

## Israel's War in Gaza: Partisan, Racial, and Generational Views on the US Role in the Conflict

Dina Smeltz, Senior Fellow, Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Lama El Baz, Research Assistant, Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Heela Rasool-Ayub, Director, Planetary Politics, New America

Candace Rondeaux, Senior Director, Future Frontlines and Planetary Politics, New America

Christopher Shell, Fellow, American Statecraft Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

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After pausing a shipment of munitions to Israel in May amid concerns about Israel's potential use of US-made weapons in its incursion into southern Gaza, President Joe Biden warned that [he would condition additional weapons](#) transfers upon Israel's adherence to international humanitarian law. Debates over the Israel-Gaza war are not only taking place at the highest levels of the US government but also among ordinary Americans across college campuses, dinner tables, and social media platforms. In recent months, [pro-Palestinian student encampments](#) and counterprotests on college campuses have become a focal point in the antiwar movement and have been bolstered by calls from progressive Democrats and State Department officials to condition US military aid to Israel.

Taken together, data from the [September 2023 Chicago Council Survey](#), February and March 2024 Chicago Council-Ipsos flash polls, and a March 2024 series of Chicago Council-New America focus groups find variations in sentiments toward the Israel-Gaza war and US-Israel policy preferences across different racial, ethnic, and generational groups of Americans. However, majorities across all backgrounds concur that the United States should apply pressure on Israel to comply with international humanitarian

laws and norms, either by exerting diplomatic pressure or restricting military aid.

## Key Findings

- Pluralities of Americans from different racial, ethnic, and generational backgrounds say they do not know enough or have not heard enough about the Israel-Gaza war to provide their opinions on it.
- Majorities across all racial groups prefer that the United States remain impartial in the Middle East conflict. Among the minority who think it should take a side, Black and Generation Z Americans think the United States should take the Palestinians' side, while other racial and ethnic groups tend to side with Israel.
- Black, Hispanic, Millennial, and Generation Z Americans are the most likely to say they do not know enough about the situation to give their opinions. Among those who do, more say Israel has gone too far in its military operations than say it is justified in defending itself.
- By contrast, White Americans are equally divided on whether Israel's military action is justified or not, and older Americans are more likely to say Israel is justified in defending itself.
- Most Americans, with the exception of those from the Silent Generation, think the United States should apply some pressure on Israel if it continues its military operations in Gaza, either by reducing military aid or exerting diplomatic pressure.

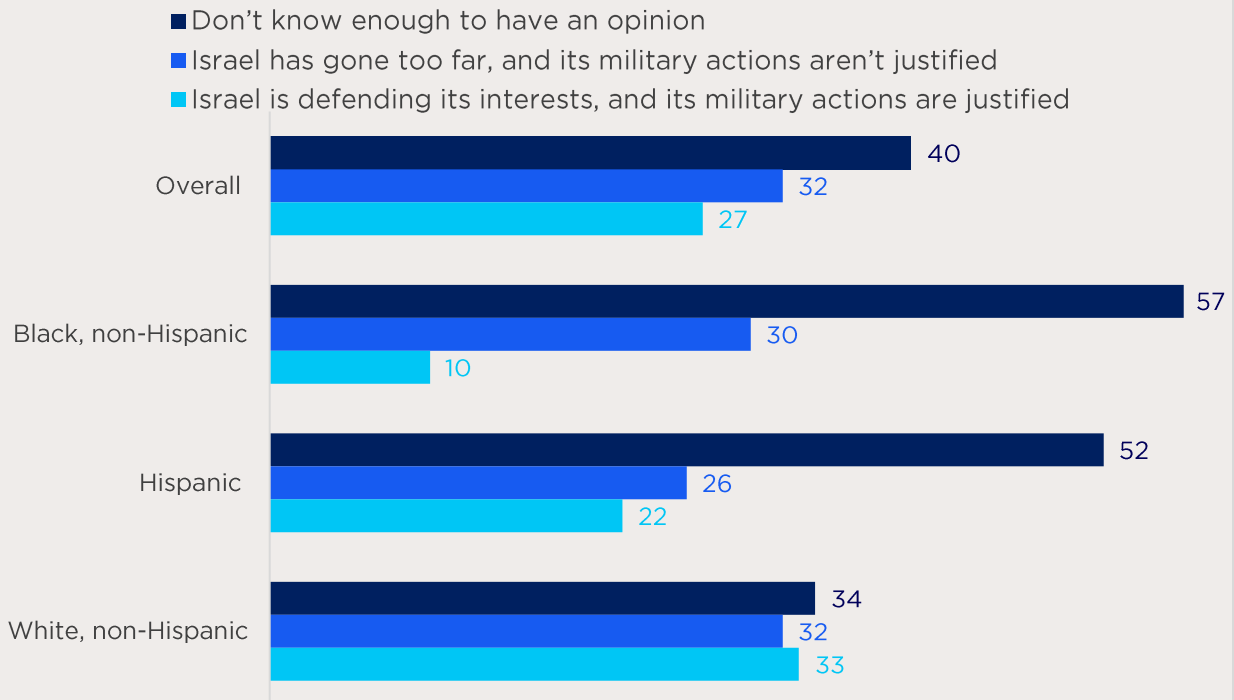
## Young Americans and Americans of Color Most Critical of Israel

A [Chicago Council on Global Affairs-Ipsos survey](#), fielded March 8-10, 2024, shows that Americans are divided in their perceptions of Israel's response to the attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023. Unusual for a headline news story, a sizable percentage of Americans say they have not heard enough about the conflict to offer an opinion. Across partisan lines, most Republicans who give their opinion say Israel is justified in defending its interests (53%), while most Democrats say Israel is not justified and has gone too far (51%).

Across racial and ethnic lines, Black and Hispanic Americans are the most likely to say they do not know enough about the situation to have an opinion. However, among Black and Hispanic Americans who choose a response, more say Israel has gone too far and is not justified in its military actions (30% and 26%, respectively). White Americans are divided, with roughly equal proportions saying either they do not know enough (34%), Israel has gone too far (32%), and Israel is justified in defending its interest (33%).

## Justification of Israeli Military Action in Gaza across Racial Groups

Thinking about the Israeli military action in Gaza, which statement best describes what you think . . . or do you not know enough about the situation to have an opinion?



March 8-10, 2024 | n=1,024

CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

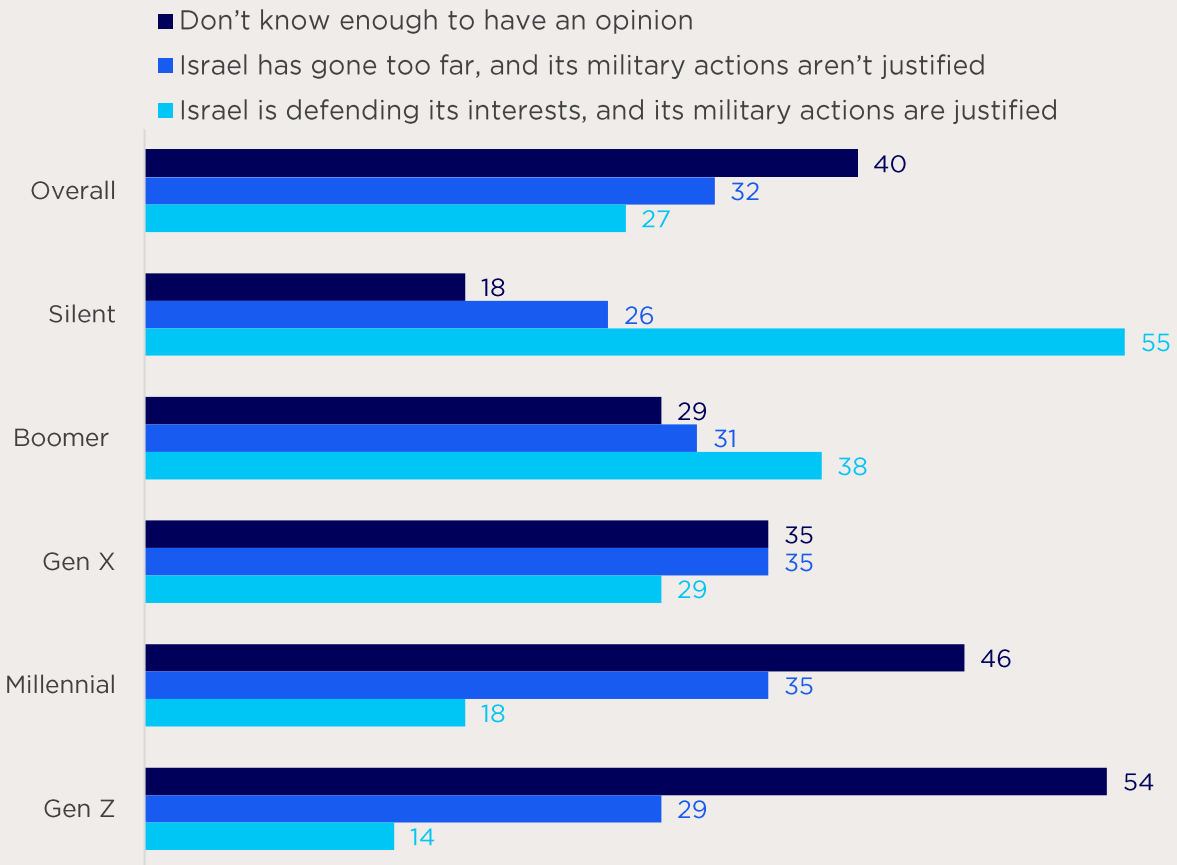
Several focus group participants admitted they were not following the situation in the Middle East closely, which supports the finding that significant pluralities of Americans do not know enough about the situation to give their opinions. For the most part, however, focus group participants across different racial groups expressed divided views. Some agreed with the Biden administration's policies toward the conflict and fully support US backing to Israel, while others strongly condemned these actions. For example, one Hispanic American praised the Biden administration's "strong condemnation of Hamas" and "support of Israel's right to respond," while another stated, "Hamas is the aggressor. Their vicious attack violates the Law of Armed Conflict in numerous ways. It was one huge war crime. Israel has the right to defend itself."

When asked to consider what's at stake in the war between Israel and Hamas, many focus group participants shared fears of a prolonged and wider regional war, direct confrontation with Iran, and increased energy prices, among other humanitarian and social concerns. One Black American participant listed "more instability in the Middle East. Possible nuclear conflict. Energy prices going up!" An Asian American cited "human rights and Israel becoming bolder with their genocide, war crimes, human atrocities." A few Hispanic participants focused on increasing Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, saying "anti-Semitism is going to get worse because of how this was handled" and mentioning "religious divides across the globe."

However, differences in Americans' assessments of Israel's military action in Gaza are far sharper across generational lines than racial and ethnic ones. A majority of Americans from the Silent Generation (55%) and a plurality of those from the Baby Boomer Generation (38%) think Israel is justified in defending its interest. Pluralities among Millennials (46%) and Generation Z (54%) say they do not know enough about the situation to have an opinion. However, among those younger Americans that do give their opinion, somewhat more say Israel has gone too far (35% and 29%) than say it is justified in defending its interests (18% and 14%). Similarly, an equal percentage of Generation X say they don't know enough (35%) as say that Israel has gone too far (35%).

## Justification of Israeli Military Action in Gaza across Generations

Thinking about the Israeli military action in Gaza, which statement best describes what you think . . . or do you not know enough about the situation to have an opinion?



March 8-10, 2024 | n=1,024  
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

Among young focus group participants, many highlight the broader ramifications of Israel's military action on Gaza and the United States' support. Some speculated on the consequences to allies. One member of the young adults focus group worried that it might prompt a "breaking up of allies," while another noted, "If terror prevails, we expect our Arab allies to distance themselves from the United States." A different respondent worried about the influence of Iran: "The result of the war will have great impact on the . . . power of the region and will determine the position of Iran." Another worried about the image of Americans because of US policy in the Middle East, saying,

“Fueling the war by providing aid and weapons to Israel will make the Middle East and the whole world hate Americans.”

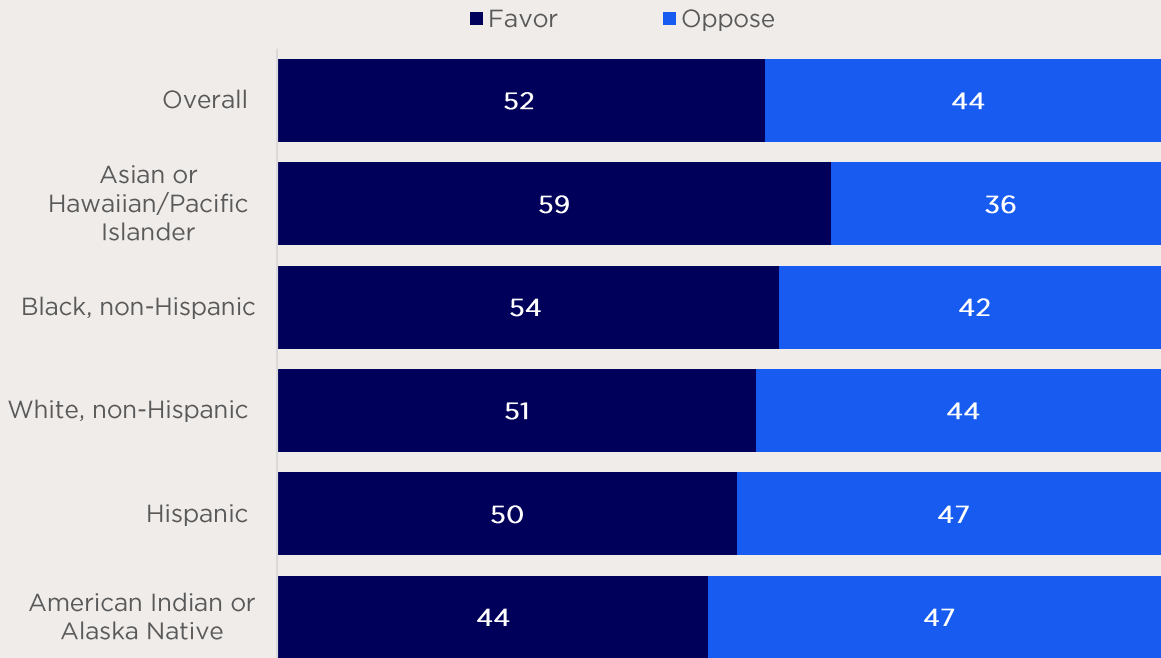
### Most Americans Say United States Should Apply Some Pressure on Israel

In the [September 2023 Chicago Council Survey](#), a bare majority of Americans supported restricting military aid to Israel “so it cannot use that aid in military operations against the Palestinians” (52%). Majorities of Democrats (64%) and Independents (52%) favored restricting military aid to Israel, while most Republicans (56%) opposed such restrictions.

With the exception of Native Americans, Americans of all different races and ethnicities favored the United States placing restrictions on its military aid to Israel so it cannot use that aid toward military operations against the Palestinians. Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander (AAPI) Americans were the most likely to favor restricting military aid to Israel (59%), followed closely by Black Americans (54%). White and Hispanic Americans were more divided on whether to impose military aid restrictions on Israel, though bare majorities were in favor of restrictions (51% and 50%, respectively).

## Support for Restricting Military Aid to Israel across Racial Groups

Do you support or oppose putting restrictions on US military aid to Israel so that it cannot use that aid toward military operations against Palestinians? (%)



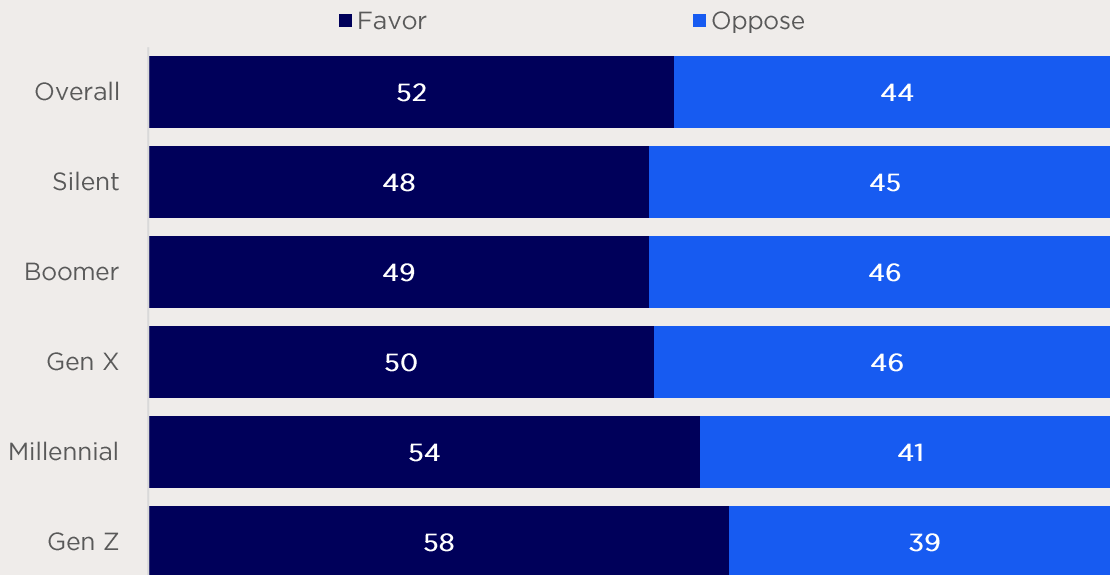
September 7-18, 2023 | n=3,242

CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

Younger Americans were more likely to support placing restrictions on military aid to Israel than older Americans, who were more divided on this item. Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, and Generation X Americans were about equally divided on whether to restrict military aid or not (48%, 49%, and 50%, respectively, favor restrictions). By contrast, majorities of Millennials and Generation Z favored placing restrictions on US military aid to Israel (54% and 58%).

## Support for Restricting Military Aid to Israel across Generations

Do you support or oppose putting restrictions on US military aid to Israel so that it cannot use that aid toward military operations against Palestinians? (%)



September 7-18, 2023 | n=3,242  
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

The Council's most recent round of polling in March 2024 asks respondents how the United States should approach continued Israeli military action in Gaza with a wider set of policy options. Americans who have heard enough about the conflict to give their opinion tend to believe the United States should apply some sort of pressure on Israel (40%), whether through diplomacy (14%) or by reducing military aid (26%). However, 23 percent say the United States should not pressure Israel at all.

Across partisan affiliations, the majority of Democrats think the United States should apply some form of pressure on Israel (57%), with a plurality saying it should reduce military aid (38%) and 19 percent preferring diplomatic pressure alone. About half of Republicans say the United States shouldn't pressure Israel at all and should leave it to pursue whatever policy it thinks is best (49%). Among Independents, most say they haven't heard enough to provide an opinion (43%), but those who have tend to think the United States should restrict military aid to Israel (27%) or apply diplomatic pressure (13%).

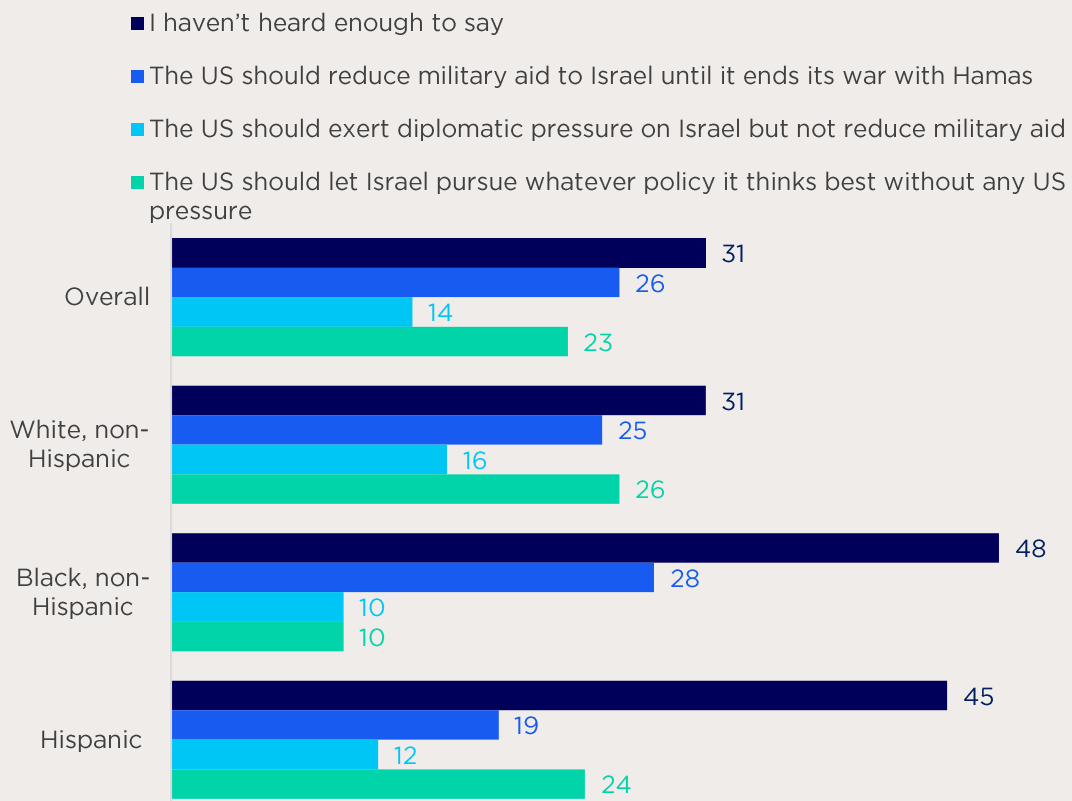
Pluralities of Black and Hispanic Americans say they haven't heard enough about the situation to say how the United States should approach Israel's



continued military action in Gaza. Among those who provide their opinion, more say the United States should pressure Israel through the reduction of military aid and exertion of diplomatic pressure than leave it to pursue whatever policy it thinks is best. White Americans are also more likely to say the United States should pressure Israel in some way rather than not at all, with four in 10 favoring either a reduction in military aid or diplomatic pressure.

## Preferred Approach to Israeli Military Action in Gaza across Racial Groups

If Israel continues its military action in Gaza, which of the following approaches do you think the US should take? (%)



March 8-10, 2024 | n=1,024  
 CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

Across focus groups, participants seemed to support initial US assistance to Israel but also expressed concern about the resulting humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. A Hispanic American observed that US officials “helped Israel promptly” and are “finally starting to do something to help Palestinian civilians, but it took way too long.” One member of the Black American group

remarked that the United States' hands are tied because "we have no ability to have our ally [Israel] not injure innocent civilians. Hamas embeds itself in with civilians so injuries will happen."

But others believe the United States should restrict weapons assistance to Israel to prevent more civilian bloodshed. "Helping Israel is good; however, if Israel is killing women and children [we should] stop the supply of weapons," one Black American participant commented. A Hispanic American participant said the United States should ensure that US weapons are used "responsibly and [limit] where and how they would be used so as not to kill people who weren't responsible for the attacks." Another in the same group added that the US government should "end all but defensive weapons to Israel and increase humanitarian aid to Gaza immediately." In a different group, an Asian American echoed this view, saying it's "not clear if we should continue supporting Israel now that it is engaged in a destructive and seemingly endless military action."

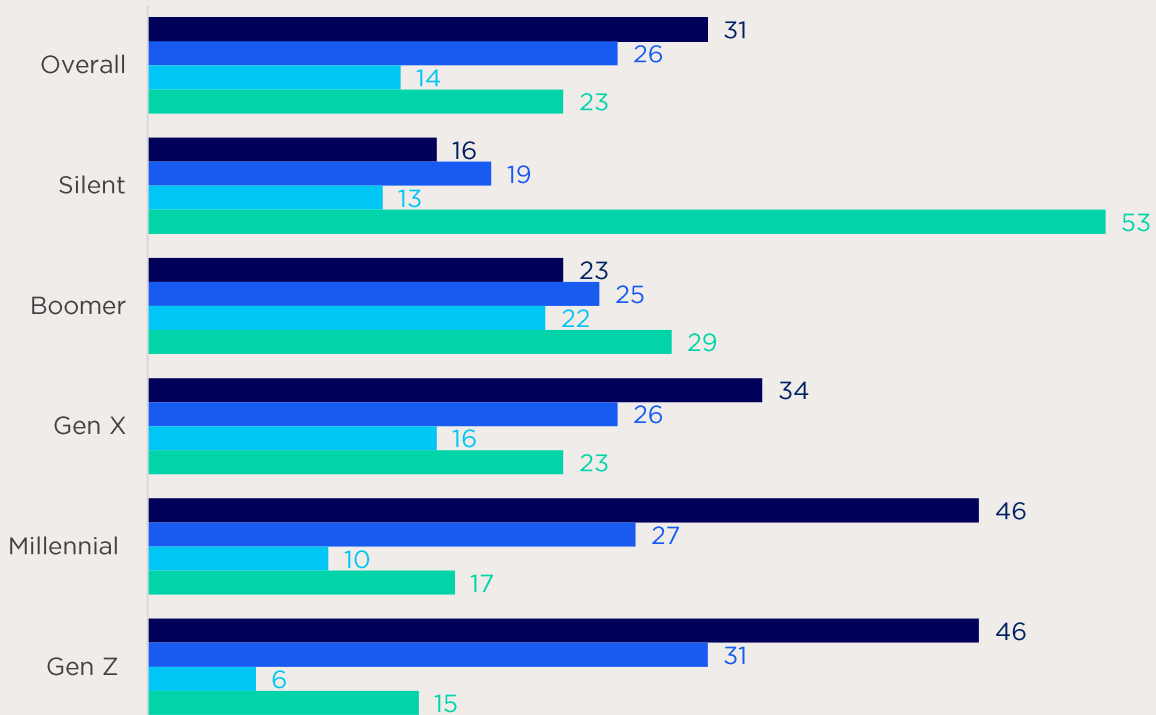
On the other end of the spectrum, an Asian American participant criticized US policy, saying the "United States is greatly diminished in its support of genocide," and a Black American argued for the United States to "stop sending money or arms and press Israel to stop the genocide." These are illustrative of the wide-ranging sentiments expressed in each of the groups.

Pluralities of Millennials and Generation Z say they haven't heard enough about the situation to answer how the United States should proceed (46% each) on this item as well. Among those that have heard enough about it, more say the United States should put pressure on Israel by either reducing military aid (27% Millennials, 31% Generation Z) or increasing diplomatic pressure (10% Millennials, 6% Gen Z) than say it shouldn't pressure Israel at all (17% Millennial, 15% Gen Z). Like their younger counterparts, more Baby Boomers and Generation X say the United States should apply some pressure on Israel (47% Boomer, 42% Gen X) than say it should let Israel pursue its own policy. In each case, those who opt for US pressure tend to prefer the reduction of military aid over the exertion of diplomatic pressure alone. The Silent Generation is the only age group that prefers to let Israel pursue the policy it thinks is best without US pressure (53%).

## Preferred Approach to Israeli Military Action in Gaza across Generations

If Israel continues its military action in Gaza, which of the following approaches do you think the US should take? (%)

- I haven't heard enough to say
- The US should reduce military aid to Israel until it ends its war with Hamas
- The US should exert diplomatic pressure on Israel but not reduce military aid
- The US should let Israel pursue whatever policy it thinks best without any US pressure



March 8-10, 2024 | n=1,024

CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

While several younger group participants said they aren't following the situation closely, others criticized the Biden administration for being too close to Israel. "We have been far too slow to condemn the actions of the [Israeli Defense Forces] during the war in Gaza. Far too many civilians have been killed," was one typical response. Others criticized the US approach as being "far too friendly with the Israeli military," with "relatively weak calls for restraint and ceasefire; not using strength as Israel's ally enough to rein in [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's government."

But others have a different take, supporting US backing for Israel and praising Biden for proposing a two-state solution, handling competing interests in the

region delicately, and continued assistance to Israel “without putting American boots on the ground.” Another young American confessed to being disturbed about rhetoric around the conflict:

“It has been horrifying to establish a moral equivalence between collateral damage Israel inflicts on Palestinian civilians while trying to spare them with the overt targeting of Israeli civilians and raping of women and [killing] children. . . . Hamas is known to hide behind civilians with the knowledge that Western ideology forbids the killing of civilians, using Palestinian deaths to their advantage and increasing civilian deaths.”

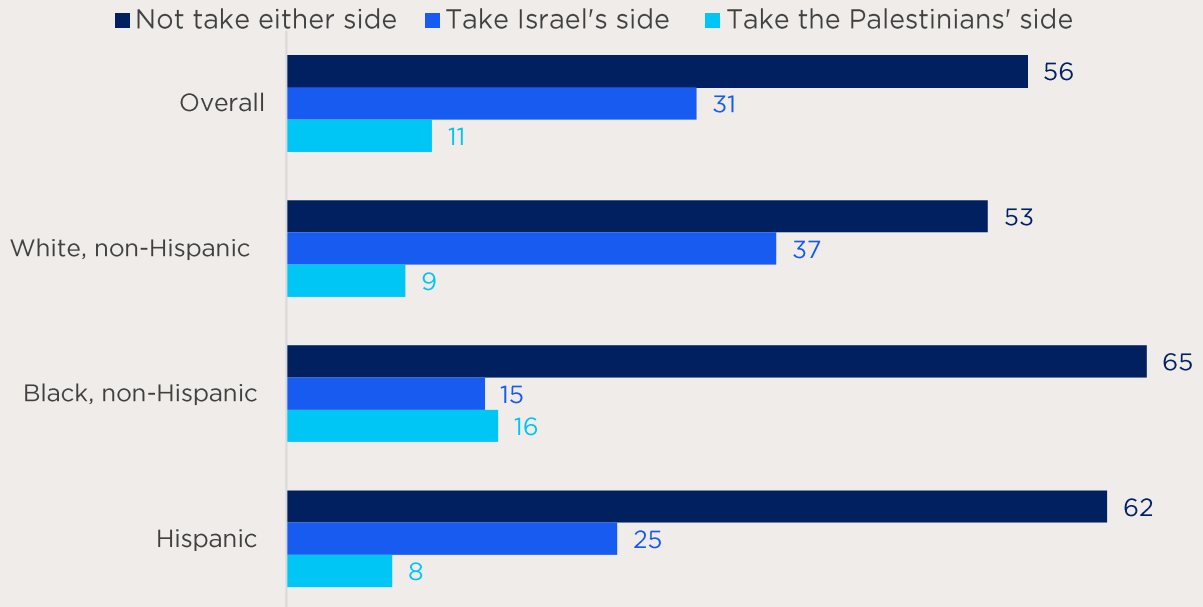
### [Similar Age and Demographic Divides on Taking a Side in the Middle East Conflict](#)

Chicago Council Surveys conducted in [February 2024](#) and [September 2023](#) reveal that most Americans prefer to stay impartial in the conflict (56%, down from 64% in July 2023), but a growing number have chosen sides since September. Attitudes toward the conflict have become more polarized between partisan groups and within the Democratic base in particular. The majority of Republicans now say the United States should take Israel’s side (56%) in the conflict, while majorities of Democrats (62%) and Independents (60%) continue to say the United States shouldn’t take either side.

Majorities across all racial groups prefer that the United States remain impartial in the Israel-Gaza war. Among the minority who think it should take a side, more think it should take Israel’s than think it should take the Palestinians’, with the exception of Black Americans. Across most racial and ethnic groups, fewer now say the United States should refrain from taking a side than in September 2023, a month before Hamas’s attack on October 7. Support for taking Israel’s side in the conflict [has also decreased](#) among Black Americans, in particular, since September 2023, while their support for the Palestinians’ side has increased (see appendix tables 1–2). Now, an equal share of Black Americans think the United States should take either side in the conflict.

## Side in Middle East Conflict across Racial Groups

In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, take the Palestinians' side, or not take either side? (%)



February 16-18, 2024 | n=1,039

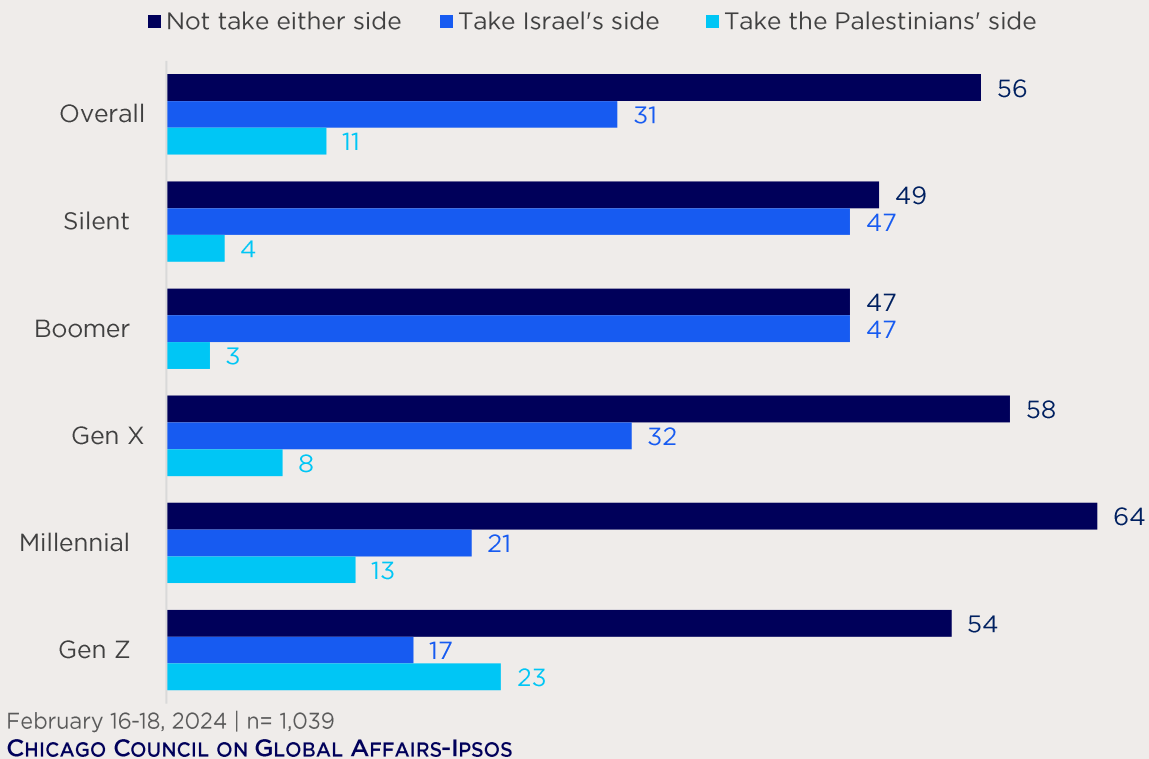
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

The idea of staying impartial prompted several comments from focus group participants. One Black American put it bluntly, “We should be neutral,” and another criticized the administration for choosing “sides over innocent lives lost.” A Hispanic American agreed that “funding should not be going to either side.” Several participants in the Asian American groups also chimed in, saying, “It should be about neutrality and trying to stay in line with other world powers,” and “the United States should take a hands-off approach. At most, it should support the innocent Palestinian civilians.” And several people across groups chided the United States for showing “favoritism” toward Israel.

Across generations of Americans, majorities prefer the United States not take a side in the conflict, with the exception of Americans from the Silent and Baby Boomer Generations, who are almost or just as likely to say the United States should take Israel's side (47% each) as say it should remain impartial (49% and 47%). Among Generation X and Millennials, those who take a side prefer to Israel's (32% and 21%) rather than the Palestinians' (8% and 13%). By contrast, those Generation Z Americans who take a side are more likely to say the United States should favor the Palestinians' (23% vs 17% Israel). In other words, support for taking the Palestinians' side in the conflict increases as age decreases.

## Side in Middle East Conflict across Generations

In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, take the Palestinians' side or not take either side? (%)



Young adults in the focus groups expressed particular concern that the United States is showing preference toward Israel. One participant noted that the United States is “responding too much to the conflict and picking a side,” while others noted that “Israel has been committing human rights violations against the Palestinian people for years and the United States has refused to hold Israel accountable.”

Others felt the United States is acting as an enabler in Israeli “genocide.” For example, according to one youth respondent, “the US should stop sending money to Israel and funding a genocide.” Speaking specifically to the longer-term implication of the Israeli military action, one young adult said, “If Israel continues to fight Gaza without regard for Palestinian lives, leaders around the world will feel more confident they can carry out ethnic cleansing without penalty.”

## Conclusion

The dozens of pro-Palestinian encampments that have emerged on college campuses across the United States in recent months reflect the particular salience of this conflict among younger generations of Americans. The data show that demographic characteristics, and particularly generation, play a significant role in dividing Americans' attitudes toward the Israel-Gaza war. While sentiments toward the conflict are mixed across racial and ethnic lines, Americans from the Silent and Baby Boomer Generations are generally far more likely than younger generations to side with Israel, justify its military actions in Gaza, and prefer the United States not put any pressure on the Netanyahu government. By contrast, young Americans are somewhat more likely to side with the Palestinians and think the United States should pressure Israel in some way, preferably by reducing its military aid to the country until it ends its war with Hamas.

## Appendix

	Race			
Q230. In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, the Palestinians' side, or not take either side?	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Take Israel's side	37	15	25	27
Take the Palestinians' side	9	16	8	21
Not take either side	53	65	62	51

	Race			
Q230. In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, the Palestinians' side, or not take either side?	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Take Israel's side	31	17	22	20
Take the Palestinians' side	6	6	7	10
Not take either side	60	76	70	69

## Methodology

This report is based on data from the 2023 Chicago Council Survey, a series of four focus group sessions, and two omnibus surveys.

The 2023 Chicago Council Survey is an annual study of American public opinion toward US foreign policy conducted and analyzed by the Lester Crown Center's survey team. Fielded September 7–18, 2023, by Ipsos using its large-scale, nationwide, online research panel, KnowledgePanel, the survey was conducted in both English and Spanish among a national weighted sample of 3,242 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

The 2023 survey sample is composed of a main sample (n=2,184) and several supplementary “booster” oversamples that allow for more detailed demographic analysis: a Hispanic oversample (n=305), a Black American oversample (n=281), an American Indian/Alaskan Native oversample (n=123), a Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander oversample (n=129), and an Asian oversample (n=330). The subsample of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives is small and required significant weighting to match the population demographics noted in the March 2023 Current Population Survey Supplemental Data. As such, conclusions drawn from this sample should be considered suggestive and interpreted with caution. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 2.0$  percentage points, including a design effect of 1.2908. The margin of error is higher for partisan, racial, and age subgroups or for partial-sample items.

Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?”

Americans are categorized into generational cohorts based on their birth year. Those born between 1928 and 1945 are considered the Silent Generation; between 1946 and 1964 are considered the Baby Boom Generation; between 1965 and 1980 are considered Generation X; between 1981 and 1996 are considered the Millennial Generation; and finally, between 1997 and 2013 are considered Generation Z.

The 2023 Chicago Council Survey was made possible by the generous support of the Crown family, the Korea Foundation, the United States-Japan Foundation, and New America.

The Chicago Council and Ipsos also conducted a survey from February 16–18, 2024, using Ipsos' large-scale, nationwide, online research panel,



KnowledgePanel, among a weighted national sample of 1,039 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 3.2$  percentage points, including a design effect of 1.09. The margin of error is higher for partisan, racial, and age subgroups.

The Chicago Council and Ipsos conducted an additional survey from March 8–10, 2024, using Ipsos’ large-scale, nationwide, online research panel, KnowledgePanel, among a weighted national sample of 1,024 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points, including a design effect of 1.09. The margin of error is higher for partisan, racial, and age subgroups.

Finally, Ipsos conducted four online focus groups among Hispanic Americans; Black Americans; Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander Americans (AAPI); and young Americans between the ages of 18–29, between March 13 and 19, 2024. Each of the respondents were members of the KnowledgePanel, Ipsos’ probability-based, online panel, and had previously completed the Chicago Council’s Annual Survey in September 2023. Respondents were recontacted in March 2024 to participate in an 80-minute, online focus group. Each group was conducted among 24 to 49 participants of like age, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Ipsos’ online focus group methodology, called “Ipsos Ideation Exchange,” is built on the Converge platform. Respondents are led through a series of exercises, proctored by a human moderator. Respondents answer questions individually first, with respondents being able to see other participants’ responses and build on them. Respondents participate using a mix of open-end response, voting, rating, and ranking exercises.

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The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at [thechicagocouncil.org](https://thechicagocouncil.org) and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

### [About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy](#)

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the

public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974. For the latest research from the Crown Center, follow [@ChiCouncilFP](#)

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New America is a think and action tank dedicated to renewing the Promise of America in an age of rapid technological and social change. Its work prioritizes care and family wellbeing, advances technology in the public interest, reimagines global cooperation, builds effective democracy, and ensures affordable and accessible education for all. Learn more at [newamerica.org](http://newamerica.org).

### [About the Planetary Politics Initiative](#)

New America's Planetary Politics initiative is a call to action for reimagining a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable global order. As our world becomes hotter, wetter, and more digitalized and complex, the time to build a new vision for global cooperation attuned to today's environment—in preparation for tomorrow—is now.