

Joint Palestinian-Israeli Surveys on Trust and the Peace Process: *Summary Report*



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המרכז לכלכלה מדינית
THE CENTER FOR POLITICAL ECONOMICS

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Palestinian-Israeli Joint Poll on Trust and Peace Process:
**MAPPING SOURCES OF MUTUAL DISTRUST IN
PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS:**

Role of education, daily life experiences, and exposure to violence

Summary Report of Joint Findings

This summary describes the Palestinian-Israeli findings of two joint surveys on trust and the peace process: A Joint Poll conducted by the [Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research \(PSR\)](#) in Ramallah and the MACRO center in Tel Aviv and with funding from the [European Union \(EU\)](#) in October and November 2020 and an earlier (August 2020) joint poll on the peace process, the Palestinian-Israeli Pulse, conducted by PSR and [the Evens Program in Mediation and Conflict Management at Tel Aviv University](#) with funding from the Netherlands Representative Office in Ramallah and the Representative Office of Japan to Palestine through UNDP/PAPP.

The summary is divided into four sections and a summary. **The first section** describes the **hypothesis** and **methodology** of the joint research. The **second section** describes our findings regarding support for peace and the relationship between two variables: **trust and support for peace**. In this section, support for peace is treated as the dependent variable and trust is treated as the independent variable. The section also highlights findings based on demographic variables, particularly age, in order to understand the attitudes of the youth.

The **third section** describes the findings regarding trust and the three components that are believed to influence the level of trust in both societies: (1) daily life hardships, (2) exposure to violence, and (3) perception of education on the other side. Here too we use the data to build a quantitative composite indicator for each of these suspected sources of distrust. The section examines the relationship between the three components and trust in which these elements are treated as independent variables and trust as a dependent variable. The **fourth and fifth sections** serve as a conclusion and policy recommendations driven by the findings.

(1) Hypothesis and Methodology

Part of a larger joint empirical research on mapping the sources of distrust in Palestinian-Israeli relations, this survey research has been guided by a basic hypothesis that public support for peace and compromise is influenced by the level of mutual trust prevailing in the two communities. Furthermore, the hypothesis identified three possible sources of mutual distrust:

daily harsh life experience, exposure to violence and conflict, and negative perception of the educational system on the other side.

The Palestinian-Israeli Pulse, August 2020: The Palestinian sample size was 1200 adults interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in 120 randomly selected locations between 12-26 August, 2020. The margin of error is +/-3%. The Israeli sample includes 900 adult Israelis interviewed through the internet by Midgam in Hebrew and Arabic 12 August and 3 September 2020. The number of Jews interviewed inside Israel is 500, 200 West Bank settlers, and 200 Israeli Arabs. The combined Israeli data file has been reweighted to reflect the exact proportionate size of these three groups in the Israeli society, and to reflect current demographic and religious-secular divisions. The margin of error is +/-3.34%.

The joint poll on trust and the peace process, October-November 2020: The Palestinian sample size was 1560 adults, including 592 youth, interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in 120 randomly selected locations between 29 October to 1 November, 2020. The margin of error is +/-3%. The Israeli sample includes 1201 adult Israelis interviewed through the internet by Rafi Smith in Hebrew and Arabic on 00 November 2020. The number of Jews interviewed inside Israel is 500, 200 West Bank settlers, and 200 Israeli Arabs. The combined Israeli and Palestinian data files have been reweighted to reflect the exact proportionate size of the various groups and ages in the Palestinian and Israeli societies, and to reflect, for Israeli Jews, current demographic and religious-secular divisions. The margin of error for the Israeli poll is +/-3.34%.

The questionnaire questions have been divided to different themes. Several questions assessed the extent of trust towards the other side and its leadership. Others questions measured experiences of violence related to the conflict and separately exposure to violence and conflict related incidences. As follows, we built different groups of questions, which when combined, helped us assess the impact of these main factors on trust and support of peace. The questions also examined the two sides perception of the educational system on the other side. In addition, we constructed a series of scales and indicators that measured the various variables of the study as well as psychological perception that respondents hold towards the conflict and the other side.

Main Findings

Israeli and Palestinian Support for Peace.

Our most unequivocal finding shows that trust is **the most important** predictor of support in the peace process among respondents from both sides.

On the Israelis side, we found additional socio-psychological variables such as ethos and stereotyping, which indicated that the less a person adheres to ethos of conflict and the less negative stereotypes he holds regarding Palestinians, the more he/she supports the peace process.

Another interesting and important finding regarding the Jewish sample was found while comparing the older and younger respondents. It reveals that in all the indices of the socio-psychological repertoire, younger Israeli Jews more commonly hold right wing political views compared to older Israeli Jews regarding Palestinians and the conflict. Specifically, younger Israeli Jews have less trust towards Palestinians, adhere more to beliefs of ethos of conflict, hold a stronger negative stereotype of Palestinians, tend more to delegitimize them, are less interested in initiating contact with a Palestinian, express somewhat stronger negative emotions towards Palestinians and express stronger opposition regarding the two-state solution than older Jews.

Among the Palestinians, we asked about support for the concept and details of the two-state solution. But peace has also been defined in term of support and opposition to an agreement based on many associated compromises as well as expression of attitudes consistent with that solution. For example, we examined attitudes regarding related topics: violence vs. diplomacy and perceptions of the other and themselves: whether they want peace or believe the other side does. We also probed the extent of zero-sum beliefs. These and other relevant questions informed our peace indicator building. The indicator of peace, has three levels: high, medium, and low. The peace indicators' building exercise showed that support for peace is predominantly low in the two joint polls, but most significantly in the October poll, when an expanded set of 13 questions were used to build this peace indicator while only four were used to build the August indicator.

While Palestinian support for the concept of the two-state solution stood at 43% in August, in October, the question was modified with respondents having the option of selecting a middle position: neither support nor oppose. In this case, support stood at 25% only and opposition at 63%; 11% selected the middle position. Additionally, in August 2020, 18% of the Palestinians agreed that most Israeli Jews want peace, a significant decrease from 39% in June 2018 and much less than our findings in June 2017 when 44% of Palestinians gave this response. More than three quarters (76%) expressed the view that they do not think most Israeli Jews want peace. In October, the question allowed for a middle choice: "neither agree nor disagree." In this version of the question, only 10% agreed with the statement that Israeli Jews want peace, 78% disagreed, and 10% selected the middle choice.

Palestinian support for peace is influenced by age. Youth, in our October poll, between the ages of 18 and 29, tend to show greater low support for peace (81%) compared to those whose age is 30 and above (72%). The gap based on age is lower according to our August poll (50% and 48% respectively).

When linking support for peace with trust level, strong positive correlation emerges: the higher the trust, the higher the support for peace and the lower the trust, the lower the support for peace. For example, with a high level of trust, support for peace in our August joint poll stood at 42% compared to only 24% when trust was low and 30% when trust was medium. While only 29% of those with high level of trust opposed peace, this percentage increases when trust is medium and low (48% and 50% respectively). These findings are confirmed in our joint October poll. Here too, a high level of trust (relying on the combined trust indicator #3) increased support for peace

to 48%, medium level of trust reduced support for peace to 23%, and low level of trust reduced support for peace further to only 4%. Similarly, only 13% of those with high levels of trust opposed peace, 44% with medium level of trust opposed peace, and an overwhelming majority of 80% of those with low level of trust opposed peace.

Israeli and Palestinian Distrust:

In this section we explore mutual distrust and its sources.

On the Israeli side, the results indicate a low level of trust towards Palestinians, expressed by the Jewish samples. However, Israeli Arabs expressed somewhat a higher level of trust towards Palestinians. Both groups did not differentiate significantly in trust towards Palestinians in general and towards their leaders. The results of the Jewish sample in the survey study 2 show that most of the Jewish respondents (34.1%) attributed their lack of trust to the “Palestinian education system, which incites against Jews”.

The proposed hypotheses were only very partially confirmed. The findings of our research mildly support hypotheses 1-3, but provided very strong support of hypothesis 4. The results for the entire Israeli Jewish sample as well as for older and younger Israeli Jews separately showed unequivocally that socio-psychological variables that represent the socio-psychological repertoire of the participants determine the levels of trust to a large extent.

The results indicate that Jewish respondents reported low levels of experienced violence related to the conflict. However, exposure to violence- through hearing or seeing it on media, shows a relative high level of exposure among Jewish respondents.

Israeli Jews tend to think that Israeli teachers present the Palestinians neither negatively nor positively. Also, not surprisingly, Israeli Arab respondents think that Israeli teachers portray Palestinians in a more negative manner. Regarding the way Jews are portrayed in the Palestinian educational system, the results showed that Israeli Jews believe it presents Israeli Jews negatively (between very negatively and negatively).

Israeli Jews: When we look at the effect of the psychological variables in the second major study, we find that the most important determinant of distrust is the negative stereotyping that Israeli Jews hold towards Palestinians. Viewing Palestinians as violent and hostile leads to high levels of distrust. Experiences of violence then serves as reinforcement of such believes rather than a main cause of distrust. The second most influencing variable on trust, is open mindedness. That is, closed minded individuals who are not ready to explore and exchange information with Palestinians also tend to distrust them. The next contributor to distrust is related to extreme negative stereotyping—i.e., delegitimization of Palestinians. Meaning that many respondents mentally deny Palestinians of their humanity, viewing them as an excluded group. The delegitimization variable appeared as the third most dominant factor in determining distrust among the Israeli Jewish population and the younger Israeli Jewish population. Among the older

Jewish population, the third strongest determinant of distrust is political orientation, meaning the more right-wing a person is, the less trust he/she has towards Palestinians. Among Israeli Jews in general, only after political orientation comes the variable of exposure to violence and conflict, indicating that the more a person was exposed to conflict violence the less trust he has towards Palestinians. Then comes the variable of perception of the Palestinian educational system, indicating that the more this system is perceived as presenting Israelis negatively, the less trust Jews have towards Palestinians. Finally, comes ethos of conflict, age, and negative presentation of the Palestinians by the Israeli teachers in the Israeli schools- All significantly predict lack of trust.

Israel Arabs: The analyses of Israeli Arabs' respondents reveal a different tale. Examining the entire sample indicates that the most important predictor of distrust is the influence of the Palestinian media, meaning that the more the Palestinian media fosters trust, the respondents feel of trust in Palestinians increases. In addition, there are the following predictors: views about Holocaust and Anti-Semitism, stereotyping of the Palestinians, political orientation, openness, negative presentation of Palestinians by Israeli teachers in Israeli schools and importance of religion.

Among the Palestinians, findings of our two joint surveys indicate that the levels of trust in the other side are very low and distrust is overriding. A solid majority feels Israeli Jews are untrustworthy. For trust, the building of the indicator went through three steps: the first step was to build an indicator based on measuring direct questions about willingness to trust the other side. The second step was based on a set of indirect questions about trust. In the third step, we combined the two indicators into one. Findings show mostly low levels of trust for all three trust indicators, but more so in October and in trust indicator #3 (the combined trust indicator). A large set of questions (15 direct and indirect questions) was used to build the October trust indicator while only five direct and indirect questions were used to build the August indicator.

In examining trust, we also asked more detailed questions about the potential antecedents of (mis)trust and how various social actors contribute to it. The answers to three sets of questions regarding the other side's perceptions and actions are strong potential antecedents of distrust: Palestinians believe that the other side does not want peace and that the other side's education system is biased against them. Naturally, all of these perceptions could contribute to low levels of trust.

Distrust is reinforced by a prevailing perception that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is characterized by zero-sum relations: "Nothing can be done that's good for both sides; whatever is good for one side is bad for the other side:" 74% of Palestinians in August 2020 agree with this dismal zero-sum characterization.

When asked why they do not trust the other side, Palestinians focused on the political goals of Israeli Jews (42%) and on their religion and culture (24%). Other factors picked by Palestinians were the Israeli leadership (16%), negative personal experiences (10%), and incitement in the Israeli educational system (5%).

We examined the extent to which Palestinians believe that different social actors help foster or diminish trust among the two peoples. In our August poll, a vast majority of 78% thought that the “current Israeli leadership,” diminishes trust. In our October joint poll, 86% said the Israeli leadership diminishes trust and only 3% said it increases trust; 9% said it neither strengthens nor diminishes trust. When looking at the “current Palestinian leadership in the West Bank,” 34% of Palestinian respondents in August thought it diminishes trust, 32% thought it neither diminishes or fosters trust, and 27% thought it fosters trust. In October, the belief that the Palestinian leadership diminishes

When asking about the role of Israeli and Palestinian press, 67% of Palestinians believed in the August joint poll and the 74% in the October joint poll that Israeli press diminishes trust, whereas 39% thought the same about the Palestinian press in August and 54% on October. Relating to the Israeli and Palestinian school curriculum, 67% of Palestinians believed in August and 73% in October that the Israeli curriculum diminishes trust, whereas 33% in August and 47% in October believed the same about the Palestinian curriculum. Finally, when asking about Israeli and Palestinian social media, 44% of Palestinians in August and 55% in October said Palestinian social media diminishes trust, whereas 67% in August and 72% in October thought the same about Israeli social media.

Following the difficult reality of this protracted conflict, we examined the conflict-related experiences of both parties and the impact of such experiences on the willingness to trust the other side. Findings show very low level of trust, reflecting the high levels of violence and hardships in the conflict and its negative psychological impact. In this section, we describe the Palestinian findings regarding the three variables covered in our two joint surveys: (1) daily life hardships, (2) exposure to violence, and (3) perception of education. It describes the method used to indicators for the three elements. These variables are believed to significantly contribute to the generation of mutual Palestinian-Israeli distrust.

The indicators’ building exercise produced the following findings: the hardships indicator was found relatively high in the August poll and relatively low in the October poll. Exposure to violence was mostly low in August and high in October, but the negative perception of education on the other side was predominantly high in both polls. Using these three indicators the findings from the August poll shows a somewhat weak correlation between trust and hardships and exposure to violence and strong correlation between trust and perception of education. A high level of hardship produced a low level of trust standing at 78% while a low level of hardship produced a low level of trust standing at 74%. In other words, the higher the level of hardships, the higher the level of distrust and the lower the level of hardships, the lower the level of distrust.

Similarly, a high level of exposure to violence produced a low level of trust standing at 81% while a low level of exposure to violence produced a low level of trust standing at 75%. In other words, the higher the level of exposure to violence, the higher the level of distrust and the lower the level of exposure, the lower the level of distrust.

Finally, a negative indicator of perception of education produced a low level of trust standing at 80% while a positive indicator of perception of education produced a low level of trust standing at 60%. In other words, the more positive the perception of education on the other side, the more

likely the level of distrust would be lower and the more negative the perception of education, the more likely the level of distrust would be higher. These findings are consistent with the research hypothesis in which these three elements contribute to greater levels of distrust in the other side.

These findings among the Palestinians are confirmed in our joint October poll. Here too, a high level of hardships increases low trust to 89% while a low level of hardships reduces low trust to 80%. Similarly, a high exposure to violence increases low trust to 87% while a low a low level of exposure to violence reduces low trust to 79%. Finally, a negative perception of the Israeli educational system increases low trust to 86% while a positive perception of that educational system reduces low trust to 73%.

Conclusions

The present study unveils the roots of distrust in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study shows that although exposure to violence related to the conflict, experience of violence and hardships, and negative perceptions of the educational system of the other side have some effect on trust, particularly among the Palestinians who live under the harsh reality of military occupation, the primary determinants, particularly among the Israelis, are the socio-psychological variables representing the repertoire that Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs are carrying. This repertoire includes beliefs, attitudes and emotions. Among Israeli Jews, these beliefs and attitudes of the conflict take the form of stereotypes, ethos of conflict, concerns about antisemitism and holocaust and political orientation. They lead also to cognitive closure, reflected in refusal to acquire information from a Palestinian. This socio-psychological repertoire influences what information receives attention and the way in which it is mentally coded and organized. Next, it functions as an interpretive framework, influencing evaluations, judgments, predictions and conclusions drawn by Israelis. This repertoire is the key determinant of trust. For example, Israeli Jews, who negatively stereotype Palestinians and even delegitimize them, while adhering to ethos of conflict as their ideology, show distrust towards Palestinians.

What should be of great concern is the well-established findings showing that this repertoire is acquired at the very early age. This is unavoidable, as children learn this repertoire from all agents of socialization, including parents, leaders, television, literature, teachers, social media and schoolbooks. The beliefs and attitudes regarding the conflict learned by children at an early age remain in their socio-psychological repertoire and may have latent influence later on. These contents serve as fertile ground for the later development of conflict attitudes. They may constitute a part of children's general worldviews which remains relatively constant across time. Eventually, these will pose a barrier to peaceful conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Living under military occupation, Palestinians experience hardships and exposure to violence on daily basis. We suggest that these are some of the reasons for such strong distrust of Israeli Jews.

On the Israeli Jewish side, some of these reasons also lies in the cultural-societal-political climate of the Israeli society, as reflected in the information provided by leaders, mass-media, schools, ceremonies, memorial days, the imparted collective memory and existing dominant political ideologies. On the Palestinian side, changing the reality on the ground and restoring hope for peace and the two-state solution is essential for restoring some level of trust. On the Israeli Jewish side, a major societal change is needed to change the state of mind that is supporting distrust. On both sides, conflict supporting narratives need to be addressed before any trust can be restored.

1. *Change the new reality on the ground:* For Palestinians, the reality on the ground worsen by the day as land is confiscated, homes demolished, movement and access restricted, and settlers' violence increases. Israelis too, particularly settlers who live in the occupied territories, face occasional violence and rock throwing from West Bankers and rockets from the Gaza Strip. Although Palestinian and Israeli authorities coordinate with each other on essential civil and security matters, no dialogue takes place on how to ease daily living conditions, stop the building of settlements, or eradicate violence. To be effective in reducing distrust and hate, coordination between the two sides need to cover all these additional areas of daily friction and difficulties and search for ways to deliver security to both sides. It goes without saying that only the ending of occupation and the building of permanent peace can bring about a real restoration of trust and begin the process of reconciliation.
2. *Stop incitements and minimize negative language and phrasing:* Various formal and informal sources in Israel, present the Palestinian school textbooks, teachers, mass media and the leaders as inciting against Israel, Zionism (Jewish Nationalism) and as being anti-Semitic. This practice can be found also on the Palestinian side. It is exaggerated and augmented serving the struggle between the two contradicting and rival narratives.
3. *Contact between People:* Contact between members of the two societies is one of the most researched methods to change beliefs, attitudes, and emotions in order to improve the relations between them.
4. *Use of mass media:* Mass media is one of the most powerful agents that provides information and shapes public opinion. Mass media should stop presenting the other side in negative way and develop peace journalism. It can supply major information about the other group; it can supply major information about the culture of the other- with films, theatrical plays, or entertainment programs; it can enlighten in a balance way, the eruption of the conflict, its major events and costs that have been paid for continuation of the conflict.
5. *Education:* Education constitutes one of the most important methods for eradicating distrust. This method involves using the school system since this system is often the only institution of which the society can make wide scope use to change the psychological repertoire of society members. Education for building trust must begin at an early age and continue through the years of schooling. Also, it is possible to a establish joint Israeli-Palestinian committee to examine existing textbooks and curricula to eliminate any derogative expressions.
6. *Joint Projects:* Joint projects of various kinds can serve as a method for building trust. They can be in different areas such as culture, health, agriculture, or science. Joint projects in different areas between Israelis and Palestinians can foster links between

members of the two groups at different levels of society, such as elites, professionals, as well as grass roots. This method provides opportunities for personal encounters in which past opponents can form personal relations.



EUROPEAN UNION



من الشعب الياباني
From the People of Japan

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