

New Saudi Opinion Poll Shows 40 Percent Still Back Some Ties with Israel; Three-Fourths Say Rocket Fire Against Israel Will Have Negative Effects

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Brief Analysis

A rare public opinion poll in Saudi Arabia, commissioned by the Washington Institute and conducted in March/April 2023 by a reputable regional firm, reveals an intriguing mix of attitudes—some in line with emerging Saudi government policies; others, not so much.

Against the background of this week’s exchanges of fire between Israel and Gaza, it is striking that the solid majority (76%) of Saudi citizens say that Hamas “firing missiles or rockets against Israel from Gaza” will have “negative effects on our region.” Moreover, as in previous polls since November 2020, around 40% of Saudis continue to accept economic ties with Israel. In this survey, 38% answered in the affirmative to this proposition: “If it would help our economy, it would be acceptable to have some business deals with Israeli companies.”

By way of instructive comparison, affirmative responses to this question in Egypt or Jordan, both officially at peace with Israel for several decades, have hovered at around the 10% range in every recent survey. The relatively high and steady level of Saudi popular support for such initiatives is especially notable because most of the fieldwork for this survey was conducted during Ramadan—a month of heightened tensions between Israelis and Palestinians around the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, as was widely reported in Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, 41% of Saudis continue to say that “the agreement on a maritime boundary between Israel and Lebanon” will be a positive factor for the region. And in another question asked here for the first time, two-thirds (65%) judge that “the mass protests by some Israelis against the new Netanyahu government there” will produce some positive effects as well.

But Full Normalization and Military or Humanitarian Cooperation with Israel Lag Well Behind

This relatively high level of popular acceptance and nuanced attitudes, however, does not mean that most Saudis favor full normalization with Israel today—nor active cooperation with it against Iran. Again as in previous recent polls, just 20% say that the Abraham Accords will yield positive results for the Middle East. An equally small minority (18%) express agreement with this proposition: “Despite our differences with Israel on other issues, some Arab states should cooperate with Israel against the threats we face from Iran.”

In addition, on an even more pointed question, the overwhelming majority (85%) concur with the following assertion: “A major American or Israeli military strike against Iran would be too dangerous, and a bad idea for our country.” An almost equally large majority (81%), surprisingly, also agree with this deliberately provocative statement: “In case of an earthquake or other natural disaster, as we just saw in Turkey and Syria, Arab countries should refuse any humanitarian aid from Israel.”

Majority of Saudis Also Oppose Normalization with Iran, View It As ‘Enemy’

Also highly noteworthy in these responses is that on some other issues, including Iran, the majority of Saudis privately *disagree* with their own government’s latest policy moves. For example, two-thirds (67%) say that “the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran” will produce *negative* regional outcomes. The majority of Saudi citizens (58%) view Iran as “an enemy of our country” (although among Saudi Arabia’s small Shia minority, that proportion drops to 39%). These findings bolster the overall credibility of the survey as a reflection of actual attitudes, rather than merely a roster of “politically correct” responses.

Methodological Note

This analysis is based on findings from a survey among a representative, random national sample of 1,000 Saudi citizens. Sample selection followed standard geographic probability procedures, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately 3 percent. The survey was conducted by a highly qualified, experienced, and completely apolitical regional commercial firm. Strict quality controls and assurances of confidentiality were provided throughout. Additional details, including full question wording and data set with demographic breaks, are available on our [interactive polling platform \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twi-interactive-polling-platform\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twi-interactive-polling-platform). ❖

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