



## PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

# Was Israel's Entry Refusal a Boon or a Bust for Tlaib and Omar?

by Prof. Hillel Frisch

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,283, September 9, 2019

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The dual abilities of Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar to arouse the ire of President Trump and spout antisemitic, anti-Israel messages with impunity have raised their profile well beyond that of other junior representatives and significantly boosted their popularity. Supporters of Israel, as well as those who care about the interests of the US, will have to strive to defeat them in the next Congressional elections.

Ever since the heavy British crackdown on the Irish rebels after their defeat during the famous Easter uprising of 1916, policymakers have been acutely aware that overreaction often plays into the hands of those a state is attempting to defeat.

Up to and during the Irish insurrection, the Irish nationalists were a small minority of the Irish population, which explains why it was defeated within only five days. It was the British overreaction – the hanging of 14 of the organizers and the heavy court sentences given to some of the perpetrators of the insurrection, on flimsy evidence – that rallied the vast majority of the Irish public behind the nationalist cause and against British rule.

Within less than three years, the majority had voted the nationalists into the British Parliament, where they refused to take their seats. The rest is history.

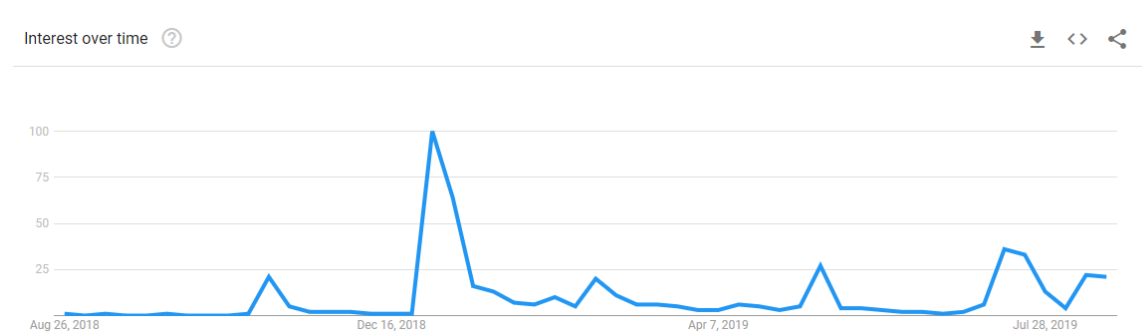
This raises the question of whether Israel's refusal to allow entry to first-term Congresswomen Tlaib and Omar, both passionate supporters of the BDS movement, helped or hurt them. And another question follows on from that one: how similar was the effect of this decision to the effect of Trump's Twitter attack of a month before, aimed at the two Congresswomen as well as two

others, in which he told them “to go back to where they come from” (though only one of the four, Omar, was born on foreign soil, in Somalia)?

Google Trends provides data with which to answer these questions. This tool plots the relative number of searches for a term over time and then aggregates the data to give weekly averages. The number of searches reflects not only interest but often empathy as well.

Trump’s Twitter outburst occurred on July 12. Israel’s refusal to allow Omar and Tlaib entry on the terms they demanded occurred on August 14. (The refusal was later altered to allow Tlaib entry provided her visit was limited to family matters. She rejected the offer.)

### Relative searches over 12 months for Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib as of August 25, 2019



As the graph indicates, the high point for Tlaib was neither Trump’s tweet nor Israel’s decision to refuse her entry. It was her inauguration on January 3, 2019, when she swore allegiance to the US on an English language Quran while dressed in a traditional Palestinian costume.

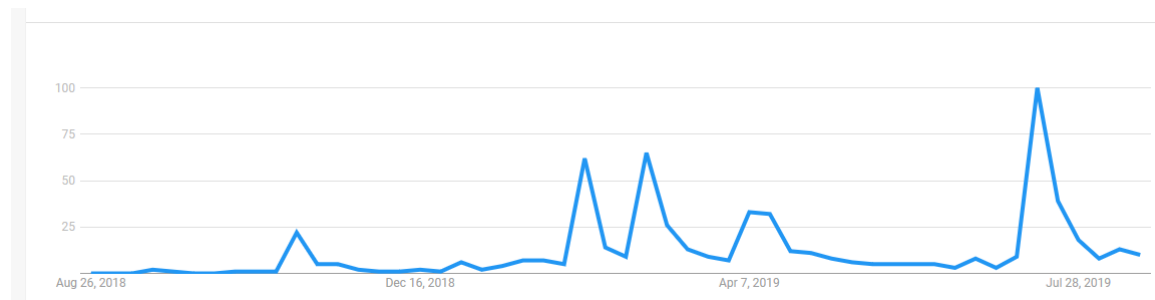
That said, both the tweet and Israel’s entry refusal were high points of relative interest. The searches indicate that interest in Tlaib was stimulated by both events.

The common denominator of two of these occasions – Tlaib’s Palestinian costume and Israel’s refusal to grant her entry on her terms – demonstrates that her pro-Palestinian persona is a boon to her popularity.

A different profile emerges for Ilhan Omar (see graph below). For her, the high point was clearly Trump’s tweet. Omar’s inauguration did not seem to elicit wide interest. Surprisingly, Israel’s refusal to grant her entry did not seem to generate widespread interest in her, despite the huge media interest in the decision.

Both politicians generated searches in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

### Relative searches over 12 months for Congresswoman Ilhan Omar as of August 25, 2019

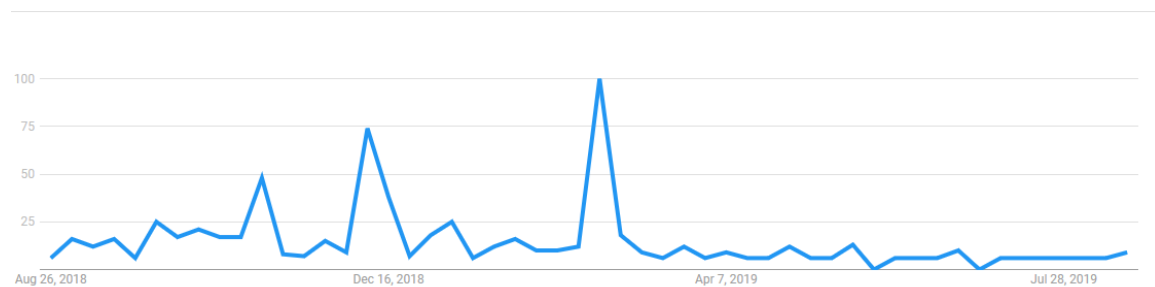


It appears that in both cases, it was domestic American politics – in particular, President Trump’s focus on the Congresswomen themselves rather than on the Israeli reaction – that boosted their popularity. This is typical of American politics, which is highly domestically focused and where foreign affairs arouse little interest.

Of course, the president’s animus toward the two women did involve Israel and BDS. One can therefore infer from the resulting increase in interest in them that their striking out against Israel indirectly increased their popularity.

To confirm this point, we can compare Tlaib’s and Omar’s search trends (which measure popularity) against those of other first-term members of Congress. Co-President of the House Democratic Freshman Class Colin Allred (a former professional football player from Texas), and President of the House Republican Freshman Class Mark Green (a former medical officer in the US army and veteran of the Iraq war), make a good comparison because of their contrasting backgrounds: they are both male, Caucasian, and presumably Christian, and have achieved relatively prominent positions.

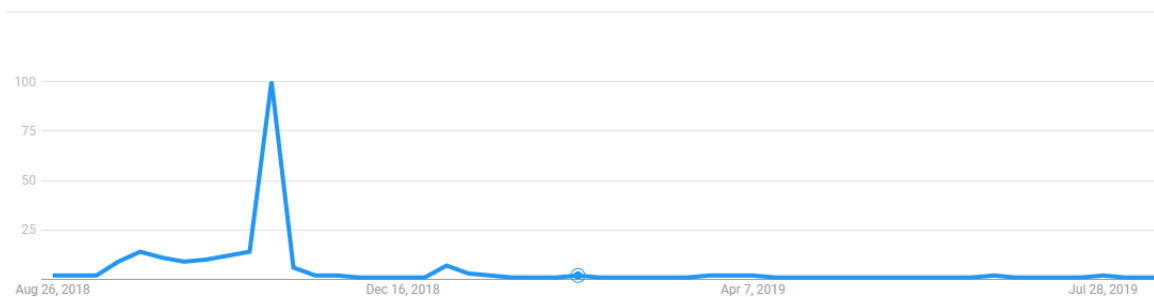
### Relative searches over 12 months for Congressman Mark Green as of August 25, 2019



As shown above, the high point for Green, as it was for Tlaib, was his inauguration. But ever since then, he has compared unfavorably in terms of popularity with both Tlaib and Omar. Interest in him has been steady but low. Even more tellingly, Green generated sufficient data in only 35 states compared to all 50 for the Congresswomen.

The same holds true for Democratic representative Colin Allred. The high point for him was his inauguration – after which interest in him dropped off almost completely. Searches for Allred generated sufficient data in 43 states.

#### Relative searches over 12 months for Congressman Colin Allred for August 25, 2019



The lesson is clear. It pays to be anti-Israeli in Congress, at least during President Trump’s incumbency. It behooves Israel supporters to find candidates who can defeat Tlaib and Omar, who are not only on the wrong side in relation to Israel but are hostile to US interests as well.

*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.*