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**PALESTINIAN  
VIEWS ON WAR  
AND PEACE  
WITH ISRAEL**



**DAVID  
POLLOCK**





# **A Nation Divided**

**Palestinian Views on  
War and Peace with Israel**



**David Pollock**

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# Introduction and Overview



THIS STUDY ANALYZES PALESTINIAN POPULAR ATTITUDES IN THE West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, based on numerous systematic surveys conducted there by the author and qualified local experts from 2010 to 2020. During this entire period, the author worked mostly with the Palestine Center for Public Opinion (PCPO), based in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem in the West Bank, but also with several other highly credible Palestinian pollsters cited in the text. He has consulted regularly with all these survey research professionals ever since helping conduct the first-ever scientific Palestinian public opinion polls in the immediate aftermath of the Oslo Accords of September 1993.

Each one of these surveys comprised face-to-face interviews with representative random, geographic probability samples of between 1,000 and 1,500 respondents. All interviews were conducted entirely by trained local Palestinian professionals, with strict assurances of confidentiality and extensive quality-control checks administered by experienced Palestinian field supervisors. Each interview consisted of at least thirty questions, many with multiple response options, plus appropriate detailed demographic information. The result over ten years is literally hundreds of thousands of relevant data points. Analyzing these results, and exploring their trends and patterns over time, yields this comprehensive and factual account of Palestinian public opinion.

In addition, this analysis has several noteworthy subsidiary features. First, it consistently distinguishes among public attitudes in the three major territorial units covered: the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. The first two have total Palestinian populations of approximately two million each; East Jerusalem is home to around 350,000 Palestinians who have the special status, unlike the others, of being permanent residents of Israel. The circumstances and opinions of these different populations, separated by geography, opposing governments, and Israeli security barriers, diverge significantly. That is why this study makes a deliberate decision to deal with their respective survey results separately; lumping them all together tends to obscure rather than illuminate the subject. Further, to ensure the

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statistical validity of the findings from the three areas, the random survey samples for each include at least 500 respondents.

Second, this study emphasizes trends in Palestinian attitudes toward Israel, the United States, and the peace process, more than the narrower snapshots of internal Palestinian political rivalries or broader questions about abstract values, which are the meat of other survey analyses. Those questions are taken into account here as well, but mainly as they relate to Palestinian attitudes toward specific topical foreign policy issues. In this context, shifting attitudes toward other Arabs, Iran, and extraregional players like Russia or Turkey also receive due attention. The result is an account with both a longer timeframe and a sharper focus on the issues most directly relevant to U.S. policy options.

Third, the surveys analyzed here include many key questions omitted from other works. Among them are questions about personal (not just political) priorities, practical problems of everyday life, and even emotional reactions to positive or negative interactions with Israelis. Topics regarded as taboo such as individual intentions regarding the refugee “right of return,” preferences for either Palestinian or Israeli citizenship, and religiously motivated opinions are all directly addressed. In addition, the surveys pose questions about very long-term expectations and preferences; for instance, whether conflict with Israel should continue even after a “two-state solution” is concluded, and whether Israel will exist thirty or even a hundred years from today.

Fourth, this analysis makes use of polls by a number of different Palestinian pollsters, rather than depending upon a single source. The primary polls cited were devised and supervised directly by the author, in order to ensure the highest possible level of quality control. But other polls by the most reliable local survey research organizations are cited as well to complement the primary ones: to fill in gaps in subject coverage or timeframe, to check for inter-pollster reliability, and to bolster the overall credibility of the data. In a few cases, the author even ran the same questions concurrently with two different pollsters to confirm that the results were reasonably congruent. In other cases, he added qualitative focus-group or targeted in-depth elite interviews to round out and illuminate the quantitative findings.

Fifth, and finally, the survey instruments employed for this study were systematically “scrubbed” to ensure the most neutral wording and objective findings possible. Individual questions were stripped of slogans, “loaded” phrases, and unbalanced response options to the greatest extent feasible. Entire questionnaires were carefully constructed to avoid sequence bias, undue repetition, or awkward transitions. Translations were back-checked through several iterations to ensure maximum consistency and clarity. And

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each questionnaire was pretested on field supervisors, interviewers, and random respondents.

For some of the most sensitive questions, respondents were asked to rank their preferences rather than be forced into simplistic yes-or-no answers. In addition, to preempt any suggestion that interviewers were “leading the witness,” they were warned never to press respondents for a different answer if they first refused, said “don’t know,” or volunteered “both” or some other idiosyncratic response. In a few cases, a fictitious item was even included in “awareness,” or “how much have you heard or read about,” questions as a check on disingenuous responses.

In short, the pollsters expended every effort to ensure the fairest possible reflection of Palestinian popular attitudes, whether or not they are “party line” or politically correct. As a result, these data sets make it possible to draw accurate conclusions about the extent to which Palestinians agree or disagree with their political leaders, or with conventional wisdom—or with each other. This will enable a useful exploration—which this study ultimately attempts—of the possible policy implications of Palestinian public opinion.

### Summary of Major Themes

The overarching conclusion from the empirical data is that the Palestinian public, as the title suggests, is divided, along many different dimensions. Some of these divisions are fairly deep, others, less so. But contrary to common perceptions, there is considerable divergence of views in Palestinian society, at least under the surface. This introductory section briefly outlines the major aspects of these cleavages, the accumulated evidence for which forms the bulk of the detailed analysis to follow.

#### *Trends over Time*

Polling reveals trends on Palestinian attitudes generally and support for the two-state solution specifically.

**Attitudes change.** The first significant division in Palestinian public opinion is between then and now: attitudes changed over the past decade, in response to changing circumstances, altered perceptions, and perhaps the mere passage of time. In recent years, Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank/East Jerusalem have generally become both more pessimistic and less reconciled to the prospect of peace with Israel.

**The two-state solution has minority support.** Related to this is a second key finding: the Palestinian public in both Gaza and the West Bank/East

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Jerusalem is sharply divided over the basic question of a two-state solution. In earlier years, this division hovered around a 60–40 favorable margin.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, however, the margin has been reversed, and today popular backing for two states has become a minority view (see figures A.1 and A.2).<sup>2</sup> This is the case amid insistent messaging from both Fatah and Hamas emphasizing their claim to “all of historic Palestine”—meaning the end of Israel as a separate state.

### ***Strategy vs. Tactics***

A polling focus on strategy versus tactics indicates some daylight in Palestinian stances.

#### **The public is more flexible on some tactical medium-term issues.**

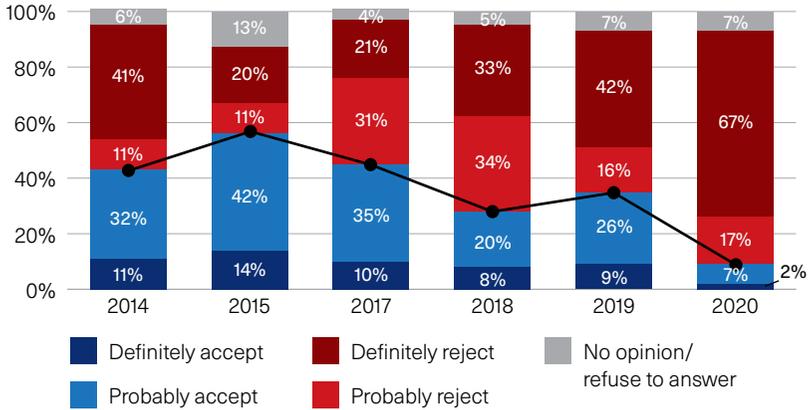
Third, the Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem tend to have different attitudes toward short-term or medium-term issues, as opposed to very long-term national goals. On many issues, their views tilt in a pragmatic direction. Majorities, for example, support various specific forms of economic cooperation with Israel even now. Substantial minorities also back certain specific, highly controversial concessions, even on “permanent status” issues, in order to achieve a two-state solution some day: namely, ceding the refugee “right of return” to Israel, or recognizing it as “the homeland of the Jewish people” (see figures A.3–A.6).

Most recently, to cite additional tactical flexibility at the popular level, majorities of Palestinians even support resuming negotiations with Israel without preconditions. And they opposed their own governments’ diplomatic boycott of Washington and preemptive rejection of the “Trump peace plan,” preferring to wait and examine it after its release. The public is also split over continuing bonus payments to prisoners, rather than united behind this provocative policy, as Palestinian officials often claim. In all these ways, there is a clear—if often overlooked—divide between elite and “street” opinion, with Palestinian publics notably more moderate than their political leaders.

#### **But sharing Jerusalem is a tougher sticking point than many believe.**

One unexpectedly hardline attitude in these findings concerned Jerusalem in the polls from 2017–20. Around half of West Bank and Gaza respondents “strongly agree” with this proposition: “We should demand Palestinian rule over all of Jerusalem, east and west, rather than agree to share or divide any part of it with Israel.” An additional 25%–30% agreed “somewhat” with that view. These new figures confirmed results from a 2017 poll that went unreported as an outlier or statistical anomaly at the time.<sup>3</sup>

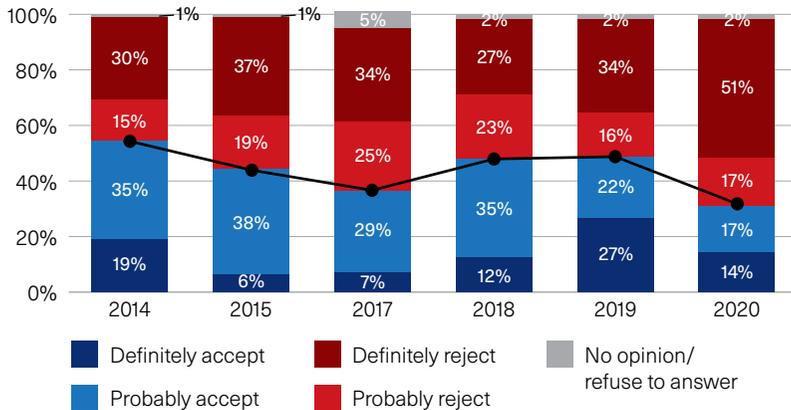
**Figure A.1.** “Some people say that, if it might help to end the occupation, the Palestinians should accept the principle of ‘two states for two peoples—the Palestinian people and the Jewish people.’ Others say no, on the contrary, the principle is wrong and Palestinians should reject it because we should not accept a state for the Jewish people. Which view is closer to your own?”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

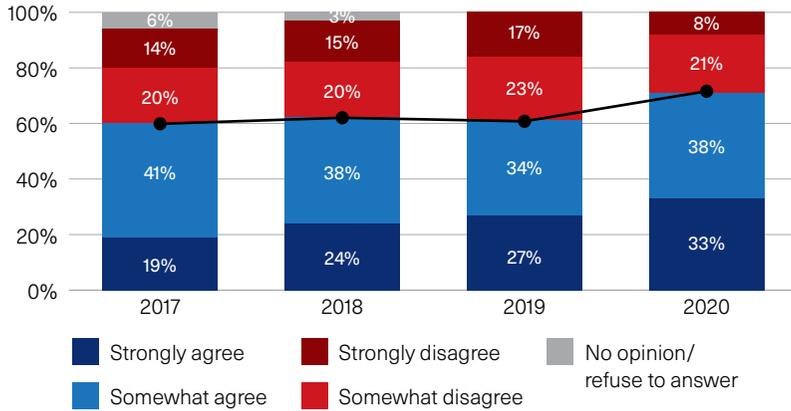
**Figure A.2.** “Some people say that if it might help to end the occupation, the Palestinians should accept the principle of ‘two states for two peoples—the Palestinian people and the Jewish people.’ Others say no, on the contrary, the principle is wrong and Palestinians should reject it because we should not accept a state for the Jewish people. Which view is closer to your own?”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

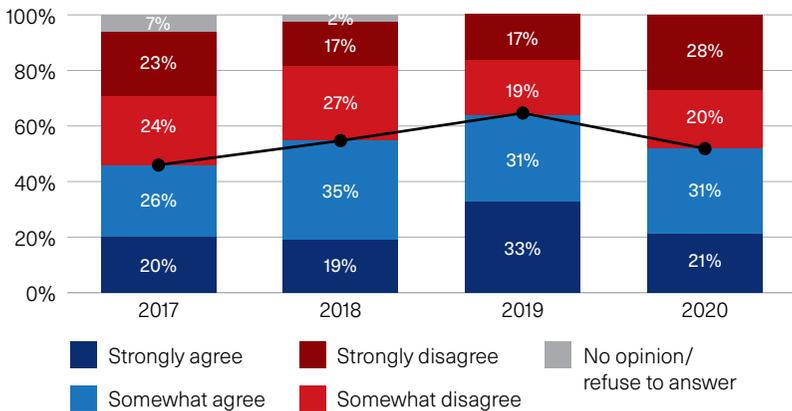
**Figure A.3.** “Please tell me if you agree or disagree strongly, or only somewhat, with the following statement: Regardless of what’s right, the reality is that most Israeli settlers will probably stay where they are, and most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

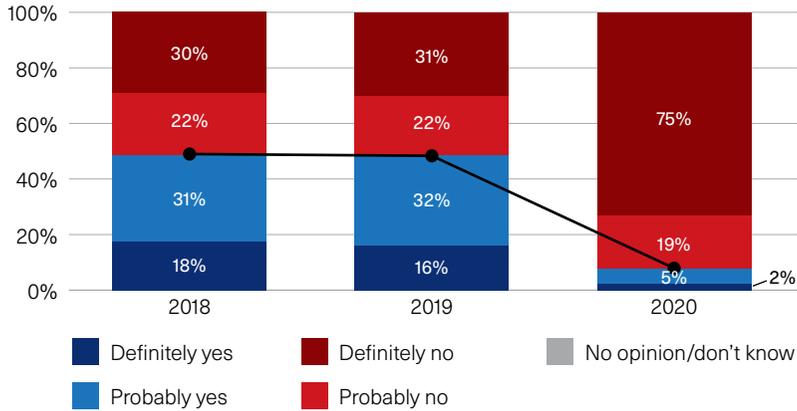
**Figure A.4.** “Please tell me if you agree or disagree strongly, or only somewhat, with the following statement: Regardless of what’s right, the reality is that most Israeli settlers will probably stay where they are, and most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

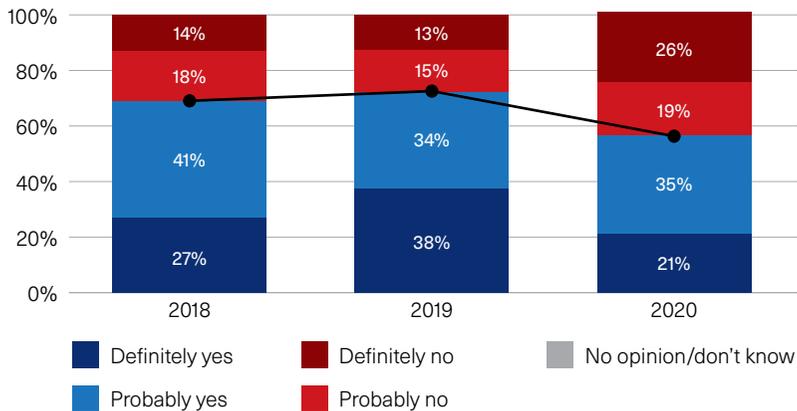
**Figure A.5.** "If there are negotiations with Israel, do you think that the Palestinian leadership should accept that the 'right of return' will apply to the West Bank and Gaza but not to Israel, if that is the very last step required to end the occupation and achieve a real independent Palestinian state?"



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure A.6.** "If there are negotiations with Israel, do you think that the Palestinian leadership should accept that the 'right of return' will apply to the West Bank and Gaza but not to Israel, if that is the very last step required to end the occupation and achieve a real independent Palestinian state?"



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

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For some of these Palestinians, this apparently extreme position may simply mean that Jerusalem is more of a political slogan or a religious symbol than a lived reality. But those percentages are about the same for the Palestinians of East Jerusalem, who work and travel freely in the mostly Jewish half of the city west of the 1967 frontier. Other polls, however, have shown that when a similar question is presented as part of a package deal, leading toward a two-state solution, half or more of the overall Palestinian public has been prepared to accept divided control over the city. Indeed, when the author personally asked local interviewers about this in January 2020, they maintained that many respondents are probably just rebutting the Israeli claim to all of Jerusalem.

### ***The Public vs. the Politicians***

Distinctions between popular and elite Palestinian views also warrant close attention.

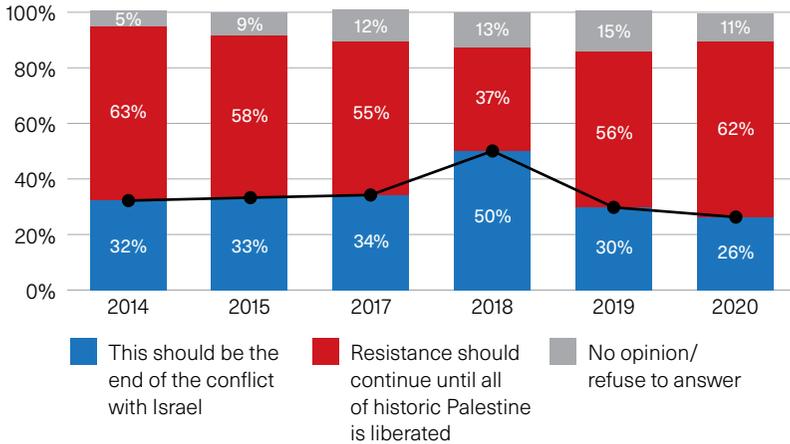
**The elite neglects the street.** A corollary finding is that such attitudinal divisions between the elite and the Palestinian street usually have little effect on internal policymaking, either by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank or by Hamas in Gaza. In this respect, the analysis presented here supports the following judgment, rendered in October 2019 by a leading Palestinian expert:

There are considerable differences among Palestinians on some of the most vital political issues and survey research can easily demonstrate the gap between the public and the policy makers. Yet, it is evident that Palestinian policy makers pay little attention to survey research and show little interest in finding out what Palestinians think.<sup>4</sup>

Given the limited impact of the Palestinian street on Palestinian policy, the concluding section of this essay must come to grips with how U.S. policy might take Palestinian public opinion into greater account.

**Majorities support no end to conflict.** At the same time, popular attitudes on some crucial long-term questions are similarly out of sync with official PA positions—but, in this case, are actually more hardline. Majorities in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem increasingly say that a two-state solution should *not* mean the end of conflict with Israel. Rather, around 60% would opt to continue the struggle to “liberate all of historic Palestine” (see figures A.7 and A.8). Reinforcing this point, around the same proportion now also say that any compromise with Israel should be only temporary.

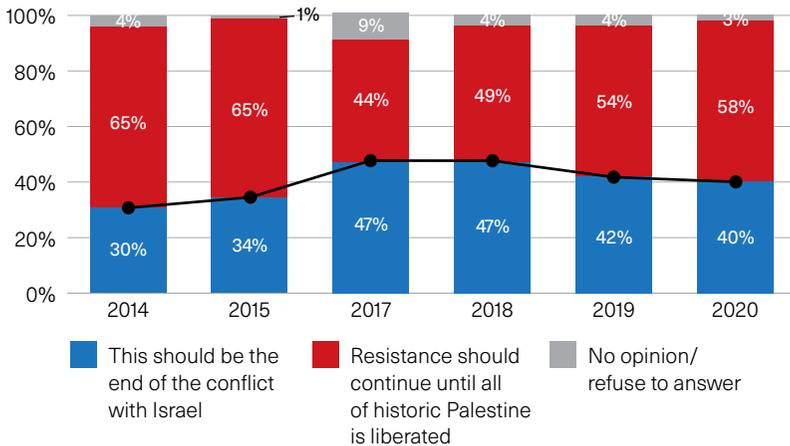
**Figure A.7.** “If the Palestinian leadership is able to negotiate a two-state solution with Israel, do you think that this should be the end of the conflict or that resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated?”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

**Figure A.8.** “If the Palestinian leadership is able to negotiate a two-state solution with Israel, do you think that this should be the end of the conflict or that resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated?”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

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Moreover, even larger majorities deny that Jews have any connection or rights to any land in historic Palestine.

Thus, short-term popular pragmatism coexists with long-term militancy going beyond the PA's formal acceptance of a two-state solution. Rather, these attitudes are more in tune with the pervasive Fatah and Hamas rhetoric, and even with PA textbooks and maps, about eventually regaining all of Palestine "from the river to the sea," at the expense of Israel's very existence.

### ***Limited Room for Maneuver***

These seemingly contradictory patterns of changing attitudes suggest short-term pragmatism but long-term maximalism, as well as gaps between elite and street opinion. This divergence leads to one conclusion: uncertainty.

So there is no evidence that the negative trend on permanent peace is inexorable. On the contrary, the larger point is that Palestinian attitudes are not static or impervious to influence, whether from within or without. During those brief interludes in the last ten years when negotiations with Israel got under way, the Palestinian public in each major geographic area generally moved in a modestly more moderate direction. Thus, the overall hardline trend could conceivably be reversed, if some positive stimuli reemerged on the scene.

Moreover, hardline attitudes on Israel's "right to exist" or its very long-term fate, and on the Palestinian "right" in principle to claim "all of historic Palestine, from the river to the sea," can conceivably coexist with a more pragmatic acceptance of Israel's reality for the foreseeable future. Those underlying long-term attitudes, in other words, may well be more aspirational than operational for much of the Palestinian public. In that sense, Israel's "cold peace" on the popular level with both Egypt and Jordan may be an analogous model—and those peace treaties have lasted, and served Israel's security very well, for more than forty and twenty-five years, respectively.

Thus, the Palestinian public's adherence to maximal historic claims need not be an insurmountable obstacle to a historic and enduring compromise of some kind with Israel. Palestinians' hostility might ebb with time if their experience with Israel during that time improves. And even if their underlying rejection of Israel's legitimacy persists, the pragmatic strand in Palestinian public opinion, and thus in popular behavior, would probably serve as a serious constraint on a total unraveling of any agreement with Israel—especially in the face of Israel's continued strong security hand.

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The polls show Palestinian leaders lacking credibility with their own public—so pragmatism might prevail one day, ironically despite all the maximalist dreams. But the record so far suggests that the public's short-term, relatively practical desires are often overridden by more hardline political decisions.

### *Demographic Differences*

**The young generation is moderate on tactics, but not on strategy.** On the generational divide, the dichotomy between short-term and long-term attitudes is even stronger for young Palestinians. Those ages eighteen to thirty, around half the adult population, are more moderate than their elders regarding the tactical issues just noted. However, they are no more moderate than the over-thirty cohort concerning the long-term issue of permanent peace—versus continuing conflict—with Israel, even after a two-state solution. This surprising phenomenon is the most striking finding from demographic analyses of the data, looking at age, gender, education, and other relevant categories.

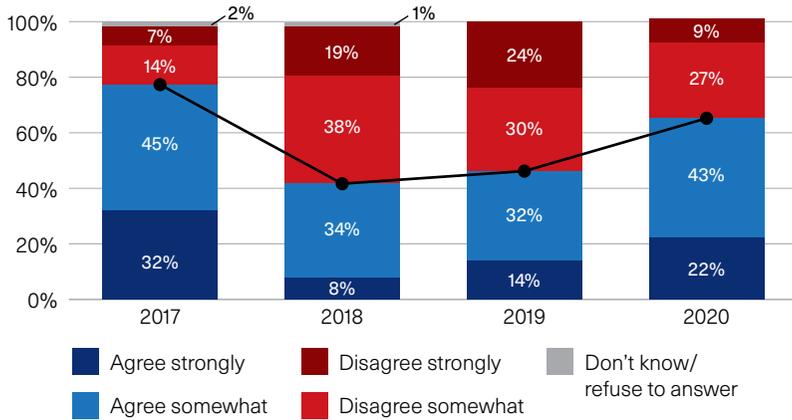
### *Geographic Divides*

Prevalent geographic divides encompass Gazans versus West Bankers, the case of Jerusalem Arabs, and broader Palestinian views on Israel compared to those of other Arab publics.

**Gazans are more moderate than West Bankers.** Even more surprising is another big finding, about a geographic divide between West Bank and Gaza attitudes. Contrary to common perceptions, Gazans are in fact more moderate than their West Bank counterparts on many tactical issues of relations with Israel. This pattern is particularly vivid in the five years after the 2014 Gaza war. Among Gazans, solid majorities want a ceasefire with Israel, an end to the violent border protests, and Israeli jobs and investment in their area—and even a radical shift by Hamas “to stop calling for Israel's destruction.” Among West Bankers, by contrast, those positions attract only minority support, though a slight shift in the opposite direction can be seen in 2020 (see figures A.9 and A.10).

**East Jerusalemites are a special case, with a new sharp shift away from Israel.** The 350,000 Palestinians of East Jerusalem, who enjoy access to Israeli jobs and other benefits, also differ from West Bankers and Gazans in their attitudinal profile. During the first half of the period covered, from 2010 to 2015, their expressed preference for Israeli over Palestinian citizenship rose from 35% to a remarkable 52%. Since then, however, polls show them to have an overwhelming preference for Palestinian citizenship.

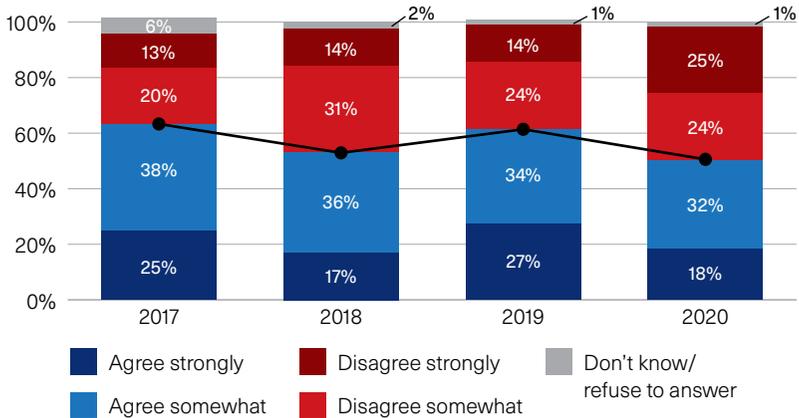
**Figure A.9.** “Please tell me if you agree or disagree strongly, or only somewhat, with the following statement: Hamas should stop calling for Israel’s destruction, and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure A.10.** “Please tell me if you agree or disagree strongly, or only somewhat, with the following statement: Hamas should stop calling for Israel’s destruction, and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

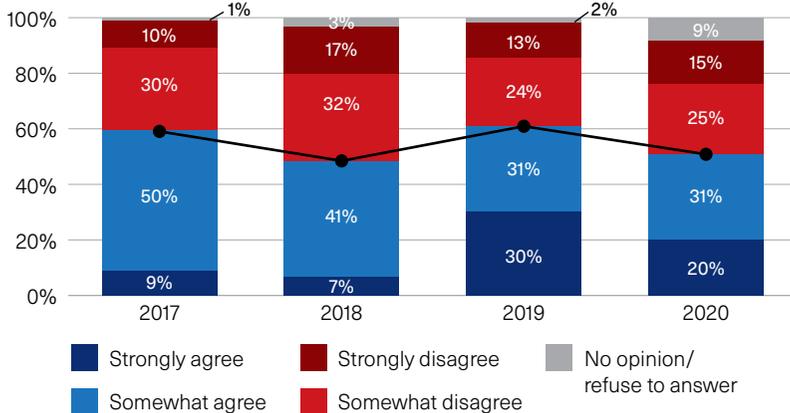
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This dramatic change seems due to their increased alienation from Israel as a result of the “knife intifada” in 2015–16, tensions over the al-Aqsa Mosque, and Israel’s tough security measures in response. The downturn reversed modestly in 2019, yet still serves as a vivid illustration of just how much and how quickly certain opinions can be transformed, and how different some Palestinians can be from others.

### **Palestinians are now less open to Israel than are many other Arabs.**

While the two-state solution has become a minority choice for these Palestinian publics, other polls show it now garners majority support among Arab publics in neighboring countries and in the Gulf. Two-thirds of those outside publics, on average, say their governments should “offer incentives” to both Israelis and Palestinians to compromise with each other, and a majority of Gazans, West Bankers, and East Jerusalem Palestinians agree. However, around 70% of these three populations say that other Arabs are moving toward rapprochement with Israel without regard for the Palestinian cause (see figures A.11 and A.12).

**Figure A.11.** “Regarding the role of other Arab governments toward the Palestinian cause, please tell me if you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: Arab governments should take a more active role in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, offering incentives to both sides to take more moderate positions.”

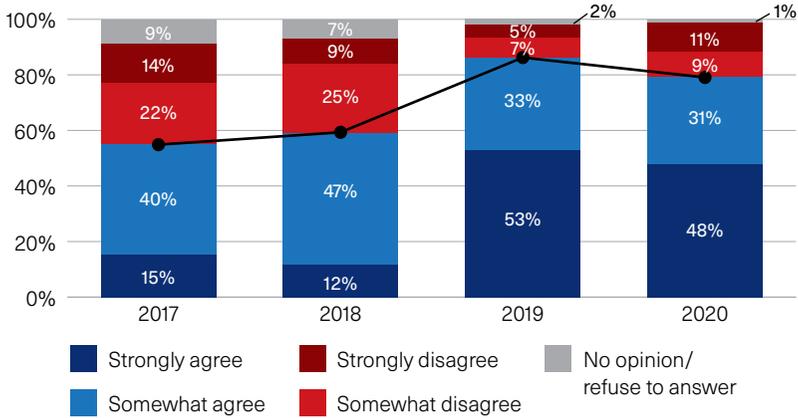


### **West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

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**Figure A.12.** “Regarding the role of other Arab governments toward the Palestinian cause, please tell me if you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: Arab governments should take a more active role in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, offering incentives to both sides to take more moderate positions.”



### Gaza respondents

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

## Notes

1. David Pollock, “Palestinians Want Hamas In, but Want Peace Talks Too,” Policy Alert, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 6, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/palestinians-want-hamas-in-but-want-peace-talks-too>.
2. David Pollock, “Half of Palestinians Still Want All of Palestine—But Most Would Compromise for Less,” *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 13, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/half-of-palestinians-still-want-all-of-palestine-but-most-would-compromise>.
3. Ibid.
4. Walid Ladadweh, *Role of Palestinian Public Opinion in the Making of PA Policy*, Critical Policy Brief 6 (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2019), 1, <http://bit.ly/36kDmJ0>.

# Part I



## Long-Term Trends, East Jerusalem, and Policy Implications



# 1

## Long-Term Trends and Patterns



DATA COLLECTED BETWEEN 2010 AND 2020 INCLUDED A SET OF “trend” questions. Over time, these questions can map shifts in Palestinian attitudes in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem that range from views on economic instability to political attitudes on a number of domestic and international issues. These trends reinforce the importance of breaking out Palestinian populations by location, given that different populations demonstrate divergent attitudes on a number of key issues.

Even so, understanding the trends behind Palestinian views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complicated. Responses among the same populations can change significantly with a slight rewording of a question, opinions can oscillate from year to year, and apparent trends visible over multiple years can even completely reverse between polling periods. However, some basic conclusions can still be drawn. In broad strokes, Palestinians—in particular West Bankers and East Jerusalemites—are much less optimistic about a two-state solution than during the early Obama era, when active negotiations were ongoing. Second, the attitudes of different Palestinian populations are in some cases shifting independently of one another. Gaza attitudes on some issues are shifting toward increased pragmatism. In contrast, East Jerusalemites are demonstrating greater alienation from Israeli society, which appears to be correlated to more hardline views regarding the conflict overall. Finally, these trends emphasize that Hamas and PA policies in many significant cases do not align with popular Palestinian opinion. The majority of Palestinians want to focus on domestic reforms and economic issues rather than on Israel, and the majority want free and fair elections even as they have little trust in existing governing bodies.

## **Sovereignty over All of Jerusalem**

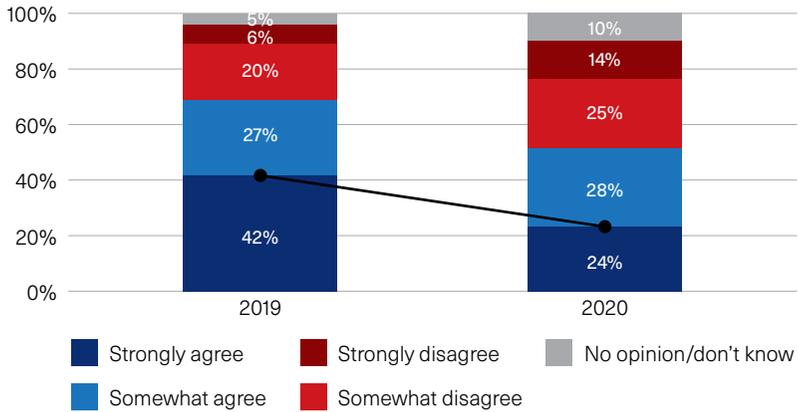
On the issue of Jerusalem, East Jerusalemites responded similarly to the West Bank and Gaza in 2019 when asked explicitly whether Palestinians should “demand Palestinian rule over all of Jerusalem, east and west, rather than agree to share or divide any part of it with Israel.” A total of 78% of East Jerusalem respondents answered in the affirmative, compared to 79% in the West Bank and 82% in Gaza in that same year. However, in 2020, East Jerusalemites began to diverge from their West Banker and Gazan compatriots, with a total of 67% East Jerusalemites, 80% Gazans, and 52% of West Bankers demanding rule over “all of Jerusalem” (see figures 1.1 and 1.2).

## **Domestic Concerns: Economic Uncertainty, Institutional Frustration**

The lack of economic opportunity has created hardships for West Bankers and especially Gazans. In 2019, three-quarters of respondents in Gaza reported that their household’s monthly income was under 1,200 shekels (about \$300), while only 9% had a household monthly income over 2,400 shekels (about \$600). In 2018, the Trump administration ended all funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The same year, President Trump signed the Taylor Force Act, which suspended funding to the PA until it abandoned its support of the Palestinian Authority Martyrs Fund. PA disputes with Israel over taxes and the slow reconstruction of Gaza have contributed to an ongoing economic crisis. In consequence, Palestinians have had little reason to be optimistic about their economic future. When the United States stopped funding UNRWA, around 60% of 2018 Palestinian respondents in the West Bank and Gaza believed that Palestinians would “suffer severe new economic hardship,” while just 37% thought that economic help would come from other Arab states, Europe, or Israel. However, when respondents were presented with options for what they wanted from the United States, only a small minority of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza selected “more economic aid” as their top choice in 2018. The deteriorating attitudes towards the United States were further highlighted by the large majority of respondents who believed that the best thing for the United States to do was to “stay out of their affairs all together.”<sup>11</sup>

Respondents between 2015 and 2018 were asked to consider where “making enough income to live comfortably” ranked among top priorities that included “having a good family life,” “working to establish a Palestinian state,” and “being a good Muslim.” While somewhat fewer West Bankers reported that income was their top priority in 2018 relative to 2015, the

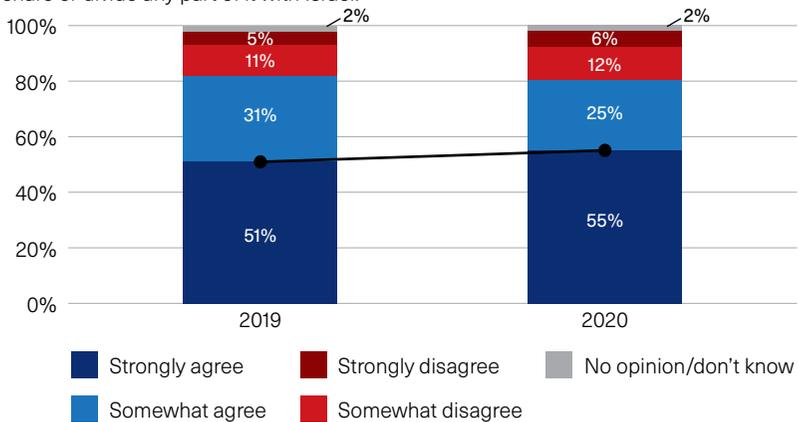
**Figure 1.1.** “Let me read you some last thoughts about the conflict with Israel that some people are debating these days. For each one, please tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: We should demand Palestinian rule over all of Jerusalem, East and West, rather than agree to share or divide any part of it with Israel.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

**Figure 1.2.** “Let me read you some last thoughts about the conflict with Israel that some people are debating these days. For each one, please tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: We should demand Palestinian rule over all of Jerusalem, East and West, rather than agree to share or divide any part of it with Israel.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

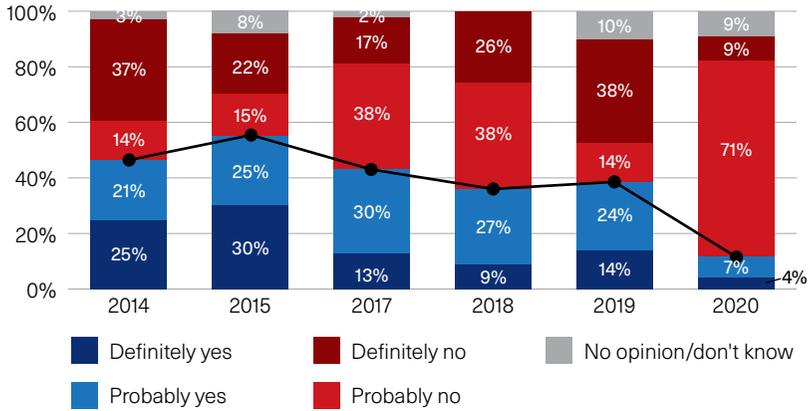
## A NATION DIVIDED

number of Gazans answering this way held steady after dipping in 2017. In all cases, a larger percentage of West Bankers and Gazans alike see income as a higher priority than establishment of a Palestinian state. And a good family life often obtains the plurality of responses as the top priority.

Due to these ongoing economic concerns, many Palestinians appear to accept the idea of practical economic cooperation with Israel. A pair of questions has tracked Palestinian attitudes toward such economic cooperation, asking about both access to jobs within Israel and the potential for Israeli companies to establish jobs in the West Bank and Gaza. Data collected by The Washington Institute in 2014 initially revealed support for more Israeli jobs in Gaza and the West Bank, with 50% of Gaza and 53% of West Bank respondents “definitely” interested in such a proposal (see figures 1.3 and 1.4). In 2019, West Bank respondents shifted slightly toward a more negative view of Israeli jobs in the West Bank and Gaza, while Gaza respondents demonstrated a trend also evident in other questions, of increasingly pragmatic attitudes relative to West Bankers. In 2020, Gazans continued to show a more pragmatic approach compared to their compatriots in the West Bank, with around 53% of Gazans interested in Israeli jobs. The downward trend exhibited by West Bank respondents was made clear by the mere 11% of residents who voiced support for expansion of Israeli jobs being offered there, compared to 38% the previous year.<sup>2</sup>

Early results from 2015, the year after the Gaza war, showed a downward trend in preference for economic cooperation with Israel from Gazans—the percentage of those who answered “definitely yes” to such a proposal dropped 36 percentage points, while “definitely no” responses for the same year effectively doubled, from 16% to 36%. The 2017 data shows a slight moderation of these numbers, but 2019 data demonstrates a reversal in attitudes back toward support that is unique to Gaza. Despite the negative sentiment of Gaza respondents in earlier years, by 2019, they had a much more positive view of Israeli companies offering jobs. As figure 1.3 shows, there was a 23-percentage-point increase, from 17% to 40%, in those who answered “definitely yes,” and an equivalent 9-percentage-point increase in those who would “probably” like to see Israeli companies offer more jobs in the Gaza Strip. The overall support for continued economic cooperation with Israel remained stable with 67% of respondents in 2020 favoring at least some expanded opportunities with Israeli companies (68% in 2019). However, in 2020, the number of respondents who answered “definitely yes” dropped. This percentage drop in the number respondents who answered “definitely yes,” is likely in reaction to the inclusion of a third option that same year. The three options included in 2020 were: “definitely or just probably” (24%), “definitely yes” (29%), and “probably yes” (14%).<sup>3</sup>

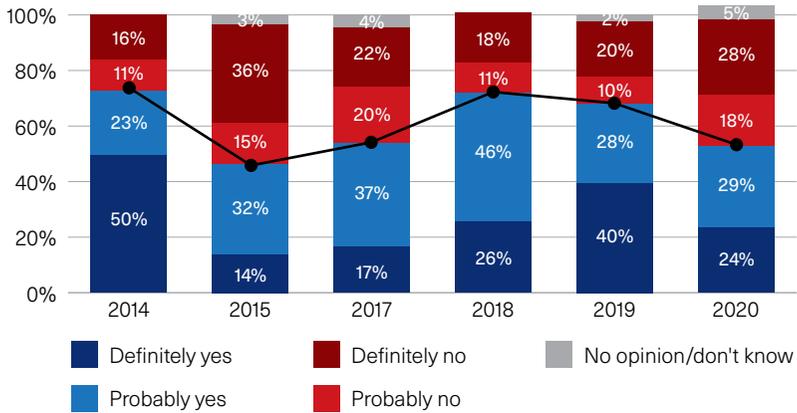
**Figure 1.3.** “In the current situation, would you or would you not like to see Israeli companies offer more jobs inside the West Bank and Gaza?”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

**Figure 1.4.** “In the current situation, would you or would you not like to see Israeli companies offer more jobs inside the West Bank and Gaza?”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

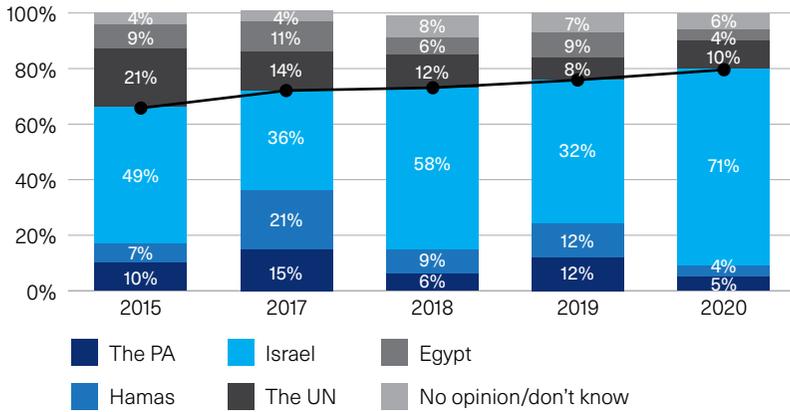
## A NATION DIVIDED

Many economic issues in the Palestinian territories have a political dimension. Polling on one particularly contentious issue—reconstruction of the Gaza Strip—revealed how the attitudes of Gazans, West Bankers, and East Jerusalemites have differed over time. Results have been consistent in the West Bank from 2017 to 2020, with most respondents seeing Israel as responsible for the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza—even though 2017 stood out as a year when only 36% of West Bankers held this opinion. Nevertheless, attitudes in Gaza have oscillated between a plurality of respondents placing blame on Hamas and on Israel. During 2015 and 2018, a plurality of Gazans principally blamed Hamas (40% and 32%, respectively), while in 2017 and 2019, a plurality of Gazans blamed Israel (46% and 37%, respectively). In 2020, a plurality of Gazans continued to blame Israel (44%), while only 21% blamed Hamas (see figures 1.5 and 1.6).

Notably, the population most likely to blame Israel for a lack of reconstruction since 2017 has been East Jerusalemites, even though they were least likely to blame it in 2015. Then, only 13% of respondents believed that Israel was most to blame, and an equal proportion believed Egypt should be singled out. A larger percentage (18%) placed the blame principally on the UN. However, every year since 2017, a majority of East Jerusalemites have principally blamed Israel: 53% in 2017, 97% in 2018, 67% in 2019, and 57% in 2020 reported that Israel was most to blame for lagging reconstruction. Even though this number had suffered a 10-percentage-point drop since 2019, this position has held majority support from East Jerusalem respondents over the past three years.<sup>4</sup> Almost certainly, this shift reflects the general deviation from Israel during these years, not any specific perception about Gaza—which few East Jerusalemites have ever visited.

Responses to other questions show a Gaza majority willing to prioritize economic incentives over ideological goals. In 2018, when Gazans were asked their views on giving up the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees inside Israel if Arab states provided economic aid to settle them in Gaza or the West Bank, they were more likely than West Bankers to agree: 58% of Gazans, compared to 41% of West Bankers, said that this was at least a “fairly positive idea.” This acceptance had increased slightly from 51% in 2017, while West Bank attitudes held flat. This is similar to the divergence between the two populations regarding a two-state solution between 2015 and 2019, discussed in greater length shortly. (This majority acceptance of ceding a Palestinian “right of return” to Israeli territory is all the more remarkable when compared to earlier trends on the question.) In 2015, when asked whether they would accept a limited “right of return,” 51% of West Bankers said they would likely accept such an offer if it was “the very last step required to end the occupation and achieve a real independent

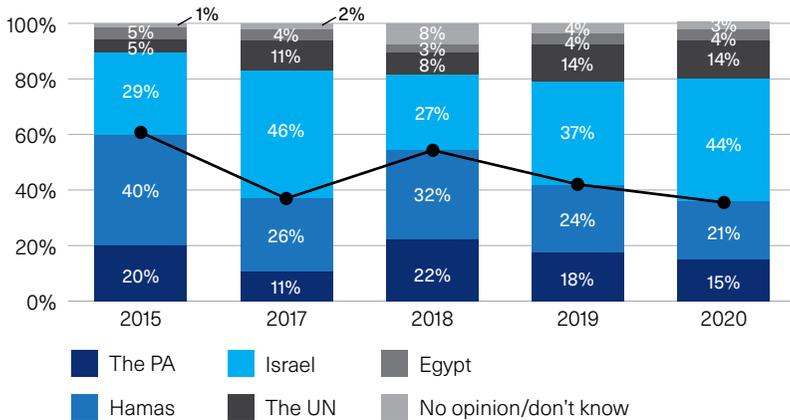
**Figure 1.5.** “Who do you think bears the greatest responsibility for the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza? Is it:”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 1.6.** “Who do you think bears the greatest responsibility for the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza? Is it:”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

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Palestinian state,” while only 43% of Gazans thought Palestinian leadership should make such a concession even to bring about an independent Palestinian state.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, in 2019 and 2020, a solid majority of Gazans “strongly” agreed, “internal political and economic reform is more important for us than any foreign policy issue.” In 2020, a remarkable 86% agreed at least “somewhat” that domestic reforms should be prioritized, this number was virtually unchanged from the previous year. This idea has remained popular, though not as overwhelmingly, in the West Bank, with support from 72% of respondents in 2019 and 71% in 2020 (see figures 1.7 and 1.8).

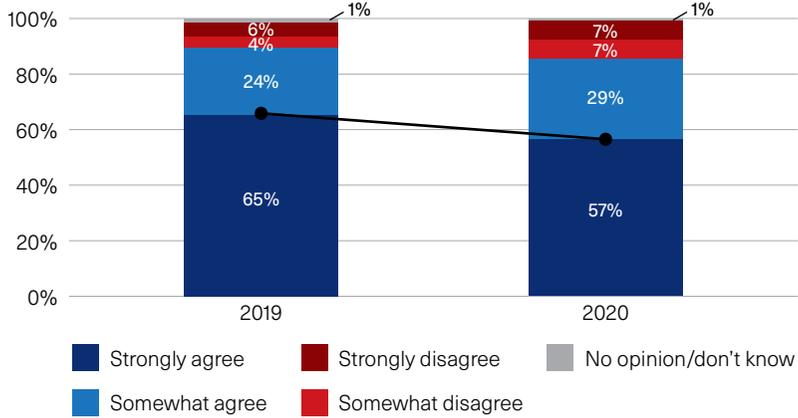
### ***Political Frustrations***

In a July 2018 poll conducted by Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), Nader Said noted an “alarming” trend of apathy that “many Palestinians express for their political options,” citing a plurality of respondents who would choose not to vote in legislative or presidential elections. According to Said, this trend reflects a “rejection of the current system that goes beyond current candidates or political leaders.”<sup>6</sup> This finding was stark, given AWRAD’s historic polling results on Palestinians’ views of Abbas: in 2010, 54% of Palestinians polled reported a positive view of Abbas, while 56% held a positive view of Fatah.<sup>7</sup>

A late July 2018 poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre corroborated Said’s findings of increased political apathy. Those who trust Abbas have held steady, according to both polls, at a low 11%, and respondents’ trust in Fatah is only slightly higher, at 25%. Results from these two polls also suggested high levels of apathy toward political leaders and presidential elections in particular. When JMCC respondents were asked to consider a presidential election where Abbas was a candidate, 45% said that “they did not know or had no answer about who they would vote for.” When respondents were asked to consider an electoral field that did not include Abbas, the percentage of respondents who did not have a specific candidate in mind rose to 56%.<sup>8</sup>

The 2019 data from The Washington Institute suggested an adjusted interpretation: Palestinians may be apathetic toward their current electoral options (or lack thereof) and poor governance, but many see political reform as an important focal point. When asked what the highest priority should be for a Palestinian national goal, 42% of West Bank respondents and 47% of Gaza respondents chose “domestic” political reforms over “external” efforts “to end the occupation” through resistance, negotiations, or greater international recognition. While 2020 results in Gaza remained stable, with

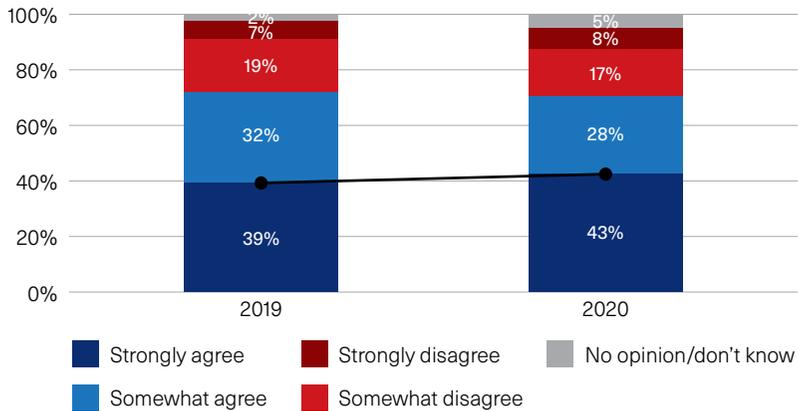
**Figure 1.7.** “Let’s start with some general questions about Palestinian life today. For now, please tell me if you agree or disagree, strongly or just somewhat, with the following statement: Right now, internal political and economic reform is more important for us than any foreign policy issue.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

**Figure 1.8.** “Let’s start with some general questions about Palestinian life today. For now, please tell me if you agree or disagree, strongly or just somewhat, with the following statement: Right now, internal political and economic reform is more important for us than any foreign policy issue.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

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44% favoring “domestic” goals over “external” ones. However, the results in the West Bank showed a significant drop, with only 26% favoring domestic over external reforms, a dramatic change from 2019.<sup>9</sup>

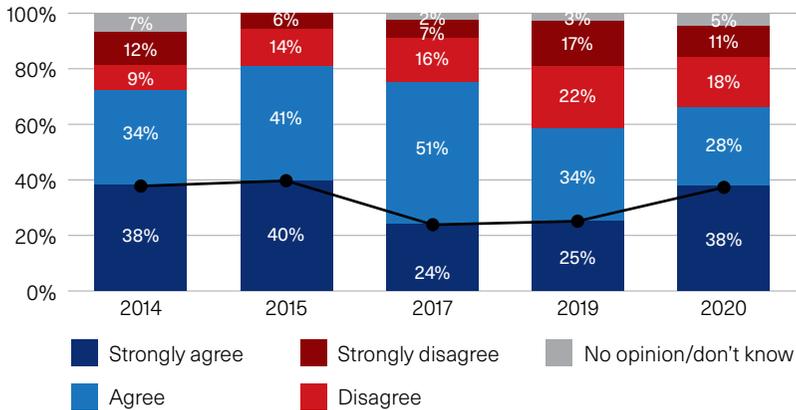
In 2019, 21% of West Bankers said that holding “new elections for the Palestinian president and parliament” should be the highest priority in the next five years, while only 14% chose this option in 2020. Also in 2019, 17% of respondents in the West Bank and 21% in Gaza thought that making the PA and Hamas “more effective, non-corrupt governments” should be the top priority. The following year, this option garnered only 12% support from the West Bank and 17% from Gaza. Interest in domestic issues increased slightly between 2018 and 2019—by 8 points in the West Bank and 3 points in Gaza—but this spike was reversed by the 2020 results, which reflected a 16-point decrease.<sup>10</sup>

These recent data points confirm longer trends of frustration with institutional structures. The Washington Institute’s data from 2014 to 2020 suggests that there has been a decrease in support for both the PA and Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza during this period (see figures 1.9 and 1.10). For example, a majority of respondents from both locales have consistently expressed support for the PA to “take over the administration” of the Gaza Strip from Hamas. However, this response from West Bank residents has decreased slightly over the past six years, from 72% in 2014 to 66% in 2020. The decline has been more significant in Gaza, with 88% in 2014 expressing support for the PA to take over its administration, down to 62% in 2020. This decline in support is not to say that Hamas is gaining popularity, as a PA takeover of Gaza has received support from a majority of respondents over the past six years. These findings are strengthened by a significant minority—16% in the West Bank and 18% in Gaza—who, in 2020, believed that the most likely medium-term outcome for the PA was a weakening of its control, “to the point of anarchy,” in the West Bank.<sup>11</sup>

Growing antipathy toward PA involvement has not been countered by an increased desire to see Hamas operate politically in the West Bank. Rather, when asked if the PA should allow Hamas to operate in the West Bank, respondents from both the West Bank and Gaza have moved away from options that express “definite” support and toward a more equivocal position. Moreover, Gaza frustrations with Hamas remain quite prevalent: in 2020, a full 50% of Gaza respondents stated that it would be better for them to be part of Israel than under the control of the PA or Hamas, compared to just 22% of West Bankers and 26% of East Jerusalemites who said that.

Support in the West Bank for Hamas maintaining an armed militia “no matter what happens” has declined marginally among West Bank respondents from 2014–18. In 2014, 63% of West Bank respondents supported an

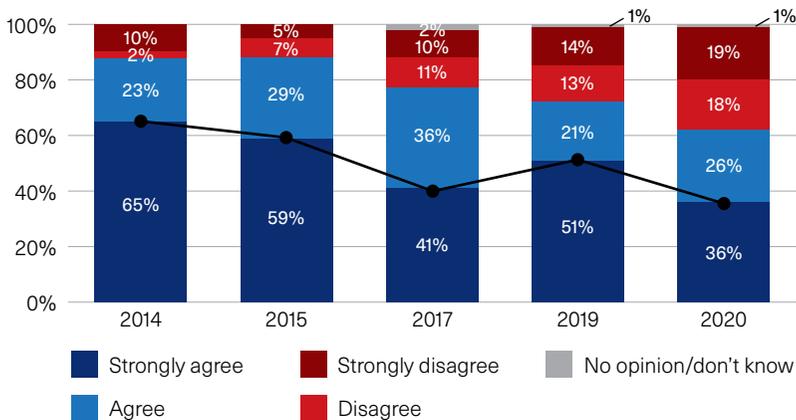
**Figure 1.9.** “Let’s continue talking about Palestinian national issues. I’d like to mention some ideas that people are talking about these days, and that different people have different opinions about. For each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: The PA should send officials and security officers to Gaza, to take over the administration there, with Hamas giving up its separate armed units.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014

**Figure 1.10.** “Let’s continue talking about Palestinian national issues. I’d like to mention some ideas that people are talking about these days, and that different people have different opinions about. For each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: The PA should send officials and security officers to Gaza, to take over the administration there, with Hamas giving up its separate armed units.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014

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armed Hamas presence. That number narrowed by 5 percentage points in 2018, to 58%. Nevertheless, support for an armed Hamas has remained a majority stance among West Bank respondents over all four years of polling. Moreover, it is important to note that in 2015, soon after the Gaza war, this support spiked up to 77%. This is higher by 14 percentage points or more than the rest of the trend data and is an outlier.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Question of Citizenship**

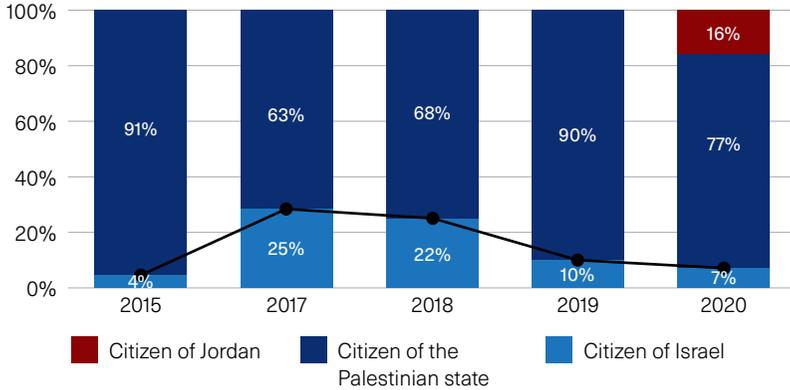
Relating to both Palestinian governance and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the question of citizenship. This issue and the remarkable shift in attitudes between 2010 and 2019 are discussed at length in the later section on East Jerusalem. The attitudes of West Bank respondents also shifted—away from favoring Palestinian citizenship and back again—over the shorter period where data was available (2014–20). In contrast, Gaza responses to the same question remained stable over this period.

When West Bank residents were given the option of being a “citizen of Palestine (or Israel) with all of the rights and responsibilities of other citizens,” an almost 30-point drop was observed between 2015 and 2017 in those who would prefer to be citizens of Palestine, from 91% to 63%. There was a corresponding 21-point increase in West Bank residents who would prefer to be citizens of Israel, from 4% in 2015 to 25% in 2017, with the large remainder either refusing to answer or reporting they did not know.

This interest in Israeli citizenship reflected a particular moment in West Bank attitudes rather than a sustained trend; while this number remained similar in 2018 at 22%, it fell back down to 10% in 2019 and 7% in 2020. Moreover, attitudes in the West Bank have flipped back and forth on the issue of Palestinian citizenship over the past three years. From 2017 to 2019 there was a 27-percentage-point increase in those who would prefer to be citizens of Palestine (63% in 2017, to 68% in 2018, and 90% in 2019). The percentage of West Bank respondents who prefer Palestinian citizenship fell to 77% in 2020. It should be noted that in 2020 a third option of citizenship was added, in which respondents were asked if they would choose to be a citizen of Jordan. A sizable minority—16% West bank, 11% Gaza, and 15% from East Jerusalem respondents—chose this option (see figure 1.11).

Data from the Gaza Strip does not demonstrate any shift away from an overwhelming interest in Palestinian citizenship. Gazans drifted away from this preference by only 5 percentage points (82% in 2017 to 79% in 2020), and preferences for Israeli citizenship remained relatively unchanged over that period. When given the choice for Jordanian citizenship in 2020,

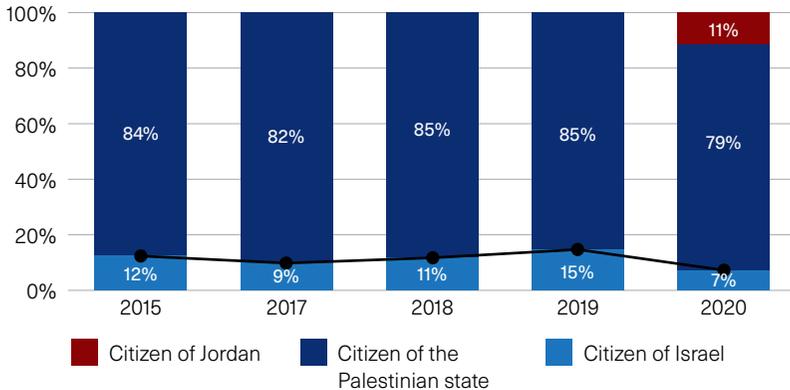
**Figure 1.11.** “As you know, states offer their citizens certain rights, like law and order, personal freedom, or healthcare and retirement benefits, and also require certain responsibilities from them, like paying taxes, obeying the law, and coexistence with everyone else. Let’s suppose that there’s an agreement on a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, and you could choose your citizenship. Would you prefer to become a citizen of the Palestinian state or a citizen of Israel?”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 1.12.** “As you know, states offer their citizens certain rights, like law and order, personal freedom, or healthcare and retirement benefits, and also require certain responsibilities from them, like paying taxes, obeying the law, and coexistence with everyone else. Let’s suppose that there’s an agreement on a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, and you could choose your citizenship. Would you prefer to become a citizen of the Palestinian state or a citizen of Israel?”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

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this option garnered around 11% support. Notable, however, is that in 2018, more East Jerusalemites (95%) reported that they would choose Palestinian citizenship than Gazans (85%), a recent trend that is discussed at length separately (see figure 1.12).

### **Two-State-Solution Trends and “Right of Return”**

The two-state solution, the implicit goal of U.S. negotiations during the Obama years, has had more equivocal support from Palestinians. Depending on the formulation of the question—and the year in which it was asked—Palestinian respondents have demonstrated complicated and changing attitudes toward the related formula of “two states for two peoples.” This is also evidenced by the 2020 results concerning the ongoing prospects of the two-state solution among Palestinians, which were likely affected by the anticipation of the Trump administration’s “deal of the century.” The Trump plan was announced on January 28, 2020, to almost universal Palestinian condemnation. A series of new questions was added in 2020 to see if the public aligned with their leaders’ preemptive rejection of the plan.

From 2015 on, respondents from all three locales were asked by The Washington Institute and PCPO to choose a “Palestinian national goal for the next five years,” from three options: working toward “reclaiming all of historic Palestine from the river to the sea”; “ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to achieve a two-state solution”; or “a one-state solution in all of the land, in which Arabs and Jews would have equal rights in one state from the river to the sea.” A plurality of respondents in both the West Bank and Gaza picked “regaining all of historic Palestine from the river to the sea” throughout the polling period. The exception was in 2017, when 44 percent of West Bank respondents said that “ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to achieve a two-state solution” should be the main goal. This momentary shift in West Bank attitudes also took place in the only year in which West Bankers were more likely than Gazans to support “ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to achieve a two-state solution.” In 2015, while 44% of Gazans supported this option, support for regaining “all of historic Palestine” was higher, at around 50%. Thus, the relatively large interest in “ending the occupation” to “achieve a two-state solution” was in part due to a relative lack of interest in the “one-state” goal (at 5%).

In contrast, East Jerusalem support for a two-state solution—while originally higher than support in the West Bank and 5 points higher than in Gaza—has steadily decreased. At the same time, support for working to

## LONG-TERM TRENDS AND PATTERNS

regain “all of historic Palestine” has steadily increased, with the majority of East Jerusalemites choosing this option in 2020. Since 2018, the decline in support by West Bankers and East Jerusalemites for a two-state solution has been significant, with only a minority choosing this option as their top goal for the next five years. In 2020, fewer West Bank respondents than in any previous year—only 14%—selected “working toward a two-state solution” as the preferred goal, down 12 percentage points from 2019. However, this loss of support is likely due in part to the inclusion, in 2019 and 2020, of a fourth option: “moving toward a confederation with Jordan or Egypt, including Palestinian self-government.” A total of 9% of West Bankers and 2% of East Jerusalemites polled supported this option in 2020.

The third option, achieving “a one-state solution in all of the land, in which Arabs and Jews would have equal rights in one state from the river to the sea,” has proven a distant third in popularity, but almost one-quarter of East Jerusalemites surveyed picked that option in 2015, 2017, and 2019. Popularity for this option continued to decrease, with only 11% of West Bankers, 9% of Gazans, and 9% of East Jerusalemites choosing it in 2020.

Further complicating these attitudes is the separate question of what the future should hold in the event of a negotiated two-state solution. Until 2019, answers to this question suggested a positive trend among Gaza and East Jerusalem respondents toward accepting a final peace, though not among West Bankers. In 2014, a little under a third of each population stated that a negotiated two-state solution should be the end to the conflict. However, after that the populations diverged: West Bank respondents have answered this question remarkably consistently ever since. In contrast, there was an upward trend among Gaza respondents, from 30% in 2014 to 47% in 2017. This number held steady in 2018 and dipped only slightly, to 42%, the following year. Moreover, Gazans’ “yes” responses to a question added in 2017, which asked respondents to consider the acceptability of a two-state solution, rose between 2017 and 2019 from 36% to 49%.

Similarly surprising is the difference between West Bank and Gaza attitudes toward exercising a “right of return” to “the 1948 lands.” When asked in 2015 by The Washington Institute and PCPO whether they have seriously considered the practical implications of “returning to live in [their] family’s village or town in the 1948 lands someday,” West Bank and Gaza Strip respondents had very different answers. While 71% of West Bankers surveyed said they considered this prospect “frequently,” only 42% of respondents from the Gaza Strip answered in the same way. A 46% plurality of Gaza Strip respondents said that they think of the practical prospects of moving back to these regions only sometimes, and 10% of Gaza respondents said that they “rarely” consider this option. In contrast, only 2% of

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respondents in the West Bank said that they “rarely” consider moving back to “the 1948 lands.”

Respondents were also asked in 2017 by the Washington Institute and PCPO about the feasibility of moving back to “the 1948 lands” and not just their personal preferences. A total of 59% of West Bank respondents agreed with the statement that “regardless of what’s right...most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands.” This suggests that while West Bank Palestinians may think hopefully of returning to these lands and have considered the practical aspects of doing so, they do not think that this is a likely reality. This belief was also reflected in West Bank responses from Washington Institute polls since 2018, in which agreement with the statement that Palestinian refugees would not return to “the 1948 lands” rose 9 percentage points, from 62% in 2018 to 71% in 2020.

In contrast, in 2017 only 46% of Gaza respondents agreed with the statement that “regardless of what’s right...most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands,” and 47% disagreed. Agreement with the statement increased 8 points, to 54%, in 2018, with a correlating 3-point drop in disagreement, to 44%. These numbers have remained steady over the past two years, with 52% of Gazans viewing a “return” to the “1948 lands” as unlikely in 2020, while the percentage of Gazans that disagree with this is up 4 percentage points since 2018.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this growing disillusionment with the possibility of “moving back” to “the 1948 lands,” Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip are optimistic about a future for Palestine. In the West Bank, support for the statement that “eventually, the Palestinians will control almost all of Palestine, because God is on their side” dropped 6 percentage points from 2017 to 2018, from a 38% plurality to 32%. In Gaza support held steady, with 42% plurality agreement in 2017 and 43% plurality agreement in 2018. In each case, the second-most popular option also remained consistent over time, but differed in Gaza and the West Bank. In both 2017 and 2018, a plurality of respondents from the Gaza Strip picked an eventual compromise with Israel as the second-most likely outcome. In contrast, West Bank respondents said that it was more likely that “Palestinians would control all of Palestine, since the Palestinians will outnumber the Jews one day.” In fact, in both 2017 and 2018, only 18% of West Bank respondents thought a compromise with Israel was likely, making it the least popular response in this locale.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the issue of an eventual two-state solution, though, East Jerusalem respondents showed the widest variation in their responses between 2014 and 2020 in The Washington Institute and PCPO polls. While in 2014 only 32% said a two-state solution should be the end of the conflict with Israel, this shot up 24 percentage points by 2017 and another 17 percentage

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points in 2018, demonstrating a major shift toward acceptance of a final peace if two states were established. However, with major gains came major losses: respondents returned to acceptance levels of 31% in 2019 and 30% in 2020, which were similar to levels in 2014. Acceptance of a two-state solution followed the same trajectory among this population, though with less aggressive gains and losses: 59% of respondents in 2018 and 42% of respondents in 2019 said two states was the preferred national goal.

And in the Washington Institute and PCPO polls a majority of Gazans polled have supported the idea that Hamas should “stop calling for Israel’s destruction, and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders,” West Bank support for such a policy has fluctuated between 2017 and 2020. In 2017, a full 77% of West Bank respondents supported such a position (14 percentage points more than Gazans). The following year, support for this position dropped and stayed around 42% in 2018 and 46% in 2019. In 2020, support rebounded to 65%. Respondents from Gaza also varied in support of this statement. In 2018, support decreased from 63% to 53%, crept back up to 61% in 2019, and retreated back to 50% in 2020.<sup>15</sup>

West Bank support for maintaining a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas saw a declining trend in the 2017–19 Washington Institute polls, but support for this policy regained traction in 2020. Meanwhile, Gaza responses have shown decreasing support for this policy. In 2017, over three-quarters of West Bank respondents preferred for Hamas to change its tactics entirely. In 2014, only 36% of West Bank respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with maintaining the ceasefire, with that number decreasing by 9 percentage points in 2015. Yet by 2017, disagreement had returned to 36%, increasing 6 percentage points in 2018 to 42% and to 44% in 2019. In 2020, disagreement on maintaining a ceasefire dropped to just 25% in the West Bank. Despite this variation, support for maintaining the ceasefire has always enjoyed a strong majority in the West Bank. Gaza support for a ceasefire was higher than in the West Bank up until 2020, when 69% of West Bankers compared to 56% of Gazans supported this policy. Overall disagreement has increased among Gazans polled, with 31% reporting that they disagreed with a ceasefire in 2019, rising to 42% in 2020. The year 2020 marked the first of all the years surveyed that more West Bankers than Gazans supported this policy.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, despite Gazans’ concerns over governance issues with Hamas, discussed earlier, their support for maintaining Hamas’s armed militia has increased in the 2014–18 Washington Institute/PCPO polls (even as West Bankers have actually become less supportive). In 2014, Gaza respondents supported maintaining Hamas’s armed militia by a 61% majority, which was

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statistically identical to the West Bank (2 percentage points apart), though West Bank respondents were slightly more favorable. These attitudes have since diverged somewhat: while in 2018 66% of respondents from the Gaza Strip supported maintaining the militia, only 58% of West Bank respondents answered in kind. Comparing Gaza attitudes on issues relating to the two-state solution suggests that while residents may be less optimistic about the security Hamas militias can provide, whatever the political cost, they are nevertheless increasingly open to a final end to the conflict if negotiations are successful.

Support by Gazan respondents for maintaining Hamas's armed militia has maintained a stable majority from 2014 to 2018, increasing slightly over the past four years. In 2014, support for this idea enjoyed a 61% majority and increased five percentage points to 66% in 2018. Nevertheless, Gazans have demonstrated flexibility on the question of arms: a consistent majority have expressed support for Hamas to give up its armed militia if this is a prerequisite for participation in elections. Unlike Gaza respondents, the proportion of West Bank respondents who support this policy has declined. In 2014, 63% of West Bank respondents supported an armed Hamas presence. This proportion narrowed five percentage points to 58% of West Bank respondents in 2018. One year stands out; the highest majority from both locales—77% of West Bankers and 80% of Gazans—opposed dissolution of the militia in 2015. This may suggest a response to dissolution of the Hamas-Fatah unity government.<sup>17</sup>

### **West Bank vs. Gaza vs. East Jerusalem**

It is clear that differing geographical locations influence the perspectives and priorities of Palestinians. While West Bankers and Gazans seem to share many priorities and views on the conflict with some exceptions, East Jerusalemites diverge from their Palestinian counterparts in almost all polling results. They consistently demonstrated somewhat more moderate views toward the conflict and toward Israel in general, but deviated slightly in 2020. An example can be seen in the responses given by the three Palestinian groups when asked about their national priorities.

In both the West Bank and Gaza, a majority of respondents have stated that “regaining historic Palestine, from the river to the sea” was their foremost priority, though slightly varying in intensity. In 2014, 55% of West Bank respondents and 68% of Gaza respondents chose this option, while 66% and 56%, respectively, chose that option as their top priority in 2020. Although the same question produced lower percentages in 2015, that

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option remained the most popular response until 2020, when regaining “all of Palestine” became the top choice again.

Compared to Gazans and West Bankers, East Jerusalemites in both 2015 and 2017, chose “ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to achieve a two-state solution,” by a significant majority. This demonstrated their tendency toward more moderate stances on the conflict during that time period. However, responses from East Jerusalem flipped in 2020 and a solid majority of East Jerusalem respondents (59%) instead chose the first option, “regaining historic Palestine” (see figures 1.13 and 1.14).<sup>18</sup>

In responses on whether Jews have any rights to land in Palestine, a similar pattern emerged. Among East Jerusalemites, 55% said no. With Gazans and West Bankers, once again there appeared to be reasonable alignment on the issue: 88% of Gaza and 81% of West Bank respondents held the belief that Jews have no rights to any Palestinian lands. These groups did start to diverge, however, as time went by. In 2017, 73% of respondents in the West Bank maintained that view, while the figure in Gaza rose to 90%.

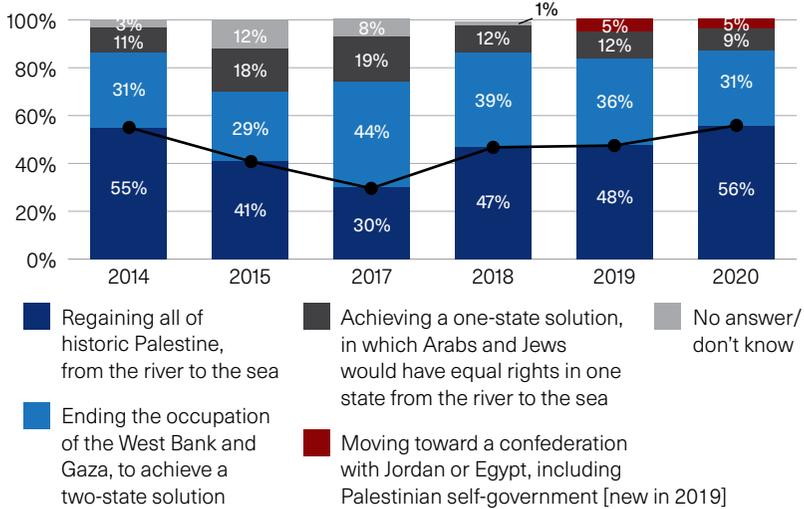
In terms of personal priorities, however, there seemed to be much more similarity between the three groups. In 2017, 30% of West Bankers, 26% of Gazans, and 28% of East Jerusalemites polled chose sufficient income as their first personal priority. The results for the other options were also mostly similar.<sup>19</sup>

On some long-term questions, there is also a pattern of West Bankers shifting over time while Gazans either grew more radical or maintained their stances. An example can be seen in responses to the question whether Palestinians would choose Palestinian or Israeli citizenship if a two-state solution were enacted. While in 2015, 91% of West Bankers and 84% of Gazans polled stated that they would choose Palestinian citizenship, only two years later, the proportion of West Bankers who gave that answer dropped to 63%, while those in Gaza stayed statistically the same at 82%.

When respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with the idea that Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian people and Israel is the home of the Jewish people, the two groups clearly diverged from each other. Between 2014 and 2015, the percentage of Gazans who “strongly” agreed with this idea dropped from 19% to 6%, while on the other end, the number of West Bankers who disagreed “strongly” dropped from 41% to 20%.

However, this pattern was not always so clear-cut, as there were occasions in which the inverse occurred. An example of this—as discussed earlier—is attitudes toward Israeli economic policy. In 2015, 30% of West Bank respondents felt that they “definitely” would like to see Israeli companies offer more jobs inside the West Bank and Gaza. Within the space of a year, this number declined to 13%, while the percentage of Gazans barely

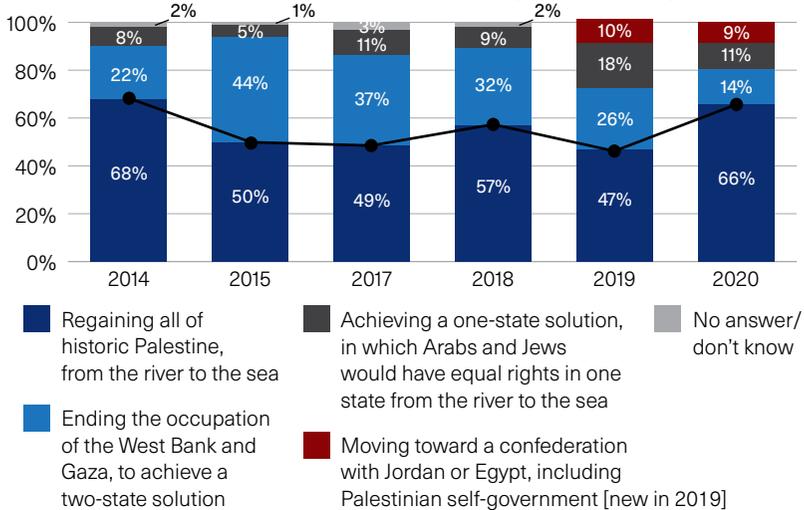
**Figure 1.13.** “Next, I’d like to ask your personal opinion about what should be the top Palestinian national priority during the coming five years. I will read you four different views about that, and please tell me which one is closest to your personal opinion about what should be the top Palestinian national priority in the next five years.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

**Figure 1.14.** “Next, I’d like to ask your personal opinion about what should be the top Palestinian national priority during the coming five years. I will read you four different views about that, and please tell me which one is closest to your personal opinion about what should be the top Palestinian national priority in the next five years.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

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shifted—in fact, slightly growing, from 14% to 17%. In tandem, when asked whether they would like to see Israel allow more Palestinians to work inside the country, the percentage of West Bankers who answered “definitely yes” dropped from 35% to 15%, while there was a negligible, single-percentage-point decrease for Gazans (from 32% to 31%).<sup>20</sup>

A moderation in Gaza opinion can also be seen with regard to views on the aftermath of a two-state solution. Although in 2015, 65% of Gazans polled felt that “The struggle is not over and resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated” if a two-state solution were enacted and that resistance should continue until Palestine is liberated, by 2017, only 44% still felt that way. While in the West Bank a majority, 58% in 2015 and 55% in 2017, continued to choose this option.

The difference between opinion in Gaza and the West Bank therefore appears mixed, with Gazans sometimes seeming more radical while at other times more moderate than West Bankers. What seems clear, however, is that as time passes, the two are aligning less on certain issues, while uniting on others.

### **Tactical vs. Strategic Positions**

The combined data supports the thesis that among the Palestinian public, a maximalist trend on strategic positions has emerged alongside a growing willingness for concessions on a tactical level. Respondents were more militant than the PA official position on the longer-term goals such as unity with Hamas, continuing the armed struggle against Israel, and future claims to all of historic Palestine. Yet around half the public was willing to accept more moderate positions if required “to end the occupation now”: sharing sovereignty over Jerusalem, ceding the “right of return,” resuming negotiations, or recognizing Israel as the Jewish people’s homeland. This paradox is in line with the general decrease in support for both Hamas and the PA between 2014 and 2019 and a continual tension between aspirations and reality among the population.

The hardening of attitudes on long-term goals regarding the future of a Palestinian state could be explained by Palestinian frustration with continued economic uncertainty, institutional dissatisfaction, and diplomatic failures. When looking at their long-term vision, a majority of respondents may have begun to question the feasibility of negotiations toward a two-state solution—and whether such a solution should even be an end to the conflict. These attitudes are also reflected in a hardening of the view that the only option was to pursue the liberation of Palestine “from the river to

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the sea.” However, the increasing cynicism and support for a zero-sum strategic objective is countered by Palestinian willingness to express support for more moderate tactical goals.

Tactically, support for maintaining a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has remained relatively stable in all three areas. The results from 2015 exhibited a rise in support from West Bank and Gaza, with 71% and 83% respectively in favor of the ceasefire. These numbers remained relatively unchanged in the West Bank over the next five years. However, the percentage of Gaza respondents in favor of maintaining the ceasefire decreased to 56% in 2020. Nevertheless, the desire to maintain a ceasefire with Israel has remained a majority opinion since 2014 (see figures 1.15 and 1.16).<sup>21</sup>

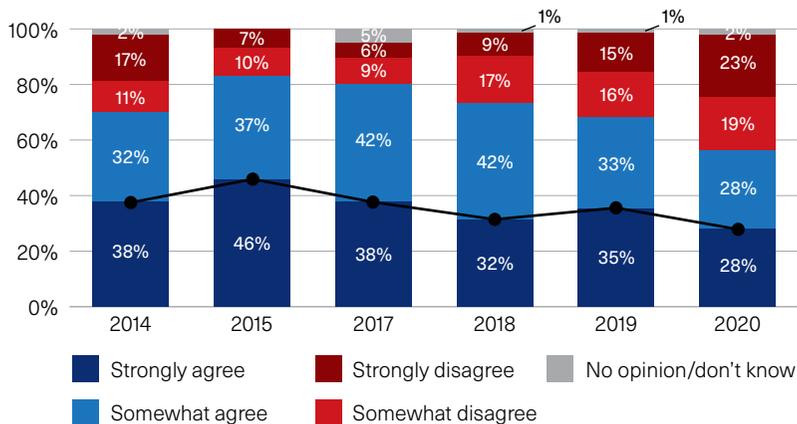
This paradox is also seen in opinions regarding the “right of return.” A majority of Palestinians continue to consider this a “vital goal.” Yet what is surprising is their tactical flexibility. Responses from 2017–20 suggest that West Bankers remained hopeful about “returning to the 1948 lands” but increasingly recognized the dim prospects of doing so. Responses from Gazans showed a more realistic approach as well, with more respondents feeling they were unlikely to fulfill this wish. In 2020, 71% of West Bankers and 52% of Gazans agreed that “regardless of what’s right...most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands.” In 2017, 60% of West Bankers and 46% of Gazans saw the “right of return” as unlikely. Generally, respondents have become more pragmatic on this goal, which for Israel has been a nonstarter for decades.<sup>22</sup>

### **Elite vs. Street Opinion**

Often where more division lies is between the Palestinian elite and the Palestinian public. Throughout polling data gathered by AWRAD in 2014, there was a clear discrepancy between the two groups’ attitudes toward Palestinian compromises. When asked about the potential for a key set of compromises related to the peace process, only 41% of the elite demonstrated willingness to accept such compromises, while 48% of the public did. Moreover, on the question of ongoing negotiations with Israel, 49% of the public supported this idea, while only 39% of the elite were in favor. The same divide is reflected in the views of college graduates against those of illiterate Palestinians, with two-thirds of graduates rejecting the idea of a peace deal that contains recognition of Israel, compared to just 43% among those who are illiterate.

This finding helps to provide further insight into class-based views on Trump’s “deal of the century.” The 2018 and 2019 PCPO polls revealed

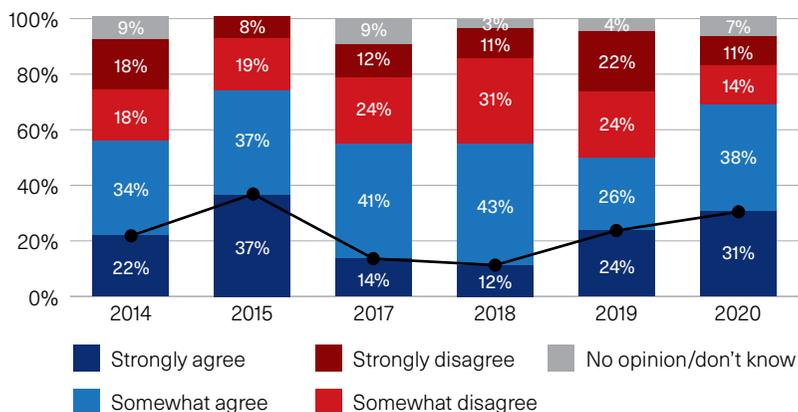
**Figure 1.15.** “I’d like to mention some ideas that people are talking about these days, and that different people have different opinions about. For each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: Hamas should preserve a ceasefire with Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

**Figure 1.16.** “I’d like to mention some ideas that people are talking about these days, and that different people have different opinions about. For each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: Hamas should preserve a ceasefire with Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll June 2015, May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll September 2014, October 2018

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that the majority of the Palestinian public actually opposed their governments' preemptive rejection of the plan, as they would rather understand it before establishing a stance on the matter (see figures 1.17 and 1.18). Such responses suggested that the public had a more open mindset toward the deal than those who could be negotiating it. However, after the plan was announced in late January 2020, a Washington Institute and PCPO poll found that around 94% of respondents from the West Bank, 70% from Gaza, and 83% from East Jerusalem "categorically rejected" the Trump plan. The 2020 poll also revealed a greater desire for pragmatic improvements on the ground and renewed peace talks.<sup>23</sup>

### **Generational Differences and Similarities**

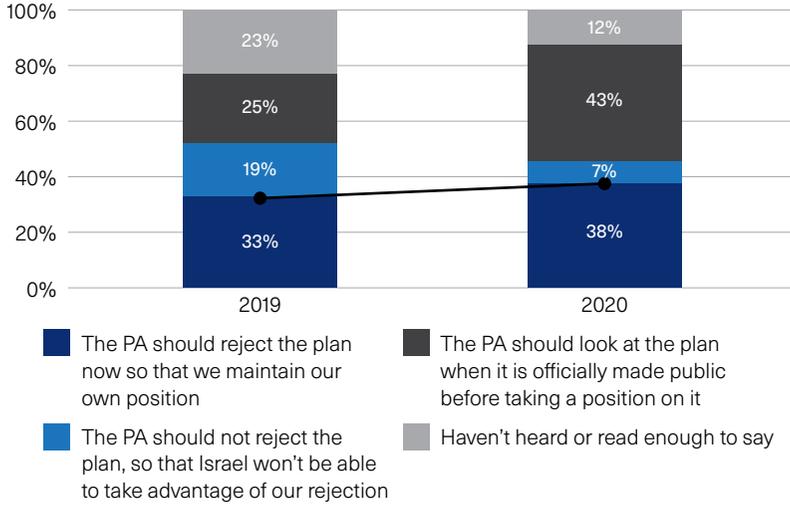
Also notable is that, according to 2019 data, the younger Palestinian generation has somewhat more moderate views than their elders on a variety of current issues—although, as discussed above, not on long-term ones. Those ages eighteen to thirty express a marginally greater interest in economic or internal political progress, personal contacts with Israelis, giving the Trump peace plan a chance, and the like. Yet only around one-third say they favor permanent peace with Israel—about the same minority percentage as among Palestinians over thirty. So the data gives no grounds to imagine that a generational shift, or the mere passage of time, will improve the prospects for Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation at the grassroots level.

Despite the somewhat more moderate views of the younger generation, there is a relatively high degree of consistency in the views of younger and older Palestinians on a wide range of political matters. On most of the forty questions in the 2019 Washington Institute/PCPO survey, many with multiple parts, only a few, statistically insignificant percentage points separate the two generations—and even those minor differences mostly do not exhibit any consistent pattern.

Overall, then, on many issues, this younger generation of Palestinians is neither more moderate nor more radical, and neither more secular nor more religious, than its elders. For example, in both age cohorts, and in both Gaza and the West Bank, the overwhelming majority (nearly 90%) say that religion is important in their lives. (The total population is approximately 95% Muslim, and this sample, strictly by the laws of probability, turned out to be entirely Muslim.)

One modest variation in this realm concerns support among Gazans for the Muslim Brotherhood. Among respondents over thirty, that figure stands at 54%, while among younger adults, it drops to 41%. The numbers

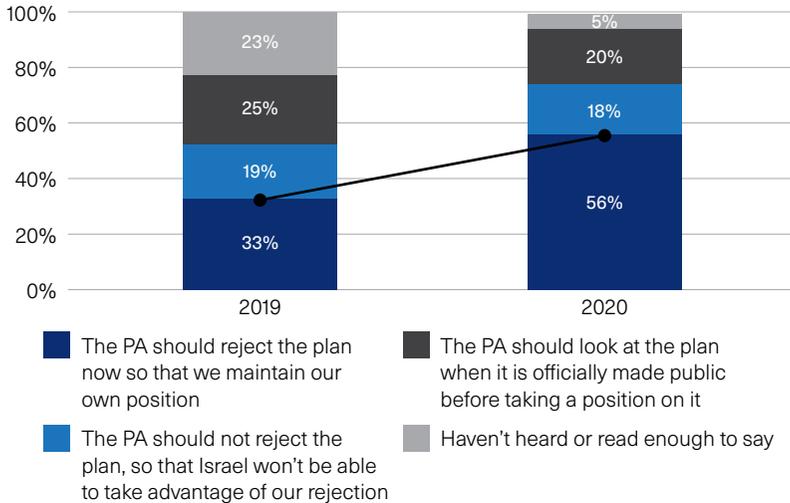
**Figure 1.17.** “As you may know, U.S. president Trump has said he would like to present a plan for peace between the Palestinians and Israel. Regarding this future plan, please tell me which one of the following comes closest to your own personal opinion—or whether you haven’t heard or read enough to say.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

**Figure 1.18.** “As you may know, U.S. president Trump has said he would like to present a plan for peace between the Palestinians and Israel. Regarding this future plan, please tell me which one of the following comes closest to your own personal opinion—or whether you haven’t heard or read enough to say.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

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are similar for Hamas itself: 62% of older Gazans surveyed say it should be allowed to operate freely in the West Bank as well, compared with only around half among the younger generation.<sup>24</sup>

Also mostly consistent across generations, although by a much narrower majority, is rejection of permanent Palestinian-Israeli peace. Asked if a two-state solution should be “the end of conflict with Israel,” just 34% of young West Bankers answered yes. Among those over thirty, that proportion is even lower, at 25%.<sup>25</sup>

In Gaza, on this as on many related issues, overall opinions are somewhat more moderate (as discussed earlier). But the generational difference is reversed there: 38% of young Gazans say a two-state solution should end the conflict, while 46% of their elders agree with that ideal. Similarly, while 41% of young Gazans would recognize Israel as “the state for the Jewish people” if that would help Palestinians obtain their own state, among older Gazans, that figure rises unexpectedly to 56%.<sup>26</sup>

On one related question, a truly startling difference appears in this survey—not between generations, but between West Bankers and Gazans as a whole. In each territory, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with this provocative statement: “The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is mostly just for politicians or old people, and I simply don’t think about it very much.” In the West Bank, just one-quarter agreed even “somewhat” with that proposition. But in Gaza, remarkably, that figure doubled, to 52%.<sup>27</sup>

In both places, again surprisingly, there is very little difference between younger and older residents on this seemingly age-related question. The explanation for these highly counterintuitive findings is almost certainly that, ever since the 2005 withdrawal of all Israeli soldiers and settlers from Gaza, neither young nor old there have had much daily contact with Israel at all—in sharp contrast to conditions on the West Bank, where Israeli soldiers, settlers, and checkpoints are a constant reminder of the conflict.

### ***Short-Term Pragmatism for Young Palestinians***

With respect to more immediate issues—relations with Israel, with the Fatah or Hamas governments, with other Arabs, or with the United States—some significant generational differences do emerge. First, Palestinians ages eighteen to thirty are more likely to prioritize internal political reform over other political goals, including “resistance” against Israel. In the 2019 Washington Institute/PCPO poll, respondents were given a list of five possible priorities, half the younger generation in both the West Bank and Gaza chose “holding new elections and making our government more effective

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and less corrupt.” Among older Palestinians, that figure is noticeably lower: 35% in the West Bank, and 38% in Gaza.<sup>28</sup>

In their attitudes toward the United States, too, the two generations diverge to some extent, especially in the West Bank. Young adults there are somewhat less opposed to certain U.S. policies and somewhat less aware of others. For example, just 29% of younger West Bankers surveyed want to reject the Trump peace plan outright, even before it is officially released, compared with 37% of older ones. And more younger West Bankers—22%—selected U.S. economic aid from a list of policy options, including more pressure on Israel or “stay out of our affairs altogether,” than the 13% of older ones who did so. Two-thirds of the younger cohort, compared with 59% of the older one, approve another current U.S. goal: “looking more to other Arab states...to improve our situation.”<sup>29</sup>

One other relevant generational difference stands out with particular clarity. Younger West Bankers are significantly more likely to say their government should stop paying extra bonuses to prisoners in Israeli jails. A surprisingly high 49% agree with that supposedly very controversial position, compared with just 35% among the older generation. And this is not because the younger generation is more informed about the economic costs of this policy. In fact, just 40% of young adult West Bankers, but 51% of their elders, say they have heard much about the Taylor Force Act, which cuts U.S. aid because of PA bonuses to terrorists.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, on a few immediate questions of relations with Israel, younger West Bankers are also comparatively moderate. The majority of those polled (62%) say they support personal contacts with Israelis “in order to help the peace camp there”; just half of older West Bankers agree. And 44% of the younger generation want “more jobs with Israeli companies in the West Bank,” compared with only 32% of the older generation there.

## Notes

1. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2017) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
2. See the following pieces by David Pollock: "Palestinian Public Are Tactical Moderates, but Strategic Militants: Where Does That Lead?" *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 15, 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-are-tactical-moderates-but-strategic-militants-where-doe>; "New Polls Show Most Gazans Want Israeli Jobs, Not Hamas Mobs," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 29, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-show-most-gazans-want-jobs-not-mobs>; "Younger Palestinians More Moderate on Tactical Issues, But Not on Long-Term Peace with Israel," PolicyWatch 3175, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/younger-palestinians-more-moderate-on-tactical-issues-but-not-on-long-term>; "Palestinian Public Rejects Trump Plan but Prefers Calm, Practical Response," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 14, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-rejects-trump-plan-but-prefers-calm-practical-response>.
3. Ibid.
4. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 7–19, 2015, n = 919 Palestinian adults; May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 25–July 15, 2019, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
5. Pollock, "Palestinian Public Are Tactical Moderates" <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-are-tactical-moderates-but-strategic-militants-where-doe>; Pollock, "New Polls Show Most Gazans Want Israeli Jobs," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-show-most-gazans-want-jobs-not-mobs>.
6. Arab World for Research and Development, "Palestinians Reject 'Deal of the Century,' Decision to Cease Payment of Gaza Salaries," July 23, 2018, [http://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/polls\\_percent202018/july\\_percent202018/English\\_percent20PR\\_percent20\(July\\_percent202018\).pdf](http://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/polls_percent202018/july_percent202018/English_percent20PR_percent20(July_percent202018).pdf).
7. Ibid. Note that the poll was taken July 7–10, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
8. Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, "Poll No. 92—Oslo Accords 25th Anniversary," August 6, 2018, n = 1,200 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://www.jmcc.org/documentsandmaps.aspx?id=879>.
9. Pollock, "Younger Palestinians More Moderate on Tactical Issues," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/younger-palestinians-more-moderate-on-tactical-issues-but-not-on-long-term>; Pollock, "Palestinian Public Rejects Trump Plan but Prefers Calm," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/>

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- [fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-rejects-trump-plan-but-prefers-calm-practical-response](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-rejects-trump-plan-but-prefers-calm-practical-response).
10. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 25–July 15, 2019, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2019, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
  11. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 15–17, 2014, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2014, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
  12. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 15–17, 2014, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 7–19, 2015, n = 919 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2014, 2015, 2018) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
  13. Pollock, “Younger Palestinians More Moderate on Tactical Issues,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/younger-palestinians-more-moderate-on-tactical-issues-but-not-on-long-term>; David Pollock, “For a State, Palestinians Would Cede ‘Right of Return’—and More,” *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 3, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/for-a-state-palestinians-would-cede-right-of-return>.
  14. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2017, 2018) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
  15. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 25–July 15, 2019, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
  16. David Pollock, “The Surprising Opinions of Palestinians,” *New York Daily News*, June 7, 2017, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-surprising-opinions-of-palestinians>; Pollock, “New Polls Show Most Gazans Want Israeli Jobs,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-show-most-gazans-want-jobs-not-mobs>; Pollock, “Palestinian Public Rejects Trump Plan but Prefers Calm,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-rejects-trump-plan-but-prefers-calm-practical-response>.
  17. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 15–17, 2014, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 7–19, 2015, n = 919 Palestinian adults; May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2014, 2015, 2017, 2018) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.

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18. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 15–17, 2014, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 7–19, 2015, n = 919 Palestinian adults; May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 25–July 15, 2019, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2014, 2015, 2017, 2018) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
19. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; June 25–July 15, 2019, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2017, 2019, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
20. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 15–17, 2014, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 7–19, 2015, n = 919 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2014, 2015) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
21. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: June 7–19, 2015, n = 919 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2015, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
22. Pollock, “Palestinian Public Are Tactical Moderates,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-are-tactical-moderates-but-strategic-militants-where-doe>; Pollock, “Palestinian Public Rejects Trump Plan but Prefers Calm,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-rejects-trump-plan-but-prefers-calm-practical-response>.
23. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; June 25–July 15, 2019, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2018, 2019, 2020) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
24. Pollock, “Younger Palestinians More Moderate on Tactical Issues,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/younger-palestinians-more-moderate-on-tactical-issues-but-not-on-long-term>.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.

## 2

# Evolving Options in East Jerusalem



POLLING DATA ALLOWS RESEARCHERS TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES and similarities between Gazans, West Bankers, and East Jerusalem Palestinians. In many ways, the East Jerusalem population is distinctive: sometimes portrayed as straddling the two countries, East Jerusalem is home to about 320,400 Palestinian Arabs, as well as 200,000 Israelis who live beyond the June 1967 ceasefire lines. In tracking preferences, changes in opinion, and developing trends among East Jerusalem Palestinians over a decade, one perceives a unique population that hopes for an independent Palestinian state while maintaining an affinity—if an increasingly tenuous one—with Israeli infrastructure as well as social and economic services.

### **300,000 Palestinians in Nineteen Neighborhoods**

In September 2010, The Washington Institute and the Palestine Center for Public Opinion devised and supervised a systematic survey of Palestinians living in the nineteen neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. The aim was to determine the extent to which these individuals shared motivations and political preferences with their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The residents of East Jerusalem have frequently demonstrated attitudes notably different from their West Bank and Gaza counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

Palestinians in East Jerusalem, unlike those in Gaza and the West Bank, hold blue Israeli identity cards, giving them permanent resident status and enabling them to travel to the West Bank and also within Israel. This means that unlike West Bankers or Gazans, East Jerusalem Palestinians have been relatively mobile and are not isolated from either Palestinians or Israelis. At the time of initial data collection in September 2010, not only did East Jerusalemites frequently travel to West Jerusalem, other areas of Israel, and the West Bank; they also had quite a high level of interaction with Jewish

## A NATION DIVIDED

citizens of Israel. This was a population that often traveled or worked on the western side of the city, and some were educated in Israeli institutions.

Demographic research related to the survey produced a clear yet counterintuitive conclusion: despite libelous rhetoric about the “Judaization” of Jerusalem, Palestinians’ population growth in the city had substantially outpaced that of Israelis. Since 1967, the city’s Israeli population—including in the new neighborhoods beyond the armistice lines in effect from 1949 to 1967—had indeed grown substantially, roughly doubling from under 250,000 to around half a million in 2011. But over the same period, the Palestinian population had more than quadrupled, from around 70,000 in 1967 to 288,000 at official count in 2010.<sup>2</sup>

This sharp increase reflects a combination of factors—natural growth, migration, and the expansion of municipal boundaries in 1967, which absorbed Palestinian areas. All of these factors have contributed to this enormous growth, probably in roughly equal measure. As a result, the Palestinian proportion of the city’s total population had increased from under 25% in 1967 to 37% by 2011.

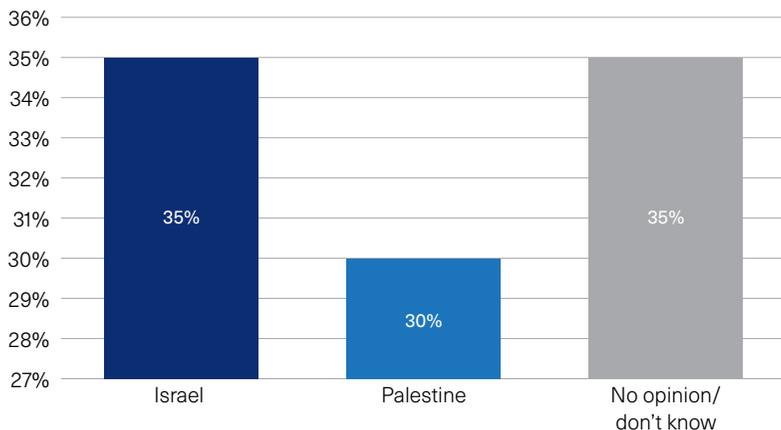
In the September 2010 poll, about 44% of respondents reported a monthly household income of 4,800 shekels (\$1,400) or more. Almost half the total population of East Jerusalem enjoyed a lower-middle-class standard of living or higher, far better than Palestinians in the West Bank—and certainly in Gaza—and approximately equivalent to Arab citizens of Israel inside the 1967 lines. However, it was significantly lower than that of the Israeli Jewish population at the time.<sup>3</sup>

### **Israeli or Palestinian Citizenship, 2010**

The quality of life in East Jerusalem relative to the West Bank and Gaza played a role in some East Jerusalem respondents’ interest in Israeli citizenship. When asked in 2010 whether they would prefer to be citizens of Palestine or Israel if a two-state solution were to work out, 35% of respondents said that they would prefer Israeli citizenship (see figure 2.1). The proportion who preferred Palestinian citizenship was 5 percentage points lower, at 30%. Another full 35% said they did not know, with this figure including those who refused to answer the question.<sup>4</sup>

This was an abnormally large percentage of respondents not expressing an opinion or refusing to respond. To make these individuals’ opinions a little more legible, the authors, after the interviews were completed, did a statistical analysis of the 35% who did not express a preference for Israeli or Palestinian citizenship. They then analyzed responses to other questions in

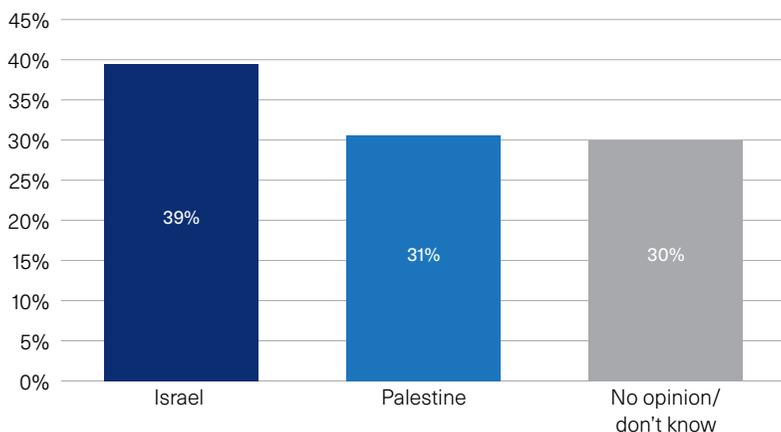
**Figure 2.1.** “If a permanent, two-state solution is able to be worked out, would you prefer to become a citizen of Palestine, with all the rights and privileges of other citizens of Palestine, or would you prefer to become a citizen of Israel, with all the rights and privileges of other citizens of Israel?”



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll September 2010

**Figure 2.2.** “If a permanent, two-state solution is able to be worked out, do you think that most people in your neighborhood would prefer to become citizens of Palestine, with all the rights and privileges of other citizens of Palestine, or would they prefer to become citizens of Israel, with all the rights and privileges of other citizens of Israel?”



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll September 2010

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the survey and cross-referenced these data points in order to reach a judgment. The people who said they did not know or would not answer were noticeably balanced or moderate in their views toward political, economic, and social issues in their lives at the time. Statistically speaking, those 35% were slightly more similar in their responses to those who said that they would prefer Israeli rather than Palestinian citizenship. The respondents who answered “I don’t know” or “I refuse to answer” on the question of citizenship answered more similarly to the people who preferred Israeli citizenship on twenty-seven out of the fifty different variables analyzed, and more similarly to people who favored Palestinian citizenship on seventeen of those variables. On the remaining six variables, these respondents were balanced exactly in the middle between those preferring Israeli citizenship and those preferring Palestinian citizenship.

After the questions were adjusted slightly to ask whether respondents thought their neighbors would prefer Israeli or Palestinian citizenship, the percentage indicating a preference for Israeli citizenship rose 4 points, reaching 39% overall (see figure 2.2). When very similar versions of the same question yield similar responses, these responses are more likely to be genuine than when similar questions yield more varied responses. The close alignment of these responses—almost within the margin of error—indicated that answers to this question were probably genuine reflections of opinion.

When asked whether they would be willing to move in the event of a peace settlement (in order to make their preferred citizenship a reality), about 40% of East Jerusalem respondents said that they would be willing to move to Israel for citizenship. In contrast, when asked whether they would be willing to move to Palestine if their neighborhood came under Israeli rule, the majority of respondents said that they would be unwilling to do so.<sup>5</sup>

The authors presented these results to the Council on Foreign Relations and Palestinian activists in Washington, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and New York in 2011. One of the Palestinians commented that the PA had a problem with the population of East Jerusalem—the people were not on their side. Moreover, these preferences were roughly equivalent across age, income, and education demographics. While the younger segment of the population was slightly more inclined to say that they would prefer Israeli citizenship, this difference was not large. Even in the Shuafat refugee camp, where attitudes were the least moderate overall, a plurality of respondents preferred Israeli citizenship.

These notable findings almost certainly reflect East Jerusalem Palestinians’ practical considerations. Fully 44% of Palestinians in East Jerusalem at the time said they were either very or somewhat satisfied with their

## EVOLVING OPTIONS IN EAST JERUSALEM

standard of living—a high percentage of positive responses in comparison to other populations in the Arab world at the time. Widespread discontent was prevalent in the region during this period, as evidenced by the rising tensions that brought about the Arab Spring.<sup>6</sup>

Many of these Palestinians were generally satisfied with the practical issues dominating their daily lives, including education, access to a nearby place of worship, healthcare, and basic services such as electricity and water. While there was a significant minority who had a neutral or negative view, the majority said that they were satisfied with their quality of life in these areas. Contrary to popular assumptions of social antagonism between Israelis and Palestinians in 2010 and 2011, less than half the Palestinians in East Jerusalem were dissatisfied with their personal interactions with Jews in the city. Palestinians in East Jerusalem were also dissatisfied with their ability to obtain travel documents, their interactions with municipal officials, and their access to disability benefits.

When asked about the major deciding factors in their preference for Israeli citizenship over Palestinian citizenship, 35% of respondents said that practical issues dominated—freedom of movement, higher income, health insurance, job opportunities, prosperity, and more shops. Much lower down the list came issues of politics, culture, and law and order. Conversely, of the Palestinians who said they would rather be citizens of Palestine, 30% saw practical issues as secondary to issues of nationalism, identity, religion, and eliminating discrimination. But three-quarters of East Jerusalem Arabs were at least a little concerned, and over half were more than a little concerned, that they would lose their ability to write and speak freely if they became citizens of a Palestinian state rather than remaining under Israeli control in 2010 (see figures 2.3–2.6).<sup>7</sup>

However, a narrow majority of Palestinians in East Jerusalem—56%—felt that there was a great deal or a fair amount of discrimination against them by the Jerusalem municipality. In other words, a majority of respondents in East Jerusalem felt that there was institutional, not social, discrimination against them in 2010. But almost half of the Palestinians reported that corruption by PA officials was also a big or at least a moderate problem for them personally at the time of this poll.

At the time of data collection in 2010, most respondents said that their identities as “blue card holders” were almost as important as their identities as Palestinians or Muslims. This too suggests that preservation of some special status and access to education, employment, travel, and social benefits were factors for respondents when evaluating potential citizenship. In East Jerusalem, only about 30% of respondents sympathized with either Fatah or Hamas or with the Israeli Arab Islamic movement. These 2010 poll

**Figure 2.3.** “Benefits of Becoming a Citizen of a New State of Palestine”

Easier access to friends and family in the West Bank	81%
Being a citizen of an Arab country	69%
Easier access to shopping, business, and entertainment in the West Bank	66%
Being a part of a Muslim-majority country	66%
Easier access to Jordan and other Arab countries	64%
The possibility of greater social equality as a full citizen of Palestine	62%
Acquiring a Palestinian passport and a Palestinian identity	52%
Access to the Palestinian school system	50%
Palestinian management of my neighborhood, which might allow for better growth and development	49%
Access to job markets in the West Bank	48%
Law enforcement by Palestinians in my neighborhood	46%
Continued ability to vote in the national elections	44%

**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll September 2010

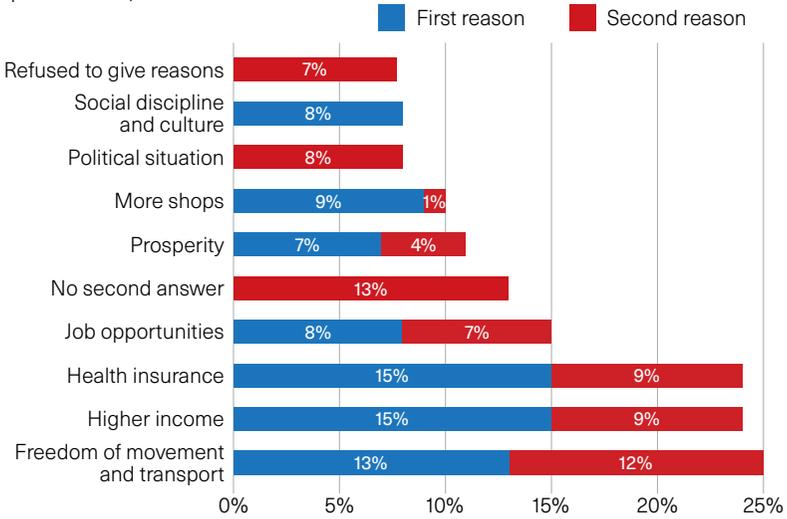
**Figure 2.4.** “Benefits of Becoming a Citizen of Israel”

Continued membership in the Israeli healthcare system	68%
Continued membership in the Israeli unemployment and disability benefits system	64%
Continued access to job markets in West Jerusalem and elsewhere in Israel	61%
Continued access to friends and family in Israel	60%
Continued access to the beach in Israel	60%
Continued membership in the Israeli retirement benefits system	60%
Continued service by the Israeli municipality, water, power, sewage, etc.	60%
Continued service by Israeli law enforcement	60%
The possibility of greater social equality as a full citizen of Israel in the context of a peace agreement	59%
Continued access to shopping, business, and entertainment in Israel	57%
Continued access to the Israeli school system	51%
The ability to vote in Israeli national elections	44%

**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll September 2010

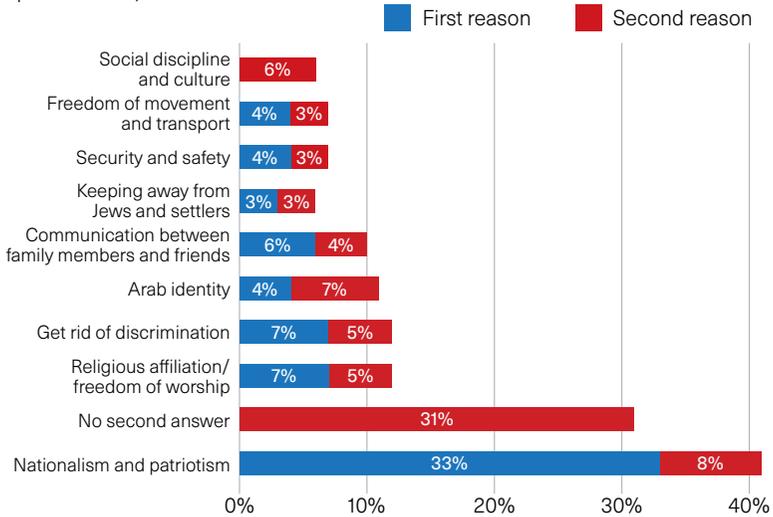
**Figure 2.5.** "First/Second Reason for Becoming a Citizen of Israel"  
(Top 10 reasons)



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll September 2010

**Figure 2.6.** "First/Second Reason for Becoming a Citizen of Palestine"  
(Top 10 reasons)



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll September 2010

## A NATION DIVIDED

results indicated that compared to personal identity markers, politics was a lesser preoccupation for East Jerusalemites.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, respondents were generally a religious and conservative group. This was evidenced by concerns that a more liberal Israeli culture would ultimately have a negative moral impact on their children. Even though the respondents, like the population as a whole, were mostly well educated and young, a fairly high proportion of respondents were concerned with what they viewed as lower moral standards in Israeli society in comparison to their ideal of a Muslim-based society and culture in 2010.

### **Peace Process**

When asked whether armed conflict was likely to continue even after a peace agreement, 41% of the East Jerusalem respondents said that it was. At the time, the residents of East Jerusalem were considered more moderate than Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, so this pessimism about permanent peace was significant. However, only 31% of respondents said that they thought their own neighbors would support the continuation of violence after a peace agreement.<sup>9</sup>

When asked to estimate the likelihood of a new intifada originating in East Jerusalem should the peace process fail, close to two-thirds of respondents (64%) said that a new intifada was at least somewhat likely, given the political climate in 2010. When combined with previous data, their responses made it clear that many East Jerusalemites were not only pessimistic about the longevity of a peace agreement, but also feared that a failure of the peace process would likely result in violent clashes. This was indeed what happened in East Jerusalem in 2015.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, as of 2010, only a third of Palestinians polled in East Jerusalem said that a unilateral declaration of Palestinian independence, even one backed by the United Nations, would positively influence their lives. Two-thirds said that such a unilateral step would be no more than an empty declaration and therefore would not have a positive effect. At the time, these results indicated that East Jerusalem Palestinians were largely pessimistic about their domestic and international options, at least for the near future. But they believed that a premature declaration of Palestinian independence, coupled with a failed peace process, could result in a rise of violence in the area, especially during the peak of the Arab Spring.

### **Citizenship: 2011 Polling**

From September 4 to September 10, 2011, Nabil Kukali of PCPO conducted another poll of East Jerusalem Palestinians and found that 45% of respondents would prefer to become citizens of Israel rather than of a new Palestinian state. This cast fresh doubts on the official Palestinian claim to the city and represented a significant uptick in preference for Israeli citizenship from the 2010 poll (which showed 35% preference for this outcome). In fact, only about one-quarter (23%) of the city's 300,000 Palestinian residents said they "definitely" preferred Palestinian citizenship, despite the surge in nationalist rhetoric leading up to the mid-September 2011 UN debate. Even more remarkably, 42% of respondents said they would actually be willing to move to a different neighborhood, if necessary, in order to remain under Israeli rather than Palestinian control.<sup>11</sup>

As in 2010, participants were more likely to prioritize practical concerns over ideological allegiance when asked whether they would prefer to be an Israeli or Palestinian citizen. From a practical standpoint, they offered several reasons for preferring Israeli citizenship: greater freedom of movement under Israel's jurisdiction, higher income, more employment opportunities, and a better social safety net (including health insurance, pensions, and disability benefits). Indeed, two-thirds reported that they traveled not just to West Jerusalem, but also to other parts of Israel every week. At the same time, more than half of the 2011 respondents said they would be concerned about increased corruption and decreased freedom of expression under Palestinian rule.

Nevertheless, just over half (53%) of these respondents said that they preferred Palestinian citizenship, a 23-percentage-point increase from 30% in November 2010. And almost half (44%) said they would probably move, if necessary, in order to obtain Palestinian citizenship. This change suggested that, as discussion of Palestinian statehood and the future of Jerusalem became more explicit, views shifted toward this option among the third of respondents who previously voiced uncertainty or refused to answer these questions in the 2010 poll.<sup>12</sup>

The large number of East Jerusalemites interested in Israeli citizenship is incongruent with the number who have actually obtained it. In theory, Palestinian legal residents of Jerusalem have had the right to request Israeli citizenship since 1967. However, only a small minority have chosen to exercise that right. Although on the surface this may seem surprising given previously mentioned results, several complex reasons are likely behind this: social stigma; fear of losing Jordanian citizenship; reluctance to engage in a potentially costly, time-consuming, and uncertain bureaucratic process;

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and a lack of sufficiently meaningful incentives. As a result, only about 15,000 out of 300,000 East Jerusalem Palestinians were Israeli citizens as of September 2011. Fewer than 10% of the poll's respondents reported holding an Israeli passport.<sup>13</sup>

The September 2011 poll suggested that this reticence could change if the need to choose between Israeli or Palestinian citizenship became somewhat more realistic. For example, a 62% majority said that “the ability to vote in Israeli national elections” would be at least moderately important to them if their neighborhood were recognized as part of Israel. The same percentage said that “social equality as full citizens of Israel” would also be important.

### Standard of Living

In 2011, East Jerusalem Palestinians remained generally dissatisfied with the amount of income they earned and property taxes they paid, and with the delays in travel caused by checkpoints or by Israel's West Bank security barrier. Yet a comparison of results from the previous year suggested a significant improvement in perceptions of other issues.

For example, a 57% majority were satisfied with their standard of living in 2011, up from 44% in November 2010. And just 43% reported dissatisfaction with their ability to obtain building permits, a significant drop of 24 points from the previous survey. Similarly, only 16% of respondents in 2011 reported dissatisfaction with Jerusalem municipal officials, a significant 19- point improvement compared to 35% in November 2010. Only a relatively small minority of East Jerusalem Palestinians (24%) said they were “very” dissatisfied with “the ease or difficulty of obtaining building permits” in the city in 2011—a surprising finding, given the preoccupation with this problem among some media outlets and NGOs. And while 70% of the 2011 respondents said that discrimination in municipal services was at least a “moderate” problem, only 7% named building permits, evictions, or demolitions as examples of such discrimination in response to an open-ended question.<sup>14</sup>

This counterintuitive finding derived from a combination of important but widely misunderstood underlying factors. First, in 2011, only a tiny fraction (6%) of Jerusalem's Palestinian population lived in the two neighborhoods most affected by demolitions, Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah. Second, while the demolitions caused distress for individuals, the number was low, averaging under fifty per year since 1967. Third, the movement of new Israeli residents into Palestinian neighborhoods had been remarkably minimal over the preceding twenty years, rising from 1,400 in 1991 to 2,200 in 2011, according

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to an estimate by independent Jerusalem expert Daniel Seidemann of the NGO Ir Amim.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, almost all the Israeli growth beyond the city's pre-1967 area was in previously empty land around the city's outskirts—areas likely to remain part of Israel in exchange for other territory in any future border agreement with a Palestinian state. Fourth, and perhaps most important, the Jerusalem municipality in 2011 had sharply increased the planned number of building approvals for Palestinians from the previous year.

### **Peace Process, Intifada, UN Recognition**

Looking ahead, 21% of East Jerusalem respondents in late 2011 said that a new intifada in Jerusalem was very likely if peace negotiations with Israel collapsed entirely; an additional 36% said this was somewhat likely. These figures were a slight but statistically perceptible decrease from November 2010. More ominously, however, two-thirds of participants predicted that “some groups” would continue the “armed struggle” against Israel even if the two sides reached a peace agreement. In the November 2010 poll, only 31% of respondents had reported that their neighbors would support the continuation of violence after a peace agreement.<sup>16</sup>

A solid majority—59%—said that a UN declaration of a Palestinian state without Israel's agreement would actually have a negative effect on their lives, up substantially from 2010. These opinions were in line with those of West Bank and Gaza residents. In addition, just one-third (34%) of respondents overall said that the 2014 UN vote on Palestinian membership affected their own lives in a positive practical way.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of optimism about the PA's efforts at the UN may have been driven by the decidedly mixed views about leading Palestinian political figures. PA president Abbas scored a 49% approval rating at the time. But Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and Israeli Arab Islamic Movement leader Sheikh Raed Salah were not far behind, with 40% and 33%, respectively. Remarkably, the Israeli mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, was in the same league, with 34%. By comparison, then president Barack Obama's popularity was considerably lower, at around 20%.<sup>18</sup>

### **Tipping Point Toward Israeli Citizenship, 2015**

By 2015, a 52% majority of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem reported that they would prefer to be citizens of Israel with equal rights—compared with just 42% who would opt to be citizens of a Palestinian state. This confirmed

## A NATION DIVIDED

the trend first established five years earlier and represented an increase from 2010 and 2011 numbers.<sup>19</sup>

In the earlier polls, East Jerusalem respondents mostly cited practical reasons for this preference. In this later poll, around half (47%) said they would take a good job inside Israel. But since most benefits of citizenship were already available to them even without Israeli citizenship, social taboos and the great practical difficulties of applying for that citizenship likely explained why only a very small proportion actually felt the need to acquire it.

### Views on Israel

Everyday access to Israel likely made Jerusalem's Palestinians more sanguine about the country's long-term future, with a majority (62%) believing that Israel would still exist, as either a Jewish or a binational state, in thirty or forty years—compared with just 47% of West Bankers and 42% of Gazans. East Jerusalem respondents were also significantly more aware of the city's ancient history than other Palestinians polled; 30% of East Jerusalemites surveyed, versus 18% of West Bankers, said that there were Jewish kingdoms and temples in Jerusalem in ancient times.<sup>20</sup>

In some other respects, too, East Jerusalem Palestinians had acquired relatively moderate attitudes toward Israel. A stunning 70% said they would accept the solution of “two states for two peoples—the Palestinian people and the Jewish people.” In the West Bank, the comparable figure was 56%; in Gaza, 44%. An equally noteworthy 40% in East Jerusalem said that “Jews have some rights to the land along with the Palestinians”—versus just 13% in the West Bank and 11% in Gaza. And concerning Jerusalem itself, only 23% of its Palestinian residents insisted on Palestinian sovereignty over the entire city—just half the percentage with that view in the West Bank or Gaza.<sup>21</sup>

This did not mean, however, that East Jerusalem's Palestinians were moderate in every respect. For example, 55% said that even after a two-state solution, they would still want to “liberate all of historic Palestine,” though not necessarily to expel or disenfranchise Israeli Jews. Combined with their comparatively widespread preference for Israeli citizenship, these numbers also signaled a relative openness to a “one-state solution,” not favored by most Gazans or West Bankers at the time. Meanwhile, a majority (61%) of East Jerusalem respondents also offered at least verbal support for “armed struggle and car attacks against the occupation.” This figure was somewhat lower than among West Bankers or Gazans, but not by much.<sup>22</sup>

## EVOLVING OPTIONS IN EAST JERUSALEM

But most surprising of all were the findings about partisan affinity. Fully 39% of East Jerusalem Palestinians said that Hamas “most closely represents your political affiliation.” This may have been—in part—due to a relative prioritization of religion: 37% picked “being a good Muslim” as their first or second personal priority from a list of ten options. But even more East Jerusalemites (47%) said they are politically “independent.” These numbers may also have been somewhat skewed by the reality that Fatah and the PA are not allowed to operate officially in Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup>

### **Sharp Reversion Away from Israel, 2017–20**

In late May 2017, during the ten days just before Ramadan, the author supervised a new poll through the PCPO. This and later data, from The Washington Institute and the PCPO in October 2018, reflected some of the same trends shown in previous polls in general social and economic areas, but demonstrated noticeable and at times very substantial shifts in the political tone adopted by East Jerusalemites. Overall, 2018 responses were similar to the 2017 polling data from the same region, but were more hardline in certain politically salient areas.

Relatedly, in early August 2017, an outbreak of small-scale Palestinian violence and public protest occurred on the heels of two years of sporadic stabbings and other attacks by local Palestinians. The general consensus at the time was that the common factor behind these attacks was the proliferation of false rumors of Israeli “encroachment” on al-Haram al-Sharif, the plaza surrounding the historic al-Aqsa Mosque.

On the surface, the polling results in 2017 gave an impression of a peaceful East Jerusalem population in line with earlier years, largely content with their work, travel, education, and social welfare benefits, despite lacking Israeli citizenship. Furthermore, when asked about a few bellwether issues concerning Palestinian and Israeli relations, the East Jerusalem respondents were generally more moderate in their views than West Bank or Gaza residents.

However, East Jerusalem’s Palestinians in 2017 were consistently more nationalist and more religious than in past polling responses. This is most strongly evidenced by the sharp drop from 2015 in the number of respondents who said that they would prefer Israeli citizenship to Palestinian citizenship. The eruption of the “knife intifada” shortly after the data collection for the September 2015 poll may partially explain this drop.

For context, the East Jerusalemites polled in 2015 indicated with a 52% majority that they would rather be citizens of Israel than Palestine, if they

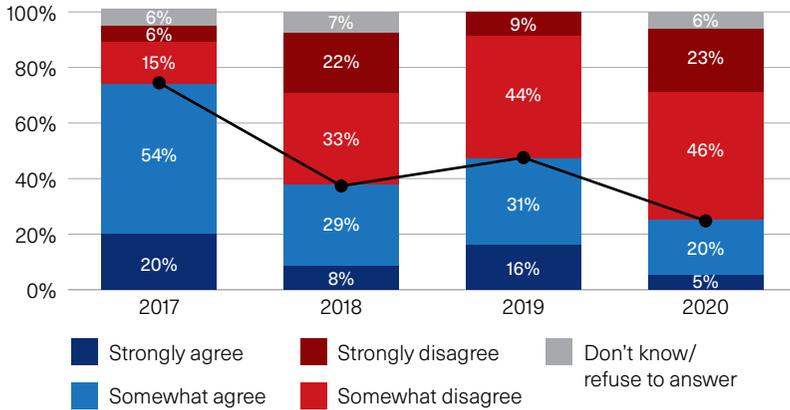
## A NATION DIVIDED

had equal rights afforded to them in both countries. Only 42% of the respondents said that they would prefer to be citizens of Palestine. In 2017, polled respondents from East Jerusalem shifted their professed opinions dramatically, with 77% saying that they would prefer to be citizens of Palestine. The 2018 poll confirms the 2017 results and extends the trend to a 95% majority of East Jerusalem respondents, an 18-percentage-point gain from 2017 and a massive 53-percentage-point gain from 2015. In 2020, the proportion of East Jerusalemites preferring Palestinian citizenship dropped significantly to 70%, but this still remained the top choice among respondents.<sup>24</sup>

As a whole, East Jerusalemites in 2018 professed more hardline and militant views on the ceasefire than respondents from other locales as well. A 55% majority of respondents from East Jerusalem were against preservation of a ceasefire in the West Bank and Gaza, a dramatic 34-point increase in opposition from the 2017 numbers. In 2020, hardline views were again on the rise, with 69% of respondents opposing the preservation of a ceasefire in the West Bank and Gaza. Furthermore, while a majority of West Bank and Gaza respondents supported the ceasefire in 2017, 2018, and 2020, the East Jerusalem respondents were the only subcategory polled who voiced majority discontent with the ceasefire in these three years (see figure 2.7).

The dramatic shift away from a preference for Israeli citizenship and benefits was also reflected in other responses. When East Jerusalem respondents were asked in 2018 and 2020 whether they would prefer to live in an equally nice home in Palestine or in Israel, in both years 95% said they would likely choose a home in Palestine. The data also indicates some level of polarization or hardline sentiment against Israelis: 82% of East Jerusalem respondents said that they would not accept any Jews in an independent Palestinian state. And 44% said that they disagreed at least somewhat with the idea of fostering interpersonal relationships or dialogue with Israelis as a way to encourage them toward the peace process—even though most do interact with Israelis in some fashion on a daily basis. That said, 44% is a lower percentage than in 2017, when a 60% majority of respondents were not supportive of fostering relationships with Israelis. In 2020, the proportion of East Jerusalemites who opposed fostering dialogue with Israelis rose to 50%. This trend was confirmed in 2019 polling; whereas a full 50% of Gazans stated that it would be better for them if they were part of Israel than under the control of the PA or Hamas, East Jerusalemites were actually more in line with West Bank attitudes: just 22% of West Bankers and 26% of East Jerusalemites believed it was better to be part of Israel. The trend continued slightly downward in 2020, with only 23% of East Jerusalemites believing it would be better to be part of Israel (see figure 2.8).<sup>25</sup>

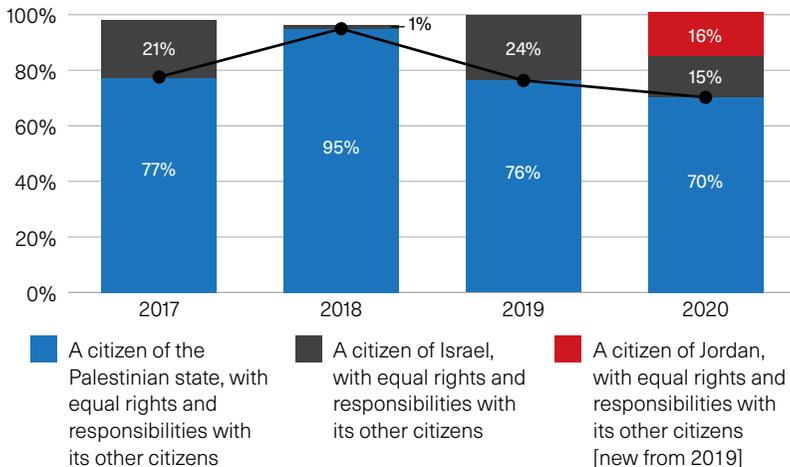
**Figure 2.7.** “Let’s continue talking about Palestinian national issues. I’d like to mention some ideas that people are talking about these days, and that different people have different opinions about. For each one, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: Hamas should preserve a ceasefire with Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.”



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\* TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 2.8.** “As you know, states offer their citizens certain rights, and also require certain responsibilities from them. Let’s suppose that there’s an agreement on a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, and you could choose your citizenship. Would you prefer to become”:



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

## A NATION DIVIDED

This mistrust of Israel was also evident elsewhere. When asked what they thought would be the most effective way for Israel to convince Palestinians that they wanted peace, 27% of East Jerusalem respondents said that Israel should stop building settlements beyond the wall. The second-most popular choice, with 23%, was for Israelis to curb “violent or aggressive behavior from settlers.” When responses were compared to those from 2017, it was clear that settlements had impacted East Jerusalemites’ opinions of Israel during the interim period. Only 17% of respondents in 2017 voiced this concern around building settlements, 10 percentage points lower than the 2018 numbers. Furthermore, only 7% of respondents in 2017 said that Israel should stop “violent or aggressive behavior by settlers” in order to prove that it was serious about peace. This was a 16-percentage-point difference from the heightened levels of concern evidenced in 2018. In 2020, the question was posed again with a slight variation in choices: “Israel should declare its willingness to share Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and of a Palestinian state” (9%); “Israel should stop its military or security incursions into Area A cities” (28%); “Israel should allow more Palestinian freedom of movement” (25%); “Israel should stop violence or aggressive behavior by the settlers” (25%); “Israel should free more Palestinian prisoners” (11%).<sup>26</sup>

When asked about the eventual outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 50% of East Jerusalem respondents said that Palestinians would control all of Palestine “because God was on their side.” In both 2017 and 2018, 23% of East Jerusalem respondents said that the most likely outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an eventual compromise with Israel, with the two countries living “side by side.”

Along these same lines, the 2018 data showed a sharp increase in the percentage of East Jerusalemites who were willing to start fresh with Israel in the event of peace: a 73% majority said that a two-state solution should end the conflict, a 23-percentage-point increase from the 50% of respondents who said this in 2017. By 2020, East Jerusalem respondents indicated a more bellicose view of the future, with only 14% believing a two-state solution should end the conflict. Meanwhile, 72% of respondents, a vast majority, believed that hostilities would persist, even after a two-state solution. This shift is possibly due to the release of Trump’s peace plan, which many Palestinians believe heavily favors the Israeli side.<sup>27</sup>

When asked to consider Hamas policies, respondents from East Jerusalem were marginally more negative toward the organization than their counterparts in the West Bank. A 55% majority of East Jerusalem respondents were against the weekly Hamas protests at the border. In contrast, only 48% of West Bank respondents answered likewise. Though East Jerusalem respondents condemned these protests, the majority still supported Hamas

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“maintaining its armed units, no matter what happens.” But support for these militias was down 18 points, from 70% in 2017 to only 52% in 2018.

Finally, 40% of East Jerusalem respondents said that they would not support the resumption of peace negotiations unless Israel were to offer serious concessions first. This was not dramatically different from views in the West Bank or Gaza, where 52% and 50% of respondents, respectively, reported similar opinions. Furthermore, 32% of respondents from East Jerusalem said that they would oppose the resumption of negotiations under any conditions. This was generally reflective of the larger trend toward a political hardline evident in other responses, indicating a growing discontent with Israeli governance and with the peace process.<sup>28</sup>

### **Neither Israeli Rule nor Uprising Against It**

On several metrics, from East Jerusalemites' citizenship preferences to the prospect of a future intifada, polling suggested a distaste for Israeli control but also a reluctance to take up arms to change the status quo. The Silwan and Abu Tor neighborhoods represented special cases for examination.

#### ***The Bellwether Citizenship Question: Palestine Trumped Israel***

East Jerusalem's 330,000 Palestinian legal residents, though overwhelmingly not Israeli citizens, have many practical advantages over their West Bank neighbors. Only the former have the right to work, study, and travel freely inside Israel, and to participate in Israel's extensive social welfare system of healthcare, unemployment, and retirement benefits. As a result, previous surveys demonstrated that a significant segment of these Palestinians gradually came to prefer Israeli to Palestinian citizenship, if faced with that stark choice.

In fact, from 2010 to 2015, the proportion of East Jerusalemite Arabs who said they would prefer Israeli to Palestinian citizenship rose substantially: from 35% to a remarkable 52%. But that number dropped precipitously, to the 10–20% range, once the 2015–16 Palestinian “knife intifada” violently alienated the Jewish and Arab halves of the city from each other. In the Washington Institute/PCPO January 2020 survey, that proportion stabilized at around 17%—compared with two-thirds who would choose citizenship in a Palestinian state.<sup>29</sup>

More light on this question comes from two other, related ones. Around one-fourth of the city's Palestinians agreed at least “somewhat” with this provocative assertion: “It would be better for us if we were part of Israel

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than in Palestinian Authority– or Hamas-ruled lands.” At the same time, however, three-fourths were inclined to believe that “Israel will never accept a one-state solution that gives the Palestinians equal rights, even if they become a clear majority.”

### ***Jordan Retained Minority Support***

In the 2020 survey, a new choice was offered as well: Jordanian citizenship. The results showed that option statistically tied with Israel, at 18%. Interestingly, that is close to the 25% of East Jerusalem Palestinians who said they still hold a valid Jordanian passport, more than half a century after Israel captured the city’s eastern half from the Hashemite Kingdom in the Six Day War. In addition, around half of all Palestinians in the city said Jordan should have “a major role” in solving the Palestinian problem. And about two-thirds held a “somewhat favorable” view of Jordan’s King Abdullah.

### ***And the Dream to Regain All of Palestine Persisted***

Like their West Bank and Gaza cousins, the majority (57%) of East Jerusalem Palestinians preferred a five-year goal of “regaining all of historic Palestine for the Palestinians, from the river to the sea,” rather than just “ending the occupation to achieve a two-state solution” (32%). Similarly, a follow-up question asked about next steps in case “the Palestinian leadership is able to negotiate a two-state solution.” Fewer than one-fifth of respondents said “that should end the conflict with Israel”; while over two-thirds said “the conflict should not end, and resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated.” Around 15% expressed no opinion on the matter.<sup>30</sup>

This pattern was also evident in response to several other relevant questions. Around three-quarters said that “any compromise with Israel should only be temporary.” Nearly as many thought that “eventually, the Palestinians will control almost all of Palestine”—either because “God is on their side” or because “they will outnumber the Jews someday.” Even about Jerusalem itself, around two-thirds of the city’s Arab residents agreed at least “somewhat” with this maximalist position: “We should demand Palestinian rule over all of Jerusalem, east and west, rather than agree to share or divide any part of it with Israel.” The exception lay in the relatively comfortable, outlying and mixed Arab-Jewish neighborhood of Abu Tor, where just 42% endorsed that hardline opinion.

Yet when such questions were phrased in terms not of “rights” but of realistic expectations, a much less sanguine view emerged. For example, three-quarters agreed at least “somewhat” with this assertion: “Regardless of what’s right, the reality is that most Israeli settlers will probably stay

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where they are, and most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands.” That terminology revealed a much more ambivalent attitude toward Israel’s longevity, if not its legitimacy (see figure 2.9).<sup>31</sup>

### ***Social Distancing Even Before Coronavirus***

The prevailing Palestinian sense of alienation from Israel is to a significant extent personal, as well as political. Respondents were asked about “your own personal contacts with Israelis, like at work, school, shopping, or on the bus or train.” In most Palestinian neighborhoods, 55% called those interactions “very bad,” plus 24% who answered “fairly bad.” In the middle-class, mixed Arab-Jewish large neighborhood of Abu Tor, the numbers were no better: 50% “very bad” and 37 percent “fairly bad.”

### ***So Why No Jerusalem Intifada?***

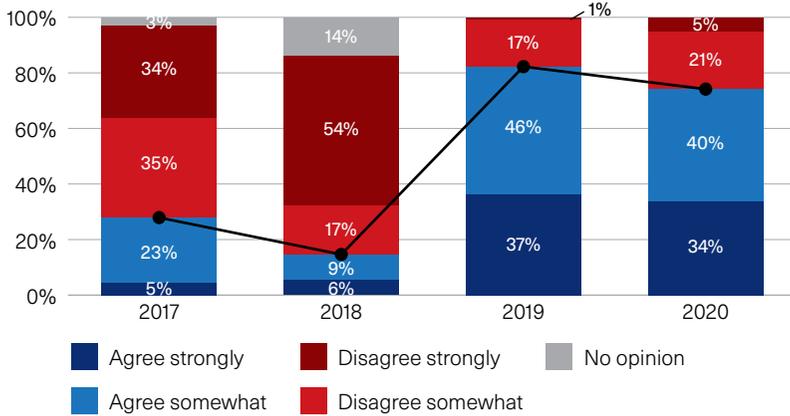
Given the general Palestinian rejection of Israeli rule, and the lack of any credible peace process, why was there no intifada in East Jerusalem, as in some previous periods—including the sporadic “knife intifada” of 2015–16? Instead of speculating, the authors turned to crowdsourcing, asking the locals themselves for their answers to this key question. The results pointed to a variety of factors, with some divergences by neighborhood (see figure 2.10).<sup>32</sup>

First of all, only around a fifth of East Jerusalemites said that an intifada should now become the top Palestinian priority, when asked about a range of responses to their current predicament. The corresponding figure was almost the same in the West Bank. And just around the same, a relatively small minority, felt “strongly” that Palestinians should resort to force even if Israel moves to annex more West Bank territory.

But why? In most of East Jerusalem, a plurality (around a third) of respondents selected two “major factors” behind the absence of an intifada: “Many people are more preoccupied with their personal lives than with politics”; and “Many people are concerned about tough Israeli reactions to any disturbances.” Somewhat fewer, around a quarter, also cited four additional popular attitudes as “major factors” in this context: concern about “tough PA or Hamas reactions to any disturbances”; preference for a peaceful approach; lack of trust in their own leaders; and hope for some outside intervention on their behalf.

A separate question came at this problem from a different direction. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with this statement: “When I think about what’s happening in Syria or Yemen and other places, I feel that my situation is actually not bad.” All around East

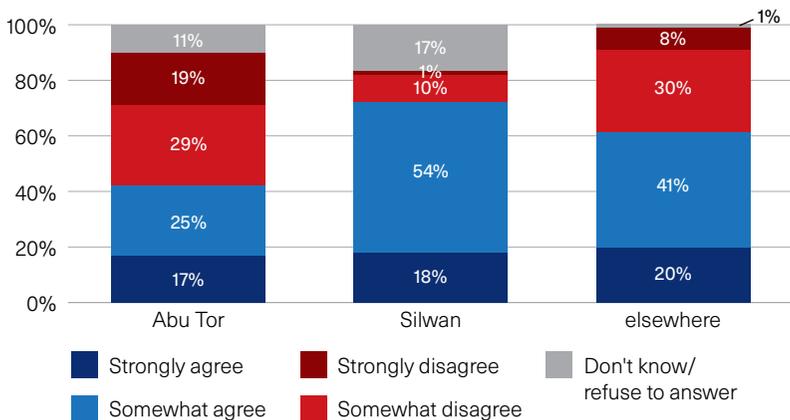
**Figure 2.9.** "I'd like to read you a few statements about these issues. For each one, please tell me if you agree or disagree strongly, or only somewhat: Regardless of what's right, the reality is that most Israeli settlers will probably stay where they are, and most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands."



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 2.10.** "Please tell me whether you would agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: The Palestinians should move to a new intifada and make armed struggle their top priority."



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

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Jerusalem, the majority agreed at least “somewhat” with that sentiment. This, too, probably helped explain why these Arab residents, even in the more militant neighborhoods, were not rising up en masse these days.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Silwan and Abu Tor Neighborhoods Differed from Others, and Each Other***

For purposes of the 2020 analysis, two neighborhoods were singled out for comparison—with each other and with the rest of Jerusalem’s Palestinian population. The two were Silwan, a small, poor, and densely packed area overlooking the Old City that has at times been a flashpoint for Jewish and Palestinian activism and tension; and nearby Abu Tor, a larger, more modern and middle-class area with some Jewish residences mixed in. The Silwan and Abu Tor boosted subsamples were small, at a hundred respondents each, so the findings should be taken with appropriate caution. Nevertheless, they provided a valid and useful contrast, along with an intriguing lesson in how complex and counterintuitive local attitudes may be.

In these adjacent southeastern neighborhoods, popular explanations for the absence of an intifada took a different, more sullen turn. In those two areas, on average, only around 10–15% of respondents cited any of the five earlier-noted options as a “major factor” behind the surface calm on their streets. Instead, much higher proportions volunteered “don’t know” responses, or simply refused to answer.

**In Silwan especially, fully 40% ducked a response to the following two prompts.** “Many people don’t see any leaders they trust to help organize an intifada or armed confrontation against Israel”; and “Some people believe that an external force will help the Palestinians.” This pattern probably reflected a higher prevalence of very private expectations, perhaps for support from Turkey, Hamas, the Israeli Arab Islamic Movement, or other controversial outside actors that were particularly active in the neighborhood in recent years.<sup>34</sup>

But more broadly, on almost the entire range of political questions, from rejection of a two-state solution to rejection of a new intifada, and many more such issues, attitudes in Abu Tor were approximately in line with those in most other Palestinian neighborhoods. By contrast, attitudes in Silwan were exceptionally militant. To cite but one instance, here are the percentages who agreed with this simple sentence: “I hope someday we can be friends with Israelis, since we are all human beings after all.” In Abu Tor, that figure was 29%; in most other neighborhoods, 33%. But in Silwan, a mere 4% agreed—compared with 90% who “strongly” disagreed.

## A NATION DIVIDED

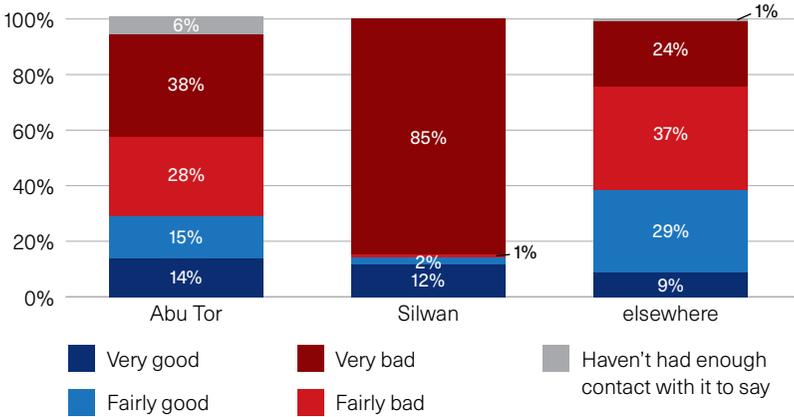
**Silwan has other special aspects.** Respondents from this small neighborhood, right on the edge of major Jewish archaeological digs around the ancient First and Second Temple “City of David” site, stood out for having exceptionally negative views of that activity. Fully 85% in Silwan called these excavations “very bad”—compared with only half in nearby Abu Tor, and just one-quarter elsewhere in the city. The conclusion was that this is primarily a highly localized problem, at least from a public opinion—if not necessarily a broader political—perspective (see figure 2.11).

There are, however, a few questions on which Silwan residents expressed more favorable views than anyone else. One concerns “recent infrastructure projects by the city, like new roads or sewage pipes.” Remarkably, 39% in Silwan said these improvements are “very good,” with an additional 59% calling them “fairly good.” By comparison, only half their neighbors in Abu Tor, and just 30% elsewhere, said that the municipality’s new infrastructure projects are even “fairly good.”

Also surprisingly positive are Silwani views on this proposition: “Most Israelis would accept a two-state solution, if that would provide permanent peace.” In Silwan, 79% agreed at least “somewhat” with that statement. But in all other neighborhoods combined, that figure drops to just 36%. This highly counterintuitive finding is probably related to another one: despite the occasional headlines about friction between Silwanis and some Jewish activists in their area, more Silwan residents (24%) than residents in other Palestinian neighborhoods report that their own personal interactions with Israelis are at least “fairly good” (see figure 2.12).

Yet as previously noted, one other finding stood out about Silwan: the unusually high proportion of “don’t knows” or refusals to answer specific questions. In this context, 22% would not comment on their everyday contacts with Israelis, compared with 8% in Abu Tor, and less than 1% elsewhere. Silwani responses to certain other questions, whether personal or political, showed a similar pattern. The clear impression was that their neighborhood was more insular, suspicious, reticent, and relatively fearful or just reluctant to express an opinion on selected issues.<sup>35</sup>

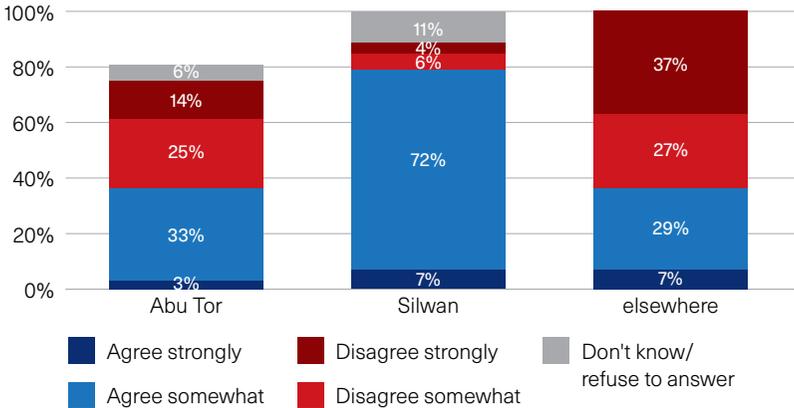
**Figure 2.11.** “Please tell me your personal opinion of the following: Israeli archaeological excavations, such as underground tunnels near Silwan.”



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

**Figure 2.12.** “Let me read you some last thoughts about the conflict with Israel that some people are debating these days. For each one, please tell me if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly: Most Israelis would accept a two-state solution, if that would provide permanent peace.”



**East Jerusalem respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

## Notes

1. David Pollock, "What Do the Arabs of East Jerusalem Really Want?" Issue Brief, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, September 7, 2011, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/what-do-the-arabs-of-east-jerusalem-really-want>.
2. David Pollock, "Poll Shows 40 Percent of Jerusalem Arabs Prefer Israel to a Palestinian State," PolicyWatch 1867, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 2, 2011, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/poll-shows-40-percent-of-jerusalem-arabs-prefer-israel-to-a-palestinian-sta>.
3. Pollock, "What Do East Jerusalem Arabs Want?" <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/what-do-the-arabs-of-east-jerusalem-really-want>.
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19. David Pollock, "Half of Jerusalem's Palestinians Would Prefer Israeli to Palestinian Citizenship," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/half-of-jeruselems-palestinians-would-prefer-israeli-to-palestinian-citizen>.

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26. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: May 16–17, 2017, n = 1,540 Palestinian adults; October 3–19, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults; January 23–February 11, 2020, n = 1,000 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2017, 2018) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
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32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.

### 3

## Policy Implications



THIS STUDY HAS SOUGHT TO CLARIFY THE CONTOURS OF PALESTINIAN public opinion in great detail, but the impact of this opinion is much less clear. For, as one Palestinian authority recently wrote, “The fact that Palestine has not witnessed any general election since 2006, and the fact that elections might not take place any time in the near future, might inevitably lead to authoritarianism and with it a total disregard to public opinion.”<sup>11</sup> Given the limited role of public opinion in Palestinian politics, the policy implications must be correspondingly modest.

Nevertheless, the survey data does reveal an opportunity for better coexistence between Israel and the Palestinian people of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, even though the prospect of either Palestinian democracy or a full political settlement with Israel seems remote. This paradox expresses itself in continued popular rejection of Israel’s legitimacy and of permanent peace—alongside support for a ceasefire, economic cooperation, and even formal negotiations with the Jewish state. The best opportunity for peaceful coexistence may rest in those people who, while not giving up on long-term Palestinian political aspirations, are more inclined than their political leaders to build on practical efforts to improve their lives.

To be sure, the Palestinian governments in the West Bank and Gaza are not democracies where public opinion determines public policy. Yet knowing how popular attitudes compare with official Palestinian policies (of the PA, Hamas, or both) can point the way toward more effective U.S. policymaking. Where official Palestinian policy enjoys solid popular support, active U.S. opposition risks a backlash, at both elite and street levels. Without some compelling reason to take that risk, the United States should probably avoid such dead-end approaches.

Conversely, certain discrepancies between official Palestinian policy and public opinion could open avenues for the United States to pursue positive changes to the status quo. Ideally, such initiatives would work in tandem with complementary adjustments in Israeli policy. This brief chapter addresses some specific recommendations in this regard.

## **Hold Palestinian Officials Accountable to Their Own People**

Two examples from the 2010–20 period amply illustrate this point, one a missed opportunity from the Obama era, and the other still a potential opportunity for the Trump administration. Findings from 2013 to 2014 in the West Bank and Gaza showed overwhelming support for a new “unity” government including both Hamas and Fatah—even as a narrower majority still supported peace talks and coexistence with Israel. The latter finding suggests that a U.S. policy of holding the Palestinian government to its previous commitments regarding nonviolence and negotiations with Israel would have enjoyed majority acceptance at the Palestinian popular level.

Moreover, the West Bank and Gaza publics, according to the most reliable polls, were then more receptive to the Fatah side than the Hamas side of their new national unity arrangement. This offered U.S. policymakers some prospect of working to preserve the option of a two-state solution, despite Hamas’s continuing rejection of that ideal.

Several misconceptions, however, marred the policy discussion. The first was that Hamas’s culpability for kidnapping and murder, and for the escalating rocketfire from Gaza against Israeli border towns, was labeled “unclear.” In reality, Hamas fully controlled the Gaza territory from which dozens of rockets were launched daily into Israeli civilian areas. The fact that Hamas had stopped “rogue” rocketfire in the past demonstrates that it could have enforced the same policy in 2014—had it chosen to do so.

A second misconception was that this violence was unrelated to the establishment in early June of the short-lived Fatah-Hamas unity government. Third, much of the public discussion blithely assumed that Abbas had been seriously “weakened” by his very commendable public condemnation of the 2014 kidnapping.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Abbas and Fatah maintained their strong straw poll lead over any potential Hamas challengers. Moreover, a solid majority of Palestinians—especially Gazans—clearly favored the unity government’s formal commitment to nonviolence, and just as clearly said that Hamas should preserve a ceasefire with Israel in Gaza and the West Bank.

Therefore, Washington would have been on firm ground in insisting that, as a condition for continued U.S. aid and support, the PA must either act unambiguously to end Hamas violence or dissolve its partnership with that U.S.-designated terrorist organization. This should have been the real—as distinct from rhetorical—U.S. policy response to Hamas terrorism. Given the realities just outlined, such firm U.S. conditionality would not have “weakened” Abbas; it would actually have strengthened him.

## A NATION DIVIDED

Fast-forwarding to today and tomorrow, the Trump administration's sharply different policy almost constitutes a laboratory experiment in denying aid to compel even modest Palestinian policy changes. The experiment has so far failed. But it has not led to popular backlash, anarchy, regime collapse, or any of the dire straits predicted by some analysts. And in the longer term, it offers hope of extracting at least some positive results in exchange for restoring benefits withheld.

### **Focus on the Short Term First**

This may sound obvious, but apparently it is not. The clear divergence in Palestinian popular attitudes toward two different timeframes—tactical pragmatism in the short term and maximalism in the long term—is one of the key findings from this past decade's worth of field research and analysis. For policymakers on all sides, these bifurcated attitudes present both an opportunity and a severe challenge. The opportunity is to take advantage of current tactical flexibility in order to take steps toward peaceful coexistence, and perhaps ultimately toward conflict resolution. The challenge, naturally, is how to make the transition from short-term fixes to lasting solutions. But this divergence in and of itself suggests that the U.S. policy focus on “final” status may be misplaced.

Although public opinion is certainly not the decisive factor in Palestinian politics, either in the West Bank or Gaza, this analysis suggests an immediate opening for U.S. policy. A U.S. emphasis on Palestinian political reform, economic opportunity, dialogue with Israelis and with other Arabs, and even an end to terrorist subsidies would find significantly more resonance than is often supposed—especially among the rising generation. Over time, this might yield some pressure on local politicians to soften their opposition to all those undoubtedly worthy objectives.

One reason for some cautious optimism on this score is the demographic divide on tactics between younger and older Palestinians. The former are notably more flexible on this dimension than the latter. If their tactical flexibility is acknowledged and reciprocated, their relatively hardline posture on “strategic” permanent status issues might moderate over time. Even if that doubly positive outcome fails to materialize, at least some short-term progress could be registered in the meantime, simply in order to keep diplomatic doors open and avoid aggravating an already difficult situation on the ground.

## Deal with Gazans, Not Just West Bankers

The aftermath of the 2014 war cemented Gazans' frustrations with Hamas tactics. Gaza respondents significantly favored Fatah politicians over Hamas ones, supported Hamas maintaining a ceasefire with Israel, and approved of the prospect of the PA taking over Gaza. Moreover, regional polls demonstrated that Hamas's popularity was at a very low point in Egypt, in Jordan, in Lebanon, and in Israel among Arab citizens. In all those places, according to a spring 2015 Pew Research Center poll, a clear majority had an unfavorable view of Hamas (except among Lebanese Shia). So too, remarkably, did 80% of Turkish respondents, despite their prime minister's vociferous backing of the group.<sup>3</sup> These fundamental facts could have guided the U.S. government and its regional allies as they searched not just for a ceasefire, but also for longer-term economic and political prescriptions for Gaza.

This surprising pattern of relative Gaza moderation on many tough questions repeated itself in subsequent years, with more missed opportunities for U.S. policy. In 2017, while most Gaza respondents denied Israel's right to exist, most also accepted the necessity to coexist. For example, the growing disillusionment with the possibility of "moving back" to "the 1948 lands," exhibited in 2017 survey responses, showed greater Gaza flexibility.

In fact, the biggest surprise was that on many peace process issues, West Bank Palestinians voice a harder political line than do their fellow nationals in Gaza. In 2017, while only one-quarter of West Bankers surveyed wanted to resume diplomatic discussions with the United States, Gaza responses were more positive.<sup>4</sup> And this trend would become increasingly prominent in 2018 and 2019.

For U.S. policymakers, the implications of these findings should be clear. Pressing the PA to come back to the table, let alone to make concessions, would see very little popular resonance in the West Bank and could even backfire. In fact, popular attitudes were surprisingly more receptive to practical U.S. economic interventions in Gaza; perhaps this was where the most urgent U.S. efforts should have been concentrated.

The Gaza public's relatively moderate views on some crucial economic, political, and even security issues continue to defy both common misconceptions and Hamas policy. For this reason, contrary to conventional wisdom, short-term proposals to improve Palestinian life would probably find greater popular support inside Gaza than in the West Bank—even if the practical difficulties of implementation may be worse under Hamas than under Israeli or PA supervision.

## **Do Not Count on Long-Term Goodwill**

Palestinian public opinion is not impervious to changing circumstances. Polls show that Israeli overtures, or at least restraint, may be met with more moderate Palestinian attitudes. Conversely, hardline Israeli policies—whether on settlements, security, or economic relations—are often accompanied by negative shifts in Palestinian public opinion. The U.S. interest in both short-term stability and medium-term coexistence would be well served by underscoring this point to the Israeli authorities.

But in the longer term, majority Palestinian popular opposition to permanent peace with Israel, even among the younger generation, suggests that real reconciliation remains a distant dream. U.S. efforts to promote progress on the ground, and to encourage Israelis to make overtures to their neighbors, might soften this hardline grassroots attitude eventually. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that a compromise deal based mostly on goodwill is not a realistic option, either for the United States or for any of its regional partners. The severe challenge is that given Palestinian attitudes about the long-term future, there is good reason to wonder if any final status agreement would exhibit real longevity. That is why, in applying the widely accepted principle of “land for peace,” responsible policymakers should pay at least as much attention to practical ways of maintaining peace even after such an agreement.

## **Account for East Jerusalem's Special Attitudes**

The political implications of this first-ever series of credible Palestinian surveys in the city are clear, if highly controversial. Simply put, official PA demands that East Jerusalem be the capital of a new Palestinian state were contrary to the wishes of much of the city's Palestinian population, at least during the first half of the 2010s.

Even now, these data points present a more complicated picture of East Jerusalem's role in the conflict than is usually acknowledged on the international stage. They could therefore help refine the discussion of Jerusalem during later negotiations. The presumptive solution—Palestinian neighborhoods for Palestine, and Israeli neighborhoods for Israel—may not be aligned with the desires of the population. East Jerusalem Palestinians are not statistically equivalent in their views to their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza, and treating them as such would be damaging both to the local population and to broader peace efforts. Political leaders both in the region and internationally should recognize and act upon these differences in order to better reflect the needs and preferences of the population actually living in East Jerusalem.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The evidence from East Jerusalem respondents is that practical, mutually beneficial working relations with Israelis have tended to produce more moderate attitudes. On questions of Israel's longevity, Jewish rights to the land, and others, those 300,000 Palestinians were more conciliatory than their 4 million or so counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza, from 2010 through 2015. Later polls, however, demonstrate how attitudes can sour when close proximity fosters increased hostility.

In light of these shifting, highly distinctive popular attitudes, one useful policy pointer would be to look for creative ways to maintain the special access of East Jerusalem Palestinians to jobs, travel, social welfare benefits, education, and other productive contacts with Israel—whatever the larger political or religious disputes and conflict-resolution mechanisms regarding the city's future. The crux of the matter is to engage the people, not just the politicians. Working to accommodate popular desires for practical progress, certainly as the first step, could be the key to one day clearing the roadblocks to peace at the higher political levels.

## Notes

1. Walid Ladadweh, *Role of Palestinian Public Opinion in the Making of PA Policy*, Critical Policy Brief 6 (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2019), 4, <http://bit.ly/36kDmJ0>.
2. Barak Ravid, "Abbas Condemns Kidnapping of Israeli Teens, Death of Palestinian Youth," *Haaretz*, June 16, 2014, <https://www.haaretz.com/premium-abbas-condemns-kidnapping-1.5252048>.
3. Pew Research Center, "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," March 8, 2016 (covering a poll conducted October 14, 2014–May 21, 2015; n = 5,601 Israeli and Palestinian adults), <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/03/Israel-Survey-Full-Report.pdf>.
4. David Pollock, "The Palestinian Public's Tough Choices: On Violence, Instability, Hamas, 'Jewish State,'" *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 27, 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-palestinian-publics-tough-choices-on-violence-instability-hamas-jewish>.

## 4

# Methodology



DURING THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, PALESTINIANS HAVE LED other Arab pollsters in their volume of political polling and their reliability across contractors. A number of reputable pollsters have taken the pulse of the Palestinian public at frequent intervals ever since the 1993 Oslo Accords opened up the territories to this kind of research. One unusual advantage enjoyed by early Palestinian pollsters was the relatively wide acceptance of polling efforts by their own society and leadership, who tended to share the sense that these polls represented a reprieve from Israeli prohibitions against such political activity.

A small anecdote illustrates this point. The author worked on one of the very first true probability samples for a Palestinian political poll in late May 1994. While he and the field supervisor took a random walk to choose interview households in the West Bank village of Anabta, the supervisor remarked how pleased he was that the very act of conducting a public opinion poll seemed to herald a new era of freedom and even peace. But one interview subject was too overcome by emotion to complete the questionnaire because she had recently lost a son in the waning days of the first intifada. Coming out of her house, the author asked the field supervisor whether he knew the woman's story, to which he replied, "Yes, I know. She's my mother." Despite his loss, this young man was ready to put the past behind him and participate in peaceful efforts, including public opinion polls—and so, too, according to his polls and many others, were the majority of Palestinians.

On the methodological level, most Palestinian pollsters moved quickly beyond quota or other unscientific sampling to implement more reliable standard probability techniques. Social pressures or dissimulation, however, continue to present a harder challenge to obtaining accurate results. Perhaps as a consequence, some of these polls appear to have a slight tendency to underrepresent Islamist or extreme views.

Palestinian pollsters have actually tested and attempted to remedy possible sources of such bias. For instance, in November 1994, one polling group tracked whether interviewers who dressed in religious Islamic

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fashion recorded more “votes” for Hamas than did their Western-dressed colleagues during in-person interviews with respondents. When that seemed to be the case, by about 10 percentage points, the group sought more-neutral clothing for its fieldworkers.

Generally, when substantial discrepancies in data between different polls do appear, on closer inspection they usually seem to reflect differences in question wording rather than major sampling or reporting discrepancies. On the whole, results from different pollsters from similar time periods are usually in the same ballpark, and thus pass the test of inter-pollster reliability.

The professionalism of these polls immediately leads back to a riddle from the last Palestinian national elections in 2006. If these Palestinian polls were so good, why did they miss the most fateful—and eminently pollable—result of recent Palestinian political history, namely, the Hamas victory?

The answer is deceptively simple. It was not the polls themselves, but the analysts' failure to take into account the hybrid nature of the Palestinian electoral system, that proved to be such an embarrassment. Half the 128 seats in the Palestinian legislature were allotted on the basis of at-large voting results by party lists, but the other half were decided according to votes for individual candidates in each separate electoral district. Several preelection polls correctly discovered that Hamas and Fatah were locked in an unexpectedly and increasingly close race for votes at the national level in what looked like a virtual tie as Election Day approached. But no known poll investigated the electoral contest at the district level. In every one of the districts, Hamas ran only a single candidate for each available seat, while an undisciplined and divided Fatah party often ran several competing candidates. The predictable (but unpredicted) outcome of this strategy was that Fatah votes in various districts were split many different ways and largely wasted—leaving the Hamas candidates in those districts with a plurality, and thus a seat in parliament.

As a result, Hamas ended up with a solid overall majority of seventy-four seats. (In this respect, Palestinian pollsters could have learned a valuable lesson from their Jordanian counterparts just across the river. The latter have been paying careful attention to the gerrymandering and other vagaries of Jordan's electoral districting—and accurately predicting the results—ever since the first truly competitive parliamentary vote in that country in 1989.) After the surprise result of the 2006 Palestinian election, reports surfaced that some U.S. government survey researchers had in fact warned about a Hamas upset electoral victory. The warning, however, apparently came much too close to election time for anyone to do anything about it, even had anyone been so inclined.

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Palestinian pollsters have not been able to revise their strategy for election polling because no national elections have since been held. However, multiple pollsters do continue to pose hypothetical political questions, such as which candidate a respondent would vote for were presidential elections to be held. Because of this large data set already available from Palestinian pollsters, this report does not focus on internal Palestinian politics.

Other problems that pollsters in the region must tackle include the need to analyze separately distinct social segments (ethnic, sectarian, or geographic) in order to better determine where their attitudes converge and diverge. In the case of East Jerusalem, until the author conducted polls there beginning in 2010, no polling had ever been conducted in the area. Earlier polls that ignored East Jerusalem resulted in data too sparse to be representative of its population.

Subsequent polling of East Jerusalemites has demonstrated just how widely this population can vary in its perspectives (see chapter 2). Lumping the West Bank and Gaza together is also an increasingly unsound methodology, as the attitudes and circumstances of their populations are diverging more and more.

However, the most important lesson from the past decade's polling on Palestine is that one must pursue it consistently and analyze the resulting data stringently if policymakers are to understand the nature of each subregion. Data collected once or twice may provide a snapshot of public opinion, but consistent trend analysis over time can yield valuable insights and guide policy more effectively. Therefore, this project has tracked polling results in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem in order to develop a repository of data, extrapolate significant social, political, and economic trends, and ultimately suggest a meaningful path forward based on insights into Palestinian public opinion over time.

By tracking polls released by reliable Palestinian pollsters, this project endeavors to build upon the trends first apparent in earlier studies in order to paint a more complete picture of Palestinian preferences and motivations in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Examining the impact of notable political, social, and economic events on polling respondents ultimately presents Palestinians more accurately as a nuanced and conflicted population with changing needs and wants—and often at odds not just with the Israeli government, but also with their own governments in both the West Bank and Gaza.

In order to extend the trend analysis using sources beyond Washington Institute polling, which began in 2010, the author has also relied on outside polling data. This includes data from Nader Said of Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), whose organization began polling regularly in

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2007, from Khalil Shikaki's Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), and from Nabil Kukali's Palestine Center for Public Opinion (PCPO), which also administered a number of later Washington Institute polls.

The Washington Institute initially partnered with the PCPO and other Palestinian polling institutions in 2014 to produce a series of polls that built on the author's work from 2010 and 2011 on East Jerusalemites' views of major issues facing Palestinian society. These polls have been conducted yearly except in 2016, with approximately half of the questions targeting long-term trends and the other half highlighting relevant issues of the moment.

Methodologically, the surveys comprise face-to-face interviews with representative samples of adult Gazans, West Bankers, and East Jerusalemites using standard geographic probability techniques. The Palestinian pollster or pollsters employ only highly qualified and experienced local staff in each territory, with strict assurances of confidentiality and advanced, real-time GPS and tablet-based quality controls. The author has personally supervised sampling frames, fieldwork protocols, questionnaire translation, and data processing and reporting in all polls except the poll conducted in 2019.

The 2014 poll, specifically, was conducted from June 15 to 17 by a highly respected Palestinian pollster, who held face-to-face interviews with 1,200 Palestinians throughout Gaza and the West Bank using standard random geographical probability sampling, yielding a margin of error of approximately 3%.

In 2015, the PCPO conducted the poll, which consisted of personal interviews with a representative geographic probability sample of 919 respondents, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately 3.5%.

The PCPO again conducted the poll in 2017, with face-to-face interviews from May 16 to May 27 among a representative sample of 1,540 Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem under the author's overall direction.

In 2018, findings were based on personal interview surveys conducted by two different reputable Palestinian pollsters from October 3 to 19, using standard geographic probability sample techniques. One poll comprised a representative sample of 732 West Bank and East Jerusalem Palestinians and 468 Gazans, yielding margins of error of approximately 3.7% and 4.1%, respectively. The other poll, conducted by the PCPO, comprised representative samples of 500 each in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, yielding margins of error of approximately 4% in each territory.

The PCPO conducted the 2019 survey from June 27 to July 15, using face-to-face interviews and standard geographic probability techniques to provide accurate representative samples. Interviews were conducted in Arabic by trained local staff, supervised by experienced survey professionals using

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advanced, GPS-specified tablet data entry and coding techniques, with strict assurances of confidentiality. The sample sizes were 500 each in the West Bank and Gaza, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately 4% for each subsample, while in East Jerusalem it was 200. In line with the total target population profile, half the polling sample was between ages eighteen and thirty, while the other half was over thirty. The statistical margin of error for each generational subsample is naturally somewhat larger than the regional subsample margin of error of approximately 4%.

In 2020, surveys were also conducted by PCPO, comprising face-to-face interviews among a representative sample of 500 West Bankers, 500 Gazans, and 650 East Jerusalemites from January 23 to February 11. The project was sponsored by The Washington Institute, and the author personally traveled to the region to supervise it, ensuring strict respondent confidentiality, technical proficiency, and quality controls. The margin of error for the separate West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem subsamples was approximately 4% (although significantly larger for the two boosted East Jerusalem neighborhood subsamples).

The author personally traveled to the region to supervise all PCPO surveys, except for the 2019 round of fieldwork. He approved the PCPO's sampling frames and methods, field protocols and quality controls, questionnaire translations, strict assurances of confidentiality and noninterference by any outside party, and all other procedural aspects of the research. Additional methodological details are readily available on request.

The focus on tabulating responses by region makes the clear differences in perspectives between Gazans, West Bankers, and East Jerusalemites discernible. Moreover, the major shifts in trends visible over the polling period help demonstrate the changes in Palestinian public opinion that have emerged over the past decade. In addition, the relatively hardline results from some questions about the long term argue convincingly that the tactical moderation often expressed on short-term issues has not simply been a pretense or an artifact of "courtesy bias." Indeed, it is precisely these mixed-to-negative views of Israel's distant future that offer greater credence to the relatively pragmatic voices on more immediate issues explored later.

In conducting this polling, The Washington Institute has contributed to the field of Palestinian polling by providing unique question formulations and rigorous observation, and by highlighting the difference between the actions and statements of Palestinian political actors and the publics they claim to represent. Moreover, this analysis focuses on three elements of Palestinian public attitudes: domestic issues, views on U.S. peace efforts in the decade from 2010 to 2020, and attitudes toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ability to access a number of simultaneous polls

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on similar questions provides invaluable information about inter-pollster reliability. In late 2018, the author conducted an unusually direct experiment, comparing findings of two face-to-face, standard probability surveys taken by two different, reliable Palestinian pollsters among representative samples of some 500 randomly selected Gazans between October 3 and 15. One poll was supervised by the highly experienced, Bethlehem-based PCPO. The other, a condensed version with selected key questions, was run by a different but equally qualified organization based in Ramallah that insists on anonymity. To optimize access and validity, both organizations used local Gaza interviewers and field supervisors exclusively.

The data sets from these two polls are broadly similar, suggesting a relatively high degree of reliability. However, there were some differences, as will be noted in the appropriate sections. These discrepancies can almost certainly be attributed to the fact that in one survey, these questions followed a long list of provocative topics, which can influence responses.



## **Part II**



# **Decade of Divisions: Chronological Analysis**



# Political Climate Changes During Obama's First Term, 2009–13



THE PERIOD BETWEEN 2009 AND 2013 MARKED A SERIES OF MAJOR shifts in the United States, Israel, and the Arab world. During the early period of the Obama administration, U.S. officials made optimistic commitments on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Yet the Arab Spring shook international expectations of the region, while Hamas continued to solidify its control over Gaza in the wake of its 2007 takeover of the territory.

The author spent time with lead researchers Nader Said of AWRAD and Nabil Kukali of PCPO in Ramallah and Bethlehem as they were in the final stages of preparing two August 2010 polls.<sup>1</sup> These meetings reconfirmed the integrity, technical competence, and analytical acumen that previous professional acquaintance with both men had demonstrated, dating back to the infancy of Palestinian polling in 1993. Several trend questions that would be continued in later Washington Institute polling were discussed at the meetings.

## **Domestic Shifts: Hamas Popularity Suffers**

Three years after the Hamas political triumph in the PA's last national parliamentary elections in 2006, popular opinions of Hamas had declined dramatically. In early January 2008, Fatah was outrunning Hamas in both the West Bank and Gaza by 10, 20, or even 30 percentage points in some districts—except for the two largest cities, Gaza City and Jerusalem, where the two parties were tied.<sup>2</sup> The decline in popular approval of Hamas would continue into 2010. By late October of that year, AWRAD polls reported that support for Hamas had reached what was then an all-time low, just 11%, after peaking after the 2006 election.<sup>3</sup> At the time, Hamas was slightly more popular in Gaza than in the West Bank, though these results would reverse themselves

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in the following years.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, even ostensibly political victories did little to reverse this downward trend: after Hamas scored a propaganda coup in February 2008 by temporarily breaching the border wall between Egypt and Gaza, it gained only 3 points in popularity in polling of Palestinians, with Fatah still ahead by 12 percentage points—46% to 34%.<sup>5</sup>

Polls conducted by AWRAD and PCPO in August 2010 highlighted another important domestic political trend: support for PA prime minister Salam Fayyad's government was increasing. Fayyad—of the short-lived Third Way Party, which was designed to provide an alternative to Hamas and Fatah—initially became prime minister as part of Abbas's emergency government, developed in 2007 in response to the Hamas electoral victory. Three years into his term as prime minister, which would end with his resignation in 2013, a 57% majority of respondents in the PCPO poll said that Fayyad's administration had "advanced the reform process in the Palestinian Authority."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, most viewed his performance as either better than (54%) or equal to (23%) that of the previous, Hamas-led government. Around half of the respondents (52%) credited Fayyad with decreasing "the rate of corruption" and "improving internal security and safety" (44%) in Palestine. Only 15% of respondents cited deterioration in either of those areas.<sup>7</sup> Overall, most West Bank and Gaza Palestinians preferred either this "current government with a majority of independents" (47%) or "a government with a Fatah majority" (33%). Only 14% of respondents opted for a Hamas-led government in late summer 2010.<sup>8</sup>

However, this overall increase in support for Fayyad and general satisfaction with his policies did not extend to satisfaction with the Palestinian economy, a situation that would only worsen in the following years because of the PA's ongoing financial crisis. In fact, two-thirds of respondents in the PCPO poll indicated that they were worried about "the subsistence of their family," and nearly half (44%) rated either jobs or money as their "main concern at present." Most troubling was the fact that only a third of respondents to the PCPO poll called their personal economic situation "good."<sup>9</sup> It was clear that economics were not driving Fayyad's success—rather, the shift indicated that Hamas's political hard line was losing support in the region. Worries over economic conditions in the West Bank and Gaza would continue to be top priority, and a plurality of respondents in a September 2012 poll from PCPSR (32%) stated that poverty and unemployment was "the most severe problem confronting Palestinians" at the time.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, most Palestinians remained skeptical that the new round of peace talks that came with the incoming Obama administration in 2009 would actually yield the desired results. In a September 2012 PCPSR poll, two-thirds said that President Obama was incapable of achieving an

independent Palestinian state—almost exactly the same figure found in polls from January and March of 2010. Furthermore, a large minority (around 40%) still voiced support for some forms of violence to advance this goal, though such support had declined modestly since January 2010.<sup>11</sup>

### **Peace Process**

The year 2009 marked not just the beginning of the Obama administration but also Binyamin Netanyahu's return as Israel's prime minister after defeat in 1999, and the first war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The ceasefire was holding by February. Netanyahu's subsequent visit to Washington to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, among other things, was marked by a dispute: Obama insisted that the next step should be a total Israeli freeze on settlements in the West Bank, but Netanyahu resisted. He did, however, offer his first public acceptance, in a June speech at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv, of a two-state solution: a negotiated agreement to establish a Palestinian state, including territory currently under Israeli control, alongside Israel. Netanyahu's later announcement of a ten-month settlement freeze would ultimately pave the way for short-lived direct talks between him and PA president Mahmoud Abbas. Although these talks would collapse, Palestinian public opinion demonstrated an openness to settling the conflict, though little trust in the intentions of the other side.

Palestinian polls from 2009 indicated that the public was initially skeptical of the prospects for such an agreement, with only about half voicing support.<sup>12</sup> But as Netanyahu agreed to a ten-month "moratorium" on new settlement construction, and as he and Abbas prepared to begin peace talks in Washington during September 2010, the Palestinian public had become slightly more receptive. Several different Palestinian pollsters documented this shift in polls from August of 2010.<sup>13</sup>

While much of the media coverage until that moment had discussed Palestinian opposition to the negotiations, AWRAD's and PCPO's polls—both conducted during August 2010—suggested that the people of the West Bank and Gaza were now swinging solidly behind compromise positions on several contentious core issues.<sup>14</sup>

Admittedly, these shifts may have been fragile, reversible, or perhaps even irrelevant. New Israeli-Palestinian clashes, a fresh round of perceived provocations, or failed talks were likely to spark a popular backlash. Hamas aside, Palestinian political figures were deeply divided on the issue, even within Fatah. In addition, Palestinians outside the West Bank and Gaza—who were not represented in these polls—almost certainly harbored

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more hardline views, and leaders take that into account. Even “inside” the territories, most of the public remained highly skeptical about the actual prospects for peace, while a large and vocal minority remained adamantly opposed. Indeed, most Palestinians objected to resuming direct negotiations without advance commitments on timetables, terms of reference, and an Israeli settlement freeze.

Nevertheless, the PCPO poll showed a two-to-one preference for separate states of Israel and Palestine (55%) rather than “one binational state in all of Palestine” (28%).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, 62% of the AWRAD respondents viewed a two-state solution as at least “tolerable.”<sup>16</sup> More dramatically, AWRAD reported that an overwhelming majority (95%) of Palestinian respondents would agree to “consider a comprehensive peace agreement, if implemented, as the end of the conflict.”<sup>17</sup> Yet when asked whether “Palestinians and Israelis will coexist if Palestinians gain their own independent state,” a mere 17% answered “yes,” compared to 38% “maybe” and 42% “no.”<sup>18</sup> These apparently contradictory answers hinted at a trend that would emerge more clearly in later Washington Institute polling: a majority or near majority of Palestinian respondents were often likely to accept practical measures to end the conflict, even while many doubted the likelihood of maintaining coexistence after such an agreement.

Notably, these generally positive findings from late summer 2010 were broadly consistent with earlier surveys conducted in March and June of 2010 by PCPSR, which showed around 60% support for a two-state solution, for an end to the conflict, and even for “mutual recognition of Israel as the state for the Jewish people and Palestine as the state for the Palestinian people.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, PCPSR polling documented an upward overall trend in support for these and other compromises with Israel since its poll in August 2009.<sup>20</sup>

Further, a majority of the Palestinians polled by AWRAD in August 2010 were amenable to “land swaps” with Israel. More specifically, two-thirds of Palestinians said that adjusting “the 1967 border through agreement to equivalent exchange of land” was at least “tolerable.” Even more pointedly, nearly half (47%) acquiesced to “moving [Israeli] settlers to large blocs and exchanging land.” This answer represented a significant shift in attitudes: reliable unpublished data from earlier in 2010 showed that land swaps had previously been an important sticking point among Palestinians.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, nearly two-thirds (64%) of the AWRAD respondents said it was at least “tolerable” for refugees to “return to Palestine (West Bank/Gaza) within agreed borders” as part of a peace agreement—implicitly excluding any return to Israel—though it is important to note that the question was not framed around the claim to a historic “right of return.” Moreover, fully

half of the respondents said that they would accept a UN decision “to close the refugee camps and resettle [the refugees] with compensation outside of Israel.”<sup>22</sup> Many polls at the time showed that large majorities in the West Bank and Gaza called recognition of the “right of return” “essential” to any peace agreement. Yet when asked in a September 2012 PCPSR poll to rank it alongside three other national goals, only 30% picked the “right of return” as the most important—compared with an independent Palestinian state (44%), an Islamic society (15%), and a democratic society (11%).<sup>23</sup>

About half of respondents were also relatively moderate in their views on the fate of Jerusalem. A total of 46% of AWRAD respondents were willing to tolerate the option of “dividing the city according to Palestinian and Israeli neighborhoods.” This was an implicit concession that Israel would retain the large post-1967 areas it annexed to the Jerusalem municipality, which at the time were populated by nearly a quarter million Jewish residents. Moreover, exactly half of the Palestinians polled indicated they would acquiesce to a compromise in which “the Western Wall will be under Israeli sovereignty,” as long as “Christian and Muslim holy sites, including the Temple Mount, will be under Palestinian sovereignty.”<sup>24</sup>

Ironically, PA messaging during this period about “reclaiming” Jaffa, Haifa, and all of Israel does not seem to have convinced the PA’s own public that this was its government’s true intent. In PCPSR polls in June 2012 and again in September 2012, only one-quarter of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians polled said that the long-term goal of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or PA was to conquer all of Israel; most said that goal was just to recover some or all of the territories captured by Israel in 1967.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, more than twice as high a proportion of Israeli respondents (66% in March, 54% in June, and 56% in September 2012) believed that the PLO or PA’s long-term goal really was to conquer all of Israel.<sup>26</sup> Taken together, these results suggested an ironic and disturbing conclusion: while the PA’s public claiming of lands in pre-1967 Israel may have helped alienate the Israeli public, the PA apparently had not succeeded in persuading its own public by 2012 that this was its intention. Thus, this incitement appears to have had a self-defeating aspect if it was meant to bolster popular support.

When examining the role of the PA during this period, as well as its messaging regarding the peace process, it is worth remembering that Palestinian views of the PA and its leaders, including President Abbas, are often negative, and therefore, there was little reason to expect the leadership’s words to be decisive concerning popular attitudes toward Israel.

## **Extant Frameworks and Regional Flexibility**

By September 2010, Netanyahu and Abbas had arranged to meet in New York for the first face-to-face peace negotiations during the Obama administration. A number of potential frameworks had previously been proposed to suggest ways forward to a final status agreement. During September 2010, respondents across the region were asked their opinion on various proposals. The results suggested that a window existed during the short-lived Netanyahu-Abbas negotiations that same month where popular opinion across the Middle East—among Palestinians, Israelis, and those in the broader Arab world—would look on successful negotiations relatively favorably.

Surveys of the Israeli, Palestinian, and greater Arab public from the pre-Arab Spring era indicated that around half of each group supported the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. This Saudi-proposed plan focused on peace and Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for Israel's full withdrawal from the territories it had captured in the Six Day War in 1967. Similarly, around half of respondents in each of these publics also supported other, analogous proposals focused more narrowly on "land for peace" in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, such as the unofficial Palestinian-Israeli Geneva Accord of 2003 or the Clinton Parameters of December 2000.<sup>27</sup>

Given such statistics, was this glass half empty or half full? These results suggested that political leadership had a greater degree of flexibility than either side believed, and that skillful maneuvering could have moved these societies toward peace based on mutual compromises in 2002–03 and 2010. Ultimately, the failure of such mutual compromises to emerge derailed the talks. It is notable nevertheless that, at least from a public perspective, both Israeli and Palestinian societies had a significant degree of interest in such compromises. Just as at least a narrow majority of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians polled expressed support for compromise proposals during the month preceding the Netanyahu-Abbas negotiations, Israeli respondents tended to support such proposals even when they were worded to provide for sharing Jerusalem and omitted any recognition of Israel as a "Jewish state."

At the same time, Palestinians were somewhat more likely, and Israelis somewhat less likely, to support the Arab Peace Initiative as compared to the other proposals just mentioned—in both cases, almost certainly because it included an ambiguous reference to UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and the Palestinian refugee "right of return" to Israeli territory. For a significant number of Israelis, this issue seemed to outweigh even the prospect of recognition by the entire Arab League. For a significant number

of Palestinians, the inclusion of this concept—nebulous as it was—as well as the explicit backing of Arab states, appeared to expand willingness to accept peace with Israel. Even so, a majority had already indicated in 2010 polling a willingness to accept an end to the conflict even without explicit provision for refugee movement into pre-1967 territory.

Attitudes toward other negotiations roadmaps were similarly flexible. In March 2010, the International Peace Institute reported that 56% of Israelis polled supported the Geneva Accords—along with about half of the Palestinian respondents.<sup>28</sup> The group's poll from December 2008 had shown similar results, with a 51% support rating among Israelis but about 41% among Palestinians, suggesting an increasingly flexible popular attitude toward frameworks now that negotiations were actually in progress.<sup>29</sup> Palestinian support, measured in November 2010, increased to 68% when respondents were asked specifically about the clause stating that Israel would withdraw from East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, and receive no more than 3% of Palestinian-controlled land in return.

Of course, a great deal in polling—especially on such a sensitive and complicated issue—depends upon the precise timing, wording, and sample selection of surveys. That is all the more reason why polls asking not about the Arab Peace Initiative specifically, but about other loosely similar proposals, could only be understood as a rough guide to public opinion on these issues at the time. Even polls that asked explicitly about the initiative must be taken with the proverbial grain (or more) of salt, depending upon their individual context, technical specifications, and the overall credibility of the pollster.

Also notable were the findings on Israeli attitudes toward the hot-button issue of Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. A November 2011 Brookings Institution survey showed overwhelming support among Israeli Jews for the demand for recognition (79%); half that percentage stipulated that such recognition should be a precondition for negotiations or a settlement freeze, while the other half was willing to wait for recognition as part of a final peace agreement.<sup>30</sup> Findings presented by leading Israeli expert Yehuda Ben Meir, based at the Institute for National Security Studies, showed that even as of May 2012, such recognition would result in a significant percentage increase (15 points) in Israeli Jews who accepted the creation of a Palestinian state as part of a peace agreement.<sup>31</sup>

James Zogby, an expert serving as president of the Arab American Institute, presented results from separate late 2012 surveys that showed “58 percent of [Israeli] Jews thought that Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state would make peace more possible—and only 35 percent of the Palestinians [in the West Bank and Gaza thought so].”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless,

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PCPSR polls from this period demonstrated that approximately 60% of Palestinians agreed to recognition of Israel as a Jewish state as part of an acceptable package peace deal, though such a proposal lost majority support by 2014.<sup>33</sup> Zogby's polls even showed that 36% of Palestinian refugees in Jordan agreed at the time, under those circumstances, to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.<sup>34</sup>

A longer look at trends in Israeli and Palestinian polling since the end of the second intifada in 2005 and Abbas's ascendancy to PA president demonstrates that both Israelis and Palestinians had mostly supported peace negotiations—though with very little faith that they would lead to a lasting peace. Neither believed that the other was serious about pursuing a two-state solution, even though narrow majorities on both sides usually claimed to support it at the time. Support among Israelis was generally about 10 percentage points higher than among Palestinians.<sup>35</sup> This kind of ambivalence was seen throughout the data. Most Palestinians polled believed that nonviolent means were the best for ending the occupation but had little faith in any methods achieving results. Israelis continued to believe that Palestinians wanted to destroy the Jewish people, or at least to destroy Israel, while only a minority of Palestinians believed that of themselves. Likewise, Palestinians believed that Israel's true goal was to continue to spread its territory across all of historic Palestine, and also believed that a majority of Israelis supported discriminatory legislation implemented in Israel.<sup>36</sup>

Essentially, on almost every subject associated with the peace process, by 2012 most Israelis and Palestinians vehemently distrusted the other side's intentions while believing that their own were good and pure. This reflected a consciousness of circumstance: each side assumed that its actions were a product of circumstance while simultaneously assuming that its adversary's were a product of intentional choice. Nevertheless, on specific issues, a majority of those polled on both sides expressed a willingness to accept tactical flexibility. While this flexibility was carried forward to the next series of peace efforts in 2013 and 2014, certain views on contentious issues would begin to harden.

## Notes

1. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, poll no. 172, August 30, 2010.
2. Arab World for Research and Development, *The Middle East Peace Process: Silver Linings Remain—Results of a Comprehensive Survey*, August 22, 2010; poll taken August 8–14, 2010, n = 3,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://bit.ly/37xLcjN>.
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# Kerry's Peace Initiative, 2013–14



ONCE BARACK OBAMA BEGAN HIS SECOND TERM AS PRESIDENT, with John Kerry as his new secretary of state, the United States renewed intensive diplomatic efforts to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. After over a year of negotiations, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu conditionally accepted a framework for such an agreement based on a two-state solution. This meaningful gesture toward a diplomatic solution was not made without reservations and engendered substantial public controversy in Israel. Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas refused to respond to this overture, and had, as senior U.S. diplomat Martin Indyk put it, “checked out” of the negotiations by early 2014.<sup>1</sup> The PA-Hamas agreement to form a unity government, signed April 23, 2014, further complicated the situation. But the monthlong war between Israel and Hamas in summer 2014 effectively ended any chance of renewing talks in the near future.

In retrospect, the talks in early 2014 represented the last round of direct or even indirect Israel-Palestinian peace negotiations to date. On the Israeli side, Netanyahu used their failure to argue successfully during his 2015 reelection campaign that there was “no partner” for peace. On the U.S. side, the presidential campaign and Donald Trump’s surprising electoral victory the following year pushed Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking off the main political agenda, where it remained for the first two years of President Trump’s term. Consequently, the changing public opinions on the negotiations, their collapse, and the effect of each major event in the first half of 2014 on peace prospects are particularly significant for understanding the impact of elite decisions on popular Palestinian attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Twilight for Negotiations, March 2014

Ironically, at the tail end of the negotiations in March, popular Palestinian attitudes continued to afford better prospects for compromise on the issues discussed than did the official PA position. There is no evidence, though, that these views were taken seriously into consideration by senior PA officials.

A closer look at Palestinian views on prisoner releases, the Jewish state question, economic needs, and other concerns suggests that diplomatic openings were far from exhausted during this period. On the eve of the PA-Hamas unity agreement in April and the collapse of peace talks with Israel, a significant number of Palestinians surveyed in the West Bank and Gaza were prepared to accept various diplomatic compromises on these key issues. A number of polls conducted in early 2014 by PCPSR, AWRAD, and PCPO, each with approximately 1,000–1,200 participants, in combination with in-depth discussions with Palestinian scholars and others from this period, indicated that President Abbas had greater latitude to make a deal than was often supposed at the time.

For instance, polling results suggested that the general publics of the West Bank and Gaza were somewhat more inclined toward compromise than Palestinian elites—according to polls of leading political, media, professional, and academic figures. A comparison of an unpublished February 2014 AWRAD poll tracking elite opinion and a separate March AWRAD poll tracking overall public opinion showed 49% of the public, but just 39% of the elite, supported “the ongoing negotiations between the PA and Israel.” Similarly, 44% of the public but only 31% of the elite said they might have accepted a temporary Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley.<sup>2</sup>

On a few issues, the discrepancy pointed in the opposite direction. The suggestion of a demilitarized Palestinian state, for instance, got a “maybe” from half the elite, but a mere one-fifth of the Palestinian street. Nevertheless, when asked about an overall package of these and other compromises, 48% of the street accepted such a proposal, as compared to 41% of the Palestinian elite.<sup>3</sup> The disparity between elite and general public opinion was particularly pronounced on the question of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. In the pair of AWRAD polls, only 15% of the elite said they “might” have accepted this suggestion—but 40% of the overall West Bank and Gaza population voiced that view.<sup>4</sup> A separate survey from PCPSR, conducted in March 2014, found that while two-thirds of college graduates in the West Bank and Gaza rejected a deal including recognition of the Jewish state, only 43% of illiterates did so.<sup>5</sup>

Granted, this represented a decrease from PCPSR’s 2012 poll, which reported 60% support for such a suggestion. Indeed, earlier polls, from

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2006, reported a remarkable two-thirds of the West Bank and Gaza public accepting recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.<sup>6</sup> The decline was probably due to several factors: the Israeli government's insistence on this condition, the Palestinian government's adamant rejection of it, and the overall downturn in popular confidence in the peace process. Despite all these negative signals, it was noteworthy that such a large minority of the Palestinian public continued to accept the controversial concept of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state at the time, and that such a suggestion had previously been accepted by the majority of Palestinians.

Yet one of the most striking findings buried in these survey reports was that none of the previously noted issues topped local priorities. Rather, Palestinians, like most people, were more interested in domestic than in foreign affairs. When the PCPSR asked survey participants to pick "the most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today," around two-thirds selected internal matters, including poverty and unemployment (27%); lack of national unity (21%); or "corruption in some public institutions" (10%). Just one-fourth picked "the continuation of occupation and settlement activities" as their most serious problem at the time, while 10% cited "the siege and closure of the Gaza border crossings."<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the PCPSR poll also suggested that the issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons was more salient, and perhaps more relevant to an effort to revive the peace talks, than Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Views on extending these talks shifted from 55% negative to 51% positive if Israel agreed to a partial settlement freeze. However, support for continuing negotiations jumped to 65% if Israel freed more prisoners. Even more respondents (68%) agreed with delaying Palestinian accession to additional international bodies in exchange for new prisoner releases by Israel.<sup>8</sup>

A March 2014 PCPO poll found that three-quarters of Palestinians believed prisoner release was pivotal to keeping the peace talks alive, affirming a sense of this issue's importance to Palestinian respondents. In responses to an open-ended question about conditions for continued talks, freeing prisoners (35%) slightly outranked a settlement evacuation (33%).<sup>9</sup> In a later AWRAD poll (May 2014), a related question focused on final status issues suggested that the "most significant impediment" to reaching a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was Jerusalem, rather than refugees, with the margin even higher (46% vs. 33%) among Gazans, who are largely of refugee origin.<sup>10</sup>

Between March and May 2014, the announcement of a unity agreement between Hamas and Fatah put negotiations with Israel on hold. Yet in late May of that year, despite the popularity of the unity government, half the Palestinian respondents in an AWRAD poll still backed the resumption of

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peace talks, with very little difference between West Bank and Gaza opinion. That proportion rose to a surprisingly high two-thirds if Israel accepted two Palestinian conditions: a fourth round of prisoner releases and a three-month settlement freeze. Meanwhile, a mere 15% of West Bankers and 24% of Gazans favored “the approach [armed struggle, no peace] advocated by Hamas” for achieving Palestinian independence.<sup>11</sup>

Another alternative—working toward one state combining Palestinians and Israelis with equal rights—attracted support from approximately one-quarter of those polled by AWRAD in March 2014, including nearly 30% of West Bankers.<sup>12</sup> While this remained a minority view, the results represented a substantial increase from past years. The reasons were most likely a combination of growing popular disillusionment about the prospects for a two-state solution, revived perceptions of an eventual Palestinian demographic challenge to Israel, and a gradually increasing awareness of a movement to delegitimize Israel as an “apartheid state.”

Among the most interesting results from both the AWRAD and PCPO polls in early 2014 were responses on various forms of pragmatic cooperation with Israelis. Despite the semiofficial Fatah campaign against “normalization,” West Bankers were closely divided on numerous forms of contact with Israelis. Between 43% and 49% said it was acceptable to welcome visiting Israelis, have political discussions with them, talk to Israeli journalists, improve trade relations with Israel, and cooperate on scientific, environmental, or health projects. Only when it came to sports or cultural events did a large majority (66%) reject such contacts. Popular opposition to all these options was somewhat higher in Gaza, but security restrictions made such contacts almost impossible there in any case.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, continuing interest in peace talks helped explain why, in a separate Zogby poll from the same period, two-thirds of respondents said that it was important for the Palestinians to maintain good relations with the United States. This contrasts dramatically with the fact that a mere 27% had a favorable opinion of the United States. Overall, 60% said the United States was at least “trying” to develop good ties with their country.<sup>14</sup> Those figures were confirmed by the AWRAD survey, which showed 55% deeming the United States “important to the conduct of negotiations and the eventual resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, when Zogby asked Palestinians about the most important priorities for U.S.-Arab relations, under half (47%) picked the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nearly as many (39%) chose ending the Syrian conflict or helping Syrian refugees.<sup>16</sup> This sentiment aligned broadly with results from the April Pew Research Center poll, which showed two-thirds of Palestinians strongly disapproving of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in 2014.<sup>17</sup>

## Optimism over Unity Government, but with Fatah Policies

Findings from the first half of 2014 in the West Bank and Gaza showed overwhelming support among respondents for a unity government backed by both Hamas and Fatah—even as a narrower majority still supported peace talks and coexistence with Israel. A Washington Institute–sponsored poll conducted by a highly reliable Palestinian survey organization, which insists on anonymity for professional reasons, provided the data for assessment. According to this poll in May 24–26, 2014, the idea of a Palestinian unity government enjoyed very broad backing among West Bank and Gaza Palestinians. Three-quarters of respondents in both territories supported integrating Fatah and Hamas security services and including Hamas in the PLO. An even larger majority supported reconciliation even if it resulted in U.S. economic sanctions or Israeli political pressure. In a related finding, overall optimism had surged 15 points since March 2014—with a notable jump in Gaza, from 46% to 71%.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, a slight majority of West Bankers and Gazans polled supported the statement by President Abbas that the new government “would recognize Israel, renounce violence, and honor all previous international agreements.” The margin of support was somewhat higher in the West Bank (54% in favor vs. 40% opposed) than in Gaza, where respondents were almost evenly split on this question.<sup>19</sup> According to this poll, a narrow majority of Palestinians still accepted “the principle of a two-state solution with a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with Israel.” Here again, the margin of support was significantly higher in the West Bank (58% vs. 39%) than in Gaza (52% vs. 47%).<sup>20</sup>

In spite of continued majority interest in a two-state solution, the prospect of a unity government had Palestinians prioritizing domestic issues as well. The most urgent task in Palestinian eyes, especially in Gaza, was a new national election; in a reliable poll taken during this period, it was the top priority for 69% of Gazans and 45% of West Bankers surveyed. By contrast, approximately 10% overall selected one of the other options offered: resuming peace talks, joining more UN and international bodies, nonviolent resistance, or violent resistance. If an election were held, Abbas and Fatah would be favored over Hamas candidates by margins of around 41% to 13%—although nearly 40% of Palestinians surveyed were either undecided or unlikely to vote.<sup>21</sup>

Given the support for a unity government, the question of which policies Palestinians supported from Hamas and Fatah was also key, and their attitudes toward Israel remained contradictory during this period. Palestinians

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were asked if they would personally support armed resistance to Israel. Around one-third answered in the affirmative, with the figure somewhat higher in Gaza. A different question proved even more telling, for it was less politically loaded. When asked what they believed would happen if the round of negotiations at the time were to fail, a mere 25% responded, “a new intifada.” An equal proportion said that “President Abbas will return to the UN,” and 11% predicted the collapse of the PA. The most common response about potential outcomes, however, was “nothing.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Attitudes Toward Peace as Talks Fail, and as Kidnapping Crisis and Gaza War Loom**

The situation, however, was quickly changing by summer of 2014. The Washington Institute and a reliable Palestinian pollster that must remain anonymous conducted a survey on June 15 to 17, 2014, which showed that Palestinian popular attitudes had hardened on long-term issues of peace with Israel. The survey took place after the start of the June 2014 kidnapping crisis, in which three Israeli teenagers were abducted and murdered in the West Bank.

Fewer than 30% of Palestinian respondents (33% of West Bankers and 22% of Gazans) still supported a two-state solution when offered other options. This was in contrast to polling data from May 2014 suggesting a narrow majority in favor. Instead, a clear majority (60% overall, including 55% in the West Bank and 68% in Gaza) said that the five-year goal “should have been to work toward reclaiming all of historic Palestine, from the river to the sea.” Contrary to other recent findings, even fewer respondents picked a “one-state solution” in which “Arabs and Jews would have equal rights in one country, from the river to the sea.” That was the preferred option of a mere 11% of respondents in the West Bank and 8% in Gaza. Palestinian public opinion appeared to be shifting toward maximalism.

This pattern was confirmed by other questions in the survey. For example, just one-third said that a two-state solution should serve as “the end of the conflict,” while two-thirds said that “resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated.” Only a third of respondents said that “it might be necessary to give up some of our claims so that our people and our children could have a better life.” Similarly, only a third of respondents preferred a two-state solution as their leadership’s final goal. Instead, two-thirds said that should be part of a “program of stages” to “liberate all of historic Palestine later.”

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Nevertheless, despite the escalation in tensions from the kidnapping and murder and Israel's resulting intensive searches and arrests, the Palestinian public did not turn toward support for large-scale violence. Rather, on tactical questions of relations with Israel, respondents broadly supported a non-violent approach. In this June 2014 Washington Institute survey, when asked whether Hamas "should maintain a ceasefire with Israel in both Gaza and the West Bank," a majority (56%) of West Bank respondents and a remarkable 70% of Gazans answered "yes." Similarly, when asked if Hamas should accept Abbas's position that the new unity government should renounce violence against Israel, West Bankers were evenly divided, yet a majority (57%) of Gazans answered in the affirmative.

In contrast, peaceful "popular resistance against the occupation"—such as demonstrations, strikes, marches, mass refusals to cooperate with Israel, and the like—was seen as having a positive impact by most respondents in both territories: 62% in the West Bank and 73% in Gaza. The survey did not ask specifically about the latest kidnapping, which did appear fairly popular among Palestinians, judging from print, broadcast, and social media content and anecdotal evidence available at the time. A week after the survey was completed, Israel's shooting of several Palestinians and arrest of hundreds more in the search for the kidnap victims likely turned the Palestinian public in a more actively hostile direction toward Israel.

The kidnapping incident, along with a Palestinian hunger strike in Israeli jails, also kept public attention on the prisoner issue—already a key focal point of public opinion during the earlier period of negotiations. When asked what Israel could do "to convince Palestinians that it really wants peace," a large plurality in both the West Bank and Gaza picked "release more Palestinian prisoners." That option far outranked the others, each in the 15%–20% range: "share Jerusalem as a joint capital," "stop building in settlements beyond the security barrier," or "grant Palestinians greater freedom of movement and crack down on settler attacks."<sup>23</sup>

Most striking, and contrary to common perceptions, Hamas did not apparently gain political traction from the kidnapping incident during this period. When asked who should be the president of Palestine in the next two years in anticipation of elections for the unity government, most Palestinians polled in both the West Bank and Gaza named either Abbas (30%) or other Fatah-affiliated leaders: Marwan Barghouti (12%), Mohammad Dahlan (10%), Rami Hamdallah (6%), Mustafa Barghouti (4%), former prime minister Salam Fayyad (2%), or Mahmoud al-Aloul (1%). In stark contrast, Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Mashal rated a combined total of just 9% support in the West Bank and 15% in Gaza. Another intriguing finding is that Dahlan had significant popular support among Gazans, at 20%. Also

notable is that not one of the other old-guard Fatah figures, such as Abu Ala, Nabil Shaath, or Jibril Rajoub, attracted even 1% support in either the West Bank or Gaza.<sup>24</sup>

### **Pragmatism on Short-Term Issues with Israel**

Some additional and unexpected signs of tactical short-term pragmatism concerning bread-and-butter issues showed up in the 2014 Washington Institute poll. Over 80% of those polled in the West Bank and Gaza said they “definitely” or “probably” wanted Israel to allow more Palestinians to work within the country. Around half of those respondents said they would personally take “a good, high-paying job” inside Israel.<sup>25</sup>

This interest in economic opportunity was particularly notable in Gaza, where the economy declined in 2014 and unemployment climbed to around 40%. Egypt’s closure of multiple smuggling tunnels and the Fatah-Hamas dispute over post-reconciliation salaries only exacerbated this dire economic situation. Gaza respondents overwhelmingly (82%) said they “would like to see Israel allow more Palestinians to work in Israel” at the time. Still more poignantly, a majority (56%) said they were “personally willing to work in Israel if there was a good, high-paying job.” Thus, Gazans actually favored some form of relations with Israel in order to find work.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, despite narrow majority support for boycotting Israel, a large majority said they would also like Israeli firms to offer more jobs inside the West Bank and Gaza. Nearly half of all respondents said they would take such a position if it were available. This kind of pragmatism was particularly pronounced among the younger generation of adult Palestinians, in the eighteen- to thirty-five-year-old cohort. In a similar vein, more than three-quarters of younger West Bankers said they would like to see Israel build a new north-south highway bypassing Israeli checkpoints around Jerusalem. Among older West Bankers, that figure was somewhat lower, with around two-thirds of respondents supporting such a move.

However, as Israel continued its search for the kidnap victims during mid-June 2014, Palestinian respondents voiced widespread concern about Israeli behavior in the territories. In the West Bank, three-quarters of respondents saw a “significant problem” with “threats and intimidation from Israeli soldiers and border guards” and with “delays and restrictions at checkpoints.” Slightly fewer West Bankers, but still a majority (63%), saw “threats and intimidation from Jewish settlers” as a significant problem. These figures remained somewhat lower in Gaza, where Israel’s presence in border areas, except during the occasional armed skirmishes, was limited.

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Yet the widespread negative perception of their own officials' behavior put these numbers in perspective. Despite the optimism about a prospective unity government, 72% of West Bankers polled saw "corruption by Palestinian government officials" in the current government as a major problem, while among Gazans, the proportion was 66%. Similarly, 77% of West Bankers and 71% of Gazans saw local crime as a significant problem.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

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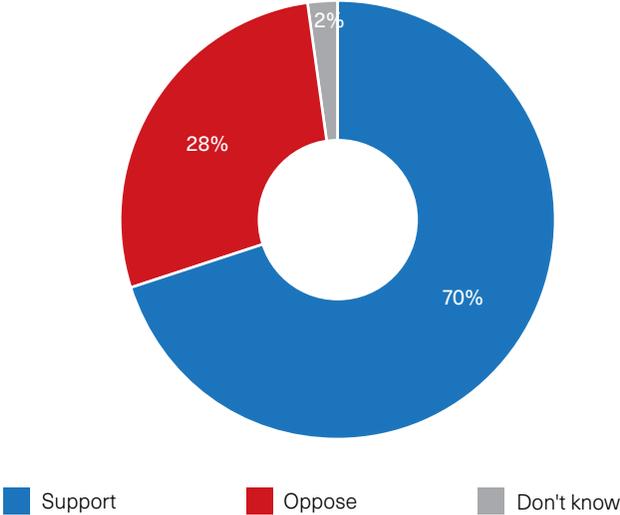
# War in Gaza and Its Aftermath, 2014–16



BY MID-JULY 2014, THE KIDNAPPINGS AND THEIR AFTERMATH HAD evolved into war in Gaza, with ultimately devastating results for Gazans. Earlier data from the April 2014 AWRAD polls referenced previously had established Gazans' frustrations with Hamas tactics: Gaza respondents significantly favored Fatah politicians over those from Hamas and supported maintaining the Hamas ceasefire with Israel. In light of dissatisfaction with Hamas security forces and administration, most respondents favored a PA takeover in Gaza. A remarkable 88% of those polled agreed with this statement: "The PA should send officials and security officers to Gaza to take over administration there"—including two-thirds who "strongly" agreed. When asked the same question a year later, in 2015, the number of Gazans who supported such a change held steady, with another 88% agreeing that PA administration represented the better option. In the West Bank, this proportion was nearly as high, at 81% (see figures 7.1 and 7.2).<sup>1</sup>

As the 2014 polls and successive polls demonstrate, there is a sharp contrast between what most Gazans want and what their Hamas government actually does. An AWRAD poll taken from July 19 to 21, 2014, shows that Hamas's popularity did rise significantly, but briefly, during this period, explicitly in relation to its role during the Gaza war, with 85% of respondents approving of its "role in the current conflict." Some Palestinian and Israeli analysts credited this shift in sentiment to the PA's tone in mid-July 2014, since President Abbas's July 22 speech and an accompanying PA leadership statement both endorsed many Hamas demands. Still, only 31% of West Bankers said that their overall political affiliation was with Hamas. More of them supported an immediate ceasefire (51%) than opposed it (44%), which was contrary to the stated position of Hamas.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this July 2014 poll also showed great popularity for the tiny but very vocal Gaza terrorist organization known as Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). That group garnered 71% support in the West Bank—and a stunning 84% in Gaza. PIJ's popularity there far eclipsed that of

**Figure 7.1.** “Do you support or oppose the following position: Hamas should maintain a ceasefire?”

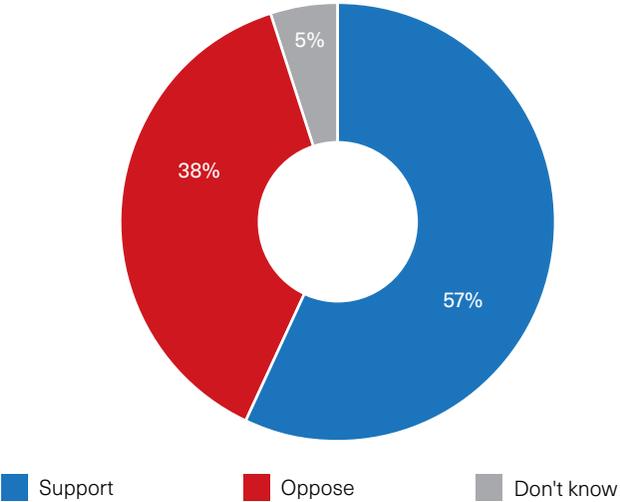


**Gaza respondents**

\*AWRAD poll April 2014

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**Figure 7.2.** “President Mahmoud Abbas stated that the unity government to be formed would recognize Israel, renounce violence, and honor all previous international agreements. Do you support or oppose that Hamas should accept this position?”



**Gaza respondents**

\*AWRAD poll April 2014

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the Hamas ruling faction, and indeed may in part have reflected a kind of protest vote against Hamas failure, repression, and misrule. Nevertheless, it challenges the idea that frustration with Hamas extended to all violent organizations.

Even so, about half of West Bankers and Gazans still said they accepted the principle of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and agreed to certain tactical compromises with Israel—at least in the short term. About half of respondents agreed to recognize Israel as “the state of the Jewish people” if this was necessary to get a Palestinian state. When asked about their long-term vision however, a clear majority in both the West Bank and Gaza still said that two states should not be the end of the conflict—and that the struggle, armed or otherwise, to “liberate all of Palestine” should continue until Palestinian victory was achieved.<sup>3</sup>

These more skeptical attitudes toward a two-state solution appeared to solidify in late 2014 and early 2015. This was true of views on the feasibility of negotiations toward two states and also of interest in this approach. On a two-state solution, an AWRAD poll released in January 2015 indicated that only 33% of overall Palestinian respondents believed they were closer to achieving an independent state than during the Oslo Accords period, while 58% believed they were farther from this goal.<sup>4</sup> In answer to the same question in AWRAD’s April 2015 poll, only 29% said they believed Palestinians were closer to achieving a Palestinian state, while 64% believed they were farther away.<sup>5</sup> In a PCPSR poll conducted in March 2015, 59% of respondents said they believed the two-state solution was no longer viable, while 38% believed it still was.<sup>6</sup>

Belief in the viability of a two-state solution apparently dropped over the previous three months: in a PCPSR poll from December 2014, 48% indicated support for the two-state solution. That said, rejection of the one-state solution remained relatively constant, with 71% opposing it in December and 68% in March.<sup>7</sup> On the topic of violence, the December PCPSR poll found that 79% supported methods used by Hamas in confronting Israeli occupation—confirming Washington Institute data on the same issue—while 80% supported attempts by individuals to stab or run over Israelis with their vehicles. More broadly, 62% supported popular nonviolent and unarmed resistance, even as 60% also favored returning to armed intifada and confrontations.<sup>8</sup>

A PCPSR poll conducted several months earlier, in September 2014—before the Palestinian UN accession bid and attempt to accede to the International Criminal Court (ICC)—provided notable results on a question concerning the most effective means of ending occupation and building a Palestinian state: 44% responded that armed confrontation was the most

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effective means; 29% believed negotiation was best; and 23% believed popular nonviolent resistance was the most effective route to statehood.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, PCPSR's March 2015 poll revealed similar attitudes toward negotiations (29% in favor), but a relative increase in support for popular nonviolent resistance (30%) and a decrease in support for armed confrontation (27%).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, as of mid-2015, polls also showed the majority of Palestinians opposed a third intifada. An AWRAD poll conducted in April demonstrated that only 26% of Palestinians supported starting an intifada, while 67% opposed it.<sup>11</sup> The drop in support for a two-state solution and the increase in support for forms of violent resistance were a troubling trend in Palestinian public opinion in the wake of the Gaza war, although it is difficult to establish causation.

These polls also demonstrated a high degree of support for the PA's decision to join international organizations such as the ICC. Earlier polls had demonstrated the respondents' interest in joining international organizations: PCPSR's survey from March 2014 found overwhelming popular backing (86%) for a unilateral PA move to join international organizations, though support dropped markedly, by 26 percentage points, if U.S. economic sanctions would result from the decision.<sup>12</sup>

In PCPSR's March 2015 poll, 82% of respondents supported joining international organizations, and 86% wanted the PA to submit a complaint to the ICC against Israel for building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Even when asked about the PA's decision to join the ICC despite Israel's freezing the transfer of tax revenues, 69% of respondents answered they believed it was the correct decision.<sup>13</sup>

As for the issue of refugees, the "right of return" continued to be a prominent concern for Palestinians. PCPSR polls in December 2014 and March 2015 asked about the most important and second-most important national goals for Palestinians: the refugees' "right of return" to their 1948 towns was considered the most important by 31% of respondents in December and 36% in March and the second-most important by 43% of respondents in December and 37% in March.<sup>14</sup>

On normalization, polling during this period indicated Palestinians generally opposed it, even if they continued to want Israelis to employ them. For example, boycott movements had overwhelming support in the Palestinian territories. The March 2015 PCPSR poll showed 85% of respondents "certainly support[ed]" or "support[ed]" local and international campaigns to boycott Israel and impose sanctions against it, while only 13% opposed them.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, when asked about the efficacy of boycotting Israeli products as a tool to help end occupation, 65% in both the West Bank and Gaza believed it was effective and 34% did not. The same PCPSR poll showed

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Palestinians also supported ending security coordination with Israel, with 60% in favor of ending it and 35% opposed.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the 2015 Washington Institute poll emphasized that a majority of Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza continued to want economic cooperation with Israel. Two-thirds of West Bankers and three-quarters of Gazans surveyed said they “would like to see Israel allow more Palestinians to work inside Israel.” Moreover, a majority (55%) in the West Bank, and nearly as many in Gaza (48%), said they wanted “to see Israeli companies offer more jobs inside” those areas. When asked about such practical possibilities even “after the Israeli election and the formation of their new government”—elections were scheduled for March 2015—over one-third of Palestinians in each territory still saw at least some chance of progress.<sup>17</sup>

A key related question—showing sharp divergence between West Bank and Gaza opinion—concerned “responsibility for the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza.” In the West Bank, a large plurality (40%) put the heaviest blame on Israel. A mere 7% singled out Hamas for blame. But in Gaza itself, this order was dramatically reversed: a plurality (40%) blamed Hamas the most, with Israel coming in second, at 29%. By comparison, only small minorities—10% of West Bankers and 20% of Gazans—placed the primary onus for Gaza’s plight on the PA.<sup>18</sup>

On broader questions of relations with Israel and the peace process, West Bank and Gaza Palestinians had very mixed views. PCPSR’s March 2015 poll asked specifically about support for an independent Palestinian state on condition of “a mutual recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people.” A minority 39% agreed to such a proposal, while 59% opposed it.<sup>19</sup> The issue of a “Jewish state” was clearly a sticking point at the time; recognizing Israel enjoyed more support in other formulations of the question that did not include direct reference to Jewish identity. For example, in response to a question that conditioned establishment of a Palestinian state in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative on Arab states’ “recogniz[ing] Israel and its right to secure borders, [signing] peace treaties with her and establish[ing] normal diplomatic relations,” 46% supported such a plan and 50% opposed it.<sup>20</sup>

Two polls—one conducted in November 2015 by The Washington Institute/PCPO and another conducted in July 2016 for an outside advocacy group by Palestinian experts working under American supervision—confirmed this troubling ambivalence: support for a two-state solution, on the one hand, and refusal for this to be the end of the conflict, on the other. In these polls, 60% of respondents overall said they supported a two-state solution, meaning coexistence between Israel and a Palestinian state. But roughly the same proportion also said that while this was their stated

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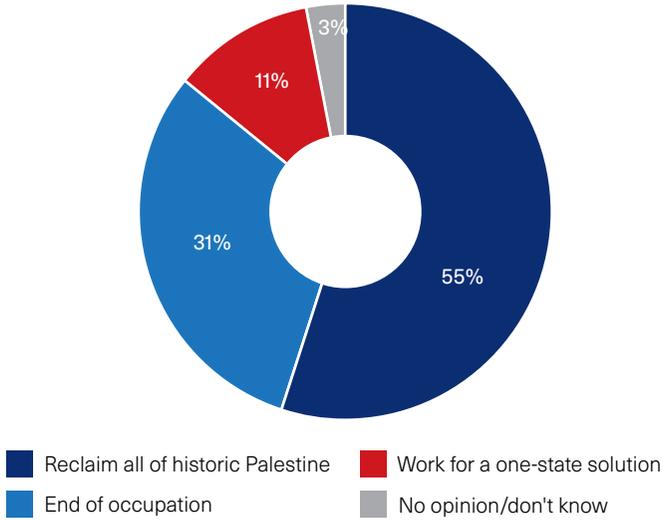
goal, their actual goal was “to start with two states but then move to it all being one Palestinian state (including all of what is now Israel).”<sup>21</sup> Only a third of all respondents said that the preferable goal was permanent coexistence between two separate independent states, Palestine and Israel. Similarly, two-thirds or more agreed that “over time, Palestinians must work to get back all the land for a Palestinian state”; a mere 25% of respondents agreed that “Israel had a permanent right to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people.”<sup>22</sup>

Overall, these responses demonstrated a dichotomous set of attitudes: some tactical flexibility toward Israel today, but much potential for irredentism in the future. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the tactical flexibility was there, including on recognition of Israel as “the state of the Jewish people,” or restrictions on the Palestinian refugee “right of return.” One other important sign of short-term pragmatism was, according to 2015 Washington Institute polling, a willingness among around half of Palestinian respondents, in both the West Bank and Gaza, to share sovereignty over Jerusalem with Israel.

However, not only did many Palestinian respondents refuse to see a two-state solution as the end of the conflict. In this Washington Institute/PCPO poll, many respondents, when asked to imagine the long-term future of the conflict, did not expect Israel to exist.<sup>23</sup> A plurality of respondents picked “reclaiming all of historic Palestine from the river to the sea” rather than “a two-state solution” as the “main Palestinian national goal” for the next five years (see figures 7.3 and 7.4). In the West Bank, the margin was 41% vs. 29% of respondents, respectively. In Gaza, surprisingly, the margin was much closer: 50% opted for all of Palestine, compared with 44% who favored a two-state solution. But this difference was largely accounted for by a third option: a “one-state solution in all of the land in which Palestinians and Jews have equal rights.” Among West Bankers, 18% selected that option; among Gazans, just 5% did. From a normative perspective, Palestinian attitudes were also clearly maximalist. In the West Bank, 81% of respondents in 2015 said that all of historic Palestine “is Palestinian land and Jews have no rights to the land.” In Gaza, that proportion was even higher: 88%.<sup>24</sup>

Looking toward the distant future, most respondents did not think it likely that Israel would continue to exist. Only one-fourth of Palestinians surveyed in either the West Bank or Gaza expected Israel to “continue to exist as a Jewish state” in thirty to forty years. Another fourth of respondents thought that Israel would become “a binational state of Jews and Palestinians.” A total of 38% of West Bankers, along with 53% of Gazans, thought that Israel would no longer exist at all, even as a binational state. That group was about evenly split between those who predicted that Israel “would collapse from

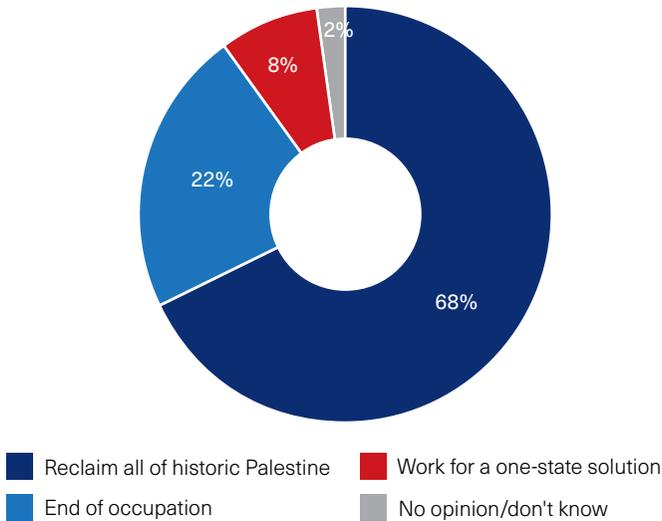
**Figure 7.3.** “I want to ask your own view about what the main Palestinian national goal for the next five years should be. I will read three different views on this; please tell me which one comes closest to your own view.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll November 2015 and July 2016

**Figure 7.4.** “I want to ask your own view about what the main Palestinian national goal for the next five years should be. I will read three different views on this; please tell me which one comes closest to your own view.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll November 2015 and July 2016

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internal contradictions” and those who believed that “Arab or Muslim resistance would destroy it.”<sup>25</sup>

As for the really long-term view, a century away, only 12% of West Bankers and 15% of Gazans polled said that Israel would still exist then as a Jewish state. In the West Bank, a plurality (44%) thought that Israel would either collapse or be destroyed, although 20% quite reasonably said they did not know what would happen to the region in one hundred years. In Gaza, an absolute majority (63%) anticipated the destruction or collapse of Israel within that distant horizon.<sup>26</sup>

### **Cause and Effect: Palestinian Messaging**

One possible influence on Palestinian attitudes discussed earlier was PA messaging during this period. It is very difficult to determine the causal direction, however—that is, the extent to which messaging during this period shaped public opinion in the PA’s jurisdiction, versus the extent to which it simply reflected it. The often negative Palestinian views of the PA and its leaders, including President Abbas, give little reason to expect their words to be decisive concerning attitudes toward Israel.

Moreover, the reach of PA messaging should not be overemphasized. West Bank and Gaza Palestinians often paid about as much or more attention to outside Arabic media as to local ones at the time. In June 2014, for example, according to credible surveys, more Palestinians watched foreign Arabic-language media (38%) than local Palestinian media (34%). Subsequent surveys showed only modest changes by September 2014 (33% foreign, 44% domestic) or December 2014 (37% foreign, 40% domestic).<sup>27</sup> So even if attitudinal trends can be derived from media messages, those messages and that influence may well have been received from outside the PA. Yet in some cases, Palestinian messaging was speaking to a receptive base.

Overall, data from 2014 and 2015 indicated a close convergence between PA messages and local public opinion on many points related to Israel—but also some intriguing divergences on certain issues or at certain times. On some key issues, such as acceptance of a “two-state solution” but insistence on “the refugee right of return,” popular attitudes seemed roughly in sync with the Ramallah government’s line. But on certain tactical issues, such as a return to negotiations or local economic interactions with Israel, the public was actually more moderate than the PA party line. On certain longer-term or strategic issues—such as unity with Hamas, the eventual claim to all of Israel, or “armed struggle” against it—the reverse was often the case: the public tended to be more militant than the official messages it received at the

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time. Given this pattern, it is reasonable to conclude PA messaging probably influenced Palestinian public opinion but did not exert control over it.

It is also important to note that, while Palestinians saw Palestinian statehood as important, they continued to cite personal concerns as their top priorities. In the West Bank, most people surveyed said that their top priority was either “making enough money to live comfortably” (44%) or “having a good family life” (34%). In Gaza, the results were similar, though skewed a bit in the other direction: 31% picked money, and 34% picked family. By contrast, just 14% of West Bankers and 24% of Gazans polled selected “working to establish a Palestinian state” as their top priority. A mere 12% of West Bankers said “being a good Muslim (or Christian)” was either their first or even their second priority. In Gaza, that figure was somewhat higher but still unexpectedly low, at 19%. These findings from the 2014–15 polls put Palestinian political attitudes in a more realistic perspective, suggesting that their intensity paled beside everyday concerns.

## Notes

1. Arab World for Research and Development, “1 April 2014: Government Performance, Reconciliation, Elections, BNC Movement and Normalization”; poll taken March 9–11, 2014, n = 1,200 Palestinian adults, <http://www.awrad.org/page.php?id=7hfeBu81Cja9852360ANesvSXXieG>.
2. Arab World for Research and Development, “23 July 2014: Results of a West Bank–Only Public Opinion Poll and a Specialized Poll for Opinion Leaders Focusing on the Current War in Gaza”; poll taken July 19–21, 2014, n = 300 Palestinians in the West Bank, <http://www.awrad.org/en/article/10367/23-July-2014-Results-of-a-West-Bank-only-Public-Opinion-Poll-and-a-Specialized-Poll-for-Opinion-Leaders-Focusing-on-the-Current-War-in-Gaza>.
3. This poll was conducted by an agency that must remain anonymous. Data was provided to the author, who has used it here. See also David Pollock, “New Palestinian Poll Shows Hardline Views, But Some Pragmatism Too,” PolicyWatch 2276, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 25, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/new-palestinian-poll-shows-hardline-views-but-some-pragmatism-too>.
4. Arab World for Research and Development, “14 April 2015: Performance of Palestinian Leaders, Living Conditions, Rebuilding Gaza, Popularity of Political Factions, Presidential and Legislative Elections, Negotiations, Third Intifada Uprising, ‘ISIS’ Phenomena and Operations [*sic*] Decisive Storm”; poll taken April 4–6, 2015, n = 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, <http://www.awrad.org/page.php?id=PhhgMZVvpia9996912Adn0caC8LF2>.
5. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 55”; poll taken March 19–21, 2015, n = 1,262 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/605>.

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6. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 54"; poll taken December 3–6, 2014, n = 1,270 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/600>.
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8. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 53"; poll taken September 25–27, 2014, n = 1,200 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/498>.
9. Ibid.
10. Arab World for Research and Development, "Results of AWRAD Palestine Poll: A National Opinion Poll in West Bank and Gaza Strip," April 14, 2015, <https://bit.ly/30HDX8l>.
11. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 55"; poll taken March 19–21, 2015, n = 1,262 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/605>.
12. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 51"; poll taken March 20–22, 2014, n = 1,200, <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/188>.
13. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 54"; poll taken December 3–6, 2014, n = 1,270 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/600>.
14. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 55," <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/605>.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. David Pollock, "New Poll Shows Most Palestinians for Practical Progress, Tactical Compromises with Israel," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 23, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/new-poll-shows-most-palestinians-for-practical-progress-tactical-compromise>.
19. Ibid.
20. Palestine Center for Public Opinion, unpublished data sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; poll taken June 7–19, 2015, n = 921 Palestinian adults. See appendix (2015) to this study, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-nation-divided-palestinian-views-on-war-and-peace-with-israel>.
21. Private communication to the author.
22. David Pollock, *Mixed Messages: Abbas and Palestinians on Israel, 2014–16*, Policy Focus 144 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2016), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/mixed-messages-abbas-and-palestinians-on-israel>.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research: "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 52"; poll taken June 5–7, 2014, n = 1,270 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/465>; "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 53," <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/498>; "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 54"; poll taken December 3–6, 2014, n = 1,270 adults in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/600>.

# Interregnum, 2016–17



AFTER THE FAILURE OF KERRY'S PEACEMAKING MISSION AND END of the war in Gaza, the peace process tended to drop off the agenda of both Palestinian politics and Palestinian pollsters. This vacuum was compounded from late 2015 through mid-2017 by several new factors, all of which deepened the diplomatic freeze: the "knife intifada," especially in Jerusalem; the U.S. election season, with the unexpected triumph of Donald Trump and the subsequent government transition; and the Israeli election season and slow government-formation process. Thus, there is a small gap in The Washington Institute's own polling data, with no polls conducted between June 30, 2015, and May 31, 2017. To fill this gap, fourteen polls from Nader Said of AWRAD and Khalil Shikaki of PCPSR, taken from October 2016 through early 2018, are analyzed in the passages to follow. Palestinians and their pollsters proved more preoccupied with internal issues during much of this period than with any prospects for the dormant peace process.

## The PA, Hamas, and Reconciliation

In 2016 and 2017, Fatah and Hamas renewed efforts to draft a reconciliation agreement, building on previous attempts at a unity government in 2014. PCPSR polls reported that between December 2016 and March 2018, a majority of respondents were pessimistic regarding reconciliation and the reconciliation government. When asked who was to blame for hindering the reconciliation process, a majority in all the PCPSR polls said the PA and President Abbas, and this number increased by 11 percentage points over these two years. Support for Hamas in the West Bank held steady at around 30% of those polled, while support for Hamas in Gaza dropped 6 percentage points, from 38% in 2016 to 32% in 2018.<sup>1</sup> The comparable AWRAD data shows support for Fatah in both the West Bank and Gaza in a similar range, at 37%.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the peace process, the PCPSR and AWRAD polls both showed support for a two-state solution declining from earlier highs, but

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stabilizing at about half the Palestinian respondents. When asked about the best way to achieve a Palestinian state, 44% of participants in the PCPSR December 2017 poll said “armed action”—a high point; all other polls in that period had “negotiation” as the top choice. As for the most “vital goals” for Palestine, respondents’ consistent majority choice was to end the occupation. Establishing the “right of return” to 1948 homes and land was the consistent second choice, “building a pious individual and Islamic society” was third, and “building a democratic system” was the least popular overall.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding “the most vital and pressing problems facing Palestine,” no single answer dominated. However, the “poverty and employment” response dropped 6 percentage points overall, while the “siege of Gaza” rose 7 percentage points—from 15% to 22% of respondents. The “spread of corruption” peaked in the poll published in July 2017, with 28% of responses, compared to a 23% average over this timeframe. Again, when the above data from the PCPSR polls was compared with data gathered from three separate AWRAD polls with similar questions, these numbers changed but little.<sup>4</sup>

When asked about Palestine’s best options in the absence of negotiations, the majority of all respondents over the selected timeframe chose “join more international organizations.” An option that gained some popularity was “nonviolent popular resistance,” with a 5-percentage-point increase overall. The “armed intifada” option lost some popularity over time from December 2016, declining by 8 points.<sup>5</sup>

## Elections

When respondents were asked to consider a presidential election between President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, all PCPSR polls except March 2018 showed either a tie or Haniyeh with the majority—a stark shift from earlier numbers, which showed Abbas significantly higher. The March 2018 poll indicated an 11-point increase in Abbas’s numbers, while Haniyeh saw a 12-point drop.<sup>6</sup> In response to the same question during an AWRAD poll in January 2017, a plurality (37%) said they would choose not to vote rather than selecting one of the two.<sup>7</sup>

When PCPSR asked respondents to consider a presidential election in which Haniyeh and Marwan Barghouti, a Fatah leader jailed in Israel for directing terrorist murders since the second intifada, were the only candidates, Barghouti had at least a 9-percentage-point lead over Haniyeh in all the polls. When all three candidates—Barghouti, Haniyeh, and Abbas—were presented to respondents, the majority in all polls still selected

Barghouti, and Abbas was third by at least an 8-point margin. When AWRAD asked respondents to choose between Barghouti and Haniyeh in January 2017, the majority (51%) also said that they would vote for Barghouti; Haniyeh got a mere 15%.<sup>8</sup>

It must be noted that these straw polls occasionally show some serious inter-pollster discrepancies. For example, one AWRAD poll gave Abbas a 16-percentage-point majority that he never enjoyed in the PCPSR polls in this timeframe. Yet this is the exception that proves the rule of rough inter-pollster consistency.

During this period, perceptions of overall conditions in Gaza dropped from an already very low 11% “positive” down to single-digits: 5%. And evaluations of overall conditions in the West Bank dropped 11 points, to just 20% “positive.” On average, only 34% of Palestinians polled believed that West Bank residents could criticize the PA without fear. Between one-quarter and one-fifth of all West Bankers surveyed said they wanted to emigrate from that territory.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

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2. Arab World for Research and Development, “85 Percent of Gazans Report Deterioration in Economic Conditions and Palestinians Are Divided over Negotiations”; poll taken April 7–10, 2018, n = 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank, <https://bit.ly/2Vratcg>.
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5. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Public Opinion Poll No. 62”; poll taken December 8–10, 2016, n = 1,270 Palestinian adults, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/676>.
6. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Public Opinion Poll No. 67”; poll taken March 14–17, 2018, <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/725>.
7. Arab World for Research and Development, “2016 in Review, Expectations for 2017,” press release; poll taken January 16–17, 2017, n = 1,200 adult Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <https://bit.ly/2Xzblwi>.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

# President Trump and the “Deal of the Century,” 2017–20



IN 2017, PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP LITERALLY OPENED A NEW chapter in U.S. policy toward Israel and the Palestinians, tilting sharply in favor of Israel. The Washington Institute, in May 2017 and October 2018, asked respondents to evaluate President Trump’s overall policies. While the majority in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip gave Trump a “fairly bad” response, there were some slight regional differences. But signs also indicated that Palestinian views, more open-minded toward the Trump administration during its first two years, were souring after the December 2017 decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, along with official U.S. steps to downgrade Palestinian ties and economic assistance. Nevertheless, despite the PA’s decision to boycott Washington after its Jerusalem announcement, the Palestinian public has not completely lost hope, either in the United States or in the peace process.

By 2018, a plurality of AWRAD respondents said that the U.S. president was “incapable” of making a deal. This received a 41% plurality response in the West Bank; Gaza residents were more negative, with a 52% majority expressing this belief. Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of respondents (74% as of April 1, 2018) believed that Palestine was not a central issue for the rest of the Arab world. And a majority of respondents have consistently demonstrated their belief in a Sunni Arab alliance with Israel. That number has steadily increased since the December 2016 poll, reaching a high point of 70% in April 2018.<sup>1</sup>

When The Washington Institute posed a substantively similar question in May 2017, respondents in both regions expressed little confidence in this administration to “make a serious effort to help solve the Palestinian problem.” West Bank residents were marginally more positive toward President Trump. In a later poll from the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre (JMCC) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, released on August 6, 2018, Palestinian

## PRESIDENT TRUMP AND THE “DEAL OF THE CENTURY,” 2017–20

respondents similarly expressed a clear lack of faith in Trump’s ability to deliver the “deal of the century.”<sup>2</sup>

Overall, The Washington Institute’s respondents ranked the establishment of a legitimate Palestinian state/territory as a national priority and perceived Donald Trump as not seriously pursuing a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate. AWRAD’s respondents from both the West Bank and Gaza, on the other hand, had yet to make up their minds about Trump’s broader intentions in Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

### **Abbas in Washington**

According to the 2018 AWRAD poll, 39% of respondents did not follow news reports about President Abbas’s visit to Washington to meet with President Trump. However, these numbers vary a bit when broken down by region: a slight majority of respondents in the Gaza Strip said that they did, in fact, follow reports on the visit, at least to some extent. While The Washington Institute did not inquire whether respondents had followed the news reports on the visit, both pollsters did ask them whether they perceived the visit as successful. The Washington Institute’s results saw a plurality selecting “somewhat negative” as their governing perception of Abbas’s visit, with 39% and 34% in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively. These impressions were not as overwhelmingly negative as those in the AWRAD poll—even if, this time, the difference was statistically less significant.<sup>4</sup>

While on the surface attitudes toward the United States may appear to be increasingly negative, support for negotiations has remained steady. Despite worsening perceptions of the United States because it moved its embassy and recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, the majority of Palestinians do not support severing relations completely, indicating that there may be room for negotiations in the future. And though Palestinians have become increasingly skeptical of an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through negotiations, a significant group continues to demonstrate an openness to such a process.

Additionally, the relative optimism from the earlier period of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians demonstrates how Palestinian public opinion on a two-state solution is dependent on its perceived feasibility—or hope. Shifts also demonstrate public opinion is dependent on the current atmosphere and individual events, though different external events impact the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem populations differently. Therefore, the Palestinian population must be treated as nuanced and

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multidimensional across regions and localities, rather than being reduced to a monolith of simple majorities.

When respondents were asked whether Palestine should accept an invitation back to negotiations from the Trump administration, a 16-point increase emerged from the initial 25% who said “yes” in May 2017. Thus, the PCPSR data from October 2, 2017, collected after President Trump’s visit to Jerusalem that May, shows a high of 41% of respondents saying they would support a return to negotiations with the Trump administration.<sup>5</sup> While the majority of respondents did say that Palestine should reject the call, this response fell about 20 percentage points from May to October 2017. Nevertheless, a growing majority of respondents from the PCPSR polls in May and October believed that Trump was not “serious” about resuming negotiations: a stunning 45-point increase occurred in this response over the selected timeframe, reaching a high of 74%. In the PCPSR poll published in October 2017, 83% of the public surveyed thought that Trump would be biased in favor of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Changing Role of Jerusalem**

The Washington Institute asked respondents in May of 2017 to rate the importance of a potential relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. A 36% plurality of respondents in the West Bank said that this issue was “not so important” compared to other issues at the time. The second-most popular selection was “fairly important,” with 31% of respondents choosing that answer. These numbers differ greatly from those in the Gaza Strip. The majority of The Washington Institute’s Gaza respondents said that this issue was “fairly important” when compared to other issues at the time. Unlike West Bankers, Gazans selected “very important” the most frequently after “fairly important”—25% and 30%, respectively.

When the United States announced in December 2017 that it would formally recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the PCPSR polled Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza asking whether this announcement was a threat to Palestinian interests. A 79% majority of respondents said it was a “great threat,” and 12% characterized it as a “limited threat.” Only 7% said that the announcement represented “no threat” at all. This growing mistrust of the U.S. administration is also reflected in a JMCC poll completed in August 2018, in which 61% of respondents supported the PA policy of rejecting the U.S. role as the “sole mediator in the peace process.” However, only 28% of JMCC respondents supported the PA’s choice to refuse outright to deal with the United States after the Trump administration

recognized Jerusalem as the capital. This shows how U.S. policy toward Jerusalem, including moving the U.S. embassy and recognizing Jerusalem as the capital, has increased the perception of threats to Palestinian interests and led to concerns about the U.S. mediation role in the peace process. However, it is important to note that according to the JMCC poll, the majority of respondents did not support turning their backs on the United States entirely, possibly leaving room for future Palestinian negotiations with Israel and the United States.

## **Future Negotiations and Trump Administration Policies**

When AWRAD polled Palestinians in May 2017 and asked whether they would support a future summit in Washington DC, hosted by President Trump and attended by the Israeli prime minister and Palestinian president, the results varied modestly depending on locality. Only 26% of West Bank respondents, compared to a 43% plurality in the Gaza Strip, said they would support such a summit. This striation was also reflected in responses about resuming negotiations, which West Bankers were somewhat less inclined to support. A 57% majority of Gazans told AWRAD that they would support resumption of negotiations, while only 43% of West Bank respondents answered the same. When considered en masse, 49% of AWRAD respondents said they would support the resumption of negotiations, while 45% opposed resuming peace talks.<sup>7</sup>

One might have expected this overall support for resuming negotiations to drop when President Trump announced in December 2017 that the United States would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and Palestinian leadership, with Mahmoud Abbas at the helm, dramatically cooled relations with Washington. However, according to the August 2018 JMCC poll, 49% of respondents said that they would support a return to negotiations, a number consistent with the AWRAD findings from May 2017. The proportion of respondents against the resumption of negotiations rose only 1 percentage point, from 45% to 46%.<sup>8</sup> These findings are confirmed by Washington Institute polls taken in May 2017, October 2018, and July 2019.

In May 2017, President Trump, barely five months in office, made an official visit to Jerusalem, which he said he would soon recognize as Israel's capital for the first time. Polling data indicated that West Bank and Gaza residents were not as hostile to President Trump's posture as most observers assumed. To be sure, Trump returned from Jerusalem and Bethlehem with no agreements in hand. However, data from that month revealed a

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perhaps surprising degree of support for several key points raised by the Trump administration during these first months in office, as follows.

An early administration suggestion that did receive majority public support was the concept of a “regional approach” to Israeli-Palestinian peace-making, in which “Arab states would offer both sides incentives to take more moderate positions.” The Washington Institute polls taken in 2017 revealed that in the West Bank, 58% of respondents approved; in Gaza, 55%. Support for this position in Gaza would grow even more in coming years, with a remarkable 86% of those polled agreeing with such an approach in 2019.<sup>9</sup>

However, one of the most startling findings of the 2017 Washington Institute/PCPO poll related to bonuses the PA paid to convicted terrorists. Israel, the U.S. Congress, and the Trump administration had all decried the practice; this eventually led to Trump’s signing the Taylor Force Act in March 2018 to block U.S. economic aid to the PA. The PA has claimed that popular pressure compels it to persist in granting these payments, yet the 2017 survey indicated that two-thirds of Palestinians thought “the PA should give prisoners’ families normal social benefits like everybody else, not extra payments based on their sentences or armed operations.” Among West Bank respondents, the exact figure was 66%; among Gazans, 67%. By 2019, though, support for this position would decrease, with only 43% of West Bankers and 50% of Gazans polled supporting an end to such payments.<sup>10</sup>

Trump’s overall Middle East agenda received mixed reviews from Palestinians during this period. In the 2017 Washington Institute/PCPO poll, a total of 30% of respondents thought it was likely that Trump “will make a serious effort to help solve the Palestinian problem,” with the majority disagreeing. By 2018, West Bank respondents’ belief that such an effort was likely had dropped by 19 percentage points, to just 11%, yet Gazan responses remained steady at around 25%.<sup>11</sup>

### **Priorities for the Trump Administration**

In the 2017 Washington Institute/PCPO poll, equally revealing were the answers to this question: “What is the one thing you’d most like the U.S. to do about the Palestinian issue these days?” A plurality (34%) of West Bankers surveyed picked “put pressure on the PA and Hamas to be more democratic and less corrupt”—more than those who preferred to “put pressure on Israel to make concessions” or “increased economic aid to the Palestinians.” Among Gazans, only a quarter picked “put pressure on Israel.” Most of the rest were divided among “increase economic aid” (29%); “put pressure on the PA and Hamas to be more democratic and less corrupt”

## PRESIDENT TRUMP AND THE “DEAL OF THE CENTURY,” 2017–20

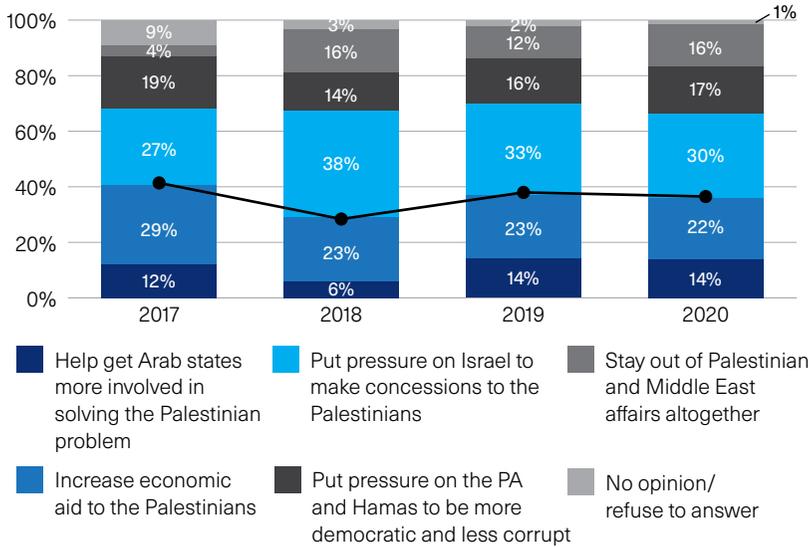
(19%); and “help get Arab states more involved” (12%). Notably, just 9% of Gazans and 11% of West Bankers thought that the United States should “stay out of Palestinian and Middle East affairs altogether.”<sup>12</sup>

Over a year later, in an October 2018 poll sponsored by The Washington Institute, Gazans continued to exhibit a comparatively moderate mix of attitudes toward the role of the United States. However, West Bank attitudes had decidedly soured against U.S. involvement. When Gazans were asked the same question regarding U.S. involvement in Palestinian issues, the winner was to “put pressure on Israel to make concessions,” with 38%, a 10-percentage-point uptick from the previous year. But a close second place went to “increase economic aid to the Palestinians,” at 23% (a 6-point drop from the previous year), followed by “put pressure on the PA and Hamas to be more democratic and less corrupt,” at 14% (a 5-point drop). A still small minority reported that the United States should “stay out of Palestinian and Middle East affairs altogether” (16%).<sup>13</sup> The following year, in a 2019 Washington Institute/PCPO poll, Gazans’ answers did not change substantially, with a slight decrease in those who most wanted the United States to exert pressure on Israel and a slight increase in those interested in Washington helping Arab states become more involved—from 6% to 14%.<sup>14</sup>

In the West Bank, however, the option to “stay out of Palestinian and Middle East affairs altogether” actually earned top billing in the October 2018 poll, with a stunning 49%—a sharp 38-point increase from the previous year’s results. A distant second place went to “put pressure on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians,” with 22% of West Bankers surveyed selecting this option.<sup>15</sup> By 2019, a Washington Institute/PCPO poll revealed that this attitude had softened somewhat, though a third of West Bank respondents still thought the best option was for the United States to stay out of Middle East affairs altogether. However, this was followed closely by putting pressure on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians, and by increasing economic aid—a 14% uptick from the previous year (see figures 9.1 and 9.2).<sup>16</sup>

Alongside these negative attitudes, awareness of recent U.S. pressure seemed high in 2018. Three-quarters of Palestinian respondents said they had heard at least a fair amount about the funding cutoff for the UN Relief and Works Agency, though just 18% thought this would yield any changes in PA policy. Even more (78%) reported knowing “a great deal” or a “fair amount” about the U.S. embassy move to Jerusalem. The majority also said that they had heard about closing the PLO office in Washington. It must be noted, however, that 36% of respondents said that they had heard more than a little about “the start of official American negotiations with Hamas”—an entirely fictitious prompt, and one not actually even rumored at the time, but used as a “control variable” for this question.<sup>17</sup>

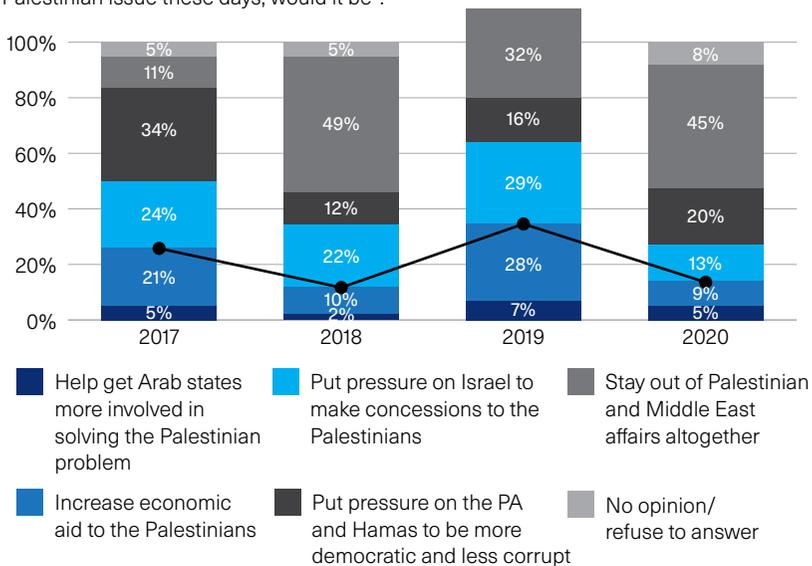
**Figure 9.1.** “Now, if there’s one thing you’d most like the U.S. to do about the Palestinian issue these days, would it be”:



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 9.2.** “Now, if there’s one thing you’d most like the U.S. to do about the Palestinian issue these days, would it be”:



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

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On another all-too-real issue, fewer than half (43%) of respondents had heard of the Taylor Force Act, which cut funding to the PA because of its payments to convicted terrorists and their families. This number had not increased substantially by 2019, with 52% saying they had read a fair amount or a lot about the act.<sup>18</sup>

These trends continued to take shape as details surrounding Trump’s “deal of the century” emerged. Despite the very negative Palestinian official and media commentary on the Trump peace plan, the July 2019 Washington Institute/PCPO poll suggested a more equivocal view among regular Palestinians. Only one-third of respondents in either the West Bank or Gaza agreed that the PA “should reject [the plan] now.” Instead, a larger percentage advocated a more measured position: around one-quarter in each territory said “the PA should not reject the plan, so Israel won’t be able to take advantage” of that, while an additional one-quarter said that “the PA should look at the plan when it is officially released, before taking any position on it.” However, the polling data also demonstrated a comparative lack of awareness in the West Bank, where 23% admitted they “haven’t heard or read enough” about the peace plan to venture an opinion about it. Among Gazans, the comparable figure was just 12%.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, many Palestinians reported not having enough information about the U.S.-led Bahrain economic workshop, which had just occurred, to say whether it had been a good or bad idea. Again, Gazans reported being better informed: just 19% of Gazans polled said they had not heard or read enough to say one way or another, while a large 40% of West Bankers gave that nonresponse. At least in some cases, respondents may have claimed ignorance because they were reluctant to contradict the official PA and Hamas opposition to the conference.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, those who did express an opinion of the Bahrain conference had a predominantly unfavorable view. Just 30% of respondents in Gaza and a mere 14% in the West Bank thought that gathering was a “good idea.” Around half in each territory called it a “bad idea.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Most West Bank and Gaza Palestinians Approve of Jordan—but Not of Confederation**

The July 2019 public opinion poll also revealed that most West Bank and Gaza Palestinians surveyed approve of Jordan’s King Abdullah II, look to his country for help, and want it to play a major role in their future—though just a small minority favored a future confederation with Jordan. On other issues, the Palestinian public was surprisingly flexible on the prisoner issue but tough on Jerusalem.

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When asked about various regional or global leaders, the large majority of Palestinian respondents voiced a favorable opinion of King Abdullah: 68% of Gazans, and a stunning 77% of West Bankers. These remarkably high numbers were about on a par with those for Turkish president Erdogan, often considered by outsiders to be something of a hero to Palestinians. By comparison, Egypt's president, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, gets good ratings from 55% of Gazans polled—but merely 16% of West Bankers.<sup>22</sup>

Saudi crown prince Muhammad bin Salman lagged behind, with 38% of Gazans and only 22% of West Bankers surveyed expressing a positive view. Interestingly, Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei earned almost exactly the same degree of Palestinian popular approval: 38% in Gaza and 18% in the West Bank.<sup>23</sup>

Support for countries reflected public attitudes toward their leaders: Jordan was favored for a “major role” in the future of Palestine by 63% of West Bank and 51% of Gaza respondents. Saudi Arabia, by contrast, garnered under 40% support among both Palestinian publics. Moreover, solid majorities in both the West Bank (62%) and Gaza (77%) agreed that “right now, the Palestinians should look more to other Arab governments, like Egypt or Jordan, to help improve our situation.”<sup>24</sup>

This should not be interpreted to mean Palestinians want unity or even confederation with any of their neighbors. When offered that option—along with a two-state, one-state, or all-of-Palestine solution—polled Palestinians gave confederation with Egypt or Jordan, “including Palestinian self-government,” only single-digit support (9% of West Bankers, 5% of Gazans, and a startlingly low 1% of East Jerusalem Palestinians). A “one-state solution, in which Arabs and Jews would have equal rights in one state from the river to the sea,” garnered double that support among West Bankers and Gazans, albeit still with a small minority: 18% of West Bankers, 12% of Gazans, and a high of 20% in East Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

Yet a significantly larger proportion in all three places agreed at least “somewhat” with this highly provocative assertion: “It would be better for us if we were part of Israel, rather than in PA- or Hamas-ruled lands.” Fully half of Gazans surveyed voiced that view. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, that figure was around one-quarter.<sup>26</sup>

### **Just One-Quarter Favor a New Intifada over Other Options**

In all three areas surveyed, two-thirds or more justified attacks on Israeli settlers, soldiers, and police. Narrower majorities also said they support

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“armed struggle” in principle, if given a simple yes-or-no choice about it. Yet when offered a variety of options, including diplomatic efforts or a greater focus on internal reforms, only about one-quarter in any of these areas said they prefer renewing an intifada against Israel. This counterintuitive point was confirmed by consistent responses to several different question wordings used in this survey, to measure actual popular preferences rather than the usual rhetorical postures.<sup>27</sup>

In a second stark contrast with common misconceptions or partisan claims, echoing a view expressed by respondents in 2017, around half the public polled in both the West Bank and Gaza agreed with this proposal: “The Palestinian Authority should stop special payments to prisoners, and give their families normal social benefits like everybody else.” This finding confirms unanticipated results from previous polls. It is also in line with a decline in the priority Palestinians accord to prisoner releases carried out as Israeli goodwill measures. Presented with a list of priorities, only about one-quarter in any of the three publics polled picked prisoner releases as their top priority.<sup>28</sup>

### **Polling Suggests Increasing Frustration in the West Bank**

Whereas the polls sponsored by The Washington Institute over 2017–18 have demonstrated the stability of Gazans’ frustrations with Hamas, polls since 2017 have also shown West Bankers’ increasing frustration with their political institutions. West Bank attitudes toward Ramallah have been skeptical at best. The 2017 Washington Institute/PCPO survey revealed that a solid majority of West Bank respondents, 68% in 2017 and 58% in 2018, believed that Hamas “should be allowed to operate politically in the West Bank in a free and open fashion,” in opposition to current PA practice. When asked about the PA’s future prospects in 2017, only 15% of West Bank respondents expected it to “remain in power more or less as now, regardless of who leads it.” The remainder were divided among a variety of other prognoses: either anarchy or else greater control of the West Bank by Hamas, by local authorities, or even by Israel. Nevertheless, 14% of West Bankers stated that “Israel will take over more control over the West Bank, at the expense of all Palestinian parties.”<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, West Bank support for recognizing Israel as a Jewish state also declined from 2017 to 2018. Respondents from both the Gaza Strip and West Bank were asked whether they agreed with the formula of “two states for two peoples.” In the West Bank, the percentage who disagreed rose 12

## A NATION DIVIDED

points, from 52% in 2017 to 64% in 2018. In Gaza, the percentages were similar, with 52% of respondents in 2017 and 62% in 2018 disagreeing with the proposition of “two states for two peoples.” The only year in which the data reflects majority West Bank support for “two states for two peoples” was 2015, and even then, respondents voiced support by only a slim 56% majority. This was not the case in Gaza, where a majority of respondents still opposed “two states for two peoples” in 2015, though support for this idea had risen slightly to 44%.

None of this meant that the Palestinian public endorsed Israel’s rule at the time. Indeed, the percentage who said that “Jews have some rights to this land” was in the single digits. Yet while most respondents denied Israel’s right to exist, most accepted the necessity to coexist. In 2017, a 60% majority of West Bankers polled agreed with this stark statement: “Regardless of what’s right, the reality is that most Israeli settlers will probably stay where they are, and most Palestinian refugees will not return to the 1948 lands.” Even among Gazans, nearly half (46%) accepted that assessment.

Moreover, in 2018 the vast majority of West Bankers surveyed, as in previous years, said that their top priority was either “having a good family life” (49%) or “making enough income to live comfortably” (38%), rather than “working to establish a Palestinian state” (11%). Even as a second priority, just 26% in Gaza picked that political option (see figure 9.3).<sup>30</sup>

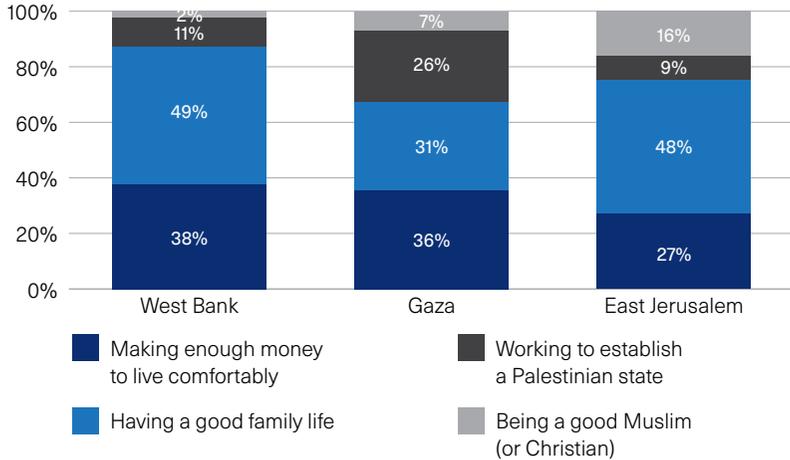
For progress toward their national goals, most West Bankers preferred “peaceful resistance,” international recognition, or even negotiations with Israel—if Israel offered some concessions first. The top three picks for Israeli overtures, each selected by one-quarter of the respondents, were to build a highway for West Bankers to bypass the Jerusalem checkpoints; to stop building settlements beyond the wall; and to stop settler violence. By comparison, releasing prisoners or “sharing Jerusalem as a capital” had dropped on this list of desired gestures of Israeli goodwill.

Significantly, one other Palestinian political option that attracted great popular support, despite rarely (if ever) having been posed in a poll before, was the suggestion to “work more closely politically with Palestinians inside the 1948 lines.” In the 2018 Washington Institute/PCPO survey, three-quarters of West Bank respondents endorsed this idea, including nearly a third who said such a suggestion was “very positive.” Given subsequent nationalist political activism among Israel’s roughly two million Arab citizens, nearly equal in numbers to their counterparts just across the Green Line in the West Bank, this is an orientation that should be more closely examined in future surveys.<sup>31</sup>

On a tactical level, again surprisingly, West Bank views were also significantly more militant than Gaza views. For example, just 36% of West

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**Figure 9.3.** “Let’s start with personal priorities. As you know, different people may have different personal priorities at different times in their lives. I would like to list several possibilities for you—and please tell me which one is your top personal priority these days, or if there is a different top priority you’d name instead.”



\*TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

Bankers surveyed wanted Israeli firms to provide more jobs in their territory. Somewhat more (42%), but still a minority, wanted “direct personal contacts and dialogue with Israelis, to support those who want peace.”

More ominously, at least the same proportion in one of the Washington Institute polls in 2018 favored “ending security coordination with Israel.” Figures from the other poll, where fewer respondents volunteered a “don’t know” response, were even higher: 63% said that stopping this security coordination would have at least a “somewhat positive” effect.<sup>32</sup>

Strikingly, in 2019, Gazans were also somewhat more positive than West Bankers when comparing their own circumstances with those of other Arab populations. The Washington Institute asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with this statement: “When I hear about what’s happening in Syria or Yemen and other places, I feel that my situation is actually not bad.” In the West Bank, half of those surveyed agreed at least “somewhat” with that notion. Among Gazans, however, despite their objectively worse conditions, that proportion rose to two-thirds. In 2020, 67% of Gazans and 57% of West Bankers agreed that their circumstances were not that bad compared to other Arab populations.<sup>33</sup>

This pattern of relative Gaza moderation and West Bank militancy did not hold across the board. On several other, more hypothetical or visceral questions, Gazans showed at least as much militancy as West Bankers.

This was true of justifying violence against Israeli settlers, rejecting Israel's legitimacy, and mixed views about long-term peace.

## **Hamas and Gaza Public Opinion, 2017–20**

June 2017 marked the tenth anniversary of the violent coup in which Hamas took control over the 1.9 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. There is still no end in sight to this predicament—but Hamas continues to be very unpopular in Gaza, according to Washington Institute–sponsored polls taken between 2017 and 2020. In 2017, only 14% of Gazans surveyed self-identified as Hamas supporters, while 41% identified as part of Fatah. Indeed, the large majority of Gazans—77%, including 41% who felt strongly about it—agreed that “the PA should send officials and security officers to Gaza, to take over the administration there.”<sup>34</sup> By 2019, the overall proportion of supporters in Gaza for this proposal had dipped marginally to 72% of respondents, yet a majority (51%) strongly agreed that this should be done.<sup>35</sup> In 2020, a 10-percentage-point dip in overall support occurred, with only 62% of overall Gazans agreeing with this proposal, while even fewer (36%) “strongly” agreed.<sup>36</sup>

Hamas’s political rhetoric, importantly, is often not in line with what a majority of Gazans want. For example, the majority of Gazans surveyed (62%) said in 2017 that “Hamas should stop calling for Israel’s destruction, and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.” Agreement with this statement dipped in 2018, but there remained at least a plurality who supported it: one of the Washington Institute polls conducted during this period showed that Gazans said “yes” by a margin of 53% to 45%, while the other poll yielded a slightly narrower margin, 48% to 44%. However, support fluctuated over the past two years, with 61% of Gazans in 2019 and 50% in 2020 agreeing with such an idea.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, in 2018, when asked about the weekly Hamas-led border protests, just 36% of Gazans supported this tactic, while 62% opposed it. In 2019, support increased very slightly, but only to 41%. However, another 40% of Gazans were strongly against the tactic. Conversely, questions on a formal ceasefire with Israel in 2018 garnered more support than opposition: 73% to 25% in one poll, and 51% to 45% in the other. On the harder question of full peace with Israel, notably, both polls from 2018 likewise showed more popular support than opposition.<sup>38</sup>

The 2018 survey also showed that Gazans were suffering economically under Hamas rule. Two-thirds reported a monthly family income of under 1,200 Israeli shekels (around \$330 in 2017)—compared with just 8% of West

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Bankers, most of whom reported monthly incomes at least twice as high. By 2019, this trend had worsened; a full 75% of Gaza respondents reported an income of less than 1,200 shekels, with 41% stating that their monthly income was less than 600 shekels (around \$170). By 2020, 47% of Gazans also described their “family/household income” as “weak” or below average. These numbers helped explain why a majority of Gazans, more than West Bankers, have desired economic relief even from Israel over the past two years: 72% of Gazans in 2018, 68% in 2019, and 67% in 2020 voiced support for Israeli companies offering more jobs inside Gaza and the West Bank. Notably, over half of Gazans said in 2018 that they would accept an Arab offer of “extra economic aid in order to resettle Palestinian refugees in the West Bank or Gaza but not inside Israel.”<sup>39</sup>

When asked whom they blame most for the economic misery resulting from the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza, fewer than half of Gazans surveyed (46%) singled out Israel in 2017. The rest blamed other actors: Hamas, 26%; the PA, 11%; the UN, 11%; or Egypt, 4%. The last number was remarkably low, considering that according to UN statistics, Egypt kept Rafah, its only border crossing with Gaza, completely shut for 322 days during 2016.<sup>40</sup> And by 2018, a plurality of Gazans had shifted their blame to Hamas: 32% cited Hamas as most to blame, while only 27% blamed Israel, a 19-percentage-point drop from the previous year. Moreover, blame toward the PA now followed close behind, at 22%. These numbers remained relatively stable, with 44% of Gazans placing the blame on Israel for the slow pace of reconstruction in 2020, followed by Hamas, 21%; the PA, 15%; the UN, 14%; and Egypt, 4%.<sup>41</sup>

Most surprising of all, Gazans in June 2017 were more moderate than West Bankers on the key question of permanent peace with Israel. When asked about future options, a narrow plurality of Gazans (47%) said that if Palestinian leadership is able to negotiate a two-state solution, then that should be the end of the conflict. This was an increase of 13 points since 2015. A total of 44% took the opposite view: the conflict “should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated,” but just 24% thought that a realistic goal “for the foreseeable future.” These proportions were reversed in the West Bank: a narrow majority (55%) of respondents said that the conflict should continue even after a two-state solution, while 34% said that such a solution should end the conflict with Israel.<sup>42</sup>

The explanation for this striking dichotomy almost certainly rested in the differing experiences of the two Palestinian populations. Gazans were much more familiar with the devastating consequences of endless war against Israel, while West Bankers were much more familiar with the PA’s equivocal policies.

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Regarding contacts with Israel, even without a peace agreement, the evidence was clearer still. Despite the official Hamas anti-normalization policies and demonization of Israelis, the 2018 polls showed that most Gazans say they want direct personal dialogue with Israelis.<sup>43</sup>

To be sure, this did not mean that most Gazans liked, trusted, or simply accepted the lasting reality of Israel. In the 2018 poll, for instance, only about half said that negotiations with Israel had even “somewhat positive” results to date. Similarly, only about half of Gaza respondents said that a two-state solution should “end the conflict.” From 2017 to 2020, more than half of respondents continued to predict that “Palestinians will control almost all of Palestine,” either because “God is on their side” or because “they will outnumber the Jews someday.” In 2020, Gazans were slightly more optimistic, with 65% of respondents predicting “Palestinians will control almost all of Palestine,” up from 58% the previous year.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, Gazans were unexpectedly realistic on some final status issues in the 2018 poll. On the refugee problem, to cite but one highly emotive example, 68% favored accepting a “right of return” only to the West Bank and Gaza but not to Israel, “if that is the very last step required to end the occupation and achieve a real independent Palestinian state.” Among West Bankers, the comparable figure was a full 20 points lower. The official position of both the PA and Hamas remains, to this day, steadfastly opposed to such a compromise. In 2020, the number of respondents who accepted the “right of return” to only the West Bank and Gaza decreased to 56%. Despite falling slightly in 2020, the option has maintained majority support from 2017 to 2020.<sup>45</sup>

So why, despite this popular will, has nothing changed in Gaza? It is because the PA has refused to assert its role in that territory, while Hamas has also refused to risk its rule by holding elections during its entire period of control. The result has been continued Hamas rule by force of arms. The people of Gaza know it; three-quarters in the Washington Institute/PCPO poll in 2017, up sharply from 35% in the previous (June 2015) poll, said that elections should require Hamas to “give up its separate armed units.” However, Hamas had no intention of doing that, no elections were held, and the people of Gaza were left with no say in the matter—even though an overwhelming majority want free and fair elections. The 2019 Washington Institute/PCPO poll asked whether Hamas and the PA should allow “free and fair Palestinian elections”; 64% of Gazans surveyed “strongly” agreed, and another 24% agreed “somewhat.” In 2020, the overall number of Gazans who agreed at least somewhat with that idea remained the same, while those who agreed strongly rose slightly to 70%.<sup>46</sup>

## Palestinian Public Rejects Trump Plan

Around the time that the Trump administration unveiled the “deal of the century” on January 28, 2020, three different Palestinian polls (PCPSR, AWRAD, and JMCC) indicated that the West Bank and Gaza publics rejected the U.S. administration’s peace plan by margins of around 90%.<sup>47</sup> A Washington Institute/PCPO poll taken in February of 2020, however, revealed that most Palestinians also reject an armed confrontation or “intifada” against Israel—opting instead for a focus on pragmatic improvements on the ground, or even on renewed peace talks.

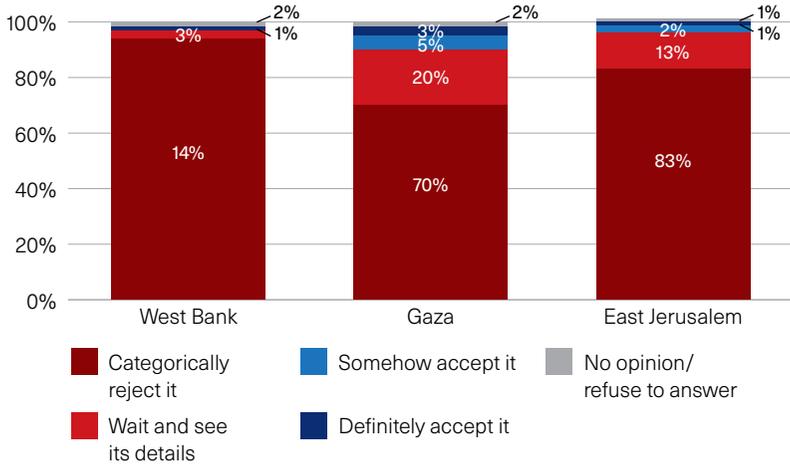
**Gazans refuse plan, yet most want talks.** In the February 2020 Washington Institute/PCPO poll, 94% of West Bankers said that they “categorically rejected” the Trump plan (see figure 9.4). Interestingly, Gazan respondents were somewhat more moderate on this question, as they were on many other such issues. In Gaza, 70% rejected the plan and 20% wanted to “wait and see its details,” while the remaining 9% would likely “accept” the plan. Similarly, only one-third of Gazans—compared with two-thirds in the West Bank—wanted to cut off all diplomatic contacts with the United States.<sup>48</sup>

**Majorities want calm, not confrontation.** Moreover, rejection of this peace plan did not mean desire for violent confrontations. On the contrary; the majority of Palestinians overall wanted Hamas to maintain a ceasefire with Israel: 56% of Gazans along with 69% of West Bankers reported supporting such a policy. And a mere 22% of West Bankers in the latest poll wanted to “escalate the resistance against Israel.” This figure was confirmed by a separate poll completed a week earlier and published by Birzeit University in the West Bank (see figures 9.5 and 9.6).<sup>49</sup>

**Why no intifada?** The majority (55%) of West Bankers said one factor explaining the lack of an uprising is that “many people are concerned about tough Palestinian Authority reactions to any disturbances” (see figure 9.7). This sentiment was echoed in a separate poll released by Khalil Shikaki’s PCPSR around the same time as the Washington Institute/PCPO poll, in which 73% anticipated that the PA leadership would not allow a “resumption of armed struggle or an armed intifada.” Other calming factors identified by majorities in both the West Bank and Gaza included a preoccupation with personal concerns, fear of Israeli retaliation, hope for outside support, dearth of trusted leaders, or a preference for peaceful approaches.<sup>50</sup>

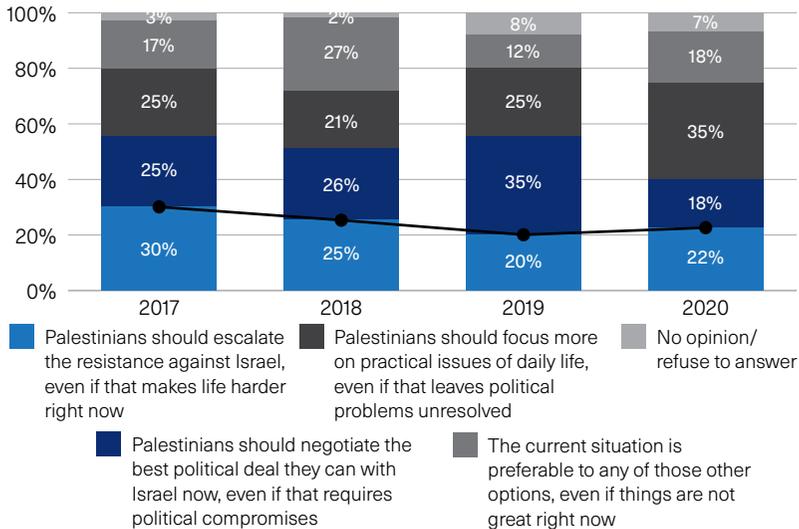
Pragmatism was also evident in other responses in the February 2020 poll. Around 85% of Gazans, and 71% of West Bankers, agreed with the following statement: “Right now, internal political and economic reform is more important for us than any foreign policy issue.” More pointedly, 70%

**Figure 9.4.** “U.S. president Donald Trump is going to publicize his long-outstanding Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, advertised as the “deal of the century,” at the end of January. How would you describe your reaction to this plan?”



\*TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

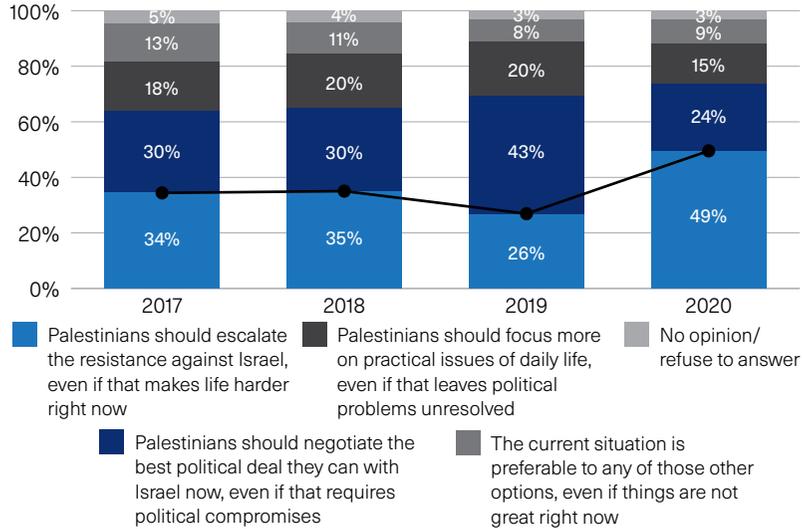
**Figure 9.5.** “Now, in the short run, there are different views about the approach Palestinians should take toward Israel these days. I will read you four different ideas about that, and please tell me, which one comes closest to your own view.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

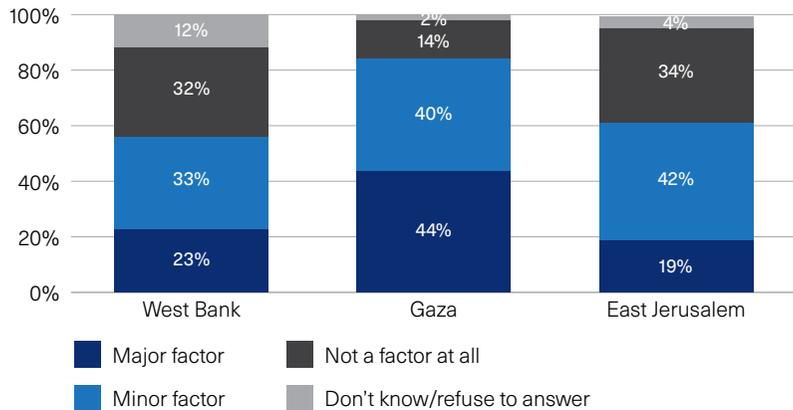
**Figure 9.6.** “Now, in the short run, there are different views about the approach Palestinian should take toward Israel these days. I will read you four different ideas about that, and please tell me, which one comes closest to your own view.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 9.7.** “I’d like to ask your personal opinion about why there’s no intifada in the West Bank, and why the border between Israel and Gaza is pretty quiet. Let me list a few possible reasons for this—and for each one, please tell me if you think it is a major factor in explaining this relatively calm situation, just a minor factor, or not a factor at all: Many people are concerned about tough PA and Hamas reactions to any disturbances.”



\*TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

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in both territories also agreed with this seemingly provocative proposition: “Right now, the Palestinians should focus on practical matters like jobs, health care, education, and everyday stability, not on big political plans or resistance options.”<sup>51</sup>

**Economics first for Gaza.** Prioritization of economic issues was particularly strong in Gaza, where the immediate needs were more pressing. Seventy percent of Gazans, compared with just 20% of West Bankers, said they wanted “Israeli companies to offer more jobs” in their area. In a similar vein, asked what they most want from the United States, 20% of Gazans picked more economic aid; a mere 9% of West Bankers said the same, with the majority preferring that the United States simply stay out of their affairs altogether.

**Majorities expect peace talks after Israeli election.** Looking at the 2020 elections in both Israel and the United States offered one surprising and encouraging finding. Nearly 60% of Palestinians—whether in Gaza or the West Bank—said that “resumption of peace negotiations with a new Israeli government” would be at least “fairly likely” after the Israeli vote on March 2, 2020 (see figure 9.8).<sup>52</sup>

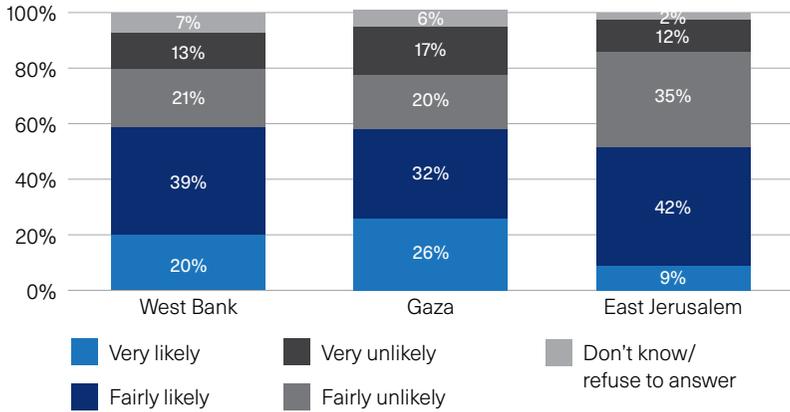
But expectations regarding the American election were more pessimistic. Only 22% in Gaza—and even fewer, a mere 9%, in the West Bank—thought the outcome of the November U.S. election would make things “better for the Palestinians.”<sup>53</sup>

## Palestinian Majority Rejects a Two-State Solution

In between the unveiling of the Trump peace plan on January 28, 2020, and Israel’s third national elections on March 2, 2020, survey data from that February showed that most Palestinians preferred “regaining all of historic Palestine” over permanent peace with Israel. Yet majorities in both the West Bank and Gaza voiced much more pragmatic views about the impracticality of a one-state solution, the return of refugees, or armed struggle against Israel.

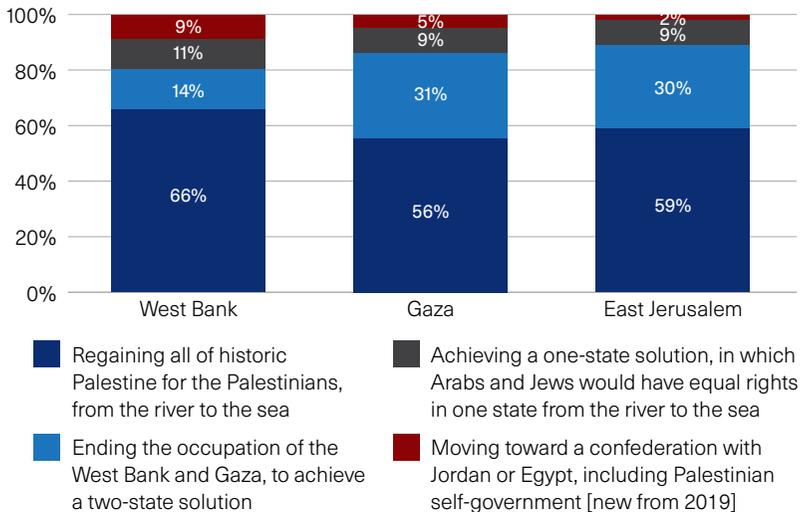
This tension between seemingly contradictory, relatively moderate short-term and maximalist long-term popular attitudes should be a foundation for a more effective policy. Such a policy would emphasize current openings for compromise and practical cooperation, while guarding against—and perhaps gradually moderating—future temptations to violence or irredentism. Given these very mixed Palestinian views, one could reasonably project that a hasty push for a “two-state solution” might not actually produce lasting

**Figure 9.8.** "I'd like to ask about your expectations for this new year of 2020. Let me list a few things that might or might not happen this year. For each one, please tell me if you think it is very likely, fairly likely, fairly unlikely, or very unlikely to happen over the coming year or so: Resumption of peace negotiations with a new Israeli government."



\*TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

**Figure 9.9.** "I'd like to ask your personal opinion about what should be the top Palestinian national priority during the coming five years. I will read you four different views about that, and please tell me which one is closest to your personal opinion about what should be the top Palestinian national priority in the next five years."



\* TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

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peace. At the same time, preventing provocative Israeli moves toward annexation would reduce the risk for the popular backlash foreshadowed in these survey findings.

**Few still support a two-state solution.** Perhaps ironically, while some attributed Palestinian rejection of Trump's plan to its new limits on the traditional two-state paradigm, most Palestinian respondents rejected that model as well. Asked to choose “the top Palestinian national priority during the coming five years,” two-thirds (66%) of West Bankers picked “regaining all of historic Palestine for the Palestinians”; a mere 14% chose “ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, to achieve a two-state solution.” Gazans were arguably more moderate: 56% wanted all of Palestine, while 3% opted for the two-state solution (see figure 9.9).<sup>54</sup>

These maximalist long-term aspirations were also reflected in responses to other survey questions. For example, when asked about next steps “if the Palestinian leadership is able to negotiate a two-state solution,” just 26% of West Bankers said this development “should end the conflict with Israel.” In Gaza, that figure climbed to 40%. Around 60% in both areas say “the conflict should not end, and resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated.”

**Yet no groundswell for one-state solution.** At the same time, contrary to common perceptions, the idea of a binational state, or a civil struggle for equality, did not gain much popular Palestinian support. Only around 10% in either the West Bank or Gaza said their priority was “achieving a one-state solution, in which Arabs and Jews would have equal rights in one state from the river to the sea.” And only around 10% in either place preferred to become “a citizen of Israel, with equal rights and responsibilities,” rather than a citizen of a Palestinian state.<sup>55</sup>

**Some popular realism on practical options.** These views reflected an assessment of the real-world obstacles to any such grand political objectives. Two-thirds in both the West Bank and Gaza agreed with this prognosis: “Israel will never accept a one-state solution that gives the Palestinians equal rights, even if they become a clear majority someday.” Nevertheless, as a practical matter, one-third of West Bankers said “it would be better for us if we were part of Israel rather than in PA- or Hamas-ruled lands.” Among Gazans, that proportion rose to a remarkable 40% of the population.

**Resignation on both Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlers.** On a related question, 71% of West Bankers agreed, at least somewhat, with this prediction: “Regardless of what’s right, the reality is that most Israeli settlers will probably stay where they are, and most Palestinian refugees will not

return to the 1948 lands.” In Gaza, that proportion was noticeably lower, but still a bare majority, at 52%. And on a personal level, a mere 5% of either Gazans or West Bankers said they might actually go to Israel “if you had a choice to move to an equally nice home in Israel, or stay in Palestine.”<sup>56</sup>

**Little local support for intifada, but annexation would spur anger.**

Asked to choose among various responses to their current predicament, only 22% of West Bankers would have opted to “escalate the resistance or intifada against Israel, even if that makes life harder right now.” But a direct question about responses to possible Israeli annexation moves yielded a tougher reaction. A narrow majority (56%) agreed that “the Palestinians should focus on opposing any new Israeli attempts to annex any West Bank territory, even by force if necessary”—including 25% who felt “strongly” that way (see figures 9.10 and 9.11).<sup>57</sup>

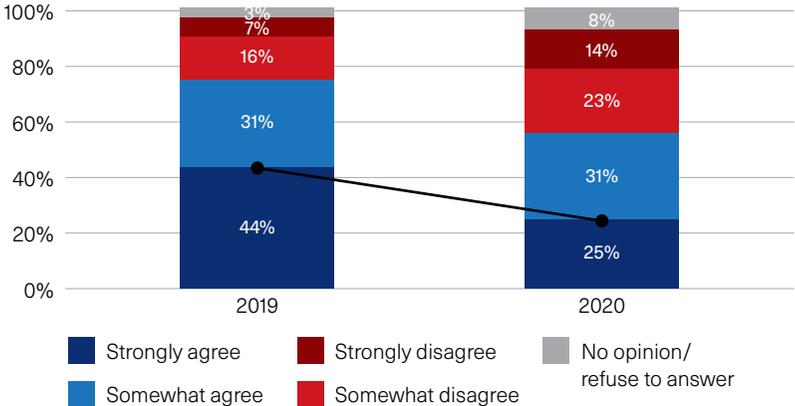
**Public more moderate than PA on prisoners, normalization.** Regarding Palestinian Authority bonuses to convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons, the West Bank public was strikingly at odds with its political leaders. Two-thirds (68%) of West Bankers, a marked increase between 2017 and 2020, agreed, at least “somewhat,” with this proposition: “The PA should stop special payments to prisoners, and give their families normal social benefits like everybody else—not extra payments based on their sentences or armed operations” (see figures 9.12 and 9.13).<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the West Bank public actually rejected the official PA policy against “normalization” with Israelis. Again, two-thirds (67%) of West Bankers agreed, at least “somewhat,” with the following statement: “Palestinians should encourage direct personal contacts and dialogue with Israelis, in order to help the Israeli peace camp advocate a just solution.” Among Gazans, that proportion was nearly as high, at 61% (see figures 9.14 and 9.15).<sup>59</sup>

## **Palestinians React to Israel’s Third Election by Looking to Other Arabs for Next Steps**

In watching Israel’s third national election in early March 2020, Palestinians found their low expectations fulfilled. The vote produced yet another inconclusive result, with the incumbent prime minister’s Likud Party narrowly leading but unable to muster a majority governing coalition with its existing right-wing and religious allies. The centrist Blue and White opposition party did even worse, gaining barely over one-quarter of the seats in parliament. And both parties have said they accept the Trump peace plan announced in late January 2020, which would preserve Israel’s settlements

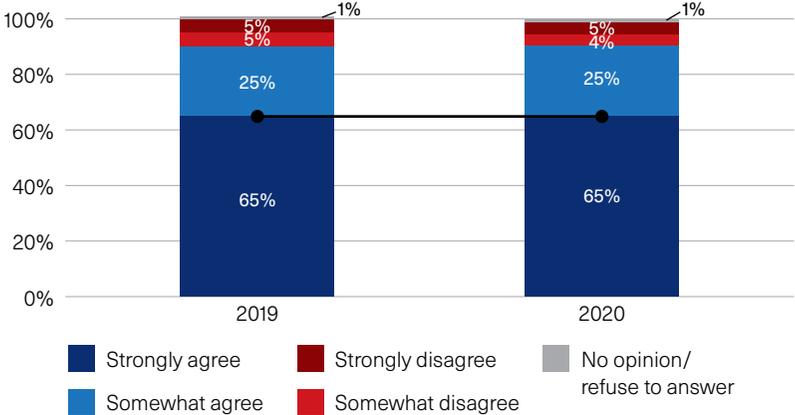
**Figure 9.10.** “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: The Palestinians should focus on opposing any new Israeli attempt to annex any West Bank territory, even by force if necessary.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

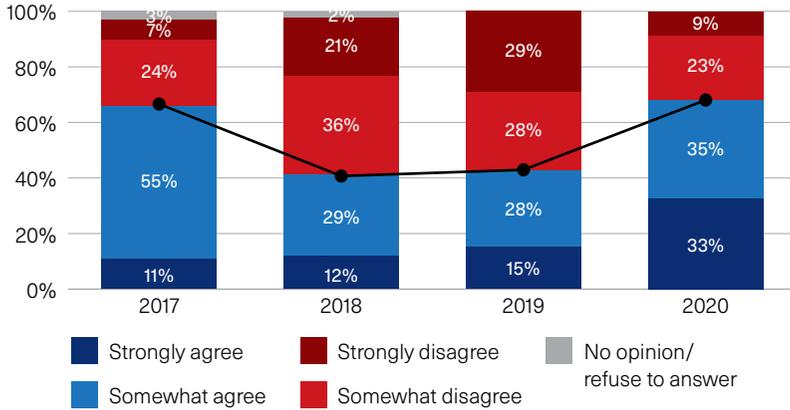
**Figure 9.11.** “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: The Palestinians should focus on opposing any new Israeli attempt to annex any West Bank territory, even by force if necessary.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

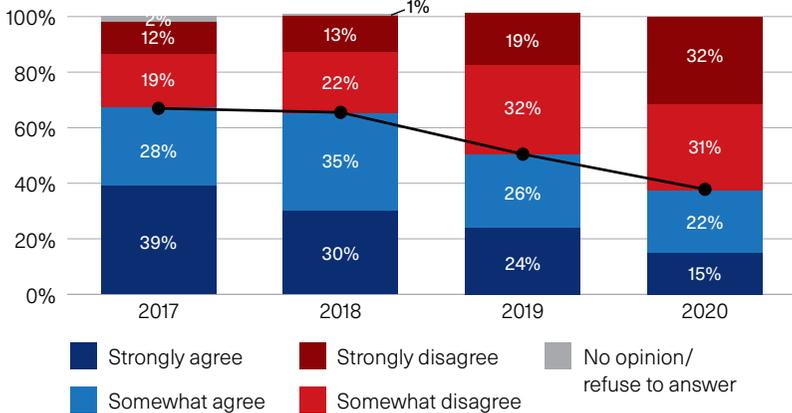
**Figure 9.12.** “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: The PA should stop special payments to prisoners and give prisoners’ families normal social benefits like everybody else—not extra payments based on their sentences or armed operations.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

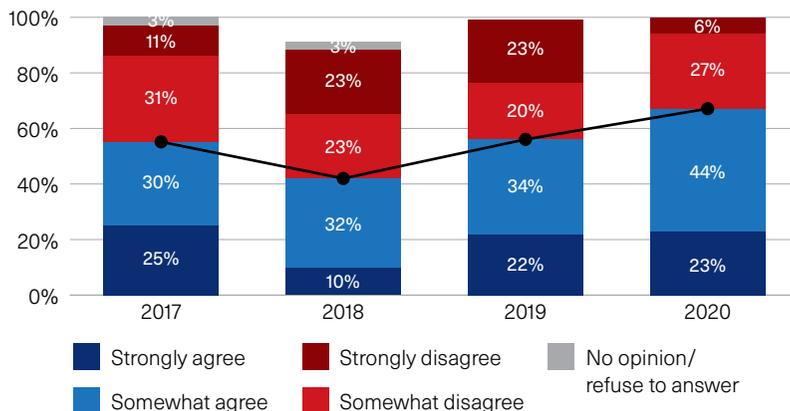
**Figure 9.13.** “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: The PA should stop special payments to prisoners and give prisoners’ families normal social benefits like everybody else—not extra payments based on their sentences or armed operations.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

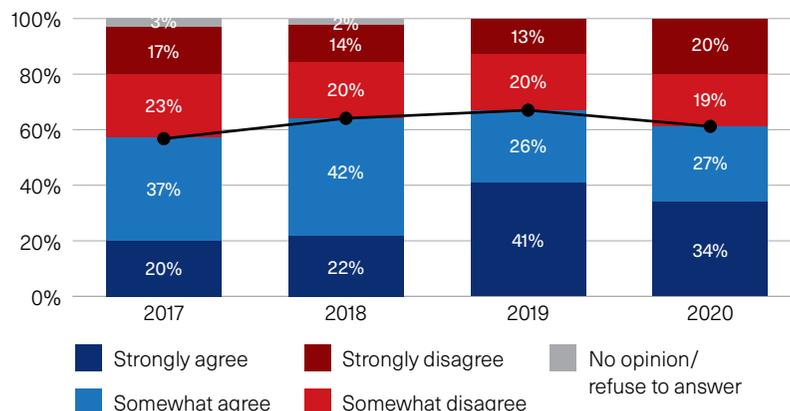
**Figure 9.14.** “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: Palestinians should encourage direct personal contacts and dialogue with Israelis, in order to help the Israeli peace camp advocate a just solution.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

**Figure 9.15.** “Please tell me whether you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: Palestinians should encourage direct personal contacts and dialogue with Israelis, in order to help the Israeli peace camp advocate a just solution.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

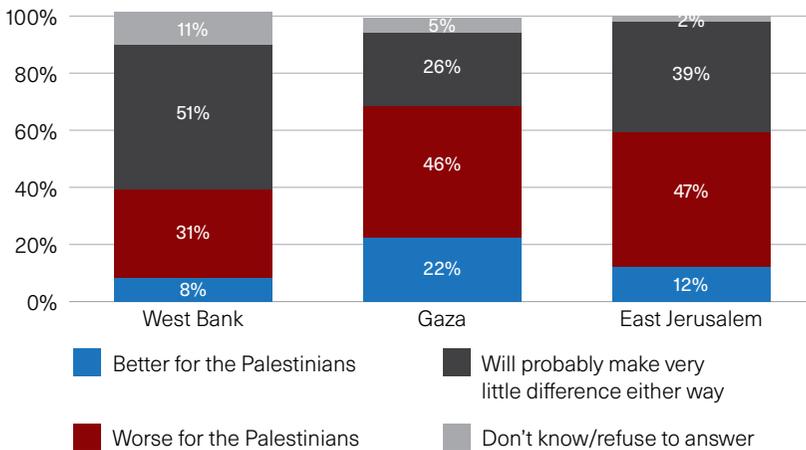
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and security control in the West Bank while putting off the prospect of Palestinian independence.<sup>60</sup>

A Washington Institute/PCPO poll conducted during the third Israeli election campaign, from January 23 to February 11, showed a mere 8% of West Bankers, along with 22% of Gazans, reporting that the vote would probably make things “better for the Palestinians.” Many more expected Israel’s election to make things worse for them: a third of West Bankers, and nearly half (46%) of Gazans. The remainder—half in the West Bank, and a quarter in Gaza—anticipated that it would “probably make very little difference either way.” These mixed but mostly pessimistic expectations help explain the largely quiescent popular reactions to the actual outcome (see figure 9.16).<sup>61</sup>

By comparison, the poll indicated that Palestinian attitudes toward possible support from some of their Arab neighbors were surprisingly positive. Lacking trust in Israel, and widely disenchanting with their own leaders in both Gaza and the West Bank, the Palestinian public appeared receptive to some form of coordination with these Arab neighbors. At the popular level, at least, the way may now be more open for certain Arab states to assume a larger role in promoting progress toward Palestinian-Israeli agreements,

**Figure 9.16.** “Israel will have another national election in March. Do you think the result will probably be better for the Palestinians, or worse for the Palestinians—or will it probably make very little difference either way?”



\* TWI/PCPO poll February 2020

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or at least coexistence. From a policy perspective, this often overlooked option should have been explored with greater intensity.

For example, nearly three-quarters in both the West Bank and Gaza agreed with this proposition: “Right now, the Palestinians should look more to other Arab governments, like Jordan or Egypt, to help improve our situation.” Half of West Bankers, and 79% of Gazans, also agreed with this statement: “Arab states should play a greater role in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, offering both sides incentives to take more moderate positions” (see figures 9.17 and 9.18).<sup>62</sup>

The sense of connection with Jordan was particularly widespread. Among West Bankers, 42% suggested that Jordan should play a “major role” in solving the Palestinian problem; remarkably, that figure was even higher among Gazans, at 59%. Moreover, Jordan’s King Abdullah enjoys a 64% approval rating in the West Bank, and 69% in Gaza. In sharp contrast, for example, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman received good reviews from just around one-quarter of the Palestinians in either territory.<sup>63</sup>

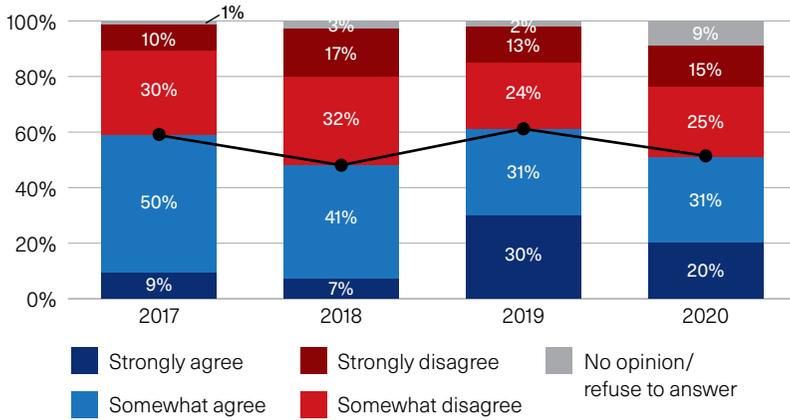
Regarding Egypt’s president, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, West Bank and Gaza attitudes were starkly divergent. A mere 11% of West Bankers voiced a favorable view of Sisi’s policies, compared with 56% of Gazans. This startling difference may have reflected Gazans’ proximity to and dependence on Egypt, and perhaps also a shared animosity toward the Hamas rulers of Gaza; but the exact reasons for such an unexpected attitudinal dichotomy await further research (see figures 9.19 and 9.20).

None of these results meant that Palestinians in either territory wanted Egypt or Jordan to restore their pre-1967 control over those lands. On the contrary: only 9% of West Bankers and 5% of Gazans desired to “move toward confederation with Egypt or Jordan, including Palestinian self-government.”<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, around half the public in both territories harbored a realistic perception of Arab state self-interest and fatigue regarding the Palestinian problem, with 47% of West Bankers and 53% of Gazans accepting the following controversial judgment: “Arab states are neglecting the Palestinians and starting to make friends with Israel, because they think the Palestinians should be more willing to compromise.” This unique new finding from this latest poll reflected a surprisingly high level of Palestinian public awareness about a major shift in regional dynamics, on both the elite and the “street” levels.<sup>65</sup>

In fact, a September 2019 survey by Zogby International did find that 70% or more of the publics in four key Arab countries—Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—agreed with the statement that “some

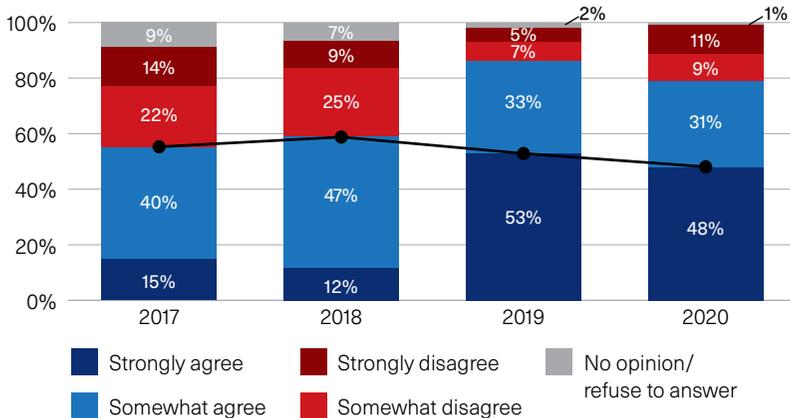
**Figure 9.17.** “Regarding the role of other Arab governments toward the Palestinian cause, please tell me if you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: Arab states should play a greater role in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, offering both sides incentives to take more moderate positions.”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

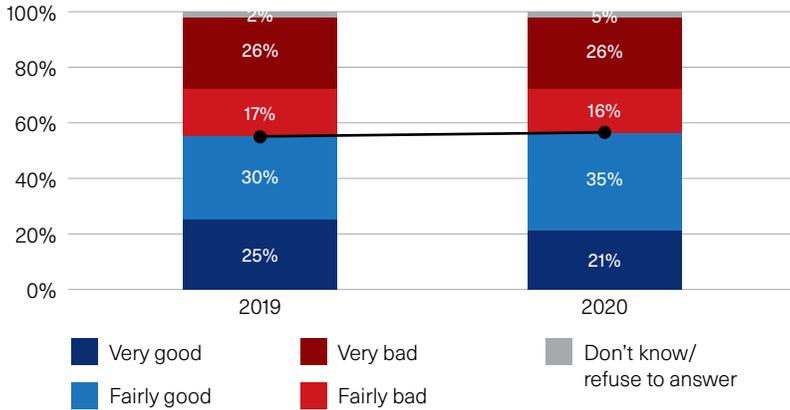
**Figure 9.18.** “Regarding the role of other Arab governments toward the Palestinian cause, please tell me if you agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat, with the following statement: Arab states should play a greater role in Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking, offering both sides incentives to take more moderate positions.”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll May 2017, July 2019, February 2020 and TWI/PCPO/other Palestinian poll October 2018

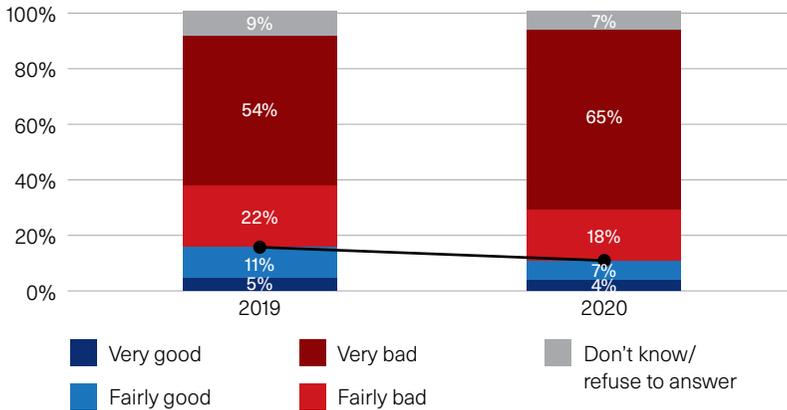
**Figure 9.19.** “Turning to the leaders of some other countries, please tell me your personal opinion of the recent policies of the following. Do you think the policies of each one on this list are very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad: Egypt’s President Sisi?”



**Gaza respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

**Figure 9.20.** “Turning to the leaders of some other countries, please tell me your personal opinion of the recent policies of the following. Do you think the policies of each one on this list are very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad: Egypt’s President Sisi?”



**West Bank respondents**

\*TWI/PCPO poll July 2019, February 2020

Arab states should have relations with Israel, even without a Palestinian agreement.” Nevertheless, in the poll of Palestinians, around half of West Bankers and fully 82% of Gazans reported feeling that “the Palestinians must pressure other Arab governments to support our full rights, and then they will mostly do that.” That is because roughly the same proportions said that “Arab governments might want to forget the Palestinians, but their people will never let them do that.”<sup>66</sup>

Among non-Arab regional actors, Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received high marks: 64% approval in the West Bank and 74% in Gaza. Significantly, Iran’s Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has also vocally advocated for the Palestinian cause, suffered greatly by comparison. Just 12% of West Bankers and 33% of Gazans expressed even a “somewhat” positive view of him. This is not purely a Sunni-Shia sectarian differential. Iran’s Lebanese Shia ally Hezbollah, which claims to threaten Israel on its northern border, earned positive reviews from noticeably higher proportions of Palestinians: 35% of West Bankers and 59% of Gazans.<sup>67</sup>

## **Most Palestinians Wanted to Work with Israel Against the Coronavirus, Though Nearly Half Thought It Was Deliberately Spread**

The coronavirus outbreak has affected Israeli personal and public life but, as of this writing, has had a lesser effect on the Palestinians next door in the West Bank and Gaza. Even so, an extraordinary public opinion poll conducted in those territories right in the midst of the medical crisis revealed a glimpse of changing attitudes and behavior due to the virus, with some unexpectedly positive aspects.

### ***Cooperation and Conspiracy Theories***

A poll conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion between March 12 and March 15, 2020, revealed that two-thirds of the public in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem supported “cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians to prevent the spread of coronavirus.” This proportion was significantly higher than the roughly half of Palestinians who reported supporting economic cooperation with Israel in another poll conducted by the same organization in mid-February 2020.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time, however, the poll demonstrated the lure of conspiracy theories surrounding this plague: 47% of Palestinians reported that they “believe a foreign power or other force is deliberately causing the spread of coronavirus.” The other half (51%) said it is “a natural mutation.”<sup>69</sup> By

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comparison, the latter figure stood at 43% in a Pew Research Center survey of Americans conducted between March 10 and March 16, 2020. The Pew survey also found that nearly one-third of American respondents believed the virus was either deliberately spread or that they did not know its origin.<sup>70</sup>

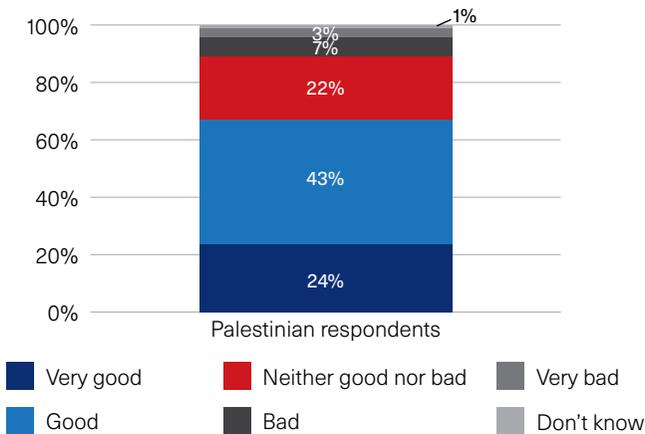
Among Palestinians, this level of suspicion and uncertainty may be linked to social media views. The narrow majority of respondents (53%) perceived social media as playing a negative role in this crisis, compared with just 37% who saw its role as positive. Nevertheless, the majority (58%) also noted that online education networks were a useful new option in this situation—including 15% who cheered virtual learning as “a very cool alternative.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Majorities Approve of Government Actions**

In general, the Palestinian public gave local authorities fairly good marks for handling this crisis, which helped explain the relatively calm situation. Two-thirds rated the performance of their public health authorities as “very good” (24%) or “good” (43%) (see figure 9.21). A narrower majority said the same about “the performance of the security services in controlling matters and not causing panic and fear among the Palestinian public at present”: 23% categorized the performance as “very good,” along with 39% who said just “good.”

Moreover, a similar majority (61%) agreed with this proposition: “I am willing to sacrifice some of my individual rights if it helps prevent the spread

**Figure 9.21.** “How would you generally evaluate the performance of the Palestinian health authorities on preventing the spread of the coronavirus in the Palestinian territories?”



of the virus.” In the United States, according to a parallel Gallup International poll, the corresponding figure was somewhat lower at 45%.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Personal Lives Widely Disrupted***

The overwhelming majority (84%) of Palestinians reported that they were worried about the virus—with half admitting to being “very worried.” Despite opinions appearing split as to whether the threat is exaggerated—43% reported that it was, while 55% disagreed—expectations were generally pessimistic: 43% said “the worst is yet to come”; 34% said “things will largely stay the same”; and just 23% predicted that “the worst is over.” By comparison, individuals in Turkey expressed much more optimism according to the Gallup International survey, with 63% saying the worst is already over.

In terms of economic impact, 71% of Palestinians said the virus has affected their household. But only 31% considered that impact to be severe. In terms of personal habits, around two-thirds reported using sanitizer and washing their hands more often; around 40% also reported staying at home or having less social interaction. Only around one-fourth, however, said that they used masks or gloves to reduce the risk of infection.<sup>73</sup>

## Notes

1. Arab World for Research and Development, “85 Percent of Gazans Report Deterioration in Economic Conditions and Palestinians Are Divided over Negotiations”; poll taken April 7–10, 2018, n = 1200 Palestinians in the West Bank, <https://bit.ly/2Vra1cg>.
2. Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, “Poll No. 92—Oslo Accords 25th Anniversary,” August 6, 2018, <http://www.jmcc.org/documentsandmaps.aspx?id=879>.
3. David Pollock, “Palestinian Public Are Tactical Moderates, but Strategic Militants: Where Does That Lead?” *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 15, 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-are-tactical-moderates-but-strategic-militants-where-doe>.
4. Arab World for Research and Development, “Public Opinion Poll in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Local Election and Evaluation of Leaders”; poll taken May 21–23, 2017, n = 500 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, <https://bit.ly/2wldwTr>.
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6. Ibid.
7. Arab World for Research and Development, “Public Opinion Poll: Local Election,” <https://bit.ly/2wldwTr>.
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9. Pollock, "Palestinian Public Are Tactical Moderates," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/palestinian-public-are-tactical-moderates-but-strategic-militants-where-doe>.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. David Pollock, "New Polls Show Most Gazans Want Israeli Jobs, Not Hamas Mobs," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 29, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-show-most-gazans-want-jobs-not-mobs>.
14. David Pollock, "New Palestinian Poll Reveals 'Wait and See' View of Trump Peace Plan," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 29, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-palestinian-poll-reveals-wait-and-see-view-of-trump-peace-plan>; David Pollock, "Younger Palestinians More Moderate on Tactical Issues, But Not on Long-Term Peace with Israel," PolicyWatch 3175, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/younger-palestinians-more-moderate-on-tactical-issues-but-not-on-long-term>.
15. Pollock, "New Polls Show Most Gazans Want Israeli Jobs," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-show-most-gazans-want-jobs-not-mobs>.
16. Pollock, "New Palestinian Poll Reveals 'Wait and See' View," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-palestinian-poll-reveals-wait-and-see-view-of-trump-peace-plan>.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. David Pollock, "Most Palestinians Approve of Jordan—Plus Other Survey Surprises," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 26, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/most-palestinians-approve-of-jordanplus-other-survey-surprises>.
23. Ibid.
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25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. David Pollock, "The Palestinian Public's Tough Choices: On Violence, Instability, Hamas, 'Jewish State,'" *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 27, 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-palestinian-publics-tough-choices-on-violence-instability-hamas-jewish>; David Pollock, "New Polls: West Bankers Oppose Both Armed Revolt and U.S. Talks," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 8, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-west-bankers-oppose-both-armed-revolt-and-u.s.-talks>.
30. Pollock, "New Polls: West Bankers Oppose Both," <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/new-polls-west-bankers-oppose-both-armed-revolt-and-u.s.-talks>.

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32. Ibid.
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**David Pollock**, the Bernstein Fellow and director of Project Fikra at The Washington Institute, served previously as senior advisor for the Broader Middle East at the State Department, with a focus on women's rights. He also helped launch the department's Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative and the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, working directly with advocates across the Middle East. Pollock has served as a visiting lecturer at Harvard University



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