

Roadmap to viable statehood: Holding the PA to account

Bren Carlill¹, September 2025

Executive summary

In July and August this year, France, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia announced that they will be recognising Palestine this month, in exchange for numerous commitments made by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas.

Australia's official announcement of recognition summarised these commitments as promises to "reform governance, terminate prisoner payments, institute schooling reform, demilitarise and hold general elections."

However, Western recognition of the 'State of Palestine' rewards Palestinian promises, not Palestinian actions. AIJAC [is on record](#) that the recognition of a non-existent Palestinian state is premature and counterproductive.

While the implementation of Abbas' commitments is required to establish a viable Palestinian state, the commitments he has made are unpopular with Palestinians and, because the PA lacks popular legitimacy, implementing them is almost certainly not politically feasible. Enforcing them risks PA collapse or violent backlash; not enforcing them entrenches corruption, armed militias and ongoing conflict – the Catch-22 at the heart of current policy.

This report uses 11 years of survey data sourced by the [Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research](#). It exposes the long-term, consistent positions of Palestinians on the issues at the centre of the commitments that Abbas has made, and upon which Western recognition of Palestine is predicated.

It finds that only a very careful Western approach, based on unstinting conditionality, will allow for the creation of a viable Palestinian state, regardless of the rhetorical recognition that ostensibly gives credence to the fiction that such a state already exists.

Western recognition has removed one of the few credible carrots that could be used as leverage to hold the PA to account. The remaining sticks (e.g. aid conditionality and

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political pressure) are politically hard to wield and historically inconsistently applied. This will make holding the PA to account very difficult.

This report recommends that Australia, in concert with likeminded countries, establish a roadmap for the creation of a Palestinian state in which movement from one phase to the next will be clearly and directly dependent on the PA meeting its commitments. It must not be a time-bound roadmap, but an achievement-based roadmap. The first phase of the roadmap will focus on rebuilding the PA's popular legitimacy. This will provide it with the political currency it needs to agree to and implement the necessary compromises that peace requires. Unambiguous pro-peace messaging will need to slowly reverse 30 years of anti-peace messaging and help change Palestinian societal attitudes towards peaceful coexistence and Israel's permanency. Only when Palestinians have internalised that Israel is permanent will sustainable peace be possible.

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Introduction

On August 11, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong announced that Australia will recognise the so-called State of Palestine at the UN General Assembly in September.

This followed France, Canada and the United Kingdom making similar announcements. Other countries, including Belgium, have since followed suit.

The international leaders who have announced recognition have predicated that recognition on a number of commitments that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas made in a letter to French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman in June, and reiterated to numerous world leaders since, including Mr Albanese.

These commitments include promises to:

- hold elections within 12 months of the war ending
- end the “pay-for-slay” payments to convicted terrorists or their families
- disarm Hamas and other armed groups and prevent Hamas from playing any role in a new Palestinian state
- reform school curriculum to remove incitement to violence and promote coexistence
- accept a demilitarised Palestinian state

Additionally, the international community has included a condition that the PA implement governance reforms.

The commitments made by Abbas, and the conditions that the various Western leaders have declared, would – *if implemented* – pave the way for the creation of a viable Palestinian state and sustainable Israeli–Palestinian peace.

However, the West has a poor record of holding the PA to its commitments, whether they be promises of cracking down on terrorism, ending corruption or removing hate education from school textbooks. Further, now that the West is recognising the so-called State of Palestine, it will have much less leverage over the PA. (That is, the West could have provided the PA with achievable objectives, and offered recognition as a reward for when those demands were met. This is no longer an option.)

Making things more complicated is that all of the commitments made by Abbas are highly unpopular amongst Palestinians.

This report will address the challenges that Australia and the international community face in ensuring the PA implements these conditions. It will do this by focusing both on previous attempts at doing so and on Palestinian public opinion about each of them.

Structural issues

The PA does not enjoy popular legitimacy among Palestinians, and the conditions and predications the international community has placed upon its recognition of Palestine will, if implemented, further undermine that legitimacy. This is because the promises made by Abbas are deeply unpopular among Palestinians.

This presents the international community with a Catch-22 situation. The conditions and predications of recognition are necessary for an economically viable and stable Palestinian state to be established – and for a sustainable Israeli–Palestinian peace to be forged (i.e. the ‘two-state solution’). However, implementing most of these conditions will be essentially impossible – certainly in the near term – for a Palestinian government despised by its people.

The rush to recognition of statehood will thus likely have one of two outcomes in the near future:

1. The international community will fail to ensure that the PA carries out the reforms. This will lead to the continuation of the current kleptocratic, nepotistic and autocratic regime, which most of the world rhetorically considers a state but which is, in reality, not a state at all. Moreover, the continued presence of armed militias that seek to attack Israel ensure the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will not be resolved (the most likely outcome); or
2. The international community will enforce the rapid implementation of the reforms, leading to a complete collapse of the legitimacy of the PA, and/or a Palestinian civil war, as armed groups push back against efforts to disarm them. The Palestinian population will largely support the latter groups, because they reject both the idea of a Palestinian state next to Israel, and the conditions necessary to achieve this outcome.

Israeli–Palestinian peace is an important objective of the international community. Given the lack of movement toward peace for many years, and the devastating Hamas–Israel war since October 2023, it is understandable that the international community wants to urgently compel movement. However, as the survey data below shows, the Palestinian people do not want a state next to and at peace with Israel, and nor do they want the PA to implement the reforms that Abbas has promised.

If the Western countries that have announced they will be recognising Palestine are, indeed, serious about creating peace, this report will be highly useful. This is because, by highlighting the challenges Abbas faces in implementing his promises, the report allows the international community to avoid unintentionally damaging prospects for peace by insisting on rapid moves that further undermine both the popular legitimacy of the Palestinian government and prospects for eventual peace. This report offers a better pathway rooted in empirical realities – first, build up PA legitimacy, then ensure Abbas or his successor implements his promises, and only then ensure a state is established.

If the international community genuinely wants to create a viable Israeli–Palestinian two-state outcome, it needs to encourage and, if necessary, coerce the PA to

implement the reforms that will increase its popular legitimacy. This will enable it to carry out other, unpopular reforms that are necessary for a sustainable peace to be forged. Forcing the PA to implement all reforms simultaneously, or within a short period of time, would lead to failure, one way or the other. This would push back even further the chance of peace. Likewise, allowing Abbas and the PA to renege on Abbas' commitments would also undermine the possibility of peace, by having the Palestinians receive a significant diplomatic reward (i.e. recognition) by making empty and unfulfilled promises, instead of taking concrete action.

‘Conditions’ for recognition

Australia did not place any preconditions on the recognition of the ‘State of Palestine’. It did, however, declare that its decision to recognise was “predicated” on recent promises made by PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Government ministers avoided answering subsequent media questioning as to whether recognition would be withdrawn if Abbas’ commitments were not fulfilled.

The prime and foreign ministerial [statement](#) announcing recognition read,

More than 77 years later, the world can no longer wait for the implementation of that Resolution to be negotiated between the parties.

Australia’s decision helps build the historic global momentum to break the cycle of violence in the Middle East...

The world is seizing the opportunity of major new commitments from the Palestinian Authority, including to reform governance, terminate prisoner payments, institute schooling reform, demilitarise and hold general elections. The Palestinian Authority has also restated its recognition of Israel's right to exist.

Australia’s position is predicated on the commitments we have received from the Palestinian Authority. We will continue to work with the international community to hold the Palestinian Authority to its commitments and to encourage normalised relations between Israel and its neighbours. The President of the Palestinian Authority has reaffirmed these commitments directly to the Australian Government.

The commitments by the Palestinian Authority are strengthened by the Arab League’s unprecedented demand for the terrorist organisation Hamas to end its rule in Gaza and hand over its weapons...

There is much more work to do in building the Palestinian state. We will work with partners on a credible peace plan that establishes governance and security arrangements for Palestine and ensures the security of Israel.

In his comments to the media on August 11, the Prime Minister also [said](#),

Our Government has made it clear that there can be no role for the terrorists of Hamas in any future Palestinian state. This is one of the commitments Australia has sought – and received – from President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority.

The Foreign Minister [added](#),

Australia will hold the Palestinian Authority to its commitments. The practical implementation of our recognition will be tied to progress on these commitments.

The commitments to which the Prime and Foreign Ministers refer appear to be based on a letter that Mahmoud Abbas sent to French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman dated June 9. This letter has not been published

in full, but the relevant parts have been summarised by many, based on what the French Foreign Ministry has released.

Some quotes from the letter are available in [this](#) France 24 article:

Hamas will no longer rule Gaza and must hand over its weapons and military capabilities to the Palestinian Security Forces... Hamas has to immediately release all hostages and captives...

[We are] ready to invite Arab and international forces to be deployed as part of a stabilisation/protection mission with a (UN) Security Council mandate...

We are ready to conclude within a clear and binding timeline, and with international support, supervision and guarantees, a peace agreement that ends the Israeli occupation and resolves all outstanding and final status issues...

The Palestinian State should be the sole provider of security on its territory, but has no intention to be a militarised State.

These commitments, and the commitments of the international community, were expressed in the '[New York Declaration](#)', issued by the 'UN High-Level International Conference on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution', which was convened by France and Saudi Arabia and held in New York on July 29, 2025:

We welcomed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' commitments on behalf of Palestine expressed in his letter dated June 9th, 2025, including to the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and the continued rejection of violence and terrorism. We also welcomed President Abbas' statement that the Palestinian State should be the sole provider of security on its territory, but has no intention to be a militarized State and is ready to work on security arrangements beneficial to all parties, in full respect of its sovereignty and as long as it benefits from international protection.

We reaffirmed the need for the Palestinian Authority to continue implementing its credible reform agenda—with international support, particularly from the EU and the League of Arab States, focusing on good governance, transparency, fiscal sustainability, fight against incitement and hate speeches, service provision, business climate and development.

We also welcomed President Abbas' commitment to holding democratic and transparent general and presidential elections throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, within a year, under international auspices, enabling democratic competition between Palestinian actors committed to respect the PLO political platform, its international commitments and the relevant UN resolutions, and the principle of "One State, One Government, One Law and One Gun", and allowing for a new generation of elected representatives to take responsibility.

A [joint statement](#) made by 15 foreign ministers, including Australia's, on 29 July, described as the 'New York Call' (it was issued after a phone call, which was after the New York Declaration), included,

We... welcome the commitments made by the President of the Palestinian Authority on June 10th where he (i) condemns the October 7th terrorist attacks (ii) calls for the liberation of hostages and disarmament of Hamas (iii) commits to terminate the prisoner payment system (iv) commits to schooling reform, (v) commits to call for elections within a year to trigger generational renewal and (vi) accepts the principle of a demilitarized Palestinian State.

In his [opening speech remarks](#) at the plenary session of the High-Level International Conference on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot similarly said,

In the letter to the President of the French Republic and the Saudi Crown Prince, the President of the Palestinian Authority condemned for the first time the 7 October terrorist attacks, called for the immediate release of the hostages of Hamas, and called for the latter's disarmament and its exclusion from Gaza's governance. He confirmed the end of allowances for the families of prisoners convicted of terrorism offences, announced a reform of school textbooks to remove all hate speech, and committed to holding presidential and general elections in 2026. The conditions set down for the acceptance of a Palestinian State by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in his 2009 Bar-Ilan speech, are met.

This last sentence might not be accurate. In a [speech](#) at Bar Ilan University in June 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu outlined his vision for future Israeli-Palestinian relations, and a Palestinian state. His first condition was about Palestinian recognition of Israel as a *Jewish state*, as opposed to merely recognising that Israel exists. This came with a corollary that Palestinians must drop their demand for the so-called 'right of return'. Netanyahu said,

a fundamental prerequisite for ending the conflict is a public, binding and unequivocal Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. To vest this declaration with practical meaning, there must also be a clear understanding that the Palestinian refugee problem will be resolved outside Israel's borders. For it is clear that any demand for resettling Palestinian refugees within Israel undermines Israel's continued existence as the state of the Jewish people.

It is unclear whether the Palestinian letter to the French and Saudi leaders made clear that the Palestinians recognised Israel as a Jewish state. It is also unclear whether it explicitly mentioned the refugee issue at all.

The second condition Netanyahu listed in his speech was demilitarisation, which does appear to have been addressed by Abbas' letter to Macron and bin Salman. That said, Netanyahu explained what he meant by demilitarisation:

Namely, without an army, without control of its airspace, and with effective security measures to prevent weapons smuggling into the territory – real monitoring, and not what occurs in Gaza today. And, obviously, the Palestinians will not be able to forge military pacts.

It is unclear whether Abbas' letter spelled out what he meant by a demilitarised Palestinian state and, if so, whether it matched Netanyahu's 2009 Bar Ilan conditions, as Barrot declared.

Working with the Palestinian Authority

The Australian and foreign governments have made clear that their current diplomatic activity includes working with the PA to establish a Palestinian state. On the face of it, this makes sense, since the PA was established in 1994 as an interim government with limited autonomy until a permanent status agreement was signed.

The PA has a long history of breaking promises of [reform in governance](#), [removing hate material from schoolbooks](#), [ceasing its 'pay-for-slay' scheme](#) of financial rewards for terrorists and their families and [cracking down on armed groups](#). And the West has a long history of ignoring these broken promises or, at least, not pushing back strongly against them for fear of damaging peace negotiations or the progress toward a two-state outcome.

Even if we put this to one side by taking the Australian, British, French, Canadian and other governments at their word that they are serious about enforcing the promises this time, it is useful to determine whether the PA is popular, or even respected, by the Palestinian people. This is because implementing unpopular reforms or compromises, whether in the context of internal governance or the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, requires the leadership to have political capital. Only a popular and respected government will be able to have its population peacefully accept these unpopular reforms and compromises.

The popularity of the PA was raised with the Prime Minister in the [following exchange](#):

Journalist: Polling shows that the PA is unpopular amongst Palestinians themselves. They're rife with corruption and most experts argue they've rarely resembled a functioning authority. Do you trust that they'll listen to these conditions?

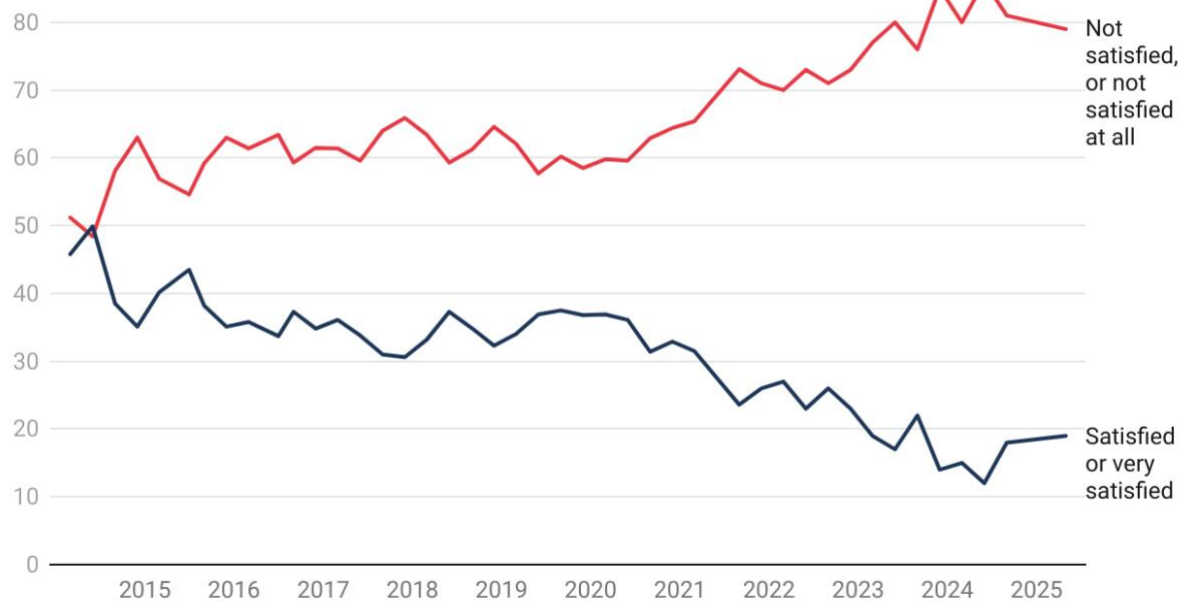
Prime Minister: Well, I'm not sure how you poll in Gaza at the moment. It would be an interesting exercise. But what people in Gaza want clearly is for peace to come out.

However, significant polling data on Gazans, and indeed all Palestinians, is available. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) has been conducting opinion polls in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for many years, including in Gaza since the Hamas–Israel war started on October 7, 2023. The PCPSR's detailed methodology for how it has collected survey data in the Gaza Strip since the war began is included in its post-October 2023 reports (for instance, [here](#)).

The PA is not popular in either the West Bank or Gaza. The PCPSR has asked questions in many surveys about the performance of Abbas, as well as about the PA overall.

Here are the results of surveys since the beginning of 2014 asking Palestinians whether or not they are satisfied with the performance of Mahmoud Abbas:

Are you satisfied or not satisfied with the performance of Mahmoud Abbas since his election as president of the PA?

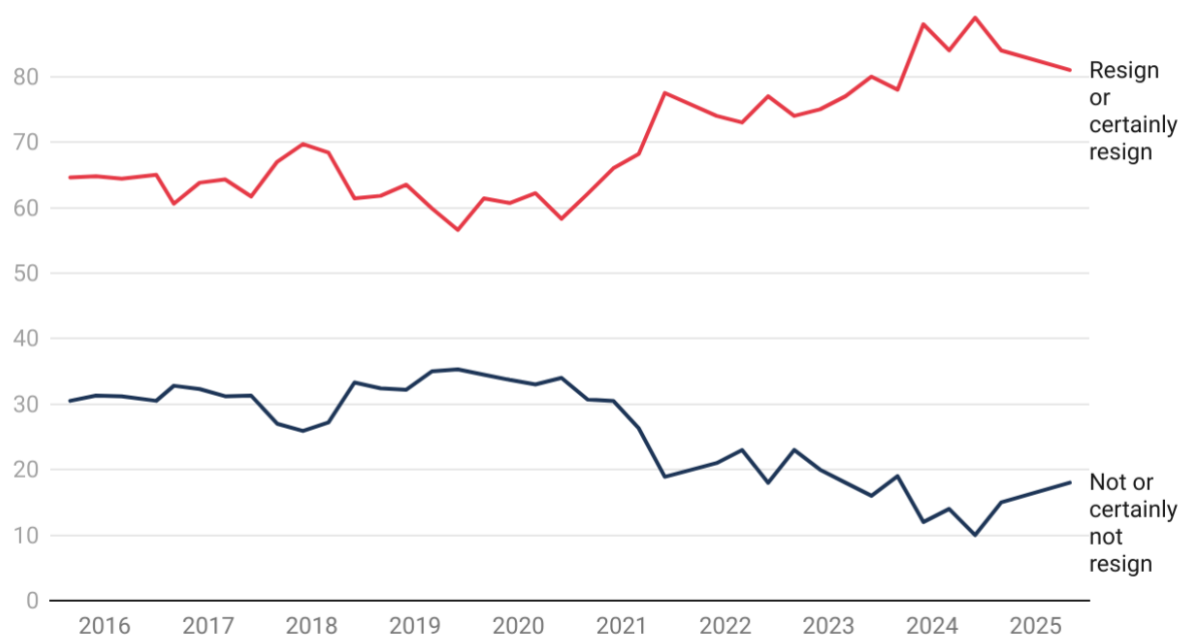


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Similarly, for many years, Palestinians have been asked if they would like Abbas to resign:

If it were up to you, would you want Abbas to resign or not resign?

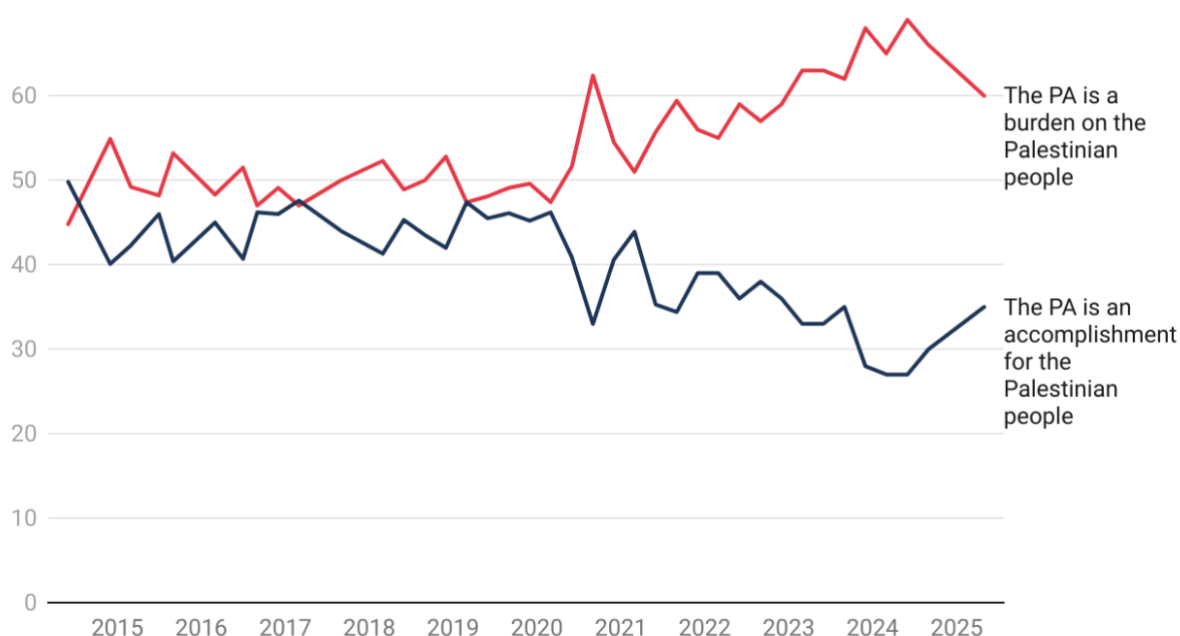


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However, it is not just Abbas that is unpopular, but the entire PA. Palestinians were asked whether the PA is an accomplishment or has become a burden for the Palestinian people. A majority think it has become a burden.

Some people say that the Palestinian Authority has become a burden on the Palestinian people while others say that it is an accomplishment for the Palestinian people. What do you think?



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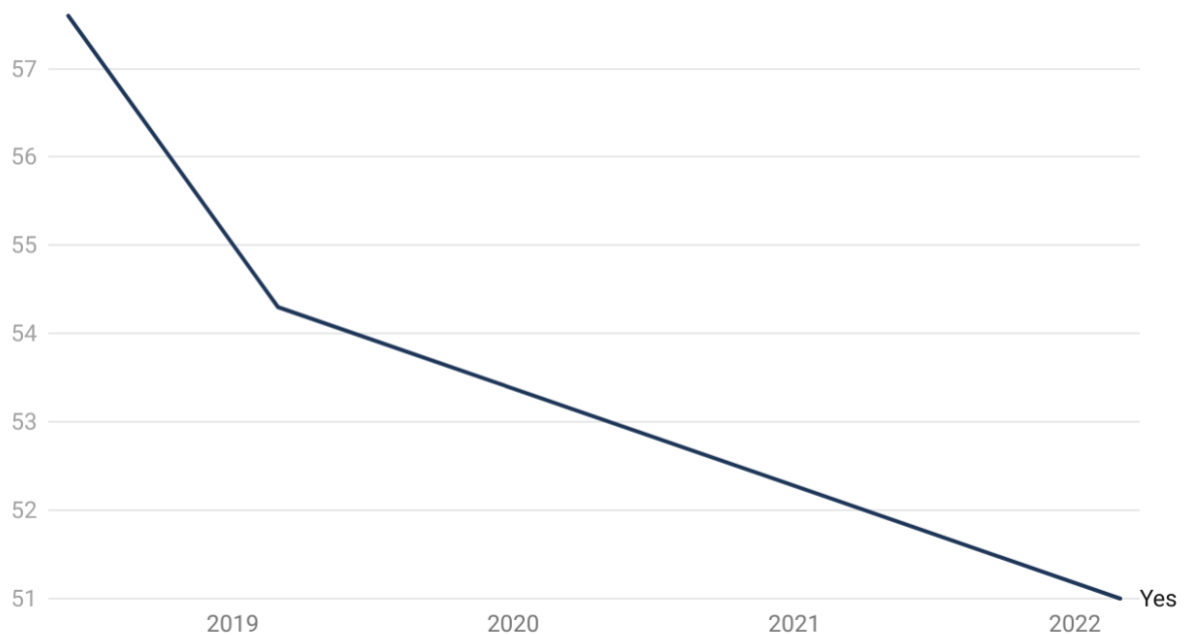
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The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is referred to by itself and the UN as the ‘sole legitimate representative’ of the Palestinian people. Whereas the PA is the interim, autonomous government in the West Bank (and, theoretically, in Gaza) pending a final status agreement with Israel, the PLO is the body that claims to represent Palestinians internationally.

On three occasions over a four-year period, highly similar questions² were asked about the popular legitimacy of the PLO, by asking if the respondent viewed it as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people:

² These were: “And what about the PLO in its current institutions and leadership? Do you see that it remains the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people?”; “How do you view the PLO, with its current institutions and leadership? Do you think it is still the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people?”; and “For you personally, is the current PLO your sole legitimate representative?”

Do you view the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people?



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This shows a declining popularity of the PLO over time.

What the above shows is that Mahmoud Abbas, who made the commitments upon which the international community is predicated its recognition of 'Palestine', has very little legitimacy among Palestinians. Nor does the PA, which is the organisation with which the international community will work to implement those commitments.

Without popular legitimacy, the PA does not have the political capital to implement reforms that are unpopular. Moreover, as we shall see below, all the promises made by Abbas are unpopular amongst Palestinians.

Palestinian views on peace with Israel and the two-state outcome

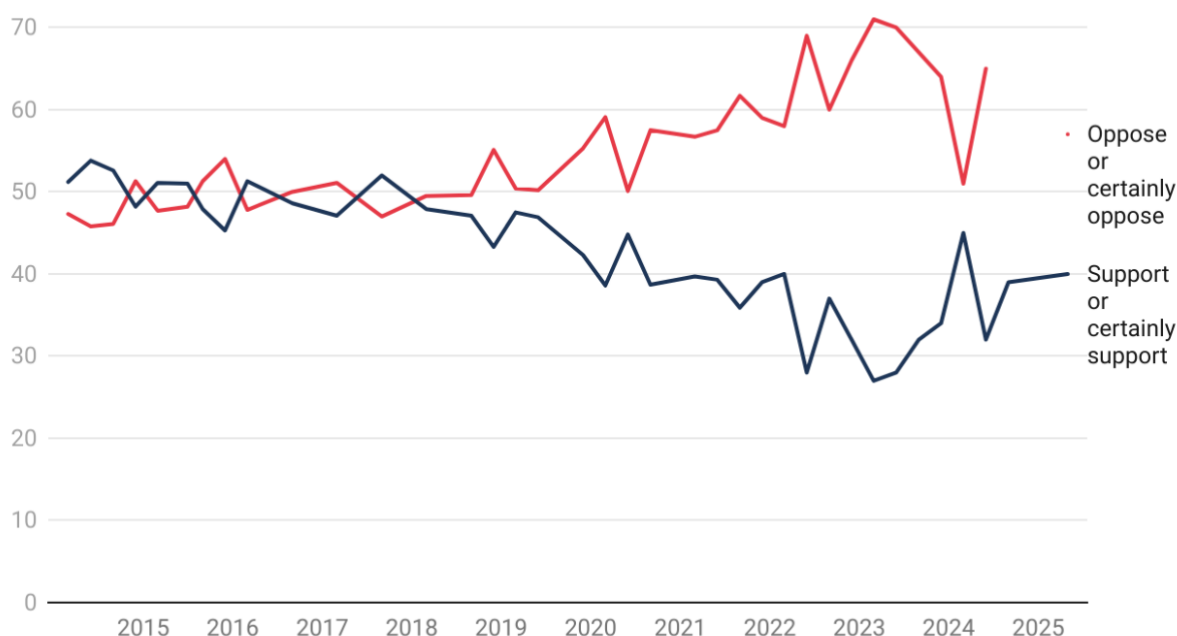
“Unwavering commitment” to a two-state outcome is expressed by the Western countries that are involving themselves in the Israeli–Palestinian dispute at this time. A two-state outcome is explicitly the goal of the process.

However, this outcome appears more popular among Western leaders than among Palestinians. Over many years, Palestinians have been asked their views on the peace process, on theoretical outcomes (i.e. choosing between a one-state, two-state or other outcomes), on specific proposals (whether proposed by Israel or other parties, or merely theoretical proposals), and the kind of relations they would expect with Israel.

There are too many of these questions to replicate here. However, the following provides an indication of what Palestinians feel about a two-state outcome and relations with Israel.

In almost every survey between the beginning of 2014 and the most recent survey of May 2025, Palestinians were asked if they support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. For the first four years, opinion was relatively evenly split. However, from the beginning of 2018, an increasing majority was against the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Do you support or oppose the solution based on the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel known as the two states solution?

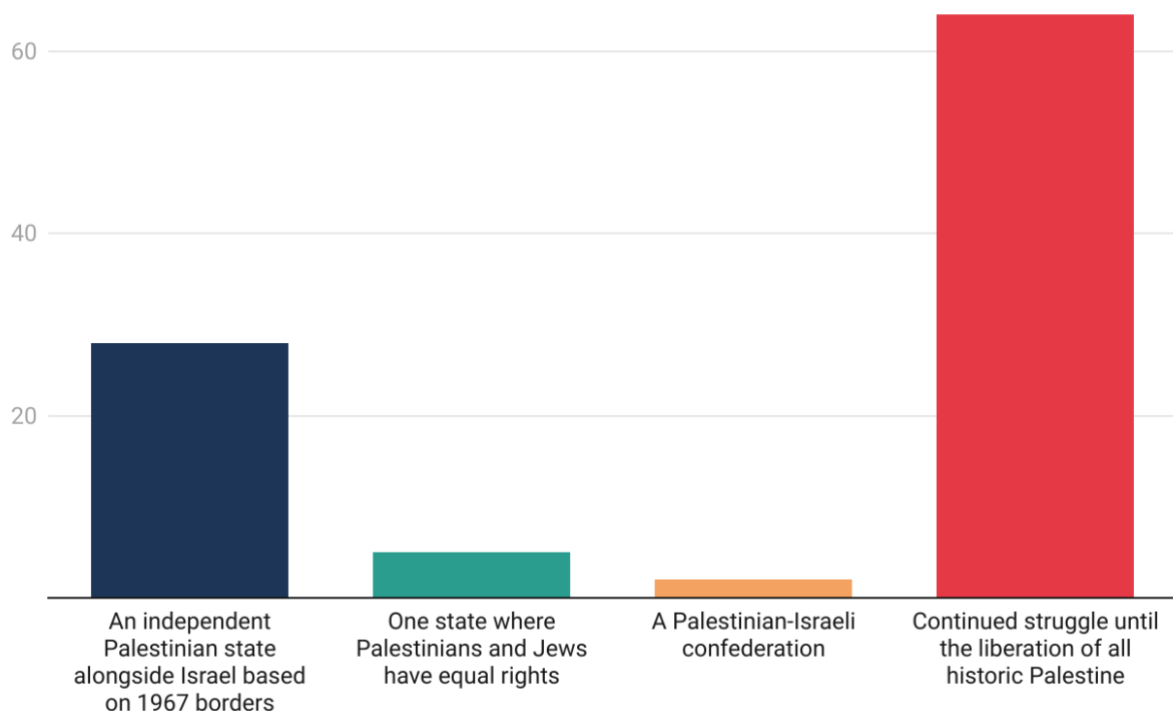


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On many occasions, Palestinians have been asked in surveys to choose their preference from a number of outcomes, usually including a two-state outcome and a one-state outcome, and sometimes including a confederation or other configurations. On only one occasion since January 2014 (in [December 2023](#)) have Palestinians been explicitly asked about an outcome that means the destruction of Israel. The result was a resounding affirmation.

Which solution should Palestinians seek to achieve?



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In June 2023, among a series of questions that marked the 75th anniversary of Israel's establishment as a modern state, and also 75 years since what Palestinians describe as the 'Nakba' ('catastrophe', which originally referred to the establishment of Israel, but has come to mean the creation of the Palestinian refugee population), Palestinians were asked a similar question to the above in a more subtle way:

"When considering the situation of Israel and the Palestinian people 75 years after the Nakba, do you think that the Palestinian people are capable in the near future of recovering historic Palestine and returning refugees to their villages and cities from which they were expelled?"

"Recovering historic Palestine" means replacing Israel with a Palestinian state. A total of 51% of Palestinians said yes. While this question specifically speaks to capability, rather than intent, it does indicate that Palestinians have not yet internalised the

permanency of Israel. Sustainable peace is unlikely until such an internalisation has taken place at a societal level.

There have also been one-off questions about peace. There is typically (though not always) a plurality – if not an outright majority – that rejects proposed peace agreements, negotiations or even the two sides meeting. Examples include:

March 2014

- If the two sides succeed in reaching a peace agreement and President Abbas asked the Palestinian public to vote in favour of this agreement in a referendum, do you think the majority of the public will vote in favour or against the peace agreement?
 - 56% in favour, 34% against³

June 2014

- There is a proposal to have the UN Security Council determine the borders of the state of Palestine and to impose these borders on the two sides [the Israelis and the Palestinians]. Are you in favour or not in favour of this idea?
 - 42% support, 55% reject

December 2014

- Now that Palestinians and Israelis have returned to final status negotiations, the following items might be presented to negotiators as the elements of a permanent compromise settlement. Tell us what you think of each item... When the permanent status agreement is fully implemented, it will mean the end of the conflict and no further claims will be made by either side. The parties will recognise Palestine and Israel as the homelands of their respective peoples.
 - 61% agree, 37% reject

September 2015

- There is a French proposal that entails a UN Security Council resolution affirming the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with mutual territorial swaps, making Jerusalem a joint capital for Palestine and Israel, setting a deadline for the end of Israeli occupation, and holding an international peace conference. What is your view of this proposal? Do you accept or reject it?
 - 37% accept, 60% reject

September 2016

- President Abbas accepted a Russian invitation to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Moscow. Are you with or against the acceptance of this invitation?
 - 36% with acceptance, 55% against acceptance

December 2016

³ Almost all questions asked by the PCPSR include a 'don't know' option, which explains why the responses to binary questions don't appear to add up to 100%.

- The PA leadership sent Palestinian firefighters and firefighting vehicles to help extinguish the fires that erupted in Israel two weeks ago. In your view, was the PA leadership decision to do that right or wrong?
 - 47% right decision, 50% wrong decision

December 2016

- Are you pleased or displeased with the participation of President Abbas in the funeral of Shimon Peres?
 - 14% pleased, 83% displeased

December 2016

- Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu invited President Abbas to speak in front of the Israeli parliament. In your view, should Abbas accept or reject the invitation?
 - 21% accept, 73% reject

December 2018

- What in your view should the deterring penalty be for someone who [sells properties to Israeli Jews in Jerusalem and other areas]?
 - Death sentence 64%, Prison sentence 22%, Financial penalty 2%, send into exile 5%, other 2%

December 2018 and March 2019

- What if the American plan contained all these things? What if it calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, with borders based on the 1967 lines, a just solution to the refugee problem, and an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967? Should the Palestinian leadership in this case accept or reject the American plan when submitted as a basis for negotiations?
 - An average of 44% accept, an average of 51% reject. (That said, a majority of Gazans accepted the idea, but a majority of West Bank Palestinians rejected it.)

What if the American plan contained all these things? What if it calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, with borders based on the 1967 lines, a just solution to the refugee problem, and an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967? Should the Palestinian leadership in this case accept or reject the American plan when submitted as a basis for negotiations?



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March 2023

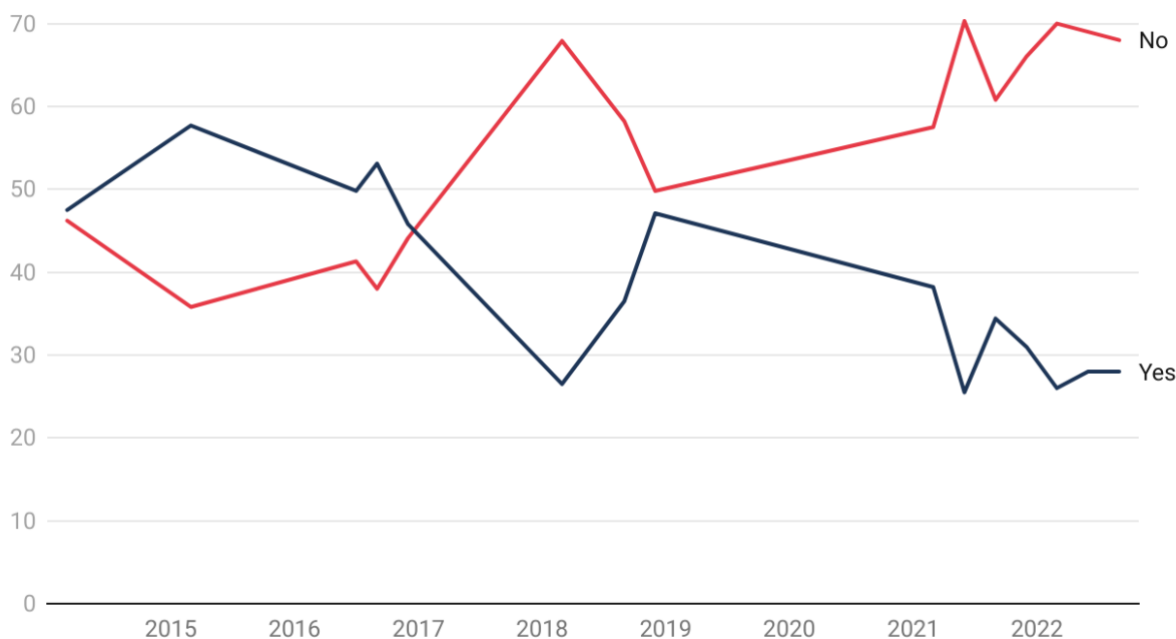
- Around the end of last month, an official Palestinian delegation met with an official Israeli delegation in Aqaba, in the presence of Jordanian, Egyptian, and American delegations, to manage rising tensions in the West Bank and prevent escalation. Were you for or against the holding of this meeting?
 - 21% for, 73% against

Negotiations with Israel

In 2014, the Palestinians pulled out of final status negotiations with Israel and have refused to re-enter them ever since. Over many years, Palestinians were asked on multiple occasions whether the two sides should enter into peace negotiations.⁴ Here are the results:

⁴ Questions: “About eight months ago Abbas agreed to enter into direct negotiations with Israel for nine months. Did you support or oppose the decision by President Abbas to return to negotiations with Israel?”; “The French Initiative calls for the formation of an international support group for Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the holding of an international peace conference to find a solution based on the two-state formula within the context of the Arab Peace Initiative and in accordance with a specified timetable. Do you support or oppose this French Initiative?”; “Given the outcome of the Israeli elections [Netanyahu won], should the PA return or not return to negotiations with Israel?”; “If the US asked the Palestinian leadership today to return to negotiations with Israel, should the leadership accept or reject such a request?”; “In principle, are you for or against holding Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in order to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?”; “Under current conditions, do you support the return of the

Should the two sides resume negotiations?



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Recognition of Israel as a Jewish state

Given Palestinian views on a two-state outcome, relations with Israel and negotiations with Israel, there is little surprise that few Palestinians support the notion of recognising Israel as a Jewish state.

In [March 2014](#), Palestinians were asked, “The Framework document that the American side might present to the parties might include an acknowledgement of the 1967 lines as the basis for negotiations and East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. But it might also ask the Palestinian side to recognize Israel as the state for the Jewish people in return for an Israeli acknowledgement of Palestine as the state for the Palestinian people. Do you think the Palestinian side should accept or reject such a Framework document?” Only 32% accepted the idea.

Between March 2014 and September 2016, Palestinians were asked, “There is a proposal that after the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the settlement of all issues in dispute, including the refugees and Jerusalem issues, there will be a mutual recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people. Do you agree or disagree to this proposal?” An average of 58% of Palestinians disagreed with the proposal.

Palestinian side to negotiations with Israel without prior conditions from either side?”; and “Do you support a return to Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations under international and Arab auspices?”.

International leaders have emphasised that one of the commitments Abbas has made is, in the words of Albanese, “The Palestinian Authority has also restated its recognition of Israel’s right to exist.”

The PLO recognition of Israel’s right to exist was secured in writing in 1993, so this is not a new commitment. What Israel has been insisting on for some time, however, is that the PA recognise Israel *as a Jewish state*. Doing so would be an important indication that the Palestinian leadership has internalised Israel’s permanence and that it is dropping calls for policies, such as the so-called ‘right of return’, which would end Israel’s Jewish majority. This was the first of two conditions made by Netanyahu in his Bar Ilan speech.

There is no indication of whether Abbas’ letter to the French President and the Saudi Crown Prince contains recognition of Israel’s Jewishness, or whether his comments in his phone call with the Australian Prime Minister did either.

Should the international community be determined to establish a viable Israeli–Palestinian peace via a two-state outcome, insisting on this concession is vital.

In the short-term, this would be a very unpopular choice among Palestinians. This shows that, if the international community is serious about forging peace, it will need to actively work with all its partners to help Palestinians internalise Israel’s permanency, and the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state, just as Israel will accept Palestine’s self-description as an Arab or, more specifically, a Palestinian state.

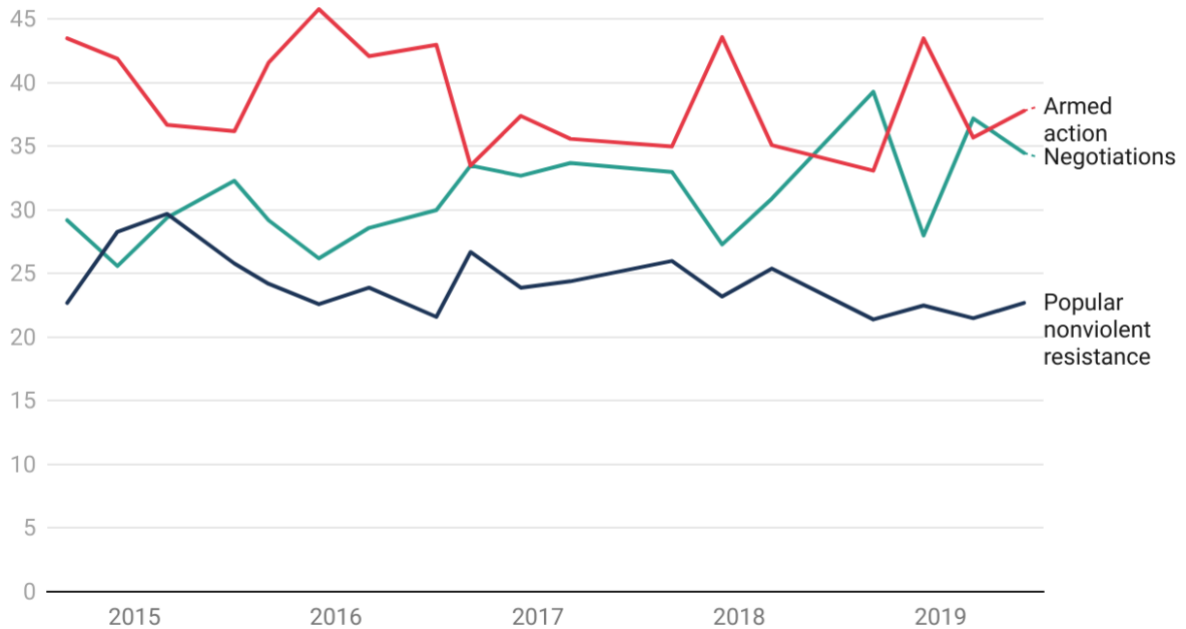
Views on violence

In the same way that relatively few Palestinians desire peace with Israel, peaceful relations with Israelis or negotiations with Israel, a significant number of Palestinians support violence against Israeli civilians.

This is significant because the New York Declaration stated that Abbas’ “commitments on behalf of Palestine” included “the continued rejection of violence and terrorism.”

In almost every poll between September 2014 and May 2019, Palestinians were asked their view on the most effective means for the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel.

In your view, what is the most effective means for the establishment of a Palestinian state next to the state of Israel?

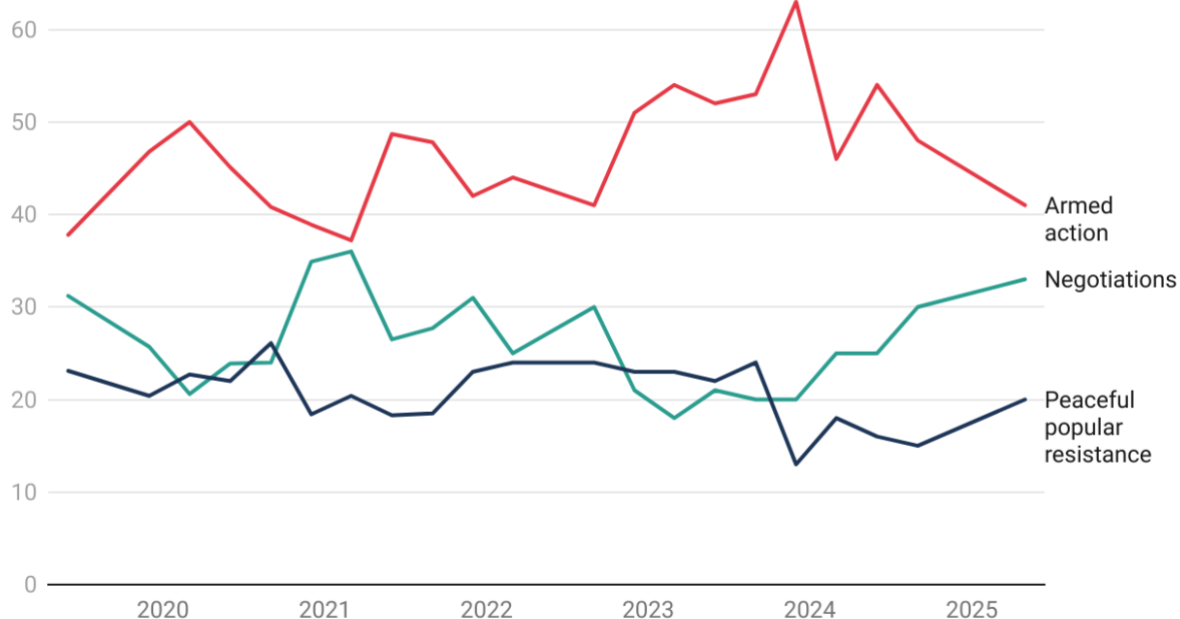


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From June 2019, this question was changed subtly. It became “What is the *best* means of ending the occupation”. In some surveys, this was extended to, “...and building an independent state” or changed to “...to achieve Palestinian goals”. However, the results were similar – ‘armed action’ was the most popular choice.

What is the best means of ending the occupation (and building an independent state)?

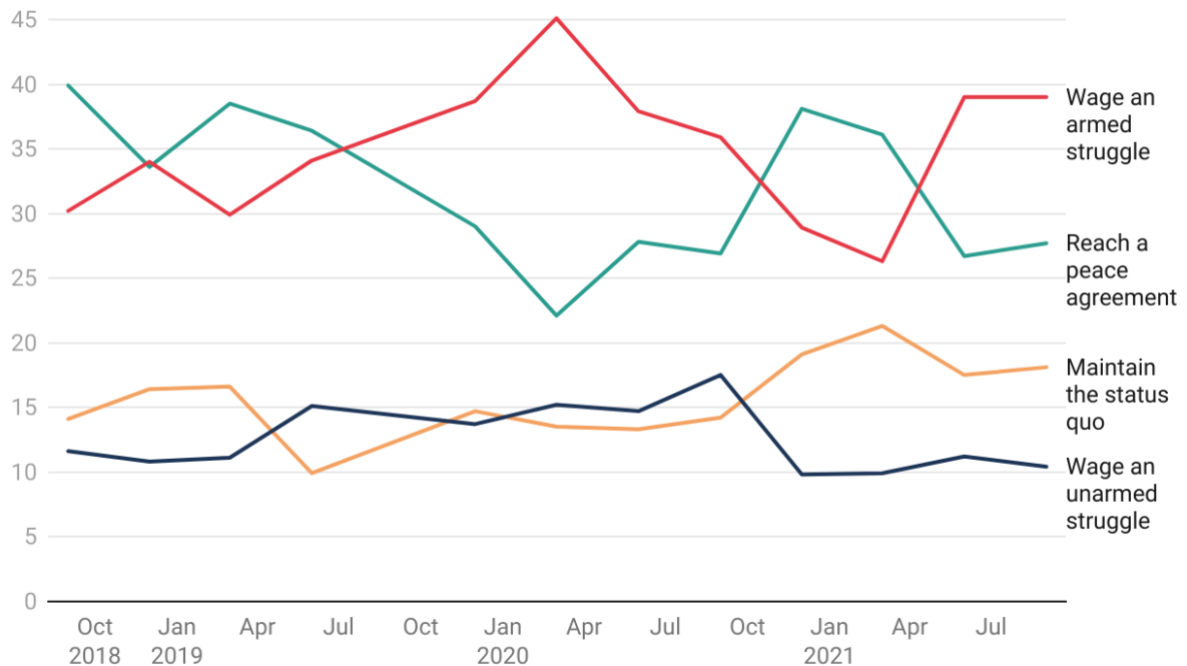


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Similarly, in all but one survey between September 2018 and September 2021, Palestinians were asked to choose between maintaining the status quo, waging an armed struggle, waging an unarmed struggle or reaching a peace agreement as their “most preferred approach to Israeli–Palestinian relations.”

Which of the following is your most preferred approach to Israeli-Palestinian relations?

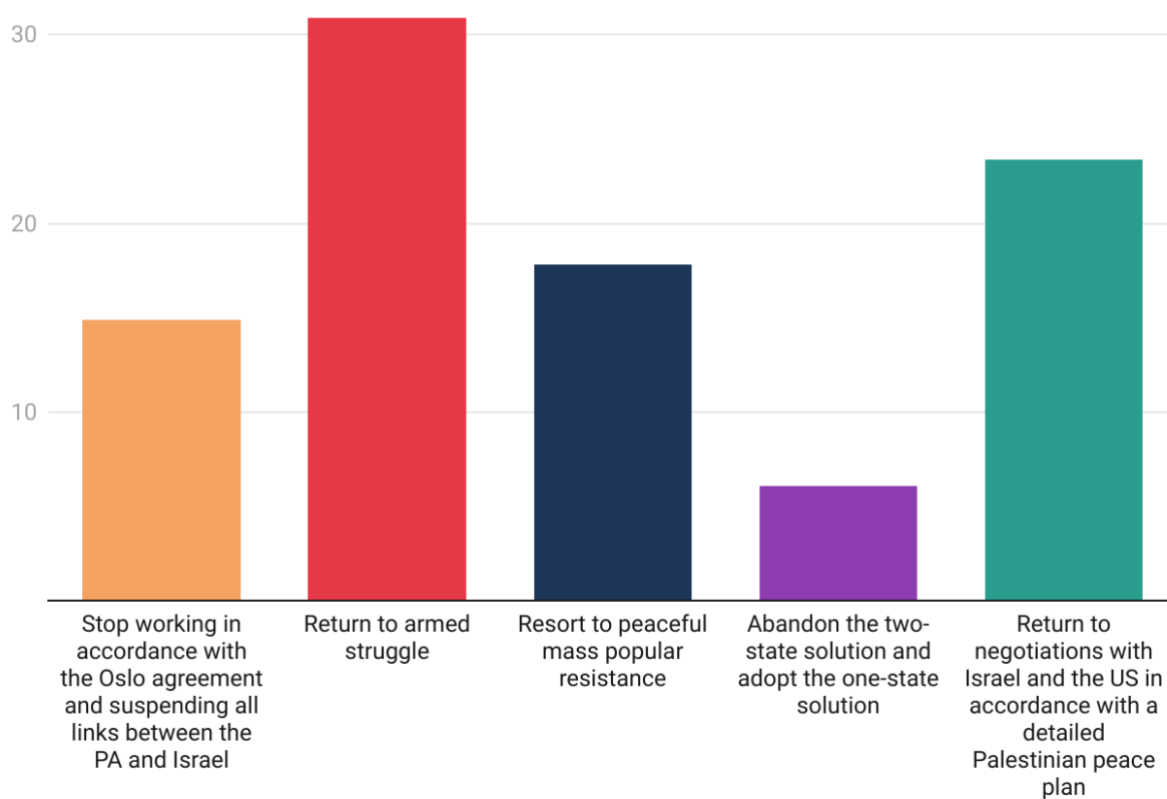


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In [June 2020](#), Palestinians were asked in five successive questions whether they supported a series of policy options, such as a return to armed struggle, a resort to peaceful mass popular resistance, a return to negotiations and so on. With the exception of a return to negotiations (which only garnered 36% support), all options received majority support. Then, Palestinians were asked to choose just one of these five options.

If you have to choose one of these five alternatives, which one would you select?



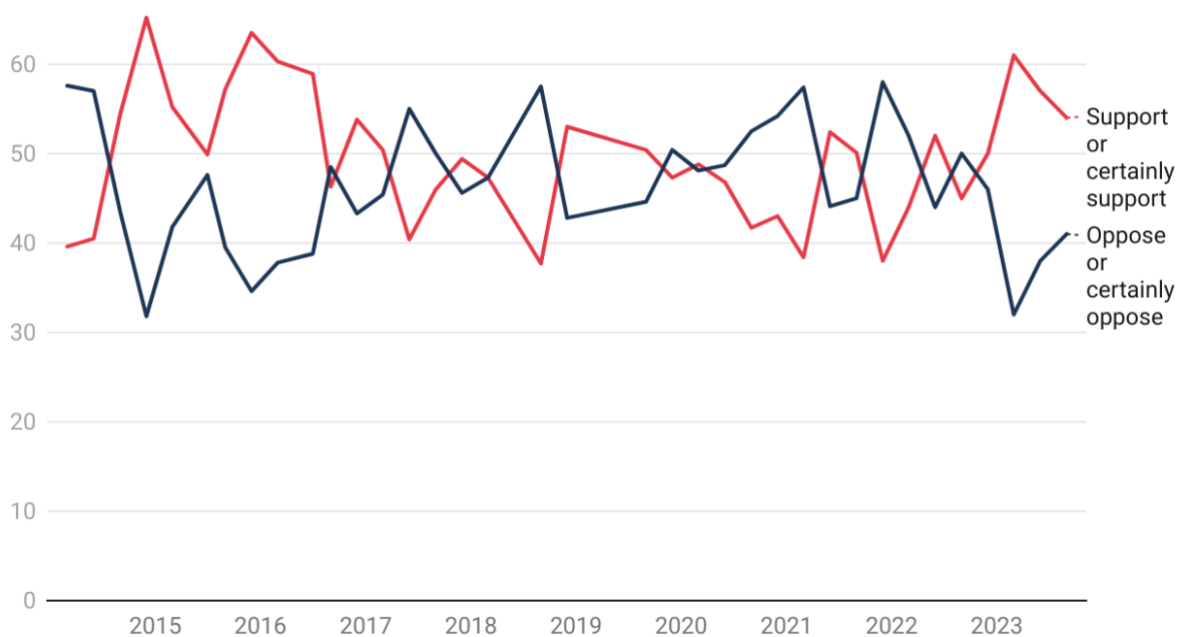
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What the above results – from questions in multiple surveys extending over many years – show is that violence is usually the tactic most supported by Palestinians.

Beyond questions about the best or most effective means of advancing Palestinian goals, questions are often asked about violent attacks. These include:

Concerning armed attacks against Israeli civilians inside Israel, I...



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While it is relieving that, at least for some of the time, there was more opposition than support for terrorist attacks, it is certainly problematic that this question results in a relatively even split across Palestinian society. It is also concerning that support for terrorism spiked in the surveys after the brutal and sadistic Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.

There have been also many one-off questions about violent incidents, or methods of violence used.

December 2014

- Recently there has been an increase in Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank in attempts to stab or run over Israelis. Do you support or oppose these attempts?
 - 80% support, 20% oppose

December 2015, March 2016 and July 2016

- Do you support or oppose the use of knives in the current confrontations with Israel?
 - An average of 59% support, an average of 39% oppose

July 2016

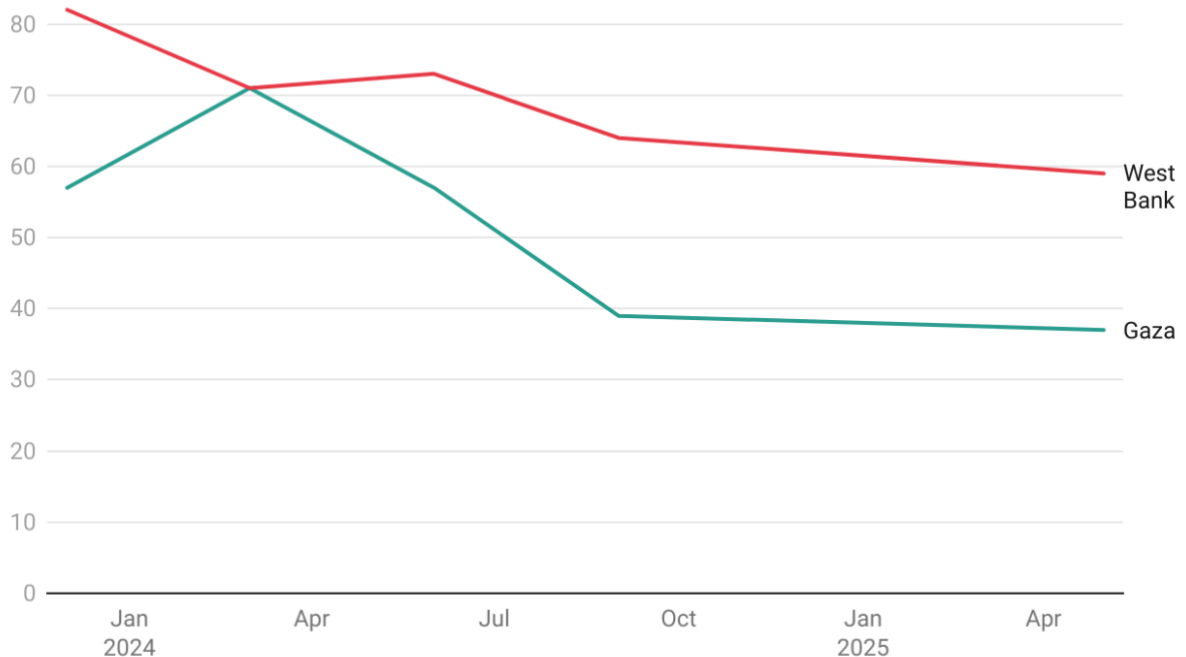
- Two months ago, a bombing attack against an Israeli bus took place injuring about 20 Israelis. Do you support or oppose this type of attack which targets Israeli passengers' buses?
 - 65% support, 31% oppose

June 2022

- Are you supportive or opposed to attacks by individual Palestinians unaffiliated with any known factions?
 - 56% support, 39% oppose

Finally, in the five surveys conducted since the October 7, 2023 Hamas-led attacks against Israel, Palestinians have been asked whether they supported Hamas' decision to attack Israel. We see initial high support for the attack declining over time. And we see considerably more support for the attack amongst West Bank Palestinians. Indeed, as of May 2025, there is still majority support for the October 7 attacks amongst West Bank Palestinians.

Was Hamas' decision to launch its offensive on October 7 correct? (Yes)



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What 11 years of survey data, collected both before and during the 2023 Hamas–Israel war, tells us is that Palestinians do not like PA President Mahmoud Abbas or, indeed, the PA; that they are generally not in favour of a two-state outcome; they are not in favour of peaceful relations with Israel; they are not in favour of negotiations with Israel; but they are in favour of violence against Israel; and that, given a choice between a two-state outcome and ‘continued struggle’ until Israel is destroyed, a majority choose the latter.

With this context in mind, we can turn to the predications and commitments that those Western countries that will be recognising Palestine are seeking from the PA.

Education

The PLO and the PA are officially committed to achieving a state through negotiations, not violence. However, the PA has been teaching its children since its inception that Israel is temporary, that Jews have no historical, cultural or legal claims to the land, that violence is laudable and that those who commit violence are glorified.

An entire generation has been thus taught. The results of the opinion polls reproduced above show that Palestinians have clearly internalised these messages. Certainly, Palestinian views on violence and peace reflect what they've been taught in Palestinian schools since the 1990s. At a deeper level, however, one of several key reasons why the PA's popular legitimacy is so low is because the PA is officially committed to a two-state outcome and peace with Israel, despite having taught its citizenry for more than 30 years that these outcomes are not desirable; it has taught its population to believe in an ideology that is at odds with the PA's *raison d'être*, which is to establish a Palestinian state alongside, not instead of, Israel. If corruption is lessened, that will improve the PA's standing, but it will be much harder to unwind 30 years of anti-peace education.

Still, this has been announced as a priority of the international community, and was one of the commitments made by Abbas in his letter to the French President and the Saudi Crown Prince.

The research organisation Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE) [has monitored Palestinian school books](#) for decades. It has highlighted the explicit and implicit references to the concept of Israel's temporality and to adulations of violence. It has also noted that references to peace agreements made with Israel have been removed from Palestinians school books.

[A 2019 report](#) found that violent words (such as jihad fighting, martyrdom, terrorists, blood, intifada, resistance, massacre among others) occurred 2,795 times across the Palestinian curriculum. For instance, it highlights a poem for Grade 3 students that calls for "sacrificing blood", "eliminating the usurper" and "annihilat[ing] the remnants of the foreigners."

A [March 2025 IMPACT-SE report](#) about a newly 'abridged' PA curriculum for school students in Gaza found,

The PA has retained content containing antisemitism, glorification and justification of violence and terrorism, encouragement of martyrdom and jihad, dehumanization and demonization of Israel, and the erasure of Israel from maps.

The report also found, of reopened schools in Gaza,

Documented blackboard notations, classroom posters, and graffiti openly glorify terrorism, celebrate the October 2023 massacres and honour Hamas terrorist figures killed in the war. Documented evidence from these classrooms confirms that incitement remains a core pillar of Palestinian education in Gaza, despite the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis.

IMPACT-SE has also found that, following pressure, the PA textbooks took out hateful material, only to put them back in later. In a conversation with the author, the IMPACT-SE CEO said that much of the hateful material was reinserted into the textbooks after 2014, when the PA determined that it would no longer seek a state through negotiations with Israel.

Concern about the textbooks and school curriculum is not confined to IMPACT-SE or Israeli groups. The European Parliament has, for [six consecutive years](#), passed [resolutions](#) demanding that funding to the Palestinian Authority be contingent on changes to textbooks in their schools, citing concerns about antisemitism, incitement to violence, hate speech and glorification of terrorism in them. The most recent was in [May 2025](#).

This official incitement and radicalisation in education seems broadly parallel to the decision by the PA, in the weeks after Yasser Arafat's rejection of peace at Camp David in July 2000, [to dramatically ramp up](#) the incitement to and glorification of violence in Palestinian media, which helped provide solid community support for the Second Intifada that began in September that year.

The international community has, for many years, "[deplored](#)" the anti-peace messaging in Palestinian textbooks. And yet, the hatred continues to exist there.

That said, verifying that this hatred is removed is far easier than verifying other commitments made by Abbas in June this year. If the international community is serious about having the PA reform its textbooks, it must not only insist that it does and verify that it does, but threaten and implement clear punishments if it fails to do so, especially if the hateful material is re-inserted into the books. The content of Palestinian textbooks will be an early test – and the easiest – of whether the international community will keep its promise to hold the PA to account post-recognition.

Elections and excluding Hamas from a Palestinian state

The Australian Government has stated that the PA has committed itself to holding elections within a year. In [comments](#) to the British Prime Minister in early September, Abbas clarified that he meant within a year of the Hamas–Israel war ending.

The New York Declaration further explained,

We also welcomed President Abbas' commitment to holding democratic and transparent general and presidential elections throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, within a year, under international auspices, enabling democratic competition between Palestinian actors committed to respect the PLO political platform, its international commitments and the relevant UN resolutions, and the principle of "One State, One Government, One Law and One Gun", and allowing for a new generation of elected representatives to take responsibility.

There are two main obstacles to this. First, Palestinians do not trust the PA to run free and fair elections. They have also seen in the past that when Abbas called for and organised elections, he cancelled them because it appeared that Hamas was going to win, although he always cited other reasons. Indeed, opinion polls taken over many years show significant support for Hamas candidates and for Hamas as a whole.

The second obstacle is the question of participation. By implying that only those parties that "respect the PLO political platform" will be able to participate in the elections, the international community is seeking to exclude Hamas. Indeed, the Australian Prime Minister said this explicitly. An [exchange](#) between a journalist and the Prime Minister went as follows:

Journalist: The problem is, PM, one of the caveats is Hamas doesn't play a role, but you cannot guarantee that Hamas won't play a role, can you?

Prime Minister: Yes, you can. The international community certainly can, and that is very clear. Hamas is a terrorist organisation. It has no role to play...

Journalist: You say that Hamas has no role to play. You say that, Canada says that, France says that, but there's nothing the West can do to stop them from being elected. And if they are elected, will you revoke recognition?

Prime Minister: Of course there is something we can do. We can stop them standing, let alone be elected...

Journalist: PM, with respect, even in 2007, Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas, when Hamas took control, you just can't guarantee that it won't happen again.

Prime Minister: Well, you can if you have all of the Arab states in the Middle East, all speaking as one, as well as the Palestinian Authority, as well as the international community. Yes you can. One of the things that is fostering hatred in the Middle East is no hope going forward of a solution. If you have people in Israel feeling threatened, and October 7 of course showed the reality of that threat. And you see people in Palestine

having no hope, no hope of any future. Seeing their brothers and sisters and children killed -

Journalist: So, you will revoke Palestinian statehood if Hamas is involved and has a role in the Palestinian state?

Prime Minister: Hamas will have no role. The international community are very clear.

If, as will be shown below, a significant number of Palestinians say they would vote for Hamas in elections, an internationally-sponsored election process that excludes Hamas will more than likely undermine the electoral process and the popular legitimacy of the PA.

Trust in the electoral process

In [December 2019](#) and [March 2020](#), Palestinians were asked, “Do you trust the integrity and capacity of the Palestinian Election Commission to successfully manage the election process?” An average of 48% of West Bank Palestinians said yes, and an average of 45% said no.⁵

Similarly, in [December 2020](#), Palestinians were asked, “Do you think Palestinian legislative or presidential elections, if held today, will be free and fair?” Thirty-three percent of West Bank Palestinians said yes, whereas 58% said no.

A similarly worded question in [March 2021](#) asked, “If legislative and presidential elections are held, do you think they will be fair and free?” Thirty-two percent of West Bank Palestinians said yes, and 48% said no.

Since the PA was established in 1994, it has held two presidential elections (1996 and 2005) and two legislative elections (1996 and 2006).

Presidential and parliamentary elections were announced for 2011, 2021 and 2022. However, Abbas has “postponed” each of these, using various pretexts.

After Abbas cancelled the elections that were due to be held in May 2022, Palestinians were asked their view as to his main motivation in doing so. “Was it because Israel refused to allow them in East Jerusalem or because he was worried about the outcome of the elections?” Two-thirds (67%) of Palestinians believed it was because he was worried about the outcome of the elections.

Popularity of Hamas

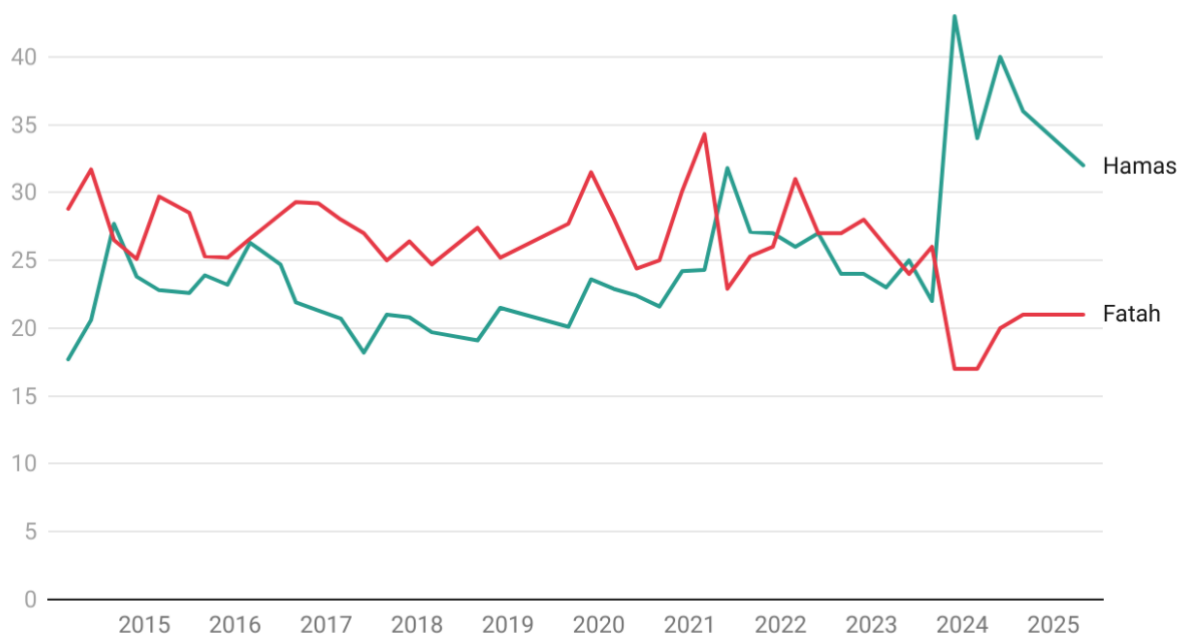
Hamas has long been – and continues to be – popular among Palestinians. Until Palestinian society fundamentally rejects violence and Hamas’ objectives, excluding

⁵ The opinions of just West Bank Palestinians (not Gazans) are included here because, since 2007, only West Bank Palestinians have lived under the regime of the Palestinian Authority and are thus better placed to judge whether Palestinian Authority elections will be free and fair.

Hamas from the electoral process (though the correct thing to do) will undermine the legitimacy of that electoral process and of the resultant government. It might also provide Hamas or similarly violent Islamist movements the pretext to undermine the electoral process using violence.

Palestinians have long been asked questions about the popularity of Hamas and its leaders. In almost every poll conducted since the beginning of 2014, Palestinians have been asked which political party they support. They are offered 11 different political parties. Only Fatah and Hamas score double digit support, so only they are represented in the graph below.

Which of the following political parties do you support?



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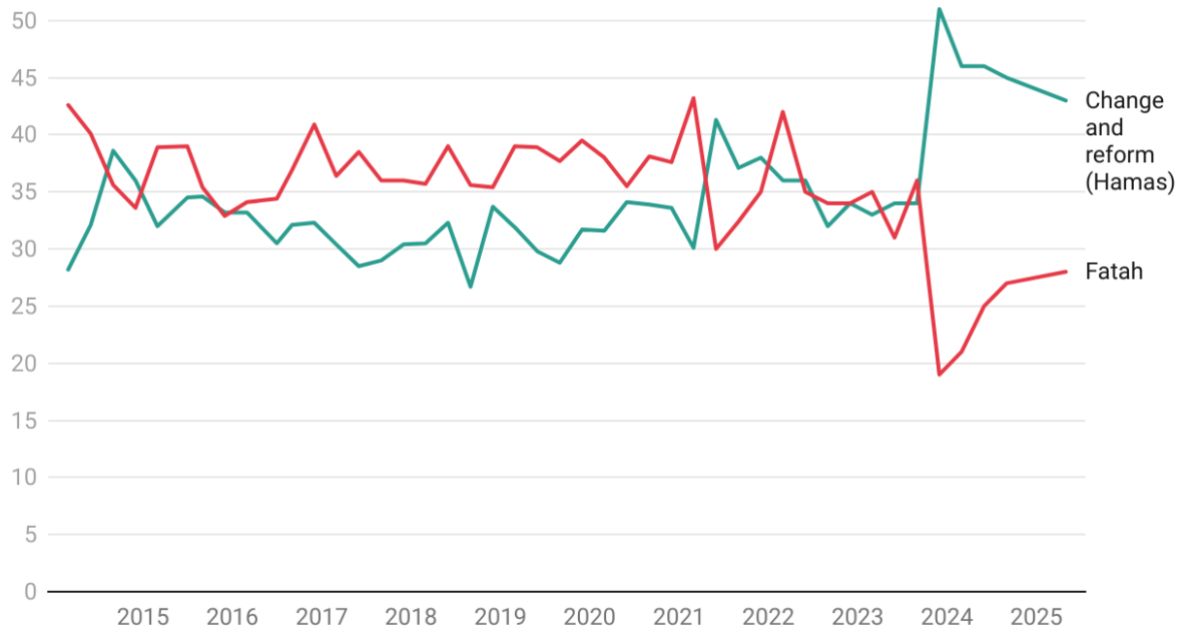
To view an interactive version of this graph, [click here](#)

The data shows considerable and steady support for Hamas over time, though usually less than the support Fatah enjoys. Worryingly, support for Hamas spiked after October 2023, which appears to match the above reported Palestinian support for violence.

It is of note that, in most surveys, Palestinians were offered a 12th option for this question: 'None of the above'. In the available data, 'None of the above' scored an average of 34%, ranking it the most popular option (with the exception of Hamas post-October 2023). This is further indication of the lack of political legitimacy that the PA regime has among Palestinians.

In another frequently repeated question, Palestinians are asked to choose from the list of parties that participated in the 2006 parliamentary election. Hamas (which participated under the label 'Change and Reform') won the 2006 parliamentary election.

If new elections agreed to by all parties are held today and the same lists that took part in the last PLC elections were nominated, for whom would you vote?



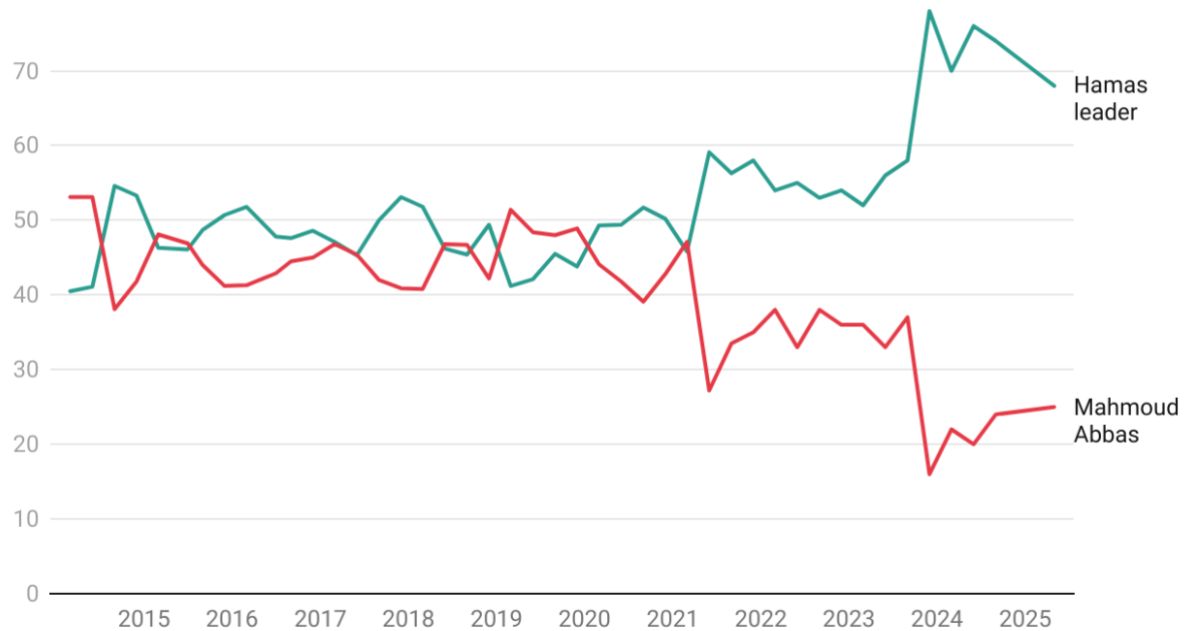
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This data again shows that Fatah (with an average of 35%) was only slightly more popular than Hamas (with an average of 34%), and again shows that Hamas' popularity soared as a result of its October 7, 2023 attack.

Palestinians were also regularly asked to choose between political candidates. They were asked to choose between the Hamas leader and Mahmoud Abbas, the Hamas leader and Marwan Barghouti, and the Hamas leader and both Marwan Barghouti and Mahmoud Abbas. Marwan Barghouti has been in an Israeli prison since 2002, having been sentenced for ordering and overseeing the murder of Israeli civilians during the Second Intifada. He was a leader of one of the Fatah factions, and is often touted as an alternative leader of Fatah and, thus, the Palestinian national movement.

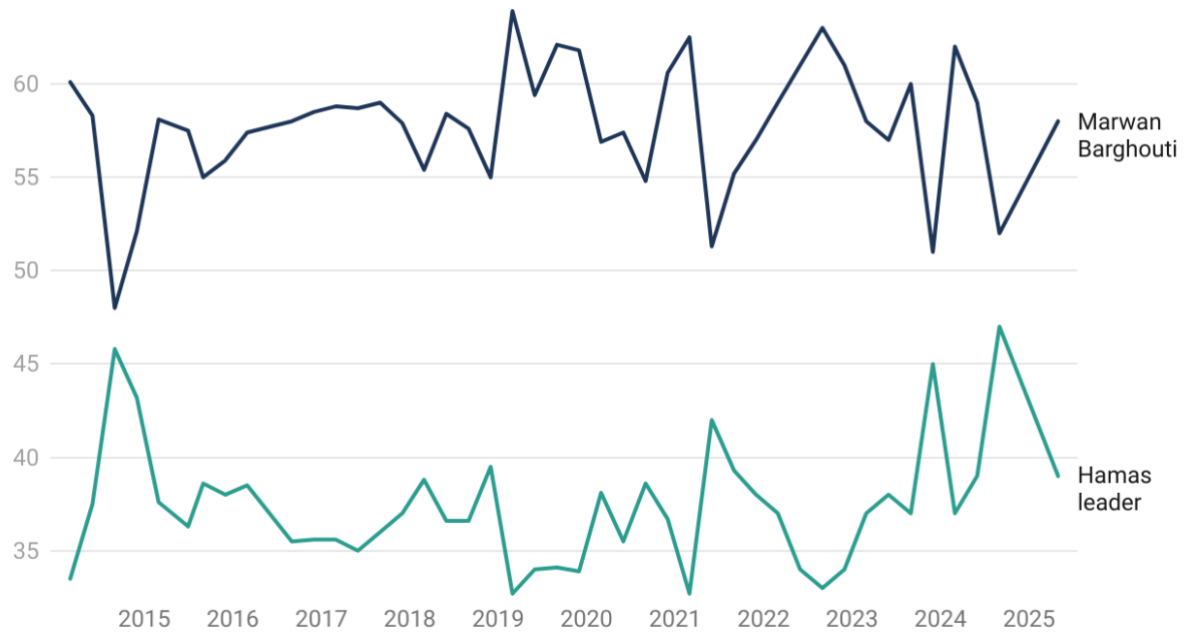
If new presidential elections are to take place today, and Mahmoud Abbas was nominated by Fatah and [the Hamas leader] was nominated by Hamas, for whom would you vote?



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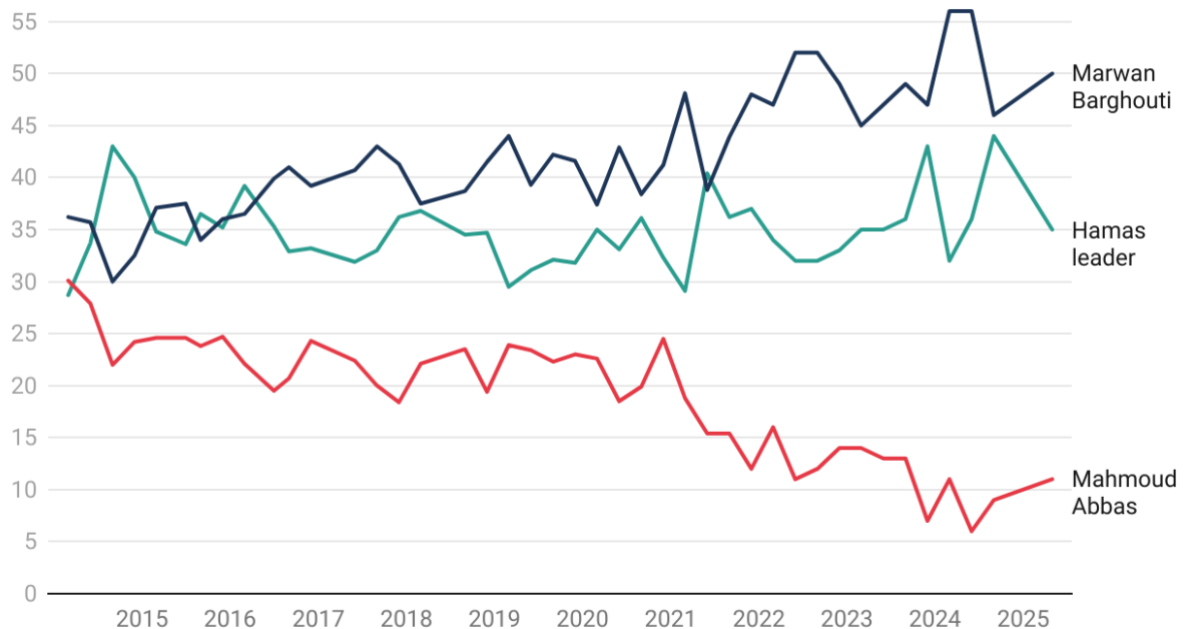
And if the competition was between Marwan Barghout representing Fatah and [the Hamas leader] representing Hamas, for whom would you vote?



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To view an interactive version of this graph, [click here](#)

And what if the competition was between Marwan Barghouti, [the Hamas leader] and Mahmoud Abbas, for whom would you vote?



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To view an interactive version of this graph, [click here](#)

What this data shows is both the unpopularity of Abbas and the significant levels of popularity of the Hamas leader of the day.

Excluding Hamas

Beyond merely excluding Hamas from the electoral process, world leaders have been adamant that there will be no role for Hamas in the new Palestinian state.

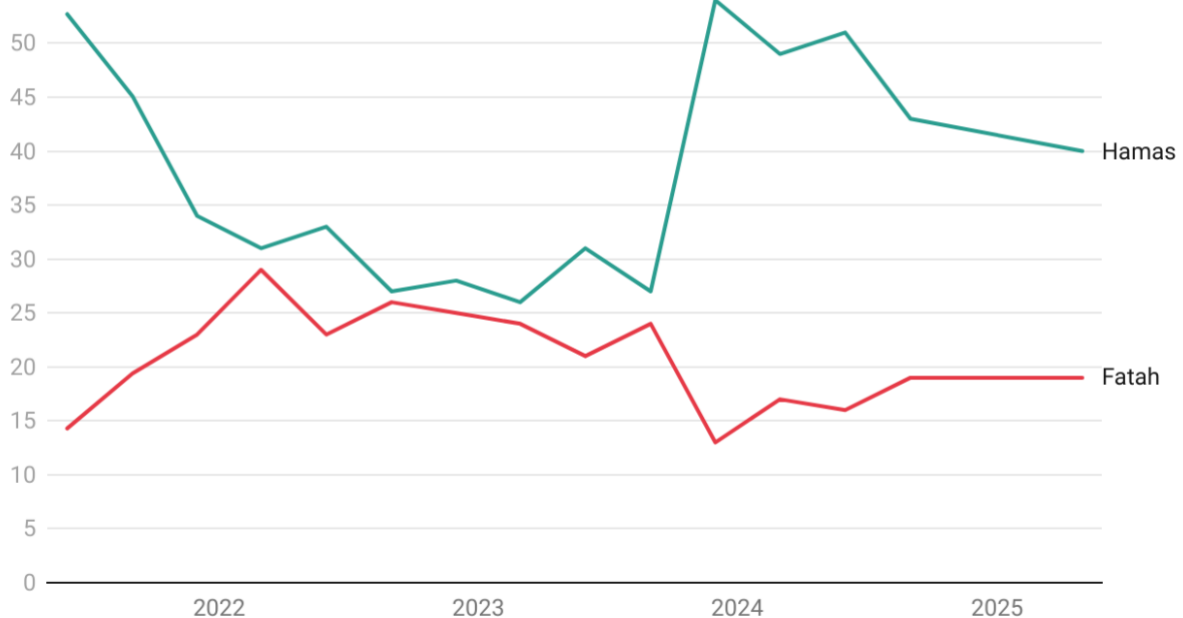
In his comments to the media on August 11, the Prime Minister [said](#),

Our Government has made it clear that there can be no role for the terrorists of Hamas in any future Palestinian state. This is one of the commitments Australia has sought – and received – from President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority.

As above, Hamas is a popular choice as a political party. Other survey questions have revealed that Hamas – and its tactics – are popular in other ways as well.

Since June 2021, Palestinians have been asked in every poll which group they see as the most deserving of representing the Palestinian people.

Who do you see as the most deserving of representing the Palestinian people? Is it Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, or Fatah under Abbas' leadership in the West Bank?



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To view an interactive version of this graph, [click here](#)

The above graph shows us that Palestinians have felt that Hamas was more deserving of representing the Palestinian people than Fatah since at least June 2021. A significant difference of opinion opened up after October 2023. That is, following its horrific attack on October 7, a clear plurality (and sometimes majority) of Palestinians felt that Hamas was more deserving of representing the Palestinian people.

Even back in 2014, when polls indicate that Fatah was more popular than Hamas, Palestinians were asked, in [March](#) and [June](#) that year, “When thinking about the experience of Hamas and its government under Ismail Haniyeh, and the experience of Fatah and President Abbas and the way the two sides deal with Israel, in your view whose way is the best to end the Israeli occupation and build a Palestinian state: Hamas’ way or Abbas’ way?” An average of 40% chose Hamas, compared with an average of 45% that chose Fatah.

Between September 2014 and September 2015, this question was refined a little to, “What about the approach or method used by Hamas in confronting occupation in the Gaza Strip? Do you support or oppose this approach or method?” An average of 76% supported this approach.

During the same period, Palestinians were asked, “And what about the West Bank, do you support or oppose emulating the same approach or method used by Hamas in confronting occupation in the Gaza Strip by transferring it to the West Bank?” This was

slightly less popular, but still garnered majority support with 59%. Support was very similar in both the West Bank (57%) and Gaza (62%).

On the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Israel, Palestinians were asked, “What has been the best thing that has happened to the Palestinian people over the past seventy-five years?” The results:

- The rise of the Islamic movement such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the eighties – 24%
- The first intifada in the late 1980s and the second intifada between 2000 and 2005 – 21%
- The establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the sole legitimate representative – 18%
- The establishment of the PA on part of the Palestinian territories – 14%
- The establishment of Fatah in the 1960s and its launch of the armed struggle against Israel – 9%

Finally, since the war began in October 2023, Palestinians have been asked about possible post-war scenarios. The following are relevant to views on Hamas.

Asked, in [March](#), [June](#) and [September](#) 2024, who they would prefer to see in control of Gaza⁶, a clear majority chose Hamas – an average of 60%.

There were similar results when people were asked what post-war scenario they would prefer. An average of 60% chose ‘the return of Hamas’. This single option was more popular than the combined average total of all the other options.⁷

Palestinians were asked in [May 2025](#) whether they supported or opposed the expulsion of some Hamas military leaders from Gaza as a condition for stopping the war. Two-thirds (65%) of Palestinians opposed this.

Combined, the above data tells us that Hamas remains very popular amongst Palestinians. Moves to exclude Hamas from the electoral processes or from the newly established Palestinian state could undermine the state’s and its leaders’ legitimacy, and could provide a pretext for violence.

It might be remembered that the pretext for Hamas overrunning the Gaza Strip in 2007 was the moves by the PA – supported by the international community – to sideline Hamas after it won the 2006 parliamentary elections. The international community

⁶ The choices were: the Israeli army; Hamas; the PA under President Abbas; the PA under someone other than President Abbas; one or more Arab countries; the UN; the PA under a national unity government without President Abbas; and a new Palestinian Authority with an elected president, parliament and government.

⁷ The return of the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Abbas; the establishment of a new Palestinian Authority with an elected president, parliament and government; the establishment of a local authority formed by Israel; the establishment of multiple armed groups; the control of tribes and large families; and the control of the Israeli army.

subsequently insisted that there would be no role for Hamas unless it recognised Israel, recognised past agreements and committed to non-violence. Hamas ignored this.

Beyond Hamas, the combined data on the popularity of the two-state option, on the popularity of violence and the popularity of Hamas (both as a political party, and as exemplar of violent resistance against Israel's existence), shows us that the Palestinian population is not ready for the creation of a state next to Israel. At least, they are not ready for a state that will live in peace with Israel, which is the vision expressed by the international community.

This is particularly important since the PA does not have the popular legitimacy to disarm armed groups that are not part of its police force.

‘One gun’

Even putting Hamas’ existence and its 2007 takeover of Gaza to one side, the PA has not had the monopoly on force in areas under its control for a long period of time. Armed groups – some affiliated with established organisations like Hamas and Fatah, and other newer, unaffiliated organisations, such as the ‘Lions’ Den’ – have challenged the PA’s authority, leading to large areas within numerous West Bank cities into which the PA security forces dare not enter.

The New York Declaration referred to the PLO’s principle of “One State, One Government, One Law and One Gun.” This principally referred to the issue of these armed groups existing within the PA.

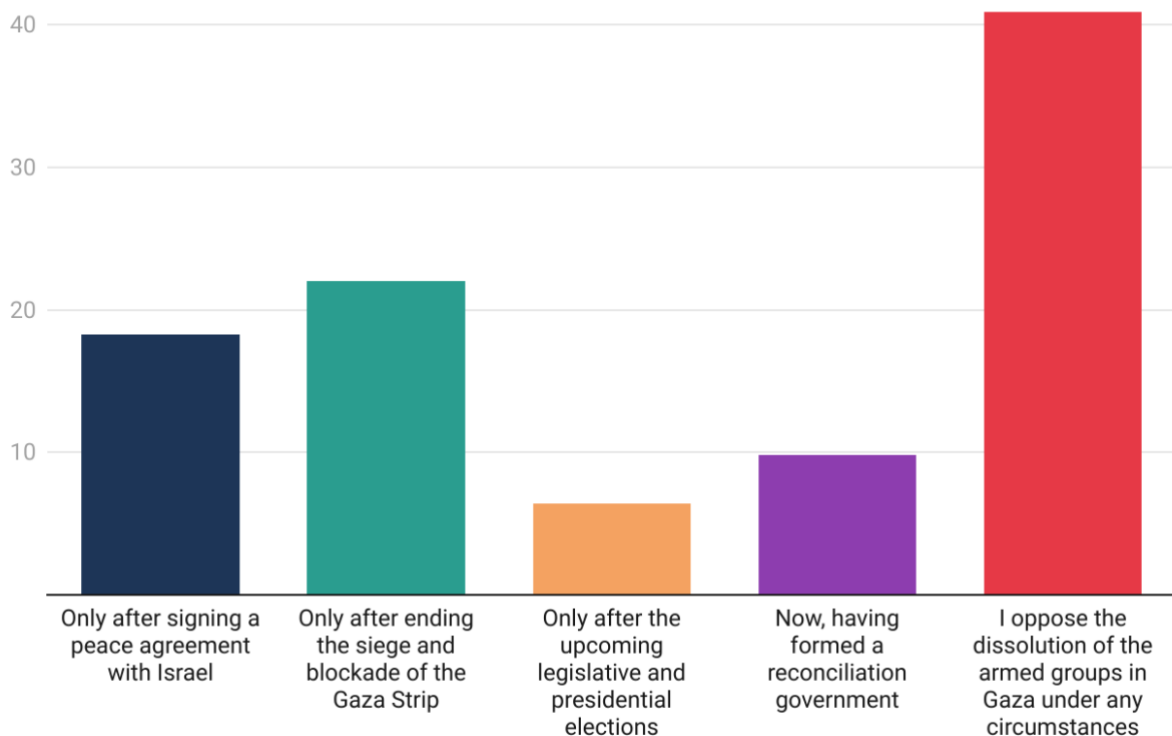
Over many years, there have been attempts by the international community to train PA police and have them enforce the rule of law in areas under its control. This includes preventing terrorist attacks against Israelis and arresting terrorists. Unfortunately, the PA has comprehensively failed in this endeavour. It has, for many years, ceded control of parts of several West Bank cities to these armed groups.

Beyond the logistical difficulties involved in re-training the PA police to take on and disarm these groups, so is unpopular among Palestinians. Thus, once again, having the PA implement the commitments Abbas made, and the predications the international community has placed on recognition of Palestine, will undermine the popular legitimacy of the PA.

In the four surveys held between June 2018 and March 2019, Palestinians were asked, “President Abbas says that there must be one government and one arm. Do you support or oppose the continued presence of armed battalions alongside the official security forces of the PA?” An average of 67% were in favour of the continued presence of the “armed battalions”.

In [July 2015](#), Palestinians were asked, “Under what conditions should armed groups in Gaza be dissolved?” Forty-one percent of Palestinians responded, “I oppose the dissolution of the armed groups in Gaza under any circumstances.” This was the most popular response, by 19 percentiles.

Under what conditions should armed groups in Gaza be dissolved?



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In [December 2022](#), [March 2023](#) and [June 2023](#), Palestinians were asked about armed groups in the West Bank: “Armed groups, such as the Jenin Battalion and the Lions’ Den, have recently appeared in parts of the West Bank. Are you for or against the formation of such armed groups that do not take orders from the Palestinian Authority and are not part of the official security services?” An average of 70% were in favour of such armed groups.

This is despite the fact that a follow-up question, asking whether Palestinians feared that the formation of these groups might lead to internal armed conflict between them and the PA security services, revealed that an average of 55% of Palestinians held such a fear.

They were then asked whether they were for or against the PA’s call for these groups to give up their arms to the PA’s security services. An average of 81% were against.

Importantly, an average of 87%, in a final follow-up question, answered that they did not believe that the PA had the right to arrest members of these armed groups in order to prevent them from carrying out attacks against Israel.

This sentiment was foreshadowed six years earlier, when Palestinians were asked, “Head of the Palestinian intelligence department Majid Faraj indicated that the Palestinian security services have succeeded in preventing 200 attacks against Israelis in the recent confrontations. Are you in favour or not in favour of this action by the PA security services?” Only 30% of Palestinians were in favour.

With such an overwhelming majority of Palestinians in favour of these armed groups’ existence and against their being disarmed by the PA, how does the international community expect the PA to act against them?

Palestinians don’t want to see Hamas disarmed, either. This, we might remember, was one of the commitments that Abbas made in his June letter. Asked in [May 2025](#) if they supported the disarmament of Hamas in the Gaza Strip in order to stop the war, only nine percent of West Bank Palestinians supported the call. One-third of Gazans supported it. But almost two-thirds (64%) of Gazans and a whopping 85% of West Bank Palestinians opposed the idea of Hamas disarming in order to end the war.

The stark results of the surveys in 2022 and 2023, and about Hamas in 2025, are also reflected in a series of questions asked in 2019.

In [June 2019](#), there was talk of a reunification deal between Hamas and Fatah, whereby Gaza and the West Bank would once again become a single political entity. However, Hamas’ condition was that its armed wing would not be disarmed. Fatah’s condition was that it would be, in line with the ‘one gun’ concept. Palestinians were asked what they thought: “If you are in favour of preconditions, does this mean that you stand with Hamas’ precondition opposing the disarming of armed groups? Or with Fatah’s precondition opposing the presence of armed groups alongside the PA security services?”

- With Hamas’ precondition – 42%
- With Fatah’s precondition – 41%

Another question provided a clearer response: “If you are opposed to preconditions, does this mean that you oppose the disarming of armed groups or does it mean that you oppose the presence of armed factions alongside the PA security services?”

- Opposing disarming the armed groups – 67%
- Oppose the presence of armed groups alongside the PA security services – 29%

Demilitarised Palestinian state

A commitment made by Abbas, and repeated by world leaders, is that the new Palestinian state will be demilitarised.

The joint Australian prime and foreign ministerial statement, in which forthcoming Australian recognition of Palestine was announced, listed it as among “major new commitments” made by the PA.

However, it is not a new commitment. Palestinian negotiators accepted this in the 1990s. And the Clinton Parameters of late 2000 included that Palestine would be a ‘non-militarised state’. The Palestinians accepted the Clinton Parameters with reservations, but these reservations did not mention the issue of militarisation.

The Oslo agreements provided strict limitations as to the size of the security forces that the PA was allowed to deploy. However, the PA [quickly breached](#) these limits, with little pushback from the international community.

Further, the French Foreign Minister stated that Abbas’ June 9 letter to the French President and Saudi Crown Prince had met the conditions set by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu during his Bar Ilan speech. During that speech, Netanyahu explained what he meant by demilitarisation:

Namely, without an army, without control of its airspace, and with effective security measures to prevent weapons smuggling into the territory – real monitoring, and not what occurs in Gaza today. And, obviously, the Palestinians will not be able to forge military pacts.

Either way, Palestinians do not want a demilitarised state. In [December 2014](#), Palestinians were asked, “Now that Palestinians and Israelis have returned to final status negotiations, the following items might be presented to negotiators as the elements of a permanent compromise settlement. Tell us what you think of each item... An independent Palestinian state would be established in the areas from which Israel withdraws in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; the Palestinian state will have no army, but it will have a strong security force but an international multinational force would be deployed to ensure the safety and security of the state. Both sides will be committed to end all forms of violence directed against each other.” Only 28% agreed to this; 71% disagreed.

Similarly, in [December 2018](#), Palestinians were asked, “And in case a Palestinian state emerged as an outcome of negotiations with Israel, do you want this Palestinian state to be armed with heavy arms such as tanks and an air force or would you be satisfied with a strong security force able to maintain law and order but without heavy arms?” Two-thirds of Palestinians (68%) said they wanted a Palestinian state with heavy arms.

Once again, the Palestinian population is at odds with the commitments made by Abbas and the PA, which will further reduce the PA’s popular legitimacy.

An international force?

In his June letter outlining his commitments, Abbas wrote “[We are] ready to invite Arab and international forces to be deployed as part of a stabilisation/protection mission.”

However, Palestinians do not want international forces to be part of the post-war mix.

In [December 2023](#), Palestinians were asked, “Would you support an Arab presence to provide basic administrative and health services post-war?” Fifty-three per cent of Palestinians opposed this.

In the same survey, Palestinians were asked, “Would you support deploying an Arab security contingent to help the PA maintain security after the war?” Seventy per cent of Palestinians reported that they would not support this.

Sentiment further declined six months later. In [June 2024](#), Palestinians were asked, “If the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are unified under the control of the Palestinian Authority, would you support the deployment of an Arab security contingent from countries like Egypt or Jordan to provide support for the PA and help maintain security?” A resounding 75% of Palestinians rejected this.

Once again, Abbas – who is unpopular, and head of an institution that is unpopular – is making unpopular commitments in order to secure Western support. Either these commitments won’t be realised or, if they are, the popular legitimacy of the Palestinian government will be further weakened.

Termination of prisoner payments

Another commitment made by Abbas was about payments to terrorists imprisoned in Israeli jails and the families of those who are killed, sometimes termed “pay-for-slay” payments by their critics. In his opening remarks to the July 2025 UN conference on the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, the French Foreign Minister said that Abbas “confirmed the end of allowances for the families of prisoners convicted on terrorism offences.”

For many years, the PA has paid a pension to Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The amount provided to these prisoners is linked to the length of the sentence imposed by Israel. This ultimately means that those Palestinians who commit the most serious crimes, like murder, are paid the largest pensions. Critics have long called this ‘pay-for-slay’ [and argued](#) that the policy both provides an incentive to commit terrorism and glorifies terrorism.

In January 2025, the PA announced to Western media that it had scrapped its pay-for-slay policy. As above, in June he reconfirmed this to the international community.

However, the PA has also told Palestinians and Arab media that the change was merely window dressing [to deliberately mislead](#) the West, and that payments to terrorists would continue. “If we have only a single penny left”, Abbas told the Fatah Revolutionary Council, “it will go to the prisoners and the martyrs.” As of August 2025, payment to prisoners [appears](#) to be continuing. It is worth noting that, on September 3, the French Foreign Minister [claimed on X](#) that “The « pay for slay » has ended on August 1, and an independent audit will verify this soon.”

The reason for the PA’s sleight of hand, and its reassurance that it would continue paying prisoners is because of its popularity among Palestinians.

In [September 2018](#), Palestinians were asked, “Should the Palestinian Authority change its policy regarding payments to prisoners, membership in international organisations, and negotiations with Israel in order to ensure continued US assistance?” Sixty-two percent of Palestinians said no.

A follow-up question asked whether the PA would change its policy under US pressure. Notwithstanding the general lack of respect that Palestinians have for the PA, 43% said that they didn’t believe the PA would change its policy.

In [December 2020](#) and again in [June 2021](#), Palestinians were asked whether they supported the concept of indexing stipend paid to prisoners to economic need, rather than the magnitude of their crime or sentence: “Given the international and Israeli pressure on the PA demanding that it stop making payments to the families of detainees and martyrs, there is an internal Palestinian discussion of making payments to these families based on financial need and size of family and not based on the activities carried out by the martyr or the number of prison years. Do you support or oppose this

idea?” Palestinians roundly rejected the concept. An average of 67% – two-thirds – of Palestinians were opposed to the idea.

Given how popular the pay-for-slay policy is, the record of the PA lying about ending it in order to deceive the West, and the fact that payments continue, if the international community is serious about holding the PA to account, as per its conditions and predications for recognition, it will have to pay close scrutiny to this issue.

In addition, and beyond the strict focus of the pay-for-slay policy, freed Palestinian terrorists [are offered jobs](#) in the Palestinian public service as a reward “for their contribution to the Palestinian liberation.” If the international community is intent on preventing PA policies that encourage terrorism, it should also ensure this practice ends.

Ending the pay-for-slay policy is important in terms of peace. However, implementing this policy will also reduce the popular legitimacy of the PA – another example of the Catch-22 situation at the heart of the Western intervention.

Reforming the Palestinian Authority

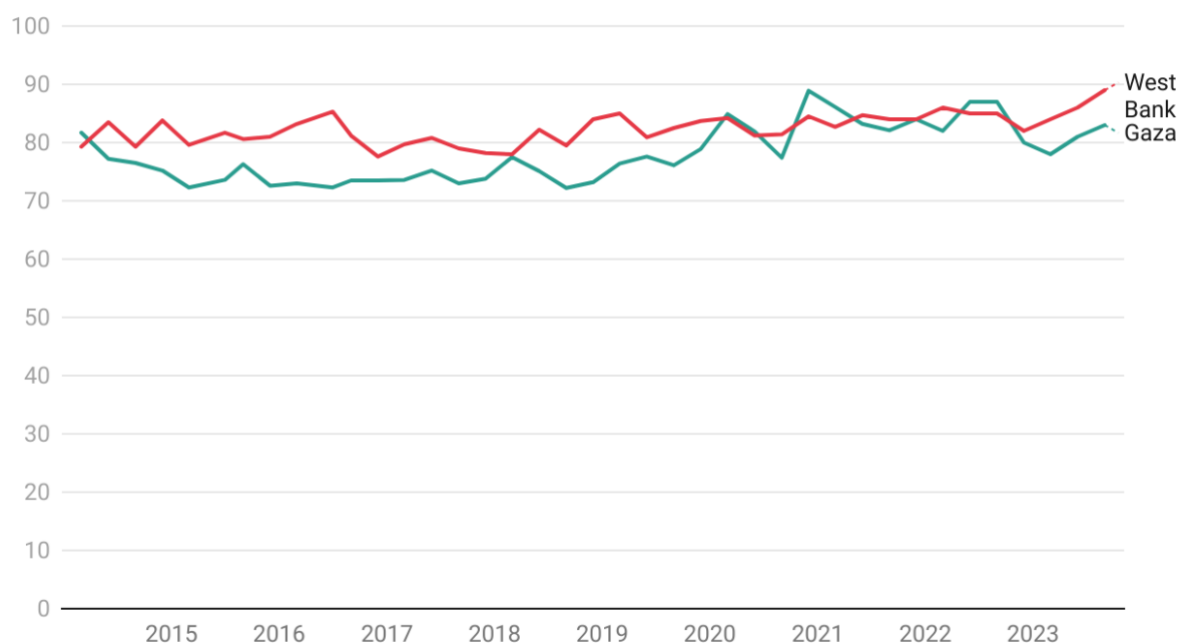
A key part of the international moves to recognise and create a Palestinian state is the issue of reform of Palestinian governance. It was mentioned in the prime and foreign ministerial statement and expanded upon in the New York Declaration:

We reaffirmed the need for the Palestinian Authority to continue implementing its credible reform agenda—with international support, particularly from the EU and the League of Arab States, focusing on good governance, transparency, fiscal sustainability, fight against incitement and hate speeches, service provision, business climate and development.

The PA has been an autocratic and corrupt regime since its founding in 1994. Palestinians are well aware of this.

In every poll from the beginning of 2014 until September 2023, Palestinians were asked whether they thought there was corruption in PA institutions. Because the question is specifically about the West Bank, in the following table, responses from Gaza and the West Bank have been disaggregated. However, we can see that the sentiment is similar across both territories. An average of 82% of West Bank Palestinians think there is corruption in PA institutions, compared to an average of 80% of Gazans.

Do you think that there is corruption in the PA institutions under the control of President Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas]? (Yes)

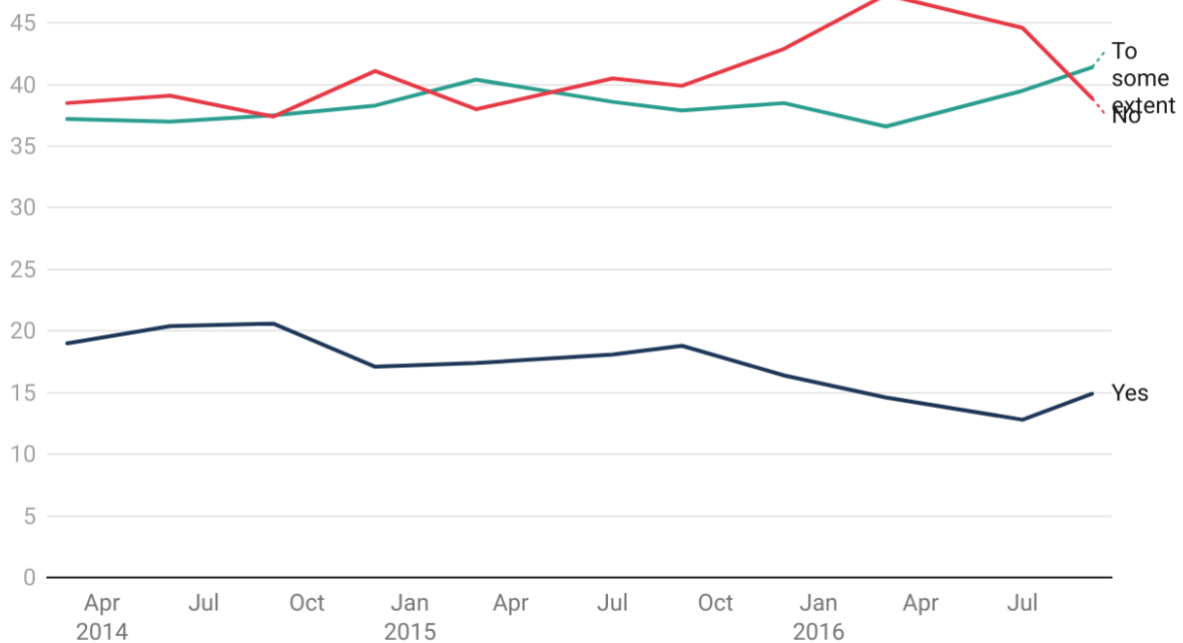


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Between March 2014 and September 2016, Palestinians were asked whether there was press freedom in the West Bank.

In your view, is there press freedom in the West Bank? (West Bank respondents only)



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Less than 20% typically said yes, though opinions were more evenly split between those who answered 'no', and those with a more measured 'to some extent'.

In almost every survey between the beginning of 2014 and September 2023, West Bank Palestinians were asked if they could criticise the PA without fear. In every poll, less than half answered yes. Over time, there has been a slight improvement, but the fact that less than half the population feel they can criticise their government shows how authoritarian it is.

In your view, can people in the West Bank today criticise the Authority without fear? (Yes)



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A mark of authoritarianism is the existence of political prisoners. In [September 2023](#), Palestinians were asked, “There has been a lot of talk recently about political detention, with the Palestinian Authority saying it has no political detainees, and opposition forces and human rights organisations saying there are political arrests. In your opinion, are there or are there not political prisoners in PA prisons?” Four-fifths (82%) of West Bank Palestinians believed there are political prisoners in PA prisons.

The four-fifths of West Bank Palestinians who answered yes are correct. [According to Amnesty International](#), the PA arrests critics and detains journalists.

The sentiments expressed in the frequently-repeated questions are also reflected in one-off questions about specific incidents. In [September 2016](#), Palestinians were asked, “Members of the Palestinian security services have beaten to death a suspect from the old city of Nablus after he was arrested and placed under their custody. Do you think this behaviour by the members of the security services was intentional or unintended?” Fifty-seven per cent of Palestinians thought it was intentional.

Similarly, in [September 2021](#), Palestinians were asked, “Three months ago, opposition activist Nizar Banat died a few hours after being arrested by the Palestinian security services from his house due to beating at the hands of the security officers. Do you think his death was a deliberate order from the political or security leadership or an unintentional mistake by an individual officer?” Sixty-three per cent of Palestinians responded that they thought it was a deliberate order from the leadership.

In the same survey, Palestinians were also asked, “The PA security services arrested many demonstrators who demanded that those who murdered Nizar Banat be put on trial. Do you see these arrests as legitimate law enforcement or a violation of liberties and human rights?” Almost three-quarters of Palestinians (74%) said they thought it was a violation of rights and liberties.

Perhaps that’s why, in [December 2019](#) and [March 2020](#), when Palestinians were asked, “Do you trust the Palestinian Police force in the West Bank in protecting with integrity and without bias?”, an average of only 48% said yes.

Indeed, in [March 2018](#), Palestinians were asked “to evaluate the status of democracy and human rights in the Palestinian Authority.” Half (50%) said it was bad or very bad. Interestingly, when Palestinians were asked the same question about France, Egypt, Turkey and Israel, 57% of Palestinians said the status of democracy and human rights in Israel was good or very good, with only 23% responding bad or very bad. Israel scored better than France (55%) and Egypt (10%), though worse than Turkey (64%).

(By [June](#) and [September 2021](#), when asked a similar question, an average of 55% of West Bank Palestinians said the status of democracy and human rights under the PA was bad or very bad; sentiment had deteriorated.)

It's not that Palestinians support authoritarianism. In 2018, the PA imposed punitive measures to pressure Hamas, which had seized control of the Gaza Strip 11 years previously, by withholding public sector salaries for Gaza-based employees and reducing public services in Gaza. There were demonstrations against this policy, upon which PA security services cracked down, injuring 22 people. When asked about this in [June 2018](#), 81% of Palestinians opposed the crackdown.

Similarly, in [September 2020](#), Palestinians were asked, “The PA security services have arrested Palestinian activists planning to organise a demonstration against corruption. Are you for or against the arrest of activists who demonstrate against corruption in the PA?” Eighty per cent of Palestinians responded that they did not support the arrests.

West Bank Palestinians don’t trust their judiciary system, either. Between September 2019 and September 2020, Palestinians were asked four times, “People differ these days in their evaluation of the work of the judiciary and the courts in Palestine. Some view them as independent and free of corruption and that they rule in accordance with the law, while others view them as un-independent and corrupt, and that they rule in accordance with whims and personal interests. If you want to evaluate the judiciary and the courts, you would say they are mostly...” An average of 66% (two-thirds) of West Bank Palestinians responded, “Un-independent, corrupt, and rule in accordance with whims and personal interests.”

That is likely why, during the same four surveys, when West Bank Palestinians were asked, “If you find yourself today in front of a Palestinian court, do you think you would probably receive a fair trial?”, an average of 62% said no.

The issue of Palestinian corruption is widely known outside the Palestinian population, too. Innumerable studies have been conducted (including by [Aman Transparency Palestine](#) (2024), the [OECD](#) (2024) and the [World Bank](#) (2011)) as to its prevalence, the need for reform, and how that reform might be carried out. Similarly, innumerable statements by international leaders have called upon the PA to institute reforms.

The corruption is deep and wide. It's not just in the political elite, [but also in](#) the commercial sector, internal security agencies, health and education. [A December 2013 report](#) prepared by the Middle East Monitor (a pro-Palestinian organisation), found that 2 billion euros provided to the PA were stolen between 2008 and 2012 through corruption.

Similarly, [a 2018 article](#) in *al-Shabaka* described the nature of PA corruption. The PA is run through a form of “neopatrimonialism”, which is when

state structures, laws and regulations are formally in place but overridden by informal politics and networks of patronage, kinship and tribalism. Instead of being organized according to merit, public function or administrative grades, a neopatrimonial regime finds its glue in bonds of loyalty to those at the top of the political hierarchy...

As a result of Fatah's control of the PA and the PLO, the Palestinian administrative and political machines run on dynamics of inclusion vs. exclusion and reward vs. punishment – fundamentally, according to loyalty. Appointments of public positions and promotions, for example, are awarded or withdrawn not on the basis of performance or professional merit but on the level of loyalty to the leadership.

The article goes on to note that senior positions in the public service are appointed, not applied for, that the PA has the power to make – and has made – a judge retire early, and that it has given itself the power to block websites and monitor social media.

“Palestinians can be arrested for expressing their opinions and political views online and charged with ‘cybercrimes’, punishable by up to 15 years,” it stated.

Moreover, these rules are typically issued by presidential decree because, after Hamas won the 2006 parliamentary elections, the PA effectively froze the Parliament. This means the PA has not been accountable for the past 19 years.

[A 2023 Washington Institute report](#) on corruption described it before Hamas' election victory in 2007:

Government jobs were political favors to be doled out to supporters; public funds, many of them from international aid, were mere means toward the enrichment of officials. Efficiency, responsiveness to the public, and the provision of services were all an afterthought.

Later in the report, it said that corruption was worse in 2023 than in 2007.

The international community has attempted to pressure the PA to institute reforms. The results are always minimal and temporary.

The appointment by Abbas of Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad in 2007 was a direct result of international pressure for the PA to institute reform. And, certainly, Fayyad did try. However, he [was undermined](#) by senior Fatah officials (who were threatened by his reforms). Abbas likewise felt threatened and [overruled](#) some of his decisions. Fayyad resigned in 2013. Many of his reforms have since been rolled back or disregarded.

In 2013, Aman Transparency Palestine [wrote](#),

Today, the Palestinian Authority lacks all kinds of authority and monitoring, legislative, executive and judicial. There is no monitoring of, or accountability for, executive authority. As long as there are no institutions monitoring the behaviour and actions of the Palestinian Authority, corruption will continue until it turns into an even more destructive force that affects the authority's branches and agencies, making it impossible to stop.

Fayyad's premiership wasn't the first time the PA was forced by the international community to undertake reforms. For instance, [US pressure](#) forced it to institute some reforms in 2003.

After the Hamas–Israel war began in October 2023, the US Biden Administration began talking about a “revitalised” PA. Its prime minister, Muhammad Shtayyeh, resigned, and Abbas appointed Muhammad Mustafa in his place, but undertook no actual reforms. Mustafa's appointment was an attempt to deflect Western pressure.

The Palestinian public is well aware of this. Asked in [June 2024](#), [September 2024](#) and [May 2025](#), “President Mahmoud Abbas appointed Muhammad Mustafa as prime minister. Do you think this new government will succeed in carrying out reforms that Shtayyeh's government was unable to do?”, an average of 70% of Palestinians said no.

Similarly, when, in [June 2024](#), Palestinians were asked, “Do you think the PA is reforming its public institutions?”, 80% of West Bank Palestinians said no.

Also in June 2024, 82% said no when asked if they thought the PA was fighting corruption, and 79% said no when they were asked if they thought the PA was “empowering the judiciary and establishing the rule of law.”

Fixing corruption

An end to, or dramatic reduction in, financial and political corruption, and a significant improvement in the rule of law and democratic processes by the PA is, by far, the most important factor that would enable the creation of a viable Palestinian state. This will also eventually create the popular legitimacy that the PA requires to implement the security-related reforms that are absolutely necessary if a sustainable Israeli–Palestinian peace is to be attained.

And while improving the rule of law (at least, in terms of the ‘one gun’ policy) will be extremely unpopular, fixing financial and political corruption will be extremely popular.

However, it appears that Palestinians do not want outside help to achieve this. In [March 2024](#), Palestinians were asked, “A proposal has been submitted for ‘the-day-after arrangements,’ under which the Palestinian Authority would be revitalised with international and Arab coalition support. Are you for or against these arrangements?” A resounding 73% of Palestinians – including 80% of West Bank Palestinians – were against the idea.

History has shown that the PA – in terms of both leadership and institution – is highly resistant to reform. The ‘neopatrimonial’ nature of the regime, which has had over 30 years to cement itself, makes any such effort much harder, as does Palestinian society generally, which tends towards being an honour society rather than a meritocratic one.

The international community, in the form of the New York Declaration, has stressed that such reform, “focusing on good governance, transparency, fiscal sustainability, fight against incitement and hate speeches, service provision, business climate and development” is a key part of the process to come after recognising Palestine.

However, the same international community has very few levers to pull to coerce the PA to effect real and lasting reforms. Indeed, there is a single lever: threatening to withhold or actually withholding financial aid. Until September this year, an additional lever was the carrot of recognition. However, the rash of Western countries rushing to recognise Palestine on the promise of reform – as opposed to rewarding completed reform – has removed this form of leverage.

While, in theory, the West could withhold financial aid to the PA, the reality is that domestic political considerations in those same Western countries would likely prevent such aid being withheld.

As such, notwithstanding the meaningful statements these Western leaders make about being committed to PA reform, the likelihood is that we will not see any lasting reform – and that the West won’t make any significant or effective effort to enforce those commitments.

Final observations

Western leaders have seized upon comments about Hamas by Abbas and the Arab League as evidence the time is right to recognise Palestine.

In his remarks to the UN, the French Foreign Minister said, “In the letter to the President of the French Republic and the Saudi Crown Prince, the President of the Palestinian Authority condemned for the first time the 7 October terrorist attacks.”

That it took 20 months for the PA President, who claims to be committed to non-violence and peace with Israel, to condemn the barbaric Hamas attacks is not something that should be celebrated. He should have been roundly condemned for not getting in front of a camera on October 7, 2023 to do so, much less in the 20 months that followed.

Instead, he spent those 20 months often [praising](#) what the attacks showed about Israeli weaknesses, and claiming that the only problem with them is the consequent impact on Gazans. Meanwhile, many senior officials in the PA have praised the attacks.

Similarly, Albanese and others have praised the Arab League’s involvement. The prime and foreign ministerial statement announcing Australia’s recognition of Palestine read, in part, “The commitments by the Palestinian Authority are strengthened by the Arab League’s unprecedented demand for the terrorist organisation Hamas to end its rule in Gaza and hand over its weapons...”

Hamas was founded in 1987. From the beginning, though especially since the beginning of the Oslo peace process in 1993, Hamas has conducted terrorist attacks. That it took the Arab League 38 years from Hamas’ founding, and 32 years since Hamas’ first attack against Israeli civilians, and 18 years since Hamas overran Gaza, to condemn Hamas as a terrorist organisation and call on it to disarm and hand over control of Gaza is, likewise, not something to be celebrated.

That Abbas and the Arab League have stated the obvious does not represent a dramatic turn-around of Arab and Palestinian opinion on Israeli–Palestinian peace, or the readiness of Palestinians to establish a viable state alongside Israel.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that current recognition-led diplomacy is colliding with stable, long-measured Palestinian opinion and with entrenched Palestinian governance failures that are, collectively, overwhelming obstacles to a viable two-state outcome. The promises the West has elicited from Abbas in order to advance a viable two-state peace are, if rapidly implemented, those most likely to further erode the PA's already thin domestic legitimacy.

Australia and partners therefore face a binary risk set in the near term:

1. Rhetorical conditionality with weak enforcement will lead to continued corruption, militia autonomy and periodic violence; or
2. Hard enforcement by an illegitimate authority will lead to internal confrontation and likely state failure.

The only realistic option is verified sequencing in which the West, unlike during the 1990s Oslo peace process, is much more committed to conditions being met than to maintaining the “momentum on the peace process.”

The sequencing needs to begin with visible, popular governance clean-up that demonstrably improves daily life for Palestinians and rebuilds trust in the PA amongst Palestinians. Only then can the PA move to monopolise security, exclude Hamas from political participation, and flag necessary compromises in the final-status-adjacent stances. If a viable two-state outcome is the outcome sought – in which Israeli and Palestinian coexist in peace – then the creation of a Palestinian state can only occur after the PA has, at a minimum established the rule of law, in terms of both corruption and the monopoly of force within areas under its control.

Recommendations to the Australian Government

1. In concert with likeminded countries, adopt a “legitimacy-first roadmap”. The end result will be an independent Palestinian state, but movement from phase to phase will be absolutely dependent on successful completion of each phase’s requirements. Phase 1 will focus on creating popular legitimacy for the PA (anti-corruption, procurement transparency, budget openness, judicial safeguards, service-delivery and, eventually, the holding of elections). Phase 2 will focus on security implications and negotiations with Israel under the auspices of the international community to create a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Tie every practical step Australia takes post-recognition to audited progress on these items. Table a short public matrix of benchmarks and consequences for failure. Enforce those consequences.
2. In concert with likeminded countries, create a body to track PA legitimacy metrics, public sentiment on violence and militia activity, and use this to control movement between phases. Ensure likeminded countries have synchronised conditionality and snap-back provisions so the PA cannot forum-shop.
3. Tie any Australian funding to measurable shifts in school and media content, including eliminating all hateful and violent content and promoting eventual acceptance of two states, monitored by external reviewers, along with the verified ending of the ‘pay-for-slay’ scheme. Suspend Australian funding when agreed-to targets are not met and do not resume it until verified results prove targets have been met.
4. Establish an annual statement to Parliament on benchmark compliance, published audits and any enforcement actions taken under the aforementioned matrix.