Measuring Elite Sentiment on the Palestine-Israeli Conflict

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(Accepted to the 2025 APSA Annual Meeting)

Background Information

The Israeli-Palestine conflict is an ongoing military, political, and religious conflict about land and self-determination occurring within the Middle East, and more specifically these West Banks and the Gaza Strip. The modern phase of this conflict began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the rise of the nationalist movements among Jews and Arabs. Both the Israel and Palestine governments have laid claims to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and tensions significantly rose with the establishment of the State of Israel. Over the years the United Nations has tried to pass multiple resolutions aimed at a peaceful solution, particularly a two-state solution, yet none have proved to have lasting success.

- Each year hundreds of world leaders from various countries come to meet at the the United Nations General Assembly General Debate where leaders discuss various world issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- During these debates world leaders deliver speeches and express their views toward this conflict, with variation in expressed sentiment towards Israel and Palestine.
- The goal of this project is to collect new data necessary to test different hypotheses in future research that relate to how various types countries would vote and take action in the UN based on the sentiment they express in the UNGAD and voting patterns.

Methodology:

- Examined resolutions of United Nations Document Database under the subsection of the "Palestine Question"
- Used the search function to find clauses mentioning "Israel" or "Palestine"
- Copied and pasted clauses into an excel spreadsheet under either Palestine or Israel section, with each entry being labeled by their resolution number and year.
- Collected data from the United Nations General Assembly General Debate Corpus (UNGDC) searching for keywords "Israel" and "Palestine" to limit data to speeches that were relevant to our analysis and ended up with 5,908 relevant observations consisting of relevant sentences or paragraphs from the world leader's speeches
- Hand coded speeches as either a positive, negative, or neutral to each country, with a "-1" entry being negative, "0" being neutral, and "1" being positive.
- Sentiment Analysis using supervised machine learning.
- Each hand coded observation was then documented in a separate category on the excel spreadsheet by either democracy or autocracy and United States ally or not based on each world leader's country from which they gave an observation. United States ally was documented by a "1" and not a United States Ally was documented by a "0." Autocracies were documented by a "0" and democracies documented by a "1."

Sentiment: hand code (1, 0, -1, or NA) – Israel Dimension

Positive (1): talk about the rights of Israel (if right to exist it is positive stance, if rights in general it is positive sentiment), back Israel, commitment to Israel security, Praise Israel. Tribute to Israel. Israel will flourish. Talking about persecution, suffering, or massacre of the Jews. Israel security concern. Connection to the land of Israel. Zionism (could be positive depending on context). strategic alliance with Israel, support normalization with Israel, historic ties with Israel, supporting Israel's peace efforts, deepening economic ties with Israel, cooperation with Israel, Israel as a model democracy, Israel's right to self-defense, Israel's contribution to regional stability, Israel's technological advancements, Israeli innovation, Israeli humanitarian aid

Neutral (0): demanding equal rights of all parties, Arab-Israel peace, implementation of agreements between Israel and Palestine, peaceful resolution of the conflict, solution to the Palestinian question, resume negotiations, peaceful negotiation, mutual accommodation, peace achieved, end the conflict, Middle East stability, regional stability,
diplomatic dialogue, international community's role, peace process, peaceful coexistence, Middle East conflict resolution, recognizing UN resolutions, Israel-Palestine cooperation,

Negative (-1): Zionism (depending on context – for example: Zionist entity), imperialism, illegal occupation, occupied territories, evacuation of territories occupied by Israel, condemn Israel, Israel aggression, Israel occupation, Israel arrogance, Israel defiance, withdraw from territories occupied in the 1967 war, condemn Israel activity, Israel crimes, Israel massacres, Zionist colonization, concern over some Israeli action, Jewish settler, sanctions against Israel, Israeli apartheid, Israeli violations, Israeli expansionism, Israeli oppression, Israeli settler violence, Israeli human rights abuses, security threats from Israel

Not Applicable (NA): If the sentence does not explicitly talk about Israel, code isr_sentiment NA. Keep in mind that zero sentiment is neutral sentiment, but not mentioning or talking about Israel in the sentence is not neutral, but NA.

Figure 1: 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Table (1)

The proportion of Israel sentiment by US allaince status

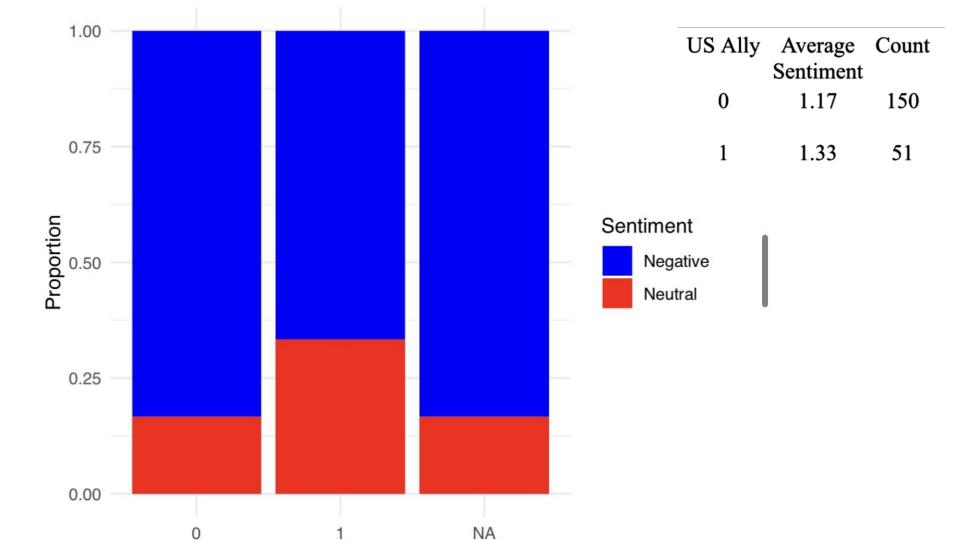| US Ally	Average Sentiment	Count
0	1.17	150
1	1.33	51

Sentiment
Negative
Neutral

Figure 3: This figure displays the proportion of either negative or neutral sentiment by either a US ally, which is marked by "1" on the graph, or a non-US ally, marked by a "0" on the graph. Average sentiment for US ally status and number of observations made for each is listed in the top left corner.

Table (2)

The proportion of Israel sentiment by regime type

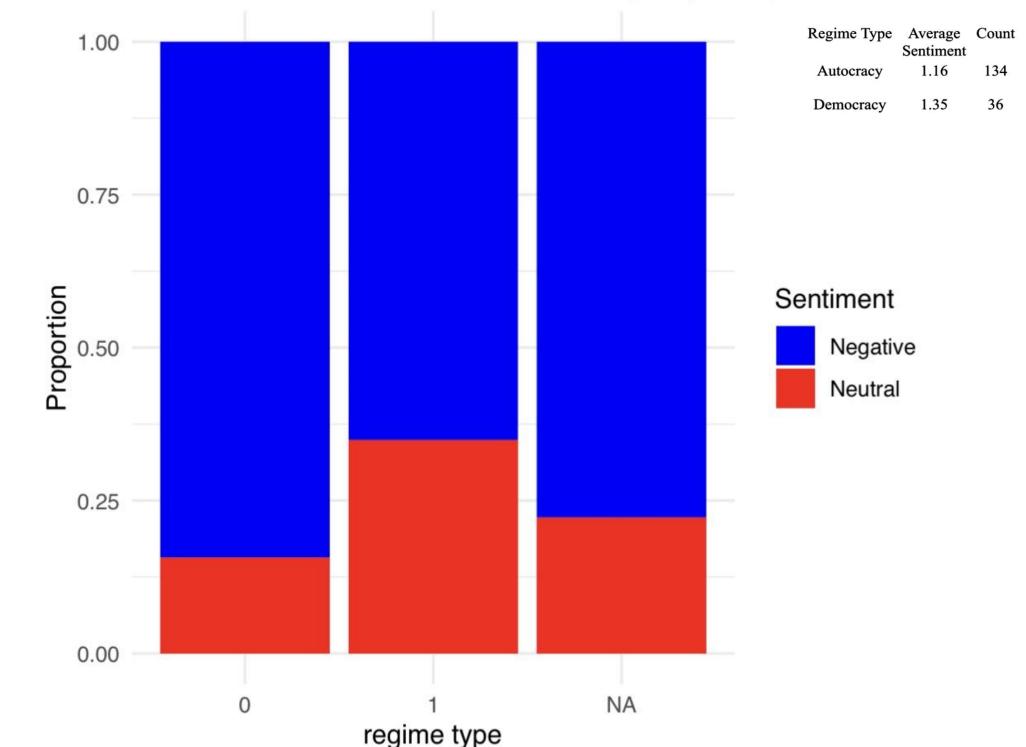| Regime Type	Average Sentiment	Count
Autocracy	1.16	134
Democracy	1.35	36

Sentiment
Negative
Neutral

Figure 4: This figure displays the proportion of either negative or neutral sentiment by either a democracy, which is marked by "1" on the graph, or an autocracy, marked by a "0" on the graph. Average sentiment for each government type and number of observations made for each is listed in the top left corner.

Figure 2: This figure displays the hand coding guidelines for what is considered a positive, negative, or neutral observation for Israel's dimension.

Preliminary Results:

Tables show preliminary results from 200 observations (speeches) only. The current research conducted was only able to observe the language that the general assembly resolutions used towards each country and only a small portion of the hand coded observations regarding elite sentiment towards Israel.

In the process of going through the general assembly resolutions passed by the United Nations regarding the Question of Palestine, we found that the majority of resolutions featured language that either condemned or expressed concern over Israel's actions and supported the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine.
- Most common demands for Israel to abide by were an end all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and a cessation of violence and destruction against Palestinian people and structures.
- These demands asserted that the Israeli presence in the Occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to international law
- The UN resolutions repeatedly used language such as "expressing grave concern" and "stresses" to address its dissatisfaction with Israeli violence, yet rarely outright condemns the violence in the general resolutions.

The data analysis collected during the hand coded observations are shown in both figures 3 and 4 where it displays a graph of average sentiment in regarding US allies vs. non-US allies and democracies vs. autocracies.
- It is worth noting that in the graphs only negative and neutral sentiment is displayed, as barely any positive sentiment were found in the 200 observations.
- The data shows us that US allies are more likely to be neutral towards Israel which reflects how the US keeps its allies on board to their strong relations with Israel.
- On the other dimeson of comparison regarding democratic vs autocratic governments, it was found that democratic leaders are less likely to express negative sentiments towards Israel.

Limitations and Future Implications for Measuring Elite Sentiment and Future Potential Research Based on Data Collected

- Only a small portion of the data was collected which could potentially lead to error in some of the observations (we are still working on hand-coding more speeches)
- For the future of the project we plan on hand coding the same observations and seeing how our results match out to establish inter-coder relatability to make sure our data is accurate.
- The end goal is to collect enough hand coded data to establish a system that can automatically determines a sentiment of positive, negative, or neutral based on an observation.
- After gaining data for the sentiment part of the project we look to move towards testing different hypotheses for predicting sentiment and policy positions towards Israel and Palestine and gathering data from the UNGA voting records with how they converge or diverge from the sentiment expressed in the UNGDA speeches.

Resources (Required poster section)

United Nations General Assembly Resolutions Database
Barak, O. (2005). The failure of the Israeli–palestinian peace process, 1993–2000. Journal of Peace Research, 42(6), 719–736. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305057889
Shushan, D. (2017). 6. Palestine and Israel at the United Nations: Partition, recognition, and membership. Charter of the United Nations, 157–173. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300182538-008