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Egypt's Public Backs Israeli-Palestinian Compromise, Wants Good Ties with United States

by [David Pollock](#)

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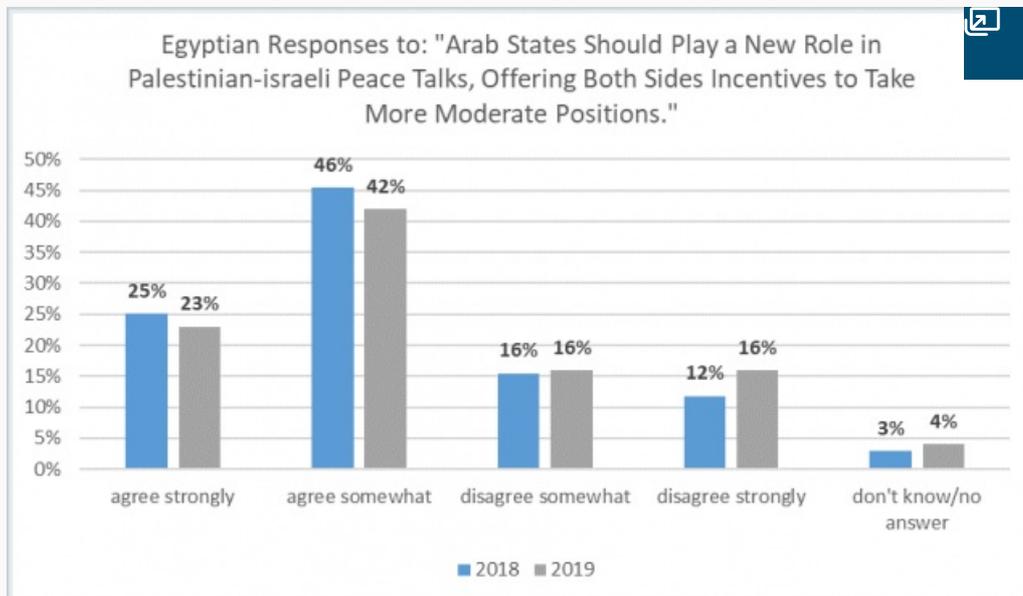
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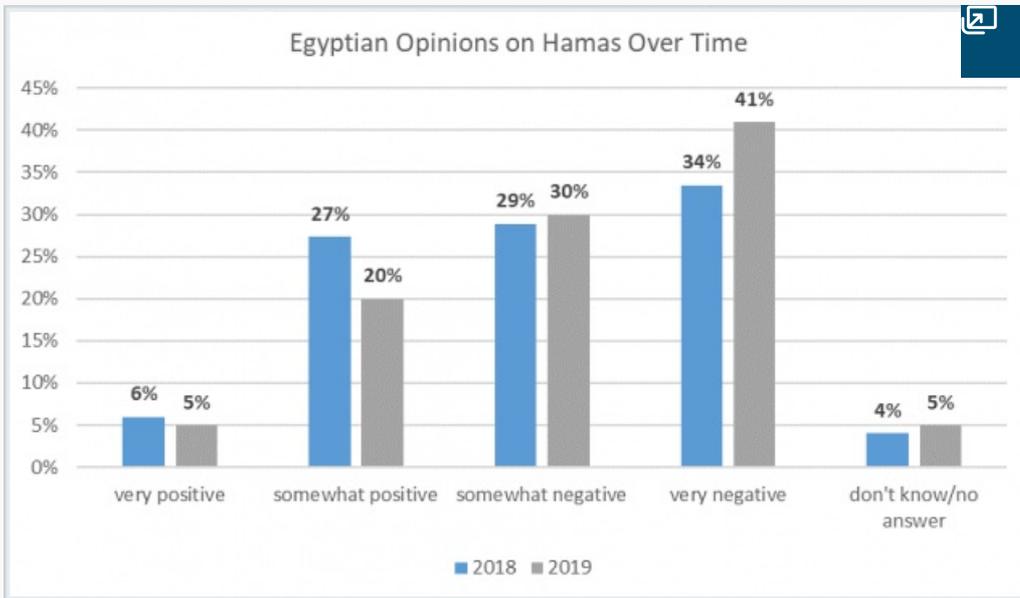


Brief Analysis

As Cairo prepares to host an urgent Arab League meeting this weekend, called to address the new U.S. Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, results from a rare new Egyptian public opinion poll show two-thirds support “incentives for both sides [Israelis and Palestinians] to take more moderate positions.” And a narrower majority, among the highest in any Arab state surveyed, also say that good relations with the [United States](#) are important for their country. Both numbers are have changed little over the [past year](#). These findings, from an independent and highly credible professional commercial pollster, are sharply at odds with the stereotypes of Egyptian public opinion as overwhelmingly anti-American and anti-Israeli.

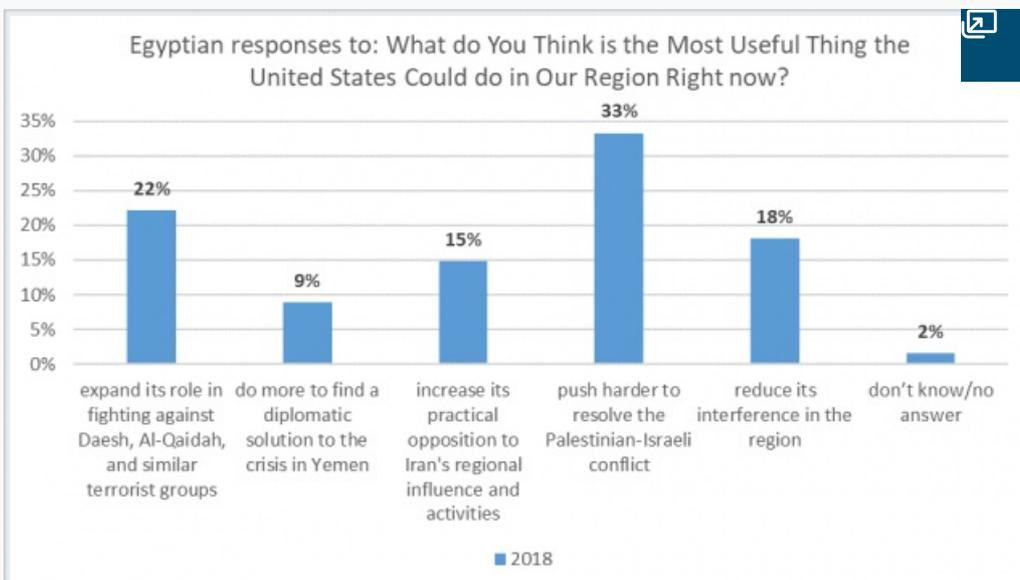


[This Egyptian popular support for some kind of Palestinian-Israeli](#) compromise—if not for the specific one outlined in Washington this week—tracks with their attitudes toward the Palestinian Hamas movement, which rejects peace with Israel. Seventy-one percent of Egyptians voice a negative opinion of Hamas, up from 63% a year ago. It is also in line with the Egyptian public’s overwhelming desire to avoid entanglement in foreign conflicts. Eight-four percent agree with this statement: “Right now internal political and economic reform is more important for our country than any foreign policy issue, so we should stay out of any wars outside our borders.”



By comparison with other countries, the United States stands out as relatively valued by the Egyptian public. Fifty-four percent of respondents say good ties with Washington are important to Egypt, whereas just 40% say the same about Russia. Both numbers are statistically unchanged since late 2018. And regarding two major Arab countries, even lower proportions of Egyptians value good bilateral relations: 33% for Iraq and a mere 20% for Syria.

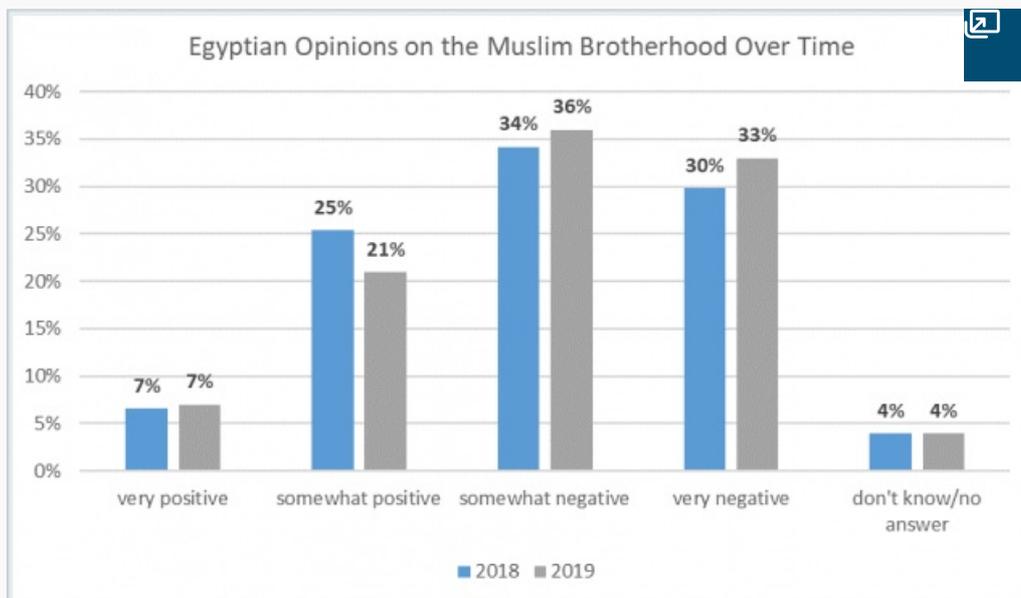
Asked about specific preferences for U.S. policy, brokering an Israeli-Palestinian deal has historically led the list in Egyptian public opinion. In the November 2018 poll, a plurality (33%) of Egyptians picked that option, ahead of countering Daesh, Iran, the Houthis in Yemen, or simply “reducing its interference in the region.” But in the latest poll, when the Israeli-Palestinian response option was deliberately omitted from the list, half of Egyptians said the U.S. should lower or even end its regional engagement.



However, all this does not imply that Egyptians approve of U.S. President Trump’s policies overall, or that they aspire to warmer relations with their Jewish neighbors. On the contrary; a mere 6%, virtually unchanged over the past year, express a favorable opinion of Trump’s policies. (In contrast, 30% voice some approval for Chinese President Xi’s policies, although an atypically high 15% admit they don’t know enough about him.) And a truly minuscule proportion, 4%, agree with this assertion: “We should show more respect to the world’s Jews, and improve our relations with them.”

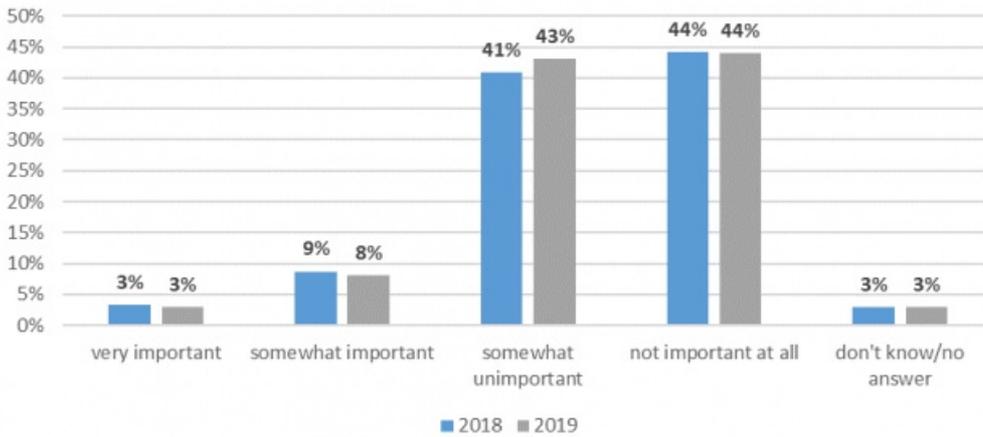
The credibility of these responses is enhanced by the finding that many Egyptian surveyed are willing to oppose the official line on some very sensitive domestic issues. Half or more say their government is doing “too little” in each one of the following areas: reducing the level of corruption in our economic and political life, dealing with our growing economic problems and people’s daily hardships, and sharing the burden of taxes and other obligations to the government in a fair manner.

Even more controversial, nearly 30% of the public voice a positive view of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is outlawed as a “terrorist organization” by Egypt’s own government. And despite that government’s appeal for religious reform, only one-fifth of Egyptians agree with this proposition: “We should listen to those among us who are trying to interpret Islam in a more moderate, tolerant, and modern direction.” These numbers, too, remain unchanged over the past year.



At the same time, there is one set of issues on which the Egyptian public continues to agree wholeheartedly with its government’s position: **opposition to Iran**, and to its proxies in the region. Eighty-seven percent say it is not important for Egypt to have good relations with Iran. Ninety percent have a negative opinion of Iran’s Ayatollah Khamenei. And the same extraordinarily high percentage express an unfavorable view of Hezbollah, Iran’s major ally in Lebanon and around the region.

Egyptian Responses To: "No Matter Whether your Opinion About Iran is Positive or Negative, How Important do you Think it is For us to Have Good Relations With Them"



Even more, 94%, voiced a negative view of Iran’s ally in Yemen, the Houthis, when that question was last asked in November 2018. These figures suggest that Egyptian-U.S. cooperation against Iran’s regional influence stands on a very firm ground of popular approval inside Egypt, as in all other Arab countries polled except Lebanon.

These findings are from a face-to-face interview survey, conducted by a widely respected and experienced regional commercial firm, among a representative national sample of 1,000 Egyptian citizens in November 2019. Respondents were selected at random according to standard geographic probability sampling methods, with strict quality controls and assurances of confidentiality. The author personally traveled to the region to consult with the project managers during the fieldwork period, in order to maintain the highest possible standards of professional integrity and objectivity. Additional methodological details, including demographics, full questionnaire and marginal results, and sampling protocols and procedures, are readily available on request. ❖



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