

Egyptians Still Lukewarm on Mass Street Protests; U.S. Trails Russia and China as Overall Partner, But Edges Out Both as Security Partner

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Brief Analysis

A new public opinion poll of Egyptian citizens, commissioned by the Washington Institute and conducted in late March/April by a regional commercial firm, showed that despite the current economic doldrums, street protests remained unpopular.

The majority of Egyptians continue to view the Abraham Accords as having a negative impact on the region and reject ties with Israelis, and over one-third of Egyptians perceive Hamas missiles against Israel as negative. Notably, on this issue and other questions addressed in the survey, there are no statistically significant differences between the responses of Egyptian adults under age thirty and the country's older generation.

Half of Egyptians Continue to Reject Street Protests – But 47 Percent Beg to Differ

Despite the continuous deterioration of the economic situation and the growing dissatisfaction with government policy, half of Egyptians agree somewhat or strongly with the following statement: “It is a good thing we do not have mass street protests against corruption, as in some other Arab countries.” Almost half (47%), however, *disagree* with that judgment. These findings are consistent with the results of the fall 2022 poll, and analysis suggesting that any protests resulting from Egypt's current economic crisis will be sporadic rather than systemic.

Russia Edges Ahead of U.S. and China as a Preferred Partner

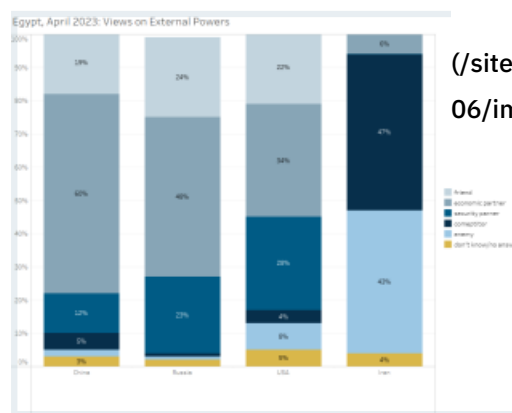
Though three-fourth of the Egyptians in fall 2022 saw the regional impact of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in negative terms, belief in the importance of relations with Russia among Egyptians has been on the rise over the past several years. Notably, a significant majority of the Egyptians—95% in the most recent Spring 2023 poll—classify Russia as an “economic partner” (48%), “friend” (24%), or “security partner” (23%). Consistent with this attitude, a large majority (76%) of the Egyptians agree at least “somewhat” that “the best outcome” in Ukraine would be “a

Russian victory, including the annexation of significant Ukrainian territory to Russia.” Less than a quarter (20%) disagreed.

Attitudes towards China are no less positive—91% view China as a partner of some type rather than a competitor or enemy. In this case, Egyptians are even more likely to describe China as an “economic partner” (60%), versus “a friend” (19%) or “security partner” (12%).

Regarding the United States, the majority of Egyptians (84%) also view Washington as a partner, with 34% saying the country is an “economic partner,” 28% saying it was a “security partner” and 22% viewing it as “a friend.” Although the United States lags behind Russia and China as a preferred partner overall, it still eclipses both Russia and China as a security partner.

In this vein, when asked more specifically about their preferred priority for U.S. policy in the region, Egyptians choose the following options: “Do more to help resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict” (38%); “Do more to help promote democracy and human rights in Arab countries” (24%); “Provide more economic aid and investment in Arab countries” (23%); and “Do more to counter threats from Iran and its proxies” (just 12%).



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Iran Widely Seen as Adversary, Yet Saudi-Iranian Rapprochement Garners Some Support

The majority of the Egyptians (89%) in the most recent poll view Iran as a “competitor” (46%) or “enemy” (43%). Despite such widespread negative attitudes towards Iran, two-thirds of the Egyptians polled agree at least somewhat that “a major American or Israeli military strike against Iran would be too dangerous, and a bad idea for our country,” while less than one-third disagree with the proposition. On a surprising note, Egyptians are divided on the recent “restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran”—a slight minority (45%) of the Egyptians see the move as somewhat or very positive, while about half (51%) view the move as somewhat or very negative.

Likewise, the majority of Egyptians (58%) disagree with the proposition that “since Iran is now getting so close to having a nuclear bomb, it’s time for an Arab country to get one too.” Reactions to this statement could depend on one’s political viewpoint—some may believe it risky to own such technology, whereas those who support such a statement may view a nuclear bomb as a national security requirement.

Abraham Accords, Contact with Israelis, and Israeli Government Remain Unpopular

Though Egypt was the first Arab country to engage in a peace treaty and normalize relations with Israel, the majority of the Egyptian public continues to resist the establishment of informal ties with Israelis and see the regional impact of the Abraham Accords in negative terms. When asked about the effect of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan on the region, only 12% of Egyptians view these effects as even somewhat positive, a percentage that has remained unchanged since the last poll in the fall of 2022. This attitude toward peace with Israel suggests a disconnect between public opinion and public policy, and that normalization has only occurred at the official level.

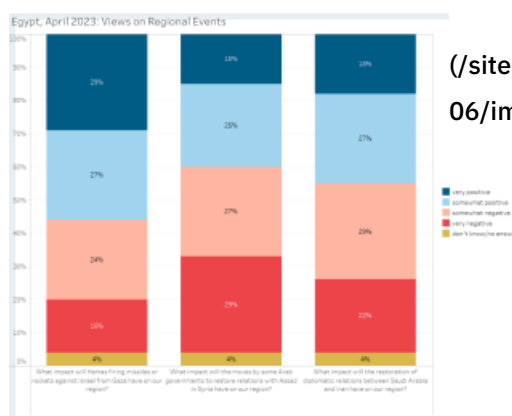
Moreover, the Egyptian public still shows very little support for establishing informal contacts with Israelis. Despite Egypt's severe economic woes, a mere 15% agree with the following statement: "If it would help our economy, it would be acceptable to have some business deals with Israeli companies." In the same vein, less than one-quarter of the Egyptians (22%) disagree that Arab countries should refuse emergency humanitarian aid from Israel in the event of a natural disaster.

Though half of Egyptians do not support the idea of street protests in their own country, two-thirds view the regional impact of the protests in Israel against the new Netanyahu government as somewhat or very positive. Such a negative attitude towards the Netanyahu government was also apparent in the fall 2022 poll, when only 5% of the Egyptians expressed a positive view regarding the results of the elections which brought Netanyahu to power.

A Few Emerging Positive Views on Israel

The agreement on the maritime boundary between Israel and Lebanon garnered support among some Egyptians, as over one-third of the Egyptians see the deal as positive. Moreover, the current poll shows that potential security cooperation between Israel and Arab countries to face Iran is plausible to some—more than a quarter of Egyptians (29%) agree with the proposition that "despite our differences with Israel on other issues, some Arab states should cooperate with Israel against the threats we face from Iran." This is a higher proportion than those citizens polled in the Gulf.

Surprisingly, also, many Egyptians are inclined to oppose Hamas engaging in armed conflict with Israel. In this regard, 40% of the Egyptians maintain that "Hamas firing missiles or rockets against Israel from Gaza" has "negative effects on the region."



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Against Official Policy, Majorities Disapprove of Relations with Assad, Religious Reform

On the regional level, when asked about "the moves by some Arab governments to restore relations with Assad in Syria," 39% saw the proposition as somewhat or very positive, while 56% see it in negative terms, demonstrating that a notable proportion of Egyptians are not following the official government line when it comes to normalization with Assad.

And when it comes to the issue of Islamic reform—a point of contention between President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the major Islamic center of learning Al-Azhar, which has been resistant—only a quarter of Egyptians agree with this proposition: "We should listen to those among us who are trying to interpret Islam in a more moderate, tolerant, and modern way." These numbers remained unchanged since the August 2022 poll. The lack of support for such a statement is striking given the role it plays in the Egyptian regime's discourse against pro-Muslim Brotherhood figures. In this case, the timing of fieldwork mostly during Ramadan may have skewed some responses in that direction.

Methodological Note

This analysis is based on findings from a survey among a representative, random national sample of 1,000 Egyptian 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 breakdowns, 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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