

Hanging in the Balance: East Jerusalemite Population Balances Israeli Benefits with Palestinian Alignment in Newest Poll

by [Cecilia Panella \(/experts/cecilia-panella\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Cecilia Panella \(/experts/cecilia-panella\)](#)

Cecilia Panella is a Research Intern on Palestinian public opinion issues and data analysis working for Dr. David Pollock at the Washington Institute. She is currently a second-year Master's candidate at Johns Hopkins SAIS concentrating in International Economics and American Foreign Policy.



Brief Analysis

An October 2018 poll of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem confirms a sharp shift against integration with Israel in the past two years. This surprising result was first reported based on our May 2017 survey, with the trend continuing towards Palestinian nationalism.

In stark contrast to previous polls conducted as recently as 2015, the overwhelming majority of East Jerusalem Palestinians would now prefer to become citizens of Palestine even if given the option of becoming Israeli citizens. The East Jerusalemite respondents from 2015 indicated with a 52% majority that they would rather be citizens of Israel than Palestine—even if both countries provided equal rights to all citizens—while 42% of the respondents said that they would prefer to be citizens of Palestine. In 2017, polled respondents from East Jerusalem dramatically shifted their professed opinions, with 77% reporting that they would prefer to be citizens of Palestine. Answers to the same question in 2018 confirm these 2017 results—the trend now extends to a 95% majority of East Jerusalemite respondents, marking a remarkable 51 percentage point gain from 2015.

The dramatic shift away from preferences for Israeli citizenship and its amenities was also reflected in other areas. When asked whether they would prefer to live in an equally nice home in Palestine or Israel, 95% of respondents said that they would likely choose a home in Palestine. Based on the timing of this shift and according to the views of experts, political leaders, and a cross-section of the population on both sides, the main factor behind this recent alienation from Israel among East Jerusalem Palestinians appears to be a growing resentment at the counter-measures Israel took in response to the 2015-16 “knife intifada” in Jerusalem.

This data may also indicate some level of broader polarization or hardline sentiment among respondents against Israelis—82% said that they would not accept any percentage of Jews in an independent Palestinian state. And nearly half (44%) reported disagreeing at least somewhat with the idea of fostering interpersonal relationships or dialogue with Israelis as a way to encourage them towards the peace process. More responses in 2017 expressed disagreement with the idea—a 60% majority.

This perceived mistrust of Israel is also evident in other responses to the poll. When asked which of five options

would be the most effective way for Israel to convince Palestine that it wanted a long-lasting peace, 27% of East Jerusalem respondents said that Israel should stop building in settlements beyond the wall, the most favored choice. At 23% of the total responses, the second most popular choice was for the Israelis to curb “violence or aggressive behavior by the settlers.”

When compared to 2017, it is clear that settlements have impacted East Jerusalemite opinions of Israel during the past year. That year, only 17% of respondents reported that stopping construction in settlements would best prove that Israel was serious about peace, while only 7% said the same regarding stopping violence by settlers.

Despite this growth in concern over settlements, East Jerusalemites are still largely optimistic about an independent Palestine. When asked about the eventual outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 50% of respondents said that Palestinians would most likely eventually control almost all of Palestine “because God is on their side,” a six percentage point increase from the year before.

Furthermore, a significant number of East Jerusalemites do not think that compromise with the Israelis is out of the question, despite their increasing concerns about settlements. In both years, 23% of respondents said that an eventual compromise with Israel where the two countries live “side by side” would be the most likely outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the second most popular answer overall. Furthermore, the 2018 data shows 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 peace should start a new chapter of Israeli-Palestinian relations, a significant increase from the 50% of respondents who shared this view in 2017.

Moreover, a 60% majority of East Jerusalemite respondents reported that they agreed to some extent with the idea of “two states for two peoples.” This number aligned closely with a 59% majority of respondents who said that they would probably or definitely accept a compromise of “two states for two peoples” if this agreement was likely to bring peace. This willingness to compromise separates the data collected in East Jerusalem from that collected in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These West Bank and Gaza respondents voiced 28% and 45% support respectively for such a compromise. While it appears that East Jerusalemites are more open to compromise at this time, it is nevertheless important to note that among East Jerusalemite respondents, support for the “two states for two peoples” concept has actually decreased from a surprising 70% majority of support in 2015.

When asked to consider Hamas as a political and military actor, respondents from East Jerusalem were generally less supportive of Hamas than their counterparts in the West Bank. A 55% majority of East Jerusalemite respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the weekly Hamas protests at the border resulting in the injuries and deaths of some Palestinians. In contrast, only 48% of West Bank respondents answered likewise. It is important to note that East Jerusalemite respondents were not outliers in expressing at least some disagreement with the tactic: a majority of those polled in the Gaza Strip (62%) and the West Bank (47%) did so as well. Despite condemning these protests, the majority of East Jerusalemite respondents (52%) still supported Hamas maintaining “its armed units during the current period, no matter what else happens,” though support for the militias is down from 70% of respondents who supported such endeavors in 2017.

As a whole, East Jerusalemites professed more hard line and militant views on the ceasefire than respondents from other locales. A 55% majority of respondents from East Jerusalem were against Hamas preserving a cease-fire in the West Bank and Gaza, a dramatic 34 point decrease in support for the cease-fire from 2017. Furthermore, while a majority of West Bank and Gaza respondents supported the cease-fire in both 2017 and 2018, the majority of East Jerusalem respondents in contrast voiced discontent with the ceasefire both years.

Finally, 40% of East Jerusalem respondents said that they would not support the resumption of peace process negotiations unless Israel were to offer “some real concessions” first. This is not necessarily dramatically different

from professed views in the West Bank or in Gaza, where 52% and 50% of respondents concurred. Furthermore, 32% of respondents from East Jerusalem said that they would oppose the resumption of negotiations under any conditions. This is generally reflective of the larger trend towards a political hardline evident in responses to other questions as well, indicating a growing amount of discontent with Israeli governance and the degradation of the peace process.

Despite these concerns, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem are optimistic both about the future of a Palestinian state and the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations should a peace deal ultimately be successful. Until then, respondents' preferred national priority is "regaining all of historical Palestine for the Palestinians, from the river to the sea." However, these long-term goals are in direct conflict with short-term realities—an increasing political hard line in East Jerusalem, a generally fragmented Palestinian population, and frustration with Israeli settlers does not bode well for any peace process effort. ❖

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