

HOW INDIA'S GEN Z SEES ISRAEL

Perceptions, Trust and Strategic Partnership

Survey Brief | May 2026

48%

associate Israel with defence & military strength

51%

rate Israel as technologically advanced (Top-2-Box)

41%

support deepening India-Israel ties

14%

rank Israel India's most helpful partner

I Introduction

India and Israel established full diplomatic relations in 1992. In the decades since, the bilateral partnership has expanded considerably — across defence procurement, agricultural technology, water management, cybersecurity, and trade. India accounted for approximately 34% of Israel's defence exports between 2020 and 2024. Twenty-nine Indo-Israel Centres of Excellence now operate across twelve Indian states, delivering drip irrigation and advanced farming techniques at scale. Bilateral trade (excluding defence) reached USD 6.53 billion in FY 2023-24, a Bilateral Investment Treaty was concluded in September 2025, and FTA negotiations were launched in February 2026.

The India-Israel relationship has attracted considerable scholarly and policy attention, particularly with respect to its defence, agricultural, and technological dimensions. The societal foundations of the relationship — how it is understood, evaluated, and situated within Indian public consciousness — have been less systematically examined. This study seeks to address that gap. It focuses on urban Indian Gen Z: the demographic cohort born after the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1992, and therefore the first for whom the partnership has been an unremarkable feature of the bilateral landscape rather than a diplomatic departure. How this generation perceives Israel, and what it understands of the relationship's content and logic, are questions of both empirical interest and longer-term analytical relevance.

II Methodology

This survey was commissioned by the India-Israel Centre and conducted by an AI-powered research platform, in May 2026. The sample comprised 500 Indian respondents between the ages of 18 and 29, with a 50:50 gender split enforced at the sampling stage. Fieldwork was conducted digitally across four regions: the Hindi Heartland (UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan; n=129), Delhi NCR (n=131), South India (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu; n=116), and West India (Maharashtra, Gujarat; n=124).

Parameter	Specification
Sample size	500 respondents
Age cohort	18–29 years
Gender split	50% male, 50% female
Survey modality	AI-assisted digital survey
Field period	May 2026
Analysis method	Top-2-Box, cross-tabulation by region and gender

III Associations and First Impressions

When asked to select the top three ideas that come to mind when they think of Israel, 48% of respondents chose defence and military strength — the highest-scoring association in the survey. Innovation and technology followed at 35%, Middle East tensions at 33%, and ongoing conflict and religious significance each at 31%. Water management and agriculture and cybersecurity each registered at 25%.

The two leading associations — defence capability and technological innovation — are broadly consistent with the actual substance of the bilateral relationship. Israel is, for a majority of this cohort, primarily a country defined by military strength and scientific capacity, which maps onto the most visible dimensions of the India-Israel partnership as it has been covered in Indian media. The developmental and agricultural dimensions of the relationship — substantive and geographically distributed as they are — appear in the secondary tier of associations, present but not primary.

Conflict-adjacent associations were prominent: ongoing conflict (31%) and Middle East tensions (33%) each ranked among the top five associations. Instagram and social media (72%) and YouTube (67%) are the dominant news sources for this cohort, and both platforms structurally amplify conflict-related content through engagement-driven algorithms. The comparative under-visibility of agricultural and developmental cooperation in this associative picture is, at least in part, a function of that information architecture.

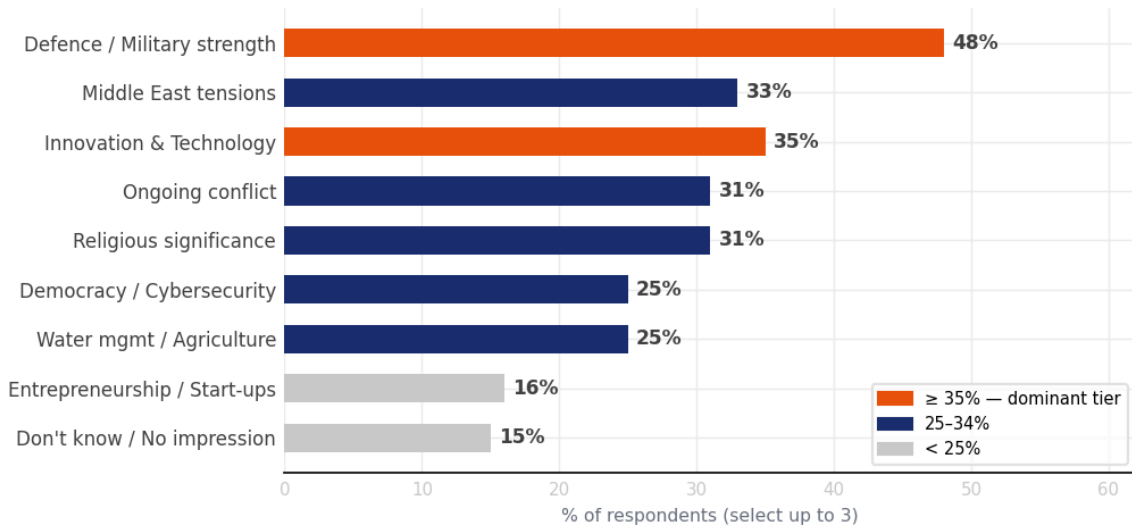


Figure 1: Top-of-Mind Associations with Israel (%; respondents selected up to 3)

IV Evaluating Israel: Six Dimensions of Perception

Respondents rated Israel across six dimensions on a five-point agreement scale. Results are reported as Top-2-Box scores (Agree + Strongly Agree). Technological advancement led all dimensions at 51%, followed by Israel understands India's security challenges (47%), Israel respects India's strategic autonomy (47%), Israel would stand by India in a crisis (46%), and Israel is a trustworthy partner for India (44%). Across these five dimensions, scores fall in a narrow band — 44% to 51% — reflecting a broadly consistent and moderately positive evaluative orientation.

The outlier is Israel's actions reflect democratic values, which scored 36% Top-2-Box, a meaningful gap below the others. Notably, 37% of respondents on this dimension chose neutral, indicating suspended judgement rather than settled disapproval. Separately, trust in Israeli technology and products was rated high or very high by 41% of respondents, with 35% neutral and 18% negative.

The convergence of scores across the four trust-adjacent dimensions — security understanding, strategic autonomy, crisis reliability, and trustworthiness as a partner — is worth noting. It suggests that positive evaluation of Israel is not concentrated in a single attribute but is distributed across the core dimensions of bilateral partnership, which points to an orientation that is more durable than one driven by a single salient association.

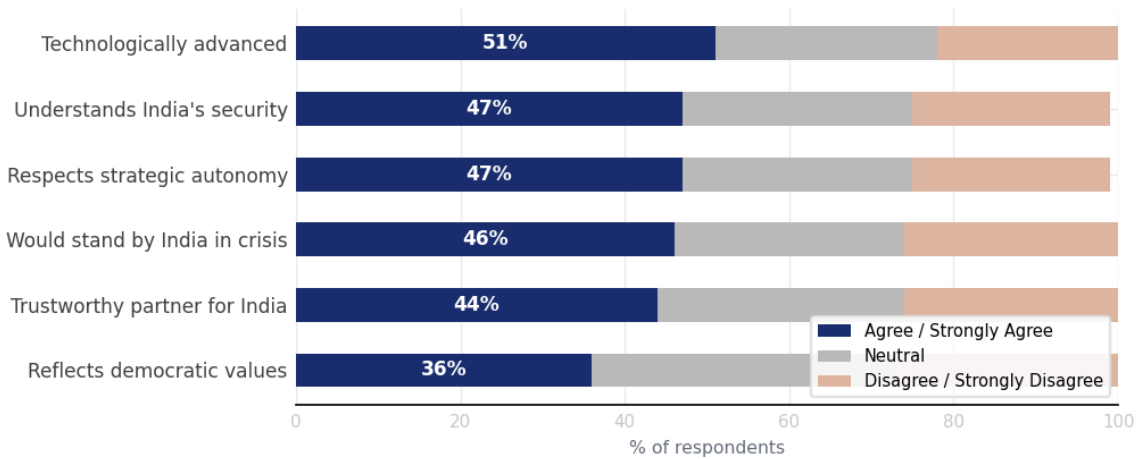


Figure 2: Evaluating Israel: Six Dimensions — Top-2-Box scores (Agree + Strongly Agree)

Across four trust-adjacent dimensions, Top-2-Box scores range from 44% to 47% — a narrow band reflecting a consistent, if measured, baseline of positive strategic evaluation.

V Strategic Orientation

When asked which country is most helpful to India today, respondents ranked Russia first (52%), the United States second (22%), and Israel third (14%), ahead of Japan. Israel's third-place position — ahead of any other named country — is notable given the limited public visibility of the partnership relative to India's relationships with the United States and Russia.

On the question of Israel's primary interest in partnering with India, responses were distributed across motives with considerable evenness: military sales and defence cooperation led at 19%, followed by access to the Indian market (18%), genuine strategic alliance (17%), and diplomatic leverage in global politics (14%). No single account of the relationship's rationale commanded a plurality, which reflects the absence of a dominant public narrative around the partnership rather than structured ambivalence about it.

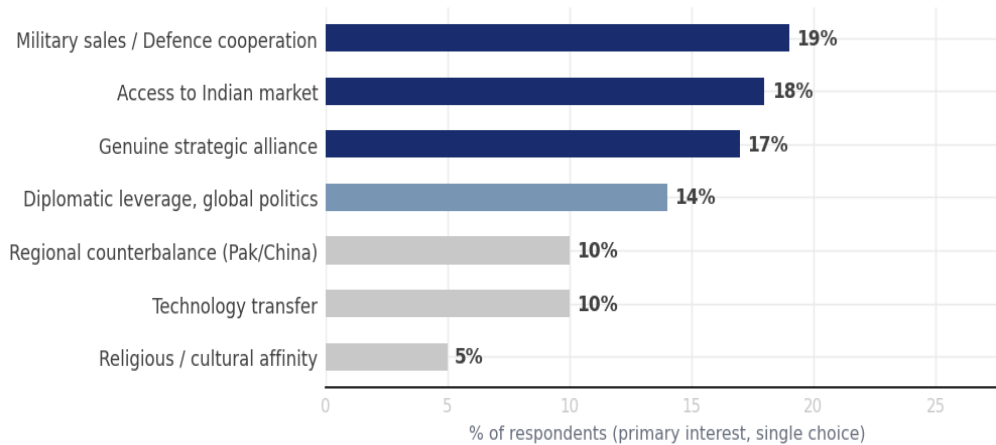


Figure 3: Perceived Primary Interest of Israel in Partnering with India (%)

On the future of the relationship, 41% of respondents supported deepening India-Israel ties — 15% significantly and 26% moderately. 28% preferred maintaining the current level, and 20% favoured more cautious or reduced engagement. Support for expansion outpaces support for contraction by approximately two to one.

VI Regional Variation

Delhi NCR leads consistently on favourable perception, trust, and awareness across all measured dimensions, which is consistent with higher exposure to English-language business and technology media in which Israel's innovation and defence sectors receive comparatively more coverage.

The Hindi Heartland registered the highest support for expanding the relationship at 47%, against 44% in Delhi NCR, 38% in West India, and 34% in South India. This is the most significant regional finding in the dataset. The Hindi Heartland combines the strongest appetite for deeper ties with comparatively lower familiarity with the partnership's developmental dimensions — a pairing that merits attention in any regional analysis of India's bilateral relationships. South India was the most reserved on expansion, with the highest concentration of respondents preferring the current level or greater caution.

Dimension	Hindi Heartland	Delhi NCR	South India	West India
Technologically advanced (T2B)	52%	57%	51%	45%
Trustworthy partner (T2B)	45%	49%	42%	40%
Understands India's security (T2B)	46%	49%	56%	40%
Favour deeper ties	47%	44%	34%	38%
Democratic values (T2B)	39%	40%	38%	28%

Bold indicates regional high on each dimension. T2B = Top-2-Box (Agree + Strongly Agree).

VII Conclusion

India and Israel have, over three decades of full diplomatic engagement, constructed a partnership of considerable institutional depth. In defence, Israel has been among India's most consequential suppliers across aerial, naval, and land domains. In agriculture, the Indo-Israel cooperation programme has deployed drip irrigation, protected cultivation, and soil and water management technologies across twelve states through more than 29 Centres of Excellence. In cybersecurity and technology, institutional and commercial collaboration has expanded alongside India's digital economy. A Bilateral Investment Treaty was concluded in September 2025 and FTA negotiations were launched in February 2026, marking the partnership's entry into a new phase of economic integration.

The data from this study indicate that awareness of this partnership among Indian Gen Z, while substantive, remains unevenly distributed. Defence capability and technological innovation are firmly established in this cohort's mental image of Israel. The developmental and agricultural dimensions — among the most geographically distributed and domestically proximate aspects of the relationship — have not yet achieved equivalent salience. This gap is a feature of the information environment as much as of the relationship itself.

What the findings do not support is an impression of public indifference or hostility. Trust indicators are positive and internally consistent. A plurality in every region surveyed favours deeper engagement. Israel ranks third among countries considered most helpful to India — a position earned without the benefit of the visibility that accompanies India's relationships with the United States or Russia. The perception of Israel as technologically advanced and as a country that understands India's security challenges scores at or above 47% Top-2-Box across the sample. These are the foundations of a public understanding that is broadly aligned with the bilateral relationship's institutional reality, even where familiarity with its full scope remains partial.

India's Gen Z holds a predominantly positive, pragmatically grounded orientation toward Israel — one shaped primarily by the partnership's security and technology dimensions, and one whose familiarity with the relationship's developmental breadth remains an open question.