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[Three-quarters of Palestinians Support Hamas' Attack on October 7, Says New Poll. Why? - Palestinians - Haaretz.com](#)

Analysis |

Three-quarters of Palestinians Support Hamas' Attack on October 7, Says New Poll. Why?

Two new polls offer insights into the Palestinian mind-set during wartime. To understand the findings, we must consider the conceptual world of respondents who live in a society that has never been free and is invariably at war



Palestinian protesters carrying posters and chanting anti-Israel slogans during a solidarity rally with Gaza, in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Wednesday. Credit: Nasser Nasser/AP

[Dahlia Scheindlin](#)

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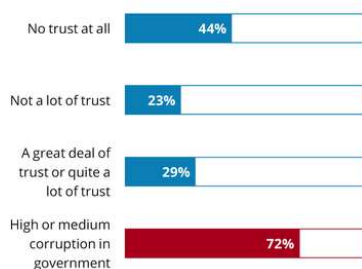
Since October 7, it has been impossible to truly understand Hamas' motives and intentions. It can be just as hard to understand Palestinian public opinion right now. After the first few weeks of chaos, two Palestinian polls became available last week – and there is no good way to spin the results.

[A survey of Gaza and West Bank Palestinians](#) by the Arab World Research and Development group (AWRAD) from the first week of November left many readers aghast: Nearly 60 percent of respondents very much supported the “military operation carried out by the Palestinian resistance led by Hamas on October 7.” Another 16 percent expressed moderate support. That’s three-quarters in total who [supported the indefensible](#).

Another three-quarters of Palestinians (76 percent) said Hamas was playing a positive role, while 98 percent said they feel some or great pride as a Palestinian. Just 13 percent of Palestinians opposed Hamas' attack (21 percent in Gaza). That sounds paltry, but just under 20 percent of Israeli adults consider themselves left-wing – the peace-supporting dissenters from their society.

Gazans didn't trust Hamas before October 7

How much trust do you have in the Hamas-led government?



Source: Arab Barometer's survey conducted among Gazans on October 6th

There are technical disclaimers: AWRAD's sample was about half the size [of robust Palestinian surveys](#), just 668 respondents, including 277 in Gaza, which lies in ruin with about one million people displaced, placing major obstacles on sampling. But with such strong trends, "flawed polling" is an easy way out. The only thing left to do is to try and understand.



Palestinians inspecting a destroyed house following Israeli airstrikes in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. A week before October 7, a man in Gaza said: "There's a lot of anger against Hamas, and the only thing that can save Hamas now is a war." Credit: Mohammed Dahman/AP

The survey offers some insight by asking what people believed to be the main reason for the "operation." The top reason cited was to "stop violations of Al-Aqsa" (35 percent); consistent with the history of the region, in which perceived offenses against Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque [have fueled the bloodiest wars](#) – from the 1929 riots to the second intifada. But 29 percent also cited "to free Palestine" and 21 percent said the attack was to break the siege on Gaza. Combined, half of respondents chose a version of freedom – 15 points higher than the Al-Aqsa response.

These questions force outsiders to ask: what is the conceptual world of the respondents? Soon after Russia invaded Ukraine and began committing horrors, the Russian-American author and journalist Masha Gessen was asked to analyze why Russian polling showed such high support for the war. [Gessen explained](#) that their book, "The Future is History," found that in a totalitarian society, "it's not that you can't find out what people really think. It's that people can't really think."

It's hard to compare Russians and Palestinians or Hamas to a classic totalitarian state. But they clearly share two critical features: First, both societies are at war, and their side kicked off the latest round with a terrible act of aggression. (Israel of course has committed terrible aggressions too, but Israeli public attitudes are for another article.)

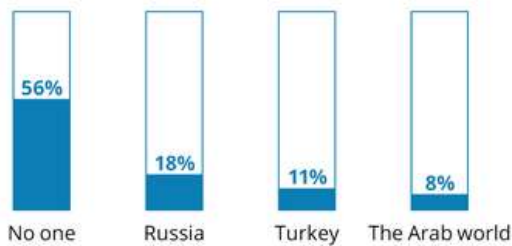
Second, Palestinians don't live under anything like democracy. In fact, between the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and the Israeli military lording over everything, they live under many layers of non-democracy. Perhaps especially in Gaza, it's worth asking what people can "really think."

Huda Abuarquob, a longtime civil society and peace activist, spoke to me by phone from Dura, outside Hebron. "If polling shows high support," she explained, "it's their first reaction to an act that put Gazans back on the map."

In fact, other studies show that Palestinians feel profoundly, existentially, alone. The second post-October 7 West Bank survey, commissioned by a new policy outfit called [the Institute for Social and Economic Progress](#), asked which international actor is Palestine's most important strategic ally: 56 percent said "none." The top ally was Russia, then Turkey (18 and 11 percent, respectively); just 8 percent chose "the Arab world." Palestinians have no homegrown heroes either. In focus groups, the institute quoted a participant saying "I feel that the Palestinian population is orphaned, there is no one to lead them."

Palestinians feel alone

Which international actor is Palestine's most important strategic ally?



Source: Institute for Social and Economic Progress post-October 7 survey among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza



Palestinians holding a picture of Russian President Vladimir Putin during a protest in support of the people of Gaza, in Hebron last month. Credit: Yosri Aljamal/Reuters

In this lonely reality, some Palestinians I know were initially spirited by images of people breaking out of Gaza, even if they later found the full extent of violence revolting. Huda recalled that in those early hours, people didn't internalize that it was about "killing human beings," she said; they thought it was the start of liberation.

When they realized what was happening, she said, "in closed circles, in family, partners, friends, no one supports the atrocities, which are against our values." Reports of rape and beheadings did not fit those values, she explained, so the subsequent mis- or disinformation that they weren't true made people happy.

Then came the alternate explanations, verging on conspiracy. "In order to feel that we are not part of [the atrocities], we tried to find ways to explain it by saying these people are not Hamas. These guys who went to homes and killed people and their families, [some Palestinians believed] they are from Egypt, from tribes in Sinai, who helped [Hamas] attack the Egyptian army in Sinai. We don't know if there's evidence or not," said Huda, explaining how Palestinians sought to distance themselves from what had happened.

In fact, there was little love for Hamas prior to October 7. In a well-publicized Arab Barometer survey of Palestinians just ahead of the attack, researchers found that anger was mounting. People blamed Hamas for economic and social woes, a stunted life, and no progress toward ending the occupation. A week before October 7, Huda heard from a Gazan man that "there's a lot of anger against Hamas, and the only thing that can save Hamas now is a war."

That bred another conspiratorial angle: that Hamas and the Netanyahu government coordinated to help each other. "Palestinians in the West Bank say that Hamas always does something [to stop a revolution against them](#), or to help the Israeli government get out of a crisis," said Huda. Some think that Qatar could be in on the plot, wondering why Israel has not assassinated or arrested Hamas leaders in Qatar if it truly wanted to.

But as the war went on, attitudes changed, said Huda. By the time of the AWRAD poll four weeks in, the wreckage of Gaza was overwhelming. Over 99 percent of the Gaza sample said there was no safe place for them or their family. Nearly two-thirds of all Palestinians believe the war is between Israel and Palestinians at large, not just Hamas. The poll also found 98 percent said "people around them" would never forget what Israel

has done to them. Huda said she still argues “how immoral [Hamas’] actions against women and children were, but this is not the time for internal divisions. We need to stand by the people in Gaza, we can’t accept any justification for it – and since then this is the focus.”

In all this darkness, a certain frenzied optimism isn’t actually surprising; it’s a “rally-round-the flag” effect, tinged with desperation. Israelis too are feeling more optimistic about the future of the state. Nearly three-quarters in the AWRAD survey say Palestine will emerge victorious from this war; similarly, less than 10 percent in the West Bank survey [thought Hamas would be defeated](#).

Media sources help shape these views, of course. The recent West Bank survey, like many before it, showed that the vast majority get their news from Al Jazeera (76 percent), and another 10 percent from “axis of resistance” countries. But the image of brainwashing might be misleading. [Obada Shtaya](#), a Palestinian Fulbright scholar and civil society strategist from Tel, a village outside Nablus, who is also a co-founder [of the institute](#) that commissioned the West Bank study, explained that there could well be “a parallel between where you get your news and your perception of what may happen. Maybe people are hoping they don’t get wiped out or lose the war, and then consume media that confirms their biases.”



West Bank Palestinian protesters rallying in support of Gaza and calling for a cease-fire on Wednesday. Credit: Nasser Nasser/AP

Or the rallying for Hamas might express something darker: fear. Huda said that Palestinians believe Hamas will get even stronger now, making them more afraid to speak against it. Fear can immobilize people: in the third week of October, the West Bank survey found that people’s top choice out of six terms to describe their emotional state of mind was “helplessness.”

Just what do these polls say about the Palestinian wartime mind-set? In an email, Gessen elaborated again on Russian public opinion:

“Garden-variety tyranny demands performance (you can think one thing and say another),” they wrote, drawing on Hannah Arendt, while totalitarianism makes people into an empty vessel by making fact and truth “unpredictable.” Again, perhaps these terms can’t be easily imposed on Palestinians, but it’s also hard to argue with Gessen’s next point: “Now we add war to this. More anxiety and a state of social, legal, and psychological mobilization. There are now so many layers of meaninglessness to polling. 1) people are afraid to say the wrong thing because [of] the police state; 2) people are afraid to say the wrong thing because of the psychic cost of breaking with a mobilized, anxiety-saturated society; 3) even if they weren’t afraid, they don’t have the information. ... So whatever they say is what they think they should say, the right thing to say, but also the only thing available to them to say.”

Personally, I don’t think this makes polls meaningless. As always, they are one more tool reflecting society – in this case, a society that has never been free, and is always at war.