

2022

RESEARCH
REPORT

**NON-AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT FUNDED
PARLIAMENTARY TRAVEL
JUNE 2018 - APRIL 2022**

KEY FINDINGS

Federal parliamentarians continue to take more lobby trips to Israel than to any other country

In the last four years (June 2018-April 2022),¹ Australian federal parliamentarians have received more sponsored trips to Israel than to any other country. There were 25 parliamentary visits to Israel, with the next most popular destinations being Taiwan (17 visits) and the United States of America (USA) (15 visits). Notably, during the same time period, there were no official Australian Government international parliamentary delegations to Israel or Taiwan. The total number of non-Australian Government sponsored trips to all countries in this period was 139, so Israel comprised 18% of all trips.

This pattern is consistent with the period 2010-2018, when federal parliamentarians received 102 sponsored trips to Israel, almost double the next-ranking countries (China-63; USA-49) (Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), 2018).

In both periods, the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) was the largest sponsor of trips to Israel. In this period, they sponsored 11 of the 25 trips to Israel (44/102 trips in the previous period) (ASPI, 2018).

AIJAC is a not-for-profit company run by four Australian businessmen, who consistently provide uncritical reporting about Israel and its role in International affairs. Former Foreign Ministers (Rudd, Carr) and senior journalists have criticised AIJAC for their significant and persistent pressure to disregard Israel's abuse of Palestinian human rights.

The second most common group taking Parliamentarians to Israel is the International Institute For Strategic Leadership Dialogue, an initiative of businessman Albert Dadon, who employed Julia Gillard's partner, Tim Mathieson, while she was Prime Minister. They sponsored 5 trips in this period.

¹ Given COVID-19 travel restrictions, it is effectively a 27-month period as no trips were recorded from March 2020 to October 2021.

POLITICAL PARTY DIFFERENCES

Whilst the numbers are small, Coalition parliamentarians were almost twice as likely than Labor parliamentarians to take sponsored trips to Israel (Coalition-15; ALP-8; Crossbench-2).

Four times more Coalition parliamentarians took AIJAC-sponsored trips to Israel than Labor parliamentarians (Coalition-8; ALP-2; Crossbench-1).

In relation to trips to Israel sponsored by other non-Government entities, almost twice as many Coalition parliamentarians than Labor parliamentarians took these trips (Coalition-5, ALP-3). Sponsors of these trips included: The International Institute for Strategic Leadership Dialogue (5); ASPI (1); Israel Allies Foundation (1)², and the Australian Computer Society (1).

By contrast, just six federal politicians (Coalition-2; ALP-3; Crossbench-1) visited Palestine (as well as Israel) in the same period. Although this was on the one trip, there were, collectively, twice as many Labor and crossbench parliamentarians who took this trip than Coalition parliamentarians. These members were all sponsored by the Kuwait Government and the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. The purpose of their visit was to seek greater understanding of Palestine-Israel and to see first hand the impact that the occupation of the West Bank has on the daily lives of its people, hearing from local Palestinians and Israelis.

² The mission of Israel Allies Foundation is to “mobilise political support for Israel” and claims to “work in 42 legislatures worldwide” (<https://israelallies.org/who-we-are>). This includes in Australia, with MP Stuart Robert listed as Caucus Chair. In 2017, Robert is quoted as saying: “This is a working caucus. This is not about words. It’s not about support. It’s about action. So, it’s about moving motions on floors of Parliament. It’s about passing legislation. It’s about insuring that BDS is illegal. It’s about insuring that our parliaments and our governments, when they vote in the UN, that they vote in support of Israel.” The same article noted that during that visit to Israel, members of the delegation “signed a declaration of support for the State. A portion of that resolution, which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, condemned the anti-Semitic misrepresentation of Israel as an “occupier”.

OTHER DATA

Almost all the trips to Taiwan were sponsored by the Taiwanese Government (94%) while the top sponsor of trips to the USA was the Australian American Leadership Dialogue (AALD).

Roughly equal numbers of Coalition and Labor parliamentarians accepted Taiwanese Government-sponsored trips. Five Labor and one Liberal member received AALD trips to the USA, while three Labor and two Liberal members accepted US State Department-sponsored trips.

Of the trips to other countries, 18 of them were sponsored by Australian international aid and development agencies; others were hosted by civil society groups, industry groups, United Nations bodies, and other countries.

Roughly an equal number of Coalition and Labor parliamentarians took sponsored trips to countries other than Israel, with a small number of crossbench parliamentarians also taking sponsored trips.

The Taiwanese Government and Save the Children are the only groups that sponsored more trips than AIJAC during the period.

RESEARCH METHODS

This report examines the overseas trips undertaken by Australian parliamentarians that were sponsored by external governments and non-governmental groups. It includes any travel or hospitality sponsored by a non-Australian Government source that exceeded \$300 in value. For almost all of these trips, this included sponsorship of flights and/or accommodation.³

The analysis is primarily based on the federal parliamentary Registers of Interests for both the House of Representatives⁴ and the Senate.⁵ Parliamentarians often provided limited details of their trips. It is supplemented by a [parliamentary speech](#) regarding the trip to the Occupied Palestinian Territories by six parliamentarians.

The complete raw data is available [here](#).

Disclosure

APAN hosts parliamentary trips to Israel and Palestine, in an effort to balance the experiences of federal parliamentarians. In APAN trips, parliamentarians at least partially cover their own expenses. APAN led two trips for federal parliamentarians in 2017; and planned tours in 2020 had to be cancelled because of COVID-19.

³ The report doesn't include flight and accommodation upgrades which were incidental to sponsored travel or hospitality. For example, if a non-Australian Government entity paid for a parliamentarian to take an Economy class flight to the USA and Qantas upgraded the parliamentarian to a Business Class flight at the airport, the Qantas upgrade isn't considered sponsored travel for the purposes of the report as it was incidental to the sponsored travel. Similarly, if a non-Australian Government entity paid for a parliamentarian's accommodation at a hotel and the hotel upgraded the parliamentarian to a superior room upon arrival, the hotel upgrade isn't considered sponsored hospitality for the purposes of the report as it was incidental to the sponsored hospitality.

⁴ https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members/Register/Previous_Parliaments/45P_Members_Interest_Statements and https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members/Register/Previous_Parliaments/46P_Members_Interest_Statements.

⁵ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Senators_Interests/Register45thparl and https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Senators_Interests/Register_of_Senators_Interests#Tabs-tab-1.