

# Comparing Arab Polls on Trump, U.S. Policy, Israel, Iran and More

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Brief Analysis

Two signature Trump Administration initiatives dominate U.S. Mideast policy today: “maximum pressure” against Iran and pursuit of an Israeli-Palestinian peace “deal of the century.” In recent weeks, Washington has upped the ante on both. It has tightened oil sanctions against Iran and designated the entire Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization. It has also announced that its Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, more than two years in the making, would be revealed soon after Ramadan, which begins next week.

In both domains, success or failure will depend in significant measure on cooperation from key potential Arab state partners for American policy. They will soon be asked to back these initiatives with financial, oil production, sanctions enforcement, and diplomatic support. Their cooperation, in turn, will depend partly on how these policies play on the “Arab street” – which has lately revived the activism evident in new, ongoing revolutions in Algeria and Sudan, along with significant street protests in various other regional locations.

Surprisingly, however, polls reveal a high level of Arab popular approval for both of these signature U.S. regional policies: tough talk and action against Tehran, and enlisting Arab state support for an historic Israeli-Palestinian compromise agreement. These findings are all the more noteworthy, and credible, because respondents generally voice unfavorable views both of U.S. President Donald Trump personally, and of the overall value of good Arab relations with the United States.

In late 2018, representative national samples in six Arab states responded to personal interviews conducted by a leading regional commercial survey firm, as commissioned by the Washington Institute. These surveys provide the most recent and reliable hard data about Arab public opinion on a range of controversial questions. Answers from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt demonstrate significant differences in opinion within most countries on domestic issues. But views on outside actors, and particularly on the two most salient U.S. foreign policy moves right now, are more likely to line up with each state's official foreign policy.

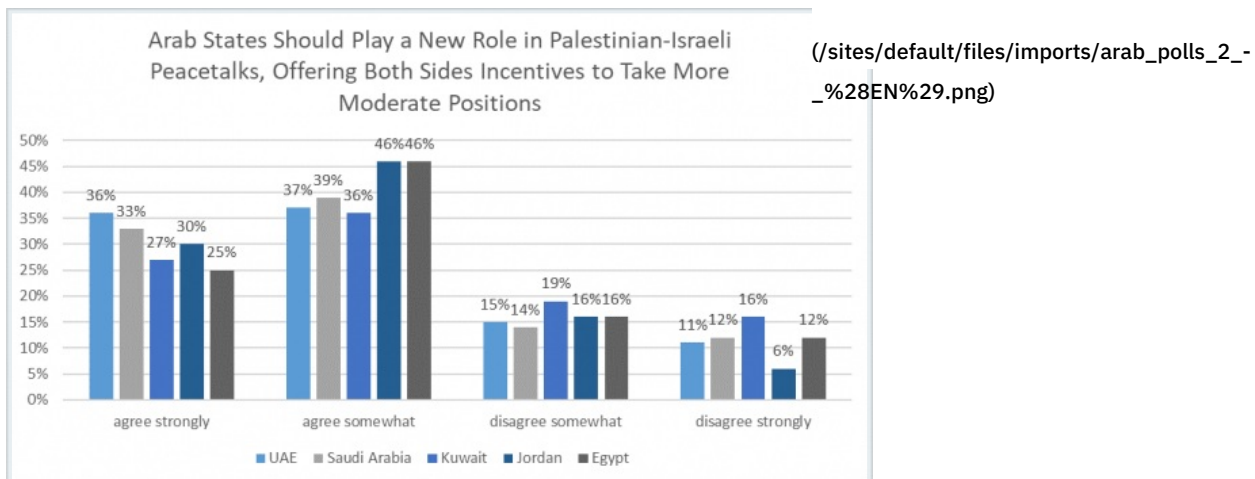
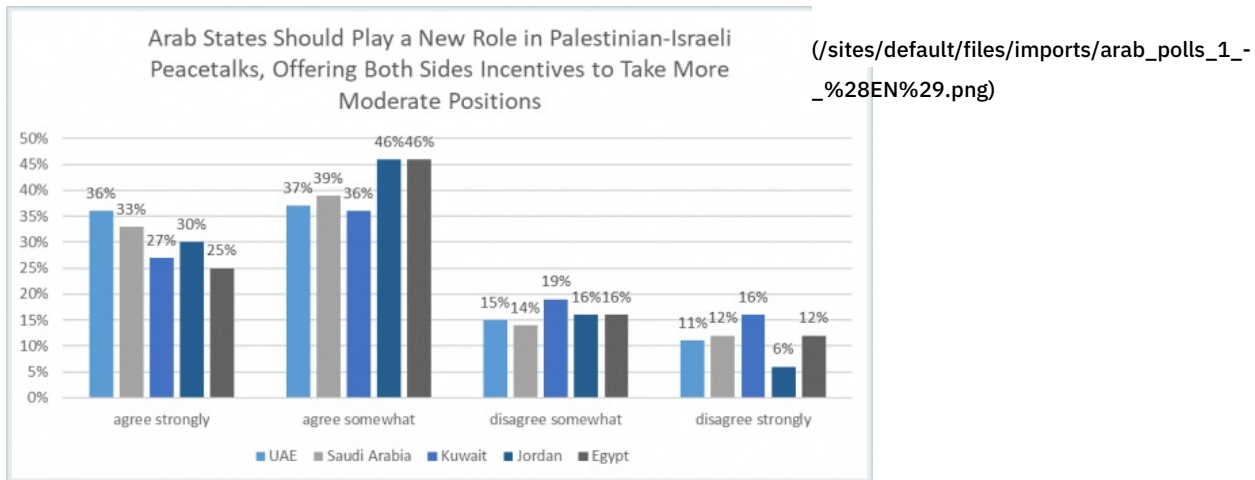
### Two-Thirds or More Would Incentivize Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Remarkably, most Arab respondents were interested in Arab states playing a larger role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—including by “providing incentives for both sides to moderate their positions.” (Note: Lebanese respondents were not polled on these questions, and were instead polled on Hezbollah policies). In fact, while Kuwaitis are the least likely to support such efforts, a full 63 percent even there agreed at least somewhat with this idea. In other countries that figure ranged from 71 percent (Egypt) to 76 percent (Jordan).

These results clearly suggest much more popular support for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking than for bilateral ties with Israel today. The implication is also that progress toward peace would substantially improve the climate for such ties. As it is, a plurality of Emiratis,

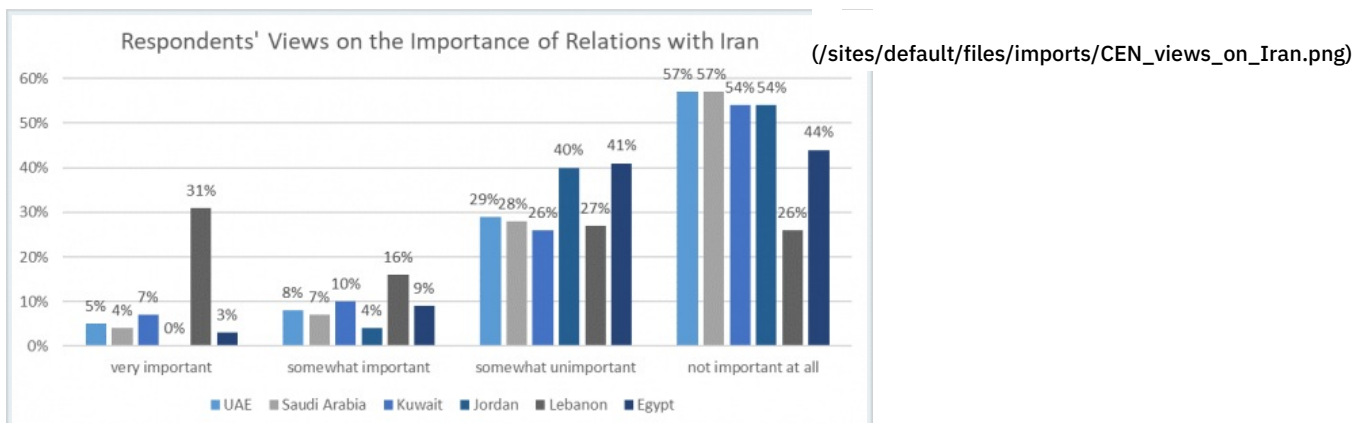
Kuwaitis, Jordanians, and Egyptians strongly disagree with efforts to cooperate with Israel now, before peace with the Palestinians—whether in technology, counterterrorism, or containing Iran. This is despite some quiet existing cooperation with several of these countries, and Israel’s longstanding peace treaty and security coordination with both Egypt and Jordan.

At the same time, around 20-25 percent of Egyptians, Jordanians, Emiratis, and Saudis agree at least “somewhat” that Arab states should already work with Israel, even without reference to the Palestinians. Still, a full half of Egyptian respondents disagree strongly, the highest such response from any country. Again, Kuwaitis are the least likely, at a mere 13 percent, to agree with this idea.



**Arab Publics Share Their Governments' Antipathy Toward Iran**

Concerning the other key U.S. policy in the region today, these survey findings are even more encouraging. Only 11 percent of Saudis, 13 percent of Emiratis, and 17 percent of Kuwaitis believe that relations with Iran are ‘somewhat’ or ‘very important’—the latter despite the Kuwaiti government’s continued efforts to maintain correct relations with Tehran. Even in Lebanon, the slight majority of respondents (53 percent) believe that relations with Iran are either ‘somewhat unimportant’ or ‘not important at all’—although the Shiite third of that population have a vastly more favorable view. The majority of respondents in all other countries except Egypt (at 44 percent) say that relations with the Islamic Republic are “not important at all.”

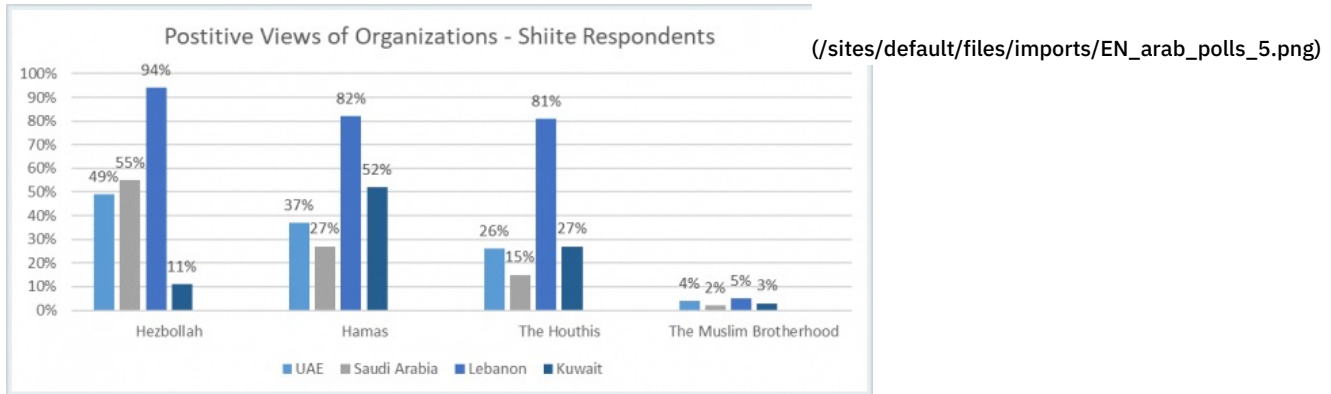
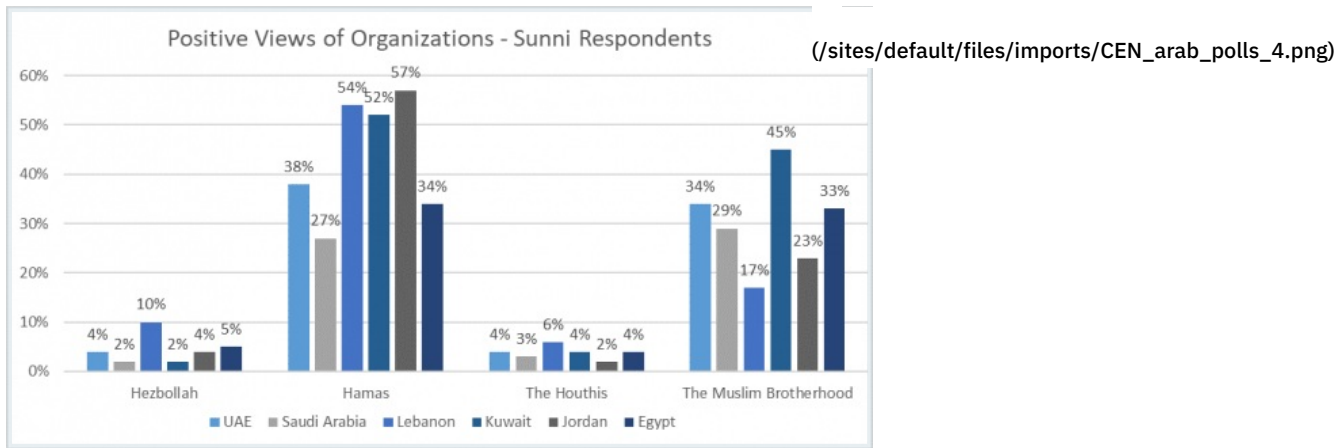


**Iran's Allies Also Rated Poorly, Though Shiites Support Hezbollah**

Among the Sunni majority in the six countries polled, Iran’s sectarian regional allies are also extremely unpopular. In a remarkable turnaround from the years just before Syria’s civil war, Sunni support for Lebanon’s Hezbollah is now in the low single digits – except inside Lebanon itself, where it barely hits ten percent. Favorable views of Yemen’s Houthis are even lower.

In general, however, Shiite respondents’ support for Hezbollah is quite high. The proportion of Lebanese Shiites who express a positive view with Hezbollah is understandably an overwhelming majority. But the majority of Saudi Shiites (55 percent), and almost half of Emirati Shiites, also express positive views of this organization, with over 20 percent in both groups seeing Hezbollah in a ‘very positive’ light.

In contrast, only around a quarter of Emirati and Kuwaiti Shiites, and just 15 percent of Saudi Shiites, have any positive associations with another one of Iran’s Shiite allies, much closer to home: the Houthis of Yemen. Indeed, nearly half of Shiite respondents from all three countries view the Houthis ‘very negatively.’

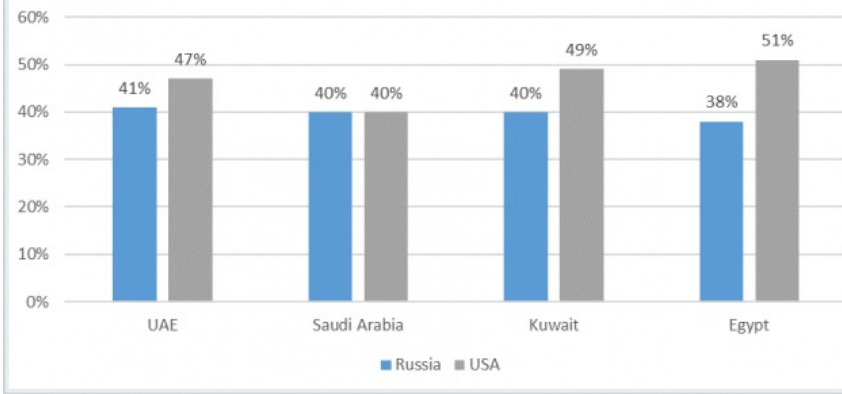


**United States Edges out Russia in Perceived Importance - But not by Much**

The Gulf countries polled are also almost completely in agreement regarding the importance of relations with Russia and, to a lesser degree, with the United States. In both the Emirates and Kuwait, the United States is viewed as important by a slightly higher percentage of respondents. However, noticeably more Kuwaitis see the United States as “very important” (27 percent) compared with Russia (18 percent). Egyptian respondents were actually more likely to believe that relations with the United States were important, and less likely to value relations with Russia, than Gulf respondents.

### Respondents' Views of Russia and USA as "Somewhat" or "Very Important"

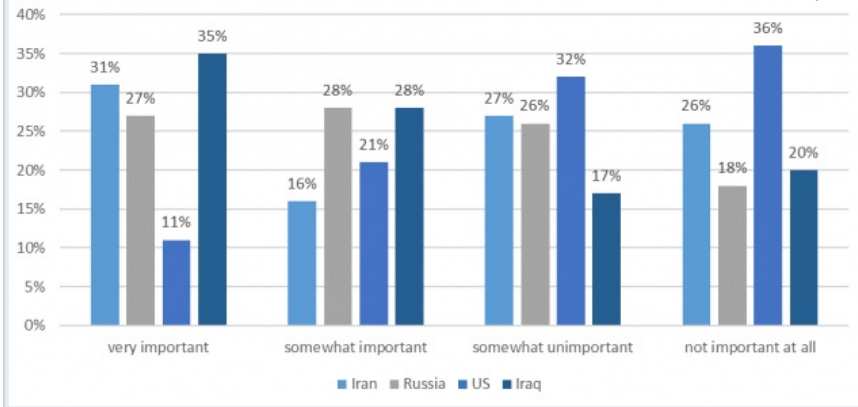
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Indeed, Lebanon is the only country with more respondents believing that Russia is 'very important' (27 percent) versus the United States (11 percent), probably due to the heavy influence Russia exerts in neighboring Syria.

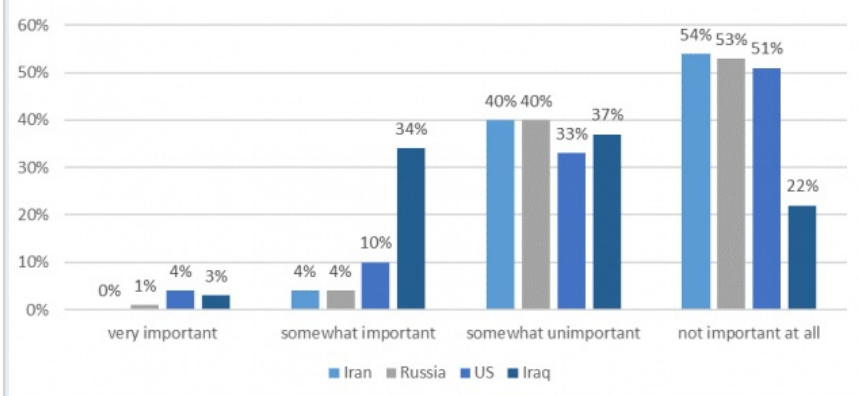
### Lebanese Views on the Importance of Foreign Relations

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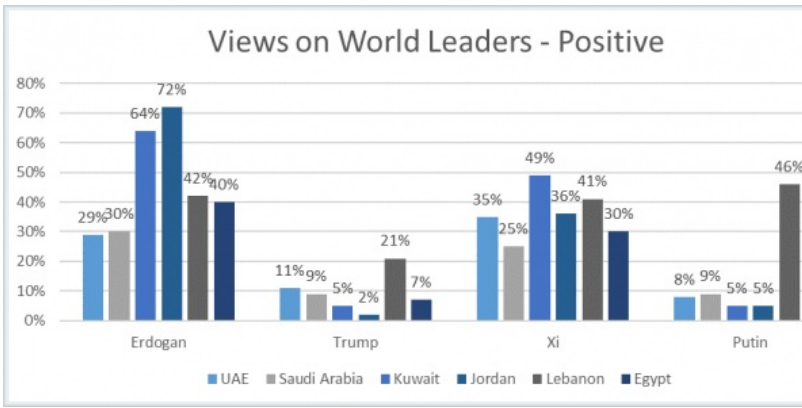
### Jordanian Views of the Importance of Foreign Relations

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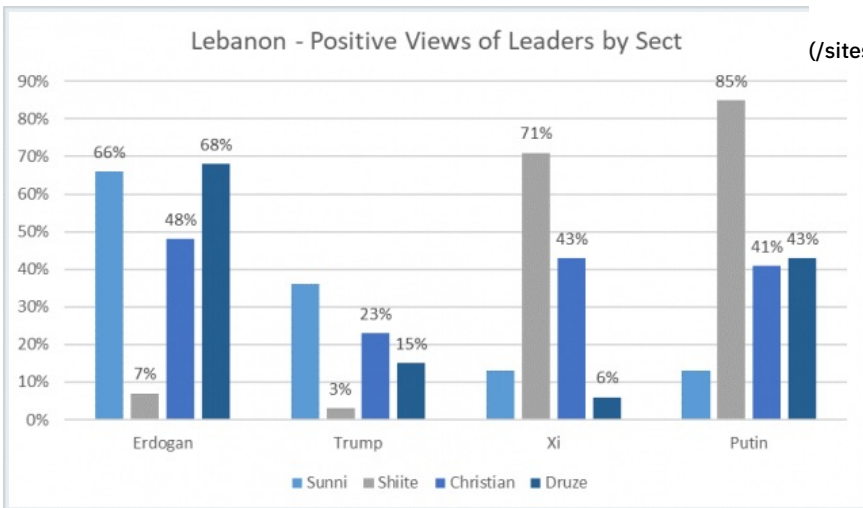
Even more insular are the Jordanians, the majority of whom do not think relations with Iran, Russia, or the United States are important at all. Even Jordan's neighbor and major trading partner Iraq is seen as important by just a 37 percent minority of Jordanians. And though Jordan is a longstanding U.S. ally, Jordanians are significantly less likely than either Gulfis or Egyptians to place much importance on relations with America. However, Jordanians are no more likely to prioritize Russian influence, as only 5 percent ascribe even some importance to those ties.

### Trump and Putin are both Unpopular; Erdogan Leads the Pack



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However, views on foreign leaders differ significantly from views on relations with their countries. Most respondents express a negative view of both U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Lebanese stand out as having significantly more positive opinions of both leaders, although views differ markedly among Lebanese from different confessions. Whereas a large majority of Lebanese Shiites have a positive view of Putin, significant minorities of Christians and Druze also do so – undoubtedly due to his strong support of the neighboring Syrian regime.



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For the same reason, a mere 13 percent of Lebanon’s Sunnis view Putin favorably. And over a third of Lebanese Sunnis have at least a somewhat positive opinion of Trump, the highest of any group polled, followed by Lebanese Christians. Egyptian Copts also give Trump relatively positive ratings, at 20 percent.

In contrast to Trump and Putin, Erdogan is a markedly popular regional leader in Kuwait and Jordan, while also finding positive associations among a significant minority among respondents in the other countries as well. Chinese president Xi is the leader least likely to be recognized by respondents, especially in the Gulf and Egypt, and opinion is more or less split between positive and negative views. Erdogan’s significant degree of support is notable as the Turkish president continues to shape a more active role for Turkey in the Middle East.



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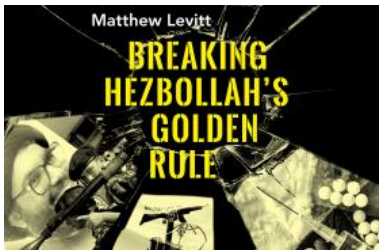
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