



Policy Analysis /

Fikra Forum

# Palestinian Public Resigned to Israel's Election Outcome, Looks to Other Arabs Instead for Next Steps

by [David Pollock](#)

Mar 6, 2020

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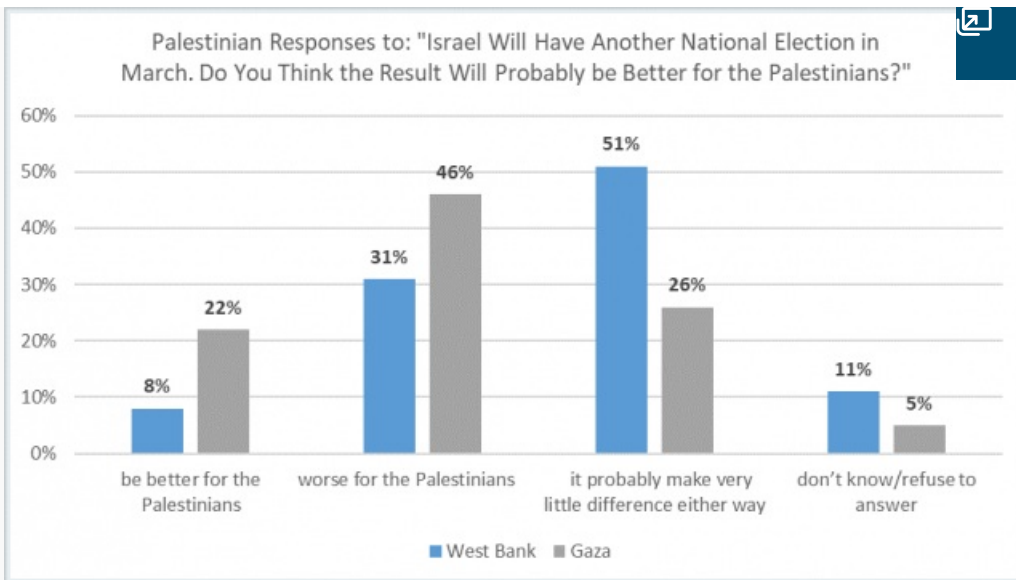
David Pollock is the Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on regional political dynamics and related issues.



### Brief Analysis

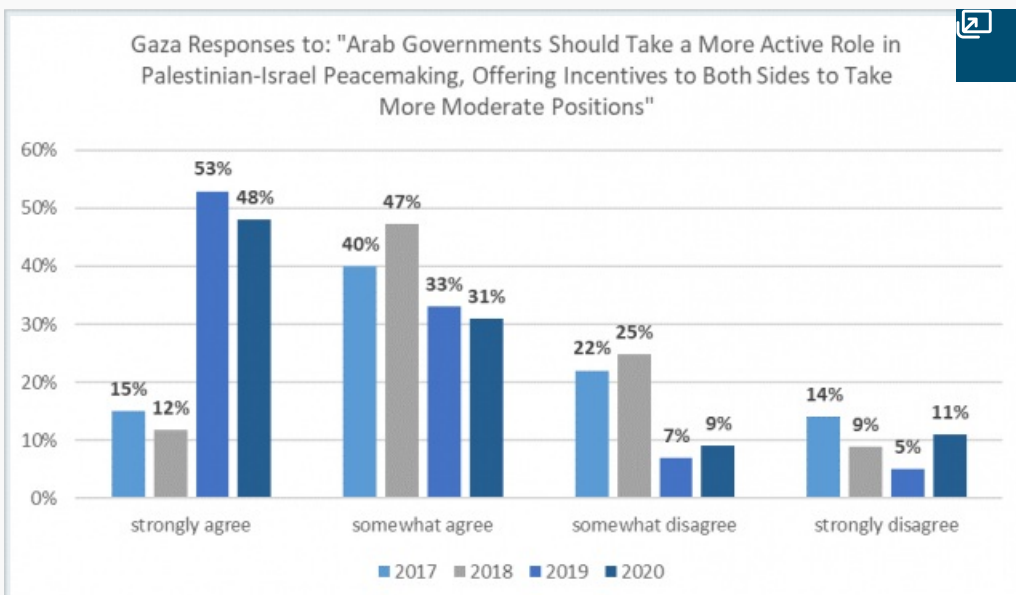
**P**alestinians watching Israel's election this week are likely to find their low expectations fulfilled. The vote produced yet another inconclusive result, with the incumbent prime minister's Likud Party narrowly in the lead **but unable to muster a majority governing coalition** with its existing 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, which would preserve Israel's settlements and security control in the West Bank while putting off the prospect of Palestinian independence.

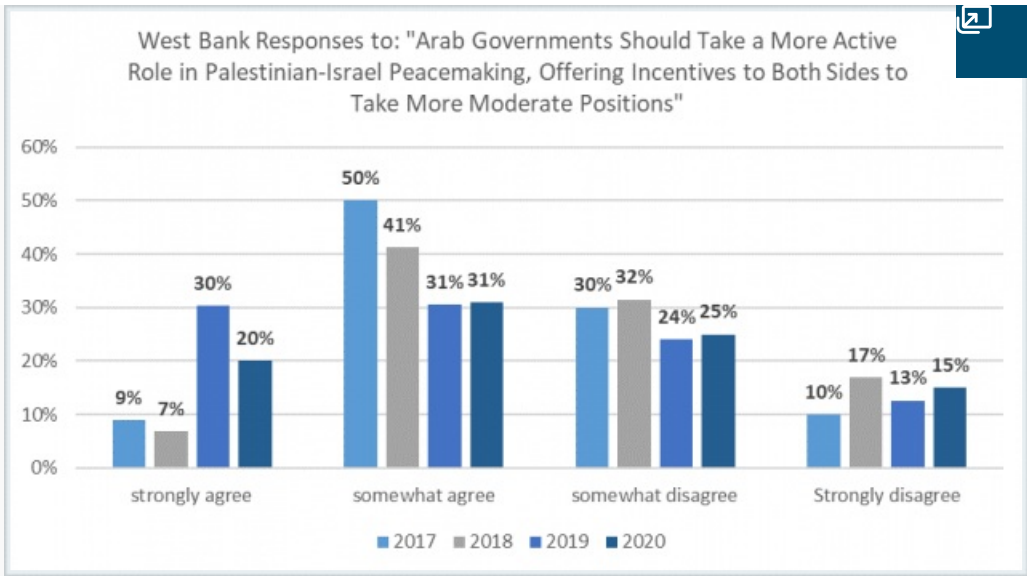
A Palestinian public opinion poll conducted during this latest Israeli election campaign, January 23-February 11, showed a mere 8% of West Bankers, along with 22% of Gazans, reporting that the vote would probably turn out "better for the Palestinians." Many more expected Israel's election to make things 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 so far.



By comparison, the poll indicates that Palestinian attitudes toward the prospect of support from some of their Arab neighbors are surprisingly positive. Lacking trust in Israel, and widely disenchanted with their own rulers in both Gaza and the West Bank, the Palestinian public appears receptive to some form of coordination with their other 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, or at least coexistence](#). From a policy perspective, this often-overlooked option should therefore be explored with greater intensity.

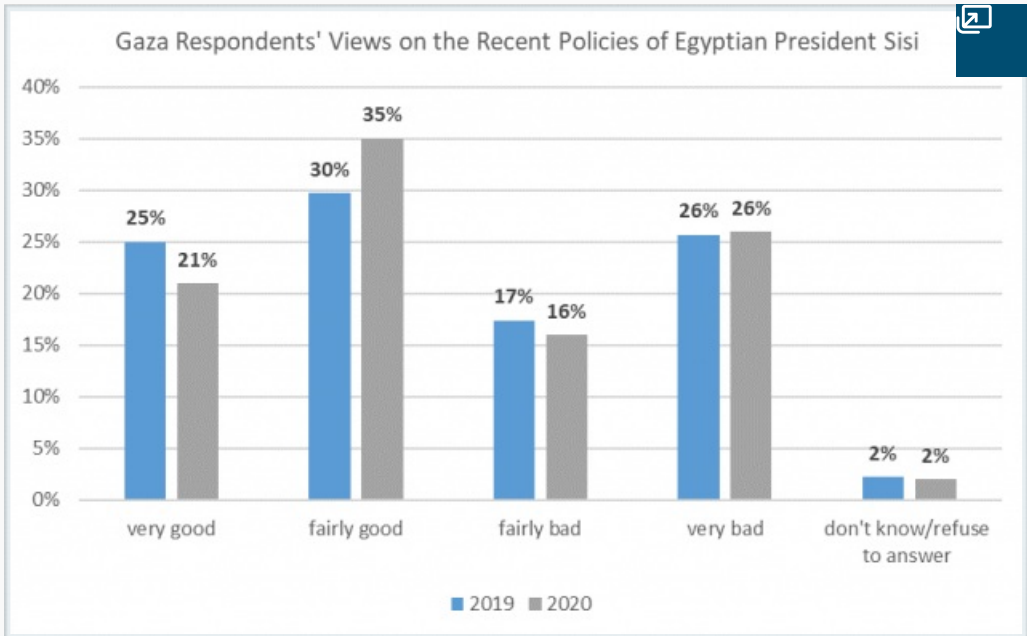
For example, nearly three-quarters in both the West Bank and Gaza reported agreeing with this proposition: “Right now, the Palestinians should look more to other Arab governments, like Jordan or Egypt, to help improve our situation.” Half of West Bankers, and 79% of Gazans, also agreed with this statement: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

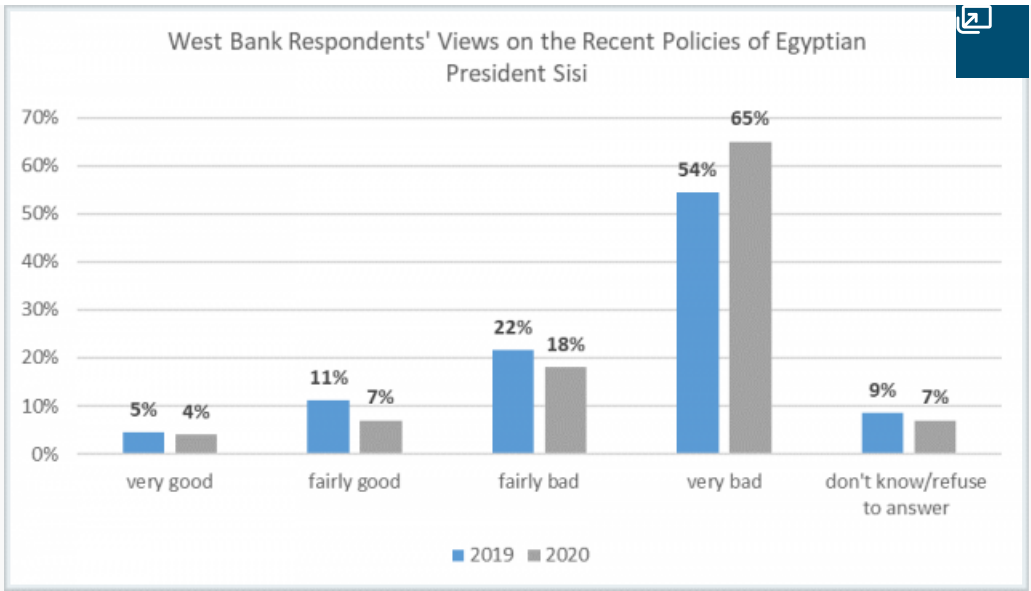




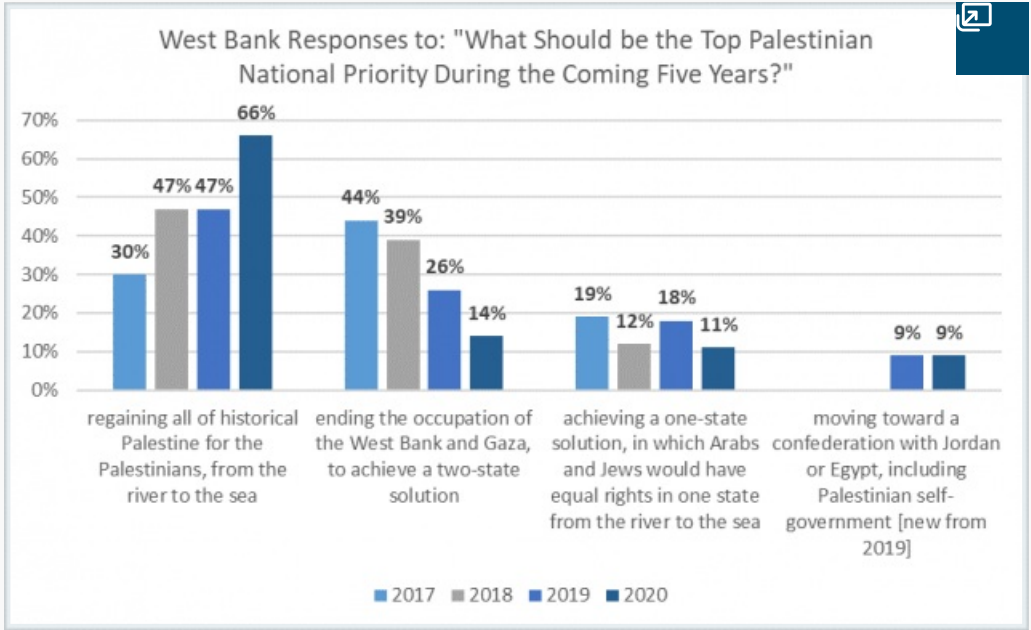
The sense of connection with Jordan is particularly widespread. Among West Bankers, 42% suggested that Jordan should play a “major role” in solving the Palestinian problem when asked; remarkably, that figure is even higher among Gazans, at 59%. Moreover, [Jordan’s King Abdullah enjoys a 64% approval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

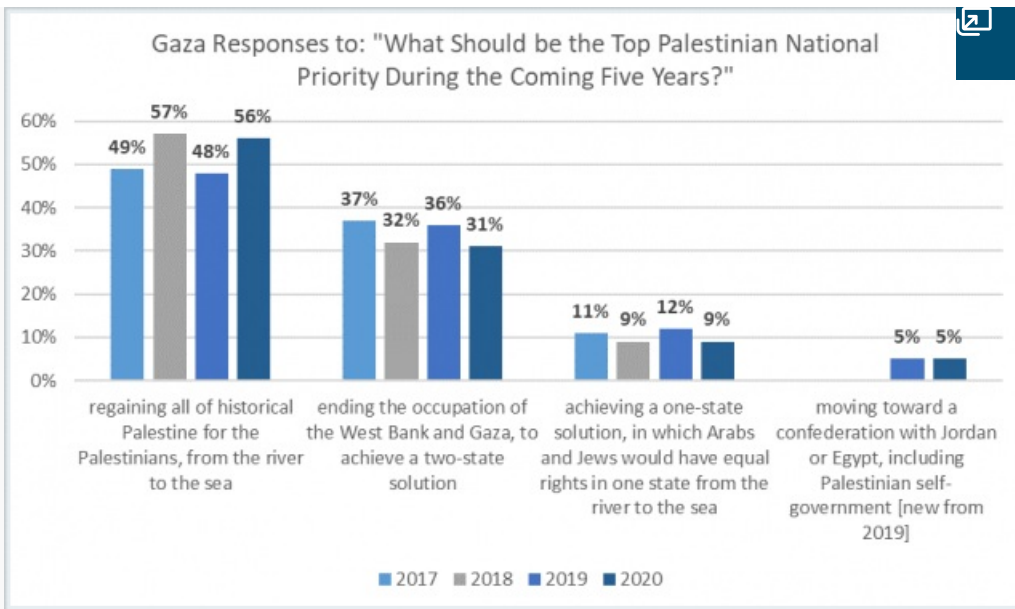
Regarding Egypt’s President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, however, West Bank and Gaza attitudes are starkly divergent. A mere 11% of West Bankers voiced a favorable view of Sisi’s policies, compared with 56% of Gazans. This startling difference may reflect Gazan proximity to and dependence on Egypt, and perhaps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





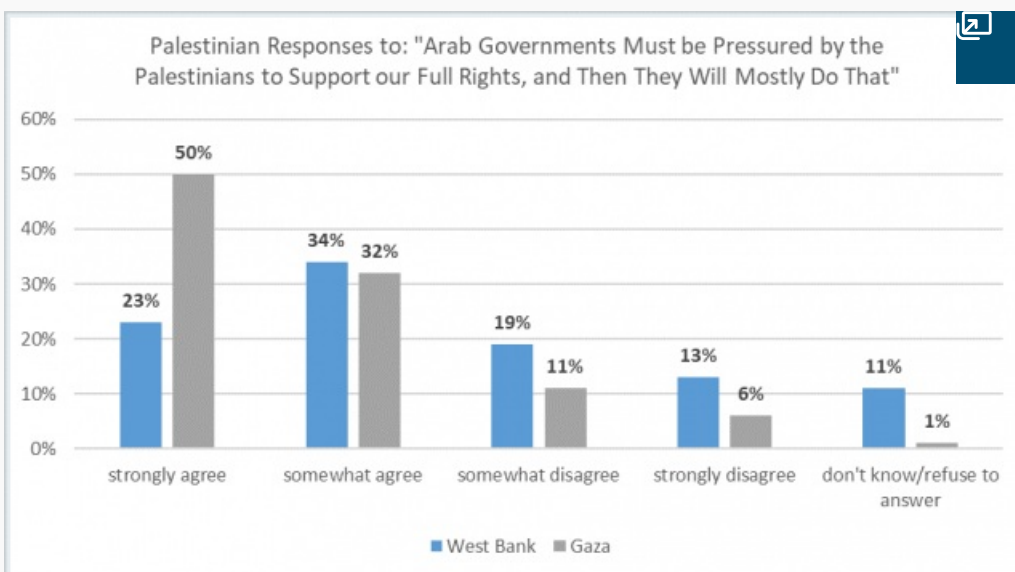
None of these results seem to mean that Palestinians in either territory want Egypt or Jordan to restore their pre-1967 control over those lands. On the contrary: only 9% of West Bankers and 5% of Gazans desire to “move toward confederation with Egypt or Jordan, including Palestinian self-government.”





Moreover, around half the public in both territories harbor 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 reflects a surprisingly high level of Palestinian public awareness about a major shift in regional dynamics, on both the elite and the “street” levels.

In fact, a [separate 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 UAE—agreed with the statement that “some 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.”



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 also vocally advocates for the

Palestinian cause, suffers 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.

This analysis is based on a survey sponsored by The Washington Institute and conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion, based in Beit Sahour in the West Bank. The survey comprised face-to-face interviews with representative samples of 500 Palestinians in the West Bank and 500 in Gaza. Sampling employed standard geographical probability methods. The author traveled to the region to consult with the local survey team, observe the launch of this project, and ensure strict adherence to the highest professional standards of accuracy, integrity, and confidentiality. The margin of error for each area is approximately 4%. Additional methodological details are readily available on request. ❖



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