

The American Perception of the Palestine-Israel Conflict

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ABSTRACT

The Palestine-Israel conflict is probably one of the most pressing problems in the Middle East. Moreover, the United States has been involved in this conflict since the 1970s. Therefore, the present research aims to learn more about the American perception of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It was conducted using a survey that addressed Americans from different backgrounds, focusing on four variables: the American government's position, solutions, the Israeli settlements, and Jerusalem. The research suggests a correlation between political party and the American perception of the conflict. It appears that Republicans seem to be against the withdrawal of the Israeli settlements, and they believe that the US government is not biased toward Israel. Nevertheless, Democrats tend to believe that the US government is biased in favor of Israel, and they support withdrawing the Israeli settlements. Moreover, there might be another correlation between the American perception and the source of information they use to learn about the conflict. Most of the surveyed Americans, whatever their resource of information that they use to learn about the conflict is, tend to believe that the US is biased in favor of Israel. It is crucial to know about the American perception when approaching to a solution to the conflict as the US is a mediator in this conflict, and a powerful country in the world. Especially because it has a permanent membership in the UN council.

KEYWORDS: American Perception, Palestine-Israel Conflict, Jerusalem, Israeli settlements.

INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict appears to be one of the most pressing political cases around the world (Chapman & Benson, 2015). This conflict can be defined as a fight between two people on the same territories (Ben-Ze'ev & Yvroux, 2018). Palestinian people were part of the Ottoman empire (Foster & Klein, 2015). At that time, noticeable numbers of Jewish people were immigrating to Palestine (Barnai & Barnay, 1992). After the Ottoman empire collapsed, Palestine was under the legation of Britain, which helped Israelis to establish their country in 1948 (Kochavi, 2003). Thus, 80% of Palestinians who were living in what is now called Israel had to escape to other parts of Palestine and to other countries (Gabriel & Sabatello, 1986). The conflict started to be over the territories, but it escalated to be a more complex conflict. The issues impending a final solution are Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, borders, Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian state, which are awaiting issues of the final phase of the Palestine-Israel negotiations that started in 199. These five issues have never been solved yet. However, many peace treaties have been tried to reach to an approach toward a final and applicable solution that both Palestinians and Israelis would accept (Osiewicz, 2013). At least one of them has always refused all the attempts to solve the problem (Talib & Mwango, 2017). The United States is one of the countries that has a long history with this conflict (Curtiss, McArthur & Stauffer, 1998). In early 1970's, the US played part in this conflict by mediating between Palestinians and Israelis (Swisher, 2018). For decades, Palestinians have seen the US to be biased in favor of Israel (Moughrabi, 1986). In addition, the American public has for years displayed pro-Israel sympathy (Odeh, 2014). As the media plays a role in politics (Caballero, 2010), the American perception of the Palestinian- Israeli conflict might have been changed recently. The abundance of information presented in social media and the access to multiple sources of information can give people a wider vision about this conflict. In fact, it is important to know what Americans believe about this conflict because the American people choose their government administration, which mediate between Palestinians and Israelis (Moughrabi, 1986). Some politicians could use their discourses around this issue to gain favor with certain groups of voters. Moreover, the US supports Israel by sending them \$146 billion in bilateral assistance (USA Today, 2021). Importantly, the US is a permanent member of the security council of the United Nations. It has the right to use the veto to prevent any resolution that other countries in the security council are voting for (Hosli & Dörfler, 2019). As a result, the American government is playing a crucial role in this conflict, as it is a mediator and pro-Israel at the same time. The mediator should take middle ground in the conflict in order to convince both parties of a solution. Palestinians need to feel that they are approached in the same way Israelis are to agree on a final solution. Otherwise, they would accept peace agreements that would not truly solve the conflict, and further violence will just continue. While a democratic government is a representer of its people, since in this case the government is elected by its people, the Palestinian- Israeli conflict might be not a deterrent factor for Americans when they vote for their government. However, it is still valuable to explore how beliefs about American policy might correlate with other factors. The following research aims to explore correlations between what American people believe and demographic features. For example, does the political party play role in what Americans believe about this conflict? Consequently, would it be different to Palestinians depending on the ruling party? Is there any correlation between the American perception of this conflict and where they receive information about the conflict from?

The objective of this research paper is to find out what Americans might believe about this conflict, especially in four factors, Israeli settlements, the security of Israel, Jerusalem, solutions to the conflict, and the American government position to this conflict. Nonetheless, this research is an exploratory study, and the results are a start point for more sophisticated studies. In addition, this paper is structured as following: the second section presents the methodology of the study. The third section describes the results and a discussion of the results. The final section describes the conclusions of the study.

METHODOLOGY

The following study was conducted using primarily Likert scale survey. An online questionnaire was designed with 15 questions on four characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict focusing on the Israeli settlements, Jerusalem, solutions to the conflict, and the American government position. Lickert-style questions in the form of a rating scale comprised the test (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). The questionnaire was administered through the Google Drive platform between June and July 2021. The total number of participants were 59, 27 men, 29 women and three people who do not prefer to say their gender.

RESULTS

Below are the results of the research. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the surveyed people.

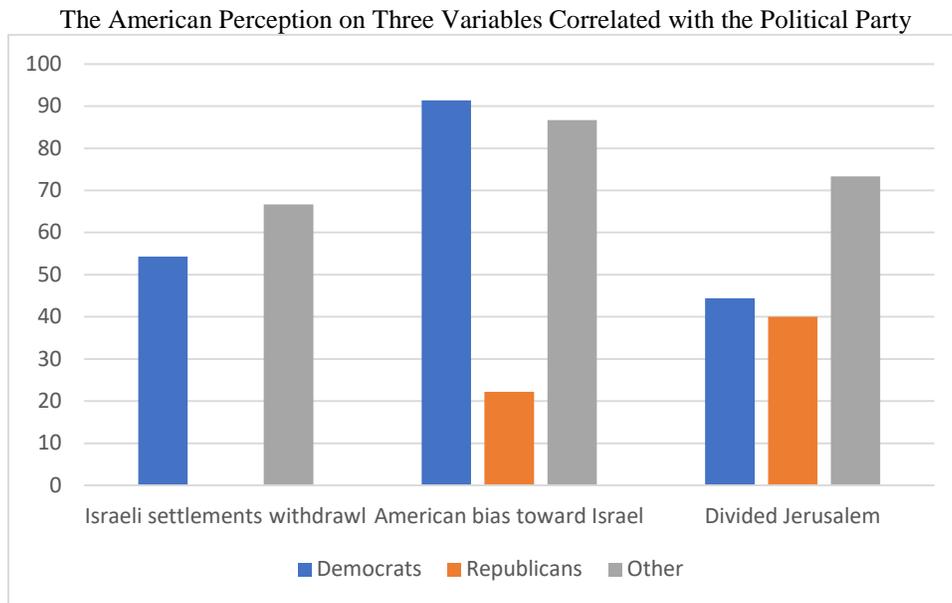
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N=59)

Variable	%
Sex	
Male	45.8
Female	49.2
Prefer don't say	5.1
Political Party	
Democrat	57.6
Republican	15.3
Other	27.1
Race	
African American	3.4
White American	84.7
Asian	3.4
Latino	1.4
Middle Eastern	1.7
prefer not to say	1.7
other	3.7
Level of Education	

High school diploma	5.1
Undergraduate Degree	22
MA/ MA equivalent graduate degree	52.5
Doctorate	11.9
prefer not to say	1.7
other	6.8
Religion	
Protestant	44.1
Catholic	13.6
Jewish	0
Muslim	0
Prefer not to say	5.1
Secular/non-religious	32.2
Other	5
Age	
20-39	49.2
40-59	20.3
60+	30.5
Geographical location	
Southeast	32.2
Northeast	23.7
West	10.2
Midwest	28.8
prefer not to say	1.7
other	3.4

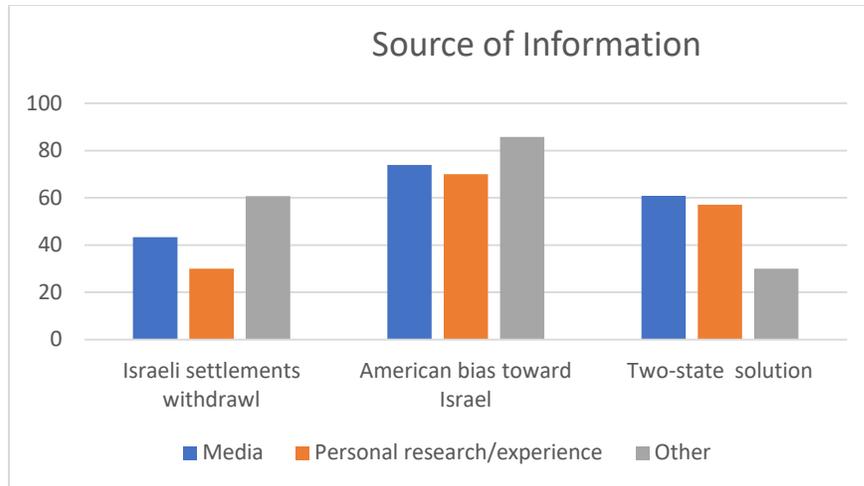
According to the survey, 84.5% of people who completed the survey know about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In addition, 45.8% of them know about the conflict through personal experience and/or research, while 37.7% of them are relying on media including TV and newspapers to learn about this conflict. However, when they were asked about the solutions to this conflict, 55.9% have heard about the one-state solution, while 86.4% of them have heard about the two-state solution. Moreover, while 37.3% of them consider the American government to be part of the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 33.9% of them believe the opposite. Although 79.6% of them think that the US government is biased in favor of Israel, 50.8% of them appear to believe that Biden's administration is not taking actions in this conflict. Moreover, 44.1% of them believe that peace in the middle east will come when Palestinians have a state of their own on the occupied territories. 54.3% of them believe that the two-state solution is the only applicable solution to this conflict, whereas 67.8% of them think that the one-state solution is not applicable in this conflict. 62.8% of them believe that Israeli people have no right to settle in the occupied territories. 64.4% of them think that Israel has no right to build settlements in the West Bank. Nevertheless, only 49.2 think that Israel must withdraw its settlements from the West Bank. 17% of them believe that a Palestinian state would be a threat to the security of Israel,

45.7% believe that a Palestinian would not affect the security of Israel. Finally, 49.1% of them want Jerusalem to be part of both states. In addition, 55.9% refuse Jerusalem to be under the control of only Israel.



According to the chart above, 54.3% the surveyed Democrats believe that Israel must withdraw its settlements from the occupied territories, while no surveyed Republican believes that Israel might have to do that. Comparing the results of the question about withdrawing the Israeli settlements with the question about the two-state solution, 44.4% of Republicans support the two-state solution. It might be confusing that no surveyed Republican supported the idea of withdrawing the Israeli settlements from the occupied territories, while some of them supported setting a Palestinian state. The reason/s for these contradict results could be because of misunderstanding the questions, or maybe they support the idea of establishing a Palestinian state if it is not located where it is now. On the other hand, 66.7% of those who are not affiliated in any political party tend to support the Israeli settlements withdrawal. In addition, 91.4% of the surveyed democrats believe that the American government is biased in favor of Israel, so do other people who are not affiliated in any political party with a percentage of 86.7%. Nevertheless, 22.2% of Republicans believe that the American government is biased toward Israel. In addition, 73.3% of not affiliated, surveyed people support the idea of dividing Jerusalem to be part of Palestinian and Israeli states. On the other hand, 44.4% of the surveyed Republicans agreed on this idea, while only 40% of Democrats support the idea. It seems that Republicans and Democrats have the same point of view about dividing Jerusalem. However, only 5% of Democrats agreed on Jerusalem's being fully under the control of the Israeli state. As a result, Democrats seem to agree on another approach when it comes to Jerusalem, which could be internationalization the city.

The American Perception on Three Variables Correlated with the Source of Information



According to the chart above, it seems that in the academic atmosphere Americans tend to believe in the idea of withdrawing the Israeli settlements. It could mean that in academic spaces, they are less likely to get misinformation and are more likely to be given historical information rather than a more politically driven media source. 60.7% of Americans who gained their knowledge about this conflict from an educational institution, or another source of information supports the Palestinians' right of having their own country without Israeli settlements. Nonetheless, only 30% of them supported the two-state solution, while no one supported the one state solution. On the other hand, 57.1% of Americans who accumulated their knowledge through personal experience or research support the two-state solution, but they do not agree with withdrawing the Israeli settlements from the occupied territories. The applicable solution to these people is not clear, and the data seems to contradict itself. However, these contradictions could shed light on American understandings and beliefs about this conflict. It could be that they did not understand the questions well, or that they believe in establishing a country for Palestinians on a different land.

All the surveyed Americans, wherever they receive their information about the conflict from, tend to believe that the US government is biased. Although the American media is politically driven (Caballero, 2010), 73.9% of those who rely on media think that the US government is biased in favor of Israel. Therefore, since most of the surveyed Americans believe that their government is biased in favor of Israel, this could be an indication on how the American government is functioning when guiding parties to this conflict to reach to a solution. Thus, both Palestinians and Israelis should be reached in the same way, which makes it fair for both of them in order to agree on a permanent and trustworthy solution.

CONCLUSION

Taking the American perception into consideration while choosing a mediator, Palestinians will be more successful in approaching a solution to this conflict. The goal of any mediation in this conflict should be to find a solution that will be agreed on from both Israel and Palestine, but in order to do that, Palestinians need to feel that they are approached in the same way Israelis are. For that, an exploratory study was conducted to find the American perception of the Palestine-Israel conflict using a survey that was focusing on four variables: the American government position, solutions to this conflict, Israeli settlements, and Jerusalem. Knowing what Americans

believe about this conflict would help the Palestinian government to take reliable actions toward approaching a solution to this conflict while also gaining fair treatment in this process. It might also help the Palestinian government whether to consider the American government as a mediator between them and the Israeli government. Moreover, it could help Palestinians in finding a way to address the American government depending on the ruling party. As there might be a correlation between the source of information Americans use to educate themselves about the conflict and what they believe, knowing that would help Palestinians to rebuttal the American version of the story by showing what the truth could be. Most of the surveyed Americans believe that the government is biased in favor of Israel. Thus, there should be a use of this piece of information by Palestinians when addressing American people or the American government.

This study has found correlation between the political party and how Americans approach the solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, further studies have to be done in order to find if there is a causation between the Americans' beliefs and political parties. Moreover, there have to be further studies to make progress in making peace in the Middle East relying on how to address the American government, according to the findings in this research and further ones. As the survey was conducted during two months, the findings might not be as confidential as they should be.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This research was conducted and written by a Palestinian author, a sort of bias toward the Palestinian people might be found in asking the questions and/or interpreting the results.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY: THE AMERICAN PERCEPTION ON THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL
CONFLICT

*Required

1. Sex *

Female

Male

Prefer not to say

2. Political party *

Democrat

Republican

Prefer not to say

Other: _____

3. Race *

White American

African

Native American

Asian

Latino

Native Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islander

Middle Eastern

prefer not to say

Other: _____

4. Level of education *

High school diploma

Undergraduate Degree

MA/ MA equivalent graduate degree

Doctorate

prefer not to say

Other: _____

5. Religion *

Protest

Catholic

Jewish

Muslim

Baptist

Prefer not to say

Secular/non-religious

Other: _____

6. Age *

20-39

40-59

- 60+
- prefer not to say

7. Geographical location *

- Southeast
- Northeast
- West Coast
- Southwest
- Midwest
- prefer not to say
- Other _____

8. On a scale from 1-5, how much do you know about the Palestine-Israel conflict?

1 2 3 4 5

I do not know anything about it 1 2 3 4 5 I know about it very well

9. Where have you learned about the Palestine-Israel conflict from? *

- School
- University
- TV
- Newspapers
- Personal research
- Personal experience
-
-

Media
Other

10. Which of the following solutions to the Palestine-Israel conflict have you heard of?

- one-state solution
- Two-statesolution
- none of them
- Other:

On a scale from 1-5, how much do you agree with the following statements?

1. The United States is part of the solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

2. The U.S. administration is biased towards Israel *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

3. The U.S. administration is biased towards Palestine *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

4. The Biden administration is active in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

5. Peace in the Middle East will come when Palestinian people have a state of their own on the occupied territories. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

6. The two-state solution is the only applicable solution to this conflict. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

7. The one-state solution is the only applicable one to this conflict. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

8. Israeli people have the right to settle in the occupied territories. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

9. Israel has the right to build settlements in the West Bank. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

10. Israel must withdraw its settlements from the West Bank. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

11. A Palestinian state on the occupied territories would be a threat to the security of Israel. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

12. Jerusalem must fully be under the control of Israeli government. *

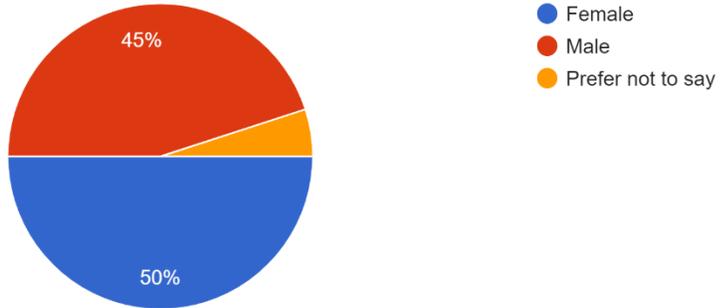
1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

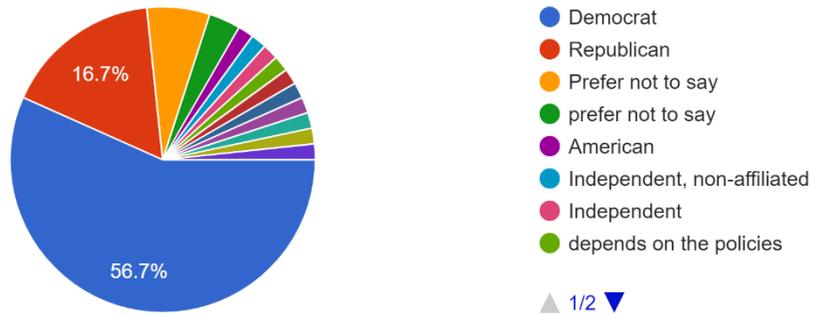
Strongly agree

APPENDIX B RESPONSES ORGANIZED BY CHARTS

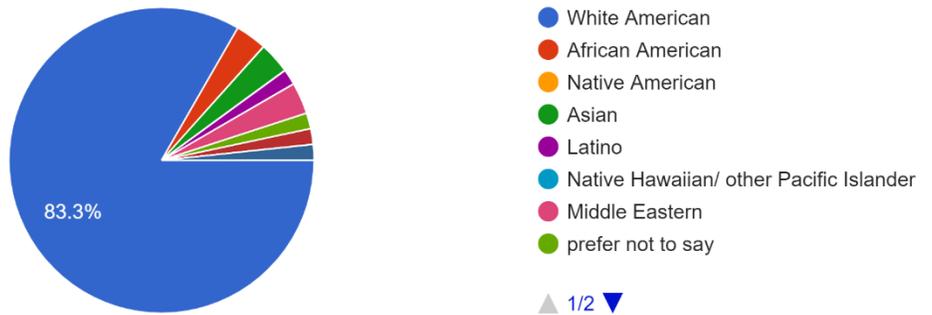
Sex
60 responses



Political party
60 responses

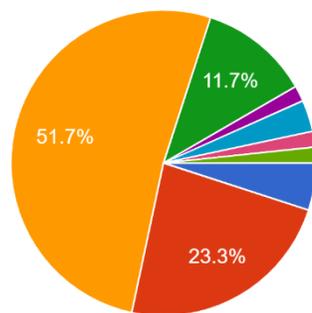


Race
60 responses



Level of education

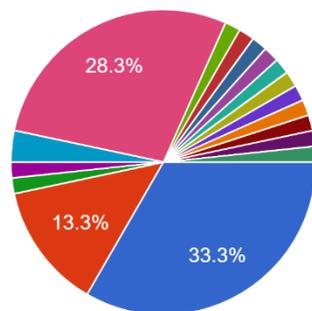
60 responses



- High school diploma
- Undergraduate Degree
- MA/ MA equivalent graduate degree
- Doctorate
- prefer not to say
- Cpa
- JD
- Some college

Religion

60 responses

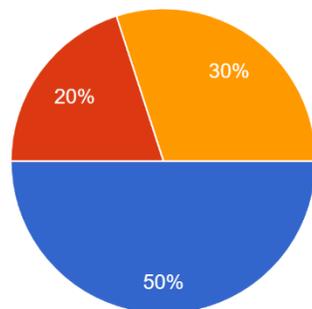


- Protestant
- Catholic
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Baptist
- Prefer not to say
- Secular/non-religious
- Christian

▲ 1/3 ▼

Age

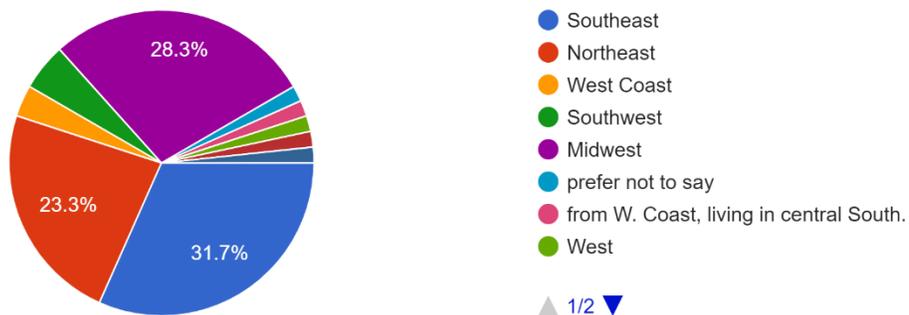
60 responses



- 20-39
- 40-59
- 60+
- prefer not to say

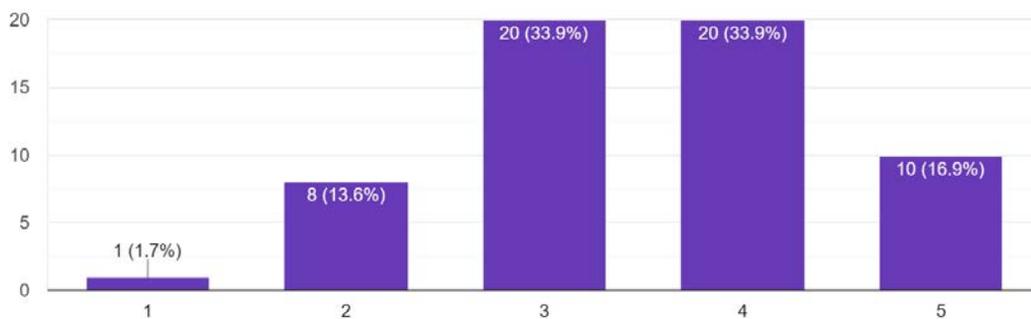
Geographical location

60 responses



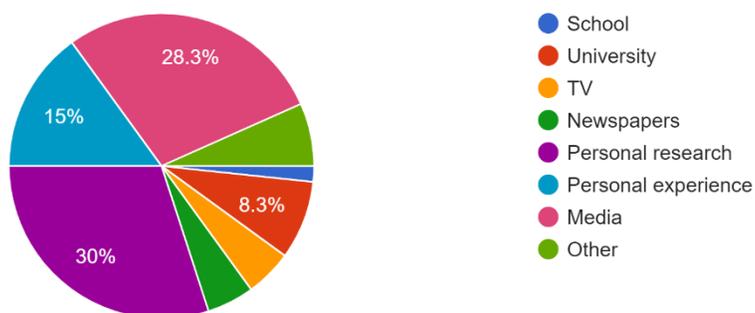
On a scale from 1-5, how much do you know about the Palestine-Israel conflict?

59 responses



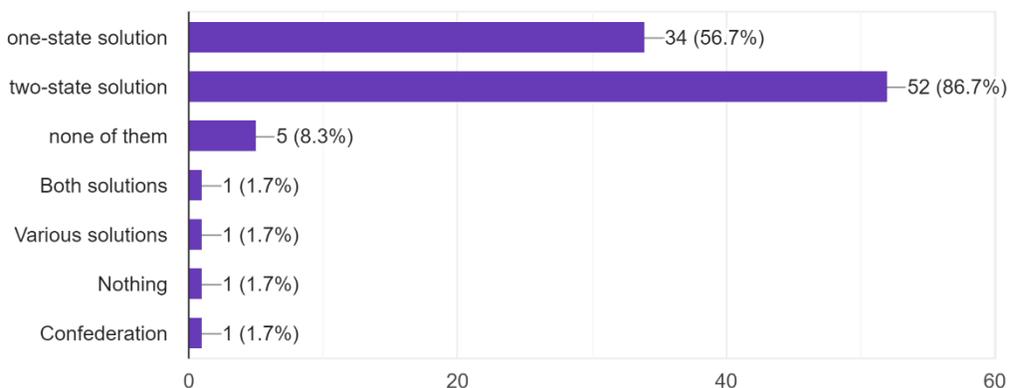
Where have you learned about the Palestine-Israel conflict from?

60 responses



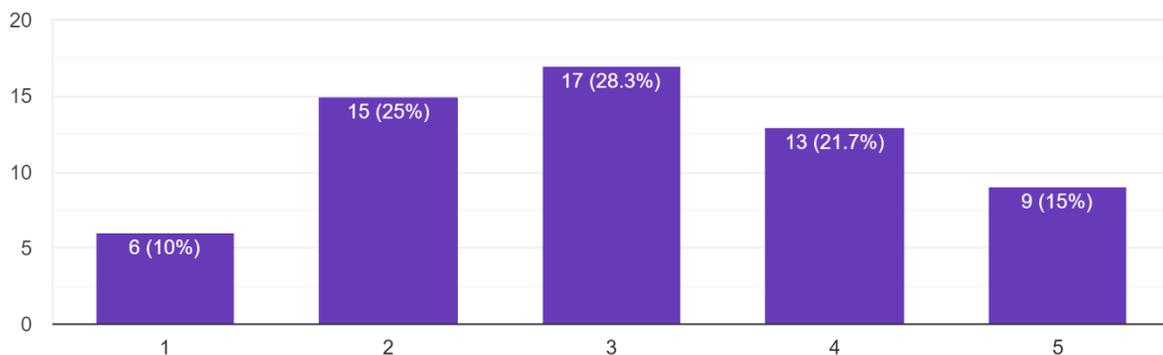
Which of the following solutions to the Palestine-Israel conflict have you heard of?

60 responses



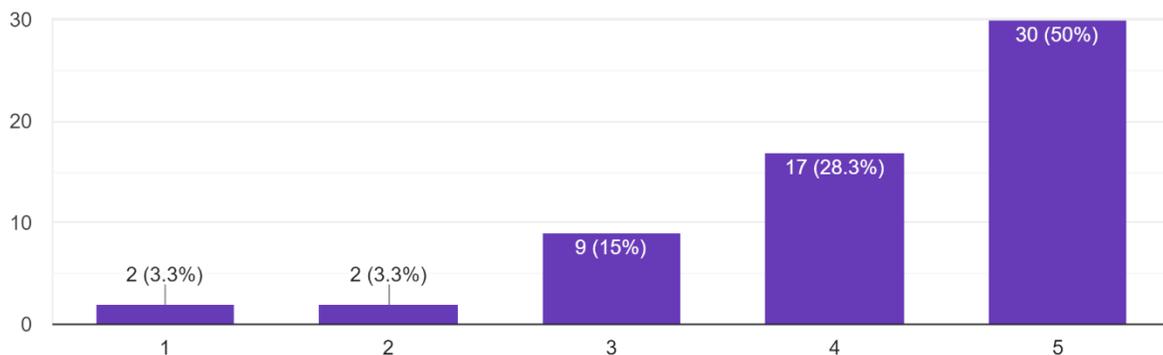
1. The United States is part of the solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine

60 responses



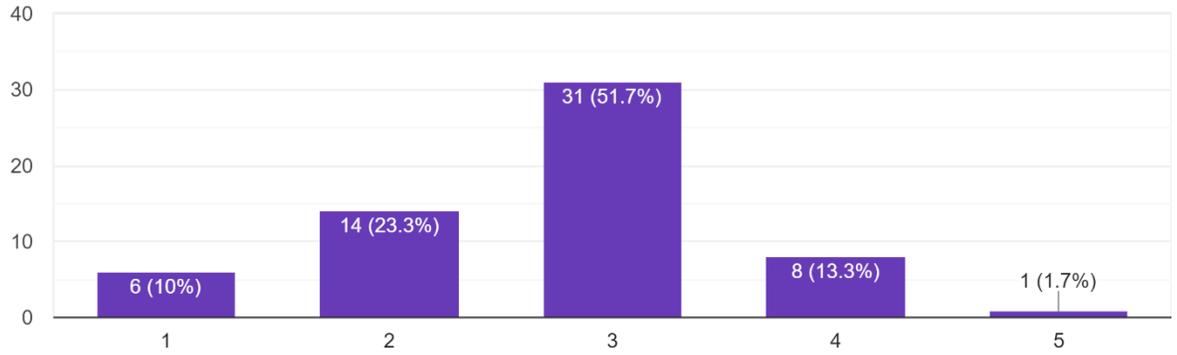
2. The U.S. administration is biased towards Israel

60 responses



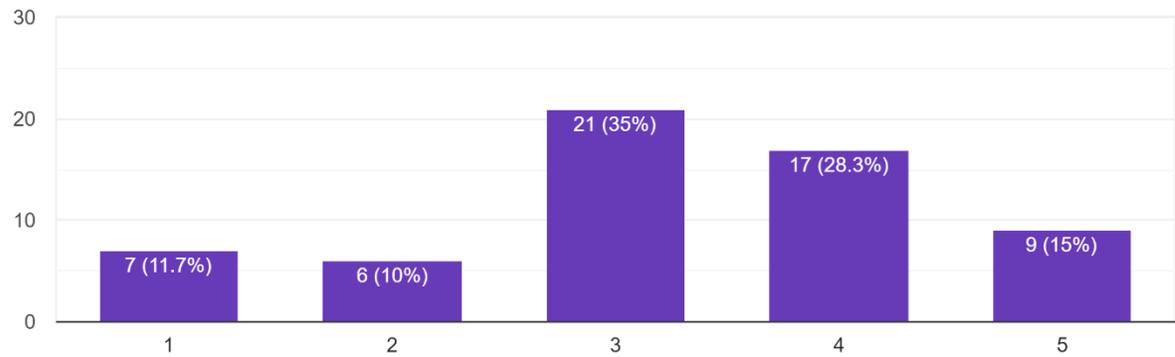
3. The Biden administration is active in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

60 responses



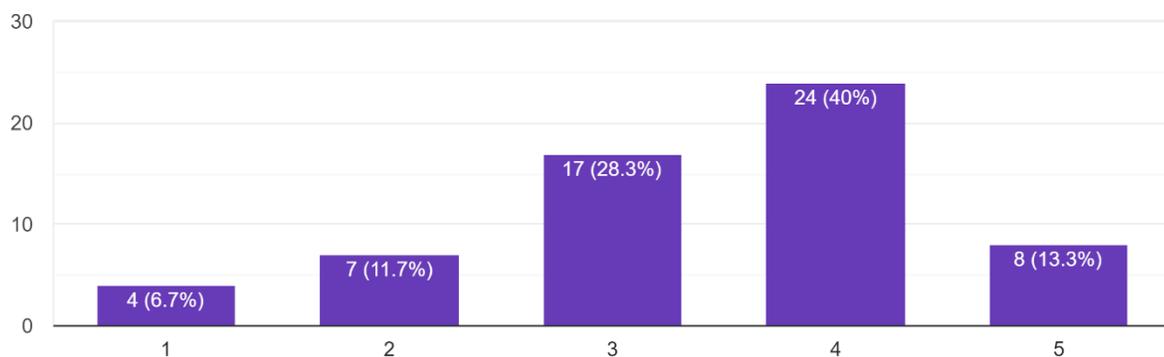
4. Peace in the Middle East will come when Palestinian people have a state of their own on the occupied territories.

60 responses



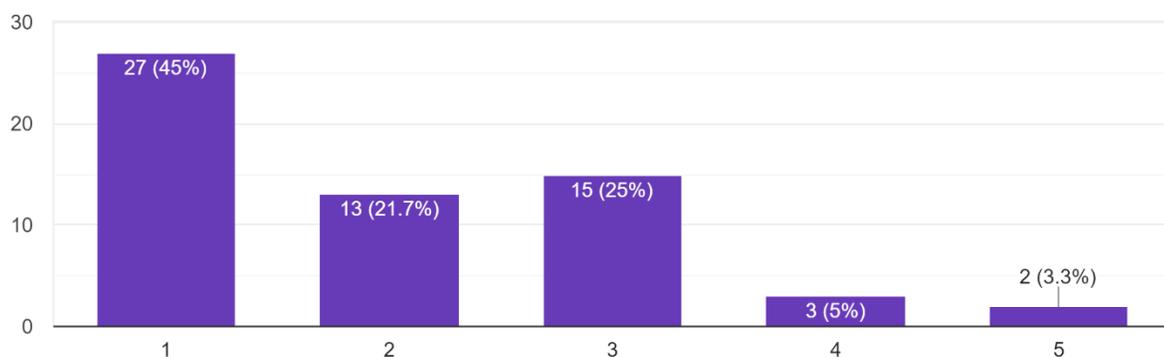
5. The two-state solution is the only applicable solution to this conflict.

60 responses



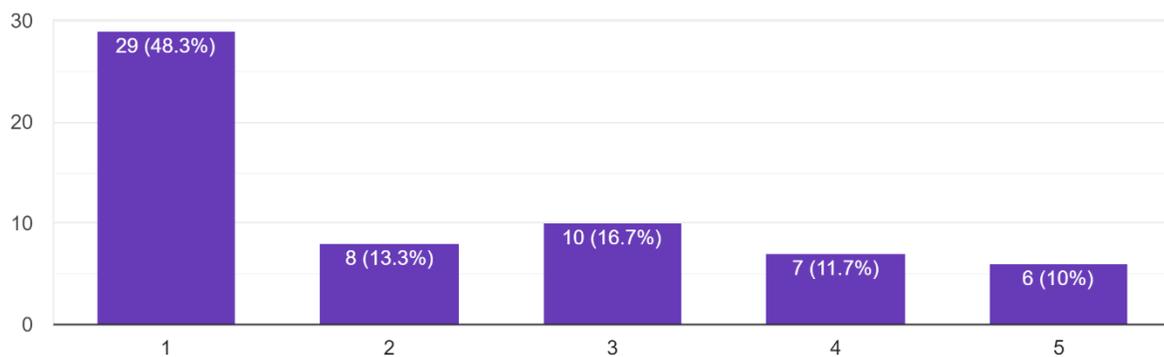
6. The one-state solution is the only applicable one to this conflict.

60 responses



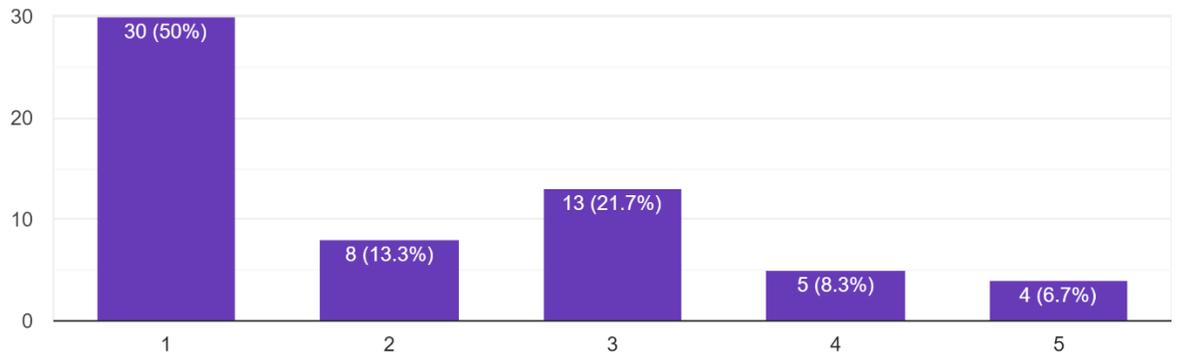
7. Israeli people have the right to settle in the occupied territories.

60 responses



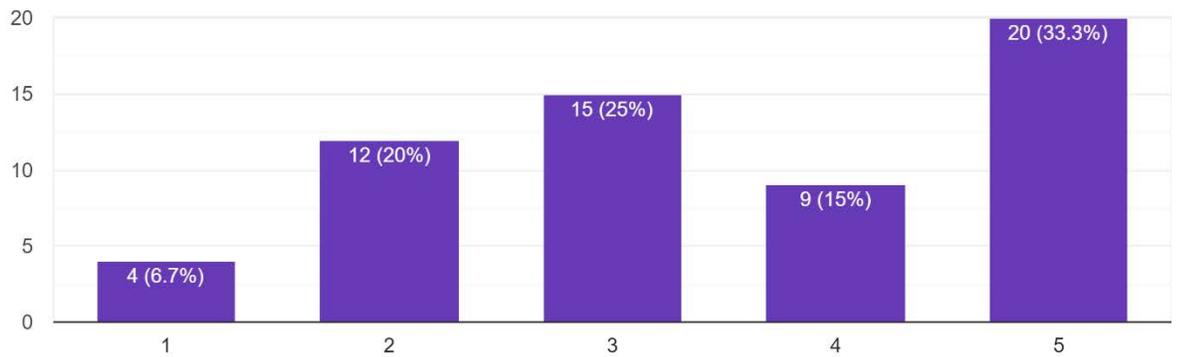
8. Israel has the right to build settlements in the West Bank.

60 responses



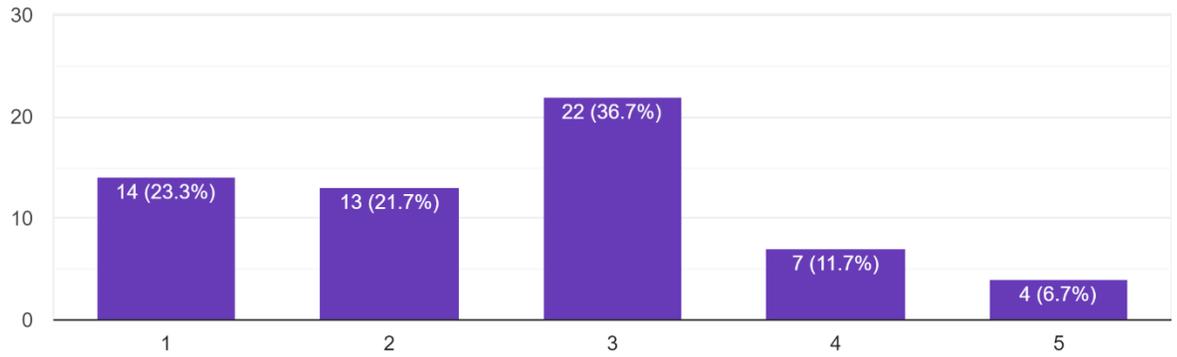
9. Israel must withdraw its settlements from the West Bank.

60 responses



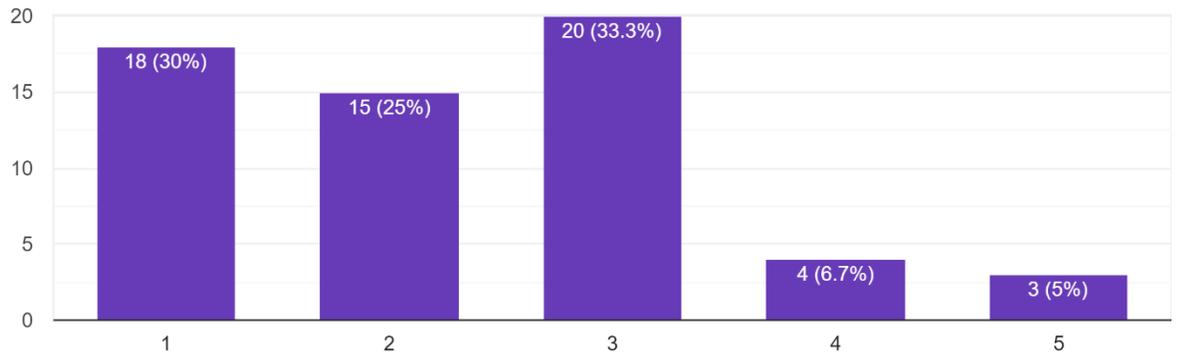
10. A Palestinian state on the occupied territories would be a threat to the security of Israel.

60 responses



11. Jerusalem must fully be under the control of Israeli government.

60 responses



12. Jerusalem must be a part of both states.

60 responses

