



**THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES**



Bar-Ilan
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The American Public and Israel in the Twenty-First Century

Eytan Gilboa



Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 181

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The American Public and Israel in the Twenty-First Century

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List of Abbreviations

AJC	American Jewish Committee
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
BESA	Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies
BDS	Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions
EU	European Union
JCAP	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
JCPA	Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
MEQ	Middle East Quartet
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PS	Palestinian State
PM	Prime Minister
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
US	United States

The American Public and Israel in the Twenty-First Century

Eytan Gilboa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supportive public opinion has been a key factor in the formation and development of the US-Israel “special relationship.” This monograph presents and analyzes long-term trends in American attitudes toward Israel since 2000. The analysis is based on the collection, integration, and analysis of data from numerous national public opinion surveys conducted in the US by the most reliable and reputable polling agencies.

This study includes five chapters. The first, the milieu of opinion formation, provides brief information on key factors that influence the adoption and evolution of opinions toward Israel. The second explores views of Israel, perceptions of Israel as an American ally, and opinions on US military aid to Israel. The third presents trends on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including views of Israel and of the Palestinian Authority, sympathies with the respective sides, and opinions on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The fourth explores opinions on Iran, mostly on the highly controversial nuclear deal of 2015. The final chapter presents and analyzes socio-demographic dimensions.

This study attempts to overcome two major deficiencies in public opinion research. Certain studies focus on the results of specific polls and do not place them within long-term trends, and most present data and interpretations are divorced from their political and strategic contexts. These contexts influence the shaping of opinions and are essential to explain fluctuations over time. This study provides both long-term trends and relevant political and strategic contexts.

The trends reveal strong and stable support for Israel in American public opinion on all the issues discussed in this study. The socio-demographic data and analysis, however, show serious cracks. Significant differences were found between the attitudes of Republicans and Democrats, younger and older people, and even different groups of American Jews. A long-term Israeli strategy must consider the positions and values of the groups that are less supportive, the predicted demographic changes in the American society, and the challenge of curbing the anti-Israel poisoning of students who will be assuming major elected and appointed positions in the next decades.

The American Public and Israel in the Twenty-First Century

Eytan Gilboa

INTRODUCTION

This study systematically explores public opinion, a key component in the American-Israeli “special relationship.” This relationship is based on a rare combination of “hard” and “soft” foundations.¹ The hard include tangible and measurable components such as strategic interests and the political influence of American Jewry and Christian Evangelicals. The soft refer to the external environment of the relationship, which includes intangible components such as similarities in historical development and shared values.

Public opinion is one of the soft foundations. The United States (US) considers Israel a strong and reliable ally in a highly unstable and volatile region. Since 9/11, their main mutual strategic interest has been the fight against terror and radical Islam.

Israel is the only true democracy in the Middle East and shares American religious, cultural, and social values. Historically, the two countries developed in a similar manner: they were both immigrant and pioneering societies absorbing immigrants from around the world, inhabiting frontier areas and cultivating arable and desert lands.

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Despite the absence of a formal defense treaty, Israel's small size, and frequent outbursts of violence in the Arab-Israeli conflict, American-Israeli relations have been closer than American relations with most of its allies. Broad, deep, and sustained public support and bipartisan collaboration in Congress have been key factors in the establishment and maintenance of the special relationship.² Frequent surveys have shown remarkable and stable support for Israel in American public opinion.³ This pattern is even more impressive when compared to the negative opinion of Israel found in democratic liberal countries such as many in Western Europe.⁴ In the other direction, Israeli attitudes toward the US have always been very supportive. This pattern too is impressive when compared to critical opinion of the US, which can again be found among traditional US allies in Europe.⁵

Until recently, the American Jewish community was the largest in the world. Today, it is the largest outside Israel. American Jews have always been active in social and political causes, and policymakers listen to their interests, concerns, and aspirations. They were very involved in the events leading to the establishment of Israel, care about its survival and wellbeing, and have strongly supported close US-Israeli ties.

In the past few decades, Christian Evangelicals have become strong supporters of Israel. They frequently report major events in Israel and the Middle East in their vast network of traditional and digital media, often visit Israel and the holy places, organize gigantic pro-Israel conventions, and lobby on behalf of Israel in Congress and at the White House.

A debate about the scale and depth of public support for Israel in the US emerged after the publication of a controversial and poorly researched book and articles by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt on the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the pro-Israel lobby in Washington.⁶ They solely attributed Washington's close relations with Israel to what they called AIPAC's excessive and harmful influence on US foreign policy. In his criticism of their thesis, Walter Russell Mead observed, "In the United States, a pro-Israel foreign policy does not represent the triumph of a small lobby over the public will."⁷ He further argued that this policy "represents the power

of public opinion,” and that support for Israel in the US “commands broad public support.” Mead attributed the strong support for Israel in the US to the traditional historical Protestant empathy for Judaism and the Jewish state. Michael Koplow also argued that “pro-Israel lobbying does not drive policy decisions,” and that support for Israel in the United States is “broad and deep.”⁸

Peter Gries argued that both Mead and Koplow were wrong to suggest that Israel had broad public support in the US.⁹ In 2011, he conducted a single survey and concluded that conservatives held different approaches to Israel than liberals: they were more pro-Israel and less pro-Palestinian while liberals held the opposite opinions. Therefore, Gries argued, the public was divided on Israel.

This conclusion is more correct today than it was in 2011, but Gries was wrong to suggest that a single survey can shed better light on overall public attitudes toward Israel. His criticism of Mead and Koplow was also wrong, as in 2011 as well as today, Israel enjoyed broad support in American public opinion. However, the ideological polarization in the US, which has worsened in recent years, could lead in the next decade to significant erosion in the still high level of support for Israel to be found among the American public.

This study presents and analyzes long-term trends in American attitudes toward Israel in the first two decades of this century. The analysis is based on the collection, integration, and analysis of data from numerous public opinion surveys.

Israel is a very popular subject in American opinion polls. Major polling agencies frequently include questions about Israel annually. Events in Israel and the Middle East often trigger numerous polls. The reason for this unusual level of interest is the special relationship between the two countries and the unique place Israel occupies in American social, cultural, religious, academic, and political life. Usually, the media in liberal democracies cover domestic affairs much more intensively than foreign affairs. The US media, however, views Israel more as a domestic issue and the coverage is accordingly frequent and intensive.

In recent years, many commentators and scholars have questioned the validity of polls and surveys due to their failure to forecast accurate results of elections and plebiscites in countries such as the US, the United Kingdom (UK), and Israel. Polls, however, are still the main social science tool for gauging public opinion. Long-term trends provide more reliable information on the distribution of opinions than periodic snapshots, and only trends enable tracing of changes over time.

This study constructs trends in opinions based on numerous national polls conducted in the US from 2000 to 2020. However, construction of long-term trends is not always possible. Pollsters focus on issues of the day, which can result in lapses and gaps in long-term trends.

Any research using public opinion surveys faces methodological difficulties. Even if the drawing of samples is accurate and follows strict statistical standards, the formulation of questions and answers, the number and order of questions, and the type, format, and timing of questionnaires or interviews can yield very different results.¹⁰ Thus, this study provides information on these issues.

Public opinion surveys influence opinions. For that reason, stakeholders often commission biased polls to make a political statement, not to discover what the public really thinks. This study employs the results of national surveys conducted mostly by the most prestigious and reputable polling agencies, such as the Gallup Poll, the Pew Research Centre, and the Roper-Harvard Poll; polling institutes of universities such as Quinnipiac and Monmouth; and organizations such as the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.¹¹ Non-biased surveys conducted or commissioned by media outlets such as CNN, CBS, ABC News/*Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*/NBC, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and Fox News were also used. Surveys conducted or commissioned by pro-Arab or pro-Israel organizations and American political organizations, and biased questions and answers, were excluded.

The best procedure was to use the same questions as much as possible, asked over time by the same polling agency utilizing the same methodology. In several cases, however, results from other agencies

were used if the questions and answers were identical or very similar and helped to build trends and overcome time lapses and other gaps.

This study has five chapters. The first, the milieu of opinion formation, provides brief information on key factors that influence the adoption and evolution of opinions toward Israel including leaders, events, and the effects of the 9/11 terror attacks in New York and Washington. The second explores views of Israel, perceptions of Israel as an American ally, and opinions on US aid to Israel. The third presents trends on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict including views of Israel and of the Palestinian Authority (PA), sympathies with the sides, and opinions on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the last decade, Israel has considered Iran's behavior and nuclear weapons program the greatest threat to its survival and wellbeing. The US means of coping with this threat, especially the 2015 nuclear deal signed by President Barack Obama and Iran together with a few other powers, became a controversial issue in American-Israeli relations. Thus, the fourth chapter focuses on attitudes toward Iran and the nuclear deal. The fifth and final chapter explores socio-demographic patterns. It traces the evolution of attitudes of Democrats and Republicans, American Jews, and Evangelical Christians as well as other socio-demographic groups.

The core issues were analyzed in all the chapters except for the one on the Iran nuclear deal. Usually, studies and newspaper reporting of surveys focus on the results of specific polls and rarely place them within long-term trends. Also, most studies of public opinion present data and interpretations in isolation from significant political and strategic contexts. These contexts both influence the shaping of opinions and are essential to explain fluctuations over time. This study attempts to overcome these deficiencies and provide both long-term trends and relevant political and strategic contexts.

THE MILIEU OF OPINION FORMATION

Many factors shape public opinion, including statements by leaders, policies, media coverage, ideological orientations, party affiliations, family, and personal experiences and events.¹² Leaders in liberal democracies both influence the shaping of opinions and are influenced by them.¹³ They can't pursue policies on significant issues for a long period of time without enough public support. When public opinion opposes a policy, leaders first attempt to change the opinion, and if they fail, they either change the policy, resign, or seek public support via elections. When the public pays attention to an issue, leaders do the same, and when making decisions, they take the public views into consideration.¹⁴ The public pays attention to issues that the media covers extensively,¹⁵ and the American media has paid much attention to Israel and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.¹⁶

Events may have significant influence on public opinion if they capture the attention of leaders and the public for long periods. These include lingering crises and processes, violence and peacemaking, and significant changes in leadership. This chapter provides information on and analysis of the positions of American presidents and Israeli prime ministers (PMs), and of key policies and major events. The chapter includes a brief analysis of the 9/11 terror attacks, which had a significant influence on American attitudes toward Israel and the Middle East.

Leaders

The approaches, policies, and behavior of heads of state and their personal relationships with one another have considerable influence on public opinion. Four American presidents served in the White House from 2000 to 2020: President Bill Clinton, Democrat, during his last year in office (2000); Presidents George W. Bush, Republican (2001-2008) and Barack Obama, Democrat (2009-2016); and President Donald Trump, Republican, during his first term (2017-2020). Israeli PMs serving during the same period represented the rival camps of Labor (left) and Likud (right) until Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert broke away from Likud in November 2005, joined forces with Labor leaders (primarily Shimon Peres), and founded Kadima, a new centrist party.

Four PMs served in Israel from the beginning of this century: Ehud Barak, Labor (2000-2001); Ariel Sharon, Likud and Kadima (2001-2006); Ehud Olmert, Kadima (2006-2009); and Benjamin Netanyahu, Likud (since 2009). Regardless of their political affiliation, all strongly promoted close relations with the US. The governments of Barak and Olmert actively pursued peace negotiations with the Palestinians. Those of Sharon and Netanyahu were less interested and less active, but in September 2005, Sharon made the historic decision to withdraw Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Due to life experiences and fundamental political and world outlook, Democratic presidents tend to work better with Israeli Labor PMs and Republican presidents with Likud PMs. Clinton established excellent relations with Barak, while Bush had good relations with both Sharon and Olmert.¹⁷ Obama had an exceptionally tense relationship with Netanyahu.¹⁸ Trump, in a complete reversal of Obama's approach, established close relations with Netanyahu, the longest serving Israeli PM.¹⁹

Figure 1: Israeli Prime Ministers and American Presidents, 2000-2020



During the first decade of the century, American-Israeli relations were marked by stability and progress inspired by agreement on major issues and policies. During this period, US policy was shaped by two presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, who both won second terms.²⁰ They both adopted a policy toward Israel based on a combination of interests and emotional connection. Both made sincere efforts to promote a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement, both offered lucrative proposals to end the conflict, and both accused the Palestinian leaders of rejecting their plans.

Obama changed the US approach to Israel.²¹ One of his first foreign policy priorities was to promote reconciliation with the Islamic world. In his first two trips to the Middle East, he visited Turkey (April 5-7, 2009) and Iraq (April 7-8) and then Saudi Arabia (June 3-4, 2009) and Egypt (June 4). He skipped Israel on both trips. He thought that distancing the US from Israel would help him achieve one of his highest foreign policy priorities—reconciliation with the Muslim world.

Obama's strategy failed. He often supported Palestinian positions, mostly blamed Israel for the failure to negotiate peace, and viewed Jewish settlements in the West Bank as the primary obstacle to negotiations and peace.²² In 2015, he signed with other countries a highly controversial nuclear deal with Iran. In the 2012 presidential elections, Netanyahu openly supported Mitt Romney, the Republican challenger, and in 2015 he severely criticized Obama for masterminding and closing the Iran nuclear deal.

Trump completely reversed the Obama approach. He withdrew the US from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed severe sanctions on the Islamic regime in Tehran.²³ He transferred the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and recognized Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights. He blamed the Palestinians for the failure to negotiate with Israel and cut annual US aid to the PA—\$500 million—on the grounds that its purpose had been to facilitate a peace process and the Palestinians had both refused to negotiate and aggressively criticized him on a personal level. Trump also cut the annual US contributions (\$250-400 million) to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinians claiming that it is corrupt, perpetuates the Palestinian refugee problem, and promotes hostility toward Israel and Jews at its schools.

Trump also closed the office of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington, claiming that after the establishment of the PA in 1994, there was no longer a need for that Palestinian mission. He rejected Obama's claim that the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal and the most important obstacle to peace. Trump announced a new plan for Palestinian-Israeli peace that included

the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, annexation by Israel of the big Israeli blocs in the West Bank, and security arrangements. In summer 2020, Trump also engineered normalization agreements between Israel and the Gulf States of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain.

Given the sharp disagreements between Obama and Netanyahu and the close collaboration between Trump and Netanyahu, one would assume that during Obama's two terms the American public would turn against Israel or at least reduce its support for Israeli causes; and conversely during the Trump term the opposite would occur. Yet the long-term trends in public opinion refute this hypothesis. By all measures and indicators, the American public's support for Israel has remained stable. The levels neither declined during the Obama years nor improved much during the Trump years. However, the sharp polarization in American politics that began during the Obama era and has reached new heights under Trump has had negative effects on Israel's standing, primarily among liberal Democrats and American Jews.

Events

Dramatic events in the US, Israel, and the Middle East influenced the evolution of American opinions toward Israel. The major events in the US include the al-Qaeda 9/11 terror attacks on New York and Washington, the subsequent long and unsuccessful US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the intense political polarization between Democrats and Republicans.

During the first decade of the century, Israeli PMs represented different parties and political ideologies, but in the second, the right under the leadership of Netanyahu dominated several coalition governments, including governments of national unity. Israel had to deal with peace proposals to settle the conflict with the Palestinians and cope with many eruptions of Palestinian violence in the West Bank and Gaza. The most important events in the Middle East were the "Arab Spring" turmoil, the Iranian nuclear weapons program and foreign military interventions in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, the rise and fall of the Islamic State, and the horrific civil war in Syria.

During the last two decades, successive Israeli and American leaders suggested many peace proposals and organized many peace conferences. At the beginning of the century, first Barak and later Clinton proposed a comprehensive peace agreement to Yasser Arafat, PLO Chairman and PA President,²⁴ but he turned them both down and failed to make counterproposals. From September 2000 to February 2005, Arafat led a major campaign of terrorism against Israeli civilians (often euphemized as the “al-Aqsa Intifada,” or the “Second Intifada”).²⁵ Palestinians conducted suicide bombings in Israeli buses, malls, restaurants, night clubs, schools, coffee shops, and hotels. Thousands of Israelis and Palestinians were killed and wounded.

In May 2002, the Middle East Quartet (MEQ), consisting of the US, the United Nations (UN), Russia and the European Union (EU), began efforts to end the Palestinian violence and resume the peace process. In April 2003, Bush announced his “Road Map to Peace” which prescribed an end to the violence; Palestinian acceptance of Israel’s right to exist; establishment of an independent Palestinian state; and the reaching of a final settlement on all other issues. Bush was the first US president to officially call for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

In November 2004, Arafat died and was replaced by Mahmoud Abbas. In August-September 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and a few settlements in the West Bank. In January 2006, Hamas, an extreme Islamic terror organization, defeated Fatah in the second and last Palestinian legislative elections, and in June 2007 won a military confrontation with the Fatah in Gaza and assumed full control over the area. The Palestinian government has been divided ever since, with Fatah/ PA rule in the West Bank and Hamas rule in Gaza.

The ongoing battle between the two Palestinian organizations is a major obstacle to peace, as Hamas opposed the 1990s Oslo agreements between Israel and the PLO, rejected any reconciliation, and continues to call for the destruction of the Jewish state by force.²⁶ Many attempts to resolve the internal Fatah-Hamas conflict have failed, which raises questions about the feasibility and value of negotiations with the Fatah-dominated PA. If Fatah and Hamas cannot peacefully resolve their own differences, how can they be expected to resolve the much tougher issues with Israel?

And even if Israel did manage to reach an agreement with the PA, Hamas would probably undermine its implementation.

Nevertheless, in November 2007, Bush made another effort to restart the peace process. He organized a conference in Annapolis with Abbas and Olmert. Later, Olmert presented a new peace proposal to Abbas, but never got an answer.

In the meantime, instead of exploiting Israel's complete withdrawal from Gaza to turn the Strip into the "Singapore of the Middle East," Hamas and Islamic Jihad turned Gaza into an Iranian military base. Instead of investing hundreds of millions of dollars in economic development, Hamas allocated huge resources to building a military force, manufacturing rockets and missiles, digging attack tunnels into Israeli territory, and launching thousands of missile/rocket attacks on Israeli cities and towns. In response, Israel imposed a siege on Gaza (for different reasons, Egypt took the same action) and when the attacks intensified, conducted major military operations to stop them. These operations were "Cast Lead" in December 2008-January 2009, "Pillar of Defense" in March 2012, and "Protective Edge" in July-August 2014.²⁷ In March 2018, Hamas began another violent campaign against the borders between Israel and Gaza, which they called the "March of Return."

From his first days in the White House, Donald Trump stated that he would resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. His peace plan, which he dubbed the "deal of the century," was the first detailed US peace plan since Clinton's proposal in 2000. It included two parts, economic and political.²⁸ Due to recurrent elections in Israel, the economic part was first presented at a workshop in Bahrain in June 2019 attended by businessmen and with no Israeli or Palestinian representatives. The idea was to present to the Palestinians the potential benefits of peace through a comprehensive package of economic development worth about \$50 billion, in the West Bank, Gaza, and countries such as Jordan and Egypt.

The political part was presented at the White House in January 2020. It offered the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in Gaza and over 70% of the West Bank, plus territorial compensation in Israel itself, and a capital on the outskirts of East Jerusalem. The Palestinians would

relinquish their demand for the “right of return” of refugees to Israel. Israel would annex the large Jewish settlement blocks in the West Bank and receive significant security arrangements and political assurances. Israel accepted the plan, but the Palestinians categorically rejected it.²⁹ Several Arab countries urged the Palestinians to accept the plan as a basis for negotiations, to no avail.

The most important development in the Middle East has been the Iranian quest for regional hegemony via nuclear weapons, sponsorship of terrorism, subversion activities in pro-American Sunni Muslim states, and military interventions in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Iranian leaders have repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel. They have built a huge infrastructure to produce nuclear bombs and long-range missiles to carry them and have been constructing military fronts around Israel’s perimeter via proxy Islamic terrorist organizations: Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza. Iran has financed, trained, and equipped these organizations. They all possess tens of thousands of rockets and missiles and the Gaza Islamist terror organizations frequently fire them into Israeli cities and villages in Iran’s service.

Hezbollah destroyed Lebanon and Hamas destroyed Gaza. Israel considered Iran and especially its nuclear weapons program as the number one strategic threat to its survival. Israel lauded the sanctions imposed on Iran by the UN but severely criticized the 2015 nuclear deal negotiated primarily by the Obama administration. The deal created an angry and bitter confrontation between Netanyahu and Obama.

Terrorism

The 9/11 terror attacks in the US had a significant influence on American attitudes toward Israel. Several commentators suggested that the main reason for the attacks was US support for Israel. Authors of conspiracy theories wrote that the attacks were organized by Israeli agents to push the US to go to war against Israel’s enemies.³⁰ The “proof” for this claim, they argued, was the small number of Jews and Israelis killed in the attacks. Both the accusation and the “proof” were fake. Initially, the two most prominent leaders of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, explained that the main reasons for the 9/11 terror attacks were the US presence in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia; and the Western

liberal, social, and political values that they perceived as threatening the survival of Islam. Israel was added much later. Meierrieks and Gries didn't find any significant connection between American support for Israel and anti-American terrorism.³¹ The public also rejected the false accusations against Israel.

In several surveys, majorities of Americans blamed US policy in the Middle East for the attacks.³² In a CBS News/*New York Times* poll, 68% thought the US policy in the Middle East bore some degree of blame for the attacks. In a *Los Angeles Times* survey, 58% of respondents expressed a similar view. Despite the absence of Israel and American-Israeli relations from al-Qaeda's initial statements, pollsters repeatedly asked Americans to list what they believed caused the attacks, including US support for Israel.

In September-October 2001, *Newsweek* asked the public to select from a list of possible major reasons for the attacks. The main reason cited by al-Qaeda's leaders for the attack, "resentment of impact of US culture in Muslim countries," was viewed by Americans as the least important motivation (28%), while "opposition to US ties with Israel and policies towards the Palestinian situation" was viewed as the main reason for the attacks (68%). Only the second main reason chosen by respondents in this survey was closer to one of the main factors mentioned by al-Qaeda: "resentment of US military and economic power."

Other questions focusing on Israel and 9/11 yielded different results. When US support for Israel was pitted against one other possible reason, the results were much less negative for Israel. A September 2001 poll by International Communication Research included the following question: "Which do you think is the more likely cause of the recent terrorist attack on the US—American support for Israel or the growing number of Arab terrorist groups and the countries that harbor them?" 66% of the respondents blamed "Arab terrorist groups," while 19% attributed the attacks to "US support for Israel." A poll by the New Atlantic Initiative/*Chicago Sun Times* in October 2001 presented a similar question: "Do you think that the US support of Israel was a major factor in the terrorist attacks against the US, or do you think that the attacks would have happened regardless of the US support of Israel?" 62% thought the attack

“would have happened regardless the US support,” while only 10% said that support for Israel was a “major factor.”

Despite these results, pollsters continued to ask whether the US should reduce its ties or even pull back from its support of Israel. Several polling agencies formulated somewhat different questions on this issue, which probably affected the distribution of results. Yet the evidence is enough to establish a trend: despite the increased threat of terrorism, Americans opposed a reduction in ties with Israel. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks and during the next two months, a Wall Street Journal/NBC poll asked respondents how the “war on terror” affected their attitudes toward US-Israeli relations. More than three-quarters said US-Israel relations should be “closer” or “stay the same,” and only between 13% and 16% thought otherwise.³³

Many factors shape public opinion and it is extremely difficult to measure the exact contribution of each to the formulation of opinions at any given time. Yet key policies and actions of US and Israeli leaders, together with major events in the US, Israel, and the Middle East including the 9/11 terror attacks in the US, influenced the evolution of American attitudes toward Israel, especially in the first decade of this century. The public didn’t believe that US-Israeli relations were the main cause of the attacks and didn’t think those relations should be reduced.

The 9/11 attacks occurred at the beginning of the second year of the Palestinian terror campaign on Israel (the so-called “Al-Aqsa Intifada”) and it is possible that many Americans felt that both the US and Israel were victims of Muslim terrorism and were fighting the same war against similar enemies.

VIEWS OF ISRAEL

This chapter presents data and analyses of American attitudes toward several key bilateral dimensions of US relations with Israel including views of Israel, perceptions of Israel as a US ally, general support, and support for military aid. General views of nations and peoples may predict opinions on specific issues, events, and processes. Thus, the first section presents American feelings toward Israel from 2000 to 2020. Successive American presidents and senior elected and appointed officials have described Israel as one of the closest US allies. The second section reveals whether the public has shared this view. The US has strongly supported Israel, and the final section suggests that the public has endorsed the general levels of support as well as the substantial US military aid to Israel.

Favorability

Fundamental general feelings toward peoples and nations are significant because they may represent an “attitude structure” or a “belief system” that influences opinions on specific policy issues.³⁴ An attitude differs from an opinion. An attitude is internal, a frame of mind affecting one’s thoughts or behavior, while an opinion is external, an explicit expressed response to a stimulus.³⁵ Attitude typically refers to a relatively general and enduring evaluation of an object or concept on a valence dimension ranging from positive to negative. Thus, attitudes are the good-bad evaluations of things, including people, groups, organizations, and behaviors.

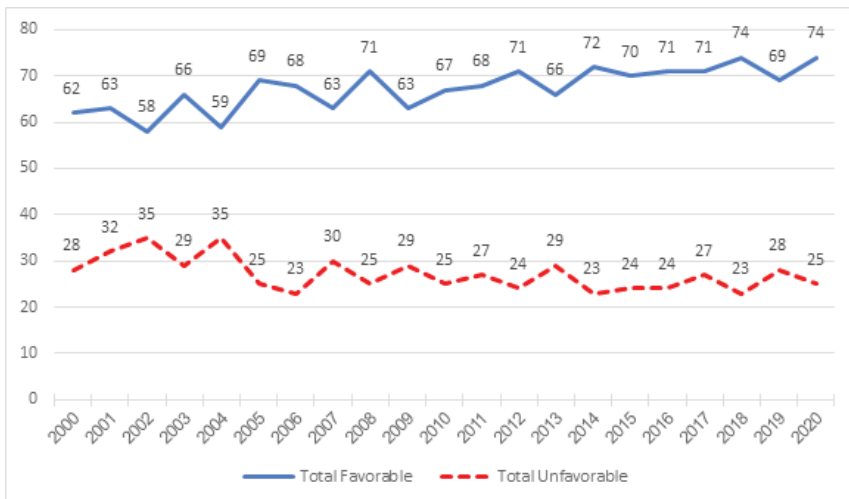
Attitude structure determines opinions on specific things. It typically includes three components: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The affective involves the person’s learning, knowledge, and thoughts about a subject; the cognitive involves feelings and emotions; and the behavioral involves past experiences. Attitude structures are identified via a survey of many opinions and in turn can predict what an opinion would be on a specific other subject.

Pollsters have used the terms “favorable” versus “unfavorable” to gauge views of peoples and nations.³⁶ When applied to American views of Israel, evaluations of this dichotomy may reveal an attitude structure. Gallup has annually asked national samples of Americans the following

question: “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?” Americans have always had highly favorable views of Israel. Figure 2 presents the distribution of combined responses (“favorable” vs. “unfavorable”) to this question about Israel from 2000 to 2020.

Figure 2 - Views of Israel, 2000-2020

Question: “I’d like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. Is your overall opinion of [Name of Country] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?” Israel (Gallup, %)



Source: Justin McCarthy, “Iran, North Korea Liked Least by Americans,” *Gallup Poll*, March 3, 2020. Gallup Poll Social Series: World Affairs, Final Topline, Q. 18, February 3-16, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/287153/iran-north-korea-liked-least-americans.aspx>

The long-term trends were mostly stable. Substantial majorities of between two-thirds and three-quarters of respondents held favorable opinions of Israel, while between one-third and one-quarter held an unfavorable opinion. Israel went up 12%, from 62% favorability in 2000 to 74% in 2020. During the first decade of this century, the scores were between 58% and 71% and the average favorable percentage was

64%. Since 2012, all but two results were over 70% and the average climbed from 64% to 70%. The unfavorability score went down slightly from 28% in 2000 to 25% in 2020. The highest unfavorability score, 35%, was registered only twice, in 2002 and 2004. The highest favorable ratios, 74% to 23% and 74% to 25%, were respectively registered in 2018 and 2019 during Trump's first term and probably reflect his warm and close ties with Israel. The lowest ratio, 58% to 35%, was registered in January 2002, during the second year of the "al-Aqsa Intifada".

US Ally

One clear measure of similar interests and close relations between states is the trust they have in each other. Michael Oren, Israel's Ambassador to the US (2009-2013), defined a close US ally in the following way:

On an ideological level, an ally is a country that shares America's values, reflects its founding spirit, and resonates with its people's beliefs. Tactically, an ally stands with the United States through multiple conflicts and promotes its global vision. From its location at one strategic crossroads, an ally enhances American intelligence and defense capabilities, and provides ports and training for U.S. forces.³⁷

American presidents, members of Congress, and senior officials often describe Israel as one of the closest American allies in the world, and certainly the closest ally in the Middle East.³⁸ This fundamental attitude persisted even in periods of disagreement and tension between the two countries.

In March 1993, at a press conference with Rabin, Clinton said, "I believe strongly in the benefit to American interests from strengthened relationships with Israel... We have begun a dialogue intended to raise our relationship to a new level of strategic partnership, partners in the pursuit of peace, partners in the pursuit of security."³⁹ In May 2008, George W. Bush told the Israeli Knesset, "The alliance between our governments is unbreakable, yet the source of our friendship runs deeper than any treaty. It is grounded in the shared spirit of our people, the bonds of the Book, the ties of the soul."⁴⁰ In April 2010, even Obama

said, “Many of the same forces that threaten Israel also threaten the United States and our efforts to secure peace and stability in the Middle East. Our alliance with Israel serves our national security interests... All sides should understand that our commitment to Israel’s security is unshakeable and that no wedge will be driven between us.”⁴¹

Trust can be gauged by the distribution of responses to a question on whether one considers a state to be a “close ally,” a “reliable ally” or a “friend.” Pollsters have used different questions and answers to investigate this issue, but the trend is very clear: the US public has consistently considered Israel a close ally and friend. Table 1 presents the distribution of responses to this question: “For each of the following countries, please say whether you consider it an ally of the United States, friendly but not an ally, unfriendly, or an enemy of the United States. How about Israel?” This question appeared in a comparative setting with other countries and separately just for Israel.

Table 1 covers the period from 2000 to 2019. The highest results for Israel in the combined “ally-friendly” category were found in the separate setting: an average of 80% selected this category, of which 46% said Israel is a US “ally.” The average in the comparative setting was 72%, of which 40% selected the “ally” category. Table 1 shows fluctuations over time but the trend has been consistently pro-Israel. In the Gallup poll, from 2000 to 2018, the score went up 19%, from 60% in 2000 to 79% in 2018. That same year, the “ally-friendly” score in the CNN poll was 75%. The high scores of 2018 and even of 2019 may have resulted from Trump’s strong support for Israel.

Table 1 - Israel: US Ally, 2000-2019

Questions: “For each of the following countries, please say whether you consider it an ally of the United States, friendly but not an ally, unfriendly, or an enemy of the United States. How about Israel?” (Gallup, Economist, Politico, %)

“Do you consider Israel an ally of the United States, friendly but not an ally, unfriendly towards the U.S., or an enemy of the United States?” (CNN, CBS, %)

Poll	Date	An Ally	Friendly, Not Ally	Unfriendly	An Enemy	Unsure
Gallup	03/2000	40	20	14	4	22
Gallup	04/2001	32	40	14	6	8
Gallup	09/2013	45	30	11	6	8
Gallup	03/2014	44	35	10	4	8
Gallup	07/2018	45	34	13	6	3
CNN	08/2006	49	33	6	4	7
CNN	03/2010	39	41	12	5	4
CNN	03/2013	46	33	8	6	6
CNN	08/2018	46	29	10	8	7
Politico	02/2017	48	20	9	5	18
Economist	12/2017	42	25	7	6	21
Economist	07/2019	38	24	9	6	23

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, “Israel and the Palestinians.” (2000-2019).

<https://www.pollingreport.com/israel.htm>; *Jewish Virtual Library*, “American Opinion toward Israel as a Friend and Ally,” (1990-2018).

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-opinion-toward-israel-s-security>

The Fox News Poll formulated a somewhat different question on the same issue in a comparative setting: “For each of the following countries, please tell me how you view its relationship with the United States—do you consider it a strong ally, somewhat of an ally, somewhat of an enemy, or a bitter enemy?...Israel.” In 2013, 77% of the respondents said Israel was a “strong ally” or “somewhat of an ally;” 15% selected the “somewhat of an enemy” or the “bitter enemy” options. In 2017, the percentage of respondents saying Israel was an ally of the US rose to 83%, and the number saying Israel was an enemy fell to only 10%.

The comparative setting also ranked Israel high on a list of US allies. In a 2003 survey, Fox News and Opinion Dynamics asked respondents to evaluate eight nations in terms of being a “friend” or “not a friend” of the US. Israel was ranked second as a “friend” by a ratio of 70% to 16%. Only Britain outranked Israel on this measure, and Israel was far ahead of Germany, France, and Saudi Arabia.⁴² The Harris Poll found in July 2007 that Israel was ranked fourth among 25 countries, below Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, but ahead of Japan, Italy, South Korea, Germany, and Mexico.⁴³

Pew found similar results in responses to this question: “Which country currently is the most important partner for American foreign policy... Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain (includes United Kingdom/England), Israel, Japan, Mexico, North Korea, Russia, or the European Union (EU)?” In 2017, Israel was ranked third after Britain and China and above all the other countries. In 2018, it was ranked fourth after Britain, China, and Canada, and in 2019, it tied for the third place with Canada after Britain and China and above all the other countries. These results clearly demonstrated the importance of Israel in the eyes of the public.⁴⁴

In the Middle East, Israel stood out as the closest and most reliable US ally. In August 2006, a Harris Poll examined public evaluation of 13 countries in the Middle East. Israel was ranked first with 75% of respondents saying it was a “close ally” or a “friend” of the US.⁴⁵ This score was far above the scores of all the other countries. Kuwait came in second at 51%, and Turkey and Egypt shared third place at

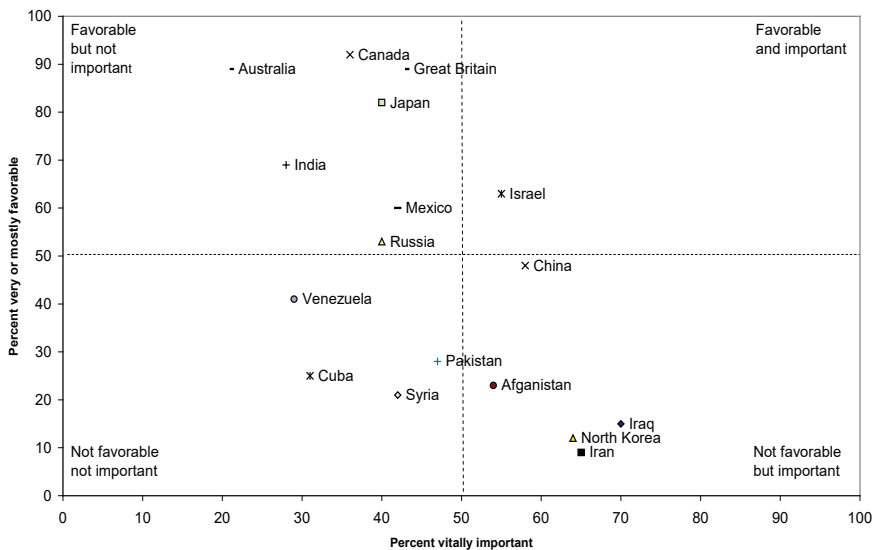
45%. Saudi Arabia was fifth at 44%, Jordan sixth at 43%, and Qatar seventh at 33%. In August 2009, Rasmussen ranked Israel first at 70%. Egypt and Saudi Arabia were far behind at 39% each, and Iraq got 17%. In March 2017, the Harvard-Harris Poll asked a national sample: “Do you consider each of the following countries an ally, an enemy, or neutral towards the US?” Again, the survey ranked Israel first at 62% with all the other countries far behind: Egypt 31%, Turkey (a NATO member) 29%, Saudi Arabia 28%, and Iraq 13%.⁴⁶

In a special February 2007 survey, Gallup identified Israel as the only country most Americans viewed as both “favorable” and “important.” Figure 3 places states into four cells: “favorable but not important,” including English-speaking countries such as Canada, Australia and Britain; “not favorable but important,” including Iraq, Iran, and North Korea; “not favorable and not important,” including Cuba and Syria; and “favorable and important,” including Israel alone. These results undoubtedly demonstrate Israel’s unique place in American public opinion.

Figure 3 - Favorability Opinions and Perceived Importance of Nations, 2007

Questions:

1. “Next, how important do you think what happens in each of the following countries is to the United States today—would you say it is vitally important, important but not vital, not too important or not at all important?”
2. “Next, I’d like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. First, is your overall opinion of [RANDOM ORDER] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable? How about—[INSERT NEXT ITEM]?”



Source: Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, “Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, N. Korea, China Viewed as World Hot Spots,” *Gallup Poll*, February 21, 2007.

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/26632/iraq-iran-afghanistan-korea-china-viewed-world-hot-spots.aspx>

Unfortunately, very few polls have examined the reasons for these highly favorable assessments. In 2001, surveys suggested several reasons to three groups of Americans: the general public, elites, and Jews.⁴⁷ All three groups considered “strategic interests” the main reason for the close US-Israeli relationship. Elites and American Jews considered “democratic tradition” the second powerful factor. American Jews, unlike the other two groups, did not think their political power was a significant factor. This opinion is not surprising, as American Jews have never been comfortable admitting their political power, which occasionally becomes an excuse for “dual loyalty” accusations and antisemitism.

Support and Military Aid

Generally favorable feelings are not always translated into actual support for policies and actions. Polling questions about the desirable levels of support and foreign aid may shed light on the willingness of Americans to translate basic favorable attitudes into more demanding commitments.

Pollsters have asked samples of Americans to evaluate the level of US support for Israel. They mostly used the following question: “Do you think the United States gives too much support to Israel, too little support to Israel, or does the US give the right amount of support to Israel?” Table 2 shows the distribution of responses to this question from 2001 to 2019. The most frequent answer was “about right” averaging 45%. The average result for the combined responses “about right” and “too little” was 65%. Thus, about two-thirds of respondents thought US support for Israel was right and should be increased. The highest combined score, 85%, was registered in 2013 and the lowest figure, 55%, in 2011. The lowest ratio (59% vs. 35%) appeared during the second year of the Second Palestinian Intifada when Israel’s defensive measures against Palestinian terrorism were described by critics and the media as excessive. The highest ratio (85% vs. 11%) was found in February 2013, about two months after Israel conducted the “Pillar of Defense” military operation in Gaza in response to Hamas’s rocket attacks on Israeli cities and towns.

Table 2 - Support for Israel, 2001-2019

Questions: “Do you think the United States gives too much support to Israel, too little support to Israel, or does the U.S. give the right amount of support to Israel?” (Gallup, CBS, Pew, %)

“Thinking about the relationship between the United States and Israel, do you think the U.S. is too supportive of Israel, not supportive enough of Israel, or is the U.S. support of Israel about right?” (Quinnipiac, %)

Poll	Date	Too Much	About Right	Too Little	Right & Too little	Unsure
Gallup	01/2001	29	58	9	67	4
Gallup	02/2002	35	49	10	59	6
Gallup	05/2003	32	48	12	60	8
Gallup	07/2006	25	32	28	60	12
CBS	09/2006	28	54	8	62	10
CBS	08/2008	30	46	12	58	12
CBS	11/2011	31	38	17	55	14
PEW	07/2012	22	46	12	58	20
PEW	02/2013	11	31	54	85	3
PEW	02/2015	18	48	29	77	5
Quinnipiac	01/2017	16	46	31	77	7
Quinnipiac	03/2019	24	47	14	61	15

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, “Israel and the Palestinians.” (2019-2000).

<https://www.pollingreport.com/israel.htm>; Jewish Virtual Library, “American Public Opinion Polls Toward Foreign Aid.”

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-public-opinion-views-toward-foreign-aid>

Attitudes toward foreign aid can serve as a major indicator of a close relationship between the country giving aid and the recipient, because it reveals a tangible commitment that goes beyond words of support. A public that defends allocations of tax money to a foreign country puts its money where its mouth is. Israel has received substantial military and economic aid from the US, primarily for two main purposes: maintaining the military balance in the Middle East to deter Arab aggression and inducing and supporting negotiations and peace agreements. Similar reasons motivated the US to aid other countries in the Middle East, including Egypt and Jordan. The US has also provided substantial economic aid to the Palestinians.

The sums and types of aid Israel has been receiving from the US have changed considerably. Since 2000, aid has been mostly earmarked for purchases of weapons in the US.⁴⁸ The total aid has been reduced from an average of \$3 billion annually in the 1990s to an average of \$2.2 billion in the 2000s. The economic portion has been reduced from \$1.2 billion in the 1990s to only about \$120 million in 2007 and was eliminated in 2008. From 2000 to 2020 the US gave Israel \$58 billion, mostly for defense purposes. Despite serious disagreements between Obama and Netanyahu, in September 2016, they signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing \$3.8 billion annually for military aid to Israel for the next 10 years.⁴⁹ This sum includes \$0.5 billion for the development and production of joint missile defense systems.

One major issue is what the US is getting in return for its military aid. Supporters of aid to Israel have argued that measured by contributions to American national security, intelligence, and diplomacy, aid has been an excellent bargain, while critics have suggested the opposite. Through extensive public campaigns, several pro-Palestinian, pro-Arab and Muslim groups in the US have attempted to create a strong public sentiment against American aid to Israel, alleging that it funds “occupation” and “aggression” against the Palestinians.⁵⁰

Use of the term “aid” in the context of US-Israeli defense relations is misleading. The more accurate and appropriate term is “investment.”⁵¹ First, it is all military. Second, most of the funds are reinvested back into the US economy, as Israel is required to spend most of

the money at American defense manufacturers. Third, US military aid to Israel has historically been viewed as an investment in peace and security. Successive American administrations saw aid packages as key to helping Israel maintain its qualitative military edge over potential threats in the region, especially those emanating from Iran and its proxies Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah. Fourth, in return for aid, Israel provides the US military and defense industries with information about weapons effectiveness, innovative military technology like missile defense systems and border surveillance technology, and shares intelligence and battle-proven military doctrines. The US military is also frequently conducting very useful military exercises with the Israeli military. Finally, the US investment in Israel pales in contrast with the US annual spending for security assistance to other allies such as Europe (\$36 billion), Japan (\$27 billion), and South Korea (\$15 billion).⁵²

In general, Americans have had reservations about foreign aid, especially in times of national economic hardship in the US, but they have consistently supported aid to Israel. During certain periods, aid to Israel has been the locomotive pulling the entire US foreign aid program and certainly US aid to Middle Eastern countries.⁵³ From 2001 to 2014 pollsters have asked the American public whether US aid to Israel should be “increased,” “kept at the same level,” “decreased,” or “stopped.” Table 3 shows that during this period about two-thirds supported aid while one-third said it should be decreased or stopped. The scores in 2001 (63% vs. 30%) and in 2014 (64% vs. 34%) were very similar.

Table 3 - US Military Aid to Israel, 2001-2014

Question: “Thinking about the military aid the United States provides Israel for military purposes, do you think U.S. military aid to Israel should be increased, kept the same, or decreased?” If decreased: “Do you think the United States should reduce the amount of military aid provided to Israel, or stop providing military aid to Israel altogether?” (%)

Poll	Date	Increase	Keep the Same	Decrease	Stop	Unsure
CNN	09/2001	8	55	29	1	7
CNN	08/2006	12	52	13	18	6
CNN	11/2011	14	50	12	21	4
CNN	07/2014	21	43	15	19	3
Chicago	06/2012	15	41	19	19	6
Chicago	06/2014	13	46	19	18	4

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, “Israel and the Palestinians.” (2000-2019).

<https://www.pollingreport.com/israel.htm>;

Jewish Virtual Library, “American Public Opinion

Polls Toward Foreign Aid.” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-public-opinion-views-toward-foreign-aid>

These figures must be evaluated against very negative opinions on the value of foreign aid for US foreign policy in general and for policy in the Middle East in particular. For example, in the 2004 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations poll, 65% and 64% respectively were in favor of cutting back on military aid and economic aid, and only 33% and 34% respectively were in favor of keeping or expanding existing levels.⁵⁴ The same survey included the following question: “After World War II, the US spent billions of dollars to reconstruct and democratize Europe. Would you favor or oppose making a similar investment in the Middle East?” Despite the presentation of a positive historical analogy at the beginning of the question, 68% opposed such aid and only 24% favored it.

More specific questions citing amounts and reasons produced different and sometimes opposite results. When *Newsweek* asked in October 2001 whether \$2.8 billion in aid given to Israel last year was “too much, too little or about right,” 52% said “too much” and only 38% said “about right” or “too little.”⁵⁵ In 2007, however, a similar question added specific purposes: giving Israel \$3 billion “to help defend itself and help the US fight terrorism” produced substantially positive results: 67% agreed while 29% disagreed. Despite the major increase in aid and the 2016 Obama-Netanyahu agreement, no reputable pollster checked what the public thought about them.

Since 2000, the American public has held highly favorable views of Israel. Majorities of Americans agreed that Israel has been a close ally or a friend of the US. One survey found that out of 17 countries, including several close US allies such as Canada, Britain, Japan, and Australia, Americans considered only Israel both a favorable and an important country. Majorities also thought US support for Israel has been about right or even too little. Greater majorities said US aid to Israel should be at the current level or even increased. All these results indicate strong positive feelings toward Israel and solid support for its survival and well-being.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is only one of many conflicts in the world, but it receives dramatically out-sized attention. It is treated as though it is the single most important key for peace and prosperity in the entire Middle East, if not the world. Politicians, policymakers, journalists, scholars, and international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often refer to it as “the Middle East Conflict” and to efforts to resolve it as the “Middle East Peace Process,” “Middle East Peace Talks,” “Middle East Peace Plans,” or “Middle East Peace Proposals.” International conferences held to resolve the conflict were called the “Middle East Peace Conference” (e.g., Madrid, October 1991; Paris, January 2017). Mediators are often referred to as “envoys for the Middle East Peace Process.” The UN has a “Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process,” and The EU has a function called “Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.” UN institutions and agencies regularly make disproportionate resolutions about the conflict that are often one-sided and anti-Israel.⁵⁶

Describing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the “Middle East Conflict” is always inaccurate and misleading, and it approached the ludicrous during the depredations of the so-called “Arab Spring” and the process leading to the normalization agreements signed between Israel and the Gulf States of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. There have been many very serious conflicts among Muslims in the Middle East that had nothing to do with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and that would not have been affected in any way by a Palestinian-Israeli peace.

For decades, many policymakers and experts argued that Arab-Israeli peace could emerge only after Israelis and Palestinians settle their conflict.⁵⁷ This has also been a wrong assertion. In March 1979, Egypt signed a peace agreement with Israel in the absence of Israeli-Palestinian peace, and Jordan followed the same path in October 1994. The UAE and Bahrain’s normalization agreements with Israel also refuted this prevailing assumption.⁵⁸ The Palestinians complained about the agreements, but Arab leaders severely criticized them for

rejecting every peace proposal. The 22-member Arab League also rejected the Palestinian demand to condemn the agreements.⁵⁹

Calling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict the “Middle East conflict” has helped the Palestinian cause and damaged Israel’s image in the court of public opinion. In many surveys, pollsters have used the phrases “Middle East conflict” and “Middle East situation” and have referred to the UN’s mostly one-sided and often ridiculous resolutions and actions.

Two agreements between Israel and the PLO determined the establishment and jurisdiction of the PA.⁶⁰ The first, the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (commonly known as the Cairo agreement) established the PA in 1994. It was signed in May of that year by Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. Arafat became the head of the PA in July 1994. The second agreement, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (commonly known as the Oslo II agreement), was signed in September 1995. That agreement divided the West Bank into three areas: A, B, and C. The PA received exclusive control over area A, which included all the big cities in the West Bank. Israel and the PA shared control over area B and Israel got exclusive control of area C, which included all the Israeli neighborhoods.

From the beginning, the PA has been an authoritarian regime. In 25 years, it has only had only two heads: Arafat until his death in 2004, and Abbas ever since. The PA held legislative elections only twice, in January 1996 and January 2006. In 2007 the legislative body ceased to exist due to the Fatah-Hamas military confrontation in Gaza.

The PA is a corrupt, ineffective, and failed government⁶¹ that has never respected basic human rights such as the freedoms of life, liberty, opinion, expression, assembly, and organization. Nor does it place any value on women’s rights.⁶² It has never established an independent media or judiciary. In Gaza, Hamas has established a ruthless Islamic theocracy.⁶³

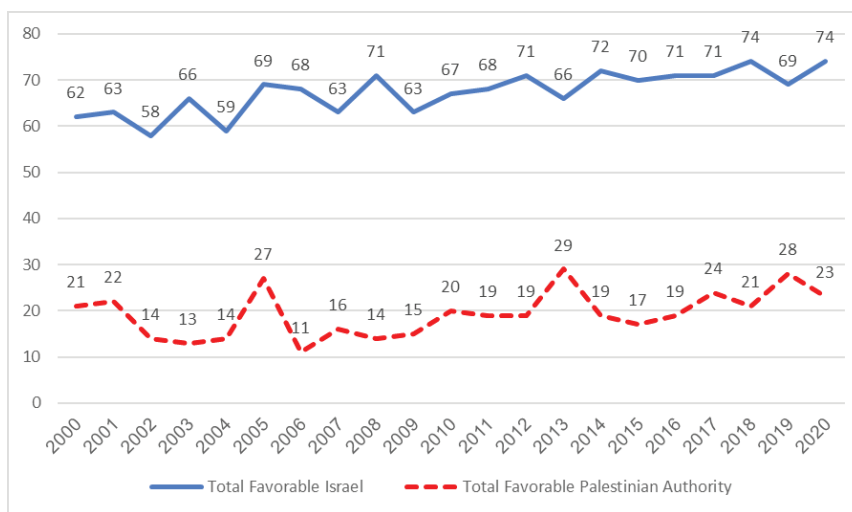
The potential development of the PA into an independent state was halted by the leadership's rejection of all peace proposals, frequent use of terrorism and violence from the West Bank and Gaza, and the division and feud between Fatah and Hamas. Contrary to prevailing belief, especially in the West, the main obstacle to peace has not been the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the borders between Israel and a Palestinian state, or even the status of Jerusalem. The main obstacle has been the Palestinian insistence on the so-called "right of return" of the Palestinian "refugees" to Israel, which, if accepted, would eliminate Israel as a Jewish state.⁶⁴

Comparative Favorability

Americans have always had highly favorable views of Israel and unfavorable views of the PA. Figure 4 compares the total "favorable" and "unfavorable" scores of Israel vs. the PA from 2000 to 2020. Substantial majorities of between two-thirds and three-quarters of respondents held favorable opinions of Israel. During the first decade of this century, the average favorable-to-Israel percentage was 64%; in the second it climbed to 71%. The PA's scores were exactly the opposite. Since 2000, about 70% of national samples held unfavorable views of the PA. In the first decade, the average ratio was 70% vs. 17% in favor of Israel. It remained similar in the second decade at 71% vs. 21% in favor of Israel.

Figure 4 - Views of Israel vs. the Palestinian Authority, 2000-2020

Question: “I’d like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. Is your overall opinion of [Name of a Country] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?” “Israel,” “The Palestinian Authority” (Gallup, %)



Sources: *Gallup Poll*, “Middle East.” February 8-11, 2015.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1639/middle-east.aspx>

Lydia Saad, “Seven in 10 Americans Continue to View Israel Favorably,” *Gallup Poll*, February 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181652/seven-americans-continue-view-israel-favorably.aspx>

Lydia Saad, “Majority in U.S. Again, Support Palestinian Statehood,” *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

The long-term trends were mostly stable. Israel went up from a 62% favorability rating in 2000 to 74% in 2020. The PA remained steady at just above 21%. Figure 4 shows that in 2020, 74% held favorable views of Israel while only 23% held a similar view of the PA. It also shows that from 2000 to 2020, Israel’s favorability went up by 12%

while that of the Palestinians remained almost constant at around 20%, with peaks in 2005, 2013, and 2019. In 2000, the gap between Israel and the PA was 41%. In 2010, it widened to 47% and in the most recent survey of 2020, it reached 51% in favor of Israel.

Comparative Sympathies

Since 1947, Gallup has been asking which side inspires more sympathy in the “Middle East situation”: Israelis or Arabs. It has conducted such surveys annually since 1947, and during periods of violence or exceptional events, several times a year. One question has consistently appeared since the first poll: “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with Israel or with the Arabs?” In 1978, Gallup changed the poll’s question by pitting Israel against the “Palestinians” instead of “Arabs.” In November 1947, 24% of the respondents sympathized more with Israel, 12% with the Arabs, and 64% other answers including “do not know.”⁶⁵ In 2020, the figures had reversed: 60% sympathized more with Israel, 23% with the Palestinians, and only 19% selected other answers.

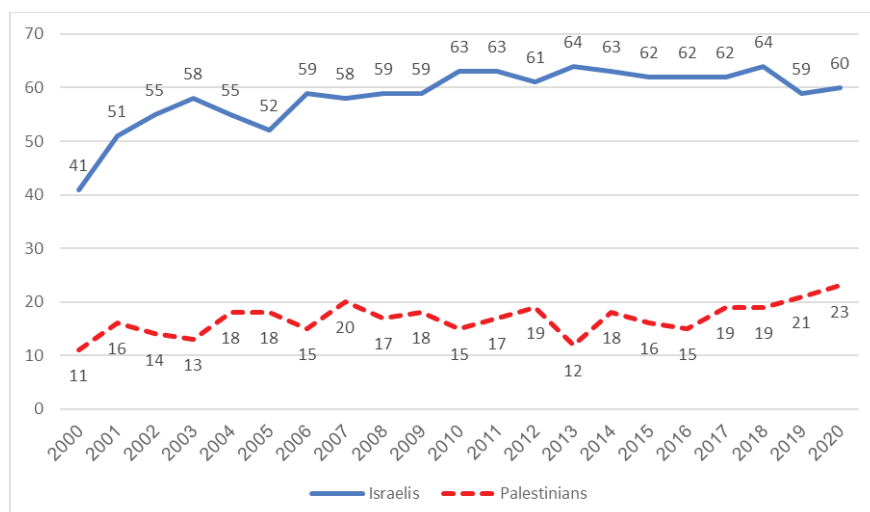
The long-term trends reveal highs and lows. Violence, and to a lesser extent peace processes, mostly influenced the fluctuations over time. During the 1967 Six Day War, the American public condemned the Arab aggression and was very concerned about the fate of Israel. The score that year was 56% for Israel versus only 4% for the Arabs.⁶⁶ That record figure was broken during the 1991 Gulf War: 64% sympathized more with Israel and only 7% with the Palestinians.⁶⁷ The reasons for the new high were Saddam Hussein’s missile attacks on Israel and the Palestinians’ enthusiastic support for his invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The lowest score ever, 32% vs. 28% in favor of Israel, was registered during the 1982 war in Lebanon, immediately after Christian Phalangists killed hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut. That score lasted only a few weeks, however, before returning to pre-war ratios.

The high and low results determined the boundaries of overall American public support for Israel: it fluctuated between two-thirds and one-third of respondents who supported Israel no matter what. Figure 5 shows results for the past 20 years. From 2001 to 2009, sympathy with Israel

went over the 50% mark. It moved from 51% in 2001 to 59% in 2006. Since 2010, it increased further, passing 60%. Twice, in 2013 and 2018, the figure matched the previous record high of 64%, registered during the 1990-91 first Gulf War. The 2001 low of 51% vs. 16% could have resulted from the failure of President Clinton's effort to broker a peace agreement and the subsequent violent eruption of Arafat's war of terror. From 2016 to 2020, the figures for Israel were stable, moving between 59% and 64%. For the Palestinians, the figures have risen steadily, from 15% to 23%.

Figure 5 - Sympathy with Israelis vs. Palestinians, 2001-2020

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



Source: Lydia Saad, "Majority in U.S. Again Support Palestinian Statehood," *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

With the caveat that the sympathy index is very sensitive to events, it reveals substantial and stable gaps in favor of Israel. The largest were registered during the 1991 Gulf War (57%) and in 2013 (52%)

following the two violent confrontations in 2012 between Hamas and Israel in Gaza (Operations “Returning Echo” and “Pillar of Defense”). The gaps were lowest during the 1988 Palestinian Intifada (22%) and at the beginning of the 1993 Oslo “peace process” (27%), when it seemed as if the two sides had embarked on a new road to peace.⁶⁸ Figure 5 also shows that in the past 20 years, the lowest figure for Israel was 51% while the highest for the Palestinians was 23%, a difference of 28% in favor of Israel. In the past 20 years the average ratio in favor of Israel was 58% vs. 17%. During this period, there has been a substantial increase in sympathy for the Palestinians, but this didn’t necessarily come at the expense of sympathy for Israel.

The Pew Research Center used a very similar sympathy question but got results significantly lower than those of Gallup. The Pew question was: “In the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, who do you sympathize with more?” In January 2018, Pew found that 46% of a national sample sympathized more with Israel and 16% sympathized more with the Palestinians.⁶⁹ As Figure 5 showed, two months later, Gallup found that 64% of a national sample sympathized more with Israel, while 19% sympathized more with the Palestinians. The difference between the results for the Palestinians in the two polls, 3%, is within the statistical margin of error. The difference for Israel, however, was 18%, a significant difference.

The very slight differences between the formulation of the questions as well as the political and religious makeup of the random samples in each survey are not enough to explain the major difference in findings. The Gallup Poll was aware of the disparity and in 2018 conducted an experiment that determined that the poll’s context was responsible for the gap.⁷⁰ The experiment presented two contexts. The first included the Israel vs. the Palestinian favorability issue discussed earlier and the second mostly American domestic issues. The results showed

that those who do not hold especially strong opinions on the Middle East are most susceptible to survey context effects. And because Americans in general are more likely to have positive opinions of Israel than the PA, those with weakly held opinions who are influenced by the survey context are more likely to say they sympathize more with the Israelis than with the Palestinians.

Therefore, the domestic issues context reduced sympathy with Israel.

Laura Adkins offered a similar explanation and attributed the gap to the order of questions in the survey itself.⁷¹ The Gallup question appeared in their annual World Affairs Survey, which included 21 questions about both foreign and domestic issues before getting around to asking about Israel and the Palestinians. In the Pew survey, the Palestinian-Israeli issue followed a list of 35 questions mostly on domestic matters, like Congress, President Trump, and the Mueller investigation of alleged Russian intervention in the 2016 presidential elections, rather than on international affairs. Adkins concluded,

[W]hen you ask people about Israel after asking them questions about foreign policy, they seem to like it a lot more than when you ask them about it after asking them about President Trump — especially if they’re Democrats.

Despite the gap, both polls showed much more sympathy with Israel than with the Palestinians.

Palestinian State

The two states for two peoples solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict means the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians only used the term “two states” and omitted “two peoples” as they have never agreed to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. This perspective is anchored in the Palestinian belief that Jews are members of a religious community rather than a nation and hence do not have a right of national self-determination.⁷² This is a false viewpoint because Judaism is both a religion and a nation. The reason for the Palestinians’ rejection is their design to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and turn Israel into a state of “all its citizens” by insisting on the “return” of millions of Palestinian “refugees” into the country. This is a euphemism for the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state. Bush, Obama, and Trump, like all US president before them, defended Israel’s demand to be recognized as a Jewish state in accordance with the UN partition resolution of November 1947. In a letter to PM Sharon of April 14, 2004, Bush was the first president to explicitly support this demand.⁷³

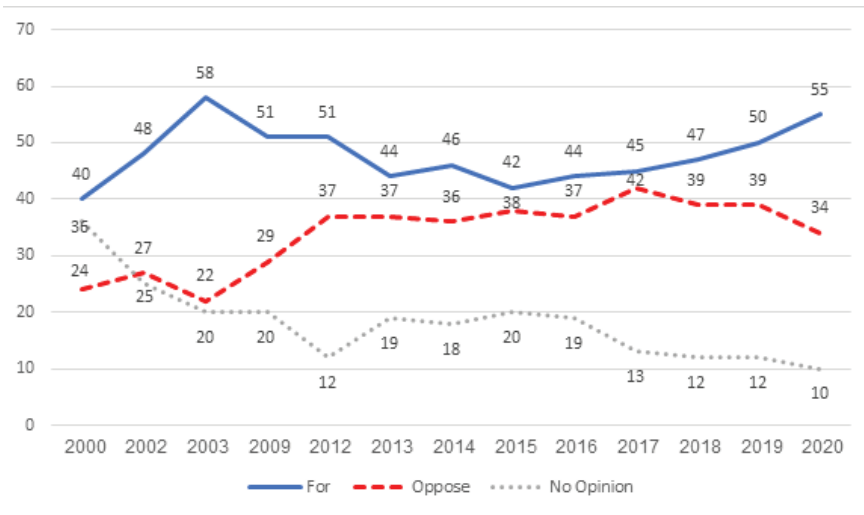
For decades, the Palestinian state solution has been a highly popular issue in surveys on American attitudes toward Israel and the Middle East. During the Oslo years, very few polls directly addressed the two-state solution, probably because all sides assumed it was the only possible option. The issue resurfaced in 2000 during the “al-Aqsa Intifada” and after a series of dramatic events in Gaza: Israel’s unilateral disengagement in 2005, the Hamas victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections, Hamas’s subsequent military takeover of Gaza in 2007, and frequent military clashes between Hamas and Israel.

Surveys conducted for *Newsweek* between 2000 and 2002 found small pluralities of Americans supporting the establishment of an independent Palestinian state: 38% vs. 29% in 2000 and 40% vs. 39% in 2001.⁷⁴ In a 2002 CBS poll, 39% vs. 30% supported the idea. In a 2002 CBS poll, 39% vs. 30% supported the state solution.

Figure 6 shows long-term trends in the Gallup poll from 2002 to 2020. Changes over time reflect the effects of developments in the conflict as well as the views and policies of US presidents, but the graph shows more support than opposition to the Palestinian state solution throughout the entire period. The lowest figure was recorded in 2000 during Arafat’s war of terror. The highest, 58%, appeared in 2003, following a subsiding of Palestinian violence and the announcement of President Bush’s “Road Map for Peace,” which included the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

Figure 6 - Establishment of a Palestinian State, 2000-2020

Question: “Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?” (Gallup, %)



Source: Lydia Saad, “Majority in U.S. Again Support Palestinian Statehood,” *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

Slight majorities (51%) supported the idea during the first term of President Obama, who strongly advocated for the two-state solution. Obama put enormous pressure on Netanyahu to accept the conditions set by Abbas for resuming negotiations with Israel: declaring support for a Palestinian state and freezing settlements in the West Bank. On June 14, 2009, Netanyahu bowed to Obama’s pressure and in a historic speech at Bar-Ilan University expressed for the first time support for an independent demilitarized Palestinian state.⁷⁵ In November 2009, he also froze construction activities in the West Bank for a period of 10 months.⁷⁶

Despite the Israeli acceptance of his conditions, Abbas still did not show up for negotiations. This affair demonstrated once again that

settlements have never been the main obstacle to peace but rather Palestinian rejectionism and unwillingness to reach peace with Israel under any conditions. Yet Obama failed to credit Netanyahu for his dramatic policy change and did not criticize Abbas for his rejectionism.

Between 2013 and 2016, close pluralities of 44%-37% supported the Palestinian state solution. A close division appeared in 2017 when 45% endorsed the state and 42% opposed it. In 2019, for the first time since 2003, support reached 50%. In 2020, 55% of a national sample approved of a Palestinian state, 34% were opposed, and 10% were unsure. Both the close division in 2016 and the higher figures in 2019 and 2020 may have resulted from Trump's statements and policies. Just before entering the White House and at the beginning of his term, Trump severely criticized the Palestinians and the Obama administration for orchestrating a resolution at the UN Security Council (No. 2334) on December 20, 2016, which declared the Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal and a "flagrant violation" of international law.

Obama had violated the well-established norm of refraining from any significant policy changes between Election Day and Inauguration Day, which always occurs on January 20. Obama's violation was even more serious as he knew President-elect Trump opposed his policy and the proposed UN resolution.⁷⁷ The House of Representatives voted 342-80 to condemn the Obama administration's role in passing the resolution.⁷⁸ Even the Democrats voted 109-76 against the Democratic president. On November 18, 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared, "The establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not, *per se*, inconsistent with international law."⁷⁹

"I am looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both parties like," Trump said on February 15, 2017, during his first meeting with Netanyahu at the White House. "I'm very happy with the one that both parties like," he continued. "I can live with either one. I thought for a while the two-state looked like it may be the easier of the two. But honestly, if Bibi, and if the Palestinians, if Israel and the Palestinians are happy, I'm happy with the one they like the best."⁸⁰ This statement represented a shift in US policy and may have led in 2017 to the close division in public opinion on the issue.

The highest figures of support for a Palestinian state in 2019 and 2020 could have reflected Trump's inclusion of a prospective Palestinian state in his peace plan. A change in the Republican opinion supports this explanation. Republicans continued to oppose the idea, but their opposition had waned in strength by 2020. In 2019, only 34% of Republicans favored the two-state solution and a majority of 53% opposed it. In 2020, the ratio was 44% for and 48% against. These results represent -5% in the opposition column and +10% in the support column. Possibly, the same phenomenon occurred in 2003 when Bush declared official American preference for a Palestinian state.

When qualifying information and conditions were added to questions, the results were diverse. Several questions cited Bush's qualified support for the idea. In November 2001, for example, the Program on International Policy Attitudes used the following question: "President Bush has said that there ought to be a Palestinian State, provided that it recognizes the right of Israel to exist. Do you support or do you oppose this position?"⁸¹ An overwhelming majority of 77% to 13% supported Bush's conditional statement. In June 2003, the Center for Security Policy asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with this statement: "A year ago, President Bush said, and I quote, 'The United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure.'" A substantial majority of 73% to 18% agreed with this position. These results were expected given the citing of Bush's endorsement as well as certain reasonable conditions that the Palestinians had to meet.

In June 2002, at the height of the "al-Aqsa Intifada," a CNN/*USA Today* poll presented the following conditional statement: "Would you support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank if the Palestinian government demonstrates that it can end the suicide bombings in Israel?" Again, 74% agreed with the condition, while 18% opposed it.⁸² Similarly, in January 2007, 25% of respondents to a POS poll supported the following statement: "It is important to create a Palestinian State now," but 60% supported the following qualifying statement: "There should not be a Palestinian state until Palestinian leaders end the terror and recognize Israel's right to exist."

In March 2008, an overwhelming majority of 93% vs. 3% agreed with this proposition: “Before a two-state solution can work and peace be realized in the Middle East, the Palestinians need to stop their missile attacks against Israel.” In all these polls, the key for American public support for the establishment of a Palestinian state has been an end to Palestinian terrorism and recognition of Israel’s right to exist. These conditions have appeared in American public opinion toward a Palestinian state for decades, but the Palestinians have repeatedly failed to meet them.⁸³

Finally, several polls investigated whether the establishment of a Palestinian state would help the US fight global terrorism or achieve Palestinian-Israeli peace. The public was skeptical. *Newsweek* found shortly after 9/11 that 43% of a national sample thought a Palestinian state would make no difference for the US “effort to build coalition to fight terrorism,” 11% said it would hurt, while 35% said it would help. A larger plurality of 47% said a Palestinian state would not increase the likelihood of peace, 19% said it would make peace less likely, while 27 % thought otherwise.

These results may have been affected by the immediacy of the 9/11 terror attacks, but in July 2004, a poll by the Israel Project asked the following question: “Do you believe that a two-state solution where both Israel and the Palestinians have their own separate land and governments will bring peace to the region or will there always be conflict?” An overwhelming majority of 72% to 26% thought the two state- solution will not end the conflict. Pollsters have not used similar questions since then.

Data and analysis of surveys of American public opinion on three issues—views of Israel vs. the PA, sympathies with the two sides, and support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state—reveal that from 2000 to 2020, Americans have consistently viewed Israel favorably and the PA unfavorably and shown much more sympathy for Israelis than for Palestinians. They are increasingly supportive of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, a trend that might have resulted from the inclusion of a Palestinian state in Trump’s peace plan.

THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

For more than two decades, Iran was building infrastructure to produce nuclear weapons. Since 2006, Iran and six world powers known as the P5+1 (UN Security Council permanent members China, France, Russia, Britain, the US, and Germany) were trying to negotiate an agreement to stop the Iranian nuclear weapons program. They used a combination of negotiations, incentives, threats, and UN-approved economic and financial sanctions. On July 14, 2015, after years of grueling negotiations and Iranian procrastination, manipulations, and deception, they reached a nuclear deal in Vienna. The agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), limited Iran's nuclear program and enhanced monitoring in return for relief from UN sanctions.⁸⁴

The deal was very controversial in both the US and Israel and led to several direct confrontations between Democrats and Republicans, the White House and the Republican-controlled Congress, and Obama and Netanyahu. In view of the fierceness of the debate, Obama conducted a major public relations campaign to convince the public that the deal was the most effective way to halt Iran's race to the bomb. In May 2016, Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, said about reporters covering the deal that they were gullible young people with no experience in foreign affairs who "literally know nothing."⁸⁵ The administration recruited commentators, Rhodes told *The New York Times*, who were "saying things that validated what we have given them to say."

Obama defended the agreement by claiming that the choice was between a deal and a war and that Netanyahu was the only leader to oppose it. These were both incorrect and misleading assertions.⁸⁶ The choice was not between agreement and war. Iran entered negotiations only because of the severe UN sanctions, and if those had been continued and made broader and deeper, negotiators would have been able to achieve a much better and more effective deal. Nor was Netanyahu the only leader to oppose the agreement. All the leaders of the pro-American Sunni Muslim Arab states also strongly opposed it.

Trump agreed with Israel and the Arab states. He described the deal as the worst accord ever made, withdrew the US from it in May 2018, and re-imposed harsh sanctions on Iran. He rehabilitated US relations with the Sunni Muslim Arab states and promoted a coalition between them and Israel against Iran.

Israel and the Arab states approved of this radical reversal of US policy. The other signatories of the deal strongly criticized Trump's reversal and attempted to undermine and circumvent his new sanctions.

The deal raised two public issues: opinions on the deal itself and the role of Congress. This section explores opinions on these issues and analyzes the development and effects of the Obama-Netanyahu feud on attitudes toward Israel.

Threat Perception

Iran, a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), has claimed many times that its nuclear facilities are intended for peaceful purposes only, that they meet the demands of the NPT and of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), that it has no intention of developing nuclear weapons, and even that such development contradicts the tenets of Islam.⁸⁷ But the reality has been different. Iran's claim that its nuclear facilities are intended only for energy, research, and medical uses is false. Iran is one of the world's biggest exporters of oil, and it makes no economic sense for it to build nuclear reactors to produce electricity. The nuclear infrastructure that Iran built was much larger than what is necessary for peaceful purposes, and it acquired dual use equipment from various countries for the purpose of developing nuclear weapons. Iran also hid two secret facilities for enriching uranium, in Natanz and Fordow, and a reactor for producing plutonium in Arak.

The combination of extreme Islamist ideology and weapons of mass destruction makes Iran the most dangerous state in the world today. The Islamist regime in Tehran, from Ayatollah Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini through former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to present Supreme Leader Sayyid Ali Khamenei and many senior political and military leaders, has constantly decried the United States as "the Great Satan,"

urged the global spread of the Islamic revolution and the destruction of Israel, sponsored international terrorism, and subverted numerous middle Eastern regimes.⁸⁸

They denied the Holocaust, blamed the West for the creation of Israel, advocating the uprooting of all Israeli Jews and sending them to Europe, and criticized moderate Arab leaders for negotiating peace agreements with Israel.⁸⁹ Iran has sponsored violence against Israel through Islamic terrorist organizations, including the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The most recent example is a speech Khamenei delivered on May 22, 2020, in which he said, “The Zionist regime is a deadly cancerous growth and a detriment to this region. It will undoubtedly be uprooted and destroyed.... Undoubtedly, the long-lasting virus of Zionism will not last much longer, and it will be uprooted thanks to the determination, faith and pride of the youth.”⁹⁰ Netanyahu responded: “We reiterate: Whoever threatens Israel with extermination puts himself in similar danger.”⁹¹

In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush defined Iran together with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and North Korea as the world “Axis of Evil.”⁹² Most of the states in the world, including the US and the EU, believed Iran wanted to build nuclear weapons and not just nuclear infrastructure for energy and peaceful purposes as it had claimed. They also believed a nuclear Iran would be a major threat to world peace and stability and therefore agreed that it shouldn’t be allowed to become a nuclear power. The debate was on the best means to achieve that goal, not the goal itself. Israel considered nuclear Iran an existential threat and warned that if nothing is done to stop the nuclear weapons program, it would be forced to use military means.⁹³

The 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Project found that an overwhelming majority of Americans, 86%, believe Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons would be a serious threat to the US. They were closely divided, however, on the best ways to prevent that outcome. In 2008, most Americans believed there was still an opportunity to peacefully prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, but if diplomacy failed, a 55% vs. 42% majority would approve of a military action by the US

and its allies. A greater majority of 63% to 32% approved of Israeli military strikes.⁹⁴ Therefore, between 2005 and 2008, Americans were not sure how to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons but supported military action if all diplomatic efforts failed. They were also divided on the deal itself and its consequences.

Table 4 – Iran’s Threat, 2015-2019

Question: “Would you say that the following represent a very serious threat to the United States, a moderate serious threat, just a slight threat, or no threat at all? ... Iran.” (CNN, %)

Date	Very Serious Threat	Moderately Serious Threat	Just a Slight Threat	No Threat At All	Unsure/ Refused
04/2015	39	33	16	11	1
09/2015	49	33	11	7	1
05/2018	40	35	15	7	3
05/2019	28	38	19	11	4

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, “Iran,” (2000-2020).

<https://www.pollingreport.com/iran.htm>

Jewish Virtual Library, “American Public Opinion Polls Regarding Iran,” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-public-opinion-toward-iran>

Table 4 shows that before the nuclear deal, 72% of a national sample said Iran represented a “very serious” or a “moderately serious threat” to the US and only 11% thought Iran didn’t represent any threat to the US. After the deal, the number of respondents saying Iran represented a serious threat to the US rose to 82% and only 7% thought otherwise. Three years after the deal, 75% said Iran represented a serious threat to the US. Four years after the deal, the number of respondents holding this opinion went down to 66%, but two-thirds of Americans still considered Iran a threatening country.

The Gallup poll found similar results. The question was: “For each of the following countries, please say whether you consider it an ally of the United States, friendly but not an ally, unfriendly, or an enemy of the United States. ... How about Iran?” In May 2000, Americans thought Iran was “an enemy” or an “unfriendly” state of the US by a ratio of 78% vs. 17%.⁹⁵ In March 2014, it went up to 82% vs. 12%.

In the campaign to win public support for the nuclear deal, Obama’s officials promised that it would change US relations with Iran for the better, but the public did not agree. The deal did not change Iran’s behavior or the perception of Iran as a serious hostile threat to the US. In July 2018, three years after the deal, the distribution of responses to the same question was statistically identical to the 2000 results: 80% to 17%. In September 2019, 76% vs. 6% of the respondents to a Harvard-Harris poll considered Iran “an enemy” of the US.⁹⁶

Views of the Deal

Pollsters asked many questions about the deal, but Table 5 shows only the distribution of responses to straightforward questions and omitted those loaded with cues and statements. Despite the extensive campaign the Obama administration conducted to gain support for the deal, Table 5 shows that the American public consistently disapproved of it. All the results were negative. Not a single poll found majority support for the deal. Several majorities either disapproved or opposed the accord.

Table 5 - Approval of Iran's Nuclear Deal, 2015-2018

Questions: “Do you approve or disapprove of the nuclear deal with Iran?” (Pew, Gallup, %)

“Do you support or oppose the nuclear deal with Iran?” (Quinnipiac, %)

Date	Poll	Approve/ Support	Disapprove/ Oppose	Don't Know
07/2015	Pew	33	45	22
09/2015	Pew	21	49	30
05/2018	Pew	32	40	28
02/2016	Gallup	30	57	13
07/2015	Quinnipiac	28	57	15
08/2015	Quinnipiac	25	55	20
09/2015	Quinnipiac	26	58	16
10/2018	Quinnipiac	31	47	22

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, “Iran,” (2000-2020).

<https://www.pollingreport.com/iran.htm>

Jewish Virtual Library, “American Public Opinion Polls: Opinion toward the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal and Aftermath,” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-opinion-toward-the-2015-iran-deal>

One reason for the disapproval could be the lack of confidence in the Iranian commitment to implement the deal. Table 6 shows that before, during, and immediately after the deal, only about one-third of respondents were “very” or “somewhat” confident that the deal would prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, while two-thirds were “not so confident” or “not confident at all.” After the deal, the public was even less confident in

Iran's intentions. In March 2015, 55% of a Fox News national sample said the US "can't trust anything" Iran says on the issue of nuclear weapons, while 28% thought "we can only trust a little of what Iran says."⁹⁷ Just one percent said the US can "completely trust" Iran on nukes.

In a CNN June 2015 survey, 64% thought the agreement "will not prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons" and only 30% said it will.⁹⁵ In September 2016, 56% thought the nuclear agreement will make the US less safe and just 26% felt it will make the country safer.⁹⁹ Several years after the deal, the public said it had failed. In October 2017, more than two years after the deal, the Harris-Harvard poll found that 71% vs. 29% of a national sample thought Iran had violated it. Three years after the deal, in May 2018, a similar ratio, 62% vs. 19% of a CNN poll expressed the same view.

Table 6 - Confidence in Iran's Compliance, 2013-2015

Questions: "How confident are you that this agreement will prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons: very confident, somewhat confident, not so confident or not confident at all?" (ABC News/*Washington Post*-ABC/WP, Quinnipiac, %).

"How much confidence do you have that Iran's leaders will uphold their side of the agreement: a great deal of confidence, a fair amount of confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all?" (Pew, %).

Date	Poll	Very Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not So Confident	Not Confident At All	Unsure
11/2013	ABC/WP	4	32	27	34	3
03/2015	ABC/WP	4	33	26	34	3
07/2015	ABC/WP	6	29	22	42	1
04/2015	Quinnipiac	4	31	23	39	3
07/2015	Pew	3	22	34	37	4
09/2015	Pew	2	18	28	42	9

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, "Iran," (2000-2020). <https://www.pollingreport.com/iran.htm>

Jewish Virtual Library, "American Public Opinion Polls Regarding Iran," <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-public-opinion-toward-iran>

The American public was not satisfied with the negotiations and the deal's results. In July-August 2015, a Monmouth University poll found that 41% said "Iran got more from the deal" while only 14% said the same about the US, and 23% thought "both got what they wanted." At the same time, a CNN poll found that 53% of respondents thought the deal "could have been more favorable to the US" and only 26% said it "was the best possible at the time." In a Pew July 2015 poll, 63% said that if the agreement is implemented, relations between the US and Iran will "stay the same" or "get worse," with only 23% saying they "will improve." In October 2017, two years after the deal was signed, 60% in a Harvard-Harris poll said it was a "bad deal" and 40% said it was a good deal."¹⁰⁰

The Role of Congress

The second controversial issue about the deal was the role of Congress. When it became clear that the P5+1 and Iran were close to concluding the agreement, Netanyahu decided to directly challenge Obama via the Republican-controlled Congress. Article II Section 2 of the US Constitution says the president "shall have the power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate to make Treaties, provided two-thirds of the Senators present concur." Not every international agreement the US signs is a treaty, so politicians and constitutional experts debated whether Obama should submit the nuclear agreement to Congressional approval or not.

Obama defined the Iran nuclear deal as an historic event and one of the greatest achievements of his administration and promised to submit it for Congressional approval. In view of Republican pressure, however, he was fearful that it would fail to meet the required two-thirds majority in the Senate. Despite his promises, he did not submit the agreement for Congressional approval.

Netanyahu hoped to prevent approval of the deal by Congress and accepted an invitation from Speaker John Boehner to deliver a speech to a special joint session of Congress. In the speech, which he delivered on March 3, 2015, Netanyahu severely attacked the Obama-led negotiations with Iran and the emerging nuclear agreement and warned that contrary to claims made by the administration, it would not prevent Iran from

developing nuclear weapons or modify its sponsoring of terrorism and violence across the Middle East.¹⁰¹ After the speech, Obama complained that Netanyahu had not offered any alternative to the deal.¹⁰² Again, his description was not accurate. Netanyahu emphasized the need to persist with heavy sanctions and even expand them.

Democrats accused Republicans of playing politics with Netanyahu against Obama and claimed that the invitation to Netanyahu violated protocol rules as it was not coordinated with the president. Many Democrats boycotted the session. A CNN/ORC Poll found that 63% of the public disapproved of the way Boehner invited Netanyahu, but at the same time, a Fox News Poll presented the following question: “Is it a good thing or a bad thing that Congressional leaders invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a jointing meeting of Congress?” A majority of 56% to 27% said it was a good thing.¹⁰³ This result means the public criticized the way the invitation had been extended, but still thought Congress should hear what Netanyahu had to say.

In a very unusual move, on March 9, 2015, 47 Republican senators, most of the party’s caucus, wrote a letter to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warning him that if the agreement was not approved by Congress it would be “nothing more than an executive agreement” between him and Obama, and “the next president could revoke such an executive agreement with the stroke of a pen and future Congresses could modify the terms of the agreement at any time.”¹⁰⁴ On May 7, 2015, The Senate passed legislation 98-1 that required Obama to submit the deal to Congress for debate and approval.

The public overwhelmingly demanded a debate and a Congressional vote. A survey in April 2015 by Suffolk University/*USA Today* found an overwhelming majority of 72% vs. 19% saying that “Congress should have a role in deciding whether or not the US will support the agreement.”¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the Fox News Poll found 76% of a national sample said “Obama should be required” to get Congressional approval for any deal he makes with Iran about its nuclear program.”¹⁰⁶ Pew also asked, “Who should have the final authority to approve the agreement?” Only 21% said Obama, and 62% said it should be

Congress. In September 2015, two months after the deal was signed, Rasmussen found a majority of 66% vs. 20% saying it should have been approved by Congress.

Two years after the deal, in October 2017, a Harvard-Harris poll asked: “Do you think the Iran deal should have been an agreement the President would sign on his own or a treaty that would have required Senate approval?” No less than 81% thought the agreement was “a treaty that should have required Senate approval,” with only 19% saying it was an agreement the president should have signed on his own.¹⁰⁷ In 2015, CNN asked several times how the Congress should vote on the deal and all the results were negative: 52% vs. 44% in July, 56% vs. 41% in August, and 49% vs. 47% in September. All these results could have been influenced by Netanyahu’s speech to Congress and the Republicans’ strong opposition to the agreement.

Because Obama bypassed the Congress, Netanyahu’s strategy failed. Throughout the Obama administration, the executive branch and the liberal media often criticized Netanyahu for his policy toward the Palestinians and his opposition to the nuclear deal—yet after his speech, the polls did not find much change in his levels of popularity. In a Gallup survey in July 2012, 35% had a favorable view of Netanyahu, 23% viewed him unfavorably, and 41% either had never heard of him or had no opinion.¹⁰⁸ Immediately after his speech, in a March 2015 survey, 38% viewed him favorably and 29% unfavorably, with a third having no opinion. In April 2019, his scores were slightly better, with 40% saying they had a favorable view of him.

One would think that if Obama were to be pitted against Netanyahu, the public would overwhelmingly side with the president. Bloomberg, however, found a closer division of opinion. When asked: “Recently, there have been clashes between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Obama. Are you more sympathetic to Netanyahu or Obama?” 47% sided with Obama and 34% with Netanyahu. This was a remarkable and unexpectedly close result between an American president and a foreign leader,¹⁰⁹ but Netanyahu’s opposition to the deal and his close collaboration with the Republicans only worsened his relations with Obama and the Democrats.

Surprisingly, perhaps, pollsters did not delve too much into what the public thought about Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal and policy toward Iran. A May 2018 CNN poll found that 63% of respondents felt “the US should not withdraw” and only 29% said it should.¹¹⁰ At the same time, however, a CBS Poll presented the question with three possible answers: the US “should remain in the deal,” “leave the deal” or “do not know enough.” Twenty-one percent said it should remain, another 21% said it should leave, and 57% said they did not know enough. In September 2019, a Harvard-Harris poll found that 40% of Americans said Trump’s dealing with Iran was “too lenient,” another 38% said it was “just right”, and only 22% said it was “too tough.” Many commentators and experts said Trump’s withdrawal from the deal could ignite a war between the US and Iran, and the public’s opposition or confusion may have resulted from fear of such a war.

The Iran nuclear deal was very controversial in the US.¹¹¹ Despite Obama’s efforts to sell it to the public, Americans were not impressed. They did not approve of the deal, did not think it was a good one, thought Iran would not implement it, and, after a few years had passed, said Iran had violated it. In the eyes of Americans, Iran represented a serious threat to the US despite the deal and failed to improve relations with Washington. The public thought Obama should have submitted the agreement to the Senate for debate and approval, but he ignored that opinion. Yet when Trump withdrew the US from the deal, the public didn’t think it was the right decision out of concern that it would spark a war.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS

The strength of pro-Israel sentiment in the US relies on two major related factors: bipartisan political support and the attitudes of American Jewry. In recent years, the attitudes of Evangelical Christians also became a significant factor. This chapter explores opinion trends among Republicans and Democrats, American Jewry, Evangelical Christians, and other groups in American society. The data for the chapter comes from responses to the same or very similar questions and issues presented and discussed in the earlier chapters. The three issue categories are Israel's favorability and bilateral relations, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the nuclear agreement with Iran.

During the last decade, Netanyahu became closer to the Republican party. His battles with Obama on the Iran nuclear deal and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, coupled with the Democratic Party's tilt to the left, alienated large groups of Democrats and American Jews who generally vote for Democratic candidates for all elected positions. These changes probably increased support for Israel among Republicans and reduced support among Democrats and American Jews. In addition, Netanyahu's close relationship with Trump increased the support of Evangelical Christians for Israeli causes. Analysis of other groups in American society reveals primarily generational gaps, with the young much less supportive than the older generations.

Republicans vs. Democrats

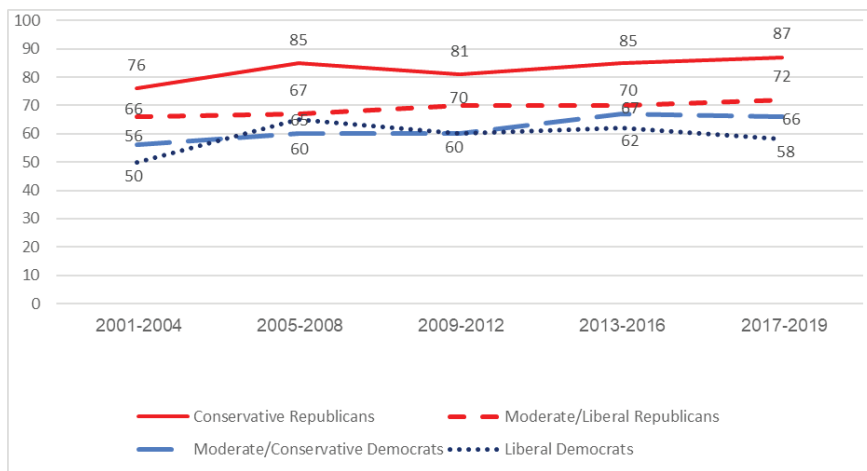
For decades, Israel enjoyed strong bipartisan political support in Washington. Republicans and Democrats almost evenly supported Israel. This bipartisanship helped Israel pass favorable legislation in Congress and secure high levels of military aid.

Surveys now reveal that this pattern may have changed.¹¹² Figure 7 presents aggregated distribution of views of Israel by party and ideology from 2001 to 2019. It demonstrates the distribution of opinions among four groups: conservative Republicans, moderate-liberal Republicans, moderate-conservative Democrats, and liberal Democrats.

Since 2001, favorable views of Israel among all these groups went up considerably. Republicans, however, have viewed Israel much more favorably than Democrats. Conservative Republicans held the highest level of favorable opinions and liberal Democrats the lowest. As could have been guessed, the opinions of moderate and liberal Republicans and moderate conservative Democrats were closer. Overall, however, the gap between Republicans and Democrats has been growing. Between 2015 and 2019 it oscillated between 13% and 15%. In 2019, it rose to 17% and in 2020 it went even further up to 24%, the highest ever.

Figure 7 - Viewing Israel Favorably by Party and Ideology, 2001-2019

Question: “I’d like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. Is your overall opinion of [Name of Country] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?” Israel (Gallup, %)



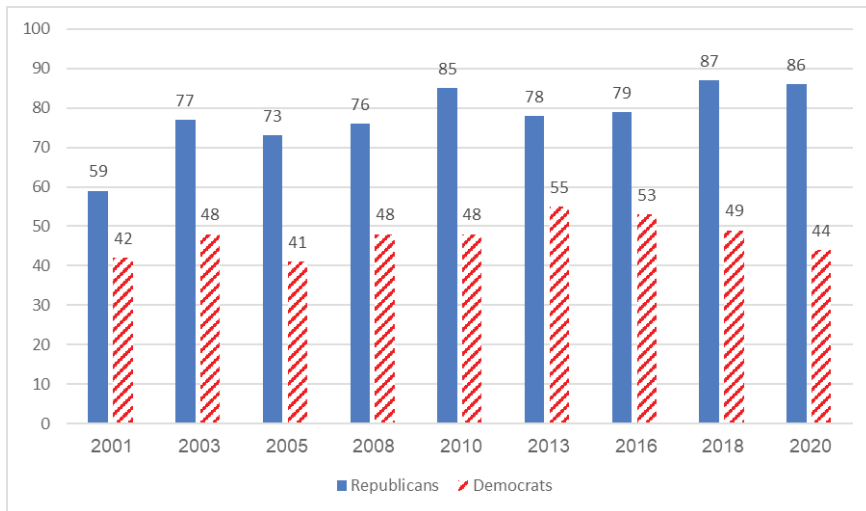
Source: Lydia Saad, “Americans, but Not Liberal Democrats, Mostly Pro-Israel,” *Gallup Poll*, March 6, 2019.

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/247376/americans-not-liberal-democrats-mostly-pro-israel.aspx>

Figure 8 presents long-term sympathy results for Israel vs. the Palestinians from 2001 to 2020. It shows that the share of Republicans sympathizing more with Israel than with the Palestinians increased 27%, from 59% to 86%. Over the same period, the share of Democrats saying this increased by only 2%, from 42% to 44%. In 2001, the gap between Republicans and Democrats was 17% (59%-42%). In 2010, it more than doubled to 37% (85%-48%), and in 2020, it went even further up to 42% (86%-44%), the highest ever.

Figure 8 - Sympathy with Israelis vs. Palestinians by Party, 2001-2020

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



Sources: Lydia Saad, “Majority in U.S. Again Support Palestinian Statehood,” *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. Gallup Poll Social Series: World Affairs, Final Topline, February 3-16, 2020.

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

In the 2020 sympathy survey, more than eight out of 10 Republicans (86%) sympathized more with Israel than with the Palestinians, while just 5% sympathized more with the Palestinians; another 6% said they sympathized with both or neither. Democrats were divided: 44% said they sympathized more with Israel, 38% said they sympathized more with the Palestinians; and 12% said they sympathized with both or neither. As in the case of the favorability index, the decline in sympathy with Israel was the sharpest among liberal Democrats. From 2016 to 2018, their share in the sympathy distribution declined from 33% to 19%.

In 2018, nearly twice as many liberal Democrats said they sympathized more with the Palestinians than with Israel (35% vs. 19%); 22% of liberal Democrats sympathized with both or neither; and 24% didn't offer an opinion. Moderate and conservative Democrats continue to sympathize more with Israel (35%) than with the Palestinians (17%). However, since 2016, the share of conservative and moderate Democrats who sympathized more with Israel declined 18% (from 53% to 35%).

Pew also found a widening gap between Republicans and Democrats on the same sympathy issue. From 2001 to 2018, the share of Republicans sympathizing more with Israel than with the Palestinians increased 29%, from 50% to 79%. Over the same period, the share of Democrats saying this declined 11 points, from 38% to 27%.¹¹³ In the 2018 survey, the share of Republicans who sympathized more with Israel had never been higher, dating back four decades. Nearly eight out of 10 Republicans, 79%, sympathized more with Israel than with the Palestinians, while just 6% sympathized more with the Palestinians; another 7% said they sympathized with both or neither. Democrats were divided: 27% said they sympathized more with Israel, 25% said they sympathized more with the Palestinians, and 23% said they sympathized with both or neither.

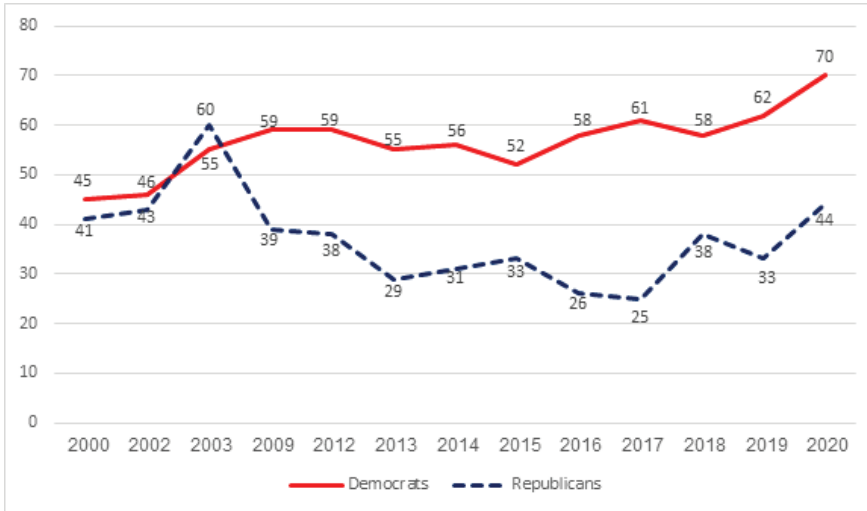
The Pew survey triggered much controversy over its questions, its results, and the gap between the Pew and the Gallup surveys. Tamara Cofman Wittes and Daniel Shapiro argued that the differences in the responses to the sympathy question by political parties or affiliation is misleading.

They blamed the formulation of the question for the differences, claiming that it was strongly pushing toward this dichotomy: “Which side are you on? Thus, the responses, by design, suggest greater polarization than perhaps exists in reality.” They added that contrary to many interpretations of the results in the media, the question measures attitudes toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, not opinions on Israel. “This misleading framing reinforces an existing problem: that Israel is conflated in the public mind with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” The comment on the interpretations is valid, but the question did measure attitudes toward the conflict, and many distributions of responses to other questions showed that Republicans have supported Israel much more than Democrats.

Republicans and Democrats also differed on the establishment of a Palestinian state. Figure 9 shows the distribution of responses from 2000 to 2020 to this question: “Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?” From 2000 to 2003, the gap between the parties was relatively small at 3% to 5%. In 2003, the Republicans even supported a Palestinian state more than Democrats. This exceptional score may have been related to Bush’s “Road Map for Peace”, which included an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Since 2009, however, the gap began to reach double digits. Since 2016, Democrats’ support has steadily gone up while that of Republicans went down. In 2019, 62% of Democrats supported the two-state solution and only 33% of Republicans felt the same way. In 2020, the Democrats’ support reached a record high of 70%, a higher proportion of Republicans also supported the solution at 44%, but the gap between the parties remained high at 26%.

Figure 9 - Establishment of a Palestinian State by Party, 2000-2020

Question: Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?" (%)



Sources: Lydia Saad, "Majority in U.S. Again Support Palestinian Statehood," *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. Gallup Poll Social Series: World Affairs, Final Topline, February 3-16, 2020.

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

Unsurprisingly, given the fierce debate on the Obama-led nuclear agreement with Iran, the surveys registered considerable division between Republicans and Democrats. Table 7 presents distribution of opinions on several key issues of the deal. While Republicans opposed the agreement by a huge margin of 86% to 3%, Democrats supported it by a slight majority of 52% to 32%. Similarly, Republicans disapproved of the deal by a substantial ratio of 73% to 8%. Democrats approved it by a 41% to 29% plurality. When asked whether Iran can be trusted to implement the agreement, 80% of Republicans said no, and only 19% said "a lot" and "a little." Democrats held the opposite view. About half of the sample said Iran can be trusted but 43% said it can't. The two

parties also evaluated the nuclear negotiations differently. While 67% of Republicans thought Iran “got more of what it wanted,” only 23% of Democrats held this view. They agreed, by 14% and 15%, respectively, that the US got very little of what it wanted, while 43% of Democrats believed the two countries got more of they wanted.

Table 7 - Views of Iran’s Nuclear Deal by Party (%)

Issue	Total	Republicans	Democrats
Support (Quinnipiac, 8/2015)			
Support	28	03	52
Oppose	57	86	32
DK,NA	15	11	16
Approve (Pew, 9/2015)			
Approve	21	08	41
Disapprove	49	73	29
DK	17	20	25
Trust Iran’s Compliance (Monmouth University, 8/2015)			
A lot	06	02	11
A little	28	17	39
Not at all	61	80	43
Not Sure	05	01	07
Who got more from the deal? (Monmouth University, 8/2015)			
US	14	08	15
Iran	41	67	23
Both/Neither	28	13	43
Not Sure	17	13	19

Sources: *PollingReport.com*, “Iran,” (2000-2020).

<https://www.pollingreport.com/iran.htm>

Jewish Virtual Library, “American Public Opinion Polls Regarding Iran,”

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-public-opinion-toward-iran>

The growing gap between the two major parties increased due to two developments: the confrontations between Obama and Netanyahu and the leftward tilt of the Democratic Party. The success of socialist candidate Bernie Sanders, and the omission of traditional pro-Israeli articles from the Democratic platform in the 2016 presidential election, demonstrated this negative development. Another indication was the election in 2018 of four “progressive” Democrats to the House of Representatives: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. The last two are Muslim (Tlaib is of a Palestinian origin), and both have been very hostile to Israel and occasionally use antisemitic slurs. On the other side, due to the close relations between Netanyahu and Trump, Republicans expressed support for Israel as never before.

American Jews

Most American Jews have always felt attached to Israel and strongly supported close American ties with their ancient homeland. A theoretical concept, however—“the distancing hypothesis”—which emerged in the last decade raises questions about the depth of the American Jewish commitment to Israel. It was first applied to generational gaps between younger and older Jews. The hypothesis says that Jews between the ages of 18 and 35 are increasingly distancing themselves from Israel socially, culturally, ethnically, and emotionally, and do not consider Israel a significant part of their Jewish identity.¹¹⁴

Rosner and Hakman distinguished among three types of distancing: emotional, which involves a weakening of visceral attachment to Israel; cognitive, which reflects reservations about the centrality of the State of Israel for Jewish continuity and thriving; and behavioral, which reflects erosion in actions manifesting connection with Israel such as donations, visits, and political support.¹¹⁵ In recent years, the hypothesis has been extended to older Jewish groups and even to the entire American Jewish community. If attachment to Israel was once considered the “civil religion” of non-affiliated American Jews, the only way for them to express their Jewish identity, the distancing theory says this is no longer the case.¹¹⁶

The distancing hypothesis became very controversial. In 2010, the journal *Contemporary Jewry* published a special issue in which 22 authors debated the hypothesis. They mainly discussed two opposing studies. One, by Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman, suggested that young American Jews are now less attached to the State of Israel than was the norm in earlier years, and that this growing distance may not be closed in the future.¹¹⁷ The other article, by Theodore Sasson, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, argued that while the young are indeed more distant now, there is a life-cycle element and as Jews age, they generally tend to become less distant from Israel.¹¹⁸ Each article provided its own data to support its argument.

In a separate book, Sasson identified a shift in American Jewry from a “mobilization” approach, which meant supporting Israel in the first decades of its existence through big centralized Jewish organizations, to an “engagement” approach that is marked by direct and personal relations with the Jewish state.¹¹⁹ Dov Waxman also had reservations about the distancing hypothesis and argued that young adult American Jews were more engaged with Israel than their predecessors, but were also more critical of Israeli government policies and felt more sympathetic toward the Palestinians than older American Jews.¹²⁰ In 2018, *Moment* magazine asked 27 prominent scholars and commentators to debate the distancing hypothesis.¹²¹ This debate also reflected the effects of the Trump presidency on American Jewry and US-Israeli relations. None of these publications clearly validated or refuted the distancing hypothesis, and the empirical data do not provide a clear judgment.

The dominant political orientation of American Jews had a critical influence on their views toward specific bilateral and regional issues related to Israel. Most American Jews have been Democrats and they have consistently supported Democratic presidential candidates.¹²² There are several estimates of the political affiliations of American Jews. American Jewish Committee (AJC) surveys found in 2000 that 59% said they were Democrats, only 9% said they were Republicans, and 30% identified as Independents. In 2010, fewer American Jews said they were Democrats (50%) and more said they were Republicans (15%) and Independents (32%). In 2019, the comparable figures were 49% Democrats, 18% Republicans, and 20% Independents.

In a 2018 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute, 47% identified as Democrats, 18% were Republicans, and 32% were Independents.¹²³ Gallup added the phrase “leaning to” Republican or Democrat, and the results were higher for both parties. In 2019, 65% said they were “Democrats or leaning to the Democratic party,” while 30% said they were “Republicans or leaning to the Republican Party.” In 2020, in a similar question format, 66% identified themselves as Democrats and only 26% identified as Republicans.¹²⁴ These figures often surfaced in presidential elections.

Table 8 shows that since 2000, Jews have overwhelmingly voted for Democratic candidates. On the Democratic side, former VP Al Gore won the highest percentage of the Jewish vote (79%), and in the 2008 elections, Obama was very close with (78%). On the Republican side, Mitt Romney won the highest score (30%). All the surveys showed that American Jews have been much more Democratic than Republican and have tended to subscribe to liberal rather than conservative ideology. At times, and more so in the last decade, these orientations have influenced their attitudes toward Israel, Netanyahu, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Moreover, Israel, especially in recent years, has not been a significant factor in American Jews’ decision on whom to vote for in presidential and congressional elections, with domestic issues and liberal causes having more influence on their voting.¹²⁵

Table 8 - American Jewish Voting in Presidential Elections

Year	Democrats	%	Republicans	%
2000	Al Gore	79	George W. Bush	19
2004	John Kerry	76	George W. Bush	24
2008	Barack Obama	78	John McCain	22
2012	Barack Obama	69	Mitt Romney	30
2016	Hillary Clinton	71	Donald Trump	24
2020*	Joseph Biden	75	Donald Trump	22

Sources: US Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record. *Jewish Virtual Library*. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-voting-record-in-u-s-presidential-elections>

“U.S. Election Exit Poll Analysis: The Jewish Vote,” *Edison Research*, August 30, 2019.

<https://www.edisonresearch.com/u-s-election-exit-poll-analysis-the-jewish-vote/>

* AJC 2020 Survey of American Jews, September 2020. “Poll: 75 Percent Of US Jews Would Vote For Biden, While 22 Percent For Trump,” Jewish News Service, October 19, 2020. https://www.jns.org/poll-75-percent-of-us-jews-would-vote-for-biden-while-22-percent-for-trump/?utm_source=Old+Daily+Syndicate&utm_campaign=1894dee4c3-Daily+Syndicate+10-19-20+%28old%29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d8296d16d8-1894dee4c3-56979065

On August 21, 2019, Trump stated: “I think any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat, I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty.” Jewish leaders and organizations criticized Trump for making this statement, which could have been interpreted as questioning the loyalty of American Jews to the US. A day later, Trump attempted to clarify his words by saying: “In my opinion, if you vote for a Democrat, you’re being very disloyal to Jewish people and you’re being very disloyal to Israel. And only weak people would say anything other than that.”¹²⁶ This didn’t help much, and attracted more wide criticism. If Trump wanted to use American Jewish concern for Israel to attract more Jewish voters to his camp, he failed.

Most American Jews have always felt close to Israel. The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey found that roughly seven out of 10 Jews felt very (32%) or somewhat (37%) emotionally attached

to Israel.¹²⁷ In 2013, Pew found almost identical results, with about seven out of 10 American Jews (69%) saying they were emotionally very attached (30%) or somewhat attached (39%) to Israel.¹²⁸ Roughly 65% of Jewish Democrats and 69% of Independents said they felt at least somewhat attached to Israel, but a much larger share of Jewish Republicans (84%) expressed the same sentiment, including half who said they felt “very attached.”

It seems that the basic attachment to Israel has only slightly changed during the years. In December 2019, the Ruderman Family Foundation asked this question: “How emotionally attached are you to Israel: very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached, not at all attached, or aren’t you sure?” Two-thirds (67%) said they were emotionally attached to Israel including 32% who selected the “very attached” response, while 31% said they weren’t attached.¹²⁹ Eight out of 10 respondents identified as “pro-Israel.” The responses also showed that over 70% felt that their personal relationship with Israel had remained the same or was stronger than it was five years ago. Liberal Jews, however, said their relationship with Israel had grown weaker than that of their counterparts. In a June 2020 survey, Mansdorf found that 70% of liberal American Jews described themselves as “pro-Israel.”¹³⁰ In September 2020, a survey of American Jews found that 88% said they were “pro-Israel.”¹³¹

The term “pro-Israel” may mean different things to different people. In 1983, Steven Cohen distinguished between Zionism and “pro-Israelism.”¹³² In past surveys, most American Jews described themselves as “Zionists,” but since a Zionist is one for whom Israel plays a central role in his life, sense of identity, and very existence, a condition that does not apply to most American Jews, their self-definition as Zionists means “pro-Israelism.” Today, even the term “pro-Israel” may be confusing. Sen. Bernie Sanders, an American Jew and a former candidate for the Democratic nomination for president, said he is a Zionist, although many of his positions on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not be considered pro-Israel. The leftist Jewish lobby, J Street, also defined itself as “Pro-Israel and Pro Peace,” although many of its positions on Israel, like its rejection of the transfer of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and support for the Iran nuclear deal, were not “pro-Israel.”¹³³ There is a

difference between being pro-Israel as a nation and being in favor of Israeli government or policies. Liberal American Jews do not always make this distinction.

Table 9 reveals interesting results by age, religious denomination, and engagement with the Jewish community. The majority in each group felt attached. In this survey, age did not make much difference, but the other variables did. The more religious the group was, the more their attachment fell in the “total” and “very” categories. The gap between Orthodox and unaffiliated Jews was 36%. A similar gap, 37%, was found between those engaged with the community and those who weren’t.

Table 9 - Attachment of American Jews to Israel By Socio-Demographic Group, 2019

Question: “How emotionally attached are you to Israel? Very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached, not at all attached or aren’t you sure?” (%)

Group \ Level	Total Attached	Very Attached	Not Attached
-40	67	27	31
40-59	65	25	32
60+	68	26	30
Orthodox	92	67	6
Conservative	85	46	13
Reform	64	18	35
Reconstructionist	60	20	35
No Denomination	56	15	41
Engaged	89	45	10
Not Engaged	52	14	44

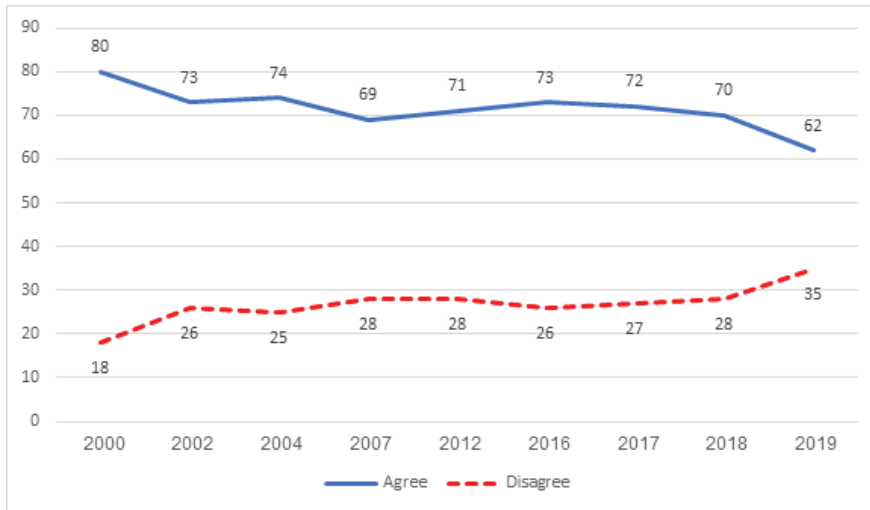
Source: *Ruderman Family Foundation*, “Findings from a Survey of 2,500 American Jews,” Newton, MA: January 13, 2020. Received from Dr. Hanna Shaul Bar Nissim, Deputy Director USA, on May 19, 2020.

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) conducts annually surveys of American Jews. From 2000 to 2010, AJC asked national samples of American Jews how “close they feel to Israel.” In 2000, 74% said they felt “very” or “fairly” close to Israel while 25% said they did not. In 2010, the comparable figures were 67% vs. 31%. These results represent a drop of 7% from the 2000 “close” column. Still, in 2010, two-thirds of the respondents said they felt close to Israel while less than a third did not.

Another question AJC asked repeatedly from 2000 to 2019 showed a different picture, especially in the last four years. The question was, “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew?” This is a problematic question because Jews may care about Israel while not considering this attitude “a very important part” of their Judaism. Figure 10 shows that from 2000 to 2019 there was a significant decrease of 18% in caring about Israel as a Jewish identity component, with almost all moving to the “do not care” column. During Trump’s first term, from 2016 to 2019, the number of respondents who said they care about Israel went down 11% and the number who did not care went up by almost the same percentage. In focus groups in 2020, Mansdorf found a very strong anti-Trump feeling among liberal Jewish Americans to the point of viewing anything associated with Trump negatively.¹³⁴

Figure 10 - American Jews: Caring About Israel, 2000-2019

Question: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew?” (%)



Source: American Jewish Committee, *AJC Annual Surveys of American Jews*. Collapsed categories: Agree: Strongly and Somewhat. Berman Jewish Databank, AJC Surveys. <https://www.jewishdatabank.org/databank/search-results?category=U.S.%20National>

American Jews, especially the more liberal, tended to blame Israel for the impasse in the peace process. The failure of the Barak-Clinton peace initiatives and the Arafat-directed second intifada did not convince them that Palestinian rejectionism and violence were mostly responsible for the stalemate.¹³⁵ The main reasons for the more recent erosion, however, were the close relations between Trump and Netanyahu and the growing rift between Netanyahu and the Democratic party.¹³⁶ Apparently, Democrats, especially liberals, did not distinguish between Israel, the Israeli public, and the Israeli government.

When asked in the Ruderman Family Foundation Survey of December 2019 to rank an order of “reasons for being less connected to Israel,” the two reasons American Jews cited as most important were “Israel’s support for President Trump” (33%) and Netanyahu’s support for

President Trump and his policies” (39%). The survey also asked about the main reasons why American Jews criticized Israel. According to 39% of respondents, “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s support for US President Donald Trump and his policies” was the chief reason for their criticism of Israel, followed by increasing religious right-wing political influence in Israel (33%), treatment of Palestinians (25%), and West Bank settlements (24%). Very few agreed that a lack of “mutual understanding or shared values” was an important reason for their criticism.

Frank Newport analyzed the surveys Gallup has been conducting since 2001 to shed light on the opinions of American Jews toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.¹³⁷ He found that from 2001 to 2014, an overwhelming majority of 93% were more sympathetic with Israel than with the Palestinians.¹³⁸ Between 2015 and 2019, this figure went down to 86%. The proportion of Jews who were sympathetic to the Palestinians was 2% in the 2001-2014 sample and rose to 7% in the 2015-2019 sample. The total ratio between the scores was reduced by 11%, but Newport argued that that change was not analytically significant. A question in a June 2020 survey mentioned only the Palestinians: “How sympathetic would you say you are to the Palestinian cause?” Fifty percent of liberal American Jews said they were.¹³⁹

Figure 11 compares levels of support for the establishment of a Palestinian state among the general public, Democrats, and American Jews. In 2002, the three groups registered very similar results, between 46% and 49%. The following year, American Jews expressed the least support for the solution. In subsequent years, the levels of American Jewish opinion grew closer to those of Democrats and farther from those of the general public.

The strongest Jewish support appeared in the most recent surveys. There are two reasons for this jump. First, the wording of the question changed. The AJC added the word “demilitarized” to the description of the Palestinian state and located the solution specifically in the West Bank. Second, since 2016, levels of support for a Palestinian state went up for all the groups, although support among the general public went up much more moderately than for Democrats and American Jews. As can be seen in Figure 11, in the last two years, even Republicans

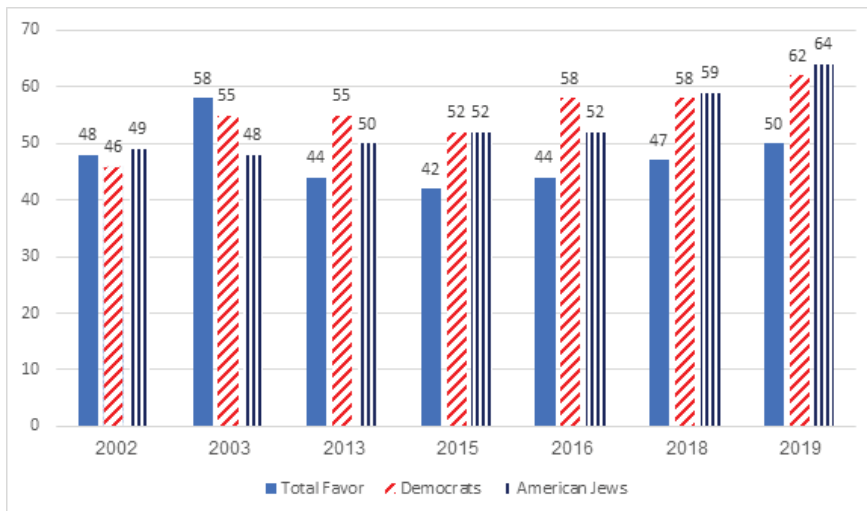
showed less opposition to a Palestinian state. The reason for all the increases is probably the inclusion of an independent Palestinian state in Trump's peace plan.

Figure 11 - Establishment of a Palestinian State: Total, Democrats, and American Jews, 2002-2019

Questions: American Jews: "In the current situation, do you favor or oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state?" (AJC Annual Surveys, 2002-2016, %).

"In the current situation, do you favor or oppose a two-state solution through the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state on the West Bank?" (AJC Annual Surveys, 2018-2019, %).

Total and Democrats: "Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?" (Gallup, %)



Sources: American Jewish Committee, *AJC Annual Surveys of American Jews*. Collapsed categories: Agree and Disagree: Strongly and Somewhat. Berman Jewish Databank, AJC Surveys. <https://www.jewishdatabank.org/databank/search-results?category=U.S.%20National>

Gallup: Lydia Saad, "Majority in U.S. Again Support Palestinian Statehood," *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

The slight increase in sympathy for the Palestinians and the larger increase in support for a Palestinian state should be placed within a wider context. From 2000 to 2015, the AJC included a question in its annual surveys about the Arabs' ultimate goal vis-à-vis Israel. Despite the support of American Jews for the two-state solution, Table 9 shows that from 2000 to 2015, overwhelming majorities agreed with the statement, "The Arabs' goal isn't to reach a peace agreement but to destroy Israel." Even in 2015, three quarters of respondents expressed this view and only one-quarter thought otherwise. It is unfortunate that AJC omitted this issue from surveys conducted after 2015.

Table 10 - Arab Goals Toward Israel, 2000-2015

Question: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the goal of the Arabs isn't the return of occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel." (AJC).

Year	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
2000	69	23
2001	73	23
2002	82	15
2003	81	16
2004	84	13
2005	78	18
2006	81	13
2007	82	12
2009	75	19
2010	75	20
2011	76	19
2013	75	24
2015	73	25

Source: American Jewish Committee, *AJC Annual Surveys of American Jews*. Berman Jewish Databank, AJC Surveys.

<https://www.jewishdatabank.org/databank/search-results?category=U.S.%20National>

The AJC surveys also sporadically included questions about other critical issues of Palestinian-Israeli relations. In the 2010 survey, a national sample was asked, “Should the Palestinians be required or not required to recognize Israel as a Jewish state in a formal peace agreement?” No less than 94% of American Jews said the Palestinians should be required to do so and only 3% thought they shouldn’t. In the following year, the score was 96% vs. 3%.

The Palestinians have consistently and vehemently rejected the demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and that rejection has touched a sensitive nerve in American Jewry. In the last decade, the Palestinians have been aggressively and unilaterally seeking recognition as a state from nations and international organizations. In the 2011 AJC survey, however, 88% of American Jews disapproved of this policy, with only 9% approving. It is again unfortunate that AJC omitted this question from surveys of the last decade.

Like most Americans, Jews were very concerned about the threat of Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons, and like the general public, they were divided about the agreement. In the 2015 survey, the AJC presented several questions about the deal. The first was this: “Recently, the U.S., along with five other countries, reached a deal on Iran’s nuclear program. Do you approve or disapprove of this agreement?” The respondents were divided: half approved of the agreement and 16% “approved strongly,” while 46% disapproved and 27% “disapproved strongly.”

Two questions dealt with monitoring and compliance. The first was, “How confident are you about the ability of the U.S. and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) to monitor Iran’s compliance?” The majority, 54%, weren’t “very” or “somewhat” confident and 44% were confident, with 6% “very confident.” The next question was, “How confident are you that this agreement will prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons?” Only 35% were “confident,” of whom only 5% were “very confident” that the deal will prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Sixty-three percent weren’t, of whom 33% were “not confident at all.” Thus, like

the general public, American Jews did not believe the deal would stop Iran's quest for the bomb.

It should also be noted that during the battle between Obama and Netanyahu over the agreement, only a slight plurality of American Jews (49% vs. 45%) approved of the way Obama was "handling US-Israel relations." At the same time, 45% vs. 26% approved of the way Netanyahu was "handling US-Israeli relations." Moreover, 52% of respondents in the same 2015 survey acknowledged that "US-Israeli relations were getting worse," but 28% blamed the US for the deterioration and only 9% blamed Israel. Fourteen percent blamed both.

Evangelical Christians

Evangelical Christians, sometimes called "Christian Zionists," are known for their strong support of Israel, mostly for theological reasons.¹⁴⁰ They believe Israel was given to the Jews by God as a prelude to the Battle of Armageddon and Jesus' Second Coming.¹⁴¹ Supporting Israel is a way for them to practice their brand of Christianity.

Evangelical support for Zionism predated the establishment of Israel.¹⁴² From a Jewish perspective, however, the caveat to their theological approach is their belief that in the aftermath of Armageddon, all Jews will see the light of Jesus and convert to Christianity. This is the main reason for American Jewish aversion to them.¹⁴³ This section examines the Evangelicals' views of Israel in comparison to those of other Christian denominations.

Since the beginning of the century, the Evangelical connection to Jews, Israel, and the land of Israel has attracted many scholars and experts.¹⁴⁴ The connection between this Christian denomination and Trump and his close relations with Israel have added more interest in the phenomenon.¹⁴⁵

Several studies examined the Evangelical role in the shaping of American opinions on Israel. The results have been consistent from the beginning of the century but are also related to the sharp rise in political polarization in the US. Most Evangelicals are Republicans,

and as Republicans have supported Israel more than any other political group in the US, their double affiliation to both the Evangelical movement and the Republican party yielded even stronger motivation to support Israel.

Based on a survey conducted in May 2002 by the University of Maryland, Mayer compared the attitudes of several religious groups toward Palestinian-Israeli issues and American policy.¹⁴⁶ His study focused on a somewhat elusive category, “Christian Fundamentalists,” which included but was not limited to Evangelicals. In addition, many of the questions in the original survey were loaded with problematic information and cues. Mayer concluded, however, that in 2002, Christian Fundamentalists were by far the strongest supporters of Israel in the US.

Cavari meticulously studied long-term responses to the Palestinian-Israeli “sympathy” question from 1967 to 2009 and found that at least since 2001, there was a strong correlation between religious beliefs, elite polarization, and sympathy with Israelis vs. Palestinians. Republicans sympathized with Israel more than Democrats, Evangelical Christians sympathized more with Israel than other Christians, and Evangelical Republicans sympathized more with Israel than other Evangelicals who subscribed to other political affiliations or none at all.¹⁴⁷

Pew found in June-July 2003 that 55% of white Evangelical Protestants were significantly more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians and only 6% sympathized more with the Palestinians, compared to 41% vs. 13%, respectively, of all those surveyed.¹⁴⁸ In a March-May 2004 survey, Pew included the following question: “Should the U.S. support Israel over the Palestinians?” While the public was divided on this issue, more than twice as many white Evangelicals agreed that the U.S. should support Israel over the Palestinians than disagreed: 52% agreed while 25% disagreed. One study used these questions within a larger analysis of the influence of religion on American opinion of US policy in the Middle East and found a strong statistical correlation between Evangelical religious affiliation and much more sympathy and support for Israel over the Palestinians.¹⁴⁹

Table 11 shows that nearly eight out of 10 white Evangelical Protestants (79%) sympathized more with Israel while just 5% sympathized more with the Palestinians. Among white mainline Protestants and white Catholics, 60% of both groups were more sympathetic to Israel, while just 14% in each group sided more with the Palestinians. Hispanic Catholics were divided: 36% sympathized more with Israel and 25% more with the Palestinians, while 24% said they sympathize with neither side. The religiously unaffiliated were similarly divided: 38% sympathized more with Israel and 29% more with the Palestinians, while 19% chose neither. From 2006 to 2016 sympathies with Israel increased across all the religious groups. There was a change in the opposite direction only among the religiously unaffiliated: In 2006, the results were 42% vs. 15% in favor of Israel, while in 2016, the score was just 38% vs. 29% in favor of Israel.

Table 11 - Sympathies in the Mideast Situation by Religious Denomination, 2016

Question: “In the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, who do you sympathize with more?” (Pew, %)

Group \ Opinion	Israel	Palestinians	Both	Neither	Don't Know
Total	54	19	13	3	10
Protestant	66	13	9	3	8
White Evangelical	79	5	6	2	8
White Mainline	60	14	12	4	11
Black	59	19	10	6	7
Catholic	50	18	15	3	14
White	60	14	9	3	15
Hispanic	36	25	24	2	13
Unaffiliated	38	29	19	4	10
Attendance					
Weekly & More	66	14	9	3	7
Less Than Weekly	48	22	15	4	11

Source: Samantha Smith and Carrol Doherty, “Five Facts About How Americans View The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” *Pew Research Center*, May 23, 2016.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/23/5-facts-about-how-americans-view-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>

When party affiliation was introduced into the equation, white Evangelical Republicans supported Israel more than other Republicans. In 2016, 85% of white Evangelical Republicans said they sympathized more with Israel than with the Palestinians, compared with 69% of all other Republicans. The increase in support for Israel from 2001 to 2016 among both groups was very similar. Pew found that since September 2001, the share of white Evangelical Republicans who sympathized

more with Israel rose 26% (from 59% to 85%) and 25% among other Republicans (from 44% to 69%).

Newport analyzed the religious factor in the shaping of sympathies with the sides in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.¹⁵⁰ He presented data by Christian denomination, political affiliation, and church attendance and found that all the groups, even those who never attended services, sympathized much more with Israelis than with the Palestinians. Table 12 shows that the Mormons were the most pro-Israel, with 79% sympathizing more with Israelis and only 11% sympathizing more with the Palestinians.¹⁵¹

Protestants were ranked second with a ratio of 66% to 14%, and Catholics third with 59% to 17%. Those identified as “other religion” sympathized more with Israelis by 54% to 18%. The lowest level of sympathy was among those without a formal religious identity, among whom 45% expressed more sympathy for Israelis and 25% for the Palestinians.

The 2015-2019 aggregate, which combined five surveys, revealed little changes in these figures. The Protestants sympathized more with Israelis by a 70%-13% ratio, the Catholics by a 60% to 16% ratio, and those without formal religious identity by a ratio of 43% to 26%. Thus, the data for the entire 2001-2019 period showed that in general American Christians support Israel much more than people who weren't religious.

Table 12 - Sympathies in the Mideast Situation by Religious Identification, Political Affiliation, and Church Attendance, 2001-2014

Question: “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?” (Gallup %)

Denominations	Israelis	Palestinians	Both, Neither, No Opinion
Mormon	79	11	10
Protestant	66	14	20
Catholics	59	17	24
Other	54	18	28
No Religious Identification	45	25	30
Party/ Church Attendance			
Republicans/Leaners			
Weekly/Almost Weekly	80	7	13
Monthly/Seldom	70	12	18
Never	65	13	22
Democrats/Leaners			
Weekly/Almost Weekly	55	20	25
Monthly/Seldom	52	20	28
Never	42	30	28

Source: Frank Newport, “Religion Plays Large Role in Americans’ Support for Israelis.”

Gallup Poll, August 1, 2014.

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/174266/religion-plays-large-role-americans-support-israelis.aspx>

Newport also examined the distribution of opinions by church attendance. On average, 66% of Americans who attended church weekly or almost every week were sympathetic to Israelis compared with 13% who were sympathetic to the Palestinians. Sympathy for Israelis dropped to 46% among those who never attended church, but was still twice as many as the 23% who were sympathetic to the Palestinians. Newport also examined the distribution of opinions by Church going for the 2015-2019 period and found little change in comparison to the 2001-2014 period. During this period, an average of 71% of those who frequently attended religious services were sympathetic to Israel (up 5%) compared with 49% of those who never attended (up 3%).

When political affiliation was added to church attendance, Table 12 shows that Republicans and Republican-leaning churchgoers significantly sympathized more with Israelis than Democrats and Democratic -leaning churchgoers.

Differences were also found between political affiliation and level of church attendance. If the frequency of going to church indicates degree of religiosity, then the more religious among both parties were the most pro-Israel. Yet Republicans who never go to church sympathized more with Israelis (65%) than Democrats who go to church weekly or almost weekly (55%).

Among Protestants, Evangelicals—perhaps the most orthodox Christians—have held a particularly favorable attitude toward Israel, but unfortunately only a few surveys explored their opinions. A survey from September 2017 revealed interesting results.¹⁵² The favorability question was formulated this way: “Overall what is your perception of the country of Israel today?” A total of 67% held a “positive” view of Israel and only 9% a negative view. Table 13 shows significant differences among socio-demographic groups among Evangelicals. Protestants held much more positive views than Catholics, more frequent churchgoers were more positive than less frequent churchgoers, males were more positive than females, Republicans were more positive than Independents and Democrats, and those with graduate degrees were more positive than those with lower levels of education.

Table 13 - Evangelical View of Israel by Socio-Demographic Group, 2017

Question: “Overall what is your perception of the country of Israel today?” (%)

Group	Positive View
Total	67
Denomination	
Protestants	71
Catholics	53
Church Attendance	
Once a Week	73
One to Three Times a Week	65
Less than Once a Month	53
Gender	
Males	76
Females	61
Party	
Republicans	77
Independents	66
Democrats	53
Education	
High School Graduate or Less	64
Some College	67
Bachelor’s degree	75
Graduate Degree	76

Source: Joel Rosenberg, *Evangelical Attitudes Toward Israel* (Nashville, TE: LifeWay, 2018).

http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Narrative-Report-Part-2-2_27_18.pdf

Respondents to the same survey thought the US “was doing the right amount to help Israel” or “doesn’t do enough” by a ratio of 55% to 6%, but 38% selected the “not sure” answer. A great majority of 95% said their “support for the existence, security, and prosperity of the State of Israel has increased over the last five years or stayed the same.” This was most probably the result of Trump’s strong support for Israel. The question about the establishment of a Palestinian state was placed within the context of a peace agreement. Participants in the survey were asked to “agree” or “disagree” with this statement: “The State of Israel should sign a peace treaty that allows the Palestinians to create their own sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza.” This formulation confused the respondents, as almost half selected “Not sure.” Among the rest, 23% agreed while 31% disagreed. Non-Hispanics were the least likely ethnic group to agree (20%).

The results for the various age groups received much media attention.¹⁵³ Commentators pointed to a generational gap in the attitudes of Evangelicals toward Israel. Table 14 shows responses to four selected critical questions by age. Substantial majorities in the total of each age group supported Israel, but there were considerable gaps between the youngest and the oldest and more moderate differences among the groups in between. The gap between the responses of the youngest and the oldest to the questions on Israel (a), (b), and (c) was 17-18%. The gap on the Palestinian state was 9%. All these are significant gaps.

Table 14 also reveals that in all the responses there was a small difference between the 18-34 and the 35-49 age groups. The gap gradually rose between these groups and the remaining age groups. There are two main reasons for the gap. Younger Evangelicals are less familiar with the Bible and increasingly moved by social justice concepts.¹⁵⁴ McClay, however, argued that Christians are closer to the Jewish people today than they have been for thousands of years, and this momentous rapprochement is likely to hold.¹⁵⁵

Table 14 - Evangelical Support for Israel by Age, 2017**Questions:**

- (a) “Overall what is your perception of the country of Israel today?” (%)
- (b) “Christians should support the right of the Jewish people to live in the sovereign state of Israel.” (%)
- (c) “Christians should support Israel’s defense of itself from terrorists and foreign enemies.” (%)
- (d) “The state of Israel should sign a peace treaty that allows the Palestinians to create their own sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza.” (%)

Question	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Opinion Age	Positive view of Israel	Israel’s Right for a State	Support Israel Defense	Reject Palestinian State
Total	67	70	74	31
18-34	58	68	66	25
35-49	64	68	67	27
50-64	69	77	74	36
65+	76	86	83	34

Source: Joel Rosenberg, *Evangelical Attitudes Toward Israel* (Nashville, TE: LifeWay, 2018).

http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Narrative-Report-Part-2-2_27_18.pdf

Most studies argued that Evangelical support for Israel is rooted in Evangelical Christian theology and a feeling of cultural and religious affinity with Jews. Yet a recent study found that the strongest predictors of support for Israel were age, opinions of Jews, and socialization (hearing what other Evangelicals say about Israel). The study also statistically confirmed the significant generational gap between 18-29 year-olds and older Evangelicals, and claimed that this was not because they were less religious.¹⁵⁶ The study speculated that the younger group was adopting more centrist political positions and a different concept of justice that led them to view Israeli policies toward the Palestinians as unjust.

Socio-Demographics

Table 15 assembled data about the distribution of opinions in 2020 on the three main issues discussed in this study by several socio-demographic groups. The issues include favorability of Israel, sympathies with Israelis and Palestinians, and support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. The groups were classified by gender, race, age, education, party, and ideology. In total, three quarters of the respondents to question (a) viewed Israel favorably and one quarter unfavorably. Clear majorities in each group viewed Israel favorably, but there were several gaps inside the various groups.

Israel got the highest scores (those at least 3.5% above the total score, which represents a standard statistical margin of error) only among Republicans (91%), whites (80%), and those over 55 (80%). The lowest scores (at least 3.5% less from the total) were found among liberals (60%), non-whites (61%), Independents (64%), ages 18-34 (66%), Democrats (67%), moderates (69%), and high school students or graduates (70%). The lowest gap (6%) was between the three levels of education and males and females (6%). The highest gaps were between Republicans and Independents (27%), liberals and conservatives (26%), whites and non-whites (19%), and those between ages 18-34 and 55+ (14%).

The total score for question (b) was 60% more sympathetic to Israelis and 23% more sympathetic to the Palestinians. The highest scores in favor of Israel were among Republicans (86%), conservatives (86%),

whites (68%), some college education (68%), age 55+ (66%), and males (65%). The lowest scores for Israel were among liberals (36%), non-whites (43%), Democrats (44%), age 18-34 (48%), independents (48%), moderates (51%), high school graduates or less (54%), and females (54%). The largest gaps existed in the ideology (44%) and party (42%) categories and between whites and non-whites (25%), males and females (25%), and ages 18-34 and 55+ (18%).

The total distribution of responses to question (c) was 55% supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and 34% opposing. No significant differences in opinions were found between males (57%) and females (54%) and whites and non-whites (56%). The 18-34 age group (57%) was close to the 55+ group (61%), but the 35-54 age group was much more divided (50%-39%). Considerable gaps were found between levels of education (high school 45% and college graduates 67%), Republicans (42%) and Democrats (67%), and Conservatives (42%) and Liberals (66%).

Table 15 - Israel Favorability, Sympathies with Israelis vs. Palestinians, Support for a Palestinian State by Group, 2020

Question (a): “I’d like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. Is your overall opinion of the [Name of a Country] is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?” “Israel” (%)

Question (b): “In the Middle East situation, are your sympathies more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?” (%)

Question: (c) “Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the West Bank and the Gaza strip.” (%)

Question	(a)		(b)		(c)	
Opinion Group	Total Favorable	Total Unfavorable	Israelis	Palestinians	For State	Against State
Total	74	25	60	23	55	34
Gender						
Male	77	22	65	20	57	34
Female	71	28	54	26	54	35
Race						
White	80	19	68	18	56	36
Non-White	61	37	43	35	56	32
Age						
18-34	66	33	48	30	57	31
35-54	75	23	61	19	50	39
55+	80	19	66	21	61	32
Education						
High School or Less	70	30	54	25	45	41
Some College	75	22	68	18	55	36
College Graduates	76	22	58	24	67	25
Party						
Republicans	91	10	86	25	44	48
Independents	64	33	48	28	57	32
Democrats	67	33	44	39	70	22
Ideology						
Conservative	86	13	80	9	42	49
Moderate	69	29	51	27	63	25
Liberal	60	39	36	43	66	24

Sources: Justin McCarthy, “Iran, North Korea Liked Least by Americans,” *Gallup Poll*, March 3, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/287153/iran-north-korea-liked-least-americans.aspx>; *Gallup Poll Social Series: World Affairs, Final Topline*, Q. 18, February 3-16, 2020. Lydia Saad, Majority in U.S. Again, Support Palestinian Statehood. *Gallup Poll*, April 22, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

The attitudes of two ethnic groups have been especially important for Israel: Hispanics (Americans whose origins are in the Latin American countries) and African Americans. Very little empirical data exists on their opinions. The last known comprehensive survey on the attitudes of Hispanics toward Israel was conducted in January 2017 by LifeWay Research.¹⁵⁷ The question on general view of Israel: “Overall what is your perception of the country of Israel today?” yielded the following responses: 45% held positive views, of whom 12% selected “very positive;” 26% held a negative view, of whom 4% selected “very negative;” and 28% chose “not sure.”

Responses to the question “Which of the following best describes your views on American involvement in Israel?” were as follows: 52% said “The U.S. is doing the right amount to help Israel” or “does not do enough,” 19% said “The U.S. does too much to help Israel,” but again a large group, 29%, selected the “not sure” option. The “sympathy” question focused on “hardships” Israelis and Palestinians face in the conflict. While 66% of Hispanics say they sympathize equally with Israelis and Palestinians, among respondents who selected only one side, 27% identified with the hardships of Israelis and only 7% identified with the hardships of Palestinians. This survey did not include a question on a Palestinian state. In comparison to the opinion trends among the general American public, these results show a lower level of support and greater uncertainty on issues related to Israel. Several experts have suggested ways to improve relations between Israel and the Hispanic community.¹⁵⁸

The attitudes of African Americans toward Israel were influenced by the relations they have had with American Jews.¹⁵⁹ In March-April 2019, LifeWay Research conducted a very similar survey of the attitudes of blacks to Israel and the results were also similar.¹⁶⁰ The question on the general view of Israel: “Overall what is your perception of the country of Israel today?” yielded these responses: 42% held positive views, of whom only 10% selected “very positive;” 27% held a negative view, of whom 3% selected “very negative;” but 32 % chose “not sure.” Responses to the question “Which of the following best describes your views on American involvement in Israel?” were as follows: 43% said “The U.S. is doing the right amount to help Israel” or “does not do

enough,” 23% said “The U.S. does too much to help Israel,” but again a large group, 35%, selected the “not sure” option.¹⁶¹

In the “sympathy” question focused “hardships,” 15% sympathized more with the hardships Israelis face, 15% with the hardships Palestinians face, and the largest group, 70%, said they “sympathize equally with both.” The survey did not include a direct question on a Palestinian state, but 24% agreed that “Israel has given Palestinians control of too much land within the country of Israel,” 34% disagreed, and 41% selected “not sure.” These results show lower levels of support for Israel on all the issues discussed in this study, with very large groups selecting the “not sure” option.¹⁵⁷

This chapter presented data and analysis of the distribution of opinions on Israel and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 2020 among socio-demographic groups in American society. It also provided the results of two surveys on the opinions of Hispanics and African Americans conducted respectively in 2017 and 2019. The support of these two ethnic groups in Israel was the weakest and the most uncertain. A comparison between the attitudes of Republicans and Democrats revealed significant and widening gaps. Republicans have been supporting Israel much more than Democrats on the major issues discussed in this work: general views of Israel, sympathies with Israelis vs. Palestinians, support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and Iran’s nuclear deal.

For obvious reasons, American Jews have supported Israel and close US-Israeli relations. There is no evidence to support the “distancing hypothesis” but the surveys do show erosion and decline, especially among liberal Democrats and young people. Evangelical Christians have become strong supporters of Israel, but in this case as well, the young and the Democrats among them exhibited less support than Republicans and the older generation. The 2020 socio-demographic profile confirms significant differences by race, age, education, party and ideology. White people support Israel more than non-white, older more than younger, the more educated more than the less educated, and Republicans and conservatives more than Democrats and liberals.

CONCLUSION

This study presents contexts, data, and analysis of American attitudes toward Israel from 2000 to 2020 across three relevant areas: views of Israel, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the Iran nuclear deal. The evidence revealed strong and consistent support for Israel across all the major issues. The data showed both stability and change in American attitudes. Stability appeared in long-term highly favorable trends on Israel as a nation and Israelis as a people. The public supported the Israeli and the Trump positions on the Iran nuclear deal more than those of the Obama administration. The study found, however, that there are clouds in the horizon due to much lower levels of support among young Americans, non-whites, and Democrats and decreasing levels among American Jews.

Two long-term prisms have influenced the evolution of attitudes toward Israel in this century. During the first decade, it was the 9/11 terror attacks in the US and Arafat's terror campaign of September 2000-February 2005 (euphemized as "al-Aqsa Intifada"). In the second decade, it was the growing political polarization in the US, the "Arab Spring," and Iran's race to the Bomb. The highly positive results for Israel over the entire period may have been influenced by the upheaval and violence of the "Arab Spring."¹⁶² The turbulence and atrocities of this period across the Arab world demonstrated, by contrast, the stability, reliability, and democratic nature of Israel.

Both religiosity and partisanship affect attitudes toward Israel, but political identity is the more important of these two variables. Measured by church and synagogue attendance, the more orthodox among both Jews and Christians have been more supportive of Israel. When political beliefs and affiliations were introduced into the equation of each religious group, religious Republicans tended to be more supportive than religious Democrats.

At the binational level, considerable majorities of Americans—between two-thirds and three-quarters—have held highly stable favorable views of Israel. Israel even went up 12% over the period, from 62% favorability in 2000 to 74% in 2020. Majorities also supported key

policy issues. They have considered Israel a close and important US ally and thought US support for Israel has been “adequate” or even “too little.” Despite the unpopularity of foreign aid and the sizeable US military aid to Israel, majorities said it should be kept at the current level or even increased.

Since 2000, both Conservative Republicans and Liberal Democrats have viewed Israel more favorably. The scores for both went up respectively by 10% and 8% but the gap between them almost doubled, rising from 16% to 29%. Still, 58% of liberal Democrats viewed Israel favorably. In the 2020 profile, 67% of Democrats held favorable views of Israel. The gap with the Republicans dropped to 24% but was still high.

Two issues were used to gauge general attitudes to Israel among American Jews: “emotional attachment” and “care.” In 2019, about two-thirds felt “very” or “somewhat” emotionally attached and “cared” about Israel, but those who said they cared dropped from 80% in 2000 to only 62% in 2019. This sharp drop and the gap between “attachment” and “care” requires further investigation. More than two-thirds of Evangelical Christians held a “positive view” of Israel, and the more frequently they attended church services the stronger were their positive views. Republican Evangelicals were much more pro-Israel than Democrat members of this church. Also, young Evangelicals held a much less positive view of Israel than older generations.

The surveys allowed two comparisons between Israel and the Palestinians. The first was on general views and the second on sympathies with the two sides.

Since 2000, the American public has held high and relatively stable favorable views of Israel and unfavorable views of the Palestinian government. This sentiment is probably related to the nature of the political systems of the two sides. Israel is a liberal democracy while the PA is a corrupt, ineffective, and failed dictatorship. The last elections were held there 15 years ago, when Mahmoud Abbas was elected for a four-year term. Since 2007, Gaza has been ruled by Hamas, an extreme Islamic terror organization.

Surveys also compared American sympathies in the conflict with Israelis and the Palestinians. This comparison focused on the two peoples, not on the respective governments or policies. Americans have sympathized much more with the Israelis than with the Palestinians. Between 2001 and 2020, the scores for the two sides went up by a similar percentage, 9% for the Israelis and 7% for the Palestinians, and the gap between the two in favor of Israel also remained similar, 35% in 2001 vs. 37% in 2020. While the overall balance has not changed much, the socio-demographic distribution has. Republicans have sympathized with the Israelis much more than Democrats. In 2001, the gap between the two parties was 17% (59%-42%). In 2020 it more than doubled to 42% (86%-44%), the highest ever.

Between 2015 and 2019, American Jews sympathized more with Israel than with the Palestinians by a ratio of 86% to 7%. Nearly eight out of 10 white Evangelical Protestants (79%) sympathized more with Israel, while just 5% sympathized more with the Palestinians. Between 2015 and 2019 an average of 71% of those who frequently attended religious services were sympathetic to Israel compared with 49% among those who never attended. The 2020 socio-demographic profile showed that while 60% of the public sympathized more with Israel and only 23% with the Palestinians, significant gaps existed across many of the groups. Males sympathized much more than females, white more than non-white, young more than older, Republicans more than Democrats, and conservatives more than liberals.

From 2000 to 2020, the public has increasingly supported the “two-states for two peoples” solution. Support for the establishment of a Palestinian state went up 15% and the opposition dropped by a similar percentage. It twice passed the 50% mark, in 2003 (58%) and 2020 (55%). This may be a case of direct presidential influence on public opinion. All American presidents in the 21st century—Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump—favored the two-state solution. Trump was wavering at the beginning of his presidency but eventually included the establishment of a Palestinian state in his peace plan. The two peaks in favor of this solution appeared when Bush and Trump specifically included a Palestinian state in their respective peace plans.

Sizable differences were found between the opinions of Republicans and Democrats on the two-state solution. Republican support slightly increased from 41% in 2000 to 44% in 2020, but during the same period, Democrats increased their support by 25%, from 45% to 70%. This increase could be attributed to Obama's strong support for the two-state solution, the tilt of the party to the left, and hostility toward Trump and his close relations with Netanyahu.

Opinions of American Jews on this issue were close to those of Democrats in both 2002 (49%-46%) and 2019 (64%-62%). During this period, support for a Palestinian state among Jews and Democrats went up respectively by 15% and 16%. These results were expected given the overwhelming Jewish affiliation with the Democratic Party. The data for Evangelicals on this issue was very limited and shows more confusion than clear attitudes: 31% opposed, 23% supported, and about half selected "I don't know." The 2020 demographic profile shows gaps among only two groups: respondents with a college education supported the state (67%) much more than respondents with a high school education (45%), and respondents in the 55+ age group supported the state (61%) more than respondents in the 35-54 age group (50%).

The Iran nuclear deal was very controversial in the US. Netanyahu bitterly fought Obama in Congress and the court of public opinion to prevent it. The public supported his evaluation more than that of Obama, but this did not prevent the deal. Americans did not approve of the deal, did not think it was a good agreement, and thought Iran got the better part of it and will not implement it. A few years later, the public said Iran had violated it. Despite the deal, the public still thought Iran represented a serious threat to the US and that the relations between the two countries had not improved. The public thought Obama should have submitted the agreement to the Senate for debate and ratification, but he ignored this position.

Republicans held very different opinions on the deal than Democrats. They disapproved of it by an overwhelming ratio of 86% to 11% while Democrats approved of it by a ratio of 52% to 32%. Republicans did not trust Iran to comply with the agreement by a ratio of 80% to 19%, while Democrats trusted Iran by a ratio of 50% to 43%. In part, these

differences result from the tough Republican opposition to Obama's domestic and foreign policies. American Jews were closely divided on the deal, with half approving of it and 46% disapproving. A slight majority, 54%, were not confident about the ability of the US and the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor Iran's compliance with the deal, while 44% were confident. Only 35% were confident that the agreement would prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, and 63% weren't confident. Therefore, in concert with the opinions of the general public, American Jews did not believe the deal would stop Iran's quest for the bomb.

A closer look at the future standing of Israel in American public opinion requires a brief discussion of four issues: demography, bipartisanship, generational gap, and American Jewry. Demographic changes in the US will gather steam over the next decades. The white population is losing considerable percentages of its share in the population while minorities, mostly Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians, are increasing their share.

Table 16 - Ethnic Groups in the American Population, 2000-2050

Groups	2000 ^a	2010 ^b	2020 ^c	2050 ^d
Whites	75%	72%	60%	47%
Hispanics	13%	16%	19%	29%
African Americans	12%	13%	13%	14%
Asians	04%	05%	06%	09%

Information for 2020 and 2050 is based on estimates.

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The percentages of whites in American society will decline consistently. At mid-century they will still be the largest demographic group but will lose the decisive majority they have known since the founding of the US, constituting only about 47%. The Hispanics are the group that has grown fastest in the country, and by 2050 they will not be far from doubling their strength, forming about 29% of the population. The share of Asians will also grow considerably and will reach about 9%. The percentage of African Americans will rise by only 2%. There are states, such as California—the most populous in the US with about 40 million residents—in which whites are already a minority, at 36.5% of the population. Hispanics amount to 39.4%, while Asians constitute 15.5% and African Americans 6.5%.¹⁶³

In the coming decade, these demographic changes will have far-reaching consequences in all areas of politics, society, and the economy in the US. By building coalitions and collaborating with each other, the minority groups could exercise significant influence on American politics and foreign policy. Traditionally, minority groups have supported the Democratic Party, which has been more attentive to their needs. That, however, is also one of the reasons for Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election. He represents a white America that is struggling to maintain its majority status in American society, has worked hard to stop illegal immigration coming primarily from Latin American countries, and has accused Democrats of opposing any limits on immigration out of a desire to bolster their own political base through immigration.¹⁶⁴

Hispanics have had divided feelings about Israel due to a combination of national, ethnic, and religious limitations. They are much less familiar with Israel and are more concerned about US relations with neighboring Central and Latin American countries. They are also mostly Catholic, a denomination that usually supports Israel less than other Christian denominations. Blacks are also less identified with Israel than other races in American society. Israel's enemies in the US have been trying to win the hearts and minds of African Americans by comparing Israelis to American whites and the Palestinians to American blacks. Many pro-Palestinian groups have also convinced blacks of the falsehood that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs is like the treatment of blacks under apartheid in South Africa.

This campaign intensified during the May 2020 protests and riots against the murder of George Floyd, a black man, by a white policeman in Minneapolis. Pro-Palestinian groups have compared the killing of Floyd by a white policeman to the killing of Palestinian terrorists by Israeli policemen or soldiers and claimed that Israeli training of police forces in the US is responsible for the indiscriminate killing of blacks.¹⁶⁵ The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) pro-Palestinian organizations exploited the tragedy to amplify the message that Israel is an illegitimate “white oppressor” state.¹⁶⁶ The antisemitic Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization has been promoting all these false analogies and has teamed up with the BDS movement to boycott Israel.¹⁶⁷ Israel security forces have trained American police units to fight terrorists, not to kill innocent bystanders and demonstrators.

Traditionally, Democrats have expressed more favorable feelings towards Israel than Republicans. Since 2000, however, this pattern has radically changed. Republicans have been supporting Israel much more than Democrats on all the major issues discussed in this work: general views of Israel, sympathies with Israelis vs. the Palestinians, support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and Iran’s nuclear deal. During Bush’s tenure, Republicans placed attitudes toward Israel in the context of the joint American-Israeli war against terrorism, while Democrats, especially liberals, had reservations about Israeli military responses to waves of Palestinian violence from the West Bank and Gaza.

The rift between Democrats and Israel worsened in the last decade, and both sides were responsible for the fracture. Netanyahu had a tense relationship with Obama, supported Republican candidates for president (Mitt Romney in 2012 and Trump in 2016), and created a very close relationship with Trump. Netanyahu confronted Obama on the Iran nuclear deal and the peace process with the Palestinians, while Obama distanced the US from Israel and legitimized Iran’s hegemonic aspirations in the Middle East.¹⁶⁸

The Democratic Party is divided into moderates and radicals (they call themselves “progressives”). There are significant differences between the two branches. Moderates like Joe Biden are “moderate

restorationists” who want to fix shortcomings in the present political system and restore the US role in foreign affairs to what it was before Trump. The radicals think the present US system is beyond repair and must be replaced with a “progressive” system. In foreign affairs, that would mean completely overhauling the American role in the world, including American-Israeli relations. In recent years the radicals have assumed more and more power and influence in the Democratic Party.

In 2016, Senator Bernie Sanders, a radical left candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, seriously challenged moderate Hillary Clinton. Two radicals participated in the 2020 presidential primaries, Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren, and both of them challenged moderate Joe Biden. In the 2018 congressional elections, four radicals won seats in the House of Representatives: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. All four are women of color under 50 and thus belong to the least Israel-supportive groups in American society.

The four Congresswomen joined forces and formed a group called the “Squad” to maximize their influence on the party. Omar and Tlaib are Muslim and the latter is of Palestinian origin. They have made antisemitic slurs and were censured by the party’s leadership. They support the BDS movement and the cutting and conditioning of military aid to Israel, and want pressure and sanctions placed on Israel to force it to change its policies in the conflict with the Palestinians. In August 2019, they were justly barred from entering Israel ostensibly for a “fact-finding tour.” The visit was clearly intended to provoke, and was canceled by Israel due to the participants’ blatant support for BDS, terrorism against Israel, and minimizing of the Holocaust.¹⁶⁹

Ocasio-Cortez is a rising star in the Democratic party. She demonstrated her ignorance, intolerance, and political extremism toward Israel when in September 2020 she first accepted an invitation from the leftist “Americans for Peace Now” organization to participate in an event commemorating former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on the 25th anniversary of his assassination. She then withdrew after receiving old and irrelevant negative information about Rabin from a radical anti-

Zionist and antisemitic body (+972 Magazine) that rejects Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.¹⁷⁰

American Jews have always supported Israel and close US-Israeli relations. There is no evidence to support the “distancing theory,” but surveys do show erosion and decline, especially among liberal Jews and young people. Since most American Jews are Democrats, the rift between Israel and the party that intensified in the last decade must have had some influence on their opinions. Surveys found that religiosity and engagement are critical determinants. Those who are more orthodox and engaged with the Jewish community have been much more pro-Israel than the other groups.

Political power in the US relies on voter turnout and effective lobby organizations. American Jewry suffered from a serious political split in their ranks. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was one of the most influential lobbies in Washington and for decades helped to maintain close ties between the US and Israel. AIPAC has become a target for attack and criticism from several circles.¹⁷¹ It was accused of pushing the Bush administration to wage war in Iraq solely to satisfy Israeli, not American, interests. These accusations were false, but they damaged AIPAC's image and reputation.

AIPAC has also been challenged by J Street, a leftist Jewish lobby organization. J Street was created in November 2007 to challenge what they called AIPAC's rightist orientation. J Street presented itself as a “pro-Israel and pro-peace” lobby and claimed to serve as a home for liberal Jews who otherwise would have no interest in Israel.¹⁷² All these self-descriptions, slogans, and claims are highly questionable.¹⁷³ J Street has certainly not been pro-Israel. It endorsed the highly distorted, unethical, and unprofessional Goldstone Report, which accused Israel of committing war crimes during the 2008-2009 military response to Hamas's violence from Gaza (Operation Cast Lead).¹⁷⁴ Both Likud and Labor opposed the Iran nuclear deal, but J Street supported it.¹⁷⁵ This organization has supported congressional candidates hostile to Israel, failed to condemn Palestinian terrorism and rejectionism of peace proposals, and criticized actions by Trump that most Israelis support, including the transfer of the US embassy

from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognition of Israel's sovereignty in the Golan Heights, and his peace plan.

Anti-Zionism has been spreading inside and outside the Jewish community. Two organizations of young radical American Jews, "Jewish Voice for Peace" and "IfNotNow," have been ostensibly against Israeli "occupation" of the West Bank, but they have severely criticized Israeli policies and US-Israel relations, strongly protested what they perceived as American Jewish institutional support for Israel, teamed up with the BDS movement, and supported anti-Israeli candidates for elected political positions. They have been very active on campuses, where they cause much damage because young non-Jews may think that if Jews themselves are so critical of the Jewish state, whatever they say must be true.

Another challenging factor is the rise of intellectual critics such as Peter Beinart, Judith Butler, Daniel Boyarin, and Michelle Goldberg, who question the fundamental legitimacy of Israel's existence as a Jewish state and who support the BDS movement.¹⁷⁶ Several of them have supported a one-state binational solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state. A few have even implied that the American Jewish diaspora could be an alternative to a Jewish state.¹⁷⁷ This stance is ridiculous, given the massive immigration of American Orthodox Jews to Israel, the high assimilation rate, and the decline in affiliation with Jewish community organizations.

It is astonishing to note that both the radical anti-Israel organizations and Jewish intellectuals believe they must be anti-Zionist and reject Israel's right to survive as a Jewish state in order to ensure their own survival as American Jews.¹⁷⁸

The writings of the radical intellectuals have bolstered the enemies of Israel who argue that Israel is so evil that it should not exist. Israel is the only state in the world whose right to exist is challenged. Beinart has become a very popular speaker at synagogues, Jewish community centers, Hill Houses, and other Jewish organizations, and has cultivated a sizeable group of followers for his approach. Recently, he wrote

that Israel should be replaced by a binational Arab-Jewish state and received much criticism from various Jewish circles.¹⁷⁹ Given these fundamental negative developments, scholars and intellectuals have suggested ways to overcome the growing alienation between the two largest Jewish communities in the world.¹⁸⁰

The data presented in this work clearly reveal a generational gap in American attitudes toward Israel. People between the ages of 18 and 35 are much less supportive of Israel than older generations. This finding appeared among the general public as well as individual socio-demographic groups, even among American Jews and Evangelicals. Older people are familiar with the history of Israel and the Holocaust and are more capable of placing recent events in proper context. They are also better equipped to distinguish between facts and propaganda. Young people tend to be more liberal and radical, and they are exposed on college campuses to intense anti-Israeli Palestinian and Muslim propaganda and incitement to antisemitism, hatred, and violence.

Younger Americans who seek information about Israel primarily from websites and social networks are subjected to the constant aggressive lies and manipulations of a strange coalition that includes Arab and Muslim organizations, radical left-leaning groups, and rightist antisemitic organizations. These young people are, therefore, prone to adopt a highly distorted view of American-Israeli relations and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The young, especially those committed to human rights and who are averse to military confrontation, harshly judge Israel solely based on her perceived policies in the conflict with the Palestinians. They know very little, however, about the conflict, and those who are in college are exposed to a huge anti-Israel propaganda machine operated by the BDS movement.

The BDS movement is antisemitic, extreme, and deceptive.¹⁸¹ It disseminates lies and fabrications about Israel and the conflict. Under the banner of “justice,” “international law,” and “human rights,” they delegitimize and demonize Israel and deny its right to exist. On American campuses, they conduct an annual event called “Israel Apartheid Week.” Of all the pressing global issues and all the horrific civil wars and atrocities in the Middle East, from Iraq and Syria to Libya and Yemen, Israel is the only issue to receive a whole

week's worth of condemnation. Nor are BDS activists satisfied with just voicing their extreme and antisemitic opinions. They have also intimidated, harassed, and attacked Jewish students.

BDS activists claim that academic freedom and freedom of speech apply only to themselves. They often disrupt and occasionally violently prevent events and lectures by pro-Israeli speakers.¹⁸² They talk about "freedom," "justice," and "equality," none of which exists anywhere in the entire Arab Middle East. They are not really concerned about the human rights of the Palestinians, freedom of speech, or academic freedom in the West Bank and Gaza, as they never criticize the serious violations of those rights committed by the PA and Hamas.¹⁸³ They have also opposed the two-state solution and the peace agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel's national security and wellbeing depends on substantial and continuing American support in the areas of defense, diplomacy, politics, and economics.¹⁸⁴ Public opinion is a significant factor in the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy and in the US-Israel special relationship. Until recently, Israel could have safely relied on a supportive public in the US. This study shows that this may no longer be the case. Knowing well the importance of public opinion and favorable attitudes toward Israel in the US, the enemies of the Jewish state have embarked on a major propaganda campaign to promote a negative image for Israel.¹⁸⁵ Israel has begun to confront this campaign but needs to do much more via effective public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy is a communication process in which states, non-state actors, and organizations work to influence the policies of a foreign government by influencing its citizens.¹⁸⁶ This formulation suggests a two-step influence process: first, an actor employs direct communication to create supportive public opinion in another state; and second, the informed foreign public influences its government to adopt a friendly policy toward that actor. In popular terms, public diplomacy refers to "the battle for the hearts and minds of people."¹⁸⁷ Public diplomacy has become a major instrument of foreign policy.¹⁸⁷ The Palestinians have been effectively using public diplomacy to delegitimize and demonize Israel. For years, Israeli governments have

neglected public diplomacy due to purely political calculations in irrelevant ministries.¹⁸⁸ Israel must fundamentally alter its approach to the instruments and organizational structure of public diplomacy.

The special US-Israeli relationship is critical for the security and wellbeing of Israel. Strong public support for Israel is an essential component of this relationship. The opinion trends in the first two decades of this century have been favorable, but there are signs of serious cracks. Israel can't afford to win support from only half the American people, however strong and solid that support might be. The rift with the Democrats and American Jewry and the stiff competition between the two Jewish lobby organizations have already damaged the special relationship. The Netanyahu-Trump relationship contributed to the deterioration in relations between Israel, the Democrats, and American Jewry. New leaders in the US and Israel should have an opportunity to ameliorate the rift.

A long-term Israeli strategy must consider the positions and values of groups that are less supportive, demographic changes in American society, and the challenge of stopping the anti-Israel poisoning of students who will be assuming elected and appointed positions in the next decades. A long-term strategy must lead to repairing relations with moderate Democrats and American Jews, reaching minorities, and curbing the Palestinian and Muslim delegitimization and dehumanization of Israel that is rampant on American university campuses.

NOTES

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