individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance ...in this spirit and with this dedication we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems, as indeed happened in South Africa and with many other liberation movements in the world.” Christian Aid, the official relief and development agency of [41 British and Irish](#) churches including the Church of England, advocates for a boycott of settlements.

3.6 Public opinion

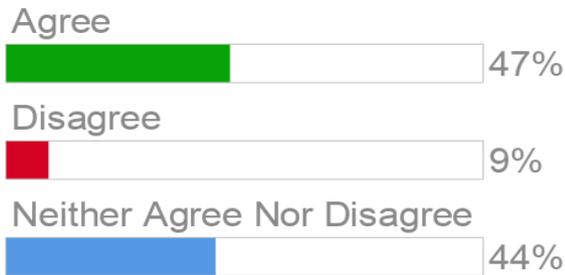
UK public opinion polls have measured a consistently low level of support for a boycott of Israel. An opinion poll carried out in October 2018 by [Populus for BICOM](#) with a sample size of 2000 people found that 14 per cent of respondents support a boycott of Israel. Forty-eight per cent of people agreed with the statement: “I do not support boycotts of Israel and find it difficult to understand how others do given everything else that is going on in the world.” Fourteen per cent disagreed and 38 per cent said they didn’t know. The trend has been broadly stable since the question was first asked in 2014. In a [survey conducted by the Ipsos MORI company](#) during 2016 and 2017 on behalf of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and the Community Security Trust, 10 per cent of respondents supported a boycott of Israel and 46 per cent disagreed. The poll also suggested that respondents who supported boycotts and the apartheid analogy were significantly more likely to agree with “more traditional anti-Jewish tropes”.

UK boycott campaigns have been widely condemned. The Tricycle Theatre was criticised in 2014 when it withdrew from the Jewish Film Festival because the festival received sponsorship from the Israeli government. An editorial in the *Guardian* newspaper [stated](#) that it had “made a bad error of judgment”. In October 2015 nearly 150 leading British cultural figures signed a letter published in *The Guardian* rejecting [calls by Artists for Palestine which called for a cultural boycott of Israel](#). The letter was signed by J.K. Rowling, Melvyn Bragg, Niall Ferguson, Hilary Mantel, Simon Schama, Simon Sebag Montefiore, Anthony Seldon, Zoe Wannamaker and others. The Shalom Festival of Israeli culture – established to create space on the Edinburgh festival fringe to showcase Israeli culture in response to disruption of Israeli performers by boycotters in previous years – was run as part of the Edinburgh Fringe in 2016 and 2017 and included the Incubator Theatre previously withdrew from the festival after being subjected to an Israel boycott campaign.

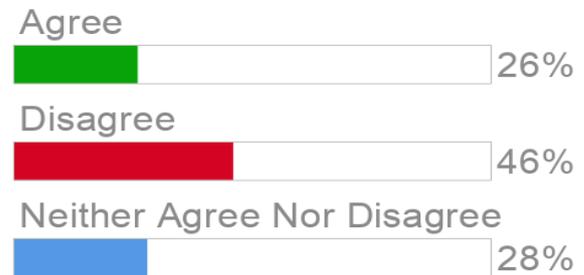
SECTION 4: THE BOYCOTT MOVEMENT IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Israel has strong diplomatic, economic and military

A boycott would hurt both Palestinians and Israelis because a successful Palestinian economy needs a strong Israeli economy alongside it as its largest trading partner



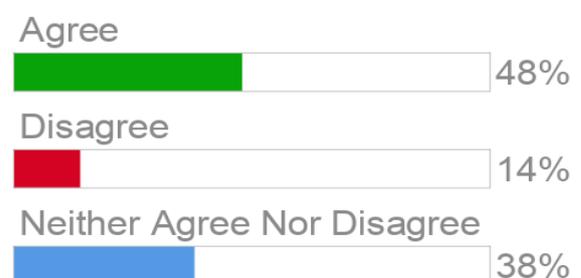
An economic boycott of Israel would increase Israel's willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians



I would be more likely to boycott goods and produce from Israeli settlements in the occupied territories



I do not support boycotts of Israel and find it difficult to understand how others do given everything else that is going on in the world



[relations with most European governments](#) and Israel-EU trade remains strong. Imports from the EU have grown from €14bn in 2006 to more than €21bn in 2016.

[The EU has explicitly opposed boycotts of Israel.](#) In July 2018, EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini [emphasised](#) that: “The EU rejects any attempts to isolate Israel and does not support calls for boycott. The EU does not fund actions that are related to boycott activities.”

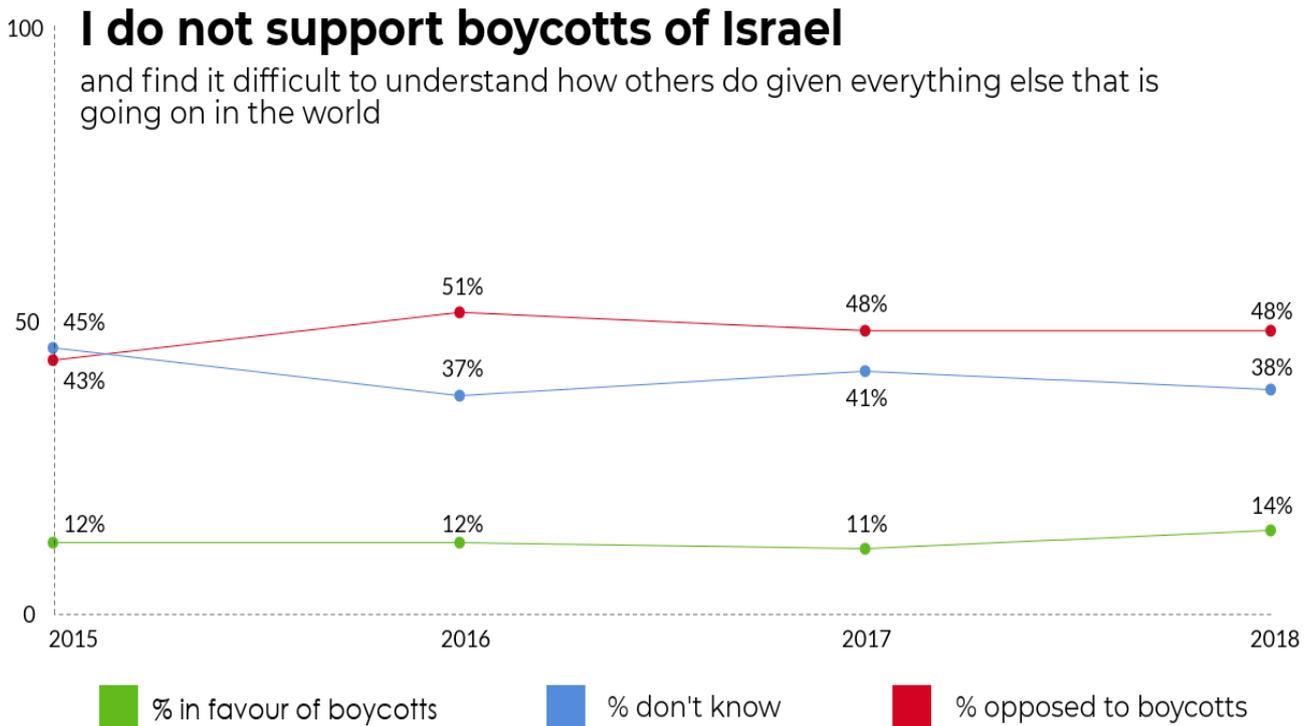
[France has introduced legal measures against boycotts](#) which extend anti-racism laws to the targeting of specific nations for discriminatory treatment. Former [President François Hollande told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) about his strong opposition to boycotting Israel and his desire to maintain strong economic relations between the two countries.

[In Germany the notion of a consumer boycott of Israeli products carries an added negative political weight](#) due to the echo of the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses and [Chancellor Angela Merkel has](#)

[consistently opposed boycotts](#) and promised that “Israeli products will, of course, continue to receive preferential market access”.

[Some European countries have emphasised that while they oppose boycotts, individuals and groups who support it should be protected by freedom of expression.](#) Then-[Dutch foreign minister, Bert Koenders](#) said that: “Statements or meetings concerning boycotts are protected by freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as enshrined in the Dutch Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights”. It followed a similar declaration by Sweden. In 2018, an internal document from Norway’s Foreign Affairs Ministry concluded that boycotting products and services coming from Israeli settlements is legal and does not contradict Norway’s international trade commitments but [asserted](#) that: “The government does not consider boycotting Israel’s product to be helpful in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” The examination began after two Norwegian cities, Tromsø and Trondheim, applied boycott measures on products and services coming from Israeli settlements.

Populus - UK Public Attitudes Survey



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has [expressed his opposition to boycotts](#), telling the Canadian Jewish News in 2015: “I’m opposed to the BDS movement. I think that it’s an example of the new form of anti-Semitism in the world, as Irwin Cotler points out, an example of the three ‘Ds’: demonisation of Israel, delegitimisation of Israel, and double standard applied toward Israel.”

[Political support in America for boycotts of Israel is low](#) and is not supported by any Democratic senator or presidential candidate. At the same time, two Democrat freshmen Congresswomen, Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN), recently expressed their support for boycotts of Israel and Bernie Sanders has backed the right to boycott in general.

A poll by [Ipsos Global Market Research](#) in May 2016 – with a sample size of 1,100 people – found that 33 per cent of respondents believed that a boycott of Israel was justified but 62 per cent believed it was an expression of modern antisemitism. A more recent February 2019 poll published by [Rasmussen](#) of 1000 likely voters found that 20 per cent supported a boycott of Israel and 41 per cent opposed it. Thirty-nine per cent said they didn’t

have an opinion.

[Twenty seven states in America have adopted anti-boycott laws](#), which require state contractors to certify that they are not participating in politically motivated boycotts against Israel. But the laws are subject to a number of legal challenges, including by the [American Civil Liberties Union](#), who claim the law violates civil liberties and the First Amendment right to free speech.

[To counter this, opponents of boycotts introduced ‘The Strengthening America’s Security in the Middle East Act’](#), known as S.1, to provide legal cover to the different state anti-boycott laws. Despite passing 77-23 in the Senate, the bill aroused controversy with some Democrats – including the potential presidential candidates in 2020 – arguing it set a precedent for legislative assaults on free speech in other domains. Senator Elizabeth Warren stated that while she opposes boycotts: “Outlawing protected free speech activity violates our basic constitutional rights.” Senator Cory Booker argued that: “There are ways to combat BDS without compromising free speech, and this bill as it currently stands plainly misses the mark”. To become law, the bill has to pass the House of Representatives –

which is far from certain – and be signed into law by the President.

SECTION 5: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BOYCOTTS

Though some Israeli politicians have warned about the potential impact of the boycott movement, its impact has so far been limited and sporadic.

This is primarily due to the composition of Israel's output, which consists of high-grade intermediate industrial products, which makes it harder for bottom-up consumer campaigns to target, and not easily substitutable. A report by the [Institute for National Security Studies](#) said that: "Campaigns calling on consumers to boycott Israeli products are perhaps capable of harming the export of agricultural and food products, which represent less than 10 per cent of Israel's total exports to the EU, they will find it harder to impact the export of chemical, rubber, IT, machinery, and optical products, which represent more than 45 per cent of Israel's total exports to the EU and are embedded in various stages of production in many different industries throughout Europe and other countries."

Some international corporations have come under pressure to divest from Israeli companies. In January 2014, PGGM, the largest pension fund in the Netherlands, announced its divestment from Israel's five largest banks. The Danish Dansk Bank, and Sweden's Nordea Bank have blacklisted Israeli banks due to their alleged financing of construction in settlements. The Norwegian Finance Ministry has also blacklisted Africa Israel Investments and Danya Cebus due to their involvement in constructing Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. In December 2016, British security company G4S announced that it was selling most of its Israeli business after a boycott campaign was launched against the company, and Veolia was targeted for its work on the light rail in Jerusalem. Some decisions claimed as victories by the boycott movement have been denied by the companies involved. In January 2016, French telecoms giant [Orange denied](#) their decision to end their franchise relationship with Israeli company Partner Communications was connected to a boycott campaign. Their CEO told *Yediot Ahronoth*: "We love Israel, we are in Israel, in the enterprise market, we invest money in innovation in Israel, we are a friend of Israel." Other moves hailed by the BDS Movement,

such as [Sodastream](#) relocating from the West Bank to the Negev, led to 500 Palestinian workers losing their jobs. It is also far from clear the BDS campaign affected the company's financial success. In 2018, it signed a \$3.2bn deal with Birnbaum and PepsiCo.

Attempts to convince performers to boycott Israel has had very limited success. Two high profile artists, Lorde and Shakira, were due to perform in 2018 but pulled out after boycott campaigns. In September 2018, US artist Lana del Ray pulled out of the Meteor music festival in Israel, and several British DJs and artists also pulled out of the festival, some of them making pro-boycott statements on social media. A football match between Israel and Argentina before the World Cup was also cancelled, (while boycott activists who threatened the players and their families claimed this as a victory, others put the cancellation down to the fact the Argentinian team didn't want to travel so soon before the beginning of the World Cup and Culture Minister Miri Regev insisting the match be moved from Haifa to Jerusalem).

Yet despite calls for boycott, the Giro d'Italia bike race took place in Israel in 2018. And many high profile bands and comedians have performed in Israel over the last 2 years, including: Tom Jones (2017), Guns N Roses (2017), Britney Spears (2017), Take That (2017), Jamiroquai (2018), Backstreet Boys (2018) as well as comedians Chris Rock (2018), Jerry Seinfeld (2017) and Eddie Izzard (2017). Bon Jovi and Jennifer Lopez are due to perform this Summer and Madonna will be singing at the Eurovision Song Contest in Tel Aviv. In 2017, before its visit to Israel, Radiohead responded to the pressure being put on the band to pull out of a scheduled gig, by calling it "deeply disrespectful" [adding](#): "The kind of dialogue that they want to engage in is one that's black or white." Nick Cave, who performed in Israel in 2018, called the cultural boycott of Israel "[cowardly and shameful](#)".

While the boycott movements attempt to generate wide support for a boycott of Israel has largely failed, there has been an increased attempt to distinguish between boycotts of Israel and boycotts of settlements and settlement businesses and products in the West Bank. In December 2016 the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling on states "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the

territories occupied since 1967”. In 2016 the UN Human Rights Council, on the initiative of Arab and Muslim countries and following campaigns by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty, mandated the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to produce a database of all business enterprises engaged in certain Israeli settlement activity, though the database is yet to be published. [Amnesty](#) has also called for governments to “stop enabling the economy that keeps these illegal settlements growing and fuels the suffering of Palestinians” and together with [Human Rights Watch](#) demanded that Airbnb (as well as for Booking.com, Expedia, TripAdvisor) stop listing homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Airbnb announced it was delisting homes in West Bank settlements in November 2018 but reversed this decision in April 2019 after a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of Israeli property hosts.

[Several European governments have pressed for the EU to more clearly differentiate between Israel and the West Bank](#), including by labelling goods originating in West Bank settlements. In 2015, in a move very similar to guidelines already in force in the UK since 2009, the EU adopted guidelines stating that products produced in the West Bank and Golan Heights cannot be marked as ‘produce of Israel’, and products from Israeli settlements need to be specifically labelled as such. The UK explains its own guidelines as being based on a “clear and transparent labelling of settlement products to ensure that individual consumers are able to make informed choices before they buy”. These moves, which were heavily criticised by the Israeli Government, still allow goods produced in settlements to enter the EU and be available for purchase and do not seem to have had any significant impact on consumer decisions.

Ireland’s Senate recently approved the first stage of a new law to make it a criminal offence to import products from Israeli settlements. The Control of Economic Activities (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018 prohibits “the import and sales of goods, services and natural resources originating in illegal settlements in occupied territories,” with this being punishable by up to five years in prison. The law must still be approved by further votes in the Senate and approved by the lower house of Parliament before becoming law.

SECTION 6: THE BOYCOTT MOVEMENT AND ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS

Many opponents of boycotts believe that its main damage is making steps towards a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians harder to achieve by:

1. [Building on and perpetuating a false picture of the conflict](#) by masking the complexity of the long history of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Opponents argue that the boycott movement draws a [false analogy](#) between Israel and apartheid South Africa, as opposed to recognising the legitimacy of both Jewish and Palestinian national movements. Professor Alan Johnson argues the claim that Israel is a settler colonialist state just like the US can only be advanced “by erasing historical specificity and distorting the Zionist experience as just another case of ‘white settlers from Europe,’” adding that it ignores the Jewish relationship to the land, the radicalisation of European antisemitism, the local character of so many Israeli Jews, and the international community’s mandate to create a Jewish homeland.

2. [Demonising one side by branding the Jewish claim to national self-determination](#) uniquely, as racist or Nazi despite this right being recognised as universal by the UN Charter, and the Jewish right to a national home being explicitly recognised by the League of Nations and United Nations. Rather than criticising specific Israeli policy, BDS treats the very existence of Israel as illegitimate.

3. [Promoting an unrealistic, radical, and dangerous solution to the conflict by advancing the equivalent of a one state solution in which seven million descendants of Palestinian refugees are allowed to return to Israel.](#) [Palestinian and Israeli polling](#) shows that even with support for a two-state solution at its lowest in a decade amongst Israelis and Palestinians, a consistent majority of both peoples oppose a one state solution. Most Israelis see such a ‘one state solution’ as another way of dismantling Israel.

4. [Opposing normalisation between Israelis and Palestinians, thus creating a chilling effect on attempts for joint projects.](#) By marginalising groups working for coexistence and reconciliation and promoting the most extreme and uncompromis-

ing positions on the Palestinian side, the boycott movement undermines those very forces most committed to mutual recognition and peace (as demonstrated in the LSE Conference including Israeli and Palestinian peace activists that was boycotted by the movement). The [New Israel Fund](#), the major progressive NGO working for a shared society and equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel, “views the use of these [BDS] tactics as counterproductive, and is concerned that segments of this movement seek to undermine the existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish homeland”. Opponents of boycotts also believe that one-sided international pressure designed to weaken, isolate, and even deny the legitimacy of Israel disincentivises the Palestinian leadership from addressing the difficult concessions both parties must make in negotiations, since they may believe the lack of a diplomatic solution will strengthen their hand and weaken or even destroy Israel over time.

[These components frequently lead to defamation and hate speech being used towards Jewish Israelis and ‘Zionists’](#). As a [group of British and American scholars](#) wrote in 2015: “Shrill campaigns of hatred that demonise Israel and its people are now common features of debate on the Middle East. Such campaigns go well beyond robust objections to the actions of the Israeli government and its army. They seek to delegitimise the country and to stigmatise anyone associated with it. It is little wonder that in this sort of environment anti-Israel protests often spill over into attacks on local Jewish communities.”

SECTION 7: THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE

The Israeli right highlights examples of boycott initiatives to reaffirm their position that international moves to promote Palestinian rights are inherently hostile to Israel’s interests and threaten its very existence. Strategic Affairs Minister and Likud MK Gilad Erdan said the boycott movement’s [real goal is to wipe Israel off the map](#) and that: “BDS and terror are two sides of the same coin. Both justify violence against Israeli civilians. Their aim is the same, only their means are different”.

Politicians on the Israeli centre-Left, while also harshly criticising the movement have highlighted calls to boycott Israel as an illustration of the threat

of political or economic isolation that faces Israel if it does not develop a proactive policy to resolve the Palestinian question. But Yair Lapid, head of the centrist Yesh Atid party and part of the Blue and White party, described it as “actually a puppet in a theatre operated by Hamas and Islamic Jihad” adding that boycott leaders are “[out and out anti-Semites](#)”.

[The task of ‘strategically’ combatting boycotts has been led by the Ministry of Strategic Affairs](#), a department with several dozen staff based in the Israeli Prime Minister’s office, with a budget of NIS130 million (£27.5m) over three years.

[The ministry has gathered intelligence on boycott activities](#) and has published on its [4il.org.il website](#) a series of reports detailing networks of boycott supporting organisations and their links in some cases to terrorist organisations Hamas and the PFLP, through shared personnel and fundraising. A recent report, [Terrorists in Suits](#), examined 13 international organisations that support boycotts of Israel, and alleged that 30 senior members of staff were or had been engaged in terrorist activity. The ministry has also been involved in exposing the pro-boycott activities of NGOs funded by European governments, leading Israel to [successfully lobby](#) those government to cut their funding. In May 2018 it published a list of NGOs funded by the EU which it said promoted boycotts, and were in some cases [linked](#) to terrorist organisations (charges denied by the EU).

[The Israeli Parliament has passed legislation to combat boycotts some of which has been criticised by opposition parties](#). In July 2011, the Knesset passed a law enabling individuals or organisations who publicise a call for an economic, cultural or academic boycott against a person or entity merely because of its affiliation to the State of Israel to be sued for damages, even if no damages were proven. The law was highly controversial in Israel, with many arguing it was a contravention of the right of free speech and a 2015 Supreme Court ruling amended the law to say that damages must be proven. The law was used for the first time in 2018, when an Israeli court ordered two New Zealand boycott activists to pay damages to two Israeli teenagers due to “emotional damages” caused by the cancellation of a concert by pop singer Lorde who cancelled her Tel Aviv date due to a boycott campaign.

In 2017, the Knesset passed a law banning entry to Israel of any non-citizen “who knowingly issues a public call for boycotting Israel ... [which] has a reasonable possibility of leading to the imposition of a boycott.” It applies to boycotts of Israel, Israeli institutions or “any area under its control” including settlements. In January 2018, the Ministry of Strategic Affairs published a [list](#) of pro-boycott NGOs whose activists would be banned from entering Israel. The move was criticised by opposition parties, with Yair Lapid [charging](#) that it harmed action against boycotts. He said: “Boycott activists are detestable but this is an idiotic idea. So our policy to fight boycotts is by implementing another boycott?” The Labour Party also criticised the list, with leader Avi Gabbay [saying](#) it had “no logic at all. They are causing damage abroad. So if they are here, they can’t do the same damage abroad,” and Tzipi Livni argued that the the way to hinder boycott activists was not to keep them out of Israel but to “allow them in so that they can see this country for what is really is.” In August 2018, Israeli authorities attempted to refuse entry into Israel of Lara Alqassem, a Palestinian-American student who had been granted a visa to study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, due to her prior involvement in pro-boycott organisations. The ban was overturned after an appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court, with the student arguing that she was no longer involved in these activities. Other legislative responses have included forcing NGOs to be more transparent about funding received from foreign governments.

[Some groups in Israel have implicitly warned the government](#) that while boycotts have to be fought, Israel will not be able to weaken the attraction of the movement without a [credible and persistent commitment by Israel to reaching peace](#) and ending control over the Palestinian population, as well as full integration and equality of Israel’s Arab citizens.

CONCLUSION

The movement to boycott Israel is strongly supported by trade unions, church groups and on university campuses. It has pressured some international corporations into divesting from Israeli companies and artists from appearing in Israel. But the economic impact of these boycotts has been

limited and sporadic, and many A-listers in the entertainment business continue to perform in Israel. While the BDS Movement has actively tried to brand itself as a human rights organisation, it has failed to build a mass movement or translate some of its small gains into wider acceptance. Many Governments view it as a negative phenomenon and have even passed legislation specifically to counter it.

While many states and allies of Israel are frustrated by the absence of a peace process there are increasing calls to more clearly differentiate between Israel and the West Bank. The goals of the BDS Movement have however been largely rejected as a constructive paradigm for resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

This report has been produced by BICOM’s research team in consultation with British, Israeli and US experts. We are grateful for their help.

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