

Emiratis Split on Importance of World Powers, While Views on Abraham Accords Hold Steady

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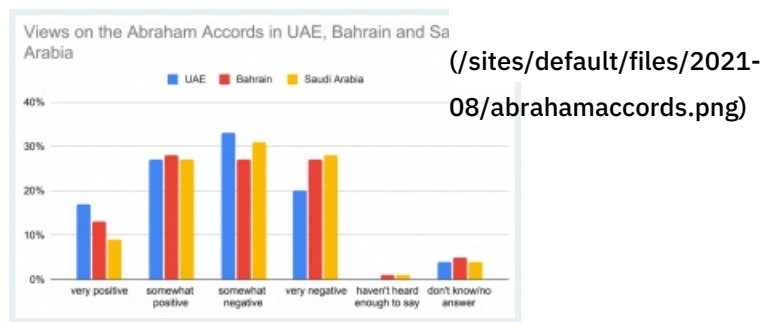
Brief Analysis

When polled, Emiratis demonstrate support for a renewed nuclear agreement with Iran, and opposition towards Islamist groups.

Leading the way with last year's Abraham Accords, the Emirati public's view of the new peace between the UAE and Israel has been an open question. According to Washington Institute polling conducted between June and July 2021, while a majority of Emiratis do not support the peace agreements, the percentage of those who hold positive views on these issues is holding steady, and in some cases increasing. More popular, however, is the potential for a renewed nuclear agreement between Iran and P5+1 countries. In contrast, views of the importance of relations with powers like the United States and China are split—with about half of respondents valuing relations with each, with larger majorities valuing relations with regional partners Egypt and Jordan.

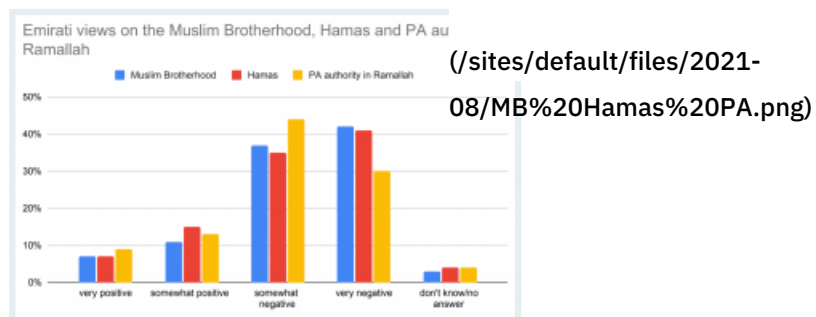
Emiratis More Likely than Saudis or Bahrainis to Support Abraham Accords

One of the notable questions after the May escalation between Israel and Hamas was how this might affect Arab publics' views of the still-recent Abraham Accords. When it comes to the Emirates, at least, the conflict appears to have had a negligible impact.



Neither the PA in Ramallah nor Hamas in Gaza are seen in particularly positive light, with both administrations viewed as 22% and 24% positive respectively. Moreover, positive views of Hamas actually decreased by eight percentage points since last November, and half of the 48% positive view polled in 2017. Notably, the plurality of Emiratis (41%) now see Hamas in a ‘very negative’ light—the most of any Gulf country polled. Moreover, there does seem to be a generational difference in attitudes towards Hamas. Support for Hamas among Emirati citizens below 30 drops by twelve percentage points—from 34% to 22%.

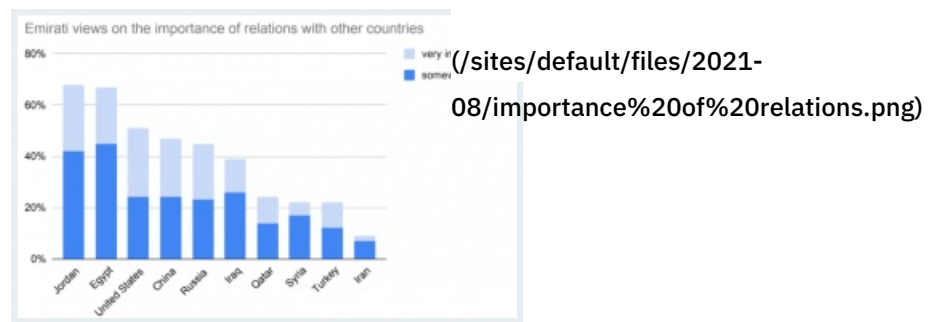
A decline in the opinion of Islamist groups is visible through the polling of support for the Muslim Brotherhood—a group officially banned in the UAE. Here, a decreasing trend in support also continues, from 31% in 2018 to 16% in the most recent polling.



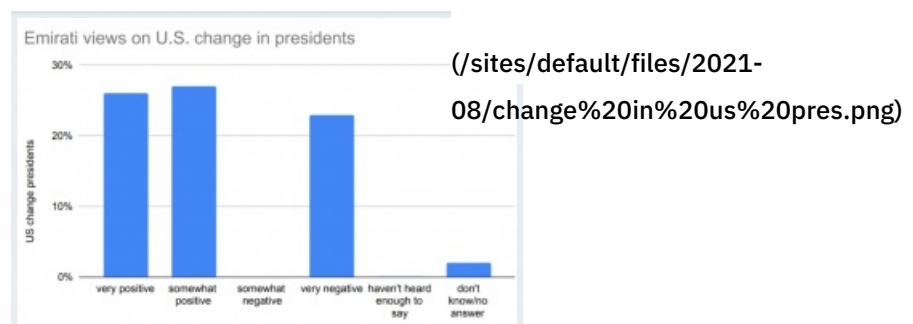
Likewise, Emiratis were the least likely of the Gulf countries polled to support Hamas’s launch of missile rockets into Israel during the May escalation between the two. In contrast to the 41% who supported this measure, there is similar support the peace agreements between Israel and Arab countries at 44%. Meanwhile, a little over a third (37%) support ‘business or sports contacts with Israelis’—a notable increase from the 14% who responded positively when polled a year ago in June 2020.

More Importance Placed on Regional Partners over Global Powers

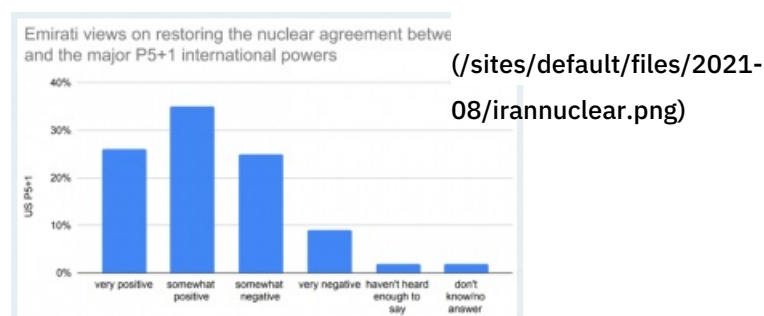
In terms of prioritizing relations, two thirds of Emiratis see relations with certain regional partners—namely Egypt and Jordan—as at least somewhat important. And while not quite as valued, 45% of Emiratis see relations with Iraq as important as well. In contrast, while the Emirati government has taken steps to normalize relations with Syria and the blockade against Qatar has ended, most Emiratis do not value relations with either country. About a quarter (23%) see relations with Syria as at least somewhat important, while 28% value relations with Qatar.



When it comes to great power competition between the United States and China, opinions on the importance of relations with these two countries remains are neck-and-neck but split among the Emirati public, with 51% and 47% of Emiratis respectively placing some importance on these relations. However, the change in administrations does not seem to have played a large role: the number of respondents who saw relations with the United States as important did not change substantially between the Trump and Biden administrations. And when polled, just a slim majority (53%) of Emiratis saw the change from Trump to Biden in a positive light.



That being said, more Emiratis are likely to support moving towards a nuclear agreement between Iran and the major powers, with 61% reporting that moving to restore the agreement is at least a somewhat positive development.



Domestic Reforms and Demographics

When it comes to focusing on economic reforms, most Emiratis are in strong agreement—74% agree that internal political and economic reform is more important than foreign policy issues, so “we should stay out of any wars outside of our borders.” However, most Emiratis are likewise glad that the country is not seeing protests along the lines of those in Lebanon and Iraq—though 23% would still disagree that it is a ‘good thing’ the UAE doesn’t have these kinds of street protests. Emiratis are also less likely to support ‘more moderate Islam’ than either Saudis or

Bahrainis. Just 33% of Emiratis do so compared to 39% of Saudis and 51% of Bahrainis. However, the Emirates' Shia minority are slightly more inclined to support such a proposal, with 42% agreeing with the proposal.

Yet there are generally notably few differences in opinion between the Emirates' Sunni majority and Shia minority responses. Where views can diverge is on questions related to Iran and world powers. For example, while little over a quarter of Shia voice support for Hezbollah, no Sunni respondent voiced any support. Likewise, like other Shia minorities, Emirati Shia are more likely to view relations with Iran as important, though in this case the difference is less stark, with just 19% of Shia versus 8% of Sunni respondents voicing this opinion. Moreover, there is just a nine point difference in opinion when it comes to seeing P5+1 negotiations with Iran in a positive light, though 70% of Shia do view these efforts positively.

There are also slight differences when it comes to the importance of other world powers. Namely, Shia value relations with China at 53%, versus 46% of Sunni respondents. Correspondingly, slightly fewer Shia (42%) value relations with the United States compared to the Sunni majority (51%).

Generational differences are even less pronounced. Except in the cases noted above, Emirati citizens of a younger generation (18-29) do not have significantly divergent views from those above thirty.

Methodological Note

Each of these three surveys consisted of face-to-face interviews with a true random national sample of citizens (excluding the large expatriate, mostly guest worker population), male and female, over the age of eighteen. The statistic margin of error is 3%. The samples were selected by standard geographic probability methods, with interviews conducted in Arabic in private homes by experienced local professionals. The translation from the English original questionnaire was back-checked by native speakers and pretested for clarity and precision. Strict assurances of confidentiality, along with supervisory quality controls, were provided throughout. Additional methodological details are readily available on request. ❖

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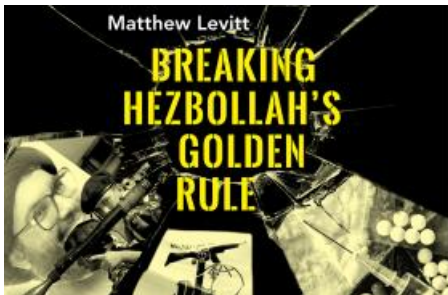
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