

Most Palestinians Approve of Jordan—Plus Other Survey Surprises



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A detailed public opinion poll from last month shows that most West Bank and Gaza Palestinians approve of Jordan's King Abdullah, look to his country for help, and want it to play a major role in their future—though just a small minority favor a future confederation with Jordan. On other issues, the Palestinian public is surprisingly flexible on the prisoner issue, but tough on Jerusalem.

Three-Quarters in West Bank, Two-Thirds in Gaza Like Jordan's King Abdullah

When asked about various regional or global leaders, the large majority of Palestinians voice a favorable opinion of Jordanian King Abdullah: 68 percent of Gazans, and a stunning 77 percent of West Bankers. These remarkably high numbers are about on a par with those for Turkish President Erdogan, who is more often considered by outsiders to be something of a hero to Palestinians lately. By comparison, Egypt's President Sisi gets good ratings from 55 percent of Gazans—but merely 16 percent of West Bankers.

Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman lags behind, with 38 percent of Gazans and only 22 percent of West Bankers expressing a positive view. Interestingly, Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei earns almost exactly the same degree of Palestinian popular approval: 38 percent in Gaza, and 18 percent in the West Bank.

Similarly at the national level, not just the personal one: the country of Jordan is favored for “major role” in the future of Palestine by 63 percent of West Bankers, and 51 percent of Gazans. Saudi Arabia, by contrast, garners under 40 percent support among both Palestinian publics. Moreover, solid majorities in both the West Bank (62 percent) and Gaza (77 percent) agree that “right now, the Palestinians should look more to other Arab governments, like Egypt or Jordan, to help improve our situation.”

Yet Very Few Want Confederation with Jordan; More Prefer “One State” with Israel

But this does not mean that Palestinians want unity or even confederation with any of their neighbors. Offered that option, along with a two-state, one-state, or all-of-Palestine solution, confederation with Egypt or Jordan “including Palestinian self-government” attracts only single-digit support (9 percent of West Bankers, 5 percent of Gazans, and a startlingly low 1 percent of East Jerusalem Palestinians).

A “one-state solution, in which Arabs and Jews would equal rights in one state from the river to the sea,” garners double that support, albeit still a small minority: 18 percent of West Bankers, 12 percent of Gazans, and a high of 20 in East Jerusalem). Yet a significantly larger proportion in all three places agree at least “somewhat” with this highly provocative assertion: “It would be better for us if we were part of Israel, rather than in PA or Hamas ruled lands.” Fully half of Gazans voice that view. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, that figure now stands at one-quarter.

Just One-Quarter Favor a New Intifadah Over Other Options

In all three areas surveyed, two-thirds or even more justify attacks on Israeli settlers, soldiers, and policemen. Narrower majorities also say they support “armed struggle” in principle, if given a simple yes-or-no choice about it. Yet when offered a variety of options, including diplomatic efforts or a greater focus on internal reforms, only about one-quarter in any of these areas say they prefer renewing an intifadah against Israel. This counter-intuitive point is confirmed by consistent responses to several different question wordings used in this survey, to measure actual popular preferences rather than the usual rhetorical postures.

Prisoners A Lower Priority than Often Assumed

In another stark contrast with common misconceptions or partisan claims, around half the public in both the West Bank and Gaza agree with this proposal: “The Palestinian Authority should stop special payments to prisoners, and give their families normal social benefits like everybody else.” This finding again confirms unanticipated results from previous polls. It is also in line with a decline in the priority accorded to prisoner releases as an Israeli goodwill measure. Presented with a list of such options, only about one-quarter in any of the three publics polled pick that as their top priority.

At the same time, just half the public say they have heard even “a fair amount” about the U.S. Taylor Force law, “cutting aid to the Palestinian Authority due to payments to prisoners.” This suggests that many Palestinians do not attribute their economic woes either to American pressure, or to their own government’s intransigent policy on prisoners’ bonuses.

But Sharing Jerusalem A Tougher Sticking Point than Many Believe

One unexpectedly hardline attitude in these findings concerns Jerusalem. Around half of West Bankers and Gazans “strongly agree” with this proposition: “We should demand Palestinian rule over all of Jerusalem, east and west, rather than agree to share or divide any part of it with Israel.” An additional 25 to 30 percent agree “somewhat” with that view. These startling new figures confirm results from a 2017 poll, which went unreported as an “outlier” or statistical anomaly at the time.

For some of these Palestinians, this seemingly extreme position may simply mean that Jerusalem is more of a political slogan or a religious symbol than a lived reality. But those percentages are about the same for the Palestinians of East Jerusalem, who work and travel freely in the mostly Jewish half of the city west of the 1967 frontier. Other polls, however, have shown that when a similar question is presented as part of a package deal, leading toward a two-state solution, half or more of the overall Palestinian public has been prepared to accept a division of control over the city.

Methodological Note

This survey was conducted June 27-July 15, 2019 by the West Bank-based Palestine Center for Public Opinion, using face-to-face interviews and standard geographic probability techniques to provide accurate representative samples. The sample sizes were 500 each in the West Bank and Gaza, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately four percent for each subsample, and 200 in East Jerusalem. The author has personally supervised previous surveys by this pollster, and approved their sampling frames and methods, field protocols and quality controls, questionnaire translations, strict assurances of confidentiality and non-interference by any outside party, and all other procedural aspects of the research.