

American attitudes on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(October 2016)

Shibley Telhami
Principal Investigator*

A survey sponsored by
University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll
fielded by Nielsen Scarborough

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted October 5-14, 2016 with a panel consisting of a probability-based representative sample. The panel was recruited by Nielsen Scarborough from its larger probability-based national panel, which was recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households provided by Survey Sampling International. A total of 1528 panelists completed the survey. Responses were weighted by age, gender, income, education, race, and geographic region using benchmarks from the U.S. Census. The survey was also weighted by partisan identification. The margin of error is 2.5%

Valuable assistance was provided by Neil Schwartz, Scott Willoth, and Jordan Evangelista from Nielsen Scarborough. Brittany Kyser, Rachel Slattery, and Anne Peckham were particularly helpful.

Note: Percentages may not always add to one-hundred due to rounding.

*The October 2016 data is from a larger University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll with Shibley Telhami and Stella Rouse as principal investigators.

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Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted November 18-23, 2016 with a panel consisting of a probability-based representative sample. The panel was recruited by Nielsen Scarborough from its larger probability-based national panel, which was recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households provided by Survey Sampling International. A total of 1,042 panelists completed the survey. Responses were weighted by age, gender, income, education, race, and geographic region using benchmarks from the U.S. Census. The survey was also weighted by partisan identification. The margin of error is 3.04%

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Key Findings

President Obama and the United Nations

1. Pluralities of the American public support Obama Administration action at the United Nations on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict before leaving office.

- A plurality of Americans (46%) say that they either strongly or somewhat support the Obama administration backing or sponsoring a United Nations resolution that outlines the parameters for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before Obama leaves office. A quarter of Americans neither oppose nor support this resolution, while 27% either strongly or somewhat oppose it.
- Democrats are far more likely than both Republicans and Independents to support this resolution. Seventy percent of Democrats support it compared to 22% of Republicans and 37% of Independents.
- On the issue of President Obama supporting or sponsoring a United Nations resolution to end Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank before he leaves office, a plurality of Americans (40%) either strongly or somewhat support this. Twenty-three percent of Americans neither oppose nor support and 33% either strongly or somewhat oppose this resolution.
- Democrats are significantly more likely than both Republicans and Independents to back President Obama's support or sponsorship for a United Nations resolution to end Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank before he leaves office. Sixty-five percent of Democrats either strongly or somewhat support this whereas only 16% of Republicans and 28% of Independents do. In contrast, Republicans are more than five times as likely to either strongly or somewhat oppose this (57%) as Democrats (11%).

President-Elect Trump and the Israeli-Palestinian Issue

2. Most Americans want President Trump to lean towards neither side in mediating the Israel-Palestinian conflict, but most expect him to lean toward Israel.

- Most Americans want the new Trump administration to be even handed on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, with 57% saying that he should lean toward neither Israel nor the Palestinians in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, when asked what they believe the new Trump administration will in fact do, most Americans said that they believed he would not be even handed and would instead lean toward Israel (57%).

- Across party lines, there are significant differences in what side Americans believe the new Trump administration should lean in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A majority of Republicans believe that the new administration should lean toward Israel (56%), which is more than three times the amount of Democrats (17%) and almost double the size of Independents who say this (29%). A majority of both Democrats and Independents believe that it should lean toward neither side with 69% and 66% respectively. Forty-two percent of Republicans believe that it should lean toward neither side and less than one percent of Republicans believe that the new administration should lean toward the Palestinians.
- When asked what they believe the new Trump administration will in fact do, the differences in numbers are not as great. Sixty-two percent of Republicans believe that it will lean toward Israel and 55% of Democrats and 46% of Independents believe that this is what the new administration will in fact do. Independents are more likely to say that the new administration will in fact lean toward neither side (42%) with 35% of Republicans and 27% of Democrats believing this.

Reaction of the United States to Israeli Settlements

- 3. The American polarization on how to react to Israeli settlements has expanded over the past two years as 60% of Democrats now support imposing economic sanctions or more serious action.**
- Americans continue to be highly polarized along party lines on imposing some economic sanctions or taking more serious action on Israeli settlements but the gap has widened over the past year. In November 2016, a majority of Democrats (60%) supported imposing some economic sanctions or taking more serious action compared with 49% in November 2015. Looking at Republicans over these years, 31% supported imposing sanctions and taking more serious actions in November 2016 and 26% supported this in November 2015.
 - In November 2016, when asked how they believed the U.S. should react to new settlements, a majority of Americans (52%) supported the U.S. doing nothing or limiting opposition to words. Republicans and Independents were more likely to agree with this (68% and 54% respectively) than most Americans and Democrats were less likely (37%).
 - Over the past year, the support for imposing economic sanctions and taking more serious measures has gone up overall. In November 2015, 37% of Americans supported this compared to 46% November 2016.

UN Security Council and the Establishment of a Palestinian State

- 4. Overall, Americans supporting a U.S. veto of a UN resolution on Palestinian statehood remain a minority (31%), including 51% of Republicans but only 16% of Democrats.**
- When asked what they think the U.S. should do as a member of the UN Security Council if the UN considers a plan to endorse the establishment of a Palestinian state, 32% say that the U.S. should abstain from voting, 31% say that the U.S. should vote against endorsing the establishment of a Palestinian state, and 34% believe the U.S. should vote in favor of endorsing the establishment of a Palestinian state.
- Independents are more than twice as likely (59%) than both Republicans and Democrats to think that the U.S. should abstain from voting (29% for both). A majority of Republicans (51%) think that the U.S. should vote against endorsing the establishment of a Palestinian state and a majority of Democrats (51%) think the U.S. should vote in favor of endorsing the establishment of a Palestinian state.
- Compared with last year (November 2015), the percentage of Democrats who support the establishment of a Palestinian state has increased from 39% to 51%. In addition, the number of Democrats who believe the U.S. should abstain from voting has decreased from 42% to 29%. For Republicans, there has been a decrease in support for abstaining from voting, which dropped from 37% to 29% in the past year. The number of Republicans who think the U.S. should vote against endorsing the establishment of a Palestinian state increased from 43% to 51%.

Israeli Influence on American Politics and Policies

- 5. Americans remain highly divided with 55% of Democrats saying Israel has too much influence compared with 54% of Republicans who say that Israeli influence is at the right level.**
- Overall, 44% of Americans say that the Israeli government has about the right level of influence, 39% say it has too much influence, and 15% say it has too little influence.
- When broken down by party, more than half of Democrats believe that Israel has too much influence (55%) and more than half of Republicans believe that it has about the right level (54%). Republicans are evenly split in their opinion on whether Israel has too little or too much influence with 22% believing it has too much and 22% believing it has too little influence.

- Compared to one year ago, the number of Republicans who agree that Israeli influence is at about the right level slightly increased from 52% to 54%. For Democrats, the percentage who agree that Israel has too much influence increased from 49% to 55%.

Is Israel an Ally or a Burden to the United States?

6. Most Americans, 76%, across party lines, agree that Israel is a strategic asset to the U.S. At the same time, a majority of Democrats (55%), say that Israel is also a burden.

- A large majority of Americans (76%) agree that Israel is an important ally to the United States as it provides essential military and intelligence cooperation and plays a regional role that's helpful to American interests.
- A majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents agree that Israel is an important ally to the United States, however, Republicans (85%) are more likely than both Democrats (70%) and Independents (68%) to agree with this. Democrats and Independents (26% for both) are more than twice as likely as Republicans to disagree with this statement.
- Americans who are 55 years of age or older are more likely to say that Israel is an important ally to the United States (86%). A majority of 18 to 34 year olds and 35 to 54 year olds also feel this way with 70% and 71% respectively.
- Slightly more than half of Americans (54%) disagree with the concept of Israel being a burden to the U.S. as Israel's actions in the region generate hostility toward the United States in Arab and Muslim-majority countries whereas 40% of Americans feel this way.
- Across party lines, significantly more Republicans disagree with this (71%) compared to Democrats (39%) and Independents (52%). Less than a quarter of Republicans agree that Israel is a burden (24%) whereas more than half of Democrats do (55%). Just about more than half of Independents (52%) disagree that Israel is a burden and 41% agree that it is.
- Sixty-one percent of people who are 55 years of age or older disagree that Israel is a burden to the U.S. and 31% agree that it is a burden. More than half of 35 to 54 year olds disagree with this (51%) and slightly less than half of 18 to 34 year olds do (49%).