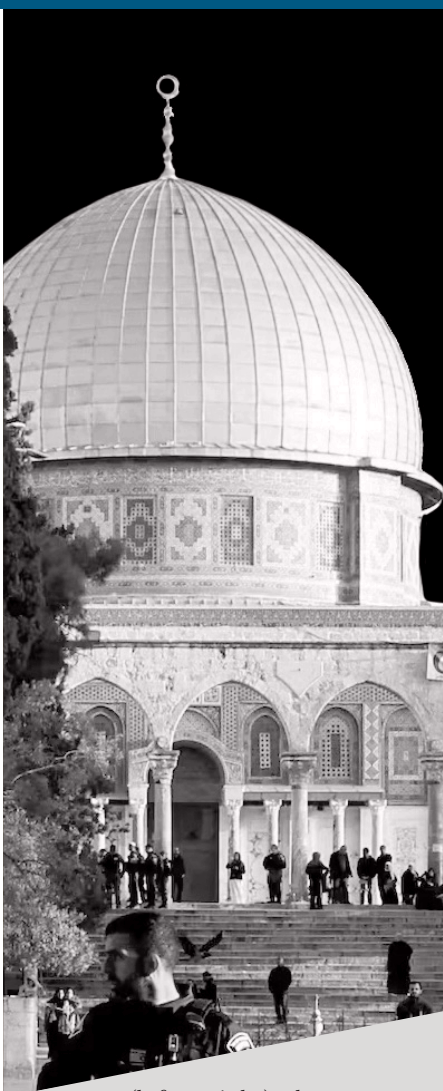




Understanding Geographic Distinctions in West Bank Public Opinion

Catherine Cleveland



(left to right) Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem; an Israeli military vehicle in central Ramallah, September 2024; Fatah (top) and Hamas (bottom) protesters in Hebron. REUTERS



In a set of striking new findings, an unusually extensive poll of Palestinian public opinion shows substantial differences in attitudes along geographic lines, with residents in the northern, central, and southern regions of the West Bank—and in formerly Jordan-held East Jerusalem—having their own unique and independent approaches to critical policy issues.* The ability to differentiate Palestinian public opinion in such a granular fashion could have major implications for U.S. policy, from how to design development programs to where to focus anti-corruption reforms.

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The survey, conducted in August 2024 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, yielded results suggesting that in order to be effective, policy approaches and assistance programs must adapt to the current on-the-ground reality. What may be effective in the northern West Bank will not necessarily be effective in the center or the south.¹ Analysts of the Palestinian arena and public opinion will also need to be more intentional about developing their assessments based on localized context.

Although this survey suggests that hyperlocalized factors heavily influence Palestinian public opinion as well as domestic and foreign policy views, the language of Palestinian nationalism continues to resonate. And on a number of issues, Palestinian opinions across the West Bank do not diverge, including the majority opinion that Israel will collapse in thirty to forty years and the perception of the United States as an enemy.

The Washington Institute survey was fielded by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion (PCPO), headed by Nabil Kukali, over August 1–13, 2024. It considered three West Bank regions—northern (Jenin, Nablus, Qalqiliya, Salfit, Tubas, and Tulkarem governorates), central (Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jericho governorates, along with PA-controlled areas of East Jerusalem governorate), and southern (Hebron governorate)—along with Israel-controlled East Jerusalem. While the Institute’s annual survey, conducted by the late David Pollock with PCPO over the last decade, has usually included Gaza, polling a fully representative sample in the coastal territory was not possible this year owing to obvious challenges created by the war. This survey, in turn,

incorporated a greater number of West Bank respondents than in the past, allowing for a higher sampling size.

Of the three West Bank regions, significant minority support for Fatah was registered in the central region alone, whereas nearly half of the population in the northern and southern regions identified with “resistance” factions. Similarly, a majority in the central region supported a two-state solution with Israel, while attitudes in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem were split and majorities in the north and south expressed support for a maximalist outcome with a Palestinian state in “all of historic Palestine.”

Distinctions can also be observed between the northern and southern regions, even as respondents in both expressed strong views against compromise with Israel over statehood. Namely, most southern West Bankers (along with central West Bankers) show high levels of concern about prioritizing the prevention of a “catastrophe [like the one] that has befallen Gaza,” a statement that does not resonate with most northern West Bank residents. In Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, half agreed with this proposal.

In light of the Gaza war and escalating violence in the West Bank, questions were designed to avoid responses that would fluctuate significantly in response to specific current events. Even so, a year of conflict has naturally affected attitudes on certain issues. Here, tracking stable trends from earlier surveys can help clarify areas of change and continuity in public opinion responses to the Gaza war and Israeli military operations in the West Bank.



Methodology

A multistage probability sampling method was employed for this face-to-face household survey, with a representative West Bank sample based on population estimates from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) 2017 census and updates in 2023.² In the West Bank, 113 primary sampling units (PSUs) were selected based on probability proportional to size (PPS) across the eleven West Bank governorates, accounting for urban, rural, and refugee camp residence types.

Starting points were selected from a comprehensive list across each governorate. Within each PSU, households were chosen by a random walk from these known starting points, with sampling intervals of every fifth household in urban areas and every third household in rural areas, with up to fourteen households surveyed per PSU. Selection in dwellings with multiple households was determined by household selection grid—essentially, a randomized protocol.

Household respondents were selected by the “last birthday” method.³ In cases where the selected respondent for a household was not initially available, representatives returned at least twice during the day before moving to the next selected household. Surveys were conducted via tablet-assisted personal interviewing (TAPI) using the SurveyToGo app, with GPS monitoring and supervision.

To provide data comparisons with the West Bank, neighborhoods in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem were sampled proportionally based on data from

Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, with the goal to create a sample size of 500 (see table 1); households and respondents were identified using the same method as that outlined above.

Table 1. Survey Respondents by Region

Region	Sample Size
West Bank	
North	448
Central	307
South	286
Israel-controlled East Jerusalem	500

The margin of error for the total West Bank sample is 3% and for the East Jerusalem sample, 4%, with each at a 95% confidence interval. The margin of error for West Bank subsamples discussed in the analysis varies by up to 6%. Differences between subsamples are only highlighted when they fall outside the margin of error.⁴ West Bank data has been weighted for age and gender based on the PCBS 2023 year-book. Finally, charts and graphs may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Survey Challenges

In the northern region, the most populous of the West Bank, results were complicated by apparently decreased trust in survey research, with a sharp uptick in nonresponses compared to previous surveys. This was most evident in answers to open-ended questions. For instance, when prompted to state Hamas’s “primary goal” in launching its attack on October 7, 2023, 40% of respondents indicated that they did not know—in contrast to single-digit nonresponse levels in other regions.

Nonresponses were also up in trend questions. When asked whether they agreed with the statement that “the Palestinian Authority should allow Hamas to operate in the West Bank in a free and open fashion,” nonresponses from the northern region rose to 19%, versus 5% in 2023. A nonresponse rate hovering around 20% recurs for a number of politically sensitive questions. Given heavy Israel Defense Forces activity in the north, respondents who were generally willing to participate in the survey may have been less likely to express views that they perceive could lead to IDF action against them.⁵

Challenges of a different sort appear when analyzing attitudes in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem. While nonresponse rates are low, potential concerns about monitoring may have prompted self-censorship on politically sensitive questions, such as those explicitly asking whether Palestinian national movements should prioritize “destroying Israel” or what will “realistically be the future of Israel” over the long term. Particularly in the latter case, 46% of East Jerusalemites expressed the

belief that Israel will no longer exist, compared with 71% of West Bank Palestinians. While such numbers may reflect real differences in viewpoint, one must also consider the possibility that some respondents are providing responses that they believe are more socially desirable to authorities.⁶

Responses to a question about voter participation were especially notable. In February 2024, Israel held a municipal election, and the self-reported 26% participation in PA-controlled East Jerusalem and 44% in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem dwarfed the estimated 1.7% voter turnout of Palestinians living in Israel’s Jerusalem municipality, suggesting major overreporting.⁷ Some voter overreporting is common in surveys, but these results could indicate social desirability bias despite assurances of confidentiality by the interviewer—perhaps meant to signal to authorities a willingness to participate in Israeli political life.⁸

Responses to other politically sensitive questions, however, suggested a high willingness to go against authorities’ apparent preferences. For instance, a high rate of East Jerusalem residents agreed with the principle that Palestinians should “seek to liberate all of historic Palestine.” Likewise, when asked to identify whether Iran was more likely a friend or an enemy to “our country,” East Jerusalemites said “friend” by 40%, a finding statistically equivalent to that found in the central and southern regions, despite the undisputed Israeli perspective that Iran is an existential threat.

Center vs. Periphery Views of the West Bank Future

In the year since October 7, Fatah—the dominant bloc within the Palestinian Authority (PA)—has retained some support in the West Bank’s central region, where the Ramallah-based seat of government is located, but very little in the northern and southern regions. In the north and south, moreover, few respondents expressed trust regarding the continued functioning of the PA and Fatah. Supporters of Hamas—who in the survey were more likely than Fatah supporters to express pessimism with the status quo—were also more likely to indicate that the Islamist group has popular support across the West Bank, and that Palestinian national parties should work toward a Palestinian state in “all of historic Palestine.”

Drop in Fatah Affiliation in the North, South

Even a decade ago, Fatah did not possess what could be characterized as broad-based support when measured across the West Bank. Frustrations with the PA and Fatah have long prevailed even in the central region, the only region where significant affiliation with Fatah remains. Today in the center, 36% say that either Fatah or the PA itself “best represents” their interests, a proportion statistically equivalent to attitudes in 2014 and 2019 (see figure 1). Moreover, the number of independents—or those who believe no party represents them—has been consistently significant since Washington Institute surveys began, with the current figure at 33% in the West Bank overall.

By contrast, support for Fatah in the north and south has dropped since political identification was first surveyed in 2014, with those who believe the party “best represents their interests” standing at 12% and 14%, respectively.⁹ In the north, this shift is

especially stark—45% self-identified with Fatah in a similar question posed on political affiliation in 2014. The reasons for this erosion are likely myriad. Ramallah has struggled to respond to intermittent Israeli policies advocating annexation of the West Bank and proved unable to shore up its electoral legitimacy, spotlighted by its failure to hold highly anticipated national Palestinian elections scheduled for May 2021. PA inaction in response to the war in Gaza and increasing Jewish settler attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank have also likely damaged its standing significantly in public opinion. For the north, escalating conflict in urban areas between armed militias and the IDF would appear to emphasize the PA’s stark limitations in providing security for residents.¹⁰ Support for Fatah in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem—by comparison—has been and remains low, currently at 16%, versus 12% in 2015.

Ambivalence About Potential Leaders and PA Resilience

A deeper look at survey results shows that a majority of West Bank respondents—driven specifically by attitudes in the north and the south—do not believe a political figure currently exists who can effectively lead the Palestinian people. On this item, further emphasizing the PA’s lack of legitimacy, virtually no respondents listed PA president Mahmoud Abbas, who turns eighty-nine in November and has not run for reelection since taking office in 2005 (see figure 2).

Just as residents of the West Bank’s northern region expressed lower belief that either Fatah or the PA “best represents [their] interests,” they also hesitated to share specifics on who could provide “effective Palestinian leadership.” The trend of nonresponse (discussed in the “Survey Challenges” box) contrasted with the greater willingness to identify potential leaders in the central region and East Jerusalem.

Israel-administered East Jerusalem, for its part, stands out for appearing to be especially engaged

Figure 1.

Thinking about the Palestinian or Arab movements active today, which movement do you feel best represents your interests?

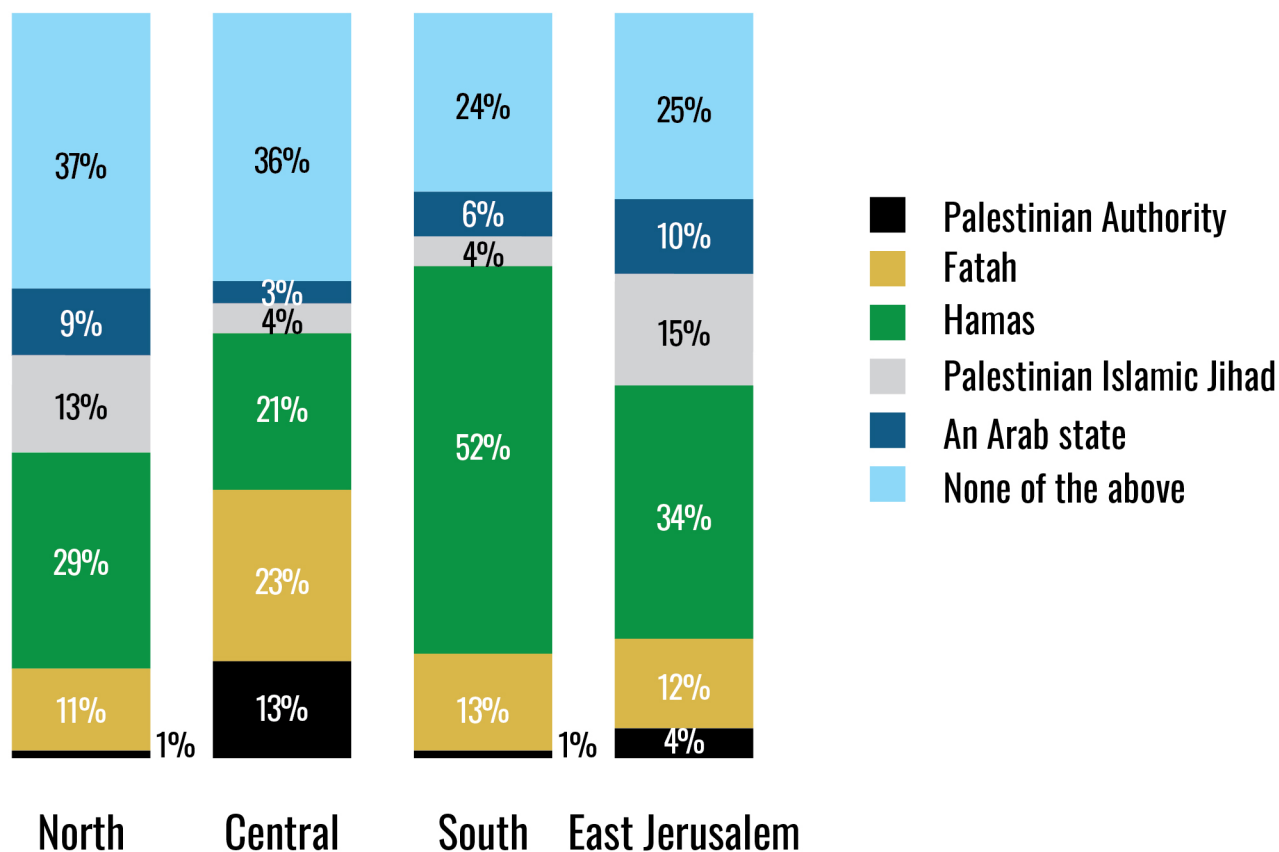
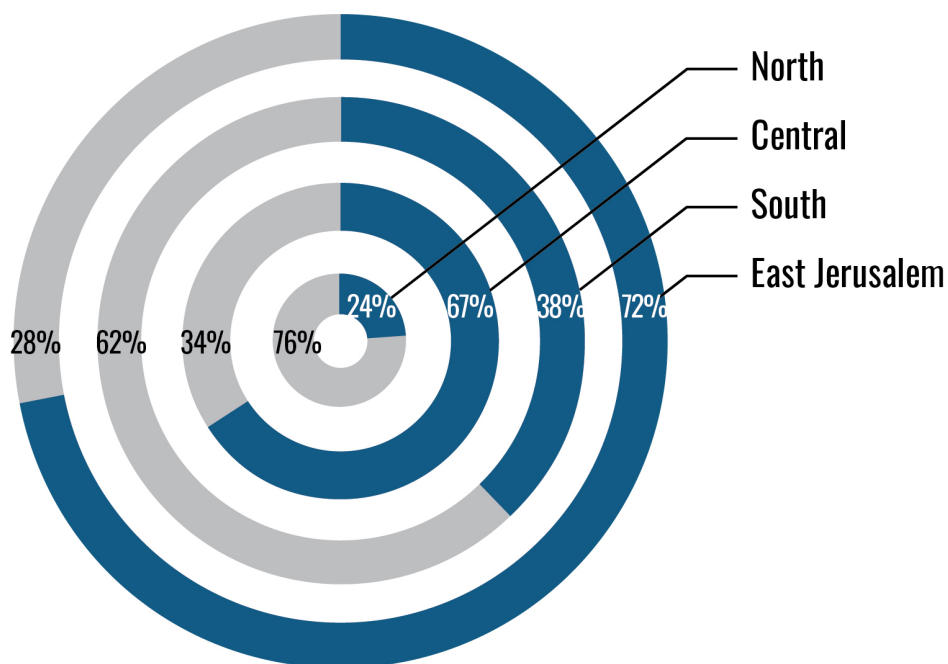


Figure 2.

Thinking about Palestinian leadership today, is there currently someone you think can be an effective leader of the Palestinian people?

Yes
No



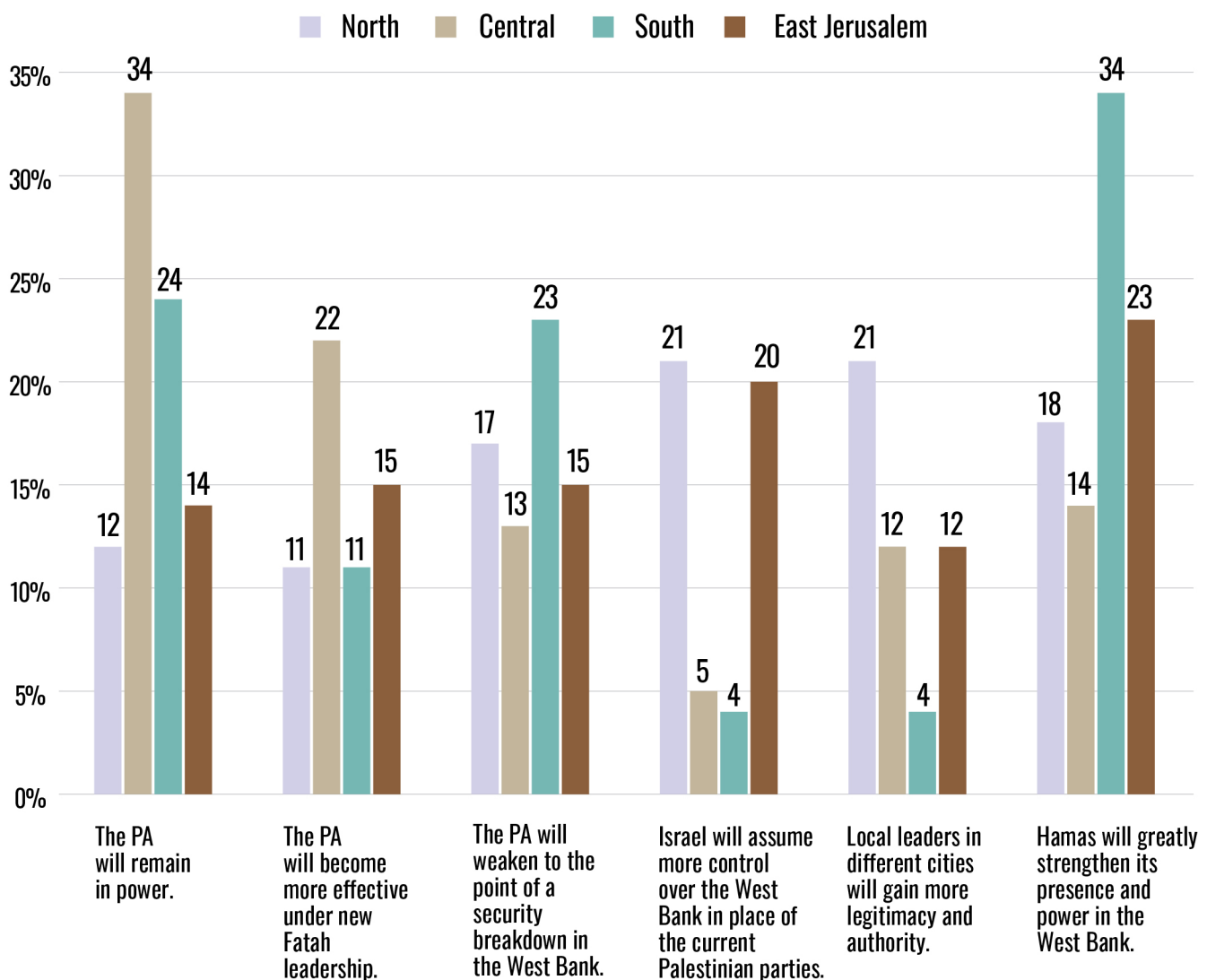
politically, with responses from the area including a diversity of both Fatah and Hamas personalities not mentioned elsewhere. A significant proportion of respondents named current Fatah figures (26%), independents, or former Fatah leaders (5% for Mohammad Dahlan, 6% for Mustafa Barghouti), indicating a distinction between low self-affiliation with the party and higher support for specific Fatah leaders. Meanwhile, 17% stated that current Hamas leader Yahya al-Sinwar could provide effective leadership, whereas an additional 14% listed other

Hamas figures such as Khaled Mashal; by contrast, 2% of southern West Bank Palestinians mentioned alternative Hamas figures in addition to Sinwar.¹¹ In line with party identification, responses from the central region centered on Fatah figures, most notably Marwan Barghouti (33%), who has been incarcerated since 2002.

Comparatively optimistic perspectives on the future of the West Bank largely track with geographic areas of self-affiliation with the PA/Fatah (see figure 3).

Figure 3.

Turning to the West Bank, and looking toward the next twelve months, which one of the following do you think is the most likely future for the Palestinian Authority?



Specifically, in the central region, more than half of Palestinians (56%) stated their belief that, at least for the next twelve months, the governing body will continue to exist either in something like its current form or as a more effective organization under new Fatah leadership. Yet only about a third hold this view in the south and in East Jerusalem, and less than a quarter (23%) do in the north.

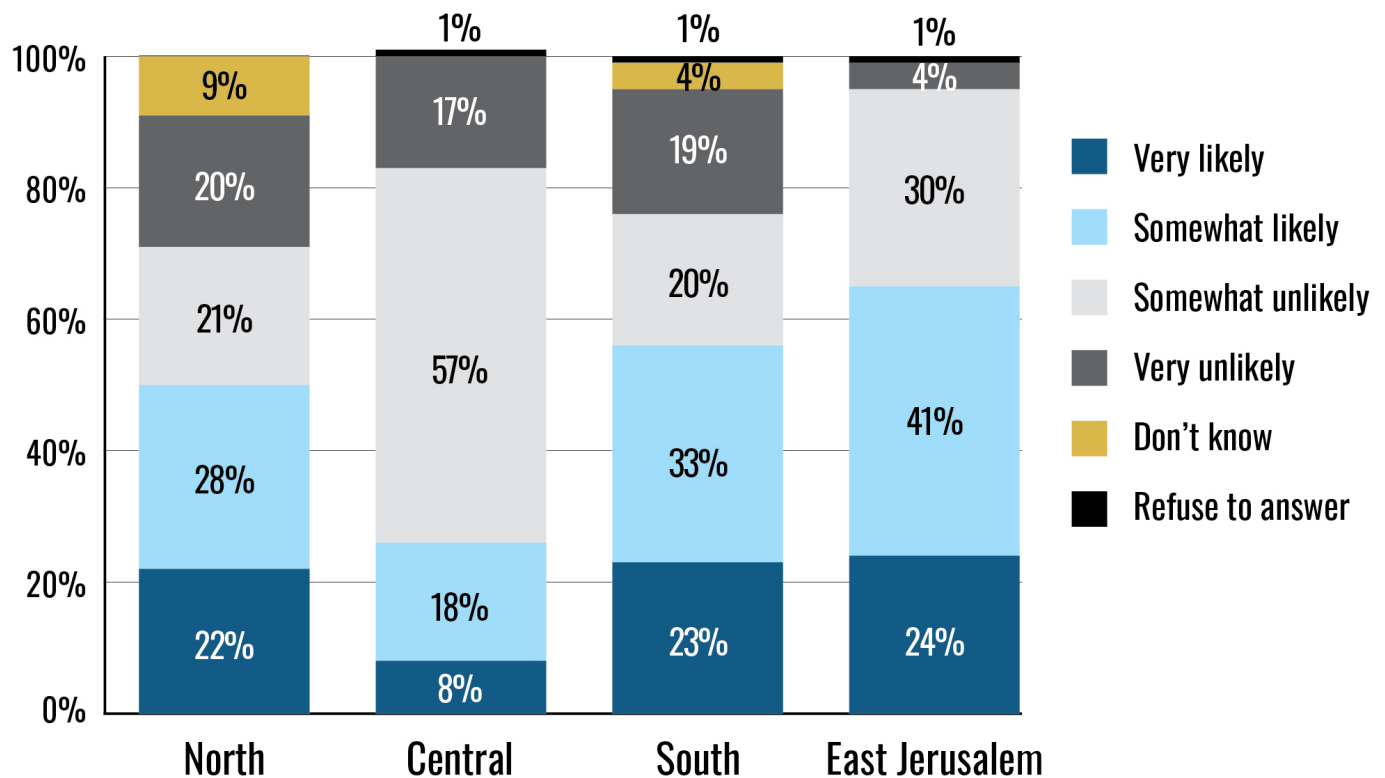
When asked to consider the West Bank over the next year, a plurality of respondents in the north imagined alternative power arrangements, with predictions split between Israeli control, Hamas control, and the emergence of local leaders who obtain “more legitimacy and power.” By contrast,

whereas southerners believed continued control by a Palestinian party is likely, they were divided on whether Fatah (35%) would persist or Hamas would execute a takeover (34%).

Reinforcing this distinction between center and periphery, just 26% of respondents in the central region agreed that it is at least somewhat likely that the PA will collapse within six months, while about half of residents in the northern and southern regions held such a view.¹² From Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, a collapse appeared likely to an even larger proportion—with 65% agreeing it was at least somewhat likely (see figure 4).

Figure 4.

How likely is the collapse of the PA?



Rising Support for Hamas, Most Notably in the South

Across the West Bank, alongside the drop in support for Fatah and ambivalence about the staying power of the PA, support for Hamas has jumped from earlier static levels. When polled in 2014, 2015, and 2019, approximately 10% of West Bank Palestinians indicated their affiliation with Hamas, a figure that swelled to 33% in this latest survey when a similar question was posed about which movement “best represents” them.¹³

Hamas affiliation is especially evident in the south, where 52% of those surveyed stated that the group “best represents [their] interests.” Yet when the aperture is expanded to include all those who made this statement with respect to *muqawama* (resistance) movements—adding Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) specifically—proportions in the north and in East Jerusalem appear similar to Hamas support levels in the south, while contrasting with 26% self-identification for either Hamas or PIJ in the central region. Hamas has invested significant resources over the years into building operational capacity and public support in the West Bank, but the current bounce in those who see the movement as best representing their interests is likely influenced by the Gaza war.

When examining Fatah versus Hamas backers in the West Bank, one also finds underlying differences in attitude regarding both internal Palestinian issues and the future of the conflict with Israel.¹⁴ On economics, for example, a notable drop was observed in reported average monthly incomes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, based on a comparison of this survey with one from July 2023.¹⁵ However much the war and Israeli policies may come in for blame, pervasive economic insecurity highlights for Palestinians the governance failures of the PA.¹⁶ The causes of West Bank economic deterioration are wide-ranging, from the withholding of PA tax revenues by the Israeli government (which account for a significant proportion of total PA revenues),¹⁷ to reduced international funding for the

West Bank,¹⁸ a significant reduction in Israeli permits allowed for West Bank workers, rising international food prices, and a precipitous drop in visits to religious tourism sites such as Bethlehem,¹⁹ along with long-running PA mismanagement and corruption. Economic anxieties are compounded by significant and unpredictable road blockages, increasingly active armed militias, a rise in settler violence and reprisal attacks, and extensive IDF operations in the West Bank.

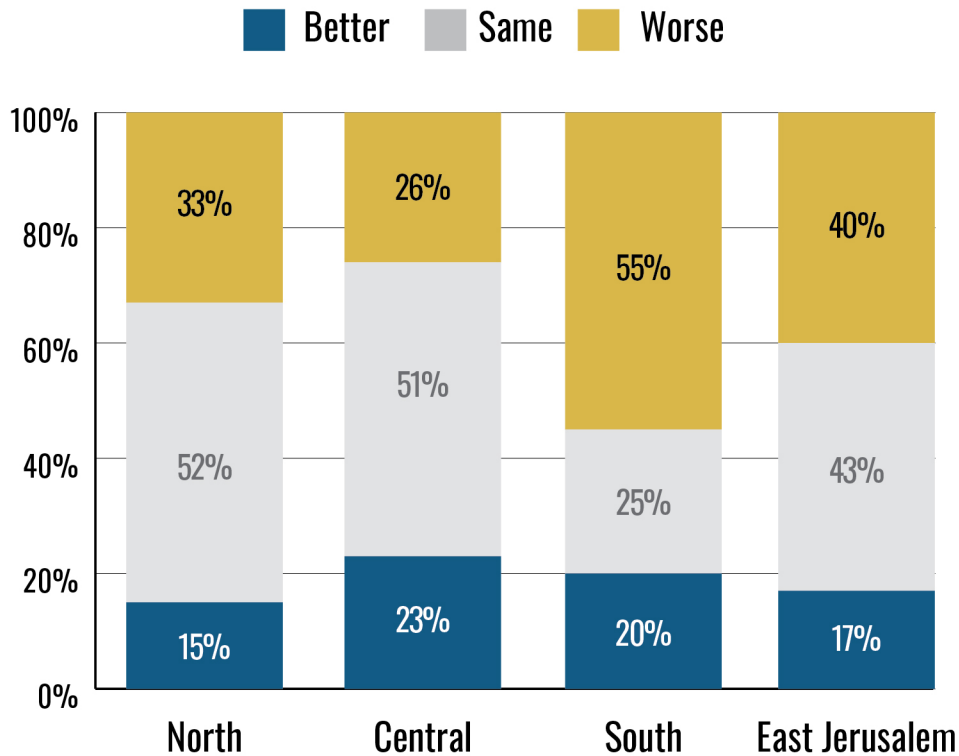
A larger proportion of those experiencing poverty look toward Hamas. In one disparity, 34% of Hamas backers reported monthly household incomes below the effective poverty line in the Palestinian territories (2,500 Israeli shekels, or about US\$667),²⁰ compared with just 14% of Fatah supporters and 17% of those who do not believe any movement represents their interests.²¹ Related to economic strain, Hamas supporters are also more likely to express pessimism about their children’s future. While this pessimism is expressed in higher proportions by those living in the south, the distinction holds across all the West Bank regions, with 47% of those looking to Hamas saying that their children’s lives would be worse in ten years, compared with 24% of PA and Fatah supporters and 34% of unaffiliated respondents (see figure 5).

Given the subgroup who said their interests are best represented by Hamas but named Fatah political figures in response to the “effective national leader” question, Hamas identification might be shallower than that for Fatah. Specifically, of the 38% of respondents identifying with Hamas who also said an effective leader existed, a third (or 13% overall) chose someone affiliated with Fatah, compared with the balance (25% overall) who chose from among the Hamas leadership. By contrast, just 2% of individuals identifying with Fatah named a Hamas individual as a potential leader.

Even so, those who identified with Hamas were more likely than those who identified with either Fatah or no political party to believe that Hamas would greatly strengthen its power in the West Bank and shape

Figure 5.

Do you think your children's lives will be better than, the same as, or worse than the current situation during the next ten years?



the territory's political trajectory. When asked about the near future of the West Bank, 38% of Hamas supporters—versus 6% of Fatah supporters and 14% of unaffiliated respondents—said Hamas would greatly increase its power over the next twelve months.

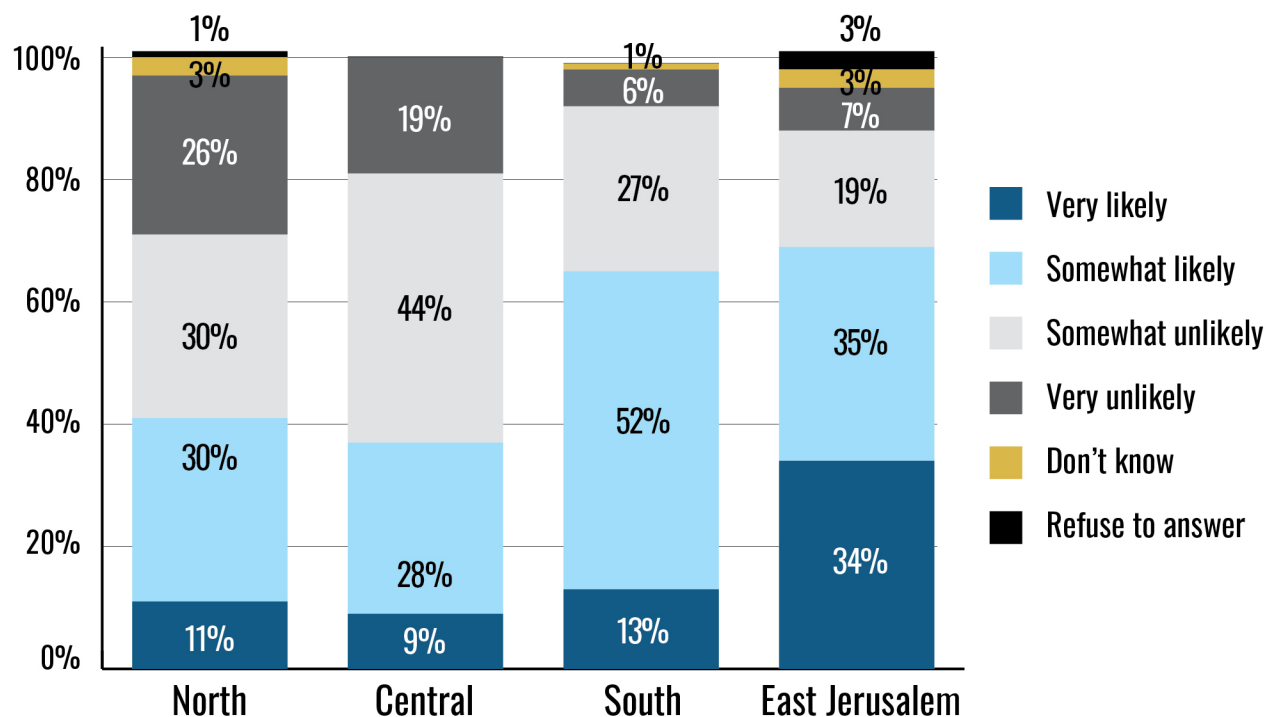
Unsurprisingly, Hamas supporters are also more likely to expect mass Palestinian support for the movement in the territory: 59% of them stated that a major armed pro-Hamas uprising in the West Bank is likely in the next six months, compared to 33% of Fatah affiliates and 44% of those who are unaffiliated (see figure 6). Likewise, a majority of Hamas supporters (58%) believed that the PA's collapse is at least somewhat likely within the next six months, compared to 26% of Fatah supporters and 38% of unaffiliated respondents.

In a similar vein, a majority of Hamas supporters reject the idea of compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with 61% stating that the most realistic path forward for Palestinian political movements is to “destroy the state of Israel and regain all of historical Palestine for the Palestinians.” Correspondingly, 77% of Hamas supporters indicated that the Palestinian leadership should ignore a two-state solution even if the prospect “becomes available.” By comparison, just 42% of Fatah and PA supporters and 51% of unaffiliated respondents agreed with this view.

Belief in the actual likelihood of a Palestinian state “in most of historic Palestine” is less certain, however. Only about half of Hamas supporters (53%) along with 35% of Fatah supporters and 37% of unaffiliated respondents expressed a belief that such a state would exist over the next thirty to forty years.

Figure 6.

How likely is a major armed uprising in the West Bank in support of Hamas?



Attitudes Toward the Gaza War and the Broader Conflict with Israel

In the 2023 Washington Institute survey, conducted before the Hamas-led attack on October 7, attitudes in the West Bank were mixed as to whether “Hamas should preserve a cease-fire with Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.” The outlier here was the northern region, where just 34% of respondents agreed, while 60% disagreed and 6% indicated they did not know or refused to answer. By contrast, respondents in the central and southern regions agreed by an average of

56%; in East Jerusalem 61% agreed, with responses being higher among those ages 18–30 (70% v. 57% for ages 31 and older). Today, whereas a majority of those surveyed in the central region remain committed to a two-state solution should one prove feasible, a large majority of respondents in the north communicated support instead for a Palestinian state in all of historic Palestine, and appeared less likely to be deterred by severe Israeli military responses. In the south, a majority of respondents indicated support for maximalist outcomes yet showed economically motivated pragmatism, perhaps aligning with the majority view that a Palestinian state will emerge in “most of historic Palestine” while sharing in the almost unanimous concern about preventing a Gaza-level catastrophe in the West Bank.

As in other areas of inquiry, respondents' geographic location, whether within the West Bank or Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, was a significant factor in their perceptions of Hamas's motives in the war, as measured by this open-ended question: "In your opinion, what is the primary goal that pushed Hamas to decide to attack Israel on October 7?"

In the southern region (Hebron), a majority of respondents agreed that Hamas's primary goal was either to protect or free holy sites, including Jerusalem and its al-Aqsa Mosque, or else to end the Gaza blockade and Gazans' broader suffering. In the north, a plurality of respondents (40%) refused to ascribe any goal to Hamas, likely reflecting a fear of surveillance on sensitive issues by the Israeli state.

In the central region, a plurality of respondents characterized Hamas's goal as addressing the situation of Palestinian prisoners (33%) or else broader Palestinian or West Bank suffering and associated Israeli violations (20%). Central region residents likewise appear to believe strongly that special payments by the PA to inmates in Israeli prisons must not be rescinded, even as doing so is necessary to renew direct U.S. assistance to the PA, according to the Taylor Force Act (adopted in 2018).²² While the large majority of West Bank and East Jerusalem Palestinians rejected the proposal that "the PA should stop special payments to prisoners and give prisoners' families normal social benefits like anyone else—not extra payments based on their sentences or armed operations," those in the center appeared most vehement, strongly disagreeing at the level of 64%, compared to 33% in the south, 25% in the north, and 12% in East Jerusalem.

Among East Jerusalem respondents, those who agreed that Hamas's primary goal was related to prisoners tended to offer a transactional framing not seen in other regions surveyed. Specifically, of those listing prisoners as the primary driver, 80% framed the issue as "capturing" Israeli prisoners or "exchanging" prisoners rather than emphasizing Israel's "abuse" of Palestinian prisoners. In the northern and central West Bank—the other two areas

where this explanation had significant traction—respondents were more likely to generalize (15%/27%).

Other East Jerusalem respondents suggested potential attack causes absent elsewhere in the West Bank, such as "incitement" from Iran or Hezbollah or else a personal decision from the Hamas leadership (20% total). Of the mere 4% in the central region who cited these causes, most came from PA-controlled East Jerusalem; in the northern or southern regions, such views did not register at all.²³

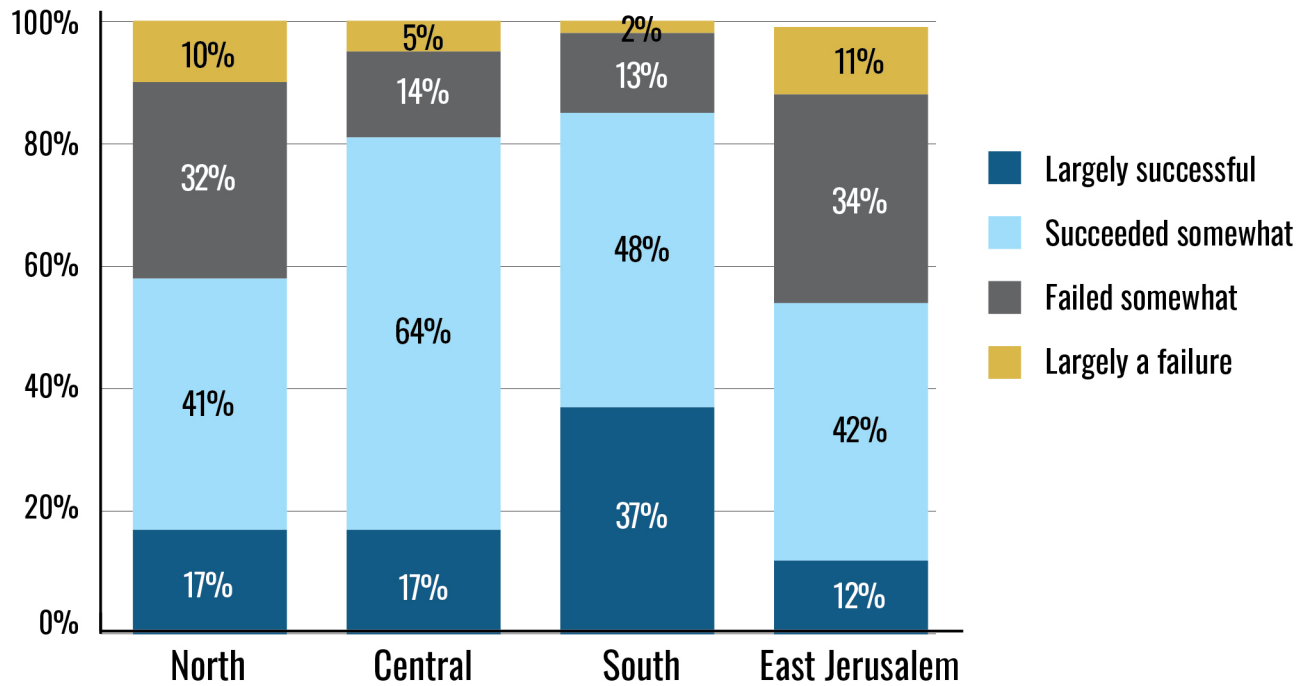
Finally, 72% in the West Bank and 54% in East Jerusalem agreed that Hamas has been at least somewhat successful in achieving its primary goal in the conflict.²⁴ Claims that the group has been "largely successful" are unsurprisingly more likely from Hamas supporters (39%) relative to PA/Fatah supporters (17%) and unaffiliated respondents (9%) (see figure 7).

Yet even the responses of Hamas supporters allow that the catastrophic loss of life and property in Gaza could outweigh the group's achievements: 42% of Hamas supporters agreed that "the sacrifices Gaza has made are greater than what Hamas has achieved." A full two-thirds of Fatah supporters and unaffiliated respondents agreed with this view.

Respondents from the central region projected generally sanguine attitudes when asked whether regional countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and global powers like Russia and China, were "mainly a friendly or enemy country to our country." Receptivity here may be tied to the majority belief in the central region (72%) that the current "international attention will lead to tangible political changes for the Palestinians." Affirmative answers by Hebron governorate residents (65% v. 46% in the north) may be a response to Jordanian popular opinion independent of policies advanced by Amman. Relatedly, in the south—with its significant ties to Jordanian tribes—support for "look[ing] towards neighboring Arab governments like Jordan to help improve the Palestinian situation" is highest (73%),

Figure 7.

In your opinion, has Hamas succeeded or failed in its primary goal?



compared with 41% in the center and 52% in the north. As reflected in 2023 Washington Institute polling, the Jordanian people expressed strong support for Palestinians and for Gazans particularly. Success by the Muslim Brotherhood–affiliated Islamic Action Front in September 2024 parliamentary elections may imply further such support.²⁵ Across the West Bank finally, the large majority of respondents expressed negative views about the United States (with 82% overall regarding it as an enemy) and positive views about Qatar (with 67% overall calling it a friend).

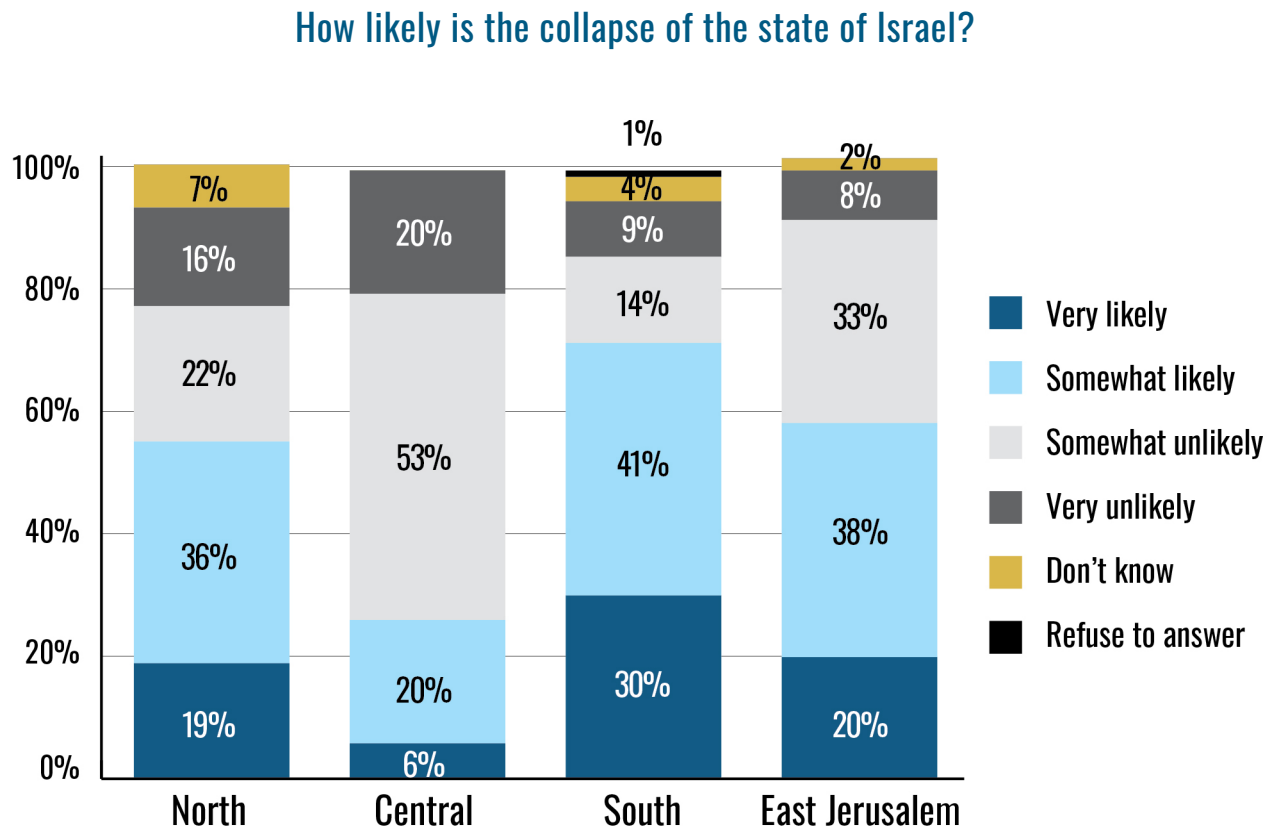
Growing Belief that Israel Could Collapse

A notable shift involved West Bank Palestinians' views on whether Israel would continue to exist in thirty or forty years, according to the survey.

“Regardless of personal preference,” a large majority in the West Bank (71%) now agreed that Israel would not exist in that timeframe—compared to 48% in 2023—whether due to internal contradictions or destruction by “Arab and Muslim resistance.” A comparable if smaller increase occurred among respondents from Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, from 33% to 46%.²⁶ (See figure 8.)

With respect to a possible Israeli collapse over the next six months, responses appear to correlate with ideology. Whereas two-thirds of Hamas supporters indicated that such an outcome is likely, one-third of Fatah backers did so, along with half of unaffiliated respondents. Assessed by region, southern West Bankers were most likely to believe an Israeli collapse is “somewhat likely” within six months (71%), versus 55% for northern West Bank residents and 27% in the center.

Figure 8.



Dimming Interest in Engagement with Israel, Some Resilience for Two States

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Gaza war appears to have hampered interest in engagement with Israelis, even to encourage a “just solution” to the conflict, with an especially significant shift observable in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, where such engagement previously enjoyed majority support and would theoretically be more feasible. When asked whether Palestinians “should encourage direct personal contacts with Israelis to help Israeli advocates for peace support a just solution to the conflict,” just under half of respondents in East Jerusalem agreed (47%), a 27-point drop from the tally in 2023.

Yet when taking the longer view, overall acceptance by West Bank residents of “two states for two

peoples—the Palestinian people and the Jewish people”—if this will help secure a Palestinian state was statistically equivalent to the opinions of a decade ago. When this question was fielded a few weeks before the start of the 2014 Gaza war, 43% supported such a proposal while 51% rejected it. A decade later, 39% in the West Bank accepted this same proposal while 52% rejected it.²⁷

Regarding support for a two-state solution, the central region again stands in contrast to the West Bank peripheries. Backing for this outcome appears to hold whether the question focuses on current Palestinian priorities or an end to the conflict, were the prospect of a two-state solution to emerge. A majority in the center (58%) thus agreed that the most realistic option for Palestinian national political parties over the next five years is to focus on ending the Israeli occupation through a two-state solution, a

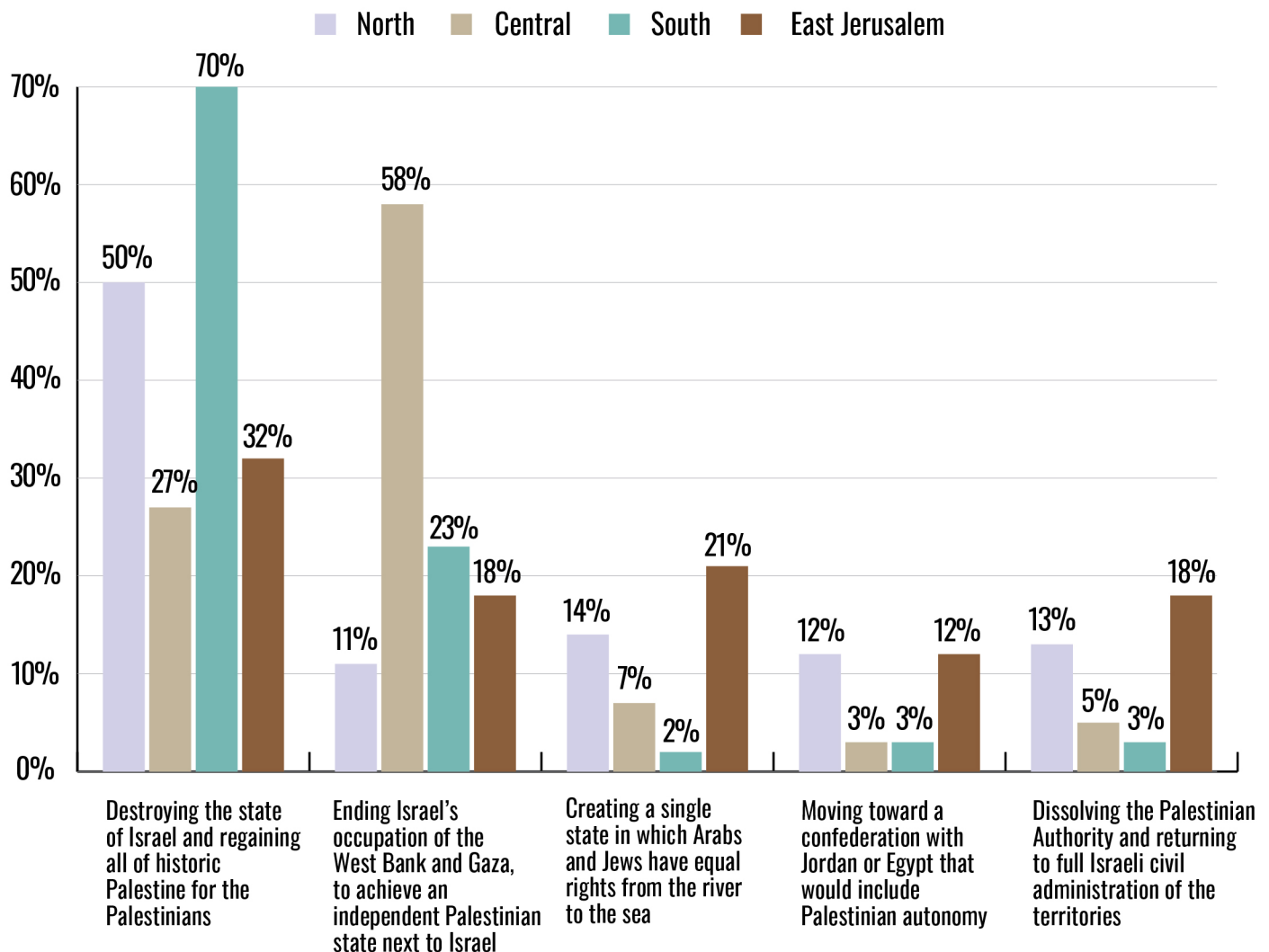
finding repeated in the responses to various formulations of the question. (The same applies generally in polling of Fatah supporters.) Attitudes in the south appear most averse to this outcome, even as a desire for economic stability and security (explained later) may explain the relative calm in the area.

Central West Bankers and residents of East Jerusalem expressed similar minority support for a maximalist solution involving the creation of an

exclusively Palestinian state in “all of historical Palestine,” at 27% and 32%, respectively. Yet East Jerusalem respondents also evinced skepticism about a two-state outcome, with just 18% saying that this was the “most realistic option” for Palestinian political movements in the near future. Alternatively, a statistically equivalent number indicated that either a binational state (21%) or complete dissolution of the PA and “returning to full Israeli civil administration of the territories” (18%) would be the most effective course (see figure 9).

Figure 9.

Which of the following is closest to your view as to the most realistic option for the Palestinian national political parties to work on as a priority for the next five years?



Two Types of West Bank Maximalism

Majorities in both the northern and southern West Bank (77% and 64%, respectively) concurred that the Palestinian leadership should reject a two-state solution if one becomes available (see figure 10). Yet residents of the north were more likely to agree with statements promoting resistance even if it incurred potential harm, whereas the majority of southern residents expressed significant concern regarding the potential worsening of their situation.

Here, even as residents of Hebron governorate are the most likely to identify with Hamas and 69% agreed that “destroying the state of Israel and regaining all of historic Palestine for the Palestinians” is “the most realistic option” for Palestinian national parties over the next five years, they also show deep concerns about the economic consequences of the current conflict. Their responses likewise suggest a strong desire to prevent the West Bank from suffering Gaza-level destruction. Specifically, when asked whether they agreed that “the top priority in the West Bank is to prevent the destruction that has occurred in Gaza

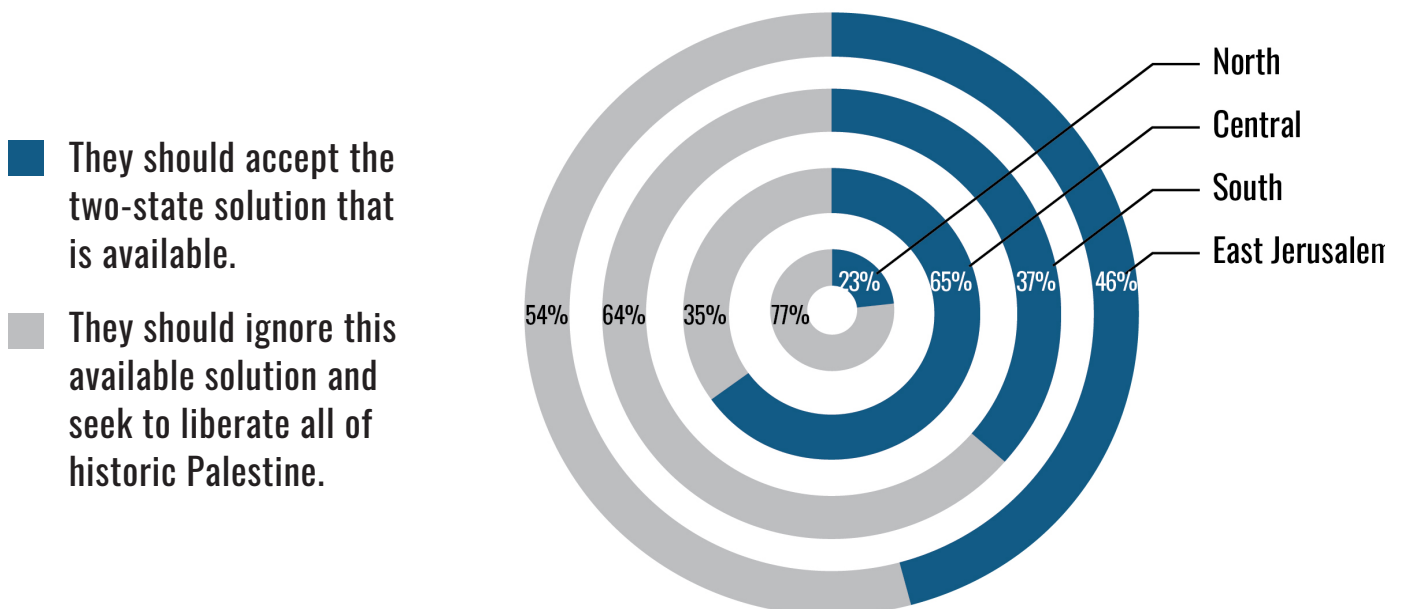
from happening here,” at least partial agreement in the south (91%) was much higher than in the north (37%)—where a full quarter strongly disagreed (24%)—and higher even than central region responses (78%). (See figure 11.)

Economic concerns also appear to have pushed more southern West Bankers to support the return of Palestinian workers to Israel (see figure 12). These worries reflect the precarious economic situation of Hebron governorate: of the 19% who reported their occupation shifting after the war began, the vast majority (91%) had previously worked in Israel or Israeli settlements. Currently, a striking 62% of Hebron residents report that they are either unemployed or do not work outside the home. This contrasts sharply with the central region, where just 38% say the same.

In past surveys spanning 2019–23, southern West Bank residents likewise expressed majority agreement with the statement that Palestinians should focus on “practical matters like jobs, healthcare, education, and everyday stability, not on political

Figure 10.

If the two-state solution becomes available to the Palestinian leadership, do you think they should accept this solution, or ignore it and seek to liberate all of historic Palestine?



plans or resistance options”—although small sample sizes in these previous surveys complicate trend comparisons. In the north, by contrast, majority support for prioritizing domestic governance concerns over resistance has varied by year, falling from 60% in 2020 to 39% in 2023.²⁸

Responses to other questions in 2023 likewise suggested growing support for armed resistance in the north. In contrast to other West Bank regions, just a quarter (26%) of northern residents agreed with the statement that “ Hamas should stop calling for Israel’s destruction and instead accept a permanent two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.”²⁹ And when asked whether the conflict should end if a two-state solution became possible, just 17% responded in the affirmative—suggesting uncompromising views predating the war in Gaza.

The shift in northern attitudes is likely linked to

increased conflict there between armed militias and the IDF, which had already worsened significantly by the time the 2023 survey was fielded.³⁰ Notably, in survey data from 2022—when a prospective two-state solution was more popular in the West Bank overall—support was split in the north for insisting on “our full rights to all of historic Palestine,” with half disagreeing with this assertion. This latter perspective shrank considerably in the 2023 and 2024 surveys.

One counterintuitive response surfaced in the north. While most agreed with the proposal that the PA should stop security coordination with Israel, a subset persisted in strongly disagreeing, distinct from overall West Bank attitudes. In past years, the north has likewise been unique in the repeatedly high proportion of respondents who disagreed with this proposal, although those who disagreed strongly has dropped from earlier years.

Figure 11.

Right now, the top priority in the West Bank is to prevent the catastrophe that has befallen Gaza from happening here.

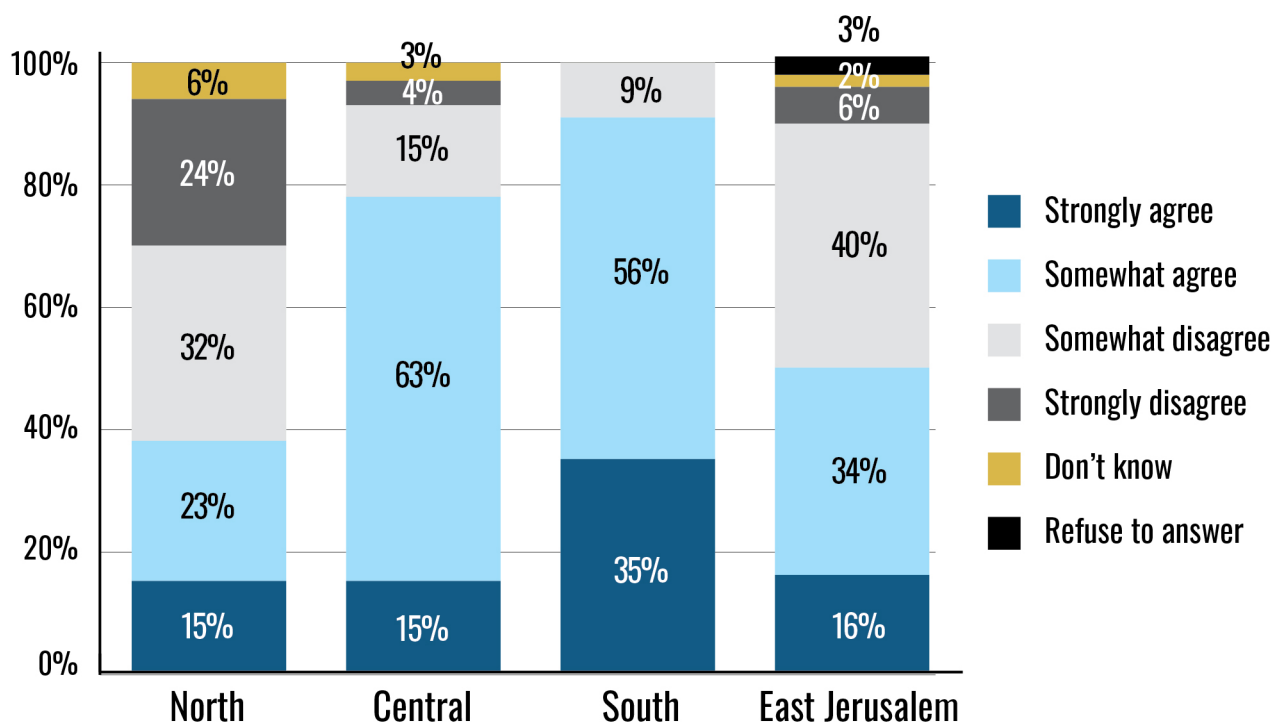
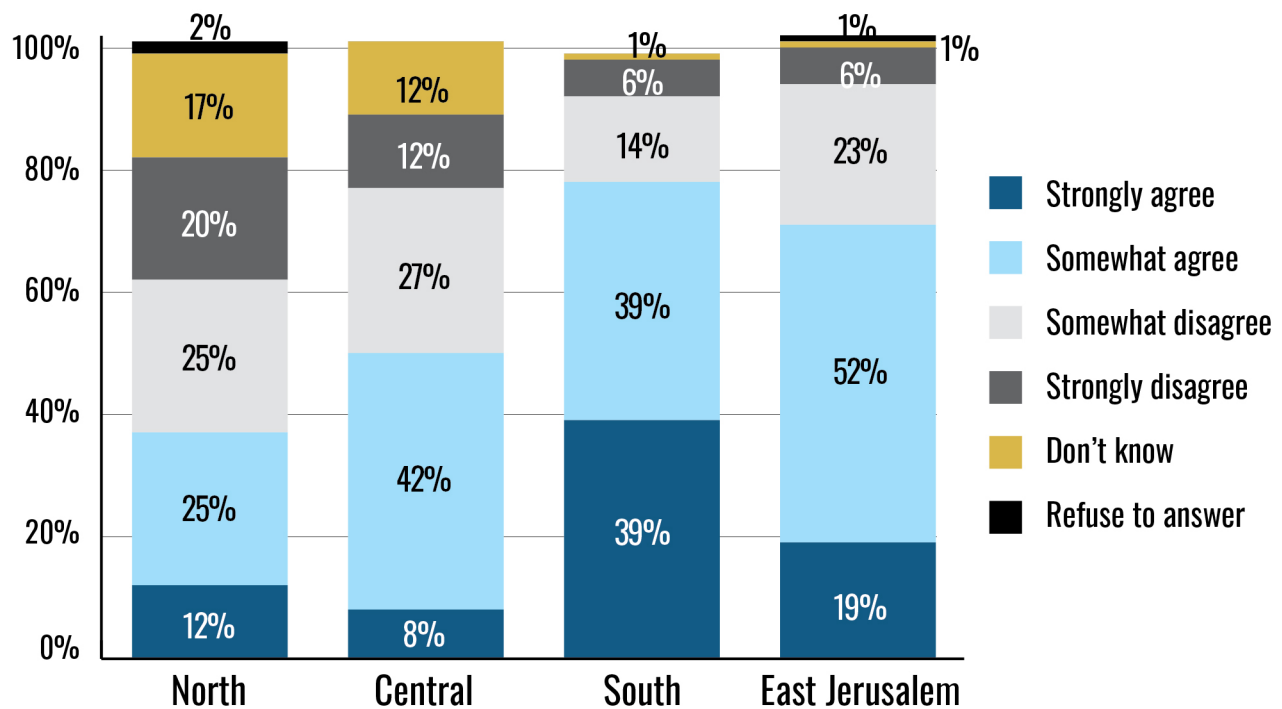


Figure 12.

The best economic solution for the West Bank is for Israel to allow workers to return.



Conclusion

Historically, public opinion in the West Bank has been presented in flattened or generalized terms, either in contrast to public opinion in Gaza or as an indivisible part of the broader Palestinian scene. But the results of the survey discussed in this paper, covering the post–October 7 era, illuminate often remarkable distinctions in attitudes across the central, northern, and southern West Bank, along with Israel-controlled East Jerusalem. (PA-controlled East Jerusalem falls within the central region, as defined in this paper.)

Significant support for the PA and its dominant Fatah Party, for example, holds only in the central region,

where the Ramallah seat of government is located. Meanwhile, northern respondents show the highest tolerance for armed resistance against Israel, and southern residents—despite their generally negative views toward compromise with Israel—express a significant interest in avoiding a calamity like the Gaza war, perhaps given concerns about a potential economic collapse. Even as not all responses reflect regional difference—e.g., perceptions of the United States as an enemy are fairly uniform—the region-specific findings suggest a new paradigm that could have major implications for U.S. policy, from how to design development programs to where to focus anti-corruption reforms. ♦

NOTES

- 1 For a different survey that recognizes regional variation in the West Bank, see Obaya Shtaya et al., *Political Orientation and Civil Liberties in Palestine* (Institute for Social and Economic Progress, 2023), <https://institute4progress.org/publications>.
- 2 See Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Estimated Population in Palestine Mid-Year by Governorate, 1997–2026,” https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/statisticsIndicatorsTables.aspx?lang=en&table_id=676.
- 3 See, e.g., Paul J. Lavrakas et al., “The Last-Birthday Selection Method & Within-Unit Coverage Problems,” *Proceedings of the Survey Research Method Section* (1993): 1107–1112, available at http://www.asasrms.org/Proceedings/papers/1993_190.pdf.
- 4 For an explanation of margin of error and its importance in comparing survey data responses, see Andrew Mercer, “5 Key Things to Know About the Margin of Error in Election Polls,” Pew Research Center, September 8, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/09/08/understanding-the-margin-of-error-in-election-polls/>.
- 5 High nonresponse levels suggest the importance of maintaining regional distinctions in West Bank surveys. Such responses, especially given the strong hesitancy to express pointed support for certain groups, could skew totals in West Bank surveys overall, especially since the north is the most populous region.
- 6 For one critique of polling in East Jerusalem, see Daniel Seidemann, “The Perils of Polling in East Jerusalem,” *Foreign Policy*, February 23, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/23/the-perils-of-polling-in-east-jerusalem/>.
- 7 Voter turnout estimate provided by email from the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research.
- 8 While East Jerusalem Palestinians cannot vote in Israeli national elections unless they have applied for and obtained Israeli citizenship, they can choose to participate in municipal elections, although their voter turnout has been historically very low relative to that for Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens.
- 9 David Pollock, “New Palestinian Poll Shows Hardline Views, but Some Pragmatism Too,” PolicyWatch 2276, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 25, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-palestinian-poll-shows-hardline-views-some-pragmatism-too>. Notably, this earlier poll was conducted June 15–17, just prior to the 2014 war in Gaza, which began July 8.
- 10 See, e.g., U.S. Department of State, “2023 Country Report on Human Rights in the West Bank and Gaza,” <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/israel-west-bank-and-gaza/>.
- 11 Ismail Haniyeh was killed in a targeted strike on July 31, 2024, the day before data collection began.
- 12 In a June 2024 survey by the Institute for Social and Economic Progress 71% of West Bank respondents expressed worries about internal strife, up from 59% in October 2023, <https://institute4progress.org/polls>.
- 13 For views on political figures, see, e.g., Institute for Social and Economic Progress, “West Bank Street Pulse,” December 13–20, 2023, <https://institute4progress.org/polls>; and see “Gaza, Political Prospects, Outgoing and Newly-Appointed Government, Elections, and Political Support,” Arab World for Research and Development, June 13, 2024, [https://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/Poll 2024/AWRAD - Main Results - Palestinian Public Opinion Poll - May 2024.pdf](https://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/Poll%202024/AWRAD%20-%20Main%20Results%20-%20Palestinian%20Public%20Opinion%20Poll%20-%20May%202024.pdf).
- 14 In East Jerusalem, subsamples by political affiliation are small and therefore have high margins of error, limiting prospects for analysis.
- 15 Link to data available from author on request.
- 16 In a survey fielded in May 2024, 54% in the West Bank said their economic situation and regional security had become “much worse” over the past year; see “Gaza, Political Prospects,” [https://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/Poll 2024/AWRAD - Main Results - Palestinian Public Opinion Poll - May 2024.pdf](https://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/Poll%202024/AWRAD%20-%20Main%20Results%20-%20Palestinian%20Public%20Opinion%20Poll%20-%20May%202024.pdf).
- 17 Smotrich allowed partial fund transfers beginning in July; see, e.g., Jacob Magid, “Israel Makes Partial Transfer of Tax Revenues Withheld from PA Since April,” *Times of Israel*, July 3, 2024, https://www.timesofisrael.com/live-blog_entry/israel-makes-partial-transfer-of-tax-revenues-withheld-from-pa-since-april/.

- 18 See, e.g., Reuters, “Palestinian President Calls on Arab Countries for Financial Support,” May 16, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/palestinian-president-calls-arab-countries-financial-support-2024-05-16/>.
- 19 For more details, see “Impacts of the Conflict in the Middle East on the Palestinian Economy,” World Bank Monitoring Report, May 2024, <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Palestinian-Econ-Upd-May2024-FINAL-ENGLISH-Only-1.pdf>.
- 20 The United Nations identifies the poverty line for a household of five as 2,470 Israeli shekels: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “53 Percent of Palestinians Live in Poverty, Despite Humanitarian Assistance,” June 5, 2018, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/53-cent-palestinians-gaza-live-poverty-despite-humanitarian-assistance>.
- 21 At least some of this can be attributed to the convergence of “elites” in the central region and to high levels of Hamas support in the south.
- 22 See “Taylor Force Act,” H.R. 1164, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1164>. The State Department continues to provide assistance to the PA’s security sector. On reported recent negotiations between the United States and the PA, see Jacob Magid, “PA in Final Stages of Talks with U.S. to Reform ‘Pay-to-Slay’ Policy—Sources,” *Times of Israel*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-in-final-stages-of-talks-with-us-to-reform-pay-to-slay-policy-official/>.
- 23 In theory, these responses could be influenced by survey conditions, such as concerns about their anonymity or independence. Such a survey effect is explored in several studies, including Justin J. Gengler et al., “‘Why Do You Ask?’: The Nature and Impacts of Attitudes Towards Public Opinion Surveys in the Arab World,” *British Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1, (2021): 115–36, doi:10.1017/S0007123419000206. Yet survey responses to this question in PA-controlled East Jerusalem closely resembled those in Israel-controlled East Jerusalem, suggesting that the difference in attitudes is more connected to geographic proximity than interviewing conditions within Israeli authority. Responses were coded prior to any subsample analysis to prevent potential error.
- 24 Compare this to the Arab World for Research and Development survey (conducted May 2024), which showed West Bank support for Hamas’s wartime actions at 62%; see [https://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/Poll 2024/AWRAD - Main Results - Palestinian Public Opinion Poll - May 2024.pdf](https://www.awrad.org/files/server/polls/Poll%202024/AWRAD-Main-Results-Palestinian-Public-Opinion-Poll-May-2024.pdf).
- 25 Data available from author on request. See, e.g., Matthew Mpoke Bigg and Rana F. Sweis, “Islamists Gain in Jordan, Reflecting Public Anger over Gaza War,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/11/world/middleeast/jordan-election-muslim-brotherhood.html>.
- 26 Responses in East Jerusalem on this and other questions about Israel may be shaped by political sensitivities, but the year-over-year shift is still statistically significant.
- 27 In Washington Institute polling conducted June 15–17, 2014, support for this proposal was at 43%, versus 51% rejection and 6% for don’t know/no answer. See Pollock, “New Palestinian Poll Shows Hardline Views,” <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-palestinian-poll-shows-hardline-views-some-pragmatism-too>.
- 28 Link to data available from author on request.
- 29 Link to data available from author on request.
- 30 The 2023 survey was fielded shortly after Israeli airstrikes in July targeting Jenin.

The Author



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In Memoriam

Dr. David Pollock

1950–2024

This Policy Note carries on the pioneering work of a cherished friend and colleague and is dedicated to his memory, may it forever be a blessing.



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