Half of Palestinians Still Want All of Palestine—But Most Would Compromise for Less

by David Pollock **(/experts/david-pollock)**

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Brief Analysis

Palestinian public opinion clearly distinguishes between perceived rights and realities. Results from a new poll conducted June 27-July 15 show very mixed views on long-term peace issues among Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. The "two-state solution" has lost majority support. Yet if that option were available, most Palestinians in those territories would be willing to compromise on the core refugee issue. And only a very small minority want to live in Israel, support a "one-state solution" with equal rights for all, or expect Israel would ever agree to that idea.

Asked about "the top Palestinian national priority during the coming five years," opinions divide as follows:

	West Bank	Gaza
Regaining all of historical Palestine for the Palestinians, from the river to the sea	47%	48%
Ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, to achieve a two-state solution	26%	36%
Achieving a one-state solution, in which Arabs and Jews would have equal rights, from the river to the sea	18%	12%
Moving toward a confederation with Jordan or Egypt, including Palestinian self-government	9%	5%

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Hardline Dreams Retain A Hold on Half the Public

Similarly, when asked about ending the conflict with Israel permanently, only a minority would approve a two-state solution: 30 percent of West Bankers, and 42 percent of Gazans. Instead, the narrow majority in both territories–56 percent in the West Bank, and 54 percent in Gaza, say "the conflict should not end, and resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated." This marks a hardening of West Bank views compared to previous polls. And under half of the Palestinian public say "we should recognize that we will never defeat Israel, and that fighting just makes things worse": 40 percent of West Bankers, and 49 percent of Gazans.

Attitudes are even more maximalist concerning the very long-term future. In both the West Bank and Gaza, the solid majority say that "eventually, the Palestinians will control almost all of Palestine." They endorse two explanations for this view. First, shared equally among Gazans and West Bankers with 46-47 percent, is that "God is on our side." Second is that the Palestinians "will outnumber the Jews someday": 22 percent of West Bankers, and 11 percent of Gazans. And three-quarters in both the West Bank and Gaza agree at least "somewhat" with this statement: "We should insist on our full rights to all of historic Palestine, so any compromise with Israel should just be temporary."

But Pragmatic Realities Temper Popular Views As Well

However, these hardline views reflect Palestinian preferences, perceived rights, or vague expectations of the indefinite future–not their sense of the realistic options today. For example, 60-plus percent in both the West Bank and Gaza agree at least "somewhat" with this 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." Along the same lines, on the refugee issue, half of West Bankers, and three-quarters of Gazans, would accept resettlement in a Palestinian state composed just of those territories, rather than inside Israel. This surprisingly flexible position was measured by two separate questions in this poll, and confirms findings reported from previous polls as well.

That pragmatic understanding extends to the notion of a "one-state solution" permanently joining Israelis and Palestinians in a single country, which some pundits and politicians have lately started promising (or threatening) to support as the alternative to "separation." Yet at the Palestinian popular level, this notion has gained but little traction, as the table above clearly demonstrates. Moreover, 70 percent of West Bankers and Gazans–and 80 percent of East Jerusalem Palestinians–agree at least "somewhat" that "Israel will never accept a one-state solution that gives the Palestinians equal rights, even if they become a clear majority someday."

East Jerusalem Palestinians Somewhat More Moderate Now Than During "Knife Intifada" of 2015-17

The capital city's Palestinian legal residents, numbering around 330,000, are a special case, because they enjoy benefits not routinely available to West Bankers or Gazans: freedom to work, study, and travel in Israel, plus the social welfare

benefits that other Israeli permanent residents receive. From 2010-2014, polls of this population showed a steady increase–to a remarkable 52 percent–in the proportion of these Palestinians who said they would actually prefer Israeli to Palestinian citizenship. But that number dropped precipitously from 2015-2017, when the “knife intifadah” and Israel’s tough countermeasures generated unaccustomed tensions in the city.

The current survey shows a modest shift back in the earlier direction, with one-quarter of East Jerusalem Palestinians now saying they would opt for Israeli citizenship if presented with that choice. By comparison, just 15 percent of Gazans, and a mere 10 percent of West Bankers, say the same. Similarly, fewer than half (47 percent) in East Jerusalem now say they would “definitely” stay in Palestine if they could move to Israel, compared with 83 percent of West Bankers and 59 percent of Gazans. The limited shift back toward Israel among the Palestinians in Jerusalem is probably due the lessening of social tensions there lately, along with a reversion to the earlier question wording that mentioned specific benefits and obligations of citizenship.

On most other issues, however, East Jerusalem attitudes are now roughly in line with the militant trend in the West Bank, and actually less moderate than in Gaza. One other important exception concerns the level of popular support for a new intifadah today. In East Jerusalem, only one-in-five “strongly” favor that option. But among West Bankers, that figure rises to 27 percent; while among Gazans, it reaches 35 percent.

Methodological Note

These findings are all from a survey conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion, based in the West Bank town of Beit Sahur near Bethlehem, June 27-July 15, 2019. This was a personal interview survey done by experienced local professionals among representative, geographic probability samples in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, with strict assurances of confidentiality. The sample sizes were 500 each in the West Bank and Gaza, yielding statistical margins of error of approximately four percent, and 200 in East Jerusalem, with a roughly seven percent margin of error. Quality controls included close field supervision and GPS tracking of each interviewer’s tablet-based data entries. The author has personally supervised previous polls by this organization, and approved their instrument translation, sampling frames, field protocols, and data processing and reporting techniques. Additional methodological details are readily available on request. ❖

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