

With Israeli Pullout, Gazans' Support for Groups Using Terrorism Drops

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Sense of Security Improves

By Angela Stephens

A poll of Palestinians conducted in October 2005--the month after Israel completed its pullout from the Gaza Strip--shows a significant drop in support in Gaza for groups that commit terrorist acts, such as Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade and Al-Qassam Brigade, the military wing of Hamas. Gaza residents also indicated a much higher feeling of personal security after the Israeli withdrawal.

Among Palestinians in the West Bank, where Israeli forces remain, support for groups using terrorism remains high and feelings of security have eroded. Gazans expressed greater opposition to shows of militancy and the presence of arms than West Bank residents.

When asked about disarming militant groups, Gazans are now roughly divided with 45% being in favor and 50% opposed, according to the October 2005 poll. This is a sharp change from December 2004 when two-thirds (66%) were opposed to disarming such groups and only 31% favored it. In the West Bank, where there is still a significant Israeli presence, opposition to disarming militant groups remained steady at 66% from December 2004 to October 2005, and support for disarming the brigades was statistically unchanged from 27% in December 2004 to 29% in October 2005. Both polls were conducted by Birzeit University.

There is strong majority support in both Gaza and the West Bank for a truce preventing attacks on Israeli targets, but in Gaza, support is 14 points higher than in the West Bank. In October 2005, 83% of those polled in Gaza said they support "a truce agreement that prevents attacks against Israeli targets," compared to 69% in the West Bank who support such an agreement. Sixteen percent in Gaza and 27% in the West Bank opposed such a truce.

Palestinians on Disarming Militant Groups

Do you support or oppose that the PNA divest arms carried by (Al-Aqsa, Al-Qassam, .. etc)?

Gaza:

Support



Oppose



West Bank:

Support



Oppose



Birzeit University,
12/2004, 10/2005

Another poll in November 2005 by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion showed majority support in both Gaza and the West Bank for renewing the existing informal truce referred to as the "calm period" with Israel, with significantly higher support in Gaza compared to the West Bank. Three-fourths of those polled in Gaza (75%) favored renewing the "calm period," while 51% in the West Bank favored doing so. A poll in December 2005 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that support for the calm period had reached 86% in Gaza and 77% in the West Bank.

Palestinians in Gaza Feeling More Secure, In West Bank Less Secure

Another marked change since the withdrawal is that the feeling of personal security among Gaza residents has risen while in the West Bank it has declined. Respondents were asked, "After the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, do you feel secure about yourself, your family and property?"

A plurality of Gaza residents, 46%, said in October 2005 that they felt secure (34% said they did not feel secure, and 20% said they felt somewhat secure). In December 2004, only 30% of those polled in Gaza said they felt secure (52% said they did not feel secure, and 18% felt somewhat secure).

Post-Withdrawal Personal Security

After the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, do you feel secure about your self, your family and property?

Gaza:

Secure



Not secure



West Bank:

Secure



Not secure



Birzeit University,
12/2004, 10/2005

By comparison, the feeling of security among those in the West Bank dropped after Israel withdrew from Gaza. In December 2004, 21% of

those polled in the West Bank said they felt secure, 56% said they did not feel secure and 23% said they felt somewhat secure. In October 2005, only 16% of those polled in the West Bank said they felt secure, while 69% said they do not feel secure and 14% said they feel somewhat secure.

Gaza residents also have more confidence than West Bank residents in Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' ability to achieve "his promise to end internal insecurity and arms chaos"--a majority in Gaza (58%) and a plurality in the West Bank (46%) said he can achieve his promise.

Gazans More Opposed to Militant Displays and Arms Than West Bank Residents

While Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank show opposition to displays of militancy, it is more widespread in Gaza. Asked in the October 2005 Birzeit poll, "Do you support or oppose militant parades, carried out by some political factions in residential areas?" 82% of Gaza respondents and 65% of West Bank respondents said they oppose such demonstrations.

Asked about "the storage of arms in residential areas," 95% of Gaza respondents opposed them, as did 91% of West Bank respondents.

Gaza residents polled in October 2005 listed "ending the problem of illegal weapons and chaos" as the most important issue among eight choices, which included improving economic conditions and releasing Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli jails. For West Bank residents, the illegal weapons problem was the second most important issue after releasing Palestinian political prisoners.

The divergence of opinion between West Bank and Gaza residents after the Israeli withdrawal compared to before the pullout raises the possibility that the changes in opinion seen in Gaza--less toleration for armed factions and an increased feeling of personal security--could occur in the West Bank with similar moves to reduce the Israeli military presence.

Polls

[Birzeit University, October 2005 poll](#)

[Birzeit University, December 2004 poll](#)