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Most Palestinians Want to Work With Israel Against Coronavirus, Though Nearly Half Think it Is Deliberately Spread

by [David Pollock](#)

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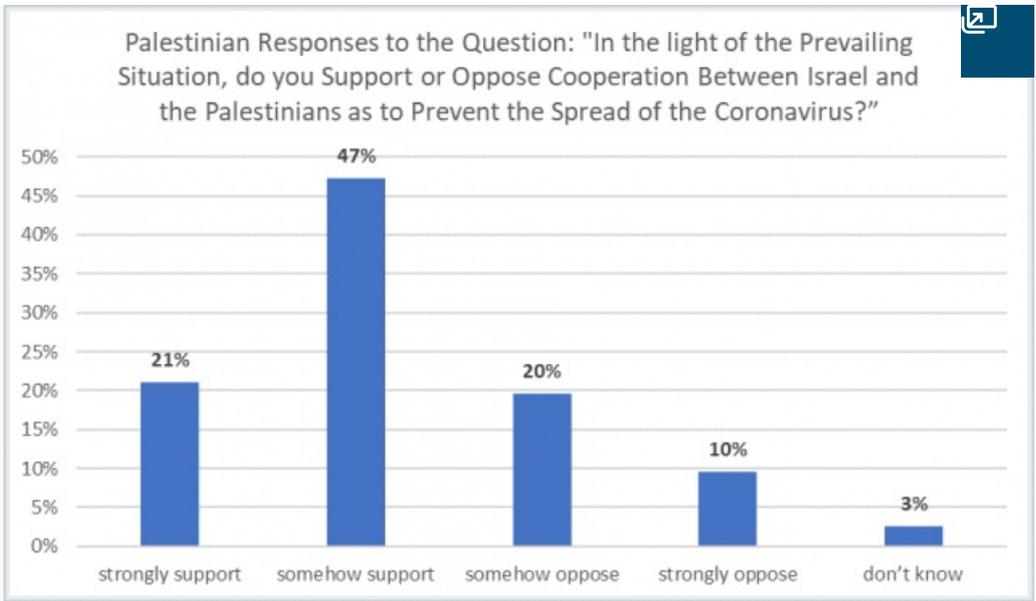
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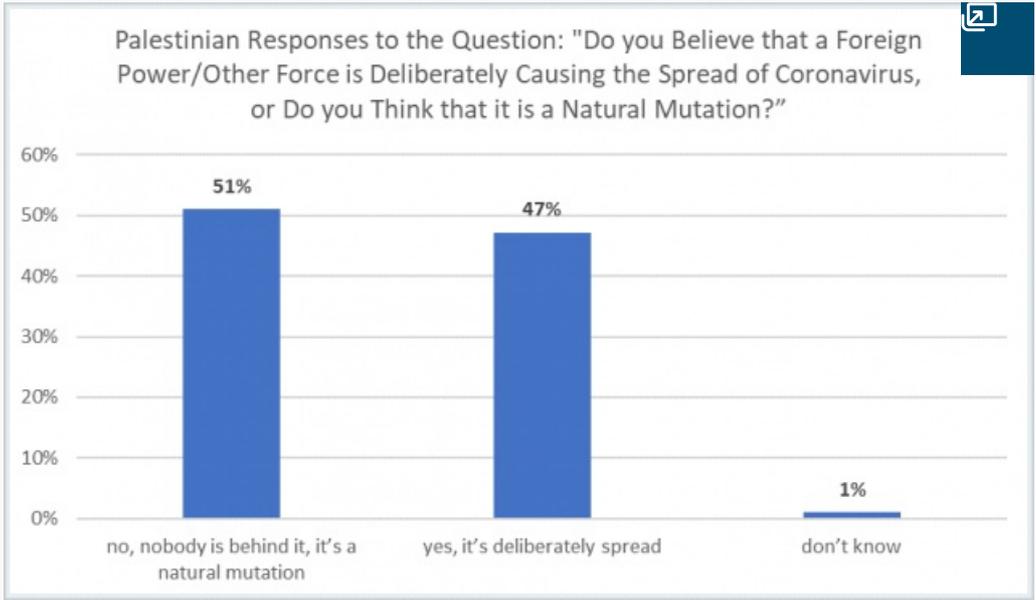
Brief Analysis

The coronavirus outbreak is having a [major effect on Israeli personal and public life](#), but has a lesser effect so far 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 this medical crisis reveals a glimpse of changing attitudes and behavior due to the virus, with some unexpectedly positive aspects.

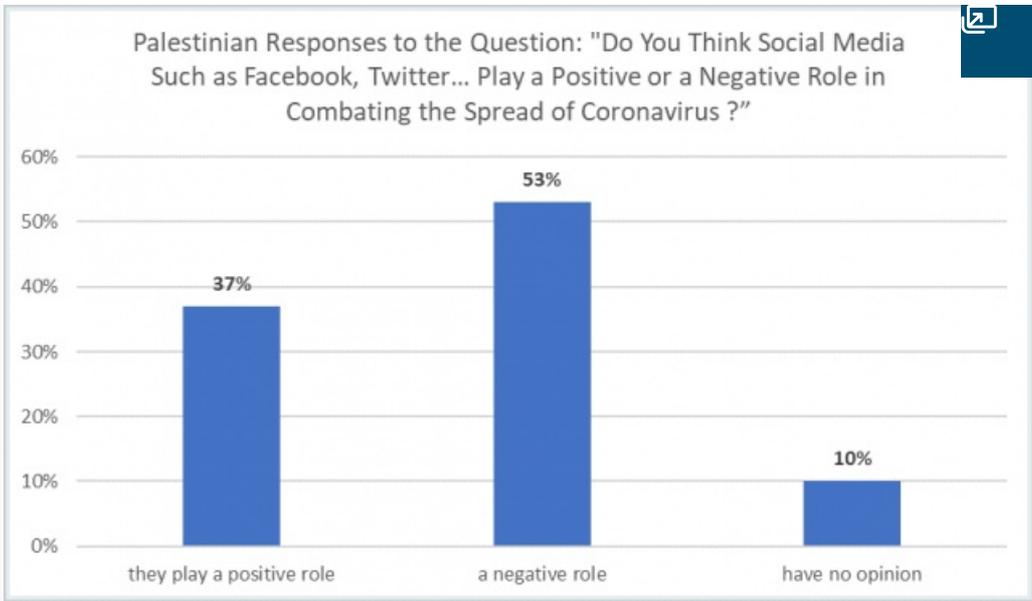
Cooperation and Conspiracy Theories. A reliable Palestinian public opinion poll taken last week shows that two-thirds of the public in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem state support for “cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians to prevent the spread of coronavirus.” This proportion is significantly higher than roughly half of the Palestinians who reported supporting economic cooperation with Israel in another poll conducted by the same organization [as recently as mid-February](#).



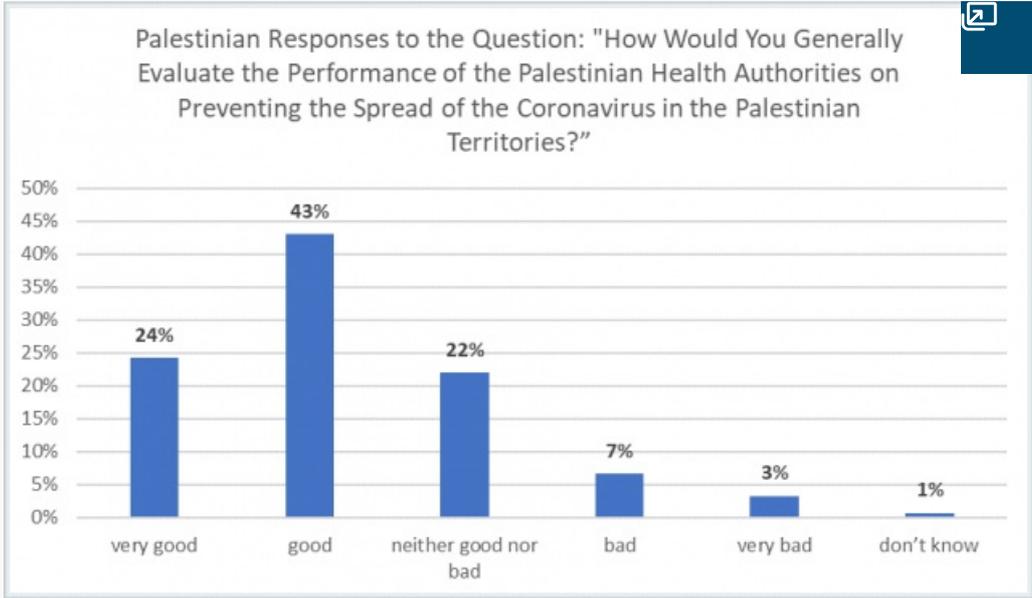
At the same time, however, the new poll demonstrates the lure of conspiracy theories surrounding this plague: 47% of Palestinians reported that they “believe a foreign power or other force is deliberately causing the spread of coronavirus.” The other half (51%) say it is “a natural mutation.” By comparison, the latter figure stands at 56% in the most recent comparable American poll—with nearly one-fourth each saying the virus is either deliberately spread, or that they “don’t know” its origin.



Among Palestinians, this level of suspicion and uncertainty may be linked to views of social media. The narrow majority (53%) viewed 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 are a useful new option in this situation—including 15% who cheer virtual learning as “a very cool alternative.”

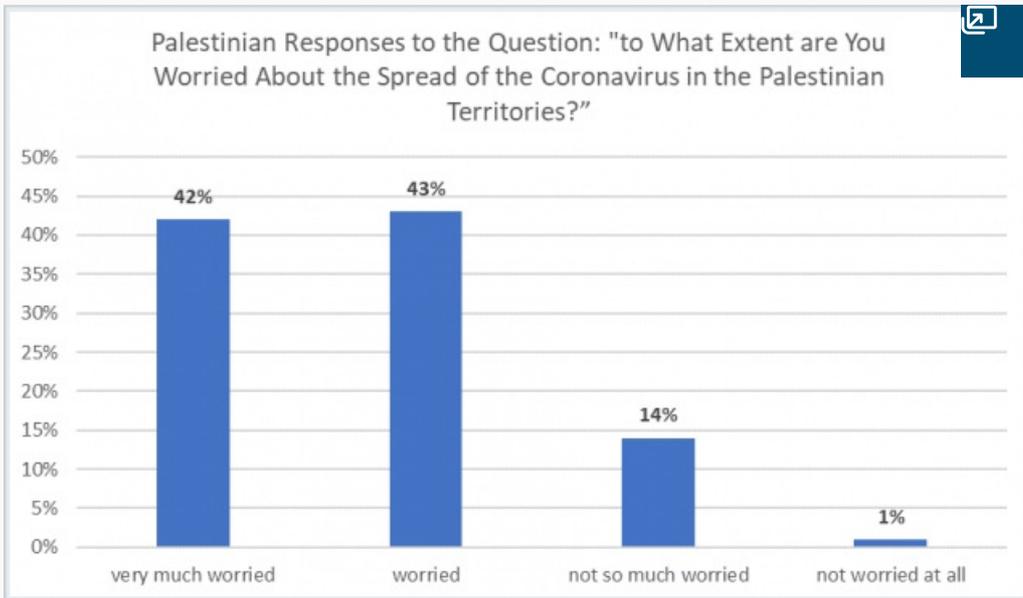


Majorities Approve Their Governments' Actions So Far. In general, the Palestinian public gave local authorities fairly good marks for handling this crisis so far, which can help explain the relatively calm situation there. Two-thirds rated the performance of their public health authorities as "very good" (24%) or "good" (43%). 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 say just "good."



Moreover, significantly, a similar majority (61%) agreed with this proposition: "I am willing to sacrifice some of my individual rights if it helps prevent the spread of the virus." In the United States, according to a parallel Gallup International poll, the corresponding figure is somewhat lower at 45%.

Personal Lives Widely Disrupted. The overwhelming majority (84%) of Palestinians did report being worried about the virus—with half admitting to being "very worried." And while opinions appear 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, Turks express much more optimism according to another Gallup International survey, with 63% saying the worst is already over.



In terms of economic impact, 71% of Palestinians say the virus has affected their household. But only 31% consider that impact to be severe so far. And in terms of personal habits, around two-thirds report using sanitizer and washing their hands more often; around 40% also report staying at home or having less social interaction. But only around one-fourth say they are using masks or gloves to reduce the risk of infection.

Methodological Note: This analysis is based on finding from a survey conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion, based in Beit Sahur in the West Bank. The survey comprised face-to-face household interviews with a representative sample of 583 Palestinians age 18 and older, of whom 64% live in the West Bank or East Jerusalem, and 36% in Gaza. Sampling methods followed standard geographical probability procedures, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately 4%.

The author has worked with this Palestinian survey firm for over 30 years, and personally traveled to consult with their full field teams in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem in January/February of this year. Each interviewer records responses on a GPS-monitored tablet computer, ensuring high quality controls and real-time data input, with strict assurances of confidentiality. For comparison, selected responses to identical questions are noted from parallel Gallup International surveys conducted in other countries during the same time frame. Those surveys, however, were mostly conducted by telephone or online. ❖



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