



Is the BDS Movement on the Rise?

by Prof. Hillel Frisch

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: According to the BDS movement's Palestine branch, the impact of the movement "is increasing substantially." Many pro-Israel sites and organizations agree with that assessment. But how accurate is this prognosis?

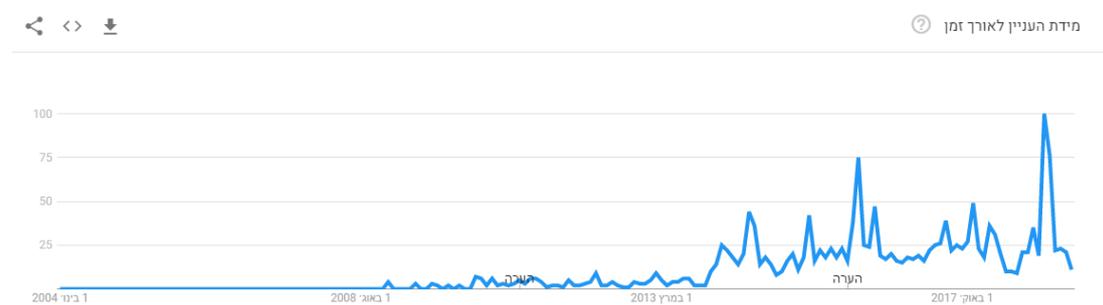
There are two basic dimensions to the efficiency of an organization – its popularity and its ability to have an effect. In the case of the BDS movement, the desired effect is to harm Israel.

With the aid of Google Trends, one can assess the first of these metrics in the US and elsewhere by exploring whether Google searches for the BDS movement have increased over time.

The graphs since 2004 clearly indicate that the movement's popularity has risen in both the world at large and the US specifically. This chart plots the growth in searches for the term worldwide.



Growth in searches in the US (see the next chart) reveals a similar pattern.



In both cases, the rise is moderate from 2008 to 2014 and then grows significantly higher from 2014 to the present. The peaks are relatively aligned, an indication of the validity of the data.

The division into two distinct periods reflects that the common perception of the movement's growing popularity is correct. Since 2016, growth appears to have slowed considerably, but it has hardly reversed itself. After all, the high point – the score of 100 – occurred in 2018.

Though Google Trends does not provide the absolute number of searches for the BDS movement, the fact that Israel is the country with the highest number of searches, with a score of 100, would indicate a relatively small search count. After all, Israel has a small population relative to most countries, and that population searches in Hebrew for the most part.

Still, 35 cases, overwhelmingly states, registered a significant amount of data (expressed by degree of shading) for this term in English. This suggests that while BDS might not rate many searches, those interested in the movement are spread across the globe. The countries can be seen in the following map generated by Google Trends when searching for "the BDS movement".



Generally speaking, searches reflect positive interest in the term being searched. Citizens in Arab states are more likely to search for Arafat than Rabin and still less Begin. Internet users in Scandinavian states will tend to search for both. African states with large evangelical populations, like Uganda and Ghana, will show high scores for searches for Begin, significantly lower scores for Rabin, and almost no searches for Arafat.

To develop a strategy with which to fight the BDS movement, it can be useful to note where it is popular, less popular, and insignificant.

Two considerations are critical in measuring the popularity of the movement. Most important is to zoom in on the major English-speaking states. Then one must take into consideration not only the absolute scores in these countries but the interest in the movement relative to the size of the population. As the following table shows, searches in New Zealand equaled those in the US, though the latter’s population is seventy times that of New Zealand. The multiple of interest for New Zealand is therefore seventy times that of the US.

Searches for “BDS Movement”:

Country	Absolute Score	Multiple of interest compared to the United States
New Zealand	53	70
Ireland	63	56
Sweden	15	9
Canada	59	10

Australia	24	6
South Africa	35	4
United Kingdom	24	2
United States	53	

One can clearly see that relatively speaking, interest in the BDS movement on a comparative basis is lowest for the most important two countries, the US and UK, significantly higher in Australia and Canada, and extremely high in New Zealand and Ireland, small and relatively unimportant countries known for their anti-Israel bias.

A search for the phrase “boycott Israel” generates almost the same order of relative interest as for the BDS movement, as one can see from the table below. This corroborates the relationship between anti-Israel bias and relative interest in the BDS movement. Ireland, New Zealand, and Norway top the list and Australia and Canada are in the middle. On the bottom are the US, the UK, and South Africa.

Degree of interest in the phrase “boycott Israel”:

Country	Absolute Score	Proportionate Interest Compared to the U.S.
Ireland	43	94
Norway	20	66
New Zealand	19	63
Denmark	10	57
Finland	7	37
Sweden	8	13
Australia	14	9
Holland	9	8

Canada	15	6
United Kingdom	21	5
South Africa	5	2
United States	21	

To see how pro-Israeli sentiment compares, we typed in the phrase “Love Israel.” The contrast was glaring. To begin with, only 13 countries generated sufficient data for this term compared to 35 countries for “boycott Israel.” The most important for this survey are the states that didn’t generate sufficient searches for “Love Israel” but were in the forefront of searches for the BDS movement and “boycott Israel.”

Missing from the “Love Israel” list are New Zealand, Ireland, the three Scandinavian states, and Holland. By contrast, the proportionate searches in Canada, Australia, and the UK are very similar to the search multiples for “boycott Israel”, suggesting a highly bifurcated public in these countries when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the BDS movement. Note also that heading the list for “Love Israel” are the African states Kenya and Nigeria, states with sizeable evangelical populations.

Table 6: Searches for “Love Israel”

Love Israel	
Israel	100
Nigeria	58
Kenya	42
South Africa	21
Philippines	20
US	12
Australia	9

UK	9
Indonesia	8
Canada	8

Finally, since the US is clearly the most important case, it is worthwhile to see how interest (and indirect support) for the BDS movement is distributed there.

The highest absolute and relative score is generated in the District of Columbia. This suggests that the BDS movement is closely followed by the Department of State, other national agencies, the major universities, and think tanks in the area. Other higher scorers relative to their population are Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, Oregon, Michigan, and Minnesota, traditionally liberal democratic states. The latter two also have sizeable Muslim populations.

The rise of the BDS movement seems to have abated somewhat both in the world at large and in the large English-speaking countries. Campaigns to counter its popularity should focus on those large English-speaking countries. In the US, campaigns should aim to prevent an expansion of its popularity; in the UK, Australia, and Canada, they should aim to blunt its already considerable appeal.

Prof. Hillel Frisch is a professor of political studies and Middle East studies at Bar-Ilan University and a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.