

Policy Alert

Egyptians Surprisingly Open to Key Trump Policies, New Poll Shows

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From countering Iran and its proxies to working directly with Israel, Egyptian survey respondents seem remarkably willing to follow Washington's lead on multiple regional issues.

As President Trump rolls out his plan for confronting Iran, a credible new poll in Egypt reveals that this posture enjoys a remarkable degree of public support in the most populous Arab country. A mere 1% of Egyptians rate Iran's regional policies favorably, and in the ongoing intra-Arab dispute with Qatar, two-thirds agree that "the most important issue" is "to find the maximum degree of Arab cooperation against Iran."

Tehran's regional allies, likewise the target of new U.S. sanctions, receive overwhelmingly bad reviews as well, with 91% of Egyptians voicing disapproval of Hezbollah -- a stunning reversal of the group's glorious image right after its 2006 war with Israel. The same high proportion express a negative view of the Houthis, Iran's favored party in the continuing Yemeni civil war.

Moreover, a mere 14% say that it is even "somewhat important" for Egypt to have good relations with Iran, while 56% call good ties with the United States "important." This stark contrast helps put Egypt's fabled anti-American sentiment in proper perspective. While the public mostly disapproves of U.S. policy overall, they also clearly value satisfactory official ties with Washington.

Asked to pick their top priority for U.S. policy in the Middle East, just 13% of Egyptians select "Reduce its interference in the region." The plurality choice, at 36%, is another area of agreement with Trump's policy emphasis: "Expand its active role in fighting the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and similar terrorist groups." Very close behind, at 33%, is one more signature U.S. declaratory policy: "Push harder to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

In that connection, Egyptians are solidly behind a Trump administration variation on the peacemaking theme: 72% agree that "Arab states should play a new role in Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, offering both sides incentives to take more moderate positions." Egypt's own diplomatic efforts to broker new Gaza security arrangements, along with possible Palestinian reconciliation on relatively moderate terms, could fit well into this framework.

Majorities in other Arab societies have offered similarly unexpected levels of support on this issue. Yet what is truly surprising about the Egyptian data is the relatively large minority who express agreement with a highly controversial proposition about Israel, even without any peace talks: namely, that "despite their differences, Arab states should work with Israel on other issues like technology, counterterrorism, and containing Iran." A full 29% of Egyptians, more than in any other recent Arab poll, agree at least "somewhat" with that statement. In this area, too, it may be time to reconsider Egypt's popular animosity toward old rivals and look for new opportunities for creative American bridge-building.

Yet the poll also highlights one area of concern: at a time of economic and political stagnation at home, Egyptians do not see any of the above issues as a top priority. Rather, 82% agree that "right now, internal political and economic reform is more important for our country than any foreign policy issue."

In that context, 29% of Egyptians still voice some sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood in private, even though it is officially outlawed as a terrorist organization. That remarkable number is statistically unchanged since the previous poll two years ago. This finding helps explain the Egyptian government's continuing concern over internal stability above all -- but also suggests that overt opposition to President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi would not muster anywhere near majority support.

At the same time, the past two years have witnessed a modest rise in the proportion of Egyptians who say that "we should listen to those among us who are trying to interpret Islam in a more moderate, tolerant, and modern direction." In what may be a hopeful or at least stabilizing sign, agreement with that idea now stands at 30%.

A note on methodology: This survey was conducted in August by a reputable regional commercial firm, using face-to-face interviews among a nationally representative, geographic probability sample of 1,000 Egyptians. The statistical margin of error is approximately 3%. Given the professional methodology, neutral question wording, and strict assurances of confidentiality, these findings provide an unusually detailed, timely, and credible portrait of Egyptian public opinion today.

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