



PERSPECTIVES

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The American Public and Israel: A Record of Support, but Clouds on the Horizon

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The American public has historically strongly supported Israel, especially since the 1967 Six Day War. This support substantially contributed to the establishment and development of a “special relationship” between the two countries. The Gallup Poll, the first and the most reputable polling organization in the US, has been measuring American attitudes towards Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict since before the establishment of Israel. The long-term trends on several issues show constant growth in public support. The 2018 survey reveals record scores in favor of Israel, but also a few weaknesses.

The Gallup Poll has conducted surveys of American public opinion towards Israel since the 1947 UN Partition Resolution. Since 1977, Gallup has conducted such surveys annually, and during periods of violence or special events, several times a year.

On March 13, 2018, Gallup released the most recent survey, conducted during the first ten days of February. A comparative analysis of the results obtained during the seventy years of Israel's independence reveals an incredible improvement in Israel's standing but also a few black clouds on the horizon of which Israel should be aware.

Sympathies

One question has consistently appeared since the first poll: “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with Israel or with the Arabs/Palestinians?” In November 1947, 24% of respondents sympathized more with Israel, 12% with the Arabs, and 64% gave other answers such as “don’t know.” In the 2018 survey, the figures had turned around: 64% sympathized more with Israel, 19% with the Palestinians, and only 20% selected other answers.

The long term trends reveal highs and lows. Violence, and, to a lesser extent, peace processes, mostly influenced the fluctuations over time.

During the 1967 Six Day War, the American public condemned the Arab aggression and was concerned about the fate of Israel. The score that year was 56% for Israel versus only 4% for the Arabs. This high was broken during the 1990-91 first Gulf War: 64% sympathized more with Israel and only 7% with the Arabs. The reasons for this new record were Saddam Hussein's missile attacks on Israel and Palestinian support for his invasion and occupation of Kuwait.

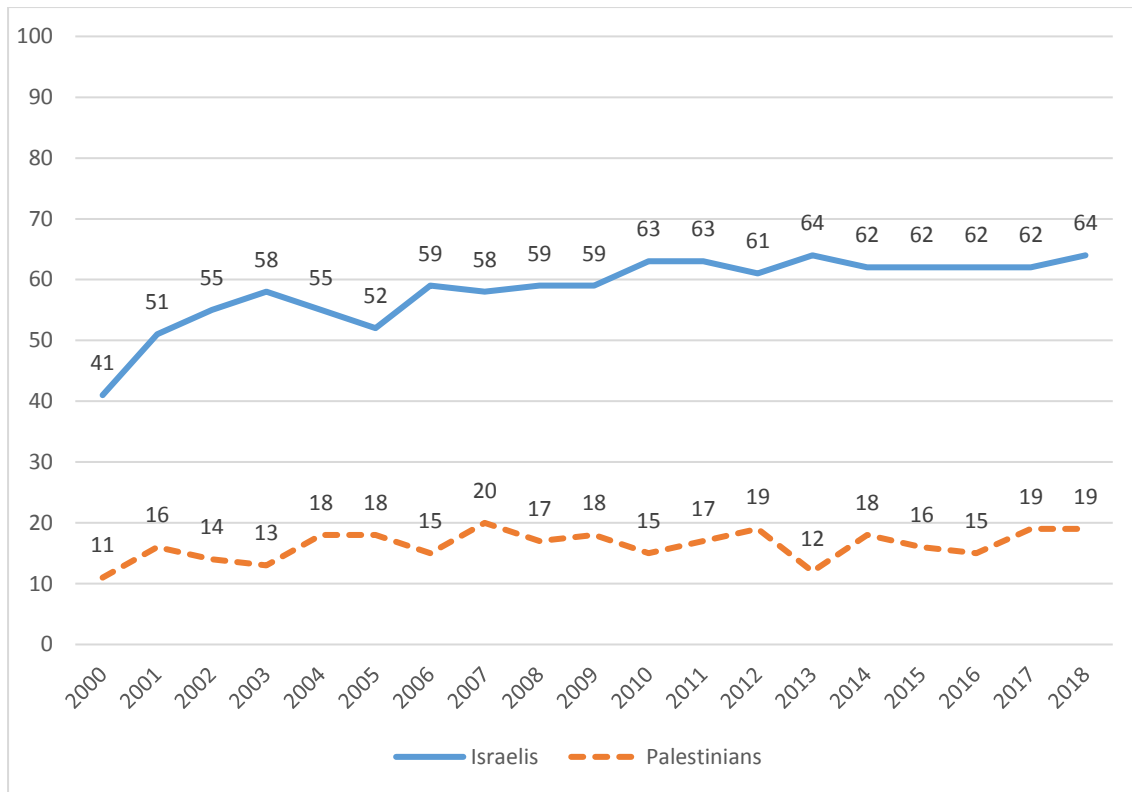
The lowest score ever, 32% vs. 28% in favor of Israel, was registered during the 1982 first War in Lebanon, immediately after the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut. This score, however, lasted only a few weeks before the public restored the pre-war ratios. The high and low results determined the boundaries of overall American public support for Israel: it fluctuated between one-third and two-thirds of respondents who supported Israel no matter. In 1978, Gallup changed the poll's question by pitting Israel against "Palestinians" instead of "Arabs," but the long-term ratios in favor of Israel remained almost the same.

Figure 1 shows that from 2001 to 2009, support for Israel went over the 50% mark. It moved from 51% in 2001 to 59% in 2006. Since 2010, it has further increased and passed the 60% mark. Twice, in 2013 and 2018, the figure matched the 64% record of 1991.

President Obama was the friendliest American president to the Palestinians. He often supported Palestinian positions and mostly blamed Israel for the failure to negotiate a peace agreement. Usually, in the US, the president has considerable influence on public opinion. Figure 1, however, demonstrates that despite the bitter disagreements and confrontations between Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu over negotiations with the Palestinians, the Iran nuclear deal, and the "Arab Spring," the public continued to support Israel over the Palestinians by unprecedentedly high ratios.

Figure 1: Americans' Mideast Sympathies

Question: "In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?"



Source: Saad, L. [Americans Remain Staunchly in Israel's Corner](#), *Gallup Polls*, March 13, 2018

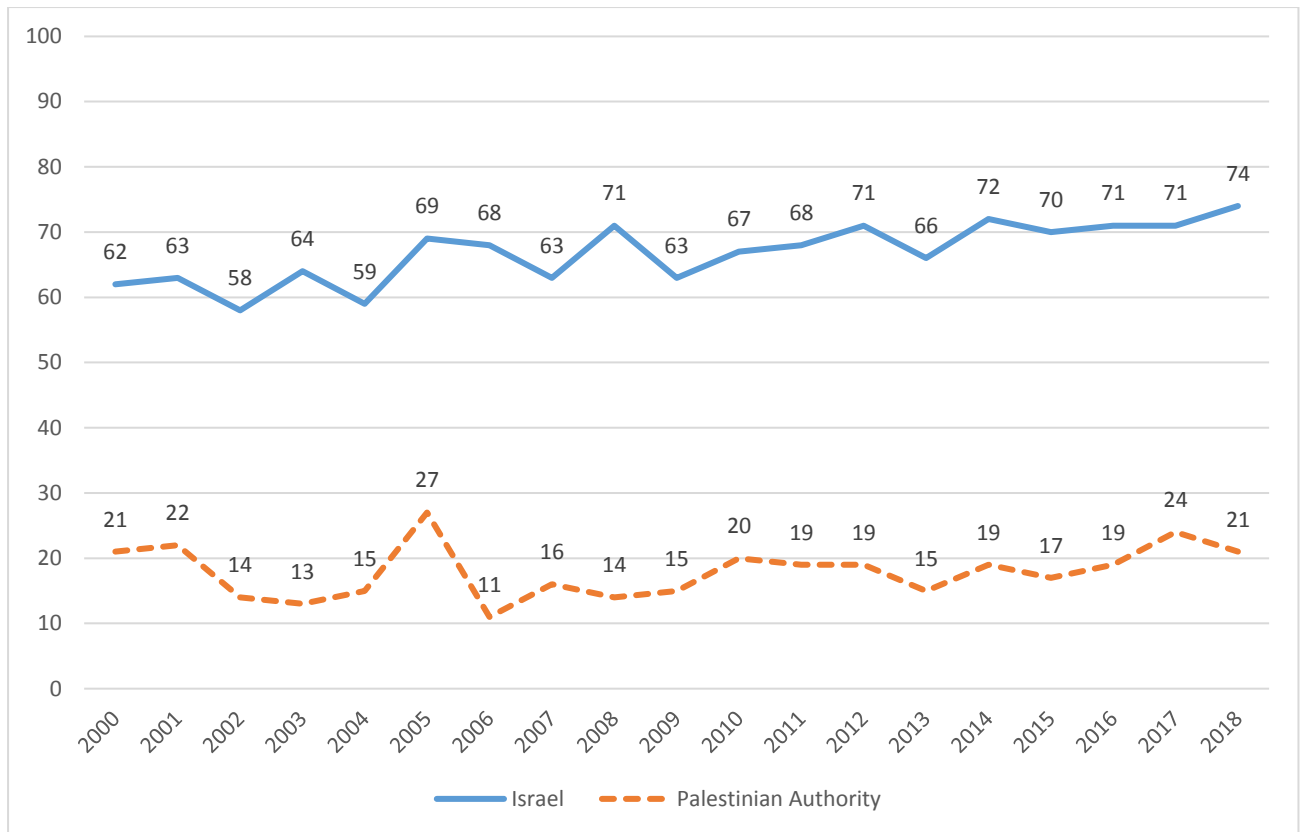
The main reason for the increase in sympathy towards Israel this century is probably the 9/11 terror attacks on New York and Washington. Many Americans felt that both the US and Israel are victims of Arab terrorism and are fighting the same war against similar enemies. The more recent highly positive results for Israel may have been influenced by the upheaval and violence of the so-called "Arab Spring." The turbulence and atrocities of this period across the Arab world highlighted the stability and democratic nature of Israel.

Favorability

Gallup found similar results in the distribution of responses of national samples to another question about the views of Americans on Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Figure 2 shows that in 2018, 74% held favorable views of Israel while only 21% held a similar view of the Palestinian Authority. The graph also shows that from 2000 to 2018, Israel's favorability went up by 12%, while that of the Palestinians remained almost constant and below 20%.

Figure 2: Americans' Views of Israel and the Palestinian Authority

Question: "Next, I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. What is your overall opinion of [RANDOM ORDER]? Is it very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable? Percentage viewing each very favorably or mostly favorably? Israel, Palestinian Authority."



Source: See Figure 1.

Sociodemographic Differences

Demographic analysis, however, reveals several negative trends, especially in the distribution of responses by political affiliation, age, and ethnicity. For many years, Israel enjoyed strong bipartisan political support, with Republicans and Democrats almost evenly supporting Israel. This bipartisanship factor helped Israel pass favorable legislation in Congress and secure high levels of military aid. In the long-term sympathy index, twenty years ago, the Republicans scored slightly more than the Democrats, and the gap was only 5%. Figure 3 shows that in 2008, the gap widened to 28% and in 2018 it reached 38%, the highest gap ever.

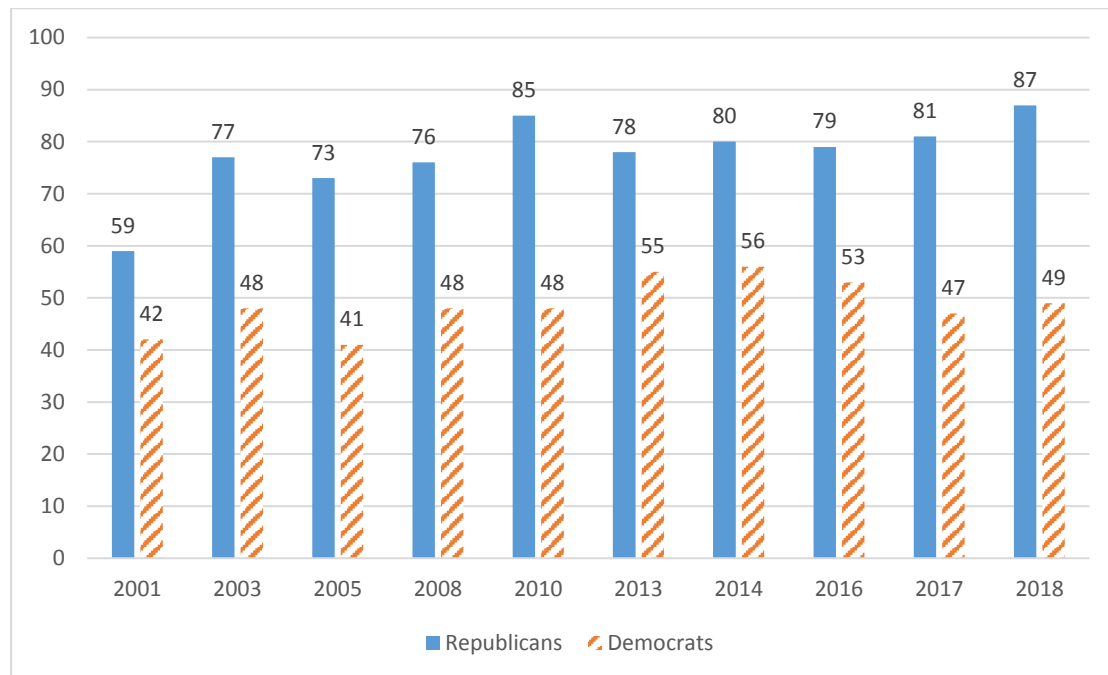
The growing gap between the two major parties increased due to two developments: the confrontations between Obama and Netanyahu and the tilt of the Democratic Party to the left. The success of socialist candidate Bernie Sanders, and the omission of pro-Israeli articles from the Democratic platform in the 2016 presidential elections, demonstrated this negative development. On the other hand, the Republican Party expressed support for Israel as never before.

The breakdown in bipartisanship support for Israel is harmful. Unfortunately, Netanyahu has done very little to reach the Democrats in an effort to restore previous levels of support, reduce the gap, and reestablish bipartisanship. He

could have done it via American Jews, who are mostly Democrats, and prominent Jewish leaders of the Democrats like Senator Chuck Schumer.

Figure 3: Sympathy for Israel: Republicans vs. Democrats

Question: "In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?" Sympathies are consistently more with the Israelis.



Source: See Figure 1.

Gallup also found considerable gaps between young and old people and between whites and Hispanics. Young voters and Hispanics are much less supportive of Israel than the other age and ethnic groups. Young people tend to be more Democratic and liberal, and they are exposed on college campuses to intense anti-Israeli Palestinian and Muslim propaganda and incitement to hatred. Hispanics are much less familiar with Israel and are more concerned about US relations with neighboring Central and Latin American countries.

The current high levels of support for Israel in American public opinion are very encouraging. However, the Democrats will recover from their losses in the 2016 presidential election and sooner or later will win back the White House and Congress. The young will grow up and replace the old, and due to immigration and higher birthrate levels, the Hispanics will have a much greater representation in the American society. Israel must reach these groups in order to maintain the current high levels of support that are essential to the protection of Israeli vital interests in Washington.

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