

New Poll Shows French and Germans more Sympathetic toward Israel

June 20, 2006



A poll by the [Pew Global Attitudes](#) project shows that the French and Germans have become more sympathetic toward Israel since the Palestinians elected Hamas, a radical Islamic group that has refused to recognize Israel or renounce violence against Israelis. The sympathies of the British, however, are unchanged.

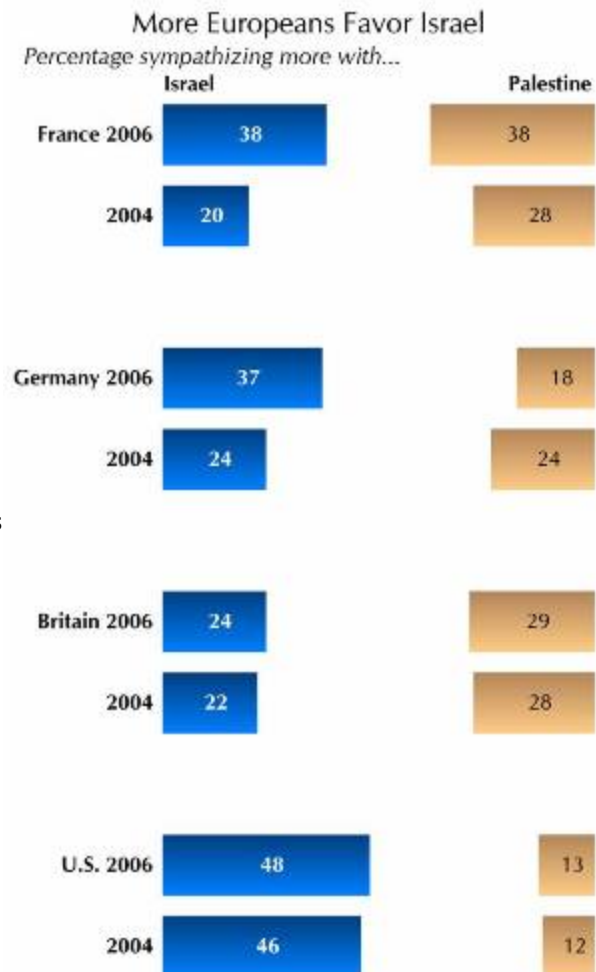
Palestinian refugees participate in a project funded by the European Union (© EC/ECHO/Maria Jose Pallares Paredes)

The European Union suspended aid to the Palestinian government after the victory of Hamas in January parliamentary elections. Germany is the EU's largest economy, followed by Great Britain and France. The EU, backed by a public that has tended to side with the Palestinians, has been the largest donor of aid to the West Bank and Gaza, sending about 500 million euros (USD \$628 million) there each year.

Pew's most recent survey, part of a broader 15-nation project, was conducted March 31 through May 14, 2006. It conducted a similar poll in 2004, prior to the Hamas victory.

While in 2004 more French sympathized with the Palestinians (28%) than the Israelis (20%), the new polls show that French sympathies are now evenly divided with 38 percent favoring each side. That represents a near doubling of support for Israel and an increase of 10 points for the Palestinians. The proportion of French not favoring one side or the other has dropped to 25 percent from 52 percent in 2004. Apparently the French are being pulled to take sides, with more moving toward the Israelis than the Palestinians.

In Germany, support for Israel has also risen, though support for the Palestinians has declined. Thirty-seven percent of Germans sympathize with Israel, more than double those who favor the Palestinians (18%). That's an increase of 13 points over the proportion of Germans favoring Israel in 2004 and a drop of six points in those sympathetic to the Palestinians. Nearly half



of Germans favor neither side (46%), down slightly from 2004 (51%).

In Great Britain, there has been little change. About a quarter (24%) of the British sympathize with Israel and 29 percent with the Palestinians. In 2004, the poll results were about the same: 22 percent express sympathy for Israel, 29 percent for the Palestinians.

Related findings

A recent poll by the [Israel Project](#), a nonprofit pro-Israel group, also shows shifts in French public opinion about the Middle East. The Israel Project's survey was limited to "opinion elites" defined as "those with a high level of education who closely follow the news." It was conducted May 10-June 1, 2006, by Stanley Greenberg of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. Respondents were asked whether they were supporters or strong supporters of either Israel or the Palestinians. The percentage of French respondents who say they support the Palestinians declined to approximately a fifth (21%) from nearly half (47%) in 2002.

This did not translate into more support for Israel among the French elites, however. Those saying they support Israel also declined from 12 percent to 4 percent. Instead, the Israeli Project—in contrast to the Pew findings—found that three quarters of the French elites (75%) now express neutrality.

The Israel Project report included German opinion elites, though only data for 2006. The proportion expressing support for the Palestinians in Germany is the same as in France: 21 percent. However, support for Israel is higher among the German elites: 22 percent compared to only 4 percent who say they support Israel. More than half (56%) express no preference.

According to the Pew findings, Spaniards tend to be the most lopsided in their support for the Palestinians. About a third (32%) favor the Palestinians over the Israelis (9%). However, most Spaniards are neutral (59%).

The United States stands out as Israel's strongest supporter: 48 percent say they sympathize with Israel in the Mideast conflict, compared to 13 percent who lean toward the Palestinians. More than a third (39%) of Americans take neither side.

In Muslim countries, support for the Palestinians remains overwhelming. Nearly all Egyptians and Jordanians (97%) say they sympathize with the Palestinians. Almost three-quarters of Indonesians (72%) express the same sentiment though 17 percent favor neither or both and 4 percent sympathize with Israel. Turks favor the Palestinians over Israelis by 63 percent to 5 percent (32% neutral) and Pakistanis by 59 percent to 6 percent (36% neutral).