

Public See Blame to Share in Israel-Hezbollah Conflict

Americans find room to criticize both sides in the Israel-Hezbollah war: A majority says Hezbollah is mainly to blame for civilian casualties in Lebanon, given its location in civilian areas. But most also say Israel hasn't done enough to avoid those casualties.

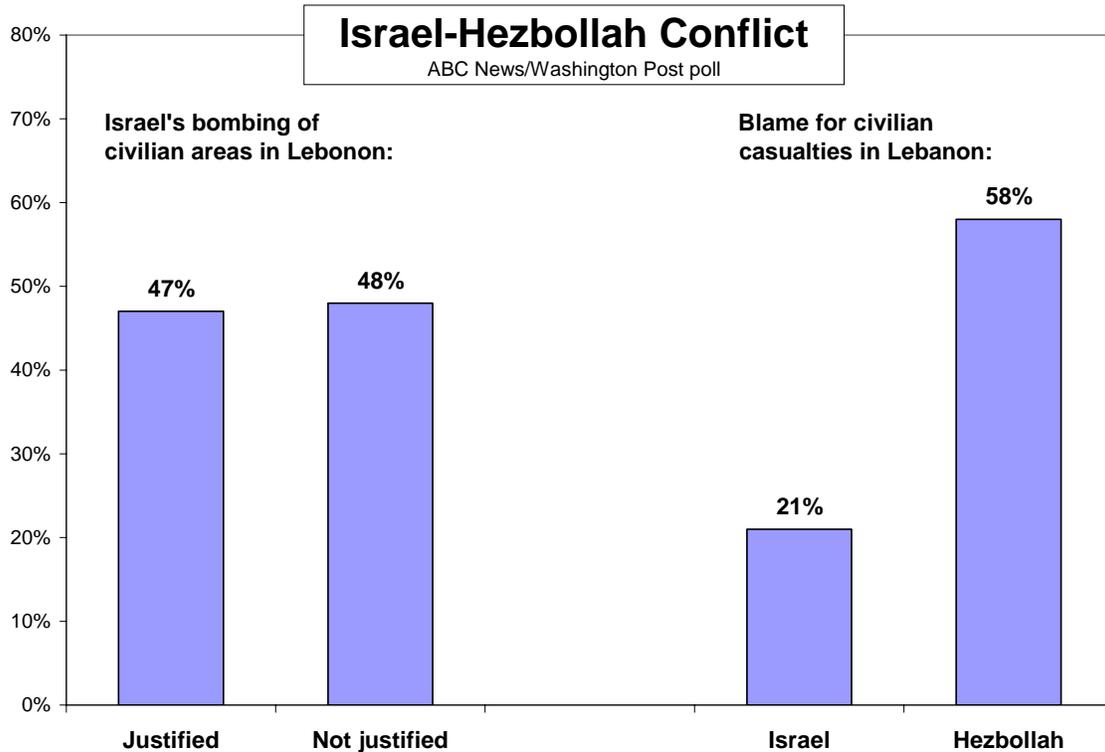
Indeed Americans divide evenly on whether Israel's bombing of civilian areas is justified – a tepid level of support for a longtime ally. And while very few blame Israel alone for the conflict, more blame both sides equally than blame only Hezbollah.



Just 38 percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll say Israel is “doing all it reasonably can” to avoid civilian casualties in Lebanon, while 54 percent say it should do more. By contrast, in a June ABC/Post poll, 58 percent said the United States was doing all it could to avoid harming civilians in Iraq.

Despite the lack of widespread support for the Israeli actions, nearly six in 10 Americans primarily blame Hezbollah for causing Lebanese casualties by locating its rockets and

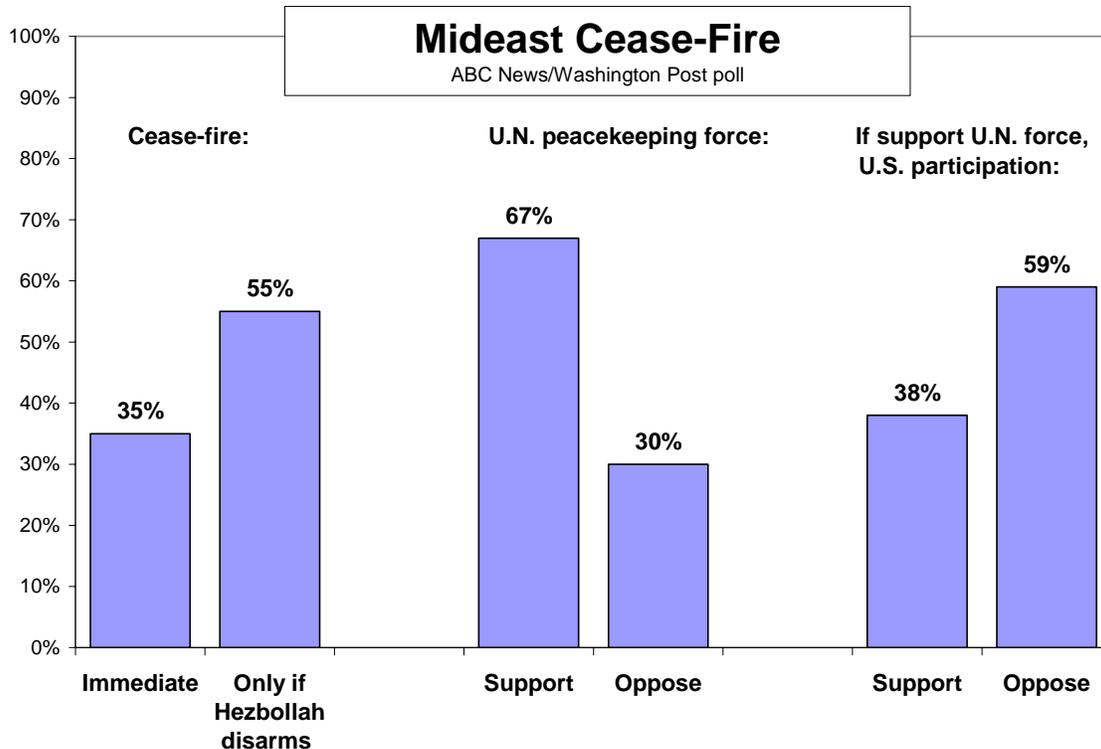
fighters in civilian areas; just two in 10 say Israel's more to blame, for bombing those areas.



More generally, 32 percent say Israel has been using too much force in the current conflict, about as many as say it's using the right amount. Fewer, about two in 10, say it's not using enough force.

CEASE-FIRE – On a cease-fire, public sentiment is more with Israel. Fifty-five percent say it should agree to a cease-fire only if Hezbollah disarms first, a position taken last week by Israel and the United States alike. (A cease-fire plan at the United Nations faltered this weekend on Lebanese complaints that it didn't call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces.)

Ultimately, two-thirds support creation of a U.N. peacekeeping force to separate the combatants. But among those who support a U.N. force, nearly six in 10 say the United States should not participate in it. In addition to the risks, this likely reflects public unease with the idea of placing U.S. forces under U.N. command.



In terms of direct U.S. interests, just over a third of Americans think the battle between Israel and Hezbollah will worsen the situation for the United States in Iraq. More, 54 percent, say it won't make much difference there. (George W. Bush gets mixed marks for handling the Israel-Hezbollah situation: 43 percent approve, 50 percent disapprove.)

Most, moreover, think it will come to naught for Israel: Just 21 percent think the conflict will end in a way that makes Israel more secure, while nearly three-quarters think Israel's security will be either unchanged, or worse than it was when the fighting began.

When fighting ends, Israel will be	
More secure	21%
Less secure	13
About the same	60

GROUPS – Views on the conflict are strongly influenced by factors including political partisanship, ideology, race and religious preference. Republicans are substantially more supportive of Israel, Democrats less so. One reason is that support for Israel spikes among conservatives and evangelical white Protestants, core Republican groups.

Overall, for instance, about six in 10 Republicans call the Israeli attacks on Hezbollah targets in civilian areas justified, while six in 10 Democrats disagree. Independents split evenly on the question.

Republicans by more than a 4-1 margin blame Hezbollah more than Israel for Lebanese civilian casualties; Democrats blame Hezbollah as well, but by a much narrower margin, less than 2-1. And about seven in 10 Republicans say Israel should agree to a cease-fire only after Hezbollah disarms; just 48 percent of Democrats agree. Reluctance to contribute U.S. troops to a U.N. peacekeeping force, however, crosses partisan lines.

As noted, ideology plays a key role in partisan differences. Conservatives are twice as likely as liberals to call the Israeli bombing justified, much more likely to blame Hezbollah for Lebanese civilian deaths and more likely to say Israel should agree to a cease-fire only if Hezbollah disarms first.

Race and religion also are factors, with whites, especially white evangelical Protestants, particularly supportive of Israel.

	Israel bombing justified	Blame Hezbollah for civilian casualties
All	47%	58%
Democrats	34	51
Republicans	62	70
Independents	48	58
Whites	52	62
Non-whites	30	45
Wh. evang. Prot.	57	69
Catholics	45	56
No religion	39	50
Liberals	28	48
Moderates	47	59
Conservatives	56	63

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone August 3-6, 2006, among a random national sample of 1,002 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and Jon Cohen.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1, 2a-2c. Separately released.

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling (ITEM)?

8/6/06 - Summary Table*

	Approve	Disapprove	No op.
d. The situation between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon	43	50	7

*Item d asked of half sample.

3-18. Separately released.

19. On another subject, who do you think is more to blame for the current conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon - (Israel), (Hezbollah), or both equally?

	Israel	Hezbollah	Both equally	Other (vol.)	No op.
8/6/06	7	39	46	1	6

20. Do you think Israel is (using too much force) in Lebanon, (not using enough force), or is using about the right amount of force?

	Using too much force	Not using enough force	Using about the right amount of force	No opinion
8/6/06	32	22	35	11

21. Israel says it has been bombing rocket launchers and other Hezbollah targets located in civilian areas, saying this is necessary for its self-defense even if civilian casualties occur. Do you think Israel is or is not justified in bombing Hezbollah targets located in areas where civilians may be killed or wounded?

	Is justified	Is NOT justified	No opinion
8/6/06	47	48	5

22. Who do you blame more for the civilian casualties in Lebanon - (Hezbollah for locating its fighters and rocket launchers) in civilian areas, or (Israel for bombing Hezbollah targets) in those areas?

	Hezbollah	Israel	Other/neither (vol.)	Both equally (vol.)	No opin.
8/6/06	58	21	2	10	9

23. Do you think Israel is doing all it reasonably can do to try to avoid civilian casualties in Lebanon, or do you think it should do more?

	Doing all it can	Should do more	No opinion
8/6/06	38	54	8

Compare to:

Do you think the United States is doing all it reasonably can do to try to avoid civilian casualties in Iraq, or do you think it should do more?

	US doing all it can	US should do more	No opin.
6/25/06	58	39	3
3/23/03	82	15	4
10/15/01*	85	12	2

*Afghanistan

24. Do you think Israel (should agree to an immediate, unconditional cease-fire in Lebanon), or do you think it (should agree to a cease-fire only if Hezbollah disarms first)?

	Immediate, unconditional cease-fire	Only if Hezbollah disarms first	No opinion
8/6/06	35	55	10

25. As part of a cease-fire agreement, would you support or oppose the United Nations sending a peacekeeping force to southern Lebanon?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
8/6/06	67	30	2

26. (IF SUPPORT, Q25) Do you think the United States should or should not send U.S. troops as part of that peacekeeping force?

	Yes, should	No, should not	Depends (vol.)	No opinion
8/6/06	38	59	2	1

25/26 NET:

	----- Support -----					No, should not	No opinion
	NET	Yes	No	Depends	DK		
8/6/06	67	26	39	2	1	30	2

27. Do you think the current conflict between Israel and Hezbollah will end in a way that makes Israel (more) secure from attacks, (less) secure, or will Israel's security be about the same as it was before this conflict?

	More secure	Less secure	About the same	No opinion
8/6/06	21	13	60	6

28. Do you think the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah will help or hurt the situation for the United States in Iraq, or won't it make much difference there?

	Help	Hurt	Won't make much difference	No opinion
8/6/06	7	35	54	4

END