

## In Gaza-Israel conflict, sympathies now shared equally between both sides after shift in Canadian opinion

*Concern over genocide allegations drives increase in calls for a full ceasefire*

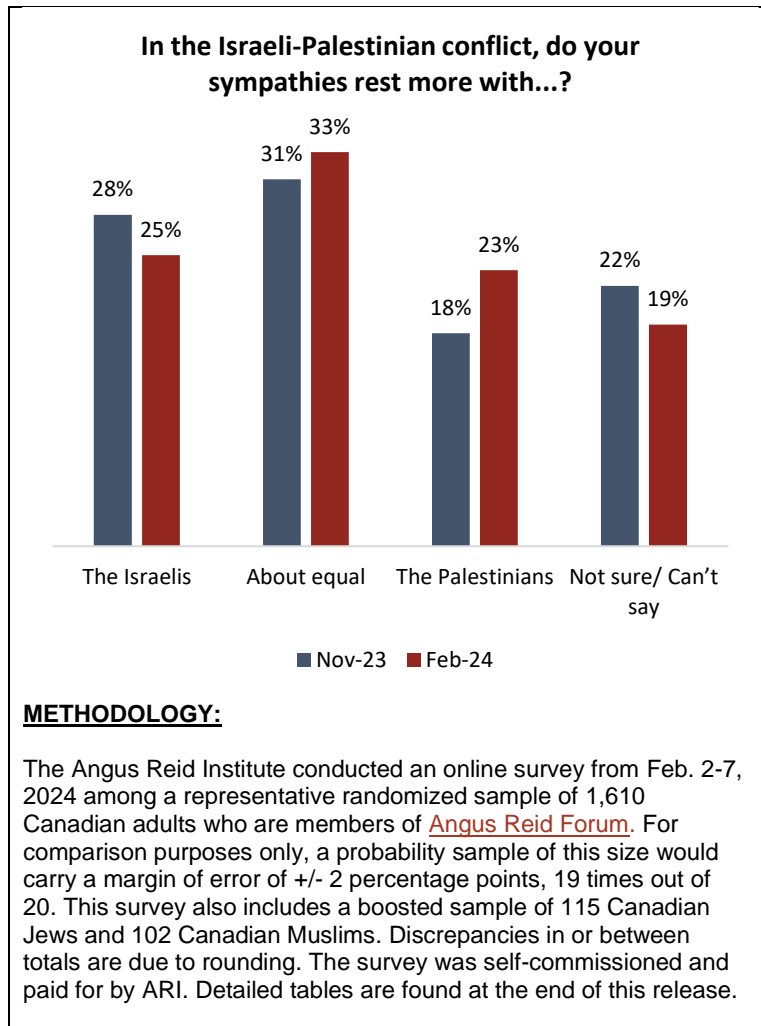
**February 12, 2024** – As the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza drags on, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians' sympathies shifting.

At the outset of the conflict, there was a 10-point gap between Canadians who said their sympathies were mostly with the Israelis (28%) and those whose sympathies were more with the Palestinians (18%). Now, the number of Canadians saying they sympathize with one side or the other has drawn near-even. One-third (33%) say their sympathies are "about equal" between both sides.

This comes amid a growing view among Canadians that the destruction wrought by Israel's military response in Gaza after the Hamas terrorist attacks of Oct. 7 has been too severe. Half of Canadians (50%) believe Israel's response has been "too heavy-handed", a five-point increase from November. There is also doubt among Canadians that Israel will be able to achieve its proclaimed goals of eradicating Hamas and freeing the hostages. Three-in-ten (29%) believe neither goal will be reached, more than the one-in-five (19%) who say both goals are achievable.

Concerns over the growing Palestinian death toll in the conflict has sparked allegations of genocide levied by South Africa in the United Nations' highest court, the International Court of Justice. Canadians are divided on the premise of South Africa's case but lean towards believing Israel is in fact committing genocide against Palestinians (41%) than not (32%).

These doubts and concerns fuel growing support among Canadians to see a full ceasefire between the two sides. Half (49%) of Canadians now want a full and lasting cessation of the conflict, while one-in-six (17%) believe if a ceasefire is called it should only be temporary. Approaching one-in-five (18%) believe no ceasefire should be called at this time. In November, Canadians leaned towards believing the ceasefire should be temporary (35%) rather than permanent (30%).



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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his government have faced criticism earlier in the conflict for being slow to call for a ceasefire after Canada abstained from [an October UN vote on the subject](#) before supporting [a later resolution in December](#). The government has also faced criticism after the December ceasefire vote from Liberal MPs, who argued the later resolution [did not impose enough conditions on Hamas](#). As Canada walks a fine line in the conflict, Canadians see the federal government performing more poorly than not on a number of measures, including representing Canada internationally, effectively communicating its position, standing up for international law, and ensuring the country is on the right side of history.

### More Key Findings:

- Canadians lean towards believing the government has sided too much with Israel (26%) than the Palestinians (18%) while one-in-five (20%) believe Trudeau and the Liberal government have struck the right balance.
- A majority see Hamas as a major detriment to lasting peace in Israel. Two-thirds (66%) believe peace is impossible as long as the organization is operating in Gaza.
- A majority (61%) of Canadians see the two-state solution as key to the peace process.

### About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

### INDEX

#### Part One: Sympathies now shared evenly with both sides of conflict

#### Part Two: Calls for ceasefire grow amid claims of genocide

- Half now say Israel too “heavy handed” in response to Oct. 7 attack
- Allegations of genocide

#### Part Three: Assessing Canadian government response

- How should Canada respond to ICJ?

#### Part Four: Expectations for the future

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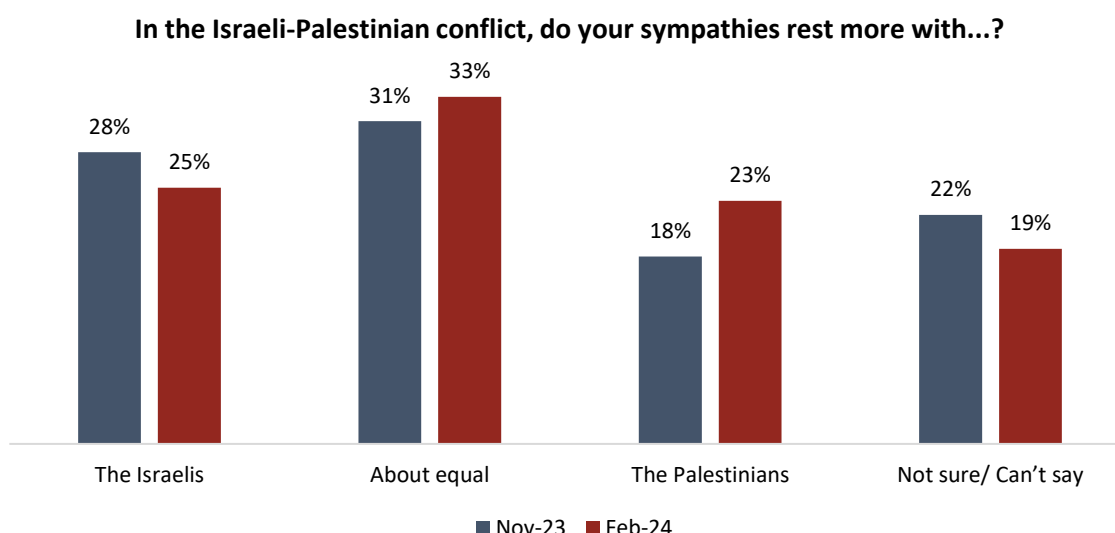
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## Part One: Sympathies now shared evenly with both sides of conflict

The conflict between Israel and Hamas, ignited after a terror attack by the latter killed 1,200 on Oct. 7, has entered its fifth month. The protracted struggle has cost the lives of more than 200 Israeli soldiers and close to 28,000 Palestinians. Though the health authority in Gaza does not differentiate between military and civilian deaths, the majority of deaths in Gaza have been women and children.

In Canada, Canadians continue to follow the conflict closely; three-quarters are having regular discussions about the conflict and reading coverage of it in the news (see detailed tables). In this changing environment sympathies have moved slightly toward the Palestinian population compared to polling done in November. Currently, the same number of Canadians say they feel more sympathy for the Israelis (25%) and the Palestinians (23%), while the largest group say their sympathies are apportioned equally:



To better understand the perspectives of Canadian Muslims and Jews on this conflict, this survey included a boosted sample of 100 Muslims and 100 Jews. Please note that although these boosted samples provide valuable context, they are not necessarily representative of the Muslim and Jewish population of Canada as a whole. Sample sizes for these groups are shown unweighted in the graphs below.

Four-in-five (83%) Muslims say their sympathies lie mostly with Palestinians in this conflict. Seven-in-ten Jews say their sympathies lie with Israelis, but one-quarter (27%) say either they sympathize with both sides or lean towards the Palestinians:

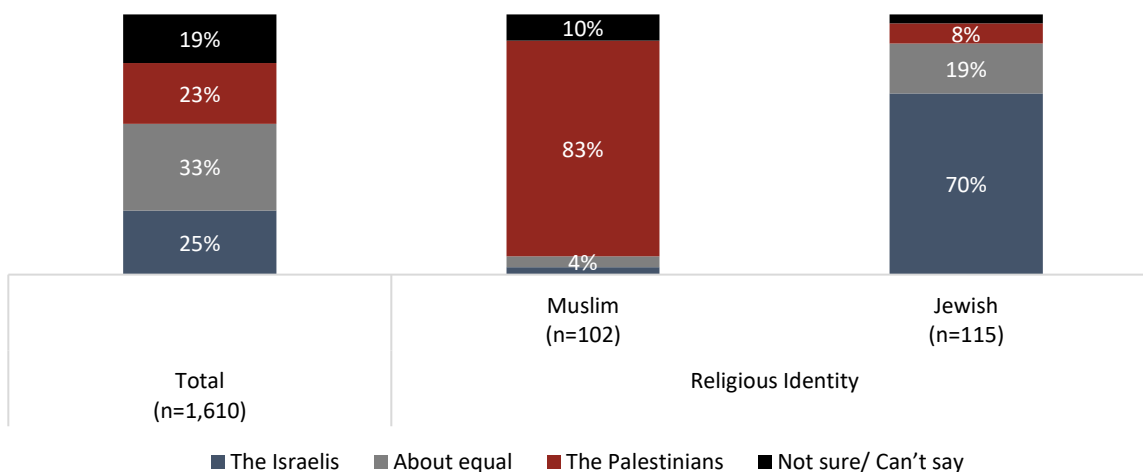
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### In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, do your sympathies rest more with...?

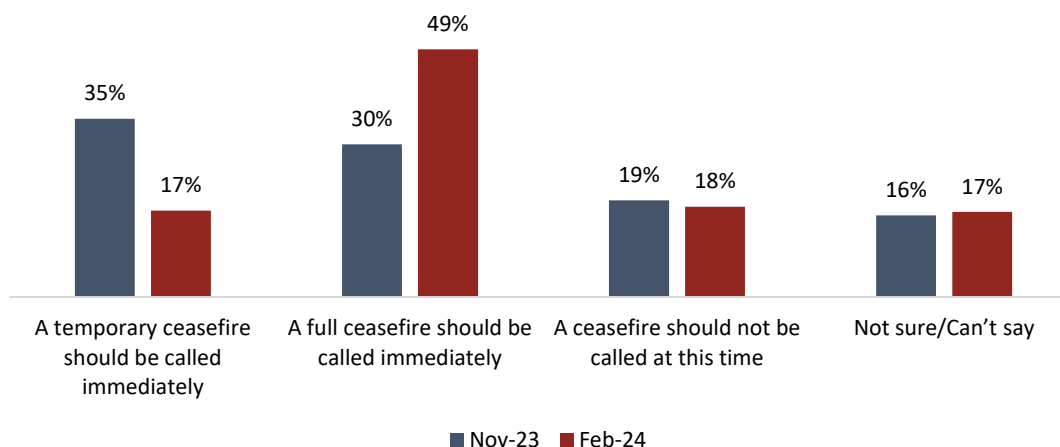


### Part Two: Calls for ceasefire grow amid claims of genocide

The number of Palestinians killed, injured, or missing continues to rise, surpassing 100,000 according to most recent estimates by the United Nations. Nearly the entire population of the Gaza strip – approaching two million people – have been displaced by the conflict. The disproportionate burden endured by women and children has caused many in the international community to push for a ceasefire. A temporary break in hostilities was implemented from Nov. 24-30 last year.

The proportion of Canadians hoping for a full ceasefire has increased 19 points compared to the period before the first temporary halt:

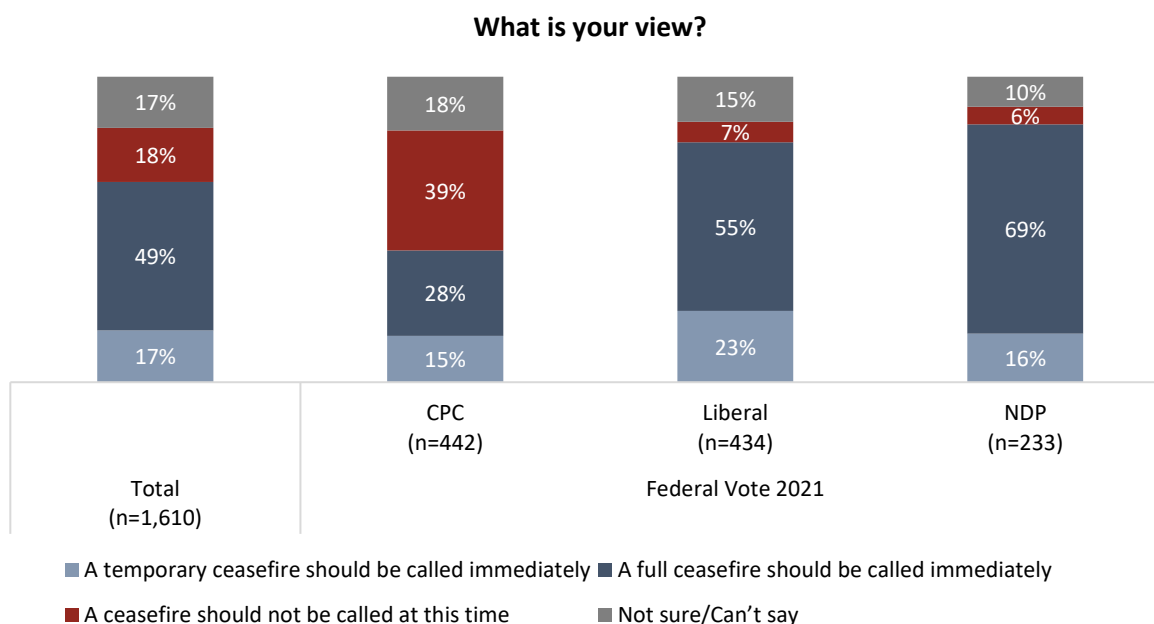
### What is your view?



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Majorities of past Liberal (55%) and NDP (69%) voters believe there should be a full ceasefire. Few in those groups believe it is not the time for a ceasefire at all. Those who voted CPC in 2021 are more likely to say now is not the time for a ceasefire (39%), but still lean towards wanting one (43%) whether its full (28%) or temporary (15%):



### **Half now say Israel too “heavy handed” in response to Oct. 7 attack**

Part of the motivation for some Canadians to support a full ceasing of hostilities may be the view that Israel's response has been too heavy handed. The proportion agreeing that this is the case has increased slightly from November to exactly half of Canadians (50%). Three-in-10 (31%) disagree that Israel's response has been disproportionate:

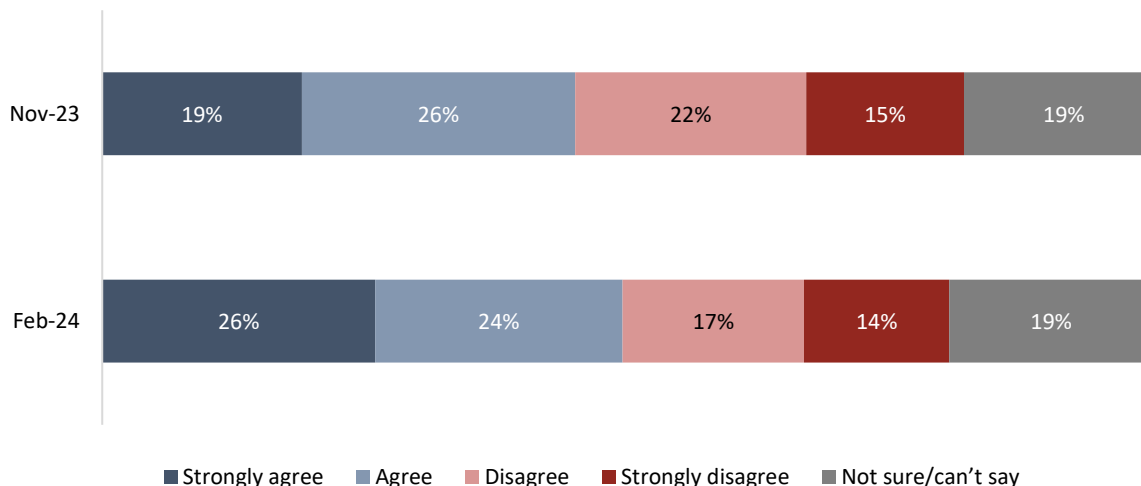
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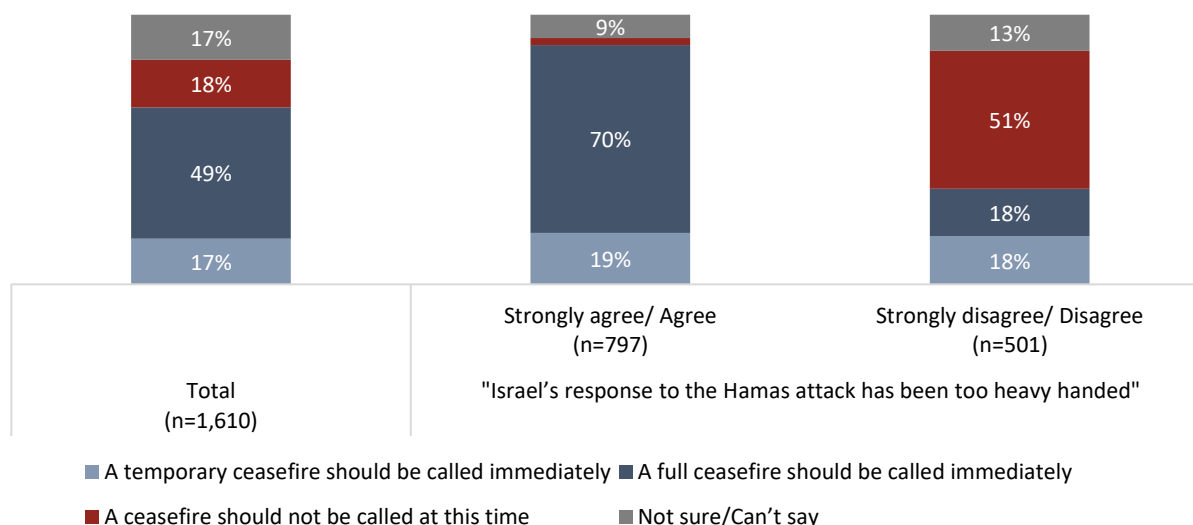
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**Agree vs. disagree -  
"Israel's response to the Hamas attack has been too heavy handed"**



Indeed, those who agree that Israel has gone too far in its aggression are vastly more likely to say that a ceasefire is needed. Notably, even 36 per cent of those who disagree that Israel has overstepped a reasonable response also agree that a ceasefire should be negotiated:

**What is your view?**



**Allegations of genocide**

South Africa made international news recently when it formally alleged that Israel is [committing genocide](#) against the Palestinian population in Gaza in the United Nations' International Court of Justice. The text of

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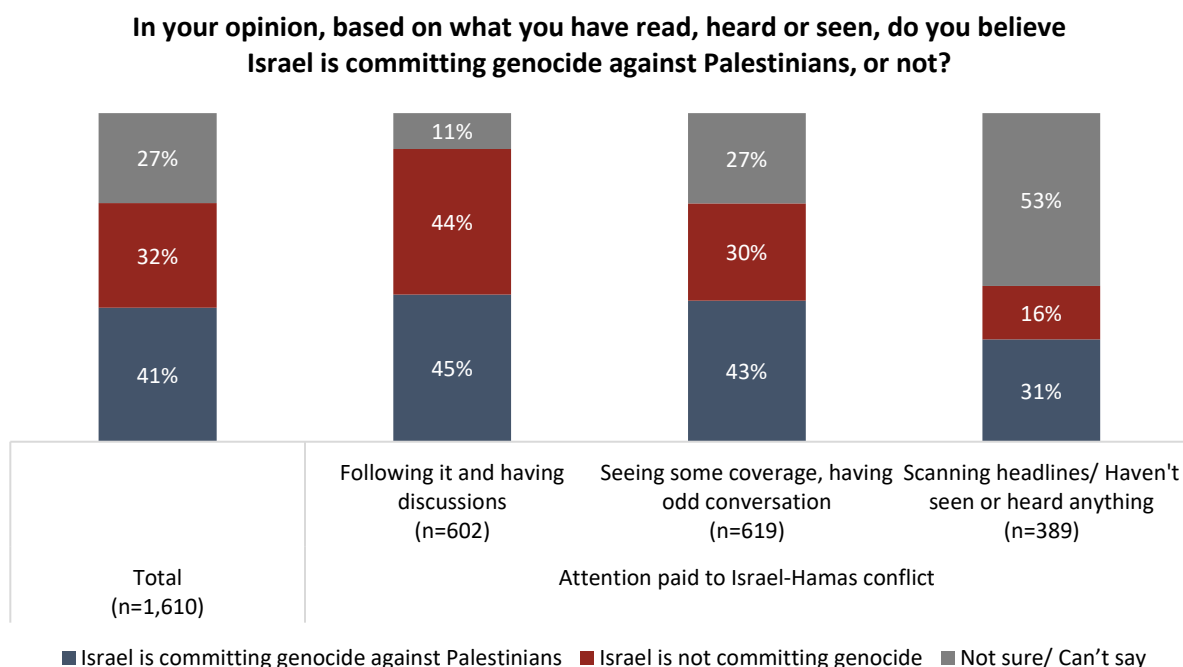
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the submission notes that:

*"...acts and omissions" by Israel "are genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group". - [BBC](#)*

The ICJ released a preliminary ruling that Israel must take measures to “[prevent and punish direct incitement of genocide](#)” in the conflict. Israel rejected the ruling, [arguing](#) that it has the right to defend itself after the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7 started the war and that Hamas is using civilians as human shields. Israel asserted that it does everything it can to avoid the killing of civilians during its military actions.

Asked for their own views of this, a plurality of Canadians (41%) believe Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians, while one-in-three (32%) disagree. Notably, those who are following the events most closely are divided evenly on this issue:



A wide gap is found on this issue across age and gender demographics. Those younger than 35 are most likely to say that a genocide is taking place – young women are particularly likely to hold this view. The one group that stands out as opposing this allegation by a significant margin are men over the age of 54:

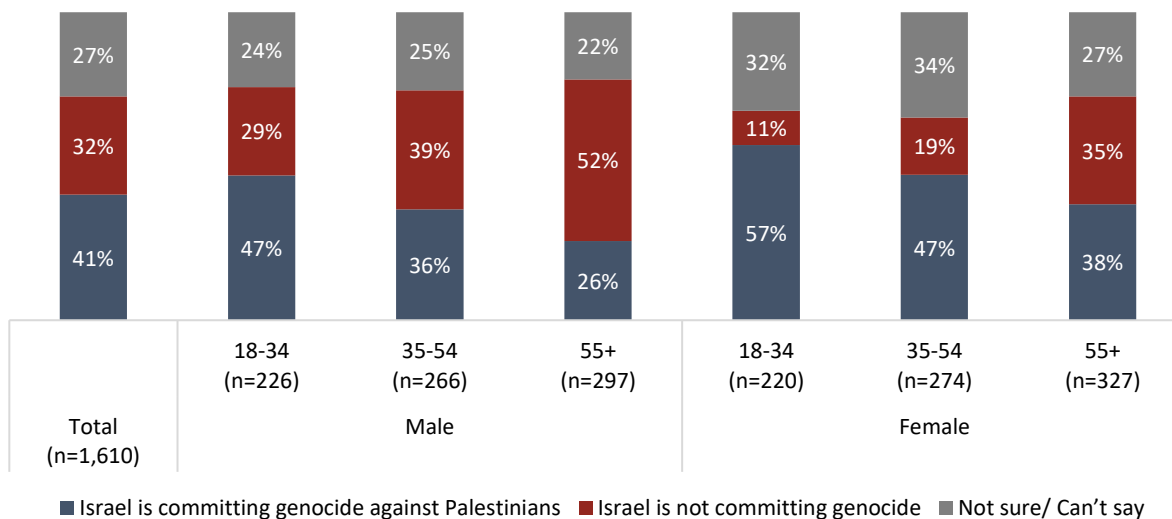
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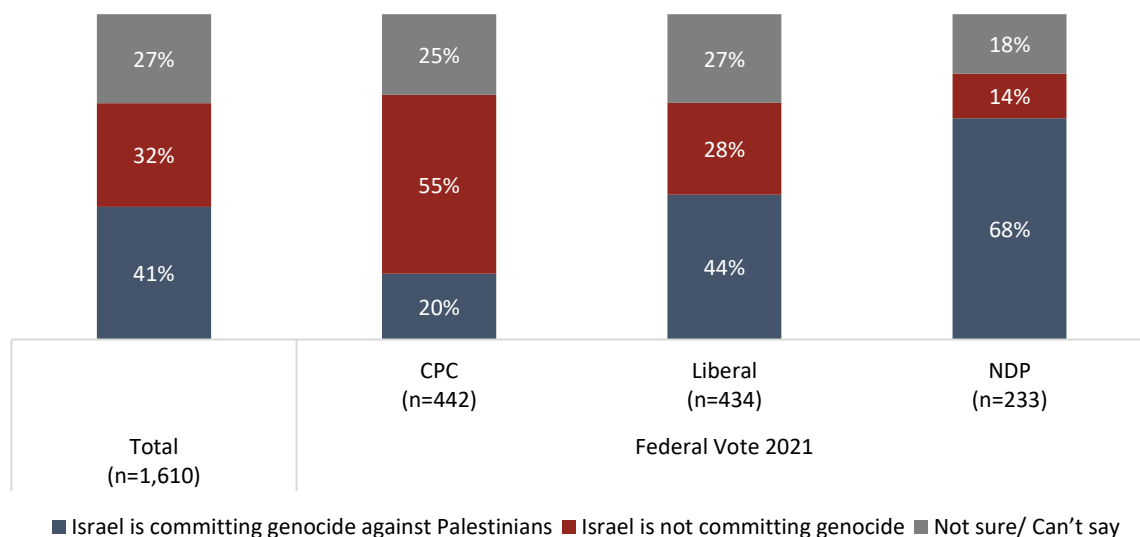
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**In your opinion, based on what you have read, heard or seen, do you believe Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians, or not?**



A majority (55%) of 2021 CPC voters say Israel is not committing a genocide against Palestinians. A plurality (44%) of past Liberal voters and an overwhelming majority (68%) of NDP voters disagree:

**In your opinion, based on what you have read, heard or seen, do you believe Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians, or not?**



### Part Three: Assessing Canadian government response

The Trudeau government's response to the case at the ICJ has been mixed. After the ICJ's initial ruling, the government stated that it would abide by the court's ruling but that this does not mean that it

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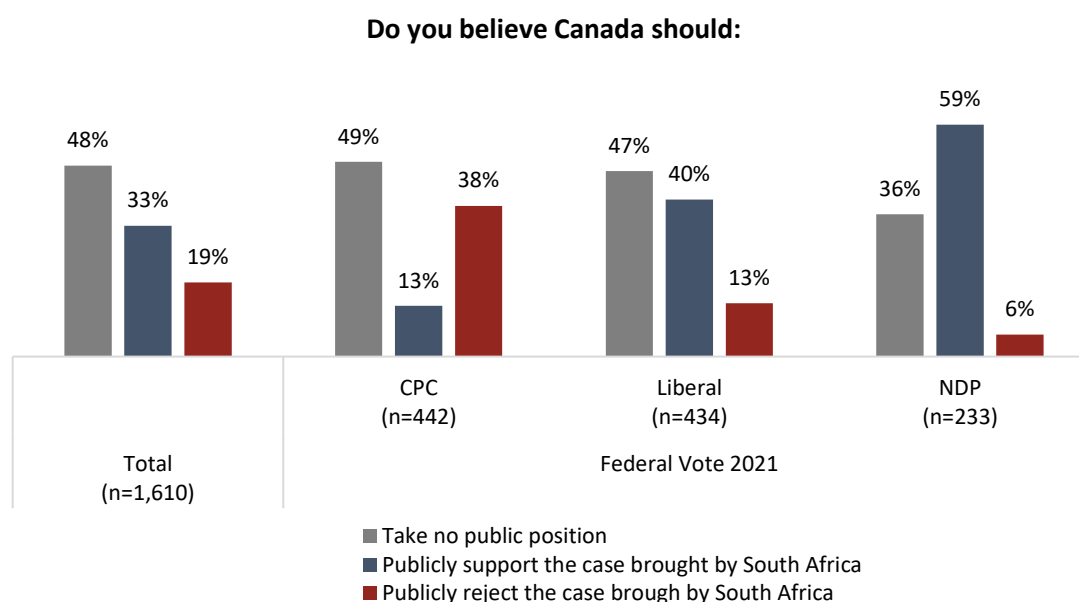


necessarily agrees with the premise of the case. Liberal Member of Parliament Anthony Housefather called South Africa's contention "baseless and insulting" to Israel, while other Liberal MPs, including Salma Zahid and Chandra Arya, urged the government to publicly support the submission.

### How should Canada respond to ICJ?

To this point, the line that the government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is walking is the one preferred by half of Canadians (48%). This group says that Canada should not take a public position on the ICJ case. One-in-three (33%) would prefer Trudeau publicly support the South African position, while one-in-five would reject it (19%).

The decision to refrain from taking a position is notably one respected by half of past Conservative voters. That said, two-in-five (38%) among that group would reject South Africa's claims, while larger groups of past Liberal (40%) and New Democrats (59%) would affirm them:



Considering Trudeau's response overall since the conflict began, a large group are completely unsure or don't know enough to gauge how it has responded. Among those who are following the events most closely, the most common position is that Trudeau has been siding too often with Israel (35%), though nearly as many say he has done the same with the Palestinians (27%):

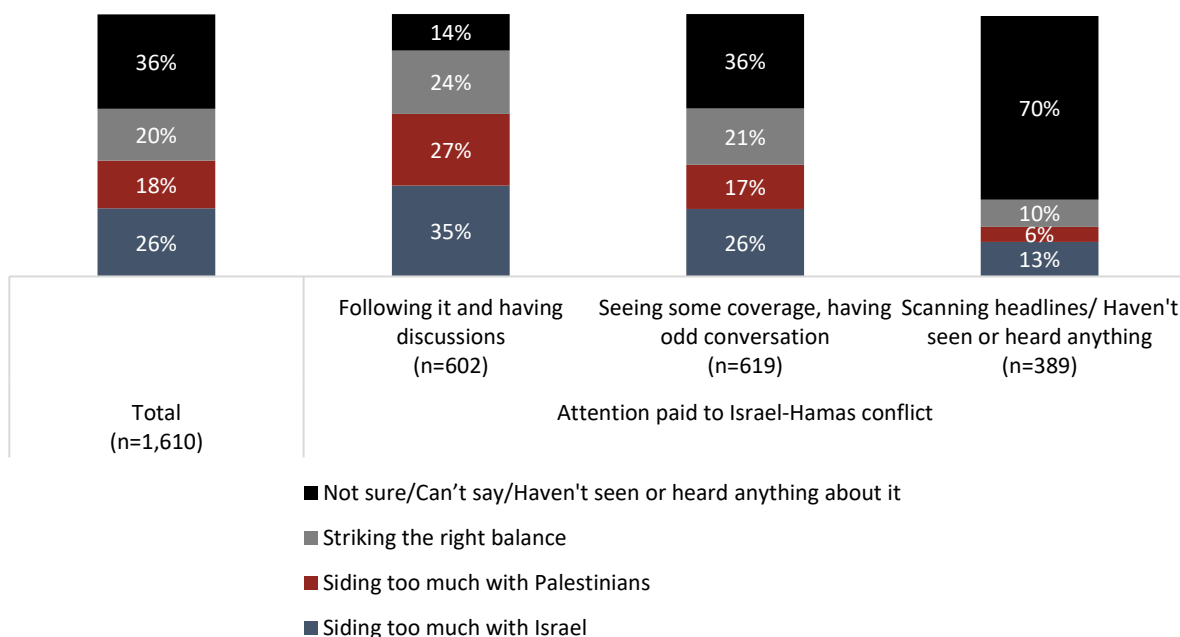
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Thinking about the Canadian government's response, and based on the approach taken by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau since the conflict began, do you feel he has been:



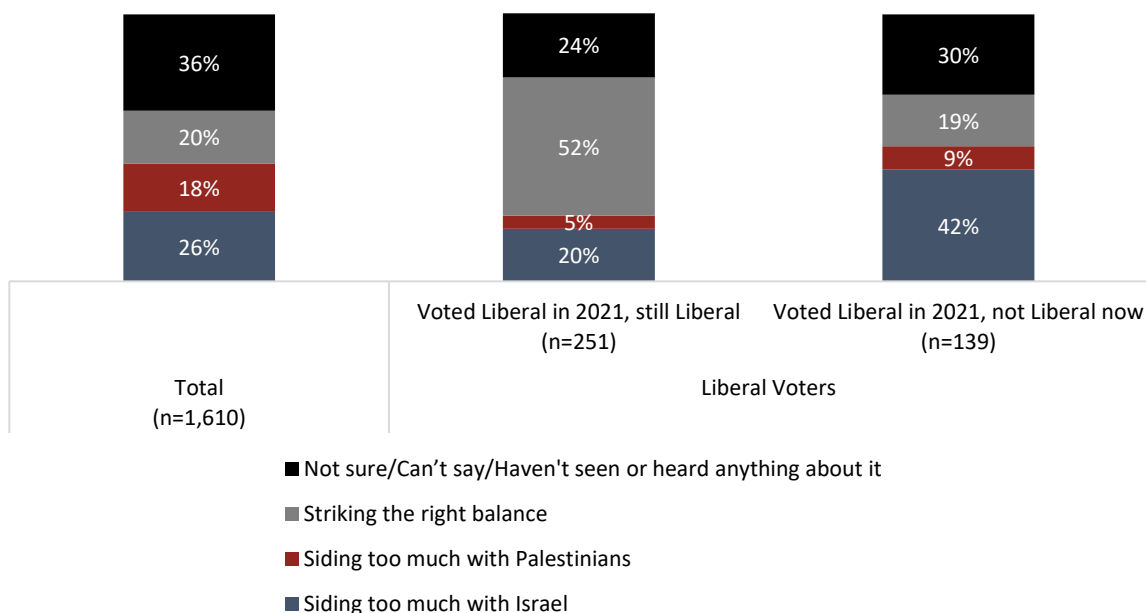
As the clock ticks down towards the next federal election, the Liberals and Trudeau have concerns about bleeding support from the levels it saw in 2021. The Liberals and Trudeau have faced criticism from the National Council of Canadian Muslims for not doing enough to stop Israel's assault on Gaza. In December, Muslim donors pulled support from the party because of the government's stance on the conflict.

Past Liberal voters who are still with the party believe the federal government has struck the right balance in its approach to the conflict by a slim majority (52%). For those who say they would not repeat a vote for the Liberals in an election in the near term, there is a wider belief that the government has leaned too heavily towards the Israeli side of the conflict.

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**Thinking about the Canadian government's response, and based on the approach taken by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau since the conflict began, do you feel he has been:**



Canadians are critical of the government and Trudeau's approach to the conflict so far. Majorities believe they have done a poor or terrible job of standing up for international laws, representing Canada, ensuring Canada is on the right side of history and communicating what the country's position on the conflict is to Canadians.

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**Do you think the Canadian government led by Justin Trudeau has done a good or bad job ...**

**(All respondents, n=1,610)**



For a segment of the population, those who feel the government is striking the right balance in its responsibilities and sympathies, these measures are viewed much more favourably. Those who feel the government has taken one side or the other are far more critical ([see detailed tables](#)).

Though Canadian Muslims are more critical of the federal government and Trudeau's performance during the conflict than Canadian Jews, neither group offers government officials much kudos:

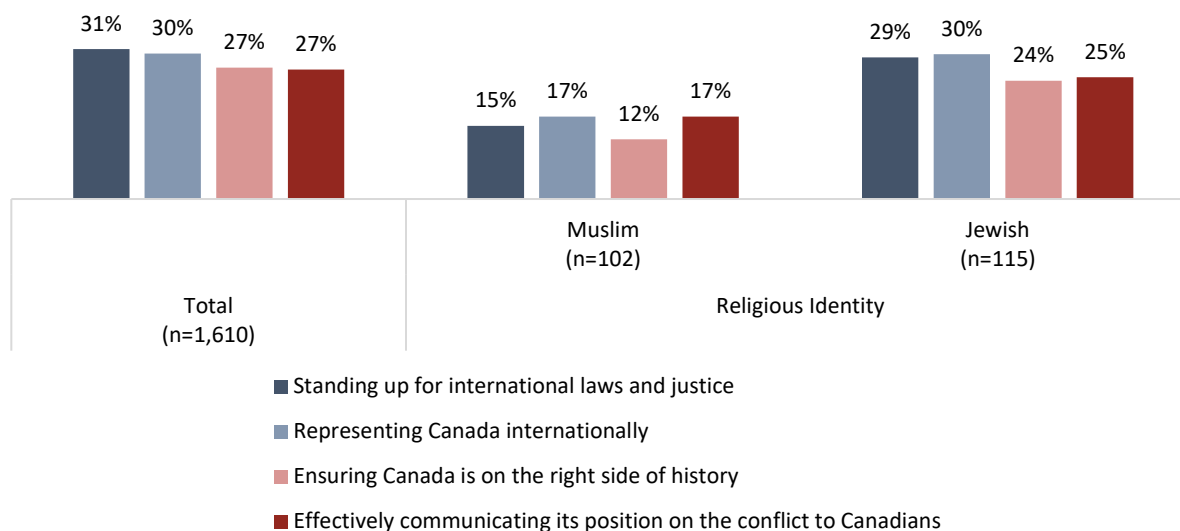
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**Percentage who believe the Canadian government led by Trudeau has done a good or great job on the following:**



Canada joined 10 other countries in ceasing funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the near east (UNRWA) after Israel alleged some of the agency's staff participated in the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas. This is viewed as the right move by a majority of Canadians, while two-in-five (42%) want Canada to continue funding UNRWA.

Past Liberal voters lean towards believing funding to UNRWA should continue. A majority of 2021 NDP voters also would prefer Canada continue funding the relief agency. By a four-to-one margin, past CPC voters see it as the right move to cut off funding for the foreseeable future:

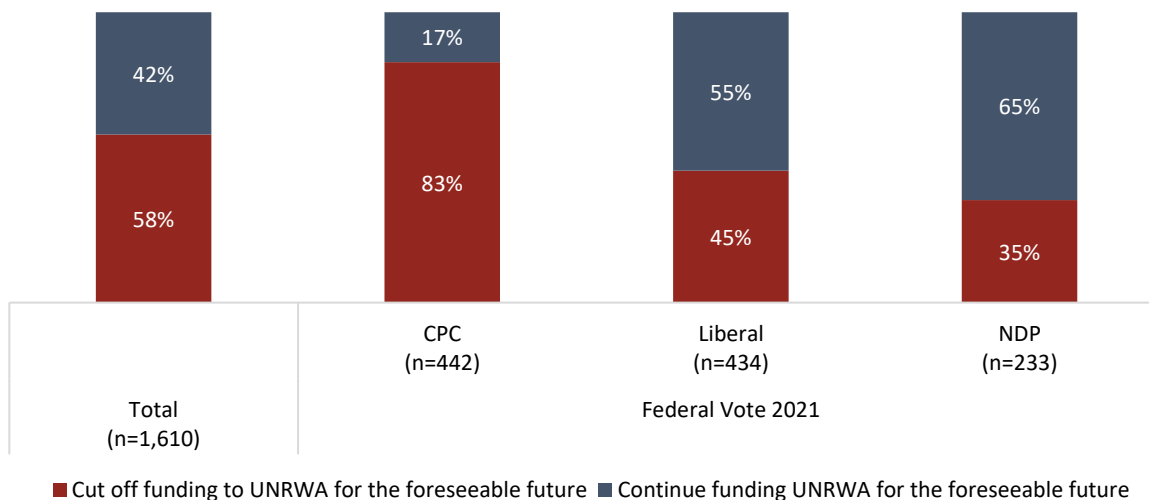
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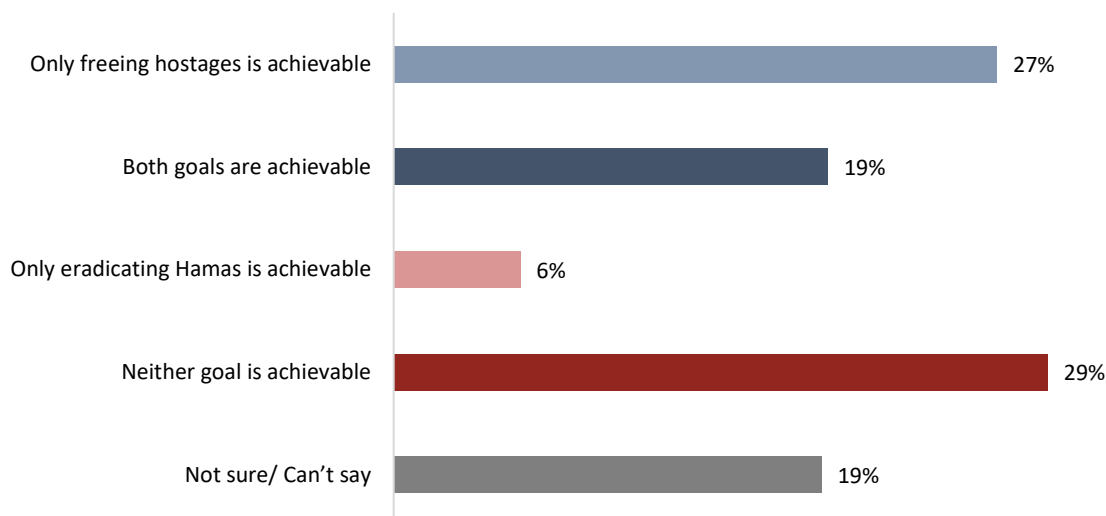
**If it were up to you – what would you do about Canada’s funding to the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees:**



**Part Four: Expectations for the future**

Israel has **resisted calls** for anything more than temporary ceasefires as it aims to completely eradicate Hamas in Gaza. Israel **also wants to free all the hostages taken** in the Oct. 7 attack before it ends the war. Canadians are skeptical Israel will be able to accomplish its aims. One-in-five (19%) believe it can eliminate Hamas in Gaza and free all the hostages, but more (29%) believe neither is possible:

**In your opinion, are Israel's goals achievable, or not?  
(All respondents, n=1,610)**



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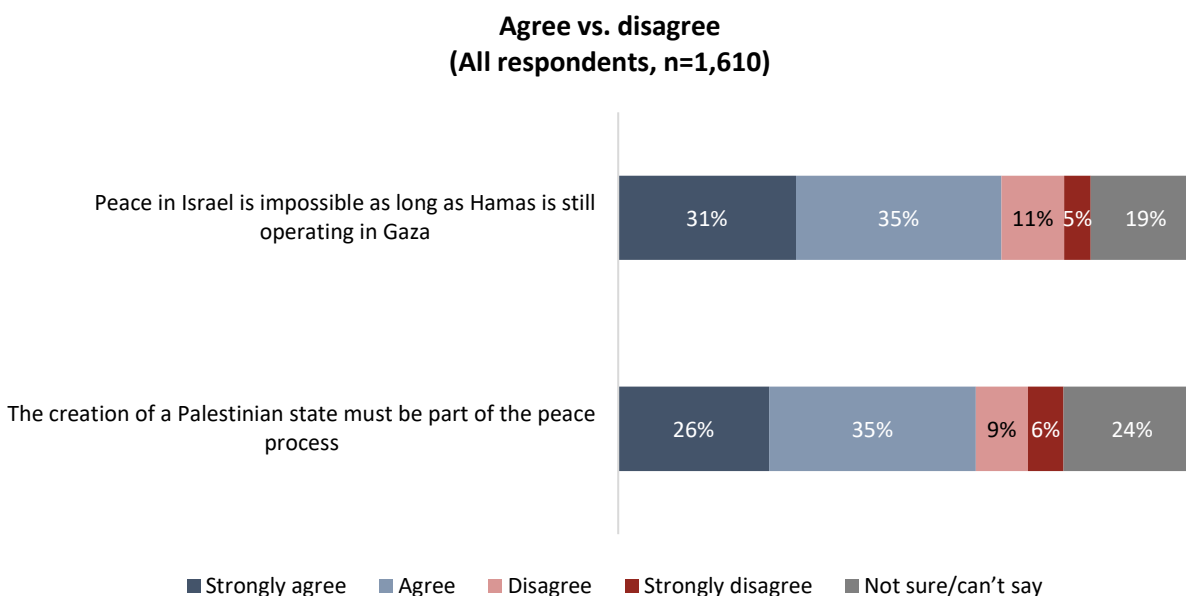
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While Hamas still exists, Canadians are concerned that peace will remain elusive in Israel. Two-thirds (66%) believe peace is impossible as long as Hamas is still operating in Gaza.

Israel's [continued resistance](#) to Palestinian statehood is perhaps another missing stepping stone in the eyes of many Canadians on the path to peace. Most (61%) believe the two-state solution is an integral part of the peace process. This is a majority opinion among Canadian Muslims (90%) and Jews (55%, [see detailed tables](#)).



There appears to be a pessimism among Canadians that peace is possible at all. Indeed, among those that Hamas' continued operation in Gaza is a barrier to peace, only one-third (34%) believe eliminating Hamas is an achievable goal.

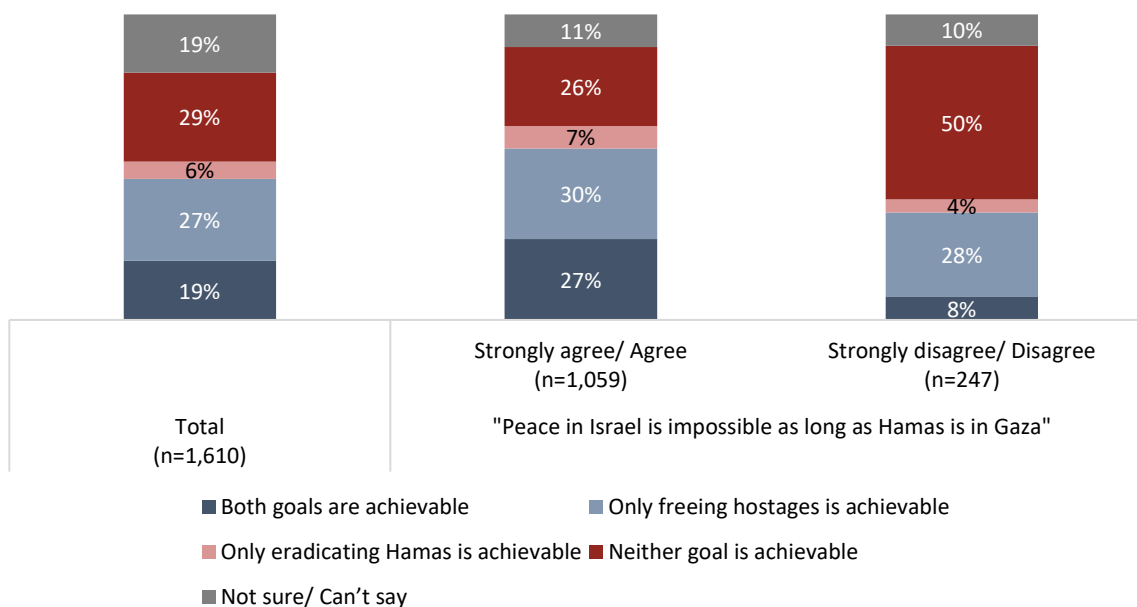
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**In your opinion, are Israel's goals achievable, or not?**



*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*

*For detailed results by religion and other cross-tabulations, [click here](#).*

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