

PRESS RELEASE

Israelis have a more positive view of Germany than Germans do of Israel

Israeli President Isaac Herzog's state visit to Germany symbolizes once again the close relations between the two countries. Yet Israelis have a much more positive opinion of Germany than, conversely, Germans do of Israel. Signs of alienation can potentially be seen among the younger generation in both countries in particular.

Gütersloh – September 2, 2022. Among Germans, 46 percent have a good opinion of Israel and 34 percent have a poor opinion. In contrast, many Israelis have a decidedly positive image of Germany, with 63 percent saying their view of the country is favorable, and only 19 percent saying it is poor. Those are the key findings from the new study *Germany and Israel Today: Between Connection and Alienation*, which is based on a representative survey conducted by pollytix strategic research gmbh in Germany and New Wave Research in Israel on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Drawing different conclusions from history

Respondents in both countries also differ in their answers to the question of whether, due to historical events, Germany has a special responsibility for the Jewish people: 58 percent of Israelis believe this is the case, while only 35 percent of Germans think this is unequivocally true. Only 27 percent of Germans, on the other hand, feel that Germany has a responsibility for the state of Israel due to past history, compared to 57 percent of Israelis who feel this is so. Thus, Israelis have expectations of Germans that the majority of German respondents do not share. On the political level, this becomes evident in a number of responses, including to the question of how Germany's policy makers should act in light of the country's responsibility. For example, 61 percent of Israelis would like the German government to provide unilateral political support for their side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, only 12 percent of German respondents share this view. And while almost two-thirds (64 percent) of Germans believe that both sides should give way in the conflict in equal measure, more than half of Israelis (55 percent) feel that the Palestinian side should concede.

"The differences in mutual perception between Germans and Israelis are also the result of different security situations and different political cultures," says Stephan Vopel, Israel expert at the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Very different conclusions drawn from history also become evident here. "The vast majority of Germans continue to subscribe to the maxim 'never again war,'" Vopel says, "while for Israelis it is 'never again be a victim.'"

Israeli public views German government's efforts positively

Similar to the findings in Germany, the German government's efforts are viewed positively by a majority of Israelis, with 55 percent saying they approve and merely 12 percent expressing a negative opinion. Only the youngest cohort of respondents has a more reserved attitude, with 47 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds viewing Germany's government positively. Germans, on the other hand, have a much more negative attitude towards the Israeli government, with only 24 percent giving a positive assessment, 43 percent saying they have a negative view, and roughly one-third not giving an opinion (32 percent "Don't know"). Moreover, younger German respondents (18–29 years) have an even less favorable opinion: Of this cohort, a mere 15 percent view the Israeli government positively.

Israelis are divided over the question of whether the relationship between Israelis and Germans is still burdened by the Holocaust: 48 percent say this is the case, while 42 percent see it as only somewhat or not at all burdened. In addition, 60 percent of Israelis reject the idea of leaving the past behind, and only 14 percent say it is time to do so. In Germany, on the other hand, one respondent in two (49 percent) says it is time to leave the past behind, with only 33 percent explicitly opposing such a step.

Different attitudes between young people in Israel and Germany

What is striking is that the youngest groups of respondents (18–29 years) in both countries have different views of key issues. While the younger generation in Germany believes that, due to the past, their country now has a responsibility for the Jewish people (44 percent of Germans agree; 53 percent of Israelis agree), younger Israelis for the most part feel Germany has a responsibility to support the state of Israel (54 percent of Israelis agree; 25 percent of Germans agree).

For Joachim Rother, Israel expert at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the findings are both an encouragement and a warning. “Much has been achieved in German-Israeli relations in recent decades,” he says. “The different perspectives of the younger generations in both countries also show, however, that an intensive examination is urgently needed of the different perspectives and realities. This is where direct interactions in the form of dialogue and cooperation can be especially helpful.”

German-Israeli cooperation promises future benefits

The study yields also new findings in the area of German-Israeli cooperation, showing that respondents are generally satisfied with its current state. For example, the majority of Germans (56 percent) and Israelis (68 percent) believe that the two countries cooperate well with each other. Four out of five Israelis (78 percent) would like to see even closer cooperation with Germany and one in two Germans (53 percent) says that greater collaboration with Israel would be desirable. While Israelis would like a more intensive partnership in the areas of economic cooperation (46 percent) and the military, arms and defense (29 percent), for Germans this applies first and foremost to the sectors science and research (41 percent) and political cooperation at government level (35 percent). A largely positive picture thus emerges on the level of bilateral relations, one that also offers potential for expansion in the future.

Anti-Semitic beliefs in Germany

The present study uses specific questions to examine aspects of anti-Semitic attitudes in Germany, without claiming to fully capture this complex phenomenon. It provides information on individual indicators, but not on anti-Semitism as a whole. The results thus tend to be higher than in other comparable studies. According to the current sample, one-quarter of respondents in Germany (24 percent) say that Jews have too much influence in the world. Anti-Semitism expressed in relation to Israel is another cause for concern: 36 percent of Germans equate Israel’s policies towards Palestinians with the treatment Jews experienced under the Nazis. It is true for both aspects of anti-Semitism that the lower the respondent’s level of education, the greater the prejudice. “Given the demonstrable connection between education and anti-Semitic prejudices, we are urgently called upon to invest more in educational efforts in the future,” Rother says.

Additional information:

The study Germany and Israel Today: Between Connection and Alienation is based on representative demoscopic surveys carried out from August 31 to October 5, 2021 by pollytix strategic research gmbh in Germany and New Wave Research in Israel on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. The authors – Professor Stephan Stetter of the Universität der Bundeswehr München, Dr. Jenny Hestermann of the Hochschule für jüdische Studien Heidelberg and Dr. Roby Nathanson of the Macro Center for Political Economics in Israel – analyze and evaluate the quantitative results and classify them according to current and historic contents.

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