

## Americans still support Israel, but views vary by age and race, poll finds

By Gram Slattery

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It's no secret that Americans tend to support Israel in its decades-long conflict with Hamas. But according to a new poll from the Pew Research Center, this support is less monolithic than one might think.

How one views Israel in the recent Gaza conflict depends largely on race, age, and political affiliation, the poll indicates. While 40 percent of Americans overall see the Palestinian militant group as the prime instigator of the current violence versus 19 percent who blame the Israelis, this gap is smaller – and even nonexistent – within certain demographic groups.

Consider differences among age groups: Among Americans 65 or older, the fault lies with Hamas, as 53 percent of them blame the militant group for the current violence, while only 15 percent blame Israel. Among Americans ages 18 through 29, however, 29 percent put Israel at fault, versus 18 percent who put the blame on Hamas.

Why are Millennials less supportive of Israeli policy? According to Alec Tyson, a senior researcher at Pew, the answer may have to do with religion, as young people are less likely to be members of denominations that tend to support Israel.

“For age, we know that younger people are much more likely to be religiously unaffiliated,” he says. “And white evangelical Protestants are really bolstering American support for Israel.”

Similar divides fall along racial and ethnic lines: While 47 percent of whites see Hamas as the instigator and 14 percent blame Israelis, 35 percent of Hispanics side with the Palestinian group on this issue, versus 20 percent with Israel. And blacks were split on the question, with 27 percent faulting the Israelis and 25 percent faulting the Palestinians.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, these minority groups – like Millennials writ large – are much less likely to belong to pro-Israel evangelical denominations.

“I think to a certain extent that the African-American and Latino difference we now see is again due to white Evangelicals being more supportive of Israel,” Mr. Tyson says.

Politics also plays a significant role in one's views, according to the report: Seventy percent of conservative Republicans blame the conflict on Hamas, versus 6 percent who place the blame on Israel. Liberal Democrats, by contrast, are split, with 30 percent falling into each category.

(In many cases, large portions of poll respondents fell into a third category – placing the blame with both Israelis and Palestinians or with neither group, or saying they didn't know.)

When asked about the appropriateness of the Israeli reaction to the conflict – rather than about the nation's culpability in starting it – the demographic splits were less pronounced.

On the whole, 35 percent of Americans believe Israel has responded appropriately to the conflict, and 15 percent say the nation has not gone far enough. Twenty-five percent, on the other hand, say Israel has overreacted.

Hispanics and Blacks again were less sympathetic to Israeli policy, with 35 and 36 percent, respectively, saying the nation had overreacted, while only 22 percent of whites shared this view.

Age-wise, 29 percent of 18-to-30-year-olds said Israel acted disproportionately, versus 22 percent of persons over 50 who agreed with this outlook.

Whether such divisions affect US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian situation is yet to be seen, Tyson says.

While younger Americans are much more critical of Israeli policy, the pollsters at Pew are unsure if Millennials will shift their politics as they grow older – or if this generation represents the first wave of increased skepticism among Americans toward Israel.

The following could bode well for pro-Israel advocates: According to a 2010 census by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, evangelicalism grew by 12 percent in the previous decade.

At the same time, the percentage of nonwhite Americans is increasing rapidly, and the US Census Bureau predicts that whites – who disproportionately support Israeli policy – will be a minority by 2043.

Some Middle East experts and policy-based organizations have interpreted this demographic shift as a potential source of increased sympathy toward Palestinians in US policy. Among them is Leon Hadar, an analyst at Wikistrat and formerly a research fellow at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, as well as the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a group in New York that focuses on improving intercultural relations.

Other groups, however, such as the Institute for National Security Studies based in Israel, argue that US Latinos' views toward Israel are more supportive than might be expected – given their average youth and widespread Democratic affiliation.

The recent Pew poll comes on the heels of a related survey conducted by the research group earlier in July, which calculated that American sympathy for Israel has grown modestly in the past few decades.

According to that poll, 51 percent of Americans now sympathize more with Israel than with the Palestinians, up from 45 percent in 1978. That increase is due entirely to changing sentiment within the GOP, the report says, as the portion of Republicans sympathizing more with Israelis jumped from 49 to 73 percent over that 36-year period.

Overall, sympathy for Palestinians has remained low and stagnant, according to that poll, with only 14 percent of Americans in both 1978 and 2014 saying they have more sympathy for the Palestinians than for Israel.