

Senator Kamala Harris Has Announced that She Will be Running for US President in 2020

Kamala Harris has sought to publicly cast herself as progressive while privately catering to special interests, including the Israel lobby.

By [Whitney Webb](#)

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Confirming long-held speculation, Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) has announced that she will be running for president in 2020, pitting her against other Democratic senators such as Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) as well as Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI). Harris' announcement has generated some buzz but surprised few, as she has been considered a likely 2020 contender for the Democratic nomination since early 2017. Harris [first tweeted](#) on Monday morning out her plans to run for president along with the Clinton-esque slogan "Let's do this together."

I'm running for president. Let's do this together. Join us:
<https://t.co/9KwgFlgZHA> pic.twitter.com/otf2ez7t1p

— Kamala Harris (@KamalaHarris) [January 21, 2019](#)

She then repeated her announcement on ABC's *Good Morning America*, stating that "I am running for president of the United States. I'm very excited about it." Harris, who decided to launch her campaign on the federal holiday celebrating Martin Luther King Jr., later added,

"I love my country. And this is a moment in time that I feel a sense of responsibility to stand up and fight for the best of who we are."

However, despite the long-promoted "inevitability" of Harris' campaign, she has failed to garner much enthusiasm from progressive voters, owing to her history of [supporting neoliberal policies](#) as well as her pro-Zionist leanings, which she has [attempted to keep from public view](#).

Though hardly "progressive," Harris – much like another 2020 hopeful, Elizabeth Warren – has [sought to cast herself](#) as such in recent years in an effort to unite a fractured Democratic party by publicly catering to progressives while also privately catering to special interests, including the Israel lobby.

In this two-part series, *MintPress News* will examine how Harris is set to emulate much of Hillary Clinton's failed 2016 campaign — particularly the distinction between her "private" and "public" positions — while using identity politics to her advantage. This has already begun, with Harris having courted past Hillary campaign staffers and millionaire donors

alike. In addition, top establishment liberals like [Joy Ann Reid](#) of MSNBC and Clinton advisor [Neera Tanden](#) are claiming that legitimate criticism of, and a lack of enthusiasm for, a Harris presidential run on the part of progressives stem from “racism” and “sexism” among left-leaning Americans — reviving the Clinton campaign’s “[Bernie bros](#)” narrative that characterizes Bernie Sanders-supporting progressive voters as “[all-white](#)” and “[all-male](#).”

One of the clearest examples of Harris’ practice of courting special interests in private while painting a different picture in public is her position on the Israel/Palestine conflict. While Harris once, in 2012 while serving as California’s attorney general, stood up to Israeli government pressure to persecute activists working with the pro-Palestinian rights movement Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS), she made a concerted effort to court pro-Israel interests as she began to pursue her higher political ambitions, namely when she kicked off her 2016 campaign for the Senate.

Since then, Harris has sought to keep a public persona of neutrality on the divisive issue by evasively responding to questions on the issue or avoiding them altogether. At the same time, Harris has been privately pandering to Israel lobby groups in “off-the-record” speeches and during trips to Israel that she and her staff chose not to publicize. This clearly reflects the image that Harris seeks to build of herself as a “progressive centrist” candidate, meaning one who cultivates a public persona of progressivism while also supporting many of the hallmark policies of establishment “centrist” Democrats and courting the mega-donors of the Democratic Party.

A quiet courtship

Once her 2016 Senate campaign was underway, Harris made it clear that she was willing to “look the other way” when it comes to the human-rights abuses regularly inflicted on Palestinians by the state of Israel. That year, in a [questionnaire](#) from *Jewish News of Northern California*, Harris asserted that

“Lasting peace [between Israel and Palestine] can only be found through bilateral negotiations that protect Israel’s identity, ensure security for all people and include the recognition of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state” — i.e., a Jewish ethnostate that gives other ethnoreligious backgrounds an “[inferior](#)” status.

In that same questionnaire, Harris also praised Israel’s Supreme Court, which has helped to enshrine apartheid and also [legalized](#) the targeted assassinations of hundreds of Palestinians during intifadas (uprisings), as “a beautiful home to democracy and justice in a region where radicalism and authoritarianism all too often shape government.”

Harris went on to resoundingly reject the non-violent BDS movement, stating:

The BDS movement seeks to weaken Israel but it will only isolate the nation and steer Israelis against prerequisite compromises for peace. At a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise – especially in Europe – and the Middle East is growing increasingly unstable, I believe we should not isolate Israel, the only democracy in the region.”

In 2017, a few months after winning her Senate seat, Harris gave her first public address to

the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in which she stated:

I believe Israel should never be a partisan issue, and as long as I'm a United States senator, I will do everything in my power to ensure broad and bipartisan support for Israel's security and right to self-defense."

Several months later, Harris quietly visited Israel, a trip that she did not post on her website or social media accounts but that was instead announced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and another Israeli politician, Yair Lapid, via social media. During the trip, Harris also briefly visited 10 female students at Al-Quds University in the occupied West Bank, where she asked the students whether Israel's massive separation wall posed "a real barrier" to their movement.

Today I met with Senator [@KamalaHarris](#) of California. We discussed the potential for deepening cooperation in water management, agriculture, cyber security, and more. I expressed my deep appreciation for America's commitment to Israel's security. 🇺🇸 pic.twitter.com/L5qdcgwWG0

— Benjamin Netanyahu (@netanyahu) [November 20, 2017](#)

Though her trip to Israel and photo-op with Netanyahu [raised some concern](#), Harris' decision to court pro-Israel interests has since grown substantially. Much as with her Israel trip though, the California senator has sought to court these interests just out of public view. For instance, in March of last year, Harris spoke to the Israel lobby organization AIPAC at an event called "A Conversation with Senator Kamala Harris." The event was not listed on the AIPAC conference's program or website, nor was it promoted by Harris herself. AIPAC Director of Communications Beth Robbins [later confirmed](#) to the *Intercept* that Senator Harris' remarks were part of "an off-the-record session."

Right now: [@KamalaHarris](#) speaking at [@AIPAC!!](#) 2020!!
pic.twitter.com/pcQPwxhmjr

— Elan Karoll (@elankaroll) [March 5, 2018](#)

Though the transcript of her remarks was never made public, one anecdote shared by a participant in the session [recounted](#) how Harris had, as a child, helped fundraise for the Jewish National Fund (JNF) "to plant trees in Israel" as opposed to selling Girl Scout cookies or something similar. However, it's unlikely that Harris mentioned at this gathering that JNF pine plantations are [largely used to cover and effectively erase](#) the bulldozed remnants of Palestinian villages that were destroyed by the state of Israel soon after its founding.

In addition to her AIPAC conferences and speeches, Harris' national security adviser up until May 2018 was Halie Soifer, a long-time advocate for Israel who [was](#) also the Obama campaign's Jewish outreach liaison in Florida in 2008 and a former advisor to former U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Soifer was also previously a speechwriter for the Israeli ambassador to the United States and was a "[Next Generation National Security Fellow](#)" with the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), which is

[headed by](#) Victoria Nuland, of the neo-conservative “Kagan clan,” and Richard Fontaine, former foreign policy advisor to John McCain.

Soifer is now the executive director of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, an Israel lobby organization that “actively promotes foreign and domestic policies consistent with socially progressive, pro-Israel, Jewish community values.”

Having it both ways

While being a pro-Israel senator is hardly uncommon in American politics, what stands out about Kamala Harris is that she has sought to obfuscate her courting of Israel lobby organizations and Israeli politicians. This shows that Harris is not only seeking to make inroads with the powerful pro-Israel lobby and win its support but is also seeking to construct a public persona that courts progressive voters.

However, if Clinton’s 2016 campaign is any indication, separating one’s “public” and “private” positions in order to win votes, while privately courting special interests, is a recipe for disaster — one that assumes progressive voters are easily duped and can be silenced by identity politics.

As the second part of this series will show, Harris’ Clintonesque construction of both a “private” and “public” platform is hardly a coincidence, since she has surrounded herself for much of her young Senate career with numerous Clinton campaign staffers and Obama administration officials and has been zealously courting Hillary Clinton’s former political patrons.

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