Previous public opinion polls conducted in the Arab East, especially in the Levant, have revealed that "inching toward peace" with Israel has not produced definitive changes in Arab perceptions. Instead, the peace process seems to have given rise to a kind of resignation born of a pervasive sense of helplessness. These poll results did much to illustrate that the acceptance of peace among Arab publics has not translated into a genuine acceptance of Israelis, nor into fostering bonds of cooperation with them.

The present study, however, looks beyond Arab approval or rejection of peace with the Jewish state to probe the environment that has both given meaning to these attitudes and shaped related behaviors. To this effect, the study explores the agents of Arab attitude formation toward Israel, perceptions about the intensity of the Arab-Israeli conflict and its future outlook, primary attitudes toward peace and their relationship to conspiracy theories, interest in building bridges of peace with Israelis, and identification of variables that promote the cause of Arab-Israeli peace.

The data come from a quota sample of 1,600 respondents divided equally among Lebanese, Jordanians, Palestinians, and Syrians, who answered questionnaires administered during February and March 1999.