



### [Bowman's Primary Election Loss and the Unprecedented Pro-Israel Dark Money Spending Against Him](#)

United States Congressional primary elections are not typically one of the top stories of the news cycle, however, the race for New York's 16th district has captured the attention of much of the nation. The Democratic primary between incumbent U.S. Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) and challenger Westchester County Executive George Latimer captivated viewers not because of scandal over election rigging or lies either side had made about the other, but rather due to the record-breaking outside spending for a House primary race. The influx of historic levels of dark money flowing into campaigns by super PACs like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has caused many people to lament the amount of influence they have over our elections, especially considering that a plethora of the most sizable donations were made after a poll earlier this year revealed that Bowman trailed significantly in the polls, indicating a potential ulterior motive to attack a vulnerable candidate on AIPAC's part. This has led some observers to ask if the unprecedented amount of spending AIPAC did on this election alone is just the beginning of a trend of possible intimidation techniques by these special interest groups towards lawmakers who legitimately criticize Israel's actions.

Representative Bowman was relatively new to the congressional arena, having been elected in 2020 after beating seasoned AIPAC donor recipient and longtime Representative Eliot Engel. During Bowman's first election, pro-Israel groups like AIPAC worked together to raise close to \$2 million on Engel's behalf. While the influx of funds certainly aided Engel's campaign, Bowman had on his side the unrest that swept the United States that year as it dealt with the social justice awakening happening in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder at the hands of police. Endorsements from Congressional Members like U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) served as validators for those unsure of Bowman's political legitimacy. Ultimately, his 2020 win was remarked as a step forward for the wave of new more progressive leaders within Congress.

This electoral cycle in particular, Israel and Palestine have been a hot-button issue which has given candidates supporters and adversaries on both sides of the aisle. Representative Bowman has not always been as big of a critic of Israeli policy as he is now, having voted to send close to \$3.3 billion dollars in aid to Israel's air defense system and co-sponsoring what many have referred to as the revitalizing bill to the Abraham Accords during his early days in office. However, in February 2022, after a trip to Israel and Palestine, Bowman's stance changed. During it, Representative Bowman was allotted a glance into the horrors that children living in the illegally-occupied West Bank dealt with on a daily basis. In a post on X, Bowman, pictured with school children, remarked that "There are streets they cannot walk and places they cannot go, simply because they are Palestinian. When I asked about their dreams, their answer was simple: freedom. The occupation must end." Upon his return, Bowman pulled his sponsorship of the bill supporting the Abraham Accords and helped co-sponsor legislation aimed at recognizing the *Nakba*. All of this left Bowman in strong standing among more progressive liberal party members, but also put him in a vulnerable spot with pro-Israel lobbying and interest groups, paving the way for pro-Israel PACs to funnel millions of dollars into a candidate to oppose Bowman. Enter AIPAC and George Latimer.

Latimer, a Westchester County native who currently serves as the County Executive, is no stranger to being supported by pro-Israel groups. Last year, the Westchester Jewish Council helped fund a solidarity trip to Israel for

Latimer, who has voiced his staunch support for Israel and its efforts. This open support of Israel is what helped garner him the unprecedented and record-breaking House primary contribution from AIPAC. During this primary race cycle, Latimer received a massive close to \$15 million in AIPAC funds. His campaign used this outside dark money to run efforts daily that sought to defame Bowman, even going as far as getting Elisha Wiesel – the son of writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel – to speak in an ad that implied Bowman was antisemitic. This all resulted in the race being the most expensive House primary election in the nation's history.

In the end, AIPAC's enormous injection of money seemed to have had an impact on the outcome of the election. Latimer was declared the winner on Tuesday evening, having captured approximately 58% of votes cast compared to around 42% amassed for Bowman, with 88% of the total votes processed. Following his defeat, Bowman took to the stage to deliver his concession remarks, apologizing for his profanity at an earlier rally in the lead-up to the election and stating that "We should be outraged when a super PAC of dark money gets fed \$20 million to brainwash people into believing something that isn't true...We should be outraged about that."

The NY-16 Congressional race has drawn international attention, highlighting divisions within the Democratic Party, and the powerful and troublesome influence of dark money and special interest groups. Representative Jamaal Bowman's shift towards a more critical stance on Israel drew in new pro-human rights supporters but also intensified opposition from pro-Israel factions. In contrast, George Latimer's unwavering support for Israel garnered him record-breaking AIPAC funds for a House primary race. This election is a glaring example of the regrettable role of dark money in politics, and observers can expect this to continue to be the case so long as PACs and special interest groups are allowed to taint them with exorbitant sums of money.