




The Young American Left and Attitudes About Israel

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Received: 15 June 2021 / Accepted: 30 December 2021 / Published online: 4 March 2022
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Abstract

Over the last two decades, a rift has emerged on the US political left regarding the State of Israel. Public polling has shown that young people and the ideological far left have developed distinctly negative views toward Israel. In the fall of 2020, we surveyed 3500 US adults, including oversampling of 2500 adults aged 18–30. We first explore the young left’s views toward Israel in comparison to how they view other foreign countries, and in comparison to how older adults and more conservative adults view Israel. We then ask whether their negative views toward Israel are explained by an issue prioritization of the Israel/Palestine conflict (no). Finally, we ask whether the young left’s negative attitudes toward Israel are focused on Israel’s politics and government or on other features of the country, such as its cultures and religions (it’s both). Overall, the young left evaluates Israel like it evaluates US adversaries such as Russia and Iran, whereas the center and right evaluate Israel like they evaluate other US allies, such as Mexico and India.

Keywords Israel · Public opinion · Young adults · US-Israel relations

For funding support, we thank the Klarman Family Foundation and One8 Foundation.

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Introduction

In May 2021, violence broke out, again, in Israel and Palestine. In the United States, the unrest surfaced a growing divide on the political left. The moderate wing of the Democratic Party, led by President Joe Biden, maintained a clear position in support of Israel.¹ The left wing of the Democratic Party, led by figureheads such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, took a strong position against Israel.² The Republican Party, in contrast, spoke with a unified voice in support of Israel.³

Journalists and commentators have noted that left-wing Democratic politicians are under increased pressure from grassroots activists to criticize Israel and take pro-Palestinian positions.⁴ For instance, when Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) issued a statement that both criticized Israel's actions toward Palestinians and endorsed Israel's right to self-defense against rocket fire on civilians, hundreds of activists who had supported Markey's recent election campaign—identifying themselves as “young people, organizers, and advocates who are responsible for Senator Markey's victory”—wrote a public letter criticizing Markey's “both sides” messaging.⁵ Their letter, which spoke of Israel as engaging in “ethnic cleansing,” encapsulates the public narrative about the young left's highly critical view of Israel.

Long before the May 2021 conflict, this brewing divide on the political left started to take root, with younger and left-leaning identifiers becoming less aligned with Israel. For instance, in 2018, Pew found that while Republicans of all stripes as well as moderate Democrats consistently sympathize more with Israel than with the Palestinians, liberal Democrats have begun to sympathize more with the Palestinians over the past two decades.⁶ Pew identified young people (aged 18–29) as by far the most Palestinian-sympathizing age cohort.

In this article, we seek a better understanding of the young left's attitudes toward Israel. To what extent does the young left actually dislike Israel? What are some plausible explanations for their attitudes toward Israel and their attitudinal departure from other cohorts of Americans? In asking these questions, we should note that we are not weighing in on the extent to which attitudes critical of Israel are or are not a form of antisemitism. A number of other scholars have researched the

¹ Sean Sullivan and Anne Gearan, “Biden is Increasingly at Odds with Other Democrats Over Israel,” *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2021.

² Anthony Zurcher, “Israel-Gaza: The Democrats' ‘Tectonic’ Shift on the Conflict,” *BBC News*, May 21, 2021; Catie Edmondson, “Sanders Introduces Legislation to Block a \$735 Million Arms Sale Package to Israel,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 2021.

³ Andrew Desiderio, Lara Seligman, and Nahal Toosi, “U.S.-Israel Politics Heat Up on the Hill as Liberals Try to Stop Arms Sale,” *Politico*, May 19, 2021.

⁴ Lisa Lerer and Jennifer Medina, “Tensions Among Democrats Grow Over Israel as the Left Defends Palestinians,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2021; Peter Beinart, “Liberal American Attitudes Are Starting To Shift On Israelis And Palestinians,” *All Things Considered*, interviewed by Audie Cornish, National Public Radio, May 21, 2021.

⁵ Matt Murphy, “Markey Backers ‘Upset and Disappointed’ By His Stance on Gaza Conflict,” *The Boston Globe*, May 13, 2021.

⁶ Pew Research Center, “Republicans and Democrats Grow Even Farther Apart in Views of Israel, Palestinians,” January 2018.

link between antisemitism and views on the Israel/Palestine conflict (Beattie 2017; Cohen et al. 2011, 2009; Kaplan and Small 2006). Here, we ask a more elementary set of questions about the contours of the young left's attitudes toward the Jewish state. Regardless of their origins, these attitudes are important to understand because of how they may impact both the future of US party coalitions and foreign policy.

Data and Methods

We fielded an original YouGov survey in November 2020 (November 9–25), after the US presidential election was called and at a relative lull in the Israel/Palestine conflict.⁷ We asked YouGov to create two samples, a sample of 2500 respondents aged 18–30 and a sample of 1000 respondents aged 18 and over. Both the young adult sample and the full adult sample were designed to be representative of the national population with respect to gender, age, race, education, and 2016 vote choice. That is, the young adult sample reflects the true population of 18–30-year-old US residents with respect to these traits, and the full adult sample reflects the true population of adults 18 years and older with respect to these traits. In several points in the analysis, we compare the under-30 sample with the 759 respondents who are over 30 in the general sample. The Supplementary Information (SI) includes documentation from YouGov about the construction of weights, which are used throughout this analysis.

The study was determined exempt from IRB review by the Tufts University Institutional Review Board for Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research, IRB ID: 00000710. Before seeing any survey questions, respondents read and agreed to an informed consent statement. They were informed that these questions were for a research study, that they would be compensated according to their agreement with YouGov, that participation was voluntary, and several other standard pieces of information.

In a separate analysis, we investigate a variety of questions related to antisemitic attitudes in the United States. In the present study, we analyze several questions we posed related to views on Israel. The questions studied here came first in the survey, before respondents were shown any questions about perceptions of Jews.

In measuring ideology, we will mainly utilize a 7-point measure of ideology (instead of a 3-point or 5-point measure), so that we can examine nuances on the ends of the ideological spectrum. One fifth (19%) of 18–30-year-olds in our sample identify as the farthest left on the ideological scale. This compares to 9% of respondents over 30 who identify as farthest left. As an alternative measure of ideology, we asked respondents whether they identified with any of the following labels: leftist, socialist, progressive, libertarian, Christian conservative, and alt-right. This list includes three identities associated with the left and three associated with the right.

⁷ YouGov is a leading firm specializing in representative online surveys. YouGov is widely used in scholarly research, such as for the National Science Foundation-funded Cooperative Election Study (Ansolabehere et al. 2021).

Respondents could check more than one. Twenty-one percent of young respondents identified as leftist, and 21% identified as socialist. There was substantial overlap in these identities. Table 1 summarizes mean responses with respect to ideology and the six ideological identities, as well as racial identities and other variables used in this analysis.

Question 1: Does the Young Left Have an Unfavorable View of Israel?

Survey researchers have long asked Americans about their views of Israel, the Israel/Palestine conflict, and the US relationship to the Israel/Palestine conflict. One of the most common questions asked in public polls has been about respondents' relative sympathies for Israel and for Palestinians in their ongoing conflict. Surveys have also asked about favorability of Israel and Palestine, whether the USA should lean more toward Israel or toward the Palestinians, whether the USA is too supportive or not supportive enough of Israel, and similarly themed questions.

In general, historical polling data show widespread public support for Israel and considerably less support for Palestine (e.g., for the Palestinian Authority).⁸ However, starting around 2000 and increasingly in the last few years, Democrats' views and Republicans' views have diverged (see Cavari 2012; Cavari and Freedman 2021). From the 1970s through the 1990s, Republicans were slightly (5–10 percentage points) more likely to be sympathetic to Israel than Democrats were. By 2018, the gap was over 50 percentage points, according to one measure.⁹

Survey research conducted by Pew, Gallup, the Associated Press, and other prominent outlets has showcased recent polls indicating that liberal Democrats and young Democrats tend to be more aligned with Palestinians than with Israel. In February of 2021, liberal Democrats were considerably more sympathetic to Palestinians than to Israel.¹⁰ In June 2021, immediately following armed conflict in Israel and Palestine, liberal Democrats were three times more likely than conservative Republicans to say that the USA was too supportive of Israel.¹¹ Three in five Republicans, but only one in five Democrats, agreed in May 2021 that it is very important for the USA to help protect Israel.¹² In mediating the Middle East conflict, most Republicans said in June 2021 that the USA should lean toward Israel, while most Democrats wanted the USA to lean toward neither side. Among Democrats aged 18–35, however,

⁸ See, for example, Lydia Saad, "Key Trends in U.S. Views on Israel and the Palestinians," Gallup, May 28, 2021; Carroll Doherty, "A New Perspective on Americans' views of Israelis and Palestinians," Pew Research Center, April 24, 2019.

⁹ "Republicans and Democrats Grow Even Further Apart in Views of Israel, Palestinians," Pew Research Center, January 23, 2018.

¹⁰ Lydia Saad, "Key Trends in U.S. Views on Israel and the Palestinians," Gallup, May 28, 2021.

¹¹ Ellen Knickmeyer and Emily Swanson, "Poll: Many Democrats want more US support for Palestinians," Associated Press, June 23, 2021.

¹² Kathy Frankovic, "Israel and the Palestinians: Where do America's sympathies lie?" YouGov, May 19, 2021.

Table 1 Summary statistics

	Adults 18–30	Adults 31+		Adults 18–30	Adults 31+
Seven-pt. ideology			Ideological identities		
Very liberal	0.19	0.09	Leftist	0.21	0.10
Liberal	0.15	0.11	Socialist	0.21	0.10
Moderate liberal	0.12	0.10	Progressive	0.40	0.36
Moderate	0.25	0.26	Libertarian	0.18	0.15
Moderate conserv.	0.10	0.14	Christian conserv.	0.24	0.39
Conservative	0.09	0.15	Alt-right	0.07	0.06
Very conservative	0.10	0.16	Other Ind. Vars		
Racial groups			State pct. Jewish	2	2
White	0.54	0.69	Female	0.49	0.53
Black	0.14	0.11	Age	24	57
Latino	0.22	0.13	4-year student	0.28	N/A
Other race	0.10	0.08	Other student	0.13	N/A

Cells contain means. For the ideological identities, respondents could select more than one identity; thus columns do not sum to 1. $N = 2500$ for the young adults sample and $N = 759$ for the adults over 30 in the general population sample

respondents were three times more likely to say the USA should lean toward Palestinians than Israel.¹³

While these polls typically ask respondents about Israel in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict, some experts have criticized the zero-sum framing (i.e., sympathies for Israel versus Palestinians) when measuring opinion about Israel or Palestine.¹⁴ Rather than comparing views about Israel to views about Palestinians in the context of the conflict, an alternative approach to understanding public sentiment about Israel is to ask respondents to evaluate Israel in the context of other countries in the world. That is the approach we take here.

Given the public attention to young people and to the political left for their negative attitudes toward Israel, we ask: To what extent does the young left actually have an unfavorable view of Israel? We compare their views of Israel to their views of six other countries. We also compare their views to the views of young respondents in the middle and right of the ideological spectrum. Finally, we compare their views to those of older Americans across the ideological spectrum.

We asked a random one third of the respondents in our study: How favorable is your impression of each of the following countries, or haven't you heard enough to say? We asked respondents about seven countries: China, India, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia. The order of the countries listed was randomized.

¹³ Shibley Telhami, "Most Americans, including half of young Democrats, disapprove of Biden's handling of recent Gaza crisis," Brookings Institution, July 29, 2021.

¹⁴ E.g., Tamara Cofman Wittes and Daniel Shapiro, "How Not to Measure Americans' Support for Israel," *Atlantic*, January 26, 2018.

Half of these countries (China, Iran, Russia) are US adversaries; half are allies. The countries exhibit regional and racial variation, and all of them, aside from Israel, are among the 20 most populated nations on Earth. One of the countries (Nigeria) is, like Israel, a major recipient of US foreign aid.¹⁵ Others are among the main US trading partners (e.g., Mexico, China).¹⁶ All seven of these nations are, to varying degrees, alleged to have regularly engaged in human rights violations.¹⁷

While we considered several factors in choosing comparison countries (size, region, relationship to the United States, domestic/international controversies), we also were constrained by the imperative not to ask about too many countries. In future work, researchers might select a different set of countries for respondents to evaluate, including countries that are not alleged human rights violators. While we do not suspect the results that follow about opinions of Israel would differ if respondents evaluated Israel in the context of another set of countries, further research would be necessary to confirm or disconfirm this assumption.

We first examined the 20% of 18–30-year-olds who identify as the farthest left ideologically. If young liberals dislike Israel, is that merely in comparison with other US allies, or do they dislike Israel even compared to US adversaries?

Figure 1 shows the favorability of each country, excluding respondents who said they hadn't heard enough to say. We find two clear groupings—countries for which very liberal young adults have favorable views (Mexico [85% favorable], India [63%], and Nigeria [60%]) and countries for which very liberal young adults have unfavorable views (Russia [8% favorable], Iran [17%], China [18%], and Israel [33%]). The favorable countries are all generally regarded as US allies; Israel is the only ally viewed more similarly to the US adversaries by the young left. Israel is on par with China and Iran with respect to the 25% or so of young left respondents who have *very* unfavorable views of the country.

Two alternate versions of this figure can be found in the Online Appendix. In Figure S1, we examine country favorability from adults who identify as leftist, socialist, or progressive. We find the same groupings of countries, with Mexico, India, and Nigeria being viewed substantially more favorably than Russia, Iran, China, or Israel. In that analysis, socialist identifiers—again some 20% of adults age 18–30—have particularly negative views toward Israel. In Figure S2, we show a version of Fig. 1 that includes respondents who answered that they hadn't heard enough about the country to make an assessment. In that analysis, Nigeria stands out as an outlier, with a substantial number of respondents unable to evaluate Nigeria. For the rest of the countries, Israel included, most respondents can offer a positive or negative evaluation.

¹⁵ US Agency for International Development, "Foreign Aid Explorer: The official record of US foreign aid".

¹⁶ Ken Roberts, "Among Top 10 U.S. Trade Partners, There Are Just Three Bright Spots," *Forbes*, November 13, 2020.

¹⁷ Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World's Human Rights," April 7, 2021; Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2021," January 23, 2021; US Department of State, "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practice," March 30, 2021.

We now expand the analysis to the full range of ideology for young respondents (18–30) as well as respondents over age 30. Compared to older Americans, do young people across the political spectrum—left as well as right—have negative views toward Israel? On the one hand, we expected the left to have more unfavorable views of Israel than those on the right due to polarized elite cues and greater sympathies for Palestinians (Cavari 2012; Cavari and Freedman 2019). On the other hand, younger adults in general may have more unfavorable attitudes toward Israel across the board due to the fading salience of the Holocaust (Cohen 2018) and increased sympathies for Palestinians.¹⁸

Figure 2 shows an initial view of these results. Note that the confidence intervals for older adults are large in this figure because this version of the question was only asked to 255 adults over 30, and the figure subdivides them into seven ideological positions. Below, in Fig. 3, we condense respondents into three ideological categories for a view with more precise estimates.

On both ideological extremes, more young adults than older adults hold an unfavorable view of Israel. Moderate young adult favorability of Israel (58%) is indistinguishable from moderate older adults (62%). The difference is largest on the far left, where Israel favorability is 27 percentage points less among younger very liberal adults (33% for young adults versus 60% for older adults; difference of means *t*-test, $p=0.05$). Young very conservative adults are supportive of Israel (66%), but substantially less so than older very conservative (82%; difference of means *t*-test, $p=0.07$). Clearly, the most left-leaning young adults have the lowest rating of Israel compared to older adults and/or more conservative adults, but there is a large age gap on the far right as well that is not found in the ideological middle.

Table 2 shows a regression-based view of these results and includes key demographics such as age, race, and college status. Here, we use an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with a binary dependent variable (1 for favorable evaluations and 0 for unfavorable evaluations). The first model is measured with the representative sample of respondents aged 18–30, while the second one is measured with the general-public sample of respondents aged 31+. We use the 7-point ideology measure as a continuous variable, which takes values from 1 (most liberal) to 7 (most conservative). As in the figures, we find that Israel favorability increases as we move from very liberal to very conservative. The constant is greater in the older adult regression, demonstrating the higher support on average among older adults. The demographic and geographic correlates here show mostly null relationships to attitudes toward Israel. This is noteworthy, since many of these items (especially race, gender, and geography) have been found in other work to predict anti-Jewish attitudes (Cohen 2018; Feinberg 2020; King and Weiner 2007; Smith and Schapiro 2019). In contrast, attitudes toward Israel seem to mainly be a function of ideology and age cohort.

Note that Table 2 uses OLS for a binary dependent variable, as is now commonly done in the social sciences (Angrist and Pischke 2009). However, in Table S1, we

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, “Republicans and Democrats Grow Even Farther Apart in Views of Israel, Palestinians,” January 2018.

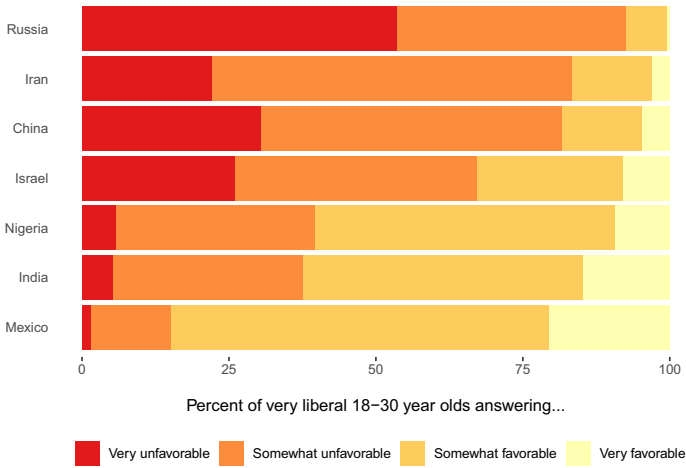


Fig. 1 Very liberal young adult favorability of countries. Note: “How favorable is your impression of each of the following countries, or haven’t you heard enough to say?” displayed for the $N = 163$ young adult respondents who identify as most liberal on a 7-point scale. One third of respondents in the study were asked this version of the question. The other conditions are reported below

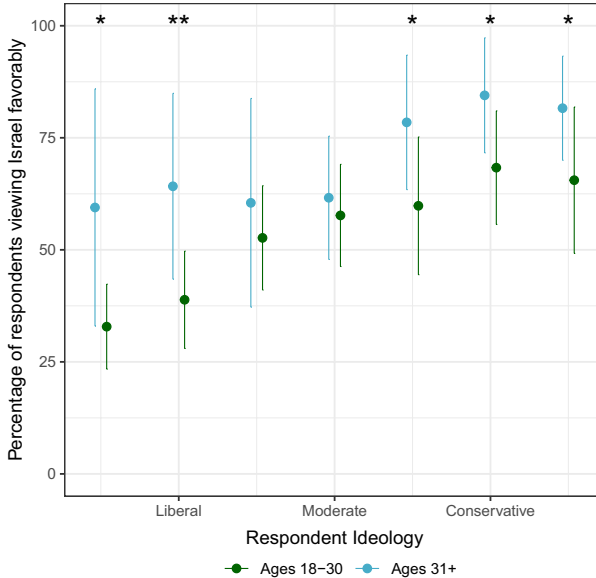


Fig. 2 Overall favorability of Israel by ideology and age. Note: “How favorable is your impression of each of the following countries, or haven’t you heard enough to say?” displayed for the $N = 834$ respondents age 18–30 and $N = 255$ respondents age 31 and older. 95% CI reported. One third of respondents in the study were asked this version of the question. The other conditions are reported below; p values from difference of means t -tests between younger and older respondents are displayed: $*p < 0.10$; $**p < 0.05$.

Table 2 Israel favorability and ideology

	Dependent variable	
	Israel favorability	
	Young adults (18–30)	Adults 31+
Ideology (7-pt)	0.053*** (0.011)	0.049*** (0.017)
State pct. Jew	0.006 (0.009)	−0.009 (0.016)
Black	0.063 (0.070)	−0.165 (0.105)
Latino	−0.044 (0.056)	−0.084 (0.109)
Other race	−0.064 (0.061)	−0.201 (0.145)
Currently in 4-year college	0.036 (0.049)	
Currently in other college	−0.067 (0.065)	
Age	−0.001 (0.006)	0.004* (0.002)
Female	−0.042 (0.039)	−0.144** (0.060)
Constant	0.219 (0.163)	0.293* (0.158)
Observations	823	255
Adjusted R-squared	0.046	0.087

OLS regression.

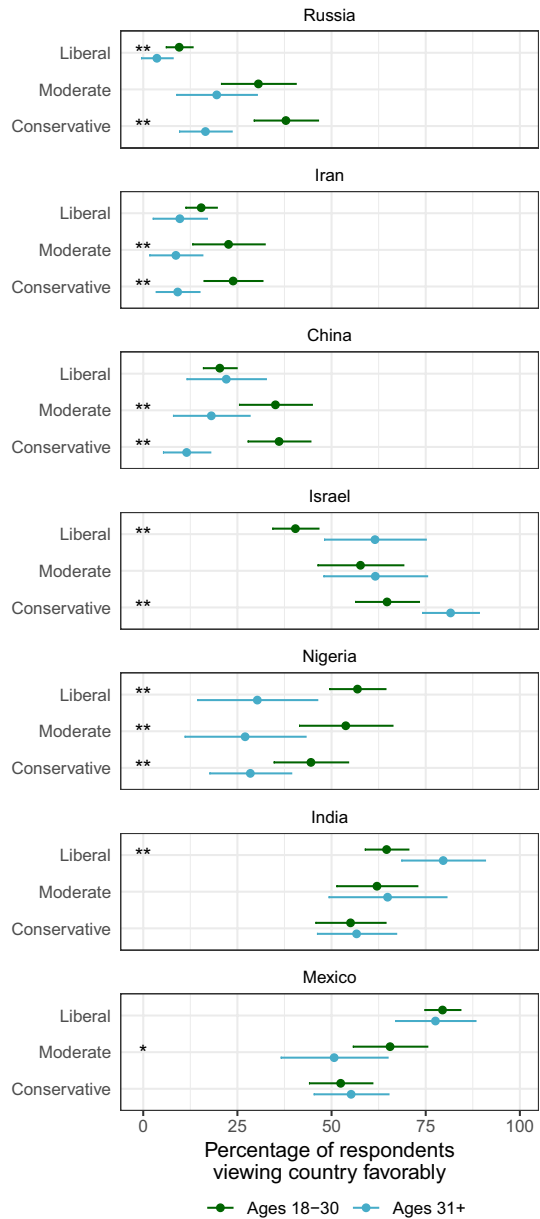
* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ Standard errors in parentheses.

replicate the analysis using logit models. In Figure S3, we use those logit models to generate predicted probabilities to help interpret the relationship between ideology and Israel favorability. The analysis in the Online Appendix offers the same interpretation as that of Table 2.

Are these ideology-by-age dynamics unique to Israel? It is possible that young liberal people simply have less favorable attitudes toward countries across the board, instead of specifically toward Israel. Figure 3 shows the overall favorability rating for each of the seven countries, with respondents broken down into liberal, moderate, and conservative. Online Appendix Figure S4 shows the full trend for ideology on a 7-point scale; the resulting trends are the same, so we group respondents into three ideological categories here for simplicity.

Young people generally do not have less favorable views of countries across the board. In fact, India and Israel are the only two countries that young people view

Fig. 3 Overall favorability of countries by ideology and age. Note: 95% CI reported. Seven-point ideological measure collapsed to three categories; *p* values from difference of means *t*-tests between younger and older respondents are displayed: **p* < 0.10; ***p* < 0.05



less favorably than older people, and the gap for Israel is substantially larger (19% on average across generations for Israel compared to 4% for India). Given prior research findings that young adults hold more cosmopolitan attitudes (Shenhav-Goldberg and Kopstein 2020; Federico and Sidanius 2002), it seems that Israel is indeed an outlier with its decreased favorability among younger Americans. Israel is also the only

country with large favorability gaps between age cohorts on both the right and the left but not among moderates, suggesting there is something unique occurring on the ends of the political spectrum when it comes to evaluations of Israel.

The political left has more favorable views than the political right toward all of the US allies except for Israel. The young right has more favorable views than the left toward all of the US adversaries. Liberals, both young and old, view Nigeria, India, and Mexico more favorably than conservatives do. Russia, Iran, and China are favored more by conservatives than liberals, as is Israel. Russia, Iran, and China all have very low favorability ratings. Israel's favorability ratings are closer on average to those of Nigeria, India, and Mexico (US allies), but Israel's pattern of increasing favorability moving from left to right matches that of Russia, Iran, and China (US adversaries).

Young people aged 18–30 have less favorable views of Israel than older adults do, particularly when compared to the generational gaps in favorability of other countries. The generational gaps on Israel's favorability are most noticeable on the ideological extremes. Israel is the only country whose favorability is the lowest among the young left.

Not only does the young left thus dislike Israel, but these broader patterns are distinct from those of other countries.

Question 2: Why Does the Young Left Dislike Israel?

What explains this unique pattern across generations and ideology of the American public toward Israel? This is a complicated question that we cannot fully answer within the confines of a single paper. However, we conduct two analyses to begin exploring and discover new insights.

First, we hypothesize that the relatively unfavorable perceptions of Israel come from an increased saliency of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Young adults, and the young left in particular, may be exposed to more activism and news surrounding Palestine. As a result, the young left may prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict as a political issue, leading to heightened unfavorable views toward Israel. That is, even though other major trading partners, world powers, and recipients of US foreign aid also have internal conflicts and are also regularly accused of human rights abuses, respondents on the left consider Israel's political and human rights issues to be especially salient and thus view Israel more negatively.

To test this hypothesis, we asked respondents to rank 11 policy positions in terms of how important they were to them. The 11 positions we asked about were reproductive health, racial equality, health care, the Israel/Palestine conflict, immigration, firearms, economic competitiveness, environmental policy, Russian interference, national security, and human rights in China. We chose a variety of policy items, both domestic and foreign, that were salient to politics when the survey was fielded. We hypothesized that the left would rank the Israel/Palestine conflict as more important than other ideological groups, due to the aforementioned increased salience of Palestine on the left.

The results show the opposite relationship. Neither young very liberal nor older very liberal adults prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict—the issue is the second least important on average for young adults and the least important on average for older adults. Figure 4 shows the mean ranking of the Israel/Palestine conflict by age and ideology for all respondents. While young liberals (mean ranking of 8.3) do prioritize Israel/Palestine slightly higher on average than older liberals (9.6), both young conservatives (7.1) and old conservatives (6.6) prioritize Israel/Palestine considerably higher. Older conservatives—the group most supportive of Israel—may potentially prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict due to their favorable views toward Israel. But the reverse—sympathizing with Palestine leading the left to prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict—does not seem to be true.

Table 3 shows a regression-based analysis of these results. As with the analysis in the prior section, we find that demographic variables such as race and education that in other studies are associated with higher rates of antisemitic attitudes are *not* associated with differences in prioritization of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Ideology appears to be the main driver of Israel/Palestine prioritization, but opposite that of our hypothesis: conservatives tend to prioritize the conflict more. There is a slight age effect (with younger adults prioritizing it slightly more), but even across generations, all left-leaning adults tend to rank the Israel/Palestine conflict as one of their bottom two issues. Higher saliency and prioritization of the Israel/Palestine conflict therefore does not appear to be the explanation for the less favorable views of Israel among liberal and/or young adults.

Are Views Tied to Politics or to Broader Cultural Animosity?

We next examine whether the distinct pattern of favorability regarding Israel can be explained by a dislike of Israel's politics and government in particular. Perhaps when young and/or liberal people express a negative view of Israel, they are actually just expressing a negative view specifically of Israel's *politics and government*. Exposure to activism around Palestine and news about the Israel/Palestine conflict could lead to political concerns being more salient when respondents are asked about Israel than when they are asked about other countries.

To better understand this argument, consider an analogy. Suppose that when asked about Mexico, left-leaning and right-leaning Americans evaluate the country on different terms. Left-leaning respondents may think about the cultures and peoples and languages of Mexico (which they like), whereas right-leaning respondents think about the politics and government (which they may not like). The left might disfavor the Mexican government, and the right might favor Mexican culture, but their overall evaluations stem from different dimensions. (*Why* they may evaluate countries on different terms—media diets? outgroup prejudice?—is a different question.) For Israel, it is plausibly the opposite of the Mexican example: the left thinks about politics, the right thinks about culture. Interestingly, Jewish American attitudes about Israel are reflective of a similar cultural/political split. Jewish Americans

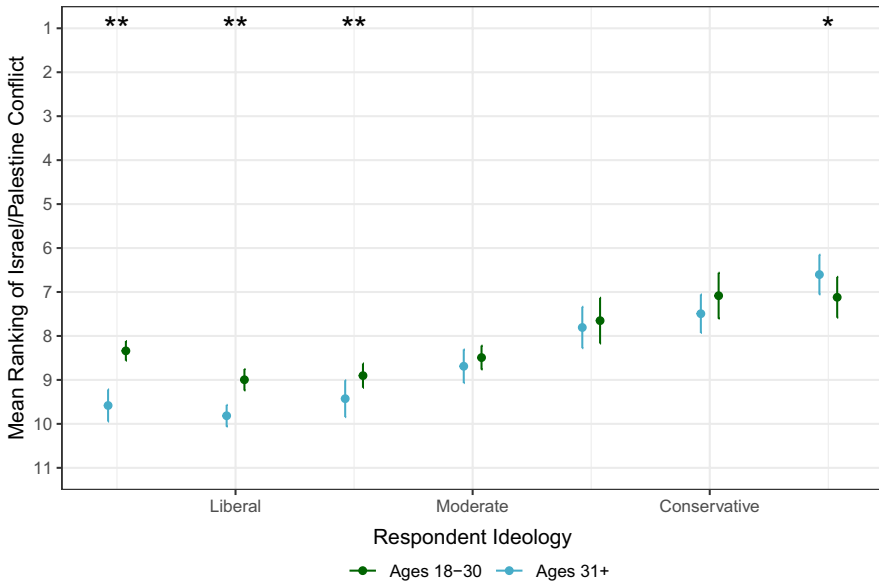


Fig. 4 Prioritization of Israel/Palestine by ideology and age. Note: 95% CI reported. $N = 2491$ for the young adult sample and $N = 755$ for older adults. p -values from difference of means t -tests between younger and older respondents are displayed: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$.

overwhelmingly favor Israel¹⁹ and feel emotionally connected to Israel, but they also disfavor the Netanyahu government (i.e., the government that was in power at the time of our survey) and they do not believe that the government is making a sincere effort toward peace.²⁰

As previously reported, the country evaluations described above were only asked of one third of our sample. Another third was asked a different version: “Thinking about their **politics and government**, how favorable is your impression of each of the following countries...” The final third of the sample was asked, “Thinking about their **languages, cultures, and religions**, how favorable is your impression of each of the following countries...”

If negative attitudes toward Israel are a result of the salience of political news about Israel or the Israel/Palestine conflict, we should expect to see the overall condition results be very close to the *politics* condition result. Perhaps the young left, like Jewish identifiers, have positive views toward Israel’s languages, cultures, and religions, yet view the country negatively overall on account of politics. Alternatively, perhaps their negative affect toward Israel runs deeper, either because their negative views of the Israeli government spill over into responses about languages/cultures/religions or because their negative views about Israel stem from prejudicial attitudes.

¹⁹ Frank Newport, “American Jews, Politics and Israel,” Gallup, August 27, 2019.

²⁰ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020,” May 11, 2021.

Table 3 Israel/Palestine issue ranking and ideological position

	Dependent variable	
	Israel/Palestine issue ranking	
	Young adults (18–30)	Adults 31+
Ideology	–0.255*** (0.035)	–0.554*** (0.042)
State pct. Jew	–0.016 (0.028)	0.043 (0.042)
Black	–0.167 (0.226)	0.482* (0.254)
Latino	–0.222 (0.202)	0.032 (0.298)
Other race	0.145 (0.176)	–0.043 (0.317)
In 4-year college	–0.214 (0.164)	
In other college	–0.288 (0.219)	
Age	0.021 (0.019)	0.007 (0.006)
Female	0.415*** (0.128)	0.453*** (0.167)
Constant	8.655*** (0.528)	9.944*** (0.419)
Observations	2462	754
Adjusted R-squared	0.049	0.202

OLS regression.

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (standard errors in parentheses).

In the Online Appendix, Table S2, we measure the rate at which respondents said “haven’t heard enough to say” to evaluate the country, for each country and in each condition. For six out of seven countries, respondents were more willing or able to evaluate the country’s “languages, cultures, and religions” than the country’s “politics and government.” However, in all cases, the majority of respondents (ranging from 60% for Nigeria to 84% for Mexico) rated countries’ cultures. In all three conditions, Nigeria exhibited the highest rates of respondents not being sure how to make an evaluation.

Figure 5 shows the favorability of Israel for the three experimental conditions—*overall*, *politics*, and *culture*—across age and ideology of the respondents. More respondents on the far left, for both younger and older adults, have a negative view of Israel *overall* and Israel’s *politics and government* than on the far right; favorability increases in both conditions as ideology moves from left to right. More young adults (across ideological positions) have a negative view of Israel *overall* and

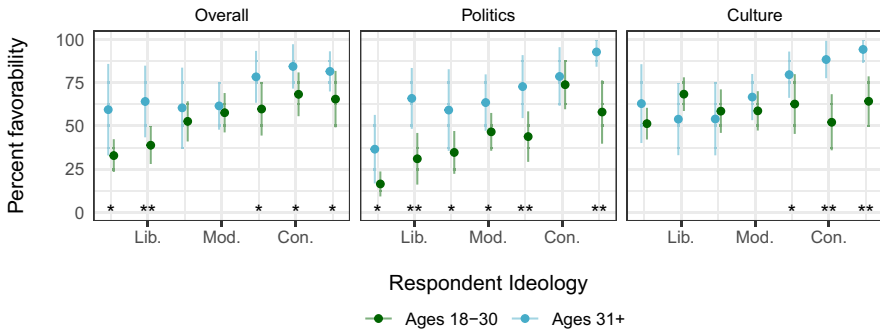


Fig. 5 Israel favorability in three conditions. Note: Overall condition: $N = 834$ for 18–30s, $N = 255$ for 31+. Politics condition: $N = 833$ for 18–30s, $N = 252$ for 31+. Culture condition: $N = 833$ for 18–30s, $N = 252$ for 31+. 95% CI shown; p values from difference of means t -tests between younger and older respondents are displayed: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$

Israel’s *politics and government* than older adults do. Young conservatives’ views of Israel are essentially the same across conditions (66% favorability overall, 58% favorability for politics, and 64% favorability for culture). Negative views of Israel are much more common among young conservatives than among older conservatives (82% favorability overall, 93% favorability for politics, and 94% favorability for culture).

Young liberals’ favorable evaluations of Israel do increase in the culture condition (51% favorability for culture, compared to 33% overall and only 16% favorability for politics). Yet still nearly 50% of young adults on the far left have a negative view of Israel’s languages, cultures, and religions.

But do more of the young left hold an unfavorable view of Israel’s culture than they do of the culture of other countries? To answer this, we examine young adult cultural evaluations of Israel compared to other countries. Figure 6 shows young adult cultural evaluations of the other six countries in our survey compared to Israel’s.²¹ Among the farthest left respondents, only Russia’s cultural evaluation has a lower point estimate than Israel’s, though the point estimates are not statistically distinguishable.

As noted back in Fig. 1, more young far-left respondents have a critical view of Iran and China than Israel overall (17% and 18% favorability, respectively, compared to 33% favorability for Israel), but their evaluations of each country’s culture is approximately equal (56% for Iran’s culture, 57% for China’s culture, and 51% for Israel’s culture). Whereas in the overall conditions, Israel was between the two clear groupings of other countries (Nigeria/India/Mexico versus Russia/Iran/China), the young far left views Israel’s culture on par with Russia’s, Iran’s, and China’s. The young left is much more favorable toward Russia’s, Iran’s, and China’s culture

²¹ Although not the focus of this section, we repeat the analysis for political evaluations and show the chart in the Online Appendix (Figure S5).

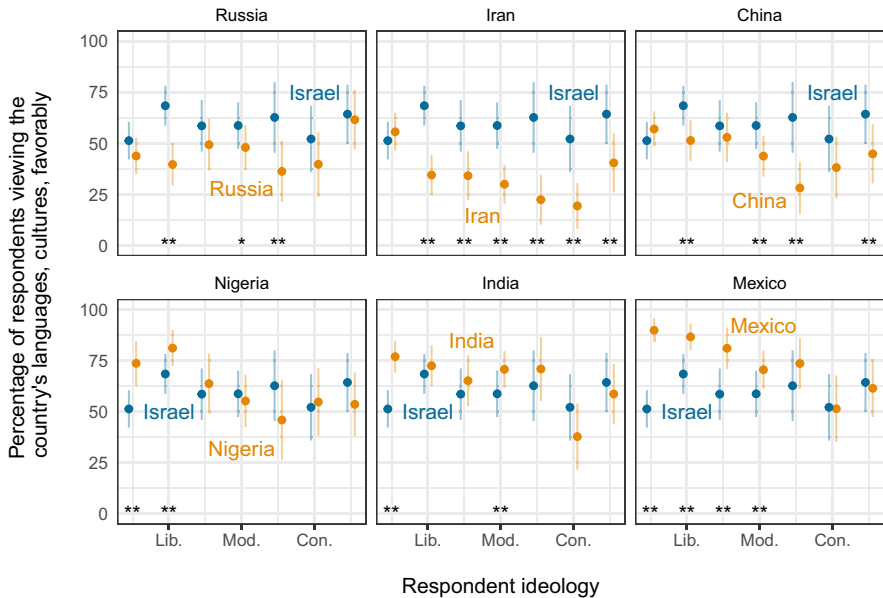


Fig. 6 Young adult cultural favorability of other countries compared to Israel. 95% CI reported; p values from difference of means t -tests between Israel evaluation and the comparison country's evaluation are displayed: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$

compared to their evaluation of the countries overall than they are toward Israel's culture versus Israel overall.

The young far right, on the other hand, views Israel's culture more favorably than they view any other country's, but this is still not much more favorable than the young far left's view of Israel's culture. Whereas the young far left views cultures of countries like Mexico (90% favorability), India (77%), and Nigeria (74%) overwhelmingly favorably, the young right's highest cultural favorability is of Israel at 64%. So while more on the young right are favorable toward Israel's culture than they are toward other countries, they favor the culture of most countries comparatively less than the young left does.

Looking at trends as we move from very liberal to very conservative, Israel once again sticks out as an outlier. Iran, China, Nigeria, India, and Mexico all have negative trends across ideological cohort—their cultural favorability decreases as we move from very liberal to very conservative. Russia is the only country with a positive trend, with cultural favorability *increasing* as we move from very liberal to very conservative. Israel's cultural favorability is essentially flat; unlike our prior analysis, there is little to no relationship between Israel's cultural favorability and ideology.

These trends are not present for older adults. The same analysis done for adults aged 31+ in our sample (shown in the Online Appendix in Figure S6) indicates a strongly positive relationship between ideology and favorability of Israel's culture. Far-right-leaning older adults have a 94% favorability rating of Israel's culture,

substantially higher than their evaluation of any other country's culture. Older far-left adults do not view Israel's culture on par with Russia's, Iran's, or China's; they are considerably more favorable of Israel's culture, grouping it instead with Nigeria's, Mexico's, and India's.

Negative views of Israel are thus not limited to political evaluations. Even when asked directly about culture, younger people have a more negative view of Israel. The differences are stark for both young far-left and young far-right respondents. These trends are not present with other countries, suggesting something unique is occurring with public opinion toward Israel in young people across the ideological spectrum.

Conclusion

Young adults across the ideological spectrum have a distinctly less favorable view of Israel than older adults do, but the ideological young left's critical attitudes toward Israel stand out in particular. Compared to both older liberals and younger conservatives, as well as compared to how they viewed other countries that are allied with the United States, the young left's negative attitudes toward Israel are anomalously extreme. Among very liberal 18–30-year-olds, Israel is viewed in the company of US rivals such as China and Iran.

Why does the young left have these distinct attitudes? Our analysis points to negative rather than affirmative answers to these questions. The issue-ranking exercise suggests that the young left does not give the Israel/Palestine conflict a high priority—at least not in the time period of our survey, in which there was relative calm between Israel and Palestine. The cultural/political/overall analysis suggests that the young left's negative views toward Israel are not simply opposition to the current government of Israel. Half of the respondents on the young left view the languages, cultures, and religions of Israel negatively, the same levels at which they view China, Russia, and Iran.

Some of these trends are seemingly explained by polarization. For instance, President Trump differentiated his party from Democrats through his association with Russia and his antagonism toward Mexico. In our analysis, we see higher support on the right than the left for Russia and lower support for Mexico—potentially a direct outcome of a polarized public following Trump's cues. Likewise, President Trump lent support to the Netanyahu government in Israel, which could explain some of the higher support on the right than left for Israel.

However, polarization is likely insufficient to characterize the patterns we uncover. Younger and older moderates hold nearly the same regard for Israel. Compared to moderates, older liberals have slightly less support for Israel and younger conservatives have slightly more support. But older conservatives have substantially greater support and younger liberals have substantially less support. It is not clear why younger liberals and older conservatives would wind up much more polarized than older liberals and younger conservatives, suggesting something more than partisan polarization is at play.

Polarization also does not neatly explain evaluations of other countries. Nigeria, for instance, is one of the few foreign countries in the world (along with Israel) in which Donald Trump was unusually and consistently popular during his presidency,²² but this does not correspond to an anti-Nigeria attitude on the left. This could be because respondents do not know about the dynamics between President Trump and Nigeria—either because partisan leaders perhaps chose not to turn Trump’s relationship with Nigeria into a political issue, or because the public may have not found news about Nigeria to be particularly salient. But even partisan evaluations of China—a relatively salient foreign power—do not follow the pattern we should expect from polarization. Despite President Trump’s repeated anti-China rhetoric and policies, the young right still views China more positively than the young left does. We do not explore the reasons for these trends here—indeed, a question for other research—but simply note that polarization does not seem to be a satisfying explanation for the trends we see for Israel or the other countries.

Why may the young left have such negative views of Israel, then? It could be that Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians merits Israel being an outlier for them. We do not here attempt to evaluate the relative failures of different states, but the answer is not an obvious yes. Consider the young left’s positive views of Nigeria, India, and Mexico. Among its many human rights violations, including executions, police brutality, and discrimination against gay people and women, Nigeria has also forcibly evicted millions of residents from their homes in recent years.²³ India has recently witnessed anti-Muslim legal discrimination as well as deadly riots against Muslims that are alleged to be fueled by political leaders.²⁴ Mexico has seen a spiraling of murders against political candidates and journalists, with accusations that the federal government has turned a blind eye.²⁵ The young left views all of these countries and their cultures positively compared to Israel.

The young left might dislike Israel because the news they hear about it is negative. The issue-ranking analysis suggests that Israel/Palestine is *not* a top priority for the young left, but heightened news attention to the conflict (compared to other countries’ conflicts) still could be making Israel less favorable in the eyes of young adults. If they hear more negative news about Israel than they do negative news about other countries, they could have uniquely negative opinions about Israel. But again, there is an underlying question we cannot answer here about why the public, or certain subsets of the public, seeks out news about some foreign countries and not others.

²² Emmanuel Akinwotu, “‘He just says it like it is.’: why many Nigerians support Donald Trump,” *The Guardian*, October 31, 2020.

²³ “Nigeria: Deadly Mass Forced Evictions Make Life Misery for Waterfront Communities,” Amnesty International, November 14, 2017.

²⁴ “‘Shoot the Traitors’: Discrimination Against Muslims under India’s New Citizenship Policy,” Human Rights Watch, April 9, 2020.

²⁵ Natalie Gallon and Matt Rivers, “At Least 88 Politicians have been Killed in Mexico since September,” CNN, May 30, 2021; Nina Lakhani, “Mexico World’s Deadliest Country for Journalists, New Report Finds,” December 22, 2020.

While we have considered a few hypotheses to explain the young left's attitudes toward Israel, we do not believe our answers are definitive but rather merit future research and exploration. Our purpose in this paper has been to illuminate basic findings about what the young left thinks on the topic of Israel relative to the young right and to older respondents, and to begin to be able to explain the nature of their views. These age-based and ideology-based cleavages over Israel may seem relatively minor, but they have the potential to affect foreign policy and party coalitions in the future. The Republican Party has come to be viewed as the "Pro-Israel" party,²⁶ in part because of the staunch support of older conservatives (which we find in our analysis as well). But the declining support for Israel among younger conservatives could lead the Republican Party to back away from its support of Israel, especially as these less pro-Israel conservatives become a larger part of the Republican Party base. With younger liberals having even stronger negative views of Israel, it is also not clear that the Democratic Party has an electoral incentive to become more strongly pro-Israel. Both parties shifting away from the United States' strongest ally in the Middle East for the past several decades would be a monumental shift in foreign policy. Accordingly, this merits continued research. We look forward to joining other scholars in a continued effort to examine this important set of attitudes.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-022-09417-2>.

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²⁶ Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, "How The GOP Became A 'Pro-Israel' Party," FiveThirtyEight, December 8, 2017.

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