



Jordanian Public Keen on Hamas, But Not ISIS or the Muslim Brotherhood

by [David Pollock](#)

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Notwithstanding the violent turbulence on Jordan's borders, a new poll indicates that the kingdom will likely continue muddling through, with little sign of mass uprisings, major reform, or dramatic policy reversals.

This past weekend, Jordan hosted Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi in Amman, during which King Abdullah pledged full support for Iraqi efforts against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which he termed "crucial for regional stability and security." But how much do Jordan's own citizens support this supposedly common struggle against ISIS?

This question takes on added urgency in view of a recent survey conducted by Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies, which found that nearly 40 percent of Jordanians say they do not consider ISIS a "terrorist organization." However, a separate September poll, conducted for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy by a local commercial market research company, suggests this sentiment is inflated. In fact, a mere 8 percent of the Jordanian public, according to this new poll, voices a favorable view of ISIS. Even Hezbollah, the armed Lebanese Shiite party, attracts a bit more backing among Jordanians at 15 percent of the total adult population.

Moreover, the low overall percentage with positive views of ISIS varies very little in different regions of the country, whether in the capital of Amman, in nearby urban hotbeds of opposition and Islamist fervor like Zarqa, or in more remote rural or tribal areas in the north or south of the country. Nevertheless, it must be noted that even this relatively low percentage of ISIS supporters is somewhat higher than in any of the five other Arab countries also represented in this poll (Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates).

At the opposite pole, in terms of Jordanian popular support for an Islamist organization, is Hamas. The large majority -- 72 percent -- of Jordanians reports a positive attitude toward Hamas, including one third with a "very positive" view. These figures are also the highest, by a considerable margin, of those observed in all six Arab countries polled. By comparison, the Palestinian Authority rates much lower: 49 percent positive, including a mere 9 percent "very positive." These numbers make sense in view of two relevant facts: first, over half of Jordan's population is of Palestinian origin, and second, the poll was taken shortly after the latest round of fighting between Hamas and Israel, which generated an extra burst of sympathy and support for that more militant Palestinian movement.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, the solid majority support for Hamas does not signify an equal expectation of defeating Israel someday -- or even a rejection of peace with Israel, as Hamas explicitly advocates. On the former point, a significantly narrower majority (58 percent) of Jordanians think that Hamas military tactics will probably defeat Israel in the future. And on the latter point, still more surprisingly, a bare majority of Jordanians agree, contrary to the Hamas position, that "the best way forward is peace between Israel and a Palestinian state" (51 percent versus 45 percent).

In between the poles of public opinion on ISIS and Hamas lies the Muslim Brotherhood, which has long been active in Jordanian politics. That organization registers an overall positive rating among one-fourth of all Jordanians, with support slightly higher in the central cities on the outskirts of Amman. This is actually a bit lower than the Muslim Brotherhood's underlying support in the other five Arab states polled -- including in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, where it is not only outlawed but publicly labeled a "terrorist" organization.

In terms of Jordan's various regions, the comparatively sparsely settled, heavily tribal, and geographically isolated south stands out as the most insular in its attitudes as well. Citizens of that area are the least inclined to voice positive opinions toward other Arab countries, from Egypt to Qatar. And they are the most inclined (50 percent versus 39 percent) to agree that "Arab countries should pay more attention to their own internal issues than to the Palestinians."

What do all these numbers mean for the prospects of either stability or greater democracy in Jordan? Public opinion is not the only or perhaps even the primary factor in this equation. Economic trends, government power, outside influence, and other inputs are all at least as important. Still, these survey findings point to a surprisingly wide margin for regime maneuver, despite all the internal and regional tensions today. The main Islamist opposition movement has only minority support. Hamas is much more popular, but its stark rejection of peace with Israel has considerably less popular appeal. And ISIS, the most urgent and violent challenge in the neighborhood, has little resonance even in the more restive regions of the country.

The one large demographic intentionally omitted from the survey are the million-plus recent Syrian refugees in Jordan -- along with hundreds of thousands of refugees from Iraq, whether from earlier or current crises in their country. The survey is based on personal interviews with a representative, countrywide geographic probability sample of 1,000 respondents, but only Jordanian citizens are included. The very large refugee population, in a country with barely 6 million citizens, is a major economic and social burden. It is therefore a potential political wild card that could ignite popular unrest or import ideological strife.

But Jordan's government is already taking some steps to limit further inflow, and to solicit a continuing stream of international aid to cope with the existing problem. These steps appear adequate, at least for now. Symptomatic of this are attitudes among the Jordanians in the north of the country, where many of the latest refugees are concentrated. Based on the results of this survey, local sentiment there is no more alienated than in other parts of the country.

Altogether, then, the kingdom appears to face manageable grassroots cross-pressures. The result is therefore likely to be neither mass popular uprising, nor major top-down reform, nor dramatic policy reversals. Instead, Jordan is probably poised to continue muddling through, much as it has before, notwithstanding all the very violent turbulence roiling the surrounding region.

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