

A poll commissioned by

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

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The Potential for a Nonviolent Intifada: A Second Study of Palestinian and Israeli Jewish Public Attitudes toward Non-Violent Action

Overview

In a continuing effort to determine the attitudes of the Palestinian and Israeli Jewish publics on the potential for a non-violent Intifada, Search for Common Ground, an American and Belgian NGO, commissioned the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) of the University of Maryland to conduct two polls, one of the Palestinian population and one of the Israeli Jewish population. Funding for the study was graciously provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom. This was the second such poll – the first having been released on August 28, 2002.

A Palestinian polling organization, the Jerusalem Media & Communications Center, carried out the poll of 599 Palestinians through face-to-face interviews from November 17-21 throughout the West Bank and Gaza, interviewing city and rural residents in the areas of Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Hebron, Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah & al-Bireh, Jerusalem, and Gaza City. Due to closures it was impossible to poll in Tulkarem City, respondents there were replaced by those from a comparable milieu in Jenin.

An Israeli polling organization, the B.L. and Lucille Cohen Institute for Public Opinion Research of Tel Aviv University, carried out the poll of 508 Israeli Jews from November 24-26, using telephone interviews. Margin of error is plus or minus 4.5% for the survey of Israelis and +/- 4% for the survey of Palestinians.

Dr. Steven Kull, Director of PIPA, is author of the report that follows.

This study's most important findings can be summarized as follows:

More than seven in ten Palestinians and Israelis indicate that they themselves are ready to move beyond the cycle of violence and undertake a settlement process based on the Palestinians refraining from violence and the Israelis agreeing to a Palestinian state based on '67 borders. Less than one in five Palestinians and Israelis (in both cases the percentages were remarkably symmetrical) were wedded to the idea of regaining historic Palestine or holding on to the Territories. However, a major portion of both the Palestinian and Israeli majorities expressed no confidence in the readiness of the other side to give up violence or make the necessary concessions. Thus majorities of Palestinians have continued to affirm the use of violent methods in the Intifada and Israelis the violent crackdown of the IDF.

However, while not ready to renounce violence, Palestinians do show overwhelming interest in and support for the recent nonviolent demonstrations in violation of the Israeli curfew. Approximately half say they either have or would participate in such demonstrations. A slight majority regards such demonstrations as at least as effective as violent methods and if conducted on a large scale this majority grows to 7 in 10. Overwhelming majorities regard Palestinians killed in the course of the recent demonstrations as martyrs, in most cases as much as suicide bombers. A strong majority also supports the idea of large numbers of Palestinians regularly refusing to abide by the curfews, and nearly half say that they would be willing to participate in such large-scale refusals.

In stark contrast to the Palestinians, barely one in ten Israelis shows any significant awareness of these recent nonviolent demonstrations. A plurality tends to interpret them negatively as a challenge to Israeli authority rather than as the emergence of a nonviolent movement. Israelis generally show very strong doubt that a genuine nonviolent movement will emerge. Nonetheless, a majority supports the idea of Israel showing restraint in relation to nonviolent demonstrations as a way of encouraging such a trend.

Although Palestinians continue to support the use of violent methods in the Intifada support for nonviolent methods is very high and higher than for suicide bombing.

Although a majority of Israelis express support for the IDF crackdown, confidence in it appears to be eroding, with a majority believing that when the crackdown causes civilian casualties it actually increases the Palestinian violence against Israelis.

Palestinian Findings

Mistrust Blocks Underlying Willingness to Stop Violence as Part of Settlement Process Based on 1967 Borders

More than 7 in 10 Palestinians indicate a willingness to stop using violence as part of a settlement process that includes the establishment of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders. Fewer than 1 in 5 Palestinians favor pursuing a violent struggle with the goal of gaining all of historic Palestine. However, because many in the majority lack faith that Israel would ever really make the necessary concessions, there is not a majority ready to renounce violence at this point.

It appears that more than 70% of Palestinians would be ready to stop the use of violence as part of a larger settlement process that includes the establishment of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders. However, due to a lack of faith that Israel would ever make the necessary concessions, these feelings are not readily expressed and are only revealed through a two-part series of questions.

Respondents were first asked:

If Israel would agree to allow the establishment of a Palestinian state within the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, evacuate most of the settlements, and negotiate in good faith on other Final Status issues, on condition that there was a period without violence against Israel, would you favor stopping violence for this period or would you favor continuing the violence?

Forty-two percent said they would be willing, while 48% said they would favor continuing the violence. Those who favored continuing the violence were then asked,

Is this because you do not believe that Israel would really agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state on terms acceptable to Palestinians, or because you favor continuing the violent struggle with the goal of gaining all of the territory of historic Palestine?

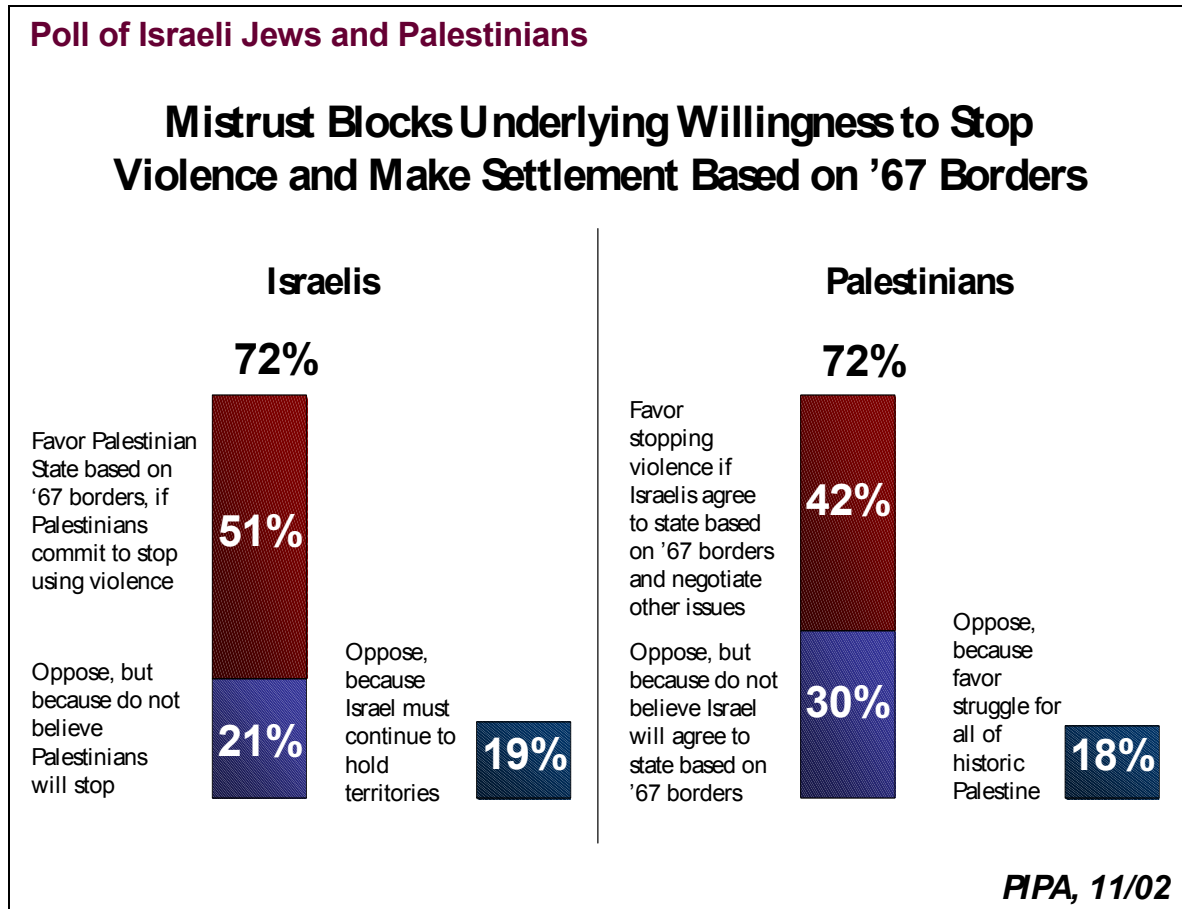
Of this group 62% (30% of the whole sample) said the reason that they did not favor stopping the violence was that they did not believe that Israel would really agree to the establishment of such a Palestinian state. Only 37% of this group (18% of the total sample) said they favor continuing the violent struggle with the goal of gaining all of the territory of historic Palestine.

Thus, it appears that 72% of the total sample would be ready to renounce violence in support of a two-state settlement if they were confident that Israel would be ready to make such a settlement on terms acceptable to the Palestinians.

The response to this question does not clarify what terms would be acceptable to Palestinians, as it specifies that there would be negotiations on “Final Status issues,” such

as the right of return. It does suggest, though, that in terms of territory, a majority of Palestinians would accept a settlement based on 1967 borders and would be ready to give up the violent struggle to regain historic Palestine.

As discussed below, a complementary set of questions posed to Israelis found a remarkable parallel, with the same 72% ready to allow a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders if they believed Palestinians would renounce violence, and just 19% set on Israel holding on to the Territories.



However, due to lack of confidence that the Israelis will ever make such concessions there is not a majority of Palestinians ready to take a position in support of renouncing violence.

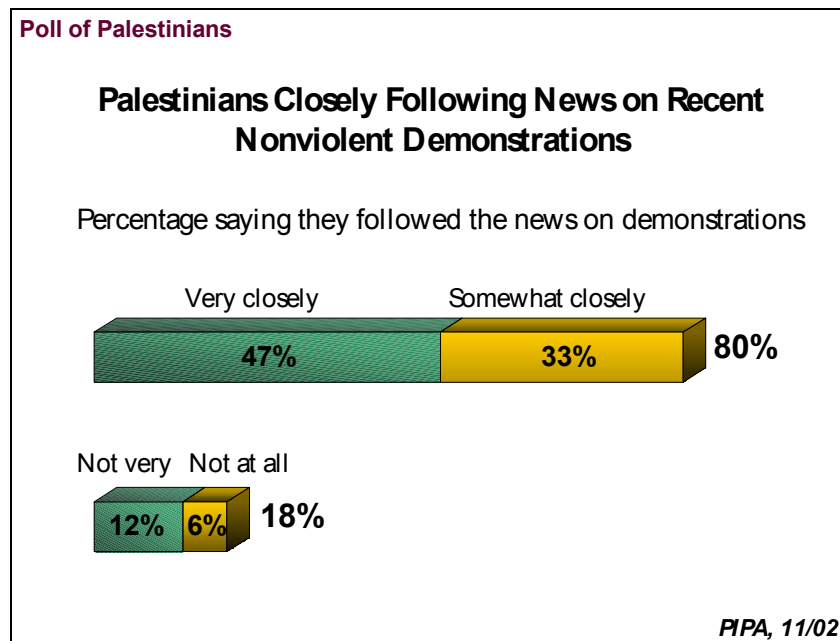
Even in response to a presentation of the prospect of more limited Israeli concessions with Israel committing to “withdraw its forces to where they were before the start of the current Intifada, refrain from all violence against Palestinian civilians, and enter into negotiations on a peace agreement”--only 36% favored “committing to stop violence against Israeli civilians.”

Support for Nonviolent Demonstrations in Violation of Curfew

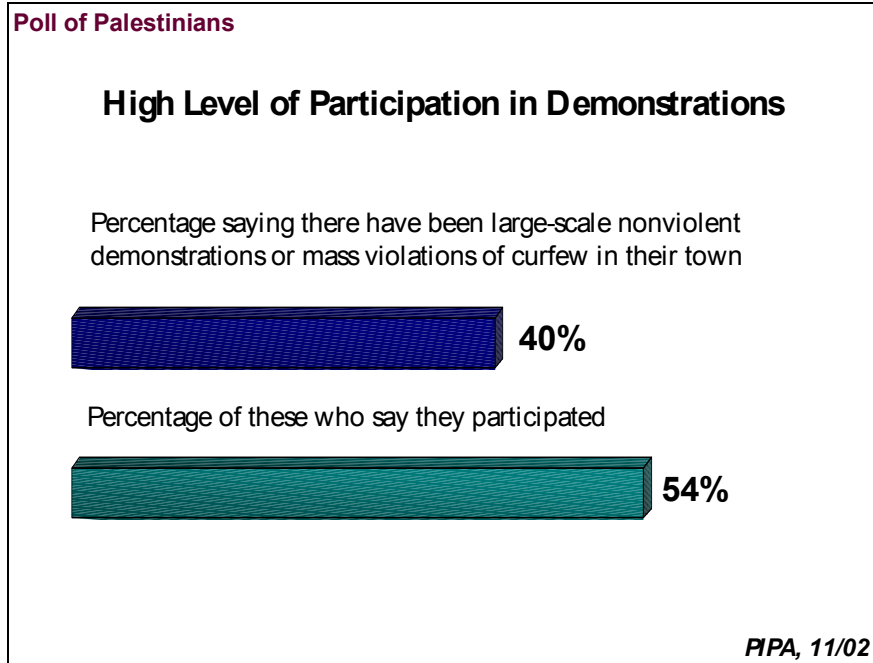
Palestinians show tremendous interest and support for the recent nonviolent demonstrations and mass violations of the Israeli-imposed curfews. Overwhelming majorities say they have followed closely the news on this issue. Among those who say that such demonstrations occurred in their town, just over half say that they participated in them. Overall, just over half say that they would be willing to participate in such actions, and another third say that they would support others doing so. A slight majority regards such demonstrations as at least as effective as violent methods, and if conducted on a large scale, this majority grows to 7 in 10. Overwhelming majorities regard Palestinians that are killed in the course of such demonstrations as martyrs, in most cases as much as suicide bombers.

Although the majority of Palestinians are not ready to renounce violence, they do show overwhelming support for the use of nonviolent methods in the Intifada and have been quite engaged and supportive of the recent nonviolent demonstrations and mass violations of the Israeli-imposed curfews.

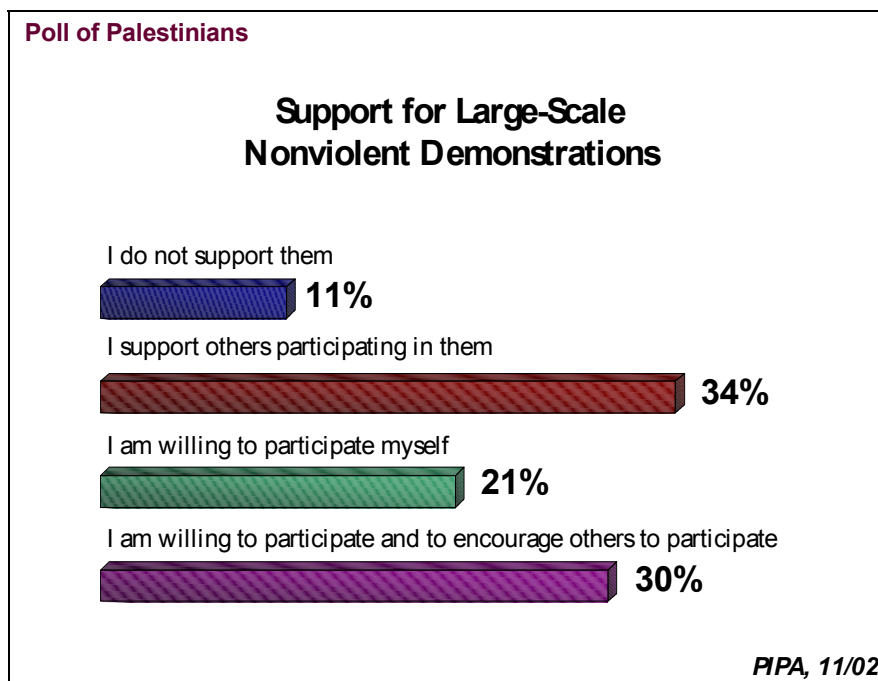
In sharp contrast to the Israeli public (see below), an overwhelming majority of Palestinians (80%) said they followed the news about these actions very (47%) or somewhat (33%) closely. Only 18% said they followed it not very closely (12%) or not at all closely (6%).



Forty percent of respondents said that there have been such demonstrations in their own town. Of these a slight majority, 54%, said they participated in them.



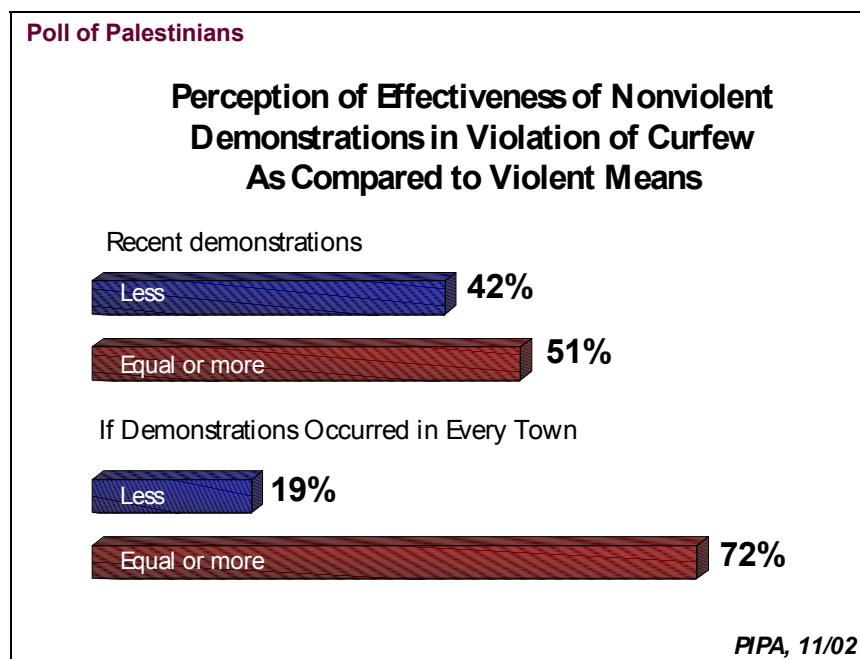
Asked how they feel “about large-scale nonviolent demonstrations in general, keeping in mind both the potential risks and benefits of this action,” again, a slight majority (51%) said they were willing to participate, with 30% of these also willing to encourage others to do so. Only 11% did not support them, while 34% said they would support others participating.



An overwhelming majority of 91% said they regarded the Palestinians killed by IDF forces in the recent demonstrations as martyrs. Of these, 51% regard them as martyrs as much (42%) or more (9%) than a suicide bomber. Thirty-two percent regard them as less of a martyr, while 16% did not answer.

Perhaps most striking, a slight majority (51%) said they regarded the recent nonviolent demonstrations as equally effective (32%) or more effective (19%) than “violent means...as a means of resisting the occupation.” Forty-two percent regarded them as less effective.

Those that said they were less effective were then asked to “imagine that the numbers of Palestinians participating in such large-scale nonviolent demonstrations in violation of the curfew expanded until large numbers in every Palestinian town were resisting in this way at once.” Of those asked, half changed their position, so that in this case only 19% of the whole sample would regard such demonstrations as less effective than violent means, and 72% would regard them as equally or more effective.

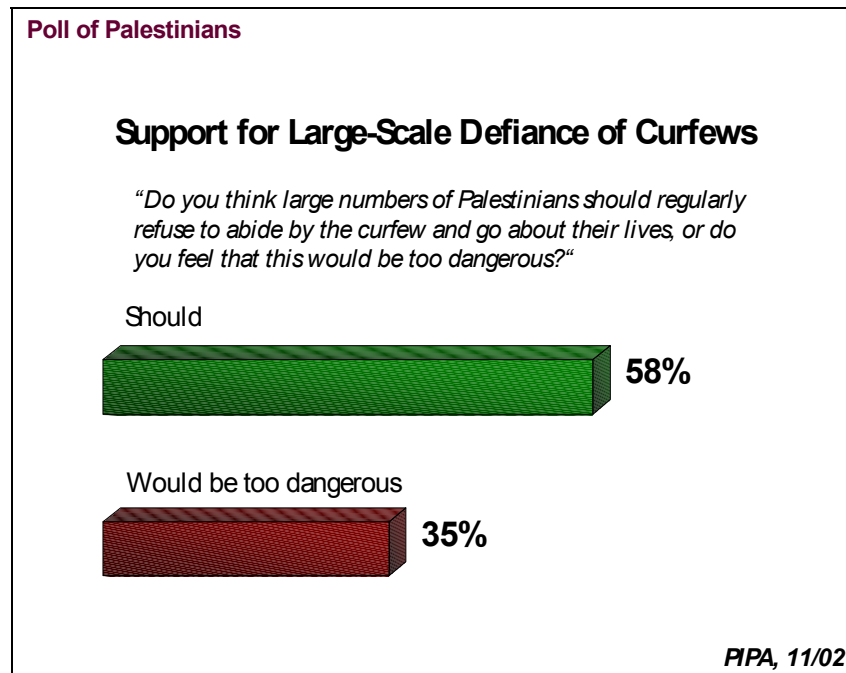


Support for Large-Scale Defiance of Curfews

A strong majority supports the idea of large numbers of Palestinians regularly refusing to abide by the curfews; only a third regards this as too dangerous. Nearly half say that they would be willing to participate in such large-scale refusals, while another third says they would support others doing so.

Palestinians are very supportive of the idea of engaging in ongoing mass defiance of the IDF-imposed curfews in Palestinian towns. When asked whether “large numbers of

Palestinians should regularly refuse to abide by the curfew and go about their lives,” a solid majority (58%) said they should. Thirty-five percent felt such large-scale defiance of curfews would be “too dangerous.”



Asked if there were “an effort to organize large-scale refusals to abide by the curfew in your town,” nearly half of Palestinians polled (45%) said they would participate in this effort, including 32% who would “participate and encourage others to participate.” Another 31% would “support others doing it” but would not participate. Just 14% said they would not support it.

Attitudes About Violent and Nonviolent Methods

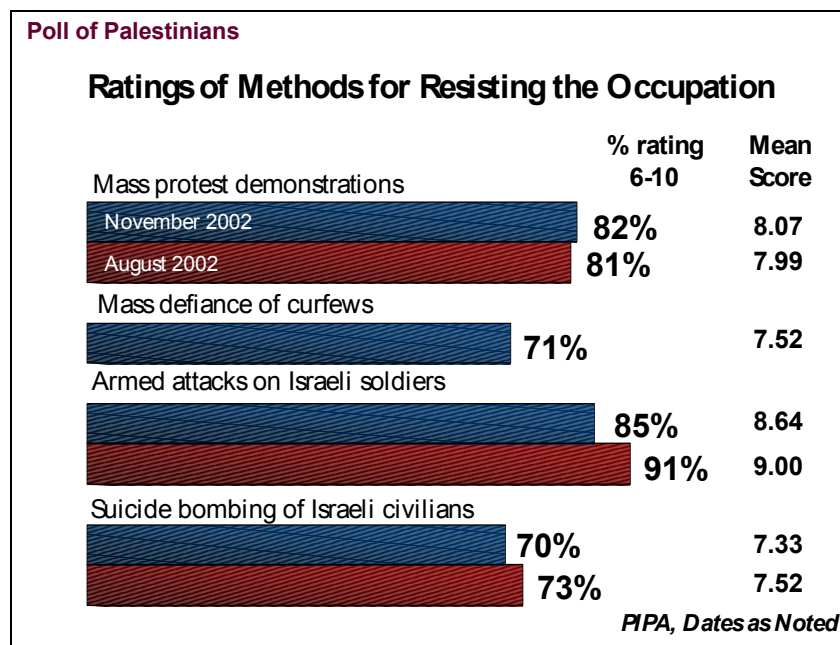
While Palestinians refuse to renounce the use of violent methods in the Intifada, support for the use of nonviolent methods is very high and higher than for suicide bombing.

In late summer 2002, some Fatah leaders made a public call for using nonviolent rather than violent forms of resistance and requested that Hamas halt suicide attacks on Israeli civilians – a development much discussed in world media at the time. Consistent with their refusal to renounce violence as long as they do not believe that the Israelis are really ready to make concessions in negotiations—discussed above-- 57% said they opposed the the Fatah leaders’ call and were divided about whether it was even significant.

At the same time Palestinians show support for nonviolent as well as violent methods. Asked, “In the future would you like to see the Intifada put more emphasis on violent methods or nonviolent methods of resistance?” 44% said both while 25% opted for more emphasis on violent methods and 19% on nonviolent ones.

Respondents were offered “a list of different methods for resisting the Israeli occupation” and asked to rate them on a 0-to-10 scale, with 0 meaning, “you strongly feel it is not a good idea”; 10 meaning “you strongly feel it is a good idea”; and 5 meaning “you are neutral.” Violent methods scored high with suicide bombings, given a positive rating (6-10) by 70% and a mean score of 7.3 and “armed attacks on Israeli soldiers” – rated positively by 85% and a given a mean score of 8.6.

However both nonviolent methods were also strongly endorsed and scored higher than suicide bombing. “Mass protest demonstrations” got a positive rating from 82%, and a mean score of 8.1. “Mass defiance of curfews” – a method not asked about before – got a positive rating from 71% and a mean score of 7.5.



A majority of Palestinians continues to say that they believe that violence against Israelis makes Israelis more ready to compromise, but that Israeli violence does not have this effect on Palestinians. Sixty-four percent thought “when Palestinians use violence that injures and kills Israeli civilians, this makes the Israelis more willing to make compromises,” while 62% thought that when Israelis “use armed force” to the same effect, “this makes Palestinians...less willing to make compromises.” The same questions were asked in August 2002 with similar results. (See the findings on Israeli Jews for counterparts to these questions.)

Consistent with the results just mentioned, and clarifying some of the roots of the strong urge to affirm the Palestinian use of violence, an overwhelming majority (78%) said in a separate question that when Israelis use armed force that harms Palestinian civilians, this “leads to an increase...in Palestinian violence against Israelis.”

Israeli Findings

Mistrust Blocks Underlying Willingness to Make Settlement Based on 1967 Borders
More than 7 in 10 Israelis indicate a willingness to allow a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders if Palestinians commit to stop violence against Israel, and do so for an extended period of time. Fewer than one in five say that they favor Israel holding on to the Territories. However, many in the majority express a lack of faith that Palestinians would really give up violence, and thus at this point there is only a bare majority ready to take a position favoring such a settlement.

It appears that more than 70% of Israelis would be ready to allow a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders if Palestinians would be ready to stop the use of violence as part of the settlement process. However, due to a lack of faith that the Palestinians would ever really forgo the use of violence, these feelings are not readily expressed and are only revealed through a two-part series of questions.

Respondents were first asked:

If the Palestinians committed to stop using violence against Israel and in fact stopped all violence for an extended period, would you favor or oppose Israel allowing the establishment of a Palestinian state outside the 1967 borders, except for some agreed-upon land swaps?

A slight majority of 51% said they would favor allowing such a state while 42% were opposed.

Those who opposed this idea were then asked:

Is this because you do not believe that the Palestinians will ever truly forgo the use of violence, or because you think that Israel must continue holding on to the Territories?

Fifty-one percent of this group (21% of the full sample) answered that they took this position because they did not believe the Palestinians would ever truly forgo the use of violence. Perhaps most significant, only 45% of this group (19% of the full sample), said they oppose such a settlement because they feel that Israel must continue to hold on to the Territories.

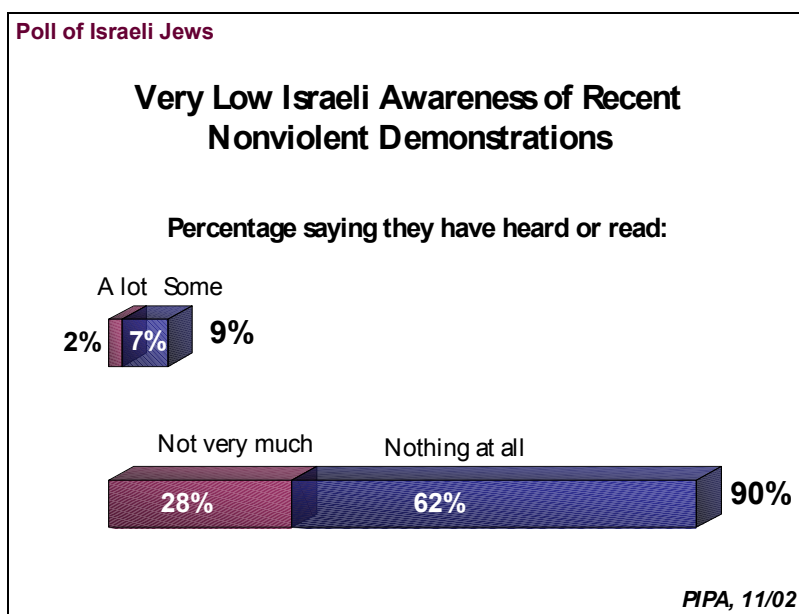
Thus it appears that 72% of the total sample would be ready to favor the establishment of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders if they were confident that the Palestinians would really forgo the use of violence.

Consistent with this widespread lack of confidence in the Palestinians, when Israelis were asked, “What percentage of the Palestinian people do you think support the idea of using only nonviolent methods in the Intifada?” the mean estimate was just 29%. This low percentage is likely a reaction to Palestinian reluctance to disavow violence.

Israelis Unaware of Nonviolent Developments, But Support IDF Restraint

Israelis have surprisingly little awareness of recent nonviolent demonstrations in violation of the curfew, and a plurality tends to interpret them negatively as a challenge to Israeli authority rather than as the emergence of a nonviolent movement. Though Israelis show very strong doubt that a genuine nonviolent movement will emerge, a majority supports the idea of Israel showing restraint in relation to nonviolent demonstrations as a way of encouraging such a trend.

Only 1 in 10 Israelis has much awareness of recent nonviolent mass demonstrations in the Palestinian territories. Asked “How much have you seen, heard or read about the large-scale demonstrations in a number of Palestinian cities that have been nonviolent but in violation of the curfew?” only 2% said they had heard “a lot”; 7% had heard “some”; 28% said “not very much” and a striking 62% said they had heard “nothing at all.” (As discussed in this report’s Palestinian findings, an overwhelming majority of Palestinians know about these demonstrations.)



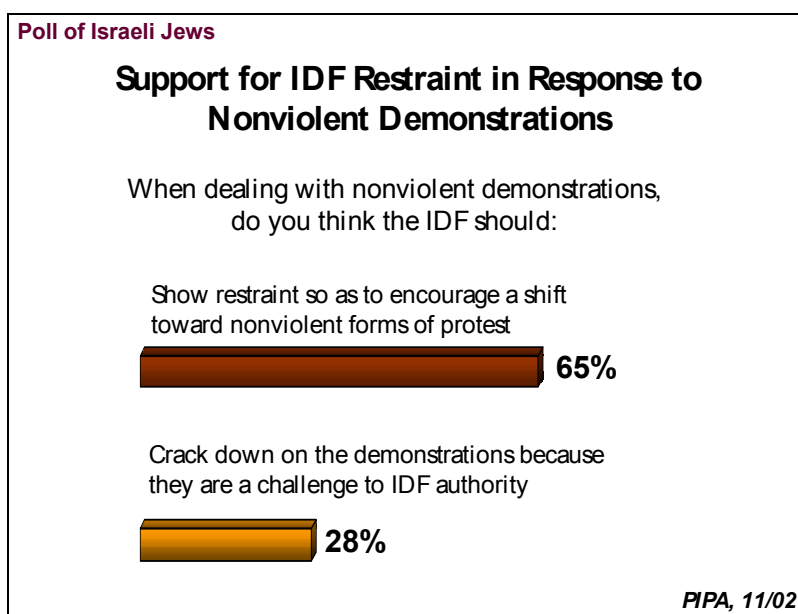
A plurality (45%) tended to interpret the nonviolent demonstrations negatively, “because they show continuing resistance to Israeli authority,” rather than as the emergence of a nonviolent movement. About a third (36%) saw the demonstrations as “a positive development, because they show a movement away from violent forms of protest.” Another 19% either saw them as both positive and negative (5%), or did not answer (14%) – as might be expected, given Israeli Jews’ very slight awareness of these events in the Palestinian territories.

Consistent with the low level of awareness of the nonviolent developments, when respondents were told that “some Fatah leaders have been recently calling for nonviolent rather than violent forms of resistance and have requested that Hamas halt suicide attacks

on Israeli civilians,” only 39% thought this was an important development (very 12%, somewhat 26%). A 59% majority saw it as not very (24%) or not at all (36%) important.

Israelis strongly doubt that a “significant Palestinian movement committed to nonviolent action only will emerge.” An overwhelming 84% said that such a development is not very likely (including 40% who felt it is “not at all likely”). Still, in the August poll, a strong majority (57%) said they would approve of a “Palestinian movement committed to nonviolent action against Israeli occupation” if one were to emerge. In the current poll a modest majority – a 53% – would regard the signs of a movement toward “greater use of nonviolent action against Israeli occupation” as a significant development, even if “other Palestinian groups continued to use violence.”

Thus, Israelis strongly support the idea of taking a measured approach in reaction to nonviolent demonstrations by Palestinians. About two-thirds (65%) thought the IDF should “show restraint” in dealing with nonviolent demonstrations “so as to encourage a shift toward nonviolent forms of protest.” Less than one-third (28%) felt the IDF should “crack down on the demonstrations because they are a challenge to IDF authority.”



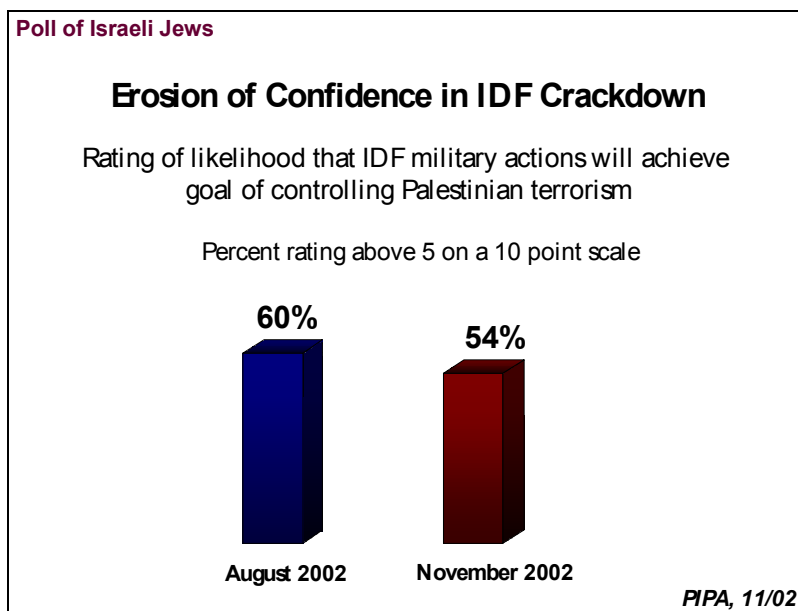
This support for not taking a harsh approach may be influenced by the impact that a nonviolent movement could have in the eyes of the world. More than 7 in 10 (72%) said that “if the Palestinians increasingly emphasized nonviolent form of protest and significantly reduced the amount of violent forms of protest ... this would lead the international community to put more pressure on Israel to make compromises.” Only 12% thought it would result in less pressure on Israel to compromise, and 12% thought it would have little effect.

Erosion of Confidence in IDF Crackdown

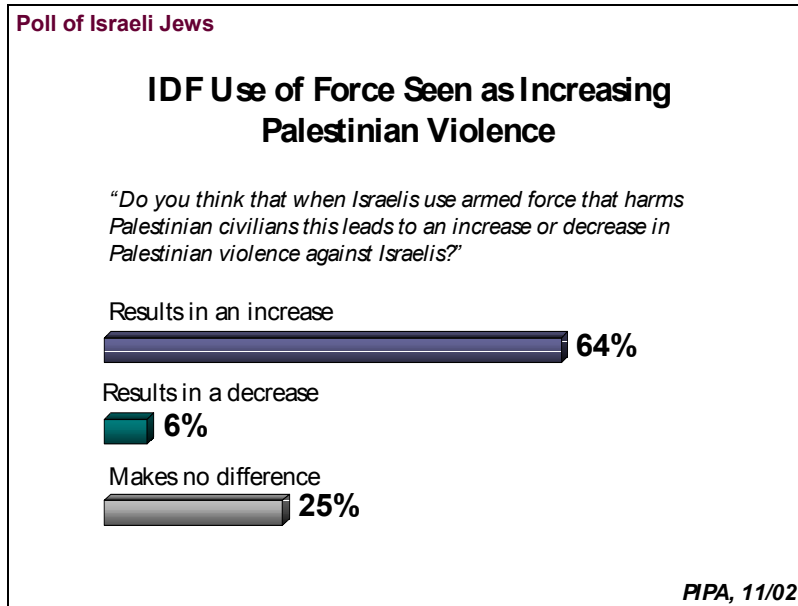
Although a majority of Israelis express support for the IDF crackdown, confidence in it appears to be eroding, with a majority believing that when the crackdown causes civilian casualties it actually increases the Palestinian violence against Israelis.

A majority of Israeli Jews expresses support for the IDF's crackdown in response to Palestinian terrorism. When asked to reply on a 0 to 10 scale – with 0 meaning strong disapproval and 10 meaning strong approval – 82% gave a rating above 5, and the mean score was 8.1. Nearly two-thirds feel that the IDF has almost always acted appropriately in its many operations in the West Bank and Gaza. A more modest majority of 52%, however, was willing to say unconditionally that the “IDF imposing curfews on Palestinian towns over the last few months has been a good practice.”

On the other hand, Israeli Jews' confidence that the IDF will achieve its goal appears to be eroding a bit. Asked “How likely do you think it is that these military actions will achieve their goal of controlling Palestinian terrorism?” and told to answer on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being very unlikely and 10 being very likely, 54% gave an answer above 5, with a mean score of 5.7. In August 2002, 60% gave an answer above 5 to the same question, with a mean score of 6.2.



Most significant, a strong majority of Israelis perceives that the crackdown appears to be increasing rather than decreasing Palestinian violence against Israelis. Sixty-four percent said that “when Israelis use armed force that harms Palestinian civilians, this leads to an increase” in Palestinian violence; 25% said this made no difference, while only 6% thought this leads to a decrease.



Even a question that asked about imposition of the curfews, without mention of any related violence against Palestinians, found that 44% thought that this action had increased support for suicide bombing. Only 17% it had reduced support for suicide bombing and 34% that it “had no real effect.”