

# U.S. Public Attitudes Toward Israel: A Study of the Attentive and Issue Publics

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In international relations scholars' study of the factors that shape foreign policy decisions, a great deal of work has been done to U.S. policy toward Israel. Among the many factors apparently influencing decisions in this arena are American national interests in the Middle East, pro-Israeli lobbying efforts in Washington, the opinions of elite foreign policy opinion leaders, and U.S. public opinion. Our focus in this paper is on this latter factor: public opinion.

Political theorists have proposed various models seeking to account for the relation between public preferences and public policy.<sup>1</sup> Yet past studies of U.S. public opinion toward Israel have been driven nearly exclusively by only one of these: the majoritarian view. In this essay, we explore the potential utility of two alternative possibilities: the guardianship and pluralist perspectives. We begin below by outlining these various perspectives and reviewing previous studies' findings regarding U.S. public opinion on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Then, we report the results of two surveys we conducted to see whether adopting the guardianship or pluralist perspectives might yield usefully different empirical findings from those of most relevance to the majoritarian view.

## MODELS OF PUBLIC OPINION INFLUENCE

According to the *majoritarian* view of public opinion influence, policymakers may at times identify the policy preference of the majority of their constituents on some issue, and then pursue that policy. If such influence occurred in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict, we would expect a majority of the American public to hold opinions consistent with U.S. behavior toward Israel. If a majority

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was instead opposed to courses of actions typically taken by the U.S., majoritarians would conclude that no correspondence exists between public opinion and U.S. policy toward Israel. Thus, it would seem unlikely that policy was shaped by the public's will.

The *guardianship* view focuses on the stratification of democratic electorates in terms of their knowledge about and involvement in politics.<sup>2</sup> This view was offered particularly clearly by Almond,<sup>3</sup> who argued that only a subset of democratic citizens are likely to be cognitively engaged in the affairs of politics and are therefore likely to exert any influence upon them. Specifically, Almond suggested, "the college-educated group constitutes... the most alert, informed, interested, and discriminating audience for public policy decisions."<sup>4</sup> It is among this *attentive public*, as Almond called it, that the correspondence between public opinion and government action should be the strongest.

Advocates of the third perspective, the *pluralist* view, would argue that one should not expect to observe correspondence between public policy and the preferences of the majority of either the general public or the attentive public.<sup>5</sup> As Dahl outlined,<sup>6</sup> the legitimacy of a democratic government is likely to be significantly eroded over time if it ignores the wills of intense minorities in order to pursue the weak preferences of majorities. Therefore, one should only expect to see correspondence between government policy on an issue and the opinions of those citizens who have strong feelings on that particular issue. With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, pluralists would therefore be most interested in the opinions of what Converse called the relevant *issue public*.<sup>7</sup>

These three visions of how public opinion impacts on policy-making could be realized through a variety of different processes.<sup>8</sup> First, policymakers could gauge public sentiment by consulting opinion poll results and then pursue policies that enjoy majority support. Alternatively, citizens could use their policy preferences on an issue to decide which candidates for public office to support, thus enhancing the likelihood that elected officials will share these preferences. Finally, individual citizens can communicate their views on an issue directly to policymakers.

#### UNDERSTANDING U.S. POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The viability of the majoritarian, guardianship, and pluralist visions of public influence can presumably be gauged by examining the correspondence between public policy on an issue and the relevant preferences of the general public or portions thereof. Of course, correspondence does not necessarily indicate that influence has occurred.<sup>9</sup> But lack of correspondence would certainly call into question the influence hypothesis.

Fortunately, many studies of American public opinion toward Israel have been reported, but nearly all have focused exclusively on the general public as a whole. Some such studies have identified significant, understandable variations in Americans' support for Israel during the last 40 years. At the same time, however, there appears to have been consistency in opinions over the long haul: at least two to three times as many Americans have typically reported being more sympathetic toward Israel than have reported being more sympathetic toward the Arabs, and this ratio was even greater during some periods, such as the early 1970s. Thus, one can legitimately conclude from this evidence that there has been substantially more public support for Israel than for the Arabs over the years. To the extent that U.S. policy has been consistent with this preference, the former can conceivably be attributed at least partly to the influence of the latter.

However, some evidence questions the viability of the majoritarian perspective in this context. First, large proportions of Americans, sometimes as many as one-third to one-half of the nation, have said they were equally sympathetic toward both sides or had no opinion one way or the other. This could be viewed as representing a challenge to the majoritarian perspective, because it could be argued that the overall majority has taken no clear stand on the issue, thus leaving government free to base its decisions on other considerations. Furthermore, Iyengar and Suleiman's longitudinal analysis showed that changes in U.S. policy toward Israel tended to precede later, consonant changes in general public opinion, rather than shifts in general public opinion on this issue preceding (and therefore perhaps causing) consonant changes in policymaking.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is unclear whether or not the majoritarian perspective is viable.

Although no detailed studies have yet examined preferences regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict of attentive public or issue public members, psychological studies suggest that these opinions are likely to have just the features necessary for significant impact on government. First, people who are especially interested or involved in an issue tend to hold attitudes that are unusually resistant to change.<sup>11</sup> Thus, government actions are unlikely to shape attentive and/or issue public members' views. This suggests that Iyengar and Suleiman's<sup>12</sup> pattern of causal flow is likely to have been due to opinion dynamics among non-members, not among members.

Because attentive public and issue public members' preferences most likely remain firmly crystallized, they persistently demand a response from government. Furthermore, prolonged interest in and thought about an issue leads people's attitudes to become more polarized.<sup>13</sup> Thus, preferences regarding U.S. action toward Israel may well be decisively one-sided among the attentive and/or issue publics. Such one-sidedness would presumably exert more pressure

on government than the largely neutral stance of the general public. For all these reasons, then, there is reason to believe that careful study of the attentive and issue publics may shed new light on the relation between public opinion and public policy in the Arab—Israeli arena.

The investigation described below represents a first step in exploring the potential utility of studying the attentive and issue publics in this domain. Specifically, we conducted two representative sample surveys to examine whether the policy preferences held by attentive public and issue public members were distinct from those of non-members. If these groups indeed adopted distinct profiles of attitudes, then a full account of public pressures on the U.S. government in this arena would seem to necessitate addressing the roles of these subgroups.

#### RESEARCH METHODS: IDENTIFYING ATTENTIVE PUBLIC AND ISSUE PUBLIC MEMBERS

The first step in designing such an investigation is the selection of methods to identify members of the attentive and issue publics in surveys. Fortunately, distinguishing attentive public members from non-members is relatively straightforward in the light of explications of the guardianship thesis and past empirical explorations of it. Just as Almond asserted,<sup>14</sup> various indicators of general political knowledge and involvement are fairly strongly positively correlated with one another, and all are positively correlated with the amount of formal education citizens have received.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, educational attainment reflects many other attributes of individuals as well, including their cognitive skills,<sup>16</sup> their incomes and occupations,<sup>17</sup> and more. But our goal here is simply to use educational attainment as an empirical handle to identify attentive public members in a descriptive sense, not to identify the particular aspects of them that are *causally* responsible for their attention levels or their attitudes. Therefore, education appears to be an effective tool for this investigation.

Differentiating issue public members from non-members, however, is a more controversial decision, because it can be done in a number of different ways. Perhaps most simply, some analysts have apparently presumed that all people who take sides on an issue feel strongly about it and are therefore issue public members, and all individuals who profess neutrality or no opinion at all are non-members.<sup>18</sup> Of course, taking this approach begs the question we wish to ask, because non-members, by definition, will not lean one way or the other on the issue. But more importantly, stimulated by Converse's "non-attitudes" hypothesis,<sup>19</sup> survey researchers have shown that respondents sometimes offer opinions on issues that do not in fact represent real or strong attitudes.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that all people who offer opinions in surveys should not necessarily be

considered members of the issue public.

Another possible approach is to focus on demographically-defined groups that seem especially likely to be concerned about and invested in a particular issue.<sup>21</sup> However, if the Arab-Israeli issue public is at all of a magnitude comparable to that of U.S. issue publics on other issues,<sup>22</sup> then it may be quite a bit larger than the 2.5 per cent of Americans who are Jewish. Indeed, it seems plausible that some members of the American public (for example, Arab-Americans) may be strongly invested in the issue and yet take an anti-Israeli view. One could attempt to use demographics such as religion, ethnicity, and place of residence to identify individuals who are presumably especially concerned about this issue. But such an approach hinges on potentially tenuous assumptions about links between demographics and concern about the issue, and it seems possible that this demographically-driven approach may fail to fully identify all issue public members or may inappropriately include people who have no passionate feelings on the issue.

A third possible approach to identifying issue public members in surveys is to use citizens' reports of how important the issue is to them personally.<sup>23</sup> A great deal of research has shown that people who consider an issue to be personally important do indeed appear to be more cognitively and behaviorally involved in the issue in a variety of ways. Therefore, personal importance seems like an effective indicator with which to distinguish issue public members from non-members. No studies have yet applied this technique in the study of the Arab-Israeli issue, so we set out to do so.

We also considered another possible approach, involving a somewhat different measure: respondents' reports of how important the issue is *for the nation as a whole*. The view of voters as "sociotropic" rather than selfish in their thinking about economics<sup>24</sup> suggests that considering an issue to be nationally important might be more motivating than simply considering it to be personally important. We therefore explored the possibility of using national importance judgments to identify members of the Arab-Israeli issue public. Furthermore, following the example of Young, Borgida, Sullivan, and Aldrich,<sup>25</sup> we considered the possibility that issue public members may be those individuals who consider an issue both highly important to them personally *and* highly important for the country as a whole.

Finally, we took a step further to explore the pluralists' perspective. From their viewpoint, especially passionate issue public members are likely to shape government policy either by communicating their views directly to government officials or by voting for candidates who share their views. Thus, the most influential citizens on this issue might be those who report exerting pressure on government in either of these two ways.<sup>26</sup> Consequently,

we assessed whether the policy preferences of these individuals regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict were different from those of the general American public.

#### NATIONAL SURVEY OF AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

##### *Data*

Our first study was done by including a series of questions in a national survey conducted by International Communications Research, Inc. (ICR) in late December, 1988 (see the Appendix for exact question wordings).<sup>27</sup> Two questions were intended to gauge each respondent's general loyalties regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. One asked whether the respondent's general sympathies leaned toward the Arabs, the Israelis, both equally, or neither. The second item gauged attitudes by assessing people's reactions to the Palestinian uprisings that occurred in 1988. Psychological studies have shown that people's attitudes color their perceptions of events in ways that reinforce those attitudes.<sup>28</sup> We therefore asked respondents whether the Palestinian uprisings aroused in them feelings of sympathy for the Israelis, the Palestinians, or neither.

Two other attitude questions tapped respondents' opinions on specific policy issues. One asked whether respondents favored Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, opposed withdrawal, or neither favored nor opposed it. The other item asked respondents whether they favored Israel initiating a dialogue with the PLO. With these latter two items, we were able to gauge respondent support for the official positions taken by the Israeli government in 1988: opposition to both withdrawal from the occupied territories and dialogue with the PLO.

To gauge issue public membership, respondents were asked about the importance of the Arab/Israeli conflict to them personally, the importance of the Arab/Israeli conflict for the U.S., the impact their views on the Arab/Israeli conflict had on their candidate preferences during the 1988 presidential election campaign, and whether they had ever taken any actions to directly express their views on the Arab/Israeli conflict to a government official. To assess attentive public membership, respondents were asked how many years of formal education they had received.<sup>29</sup>

##### *Results*

1. *General public attitudes.* As expected, opinions in the full sample reflected majority neutrality on the general sympathies question (see Table 1). Very few respondents said they were more sympathetic toward the Arabs (7.3 per cent); more respondents expressed greater

sympathy toward Israel (22.6 per cent); and the greatest number (70.1 percent) said they had equal sympathies or had no sympathies one way or the other.<sup>30</sup> The ratio of Israeli supporters to Arab supporters was 3.1; that is, Israeli supporters outnumbered Arab supporters by more than 3 to 1. Similarly, most respondents said they had no sympathies one way or the other regarding the Palestinian uprisings (55.2 per cent). However, the ratio of Israeli to Palestinian sympathizers on that item was only 1.1.

TABLE 1  
NATIONAL SURVEY: GENERAL PUBLIC ATTITUDES

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Proportion of total sample</i>
Sympathy	
Arabs	7.3%
Israelis	22.6
Equal or No Sympathy	70.1
Ratio: Israeli/Arab supporters	3.1
Uprisings	
Palestinians	15.5%
Israelis	17.3
Neither	55.2
Ratio: Israeli/Pal. sympathizers	1.1
Israeli Withdrawal	
Favor	54.5%
Oppose	14.3
Neither	31.3
Ratio: Oppose/Favor	.3
Dialogue	
Yes	72.9%
No	27.1
Ratio: No/Yes	.4
N	512

Majorities of all respondents said that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories (54.4 percent) and should initiate a dialogue with the PLO (72.9 percent), thus disagreeing with the Israeli government's official positions on these issues. The ratios of respondents endorsing these official positions to those opposing them were .3 and .4 for withdrawal and dialogue, respectively.

2. *Attitudes of the attentive public.* As expected, the general sympathies of attentive public members were different from those of non-members: members were significantly less likely to be neutral than non-members (see the first two columns of Table 2).<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, the ratio of pro-Israeli sympathizers to pro-Arab

TABLE 2. NATIONAL SURVEY: RELATION OF ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION, PERSONAL IMPORTANCE, AND NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Attitude	Education			Personal Importance			National Importance			Personal & National Importance		
	High	Low	Ratio: High/ Low	High	Low	Ratio: High/ Low	High	Low	Ratio: High/ Low	High	Low	Ratio: High/ Low
<b>Sympathy</b>												
Arabs	10.4%	6.4%		9.1%	7.1%		6.7%	7.8%		5.9%	7.1%	
Israelis	28.7	20.5		27.3	2.1		32.6	20.3		41.2	20.7	
Equal or No Symp.	60.9	73.1		63.6	70.8		60.6	71.9		52.9	72.2	
	$\chi^2(2)=6.4, p<.05$			$\chi^2(2)=1.7, n.s.$			$\chi^2(2)=6.1, p<.05$			$\chi^2(2)=7.2, p<.03$		
Ratio: Israelis/Arabs	2.8	3.2	.9	3.0	3.1	1.0	4.9	2.6	1.9	7.0	2.9	2.4
<b>Uprisings</b>												
Palestinians	31.9%	12.5%		22.6%	17.0%		20.2%	17.1%		18.8%	16.0%	
Israelis	15.0	21.4		32.1	16.4		32.1	17.1		50.0	16.0	
Neither	53.1	66.1		45.2	66.7		47.6	65.8		31.3	67.0	
	$\chi^2(2)=21.9, p<.001$			$\chi^2(2)=14.8, n.s.$			$\chi^2(2)=11.7, p<.003$			$\chi^2(2)=23.3, p<.001$		
Ratio: Israelis/Pal.	.5	1.7	.3	1.4	1.0	1.4	1.6	1.0	1.6	2.7	1.0	2.7
<b>Israeli Withdrawal</b>												
Favor	64.1%	50.6%		55.8%	54.4%		61.9%	52.8%		58.1%	53.2%	
Oppose	16.2	13.8		19.8	13.5		22.6	12.7		19.4	11.6	
Neither	19.7	35.6		24.4	32.1		15.5	34.5		22.6	35.2	
	$\chi^2(2)=10.3, p<.01$			$\chi^2(2)=3.2, n.s.$			$\chi^2(2)=14.5, p<.001$			$\chi^2(2)=2.8, n.s.$		
Ratio: Oppose/Favor	.3	.3	.9	.4	.3	1.4	.4	.2	1.5	.3	.2	1.5
<b>Dialogue</b>												
Yes	76.1%	71.3%		70.5%	73.0%		73.1%	72.3%		69.0%	72.2%	
No	23.9	28.7		29.5	27.0		26.9	27.7		31.0	27.8	
	$\chi^2(1)=1.0, n.s.$			$\chi^2(1)=0.1, n.s.$			$\chi^2(2)=0.2, n.s.$			$\chi^2(1)=0.1, n.s.$		
Ratio: No/Yes	.3	.4	.8	.4	.4	1.1	.4	.4	1.0	.5	.4	1.2
N	120	381		95	367		91	382		34	294	
Average Ratio: High/Low			.7			1.2			1.5			2.0

sympathizers was 2.8 among attentive public members, whereas it was 3.2 among non-members.

The same pattern appeared for the uprisings item. Attentive public members were less likely to have been unaffected than non-members. And among those who were affected, a majority of attentive public members were more sympathetic toward the Palestinians than the Israelis (the ratio of Israeli to Palestinian sympathizers was .5). This pattern was reversed among non-members, where the majority of those taking sides were more sympathetic toward the Israelis (the ratio of Israeli to Palestinian sympathizers was 1.7).

The same pattern of decreased neutrality among members was apparent in the policy item on withdrawal (which was the only one to measure neutrality). And the slight leaning against official Israeli policy was apparent in the dialogue item. In fact, across all four attitude indicators, attentive public members were less supportive of Israel and its government's positions than were non-members. The ratios in the third column of Table 2 are all less than one, averaging .7 (shown in the bottom row).

3. *Attitudes of the issue public.* Issue public membership was also associated with reduced neutrality on the general sympathies, uprisings, and withdrawal questions, regardless of how issue public membership was operationalized (see columns 4 through 12 of Table 2).<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to the attentive public, issue public members were generally more supportive of Israel and its government's positions than were non-members. Consistent with Young, Borgida, Sullivan, and Aldrich's approach,<sup>33</sup> this pattern was most apparent when issue public membership was operationalized via the conjunction of personal and national importance (see columns 10 through 12 of Table 2), where the average ratio of members to non-members in terms of pro-Israeli leaning was 2.0.

The same general pattern is apparent in comparisons of people separated according to attitude expression (see Table 3). Again, neutrality was less common among individuals who expressed their attitudes either directly or indirectly than among those who did not. Furthermore, the average ratios at the bottoms of columns 3 and 6 of Table 3 are again positive (1.1 and 1.8, respectively), indicating that attitude expressers were more supportive of Israel and its government's positions than were non-expressers.

4. *Independence of the attentive public and the issue public.* Membership in the attentive public was generally independent of membership in the issue public. In fact, education was uncorrelated with personal importance ( $r = -.05$ , n.s.), national importance ( $r = -.05$ , n.s.), and the conjunction of the two ( $r = -.04$ , n.s.). Although education was negatively correlated with indirect attitude expression via voting ( $r = -.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and positively correlated with direct attitude expression ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), both of these relations are relatively weak. Therefore, the

relation between attentive public membership and attitudes was apparently independent of the relation of issue public membership to attitudes.<sup>34</sup>

TABLE 3  
NATIONAL SURVEY: RELATION ATTITUDES TO ATTITUDE EXPRESSION

Attitude	Sample					
	Direct Expression		Ratio: Yes/No	Indirect Expression		Ratio Yes/No
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Sympathy						
Arabs	25.0%	6.2%		7.4%	7.5%	
Israelis	42.9	21.2		27.9	21.8	
Equal or No Symp.	32.2	72.5		64.7	70.7	
	$\chi^2(2)=24.1, p<.001$			$\chi^2(2)=1.2, n.s.$		
Ratio: <i>Israelis/Arabs</i>	1.7	3.4	.5	3.8	2.9	1.3
Uprisings						
Palestinians	35.7%	16.4%		15.9%	18.2%	
Israelis	21.4	19.5		31.9	16.8	
Neither	42.9	64.1		52.2	65.0	
	$\chi^2(2)=7.5, p<.03$			$\chi^2(2)=8.5, p<.02$		
Ratio: <i>Israelis/Pals.</i>	.6	.2	.5	2.0	.9	2.2
Israeli Withdrawal						
Favor	66.7%	53.6%		50.7%	55.8%	
Oppose	25.9	13.6		20.3	13.5	
Neither	7.4	32.8		29.0	30.7	
	$\chi^2(2)=10.4, p<.01$			$\chi^2(2)=2.0, n.s.$		
Ratio: <i>Israelis/Arabs</i>	.4	.3	1.6	.4	.2	1.7
Dialogue						
Yes	64.0%	73.5%		62.5%	75.2%	
No	36.0	26.5		37.5	24.8	
	$\chi^2(1)=1.0, n.s.$			$\chi^2(1)=4.1, p<.05$		
Ratio: <i>Israelis/Arabs</i>	.6	.4	1.6	.6	.3	1.8
N	28	433		69	358	
Average Ratio: High/Low			1.2			1.8

## SURVEY OF OHIO RESIDENTS

### Data

Our second study was designed to assess whether these same patterns could be replicated in an independent survey. For this study, the Polimetrics Laboratory at the Ohio State University interviewed a representative sample of 403 adults living in the state of Ohio by telephone during January and February, 1990. Respondents were

telephone during January and February, 1990. Respondents were asked the sympathies, uprisings, withdrawal, dialogue, personal importance, and educational attainment questions used in the national survey (see the Appendix for details).<sup>35</sup>

TABLE 4

OHIO SURVEY: RELATION OF ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION AND PERSONAL IMPORTANCE

Attitude	Total Sample	Education		Ratio: High/Low	Personal Importance		Ratio: High/Low
		High	Low		High	Low	
<b>Sympathy</b>							
Arabs	4.0%	6.3%	3.2%		9.7%	3.5%	
Israelis	19.5	33.3	14.8		41.9	17.4	
Equal or No Sympathy	76.5	60.4	82.0		48.4	79.1	
		$\chi^2(2)=18.6, p<.001$			$\chi^2(2)=15.0, p<.001$		
<i>Ratio: Israelis/Arabs</i>	4.9	5.2	4.6	1.1	4.4	5.0	.9
<b>Uprisings</b>							
Palestinians	8.8%	16.3%	6.3%		6.9%	9.1%	
Israelis	11.8	17.4	10.0		24.1	10.7	
Neither	79.4	66.3	83.7		69.0	80.2	
		$\chi^2(2)=13.6, p<.002$			$\chi^2(2)=4.7, p<.10$		
<i>Ratio: Israelis/Pals.</i>	1.3	1.1	1.6	.7	3.5	1.2	2.9
<b>Israeli Withdrawal</b>							
Favor	41.6%	49.5%	38.9%		41.9%	41.2%	
Oppose	15.5	19.4	14.3		29.0	14.3	
Neither	42.9	31.2	46.8		29.0	44.5	
		$\chi^2(2)=7.0, p<.04$			$\chi^2(2)=5.5, p<.07$		
<i>Ratio: Israelis/Arabs</i>	.4	.4	.4	1.1	.7	.3	2.0
<b>Dialogue</b>							
Yes	66.6%	69.7%	65.2%		53.6%	67.5%	
No	33.4%	30.3	34.8		46.4	32.5	
		$\chi^2(1)=0.6, n.s.$			$\chi^2(1)=2.2, n.s.$		
<i>Ratio: Israelis/Arabs</i>	.5	.4	.5	.8	.9	.5	1.8
N	401	98	303		32	356	
Average Ratio: High/Low				.9			1.9

## Results

The Ohio sample closely resembled the national sample in terms of the overall distributions of opinions (see the first column of Table 4). Three-quarters of Ohioans (76.5 per cent) expressed equal

sympathies or no sympathies. And about five times as many people expressed more sympathy toward the Israelis (19.5 per cent) than expressed more sympathy toward the Arabs (4.0 per cent). Likewise, the majority of the Ohio sample had no sympathies spurred by the uprisings, and more of those who did take sides felt more sympathies toward the Israelis (11.8 per cent) than felt sympathy toward the Palestinians (8.8 per cent). And as in the national sample, minorities of Ohioans expressed views agreeing with the Israeli government's official positions on the withdrawal issue (15.5 per cent) and the dialogue issue (33.4 per cent). Thus, the ratios of pro-Israeli positions to pro-Arab positions were 4.9, 1.3, .4, and .5, respectively, for the four attitude measures.

As in the national survey, neutrality was less common among attentive public members than non-members on the first three attitude items. And pro-Israeli sentiment was no more prevalent among attentive public members than among non-members: the average ratio in the fourth column of Table 4 was .9. However, issue public membership was again associated with increased support for Israel and its government's positions: the average ratio in column 7 of Table 4 was 1.9.

Finally, the relation of membership in the attentive public to membership in the issue public was comparable to that observed in the national sample. The Pearson product-moment correlation between education and personal importance here was .09 ( $p < .05$ ,  $N = 386$ ). Although statistically significant, this very weak association suggests that attentive public membership was essentially orthogonal to issue public membership.

## DISCUSSION

### *The Issue Public*

In sum, we found two sizable and robust differences between the opinions of issue public members and non-members. First, members were less often neutral on the Arab-Israeli conflict than were non-members, a finding consistent with demonstrations on other issues that people who consider an issue to be more important tend to express more extreme preferences.<sup>36</sup> And second, among people who did take sides, issue public members were more supportive of Israel generally and of two of its government's official policy positions than were non-members. This suggests that future investigations of the role of American public opinion in shaping U.S. policy toward Israel may benefit from careful attention to the issue public. That is, because the intense minority on this issue seems to take a stand distinct from that of the general public, the pluralist approach to public influence seems to merit specific study in this case.

Among individuals who expressed general sympathies one way or the other, the majority of the general public supported Israel, and this was even more true in the issue public. Interestingly, this leaning seems to be consistent with that of U.S. foreign policy during the late 1980s, when our surveys were done. U.S. foreign aid to Israel was greater than that given to any other nation and was quite a bit greater than that given to opposing Arab nations. U.S. political support for Israel was quite strong, especially clearly so in the United Nations, where the U.S. was willing to oppose both Arab positions and the positions of a majority of states in the UN in order to pursue Israel's goals. Thus, the general leaning of U.S. policy in the Middle East was apparently closer to the general leaning of issue public members than those of non-members.

This same finding has been obtained in previous studies that examined issue publics concerned about other policy issues as well. And in a combined analysis of numerous public policy issues, Monroe found greater correspondence between general public opinion and government policy on issues that larger proportions of Americans considered to be the most important facing the country.<sup>37</sup> Taken together with the present evidence, these prior studies reinforce the recommendation that future studies exploring public opinion impact on U.S. Arab-Israeli policy should pay special attention to the role of the issue public, because it seems to be more in line with government policy and perhaps more responsible for it.

On the two specific policy issues we examined, the majority of the general public expressed opposition to the Israeli government's official positions in the late 1980s. That is, most of the people who took sides favored withdrawal from the occupied territories and favored dialogue with the PLO. Although the issue public was relatively more opposed to these initiatives and therefore was more in line with official Israeli policies at that time, a majority of those taking sides within the issue public opposed these policies.

This may account in part for developments in U.S. policy in the Middle East that occurred in the early 1990s. At that time, the Bush Administration placed the issue of Israeli territorial compromise high on its list of priorities and took actions accordingly. These various efforts on the part of the U.S. may have occurred at that time partly because U.S. public preferences, and especially those of issue public members, were supportive of these lines of action.

### *The Attentive Public*

As expected, attentive public members expressed neutral stands less often than non-members. However, we found no robust difference between members and non-members in terms of the leaning of individuals who did take sides. If anything, attentive public members

appeared to be slightly less pro-Israel than non-members. Interestingly, this finding parallels a pattern that we uncovered through close inspection of Singer and Cohen's tables of the results of an April, 1988 national survey:<sup>38</sup> levels of sympathy toward Israel and the Arab nations was essentially equivalent among both highly-educated Americans and less educated Americans in that survey, with a trend suggesting slightly more sympathy toward Israel among the latter.

This result does not, of course, suggest that no attention should be paid to the guardianship perspective in future studies of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, this perspective may well prove to be a useful handle for gaining insight into some aspects of U.S. action relating to the Middle East. But our finding does imply that such analysis may be less fruitful than a focus on the issue public. It is certainly possible that a measure of attentive public membership more precise than education would yield different findings than those reported here. So before the guardianship perspective is abandoned completely, it may be worthwhile to consider alternative operationalizations. But for the moment, our results suggest that such efforts may not be especially fruitful. And it may turn out that in this domain, issue public pressure on government ran in the opposite direction to whatever pressure was brought to bear by the attentive public.

### *Gauging Causality*

Although our data reveal unusual correspondence between U.S. foreign policy and general sympathies in the issue public, we certainly cannot conclude that this group influenced policy-making. As Russett has pointed out,<sup>39</sup> such consistency can occur because (1) public opinion shaped public policy, (2) public policy shaped public opinion, (3) each shaped the other, or (4) neither influenced the other, but both were independently shaped by the same national and international events.<sup>40</sup> Thus, evidence of greater opinion-policy consistency in the issue public does not unambiguously support the pluralist view of public influence on government.

However, as we mentioned above, it seems particularly unlikely that such correspondence emerges because public policy shapes the opinions of issue public members. It is true that issue public members are especially likely to be attentive to issue-related events that occur and are therefore likely to be well-informed about government policy.<sup>41</sup> However, issue public members have firmly crystallized attitudes that are highly stable over time<sup>42</sup> and quite resistant to change.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the correspondence we saw between public policy and the opinions of issue public members is unlikely to represent greater impact of the former on the latter. Furthermore, people who consider an issue to be personally and nationally

important are especially likely to express their opinions either directly to government officials or indirectly via voting.<sup>44</sup> Thus, they are exerting pressure on government and are clearly players in this arena with the potential for influence.

One approach to generating more definitive evidence of causal impact of public opinion on policy has been to interview policy-makers themselves and gauge their perceptions of the processes by which decisions were made.<sup>45</sup> However, a vast literature attests to the substantial biases and blind-spots inherent in testimony about the causes of one's own and others' behavior.<sup>46</sup> Fortunately, a clearly preferable method is available: assessing lagged effects of opinion on policy in longitudinal studies. For example, Page and Shapiro examined whether shifts in government policy paralleled shifts in public opinion across a wide range of domestic and international issues and found a great deal of such correspondence.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, a large fraction of the shifts in public opinion preceded the analogous shifts in policy, thus suggesting a causal impact of the former on the latter.<sup>48</sup> However, as we mentioned above, Iyengar and Suleiman<sup>49</sup> found precisely the opposite results in their study of opinions on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which raises questions about whether Page and Shapiro's<sup>50</sup> general conclusion applies to this particular case. Nonetheless, this sort of approach clearly generates compelling data regarding the causal processes at work.

## CONCLUSION

We hope to have illustrated how the majoritarian, guardianship, and pluralist perspectives can be compared and contrasted more precisely when appropriate longitudinal data become available. In particular, to permit evaluation of the pluralist vision, issue public members must be identified in new investigations. Unfortunately, however, issue public membership has been gauged only rarely in public opinion surveys, despite a strong theoretical rationale for doing so.<sup>51</sup> If and when enough surveys have been conducted that include such measures, longitudinal analytic approaches such as Page and Shapiro's<sup>52</sup> can be applied to issue public members in isolation. This method may reveal particularly strong correspondence between opinions and policies and may perhaps thereby locate the sources of greatest influence within electorates. In the meantime, our results justify the collection of the necessary data regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and should also encourage analysts to consider the potential for issue public opinion influence in this arena more than has been done to date.

The relevance of the issue public is not likely to be substantially affected by changed international circumstances. However, the assumption that the issue-public will remain relatively stable (that is, that relatively stable groups will continue to rank the issue of the

Arab-Israeli conflict high in their priorities) may be subject to dispute if peace prevails between Israel and the Arab states. If, as one suspects, American Jews and evangelical Christians constitute significant segments of the issue-public, how the priorities of these communities will change will be significant for the issue at hand. This important subject is addressed by others in this volume.

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However, there is a crucial and significant difference between the question wordings used in those surveys and that used in ours that is undoubtedly responsible for this discrepancy. Whereas we explicitly offered the "neither" and "equal" alternatives separately to our respondents, Roper and Penn and Schoen (*Roper Reports*, 91-3, New York: Roper Organization, 1991), did not. They simply asked their respondents

- whether their sympathies were more with Israel or more with the Arabs, so people who offered the "neither" or "equal" responses in their surveys were volunteering those answers on their own. Schuman and Presser (Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser, *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys: Experiments on Question Form, Wording and Content*, New York: Academic Press, 1981) have shown that omitting response alternative in this way suppresses the number of people who offer those responses, as compared to when they are offered explicitly. Therefore, our results undoubtedly obtained more "neither" and "equal" responses than the other surveys for this reason.
31. Consistent with Almond's (*American People and Foreign Policy*) perspective, respondents who graduated from college were treated as members of the attentive public, and individuals who had attained less formal education were treated as non-members.
  32. Individuals who said the issue was the single most important to them personally or one of the two or three most important were assigned to the high personal importance group. Those who said the issue was less important to them personally were placed in the low personal importance group. Respondents who said the issue was extremely important for the U.S. as a whole were placed in the high national importance group, and those who said the issue was less important for the country were placed in the low national importance group. Individuals who said the issue was the single most important or one of the two or three most important were assigned to the indirect expression group. Those who said the issue was less important were considered non-members of this group.
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## APPENDIX: QUESTION WORDINGS

## NATIONAL SURVEY

Our section of the interview began with the following introduction: "During the last few years, there has been a major dispute between Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East over what should become of the occupied territories on the West Bank and Gaza. The next few questions are about your opinions on this topic."

Respondents were then asked ten questions, eight of which are used here. There were actually two different sets of these questions, each of which was asked of a randomly selected half of our sample. The wordings of these questions were varied slightly across the two forms. Specifically, the orders of the response alternatives were varied in order to minimize the impact of response order effects on the marginal distributions of responses (Krosnick and Alwin 1987). The wordings of the Form A questions and the variations for Form B are indicated below:

*Sympathy.* First of all, in thinking about the Arab/Israeli conflict generally, are you more sympathetic toward the Israelis, more sympathetic toward the Arabs, are you equally sympathetic to both sides, or do you have no sympathies one way or the other? (In Form B, the order of the first two response choices was reversed.)

*Israeli Withdrawal.* One proposed solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict would be for Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories in exchange for peace. Are you inclined to favor this approach, inclined to oppose this approach, or do you neither favor nor oppose it? (In Form B, the order of the first two response choices was reversed.)

*Uprisings.* Did the recent Palestinian uprising make you more sympathetic toward the Palestinians, more sympathetic toward the Israelis, or did it have no effect on your sympathies? (In Form B, the order of the first two response choices was reversed.)

*Dialogue.* Given recent events, do you feel that Israel should initiate a dialogue with the PLO or Palestine Liberation Organization?

*National Importance.* How important would you say the Arab/Israeli conflict is for the security and welfare of the United States as a whole? Is it extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important? (The order of the response choices was reversed in Form B.)

*Personal Importance.* As compared to your feelings on other political issues, how important is the Arab/Israeli conflict to you personally? Is it the single most important political issue to you, one of the two or three most important issues, one of the five most important issues, or is it not among the five issues you personally consider most important? (The order of the response choices was reversed in Form B.)

*Impact on Candidate Preference.* How important was your view on the Arab/Israeli conflict in determining which of these candidates was your favorite? Was it the single most important issue, one of the two or three most important issues, one of the five most important issues, or was it not among the five most important issues? (The order of the response choices was reversed in Form B.)

*Direct Attitude Expression.* Have you ever written a letter, made a telephone call, or done anything else to express your views on the Arab/Israeli conflict directly to a government official, newspaper, or magazine?

## OHIO SURVEY

In the Ohio survey, our section of the interview was introduced with a simple preamble: "Now I would like to ask you some questions on the Arab/Israeli conflict." Respondents were then asked the sympathies, withdrawal, uprisings, dialogue, and personal importance questions used in the national survey. Because we found no effects of the response order variations in that survey, no such variations were included in this questionnaire.