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American Public Opinion toward Israel

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# Attitudes of Hispanics toward Israel

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

US demographics are in the midst of a shift that is transforming the racial tapestry of American society, the main cause of which is the burst in American Hispanic population. The rapid growth of the Hispanic population bares many consequences, including specific implications on American public opinion toward Israel. In this report we discuss the electoral importance of the Hispanic population and trends in support for Israel among this group. Using an extensive database of surveys collected at the APOI research lab, we examine and analyze (1) the overall support for Israel within the Hispanic and non-Hispanic American public, (2) the differences in support for Israel between US-born Hispanics and Hispanic immigrants, and (3) the support for Israel among Hispanics registered to vote and non-registered Hispanics. Our findings reveal that the assimilation process increases support for Israel among this immigrant community. Specifically, we show that Hispanics who were born in the US and Hispanics who are politically involved are more supportive of Israel than those who are first generation immigrants and are not involved in the political process.

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The demographics of the United States are in the midst of a shift that is gradually yet drastically transforming the racial tapestry and diversity of American society. While in 1960, Whites accumulated 85% of the population in the United States, projections made by Pew Research Center suggest that by 2060 Whites will count for 43% of the population. This estimation—that holds critical implications on numerous aspects of life in the US such as politics, economics and more—is attributed to the fast growth of three major minority groups in the US: Hispanic, Black and Asian. The biggest contributor to this trend is the Hispanic population, with a rapid growth due to immigration and birth. The US Hispanic population now makes up 17% of the US population (54.1 million), up from 5% in 1970, making it the nation's second-largest racial group. They are expected to reach 31% by 2060 (Krogstad & Lopez, 2014).

One would expect to witness a steady rise of Hispanic political strength, parallel to the rise in their sheer numbers. Yet, for years, Hispanics in the US have been considered by pundits in the media, politicians and academics as a "sleeping giant" that is unable or unwilling to arise from his sleep and put into action his electorate power and potential influence. Indeed, this is depicted by the numbers of Hispanic eligible voters and their turnout rates. In the 2012 Presidential elections there were 23.7 million eligible Hispanic voters, of whom only 11.2 million voted (48%, compared to voting rates of 66% and 64% for Blacks and Whites, respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). A Pew Hispanic center report shows a steeper rise in the number of Hispanic eligible voters than that of Hispanic actual voters over time (since 1992) and poor turnout rates, ranging from 43 to 52 percent (Taylor, Gonzales-Barrera, Passel & Lopez, 2012). The same is also true for midterm elections, in which the Hispanic turnout rate lags behind that of other racial groups (Lopez, Krogstad, Patten & Gonzales-Barrera, 2014).

Still, recent demographic processes suggest that the Hispanic population is undergoing important changes that may dramatically affect its political participation. First, the Hispanic population in the United States remains incredibly young in comparison to the total population with a median age of 27, ten years lower than that of the US overall, or in comparison to other racial groups (Whites—42, Black—33, Asian—36).<sup>1</sup> The number of young Hispanics is increasing rapidly: From 1993 to 2013, the number of Hispanics younger than 18 in the US has more than doubled (107% increase), compared with an 11% increase among the general US population younger than 18. In any given year, more than 800,000 young Hispanics turn 18. Therefore, in the coming decades, the Hispanic share of the age-eligible electorate will rise markedly through generational replacement alone (Taylor,

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. (2013). *Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2011*. Table 9: Median Age in Years by Sex, Race and Ethnicity: 2011.

Gonzales-Barrera, Passel & Lopez, 2012). At the same time, the rate of new immigrants is steadily decreasing and therefore the balance between immigrants to natives is rapidly changing (Krogstad & Lopez, 2014).

These processes suggest that the "sleeping giant" may be on the verge of taking its role in the political process (Bass & Casper, 2001; Cho, 1999). Realizing the projected influence of Hispanics on elections and policy, we examine the views of this group about Israel. How does this group view Israel? How does it differ from the general population? And, how do the important demographic transformations detailed above, affect the views of Hispanics toward Israel?

## **Implication for US support for Israel**

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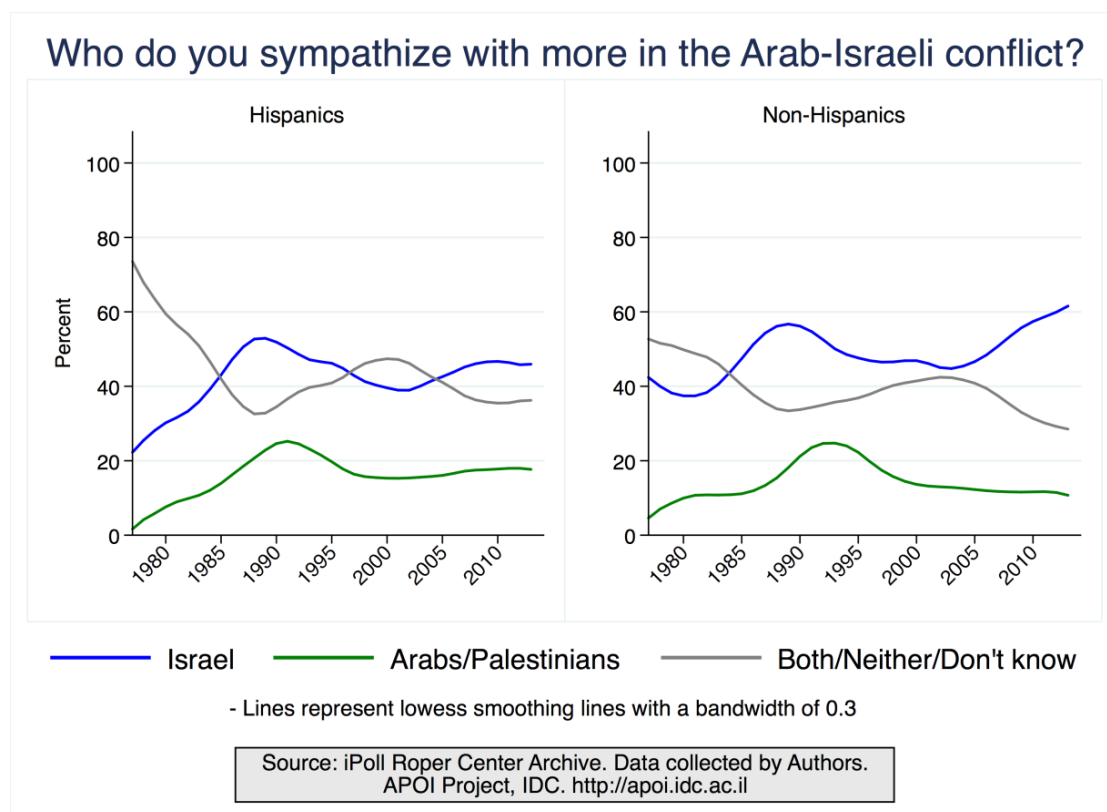
Americans have always been supportive of Israel, and view Israel in favorable terms — they sympathize more with Israel than with Arab countries or with the Palestinians, they see Israel as an ally of the US and they are willing to follow up on their support for Israel with large sums of economic and military aid (Cavari, 2014). This support for Israel has long remained strikingly homogenous across major groups in American society, yet studies show that public support for Israel in the US is undergoing important transformations. The emergence of a significant conservative movement in the US, affected American society and its political balance, which in turn changed the way support for Israel was "distributed" among American society (Cavari, 2013). In comparison, the burst of the Hispanic population and their increasing voting rates may be as influential in terms of American public opinion on foreign policy in general, and toward Israel in particular, as it will be on domestic US politics. Therefore, there is great importance in understanding the challenges and possibilities that this demographic shift in the US holds for the steady, long-lasting and bipartisan support for Israel in American public opinion, an inherent part of the US-Israel 'special relationship'.

To assess the overall support for Israel in the Hispanic and non-Hispanic American public, we examine a dataset collected at the research project on American Public Opinion toward Israel (APOI) at the IDC, Herzliya. The dataset includes all available surveys that ask Americans about their sympathies in the Arab-Israeli conflict. While these surveys are available since Israel's independence, the question of sympathy for Israel or Arabs was asked more consistently since 1964, and the polling of Hispanics as a race group since 1977. Together, these 78 surveys offer a unique opportunity to assess attitude-change of the Hispanic population over time.

## The Hispanics Gap

**Figure 1** illustrates that the trend of support of Hispanics for Israel has paralleled that of the general public. Yet, recently, we witness an increasing gap between Hispanics and non-Hispanics: Among Hispanics, A lower level of support for Israel, a higher level of support for Palestinians and more undecided (Both/Neither/DK). As a fairly new population, Hispanics went through a process of learning the American political culture and forming opinions and stands, first in matters of domestic policy which are more related to their every-day lives and influence them the most, and later in foreign policy issues as well (Cain, Kiewiet & Unlaner, 1991). The process of acquiring an opinion on the Arab-Israeli conflict by the American Hispanic population is reflected in the decline of the line of undecided (representing the percentage of those with no clear opinion on the matter), very sharply from 1977 until the late 80's and more mildly since 2000. While the formation of an opinion since 2005 in the non-Hispanic population clearly shows that the opinion acquired is a pro-Israel one, in the Hispanic population it is ambivalent since both the support for Israel and the support for Palestinians increase "on the expense" of the undecided line.

**Figure 1: Sympathies of Americans, Hispanic and non-Hispanic, in the Arab-Israeli Conflict**



## From an Immigrant to a Racial Minority

The 'nativity shift' that American Hispanic population is undergoing not only suggests that we are likely to experience stronger involvement and political participation of this group, as mentioned above, but might also bare consequences on American public support for Israel. In order to assess its' potential influence, we examined surveys that ask about race, place of birth and sympathies for Israel within our dataset.

**Table 1** compares the support for Israel (Sympathies) among Hispanics born in the US and immigrants showing that Hispanics who were born in the US are more supportive of Israel than Hispanic immigrants. Moreover, as time passes, the disparities in support for Israel between these two groups strengthens and becomes significant. This finding, combined with the 'nativity shift' described above (the share of US born Hispanics rises while that of Hispanics who are immigrants is on the decline) indicates a trend in support for Israel in American public opinion: As the balance of this group shifts from immigrants to natively born, support for Israel increases.

**Table 1: Sympathies for Israel among Hispanics, immigrants and natives, in the US**

Year of survey	N	% of support for Israel among Hispanics who were born in the US	% of support for Israel among Hispanics who were not born in the US	Z
September 1997	78	84.84	83.33	0.13
December 2001	48	79.31	68.42	0.85
March 2013	49	81.81	50.00	2.31*

\* Differences are significant at  $p < 0.05$

A more broad comparison is between Hispanics who are involved in the political process and those who are not. Specifically, we examine the support for Israel among Hispanic registered voters and Hispanic non-registered voters. To ensure sufficient observations in each group examined, we aggregate our data by decade. The results of the proportion tests are summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2: Sympathies for Israel among Hispanic registered and non-registered voters in the US**

Decade	Number of surveys	N	% of support for Israel among Hispanic registered voters	% of support for Israel among Hispanic non-registered voters	Z
1981-1990	9	306	72.85	65.88	1.20
1991-2000	7	307	71.82	67.82	0.69
2001-2010	23	1712	76.53	75.25	0.53
2011-2014	7	404	77.21	67.42	2.10*

\* Differences are significant at  $p < 0.05$

Hispanic registered voters have been more supportive of Israel than Hispanics who are not registered to vote. Differences between the two groups have been small, however. Only in the recent decade, the difference in support for Israel between the two groups has for the first time become sizeable (10 percentage points) and significant. As potential influence and electoral importance are usually attributed to populations who are more likely to engage politically (such as voting), this finding indicates that the political involved Hispanics are adjusting their support for Israel to levels that are similar to those of the broad American population thus becoming more supportive of Israel than those who are not involved.

## Conclusion

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Hispanic Americans constitute an important population of increasing presence and political strength. As such, they are likely to enjoy leverage in their ability to influence American foreign policy issues, US-Israel relations amongst others. A recent research by The Chicago Council investigated how Hispanic foreign policy views compare to those of other Americans and found that Hispanics share a very similar worldview with the larger US public in most key issues of American foreign policy (Smeltz & Kafura, 2015). The Hispanic population in the US has experienced a process of socialization that resulted in the alignment of their worldviews and values to those of the American public. Still, the racial fragmentation of public opinion toward Israel is important— for several reasons. First, it gives us a more nuanced understanding of American public opinion, in light of the demographic shift that is changing the composition of American electorate. Second, Race is an important variable in predicting future political outcomes in the US, considering the fact that Hispanics are projected to become one-third of the population by 2060 and under the assumption that the "sleeping giant" will be awakened. Finally, understanding how Hispanics acquire their opinions towards foreign policy in general and the formation of a pro-Israeli opinion in appose to a pro-Arab opinion by the Hispanic population in particular are crucial if Israel wishes to gain the allegiance of this coveted racial group.

Examining the effect of demographic changes on American public support for Israel presents Israeli policy-makers with future challenges and opportunities that these upcoming trends pose for one of Israel's most important pillars of its security doctrine — its relationship with the United States.



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