

United States Still Tops List of Great Powers "Important" to Jordan's Public

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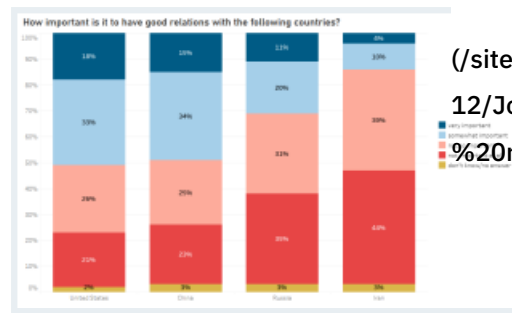
Brief Analysis

Popular attitudes in Jordan have shifted slightly over the past year in a direction generally more favorable to the United States.

Among Jordanians, both Iran and Israel remain hugely unpopular, but there has been a marginal decrease in hostility toward normalization with Israel. On the domestic front, half the public voices dissatisfaction with official efforts to deal with key problems—yet fewer are favorably disposed to mass street protests. Jordan's government, which has been sensitive to public opinion in the past, can probably find some margins for maneuver in these new findings.

A November 2021 Jordanian public opinion poll, commissioned by the Washington Institute and conducted by an independent local commercial company, reveals that ties with the United States continue to enjoy substantial popular acceptance in that key Arab state. Just over half (51%) of Jordanians say that "good relations" with the United States are "very important" or "fairly important" to their country. China is a very close second, with 49%. Russia runs a distant third, at just 31%.

Earlier years had witnessed a sharp drop in support for U.S.-Jordanian relations, from 58% viewing them as important in October of 2017 to just 14% in January of 2018, possibly in reaction to new American diplomatic gestures toward Israel. But support for good ties with Washington has steadily recovered over the past three years. On the other hand, popular support for Jordan's relations with China and Russia has declined, especially when compared with 66% and 47% of Jordanians who ranked those ties as important in October 2017.



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Equally telling, only one-third of Jordanians agree with this statement: “Our country cannot count on the United States these days, so we should look more to Russia or China as partners.” Even the American withdrawal from Afghanistan gets unexpectedly mixed reviews: around half (49%) expect that it will actually have a positive impact on the region, while the other half (45%) predict a negative effect.

By comparison, just 29% of Jordanians say that “the increase in Russian arms sales to Arab states” will have any positive effects on the region. A larger minority (45%), however, perceive at least some positive impact from “the rise of Chinese investment in several Arab countries.”

Asked more specifically about U.S. policies, a plurality of Jordanians pick “pushing for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict” as their top priority for Washington’s regional agenda. This is roughly in line with previous surveys, with 43% answering the same in November of 2020—but significantly higher than recent findings in the Gulf Arab states. The next priority for U.S. policy, as Jordanians view it, should be “promoting democracy and human rights in Arab countries” (26%), a shift from last November’s choice of containing Iran.

The other options offered—containing Iran, or resolving the wars in Yemen and Libya— now run significantly behind. This rank order is unchanged when respondents are asked a follow-up question about their second choice for American regional priorities. Surprisingly, in this context, only one-quarter of Jordanians see any positive impact from “the American agreement to keep a few thousand military advisers in Iraq.”

On Israel, the Jordanian public remains very negative, despite the warming in official ties lately. Just one-fifth view “the new economic deals between Jordan, Egypt and Israel” favorably. A slightly larger minority (26%), however, do report some positive effects from “the replacement of Netanyahu as Israel’s prime minister.”

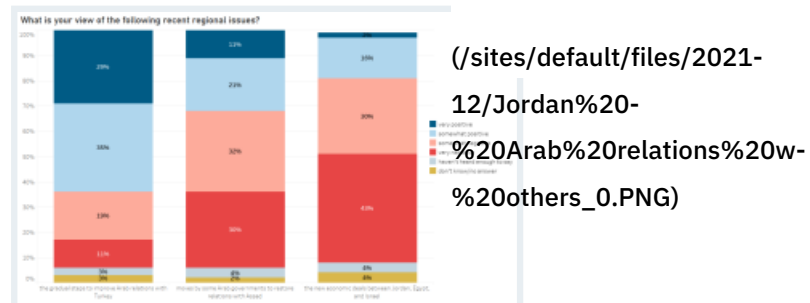
Normalization with Israel continues to be highly unpopular. A mere 13% see positive effects from last year’s “peace accords between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.” However, these views are marginally more favorable than in November 2020, when just 9% supported the first Abraham Accords. Similarly, only 14% now voice a favorable opinion of “the recent conference in Erbil, Iraq that called for peace with Israel.” The same is true for agreement that “people who want to have business or sports contacts with Israelis should be allowed to do so”— although now 44% disagree “strongly” with that proposition, a slight decrease from 51% in July of 2020 and 45% in November of the same year.

At the same time, Iran is also viewed very unfavorably by the Jordanian public. Nearly two-thirds (63%) agree with this statement: “Wherever Iran intervenes, it hurts the local Arabs and doesn’t help the Palestinians.” The same solid majority (64%) sees negative consequences from the recent election of Ebrahim Raisi as president of Iran. And a mere 14% say it is even “somewhat important” for Jordan to have good relations with Iran. This is a drop from the 23% who viewed the relationship as “somewhat important” in October 2017, and is roughly consistent with the 8% who answered the same in 2019 and 2020.

This popular antagonism extends to recent efforts at rapprochement with Iran and its regional allies. The majority (58%) of Jordanians disapprove of “the recent diplomatic talks to reach some understandings between Iran and Saudi Arabia.” A larger majority (64%) disapprove of “the moves by some Arab governments to restore relations

with the Assad regime” in Syria.

That sentiment is clearly at odds with recent official policy, and with the dominant discourse on Jordanian social media lately—offering additional evidence that many respondents are willing to differ privately with the “politically correct” line of the day. In sharp contrast with their views on Syria, nearly two-thirds approve of “the gradual steps to improve Arab relations with Turkey,” echoing the 65% of Jordanians who viewed ties with Turkey favorably in November 2020.



Turning to domestic issues, just over half (51-55%) of Jordanians, similar to previous surveys, say their government is doing “too little” to address a range of salient issues: “dealing with our growing economic problems and people’s daily hardships”; “reducing the level of corruption in our economic and political life”; “sharing the burden of taxes and other obligations to the government in a fair manner”; and “protecting the freedoms and privacy of individual citizens.” On the last issue, intriguingly, one-fourth say the government is doing “too much”—potentially representing a quiet fundamentalist backlash against perceived social permissiveness, and/or establishment resentment against vocal political dissent.



Nevertheless, the survey suggests relatively dim prospects that there will be any mass popular uprising in Jordan. The narrow majority of its citizens (55%), roughly the same amount as in previous polls, continue to agree with this statement: “It’s a good thing we don’t have mass street protests against corruption, as in some other Arab countries.”

Methodological Note:

This survey consisted of face-to-face interviews with a true random national sample of citizens, 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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