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Palestinian-Israeli Joint Poll on Sources of Mutual Distrust: Mutual Palestinian-Israeli distrust, found at the core of peace failure, is generated by socio-psychological forces heightened by daily life hardships, exposure to violence, and widespread negative perceptions about the other side's educational system

September 15, 2021 ----- Palestinian and Israeli public support for peace stands at the lowest point since the beginning of the peace process 28 years ago. Just completed joint [Palestinian-Israeli](#) research reveals an unequivocal finding: extremely low level of mutual trust among the two publics is the most important explanation for the declining support of the peace process. The joint research sought to map out the sources of distrust and recommend policy measures to address the problem of the continually declining mutual trust.

The research was conducted by the [Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research \(PSR\)](#) and the [Macro Center for Political Economics](#) during the past three years with funding from the [European Union](#) (EU). One of the surveys conducted for the project was funded by the [Netherlands Representative Office in Ramallah](#) and the [Japan Representative Office to Palestine](#) through the [UNDP/PAPP](#).

The joint research relied on surveys conducted in the second half of 2020 among representative samples of the two publics, survey experiments among those hardest-hit by the prolonged conflict and military occupation, educational and classroom experiments among students, all complemented with more than a dozen focus groups with students and those paying the highest cost of the conflict. The research was supplemented by case studies, review of textbook, the development of “objective” textbook passages, and a review of the recent history of peace education in Europe and elsewhere. The report on the historical review focused on the lessons learned from previous international examples and was discussed in a workshop for Palestinian, Israeli, and international professionals who spent years exploring this sensitive topic.

The Joint polls were conducted between August and November 2020 among representative samples of the two publics. Survey research experiments were conducted in January and February 2021 with focus groups soon after. A poll in the Palestinian-Israeli Pulse series, was conducted in August 2020 among a Palestinian sample of 1200 adults interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in 120 randomly selected locations and the margin of error is +/-3%. The Israeli sample included 900 adult Israelis interviewed through the internet by Midgam in Hebrew and Arabic The margin of error is +/-3.34%.

The joint poll on trust and the peace process was conducted among a Palestinian sample size of 1560 adults, including 592 youth, interviewed face-to-face in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in 120 randomly selected locations. The margin of error is +/-3%. The Israeli sample included 1201 adults, of which 272 were youth, interviewed through the internet by Rafi Smith in Hebrew and Arabic. The

combined Israeli and Palestinian data files have been reweighted to reflect the exact proportionate size of the various groups and ages in the Palestinian and Israeli societies, and to reflect, for Israeli Jews, current demographic and religious-secular divisions. The margin of error for the Israeli poll is +/-3.34%.

Our survey research and experiments among the general public, residents of hard-hit areas, and students indicate the following (for project reports and documents, visit [PSR](#) and [Macro's](#) websites):

- The contexts of the two societies, the Israeli and the Palestinian, are very different, leading to different results. The findings of the Israeli surveys show that trust is mostly determined by the psychological repertoire of beliefs, attitudes and emotions that are imparted and shaped in the political, educational and social culture that can be viewed as a culture of conflict. Israelis are less affected by the difficulties of daily life and violent events because their lives take place in a very different context and they lead routinized life – a normal life in the conflict
- Findings among the Palestinians show a correlation between the widespread mutual distrust on the one hand and the daily life hardships, exposure to violence, and negative perceptions of the educational system on the other side on the other hand.
- The research unveils other roots of distrust: socio-psychological variables representing the repertoire that both side are carrying, such as ethos of conflict and negative stereotyping relating to historic experiences and narratives. These variables indicate that the less a person adheres to ethos of conflict and the less negative stereotypes he or she holds regarding Palestinians or Israeli Jews, the more he/she finds the other side worthy of trust and therefore supports the peace process.
- The youth are more likely to hold hardline views, to indicate less trust, and to adhere to beliefs of ethos of conflict and hold stronger negative stereotype of the other.
- When linking support for peace with trust level, strong positive correlation emerges: the higher the trust, the higher the support for peace and the lower the trust, the lower the support for peace. Here is an example from our August 2020 joint poll: Palestinian support for the two-state solution stood at 60% among those who trust Israeli Jews and only 41% among those who distrust them; Israeli equivalent stood at 81% among those who trust Palestinians and only 34% among those who distrust them.
- A dozen Educational and classroom experiments indicated that students are more likely to trust the other side and to have a more positive attitude toward peace when the classroom text presented by the teachers were “objective” or presented the other side in a positive light.
- Six survey research experiments found residents in areas of great hardships are more likely to distrust the other and to oppose the peace process.
- A dozen focus groups among students and residents of areas of great hardships confirmed the project findings and helped to articulate the link between trust and peace and the role played by the sources of distrust.

Recommendations: It goes without saying that only the ending of occupation and the building of permanent peace can bring about a real restoration of trust and begin the process of reconciliation. Yet as our research demonstrates, progress toward peace is linked to the restoration of trust and hope. A major societal change is needed to change the state of mind that is supporting distrust. It should be accompanied by change in the information provided by leaders, mass-media, schools, ceremonies, memorial days, the imparted collective memory and existing dominant political ideologies. Additional interim measures are needed: *change the reality on the ground, stop incitements and minimize negative language and phrasing, increase contact between People, deliberately use mass media to inform and*

enlighten, use the school system with the goal of changing the collective psychological repertoire of society; and encourage joint projects in less sensitive areas such as health, science, and agriculture.

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From the People of Japan

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