

REDUCE AID TO ISRAEL BASED ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- ▶ Reducing military aid to Israel based on human rights violations is supported by more voters than oppose it: 45 percent of voters support the policy, while 34 percent oppose it, for a net support of 10 percent.
 - ▷ Reducing aid to human rights abusers is even more popular: 61 percent of voters support it, while 12 percent oppose it, for a net support of 49 percent.
- ▶ Democratic voters support reducing aid to Israel based on human rights violations at the same rate (64 percent, net support 53 percent) at which they support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general.
- ▶ Republican voters support reducing aid to human rights abusers at a slightly lower rate (55 percent) than Democrats do, but they oppose reducing aid to Israel based on human rights abuses at about the same rate that Democrats support it (64 percent oppose, for a net 45 percent *opposition*)
- ▶ Born-again or evangelical Christians, on net, *oppose* reducing aid to Israel for human rights violations by 33 percent. Among born-again/evangelical voters, 21 percent support the policy, while 54 percent oppose it.
 - ▷ Net support for reducing aid to human rights abusers among born-again/evangelical voters is 46 percent—close to the net support for this policy among voters as a whole (49 percent).

During this election cycle, we've seen a round of commentary¹ heralding the collapse of the bipartisan consensus on Israel: the combination of rhetorical support for a negotiated two-state solution and material support for the Israeli military that has characterized US policy on Israel since the signing of the Oslo Accords in the 1990s.

So far, most of the change to this arrangement has come from within the Republican Party and the Israeli government. Whether it's moving the US embassy to Jerusalem or appointing an ambassador who has personally funded West Bank settlements, President Trump has unabashedly taken the side of the racist, pro-annexation Israeli right. Much of the Democratic Party still supports the once-bipartisan consensus position: endorsing a two-state solution in policy and rhetoric while avoiding holding Israel accountable for its ongoing violations of human rights. But the Trump administration's unabashed embrace² of Israel's right-wing, pro-annexation politics—combined with brazenly defunding³ nearly all of the aid the US had been giving to Palestinians—has opened up new space for progressives to criticize Israeli policies more sharply, calling special attention to the human rights crisis facing Palestinians.

Material consequences for Israel's violations of human rights and international law are part of the US political conversation now in a way they haven't been for a long time. The US government hasn't wielded material pressure against Israel since 1991, when President George H. W. Bush withheld \$10 billion in loan guarantees until Israel agreed to halt construction of settlements in the West Bank.⁴

Of the leading Democratic presidential candidates, only Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg have proposed versions of material—rather than merely rhetorical—pressure on Israel. Buttigieg has signaled his willingness to potentially restrict or cut US military aid to Israel—but only if Netanyahu moves forward with annexing parts of the West Bank.⁵

Sanders, on the other hand, has been explicit about his openness to the possibility of restricting US military

aid to Israel on the basis of already-existing Israeli policies. Most recently, in response to Netanyahu's ban of Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib from Israel and the West Bank, Sanders said: "If Prime Minister Netanyahu doesn't want members of Congress to visit Israel, then maybe he can respectfully decline \$3.8 billion in annual funding—the largest amount of US military aid to any country."⁶

It is worth noting that the actual policy mechanism by which military aid might be used to pressure Israel into changing its behavior is not remotely settled. Among other ideas, columnist and professor Peter Beinart has proposed ending offshore procurement, the unique-to-Israel arrangement where Israel can spend a portion of its US military aid money on weapons made in Israel rather than being restricted to spending it on weapons made in the US.⁷ Political analyst Zak Witus has offered the possibility of invoking the Leahy Law, designating specific Israeli military units involved in the occupation as gross offenders of human rights, thereby cutting off aid to them.⁸ Progressive foreign policy hands will likely develop and debate other proposals in the near future.

For our part, we polled on reducing aid to Israel for human rights reasons (rather than imposing specific conditions or restrictions on aid) because it represents the most serious potential outcome of imposing conditions on aid. Are voters prepared for the outcome if the US places conditions on aid to Israel that Israel does not meet?

We also wanted to learn what voters think about the use of military aid as a policy tool, both in general and regarding Israel specifically. To what extent do American voters think the US–Israel relationship is "special"—i.e., not subject to the same rules as our relationships with other allies? Do voters support or oppose the idea that US military aid should be conditioned on recipients' respect for human rights?

From August 15 to 21, 2019, YouGov Blue conducted an online poll for Data for Progress of a national sample of 1,380 US voters. We asked two questions about US military aid:

In the past, the US has cut military aid to foreign governments accused of human rights violations. Supporters of the cuts say the US shouldn't be involved in human rights abuses and it's a waste of taxpayer money. Opponents say that even if some governments have imperfect records, we need to do what is necessary to fight terrorism and to counter foreign powers like Russia and China. Do you [support or oppose] the US government reducing foreign and military aid to governments engaged in human rights abuses?

- <1> Strongly support
- <2> Somewhat support
- <3> Neither support nor oppose
- <4> Somewhat oppose
- <5> Strongly oppose
- <6> Not sure

And:

Israel is one of the largest recipients of US military aid. Some legislators in the United States say that aid should be reduced because Israel often violates the human rights of Palestinians by using lethal military force against unarmed Palestinian civilians, including children. Other legislators in the United States say aid should not be reduced; Israel does what it needs to do to protect itself from terrorism and hostile foreign powers, who deliberately provoke Israel with violence. Do you [support or oppose] the US government reducing foreign and military aid to Israel based on human rights violations?

- <1> Strongly support
- <2> Somewhat support
- <3> Neither support nor oppose
- <4> Somewhat oppose
- <5> Strongly oppose
- <6> Not sure

In the case of Israel, 45 percent of voters support reducing aid based on human rights violations, while 34 percent oppose the policy, for a net support of 11 percent.

The numbers are even higher for the general question of cutting aid to human rights abusers. Sixty-one percent of voters support reducing aid to governments accused of human rights violations. Only 12 percent oppose it, for a net support of 49 percent.

Support for human rights-based military aid by party ID and 2018 vote record

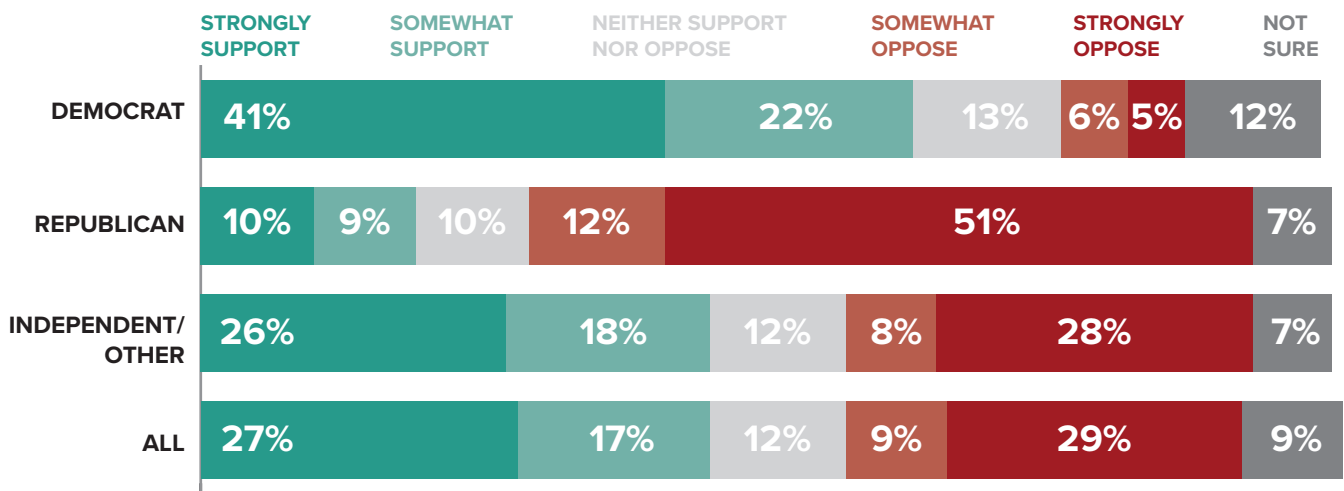
Democratic voters expressed consistent levels of support for reducing aid based on human rights violations in the case of Israel and in general. Sixty-four percent of Democrats surveyed supported reducing aid to Israel based on violations of human rights, while 11 percent opposed it. Sixty-four percent of Democrats also supported reducing aid to human rights abusers in general, while 11 percent opposed it. In both cases, reducing aid for human rights reasons is supported by 53 percent of Democrats on net. (Democratic support for reducing aid to Israel is slightly stronger, with 41 percent of Democrats strongly supporting the specific policy compared to 38 percent strongly supporting reducing aid to human rights abusers in general.) This suggests that Democratic support for reducing aid to Israel is not based on a desire to single out Israel for harsher criticism, as Israel's defenders often claim;⁹ rather, it is related to Democratic voters' preference for a foreign policy that holds countries receiving US aid accountable for their violations of human rights.

This pattern holds when applied to voting behavior, too. Sixty-six percent of voters who report voting for a Democratic congressional candidate in 2018 support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general, while 11 percent oppose it, for a net support of 55 percent. Sixty-seven percent of voters who report voting for a Democratic congressional candidate in 2018 support reducing aid to Israel, while 10 percent oppose it, for a nearly identical net support of 57 percent.

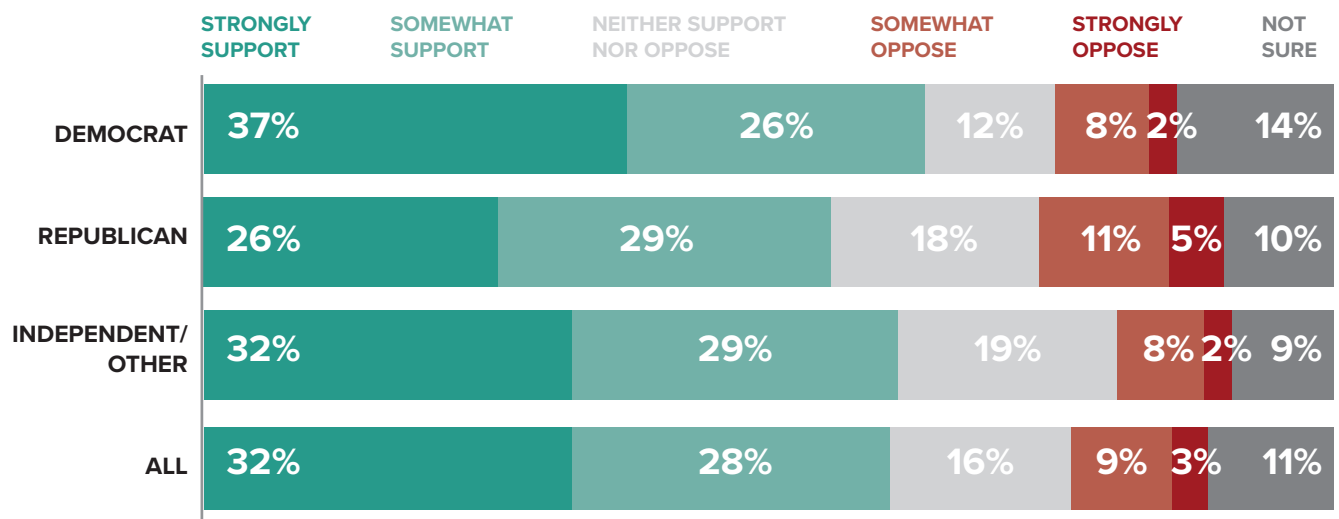
Republican voters responded differently to the question of reducing aid to Israel for human rights reasons as compared to other countries to which the US gives military aid. Fifty-six percent of Republican voters support reducing aid to human rights abusers, while 16 percent oppose the policy. In the case of Israel, only 19 percent of Republicans support reducing aid based on human

rights violations, while 64 percent oppose it. In other words, a net 40 percent of Republicans support reducing military aid for human rights reasons in general; a net 45 percent of Republicans *oppose* reducing military aid to Israel for human rights reasons. This suggests that Republican voters do single out Israel: they appear to be comfortable holding Israel to a lower human rights standard than other countries that receive US aid.

REDUCE AID FOR ISRAEL: PARTY ID



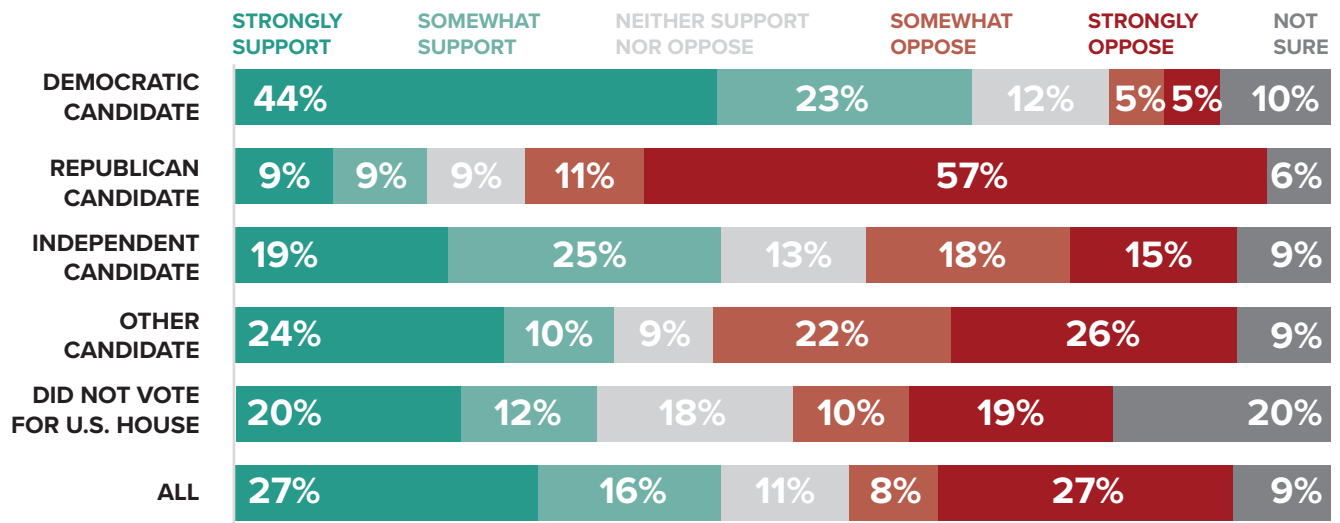
REDUCE AID FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS: BY PARTY ID



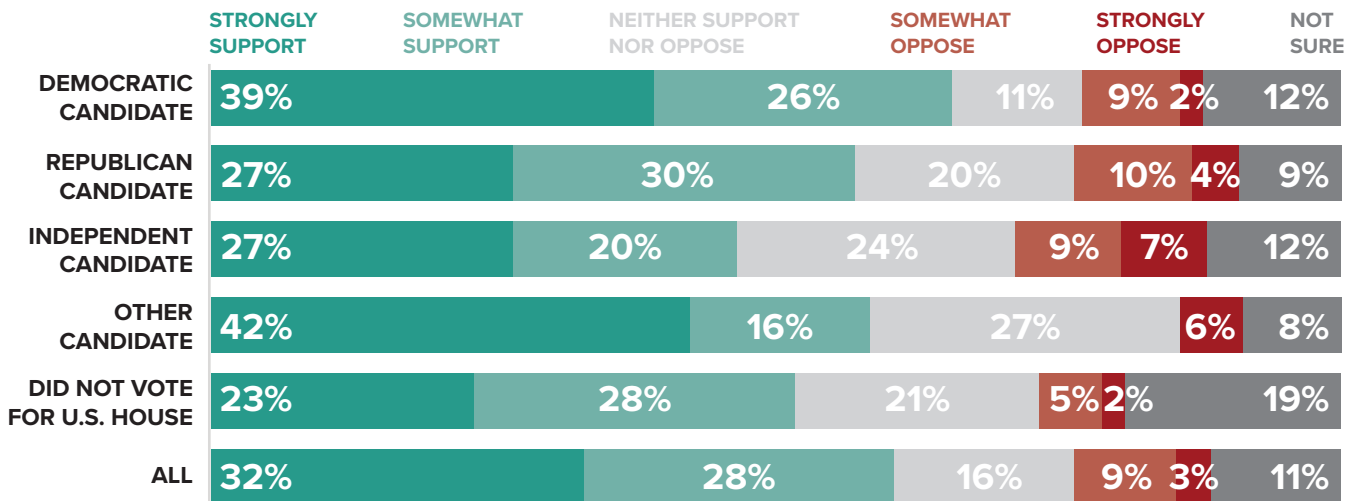
Among voters who report voting for a Republican congressional candidate in 2018, 57 percent support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general, while 14 percent oppose it, for a net support of 43 percent. On the question of reducing aid to Israel for human rights reasons, 18 percent of voters who report voting for a Republican congressional candidate in 2018 support it, while 68 percent oppose the policy: a net *opposition* of 50 percent. A majority of 2018 Republican voters—57 percent—strongly oppose reducing aid to Israel on the basis of human rights abuses.

Independent voters and those affiliated with other parties fall between Democrats and Republicans on both questions, though on net they support both policies. They support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general at a rate of 61 percent, while 10 percent oppose it. When it comes to Israel, 45 percent support reducing aid based on human rights abuses, while 36 percent oppose it.

REDUCE AID FOR ISRAEL: HOUSE VOTE POST 2018



REDUCE AID FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS: HOUSE VOTE POST 2018



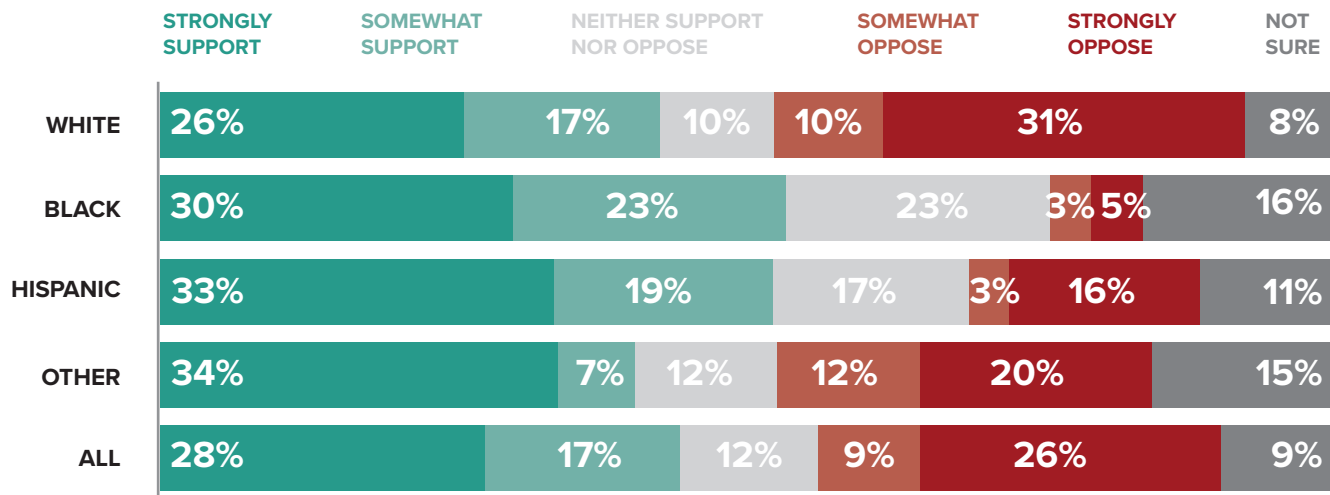
Race

White voters' support for reducing aid to Israel for human rights reasons is significantly lower than their support for reducing aid to human rights abusers in general. Among white voters, 63 percent support cutting aid to human rights abusers in general, while 12 percent oppose and 25 percent are unsure or have no opinion. White voter support for reducing aid to Israel is significantly lower: 43 percent of white voters support cutting aid to Israel for human rights abuses, while 40 percent oppose the policy and 17 percent are unsure or have no opinion. Net support for cutting aid to Israel for human rights reasons

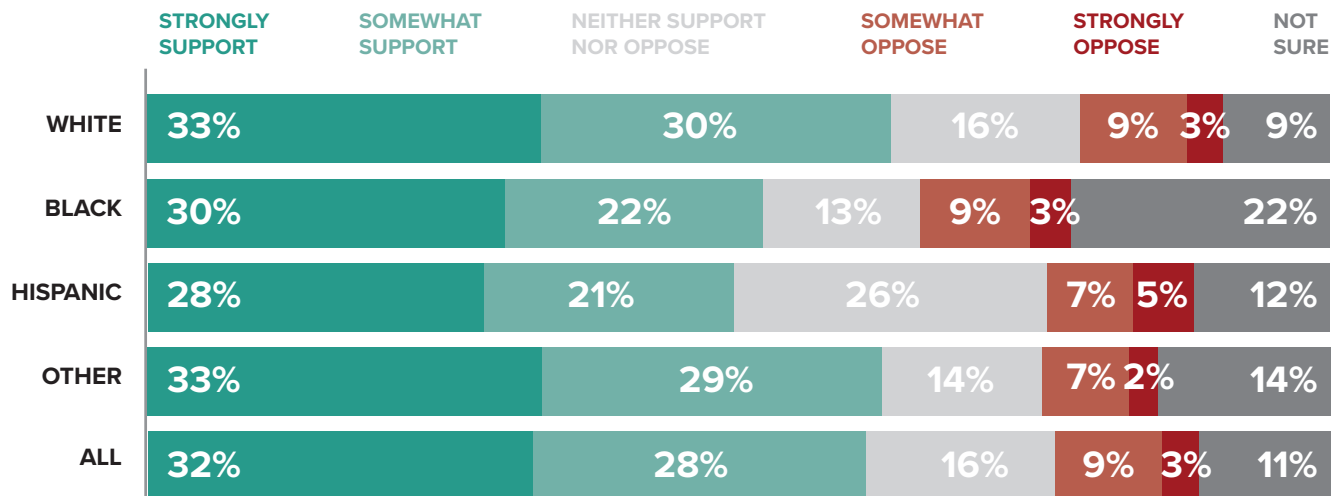
among white voters is 3 percent; net support for cutting aid to human rights abusers in general is 51 percent—a difference of 48 points.

Among voters of color, 54 percent support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general, while 12 percent oppose it. Fifty percent of voters of color support reducing aid to Israel based on human rights violations, while 17 percent oppose the policy. The net support for reducing aid to Israel among voters of color is 33 percent—9 points lower than the net support among these voters for reducing aid to human rights abusers in general.

REDUCE AID FOR ISRAEL: RACE



REDUCE AID FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS: RACE



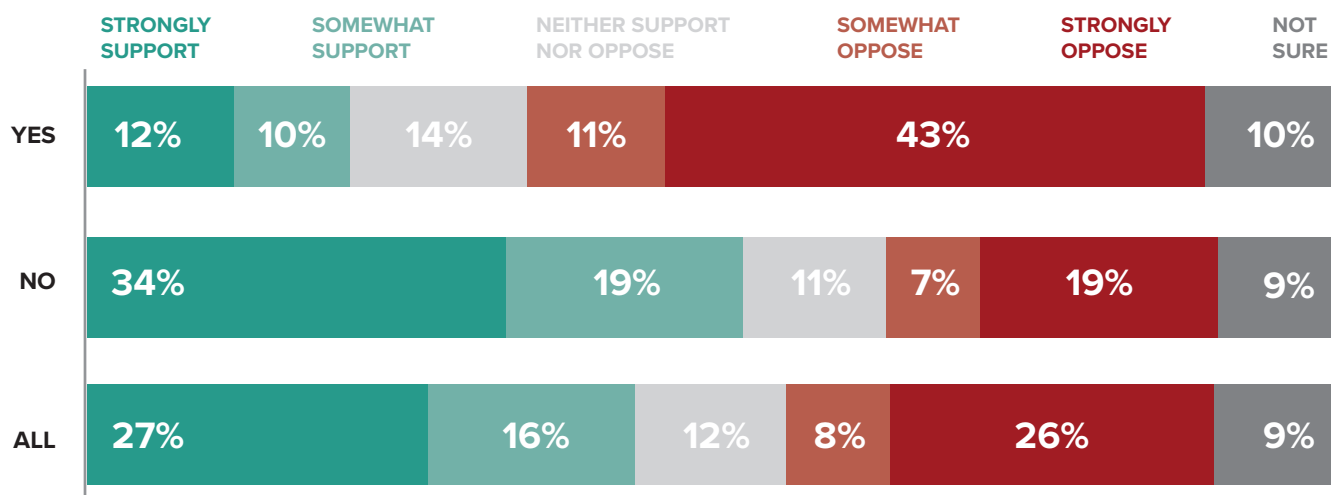
Born-again/evangelical

Among voters who are “born-again” or evangelical Christians (28 percent of the overall sample), 21 percent support reducing aid to Israel for human rights reasons, while 54 percent oppose the policy. Among these voters, support for reducing military aid to human rights abusers in general is at 59 percent, with 13 percent opposed. Net support for reducing aid to human rights abusers in general among born-again/evangelical voters is 46 percent; net support for reducing aid to Israel based on human rights abuses is *negative thirty-three percent*—a difference of 79 points. Born-again/

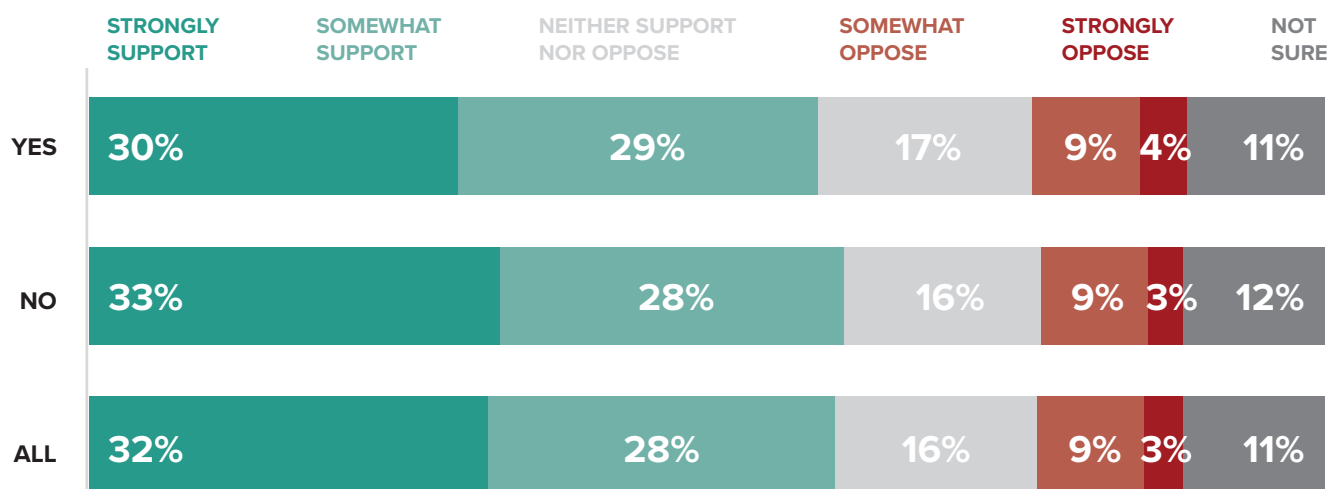
evangelical voters likely contribute significantly to the lower levels of support for reducing aid to Israel among Republicans: 48 percent of the born-again/evangelical voters in the sample are Republican, and 45 percent of the Republicans in the sample are born-again/evangelical.

Among voters who are not born-again/evangelical, 53 percent strongly or somewhat support reducing aid to Israel, while 27 percent oppose the policy. Sixty-one percent of voters who are not born-again/evangelical support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general, while 11 percent oppose the policy and 27 percent have no opinion or are unsure.

REDUCE AID FOR ISRAEL: BORN AGAIN



REDUCE AID FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS: BORN AGAIN



Age

Among voters aged eighteen to twenty-nine, 54 percent support reducing aid to human rights abusers, while 11 percent oppose the policy, for a net support of 43 percent. Forty-nine percent of this group support reducing aid to Israel based on human rights abuses, while 20 percent oppose the policy: a net support of 29 percent.

Voters aged thirty to forty-four support reducing aid to Israel for human rights reasons more than any other age group: 53 percent support the policy, while 19 percent oppose it, for net support of 34 percent. Sixty-one percent of voters in this age group support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general, while 12 percent oppose it: a net support of 49 percent. This age group is the only one to report higher net levels of support for reducing aid to Israel than for reducing aid to human rights abusers in general.

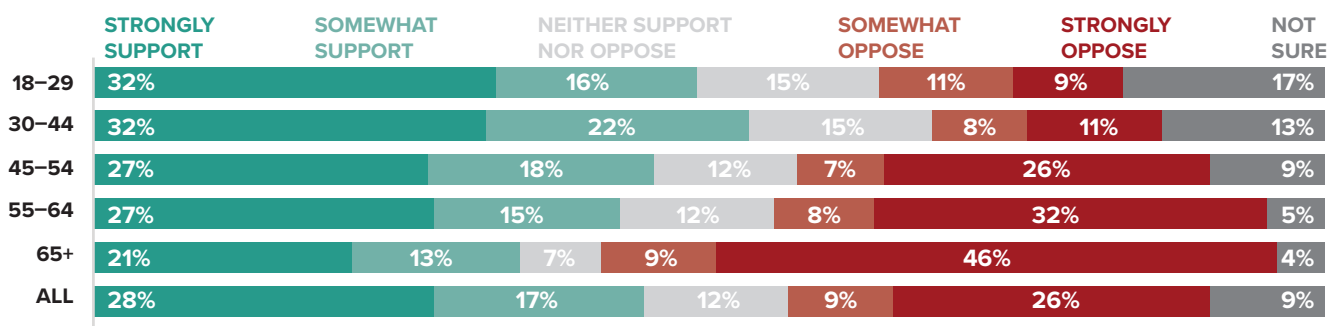
Among voters aged forty-five to fifty-four, 60 percent support reducing aid to human rights abusers in general,

while 11 percent oppose the policy—a net support of 49 percent. Forty-six percent of voters in this age group support reducing aid to Israel based on human rights violations, while 33 percent oppose it, for a net support of 13 percent.

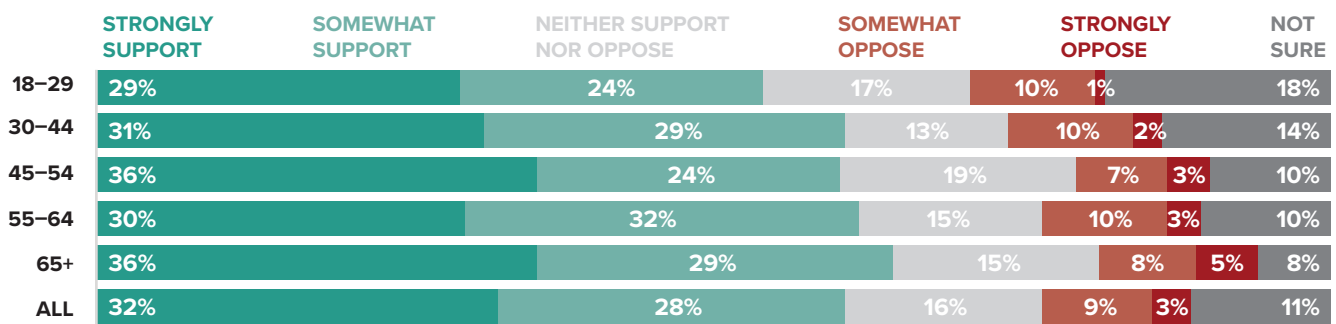
Voters aged fifty-five to sixty-four support reducing aid to human rights abusers, with 62 percent supporting to 13 percent opposed, for a net support of 49 percent. Of these voters, 43 percent support reducing aid to Israel based on human rights abuses, while 40 percent oppose the policy, for a net support of 3 percent.

Among voters aged sixty-five and older, 65 percent strongly or somewhat support, while 13 percent oppose it. Only 35 percent support reducing aid to Israel based on human rights abuses, while 55 percent oppose it. In other words: among the oldest group of voters, net support for reducing aid to human rights abusers in general is 52 percent. Net support for reducing aid to Israel based on human rights abuses is *negative 20 percent*—a difference of 72 points between aid to Israel and aid to human rights abusers in general.

REDUCE AID FOR ISRAEL: AGE



REDUCE AID FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS: AGE



ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/16/world/middleeast/rashida-tlaib-israel-visit.html>, <https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/can-bipartisan-pro-israel-consensus-be-saved-in-2020/>, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/08/trump-israel/596731/>, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/some-israelis-worry-u-s-bipartisan-political-support-is-eroding-11565992520>, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/withering-america-s-bipartisan-consensus-israel-24742>, <https://972mag.com/one-state-israel-trump-netanyahu/143055/>
2. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/09/04/how-the-right-has-tried-to-rebrand-anti-semitism/>
3. <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/u-s-state-department-removes-palestinian-territories-from-list-of-countries-1.7760186>
4. <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-how-an-ultimatum-from-president-george-h-w-bush-transformed-u-s-israel-relations-1.6702047>
5. <https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/buttigieg-netanyahu-is-turning-away-from-peace>
6. <https://twitter.com/sensanders/status/1162408600905666561>
7. <https://forward.com/opinion/424591/its-time-to-end-americas-blank-check-military-aid-to-israel/>
8. <https://truthout.org/articles/democratic-candidates-must-pledge-to-end-us-aid-for-the-israeli-occupation/>
9. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/opinion/sunday/israel-progressive-anti-semitism.html>