

# Half of Jerusalem's Palestinians Would Prefer Israeli to Palestinian Citizenship

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**Findings from a new poll suggest that those who care about democracy and peace should pay more attention to the desires of the Palestinians who actually live in Jerusalem, not just of those who claim to speak on their behalf from outside the city.**

**J**erusalem is one of the most sensitive issues in Arab-Israeli and Muslim-Jewish-Christian relations. Recent violent incidents in the city have kept it in the political and media spotlight. Yet for all the talk about it, only very rarely have its roughly 300,000 (overwhelmingly Muslim) Palestinians been asked what future they want. New research presented here fills that gap, in a most unexpected way.

In a mid-June poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion (based in Beit Sahour, the West Bank), 52% of Palestinians living in Israeli-ruled East Jerusalem said 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 remarkable result confirms and extends a trend first observed five years ago.

In a similar poll in September 2010, one-third picked Israeli over Palestinian citizenship; by September 2011, that proportion had risen to 40%. As of today it has risen again to just over half. This is dramatically different from results in the West Bank or Gaza, where a mere 4% and 12%, respectively, would prefer Israeli citizenship. The latest poll was based on personal interviews by local survey professionals of a representative, geographic probability sample of 504 East Jerusalem Palestinians and comparable samples in the West Bank and Gaza, with a statistical margin of error of approximately 4.5% in each area.

In the earlier polls, East Jerusalem respondents mostly cited practical reasons for this preference: better jobs, income, health care and other social benefits, freedom of travel, and the like. Their Israeli residence permits ("blue

identity cards") already provide such advantages over West Bank residents, and they increasingly want to retain those advantages as the Israeli economy prospers while the West Bank stagnates. Similarly, in the current poll, around half (47%) say they would take a good job inside Israel. But since such benefits are available to them today even without Israeli citizenship, social taboos and the great practical difficulties of applying for that citizenship mean that only a very small proportion have actually acquired that full formal status to date.

Their everyday access to Israel has probably also made Jerusalem's Palestinians more sanguine about that country's long-term future. A majority (62%) think Israel will still exist, as either a Jewish or a bi-national state, in 30 or 40 years -- compared with just 47% of West Bankers and 42% of Gazans who think so. They are also somewhat more aware of the city's history, if perhaps not so much as might be expected. Thirty percent of East Jerusalem's Palestinians, as against a mere 18% of West Bankers, say that there were Jewish kingdoms and temples in Jerusalem in ancient times.

In some other respects, too, East Jerusalem Palestinians have acquired relatively moderate attitudes toward Israel. A stunning 70% say they would accept the formula of "two states for two peoples -- the Palestinian people and the Jewish people." In the West Bank, the comparable figure is 56%; in Gaza, 44%. An equally noteworthy 40% in East Jerusalem say that "Jews have some rights to the land along with the Palestinians" -- as against just 13% in the West Bank or 11% in Gaza. And concerning Jerusalem itself, only 23% of its Palestinian residents insist on Palestinian sovereignty over the entire city -- just half the percentage with that view in either the West Bank or Gaza.

This does not mean that Jerusalem's Palestinians are moderate in every respect. For example, 55% say 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, this may indicate a drift among East Jerusalem Palestinians toward a "one-state solution." Meanwhile, however, a majority (61%) also offer at least verbal support for "armed struggle and car attacks against the occupation." This figure is somewhat lower than among West Bankers or Gazans, but not by much.

Most surprising of all in this connection are the findings about partisan affinity. Fully 39% of East Jerusalem Palestinians say that Hamas "most closely represents your political affiliation." Possibly this is in part because they are relatively religious; 37% pick "being a good Muslim" as their first or second personal priority, from a list of ten diverse options. But even more East Jerusalemites (47%) say they are politically "independent." These numbers may also be somewhat skewed by the reality that Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are not allowed to operate officially in Jerusalem.

Interestingly, declared support for Hamas is only half as high in Gaza, whose residents have had to live under actual Hamas rule since 2007. And in the West Bank, where the PA rules and sometimes arrests Hamas activists, a mere 11% openly affiliate with that party. A plurality of 44% identify as "independent."

Beyond the intrinsic interest of these surprising survey findings, there may be several broader political lessons here. First, the findings suggest that benefits from practical coexistence may produce a more moderate mindset. Second, partisan affiliation may not be a good guide to underlying attitudes. And third, most important, those who care about both democracy and peace would do well to pay more attention to the desires of the Palestinians who actually live in Jerusalem, not just of those who claim to speak on their behalf from outside the city.

*David Pollock is the Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of Fikra Forum. This article was originally published on the [Fikra Forum website \(http://fikraforum.org/?p=7496\)](http://fikraforum.org/?p=7496). ❖*

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