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Fikra Forum

Half of Egyptians Value U.S. Ties, But Few Want Normalization with Israel

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Egyptians show support for compromise with Qatar but not with Iran or its proxies.

Arare Egyptian public opinion poll completed in November, commissioned by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and conducted by a regional commercial firm, shows that Egyptians remain largely resistant to warming ties with Israel. At the same time, roughly half place importance on their country's relations with both China and the United States, while only small minorities feel similarly about relations with Turkey or Iran.

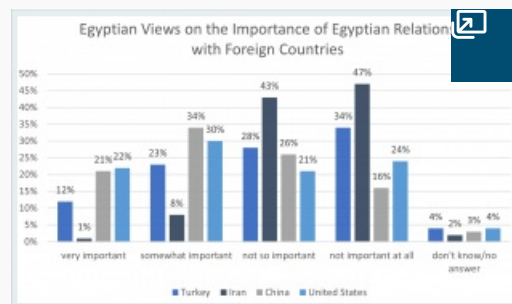
Half of Egyptian Public Still Call U.S. Ties "Important," Far Ahead of Turkey and Iran But Just Behind China

A solid majority of Egyptians (71%) did not want to see Trump reelected, and the Egyptian public still holds relations with the United States in relatively high regard. As in last year's poll, just over half (52%) say good ties with Washington are important for Egypt. Nonetheless, Egyptians now place slightly more importance (55%) on their relations with Beijing.

In sharp contrast, only 35% of Egyptians call good relations with Ankara even "somewhat important" for their own country. Relations with Iran are seen as even less desirable, with just 9% of Egyptians ranking them as even somewhat important.

In the context of U.S. policy in the region, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict still ranks highest among Egyptians, unlike

among Gulf Arabs today. When asked about their top priority for U.S. Middle East policy, more than a third of Egyptians (36%) now say "pushing for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." But nearly as many (26%) pick "finding a diplomatic settlement for the wars in Yemen and Libya." The option of "working to contain Iran's influence and activities" came in third (18%). Surprisingly, despite Egypt's high poverty rate, a mere 14% of respondents picked "providing more economic aid and investment to Arab countries."



Public Wants Rapprochement with Qatar, But Not with Iran and Its Proxies

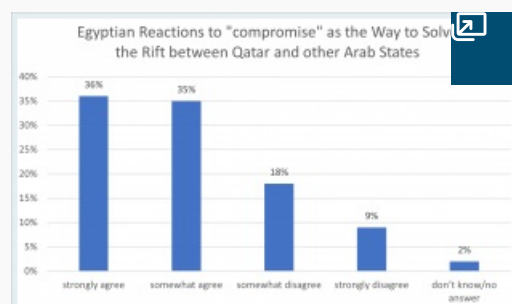
The announcement of a reconciliation deal with Qatar is likely popular with the Egyptian public. Even before the deal was announced, three-quarters of Egyptians agreed with the statement, “the way to solve our disputes with Qatar is for both sides to compromise in order to reach an agreement,” continuing a trend from earlier polls.

In contrast, Egyptians still stand with their government in opposition to Iran and its proxies in the region. When asked about the end of the UN arms embargo on Iran this month, the large majority of respondents (74%) see it as negative, while a minority (10%) view it as positive.

Furthermore, Iran's proxies in the region receive even more unfavorable reviews. Remarkably, 96% of Egyptians voice a negative opinion of Hezbollah, and an equal amount express a negative view of Iran’s ally in Yemen, the Houthis.

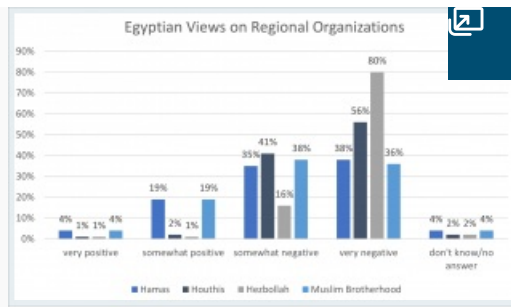
Three-Fourths Oppose Both Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood

The Egyptian public still falls in line with the attitude of their government toward the Palestinian Hamas movement, which controls Gaza on Egypt’s border and rejects peace with Israel. Seventy-three percent of Egyptians voice a negative opinion of Hamas, similar to the 71% disapproval voiced a year ago. It is likely that this attitude reflects the Egyptian public’s overwhelming desire to avoid involvement in foreign conflicts.



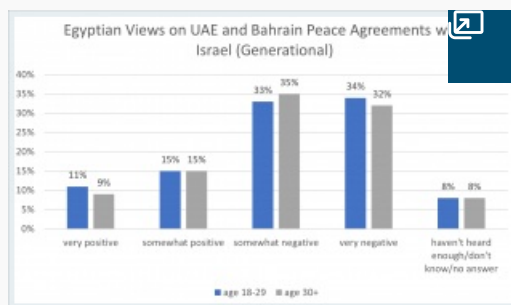
Similarly, the recent survey showed a modest decline in support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which Egypt’s own government has outlawed as a “terrorist organization.” With a drop of seven points from last year’s poll, only 23% of respondents now view the Muslim Brotherhood positively.

Sectarian division between Muslims and Egypt’s 10% Christian minority on this issue is also clear. While a quarter of the Egyptian Muslims polled view the Muslim Brotherhood positively, none of the Egyptian Christians surveyed held this attitude.



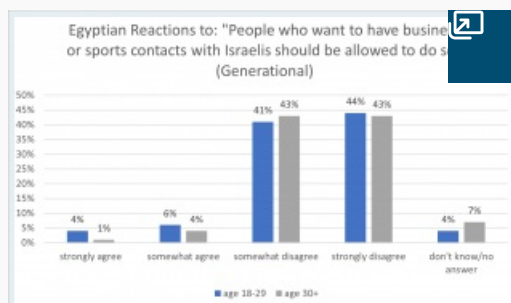
Only One-Fourth of Egyptians Support the Abraham Accords with Israel

Though Egypt was the first Arab country to establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel, the findings of the current survey demonstrate wide dissatisfaction with the recent peace agreements with Israel by the UAE and Bahrain—or with the prospect of increased Egyptian contact with Israelis. Only a quarter of the Egyptians polled view those peace agreements as positive, while the majority (67%) reject the agreements.



Notably, generational differences on peace agreements with Israel are not statistically significant. Egyptian attitudes toward peace with Israel show that the public is not in line with some of the policies of its own government, which has engaged in intensive energy and security relations with Israel since the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978. This helps explain why this cooperation is largely hidden from public view, while Egypt’s controlled media generally maintain their hostility to Israel.

In the same vein, there is also very little popular support for further Egyptian “normalization” with Israel. A mere 8% agree that “people who want to have business or sports contacts with Israelis should be allowed to do so.” As in the June 2020 poll, half of the Egyptian public “strongly disagree” with that assertion.



Egyptians Divided on Protests Against Corruption

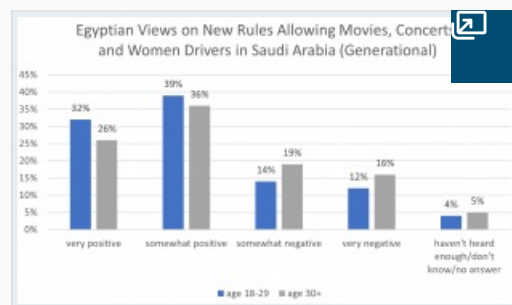
A sensitive domestic issue is the question of domestic corruption and protest. While not asked directly about protests in Egypt, half (52%) of respondents did report viewing "the anti-corruption street protests in Lebanon, Iraq, and other Arab states" as positive, while around one-third perceived them as negative. Inside Egypt itself, however, the economy has demonstrated unexpected improvement this year and last, at least at the macro level. In contrast, burgeoning inflation and deteriorating economic performance after the 2011 mass protests probably increased

Egyptians' conviction that moving against the government would be harmful to their economy.

Narrow Generational Gaps on Political and Social Issues

Surprisingly, findings reveal neither significant generational nor sectarian attitudinal gaps among the Egyptian public, especially when it comes to Israel. There was no significant difference between the responses of adults under or over 30 years of age, or among Christians and Muslims, on such questions. On the Abraham Accords with Israel, 67% of Egyptians younger than 30 consider the deal to be at least “somewhat negative,” as do 68% of those over 30. And whereas attitudes toward the Jewish state are becoming more favorable among youths in the Gulf states, the current survey shows only a miniscule 10% of young adult Egyptians agreeing that “people who want to have business or sports contacts with Israelis should be allowed to do so.”

In another counterintuitive finding, Egyptian adults under and over 30 years of age express only modestly divergent views on social issues that might be seen as more appealing to youths. For example, the younger cohort expresses an approval rate (71%) only nine points higher than that of older respondents regarding “the new rules allowing movies, concerts, and women drivers in Saudi Arabia.”



Coronavirus Crisis Conspiracy Theories Persist Among Half the Public

Egyptian public opinion has been sharply divided over the spread of COVID-19. The recent survey, as in previous rounds, shows that many Egyptians blame outside actors for the spread of the disease: 43% agree that “the coronavirus is something our foreign enemies deliberately started.” Again, there is no significant generational or sectarian attitudinal gap among the Egyptian public regarding this issue.

Methodological Note

These findings are from a survey conducted October 17-November 9, 2020, by a highly reputable, independent, and apolitical regional commercial market research firm among a representative national sample of 1,000 Egyptian citizens. The poll comprised face-to-face interviews with a true random (geographic probability) sample of the total population, yielding credible results fully in line with the highest international professional standards

The statistical margin of error for such a sample is approximately 3%; for the generational subsamples, it is approximately 4.5%. Comprehensive methodological details, including sampling procedures, quality controls, complete questionnaire, and other pertinent information, are readily available upon request. ❖



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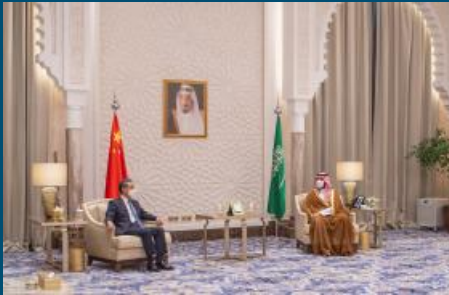
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