

Growing Majority of Americans Oppose Israel Building Settlements

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[Questionnaire/Methodology \(PDF\)](#)



A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll finds that three-quarters of Americans think that Israel should not build settlements in the Palestinian territories. This is up 23 points from when this question was last asked in 2002.

Israeli settlement of Ma'ale Adumim located in the West Bank (Photo: [Decode Jerusalem](#))

One third of Americans show more sympathy for Israel than the Palestinians, substantially more than the 12 percent who express more sympathy for the Palestinians.

However the largest number--51 percent--expresses equal levels of sympathy for each side. The percentage expressing equal levels of sympathy is up 10 points from 2002.

Even those respondents who sympathize more with Israel feel that it should not be building settlements in the West Bank by a clear majority (64%), as do those who sympathize equally with Israel and the Palestinians (80%), and those who sympathize more with the Palestinians (96%).

"Americans are showing increasing impatience with Israel for building settlements," comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. "Even the third of Americans who sympathize with Israel more than the Palestinians oppose the settlements."

Opposition to settlements is found among majorities of Republicans (65%), Democrats (83%) and independents (74%). However, more Republicans show more sympathy for Israel (50%) than sympathize with both equally (41%), while Democrats overwhelmingly express equal levels of sympathy (55%) as do independents (64%).

The poll of 1,004 respondents was fielded March 25 to April 6, 2009 by Knowledge Networks. The margin of error is plus or minus 3-4.5 percent.

Each respondent was also asked to evaluate an argument against and an argument in defense of Israel's building settlements in the Palestinian territories. These arguments were originally developed with the advice of the Israeli embassy in the US and the Palestinian Mission at the UN.

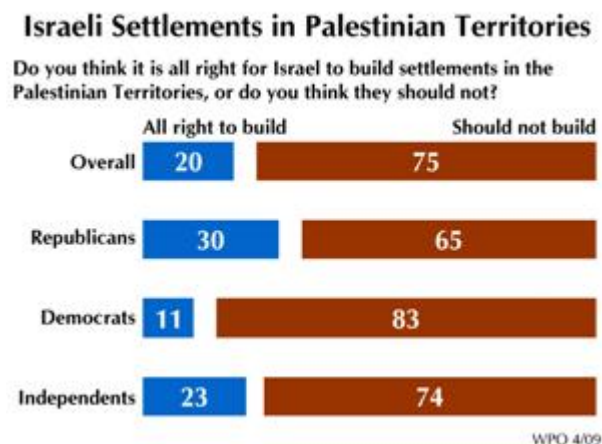
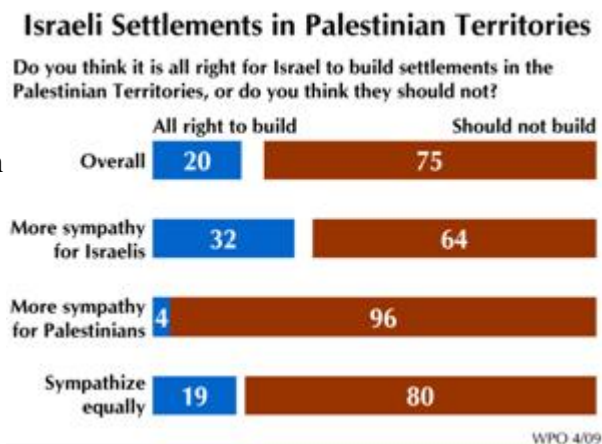
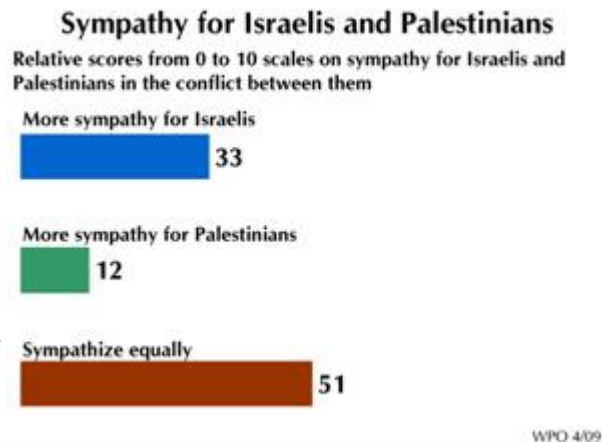
Both arguments were found convincing by a majority, but the argument against the settlements was found convincing by a larger margin. Sixty-two percent found convincing the argument against the settlements, that "UN resolutions 242 and 338, which were endorsed by nearly all members of the UN, including the US, called for Israel to withdraw from territories it invaded in the 1967 war. Thus, for Israel to build new settlements in these areas is illegal under international law." This is up five points from 2002.

At the same time a 54 percent majority also found convincing the argument in defense of the settlements, that "Israel has a right to build settlements in the West Bank and Gaza because Jews have lived in these areas for centuries and have legitimate historical claims to property there." This is unchanged from 2002.

After hearing the arguments, opposition to the settlements was 60 percent. While still a majority, this was substantially lower than it was without hearing the arguments.

This is quite interesting because, though the argument against the settlements was found more convincing than the argument in their defense, the argument in defense of the settlements appears to have had more influence on attitudes. It may be that the argument in defense of the settlements was new for more people than was the argument against them.

A modest majority--53 percent--say that the US should make it a high priority (45%) or one of the highest priorities (8%) "to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians." This is down 16 points from 2003.



Twenty-nine percent say they follow the news on the issue at least fairly closely. Those who follow the issue closely are more likely to say that the US should make the issue a high priority (72%). They are also much less likely to express equal levels of sympathy for both sides (31% as compared to 51% for the whole sample). Correspondingly, they are more likely than the general sample to have more sympathy either for Israel (47%) or for the Palestinians (21%).

However, when it comes to the question of the settlements, those who followed the issue closely are not significantly different from the general sample: three-quarters of both groups oppose the settlements. Their response to the arguments about the settlements and their position after hearing the arguments are also approximately the same.

Those who both follow the issue closely and believe that the government should make it a high priority--what could be called the "issue public"--constitute 21 percent of the sample. This group is also less likely to say they sympathize with both sides equally (36%) and more likely to express more sympathy for Israel (43%) and for the Palestinians (20%), than the sample as a whole. However, they are just as likely to oppose the settlements as is the sample as a whole.

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

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