

# The Young American Left and Attitudes about Israel\*

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## Abstract

Over the last two decades, a rift has emerged on the U.S. political left regarding the State of Israel. Public polling has showed that young people and the ideological far left have developed distinctly negative views toward Israel. In the fall of 2020, we surveyed 3,500 U.S. adults, including an oversample of 2,500 adults ages 18-30. We first explore the young left's views toward Israel in comparison to how they view other foreign countries, and in comparison to how older adults and more conservative adults view Israel. We then ask if their negative views toward Israel are explained by an issue prioritization of the Israel-Palestine conflict (no). Finally, we ask if the young left's negative attitudes toward Israel are focused on Israel's politics and government or on other features of the country, such as its cultures and religions (it's both). Overall, the young left evaluates Israel like it evaluates U.S. adversaries such as Russia and Iran, whereas the center and right evaluate Israel like they evaluate other U.S. allies, such as Mexico and India.

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# 1 Introduction

In May 2021, violence broke out, again, in Israel and Palestine. In the United States, the unrest surfaced a growing divide on the political left. The moderate wing of the Democratic Party, led by President Joe Biden, maintained a clear position in support of Israel.<sup>1</sup> The left wing of the Democratic Party, led by figureheads such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, took strong positions against Israel.<sup>2</sup> The Republican Party, in contrast, spoke with a unified voice in support of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Journalists and commentators have noted that left-wing Democratic politicians are under increased pressure from grassroots activists to criticize Israel and take pro-Palestinian positions.<sup>4</sup> For instance, when Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) issued a statement that both criticized Israel’s actions toward Palestinians and endorsed Israel’s right to self-defense against rocket fire on civilians, hundreds of activists who had supported Markey’s recent election campaign – identifying themselves as “young people, organizers, and advocates who are responsible for Senator Markey’s victory” — wrote a public letter criticizing Markey’s “both sides” messaging.<sup>5</sup> Their letter, which spoke of Israel as engaging in “ethnic cleansing,” encapsulates the public narrative about the young left’s highly critical view of Israel.

Long before the May 2021 conflict, this brewing divide on the political left started to take root, with younger and left-leaning identifiers becoming less aligned with Israel. For instance,

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<sup>1</sup>Sean Sullivan and Anne Gearan, “Biden is Increasingly at Odds with Other Democrats Over Israel,” *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2021.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Zurcher, “Israel-Gaza: The Democrats’ ‘Tectonic’ Shift on the Conflict,” *BBC News*, May 21, 2021; Catie Edmondson, “Sanders Introduces Legislation to Block a \$735 Million Arms Sale Package to Israel,” *The New York Times*, May 20, 2021.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew Desiderio, Lara Seligman, and Nahal Toosi, “U.S.-Israel Politics Heat Up on the Hill as Liberals Try to Stop Arms Sale,” *Politico*, May 19, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>Lisa Lerer and Jennifer Medina, “Tensions Among Democrats Grow Over Israel as the Left Defends Palestinians,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2021; Peter Beinart, “Liberal American Attitudes Are Starting To Shift On Israelis And Palestinians,” *All Things Considered*, interviewed by Audie Cornish, National Public Radio, May 21, 2021.

<sup>5</sup>Matt Murphy, “Markey Backers ‘Upset and Disappointed’ By His Stance on Gaza Conflict,” *The Boston Globe*, May 13, 2021.

in 2018, Pew found that while Republicans of all stripes as well as moderate Democrats consistently sympathize more with Israel than with the Palestinians, liberal Democrats have increasingly and strikingly begun to sympathize more with the Palestinians over the past two decades. Pew identified young people (aged 18-29) as by far the most Palestinian-sympathizing age cohort.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, we seek a better understanding of the young left’s attitudes toward Israel. To what extent does the young left actually dislike Israel? What are some plausible explanations for their attitudes toward Israel and their attitudinal departure from other cohorts of Americans? In asking these questions, we should note that we are not weighing in on the extent to which attitudes critical of Israel are or are not a form of antisemitism. A number of other scholars have researched the link between antisemitism and views on the Israel-Palestine conflict (Beattie 2017; Cohen et al. 2011, 2009; Kaplan and Small 2006). Here, we ask a more elementary set of questions about the contours of the young left’s attitudes toward the Jewish state. Regardless of their origins, these attitudes are important to understand because of how they may impact both the future of U.S. party coalitions and foreign policy.

## 2 Data and Methods

We fielded an original YouGov survey in November 2020 (Nov 9-25), after the U.S. presidential election was called and at a relative lull in the Israel-Palestine conflict. We asked YouGov to create two samples, a sample of 2,500 respondents ages 18-30 and a sample of 1,000 respondents ages 18 and over. Both the young adult sample and the full adult sample were designed to be representative of the national population on gender, age, race, education, and 2016 vote choice. In several points in the analysis, we compare the under-30

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<sup>6</sup>Pew Research Center, “Republicans and Democrats Grow Even Farther Apart in Views of Israel, Palestinians,” January 2018.

sample with the 759 respondents who are over 30 in the general sample. The Supplementary Information (SI) includes documentation from YouGov about the construction of weights, which are used throughout this analysis.

The study was determined exempt from IRB review by the Tufts University Institutional Review Board for Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research, IRB ID: 00000710. Before seeing any survey questions, respondents read and agreed to an informed consent statement. They were informed that these questions were for a research study, that they would be compensated according to their agreement with YouGov, that participation is voluntary, and several other standard pieces of information.

In a separate analysis, we investigate a variety of questions related to antisemitic attitudes in the United States. In the present study, we analyze several questions we posed related to views on Israel. The questions studied here came first in the survey, before respondents were shown any questions about perceptions of Jews.

In measuring ideology, we will mainly utilize a 7-point measure of ideology (instead of a 3-point or 5-point measure), so that we can examine nuances on the ends of the ideological spectrum. One fifth (19%) of 18-30 year olds in our sample identify as the farthest left on the ideological scale. This compares to 9% of respondents over 30 who identify as farthest left. As an alternative measure of ideology, we asked respondents if they identify with any of the following labels: leftist, socialist, progressive, libertarian, Christian conservative, and alt-right. This list includes three identities associated with the left and three associated with the right. Respondents could check more than one. Twenty-one percent of young respondents identify as leftist and 21% identify as socialist. There is substantial overlap in these identities. Table 1 summarizes mean responses with respect to ideology and the six ideological identities, as well as racial identities and other variables used in this analysis.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Adults 18-30	Adults 31+		Adults 18-30	Adults 31+
<i>7-pt. Ideology</i>			<i>Ideo. Identities</i>		
Very Liberal	0.19	0.09	Leftist	0.21	0.10
Liberal	0.15	0.11	Socialist	0.21	0.10
Moderate Liberal	0.12	0.10	Progressive	0.40	0.36
Moderate	0.25	0.26	Libertarian	0.18	0.15
Moderate Conserv.	0.10	0.14	Christian Conserv.	0.24	0.39
Conservative	0.09	0.15	Alt-Right	0.07	0.06
Very Conservative	0.10	0.16			
			<i>Other Ind. Vars</i>		
<i>Racial Groups</i>			State Pct. Jewish	2	2
White	0.54	0.69	Female	0.49	0.53
Black	0.14	0.11	Age	24	57
Latino	0.22	0.13	4-year Student	0.28	N/A
Other Race	0.10	0.08	Other Student	0.13	N/A

Note: Cells contain means. N=2,500 for young adults sample and N=759 for the adults over 30 in the general population sample.

### 3 Question 1: Does the Young Left Dislike Israel?

To what extent does the young left dislike Israel? And compared to what? We make three comparisons: (1) compared to the young left’s views about other countries, (2) compared to views about Israel of young respondents in the middle and right of the ideological spectrum, and (3) compared to older Americans.

We asked a random one-third of the respondents in our study: *How favorable is your impression of each of the following countries, or haven’t you heard enough to say?* We asked respondents about seven countries: China, India, Iran, Israel, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia. The order of the countries listed was randomized.

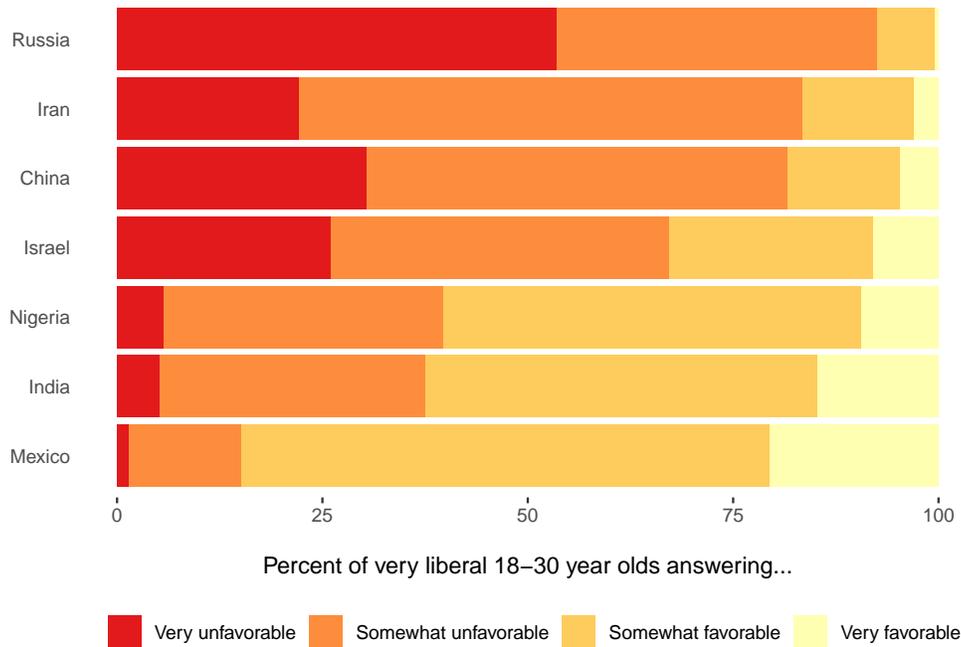
Half of these countries (China, Iran, Russia) are US adversaries; half are allies. The countries exhibit regional and racial variation, and all of them, aside from Israel, are among the 20 most populated nations on Earth. One of the countries (Nigeria) is, like Israel, a major recipient of US foreign aid.<sup>7</sup> Others are among the U.S.’s main trading partners (e.g.

<sup>7</sup>US Agency for International Development, “Foreign Aid Explorer: The official record of US foreign aid”.

Mexico, China).<sup>8</sup> All seven of these nations are, to varying degrees, alleged to have regularly engaged in human rights violations.<sup>9</sup>

We first examine the 20% of 18-30 year olds who identify as the farthest left ideologically. If young liberals dislike Israel, is that merely in comparison with other U.S. allies, or do they dislike Israel even compared to U.S. adversaries?

Figure 1: Very Liberal Young Adult Favorability of Countries



Note: “How favorable is your impression of each of the following countries, or haven’t you heard enough to say?”, displayed for the  $N = 163$  young adult respondents who identify as most liberal on a 7-point scale. One third of respondents in the study were asked this version of the question. The other conditions are reported below.

Figure 1 shows favorability of each country, excluding respondents who said they hadn’t heard enough to say. We find two clear groupings – countries that very liberal young adults find favorable (Mexico [85% favorable], India [63%], and Nigeria [60%]) and countries that

<sup>8</sup>Ken Roberts, “Among Top 10 U.S. Trade Partners, There Are Just Three Bright Spots,” *Forbes*, November 13, 2020.

<sup>9</sup>Amnesty International, “Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World’s Human Rights,” April 7, 2021; Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2021,” January 23, 2021; U.S. Department of State, “2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practice,” March 30, 2021.

very liberal young adults find unfavorable (Russia [8% favorable], Iran [17%], China [18%], and Israel [33%]). The favorable countries are all generally regarded as US allies; Israel is the only ally viewed similarly to the US adversaries by the young left. Israel is on par with China and Iran with respect to the 25% or so of young left respondents who have *very* unfavorable views of the country.

An alternate version of this figure can be found in Appendix Figure S1. There, we examine country favorability from adults who identify as leftist, socialist, or progressive. We find the same groupings of countries, with Mexico, India, and Nigeria being evaluated substantially more favorably than Russia, Iran, China, or Israel. In that analysis, socialist identifiers – again some 20% of adults age 18-30 – have particularly negative views toward Israel.

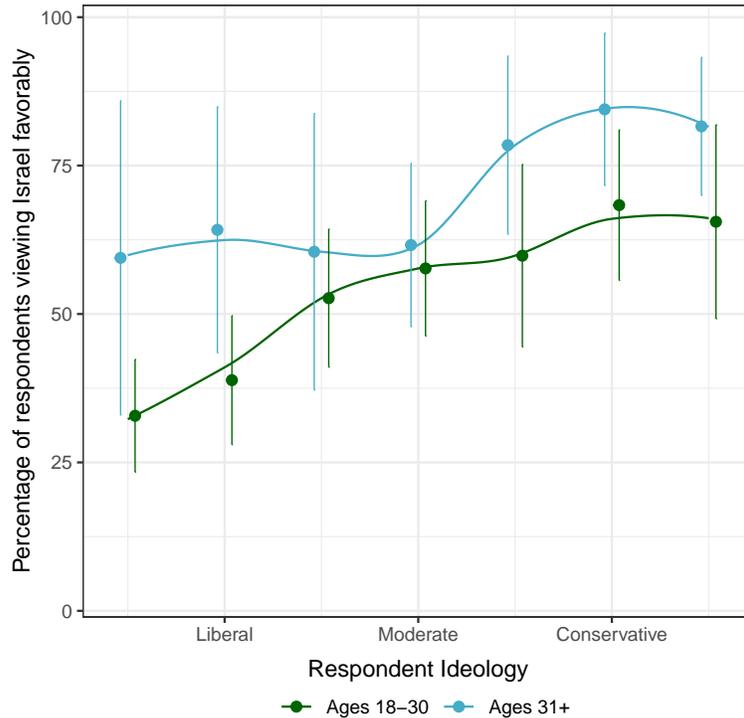
We now expand the analysis to the full range of ideology for young respondents (18-30) as well as respondents over age 30. Compared to older Americans, do young people across the political spectrum – left as well as right – have negative views toward Israel? On the one hand, we expected the left to have more unfavorable views of Israel than those on the right due to polarized elite cues and greater sympathies for Palestinians (Cavari 2012; Cavari and Freedman 2019). On the other hand, younger adults in general may be more unfavorable towards Israel across the board due to the fading salience of the Holocaust (Cohen 2018) and increased sympathies for Palestinians.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2 shows an initial view of these results. Note that the confidence intervals for older adults are large in this figure because this version of the question was only asked to 255 adults over 30 and the figure subdivides them into seven ideological positions. Below, in Figure 3, we condense respondents to three ideological categories for a view with more precise estimates.

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<sup>10</sup>Pew Research Center, “Republicans and Democrats Grow Even Farther Apart in Views of Israel, Palestinians,” January 2018.

Figure 2: Overall Favorability of Israel by Ideology and Age



Note: “How favorable is your impression of each of the following countries, or haven’t you heard enough to say?”, displayed for the  $N = 834$  respondents age 18-30 and  $N = 255$  respondents age 31 and older. 95% CI reported. One third of respondents in the study were asked this version of the question. The other conditions are reported below.

Young adults across the spectrum do have a less favorable view of Israel than older adults, especially on the ideological extremes. Moderate young adult favorability of Israel (58%) is indistinguishable from moderate older adults (62%). The difference is greatest on the far left, with younger very liberal adults 27 percentage points less favorable of Israel (33% for young adults versus 60% for older adults): difference of means t-test, p-value: 0.05. Young very conservative adults are supportive of Israel (66%), but substantially less so than older very conservatives (82%): difference of means t-test p-value: 0.07. Clearly, the most left-leaning young adults have the lowest rating of Israel compared to older individuals or more conservative individuals, but there is a large age gap on the far right as well.

Table 2 shows a regression-based view of these results and includes key demographics such as age, race, and college status. The first model is measured with the representative sample of respondents aged 18-30, while the second one is measured with the general-public sample of respondents aged 31+. We use the 7-point ideology measure as a continuous variable, which takes values from 1 (most liberal) to 7 (most conservative). As in the figures, we find that Israel favorability increases as we move from very liberal to very conservative. The constant is greater in the older adult regression, demonstrating the higher support on average among older adults. The demographic and geographic correlates here show mostly null independent relationships to attitudes toward Israel. This is noteworthy, since many of items (especially race, gender, and geography) have been found in other work to predict anti-Jewish attitudes (Cohen 2018; Feinberg 2020; King and Weiner 2007; Smith and Schapiro 2019). In contrast, attitudes toward Israel seem to mainly be a function of ideology and age cohort.

Are the ideology-by-age dynamics unique to Israel? It is possible that young liberal people are simply less favorable to countries across the board, instead of specifically towards Israel. Figure 3 shows the overall favorability of each of the seven countries, with respondents broken down into liberal, moderate, and conservative. Appendix Figure S2 shows the full trend for ideology on a 7-point scale; the resulting trends are the same, so we group respondents into three ideological categories here for simplicity.

Young people are not generally less favorable to countries across the board. In fact, India and Israel are the only two countries that young people favor less than older people, and the gap for Israel is much larger (19% on average across generations for Israel compared to 4% for India). Given prior research findings that young adults hold more cosmopolitan attitudes (Shenhav-Goldberg and Kopstein 2020; Federico and Sidanius 2002), it seems that Israel is an outlier with its decreased favorability among younger Americans. Israel is also the only country with large favorability gaps between age cohorts for both the right and the

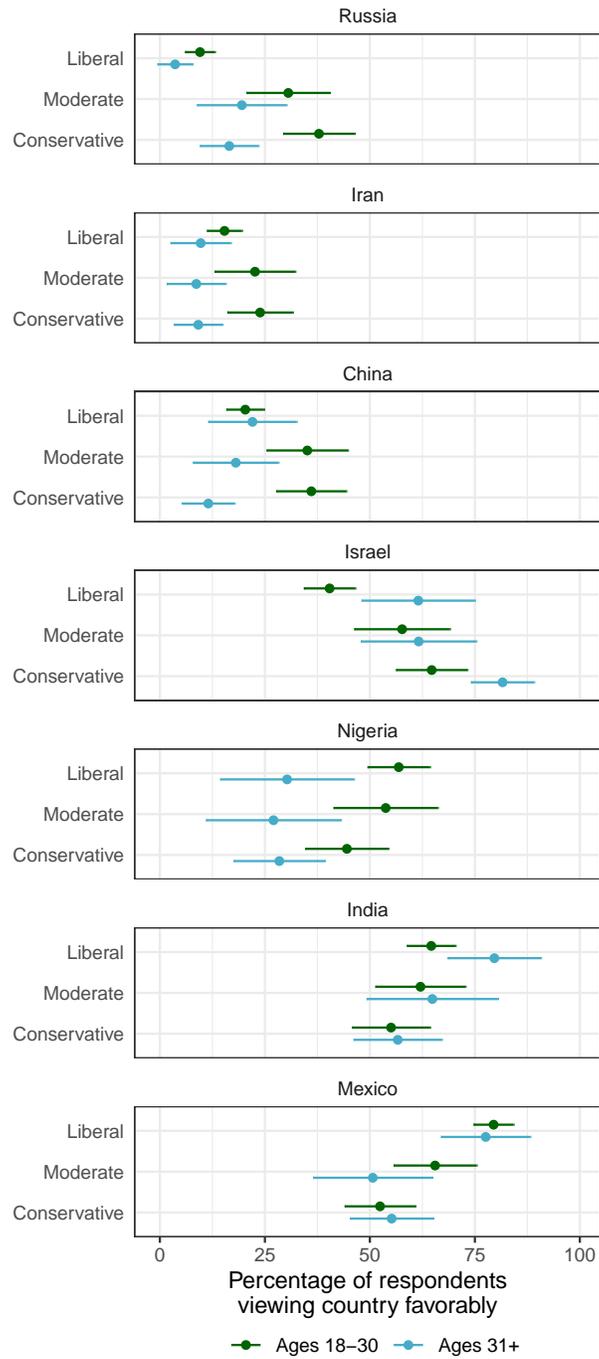
Table 2: Israel Favorability and Ideology

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Israel Favorability	
	Young Adults (18-30)	Adults 31+
Ideology (7-pt)	0.053*** (0.011)	0.049*** (0.017)
State Pct. Jew	0.006 (0.009)	-0.009 (0.016)
Black	0.063 (0.070)	-0.165 (0.105)
Latino	-0.044 (0.056)	-0.084 (0.109)
Other race	-0.064 (0.061)	-0.201 (0.145)
Currently in 4-year college	0.036 (0.049)	
Currently in other college	-0.067 (0.065)	
Age	-0.001 (0.006)	0.004* (0.002)
Female	-0.042 (0.039)	-0.144** (0.060)
Constant	0.219 (0.163)	0.293* (0.158)
Observations	823	255
Adjusted R-squared	0.046	0.087

*Note: OLS regression.  
Standard errors in parentheses.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Figure 3: Overall Favorability of Israel by Ideology and Age



Note: 95% CI reported. Seven-point ideological measure collapsed to three categories.

left but not for moderates, suggesting there is something unique occurring on the ends of the political spectrum when it comes to Israel.

The political left is more favorable than the political right toward all of the US allies except for Israel. The young right is more favorable than the left to all of the US adversaries. Liberals, both young and old, view Nigeria, India, and Mexico more favorably than conservatives do. Russia, Iran, and China are favored more by conservatives than liberals, as is Israel. Russia, Iran, and China all have very low favorability ratings. Israel's favorability ratings are closer in average to that of Nigeria's, India's, and Mexico's (US allies), but Israel's pattern of increasing favorability moving from left to right matches that of Russia, Iran, and China (US adversaries).

Young people aged 18-30 are less favorable of Israel than older adults are, particularly when compared to the generational gaps in favorability of other countries. The generational gaps on Israel's favorability are most noticeable on the ideological extremes. Israel is the only country whose favorability is the lowest among the young left. Not only does the young left thus dislike Israel, but these broader patterns are distinct from those of other countries.

## **4 Question 2: Why Does the Young Left Dislike Israel?**

What explains this unique pattern across generations and ideology of the American public towards Israel? This is a complicated question that we cannot answer completely within the confines of a single paper. However, we conduct two analyses to discover new insights.

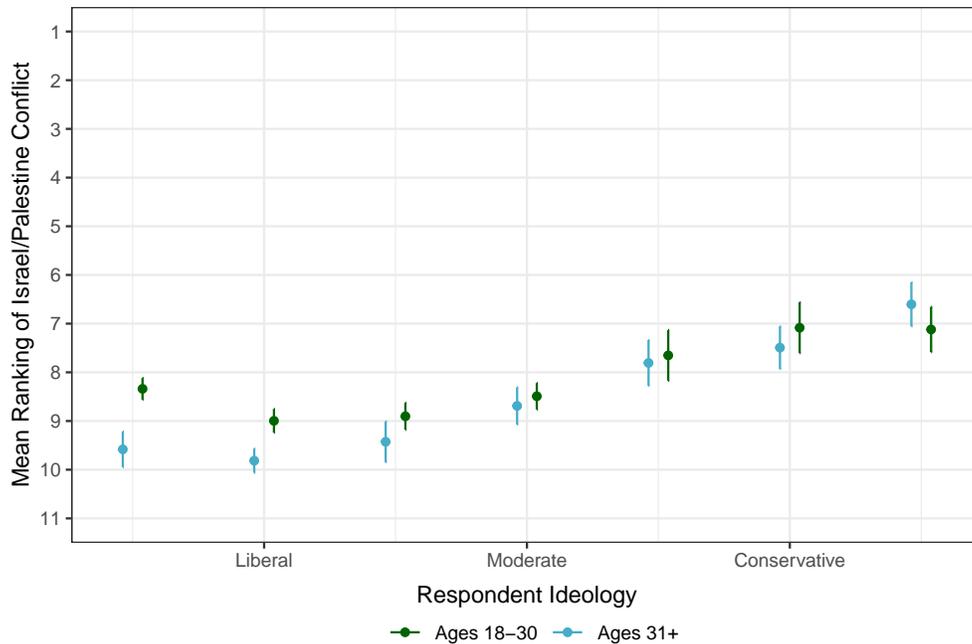
First, we hypothesize that Israel's relative unfavorability comes from an increased saliency of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Young adults, and the young left in particular, may be exposed to more activism and news surrounding Palestine. As a result, the young left may prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict as a political issue, leading to heightened unfavorability towards Israel. That is, even though other major trading partners, world powers, and

recipients of US foreign aid also have internal conflicts and are also regularly accused of human rights abuses, respondents on the left consider Israel’s political and human rights issues to be especially salient.

To test this hypothesis, we asked respondents to rank 11 policy positions in terms of how important they were to them. The 11 positions we asked about were: reproductive health, racial equality, health care, the Israel/Palestine conflict, immigration, firearms, economic competitiveness, environmental policy, Russian interference, national security, and human rights in China. We chose a variety of policy items, both domestic and foreign, that were salient to politics when the survey was fielded. We hypothesized that the left would rank the Israel/Palestine conflict as more important than other ideological groups, due to the aforementioned increased salience of Palestine on the left.

The results show the opposite relationship. Neither young very liberal nor older very lib-

Figure 4: Prioritization of Israel/Palestine by Ideology and Age



Note: 95% CI reported.  $N = 2491$  for young adult sample and  $N = 755$  for older adults.

eral adults prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict – the issue is the second least important on average for young adults and the least important on average for older adults. Figure 4 shows the mean ranking of the Israel/Palestine conflict by age and ideology for all respondents. While young liberals (mean ranking of 8.3) do prioritize Israel/Palestine slightly higher on average than older liberals (9.6), both young conservatives (7.1) and old conservatives (6.6) prioritize Israel/Palestine considerably higher. Older conservatives – the most supportive group of Israel – may potentially prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict due to their favorability towards Israel. But the reverse does not seem to be true – sympathizing with Palestine does not cause the left to prioritize the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Table 3 shows a regression-based analysis of these results. As with the analysis in the prior section, we find that demographic variables such as race and education that are, in other work, associated with higher rates of antisemitic attitudes are *not* associated with differences in prioritization of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Ideology appears to be the main driver of Israel/Palestine prioritization, but opposite our hypothesis: conservatives tend to prioritize the conflict more. There is a slight age effect, but even across generations all left-leaning adults tend to rank the Israel/Palestine conflict as one of their bottom two issues. Higher saliency and prioritization of the Israel/Palestine conflict therefore does not appear to be the explanation for the lower favorability of Israel among liberal and/or young adults.

#### **4.1 Are Views Tied to Politics or to Broader Cultural Animosity?**

Next, we consider if the pattern of favorability towards Israel can be explained by a dislike of Israel’s politics and government in particular. Perhaps when young and/or liberal people express a negative view of Israel, they are actually just expressing a negative view specifically of Israel’s *politics and government*. Exposure to activism around Palestine and news about the Israel/Palestine conflict could lead to political concerns being more salient when respondents are asked about Israel than when they are asked about other countries.

Table 3: Israel/Palestine Issue Ranking and Ideological Position

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Israel/Palestine issue ranking	
	Young Adults (18-30)	Adults 31+
Ideology	-0.255*** (0.035)	-0.554*** (0.042)
State Pct. Jew	-0.016 (0.028)	0.043 (0.042)
Black	-0.167 (0.226)	0.482* (0.254)
Latino	-0.222 (0.202)	0.032 (0.298)
Other race	0.145 (0.176)	-0.043 (0.317)
In 4-year college	-0.214 (0.164)	
In other college	-0.288 (0.219)	
Age	0.021 (0.019)	0.007 (0.006)
Female	0.415*** (0.128)	0.453*** (0.167)
Constant	8.655*** (0.528)	9.944*** (0.419)
Observations	2,462	754
Adjusted R-squared	0.049	0.202

*Note: OLS regression.  
Standard errors in parentheses.*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

To understand this argument, consider an analogy. Suppose that when asked about Mexico, left-leaning and right-leaning Americans evaluate the country on different terms. Perhaps left-leaning respondents think about the cultures and peoples and languages of Mexico, which they admire, whereas right-leaning respondents think about the politics and government, which they do not admire. The left might disfavor the Mexican government and the right might favor Mexican culture, but their overall evaluations stem from different dimensions. (*Why* they may evaluate country's on different terms — media diets? outgroup prejudice? — is a different question.) For Israel, plausibly it's the opposite of the Mexican example: the left thinks about politics, the right thinks about culture. Interestingly, Jewish American attitudes about Israel are reflective of a cultural/political split. Jewish Americans overwhelmingly favor Israel<sup>11</sup> and feel emotionally connected to Israel, but they also disfavor the Netanyahu government and do not believe that the government is making a sincere effort toward peace.<sup>12</sup>

As previously reported, the country evaluations described above were only asked to one third of our sample. Another third was asked a different version: *Thinking about their **politics and government**, how favorable is your impression of each of the following countries...* The final third of the sample was asked, "*Thinking about their **languages, cultures, and religions**, how favorable is your impression of each of the following countries...*"

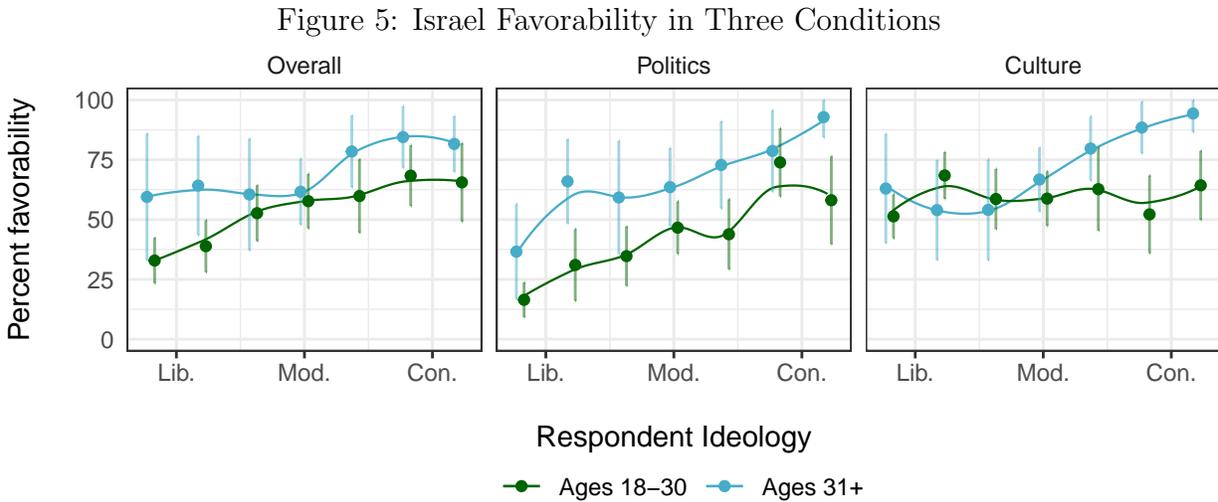
If negative attitudes towards Israel are a result of the salience of political news about Israel or the Israel/Palestine conflict, we should expect to see the *overall* condition results be very close to the *politics* condition result. Perhaps the young left, like Jewish identifiers, have positive views toward Israel's languages, cultures, and religions, yet evaluate the country negatively overall on account of politics. Alternatively, perhaps their negative affect towards Israel runs deeper, either because their negative views of the Israeli government spill over into

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<sup>11</sup>Frank Newport, "American Jews, Politics and Israel," Gallup, August 27, 2019.

<sup>12</sup>Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020," May 11, 2021.

responses about languages/cultures/religions or because their negative views about Israel stem from prejudicial attitudes.



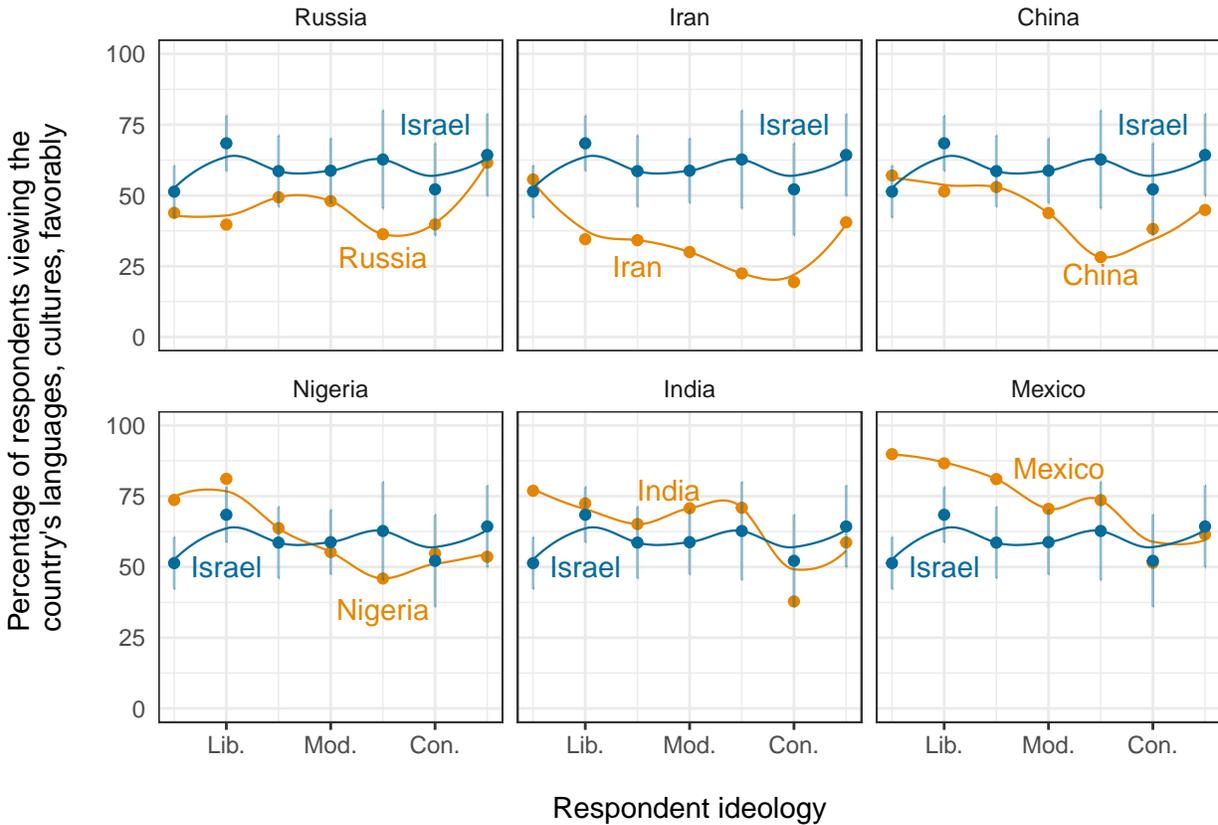
Note: Overall condition:  $N = 834$  for 18-30s,  $N = 255$  for 31+. Politics condition:  $N = 833$  for 18-30s,  $N = 252$  for 31+. Culture condition:  $N = 833$  for 18-30s,  $N = 252$  for 31+. 95% CI shown.

Figure 5 shows the favorability of Israel for the three experimental conditions – *overall*, *politics*, and *culture* – across age and ideology of the respondents. The far left, for both younger and older adults, has a much lower view of Israel *overall* and Israel’s *politics and government* than the far right; favorability steadily increases in both conditions as ideology moves from left to right. Younger adults across ideological positions have a lower view of Israel *overall* and Israel’s *politics and government* than adults over 30 do. Young conservatives’ views of Israel are essentially unchanged across conditions (66% favorability overall, 58% favorability for politics, and 64% favorability for culture) and are substantially less favorable towards Israel than older conservatives’ views (82% favorability overall, 93% favorability for politics, and 94% favorability for culture).

Young liberals’ evaluations of Israel do increase in the culture condition (51% favorability for culture, compared to 33% overall and only 16% favorability for politics). But still nearly 50% of young adults on the far left have a negative view of Israel’s languages, cultures, and

religions. Even when it comes to culture, the young on the farthest left remains less favorable of Israel than their older counterparts (63% favorability for adults 31+).

Figure 6: Young Adult Cultural Favorability of Other Countries, Compared to Israel



95% CI reported.

But does the young left hold less favorable views of Israel's culture than the culture of other countries? To answer this question, we examine young adult cultural evaluations of Israel compared to other countries. Figure 6 shows young adult cultural evaluations of the other six countries in our survey, compared to Israel's.<sup>13</sup> Among the farthest left respondents, only Russia's cultural evaluation has a lower point estimate than Israel's. As

<sup>13</sup>Although not the focus of this section, we repeat the analysis for political evaluations and show the chart in the Appendix (Figure S3).

noted back in Figure 1, young far-left respondents have more critical views of Iran and China overall (17% and 18% favorability, respectively, compared to 33% favorability for Israel), but approximately equal evaluations of their culture in this figure (56% for Iran's culture, 57% for China's culture, and 51% for Israel's culture). Whereas in the overall conditions Israel was between the two groupings of countries (Nigeria/India/Mexico versus Russia/Iran/China), the young far left views Israel's culture on par with Russia's, Iran's, and China's. The young left is much more favorable to Russia's, Iran's, and China's culture compared to their overall evaluation than they are to Israel's culture versus Israel's overall evaluation. Thus, even when asked directly about *languages, cultures, and religions*, a large portion of the young far left views Israel quite negatively.

The young far right, on the other hand, views Israel's culture more favorably than they view any other country's, but this is still not much more favorable than the young far left's view of Israel's culture. Whereas the young far left views cultures of countries like Mexico (90% favorability), India (77%), and Nigeria (74%) overwhelmingly favorably, the young right's highest cultural favorability is of Israel at 64%. So while the young right is more favorable to Israel's culture than that of other countries, they favor the culture of most countries comparatively less than the young left does.

Looking at trends as we move from very liberal to very conservative, Israel once again sticks out as an outlier. Iran, China, Nigeria, India, and Mexico all have negative trends across ideological cohort – their cultural evaluations decrease as we move from very liberal to very conservative. Russia is the only country with a positive trend, with cultural favorability *increasing* as we move from very liberal to very conservative. Israel's cultural favorability is essentially flat; unlike our prior analysis, there is little to no relationship between Israel's cultural favorability and ideology.

These trends are not present for older adults. The same analysis done for adults aged 31+ in our sample (shown in the appendix in Figure S4) indicates strongly positive relationship

between ideology and favorability of Israel's culture. Far right-leaning older adults have a 94% favorability rating of Israel's culture, substantially higher than their evaluation of any other country's culture. Older far left adults do not view Israel's culture on par with Russia's, Iran's, or China's; they are considerably more favorable of Israel's culture, grouping it instead with Nigeria's, Mexico's, and India's.

Negative views of Israel are thus not limited to political evaluations. Even when asked directly about culture, younger people have a more negative view of Israel. The differences are stark for both young far left and young far right respondents. These trends are not particularly present with other countries, suggesting something unique is occurring with public opinion towards Israel in young people across the ideological spectrum.

## 5 Conclusion

This analysis sheds light on changing party coalitions and the United States' relationship to the state of Israel. Young adults across the ideological spectrum have a distinctly less favorable view toward Israel than older adults. But the ideological left's critical attitudes towards Israel stand out. Compared to older liberals and young conservatives, and compared to how they evaluate other countries that are allied with the United States, the left's negative attitudes on Israel are anomalous. Among individuals age 18-30, Israel is viewed by the left in the company of U.S. rivals such as China and Iran.

Why does the left have these distinct attitudes? Our analysis points to negative rather than affirmative answers to this questions. The issue-ranking exercise suggests that the left does not give the Israel-Palestine conflict a high priority – at least not in the time period of our survey, in which there was relative calm between Israel and Palestine. The cultural/political/overall analysis suggests that the left's negative views toward Israel are not simply restricted to opposition to the current government of Israel. Half of the respondents

on the young left view the languages, cultures, and religions of Israel negatively, in the company in which they view China, Russia, and Iran.

Some of these trends are seemingly explained by polarization. For instance, President Trump differentiated his party from Democrats in his association with Russia and his antagonism toward Mexico. Here we see higher support on right than left for Russia and lower support for Mexico. In Israel, President Trump was very popular with the public there and he lent support to the Netanyahu government. Again, we show higher support on the right than left for Israel.

However, a polarization story seems insufficient to characterize the patterns we uncover. For one thing, younger respondents on both the left and the right have a lower regard for Israel than older respondents. For another, the story varies by country. Nigeria, for instance, is one of the few foreign countries in the world (along with Israel) in which Donald Trump was unusually and consistently popular during his presidency,<sup>14</sup> but this does not correspond to an anti-Nigeria attitude on the left.

Is Israel an outlier in the left's evaluation because Israel's treatment of the Palestinians merits Israel being an outlier? We do not here attempt to evaluate the relative failures of different states, but the answer is not an obvious yes. Consider the young left's positive views of Nigeria, India, and Mexico. Among its many human rights violations, including executions, police brutality, discrimination against gay people and women, Nigeria has also forcibly evicted millions of residents from their homes in recent years.<sup>15</sup> India has recently witnessed anti-Muslim legal discrimination as well as deadly riots against Muslims that are alleged to be fueled by political leaders.<sup>16</sup> Mexico has seen a spiraling of murders against

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<sup>14</sup>Emmanuel Akinwotu, "He just says it like it is.': why many Nigerians support Donald Trump," *The Guardian* Oct 31, 2020.

<sup>15</sup>"Nigeria: Deadly Mass Forced Evictions Make Life Misery for Waterfront Communities," Amnesty, Nov 14, 2017.

<sup>16</sup>"'Shoot the Traitors': Discrimination Against Muslims under India's New Citizenship Policy," Human Rights Watch, April 9, 2020.

political candidates and journalists, with accusations that the federal government has turned a blind eye.<sup>17</sup> The young left views all of these countries and their cultures positively compared to Israel.

The young left might dislike Israel because the news they hear about it is negative. The issue ranking analysis suggests that Israel/Palestine is *not* a top priority for the young left, but heightened news attention to the conflict (compared to other countries' conflicts) still could be making Israel less favorable in the eyes of young adults. If they hear more negative news about Israel or Palestine activism than they do negative news about other countries, they could have uniquely negative opinions about Israel.

Part of the answer for the left's views may relate to their overlaying U.S. racial politics on the Israel-Palestine conflict.<sup>18</sup> In the U.S., most Jews are white and most Muslims are non-white. That isn't the case in Israel, where most Jews are not white (Lewin-Epstein and Cohen 2019). Nevertheless, political leaders on the U.S. left, such as Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, explicitly tie Israel-Palestine conflict to the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement focused on ending police brutality against black Americans and ending white supremacy broadly.<sup>19</sup> Prior political science work has conceptualized foreign policy as a "hard" issue for the public, meaning the public views it as complex and hard to confidently take a firm stance on. U.S. race relations, however, is a notably "easy" issue: political discussions of race and racism are so ingrained in U.S. culture that most Americans have clear, strong views on the matter and can take stances on related issues based on "gut feelings" (Carmines and Stimson 1980). Conflating the Israel-Palestine conflict – a "hard issue" – with U.S. race relations – an "easy issue" – may lead the left to view the Israel-

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<sup>17</sup>Natalie Gallon and Matt Rivers, "At Least 88 Politicians have been Killed in Mexico since September," CNN, May 30, 2021; Nina Lakhani, "Mexico World's Deadliest Country for Journalists, New Report Finds," Dec 22, 2020.

<sup>18</sup>Matti Freeman, "Israel's Problems Are Not Like America's." *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2021.

<sup>19</sup>"Rep. Pressley Delivers Floor Speech on Israeli State Violence and Human Rights Abuses in Palestine," Press Release, Office of Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, May 13, 2021.

Palestine conflict as an “easy” issue as well, perhaps increasing its saliency compared to other foreign countries’ conflicts. This treatment of Israel as an “easy” issue could explain its unique status in the minds of left-wing Americans: despite allegations of similar human rights violations in many countries, only Israel is viewed through the lens of a domestic issue that left-wing Americans understand, leading to more crystallized and unified opposition.

Finally, part of the answer of the left’s views may indeed be antisemitism. Though other work has shown very low levels of overt anti-Jewish attitudes on the ideological left, several scholars have argued that strong critical sentiments towards Israel are antisemitic attitudes packaged in a socially acceptable way (Beattie 2017; Cohen et al. 2011, 2009; Kaplan and Small 2006). In other research,<sup>20</sup> we have found the young left does not report on surveys that they hold overt antisemitic attitudes. It is possible, though, that the left does harbor negative affect towards Jews but knows not to agree with explicitly antisemitic statements on surveys. Instead, they might channel their antisemitism into criticism of Israel, which they know is still acceptable to express. We do not attempt to directly answer this question, and a better answer to this question needs to be left to future work.

As stated at the start of this paper, our purpose is not to make a case for or against the claim that the left’s views on Israel are explained by antisemitism. Rather, our purpose is to illuminate the facts about what the young left thinks on the topic of Israel relative to the young right and to older respondents, and to begin to be able to explain the nature of their views. We look forward to joining other scholars in a continued effort to examine this set of attitudes. Age-based and ideological-based cleavages with respect to Israel may affect foreign policy and party coalitions in the future. Accordingly, they merit continued research.

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<sup>20</sup>See Eitan Hersh and Laura Royden, “Antisemitic Attitudes Across the Ideological Spectrum,” Working Paper, April 2021.

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## 6 Supplementary Information

### 6.1 Supplementary Tables and Figures

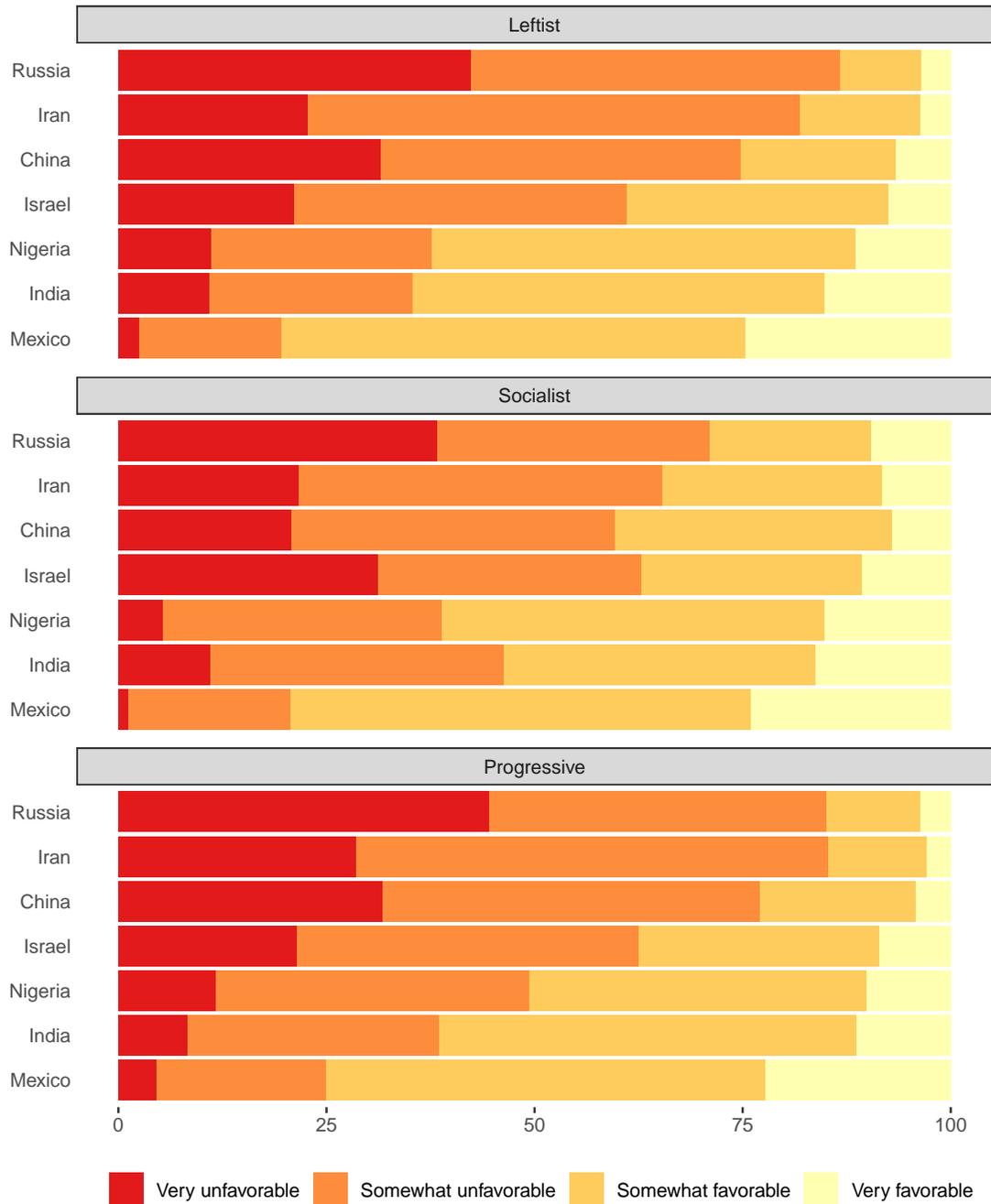


Figure S1: Country favorability among 18-30 year old respondent self-identifiers

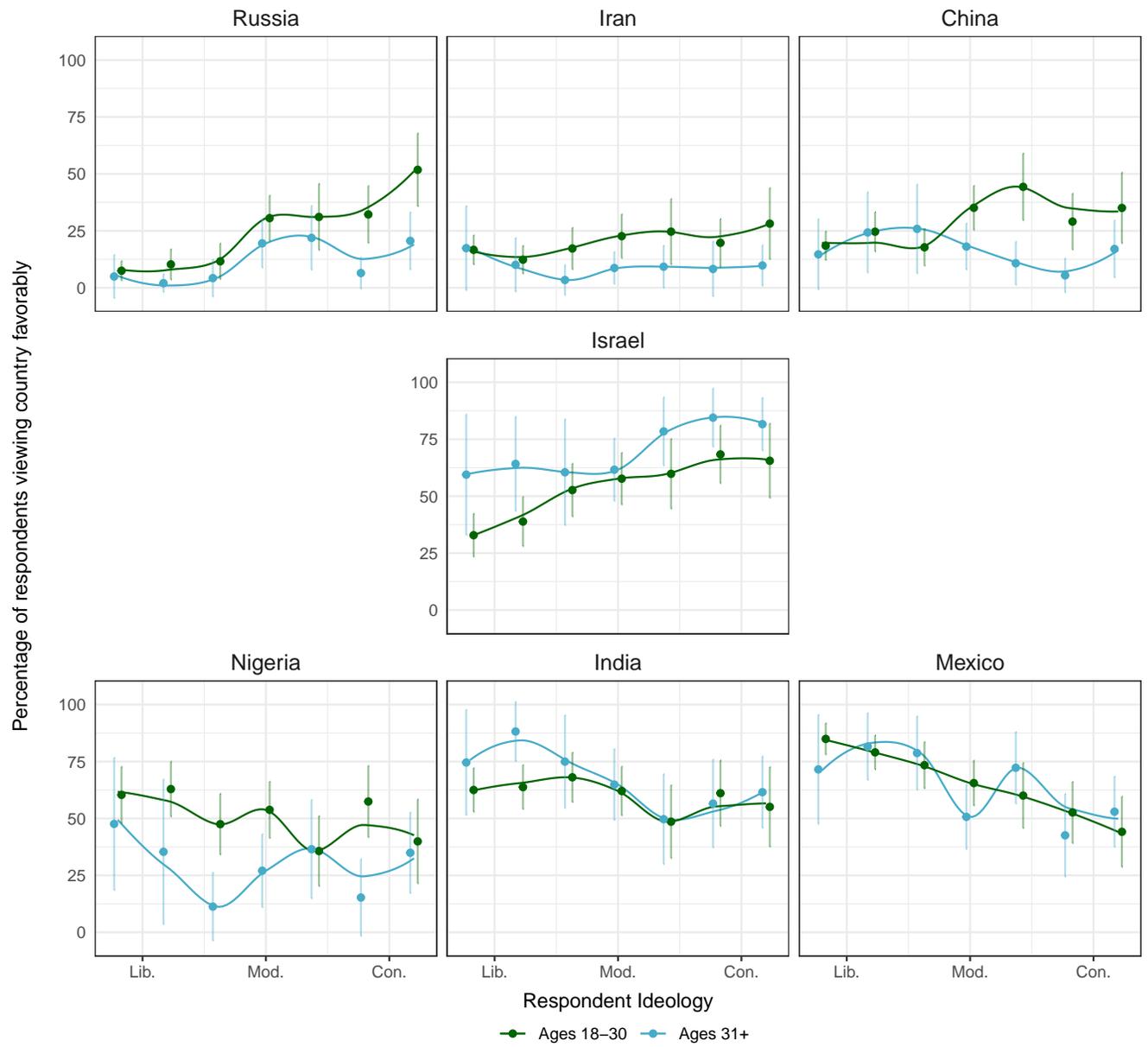


Figure S2: Overall Favorability of Countries by Ideology and Age

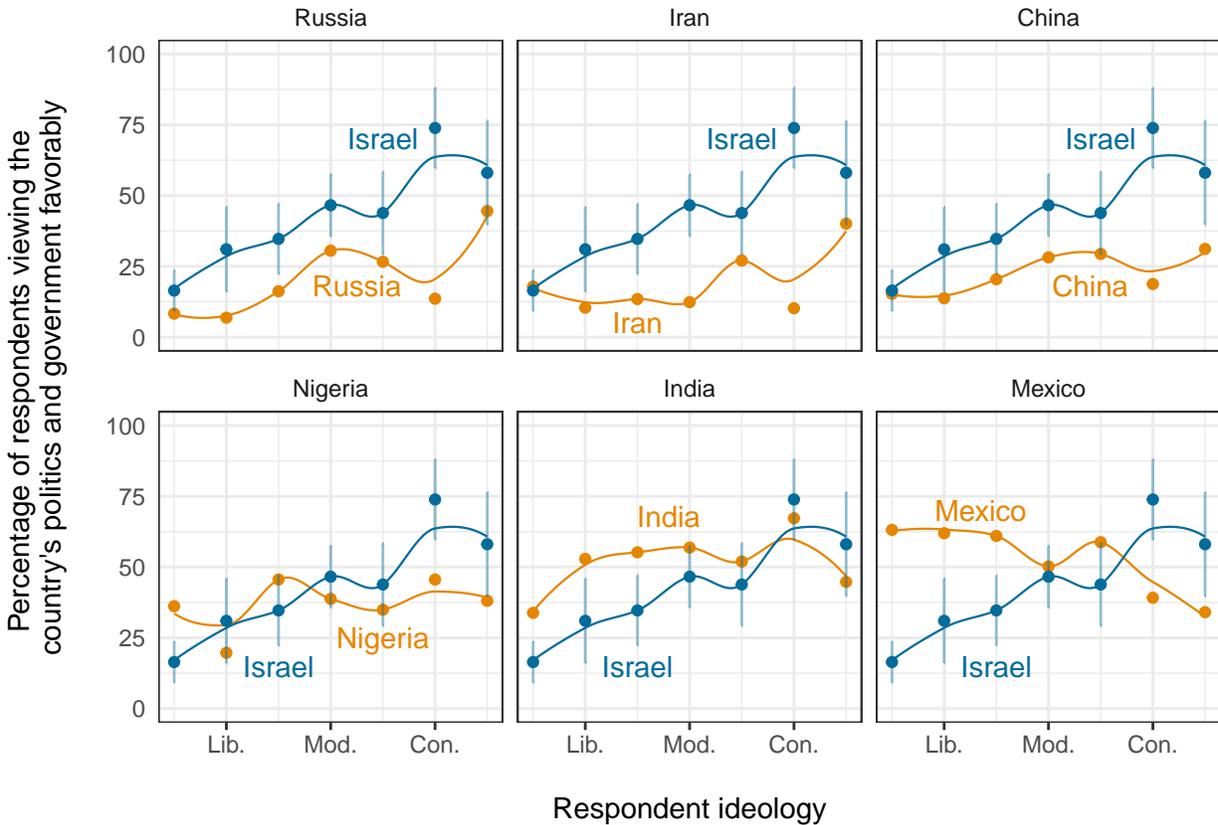


Figure S3: Young Adult Political Favorability of Other Countries, Compared to Israel

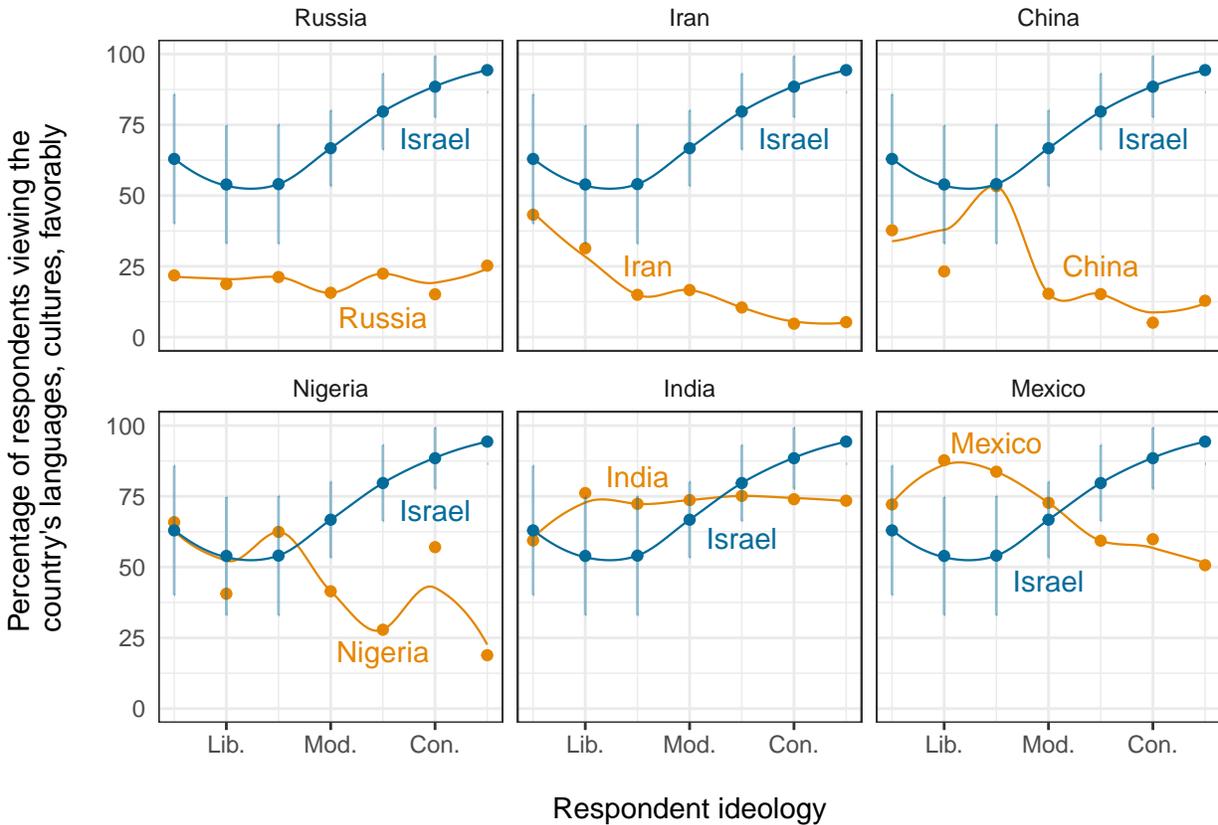


Figure S4: Older Adult Cultural Favorability of Other Countries, Compared to Israel

## 6.2 Survey Details

### 6.2.1 Informed Consent Text

The next questions are part of academic research on political attitudes, conducted by Eitan Hersh of Tufts University. Respondents may derive an intellectual benefit from thinking about their political ideas, but the researcher offers no tangible benefits to the respondents for participating. You will be compensated according to your agreement with YouGov. Participation is completely voluntary. The questions are not sensitive, are not expected to cause offense or embarrassment, and no foreseeable risks are anticipated. In order to not influence your responses, you wont be informed about some aspects of the nature or purposes of the research until the end. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be debriefed. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any individual question. Refusal to participate or discontinuing participation after consent will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled, such as incentives from the survey firm. Professor Hersh is collaborating on this research with Laura Royden, PhD student at Harvard University, who will also have access to the data and will conduct analyses. The researchers will never have access to any personal identifying information. Your answers to this survey, along with non-identifiable demographic information, will be shared with the researcher. The researcher may publish the data in an online database for social science research. If you have any questions about the research or research subjects rights, you may contact the principal investigator at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the Office of the Tufts University Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED].

I agree

I do not agree

Figure SI2: Survey Firm Description

=====  
Project Code: [REDACTED]  
Project Name: Antisemitic Attitudes  
Prepared for: [REDACTED]  
Interviews: 3500  
Field Period: November 09, 2020 – November 25, 2020  
Project Manager: [REDACTED]  
=====

YouGov interviewed 3606 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1000 general population and 2500 oversample of young adults (18 to 30) to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the 3 final weights. For the overall weight, the oversample of young adults were weighted down to the expected proportion within the US population.

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### 6.2.2 Question Ordering

Respondents first saw the *rank ordering importance of policy issues* question. They then saw the *favorability of various countries* question (randomized for *overall, politics and government, and languages, culture, and religions* conditions).