

Hamas in Arab Eyes: Few Signs of Revival, Except in West Bank

by [David Pollock \(/experts/david-pollock\)](/experts/david-pollock)

Jul 24, 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Pollock \(/experts/david-pollock\)](/experts/david-pollock)

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



Brief Analysis

Poll data and other evidence point to potential openings for promoting a ceasefire that will help the Palestinian people, not Hamas.

Any assessment of Hamas's current popularity or political power is by nature tentative and anecdotal, given that hard data is rare and the crisis is still ongoing. But the available bits of evidence -- whether from polling, interviews, media coverage, commentary, or official statements -- strongly suggest several revealing trends.

The point of departure must be credible polling data. Most such data is from shortly before or at the start of this crisis, and so is not fully up to date. Even so, it shows unequivocally that Hamas was at a very low point among Arabs: in Egypt, in Jordan, in Lebanon, among Israeli Arabs, and especially in Gaza. In all those places, according to a spring Pew poll, a clear majority (except among Lebanese Shiites) had an unfavorable view of Hamas. So too, remarkably, did 80 percent of Turks, despite their prime minister's vociferous backing of the group.

Similarly, according to [a credible Palestinian poll taken June 15-17 \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gaza-public-rejects-hamas-wants-ceasefire\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gaza-public-rejects-hamas-wants-ceasefire), Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Mashal together received a grand total of 15 percent support among Gazans, while 70 percent wanted the group to maintain a ceasefire with Israel. Some assume that Hamas's current offensive has restored its lost popularity on the Arab street, but there is little evidence to support that claim -- except in the West Bank.

In that territory, according to another credible Palestinian poll taken by the Ramallah-based Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) on July 19-21, Hamas popularity has risen substantially -- 85 percent now approve its "role in the current conflict." Some Palestinian and Israeli analysts credit this shift in sentiment for the Palestinian Authority's tone this week, with President Mahmoud Abbas's July 22 speech and an accompanying PA leadership statement both endorsing many Hamas demands. Still, even now, only 31 percent of West Bankers say their overall political affiliation is with Hamas. And more of them support (51 percent) than oppose (44 percent) an

immediate ceasefire, contrary to the Hamas position.

Inside Gaza, too, "man on the street" interviews in Arab and Western media predominantly show widespread desire for a ceasefire, with little expressed support for Hamas. Some Gazans are also voting with their feet. According to one openly empathetic Arab correspondent there, writing in *al-Monitor* on July 15, "Hundreds of families completely ignore calls by the Interior Ministry...to stay in their homes." By now the number seeking shelter in UN facilities is reportedly approaching 100,000. To be sure, the majority of Gazans remain in place, but more likely due to fear, fatalism, or lack of better options than to solidarity with Hamas.

More broadly, Arab media commentary is very sympathetic to Palestinian civilians, critical of Israel, and occasionally impressed by Hamas rockets. And such criticism of Israel -- from Arab and international sources alike -- will presumably build the longer the operation continues ([read a companion piece surveying Gaza demonstrations around the world \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gaza-demonstrations-around-the-world\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gaza-demonstrations-around-the-world)). On the whole, however, Arab commentary is not notably supportive of Hamas itself, either as a political movement or as an Islamic organization. Some of this spin reflects the larger Egyptian, Saudi, and Emirati establishment's hostility toward the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots. And many Arabs are distracted or preoccupied by other crises closer to home. As prominent Palestinian analyst Ghassan Khatib told the *Financial Times* yesterday, "There are problems no less important than Gaza, whether in Syria, Iraq, or Libya...[and] for the first time, Gaza is caught up in a regional power struggle, particularly between Egypt and Qatar."

In the diplomatic arena, the Egyptian, Tunisian, and Saudi ambassadors to the UN, among others, have spoken adamantly in the past few days about Israel's responsibility for the fate of Gaza's civilian population. Yet they did not offer corresponding support to Hamas. And official Arab statements from the Arab League and many individual governments, including the PA, have steadfastly supported an immediate ceasefire -- despite strenuous, albeit apparently weakening, Hamas objections. Some governments, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are offering humanitarian assistance to Gaza -- but again, not directly to Hamas. For U.S. diplomacy, this new center of gravity in Arab politics holds the potential to promote a ceasefire that can help the Palestinian people, but not the Hamas terrorist organization.

David Pollock is the Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of Fikra Forum. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis

Feb 14, 2022



Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022



Sana Quadri,

Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

TOPICS

Arab & Islamic Politics (/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

Arab-Israeli Relations (/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations)

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Palestinians (/policy-analysis/palestinians)