

Saudi Public Opinion in a Changing Middle East: Great Powers, the Gaza War, Pathways for the Kingdom

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China and Russia get higher marks than the United States, and Israel normalization is on hold—but respondents view Hamas negatively, want Arab involvement in the peace process, and increasingly support moderate interpretations of Islam.

Recent polling in Saudi Arabia offers reasons for concern as well as optimism regarding U.S. interests. On the downside, Saudi respondents are more likely to prioritize good relations with China or Russia as opposed to America, despite a history of U.S.-Saudi strategic ties. Likewise, enthusiasm for Israel-Saudi normalization has fallen from already-low levels amid the Gaza war, although support is slightly higher for business links. More encouragingly, respondents express negative views about Hamas, growing support for an Arab role in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, and increasing sympathy for moderate interpretations of Islam, mirroring the trajectory of Riyadh's official rhetoric.

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In this Policy Note, polling expert Catherine Cleveland offers thought-provoking analysis of surveys taken shortly before Israel's twelve-day war with Iran. U.S. policymakers can chart a productive course, she explains, by first taking an honest look at Saudi public skepticism of bilateral ties and then promoting initiatives more likely to earn support. ❖

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