



ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Sustained Support for 2 States

By Brian Katulis, Peter Juul and John Halpin

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Israelis and Palestinians appear farther away from a negotiated settlement to their decadeslong conflict than at any point since the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993.¹ President Donald Trump discarded 2 1/2 decades of bipartisan policy consensus on a two-state solution and effectively backed the demands of the Israeli government, which may include annexation of parts of the West Bank and less than full statehood for the Palestinians.²

Views of American voters

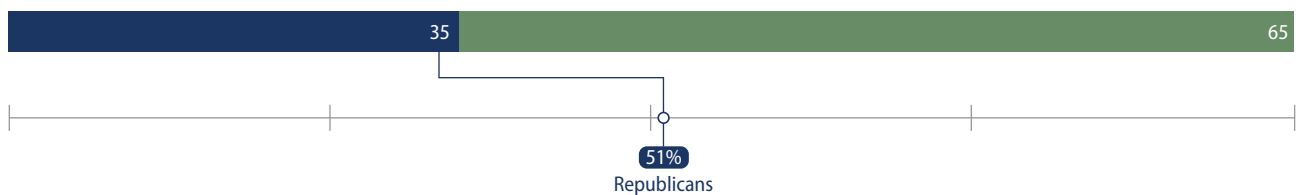
Voters prefer U.S. role as fair broker rather than making U.S. support contingent on Israeli (mis)behavior

Share of respondents, by political affiliation and generation

Q. "For each pair, please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right." (Split sample tests below)

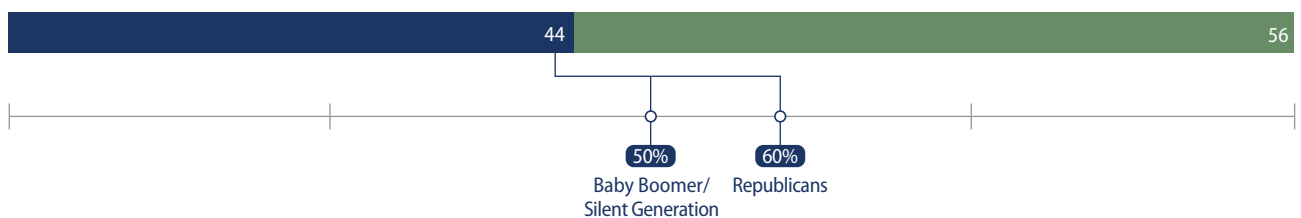
The United States should always side with Israel during peace negotiations, because Israel is our democratic ally and needs our support against a world that isolates them.

The United States should act as a fair and impartial broker in order to achieve a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.



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The U.S. should not provide unrestricted financial and military assistance to the Israeli government if it continues to violate U.S. policy on settlement expansion in the West Bank.



Source: Center for American Progress and GBAO, "Foreign Policy Research – Phase III" (Washington: 2019), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/07/29142002/FP-condensed.pdf>.

American voters remain widely supportive of Israel but have become more willing to exert U.S. leverage on the country to achieve a two-state solution to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians.

- **Widespread public support for Israel but emerging generation gaps.** More than 6 in 10, or 61 percent of, Americans consider Israel mostly a friend, including nearly three-quarters—72 percent—of Republicans and more than half of Democrats and independents, at 53 percent and 52 percent, respectively. Millennials and those in Generation Z are less likely to view Israel as mostly a friend, with slightly more than 4 in 10, or 43 percent, expressing this attitude compared with almost two-thirds (62 percent) of Generation X and nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation.
- **Support for America to act as a fair broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** Almost two-thirds—65 percent—of American voters say the United States should act as a fair and impartial broker to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians rather than always siding with Israel in peace talks. More than three-quarters (78 percent) of Democrats and two-thirds (69 percent) of independents agree the United States should be a fair broker, as do almost half (49 percent) of Republicans.
- **Willingness to condition aid to Israel on Israeli compliance with U.S. policy toward settlements.** A majority—56 percent—of American voters say that the United States should not give unconditional financial and military assistance to Israel if the Israeli government continues to violate American policy on settlement expansion or West Bank annexation, rather than always siding with Israel. Nearly three-quarters, or 71 percent, of Democrats and a majority, or 55 percent, of independents support conditioning aid, while 6 in 10 (60 percent) Republicans say the United States should always side with Israel.
- **Generational divides on U.S. policy on Israel among Republicans, policy consensus among Democrats.** Strong majorities of Millennial and Generation Z Republicans say that the United States should be a fair broker (59 percent) and be willing to limit aid to Israel (61 percent), while majorities of Generation X, Baby Boomer, and Silent Generation Republicans say that the United States should always support Israel. This generational divide on Israel among Republicans is not present among Democrats. At least 7 in 10—70 percent of Millennials, Generation Z, Baby Boomers, and Silent Generation—Democrats across generations say that the United States should condition aid. Meanwhile, at least three-quarters—74 percent of Baby Boomers and Silent Generation—of Democrats across generations say that the United States should be a fair broker.
- **Support for U.S. military action if Iran attacks Israel.** Nearly 6 in 10—58 percent—American voters support U.S. military retaliation against Iran if Tehran or its proxies attack Israel. While majorities of independents and Republicans support American military action in this scenario, at 61 percent and 80 percent, respectively, a plurality—43 percent—of Democrats oppose it.

The progressive policy alternative

- **Reaffirm two states as the U.S. policy goal.** An approach pushing for two states for two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, remains consistent with America's interests and values. President Trump's one-sided policy toward Israel and the Palestinians is out of step with the majority of the Americans on the issue.
- **Condition U.S. aid to Israel based on Israel's policy moves.** American voters remain broadly supportive of Israel but want the United States to be a fair broker in peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians—not always to back Israel no matter what. The Israeli government should know that it can expect to receive criticism and possible policy shifts by the United States if it persists in violating American policy on settlements or if it takes extreme measures such as annexing parts of the West Bank.
- **Revive assistance to the Palestinians.** President Trump's decision to halt American aid to the Palestinian people should be reversed, while new and innovative programs should be devised that can support peace.

President Trump's approach to Israel wins support among Republicans but few other voters. By and large, voters see Israel positively but want the United States to be a fair broker between it and the Palestinians—and use available diplomatic leverage if necessary to achieve a two-state outcome.

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This information is based on a national poll of 1,200 registered voters conducted July 10 to 14, 2019, by the Center for American Progress and GBAO. It is also informed by a series of focus groups, qualitative interviews, and a national poll of 2,000 registered voters conducted February 25 to March 3, 2019. Polling results are on file with the authors.

Endnotes

¹ For further reading on this topic, see Mara Rudman and Brian Katulis, "A Practical Plan on the Israeli-Palestinian Front" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2016/12/21/295552/a-practical-plan-on-the-israeli-palestinian-front/>; Brian Katulis and Dan Arbell, "Strengthening the Foundations of U.S.-Israel Ties at a Time of Change in the Middle East" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2015), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2015/04/22/111581/strengthening-the-foundations-of-u-s-israel-ties-at-a-time-of-change-in-the-middle-east/>.

² David M. Halbfinger, "Netanyahu, Facing Tough Israel Election, Pledges to Annex a Third of West Bank," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2019, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/10/world/middleeast/netanyahu-israel-west-bank.html>.