

Support for Israel strong among older white evangelicals in U.S.

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Twelve Republican senators sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week, asking to rescind the \$1 million grants the State Department gives to “anti-Israel NGOs.”

The Republican senators’ staunch support for Israel is not surprising, according to a new Pew Research survey of U.S. attitudes toward Israel and Palestine.

Republicans and those who lean toward the Republican Party express far more positive views of the Israeli people and its government than do Democrats—78 percent of Republicans view Israeli people positively compared with 60 percent of Democrats.

But white evangelicals, most of whom are Republicans, have the strongest views of Israelis. A whopping 86 percent of white evangelicals said they felt warmly toward Israelis—more than any other Christian group. By comparison, only 58 percent of Black Protestants felt warmly toward Israelis.

Overall, the survey of 10,441 U.S. adults, taken in March, found two-thirds of Americans express at least a somewhat favorable view of the Israeli people. But it also found a modest warming to Palestinians among younger Americans, and a general lack of familiarity and support for the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement, which aims to press Israel to change its policies toward the Palestinians.

Support rooted in white evangelicals' faith

As with so many other political issues—including abortion, immigration, race and gun control—white evangelicals stand out from other religious groups in their views. When it comes to Israel, those views appear firmly rooted in their faith.

The survey found 70 percent of white evangelicals believe God gave the land of Israel to the Jewish people. By comparison, only 32 percent of U.S. Jews felt God gave Israel to the Jewish people, according to a 2020 Pew survey, which asked a similar (but not identical) question.

“It’s important to their theological narrative,” said Arielle Levites, research assistant professor at George Washington University, referring to white evangelicals. “It’s important to their own sense of the arc of history.”

Many evangelicals view the creation of Israel in 1948 as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy that would usher in Jesus’ return, although the survey did not ask about this.

It’s perhaps not surprising evangelicals scored lowest in their estimation of Palestinians (37 percent), even as some Palestinians are fellow Christians (the majority are Muslim).

White evangelicals are also the religious group most likely to express a very or somewhat favorable view of the Israeli government (68 percent), compared with Catholics (50 percent), white Protestants who are not evangelical (51 percent), Black Protestants (43 percent) and religiously unaffiliated people (31 percent). The survey did not have sufficient respondents from Jewish, Muslim or other faith traditions to report on their responses.

A generational divide emerging

The survey, the second of its kind since 2019, also found a growing generational divide, with younger Americans feeling much warmer toward Palestinians. Americans age 30 and younger view Palestinians slightly more favorably than Israelis (61 percent vs. 56 percent).

Overall 67 percent of Americans expressed favorable views of Israelis and 52 percent expressed favorable views of Palestinians.

That generational change in U.S. attitudes toward Israel was reflected in another survey, commissioned by University of North Carolina at Pembroke researchers and carried out by Barna Group. That 2021 survey found younger evangelicals are much less supportive of Israel than older evangelicals. Support for Israel among young evangelicals plunged from 75 percent to 34 percent between 2018 and 2021.

“Clearly there’s more favorable views of Palestinians among younger people,” said Ariela Keysar, associate research professor at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. “I see it as a kind of generational memory.

“Older people see Israel pre-1948, before Israel was established as a democracy surrounded by hostile Arab countries. Younger people are shaped by current events. Many encounter anti-Israel views on campus. They encounter protests. Older people have not been exposed to that.”

BDS movement not gaining ground

Perhaps most surprising in the survey, 84 percent of Americans said they have heard “not much” or “nothing at all” about the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement.

The movement, launched by Palestinian groups in 2005, states that “Israel

is occupying and colonizing Palestinian land, discriminating against Palestinian citizens of Israel and denying Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homes.”

Americans, both Democrats and Republicans, young and old, and of various Christian persuasions had relatively uniform views on the movement—that is, they professed ignorance.

The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement “gets a lot of heat among a very small percentage of people,” said Ari Y. Kelman, associate professor of education and Jewish studies at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education. “It’s not galvanizing people as an organizational strategy, like divestment from South Africa managed to do for a much broader swath of the population.”

Overall, 5 percent of Americans say they support the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel.

Asked about possible outcomes for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the survey found 35 percent of Americans favored a two-state solution, in which the land would be split between Israelis and Palestinians, and 27 percent favored a one-state solution. More than a third—37 percent—said they weren’t sure what the solution to the conflict should be.

Wide partisan and age gaps in views of Israeli and Palestinian people

% of U.S. adults who have a favorable view of the ...

	Israeli people			Palestinian people		
	NET			NET		
	Favorable	Very	Somewhat	Favorable	Very	Somewhat
	%	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. adults	67	20	47	52	9	43
Republican/lean Rep.	78	32	47	37	5	32
Democrat/lean Dem.	60	11	49	64	12	52
Ages 18-29	56	13	43	61	16	45
30-49	65	16	49	55	8	46
50-64	68	21	47	45	7	38
65+	78	30	48	47	7	40
Protestant	74	28	46	46	7	39
White evangelical	86	42	44	37	5	32
White, not evangelical	70	21	49	47	6	41
Black Protestant	58	13	44	53	11	42
Catholic	67	19	48	50	9	41
Religiously unaffiliated	58	10	48	59	10	49
Atheist/agnostic	60	11	49	65	12	53
Nothing in particular	56	9	47	56	10	46

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 7-13, 2022, among U.S. adults.

"Modest Warming in U.S. Views on Israel and Palestinians"

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The margin of error for the full survey of 10,441 respondents was plus or

minus 1.5 percentage points.