PERCEPTIONS OF ISRAEL AND AMERICAN JEWS

Findings of the May 1990 Roper Poll

David Singer Renae Cohen



·	
·	
David Singer, Ph.D., is Director of the Department of Research and Publications for the American Jewish Committee and editor of the American Jewish Year Book.	
Renae Cohen, Ph.D., is a Research Analyst in the AJC's Department of Research and Publications.	
Copyright © 1990 by the American Jewish Committee All rights reserved	

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY LIBRA

INTRODUCTION

As part of its ongoing research activities, the American Jewish Committee has been conducting regular probes of the attitudes of the American public toward Israel and American Jews. Since 1984 this work has been carried out in conjunction with the Roper Organization, which has fielded a battery of AJC "proprietary" questions once each year -- January 1984; April/May 1985; June 1986; February 1987; April 1988; April 1989; May 1990.

The findings reported here are from a Roper poll conducted between May 12 and May 19, 1990. The AJC sought to use the poll as a vehicle for gauging the ongoing response of the American public to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Palestinian issue in particular.

In conducting the poll, the Roper Organization interviewed 1,997 respondents in their homes. Those interviewed constituted a representative national sample of men and women, 18 years of age and older.

FINDINGS

The findings of the Roper poll indicate that between April 1989 and May 1990, Israel's standing with the American public was largely unchanged. Sympathy with Israel in the Middle East conflict increased somewhat, while sympathy with the Arab cause decreased somewhat. During the same period, the perception of Israel as a reliable ally of the United States decreased somewhat.

While the American public continued to view American Jews in a generally positive light, there was an increase in the percentage of those who saw American Jews as more loyal to Israel than to the United States.

The results of the Roper poll are reported in detail in a series of tables in the Appendix. Among the salient findings are the following:

* Sympathy with Israel in the Middle East conflict stood at 39%, while sympathy with the Arab nations was at 9%. In April 1989, the figures were, respectively, 36% and 13% (Table 1). When given a choice between Israel and the Palestinians*** – the second time the American

[&]quot;Proprietary" questions are specially commissioned by clients. They are incorporated into the regular battery of questions that the Roper Organization poses 10 times a year as part of its syndicated subscription service, Roper Reports.

[&]quot;Findings for the period 1984-87 are reported in David Singer and Renae Cohen, Probing Public Sentiment on Israel and American Jews, American Jewish Committee, 1987; findings for the period 1985-1988 appear in David Singer and Renae Cohen, In the Wake of the Palestinian Uprising, American Jewish Committee, 1988; findings for the period 1986-1989 are in David Singer and Renae Cohen, Israel and the Intifada, American Jewish Committee, 1989.

[&]quot;The question about sympathies in the Middle East conflict took two forms. Half the respondents were asked to choose between Israel and the Arab nations; half between Israel and the Palestinians.

Jewish Committee has inquired about this matter -- the figures were only slightly different: 34% and 15%, respectively (Table 2). In April 1989, the comparable figures were 34% and 14%.

- * A small plurality of respondents continue to view Israel as a reliable ally of the United States (Israel -- reliable: 40%; not reliable: 38%). In April 1989, the figures were 44% and 34%, respectively. With regard to the Arab nations, pluralities of respondents see Egypt and Jordan as not reliable (Egypt -- not reliable: 40%; reliable: 29%; Jordan -- not reliable: 44%; reliable: 16%), while a majority see Syria as such (Syria -- not reliable: 60%; reliable: 7%) (Table 3).
- * Respondents are almost equally divided between those who think the Israeli government's response to the Palestinian uprising has been "too harsh" (29%) and those who think it has been "about right" (27%). The comparable figures in April 1989 were 30% and 28%. A smaller percentage (8%) think the response has been "too lenient" (Table 4).
- * When asked about preferred solutions to the problem of the Palestinians in the Middle East, a majority of respondents (57%) answer "Don't know," either because they have not followed the situation closely enough (40%) or because they are uncertain as to which particular solution they prefer (17%). Of those indicating a preference, 13% favor the "return of major portions of the West Bank and Gaza to Jordanian rule, with appropriate security arrangements for Israel"; 10% favor the "establishment of an independent Palestinian state in all of the West Bank and Gaza"; 9% favor "Israeli military control of all of the West Bank and Gaza, with local self-rule for the Palestinians"; 7% favor the "establishment of a Palestinian homeland in all of the West Bank and Gaza in federation with Jordan"; and 4% favor "Israeli annexation of all of the West Bank and Gaza" (Table 5).
- * A plurality of respondents (39%) think Israel is right in refusing to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) because it is a terrorist group; 30% think Israel is wrong (Table 6). In April 1989 the figures were 42% and 32%, respectively.
- * While a large plurality of respondents <u>disagree</u> (44%) with the statement "Most American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the United States," 28% agree with it. In April 1989 the figures were 43% and 21%, respectively (Table 7).
- * Only 8% of respondents believe Jews have too much power in the United States, the same figure as in April 1989. All of the following were cited ahead of the Jews as having too much power in the United States: news media (48%); business corporations (45%); labor unions (34%); Arab interests (27%); Orientals (22%); blacks (14%); and the Catholic Church (13%) (Table 8).

While the primary aim of the Roper poll is to probe the attitudes of the American public at large, some noteworthy subgroup differences do emerge for a number of the questions (Tables 9-16):

- * People who are better educated are somewhat more likely to be favorable toward Israel and American Jews than those who are less well educated.
- * People with higher household incomes are somewhat more likely to be favorable toward Israel and American Jews than those with lower household incomes.
- * Whites are somewhat more likely to be favorable toward Israel and American Jews than blacks.

- * Republicans are somewhat more likely to be favorable toward Israel and American Jews than Democrats.
 - * Protestants and Catholics differ little in their attitudes toward Israel and American Jews.

CONCLUSION

The results of the Roper poll indicate that, between April 1989 and May 1990, Israel's standing with the American public was largely unchanged, while sympathy with the Arab cause decreased somewhat.

American Jews continued to be seen by the American public in a generally positive light, but there was an increase in the percentage of those who saw American Jews as more loyal to Israel than to the United States.

APPENDIX

Table 1

Turning for a minute to the situation in the Middle East, at the present time do you find yourself more in sympathy with Israel, or more in sympathy with the Arab nations?

		· ·		the state of the s		
	1990 May	1989 April	1988 April	1987 February		
		· ·	•			
More with Israel	39%	36%	37%	48%		
More with Arab Nations	9	13	. 11	8		
Not sympathetic with either side*	24	23	26	23		
Sympathetic equally with both sides*	8	. 11	. 11	7		
Don't know/No answer	20	17	16	14		

Note: Figures represent percent of total sample, except April 1989 and May 1990 results which were asked of and based on half sample.

^{*}Answer volunteered by respondents.

Table 2

Turning for a minute to the situation in the Middle East, at the present time do you find yourself more in sympathy with Israel, or more in sympathy with the Palestinians?

	1990 May	1989 April
More with Israel	34%	34%
More with Palestinians	15	14
Not sympathetic with either side*	20	24
Sympathetic equally with both sides*	10	11
Don't know/No answer	21	18

Note: Asked of and based on half sample.

^{*} Answer volunteered by respondents.

Table 3

I'm going to mention the names of some foreign countries. For each, I'd like you to tell me whether or not you think that country is or is not a reliable ally of the United States. First, (NAME COUNTRY) (ASK ABOUT EACH ONE)

•		1990			1989			1988			1987	
		<u>May</u>	-		<u>April</u>			<u>April</u>		<u>F</u>	ebruary	
	Is a reli- able ally	Is not a reli- able ally	Don't know/No answer	Is a reli- able ally	Is not a reli- able ally	Don't know/No answer	Is a reli- able ally	Is not a reli- able ally	Don't know/No answer	Is a reli- able ally	Is not a reli- able ally	Don't know/No answer
Canada	88%	4%	8%	88%	3%	8%	89%	4%	7%	88%	3%	8%
France	61	21	18	58	22	20	53	27	20	54	27	20
West Germany	59	19	22	59	20	21	63	18	19	61	18	21
Israel	40	38	22	44	34	22	43	36	21	49	29	21
Egypt	29	40 .	31	: 29 .	40	31	31	40	29	29	41	31
Jordan	16	44	40	19	43	38	17	45	38	17	44	38
Syria	7 .	60	33	8	59	33	. 7	60	34	6	61	33

Table 4

Turning to the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, do you think the Israeli government's response to the Palestinian uprising has been too harsh, too lenient or about right?

	1990 <u>May</u>	1989 April	1988 April
Too harsh	29%	30%	28%
Too lenient	8	8	11
About right	27	28	26
Don't know/No answer	36	34	34

Table 5

(HAND RESPONDENT CARD) Which one of the following would you prefer as a solution to the problem of the Palestinians in the Middle East?

	1990 <u>M</u> ay	1989 April	1988 April
Israeli annexation of all of the West Bank and Gaza	4%	5%	5%
Israeli military control of all of the West Bank and Gaza, with local self-rule for the Palestinians	9	10	_ 10
The return of major portions of the West Bank and Gaza to Jordanian rule, with appropriate security arrangements for Israel	13	13	12
The establishment of a Palestinian homeland in all of the West Bank and Gaza in federation with Jordan	7	8	6
The establishment of an independent Palestinian state in all of the West Bank and Gaza	10	9	8
Don't know which is preferable solution	57	56	59
Is that because you haven't followed the situation closely enough to have an opinion, or because you don't know which of the solutions you would prefer?			
Haven't followed closely enough	40	33	35
Don't know which solution would prefer	17	23	24

Table 6

Israel has agreed to meet with local Palestinian representatives, but refuses to negotiate with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), claiming that it is a terrorist organization. Do you think Israel is right or wrong in refusing to negotiate with the PLO?

<u> </u>	1990 May	1989 April	1988 April
Right	39%	42%	44%
Wrong	30	32	27
Don't Know/No answer	31	26	29

Table 7

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Most American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the United States.

	1990 May	1989 April	1988 Apr <u>il</u>	1987 February
				•
Agree	28%	21%	24%	24%
Disagree	. 44	. 43	48	49
Don't know/No answer	28	36	27	26

Note: All figures represent percent of total sample.

Table 8

(HAND RESPONDENT CARD) Which, if any, of the groups listed on this card do you believe have too much power in the United States? Just call off the letter in front of the groups.

	1990 May	1989 April	1988 April	1987 February
News media	48%	45%	39%	38%
Business corporations	45	47	44	42
Labor unions	34	34	30	33
Arab interests	27	23	20	20
Orientals	22	23	15	12
Blacks	14	14	14	11
The Catholic Church	13	8	9	9
Jews	8	8	8	7
Hispanics	6	6	6	5
None	8	8	11	9
Don't know/No answer	7	7	8	8

Note: All figures represent percent of total sample. Multiple responses were accepted.

Reported sympathy with Israel and with the Arab nations, by subgroup, in percent.

May 1990

Table 9

Note: Asked of and based on half sample.

Democrats

Republicans

Political Philosophy Conservatives

Liberals

Protestants

Catholics

Religion

^{*} Answer volunteered by respondents

Table 10

Reported sympathy with Israel and with the Palestinians, by subgroup, in percent.

Note: Asked of and based on half sample.

^{*}Answer volunteered by respondents

Table 11

Reported reliability of Israel as an ally, by subgroup, in percent.

Subgroup	Is a reliable ally	Is not relible ally	Don't know/ No answer
	10.04	2004	نديد
Total	40%	38%	22%
Sex			
Males	45	37	17
Females	35	38	27
Age			
18-29	36	. 44	20.
30-44	41	38	20
45-59	42	37	22
60+	42	30	28
Race			
Whites	41	38	21
Blacks	33	37	31
Household Income	•		
< \$15,000	35	36	29
\$15-29,999	37	40	23
\$30-49,999	39	40	21
\$50,000+	53	36	11
Education			
College graduate	52	36	13
Some college	43	39	19
High school graduates	38	41	21
Non-high school graduates	29	33	38
Occupation			•
Executives/Professionals	48	38	14
White collar workers	43	40	17
Blue collar workers	37	39	24
Homemakers	32	36	32
Political Affiliation			
Democrats	39	40	21
Republicans	46	36	17
Political Philosophy			
Conservatives	43	37	21
Liberals	41	37	22
Religion			
Protestants	36	41	23
Catholics	43	37	19

Table 12

Percentage of respondents who think the Israeli government's response to the Palestinian uprising has been too harsh, too lenient, or about right, by subgroup.

Subgroup	Too Harsh	Too Lenient	About Right	Don't know/ No answer
Total	29%	8%	27%	36%
Sex	,			
Males	34	8	29	30
Females	25	8	25	42
Age				
18-29	27	7	26	40
30-44	28	9	29	34
45-59	35	9	26	30
60+	27	6	25	41
Race				
Whites	31	8	27	34
Blacks	16	6	26	52
Household Income				
< \$15,000	28	7	23	42
\$15-29,999	27	8	28	37
\$30-49,999	29	8	31	32
\$50,000+	39	8	30	23
Education				
College graduate	40	5	27	27
Some college	32	6	30	33
High school graduates	27	10	28	35
Non-high school graduates	18	9	21	52
Occupation				
Executives/Professionals	38	5	31	26
White collar workers	27	10	31	32
Blue collar workers	26	9	24	40
Homemakers	24	7	25	44
Political Affiliation				
Democrats	32	7	26	35
Republicans	29	9	32	31
<u>-</u>			32	
Political Philosophy Conservatives	20	o	20	21
	29 26	8	29 22	34 25
Liberals	36	7	22	35
Religion				_
Protestants	28	7	27	38
Catholics	31	10	26	33

Table 13

Reported preferred solution to the problem of the Palestinians in the Middle East, by subgroup, in percent.

May 1990

Subgroup	Israeli annexation	Isr.mil.contr/ local self-rule	Return major portions/ secure Israel	Palestinian homeland	Palestinian state	Don't know (DK)total	DK:not followed closely	DK:dk which solution prefer
Total	4%	9%	13%	7%	10%	57%	40%	17%
Sex				· ·				
Males	5	11	14	8	12	·50	31	18
Females	3	8	12	6	9	63	47	18 16
Age		i .		•				-
18-29	4	7	12	6	12	60	45	15
30-44	5 .	10	14	8	11	53	37	15
45-59	4	11	15	6	11	54	34	19
60+	4	9	11	8	8	60	42	18
Race		-						
Whites	4	10	13	7	11	54	38	16
Blacks	2	5	13	4	5	71	52	18
Household Income						-		
<\$15,000	2	5	12	6	10	64	49	15
\$15-29,999	3	. 7	14 .	7	10	58	41	17
\$30-49,999	4	- 12	13	6	13	51	34	16
\$50,000+	6	13	13	11	12	44	24	19
Education						•	¥	
College graduate	. 5	13	14	9	13	45	28	16
Some college	. 4	10	14	7	11	55	35	19
High school graduates	5	-8	13	6	11	57	41	16
Non-high school graduates	1	6 .	9	6	. 7	70	54	15

Occupation Executives/Professionals White collar workers Blue collar workers Homemakers	6	13	16	9	· 13	42	26	16
	5	8	15	6	10	55	40	15
	3	8	12	. 6	10	61	44	16
	2	9	9	4	10	65	49	16
Political Affiliation Democrats Republicans	3	9	13	8	12	56	41	15
	5	12	13	6	12	51	32	19
Political Philosophy Conservatives Liberals	4 4	11 6	12 15	7 11	10 13	56 51	39 35	17 14
Religion Protestants Catholics	3 4	8 11	12 14	6	11 10	60 52	45 35	15 17

Note: See Table 5 for full text of questions and choices.

Table 14

Percentage of respondents who think Israel is right or wrong in refusing to negotiate with the PLO, by subgroup.

•			T. 1.1
Subgroup	Right	Wrong	Don't know/
Subgroup	Kight	Wiong	No answer
Total .	39%	30%	31%
	,		•
Sex			
Males	40	33	28
Females	38	27	35
Age			•
18-29	33	34	33
30-44	42	29	30
45-59	41	30	29
60+	39	27	34
	5,		0,
Race			
Whites	41	30	29
Blacks	26	27	48
Household Income			
<\$15,000	34	28	38
\$15-29,999	37	29	34
\$30-49,999	44	29	26
\$50,000+	43	38 .	19
Education			· .
College graduate	43	36	21
Some college	42	31	27
High school graduates	42 40	29	31
Non-high school graduates	29	24	48
Tron ingli seriooi graduates	2)	21	70
Occupation			
Executives/Professionals	46	. 35	19
White collar workers	41	33	26
Blue collar workers	33	28	39
Homemakers	37	23	39
Political Affiliation			
Democrats	35	33	32
Republicans	46	29	25
Political Philosophy			•
Conservatives	44	26	29
Liberals	32	40	28
NAC VE MED			
Religion			
Protestants	38	28	33
Catholics	39	· 33	28

Table 15

Percentage of respondents who agree or disagree with the statement, "Most American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the United States," by subgroup.

Subgroup (Agree	Disagree	Don't know/ No answer
Total	28%	44%	28%
Sex			
Males	31	45	24
Females	25	43	32
Age			
18-29	25	47	28
30-44	28	46	26
45-59	26	45	29
60+	32	38	30
Race	;		
Whites	27	46	27
Blacks	35	28	38
Household Income		.•	
<\$15,000	- 31	38	31
\$15-29,999	29	44	27
\$30-49,999	25	47	- 27
\$50,000+	23	60	17
Education	•		
College graduate	22	62	. 17
Some college	28	44	28
High school graduates	28	42	30
Non-high school graduates	34	30	36
Occupation			
Executives/Professionals	22	57	21
White collar workers	27	52	21
Blue collar workers	· 31	37	32
Homemakers	26	35	39
Political Affiliation			
Democrats	29	43	27
Republicans	28	49	22
Political Philosophy			
Conservatives	29	43	. 28
Liberals	26	51	23
Religion			
Protestants	29	40	31
Catholics	29	48	23
	رے	70	

Table 16

Percentage of respondents reporting that they believe Jews have too much power in the United States, by subgroup.

Subgroup	Jews have too much power			
Total			8%	
Sex				
Males			11	
Females			5	
Age			٠.	
18-29	·		6	
30-44			8	
45-59			9	
60+			. 9	
Race				
Whites			8	
Blacks			6	
Household Income		•	•	
< \$15,000			7	
\$15-29,999	•		9	
\$30-49,999			8	
\$50,000+		•	9	
Education	•	-		
College graduate			11	
Some college	•	•	6	
High school graduates			7	
Non-high school graduates			7	
Occupation			•	
Executives/Professionals			11	
White collar workers			7	
Blue collar workers			7	
Homemakers			5	
Political Affiliation				
Democrats			· 8	
Republicans			9	
Political Philosophy		•		
Conservatives			8	
Liberals			8	
Religion				
Protestants			8	
Catholics	•		7	

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022-2746

Single copy Quantity prices on rec