

In Egypt, One-Third Still Like the Muslim Brotherhood; Half Call U.S. Ties "Important"

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Brief Analysis

New findings from a reliable Egyptian public opinion poll reveal very divided popular attitudes, both on the country's domestic direction and about its outside partners. Yet Egyptians mostly agree with their government on several key foreign policy issues. A mere 12% want good relations with Iran; even fewer, just 5%, have a positive view of Hezbollah. In sharp contrast, a solid majority (71%) want Arab states to play a constructive role in promoting an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

The most striking data point from this poll is that 33% of Egyptian Muslims still voice at least a "somewhat positive" opinion of the Muslim Brotherhood (including 6% with a "very positive" view). This remains the case even though the Brotherhood has been officially outlawed as a "terrorist" organization and subjected to continual media vilification over the past five years. The proportion is virtually unchanged since the previous two polls, conducted in 2015 (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypts-public-negative-on-all-regional-players-except-itself>) and 2017 (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egyptians-surprisingly-open-to-key-trump-policies-new-poll-shows>).

Moreover, exactly the same percentage of Egypt's Muslims, one-third, also have a positive attitude toward Hamas—widely viewed as the Brotherhood's Palestinian branch. These findings, so much at variance with official policies, help explain the Egyptian government's preoccupation with internal stability and control above all. At the same time, they suggest that overt Islamist opposition to President Sisi's regime would not enjoy majority popular backing.

But an even larger percentage of Egyptians, around half, express dissatisfaction with official policies on a series of other internal issues. For example, 49% say their government is doing too little in "reducing the level of corruption in our economic and political life." The same holds for "sharing the burden of taxes and other obligations to the government in a fair manner," where 48% see inadequate official effort. And almost as many, 43%, say Cairo is also doing too little in "protecting the freedoms and privacy of individual citizens."

More broadly, the overwhelming majority, 84%, agree that "right now internal political and economic reform is more important for our country than any foreign policy issue." That high proportion is virtually unchanged from [previous](#)

[polling \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egyptians-surprisingly-open-to-key-trump-policies-new-poll-shows\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egyptians-surprisingly-open-to-key-trump-policies-new-poll-shows) a year ago. The policy implication is that Egypt's political stability depends more on internal than on external developments, even if the latter tend to receive more outside media and perhaps also official attention.

The only such question asked where a plurality (47%) say government policies are “about right” concerns “promoting opportunity and equality for women.” On that issue, a bit over one-third of Egyptians, Muslim and Christian alike, believe their government is actually doing “too much.” Overall, these findings indicate considerable popular discontent with official economic, social, and internal political management. Yet once again, vocal dissatisfaction or outright opposition remains below the majority level.

On selected foreign policy issues, in contrast, Egypt's government fares better in terms of public opinion. Half of Egyptians consider good ties with the United States to be “important” for their country, even though a mere 7% have a good opinion of President Trump. Only a small minority, 18%, say they would prefer the United States to “reduce its interference in the region.”

By comparison, somewhat fewer (38%) say it is important for Egypt to have good relations with Russia—and just 8% voice a positive view of President Putin, despite recent high-profile deals and meetings. Furthermore, regarding Iran, the public agrees with its government's adversarial posture: only 12% of Egyptians consider it even “somewhat important” for the two countries to maintain good ties. Even fewer, just 5%, have a favorable view of Iran's ally Hezbollah.

On the Arab-Israeli issue, a solid majority of Egyptians continue to express views in line with Cairo's reserved support for peacemaking—72%, unchanged from last year, agree that “Arab states should play a new role in Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, offering both sides incentive to take more moderate positions.” Nevertheless, until more progress is achieved, only a minority want the Arabs to “work with Israel on other issues like technology, counterterrorism, and containing Iran”—25%, about the same as last year.

Egyptian popular concern with the Palestinian issue, while not the highest priority overall, continues to be higher than among other Arab publics further away, such as in the Gulf. Asked about their top priority for U.S. policy in the region, a plurality (33%) of Egyptians pick “push harder to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” In second place, at 22%, is more American help against jihadi terrorism, followed distantly by greater effort to settle the Yemen civil war or to resist Iranian influence in the region.

These findings are from a commercial survey by a professional regional firm, conducted in November, with face-to-face interviews among a representative national sample of 1,000 Egyptians. The survey used standard geographic probability sampling techniques, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately 3%. The data are not weighted; the total sample comprised 94% Muslims and 6% Coptic Christians. Full methodological details are available on request. ❖

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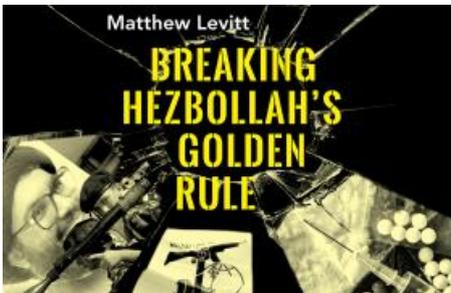
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