

APOI

American Public Opinion toward Israel

Report #2

Israeli Public Opinion toward the US: Divided Along Party Lines

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report we present some of the findings from the IDC Election survey, conducted in Israel on February 18, 2015. Our findings suggest that for the most part, Israelis tend to reciprocate Americans favorable outlook: Demonstrating favorable views that are divided along political lines. Left and center party voters tend to view the US in favorable terms, more so than right party voters or ultra-Orthodox voters. Arab party voters seem to exhibit mixed feelings toward the US. This partisan divide extends to other issues regarding the US-Israeli relations. Right wing voters blame President Obama for the deterioration of the US-Israeli relations and believe that the US is trying to influence the Israeli elections.

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Introduction

The special relationship between the US and Israel has many facets: From mutual interests to strategic alliances and for some, even religious motivations. This relationship would not have been attainable without a supportive public opinion, on both sides. Public opinion polls have shown major support for Israel among Americans. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Americans sympathize more with Israel than with the Palestinians. They also see Israel in favorable terms, consider it a vital American interest and as a close ally (Cavari, 2013, 2014 ; Gilboa, 2009).¹ While there are differences in the strength of support, the majority of Americans across most conventional demographic groups, express more support for Israel than for the Palestinian side (Cavari, 2014). To a great extent, these levels of support have remained relatively unchanged for more than four decades. An important exception in recent years is the growing divide between the parties. Since the late 1990s, support for Israel among Republicans has risen from 40-50% to nearly 80% in 2014, whereas democrats have since remained at 40-50%.

What about Israelis? Are the favorable feelings mutual? Do most Israelis see the US in favorable terms? And, does the partisan divide in the US parallel a similar divide in Israel?

We answer these questions using a survey conducted at the Lauder School of Government at the IDC Herzliya.² Our findings suggest that for the most part, Israelis

¹ See also public opinion trends on the APOI website –

<http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/main/research/apoi/publicopinion/pages/public-opinion.aspx>

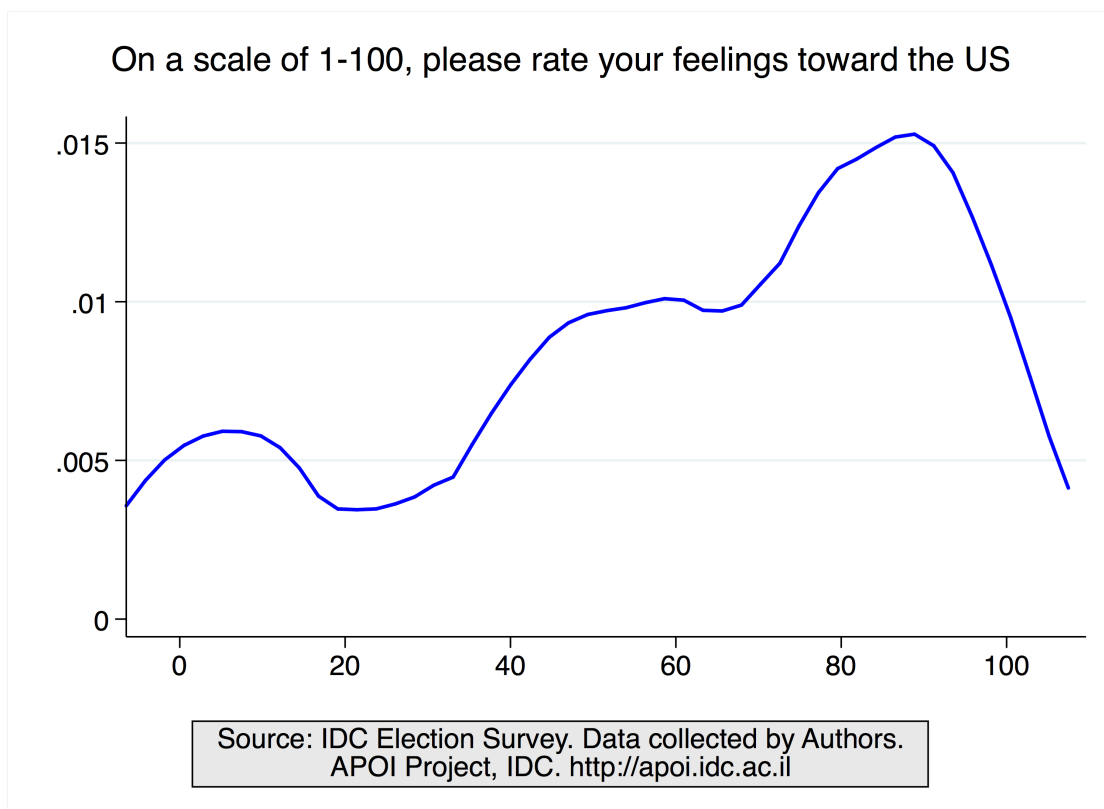
² The Survey is conducted by the Midgam Project under the supervision of Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, Amnon Cavari, Guy Freedman and Maoz Rosenthal with the support and advice of Boaz Ganor and Rafi Ventura—all of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the IDC, Herzliya, Israel.

tend to reciprocate Americans' favorable outlook though they do differ in strength along political lines.

Israeli Feelings toward the US

All respondents in the survey were asked to rate their feelings about the US on a thermometer scale (from 1 to 100). The responses are illustrated in the density curve in Figure 1. Sixty-four percent³ of Israelis expressed positive feelings toward Americans (51 or higher on the scale) and 41% express very positive feelings toward the US (76 or higher on the scale).

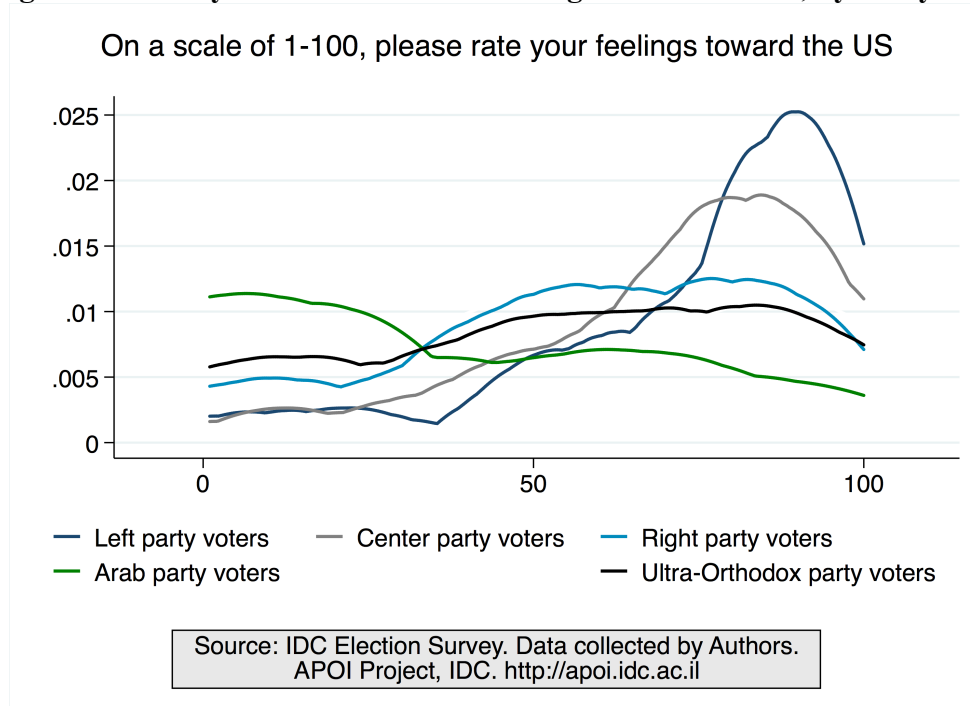
Figure 1: Density Curve of Israelis' Feelings toward the US



³ Data in the survey were weighted using a raking method, based on religion, religiosity, age group and residential area.

In figure 2, Israeli's feelings are broken down by five party blocs, based on the respondents' report on which party they would vote for if the elections were held today (February 18, 2015): (1) Left party voters (*Meretz* and *Hamahaneh Hatzioni*); (2) Center party voters (*Yesh Atid* and *Kulanu*); (3) Right party voters (*Likud*, *Israel Beitenu* and *Habait Hayehudi*); (4) Arab party voters (*joint Arab list*); and (5) Ultra-Orthodox party voters (*Shas*, *Ha'am Itanu* and *Yahadut Hatora*). Going from left to right on the political scale indicates highest feelings toward the US among left party voters (80% express positive feelings over 50 and 60% over 75 on the scale). Center party voters show similar feelings: 79% over 50 and 50% over 75. Right party voters still exhibit positive feelings toward the US, though less than the previous two: 60% over 50 and 34% over 75. These results resemble that of the ultra-orthodox party voters (52% over 50 and 34% over 75). Finally, the Arab party voters in fact display mostly negative feelings toward the US with 72% of the voters under 50 and 52% under 25 on the scale.

Figure 2: Density Curves of Israelis Feelings toward the US, by Party Bloc



Attitudes about Prime Minister Netanyahu's Speech before Congress

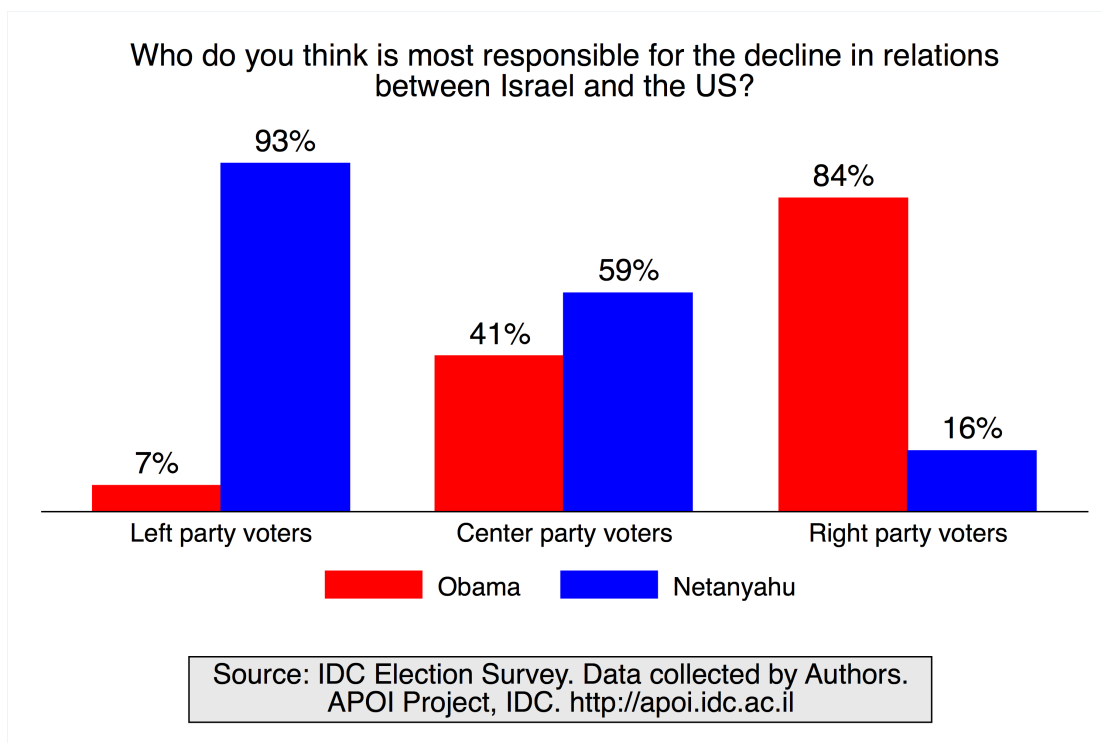
A major issue in the past few weeks has been Speaker Boehner's invitation of the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to deliver a speech before Congress in early March 2015. President Obama denounced the invitation and refused to meet with Netanyahu during his trip, noting a protocol of not meeting with foreign leaders during elections. This speech is the latest of many examples of the problematic relationship between Netanyahu and Obama. Some argue that the relationship between the US and Israel has somewhat declined and most recently, Susan Rice, the National Security Advisor, raised concern of turning relations with Israel into a partisan issue and criticized Netanyahu for damaging relations between the two countries (*The New York Times*, 2015).

We did not directly ask respondents what they think of Netanyahu's speech in this context, but we did ask whether they agreed with the statement that the relationship between the two countries has declined in recent years. Seventy-six percent agreed with the statement and only 24% disagreed. Those who agreed with the statement, were asked an additional question: "Who do you feel is most responsible for the decline in the relationship between Israel and the US". Fifty-one percent of the sample laid most of the responsibility on Netanyahu. Obama was second with 41% (the rest chose Secretary of State Kerry, Secretary of Defense Hagel, Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Leiberman or Israeli Defense Minister Ya'alon). Here too, there are sharp differences between voters by party preferences.

Figure 3 shows who respondents saw as most responsible based on their party-bloc. Ninety-three percent of left party voters lay the responsibility on Netanyahu,

compared to only 16% of right party voters who see Netanyahu as responsible. Center party voters present a more balanced picture, with 59% holding Netanyahu responsible. Not displayed in figure 3 are Arab party voters who resemble left party voters (99% see Netanyahu as responsible) and ultra-Orthodox voters who resemble the right (77% holding Obama responsible). Clearly, positions on this issue are influenced by one's political views.

Figure 3: Responsibility for Decline in US-Israel Relations



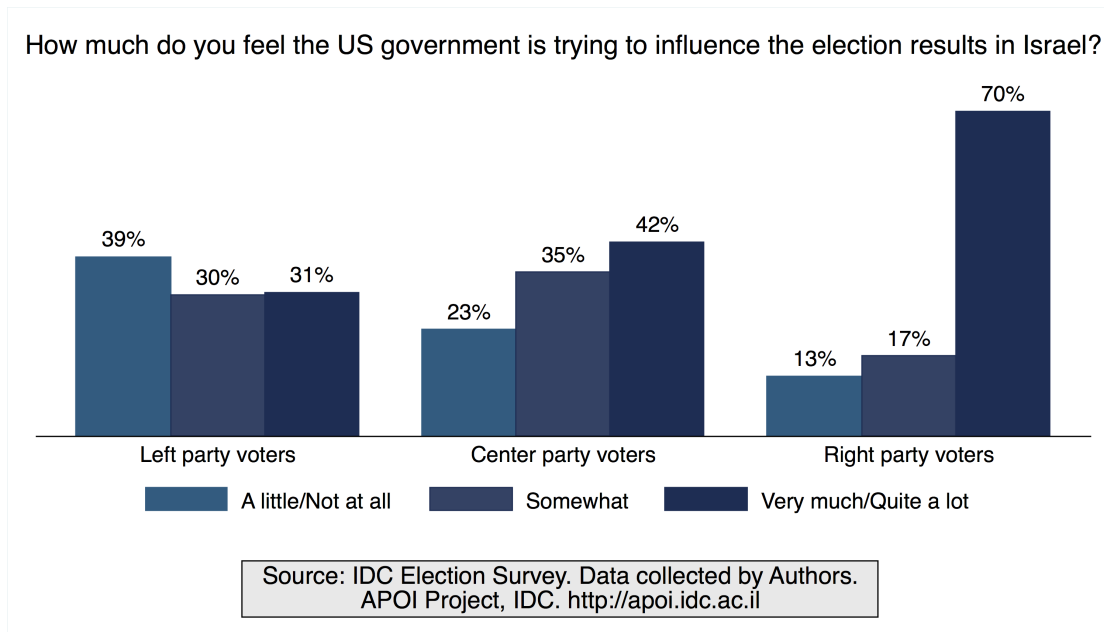
Influencing the Elections

In light of controversy surrounding Netanyahu's speech, we asked respondents how much they feel the US is trying to influence the 2015 elections in Israel. Fifty-three percent chose either 'very much' or 'quite a lot'. Twenty-four percent chose 'somewhat' and

23% chose either 'a little' or 'not at all'. The data suggest that most Israeli's feel that the US is trying to affect the results of the elections.

Once again, breaking these down by party affiliation shows the partisan divide. Seventy percent of right party voters feel the US is very much trying to influence the election results. This is the largest category for center party voters as well, though it comprises of only 42% of the center party voters. Left party voters display an opposite trend: 39%, the largest category, feel that the US is only trying to influence the elections a little, or not at all. Here too, ultra-Orthodox voters exhibit similar trends to that of right party voters. In contrast, the Arab party voters are split: 44% argue that the US is very much trying to influence the elections, but 41% argue it is not (leaving 15% in the middle).

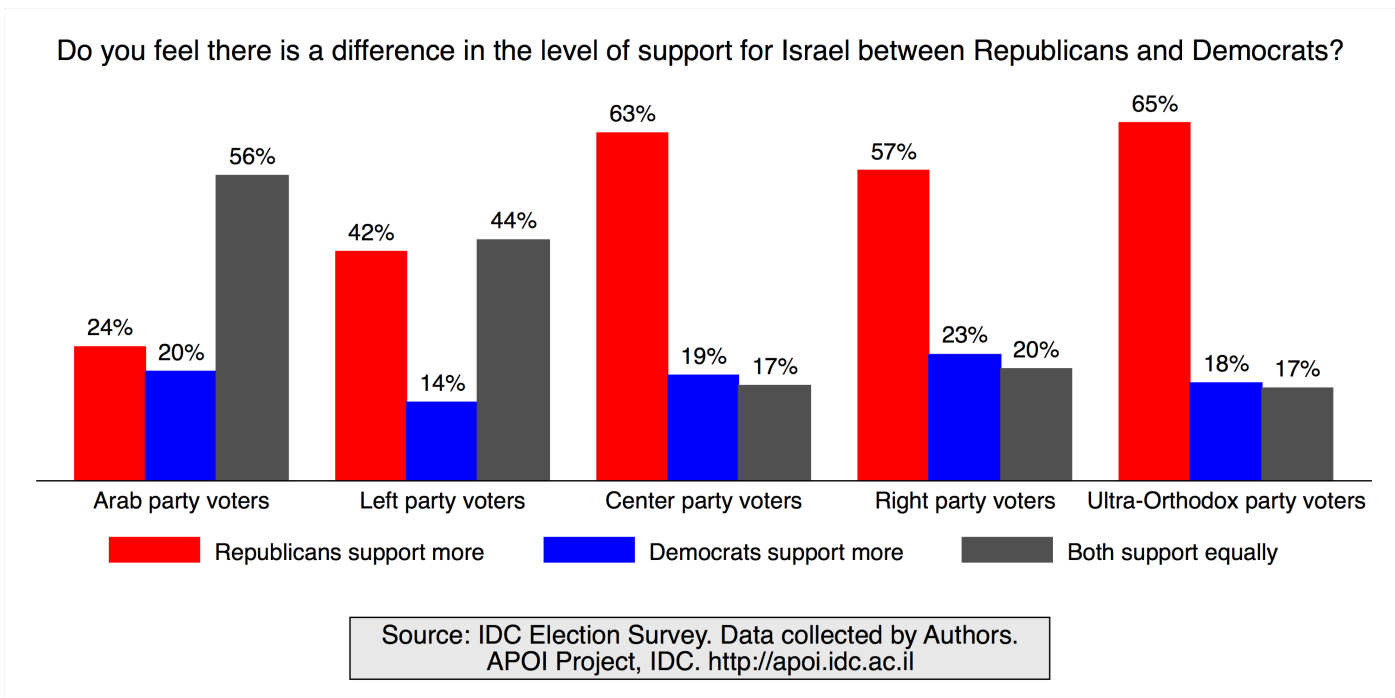
Figure 4: Is the US Trying to Influence the 2015 Elections for Knesset?



American support for Israel

Finally, we wanted to see if Israelis recognize a partisan split in the US. Respondents were asked whether they see a difference in the level of support for Israel amongst Republicans and Democrats. A plurality – 49% – feel that Republicans support Israel more than Democrats, 32% feel that both sides support Israel equally and 19% that Democrats support Israel more. Even this question is subject to political differences as can be seen in figure 5. The majority of center party voters, right party voters and ultra-Orthodox party voters, all feel that Republicans are more supportive than democrats (63%, 57% and 65% respectively). However, the majority of left party voters and Arab party voters do not see major differences (44% and 56% respectively). In addition, of the first two options (‘Republicans support more’ and ‘Democrats support more’), voters in all five blocs agree that Republicans tend to support Israel more than Democrats.

Figure 5: American Support – Partisan or Bipartisan?



Conclusion

Generally, Israelis have a favorable opinion of the US. Most exhibit warm feelings toward the US and the majority tends to hold Prime Minister Netanyahu responsible for the decline in relations between Israel and the US, over President Obama. At the same time, the majority also feels that the US is trying to influence the election results in Israel and sees American support as divided along party lines. However, breaking down these trends into political groups indicates that Israelis are not homogenous in their views toward the US. In almost all of the questions tested above, there were no major differences in results when tested across age groups, levels of education or gender (see Appendix A.), but there are differences, along political lines, namely based on the five party-blocs in Israel.

These blocs, somewhat account for religious cleavages, as well as ethnic and social ones. As we displayed here, the left wing parties and to some degree, the center parties view the US in favorable terms – much more so than right wing parties and ultra-Orthodox parties. In fact, the last two often exhibit outright negative views of the US (for instance, holding Obama accountable for the decline in relations and attributing the US with attempts to influence the results of the elections). The Arab party voters are somewhat mixed: While they show similar trends to those of the left wing parties, they don't necessarily view the US in positive terms (as we saw in the thermometer question).

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Appendix: Differences across Demographic Groups

Table 1 presents the average rating on the thermometer scale by various demographic groups. There is a significant difference between men and women: Men have more favorable feelings toward the US ($M=65$) than women do ($M=56$). There is no difference between various levels of education – positive feelings toward the US with an average of roughly 60 for all three groups. The average rating across all age groups is also positive. The only significant difference is between the average rating of ages 55-64 (72) and the two youngest age groups – 18-24 (51) and 25-34 (55).

Table 1: Israeli Feelings toward the US (Thermometer)

	Average
Gender	
Male	65
Female	56
	$t(699)=2.22^*$
Education	
Less than high school	63
High school graduate	62
College graduate or more	60
	$F(2,699)=0.25$
Age	
18-24	51
25-34	55
35-44	61
45-54	62
55-64	72
65 and over	65
	$F(5,696)=5.83^{***}$

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

In table 2, both gender and education have no effect on one's answer to the question whether relations between Israel and the US have declined in the past few years – 75-77% of all groups agree that they have declined. The majority of all age groups also

agree with this statement, though the youngest age group, ages 18-24, have a relatively small majority (64%) in comparison to all other age groups, and especially compared to ages 24-35 with the highest percent (81%).

Table 2: Decline in relations between Israel and the US

	Yes	No	Total (%)
Gender			
Male	77	23	100
Female	75	25	100
Education			
Less than high school	76	24	100
High school graduate	77	23	100
College graduate or more	76	24	100
Age			
18-24	64	36	100
25-34	81	19	100
35-44	75	25	100
45-54	74	26	100
55-64	79	21	100
65 and over	78	22	100

The question of who is responsible for the decline in relations between the two countries (table 3) seems to be more complex and variance here is higher than in other questions. In this question, there are even opposing feelings between the various groups. Men for instance tend to lay the responsibility on Netanyahu (62%) whereas women lay it on Obama (54%). Education also influences respondents' opinion: Israelis with no high school education lay most of the responsibility on Obama (63%), Israelis with higher education however lay most of the responsibility on Netanyahu (62%) and high school graduates are split right down the middle (50%-50%). Almost all age groups lay the responsibility on Netanyahu. Ages 65 and over are unique in that 74% lay the responsibility on Netanyahu compared to 52-55% in ages 18-44 and 55-64. The only age group that lays more responsibility on Obama is ages 45-54 (56%).

Table 3: Responsibility for Decline in Relations between Israel and US

	Obama	Netanyahu	Total (%)
Gender			
Male	38	62	100
Female	54	46	100
Education			
Less than high school	63	37	100
High school graduate	50	50	100
College graduate or more	38	62	100
Age			
18-24	46	54	100
25-34	47	53	100
35-44	48	52	100
45-54	56	44	100
55-64	45	55	100
65 and over	26	74	100

In table 4 (next page), we find hardly any differences between gender, education or age groups regarding whether the US is trying to influence the elections. While there is some variation in the first two categories ('very much/quite a lot' and 'somewhat'), the largest category across all groups and all variables is the third one ('a little' or 'not at all').

Table 4: Is the US trying to Influence the Results of the Elections?

	Very much/ Quite a lot	Somewhat	Very little/ Not at all	Total (%)
Gender				
Male	24	26	50	100
Female	21	22	57	100
Education				
Less than high school	18	37	45	100
High school graduate	18	25	57	100
College graduate or more	27	21	52	100
Age				
18-24	24	16	60	100
25-34	24	27	49	100
35-44	20	25	55	100
45-54	17	15	68	100
55-64	22	27	51	100
65 and over	29	30	41	100

Finally, there are hardly any differences between gender, levels of education and age groups on the question of who supports Israel more – Republicans or Democrats (table 5, see next page). The largest category in almost all groups, and by a large margin, is that the Republicans show more support for Israel. The only group showing a different pattern is ages 65 and over, with a majority of 57% arguing that the two show equal support (though of the remaining 43%, 31% feel the Republicans show more support).

Table 5: Partisan Differences in Support for Israel

	Republicans support more	Democrats support more	Both equal	Total (%)
Gender				
Male	52	12	36	100
Female	44	31	25	100
Education				
Less than high school	60	22	18	100
High school graduate	44	27	29	100
College graduate or more	51	14	35	100
Age				
18-24	47	31	22	100
25-34	63	13	24	100
35-44	53	12	35	100
45-54	56	28	16	100
55-64	42	27	31	100
65 and over	31	12	57	100