alternatives in the israeli-palestinian conflict

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Preface

For decades, the two-state solution has dominated efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Today, there is a growing belief among analysts and the Israeli and Palestinian publics that the two-state solution might not be feasible any longer, owing to political and demographic trends and structural developments on the ground. The growing doubts about the viability of the two-state solution raise the question of which, if any, of the possible alternative futures (henceforth, “alternatives”) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could succeed, if appropriately supported by the international community, in ending this conflict.

To examine this question, we set out five plausible alternatives that capture the range of what has been proposed and then conducted 33 focus groups in the region to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on perspectives toward the viability of each. The focus group exercise collected detailed opinions of more than 270 individuals, including West Bank Palestinians, Gazan Palestinians, Israeli Jews, and Israeli Arabs. These data provide a novel tool for investigating whether there are any areas of overlap between Palestinians and Israelis that might form the basis for renewed dialogue.

Our data were collected over a two-year period (the first 16 focus groups were conducted in July 2018, the remaining 17 in May 2019) that was marked by a great deal of unrest in the Middle East and political uncertainty in Israel, including two Israeli elections. U.S. President Donald Trump released his long-awaited proposed peace plan in January 2020. Although we had completed our research in December 2019, the release of the Trump plan injected new concepts into the policy debate. Therefore, sections of this report addressing Trump’s plan were added in February 2020. This report was also written before coronavirus disease 2019 became a worldwide pandemic with significant global and regional social and economic effects, which could reduce international attention to this important topic, and before the Israel–United Arab Emirates agreement (the Abraham Accords) in August 2020.

This work should be of interest to Israeli, Palestinian, U.S., and other international policymakers, in addition to policy and civil society influencers who inform the discourse surrounding the conflict at the grassroots and policy levels and are committed to finding a permanent and peaceful resolution to the conflict.
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About the RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy

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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the most enduring political challenges in the post–World War II period. Despite a multitude of high-profile international efforts, the conflict persists. In the place of political progress is an evolving status quo with growing economic and political inequality and increasingly pronounced divisions. As these divisions grow, the prospects for a two-state solution along the lines agreed to in the historic 1993 Oslo Accords look increasingly grim.

Today, the Israeli and Palestinian people are at a critical juncture. For decades, these two peoples have struggled to define the contours of an outcome that is acceptable to both sides. However, there is a growing awareness that if a resolution is not soon reached, it might never be. And although some groups benefit from the political impasse, current trends are heading in a direction that is undesirable to the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians. Expanding settlements in the West Bank threaten the viability of an independent political future for the Palestinians, and demographic trends undermine the prospect for an Israel that is democratic, Jewish, and economically vibrant.

The purpose of this research was to assess whether there were any viable alternatives to the current status quo. Specifically, relying on a systematic set of focus group discussions with Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, we set out to answer three fundamental questions:

1. Are any of the multitude of proposed alternative futures in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians?
2. If not, what types of modifications to these proposals would need to be made to make them viable?
3. What types of action can the international community take, if any, to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict?
Five Alternatives

Our analysis focused on five alternative futures (henceforth, “alternatives”) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We selected these five generalized alternatives based on a functional analysis of the range of existing proposals; we believe that these five alternatives capture the range of concepts that have been put forward.

The first of these alternatives is the perpetuation of today’s status quo. The status quo emerged in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords, a set of historic agreements that began a peace process between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. This status quo has been marked by limited Palestinian autonomy, overriding Israeli security control, and ongoing Israeli settlement expansion. Despite political discourse and debate and significant international support and interest, little progress has been made in addressing the “final status” issues anticipated in the Oslo Accords.

The second alternative is the two-state solution, which has been the international community’s preferred alternative for decades. The two-state solution usually includes the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, borders based on the pre-1967 borders (often referred to as the “Green Line”) with land swaps to compensate for West Bank land transferred to Israel to reduce the uprooting of settlements, transport infrastructure to ensure that Palestinians have freedom of movement within their new state, a resolution to the issue of the status of Jerusalem, and a mutually acceptable way forward for Palestinian refugees.

Some proposals have suggested the establishment of a confederation, following a model similar to the European Union. This alternative would establish two (Israel and Palestine) or three (Israel, West Bank, and Gaza) independent and sovereign states that would cooperate on issues of mutual interest by way of a federal government. In addition to differences in the number of sovereign states, a major difference across variations of the confederation is in the types of powers delegated to the federal government. In all variations, most power remains with the individual states, and powers delegated to the federal government are limited to issues that the individual states mutually agree are common to all states (e.g., shared natural resources, economic relations, external threats).

Annexation describes an alternative in which Israel unilaterally would annex some parts of land it captured during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, increasing the territorial size of Israel. In this alternative, Palestinians would maintain autonomy comparable to the status quo, in which they have authority over local issues and internal security, although the territory in which Palestinians exercise authority would likely be disconnected and dominated by a small number of urban centers. Movement between the much smaller territory of the West Bank and expanded Israel would continue to be limited, as in the status quo. Proposed versions of this alternative include annexation of only Jewish settlements, the Jordan Valley, all of Area C, or all of the West Bank.
The one-state solution is the final alternative we examined. It envisages a single state encompassing all (or most) of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The various proposals for a one-state solution vary in terms of their assumptions about the democratic character of the new state and whether Gaza would be included.

Focus Group Approach

The findings in this report are derived from a series of innovative, structured focus group discussions, designed to provide a nuanced view of the concerns, views, and uncertainty of the populations toward these alternatives. These focus groups were based on the RAND Corporation’s Delphi method, a widely used approach for forecasting in complex settings, which generates a blend of well-informed quantitative and qualitative insights on these alternatives. We conducted a total of 33 focus group discussions (273 participants): 13 with Israeli Jews (107 participants), 6 with Israeli Arabs (52 participants), 6 with Gazan Palestinians (46 participants), and 8 with West Bank Palestinians (68 participants). Each focus group discussion included a roughly equal blend of women and men, with the exception of the three all-male focus group discussions with ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews. Data collection was conducted during summer 2018 and summer 2019.

This research is designed to complement the extensive random-sample polling that has been done on these topics. Although the number of focus group discussions that we conducted does not allow for the same precision as polling, our data collection has several unique characteristics. First, because our intent was to capture informed perspectives on the alternatives, each of our focus group discussions began with a robust discussion (30–40 minutes in length) introducing participants to the details of each of the five alternatives. Second, our focus groups produced qualitative data that are systematic and replicable, allowing comparison both across and within different populations. Third, the blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches provided a combination of sharp predictions on the viability of alternatives and deep contextual discussions to explain what those predictions mean.

Key Findings

Eight key findings emerged from this research.
Finding 1: None of the alternatives are acceptable to a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians.

For Israeli Jews, the only alternative judged as “acceptable” by a majority of focus group participants was the status quo. For the other three populations—Israeli Arabs, Gazan Palestinians, and West Bank Palestinians—one of the alternatives were acceptable to a majority of participants.

Finding 2: The two-state solution is the most politically viable alternative, although all four populations voiced skepticism toward this alternative.

The two-state solution was the preferred alternative for both the Israeli Arabs and West Bank Palestinians and the second-highest-rated alternative for Israeli Jews and Gazan Palestinians. None of the other alternatives had anything close to this breadth of support.

However, focus group participants from all four population groups voiced skepticism toward this alternative. For Israeli Jews, advocates highlighted the political and security benefits of separation while opponents cited security, settlements, Jerusalem, religion, and feasibility as major concerns. Israeli Arabs saw separation as a benefit for both Israelis and Palestinians but stated that the Palestinians were being asked to sacrifice too much for the limited autonomy provided to them. The Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank were skeptical of both the viability and the benefits of the two-state solution.

Finding 3: Palestinians state that they want the two-state solution, but with major modifications.

The two-state solution was the most highly rated alternative among Palestinians overall. However, our focus group discussions revealed that Palestinians will accept the two-state solution only if some of its characteristics are modified. Participants reported that, among other modifications, the new Palestinian state would need to have an army to defend itself and protect its borders and would need to have economic control over its borders. They indicated that these modifications were necessary to achieve “real” independence and self-governance.

These modifications are included, in part, in the confederation alternative that we presented. Under the confederation, Palestinians would have their own separate state and more control over the borders, economic relations, and shared resources. Although Palestinians would not have an army (similar to the two-state solution), they would be permitted to operate with the Israel Defense Forces to secure borders. They would also be equally represented in a shared federal government responsible for jointly adjudicating key areas common to both states (shared resources, economic relations, and external threats), and they would have more freedom to move within and across both states. However, support for the confederation was low because it did not offer the desired separation from Israel.
Finding 4: The status quo is preferred by Israeli Jews but strongly disliked by Palestinians.

Support for the continuation of the status quo came from across the Israeli Jewish political spectrum, with focus group participants offering two types of rationales for their support. The first is that the status quo provides for the continuation of a flourishing economy and a relatively stable security situation. Second, Israeli Jewish participants reported that a major benefit of the status quo is that it is relatively risk-free when compared with the other alternatives. Even though many on the center-left preferred the two-state solution in principle and many on the right similarly preferred annexation, representatives from both political groups reported support for the status quo because they feared what might go wrong with the other alternatives.

For Israeli Arabs and Palestinians, there was a keen and strong desire for a change from the status quo and an end to “occupation.” Palestinians expressed the urgent need for a change to address their living conditions and, in particular, the poor economic situation, unemployment, lack of education, water shortages, lack of mobility, and lack of independence. Some expressed frustrations aimed at their leaders, but most blame Israel for what they consider the disastrous status quo in which they are living. Although Israeli Arabs were skeptical that change was possible, they similarly emphasized their desire for improved economic and political opportunities that might come with different alternatives.

Finding 5: There is widespread skepticism that any alternative would be feasible.

Participants in our focus group discussions were highly skeptical that any alternative to the status quo would be viable. There was widespread distrust among Israelis and Palestinians of their own leadership, the leadership of the other side, and the people from the other side. As a consequence, there was great skepticism that a deal could be reached and that either side would abide by the terms of the deal. Furthermore, many Israelis were skeptical about the feasibility of evacuating settlements, particularly in the wake of disengagement from Gaza. In addition, the majority of Israelis and Palestinians in our focus groups indicated that none of the alternatives would end the conflict.

Finding 6: Separation was the single most important factor in determining acceptability.

The desire for “separation”—that is, separation between Israelis and Palestinians—was the most important overall factor in determining support for alternatives. The overwhelming priority in all discussions with Israeli Jews and with Palestinians was the desire to separate from the other and avoid any governance or living arrangement that brought the two groups closer together. Given this lack of trust and animosity, it is not surprising that alternatives such as a confederation or a one-state solution were considered infeasible. Most Israeli Arabs also wanted complete separation from the Palestinians.
Although Palestinians sought political separation, they wanted to retain economic partnerships with Israel that they saw as critical to their livelihoods. However, most Palestinian participants indicated that they did not believe that this political separation could be guaranteed.

**Finding 7: Israeli Arabs and Palestinians indicated that all alternatives were biased in favor of Israeli Jews.**

There was a consensus among both Israeli Arabs and Palestinians that the status quo and each of the alternatives as presented were biased in favor of Israeli Jews. Palestinians viewed *all* of the alternatives as primarily serving the interests of the Israelis while asking for more compromises from the Palestinians. The consensus among Israeli Arabs was that each of the alternatives, inclusive of the two-state solution, were discriminatory and biased against both Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. They were also skeptical that any of these alternatives were feasible, as Israel would only be willing to accept an alternative that was clearly in its favor.

**Finding 8: A blend of economic and security guarantees—for Israelis and Palestinians alike—will be needed to enable a peaceful resolution to the conflict.**

Our findings suggest that an “economic peace” strategy is unlikely to be successful unless accompanied by significant security and other guarantees. Economics was only a modestly important issue for Gazan Palestinians and Israeli Arabs but largely a secondary concern for West Bank Palestinians and Israeli Jews. By contrast, security guarantees are likely to be an important factor in making progress. Security was particularly important for the Israeli Arabs and Palestinian populations, reflecting the fact that these populations fear for their security. Thus, though security guarantees for Palestinians are less often discussed than those for Israelis in the context of resolving the conflict, they are likely to be critical.

There was great concern about the economic and security implications of each of the proposals, with a mutual distrust fueling uncertainty about what the other side might do to gain advantage at their cost. Guaranteeing separation, security, and improved economic conditions would strengthen any of the proposals, though these would likely require unprecedented international commitment.

**What Can the International Community Do to Support Peace?**

Our research suggests that mistrust, broadly defined, is likely the greatest impediment to peace. Therefore, international action and commitments will likely be necessary to bridge the gap and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. For the Israeli Jews, this will require external incentives to ensure that peace is better than the status quo. But international engagement that builds optimism and enthusiasm for peace among all
parties is necessary and must involve security and economic guarantees and a public dialogue to guide and develop thinking about the alternatives and their implications.

**Policy insight 1: No alternatives to the status quo will be viable without a shift in domestic and international politics.**

The status quo, regardless of the potential long-term consequences, is currently the preferred option of Israeli Jews. However, our research, as well as that of many other observers of the political stalemate, indicates that there is strong support for the two-state solution among Israeli Jews. Identifying the types of incentives that can be provided, both domestically and internationally, to encourage Israelis to be willing to explore the two-state solution is likely critical.

**Policy insight 2: International security guarantees for the Palestinians will likely be necessary for any peaceful resolution to the conflict.**

Palestinians will likely require security guarantees, credibly backed by the international community, to accept any negotiated settlement to the conflict. Working with the Palestinians to identify the types of security guarantees that can bridge their concerns with the existing formulation of the two-state solution is likely critical to the viability of any peaceful resolution to the conflict.

**Policy insight 3: Educating the Israelis and the Palestinians could lead to more-pragmatic decisionmaking.**

Prior to our focus group discussions, few participants had a clear understanding of any of the five alternatives, including the two-state solution and even the status quo. In a number of cases, participants concluded that the rich discussion offered in our focus groups allowed them to make a more informed decision about their preferred alternative and stated that they had ended up supporting a different alternative as a result.

Our focus group approach might be useful in shaping views if applied to thorny aspects of the conflict, including concrete areas for cooperation, such as water, power, and road networks, but a broader information campaign about the various alternatives is likely necessary. However, given the relatively modest number of focus groups and the fact that our research was focused on other objectives, additional research, experimentation, and analysis are likely necessary to design an information campaign that might be effective in promoting a peaceful resolution to the current conflict.

**Conclusion**

One of our goals was to determine whether there were areas of overlap in opinions and feeling between Israelis and Palestinians that might offer avenues for negotiation, leading the parties closer to peace. Sadly, the data show the opposite. The data highlight
the deep distrust and profound animosity of each side for the other. In light of our findings, it is hard to imagine a departure from present trends and where they lead unless and until strong, courageous leadership among Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community articulates a desire for a better future for all.
Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the family of the late David K. Richards for generous support of this project. David’s commitment to research to help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an ongoing source of inspiration for us all.

We also want to thank the many Israeli, Palestinian, and international experts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict who talked with the team over the course of the project. In particular, we wanted to extend our thanks to six volunteers who spent a day with us in RAND’s Santa Monica office to pilot our focus group discussion approach; their feedback proved instrumental. We are also enormously grateful to our technical reviewers, whose wisdom and patience helped to sharpen our analysis and clarify our presentation. These reviewers were Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, Jeffrey Martini, Dahlia Scheindlin, Khalil Shikaki, and Ambassador Jacob Walles. In addition, we would like to thank Ambassador Marc Otte, Malik Dahlan, and Dan Rothem, who provided valuable insights on the study’s content and approach.

Finally, we want to thank the 273 individuals who were willing to spend half of their day in one of the focus groups we conducted. Their opinions, observations, and insights are instrumental in understanding the depths of this ongoing conflict. Ipsos and the Palestine Center for Public Opinion were crucial partners in the design and execution of these focus groups in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, and we want to thank them for their wisdom, guidance, and professionalism throughout this research.
Abbreviations

GDP  gross domestic product
IDF  Israel Defense Forces
PA   Palestinian Authority
PLO  Palestine Liberation Organization
PNSF Palestinian National Security Forces
The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the pernicious political challenges in the post–World War II period. Despite a multitude of high-profile international efforts, the conflict persists. In the place of political progress is an evolving status quo with growing economic and political inequality and increasingly pronounced divisions. As these divisions grow, the prospects for a two-state solution along the lines agreed to in the historic 1993 Oslo Accords look increasingly grim.

Today, there is a growing awareness that trends are heading in a direction that is undesirable to the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians. Expanding settlements in the West Bank threaten the viability of an independent political future for the Palestinians, and demographic trends undermine the prospect for an Israel that is democratic, Jewish, and economically vibrant.

In light of this fragility of the status quo and the challenges facing the two-state solution, analysts across the political spectrum have proposed a variety of alternative futures (henceforth, “alternatives”) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These alternatives include a confederation, in which separate Israeli and Palestinian states would be established under a single federal government; annexation, in which Israel would unilaterally seize control of all or parts of the West Bank and Gaza; and a one-state solution, in which a single state would be formed encompassing all (or most) of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. There are many permutations of each of these three types of alternatives, varying in both their designs and assumptions about conditions on the ground.

The purpose of this research is to assess community views on proposed alternatives to the current political impasse. After developing a taxonomy of these alternatives, we conducted a series of structured focus group discussions with Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians to assess their perspectives on each. In these focus groups, we sought to assess each population’s views toward the acceptability and feasibility of five

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1 We use the term Israeli Arab to refer to Israel’s Christian, Druze, and Muslim citizens of Arab descent. We recognize that this term is not universally accepted and that a number of different terms have been used to refer to this group (e.g., Arab-Israeli, Arab citizen of Israel, Israeli Palestinian, Palestinian citizen of Israel). We use this term to be consistent with the existing literature.
alternatives—the status quo, the two-state solution, a confederation, annexation, and a one-state solution—and the factors underlying their support (or lack thereof). The primary output from each discussion was verbatim transcripts capturing the myriad questions and opinions of participants about each alternative. In addition, though our focus group discussions were not designed to be statistically representative, our structured focus group methodology included a quantitative survey (as a tool to organize subsequent group discussion) comparable to those used by polling organizations.

We used the insights from these data to answer three fundamental research questions. First, are any of the multitude of proposed alternative futures in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians? Second, if not, what types of modifications to these proposals would need to be made to make them viable? Third, what types of action can the international community take, if any, to support a peaceful resolution to the conflict?

1.1. The Post-Oslo Status Quo

In the nearly 30 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords, there has been little progress in addressing the “final status” issues anticipated in these accords. The borders remain disputed, Israeli settlements in the West Bank continue to grow, the future of Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees is unclear, the security situation remains tenuous, and mutual recognition is overshadowed by violence and distrust.

However, while the political situation has been stagnant, conditions on the ground have evolved. Two macro trends are particularly germane. The first trend is the demographic shift that has been gradually unfolding because the population growth rates of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians have far outpaced Israeli Jews. At the time of the Oslo Accords, in 1993, Israeli Jews accounted for 60 percent of the total population between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan. By 2020, Israeli Jews accounted for somewhere

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2 An additional challenge is the rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox (Haredim) population—which was 12 percent of the population in 2018 and growing at roughly three times the rate of other Israeli Jewish populations—whose “accelerated growth and refusal to participate in the country’s society and economy is a recipe for disaster that may lead to economic collapse and may damage national security” (Yedidia Z. Stern and Jay Ruderman, “Haredim and the State of Israel,” Jerusalem Post, September 13, 2012; and Gilad Malach and Lee Cahaner, “Press Release: 2018 Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel,” The Israel Democracy Institute, December 19, 2018).

between 49 and 51 percent of the total population, a thin majority if at all,\(^4\) and their share is anticipated to continue to fall.\(^5\)

The second trend is the continued settlement expansion, which is sometimes referred to as de facto or “creeping” annexation of lands in the West Bank. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords, the number of settlers in the West Bank outside Jerusalem has expanded nearly fourfold and will likely surpass 500,000 by 2022,\(^6\) and the number of Jews in East Jerusalem has risen to more than 200,000.\(^7\) And, in the run-up to the March 2020 legislative elections, the leaders of Israel’s two largest parties—Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud) and Benny Gantz (Blue and White)—both promised annexation of large portions of the West Bank. These developments threaten to undermine the potential viability of any type of a Palestinian state, as such a future state would lack any semblance of geographic contiguity.

The primary implication of these trends, alongside a growing gap in quality of life and an increasingly uncertain global environment, is that the status quo is becoming brittle and unsustainable. Understanding the alternatives is thus of political importance, as a clear and coherent pathway toward a peaceful future should be preferred by all parties to the potential alternative.

1.2. A Panoply of Proposed Alternatives\(^8\)

Since at least 1993, when the Oslo Accords initiated the first tangible steps toward peace in decades, the \textit{two-state solution} has been the international community’s pre-

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\(^4\) At the beginning of 2020, the estimated Israeli Jewish population was 6.8 million, and the estimated non-Jewish Israeli population was 2.4 million (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, “Population of Israel on the Eve of 2020,” December 31, 2019b). There were an estimated 2.3–2.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) and 1.9–2.0 million Palestinians in Gaza, with the lower value for each group from the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook (Central Intelligence Agency, “Gaza Strip,” \textit{The World Factbook}, 2020a; Central Intelligence Agency, “West Bank,” \textit{The World Factbook}, 2020b) and the higher value from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, \textit{Estimated Population in Palestine Mid-Year by Governorate, 1997–2021}, 2020).

\(^5\) The estimated population growth of Israeli Jews (1.7 percent per annum) is substantially below comparable estimates for non-Jewish Israelis (2.5 percent) and Palestinians (2.4 percent). Estimates of population growth rates for Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis are based on data from 2009 to 2018 from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (authors’ estimates using data from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019a), and estimates for Palestinians are based on data from the same years from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). It is worth noting that other estimates of population growth rates for Palestinians suggest much higher numbers (e.g., World Bank, \textit{Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee}, March 19, 2018).


\(^8\) See the appendix for a more detailed presentation of the alternatives discussed here.
ferred approach for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two-state solution requires the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, land swaps to compensate for land in the West Bank utilized by settlers, transport infrastructure to ensure that Palestinians have freedom of movement within their new state, a resolution to the issue of the status of Jerusalem, and a mutually acceptable way forward for Palestinian refugees. Despite the historic achievement of the Oslo Accords, the peace process ultimately failed, as did a multitude of subsequent diplomatic efforts.9

Though alternatives to the two-state solution have long been part of the intellectual discourse around the conflict, three major classes of alternatives are now being seriously discussed. The first of these alternatives is what has been characterized as a confederation (like the European Union).10 This alternative would establish two, or potentially more, sovereign states that would cooperate on issues of mutual interest by way of a joint federal government. There have been many proposals of this type, varying primarily in the types of powers that are delegated by the states to the federal government.

Annexation is a second type of alternative in which Israel would unilaterally annex some parts of what the international community recognizes as Palestinian territory, increasing the territorial size of Israel. Palestinians would maintain autonomy comparable to the status quo, in which they have authority over local issues and internal security but no role in border security. Movement between the much smaller territory of the West Bank and expanded Israel would continue to be limited, as in the status quo. Proposed versions of this alternative include annexation of only Jewish settlements, only Area C (see Figure 1.1), all of the West Bank, or all of the West Bank and Gaza.

The one-state solution is a class of alternatives defined by geographic contiguity, in which a single state would be formed that encompasses all (or most) of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The proposals for a one-state solution vary in terms of their assumptions about the democratic character of the new state (e.g., whether the political process would be structured to guarantee indefinite Jewish control of national-level decisionmaking or be structured as a multicultural democracy in which all people have equal rights) and whether Gaza would be included in this new state.

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9 These diplomatic efforts have included, among others, the Barak/Arafat/Clinton Camp David Summit (2000), the Quartet’s Roadmap for Peace (2002), the Arab Peace Initiative (2002), the Annapolis Conference and subsequent negotiations (2007–2008), and the Kerry Initiative (2013–2014). Where official negotiations have failed, the track-two Geneva Initiative (2003) was able to reach an accord between a group of Israeli and Palestinian civil society representatives.

10 We did not consider an alternative with a federation (like the United States), because no serious proposals have considered this.
Figure 1.1
Political Geography of the West Bank

SOURCE: Adapted from B’Tselem, “Interactive Map,” webpage, undated.
1.3. Existing Analyses of These Alternatives

As noted, the intent of this study is to assess whether the two-state solution or any of these three alternatives are a viable alternative to the status quo. Though our approach for examining this question is original, as we describe in more detail in the following sections, various previous analyses have examined the viability of these different alternatives in the minds of Israeli and Palestinian communities.

Public opinion polling data have been used to assess public support for the two-state solution and its alternatives for decades. The two-state solution has, for many years, had the greatest overall public support. However, support for the two-state solution has been gradually eroding among both Israelis and Palestinians—e.g., although about 70 percent of both Palestinians and Israelis indicated support for the two-state solution in the mid-2000s, support has fallen below 50 percent in recent years.11 Decreasing trust in the other “side” and increasing skepticism in the viability of the two-state solution, largely as a result of the expanding settlements, are believed to be the primary drivers of this erosion of support.12

Recently, analysts have also used polling data to assess what types of incentives could be used to encourage a permanent peace agreement. This analysis suggests that more than two-thirds of Israelis and Palestinians would be willing to support an agreement if certain incentives were offered. For the Israelis, these data suggest that a blend of incentives needs to be offered, which could include a defense treaty with the United States, normalization of relations with Arab countries, and guarantees about the Palestinian commitment to peace.13 For the Palestinians, it is seemingly much simpler, as some 70 percent of Palestinians would agree to an agreement if it either included release of all Palestinian prisoners or guaranteed access to the Israeli labor market and free movement between the two states.14 That said, the latter incentive would likely require a substantial modification to the existing two-state solution, an issue that we address in greater detail in Chapter Five.

In addition to these public opinion–focused analyses, a number of recent studies have provided in-depth analyses of the alternatives being proposed. Several of these studies have focused on assessing only a single alternative,15 such as the series of recent studies

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12 Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018, p. 4.
13 Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018, pp. 8–9.
15 The proponents of each alternative have typically provided an analysis of other alternatives in motivating support for their alternative, and these analyses are discussed in detail in the appendix in introducing each of the alternatives. In this brief discussion, we are focused more specifically on what might be described as “independent assessments” of the different alternatives.
examining various proposals for annexation. However, the handful that have taken a more comprehensive look across multiple alternatives tend to similarly end up concluding that the two-state solution is still the best alternative on offer. One comparative study, which assessed seven different alternatives on their ability to satisfy Israeli priorities, Palestinian priorities, and their feasibility, concluded that “the two-state solution is the preferred formula” for both Israelis and Palestinians. Another concluded that the “two-state solution remains the most viable solution . . . [but] may have an expiration date.”

In analyzing the different possible alternatives, a common conclusion is that no alternative is likely to provide Israel all that it wants. Specifically, a number of analysts have observed that Israel has three primary objectives—remain a Jewish state, remain a democracy, and expand geographical control into the West Bank—but that no alternative provides Israel more than two of these objectives. Palestinians face a similar conundrum, in that many of their stated aims (e.g., retaking Jerusalem, right of return for Palestinians to Israel) are likely unachievable under any feasible alternative.

1.4. Analytical Approach

To provide novel insights on Israeli and Palestinian perspectives toward these alternatives and to assess what pathways there might be toward peace, we conducted a systematic series of structured focus group discussions with Israeli Arabs, Israeli Jews, and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. These structured discussions were based on RAND’s Delphi method for qualitative solicitation, in which the views of participants are elicited on a given topic using a standard quantitative approach and then the findings from that quantitative analysis (after being rapidly analyzed by the facilitator) are used as a focusing mechanism for subsequent discussion.

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16 E.g., Commanders for Israel’s Security, Ramifications of West Bank Annexation: Security and Beyond: Summary, October 2018; Gilead Sher and Daniel Cohen, The Repercussions of Partial or Full West Bank Annexation by Israel, Baker Institute for Public Policy, 2019.


20 Our approach was an in-person version of RAND’s modified-Delphi approach (e.g., Dmitry Khodyakov, Sean Grant, Brian Denger, Kathi Kinnett, Ann Martin, Holly Peay, and Ian Coulter, “Practical Considerations in Using Online Modified-Delphi Approaches to Engage Patients and Other Stakeholders in Clinical Practice Guideline Development,” The Patient—Patient-Centered Outcomes Research, Vol. 13, No. 1, February 2020).
This focus group discussion approach was designed to be complementary to the extensive random-sample polling that has been done on these topics. The qualitative data in these transcripts provide a nuanced, in-depth view of the concerns, views, and uncertainty of the populations toward these alternatives that is not available in traditional polling data. In addition, as our intent was to capture informed perspectives on the alternatives, each of our focus group discussions began with a robust discussion introducing participants to the details of each of the five alternatives. This differs from existing polling data, which are typically focused on providing representative estimates of how these populations might vote on alternatives.

Our focus group discussions produced both qualitative and quantitative data. The transcripts from these focus group discussions, the qualitative data, are the primary data source for our analysis. These transcripts were analyzed in their original language (either Arabic or Hebrew) in a two-step process. First, the researchers coded the discussion of each of the alternatives, identifying all discussions relevant to the acceptability of the alternative, reasons for acceptability (Jerusalem, borders, settlers, access to movement, security, governance, education, militarization, economy, and others), and barriers to implementation. For each of these categories, the researchers developed a set of relevant coding criteria to capture the perspectives of the group and the extent of agreement or disagreement among the group. In this report, selected quotes are provided in English to illustrate various perspectives toward these alternatives, with those translations provided by researchers on the RAND team.

The quantitative data produced in these focus group discussions are of two varieties. The first type of data are individual-level assessments of each alternative using a Likert scale. These data are comparable in form to the data produced by previous polling efforts, though our respondents were asked to assess each alternative along five dimensions (economics, governance, security, feasibility, overall) rather than just providing a single overall assessment. The second type of data are rank orderings of priorities, which are based on an exercise in which each respondent was asked to rank order different potential outcomes for the future from most important to least important. These data are similar to the data on “incentives” included in the Palestinian-Israeli Pulse, a poll focused on understanding the two-state solution and its alternatives, though the intent of these data is to identify the general types of factors likely to be important to respondents rather than the potential effectiveness of specific incentives.

### 1.5. Design of Focus Group Discussions

We conducted a total of 33 focus group discussions (273 participants): 13 with Israeli Jews (107 participants), 6 with Israeli Arabs (52 participants), 6 with Gazan Palestinians (46 participants), and 8 with West Bank Palestinians (68 participants). The focus groups with Israeli Jews were organized and conducted in Hebrew by the Tel
Aviv–based Ipsos, and the focus group discussions with Israeli Arabs and Palestinians were organized and conducted in Arabic by the Bethlehem-based Palestine Center for Public Opinion.

Each focus group discussion included a roughly equal blend of women and men, with the exception of the three all-male focus group discussions with ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews. However, our analysis does not allow comparison between male and female perspectives, as neither the transcripts from the discussions nor the individual-level assessments contain identifying information for the participants. Researchers from RAND, Ipsos, and the Palestine Center for Public Opinion who either observed or conducted the focus group discussions did not observe any noteworthy gender-specific differences in perspectives.

The sampling in the four target populations (Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, West Bank Palestinians, Gazan Palestinians) was designed by RAND’s partners. The data collection was not designed to be representative, but rather to provide a comprehensive view of different perspectives within each population. Specifically, it was designed to provide “saturation” for the qualitative data collection for each of the target populations. Saturation refers to the point at which additional data collection is unlikely to yield new thematic understandings, and this saturation is typically achievable with three to six focus group discussions per target population.

The participants in each focus group discussion, who were recruited by RAND’s two local partners, were deliberately homogeneous to encourage open and frank discussions. However (although the focus group discussions were not designed to be representative of each population given the relatively modest number in total), the focus group discussions were designed to provide as comprehensive a perspective as possible. Sampling was done based on political leanings for the focus groups with Israeli Jews, and the focus groups with Israeli Arabs and Palestinians were selected based on geography. Table 1.1 provides a brief summary of the location, demographic group targeted,

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21 The approximate share of women in the focus group discussions is as follows: Israeli Arab, 40 percent; Palestinian, 45 percent; and non–ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jewish, 50 percent.


24 Each group was designed to be largely homogeneous in terms of age, religious and political affiliations, and education level when possible because RAND’s partners emphasized that this would improve the candor and quality of the qualitative discussions.

25 Five of the groups, two in 2018 and three in 2019, were of Israeli Jews who reported voting for right-wing parties and self-identified as national religious or traditional. Three groups (two in 2018 and another one in 2019) self-identified as being on the left or center-left. Three additional groups were of ultra-Orthodox participants, also known as Haredi, and two groups, one in each year, were of immigrants from former Soviet Union countries, colloquially referred to in Israel as “Russians.”
and timing of each of the focus groups. RAND researchers observed four focus group discussions with Israeli Jews, one with Israeli Arabs, three with West Bank Palestinians, and none in Gaza.

These structured focus group discussions, which were designed by the RAND team based on RAND’s Delphi method, were designed to last three hours and have four major components. This overall design is illustrated in Figure 1.2, which provides the sample agenda from one of these focus groups.

The first part of these discussions, “Part 1: Review Alternatives,” was structured like a classroom discussion of the key dimensions of the status quo and the four alternatives we selected for consideration: the two-state solution, confederation, annexation, and the one-state solution. The facilitator, speaking in Hebrew to Israeli Jews or in Arabic to Israeli Arabs, West Bankers, and Gazans, introduced each alternative in turn, relying on a sequence of slides developed by the RAND research team, and taking and addressing clarifying questions. The specifics of the status quo and alternatives (and the presentation slides on them) are described in more detail in the following chapter.

The second part asked each individual to rate the status quo and four alternatives along five key dimensions: (1) overall acceptability (“How acceptable is the alternative overall?”), (2) feasibility (“Is the alternative feasible?”), (3) economic opportunity (“Economic opportunities and employment prospects for you and your family”), (4) governance (“Your ability to have a say in political decisions that are important to you”), and (5) security (“Your security and the security of your friends and family”).

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26 The first wave of data collection also asked for the group to introduce up to three additional dimensions.
were asked to rate all five options for each criterion sequentially on a score of 1–5, using a paper survey instrument that was handed to each participant. Figure 1.3 provides an example of the top of this survey instrument, where individuals are asked to rate the five based on “economic opportunity and employment.” Participants were told that scores of 1 and 2 corresponded to an “unacceptable” outcome, 3 corresponded to “uncertain,” and 4 and 5 corresponded to “acceptable.”

Part 3 of the focus group discussions (“Part 3: Group Discussion of Each Alternative”) was a structured qualitative discussion of the status quo and the alternatives. Using the data collected during this exercise (Part 2, as discussed above), the facilitator created a series of figures summarizing the individual-level ratings (an example is provided in Figure 1.4). Starting with the status quo and then the alternatives, with those with the highest overall rating going first, the participants were asked to discuss the ratings that they provided. Individuals who might be outliers (e.g., rated an alternative low while others rated it high) were asked to explain their thinking, and the group was asked to describe the aspects of the alternative that led to their decisions.

The transcripts from the data collected during this part of the focus group discussion underpin the bulk of the qualitative analysis presented in this study. Although this analysis is augmented by discussions during the initial presentation of the alternatives, the intent was that this would provide a rich source of systematic but highly contextu-

ized perspectives on each of the alternatives.

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27 For the feasibility question, “acceptable” was replaced with “feasible,” and “unacceptable” was replaced with “infeasible.”
The final part of the focus group had two components. The first component was a close-out discussion of perspectives about the alternatives, asking participants to discuss the most important factors affecting their thinking, potential deal-breakers, and views toward the representativeness of the focus group discussion findings. The second component, which is discussed in more detail in the quantitative analysis chapter (Chapter Four), asked individuals to provide rank orderings of the factors that were most critical in any type of final agreement.

1.6. Organization of This Report

The remainder of this report is divided into six chapters and one appendix. Chapter Two introduces the five alternatives as they were described to participants in our
focus group discussions. Chapter Three examines the quantitative data produced during the focus group discussions, using these data to assess the viability of the five alternatives and the factors underlying individuals’ support for different alternatives and comparing our findings and approach with the random-sample polling focused on the same topic. Chapters Four through Six then examine the robust qualitative data generated during the focus group discussions and captured by verbatim transcripts of the interviews, with Chapter Four focusing on Israeli Jews, Chapter Five focusing on Palestinians, and Chapter Six focusing on Israeli Arabs. Chapter Seven summarizes the key overall findings from this research and the implications for the possible resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An appendix then provides a more in-depth discussion and analysis of the myriad proposed alternatives to the crisis.
Our analysis focuses on five alternative futures for Israelis and Palestinians: a sustained status quo, a two-state solution, a confederation, a one-state solution, and annexation. We selected these five generalized alternatives based on a functional analysis of the range of existing proposals. We judged that the five alternatives captured the range of concepts that have been put forward (see the appendix for more details). Thus, rather than describing specific proposals, we characterized the key dimensions of proposals of this same general type and asked participants in our focus groups to assess these generalized alternatives.

In this chapter, we describe how the alternatives were presented to the participants of the focus group discussions. Because a central goal of our research was to capture informed perspectives of each alternative, the three-hour focus group discussions began with a 35-minute discussion of the details of the five alternatives. The facilitator provided a 2- to 3-minute standardized description of each alternative and then addressed clarifying questions about each. This chapter is focused on setting out the descriptions of each as they were presented during the focus group discussions.

Section 2.1 describes the six primary dimensions that we used for describing the alternatives during the focus group discussions, and Sections 2.2–2.6 sequentially describe how we characterized each alternative. The order of these sections follows the same order as in the focus group discussions. We begin with the status quo (Section 2.2), as it is the most familiar to participants and provides an anchoring point for the other alternatives; follow with the two-state solution (Section 2.3), as it is the most widely discussed alternative to the status quo; and then discuss confederation (Section 2.4), the one-state solution (Section 2.5), and annexation (Section 2.6). A final section (Section 2.7) discusses how our analysis of these five generalized alternatives can be used to analyze proposals that do not neatly fit into any one specific alternative, such as that proposed by the U.S. government in early 2020.
2.1. Key Characteristics of the Alternatives

The five alternatives can be differentiated based on six key dimensions. These six dimensions, which are summarized in this section and then illustrated across the following sections on the alternatives, are closely aligned with the “final status” issues that emerged from the 1993 Oslo Accords. The major difference is that the final status issues refer to outcomes, while we use “dimensions” to refer to the characteristics of the alternatives that will lead to these (or other) outcomes. The appendix provides a more robust discussion of how we arrived at these six specific dimensions.

The first dimension is *borders*—the geographic line (or lines) that will be used to separate Israel from a future Palestinian state. Discussions of the borders for this new Palestinian state have been based largely on United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which mandated the “[w]ithdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied” during the Arab-Israeli War in 1967.1 The “territories occupied” in this resolution refers to areas east of the 1949 Armistice Line, which was not an internationally recognized border but rather a ceasefire line that was part of the agreements that ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, often referred to as the Green Line. In recent years, discussion surrounding the borders has focused on how much of this occupied land would be kept by Israel and the quantity and quality of land within Israel that would be transferred to the Palestinians in exchange. This exchange of lands is typically referred to as “land swaps.”

The disposition of Israeli *settlers* in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which now number more than 600,000,2 is the second of these dimensions. Settlements east of the 1949 Armistice Line are viewed by the United Nations as “flagrant violation” of the Geneva Convention and “constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.”3 The resolution of the settlers’ issue is closely related to that of borders (discussed immediately above) because the determination of the border is driven in large part by the disposition of Israeli settlements.

*Jerusalem*, which the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians view or seek as their capital, and whether it should be divided or unified, has been a central issue in all peace negotiations.4 Because Jerusalem is sacred to Muslims, Jews, and Christians...

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alike, many proposals to resolve the conflict have sought to respect its religious significance and ensure access to members of all faiths.

Governance is our fourth dimension, and the first that deviates from a one-to-one correspondence with the final status issues. It refers to the internal political arrangements of each alternative—who will have political agency and how decisions over domestic and foreign policy will be determined by the states that result from the alternative. This dimension captures a component of “mutual recognition,” as it assumes that the governance relationships are mutually agreed upon. It also is deliberately designed to capture the final status issue of refugees, as the type of governance arrangement will determine who has decision authority over the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel, Palestine, or whatever the new state(s) may be.

Our fifth dimension is control, which corresponds closely with the final status issue of “security.” However, although this final status issue is more focused on the overall outcome of civilian security, our focus is on the security control measures necessary for both protecting civilians and sustaining the terms of the negotiated outcome. In particular, our characterization of the alternatives along this dimension focuses on who is providing security within each political entity, along the internal borders separating these entities, and along external borders.

The final dimension is movement, which refers to the freedom of movement of citizens within the future states resulting from the alternative. Specifically, this dimension describes the extent to which citizens are allowed to move within their own state and between the states and, thus, is embedded in aspects of the final status issues dealing with mutual recognition and security, among others.

2.2. Status Quo

The status quo was the first of the five alternatives presented to the focus group participants. The facilitator showed participants a slide summarizing the key characteristics of the status quo, focusing around the six dimensions enumerated above. The bottom panel of Figure 2.1 provides an English-language version of this slide. In addition, after presenting all five alternatives, participants were given a chart comparing all five alternatives along our six dimensions—the top panel of Figure 2.1 provides the status quo column from that chart.

Our presentation of the status quo in the focus groups was also designed to serve as a baseline for the other alternatives. It provided a pithy description of the current borders, specifically that security barriers function as de facto borders for want of formally recognized borders. We also introduced the magnitude of the challenge created

5 Specifically, it “emphasizes the importance of the safety, protection and well-being of all civilians in the region in accordance with international humanitarian law” (United Nations, The Question of Palestine: Key Issues at Stake, undated).
Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Figure 2.1
Status Quo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borders</th>
<th>Israel a state; Palestinian territories consist of West Bank and Gaza. No borders but security barrier.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settlers</td>
<td>600,000 in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; ~400,000 in the West Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>Israel annexed East Jerusalem. Palestinian population in the city ~400,000 (40%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Palestinian autonomy in Areas A and B. Gaza governed de facto by Hamas; the West Bank by Fatah-led PA. Palestinians and Israelis have control over their own local issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Palestinians control their internal security in Areas A and B; Area C and border controlled by Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Movement extremely limited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current situation - The Status Quo

Currently the status of issues is:
- **Borders** – No borders, security barrier functions like a border in many areas.
- **Settlements** – 600,000 in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; ~400,000 in the West Bank
- **Jerusalem** – Palestinian population in the city ~400,000 (40%).
- **Security**: IDF controls Areas B and C, Palestinians control Area A (IDF conducts operations in A); Israel controls Palestinian airspace.
- **Refugees**: ~5 million registered Palestinian refugees including those in camps, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

NOTES: IDF = Israel Defense Forces; PA = Palestinian Authority.

by settlements, by providing estimates of the number of current settlers; the challenge created by Jerusalem, by summarizing the number of Palestinians and settlers in east Jerusalem; and the challenge created by refugees, by providing official estimates of the number of Palestinian refugees in camps or residents in other countries.

The more complex concept introduced to participants during this presentation of the status quo was the current governance arrangements in the West Bank. This was presented through the lens of our control dimension and using a standardized map.
illustrating Areas A, B, and C (in the slide in the bottom panel of Figure 2.1). Participants were reminded that Israel controls overall security in Areas B and C, while Palestinians control Area A and policing of Palestinians in Area B, and that movement between Palestinian-controlled areas is extremely limited.

2.3. Two-State Solution

Our characterization of the two-state solution was a generalized version of the existing “land for peace” proposals, such as the Clinton Parameters, the Geneva Initiative, the 2008 Olmert proposal, or the Arab Peace Initiative. By “generalized,” we mean that the characterization did not offer details of the land swaps but instead simply indicated that two independent states would be formed following the division of land. The top panel of Figure 2.2 provides the overview of this alternative given to focus group participants, and the bottom panel provides the slides used in presenting the alternative.

The two-state solution was the first alternative to the status quo presented to focus group participants, and the presentation discussed each of the six dimensions in some detail. The discussion of borders and settlers was bundled, describing the border between Israel and the Palestinian state as a modified Green Line adjusted to exchange settlements for comparable territory within Israel. On Jerusalem, the discussion did not explicitly specify that the city would be divided but rather that it would be the capital of both states, with current Jewish neighborhoods under Israeli sovereignty and Arab neighborhoods under Palestine sovereignty. Both states would determine their own principles of governance and would be responsible for all domestic issues. In terms of control, both states would control their internal security, Israel would control security along its borders, and a multinational force would become responsible for security along the Jordan River. Finally, this alternative would allow unlimited movement within each state, including transport between Gaza and the West Bank, though movement between the two states is anticipated to be limited.

2.4. Confederation

Our definition of the confederation alternative was based on the “Two States, One Homeland” proposal developed by Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives, though our definition was designed to be broadly inclusive of other confederation

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Figure 2.2
Two-State Solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Borders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Settlers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jerusalem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movement</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alternative 1: Two-State Solution (1)**

**Borders**
- Israel maintains pre-1967 borders and continues to be a separate state.
- Palestine is established as a separate state in the West Bank and Gaza.
- Borders are re-adjusted to incorporate large Jewish settlements and compensating Palestinians with equal and comparable land.

**Jerusalem**
- Jerusalem is the capital of both states: Jewish neighborhoods under Israeli sovereignty; Arab neighborhoods under Palestinian sovereignty.

**Alternative 1: Two-State Solution (2)**

**Governance**
- Each state determines its own principles of governance

**Control**
- Palestinians and Israelis control internal security in their respective states
- Israel would control its external security, Palestine de-militarized state
- Multinational force is responsible for security in the Jordan valley

**Movement**
- Trade and travel restrictions are lifted inside Palestine (passage between West Bank and Gaza is allowed)
- Limited movement for people, goods and services between the two states - to be determined by agreements between the sovereign states
proposals. This alternative was based around the general philosophy of these proposals that “an agreement that does not respect . . . the attachment to the whole land” of both the Palestinians and the Israelis will fail. The top panel of Figure 2.3 provides the overview of this alternative given to focus group participants, and the bottom panel provides the slides used in presenting the alternative.

For borders, settlers, and Jerusalem, the definition of the confederation was similar to the two-state solution, except for two major differences. The first difference was that the borders would be drawn along the Green Line and that there would not be any land swaps. Residency and citizenship would be detached. Thus, settlers would remain citizens of Israel but would become residents of the newly formed Palestinian state and would have to abide by Palestinian laws and regulations. The second was that Jerusalem would not be divided; instead, it would be explicitly shared and open to citizens of both states, with a special municipal regime established to administer the city jointly and equally by the two states.

The confederation differs dramatically, however, in terms of governance, control, and movement. The Israelis and Palestinians would each have their own sovereign government, as in the two-state solution, but they would also be united by a federal government representing the two separate states. This federal authority would be responsible for jointly adjudicating issues that both states agree are common to both. The individual state governments would have decisionmaking authority on all internal issues (such as refugees), while the shared federal governing body, which would have equitable representation from both Israel and Palestine, would have shared authority over key mutually agreed-upon areas common to both states, such as shared resources (e.g., water), economic relations (e.g., labor mobility, trade), and external threats. The Palestinian state would not be permitted to have a standing army, though Palestinian security forces would be permitted to operate with the IDF when a capability for interoperability has been proven, and travel would be unrestricted within the new state for both Israelis and Palestinians.

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8 Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives, 2014, p. 4.
Figure 2.3
Israel-Palestine Confederation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borders</th>
<th>Two separate states; Israel maintains pre-1967 borders; Palestine includes West Bank and Gaza</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settlers</td>
<td>Settlers could stay and become residents of Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>Capital of both states; joined management city; international regime of holy basin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Each state has its own government that will have independent decisionmaking on internal issues; federal government, with representation for Israel and Palestine, is established to oversee common issues. Separate decisionmaking on many issues; joint decisionmaking on shared resources, economic relations, and external threat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Palestinians and Israelis control internal security in their respective states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Free movement across both states; Israelis and Palestinians free to reside anywhere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alternative 2: Israel-Palestine Confederation (1)**

- **Borders**
  - Israel maintains pre-1967 borders and continues to be a separate state
  - Palestine is established as a separate state in the West Bank and Gaza
  - Settlers could stay in Palestine as residents (must abide by Palestinian laws and regulations)

- **Jerusalem**
  - Jerusalem is the capital of both states
  - Palestinian residents of Jerusalem become Palestinian citizens
  - Joint municipal regime manages Jerusalem
  - Holy sites managed by international community

**Alternative 2: Israel-Palestine Confederation (2)**

- **Governance**
  - Each state has its own government that will have independent decision-making on internal issues such as immigration and citizenship
  - Federal government, with representation for Israel and Palestine, is established to oversee common issues (e.g., shared resources, economic relations and external threat)

- **Movement**
  - Citizens of both state can work and travel across both states without any obstacles

- **Control**
  - Palestinians and Israelis control internal security in their respective states
2.5. One-State Solution

Our definition of the one-state solution was based on the *multicultural democracy* concept promulgated by the One Democratic State Campaign. This alternative posits a democratic, contiguous state including Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza in which all citizens have equal civil rights, and the state ensures protection of “national, ethnic or religious collectivities desiring to retain their various identities and cultural lives if they so choose.” The top panel of Figure 2.4 provides the overview of this alternative, and the bottom panel provides the slide used in presenting it.

The presentations of the *borders* and *settlers* dimensions were bundled for the one-state solution, as in this alternative the entire area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea would be combined into a new single state. Unlike the other alternatives, the second topic in the presentation of this alternative was the *governance* arrangements, which are critical for understanding this alternative. Indeed, the resulting state would have a new character because it would be a democratic state and all citizens of this new state, Israeli and Palestinian alike, would be given equal voting rights. *Jerusalem* would be the capital, and the democratically elected government would determine all policy issues, domestic and foreign, including security *control* arrangements, *movement*, and other policy areas (e.g., refugees, prisoners).

2.6. Annexation

Our definition of the annexation alternative was based on a proposal developed by Naftali Bennett, which became part of the campaign platform for the New Right party during the 2019 election. This *Bennett Plan* calls for Israeli annexation of all of Area C, offering Israeli citizenship to Palestinians living there. This plan is similar to the 1967 Allon Plan, though updated for the settlements that have developed in the intervening five decades. The top panel of Figure 2.5 provides the overview of this alternative, and the bottom panel provides the slide used in presenting it.

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10 Halper, 2018.

11 Versions of this proposal were proposed by Bennet as early as 2012, when he was the leader of Habayit Hayehudi (Amira Hass, “Palestinian Ghettos Were Always the Plan,” *Haaretz*, January 20, 2013).


13 The New Right (Hayamin Hehadash) party estimated that 80,000 Palestinians lived in this area, although the United Nations estimates that the number is nearly 300,000 (Breiner, 2019).

14 We recognize that other proposals advocate for the annexation of the entire West Bank, which some analysts have described as the Israeli One-State Solution (Caroline B. Glick, *The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan*)
The presentation during the focus group discussions focused on the *borders* and *governance* dimensions of this alternative. On the issue of borders, participants were reminded of the definition of Area C in the West Bank (using the same map as used for the status quo) and told that the annexation of Area C would impact between 66,000 and 300,000 Palestinians who would be offered Israeli citizenship or residency. Par-

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*Figure 2.4*

**One-State Solution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borders</th>
<th>New one state for all; includes all citizens residing in pre-1967 borders, West Bank, and Gaza</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settlers</td>
<td>Settlers incorporated in new state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>Capital of the new state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>One government; proportional representation of Palestinians and Jews. New state controls all issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Internal and external security controlled by the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>No movement restrictions inside the new state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Alternative 3: One-State**

- One state for all, Jews and Palestinians, between Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River
- Equal rights for all with democratic representation
  - All Israelis and Palestinians become equal citizens
  - Political bodies are constituted through proportional representation, so that demographic realities become decisive.
  - Israel will have a new character
- Jerusalem is the capital
- The new state controls all issues

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The presentation during the focus group discussions focused on the *borders* and *governance* dimensions of this alternative. On the issue of borders, participants were reminded of the definition of Area C in the West Bank (using the same map as used for the status quo) and told that the annexation of Area C would impact between 66,000 and 300,000 Palestinians who would be offered Israeli citizenship or residency. Par-

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*for Peace in the Middle East,* New York: Crown Forum, 2014). We did not consider that alternative, because we believe that its feasibility is based on flawed assumptions, as this alternative’s advocates believe that Jewish political control of the expanded state can be sustained without sacrificing Israel’s democratic character. The appendix discusses this in more depth.
Participants were informed that Israel could avoid granting rights to the upper range of Palestinians by annexing only 95 percent (rather than all) of Area C.

The second component of the presentation focused on Palestinian governance in the remaining areas of the West Bank and Gaza. In this alternative, Palestinians would maintain autonomy comparable to the status quo, in which they have authority over local issues and internal security but no role in border security. Movement between the much smaller territory of the West Bank and expanded Israel would continue to be limited, as in the status quo, and Gaza would continue on its current course.

**Figure 2.5**
Annexation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borders</th>
<th>Israel adds Area C; Palestinian autonomy that includes Area A, Area B, and Gaza</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Settlers</td>
<td>No change in the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>No change in the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Areas A and B maintain their autonomy similar to status quo; Area C is under Israeli government control. Palestinians and Israelis have control over their own local issues similar to status quo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Palestinians control their internal security in Areas A and B; border controlled by Israel similar to status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Limited movement between Israel (including Area C) and remaining Palestinian areas (Areas A and B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alternative 4: Annexation of Area C**

**Borders**
- Israel assumes full control of Area C
- 66,000–300,000 Palestinians in Area C become residents or citizens of Israel (similarly to East Jerusalemites, they will be eligible for all social rights).
- Palestinians in Areas A and B would maintain their autonomy within the State of Israel similar to status quo

**Control**
- Palestinians will have control over local issues and internal security in Areas A and B
- Border control is managed by IDF

**Movement**
- Limited between West Bank and Israel

**Jerusalem**
- Under Israeli control
- The Palestinians in Jerusalem will continue to be residents of Israel and have an optional path toward citizenship.
2.7. Other Proposals

Although the five alternatives included in our focus group discussions were designed to capture the range of concepts that have been put forward, there are a number of existing proposals that do not fit neatly into any one group. One prominent example is the recently proposed Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People, a peace plan proposed by the Trump administration in January 2020.

Peace to Prosperity can be thought of as a composite of the two-state solution and annexation alternatives described above. In terms of borders and settlers, the proposal would involve a transfer of 30 percent of the territory of the West Bank to Israel, including the Jordan Valley and all major settlement areas. In exchange, Israel would transfer roughly half that same area to the new Palestinian state, estimated to be equivalent to 14 percent of the territory of the West Bank, though much of that would be arid land in the Negev Desert. The proposal also leaves open the possibility of transferring a number of Arab Israeli communities to the new Palestinian state; an estimated one-third of all Arab Israelis live in the bloc of communities identified in the proposal. Israel would be given immediate sovereignty over almost all of Jerusalem, with a Palestinian capital established in a small section of East Jerusalem on the Palestinian side of the existing security barrier.

For governance, control, and movement, the proposal posits the establishment of a Palestinian state with limited authority and restricted movement but only after a series of criteria related to Gaza, security, and overall governance are satisfied. It gives Israel security control over all roads and tunnels and gives Israel the right to operate a security presence inside Palestinian lands. Gaza and the West Bank would be linked by a tunnel, and the multiple large noncontiguous Palestinian areas in the West Bank created by this proposal would be connected by a complicated set of roads and tunnels

15 Another example, in addition to the U.S. government plan discussed in this section, is the idea of “parallel states,” which envisages two parallel state structures covering the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (Mark LeVine and Mathias Mossberg, One Land, Two States: Israel and Palestine as Parallel States, University of California Press, 2014).


19 The proposal refers to these as “Triangle Communities” (White House, 2020, p. 13).


21 These criteria are referred to in the proposal as “Gaza criteria” (White House, 2020, pp. 25–26), “security criteria” (White House, 2020, pp. 21–24, Appendix 2B, Appendix 2C), and “Foundations of a Palestinian State” (White House, 2020, pp. 33–35).
that would be under Israeli security control. The new Palestinian state would not be able to have an army, and the Palestinians would be themselves responsible for ensuring the demobilization and disarmament of forces in Gaza.

Though this proposal was not explicitly included in our analysis (indeed, it was promulgated after our data collection was conducted), its similarity to the alternatives we did include—particularly the annexation alternative—allows us to provide only inferences on the viability of the *Peace to Prosperity* proposal. Such inferences are discussed in Chapter Seven, where we summarize the key findings that emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses and policy implications.
This chapter examines the quantitative data produced during the focus group discussions. These quantitative data were collected primarily to support the qualitative component of the research, functioning as a “snap poll” within the focus groups to drive a rich discussion of group perspectives toward each of the alternatives. Although the respondents were not necessarily representative of the population components from which they were selected, the detailed data on support for each alternative and the different aspects of that support (economics, governance, security, feasibility) provide a source of rich and nuanced opinions on the alternatives.

Analyses of these data produce two major insights. The first is that the two-state solution is the most politically viable option. By this, we mean that a near majority of our respondents from each population group were either supportive of it or uncertain about it. None of the other alternatives had anything close to this breadth of support. However, if our respondents are an indicator for the overall population, this political viability is dependent on convincing many currently uncertain Israeli Arabs and Palestinians to support it and building support among Israeli Jews, for whom both the status quo and annexation are equally appealing.

The second insight is that a blend of economic and security incentives is likely to be necessary to encourage a peaceful resolution to the conflict, at least based on the views of participants in these focus groups. This analysis is based on a statistical analysis and rank orderings of different priorities, an approach that differs from and is thus complementary to previous approaches used to explore the impact of different types of incentives. We found that economic factors are important, particularly for Israeli Arabs and Gazan Palestinians. Our analysis also revealed some new findings, one of which is that security factors are the most important for West Bank Palestinians. And while security factors are typically highlighted as the critical issue for Israeli Jews, our analysis suggests that the governance arrangements are the most important factor. Specifically, in predicting the likelihood that an Israeli Jew will support a given alternative,

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1 See Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018, and the brief review of this work in Section 1.3.
an increase in the perceived acceptability of an alternative from a governance perspective has twice the impact of a comparable increase in perceived security.

Our quantitative data are similar to existing polling efforts, in that the intent was to assess whether individuals are supportive of different alternatives. However, our data differ from random sample polling results in several key ways. First, our replies were collected after participants were offered a detailed description of each alternative. Second, we included “uncertain” as an option in our data collection. Third, we asked individuals to assess each alternative across multiple dimensions and to consider two alternatives—the status quo and annexation—that have typically not been included in comparable data efforts. And, finally, we requested that respondents prioritize their goals.

Despite these differences, our data resulted in findings that are broadly comparable with existing polling data. In particular, we obtained results comparable to the Palestinian-Israeli Pulse, the premiere representative poll focused on understanding the two-state solution and its alternatives, and comparable polling conducted by Haaretz.

The following two sections summarize the key findings from our data, with Section 3.1 reporting the overall viability of the five alternatives and Section 3.2 assessing the factors underlying support for the different alternatives and discussing the potential utility of approaches that could be utilized to encourage support for a given alternative. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 then compare our quantitative data with existing polling efforts, with Section 3.3 describing the differences in the data collection approach and Section 3.4 summarizing the similarities (and differences) in our findings. Section 3.5 concludes with a summary of the implications of the findings presented in this chapter.

3.1. Assessment of Viability of Five Alternatives

In this section, we analyze our quantitative data to assess the political viability of the five alternatives considered in our research. Our sampling is not representative of the overall population, as our data collection was only intended to provide saturation for the qualitative components of our analysis, but our data provide new evidence on how an informed population might vote on these different alternatives.

Figure 3.1 summarizes our overall findings for the four major population groups, with the alternatives presented in the order in which they were asked about during the quantitative component of the data collection. For each, the blue bars indicate the percentage of individuals who responded that they found a given alternative either “very acceptable” or “acceptable,” and the orange bars represent individuals who reported that they were “uncertain” about the alternative. The remaining individuals assessed a given alternative as “very unacceptable” or “unacceptable.” As an example, 48 percent of Israeli Jewish respondents in our data collection reported the two-state solution as “acceptable” or “very acceptable,” and an additional 8 percent reported that they were “uncertain” about this alternative.
Figure 3.1
Assessment of Acceptability of Alternatives

NOTE: This figure summarizes individual-level responses for 107 Israeli Jewish respondents (13 groups), 52 Israeli Arab respondents (six groups), 46 Gazan Palestinian respondents (six groups), and 69 West Bank Palestinian respondents (eight groups). Panels are in the order in which alternatives were assessed during the data collection, with the two-state solution asked about first, the confederation coming second, the one-state solution third, annexation fourth, and the status quo last.
Three key insights emerge from Figure 3.1. The first is that the two-state solution remains the most viable future, at least among the respondents in our data collection. Specifically, it is the only alternative in which a near majority of all four populations were either “supportive” or “uncertain” about the alternative. Among the other alternatives, only the confederation had even this relatively weak support among more than one population (Israeli Arabs and Gazans).

The second insight is that the political viability of the two-state solution is dependent on a large number of individuals who are currently “uncertain.” This is particularly the case for the Israeli Arab and Palestinian populations, many of whom indicated that they were uncertain about this alternative. In the following section, we will examine in more detail the types of external factors that might be able to convince these individuals to be supportive.

The third insight is that the two-state solution, the status quo, and annexation all receive relatively similar levels of support among the Israeli Jewish respondents. This observation is important because the Israeli Jewish population can unilaterally select the status quo or annexation alternative while broader consensus among all four populations is likely integral to the viability of the two-state solution. This will also be examined in greater detail in the following section.

### 3.2. The Factors Underlying Support for Alternatives

Previous polling efforts, in addition to assessing the political viability of different alternatives, have sought to assess the value of various negotiating approaches to enhance support for the two-state solution. As an example, the *Palestinian-Israeli Pulse* asked Israeli and Palestinian respondents opposed to the two-state solution to consider ten different incentives that might be included as part of a permanent peace package.

In this section, we provide some additional related insights on the potential effectiveness of various incentives. First, our data provide assessment of each alternative along three dimensions (economic, governance, and security) in addition to an overall assessment, allowing a statistical analysis of the relative importance of these different factors in determining overall support. We also asked individuals to rank order different potential outcomes for the future, which provides additional evidence of the relative importance of different factors.

Two key insights emerge from this analysis. The first is that offers of an economic “peace dividend” alone are unlikely to be impactful unless they are complemented by security and other guarantees. This is perhaps surprising, as economics-related incentives for peace have been a prominent feature in previous peace attempts, from the

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2 For the West Bank Palestinians, a total of only 49 percent were supportive or uncertain.
3 Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018.
Oslo Accords to the Arab Peace Initiative to the recent *Peace to Prosperity* plan. However, our data suggest that these economic incentives will do little to encourage West Bank Palestinians to support the peace process because, for this group, economics was the least important factor.

The second insight is that security guarantees from the international community for the Palestinians might be necessary to make progress in the peace process. Security was the single most important issue highlighted by Palestinians, particularly so for West Bank Palestinians, and providing guarantees that IDF activity will cease might be a requirement for the viability of any peace agreement. This critical finding is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six, which summarizes the findings from the analysis of the qualitative component of the data collection. This finding echoes a request from the PA, as recently as 2014, for the international community to provide some sort of long-term enduring presence in the West Bank.5

**Statistical Analysis**

The quantitative component of our focus group discussions collected data on an individual’s support for each of the five alternatives and their perspective on the acceptability of each alternative from an economic, governance, and security perspective. Indeed, we asked respondents to first rate each alternative based on its acceptability (using the 1–5 Likert scale described in Section 3.1) from the perspective of “economic opportunity and employment,” then “governance,” and then “security” before asking them to provide an “overall” assessment.

These data provide a tool for assessing the relative importance of these three factors in determining support for the alternatives. Specifically, they allow for a statistical analysis, using individual-level data across five alternatives, of the relationship between overall support and support along each of these three dimensions.

Table 3.1 details the results from this statistical analysis. In this analysis, we use a linear regression approach in which the dependent (or outcome) variable is the 1–5 rating of the overall acceptability of the alternative and the 1–5 ratings for economics, governance, security, and feasibility are independent (or explanatory) variables. Most specifications for this analysis also allow us to test the importance of perceived feasibility, which was the fifth (and final) criterion that we asked respondents to consider during the data collection.

Interpreting the analysis presented in Table 3.1 is straightforward. Focusing on just the analysis in the first column, this analysis indicates that a one-point increase—e.g., from 4 (“acceptable”) to 5 (“very acceptable”)—of the economic acceptability of an

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alternative would increase its overall rating by 0.23 points. Similarly, if an external actor was able to increase the acceptability of an alternative from both an economic and security perspective by one point each, that would increase the overall acceptability by 0.52 points (0.23 + 0.29). Or, if we wanted to increase everyone’s support for a given alternative by an entire point (which would convert respondents who were uncertain into supporters of an alternative), one option would be to increase the acceptability from an economic and security perspective by two points each.

This analysis does not provide any insights on how alternatives might become more acceptable from an economic, governance, and security perspective. Instead, it provides insights on the relative importance of difference factors in determining overall support.

Several key insights emerge from the analysis presented in Table 3.1. The first is that economic incentives, at least by themselves, are unlikely to provide a decisive tool in incentivizing peace. Economics was the least important dimension overall, as demonstrated by the fact that it has the smallest estimated coefficient in the first (0.23) and second columns (0.19). This result seems to be driven largely by the West Bank Palestinians, where economics is one-half as important as governance (0.10 compared with 0.18) and one-third as important as security (0.10 compared with 0.32). Indeed, the
estimated importance of economics was substantially larger for both the Israeli Arab and Gazan Palestinian populations.

The second insight, which is an important finding and one that is not often discussed, is that security guarantees for Palestinians and Israeli Arabs could be a useful tool for encouraging peace. It is interesting to note that the acceptability of the alternatives from a security perspective was particularly important for the Israeli Arab, Gazan, and West Bank Palestinian populations, but less so for the Israeli Jewish populations. Unfortunately, these data give little insight into why security seems to be less important to Israelis but suggest that security guarantees targeted toward the Israeli Arab and Palestinian populations might be more impactful than those targeted toward the Israeli populations.

Another major insight from Table 3.1, though perhaps unsurprising, is that the political arrangements (governance) and their perceived feasibility are the most important overall factors (see column 2 in Table 3.1). This is particularly true for Israeli Jews, for whom governance and feasibility are nearly three times as important as security and nearly twice as important as economics in our data. Given the limited role that the international community can feasibly play in influencing these factors, this finding serves as a reminder of the limitations that the international community will face in incentivizing peace.

Overall, the key insight from Table 3.1 is that a blend of targeted economic incentives and security guarantees is likely to be necessary to encourage peace. However, this quantitative analysis is limited in that the sample is not representative, and it does not provide any details on the types of economic incentives or security guarantees that might be effective or the potential effectiveness of those incentives or guarantees.

**Ranking of Priorities**

In addition to asking individuals to assess alternatives along multiple dimensions, which allowed the statistical analysis presented above, the quantitative component of our data collection included a more direct way of assessing the relative importance of different factors. Each participant was provided a list of nine potential outcomes and asked to rank order these outcomes on a scale of 1 to 9.

Table 3.2 enumerates the potential outcomes presented to the Israeli (Jewish and Arab) and Palestinian populations. Each of these outcomes is something that was assumed to be desirable to the group, with the exercise designed to force individuals to explicitly “trade off” between favorable outcomes. This approach is therefore similar to the analysis of potential incentives included in the *Palestinian-Israeli Pulse*, though the intent of our analysis was to identify the general types of factors likely to be important to respondents rather than specific incentives.

Figure 3.2 summarizes the results from these individual-level rankings. In this figure, we report the average score across all individuals, divided along the four population groups. A higher score indicates a higher ranking, and the maximum value that a
Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

given outcome could receive is an 8. Thus, the fact that “Jerusalem becomes the Palestinian capital” received an overall value of 7.5 for the West Bank Palestinians indicates that a very large share of individuals (75 percent of respondents, in this case) rated this as the most important issue (and many others also scored it very highly).

Several observations emerge from the analysis presented in Figure 3.2. The first is that, similar to what the regression analysis (Table 3.2) indicated, economics is not the most important priority for either the Israeli Jews or the Palestinians. Although improved job opportunities was the second most important issue for Israeli Arabs, it was the very last among Palestinians and fourth from the last among Israelis.

A second observation is that refugees are also not a high priority, for either the Israelis or Palestinians, among the options given. For Palestinians, the right of Palestinian refugees to return or receive compensation was rated as the second least important issue. And for the Israelis, ending claims by Palestinian refugees was the least important outcome.

The third observation is related to the differing perspectives toward the future of Jerusalem. Critically, while establishing Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state was (by far) the most important outcome highlighted by Palestinian respondents, monopolizing control over Jerusalem was not a priority for Israeli Jews—perhaps because they already feel that the issue is settled. This suggests that confidence-building measures related to Jerusalem might be possible.

The fourth observation is the importance of security. This is true of both the Palestinians, for whom ending IDF activity on their lands was the second most impor-
Figure 3.2
Ranking of Different Factors

**Israeli Jews**
- Israel is a Jewish state
- Israel is a democracy
- Israel controls security along the borders including the Jordan River
- Settlements are annexed by Israel
- All of Jerusalem including Arab neighborhoods under Israeli control
- There is a good paying job for anyone who wants to work
- Arab and Muslim nations recognize the State of Israel
- Gaza and the West Bank are governed by a single Palestinian Authority
- Claims by Palestinian refugees end

**Israeli Arabs**
- Gaza and the West Bank are governed by a single Palestinian Authority
- There is a good paying job for anyone who wants to work
- Israeli Arabs are given equal rights as Israeli Jews
- Claims by Palestinian refugees end
- Israel is a democracy
- Israel controls security along the borders including the Jordan River
- Arab and Muslim nations recognize the State of Israel
- Settlements are annexed by Israel
- All of Jerusalem including Arab neighborhoods under Israeli control

**Palestinians**
- Jerusalem becomes the Palestinian capital
- IDF activity in West Bank and Gaza ceases
- Palestinians control their external borders
- Settlers removed from West Bank
- Political prisoners are released
- Palestinians allowed to move freely between West Bank and Gaza
- Palestinians can move freely within the West Bank
- Palestinian refugees allowed to return and/or receive compensation
- There is a good paying job for anyone who wants to work
tant outcome, and Israeli Jews, for whom security-related factors was the third most important issue. This observation echoes a finding from the statistical analysis in that ensuring security for both Israelis and Palestinians will be necessary for the success of any alternative.

One area that will likely continue to remain divisive, perhaps unsurprisingly, is the future of the settlements and settlers. Annexation of the settlements was the number-one priority among our Israeli Jewish respondents, after the arguably existential outcomes of ensuring that Israel remains a Jewish state, remains a democracy, and is allowed to sustain its own security perimeter along the Jordan River. However, the removal of the settlers was similarly a priority among the Palestinians. This issue is, therefore, likely to confound the peace process.

3.3. Benchmarking RAND Focus Group Results to Random Sample Poll Results

Efforts to assess popular support for different alternatives to the two-state solution have been ongoing for years. The most comparable effort to our own is the Palestinian-Israeli Pulse (henceforth, Pulse), which collected polling data on views toward the two-state solution, the one-state solution, and confederation in Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank from 2016 to 2018. However, various other polling efforts have focused on ascertaining the preferred alternative among both Israelis and Palestinians, Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans.

There are five major differences between the quantitative aspects of our data collection effort and these previous polling efforts, which are summarized in Table 3.3 and described in more detail throughout this section. These differences reflect the varying intent of each effort. Specifically, while the polling efforts were designed to provide representative data of how the populations would vote on different alternatives

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6 And others provide a historical perspective on evolving support for the two-state solution, either among Israelis and Palestinians (since at least 2006) or American Jews (since at least 2008). See, for example, Figure 1 in Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018; or J Street, Polling, webpage, undated.

7 Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018.


if given an opportunity, our intent was to provide a detailed diagnostic of why individuals supported different alternatives (and whether that support could be influenced). In addition to the five differences highlighted in Table 3.3, each of the different polling efforts considered slightly different alternatives, with the alternatives considered typically reflecting what was being discussed in policy circles at the time of the poll.

The first difference is the description of each of the alternatives offered to the participants (row one of Table 3.3). While polling efforts typically provide a description of each alternative in the question or possible responses, the participants in our focus group discussions participated in a 30- to 45-minute discussion of the different alternatives in advance of assessing each. Providing detailed descriptions of each alternative was critical to our approach, as we wanted to generate well-informed qualitative discussions about the viability of different alternatives, and we learned during our pilot that there was great variation in individuals’ understanding of the details of different alternatives (including the two-state solution). Table 3.4 compares our description of the alternatives with those included in these polling efforts.

Table 3.3
Summary of Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAND</th>
<th>Pulse</th>
<th>Critical Issues Poll, Haaretz, Palestine Center for Public Opiniona</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30- to 45-minute discussion of details of alternatives</td>
<td>Description provided in polling question(s)</td>
<td>Description provided in polling question(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
<td>4-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Participants select single preferred alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents asked about five alternatives</td>
<td>All respondents asked about three alternativesb</td>
<td>Participants select single preferred alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents assess alternatives along multiple dimensions</td>
<td>Respondents assess overall support only</td>
<td>Respondents assess overall support only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium-sized sample (N = 274) designed to provide saturation for qualitative research</td>
<td>Very large sample (N = ~3,000) designed to provide representative sample of population</td>
<td>Large sample (N = ~1,000) designed to provide representative sample of population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The Critical Issues Poll, Haaretz, and Palestine Center for Public Opinion do not use identical approaches, but they are roughly similar and share these overall characteristics.

b The Pulse includes a fourth alternative—“expulsion of Jews” or “expulsion of Palestinians”—that is not being seriously discussed.

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12 In some of the polling efforts, such as the Pulse, the question asking about an overall assessment of an alternative is preceded (or followed) by a series of questions related to specific details of that alternative. This is most commonly done for the two-state solution.

13 This observation is described in greater detail in the following three chapters.
### Table 3.4
Comparison of Descriptions of Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pulse</th>
<th>Palestine Center for Public Opinion</th>
<th>Critical Issues Poll</th>
<th>RAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-state solution</td>
<td>“establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel, known as the two state solution”</td>
<td>“ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, to achieve a two-state solution”</td>
<td>“A two-state solution: Israel and a Palestinian state side by side. The Palestinian state would be established on the territories that Israel has occupied since 1967.”</td>
<td>Detailed discussion describing the border arrangements, impact on settlers, the status of Jerusalem, governance arrangements, security arrangements, and physical movement (see Chapter Four for more details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-state solution</td>
<td>“by which Palestinians and Jews will be citizens of the same state and enjoy equal rights”</td>
<td>“achieving a one-state solution, in which Arabs and Jews would have equal rights in one state from the river to the sea”</td>
<td>“A one-state solution: A single democratic state in which both Jews and Arabs are full and equal citizens, covering all of what is now Israel and the Palestinian Territories.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederation</td>
<td>“Some people recommend the following solution: the creation of two states, Palestine and Israel, which enter into a confederation whereby citizens of one country are allowed to live as permanent residents in the territory of the other but each national group votes only in its state for elections. There would be freedom of movement for all, and Jerusalem is not divided but serves as the capital of two states. Israel and Palestine would deal jointly with security and the economy . . . “</td>
<td>No equivalent confederation option</td>
<td>No confederation option</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Definitions for the Pulse are from Khalil Shikaki, Walid Ladadwa, Dahlia Scheindlin, and Ephraim Lavie, *Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll*, Tel Aviv: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University, February 2017, and Khalil Shikaki, Dahlia Scheindlin, and Ephraim Lavie, *Palestinian-Israeli Pulse: A Joint Poll*, Tel Aviv: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University, August 1, 2017; definitions for the poll conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion are from Pollock, 2020; and definitions for the Critical Issues Poll are from Telhami and Rousse, 2018.
The second difference between our effort and these previous efforts is the specific questions that were used to ask participants about their support for alternatives. In the survey component of our focus group discussions, we asked participants to indicate their support for each of the alternatives using a five-point Likert scale, which includes a neutral category (“uncertain,” in our case), two categories indicating positive support (“acceptable” and “very acceptable”), and two categories indicating no support (“unacceptable” and “very unacceptable”). The approach used in the Pulse differs from our approach in that it uses a four-point Likert scale, providing “don’t know” as a fifth option rather than the “uncertain” option provided third in our data collection. The other polls assess the preferred alternative through a single comparative question, typically offering the textual description of each alternative (see Table 3.4).

Our choice to use a five-point Likert scale was deliberate in that we had observed that there was great confusion surrounding the definitions of these alternatives, and this five-point scale is typically recommended when respondents might not have sufficient information to make an informed decision.\(^\text{14}\) In addition, we were interested in understanding the level of uncertainty in preferences for each of the alternatives, particularly because this is a group that could, in principle, be amenable to supporting a given alternative if properly incentivized. However, the approach used in the Pulse is also appropriate for this context, as a four-point Likert scale is typically recommended for controversial topics.\(^\text{15}\) The major implication is that our results, as compared with those from the Pulse, will likely understate the support for each of the alternatives because individuals might take “refuge in that option [the “uncertain” option] rather than confessing to an unpopular viewpoint.”\(^\text{16}\)

The third difference is that our data collection asks both Israelis and Palestinians to provide an independent assessment of a wide range of alternatives. In the Pulse, all participants were asked about three alternatives (two-state solution, one-state solution, and confederation).\(^\text{17}\) In the other major polling efforts, individuals are typically only asked a single question asking individuals to select the preferred alternative rather than to sequentially assess alternatives.\(^\text{18}\)

The fourth difference is that the RAND data collection asks individuals to assess each alternative simultaneously along five dimensions—economics, governance, secu-


\(^{15}\) Johns, 2005.

\(^{16}\) Johns, 2005, p. 237.

\(^{17}\) In addition to these three alternatives, the Pulse asks participants about a number of other alternatives tailored to the population to which they belong (e.g., Palestinians were asked about “historic Palestine without full rights to Jews,” and Israelis were asked about “annexation without full rights to Palestinians”).

\(^{18}\) This is true of the Palestine Center for Public Opinion poll (Pollock, 2020), the Critical Issues Poll (Telhami and Rousse, 2018), and the Haaretz poll (Kraft, 2019).
riority, overall, and feasibility (see Table 3.5). In contrast, polling efforts typically only ask respondents for a single summary judgment of the alternatives. The implications of this difference in approach to the outcomes are unclear, though the intent in the RAND data collection was to prompt participants to think along different dimensions to support a richer and more detailed discussion during the qualitative component of the study.

The fifth difference is sampling, and whether the data collection provides a representative sample of the population. The comparable polling efforts were designed to be representative, with sample sizes sufficiently large to guarantee a margin of error for a specific population. The Pulse typically polled approximately 900 Israelis and 1,300 Palestinians to guarantee a minimum margin of error of 3 percent for each population, while the poll conducted by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion included 1,000 participants to guarantee a margin of error of 4 percent.

In comparison, RAND’s data collection, which included a total of 274 participants across 33 focus group discussions, was not designed to be representative. Instead, it was designed to provide saturation for the qualitative data collection for each of the target populations. Saturation refers to the point at which additional data collection is unlikely to yield new thematic understandings, which is typically achievable with three to six focus group discussions. Despite the comparatively limited number of participants, RAND’s focus group organizers sought to include participants who were broadly representative of the four underlying populations.

Table 3.5
Assessment Questions for the RAND Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>How acceptable is the alternative in terms of economic opportunities and employment prospects for you and your family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>How acceptable is the alternative in terms of your ability to have a say in political decisions that are important to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>How acceptable is the alternative in terms of your security and the security of your friends and family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall feasibility</td>
<td>How acceptable is the alternative overall? Is this alternative feasible?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 The fifth and final wave of the Pulse (the focus of our comparison in the following section) had a larger sample of approximately 1,600 Israelis and 2,100 Palestinians to allow for split-sample exercises.

20 E.g., Saunders et al., 2018.

21 Guest, Namey, and McKenna, 2016.
3.4. Comparison of Findings with Polling Data

In this section, we compare the findings in our own data with the results from the *Pulse*. We use the publicly available summary statistics from their June 2018 poll for our primary comparisons, as these data are closest to the timing of our own data collection (our first wave of data collection was conducted in July 2018, and the second was conducted in June 2019). However, in the following discussion, we also refer to earlier data collections in the *Pulse* series of polls.

Our data provide broadly comparable estimates for both the two-state solution and the confederation. Given the difference in our data collection method—specifically, the fact that our analysis relied on a five-point Likert scale and the *Pulse* used a four-point scale—a “comparable” *Pulse* estimate is anything that is between our estimates of those who are strictly supportive and those who are either supportive or uncertain. For both of these alternatives, three of the four populations fall within this range, with the Israeli Arab population the exception in both cases.

However, there are major differences for both the one-state solution and the Israeli Arab respondents across all alternatives. For the one-state solution, a substantially higher percentage of Palestinian respondents in our data collection were supportive, while a substantially lower percentage of Israeli Jews were supportive. Given the similarity among the findings for the two-state solution and confederation, and the fact that the two-state solution is familiar and that the *Pulse* provided a robust definition for the confederation (comparable to our own), we believe that the difference in support might be a result of variation in how respondents in the *Pulse* defined the one-state solution to themselves during the poll.

There are also substantial differences between our estimates of support for the three alternatives for Israeli Arabs, in that the *Pulse* consistently provides very high estimates of support among this population across alternatives. As an example, reported support for the two-state solution among Israeli Arabs is 82 percent in the *Pulse*, nearly double that of the next most supportive population.

**Two-State Solution**

Figure 3.3 compares our estimates of support for the two-state solution with the support found in the *Pulse*. For the RAND data, the darker portions of the bars report the percentage of individuals strictly supportive of the two-state solution (those who indicated that it was “acceptable” or “very acceptable”), and the lighter portions of

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22 Khalil Shikaki and Dahlia Scheindlin, “Palestinian-Israeli Pulse Index: Summary Table #10,” January 2019.

23 As described in the previous section, which reviews the academic literature on the difference between five-point and four-point Likert scales, the *Pulse* also provides “don’t know” as a fifth option.

24 This is overly precise, as the *Pulse* has an error margin of +/- 3 percent, but it provides a rough rubric for equivalency.
the bars report the percentage of additional individuals who indicated that they were “uncertain.”

The data in Figure 3.3 demonstrate that the quantitative component of our data collection provides a largely analogous picture of the two-state solution. For the Israeli Jewish, Gazan, and West Bank respondents, the estimated support for the two-state solution in the Pulse is—as anticipated given the difference in the choice of Likert scale and margin of error—modestly greater than that in our own data but less than the total number reporting “uncertain.”

The one major difference is that our data suggest that a substantially smaller percentage of Israel Arabs are supportive of the two-state solution. The Pulse consistently, across all five waves of data collection, suggests that more than 80 percent of Israeli Arabs are supportive of the two-state solution. In contrast, only 40 percent of Israeli Arab respondents in our data were supportive, and an additional 30 percent were uncertain.

One-State Solution

Figure 3.4 compares our estimates of support for the one-state solution with the support found in the Pulse.25 As in Figure 3.3, the darker portions of the bars report the

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25 The June 2018 wave of the Pulse did not ask individuals indicating support for the two-state solution about their support for other alternatives (Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2018, p. 7). Therefore, to allow for comparability of the RAND data with that of the Pulse, we limited the RAND data reported in this figure to individuals who
number of individuals strictly supportive of the one-state solution (those who indicated that it was “acceptable” or “very acceptable”), and the lighter portions of the bars report the percentage of additional individuals who indicated that they were “uncertain.”

The data in Figure 3.4 demonstrate two major differences in estimated support for the one-state solution. The first is that Palestinian respondents in the RAND data reported substantially higher support for the one-state solution, and the support among Gazan respondents is even higher if respondents supportive of the two-state solution are included (see Section 3.3). This difference might be, in part, due to the specific wave of data from the Pulse that we used for comparison: The four earlier waves of the Pulse found, on average, 37 percent of Gazan and 35 percent of West Bank Palestinians supportive of the one-state solution. However, our data suggest that the Pulse might still understate support for a democratic one-state solution among Palestinians.

The second difference is that both Israeli Arab and Israeli Jewish respondents in the RAND data reported substantially lower levels of support for the one-state solution than did respondents in the Pulse. Part of this difference could, again, be a function of the wave of data selected for comparison, as earlier waves of the Pulse suggested that

indicated that they found the two-state solution either “unacceptable” or “very unacceptable” (individuals reporting as “uncertain” were not included). Estimates from the RAND data in this table are therefore based on only 114 respondents.
support among Israeli Jews might be closer to 20 percent. Our data again, as with the two-state solution, show much lower support among Israeli Arabs for this alternative.

Confederation
Figure 3.5 compares our estimates of support for the confederation with the support found in the Pulse. As in the two previous figures, the darker portions of the bars report the number of individuals strictly supportive of the two-state solution (those who indicated that it was “acceptable” or “very acceptable”), and the lighter portions of the bars report the percentage of additional individuals who indicated that they were “uncertain.”

Overall, our estimates of support for the confederation are similar to that reported in the Pulse. Pulse estimates for the Israeli Jewish, Gazan, and West Bank populations fall within the range of our estimates from our focus group respondents—specifically, that they are greater than the number who are supportive but less than the combined number who are supportive and uncertain. As with both two-state solution and the one-state solution, the Israeli Arabs in the Pulse reported very high levels of support for this alternative, though the other polls do not include this option and it is impossible to assess whether this high level of support is unique to the data collected by the Pulse.

**Figure 3.5**
Comparison of Estimated Support for the Confederation

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26 The first three waves of the Pulse found 20 percent (June 2016), 19 percent (December 2016), and 20 percent (June 2017) of respondents supportive of the one-state solution (Shikaki and Scheindlin, 2019).
3.5. Implications of Findings for Potential Resolution to the Conflict

The quantitative findings reported in this chapter have two major implications for how the conflict might be resolved. The first implication is that the two-state solution emerges as the most viable option but would likely require intervention from the international community to make it politically viable to the four major population groups. The second implication is that any intervention from the international community needs to include both economic incentives and security guarantees. However, with appropriately designed incentives and political support, a two-state solution could still be possible. These findings are explored in much greater detail in the following three chapters, which examine the rich qualitative data collected as part of the focus group discussions.
CHAPTER FOUR

Israeli Jewish Qualitative Analysis

The continuation of the status quo, according to our qualitative data, was the preferred alternative for the Israeli Jews in our focus group discussions. In the alternative-by-alternative discussions that followed the quantitative component of the focus groups, only a minority of participants (mostly those on the political left) rejected the alternative outright. Many were satisfied with the status quo, and many others who were not happy with the status quo stated that it was manageable and preferable to the other alternatives.

There are two underlying bases of support for the status quo. The first is a lack of trust in the Palestinian side, which breeds fear, xenophobia, and consent to forgo basic principles of democracy when it comes to the rights of the Palestinians. The second, which is closely related to this lack of trust, was a general stated belief that none of the alternatives were feasible. As a result of this perceived lack of feasibility, the status quo trumps even alternatives that are in principle more compelling for certain groups. As an example, while the two-state solution might be preferred by the center-left in principle, a peaceful separation into two states is deemed unfeasible at the moment because the Palestinian side is split between Fatah and Hamas and is not a “partner” for peace. Similarly, although annexation of Area C might be preferred by the right, many stated that it was unfeasible because it would not be tolerated by the international community.

While many factors contributed to the rank ordering of the remaining four alternatives, as discussed in this chapter in detail, the degree of “separation”—that is, separation between Palestinians and Israelis—guaranteed by an alternative seems to be the most important overall factor. The two-state solution, while widely viewed as infeasible, was ranked second because it allowed for the most-complete separation from the Palestinians, with even groups on the left concluding that separation was preferred for reasons pertaining to security, economy, demographics, identity, and religion. Annexation of Area C, which was viewed favorably by the political right and the religious right in particular, was seen as a positive step toward separation but one in which many issues remained unresolved. Both the confederation and one-state solution received low rankings because they did not make any progress toward achieving the desired separation.
A number of other critical insights emerged during these focus groups. The first is that political groups do not have homogeneous views toward the different alternatives, and we saw particularly notable disagreements within groups related to the two-state solution and annexation. Second, concrete discussions of the conflict can shape views, as participants’ views toward the alternatives often evolved during the course of the focus group discussions. A third insight is that there was an implicit assumption across groups that no alternative would resolve the conflict. Fourth, the experience of the disengagement from Gaza was critical for the idea of feasibility and whether alternatives that involve receding territory would resolve the conflict. Finally, despite the rhetoric surrounding Jerusalem, it was rarely brought up independently by participants during the focus group discussions.

The following six sections offer a detailed discussion of perspectives toward these alternatives, based on the 13 Israeli Jewish focus group discussions conducted for this study. Each of the following five sections provides perspectives on one of the alternatives, with the sections organized from most preferred (status quo, the focus of Section 4.2) to least preferred (one-state solution, the focus of Section 4.5). A sixth section (Section 4.6) provides some broad observations about the implications of our research for future efforts to build Israeli support for alternatives to the status quo.

4.1. The Status Quo

The continuation of the status quo was the preferred alternative among Israeli Jews, with support across the political spectrum. Notwithstanding the problems of the status quo, as identified by some study participants as “occasional flare-ups,”1 the status quo is familiar and clear. This was true even among participants who self-identified as center-left, a group that is typically characterized as against the status quo. Israelis under the status quo are satisfied with their lives. Deviation from the status quo could entail risks, but there is no incentive to change. One participant in such a group stated that “Sometimes the devil you know is better than the one you don’t know.”

Few participants doubted the feasibility of the status quo, which most participants interpreted as its sustainability. Unlike the discussions around other alternatives, study participants for the most part seemed not to understand why they were being asked about the feasibility of the status quo. In their minds, the fact that they were living in the status quo meant that it is feasible. There was a general sense that conditions were perhaps not ideal under the status quo but that the problems were reasonably well understood and that Israel had proven able to manage those problems. One participant described this view as follows:

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1 The relative security and “occasional flare-up” phrase were raised in every group—for example, in the groups of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (Ramat Gan, Israel, July 12, 2018), traditional right-wing voters (Ashdod, July 16, 2018), and center-left voters (Ramat Gan, Israel, May 21, 2019).
The status quo is the status quo. Of course, it is feasible. It is the current situation. We have been in the same crisis for 70 years, and crisis needs to be managed. We are managing the crisis and it’s not as bad here.2

Several participants ascribed this sustainability to the fact that the status quo did not require cooperation with anyone else,3 though a number were explicit—also illustrated by the above quote—that the status quo required a certain amount of crisis management to sustain.4

Participants were supportive of the status quo for a number of reasons, which are summarized and illustrated in Table 4.1. First, participants stated that it provides for a reasonably good situation—e.g., it enables Israel to continue to grow and flourish economically and maintain a relatively stable security situation.

Second, the status quo was widely seen as the least flawed of the possible alternatives, and support for the status quo grew in most groups after each of the other four alternatives was introduced. In large part, this increase in support for the status quo was because participants deemed it to be relatively risk-free. One participant captured this perspective, which was expressed equally among center-left and right-wing groups (and everything in between), as follows:

Given the alternatives proposed, I think that the status quo is the best. It is possible that Trump, or Saudi Arabia, or someone would bring a magic solution and then I’ll change my mind but for now I, like many others, am afraid of changes. By the way, if you had asked me about the status quo without showing the alternatives, I would have told you it is an unbearable situation.5

Many discussants were also emphatic that they did not see the Palestinian people as a credible partner for peace and would rather maintain the status quo than risk another failed peace process with the Palestinians. These individuals frequently referred to Palestinians in less-than-flattering terms, with several discussants describing them as “terrorists” in neighborhoods that they described as a “jungle.”

The final major “positive aspect” of continuing the status quo rather than pursuing one of the other four alternatives is that the discussants stated that they did not believe that there were either Israeli or Palestinian politicians who could succeed

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2 Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2018.

3 “The status quo is feasible because we don’t need to sign agreements with anyone” (center left-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019).

4 One participant compared it to family counseling, as follows: “I am comparing us and the Palestinians to a husband and wife. It is a fact that we will always be attached to each other with our problems. In marriage life there are ups and downs. This is the status quo. It is a familiar situation with which we have been dealing since 1967 at least. Despite years with terrorism, we are handling the situation pretty well” (Soviet émigré, Ramat Gan, 2018).

5 Traditional right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019.
### Table 4.1
Positive Views Toward the Status Quo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Israel is flourishing               | “Security-wise, risk-wise—the status quo is preferable. It allows us to plan for the next day, to know that tomorrow will not be substantially worse. It does not prevent Israel from developing either economically, or demographically or in any other field. Despite the current situation, Israel is ranked high in every international ranking and it does not interfere with the international community.” (Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

“The situation we are in now, the status quo, is not bad. Security isn’t the best; however, the economic situation is good, even relative to the rest of the world, including in terms of very low unemployment, for example. There are many shortcomings but also positives. When we withdrew from Gaza, many of us thought it was a smart decision, but reality proved a little different. It did not improve our security situation. The military withdrew but the other side didn’t give us anything. The status quo is a reasonable situation and we can’t go for a meaningful possible irreversible step. I don’t just replace a couch.” (Center left-wing voter, Ramat Gan, 2019)  

“[The status quo] is the lesser of two evils. We tried the Oslo Accords, we had other agreements as well. The Israeli public understands that although not ideal, the present situation—managing the conflict—is the lesser of two evils. Aside from the extreme left, everyone understands today that we do not live in Sweden with European neighbors but that we live in a jungle.” (Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)  

“To find a solution, we need first to define the problem, and the problem is terrorism. How do we address terrorism? By surrendering to it and giving the Palestinians two states or one state? The annexation option would not solve the terror problem. The Palestinians will oppose it. This is why the status quo is the best solution. You don’t reward terrorism.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018)  

“The situation cannot go on like that. You see the situation in the [Palestinian] territories, you see our situation in Israel. It’s either one state or two states, with or without an agreement. At the end of the day we need to draw a line but there is no leader like Ariel Sharon who can draw a border. We have someone who only cares about himself and not the country.” (Center right-wing traditional voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

“The status quo is terrible but there is no alternative until public opinion changes. The two sides are still not ready for it. It will take time until leaderships or something changes, until people behave differently. It will take more than two–three years to build what we destroyed in the last 100–200 years.” (Center right-wing traditional voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

| Best of possible alternatives       | “Given the alternatives proposed, I think that the status quo is the best. It is possible that Trump, or Saudi Arabia, or someone would bring a magic solution and then I’ll change my mind but for now I, like many others, am afraid of changes. By the way, if you had asked me about the status quo without showing the alternatives, I would have told you it is an unbearable situation.” (Traditional right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

“The other alternatives are neither better nor more feasible and that’s why someone like me, who wants to move away from the status quo, ranks it as an okay option.” (Center left-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

| No partner for peace                | “[The status quo] is the lesser of two evils. We tried the Oslo Accords, we had other agreements as well. The Israeli public understands that although not ideal, the present situation—managing the conflict—is the lesser of two evils. Aside from the extreme left, everyone understands today that we do not live in Sweden with European neighbors but that we live in a jungle.” (Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)  

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| Lack of leadership (on both sides)  | “The situation cannot go on like that. You see the situation in the [Palestinian] territories, you see our situation in Israel. It’s either one state or two states, with or without an agreement. At the end of the day we need to draw a line but there is no leader like Ariel Sharon who can draw a border. We have someone who only cares about himself and not the country.” (Center right-wing traditional voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

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“These are the best of possible alternatives.” (Center left-wing voter, Ramat Gan, 2019)  

“The other alternatives are neither better nor more feasible and that’s why someone like me, who wants to move away from the status quo, ranks it as an okay option.” (Center left-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

“The status quo is terrible but there is no alternative until public opinion changes. The two sides are still not ready for it. It will take time until leaderships or something changes, until people behave differently. It will take more than two–three years to build what we destroyed in the last 100–200 years.” (Center right-wing traditional voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

“The status quo is terrible but there is no alternative until public opinion changes. The two sides are still not ready for it. It will take time until leaderships or something changes, until people behave differently. It will take more than two–three years to build what we destroyed in the last 100–200 years.” (Center right-wing traditional voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  

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in realizing the alternatives as described. Rather than risk a suboptimal outcome by an untrusted politician, the Israeli Jews preferred to wait until credible leadership was in place.

A minority of participants across groups said that the status quo has serious short-comings (Table 4.2). The foremost concern was related to security, as they said that the situation under the status quo was dangerous. This perspective was particularly common among ultra-Orthodox discussants, several of whom called for a more hawkish response on Israel’s side if the status quo were to be sustainable.

**Relations with the international community** were another area of concern, with some participants questioning whether the international community would continue to tolerate the situation. Participants with this concern, typically from the left or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2 Negative Views Toward the Status Quo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>View</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relations with the international community</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Impact on Israeli society</strong></td>
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Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

center-left, were concerned that the status quo was not sustainable but would eventually lead to either apartheid or a binational state.

The concerns of other participants on the left focused on the implications for Israeli society of the status quo. Several argued that the status had resulted in the loss of Israel’s moral compass; one said that Israel had “turned into a racist, xenophobic society, subject to crazy religious imposition.”

4.2. Two-State Solution

The two-state solution was the second most favorable alternative, after the status quo. A majority of participants indicated that the two-state solution could address the key issues of the conflict, though support was strongly aligned with sociopolitical background. Those on the right opposed this alternative, groups from the left and center accepted it, and the ultra-Orthodox and Soviet émigrés offered mixed views.

The feasibility of the two-state solution was a major factor underlying participants’ views on this alternative. Many, in addition to doubting that the two-state solution would improve the security situation, were concerned that Palestinians would not implement the agreement and that violence would continue and even worsen if this alternative were pursued. Others were skeptical about the feasibility of evacuating settlements, particularly in the wake of disengagement from Gaza. In addition, many of those who indicated that they would otherwise be supportive of a two-state solution indicated that they did not believe that the current Israeli public and political leadership would support this alternative, which we discuss in greater detail in Section 4.6. As a consequence of these concerns, many who were supportive of the idea of the two-state solution indicated that the status quo is preferable in the current environment.

The dominant positive factor about the two-state solution, at least from the perspective of the participants in our focus groups, was that it allowed for the most complete separation from the Palestinians (Table 4.3). Left-wing discussants, who held the most-favorable attitudes toward the two-state solution, spoke about it in terms of divorce. Orthodox, traditional, and émigré groups typically highlighted this positive aspect of the two-state solution in terms of the importance of separating along ethnic and religious lines. Some participants in right-wing groups highlighted separation as a positive attribute of the two-state solution, though the attraction of separation was not sufficient to overcome their broad opposition to the two-state solution.

Groups from a variety of different sociopolitical backgrounds indicated that the two-state solution would improve Israel’s international standing. Participants had different perspectives on how it would benefit Israel, but many said that it would be beneficial for Israel economically by opening new markets and diplomatically improving Israel’s image. They noted that Israel is a high-tech superpower and needs to expand its export markets.
A number of participants focused on the advantages of the agreement itself, as it would grant Israel future leverage vis-à-vis the Palestinians. It would provide the capability to “strike back if the other side violates the agreement,” but in a way that was in line with international law. In the words of one of the right-wing participants supporting the two-state solution, it would actually increase the leverage that Israel could bring to bear on the Palestinians:

If things go wrong, the fact that we signed an agreement would give us legitimacy to go for the stick-and-carrot method. In two weeks, we can reverse things to where they are today—they would not have a military.

Several groups, particularly those in center-left and left-wing groups, indicated that the two-state solution would free up resources for other needs. Specifically, it would allow Israel to rededicate funds currently spent on the West Bank to other socio-economic and even security needs.

Participants offered mixed views on the security implications of the two-state solution (Table 4.4). Some participants saw a Palestinian transition into full statehood as advantageous for Israel’s security because statehood would give the Palestinians...
### Mixed Views Toward the Two-State Solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>“All the countries that surround us have long-range missiles, but, like we don’t deal with Lebanon or Syria regularly, we would have the same with the Palestinians. You could say that we did not gain anything from the disengagement in Gaza but at least we do not have friction between populations that breeds anger.” (Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)</td>
<td>“We won’t gain anything from this solution. Today we have intelligence control over the area. We can go in and capture terrorists. Every area that we evacuate can be used to shoot us or launch arson kites at us.” (Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)</td>
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<td>“We gave them all of Gush Katif, and in return we got terror, terror, and more terror. When we controlled Gush Katif, rockets could not reach all the places they reach today. You give more, you need to withstand more. It is a simple equation—the closer to us we draw the border, the closer we bring the danger.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018)</td>
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<td>“Jerusalem is divided already, only not by a border. What is the problem dividing it? We tried it [keeping Jerusalem undivided] already; it does not work. These places are not worth it, neither the Wailing Wall nor the Cave of the Patriarchs. The idea is that all these holy places are not worth the bloodshed.” (Center left-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)</td>
<td>“If Palestine does not have a military, it puts this solution on shaky grounds. Without somebody that is in charge, things can go in extreme directions.” (Left-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“We can even divide Temple Mount. The mosque [Haram al-Sharif] will be theirs and we won’t visit. We will get the Wailing Wall of course and our parts. Half a kilometer here, another kilometer there—those few hundred meters should not stand between us and peace for generations to come. If that is the solution, I have no problem with the Palestinian capital being in East Jerusalem with parts of Temple Mount.” (Traditional right-wing voter from a community near the Gaza Strip, Ashdod, 2018)</td>
<td>“Our goal is to reach a full city, to build the temple. We believe all of Jerusalem is ours. It is a religious matter. We are hesitant about raising the issue so people don’t think we are extreme messianic nationalists. We pray for that to happen, however, and talk about it among ourselves, just usually don’t speak out publicly about rebuilding the temple.” (National religious right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>“Jerusalem is divided already, only not by a border. What is the problem dividing it? We tried it [keeping Jerusalem undivided] already; it does not work. These places are not worth it, neither the Wailing Wall nor the Cave of the Patriarchs. The idea is that all these holy places are not worth the bloodshed.” (Center left-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)</td>
<td>“The two-state solution includes the division of Jerusalem. Our religious groups won’t allow that, giving them the eastern part or anything in Jerusalem. The Muslims won’t agree either. There will be a war in Jerusalem.” (Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2019)</td>
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</table>
“something to lose.” Others compared the future Palestine with other states, including enemies in the region, that are not engaged in active fighting against Israel.

However, others stated that withdrawing from territory would increase security risk, especially as compared with the status quo. This fear is clearly connected to mistrusting the will and the ability of the Palestinians to have a state that coexists peacefully alongside Israel. The outcome of the disengagement from Gaza and recollections of the Oslo years were mentioned repeatedly as clear examples that demonstrated that withdrawing from territory for Palestinian statehood was a risky venture.

A number of participants mentioned that they were concerned that a demilitarized Palestinian state, as anticipated in the two-state solution, could be dangerous for Israel. Discussants raising this concern said that they feared that, without a central military, rogue nonstate actors could take over.

The division of Jerusalem was also a contentious issue area. Participants who voiced opposition to division of Jerusalem did so for religious and practical reasons, and the feasibility of actually dividing Jerusalem was cited by several participants as a flaw of the two-state solution itself and as an obstacle to implementation. However, some discussants noted that Jerusalem is practically already divided between the Jewish and Palestinian neighbors, arguing that this aspect of the two-state solution does not impose a feasibility barrier.

The division of Jerusalem was mostly opposed by the groups in the first round in July 2018. However, it was rarely brought up unprompted by participants in the May 2019 round. When this issue was raised by the moderator, discussants indicated that they were against division of Jerusalem but did not engage in the discussion in a meaningful way. It is impossible to know exactly what the reason was for the disinterest in Jerusalem in the later discussions, but one guess is that after the Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and subsequently moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018, Israeli Jews in 2019 no longer saw it as an issue that would require compromise.

Among the negative aspects of the two-state solution, there was a view among a large number of participants that the Palestinians do not want peace (Table 4.5). In most groups, except those of the left-wing voters, at least one participant implied or said explicitly that the Palestinians are characteristically violent, seek the destruction of Israel, and are incapable of signing or implementing peace accords. Some study participants used even harsher, racist language to describe the Palestinian character, saying that they are “murderers” and “backstabbers.” For example, a discussant in a national religious group concluded: “We all know who steals cars today, those are Arabs.”

There was also widespread concern that there are not, at least currently, Palestinian political leaders who could be partners in peace. Each and every group, irrespective of political perspective, raised the notion that there is currently no partner for peace among the Palestinians, which renders the two-state solution infeasible in the short term. Unlike the perspective just discussed, in which a subset of groups see the
Palestinians as inherently violent, the broader sentiment shared among Israeli Jewish groups was that in a different political environment on the Palestinian side, a two-state solution could become viable.

Though the two-state solution only called for the movement of a small number of settlers, many participants indicated that the settlements should not or could not
be evacuated. Only a minority of the groups, primarily those composed of right-wing voters who were concerned about whether evacuation would be “fair” for the settlers, were opposed to the overall idea of withdrawing settlers. However, a large number of groups, particularly the left and ultra-Orthodox, raised concerns about the feasibility of doing so. Although there was little doubt that Israel had the capability to orchestrate the evacuation, there was a general concern that there was not sufficient political consensus to evacuate even “400 settlers.” A number of participants emphasized that the situation was made even more difficult by the fact that the settlers would have learned from the Gazan disengagement to better resist the evacuation, which one participant described as follows: “Technically, we can do it like we did Gush Katif. It won’t be easy, but people are smarter today than they were during the disengagement from Gaza.”

A minority of discussants rejected the notion of the two-state solution altogether, arguing that Israel cannot cede the West Bank to the Palestinians. Some participants said that Israel cannot morally give up areas, others contended that ideas like the two-state solution are not applicable in religious conflicts such as the one between Israelis and Palestinians, and a third group argued that the Palestinian nationality is a fabrication. Others indicated that they felt that Israel needed all of the land in the West Bank to accommodate the entire Jewish population, with one representative individual reporting that “We need the whole area. There are ten more million Jews in the world. In 20–30 years from now we will need the whole area to live here. Look how densely populated the country is.”

4.3. Annexation of Area C

Support for Annexation of Area C was largely split along political-demographic lines. Discussants in religious and right-wing groups were mostly in favor of this alternative, arguing that annexation would have important symbolic value for Israel, would improve the quality of life for settlers and other Israelis, and would benefit Palestinians currently living in Area C. One discussant from a right-wing group described these diverse benefits as follows:

We need to control everything. First, it is ours. Second, after we annex, we can have more forces there that would be able to deal with terrorism. We will build more settlements and roads. The economy will improve. It might mean we have two–three more Arab representatives in the Knesset but that advantages would be bigger, and the world will think better of us.”

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7 Discussant in a group of right-wing voters, Ramat Gan, July 11, 2018.
All other groups had mixed reactions to the prospect of annexation, with discussants concerned with the potential negative implications for security in Israel (particularly in the West Bank), the short- and long-term consequences of formally accepting more Palestinians into Israel, and the impact that the unilateral nature of annexation would have on Israel’s relationship with the international community.

In most groups, participants became increasingly skeptical about the advantages of the annexation option relative to the status quo during the course of the discussions. One major source of confusion about this alternative was whether the annexation of Area C was an interim step, until the Palestinian side was ready for peace, or the final step. Annexation was much more widely supported when perceived as an interim step toward peace, as it was seen as a more fortified version of the status quo.

Given the unilateral nature of this alternative, most discussants viewed it as quite implementable, especially given the political climate in Israel. Only left-wing participants said that it was unfeasible because the international community would not let that happen.

Proponents of annexation, among primarily the religious and right-wing groups, described a number of benefits of this alternative (summarized in Table 4.6). Many of these supporters pointed to the *symbolic value of annexation*, as it would signal that Israel had won and the Palestinians had lost. For these individuals, annexation was akin to Israel declaring victory over the Palestinians, as Israel would declare to the world that it was sovereign in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria, in their words).

Another pro-annexation argument, which was again from primarily right-wing and religious groups, was that *annexation would normalize the settlements and give settlers the rights they deserve*. This argument was based on the belief that the current status of Area C discriminates against the settlers. Several went as far as to say that the settlers reduce terror attacks in Tel Aviv, because they serve as “cannon fodder” in Israeli-Palestinian violence, and should be acknowledged and rewarded for this role. These discussants stated that the annexation area would alleviate the bureaucratic hurdles and improve the quality of life of settlers.8 A small group of individuals were opposed to annexation because they saw only these settlers as benefiting, as described above, and stated that improving the lives of a small population was not worth the cost of giving “social rights to another 300,000 Palestinians.”

A third major benefit was that *annexation’s unilateralism makes it feasible*, and annexation is the only alternative other than the status quo that is feasible. Although

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8 Israel retains control of security and land management in Area C. The Civil Administration, the branch of the IDF designated to handle civil matters in Area C, is responsible for planning, zoning, and approving construction in the area. If the territory is annexed to Israel, presumably, settlers would become residents of Israel proper and would not have their affairs run by the Civil Administration. In practice, however, according to Peace Now, the Civil Administration approves construction in Israeli settlements in large numbers but severely restricts and declines almost all Palestinian requests for permits, whether for housing, agriculture, public uses, or infrastructure. See Peace Now, “On Israel’s Decision for Palestinian Construction Permits in Area C,” July 31, 2019.
most study participants had reservations about annexation of Area C, in all groups across the political spectrum, at least several participants indicated that this alternative was feasible because of its unilateral nature. In their view, Israel could implement such a step at any time. In addition, given the hawkish makeup of the Israeli coalition, discussants stated that this alternative could be implemented easily.

One area with mixed views was the value of expanded Israeli territory that would result from the annexation of Area C. Discussants in right-wing and religious groups, and some Soviet émigrés, spoke about how important it is for Israel to gain more territory for economic reasons, for security reasons, or to alleviate Israel’s housing crisis. However, others, including on the right, contested this claim by saying that the benefits of this extra territory would not outweigh its costs.

Offering Israeli residency and citizenship to Palestinians in Area C was another area with mixed views. Perspectives on this issue, which were typically only offered by participants when specifically prompted by the moderator, were divided clearly along partisan lines. Left-leaning participants assumed that Palestinians would get full rights, often discussing the benefit that residency would have for these Palestinians. Advocates of this alternative stated that they did not think it would erode Israel’s

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Table 4.6
Positive Views Toward Annexation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic value</td>
<td>“I think that we should declare—not stutter—‘This is ours. Deal with it.’ Some of them [the Palestinians] would internalize that game is over and would not choose terrorism because they would understand that we are determined and that they should surrender.” (National religious right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)</td>
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<td>“Annexation would turn our control of the area to absolute and put an end to the crazy idea of establishing an Arab state next to our home. Anyone who looks at a map [would] understand there won’t be another Arab state.” (Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2019)</td>
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<td>Normalize settlements and give settlers deserved rights</td>
<td>“They are under the authority of a military rule. If they need to renovate a balcony in their house they need the Civil Administration to approve it. It is not the Palestinian but rather the Jew that lives under occupation in his own land.” (Right-wing voter, Ramat Gan, 2019)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is part of our state. How is it possible that people live there and don’t get the same rights? These are Jews, residents of the Land of Israel and you don’t include them. It’s absurd. We need to declare that it is ours and then allocate budgets to strengthen security and the settlements there and that would automatically improve the image of the settlers.” (Orthodox participant, Ramat Gan, 2019)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unilateralism makes it feasible</td>
<td>“This alternative only depends on us. Once we decide to do it, we can. It is a decision that only depends on us, so it is feasible.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“I disapprove of this alternative and don’t see what it would give us, but it is very feasible. We are there [in Area C] anyway so it is just a matter of declaring it formally. The government today is [the] most right-wing government ever and that is what they want.” (Center-left voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)</td>
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democratic nature, as discussants indicated that they did not believe that the number of Palestinians in Area C would erode the Jewish majority.

Right-leaning individuals were typically opposed to offering these individuals residency, usually citing concerns with the security, religious, and ethnic implications of integrating more Palestinians into Israel. A number of these right-leaning individuals were concerned about the potential number of Palestinians in Area C and disagreed with the notion that Palestinians ought to be offered residency under annexation. As an example, one participant offered this perspective:

They don’t have to get any rights. They can stay Palestinians and go to their side. Move them to the PA. They do not belong in the State of Israel. Throw them away to the PA. If they want to get in for work they would have to have a permit.\(^9\)

Participants also offered mixed views on the security implications of annexation (Table 4.7). Some participants, mostly on the right, stated that sovereignty over Area C would improve the security situation, thinking that further bifurcating the West Bank would disrupt terror links. One participant captured this perspective as follows:

Today, if someone wants to transfer a bomb from Nablus to Jenin, they can do that freely. There is no border, no checkpoints. If we annex Area C and build fences around Areas A and B, then someone who wants to transfer [a] weapon from Nablus to Jenin would not be able to do that. They would control themselves and we control us. They would not interrupt us because they would stay in their areas.\(^10\)

However, several discussants across different types of groups, including some on the right, feared that annexation would increase security risks. One reason suggested was that Palestinians who found themselves as residents of the State of Israel against their will could react violently. Thus, lack of separation between Area C and the rest of the country would expose Israelis to greater risks. Others spoke about the need to grow the IDF’s presence in the area, which could, in turn, motivate the Palestinians to execute more terror attacks against Israelis.

The primary concern with this alternative was that the international community would disapprove (Table 4.8). The specific concern was that the international community would not allow Israel to annex territory in the West Bank. However, although this concern was supported by most nonreligious and non–right-wing groups, others argued that the opinion of the international community did not matter and that the international community would take no action even if they were not happy. The

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\(^9\) Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018.

\(^10\) Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018.
## Table 4.7
Mixed Views Toward Annexation

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<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
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| Israel needs additional territory         | Positive  
“Area C will be territory that we can build in and it is close to the center. Today, every house that is built or demolished in a remote place is deliberated indefinitely in the Supreme Court.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018)  
“We get the holy sites; they stay in Areas A and B, staying in their ghettos. We have full security control and don’t need to interact with them. The 60 or 300 thousand [Palestinians] from Area C can contribute to the state economically. They are good labor, instead of bringing Thais.” (National religious right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  
Negative  
“What can we gain out of this territory? I don’t see much. On the contrary. Regular people who are not settlers would not look for housing there. It would require a lot of resources and money to maintain this area. We would need more security forces there so defense expenditures would increase, and we would need to invest a lot of money in social benefits for the Palestinians in the area.” (Traditional right-wing voter from community near the Gaza Strip, Ashdod, 2018) |
| Israeli residency for Area C Palestinians | Positive  
“I heard that they really want us to annex. In the last ten years there is mass movement of Arabs into Jerusalem to get full rights. They get stuff . . . we would tell those people, that until now had nothing and did not know where they were, that from now on they would get full rights. What is wrong with that?” (Right-wing voter, Ramat Gan, 2018)  
“One we annex them we can provide them with education and employment, and by doing that we can change their perception of Israel. Move them to our side. In addition to the economic benefits and the cheap labor, annexation would have a psychological impact. The Palestinians in Area A and B would also behave differently because they would see the difference . . . “ (Soviet émigré, Ramat Gan, 2019)  
Negative  
“I am scared that they would have a right to vote. Imagine there would be an Arab mayor in Jerusalem. For now, they don’t vote but if we annex more, maybe they would vote. Scary!” (Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018) |
| Security                                  | Positive  
“I believe that when Israel annexes an area, it knows how to protect it. There would be more soldiers, more border police . . . They would control themselves and we control us. They would not interrupt us because they would stay in their areas.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018)  
“It would improve Israel’s security standing. It would completely block the option of invasion from the east. Jordan is the natural border of the State of Israel. Anyone who looks at a map sees that. This way we secure our control of the Jordan Valley.” (Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2019)  
Negative  
“It’s between 60,000 and 300,000 additional terrorists that would be able to move freely.” (Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2018)  
“A unilateral annexation would be problematic because not only are we not withdrawing from territory, but we are taking more from them [the Palestinians]. An intifada could develop here. There would be more people. Roads would be open. We would pay a heavy price.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018)  
“Once you annex Area C, you close Areas A and B with fences, which means growing the IDF presence there. That would oppress many more people and lead to more terrorism. I think there would be more infiltrations into Jewish settlements and more killings of families.” (Traditional center-right wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2019) |
move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem was cited as a prominent example: “The world complained about it for 2–3 weeks, but nothing really happened.” One participant said that the international community would not scold Israel over annexation, because Israel would be offering the Palestinians in Area C some rights, marking an improvement over the situation today.

The financial burden of annexation was highlighted as one of the major negative aspects of this alternative. This concern, which came from many different groups, including those on the right, was focused on the implications of the heavy financial burdens of annexation, which participants stated would detract resources from social investments elsewhere. All spoke about the Palestinians being a difficult population that would require a wide social safety net, with one representative individual concluding that “There is one pie and adding 300,000 Palestinians means that when you divide the pie to more people, each gets less.”

A related concern raised by a small minority of participants was that annexation is immoral and unethical. This perspective, though only voiced by those in left and center-left groups (and only a subset of participants in those groups), reflected a
concern with what was described as deepening the occupation and control of another nation. One participant described this perspective as follows:

Already today we run an occupation regime that borderlines apartheid. To worsen the situation and put more pressure on the population there unilaterally is unacceptable. It is a solution that I cannot agree with morally and ethically. I don’t want to control another nation; control other people who want to be independent.

4.4. Confederation

The confederation alternative, which was unfamiliar to all but a small number of discussants, was widely rejected by focus group participants. The primary barrier to acceptance was a lack of trust in Palestinians, as few indicated that the cooperative premise of this alternative was realistic. As a result, there was widespread concern about the negative security implications of allowing Palestinians the free access and movement entitled under this option. Even those who supported some aspects of this alternative criticized it as an academic concept that was probably impractical in the current context.

A number of participants described the confederation as a much less appealing version of the two-state solution, one that had all the negative aspects of the two-state solution with few of the positive benefits. One individual, who supported neither alternative, summarized this perspective in saying,

I do not like either option . . . but if I had to choose, I would say we need to separate. When we talk about two independent states, each side would fulfill its national ambitions, its vision and ambitions. We would not necessarily need to live in peace with one another. . . . Confederation is based on us separating but then deciding to cooperate. I would rather have our state and not deal with their problems. Leave us alone. Do not bother us with your problems, do not send arson kites my way, and do not pollute our water and air.11

Interestingly, several of those who were supportive of this alternative also compared it with the two-state solution in similar terms, describing it as the “continuation of a two-state solution in the future if conditions ripe[n].”

There were only three groups—one with left-wing voters, a second with center-left voters, and a third with Soviet émigrés—with participants who supported this alternative. Though most discussants in even these three groups had reservations about its feasibility, for its supporters, the confederation represented a sort of utopian situation of cooperation and fraternity:

11 National religious right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018.
It is first and foremost a solution based on cooperation, especially in comparison to other alternatives, and so it reflects my values. It would be a decision that both sides make, creating a body that ideally reflects both sides’ interests and therefore can work.\textsuperscript{12}

These supporters saw the confederation as a sort of compromise alternative or “midpoint solution” that would allow Israel to remain a Jewish democratic state while giving autonomy to the Palestinians. Though these supporters were emphatic that this alternative would require an end to the hostilities, they stated that mutual interest would keep it intact in times of crisis: “If conditions are ripe and there are no hostilities, both sides stand to gain . . . it would be in their interest to keep the confederation because they gain from it.”\textsuperscript{13}

Arguments against the confederation reflected a blend of issues with both the concept and the perceived feasibility of this alternative given the current context (Table 4.9). The primary concern, from the perspective of the focus group participants, was that Israelis and Palestinians are unable to cooperate sufficiently to support the confederation. Many groups raised variations of this concern, with participants concluding that collaboration between the two sides would be impossible given the mistrust and mutual hatred of the two sides.

A related concern was the security implications of allowing Palestinians free access and the right to live anywhere. There was widespread agreement that giving Palestinians unlimited access around the country would create an untenable security situation. Some participants raising this concern focused on the short-term security concerns, with one representative individual suggesting that there could be a “terrorist attack every hour,” while others focused on the long-term security risk that integrating the societies could have.

A number of participants were also concerned that confederation would change the character of the state. The most prominent concern was that the integration of Israelis and Palestinians would jeopardize the “Jewishness” of Israel’s people and its cities. A small number of discussants were primarily concerned about the implications of the transition of the holy sites in Jerusalem to international control, with one concluding that international involvement was a “no go. . . . Judaism is what brought us here to begin with, how can we give up on controlling those sites?”

Another objection to the confederation was a belief that it was unrealistic to suggest that settlers could stay in the State of Palestine. One participant stated that they did not believe that it was feasible to tell the “few hundred thousand settlers . . . to either evacuate or become residents of Palestine.”\textsuperscript{14} Individuals raising this perspective

\textsuperscript{12} Center-left voter, Tel Aviv, 2018.

\textsuperscript{13} Discussant in a group of center-left voters, Ramat Gan, July 11, 2018.

\textsuperscript{14} National religious right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018.
### Table 4.9

**Negative Views Toward Confederation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
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</table>
| Israelis and Palestinians cannot cooperate | “We cannot even bring the Palestinians to come back to the negotiations table. If Israelis and Palestinians could get along, there would be meetings and discussions long ago. There is no chemistry. . . . And being in a confederation would require nonstop negotiations. Every little thing would have to be negotiated and I don’t see the Palestinians with the Israelis doing that together.” (Center-left voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)  
“It is so hard to run our affairs in Israel today—the government, security, economics. I cannot imagine how it would be to cooperate with those we are now fighting. . . . I cannot see how they would want to cooperate with us. There is a big gap in perceptions. There are stigmas. For years they told their people that Israel is the enemy. Then all of a sudden they would cooperate with us?” (Soviet émigré, Tel Aviv, 2019) |
| Free access for Palestinians | “The big no-no is free movement—Israelis and Palestinians free to be anywhere. It is a powder keg. We would have a terrorist attack every hour.” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Tel Aviv, 2019)  
“Who in their right mind can even think of free access and movement? That they can freely come here? The heart of the conflict in my view is religion. . . . Like Muhammad said, ‘Let’s make peace, and after we strengthen and build up we would take over and kill you more lethally.’” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Jerusalem, 2018) |
| Change the character of the state | “Confederation changes the identity of the state, it would no longer be Israel. The culture would change. Palestinians would move to Tel Aviv.” (Center-left voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)  
“If they are allowed to live anywhere, it would lead to assimilation and loss of national identity. I trust God to defend us security-wise but the assimilation would be like in the Negev with the Bedouins.” (Right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018)  
“This is a Jewish state. I do not want integrated lives. I do not want Palestinians in my supermarket; I do not want Palestinian kids in my children’s classrooms. I want my kids to know that every product they choose in the store is kosher and allowed. I don’t want them to like products that are designed for Arabs and bring them home. How would I teach little kids? It would be a disaster!” (Ultra-Orthodox participant, Tel Aviv, 2018) |
| Settlers could not stay in Palestine | “What would happen with the settlers? If they stay and became residents of Palestine that could explode any minute. One time the Palestinians would hit the settlers; the next time it would be the other way around. Today the IDF is there to stop that.” (Traditional right-wing voter, Ashdod, 2018) |
| Economic implications | “It is a non-sensible mix. We should not be partners with them. We have joint infrastructure; we transfer them water and electricity, but that does not mean we need to manage those things together. . . . Our GNP [gross national product] is 100 times theirs. How can we build partnership between a giant and a dwarf?” (Traditional right-wing voter, Ashdod, 2018)  
“It would not give us anything. We are not becoming one state, but on the other hand we expose ourselves to all the risks of living together—security risks but mostly economic risks. Israel would have to pay more than in any other solution and would be most exposed. There is an inherent inequality between the two sides.” (Center-left voter, Tel Aviv, 2019)  
“I don’t like either option but at least with two states, each one finances itself. Here [in a confederation], I would need to put 90 percent of the money and they only 10 percent. Why do I need to fund them?” (National religious right-wing voter, Tel Aviv, 2018) |
were particularly concerned about the likelihood for violence similar to what has been seen in recent years but without the IDF present to intervene.

Finally, a number of participants were concerned about the economic implications of a confederation for Israel given the massive gap in the size of the Israeli and Palestinian economies. Some were concerned that this would mean that the confederation would impose a huge burden on Israel, as Israel would become responsible for the Palestinians, while others did not see how the confederation could bring any economic benefits.

4.5. One-State Solution

The one-state solution was the lowest-rated alternative overall. This alternative was seen by many participants as the death knell for Zionism, given the large and growing numbers of Palestinians. In discussion of this alternative, participants emphasized that they prefer separation over integration for reasons including security, religion, and national identity. A handful of Soviet émigrés were the only ones to favor this alternative.

Not a single participant thought that the one-state solution would be feasible. Even the small number of individuals who supported the alternative thought it was ideal in theory but not feasible to implement. As one example, a Soviet émigré who described the one-state solution as “the dream” for Israel concluded that

I cannot imagine the switch from one extreme to another; from a status quo in which one nation controls another to a situation in which they all live in harmony in the same state. That in schools kids from both sides study together—I cannot imagine this situation. Two peoples from different backgrounds, with different cultures, history. I wish that could happen, that globalization takes us there. That is the dream. But I do not think that it is feasible.

Despite the lack of overall support, a number of participants from different backgrounds did discuss positive aspects of this alternative (summarized in Table 4.10). First, a small group of participants from across the groups indicated that Israelis and Palestinians would learn to live together. These individuals indicated that, by sharing one state, Israelis and Palestinians would learn how to live together and respect each other. Versions of this perspective were offered across the political spectrum, including a traditional right-wing voter who concluded that

I don’t think we need to live next to each other but rather live with each other. Separation creates antagonism. I just researched my roots, how we got here. When our families came here a hundred years ago or more, Arabs lived here, and they got along.
In addition to overall concerns about feasibility, participants highlighted a number of major concerns about this alternative (Table 4.11). First, across all of the groups, there was a major concern that a one-state solution would be the end of the Jewish state and Zionism. This concern was mostly focused on population numbers and demographics, with participants highlighting the fact that a Palestinian majority in this new state would mean that “there was one state, it would be a Palestinian.” One participant eloquently captured the political consequences of the demographic impact of integrating Palestinians into Israeli society as follows:

I think that it is the worst solution of all. First, it is a burden to add three million Arabs to our state budget. Most of them come from a weak population [economically]. They would not benefit me. They would not help march the country forward. The Russian immigration contributed to the state and led it to flourish, but I do not see how that [absorbing Palestinians] would contribute. In terms of governance, like the Haredi [ultra-Orthodox] population, they can become a powerful political group and in the end would make decisions against Israel.15

Even participants who did not explicitly speak about the complete demise of Israel as a Jewish state were emphatic that they did not want integration with Palestin-

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15 Discussant in a traditional right-wing group, Tel Aviv, May 21, 2019.
Many expressed concerns about the loss of cultural, religious, and ethnic characteristics that come with the integration mandated in the one-state solution, and some of the language they used was racist and expressed mistrust and fear.

Several participants focused their concerns on what they saw as the financial burdens of the one-state solution. In their comments, individuals tended to focus their concern on the direct costs that would be imposed on Israel (e.g., to educate Palestinians, to build new infrastructure to support them) or the indirect impact on workers through increased unemployment. A small number suggested that there could be some economic benefits, as the differences in occupations and skills between the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.11 Negative Views Toward the One-State Solution</th>
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<td><strong>View</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>One-state solution would be a Palestinian state</td>
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<td>Discussants did not want integration</td>
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<td>Financial burden for Israel</td>
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<td>No going back</td>
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two economies could complement each other, though the individuals suggesting these possible positive economic effects indicated that the one-state solution could not work out in terms of governance and security.

The final concern was that the one-state solution was the only alternative that was irreversible. This issue was raised by a number of discussants, who pointed out that there would be “no going back” if this course of action faltered for whatever reason. One participant was emphatic that “we have only one country” and there was no way that the Israelis could afford the risk.

4.6. Concluding Thoughts

Jewish participants in this study were skeptical of reaching any alternative to conflict with the Palestinians. Disillusioned by the Oslo peace process and believing that there is “no partner” on the Palestinian side, most Israeli Jews told us that they prefer letting present trends continue, at least until there is a change that justifies deviating from the status quo.

If not the status quo, Jewish participants preferred the two-state solution because it provides the clearest means for separating from the Palestinians. However, this alternative was widely seen as infeasible, at least currently. Indeed, even if the Palestinians were able and willing to support it, there was a general sense that Israel itself would not be able to manage this alternative. Several groups concluded that it was “theoretically” possible but that the “people will adamantly oppose the idea.”16 Others concluded that it was logistically impossible to implement:

> We don’t even get along among ourselves. Look at the different sectors or even just the religious ones, there are so many groups. We cannot even agree on what type of education our kids receive. We cannot even form a government. How can we agree on reaching an agreement?17

Participants belonging to the political right who self-reported as voters of parties that represent the settler movement favored annexation of Area C. In addition to economics and security, annexation supporters were motivated by religious reasons, including God’s will and the importance of holy sites in the West Bank to the Jewish religion. However, most supporters of annexation indicated that they did not see it as providing the level of separation from the Palestinians that was desired. Confederation was the least popular option, followed by the one-state solution. No alternative, however, was deemed capable of resolving the conflict.

Several other key observations about Israeli Jewish perspectives toward future alternatives emerged from this research.

16 Discussant in an ultra-Orthodox group, Jerusalem, July 18, 2018.

17 Discussant in a national religious right-wing voter group, Tel Aviv, May 23, 2019.
Observation 1: **Groups are not homogeneous.** Although there was general agreement about key issues within groups, there were still notable differences between discussants, suggesting that nuance is important and that the issue itself, as well as the proposed alternatives, is complicated. The most-notable disagreements within certain groups related to the two-state solution and annexation. Thus, for example, it is simplistic to assume that because all right-wing parties are pro-annexation of Area C, including Likud, all right-wing voters are pro-annexation. In practice, study participants had mixed reactions to this option. Similarly, immigrants from the former Soviet Union are, in the Israeli mindset, considered hawkish. Yet the four groups representing this population espoused a variety of opinions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The same goes for the ultra-Orthodox groups, whose participants were divided between the status quo, the two-state solution, and annexation.

Observation 2: **The implicit assumption across groups is that no alternative will resolve the conflict.** Another key insight is that the word “peace” was hardly mentioned. When it was mentioned, it was referred to as a lofty romantic concept that does not pertain to Israelis and Palestinians in this era. Analysis of the focus group data shows that the implicit assumption of the vast majority of discussants is that none of the alternatives could end the conflict. Therefore, they kept bringing up security risks, mistrust, and mutual hatred even when asked to imagine a peaceful alternative. In addition, despite having the strongest military in the Middle East, Israeli Jews in this study mentioned fear of the Palestinians. Therefore, policymakers who seek public support for an alternative to the conflict must demonstrate how the alternative would end conflict.

Observation 3: **Restoring hope in the possibility of resolution is a first-order action.** In most groups, participants indicated during the discussion that they were feeling hopelessness and despair. Although most preferred the continuation of present trends over the other alternatives, they still wanted an alternative to conflict with the Palestinians (i.e., change from the status quo) and wanted a better future. For the most part, except for groups on the left, Israeli Jews in this study indicated that they were the peace-seeking party to the conflict but that the chance of reaching such an alternative was out of their hands. This yearning for change, which is shared across the political spectrum, indicates that restoring hope in resolution of the conflict would be pertinent for Israeli Jews before they consider making concessions.

Observation 4: **Jerusalem was barely mentioned.** Unless asked about it specifically, participants in all groups refrained from mentioning Jerusalem independently. The absence of passion for this issue could indicate that it is not as important as generally assumed or that, following the Trump administration’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Israeli Jews do not believe this is an area for compromise.18

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18 As noted in the appendix, Jerusalem has been and remains a critical issue in negotiations on which the sides must reach agreement for any solution to be acceptable. Given the Trump administration’s recognition of Jerusa-
Observation 5: To the Israelis, Gaza demonstrated why withdrawing from territory does not work. Gaza was treated as an entirely separate area, one that would not be part of any alternative. Discussants could not see how the different alternatives would address the problems of Gaza, which in their minds represented a negative real-life demonstration of why Israel cannot withdraw from territory.

Observation 6: Concrete discussions of the conflict can shape views. It was also clear that even if discussants had not changed their minds about an option, more information, visual aids, and the discussion itself introduced new perspectives that helped enrich their thinking. Some participants admitted in the end of the discussion that they were not aware of many of the facts, noting that the arguments that their peers brought up introduced new ideas and factors for consideration. Although Israelis are accustomed to talking politics and come with preconceived ideas, our exercise proved that a long, substantial discussion about the conflict and ways to address it still has merit and can help shape views.

Although the discussions did not change core views about the conflict, the opportunity to dive into the details and analyze implications of certain ideas in ways that day-to-day realities do not allow for those who are not policy enthusiasts clearly enriched participant perspectives. Providing the public more opportunities to engage in such discussions could be beneficial for policy research and civil society groups advancing alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Most Jewish participants crave some type of resolution and the prospect of a better future, but many indicated that they were scared, felt hopeless, and felt powerless. It is, therefore, advisable that programs seeking to advance conflict resolution prioritize the restoration of hope in the ability to reach peace and equip the public with agency.

As the capital of Israel and the moving of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, more research on this area is called for.
Overall, the Palestinians in our focus group discussions were unsatisfied with all five of the alternatives that we presented, all of which were seen as being biased in favor of Israel. Instead, our research suggests that Palestinians want a two-state solution with major modifications: an independent Palestinian state with geographic contiguity, political autonomy, a standing army to defend itself and protect its borders, and economic control over its borders.

Although the existing alternatives are unsatisfying, the participants indicated that they were deeply motivated to find any viable alternative to the status quo, as they indicated that finding a viable alternative before the situation gets even worse is critical. Thus, the discussions focused on identifying the least unfavorable option (rather than the most preferred). One participant from the West Bank illustrated this relative comparison approach in describing the two-state solution: “I had rejected the two-state solution at the beginning, but after you have explained the other alternatives, I see it is the best [option] available.”

For the West Bank Palestinians, the two-state solution was seen as the least unfavorable alternative because it provided them with a recognized state and they indicated that they did not believe that they would truly be treated as equals under either the confederation or the one-state solution. However, they indicated that the details of the alternative regarding settlers, a Palestinian army, freedom of movement, and Jerusalem would need to be altered for them to fully accept this alternative. For the Gazan Palestinians, the least unfavorable alternative was the one-state solution. The Gazans were deeply skeptical that the two-state solution could bridge the divide between Gaza and the West Bank—economically, geographically, and politically—but indicated that they believed that the one-state solution could bring much-needed improvements in living conditions and livelihood.

Two core themes emerged across the discussion of the five alternatives. The first is that there was a consensus that the status quo and the alternatives as presented were biased against Palestinians. Palestinians viewed all of the alternatives as primarily serv-

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1 Discussant in focus group in Ramallah.
ing the interests of the more powerful Israelis while asking for more compromises from the Palestinians. Second, Palestinians expressed the urgent need for a change to address their living conditions—in particular, the poor economic situation, unemployment, lack of education, water shortages, lack of mobility, and lack of independence. Some expressed frustrations aimed at their leaders, but most blamed Israel for the disastrous status quo in which they are living.

One caveat to these core results and to the analysis presented in the following sections is that many of the Palestinians in our focus group discussions had an incomplete understanding of some of the alternatives. This was particularly the case for the confederation, for which the concept of a unified federal government was new to most participants. As examples, in describing the confederation, one participant concluded that “the terms and details are not clear . . . 80–85 percent of the people do not know the meaning of confederation,” while another reported that he had never heard of it before, despite being involved in several polling efforts focused on alternatives to the status quo.

The following six sections offer a detailed discussion of Palestinian perspectives toward these alternatives, based on the 14 focus groups conducted with this population. Each of the following five sections provides perspectives on one of the alternatives, with the sections organized from most preferred (the two-state solution, the focus of Section 5.1) to least preferred (annexation, the focus of Section 5.5). A sixth section (Section 5.6) discusses some broad concerns about the feasibility of implementation of any of these alternatives. Table 5.1 presents quotes about the primary concerns of participants.

5.1. Two-State Solution

The two-state solution was viewed by Palestinian participants as the least unfavorable option. Some were wholeheartedly supportive of this option, a perspective that one participant illustrated succinctly in concluding, “My belief is that to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is to have a Palestinian state next to an Israeli state . . . there is no guarantee more than this. . . . I have fought for this for 30 years.” However, others were much less optimistic and preferred the two-state solution only because the alternatives were far worse. As examples, one participant indicated that Palestinians would accept the two-state solution “because it cannot be worse than the current situation,” and others explicitly indicated that it was the best of four bad alternatives.

Though the two-state solution was the most favorable option overall, the Gazans viewed this alternative less favorably than Palestinians in the West Bank. Two major

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2 Discussant in focus group in Bethlehem.

3 The quote is from a Bethlehem focus group participant. On the latter point, one participant (also from Bethlehem) reported, “For me, the four solutions are bad . . . if I must choose, I would have chosen the two-state solution.”
differences seem to be driving this difference in support. The first is that the Gazans were much more skeptical that the two-state solution would truly provide the Palestinians an independent state, with a number of participants emphasizing the point (also mentioned by West Bank Palestinians) that a state that cannot raise an army is not really a state, as one participant summarized eloquently:

> "Which country in the world would accept not being allowed to have weapons when its neighbor is weaponized? This is contradictory and unjust. When we say we are an independent state but Israel controls external security, that really means we are a state under Israeli occupation." (Ramallah)

The second major difference for the Gazans was the importance of economic issues, as Gazans were extremely concerned about the high rate of poverty and unem-

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4 Discussant in focus group in Khan Younis.
ployment and favored alternatives that they believed would help them find jobs and improve their economic opportunities.

The vast majority of participants in the Palestinian focus groups indicated that the two-state solution would be difficult to implement. Many were particularly skeptical that Israel could be incentivized to compromise on land and of the willingness and ability of Israel to evacuate the settlements as prescribed, given the high financial and political cost of moving a large number of settlers. The Gazans were concerned about the feasibility of resolving the geographical divide between Gaza and the West Bank and questioned how Hamas and the PA could come to an agreement on a Palestinian state given the ongoing political friction. One Gazan participant emphasized this last point, concluding, “We do not have confidence that the Palestinian Authority is willing to find a solution . . . we do not trust that the leadership in the West Bank will get us out of this situation.”

The return of Palestinian lands was an issue on which Palestinians offered mixed perspectives (Table 5.2). For many, the establishment of fixed and recognized borders based on the Green Line was a major positive, as it would mean that Israel would have to return some land to the Palestinians and thus would be giving them back a portion of what they characterized as their “rights.” However, many others indicated that they did not think that the two-state solution was sufficient in terms of land. Some were emphatic that anything less than a return to the 1948 borders would prevent them from achieving a fully independent and coherent state. Others in this camp were willing to support the two-state solution but indicated that it would be only a first step in their efforts to get back the land lost to Israel in 1948. One participant said, “We take the land [in the two-state solution] to build our own independent state, then we start taking over the 1948 land when we have power.”

Removal of settlers was another contentious topic area. There was overwhelming support for the removal of settlers, who were widely viewed as unlawful and violent. However, almost all participants were very skeptical about how this would be executed in practice in the implementation of a two-state solution. These areas of skepticism focused on the likely fairness of land swaps, as the participants doubted that Palestinians would be given land of comparable quality and quantity and doubted whether smaller Jewish settlements located away from the borders would really be emptied. Others took a more hardline view of the settlements and concluded that the only viable two-state solution would be one in which settlers were removed without land swaps.

The third controversial issue was whether the two-state solution would give the Palestinians sufficient control and autonomy to establish an independent and coherent state. A few of the participants stated that this alternative would give them

5 The reason for the skepticism on the land swaps was that there was a general perception that Israel is much more powerful and in a much stronger negotiating position.

6 Discussant in a focus group in Khan Younis.
more control over internal matters, particularly as a two-state solution would mean that the IDF presence in Palestine would cease. This would eliminate checkpoints and thus facilitate movement within the West Bank. They also mentioned that running their own internal security without any involvement from the IDF would result in better security because fear of IDF raids would be eliminated.

### Table 5.2

**Mixed Views Toward the Two-State Solution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return of Palestinian lands</td>
<td>Positive: “The two-state solution does not provide us with all we have fought for, but at least this alternative gets us back some land.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative: “There is a main issue here. . . . we do not want 1967 Palestine, we want the 1948 historic Palestine. A two-state solution will lead to two incomplete states.” (Gaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There is no way we will divide up Palestine [referring to 1948 land and West Bank and Gaza].” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent and coherent state</td>
<td>Positive: “In a two-state solution there is more autonomy and sovereignty for Palestinians; that means less interference from Israel.” (Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative: “The two-state solution will not provide us with autonomy or control or mobility.” (Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A two-state solution is the best from all bad solutions. But where is our port and airports? I want an army . . . a state for a state. Not a state in name only. Having just police is not adequate.” (Hebron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I refuse to call this alternative a two-state solution . . . you cannot call it a state without its own army. States should be able to control the land and the sky, with free borders. I should not be waiting for Israel to protect me from external danger. You are speaking about a government under Israeli control. This is not a solution; I don’t care what you name it.” (Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlers</td>
<td>Positive: “The best thing about this option is that settlers, to a certain extent, would be forced to leave.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In terms of removing the settlers, you give me some comfort as a citizen. Because I would refuse to have an Israeli [in the same independent state] next to me.” (Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative: “So, they [Israel] want to take [land] from us, Palestinians. For the settlements, to what borders will they compensate us and where? It is ambiguous. From Sinai? From Golan? From the North?” (East Jerusalem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I do not believe Israel will abandon Ma’ale Adumim settlements. How would it agree to replace it and if so, it will swap it with which land?” (Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In the two-state solution I do not accept the deportation of only some settlers.” (Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Nowadays, the settlers are the ones that attack me. . . . Every day they attack our homes and farms. Israel is not able to control them.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, many of the participants were much less sanguine about the prospect for an independent and coherent Palestinian state, and there was widespread agreement that the conditions of the two-state alternative needed to be adjusted to achieve “real” independence and self-governance. From the participants’ perspective, the most important thing was that the Palestinian state would need to have an army like any other country to defend itself and protect its borders. The state would also need to have direct access to airports and ports to facilitate travel and movement across borders and countries and to facilitate trade. Others, particularly the Gazans, were concerned about how the two-state solution would allow reconciliation between the political elites in Gaza and the West Bank and establish a single Palestinian state encompassing Hamas and the PA.

In addition to these three controversial areas, there were four other areas (illustrated in Table 5.3) in which the Palestinian participants expressed strictly negative perspectives. The first was that most participants indicated that the two-state solution was not the best alternative for improving the Palestinian economy and employment. These individuals were concerned about the potential negative economic consequences of decoupling the states, given the fragility of the economy, the lack of Palestinian economic infrastructure, and economic dependence on Israel. They stated that this alternative would result in reduced imports and exports with both Israel and the rest of the world, because Israel would continue to control the external borders, sea, and airspace. Furthermore, one participant raised the concern that the foreign aid that Palestinians rely on could be cut off if this alternative was implemented. A single participant mentioned that he thought that this alternative could lead to a better economy, especially if there were individuals willing to make investments in Palestine, but this perspective was not widely supported by the participants.

Second, the Gazan participants were particularly concerned about mobility between Gaza and the West Bank. Although a corridor linking the West Bank to Gaza was included in our description of the two-state solution, participants did not see how a two-state alternative would provide a practical way to connect the geographical and political divide between the two regions. They questioned whether Palestinian citizens would need to pass through an entirely separate and hostile state to reach one part of the country from another and whether travel from Gaza to the West Bank would be safe.

Third, participants were nearly unanimous in agreeing that the new Palestinian state should not be responsible for taking in all Palestinian refugees. Participants indicated that the resolution to the Palestinian refugee issue under this alternative was unjust and that the new Palestinian state would lack both the capacity and the physical space to assimilate the 1948 Palestinian refugees who might wish to return. They questioned why a two-state solution did not provide an option for 1948 Palestinian refugees to return to Israel (and only allowed for refugees to return to lands on the Palestinian
Finally, some expressed the belief that Jerusalem should be the capital of the Palestinian state and that it was inappropriate for holy sites in the city to be managed by international organizations. Participants who raised this issue strongly believed that the holy sites should be part of the Palestinian state and overseen by the Palestinian government.

5.2. One-State Solution

The one-state solution ranked, on average, as the second least unfavorable alternative for the Palestinians. A number of Palestinian participants enthusiastically supported this alternative, with participants reporting that it was the “first solution proposed by the Palestinians and the best solution for us” and that, “to a large extent, the one-state
solution is the best for Palestinians’ liberation.” Those who supported this alternative emphasized the potential benefit along core dimensions, including political and social equality, security, and economic opportunity. Detractors were primarily concerned that the one-state solution would legitimize Israeli control over Palestinian land and erode the Palestinian identity, though many also believed that Israel would be unwilling to follow through on the guarantees for political and social equality specified in the one-state solution alternative. This alternative was generally more favorably viewed by Gazans, as compared with West Bankers, which seemed to be in large part because they viewed this option as giving them the best opportunity to alleviate their poverty and improve their employment prospects.

The Palestinians overwhelmingly indicated that this alternative would not be feasible. Specifically, they stated that they did not believe that Israel, as the more powerful party, would be willing to make the many compromises that would be necessary for the one-state solution to succeed, particularly given demographic trends that suggest a gradual erosion of Jewish influence. Some of the participants sharing this view said that the one-state solution was incompatible with what they viewed as Zionism, which favors Jews above others, and that the hate, racism, and prejudice on both sides would make this very difficult to implement. A few participants were a bit more optimistic but stated that the details of the alternative would need to be much better articulated and have an associated international vision for overseeing and guiding their implementation:

This alternative will not be implemented unless there is an international vision to create one state that would be supportive to Palestinians and encourage integration similar to South Africa.

Palestinian participants highlighted three major factors that explained why the one-state solution was preferred to the confederation, the status quo, and annexation. The first was that, for some participants, it was the only alternative that could lead to equality between Palestinians and Israelis (Table 5.4). Participants were supportive of the proposed governance structure, specifically the creation of a democratic government that represents Palestinians and Israelis in proportion to their demographic size. As compared with other alternatives, some Palestinians viewed governance under a

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7 The first quote is from Hebron, and the second is from Gaza.

8 As an example, a participant in Bethlehem opined, “I think it is a thesis from the left, but it won’t get the Israeli consensus. The majority of Israelis reject this solution, fearing the demographic expansion of the Palestinians and Arabs in general.”

9 Discussant in focus group in Khan Younis.
One-state solution as achieving equality with Israeli Jews and the ability to exercise their political, religious, and cultural rights.\textsuperscript{10}

Some participants were less worried about the potential compromises that Palestinians might need to make under a one-state solution, because demographic trends suggested that they would eventually be in the majority. Given the democratic nature of the new state, the majority, in this case the Palestinians, would have more presence in the government than Jews and thus would have more control of the state’s affairs. One participant described it as follows:

\textsuperscript{10} One participant equated this alternative with secularism, which was an appealing factor: “What I like about this option is that the state would be secular and democratic. Religion has a lot of influence in many communities, including ours, leading to fundamentalism. In my opinion, a secular and democratic society makes life easier” (discussant in focus group in Bethlehem).
This alternative will be to our benefit in the long run. The demographic trends are to our advantage. Slowly we will outnumber the Jews and they will become a minority. So, Palestinians will control the land. See what happened in South Africa.\footnote{Discussant in focus group in Khan Younis.}

Second, most Palestinian participants indicated that the economic benefits of the one-state solution would be much greater than the other alternatives, as it would establish a single national economy that the Palestinians were part of rather than a Palestinian economy dependent on Israel. Because the one-state solution would have no travel restrictions, it would allow Palestinians to move freely throughout the land to find jobs. Gazan participants were particularly vocal about the economic benefits of the one-state solution, and they often contrasted the economic benefits of this alternative to the very difficult economic circumstances in Gaza.

The third positive perspective was related to personal safety, and a number of Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank indicated that safety would improve under a one-state solution. Participants voicing this perspective stated that safety would improve under this alternative because the safety of Palestinians and of Israelis would be intertwined. A few also indicated that this alternative would lead to less resistance and civil unrest because there would be one government elected democratically by the people.

Four major negative aspects of the one-state solution were highlighted by the Palestinians, and the illustrative quotes for each are provided in Table 5.5. The first is that the one-state solution de facto legitimizes Israel’s right to Palestinian land. A subset of the participants indicated that this had important symbolic value and meant that the Palestinians were succumbing to Israeli power and control. One participant illustrated this perspective in concluding that it would be equivalent to Palestinians admitting that “this land is for Israel when it is our land. . . . that means that we have lost the Palestinian cause and our legitimate ownership of our land.”

A second concern was that this alternative would entail the loss of Palestinian identity and heritage. The participants were concerned about the nature of the state’s identity, questioning what the political system would look like, whether they would have to accept a Jew as a president, what the official language would be, and many other questions of this ilk. Some participants were much less concerned about this issue, referencing the many years that Palestinians and Jews had lived closely together with few issues. However, others questioned how people from various religions and traditions could be integrated without leading to more conflict and whether it would be possible for Palestinians to live side by side with settlers under a one-state alternative.

The two final concerns were that this alternative failed to adequately address either the Palestinian right of return or the release of Palestinians in Israeli pris-
ons. In general, there was a view that the alternative, at least as presented by the RAND research team, lacked the detail necessary to be implementable because it failed to cover many priority issues. However, these were two additional areas of greatest concern to the Palestinians.

## 5.3. Confederation

The confederation was rated favorably by participants in terms of the economic implications, but the Palestinians stated that this alternative would give the Israelis too much

### Table 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legitimize Israeli rights to Palestinian land</td>
<td>“If we agree to this alternative it means we admit that this land is for Israel when in reality it is our land. That means we have lost the Palestinian cause and our legitimate ownership of our land.” (Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Israel is an occupying power and it would be inappropriate for it to coexist with Palestine. You want me to agree with Israeli Jews and say why don’t you come live with us after taking our land?” (Nablus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>“This is a very uncomfortable and very sad idea that there will be a new state with a new character. This is something that is completely unacceptable even if we were given the West Bank and Jerusalem.” (Gaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Is it possible that our flag will be blue with star of David on it, and nothing will reflect our Palestinian heritage? In that case, we will be like an expensive chocolate that does not taste good.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If Israel commits to the points you just discussed [referring to equality and democratic state], I will agree as long as we keep our Palestinian heritage alongside with the Israeli heritage.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is impossible that I will accept a president that is not a Muslim. In all Arab countries, with the exception of Lebanon, the president should be a Muslim. In a two-state solution there would be a Muslim president and a Jewish president. I cannot imagine the president of a one-state solution to be Jewish.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My traditions and culture are going to be different than theirs [Israeli]. We will not be able to agree at all.” (East Jerusalem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right of return and Palestinian prisoners</td>
<td>“This alternative has attractive features that will make Palestinians surrender. But we still do not know what happens to prisoners and refugees. Is equity the only thing we care about?” (Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I, as an individual, agree to the one-state solution under one condition, which is that refugees can come back to their land.” (Gaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They did not mention refugees under the one-state solution.” (Discussant in focus group in Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Will all the prisoners [Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails] be released and will there be no prisoners at all?” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
control over their future. In particular, the Palestinians indicated that they were concerned that Israel would still be in control of the Palestinian state, settlers would continue to live on their land, and Israel would not allow Palestinian refugees to return to their original homeland in the 1948 historic Palestine. That said, while support for the confederation was low in both the quantitative and qualitative components of our data collection, several participants highlighted the fact that this was the alternative that they were the least familiar with and had the most difficulty understanding—thus, it is possible that support for this alternative could shift if they were better informed on its details.12

Most participants stated that they did not believe that this alternative would be feasible. Foremost among discussions of feasibility was the concern about the existing hatred between Palestinians and Israelis, which would make living side by side impossible:

If we talk about two states living side by side at a minimum there must be some type of civil relationship. . . . I do not think this hatred that has been planted inside of them for many years will ever change.13

Other participants said that this alternative required too many compromises from Palestinians as it more or less formalizes the current status quo and only grants the Palestinian state somewhat increased autonomy and power. However, some participants indicated that they believed that there would be substantial international support for this alternative, as it formalizes the establishment of a Palestinian state (even if somehow less empowered than the two-state solution).

The one issue area in which Palestinian participants discussed the confederation positively was in terms of the potential economic opportunities that it would create (Table 5.6). Participants tended to describe the potential economic benefits in comparison with other alternatives, with most groups agreeing that this alternative would offer better economic conditions than the two-state solution, the status quo, or annexation. Lifting movement restrictions between Israel and Palestine was viewed as likely to help Palestinians find jobs. If desired, Palestinians would have freedom to travel internally within the state without having to pass Israeli checkpoints, as well as to travel to Israel to seek employment.

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12 As examples, here are two quotes provided by focus group participants along these lines:

We might have heard about the confederation, but its terms and details are not clear. 80 or 85 percent of the people do not know the meaning of confederation. (Hebron)

Even in the polls, not even once, (have we seen) the Israeli-Palestinian confederation! It has not [been] mentioned before! (Ramallah)

13 Discussant in focus group in Hebron.
Table 5.6

Mixed Views Toward Confederation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics Positive</td>
<td>“This would be the closest in meeting the needs of citizens (Palestinians) in terms of freedom to move, economy and governance.” (Gaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There will be free movement between the two states [leading to] exchanges in all respects. (Discussant in focus group in Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“That means that we have freedom of movement and there would be someone responsible [referring to the confederacy] regarding resources that would benefit both sides. In the end there could be a specific policy that would benefit the Palestinian side and the Israeli side and there might be more justice.” (Hebron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimize Israeli rights to Palestinian land</td>
<td>Negative “How can we speak of settlers that only carry hatred for us? This is reality and we cannot change it. A simple example is settlers coming in and massacring a sleeping family. We woke up and saw their burned and dead bodies. How can we live with them in peace? Even Israel cannot live with them.” (Hebron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Every settler will have to take permission from the Palestinian government. A settler taking permission from a Palestinian! The settler will go into your home, kill your son, and leave his body in the home, and you want us to give him permission [to stay and abide by Palestinian rule]. This alternative ridicules the Palestinians who live in this region.” (Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right of return Negative</td>
<td>“This [alternative] will allow settlers to own (more of) the West Bank and more Palestinians will come in. That will leave Palestinians who live in the West Bank with nothing.” (East Jerusalem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“In the confederation we will be allowed to take a part of our land and the refugees will be allowed to return [to this small part of the land]; where will the refugees be placed? We do not have the capabilities to have them here.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You mean if the refugee was originally from Jaffa, he will be allowed to come back to Bethlehem? He is better to stay where he is.” (Hebron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We do not want the refugees to come to West Bank or Gaza. International law says they should be allowed to return from the land they were expelled from.” (Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent and coherent Palestinian state</td>
<td>Negative “If Israel gets into war with Egypt, we will be at war with Egypt. If they get into war with Jordan, we will be at war with Jordan. Israel will be in control of our international relations with our neighbors.” (Ramallah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“So, the Israeli forces control the borders for what? Who do they think will invade other than the Arab countries and Muslims? And what do you want me to do in my own state, sit there and watch as if I am okay with it?” (Hebron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Under the confederacy there is an Israeli decision and a Palestinian decision. Which decision will end being implemented in reality?” (Khan Younis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The federal government will make important decisions and we (Palestinians) are left with no decision regarding, for example, resources.” (Bethlehem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Under the confederacy Israel will keep all its power. We will continue being the weak side.” (East Jerusalem)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the three primary negative aspects of the confederacy, from the perspective of the Palestinian participants, the fact that the confederation would *legitimize Israeli rights to Palestinian land was the most prominent*. The participants rejected the notion that Jewish settlers could be allowed to live in the West Bank and become residents of Palestine, as this was widely seen as legitimizing the settlers’ right to a land that is not lawfully theirs. There was also a general concern that, over time, settlements would again start to expand and take over even more of their land. Other participants’ concerns were focused on the animosity between Palestinians and settlers, questioning how they could live together under one Palestinian state. Furthermore, a number were incredulous that anyone could believe that settlers would be willing to abide by Palestinian rules and regulations. That said, a subset of the participants suggested that this approach to the settlers was pragmatic, because allowing the settlers to continue residing on Palestinian land would likely be much easier than trying to remove them.

The second major concern was regarding the **Palestinian right of return**. Although participants supported the refugee right of return allowed for in this alternative, because the newly established Palestinian state would have the authority to determine whether it would accept refugees into its borders, they could not see how the Palestinian state that would be established under this alternative could absorb these refugees. Participants did not believe that the West Bank, particularly given the fact that settlers would be allowed to stay and become residents of Palestine, had either the physical space or the resources to accommodate a potentially large number of returning Palestinians. Several participants also noted their frustration that the terms for the right of return in this alternative did not allow for Palestinians to return to their homes in Israel because Israel would have authority over which refugees would be allowed into Israel, as international law allows refugees the right to return to their homeland.

Third, many indicated that the authority and control given to the Palestinians in the confederation alternative would be **insufficient to establish an independent and coherent Palestinian state**. Foremost, the participants were emphatic that a Palestinian state needs to have a military and needs to be responsible for securing its own borders. Though the participants were supportive of the internal security force posited by this alternative, they stated that they did not believe that a Palestinian state could be a state if it did not control its own borders. Furthermore, a few participants were concerned that the lack of an army would mean that the Palestinians would be forced to follow Israel in international affairs and war.

In addition, there was a general impression that this alternative would simply perpetuate Israeli control of Palestinians, as the confederacy would inherently favor the entity that has the most power, and there was skepticism that the new Palestinian state would have any real power. As an example, some participants said that a joint federal government with equal representation to address common issues would not agree on critical issues, such as resource allocation (e.g., water) or how to respond to international threats to Israel. In these challenging circumstances, they theorized that it would be dif-
ficult for federal government members to come to a consensus, and Israel, the party with
the greater power, would make decisions at the expense of the Palestinians.

5.4. Status Quo

The Palestinians in the focus groups were unanimous in that the current situation is
untenable. Participants across every group opined that the poor conditions of the status
quo were the strongest incentive to accepting one of the other alternatives, as change of
any kind—even if not ideal—would likely lead to a better situation than today.

The foremost negative aspect of the status quo from the perspective of the Pales-
tinian participants is that it prevents the development of an independent, coherent,
and functional state (Table 5.7). Palestinians mentioned that the fragmentation of
the governing structure in their territories has been detrimental, and the lack of mean-
ingful coordination among administrative, civil, and security services has led to the
underprovision of basic services. The separation between Gaza and the West Bank
both geographically and in terms of governance has encouraged divisiveness among
Palestinians. Furthermore, under the status quo, Palestinians are reliant on Israel in
many areas, including military, health, and other services.

The second major concern was the economy and the lack of employment
opportunities. Specifically, many participants complained that Palestinians could not
find jobs appropriate for their education and experience and were forced to either work
in Israel (if possible) or accept positions that are low-paying and have subpar condi-
tions. Some participants blamed this weak economy on Israeli control of the borders
and the negative impacts that restrictions on trade and international assistance had
on the creation of new jobs, and others highlighted the restrictions on travel within
Gaza and the West Bank as a result of checkpoints, roadblocks, and the separation of
the territories. Participants offered different perspectives on the culpability of the PA
and Hamas in the poor economic situation: One Gazan participant indicated that he
would choose Israel if given the choice between Hamas, the PA, and Israel: “... the
days when Israel governed us was better. If they made me choose between Hamas, Pal-
estinian Authority, and Israel I will select the Jews.”

The third highlighted issue was a lack of security for Palestinians. Many par-
ticipants were particularly concerned about the frequent confrontations with settlers,
with individuals offering examples that varied from decade-long harassment of a spe-
cific family to attacks against Palestinian homes and farms near settlements. The IDF
were similarly seen as a force to be “feared,” and many participants felt that the IDF
threatened their own security and that of their children. In discussions of the IDF, par-
ticipants referenced operations in which the IDF “invaded” or demolished homes and
the treatment that Palestinians receive at the entry and exit points to the West Bank
and Gaza. In addition, many participants stated that the Israeli judiciary indirectly
Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

5.5. Annexation of Area C

The Palestinians in the focus groups were unanimously against the annexation alternative, which they viewed in large part as a worsened version of the status quo. One illustrative participant concluded that it was an alternative “favored by Israel and biased
toward Israel without a single advantage for the Palestinians.”

Though several participants viewed this alternative as no different from the status quo, others were concerned that mobility restrictions would increase and impact the economic and social well-being of West Bank Palestinians.

Participants were divided on what the long-term impact of this alternative would be for the Palestinians currently living in Area C, which would be absorbed into Israel as part of this alternative. One participant stated that it could create new economic opportunities for those in Area C, as those Palestinians “might be able to escape taxes and licensing expenses,” but others were less sanguine that anything would change for them. One Area C resident was particularly pessimistic that the promised Israeli residency would bring any benefit:

We live in Area C, without an identity card. How would this solution benefit me? Is Israel going to give me an identity card? Will we see any meaningful change in freedom of movement? Even those in Jerusalem who received identity cards experience more [Israeli] checkpoints than we currently do.

5.6. Overall Skepticism About the Alternatives

Overall, West Bank and Gaza Palestinians conveyed little optimism that a better alternative to their current situation could be found and implemented. Many of these participants discussed a loss of faith in the political process that left Palestinians feeling powerless to change the situation, which one participant summarized as follows:

The problem is that we have reached a stage of political sterility, especially for those who live here. The issue is that we live in an occupied country, a hegemony of occupation. The feelings in West Bank [are] that we are in sterile dialogue, no results. Days are just passing without any change. Years pass without any solutions; we believe that change will never come.

Several blamed the Israelis overall, who were widely viewed as wanting to manage the conflict and not seek peace, but others blamed politicians on both sides of the

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14 Participant in Bethlehem focus group.
15 “If [Area C] was annexed to Israel, movement would be limited between Israel and Palestine and so the border will close. It will become more difficult to go from Area A and Area B to Area C and vice versa. Right now, Palestinians can, but if borders close, it will be more difficult” (discussant in focus group in Ramallah).
16 Participant in Hebron focus group.
17 Discussant in focus group in Ramallah.
18 Discussant in focus group in Ramallah.
conflict for whom “people’s opinions [are] the least important thing.” Many were emphatic that the historical window for a possible resolution to the conflict was narrowing, with one participant concluding that “Israeli society is heading toward extremism, the far right is taking over . . . the opportunity for peace is slimming.”

Three major areas of concern underlie this overall skepticism among the Palestinians, as summarized in Table 5.8. The primary source of skepticism was that the West Bank and Gazan Palestinians do not trust the Israeli Jews. Simply said, they indicated that the Israel Jews will only look after their own interests, and not the greater good of the people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. A number of explanations were offered for this lack of trust, with some attributing it to an analysis of historical Jewish behavior, others attributing it to Israel’s Zionist ideology, and a third group focused more on the recent shift in Israeli politics and a government that has been increasingly moving to the right.

The Palestinians also expressed a lack of trust with international partners, specifically the United States and Arab nations. They expressed concern that alternatives often originated from international partners and that these international partners often had a large say in any final resolution. There was a consensus among the Palestinian participants that their destiny is no longer in their hands and that the interference of the United States, which they perceived to be pushing an Israeli perspective and agenda, might prevent the end of the conflict. The participants also viewed Arab countries as taking positions that were not supportive of Palestinian rights and needs.

The final concern was a lack of trust in the present Palestinian governments and their abilities to resolve the conflict. One primary concern was the separate governments representing Gaza and the West Bank, which were widely viewed as an obstacle because neither government fully represents the Palestinian people. Furthermore, many participants stated that the leadership of both Hamas and the PA would likely hinder any negotiations and be unlikely to pursue alternatives that would be best for the Palestinian people. In this area, many of the participants referenced the historical inability of Palestinian governments to negotiate successfully with the Israelis.

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19 Discussant in focus group in Bethlehem.
20 Discussant in focus group in Gaza.
### Table 5.8
Core Reasons for Skepticism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust with Israeli Jews</td>
<td>“Does Israel want any of the alternatives? Does Israel want us to live together? No, Israel wants to control. Even if any of the alternatives were implemented, they will not last because of Israel’s paranoia.” (Gaza)                                                                                     “Jews, since the days of the prophet, do not keep their commitment, they will betray us. They can do all of these things [implement all of the alternatives] and in a moment, things change and will kick us from our land.” (Bethlehem) “The Zionist entity was never ready on any day to compromise with the Palestinians, even minimally.” (Gaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust with international partners</td>
<td>“There are four countries that control the world order: America, Israel, and two other foreign countries. When these countries decide to find a solution for the Palestinian issue, then it will be resolved in just 10 months.” (Hebron) “What did not surprise me is that Arabs are currently trying to get rid of the Palestinian case. We became an annoying and embarrassing file for them. They showed their betrayal, so they try to find solutions [like what you are presenting] even if they are not fair for Palestinians, regardless [of any of] our rights. There are some countries that consider Palestinians annoying.” (Ramallah) “America has become part of this conflict now. No one cared for Jerusalem when America decided that it is the capital of Israel, this is bullying. Nobody stopped it, and Jerusalem became the capital of Israel.” (Gaza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not trust Palestinian government</td>
<td>“Who will lead the negotiations? Taken separately these entities do not represent the Palestinians.” (Gaza) “You think we can get to solutions that are just to the Palestinians? No, the authority is an accomplice. Do you think there is a leadership that leads the people in a difficult problem such as this?” (Ramallah) “Here in Palestine we are made up of parties. Fatah might agree to a one-state solution, but Hamas will not. It is their rule is what is taken by force will be returned by force. They will not accept a one-state solution.” (Ramallah) “We have the issue of teachers, which is a simple issue, and the government could not solve it. How are we going to solve a whole country and pick one of these alternatives? It is impossible.” (Hebron) “I have lived 25 years under the Palestinian Authority and have been hearing about these four alternatives for years. Are we going to wait another 25 years to implement them?” (Hebron) “The Palestinian Authority in the past 20 years negotiated and was not successful; in fact, the settlements increased. Hamas tried to find a solution through military force and was also not successful.” (Hebron)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our qualitative data for Israeli Arabs suggest that this population is deeply skeptical of any of the proposed alternatives to the status quo. There was consensus across these focus groups that each of the four alternatives, in addition to the status quo, was biased against both Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. Participants were also skeptical that any of these alternatives were feasible, as Israel would only be willing to accept an alternative that was clearly in its favor. However, among the four alternatives, they favored the two-state solution because it promised complete separation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Three core themes emerged across the discussion of the five alternatives, summarized and illustrated in Table 6.1. The first of these themes, which was expressed repeatedly across all five focus groups, was that all of the alternatives were designed to benefit Israeli Jews. For many of these Israeli Arabs, this was an extension of the racism and discrimination that they reported that they had experienced throughout their lives and was only increasing in recent years. But several also implicated the international community, and the United States in particular, as being culpable in designing alternatives that were “100 percent biased towards Israel.”

A second, related theme was that none of the alternatives recognized Israeli Arabs as a subgroup or addressed their national identity in any substantive way, with participants questioning how they will be defined under each of the alternatives and whether they will be considered as belonging to Israel. A number of participants indicated that Israeli Arabs still face substantial discrimination in Israel and questioned how the various alternatives might amplify (or reduce) that discrimination.

A final major theme was the importance of religion—in particular, the necessity that each of the alternatives ensure and respect each religion’s access to religious sites. Participants indicated that this was important for identity and for stability and that religious aspects of the alternatives trumped other mundane factors, such as economic outcomes.

The following six sections offer a detailed discussion of Israeli Arab perspectives toward these alternatives, based on the five focus groups conducted with this population. Each of the following five sections provides perspectives on one of the alternatives, with the sections organized from most preferred (the two-state solution, the focus
of Section 6.1) to least preferred (annexation, the focus of Section 6.5). A sixth section (Section 6.6) discusses some broad concerns about the feasibility of implementation of any of these alternatives.

Table 6.1
Primary Concerns and Example Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All alternatives benefit Israeli Jews</td>
<td>“All the alternatives are to benefit Israel—read each alternative sentence by sentence. The borders are for Israel, the government is for Israel, and the control is for Israel. What is left for the Palestinians? Israel controls the airspace and the sea. Everything on the table is for the benefit of Israel.” (Arara)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is true I am from the Israeli Arab group and have the blue identity card [referring to being a citizen of Israel], but I do not believe in any of the alternatives. None of the alternatives will give us [identifying as Palestinian] our rights.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I am puzzled because all alternatives are against Palestinians. Israel is remaining the strongest and most dangerous.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“All solutions are 100 percent biased towards Israel.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to Israeli Arab identity</td>
<td>“Our nationality is at stake and it is more important than any other consideration. It is directly connected to other considerations [addressed in the alternatives].” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“What bothers us in everyday life is our sense of nationality. This is experienced by every single one of us.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We suffer from instability including being able to keep our national identity [Palestinian identity].” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is strange that the Israeli Arabs were not mentioned in any of the alternatives. Are they going to be citizens of Palestine in Israeli land or citizens of Israel?” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We still suffer from the continuous efforts to erase our identity by racist laws that deepen the gap of continuous discrimination of Arabs by Jews. The recent legalization operations of extremist Jewish parties are the latest example.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>“Each side has the right to identity. Any solution should respect my identity. I am a Muslim and I would like to practice my religious freedom and my political freedom and enjoy my Palestinian identity.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Religion is more important than any other topic like economy.” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Religion affects personal and public security, because religion and holy sites, especially the Al-Aqsa, can spark global wars.” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Religion today is also on the top list of dialogues and differences, as it is more important than any factor and has an effect on all other factors.” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We, as people, primarily suffer from problems that define our position according to our religion in this religious Jewish state.” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6.1. Two-State Solution

The two-state solution was the least unfavorable alternative among Israeli Arabs in our focus group discussions, as discussed in the previous section. Thus, there was ambivalence rather than support for this alternative. One of the focus group discussants captured this perspective succinctly, concluding that the “two-state solution is an appropriate solution, but if we are talking about reality . . . the solution lacks many things which must be added to guarantee success.”

Few participants said that the two-state solution could be easily implemented. Some participants focused on the difficulty of removing settlers or swapping lands for compensation, others concluded that the potential right of return threatened Israel demographically, and yet others were not convinced that the Palestinians could actually govern effectively if given the opportunity. That said, most participants viewed this alternative as the most likely to be able to be implemented.

The primary positive aspect of the two-state solution identified by the Israeli Arabs is that it would lead to separation between Jews and Palestinians. This separation would significantly reduce the likelihood of future conflict between the two groups, which is highlighted in the first two relevant quotes in Table 6.2. This benefit would be enhanced by the fact that separation would ensure that there was, in the words of one participant, “no way to establish new settlements.”

There were mixed perspectives on the consequences of the two-state solution for Palestinian control over major aspects of their lives. On the one hand, this alternative would allow Palestinians to establish an independent governance structure, improving their control over their land, including the settlements, because most would be removed from the Palestinian state.

However, many participants stated that the two-state solution would not give Palestinians real control over their borders, resources, and economy. There was greatest concern for the explicit demilitarization of the Palestinian state, as Israel would be de facto given unlimited power to exercise security control over Palestine both internally and at its borders. One participant summarized this perspective in concluding that “a state without control of its army and its borders is a country that cannot be alive.”

Others were more concerned about the governance and economic arrangements. In terms of governance, some Israeli Arabs were concerned that the two-state solution would not provide Palestinians with needed independence to manage all aspects of the state, which would diminish the control that Palestinians would have over their state. Others focused on the potential negative economic consequences, as the Israelis would continue to control the borders and Palestine “will be held economically hostage” by Israel, according to one participant.

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1 Discussant in focus group in Nazareth.
The first negative aspect of the two-state solution mentioned during the focus groups was that it would mean that the **Palestinians had conceded their land and cause**. This particular concern focused largely on land and the perception that agreeing to a two-state solution would be an “acknowledgement of defeat” because Palestinians would henceforth have no claim over the 1948 historic Palestinian land. Several participants illustrated this particular concern in dramatic and emotional language, as illustrated in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2
Mixed Views Toward the Two-State Solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire for separation</td>
<td>“Each country will be responsible for governing its own land, there will not be conflict and war regarding land.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There will not be war against each other since they [Jews and Palestinians] will be separate.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When the two states are separate there would be no way to establish new settlements on the land.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No real control</td>
<td>“It is having an army is what defines a state. A country should be able to defend itself.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Palestinians</td>
<td>“The army is always for the Israeli people. That means no independence and no control for the Palestinians. The army is everything. It protects the country. Israel is in control of everything as we see it.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A state without control of its army and its borders is a country that cannot be alive.” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“This alternative will keep the Israeli economy strong because Israel will control all borders and ports, while we will be held economically hostage inside as we will not have the needed autonomy to trade products. Our economy will be further destroyed.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“... everything that comes into the West Bank will be supervised by Israel. When Israel does not control the borders then you can import goods from Qatar or Jordan or Europe, then the Palestinian economy would be better, the government will have better income that could be invested in infrastructure. This will improve the Palestinian state bit by bit.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equivalent to</td>
<td>“Since 1948 we have been fighting them [Israel] as enemies. By agreeing to a two-state solution or by having this discussion we are admitting that they have the right to the 1948 land. They are an occupying power and why should we be discussing land with them?” (Arara).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surrender</td>
<td>“If we agree to a two-state solution that means we have handed over our legal right to the land.” (Umm Al-Fahm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The blood of our martyrs and the years the Palestinians have spent in Israeli prisons would have been in vain.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right of return</td>
<td>“Without finding a solution that is just for the return of the Palestinian refugees, it would be difficult to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or select this solution as well as any other solution that is acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first negative aspect of the two-state solution mentioned during the focus groups was that it would mean that the **Palestinians had conceded their land and cause**. This particular concern focused largely on land and the perception that agreeing to a two-state solution would be an “acknowledgement of defeat” because Palestinians would henceforth have no claim over the 1948 historic Palestinian land. Several participants illustrated this particular concern in dramatic and emotional language, as illustrated in Table 6.2.
The second negative aspect highlighted by participants was that the two-state solution does not address **Palestinian refugees’ right of return to Israel**. For many, this is a decisive issue, and the fact that the two-state solution does not include an explicit resolution to this issue—and leaves it for the final status negotiations to determine—is a substantial issue.

### 6.2. Confederation

The confederation alternative was generally viewed negatively by Israeli Arabs, though it was the second-highest rated alternative overall. Among those most strongly supportive of this alternative, one indicated that it avoids several “sensitive problems . . . and solves the most important issue for the Jews and the Palestinians, which is the issue of Jerusalem,”\(^2\) while another concluded that the major benefit was that “it makes the [Israeli Arabs] close and equal to the other Palestinians.”\(^3\)

However, there was general agreement that a confederation is not feasible. The key impediment was the issue of settlers. From the perspective of the Israeli Arab focus group participants, there is just too much hatred between Palestinians and Jews to allow settlers to continue living in a Palestinian state. These Israeli Arabs viewed settlers as occupiers and questioned how this alternative would achieve justice for Palestinians. Others stated that it was just too similar to the status quo and could not understand how “this alternative would achieve equity” for the Israeli Arabs and Palestinians.\(^4\)

The primary positive aspect of the confederation identified by the Israeli Arabs, illustrated in Table 6.3, is the **strengthened economic opportunities for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians**. There was a general view that the structure of the confederation would nurture economic relations between Palestine and Israel. The fact that the borders would be open, and movement would not be restricted, would help strengthen the Palestinian economy and reduce unemployment.

Participants also highlighted three aspects of the political arrangements of this alternative as positive aspects of this alternative. These included **allowing for the right of return of refugees** to the new Palestinian state; **new opportunity for interaction and cooperation among Palestinians**, including those “living in Israel” and those in the West Bank and Gaza; and **enhanced Palestinian control over Jerusalem**. That said, on the issue of Jerusalem, a number of Israeli Arabs indicated that they would like to see the holy sites being managed by Palestinians who are Muslims or Christians, as

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\(^2\) Discussant in focus group in Arara.

\(^3\) Discussant in focus group in Arara.

\(^4\) Discussant in focus group in Arara.
Palestinians “understand how sacred they are . . . and gravitate towards Jerusalem for religious purposes.”

The most concerning negative aspect of the confederation was that it **would not resolve the settlers issue**. Israeli Arabs could not imagine a political system in which settlers were part of a new Palestinian state. They viewed settlers as aggressors who harbor hatred toward the Palestinians and advocated for complete separation.

The second major concern is that a confederation would create a **Palestinian state with limited control and autonomy**. Israeli Arabs did not have favorable views about the governance structure of a possible confederation. Some viewed a federal government that would be responsible for overseeing common issues, such as resources and external security, as taking authority away from the Palestinian state. Others viewed this governance structure as favoring Israel, given the fact that Israel is more powerful than Palestine and could have more influence on the overarching federal government. A final and related concern was that the Palestinian state would not be allowed to have an army, and border security would primarily be the responsibility of Israel.

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5 Discussant in focus group in Nazareth.
6.3. One-State Solution

Although the one-state solution was rated second highest by our Israeli Arab participants in the quantitative data, the discussions in the focus group revealed that the Israeli Arabs were deeply skeptical of this alternative. The greatest concern among the participants in these focus groups was that this alternative would fail to ensure equality for both Israeli Arabs and Palestinians, given the way that Israeli Arabs are treated in Israel today.

There was also great skepticism that this alternative would be feasible, with some Israeli Arabs characterizing this as a “fantasy.” Many of these skeptics referenced demographic projections (which suggest that Palestinians will soon be in the majority), with one participant stating that the “one-state solution is impossible because Israel is afraid of the Arab demographic,” and another concluding that “the one-state solution is a death sentence for Zionism, and therefore an unrealistic solution for Israel.” Furthermore, these skeptics pointed to the long history of animosity, the need to eliminate all state religions as a prerequisite for a viable single state, and the need for a mutually accepted guarantee that neither group would ever have control over the other. One participant summarized the conflicting views of this scenario succinctly:

“We are not against the one-state solution. But it is unrealistic. For us, the one-state solution is ideal for the Palestinian state, but we believe that this solution is not feasible so that affected our evaluation [of acceptability of alternatives].”

The primary positive aspect of the one-state solution, as illustrated in Table 6.4, is the new opportunities resulting from the promised equality. Advocates within the focus groups for the one-state solution pointed especially to this idea of equality under the law, with one participant concluding that the one-state solution is the “most ideal . . . because it guarantees equality to all.” Another participant highlighted the economic benefits of this equality, concluding that the one-state solution “provides economic solutions [to our plight].”

However, most of the Israeli Arabs in our focus groups indicated that they did not believe that this equality, which was a key aspect of our definition of the one-state solution alternative, was at all feasible. Indeed, the belief that official and unofficial discrimination would continue under the one-state solution was the most prominent reason why Israeli Arabs were not supportive of this alternative overall. Many Israeli Arab participants reflected on their own experiences as citizens of the Jewish state, where they feel they are second-class citizens, during the discussions of this alternative. Many mentioned increased official discrimination within Israel over the past ten years,
with several discussing a de facto move toward race separation, and others mentioned the increased discrimination that they received from Israeli Jewish citizens. Overall, the Israeli Arabs indicated that they did not see how this alternative could turn the tide on the trajectory of this dimension and stated that any future one-state solution would be inherently discriminatory against them.

A few participants were concerned that the one-state solution would jeopardize Palestinian identity and land. Many individuals questioned the nature of the new state and how it would affect Palestinian identity and language, and a few were concerned that it would be harmful in the long term to Palestinian national identity. A few others mentioned the belief that they felt that agreeing to the one-state solution would reflect a betrayal to the historical sacrifice of Palestinians, as it would be a de facto recognition that the West Bank and Gaza Strip are not Palestinian land but rather land that could be shared with Jews.

### Table 6.4
Mixed Views Toward the One-State Solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official discrimination</td>
<td>“. . . Israel has the law of nationalism [Nation State Law]. What is that? It is a law that says Israel is a state for the Jews, that is, Jews have the rights and privileges . . . we see 50 percent Arabs and 50 percent Jews but this proportion is not reflected in the government or control . . . that is the reality.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Even Israeli Arabs who are citizens of Israel do not have equal rights and are treated less than a Jewish citizen. This is an indication that Israel cares about separation by race. . . . The national policy it passed says the State of Israel is for the Jewish people, meaning Jews have the right and preference.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The Zionist project is what is in control nowadays. This nationalistic imperialistic movement is producing inequities. . . . there are Palestinians in Israel that are treated less than citizens and not treated equally [to Israeli Jews], there are those [Palestinians] in Jerusalem that have residency but do not have any citizenship. . . . void of all rights.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unofficial discrimination</td>
<td>“An Israeli-educated friend said to me that he knows that Jews do not like to learn the Arabic language because they hate us [Palestinians] and they hate the Arabs. This does not help for a one-state solution.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There is no lost love and the idea of living together.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeopardize identity</td>
<td>“Which will prevail over the other? Is it the Palestinian character or the Israeli character? Will it be called Isratine?” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If we unite under this state, it is for whose benefit? Israel or Palestine? Is there going to be one language or two languages [Arabic and Hebrew]? Would a Jewish citizen of the new state speak to me in Arabic?” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeopardize land</td>
<td>“We and our grandparents have lived the war; this is our home and they stole it. We cannot forgive them and we will not accept it.” (Nazareth)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4. Status Quo

The Israeli Arabs in our data collection were broadly dissatisfied with the status quo, in large part because of what were perceived by participants as increasingly discriminatory policies by the Israeli government against the Israeli Arabs. These discussions were largely focused on what was perceived as the untenable situation of the Israeli Arabs, though a handful of participants also highlighted the mistreatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza under the status quo. That said, not all Israeli Arabs were dismissive of the status quo, and one participant stated that “making some improvements to the status quo” would lead to a better outcome than that offered by any of the four alternatives.8

Unlike with the previously discussed alternatives, participants only offered negative views about the status quo, with the major perspectives illustrated in Table 6.5. The greatest concern among participants was the perception of increasingly discriminatory polices targeting Israeli Arabs. Many participants stated that they were treated like second-class citizens within Israel, with discrimination filtering into many different aspects of their lives, including education, employment, and right to expression.

The threat to Palestinian identity of the status quo was another major issue area. Some stated that the Palestinian identity and heritage of Israeli Arabs were being threatened by immersion into Israeli culture. Others attributed the process through which Israel was “obliterating our identity” to racist policies that discouraged Arabs from differentiating themselves from Jews.

A handful of participants also discussed the mistreatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in their critique of the status quo. These individuals pointed to the demolishing of homes, Israeli efforts to ensure that the West Bank and Gaza remain separated, and the fact that the status quo has not addressed two main issues that are important to Palestinians: the right of return and control of Jerusalem.

6.5. Annexation

The annexation of Area C was the least palatable alternative from the perspective of the Israeli Arabs, and it was widely viewed as giving legitimacy to Israel to take all Palestinian land. Yet, while there was universal dislike for this alternative, a number of participants indicated that there was not much difference between the current situation (the status quo) and annexation of Area C. One participant concluded simply that

---

8 Discussant in focus group in Arara.
it would worsen an already bad situation: “the situation is already very bad and with this alternative it will get worse.”

In terms of feasibility, many of the Israeli Arab focus group participants stated that this would be the easiest of the alternatives to implement. These individuals generally pointed to what they saw as the growing strength of right-wing political groups within Israeli politics as the reason for this. One representative individual indicated that “this alternative is the closest to be implemented from the Israeli side, especially after having the far right in power in the State of Israel.” Another similarly concluded that “we are really close to annexation . . . because the Jewish people have been radicalized.”

Participants’ primary concern with annexation was that it would make Palestinians more isolated and vulnerable (Table 6.6). Several participants described the
resulting situation through analogy to Gaza, with one participant concluding that it would make all of the West Bank and Gaza “a large prison, as the case of Gaza today.” Others suggested that it would simply mean a more severe version of the current situation in the West Bank, with fewer rights and greater restrictions placed on West Bank Palestinians.

6.6. Overall Skepticism About the Alternatives

A common theme across all five Israeli Arab focus groups was a great skepticism that any of the alternatives to the status quo were realistic. The first major concern was with the Israeli Jews, who they generally did not believe to be an honest partner who wants peace or wants to find a mutually beneficial alternative (Table 6.7). Most expressed that Israeli Jews would only look after their own interests, which generally excluded Israeli Arabs, Palestinians, and other minorities. For some participants in the focus group, this translated into skepticism about whether the alternatives would be executed at all, with one participant concluding that “The confederation or even the one-state solution is impossible to achieve, because Israel does not accept any of them.” Others were skeptical that the Israeli Jews would not use these alternatives to further their own objectives.

Many of the Israeli Arab focus groups also expressed deep concern about the ability of a future Palestinian state to govern competently, if the Palestinians were ever given the opportunity to lead a new Palestinian state. Concern focused on the split between the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza, Hamas’ militaristic behavior, and the PA’s aging leadership. Participants reported that these structural weaknesses meant that the Palestinians would be unable to negotiate successfully with Israel and to take advantage of any benefits that might come from these alternatives.

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12 Discussant in focus group in Umm Al-Fahm.
13 Discussant in focus group in Arara.
### Table 6.7
Core Reasons for Skepticism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Selected Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust with Israeli Jews</td>
<td>“From the beginning Israel came to occupy all of Palestine. Israel wants Palestine. So, it comes with details from outside [international partners] to control all of Palestine. . . . they claim it is their land!! And they make us feel they are doing us a favor.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“. . . More recently with Netanyahu rightist ideology, it is true Israel is not a good partner in the peace process.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Any solution [Israel] reaches will be for their own interest, not the Palestinians’. They want to take more than they want to give. They will not suggest any alternative unless it is for their benefit.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not trust Palestinian government</td>
<td>“Neither the Palestinian nor the Israeli governments are looking for solutions. They want the conflict to continue.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The current situation is because of Hamas controlling Gaza.” (Arara)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The goal of this report was to examine the characteristics and implications of the alternatives to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; determine what Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza thought about the alternatives; and ascertain whether there were overlapping areas of agreement or concern that might form the starting point for negotiation. To examine these questions, we set out five plausible alternatives for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that capture the range of what has been proposed. We then conducted 33 focus groups in the region to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand attitudes in the various communities. Our goal was to provide insights that could inform current and future efforts to resolve the conflict.

Almost all parties were extremely pessimistic about the feasibility of implementing any of the alternatives. About 60 percent of Israelis responded that the status quo could feasibly continue (as it has for decades). Peace was considered a “romantic notion” that was simply not attainable at the present time.

That said, both Israelis and Palestinians want change. Even Israelis, who exercise an asymmetry of power, wished for an alternative to the status quo—a status quo that Israelis recognized might endanger Israel’s Jewish or democratic nature in the long run. Yet, when faced with having to make a choice, the majority of Israelis saw the status quo as the least risky alternative for the present. In sharp contrast, Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza found the status quo or continued occupation intolerable; they were also pessimistic and almost fatalistic about the future. Palestinians stated that they felt trapped in the cycle of history and walled in by factors beyond their control in a situation they feel helpless to change.

The overriding theme of “separation” of Israelis and Palestinians was common across almost all of the focus groups. There was little aspiration for alternatives that resulted in more social or political integration, let alone union of Israeli and Palestinian governance. This desire for separation is fueled by the profound distrust of each side for the other bred by the long history of conflict.

Previous research and the alternatives reviewed in this report illustrate the deep political divides in both Israeli and Palestinian areas. The political turmoil, polarization, and lack of consensus (as evidenced by, for example, the Palestinians’ split
between Fatah and Hamas and the political divides in Israel that resulted in three elections in less than a year) make the prospect of enduring compromises and policy trade-offs difficult to imagine in the present environment.

### 7.1. Findings

We conducted 33 focus groups among four distinct groups: Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, West Bank Palestinians, and Gazan Palestinians. These focus groups were intended to provide perspectives from different political persuasions, with the quantitative data allowing us to compare our findings with previous polling research and the qualitative data providing a rich and nuanced picture of people's perspectives toward these alternatives. When the qualitative and quantitative data are combined, they give us not only a fairly clear picture of people's preferences but also an understanding of the intensity of their feelings and perspectives.

**Israeli Jews**

The first-choice alternative for Israeli Jews was the status quo. Many were satisfied with the status quo, and most others indicated that it was manageable and preferable to the other alternatives. Support for the status quo is rooted in a lack of trust in the Palestinian side and a general belief that none of the alternatives were feasible.

As a result of this perceived lack of feasibility, the status quo trumps even alternatives that are more compelling in principle, such as the two-state solution. The two-state solution was the second-rated alternative for Israeli Jews and had many appealing features: separation from Palestinians, enhancing security, identity, demographics, and preservation of a Jewish state. Though the two-state solution was rated only a few percentage points behind the status quo in our quantitative data, participants did not consider it feasible, particularly because the Palestinian side is split between Fatah and Hamas and is not perceived as a partner for peace.

Annexation was favored by participants from the Jewish right, but not by a majority. And only one-fourth of Israeli Jewish participants responded that the confederation was acceptable. That said, assessing the true support for either of these alternatives was complicated by the fact that most participants had an unclear idea and little knowledge of what confederation or annexation entailed or their implications if enacted.

The most unpopular possible alternative by far was the multicultural one-state solution, which we defined as a democratic state in which people had equal voting rights and were treated equally under laws and regulations without discrimination. Jews feared that such an alternative could endanger the Jewish nature of the state, given the demographics of the region. Ironically, if the status quo continues, existing
demographic trends suggest that some form of a binational one-state reality is likely to result.\(^1\)

When asked to rank order top priority issues, Israel Jews’ priorities were as follows: (1) Israel is a Jewish state, (2) Israel is a democracy, (3) Israel controls security along its borders, and (4) settlements are annexed by Israel. These priorities are not surprising, as each of these factors has traditionally been found to be critical to Israel. But what is somewhat surprising is the lack of emphasis on economic factors, particularly given the focus of previous peace initiatives on economic dividends. This is consistent with our findings in RAND’s *The Costs of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* study;\(^2\) which found that moving to a two-state solution was by far the best outcome economically for both Israelis and Palestinians. Ruling out irrationality, we concluded that noneconomic factors, such as security, historical narratives, unrest in the region, and religion, were more important than the increase in economic gain for Israeli Jews.

The key underlying barrier to reaching an alternative—any alternative—is that Israeli Jews do not trust Palestinian intentions. The overwhelming priority in all discussions was the desire to separate from Palestinians and avoid any governance or living arrangement that brought the two groups closer together. Given this lack of trust and animosity, it is not surprising that alternatives such as a confederation or a one-state solution were considered infeasible and utopian. “Peace” was a romantic notion rarely mentioned that had scant application to the relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

**Israeli Arabs**

The Israeli Arabs in our focus group discussions were deeply skeptical of any of the proposed alternatives to the status quo. There was consensus across these focus groups that each of the four alternatives, in addition to the status quo, was discriminatory and biased against both Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. They were also skeptical that any of these alternatives were feasible, as Israel would only be willing to accept an alternative that was clearly in its favor. That said, when pressed, most Israeli Arabs stated that the two-state solution was the least unfavorable alternative because it promised complete separation from the Palestinians.

A core concern in this group with all five alternatives was that each was designed to benefit Israeli Jews and would serve as an extension of the racism and discrimination they had experienced throughout their lives. As evidence, many pointed to the fact that none of the alternatives recognized Israeli Arabs as a subgroup or addressed their national identity in any substantive way. A final concern was that the alternatives often


did not take issues of religion as seriously as they should and that guaranteeing access to religious sites was critical for identity and stability.

However, although some participants indicated that identity, stability, and religious aspects of alternatives trumped “mundane” factors, such as economic outcomes, others emphasized the importance of economic factors. Indeed, when participants were asked to rank top priorities, employment opportunities were the second highest rated issue (second only to establishing a single Palestinian government), and many participants emphasized the importance of strengthening economic opportunities for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in their discussions of various alternatives.

Palestinians
The Palestinians stated that all of the alternatives were biased in favor of Israel and did little to address their national aspirations, and none of the five alternatives were seen as “preferred.” However, the participants indicated that they were deeply motivated to find any viable alternative to the status quo, as they stated that finding a viable alternative before the situation gets even worse is critical.

That said, there is a sharp divide between Palestinians in the West Bank and Palestinians in Gaza. The Gazan Palestinians preferred the one-state solution, as it could bring much-needed improvements in living conditions and livelihood. Although the two-state solution was viewed favorably by many, there was deep skepticism that any alternative could feasibly bridge the economic, geographic, and political divide between Gaza and the West Bank.

The situation for the West Bank Palestinians was significantly more complicated. In general, participants reported that the two-state solution was the best of bad alternatives because it provided them with a recognized state, and they did not believe that they would truly be treated as equals under either the confederation or the one-state solution. However, its proponents among our discussants indicated that the details of the alternative regarding settlers, a Palestinian army, freedom of movement, and Jerusalem would need to be altered for them to fully accept this alternative.

Two core themes emerged across the discussion of the five alternatives. The first is that there was a consensus that the status quo and the alternatives as presented were biased against Palestinians. Palestinians viewed all of the alternatives as primarily serving the interests of the more powerful Israelis while also asking for more compromises from the Palestinians. Second, Palestinians expressed the urgent need for a change to address their living conditions—in particular, the poor economic situation, unemployment, lack of education, water shortages, lack of mobility, and lack of independence. Some expressed frustrations aimed at their leaders, but most blamed Israel for the disastrous status quo in which they are living.
7.2. Policy Insights

Several key policy insights emerge from this analysis. Foremost, perhaps, given the focus on economic incentives to peace in the multitude of previous peace initiatives, is that our findings suggest that an “economic peace” strategy is unlikely to be successful unless accompanied by significant security and other guarantees. Economics was a modestly important issue for Gazan Palestinians and Israeli Arabs but largely a secondary concern for West Bank Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

By contrast, security guarantees are likely to be an important factor in making progress. Security is important not just for Israeli Jews but also for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. International security guarantees might be necessary if any alternative is to succeed.

The focus groups also identified several other areas in which compromise by one side or the other might be possible. The final status of refugees is one of these areas, which is important but not a priority concern for many Palestinians. The status of Jerusalem could also be an area for discussion. For Israeli Jews, it was important, but not one of their top priorities in the focus groups. For West Bankers and Gazans, Jerusalem’s status was a top priority. Results in this area might have been distorted by the movement of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, which could have led Israelis to consider it a settled issue.

Another key policy observation was that exercises like our own, in which the range of alternative futures is rigorously discussed, might actually increase support for peaceful and amicable alternatives to the conflict. Few participants had any real understanding of the alternatives, including both the current status quo and the much-debated two-state solution, and a number of participants indicated that their views toward one or another of the alternatives had changed during the focus group discussions. Even if discussants did not change their minds, the rich discussion introduced new perspectives that helped enrich their thinking. Although Israelis and Palestinians are accustomed to talking politics and come with preconceived ideas, our exercise proved that a long, substantial discussion about the conflict and ways to address it still has merit and can help shape views.

A final core insight is that there is a yearning for change, a yearning that is shared across the political spectrum and across population groups. Simply said, most participants wanted a resolution to the conflict and hoped for a better future but stated that the chances of reaching such an outcome were out of their hands. Thus, if pragmatic and trusted leaders could step to the fore with a commitment to peace, they could very well find populations that are willing and able to support the transition from the status quo to a stable and peaceful outcome.
7.3. Prospects for Peace

One of our goals was to determine whether there were areas of overlap in opinions and feeling between Israelis and Palestinians that might offer avenues for negotiation, leading the parties closer to peace. Sadly, the data show the opposite. The data highlight the deep distrust and profound animosity of each side for the other. In light of our findings, it is hard to imagine a departure from present trends and where they lead unless and until strong, courageous leadership among Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community articulates a desire for a better future for all.

Although the range of possible alternatives to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been much studied over decades, we did find that our structured focus group approach yielded new insights into attitudes that can be reflected in future strategies and resulted in deeper understanding of the options and the perceptions of the other side, which could help bridge some of the gaps between Israelis and Palestinians.
APPENDIX

Details of the Five Alternatives Presented to the Focus Groups

In this appendix, we provide additional details about the five alternatives that were presented to the focus groups and how we selected them:1

- status quo/present trends
- two-state solution
- confederation
- annexation
- one-state solution.

Our discussion includes relevant historical context for each alternative and major variations of alternatives that have been proposed.

We selected alternatives that met the following criteria: (1) The literature detailing and looking at the alternative was rich enough for analysis and inclusive of facts and data that allowed for analysis, comparison, and thought-based analysis and comparison with other alternatives; (2) the alternative was being seriously discussed, proposed, or considered by its inclusion in the political and public debate domains among Israelis and Palestinians; and (3) it was at least remotely feasible to be implemented, in the sense that at least there was some serious consideration of its possible implementation on the Israeli or Palestinian side.2

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1 We also examined other alternatives that we did not include in our focus group discussions, because they did not fit our criteria for inclusion. Key among the alternatives we did not ultimately include were (1) a federation model, (2) confederations with Jordan, and (3) parallel states (LeVine and Mossberg, 2014). We did not include confederations with Jordan, because the Jordanians have made it very clear that they are not interested in such an alternative (John Kifner, “Hussein Surrenders Claims on West Bank to P.L.O.; U.S. Peace Plan in Jeopardy; Internal Tensions,” New York Times, August 1, 1988).

2 For example, parallel states is a theoretical model with some literature on it (LeVine and Mossberg, 2014). In the parallel state model, Israelis and Palestinians would share the same land (all of the land west of the Jordan River) but would both have governments that would deal with their populations in the same areas. But because we could not find any Israeli or Palestinian group who thought it was remotely feasible, we did not include it as an alternative.
The alternatives presented to the focus groups were described to participants along six basic dimensions:

1. borders
2. disposition of settlers
3. status of Jerusalem
4. governance: the internal political arrangements of each alternative
5. control: security to protect civilians and sustain the terms of a negotiated outcome
6. freedom of movement for citizens.

We highlight these dimensions as appropriate in our discussion.

A.1. Status Quo/Present Trends

The status quo is better thought of as a dynamic state; thus, we also refer to it as present trends. It provides a baseline alternative against which to compare the other four alternatives.

In considering present trends, we assume that the economic, demographic, and security trends observed over the past ten years will continue for the next ten years. This does not mean stasis: We assume that conditions, including periodic business disruptions, flare-ups of military engagement, and ongoing construction of Israeli settlements, continue to evolve along current trajectories. We also assume that other non-economic variables will continue along their present trends—i.e., demographic rates of change will be consistent, settlements will continue to expand at current rates, and instability will continue in the Middle East.

Today’s trends related to Israeli and Palestinian relations have roots in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Oslo Accords, the 2006 Palestinian elections, evolving technology, the political unrest in the Middle East, Israeli settlement expansion, and the asymmetry of power between the Palestinians and Israelis. Without fundamental change or significant external shocks, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to be characterized by an economically growing Israel; a much poorer, slower-growing West Bank and Gaza; a militarily strong and economically dominant Israel; settlement expansion; deep political divisions in both areas; periodic flare-ups of violence; profound security challenges; and societies with entrenched narratives and deep and abiding mutual distrust.

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3 The Oslo Accords signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993 and 1995 govern relations between the two sides to this day.
Borders

The border between Israel and its neighbors (Jordan, Syria, and Egypt) on the eve of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War was defined by the 1949 Armistice Line, also known as the Green Line. By the end of the Arab-Israeli War, Israel occupied and controlled all of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. Since then, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan, returned the Sinai to Egypt as part of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005, and continued to occupy the West Bank. The Oslo Accords established the PA and delineated the respective responsibilities of Israel and the PA in the West Bank and Gaza. Subsequently, Hamas assumed control in Gaza from the PA and continues to rule there.

The 1993 Oslo Accords set up a process to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict consistent with United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338, which many assumed would eventually result in an independent Palestinian state, although the resolutions did not state this. With the exception of the relevant final status issues, the five-year transition called for dividing the West Bank into areas A, B, and C, which currently make up 18 percent, 22 percent, and 60 percent of the West Bank, respectively. Area A, which includes most Palestinian population centers and cities, is under the security and administrative control of the PA. Area B is administered by the PA, but security is controlled by Israel. In Area C, where all Israeli settlements except those in East Jerusalem are located, Israel exercises control over internal and external security, law enforcement, and the land. In Area C, the PA’s functional role over Palestinians extends to social services, such as education and health, but not to matters related to policing or the land, such as zoning.

If current trends continue over the next ten years, by the end of that period we would expect that borders would remain unresolved; Israel would have annexed more land; and Gaza would continue to be isolated and blockaded.

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4 The Sinai was returned to Egypt as part of the 1978 Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt. The Israeli Knesset passed a law in 1981 effectively annexing the Golan, a move recognized by the Trump administration in 2019.

5 Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but, as a result of Hamas taking control of Gaza and the security concerns generated by Hamas, whose charter calls for the elimination of Israel, Israel has maintained a strict blockade of Gaza, limiting the flow of people and goods in and out of the area. Israel controls all crossings except for Rafah, as well as seaports, fishing zones, airspace, and electromagnetic fields. The United Nations has referred to this as “effective control” (Orna Ben-Naftali, Michael Sfard, and Hedi Viterbo, *The ABC of the OPT: A Legal Lexicon of the Israeli Control over Occupied Palestinian Territory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 521–524).


Settlements
The number of settlements has grown quickly since the 1967 war. By the beginning of 2019, there were approximately 132 settlements officially recognized by the Israeli government. In addition, there were 113 outposts, which are illegal under Israeli law,8 but have been eventually recognized in the past.9 By 2019, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank had grown to approximately 450,000 (see Table A.1); an additional 200,000 Israelis live in East Jerusalem. If the number of settlers continues to expand at the present rate, there will be more than 675,00010 settlers in the West Bank by 2029.

Demographics
Demographic trends have become important in the debate over the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and have implications for the alternatives that various groups might prefer. Although there is considerable debate11 about the numbers of Palestinians and Jews currently living west of the Jordan River, the conventional view has been to posit higher population growth rates among Palestinians than Jews, resulting in projections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Settlers in the West Bank</th>
<th>Percentage Change Since Previous Period</th>
<th>Average Percentage Change per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>81,900</td>
<td>555%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>198,300</td>
<td>142%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>311,100</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>441,600</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: Peace Now, 2020; Federman, 2019; and author calculations.

8 Federman, 2019.
9 In 2017, the Knesset passed the Judea and Samaria Settlement Regulation Law, often referred to as the Regulation Law, which was intended to legalize some 16 illegal settlements in Area C ("The Amona Remainers: Netanyahu Moves to Appease the Settlers; Unauthorised “Outposts” Will Get Some Protection," The Economist, December 17, 2016). On June 9, 2020, the Israeli Supreme Court struck down the law (Rina Bassist, “Israel’s Top Court Strikes Settlement Regulation Law,” Al-Monitor, June 10, 2020).
10 Author projection using annual 4.0-percent growth rate from 2010 to 2019.
of a majority Palestinian population at some point in the future.\footnote{Sergio DellaPergola, “Demographic Trends, National Identities and Borders in Israel and the Palestinian Territory,” in Andras Kovacs and Michael L. Miller, eds., \textit{Jewish Studies at the Central European University}, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013.} Professor Sergio DellaPergola, a demographer at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, predicted in 2013 that, even excluding Gaza, Palestinians would outnumber Jews by 2050.\footnote{DellaPergola, 2013.}

It was beyond the scope of this report to analyze the various assumptions relevant to the demographic debate, although we outline the debate below. In Tables A.2 and A.3, we present the official government population statistics for 2017 prepared by Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

By official statistics, even if actual numbers vary, the trends are reasonably clear. If the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are added to the Palestinians living in

### Table A.2
2017 Population of Israel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
<th>Rate of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jews\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>6.56 million</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>5.52 million</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultra-Orthodox</td>
<td>1.03 million</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabs\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>1.84 million</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.79 million</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Includes settlers in West Bank.
\textsuperscript{b} Includes Arabs in East Jerusalem.

### Table A.3
2017 Palestinian Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
<th>Rate of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Bank\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>2.88 million</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza</td>
<td>1.90 million</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.78 million</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Includes East Jerusalem Palestinians.
Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Israel today, the numbers of Jews and Palestinians in the lands west of the Jordan River are about equal. If only the West Bank Palestinians are included, about 38–42 percent of the population is Palestinian. Thus, demographics and political representation issues loom large in discussions of alternatives to a two-state solution. Specifically, West Bank and Gazan Palestinians plus Palestinians living in Israel combined will eventually equal or outnumber Jews in the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. When that occurs, Israel will be faced with the choice of how to balance its Jewish and democratic objectives.

Beginning in 2006, researchers at the American-Israeli Demographic Research Group and elsewhere began to question official Palestinian population numbers. They questioned earlier Palestinian census numbers and their use in projections, raised a number of technical issues, and pointed out that in recent years fertility rates among Palestinians have fallen while those in Israel have risen as result of very high fertility rates among the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews. They concluded that the Palestinian population numbers were overstated by as much as a million. It should be noted that these “claims have not been corroborated by demographic experts in Israel and around the world, but Israeli right-wing activists and politicians have adopted them.”

Governance and Lack of Political Consensus

Israelis and Palestinians are politically deeply divided among themselves as well as between each other. This lack of political consensus and the reasons for it constitute barriers to change within Palestinian areas and in Israel.

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14 I.e., Israeli Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians with permanent residency status.
15 Judy Maltz, “Here’s What Happens if Israel Annexes the West Bank and Lets Palestinians Vote,” Haaretz, January 26, 2020. Maltz games out elections that include West Bank Palestinians. See also Lustick, 2019b.
16 Palestinians living in Israel include Israeli Arabs (Palestinians with Israeli citizenship) and Palestinians who have permanent residency status, most of whom are in Jerusalem.
20 The American-Israeli Demographic Research Group was a politically motivated group of “researchers, settler activists, and right wing publicists . . . funded by businessman Bennet Zimmerman” (Lustick, 2019b, p. 147). Their argument has been “ridiculed by professional demographers but widely accepted as truth among settler activists and their supporters” (Lustick, 2019b, p. 147).
Israel is a parliamentary democracy with deep, complex political divisions. The deep divides are illustrated by the April 9, 2019, Israeli elections. Forty parties ran slates, but only 11 received more than the required 3.25 percent of the vote to win representation in the 120-seat Israeli Knesset. The top two parties, the Likud and the Blue and White, each received 35 seats; no other single party won more than eight seats.23 Emblematic of the lack of consensus, Netanyahu and the Likud party were unable to form a government, necessitating a new election called for September 17, 2019.

Of the 29 parties that contested the September 17, 2019, election, nine parties received the required 3.25 percent necessary to win seats in the Knesset. The Blue and White Party won 33 seats to Likud’s 32 seats, but, again, no bloc was able to form a government, necessitating a third election.24 Again, the vote was split, with eight parties receiving at least 3.25 percent of the vote. Likud won 36 seats, and the Blue and White Party won 33. The political stalemate was finally broken when Benny Gantz split the Blue and White Party and joined Netanyahu and Likud to form a coalition government.25

A feature of the Israeli political system is not just the difficulty of forming a government but also the challenge of maintaining one. In such a fractured political environment, small parties wield outsize influence in that their withdrawal from a coalition government forces a change in the composition of the government or new elections. Moreover, Israel’s ideological divides run deep. There are parties associated with the settler movement; other parties associated with ultra-Orthodox Jews, who often seek to opt out of nonreligious service; parties rooted in secular values; and parties that court Israeli Arabs, among other divisions. Many of these parties define their interests in fundamentally incompatible ways.

In the past two decades, Israelis have become more conservative, and the majority vote for ideologically right-wing parties.26 The alliance between the secular right wing and the religious right is an important key to understanding the right wing’s hegemony in Israeli politics since 1977.27 Right-leaning trends in Israeli politics are forecast to continue as the percentage of voters who are Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox grows and as Jewish youth become more conservative.28

The Oslo Accords recognized the PLO as the negotiating organization for the Palestinians. It also established the PA as the administrative government of the Palest-
tinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Fatah became the main party growing out of the PLO, but other, more religious parties, notably Hamas, which is not part of the PLO, have also evolved.

Today Fatah and Hamas are the two major political parties among the Palestinians. Fatah controls the PA and administers self-governing areas in the West Bank; Hamas controls Gaza. Following the January 2006 Palestinian elections, which Hamas won, infighting occurred between Fatah and Hamas. Violence and a short civil war erupted. Hamas took over Gaza while Fatah consolidated its power in the West Bank. Numerous reconciliation attempts since 2007 have failed.

Among other differences, Fatah and Hamas have different views about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fatah recognized Israel’s right to exist implicitly in 1988 but more clearly as part of Oslo’s 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent letters between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin. In the 1993 declaration, the PLO “recognized Israel’s right to exist and renounced the use of terrorism and their [the PLO’s] calls for Israel’s destruction.” Fatah has also disavowed terrorism, and, up until recently, the Palestinian National Security Forces (PNSF) have actively cooperated with the IDF to combat terrorism and maintain peace in the West Bank. Led by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the PA has for years engaged in sporadic negotiations with Israel in an attempt to reach a final status accord.

In contrast, Hamas has traditionally refused to recognize Israel’s right to exist, rejected earlier Palestinian agreements with Israel, and advocated armed struggle against Israel. However, in 2017 Hamas revised its charter, softening its approach to Israel. Hamas affirmed that its “conflict is with the Zionist project not the Jews because of their religion . . . but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine” and “Zionist Israeli citizens who occupy Palestinian lands.” The revised charter considers “the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4th of June 1967, with the return of

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32 O’Malley, 2015, p. 63.

33 In May 2020, President Abbas indicated that he “absolved” all agreements with Israel and the United States, including security cooperation. In spite of this statement, cooperation to some extent seems to be continuing.

the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, to be a formula of national consensus.”

This charter implicitly recognizes the existence of Israel, at least in the short term. However, Hamas also added that Hamas rejects “any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea.” Hamas’ long-term objective has not changed.

Deep political divisions among both Israelis and Palestinians are likely to continue, making it more difficult for Palestinians, Israelis, and the leaders of both groups to garner popular support for the compromises required to break the impasse or adopt alternative solutions. Furthermore, subgroups in each population are powerful enough to make change difficult. There is little on the horizon to suggest that these configurations will change any time soon.

Economic Performance
In Israel, present economic trends identified in 2015 by RAND have remained steady. Israel’s economy is vibrant and growing. In 2014, Israeli gross domestic product (GDP) and GDP per capita stood at $295 billion and $35,900, respectively. Using GDP and GDP per capita growth rates for the period from 1999 and 2013 of 4.1 percent and 1.9 percent, respectively, RAND projected a 2024 GDP of $439 billion and per capita income of $43,300. These projections are consistent with the latest data compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza) have also experienced continued growth. According to the World Bank, GDP and GDP per capita grew to $14.5 billion and $3,094 by 2017, respectively. But, on average, Palestinians have less than one-tenth the income of Israelis, and the unemployment rate was about 20 percent in the West Bank and over 50 percent in Gaza in 2018.

The PA is likely to experience continued financial crises and uncertainty in the next decade. However, if the Israelis and Palestinians could resolve their conflict, their economies and the levels of income per capita would grow much more rapidly. Eliminating occupation and its restraints on movement and investment would immediately spur the West Bank economy. Ending the blockade of Gaza would also have immediate

35 Middle East Eye, 2017.
36 Middle East Eye, 2017.
37 Anthony et al., 2015.
41 Anthony et al., 2015.
positive effects. Israel would be able to take advantage of greater international investment and the opportunities in trade with Arab nations, spurring economic growth.

Security
Security remains high on the list of unresolved issues for both Israelis and Palestinians, but for differing reasons. The changing and uncertain regional context of the Israeli-Palestinian impasse affects how the parties perceive the costs and benefits of alternative solutions to the impasse. The chaos and uncertainty in the region also tend to magnify the perceived security risk to Israelis and, to a lesser extent, to Palestinians. Moreover, the threat that Israelis and Gulf Arabs perceive from Iran has significantly eroded Arab solidarity with the Palestinian cause. For the past decade or more, there has been a de facto rapprochement between Israel and Gulf Arab states that in the fall of 2020 was formalized in the Abraham Accords for the United Arab Emirates, further eroding the Palestinians’ already weak bargaining position.42

Today, Israel faces threats from the West Bank, Gaza, and inside Israel as well as those beyond Israel’s borders.43 Internally, this includes the threat from some Palestinian groups (e.g., Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) in addition to the possibility of further “lone wolf” attacks, such as the 2015–2016 rash of knife attacks inside Israel labeled by some as the “Knife Intifada.”44 External threats come from state-supported external forces (e.g., Hezbollah), Israel’s neighbors and enemies (e.g., Syria, Iran and its proxies45), and potentially from nonstate actors (e.g., the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). These threats are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

The Palestinians also confront both internal and external security threats. The PA faces internal threats from political and ideological rivals (e.g., Hamas), groups that reject any agreement with Israel, and lawlessness and riots over occupation. One reason Gaza security remains so volatile is the multiplicity of armed factions outside of a centralized command and control structure of Hamas. Even when dominant armed factions like Hamas adhere to ceasefires with Israel, smaller organizations might not, provoking broader military escalations.46

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45 In particular, Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons capability poses an existential threat to Israel, while Iran’s support of such proxies as Hezbollah poses a direct threat to Israel.

Although the Palestinian security forces (PNSF) and the Israelis (IDF) have coordinated closely on security to minimize terrorism, Palestinians also face a security threat from Israeli settlers, who routinely damage Palestinian olive orchards, vandalize other property, and launch occasional attacks (e.g., the Duma arson attack that killed a couple and their small child and the kidnapping and brutal murder of Muhammed Abu Khdeir). When Palestinian pollsters test Palestinian security fears, they find that “52% agree with the statement ‘I feel fear towards Israeli soldiers and armed settlers,’” and that figure rises to 57 percent among West Bank Palestinians. They fear being harmed by settlers or having their homes destroyed by the IDF. Most of settlers’ attacks are in Area B, where Palestinian police have limited authority. Palestinians also see the IDF as a security threat to them, because the IDF makes incursions, often in the middle of the night, into Areas A and B.

In theory, the Palestinians face the same external threats, although to a lesser degree, as the Israelis, but because they do not control the borders, their main external concern comes from such groups as al Qaeda, who could destabilize the PA. There is growing public and factional support among Palestinians, including Fatah, for ending security coordination with Israel and for ending Palestinian implementation of the Oslo agreement commitments, especially as Israel considers annexation of parts of Area C.

Security risks and challenges experienced over the past decade are likely to continue. Their resolution to the satisfaction of both parties will be a key challenge to the adoption of any alternative solution to the conflict.

Conflicting Societal Narratives and Perspectives

The conflicting narratives and perceptions of the Israelis and Palestinians are key to understanding why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has persisted for so long and reach-

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48 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2018, p. 27.
ing a resolution to the conflict has proven so difficult.52 These narratives and perceptions show no signs of changing.

Israelis emphasize their ancient connection to the land (i.e., the land west of the Jordan River) and their right to return to lands from which they were exiled centuries ago. They emphasize the sustained connection of the Jewish people to that land, over millennia in exile, through liturgy, ritual, and culture. Zionism is the national movement that embodies this narrative and picked up momentum in the face of widespread persecution of Jewish communities in the 19th and 20th centuries, of which the Holocaust was the culmination. Israelis see the Palestinians as Arab tribes that were loosely united and chose to flee when Israelis legitimately took control of land in 1948 and 1949.53 They see the 1967 Arab-Israeli War as a war of self-defense against countries continuing to refuse to accept their presence and right to exist.

The Israeli narrative considers the main obstacles to resolving the conflict to be security concerns, a lack of a negotiating partner, and Palestinian unwillingness to fully recognize Israel. Fear, isolation, and mistrust have led Israel to approach the peace process with great caution. Studies show that Israelis do not trust the Europeans or the international community to stand behind them, and they are very reluctant to trust Palestinians or other Arab states. These feelings have made accommodation with the Palestinians extremely difficult.54

Palestinians emphasize a very different narrative. Palestinians note that their ancestry dates back to people who lived in what is now Israel before the biblical Jews arrived. They see Zionism as a colonial enterprise supported by the British and later by the United States. They view partition in 1948 (as well as the Balfour Declaration and the partition proposed by the Peel Commission) as illegitimate. They feel that they were weak and untrained in the face of the Zionists, who succeeded in terrorizing and stampeding Palestinians to flee in 1948 in what they call the Nakbah.

From a Palestinian perspective, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War resulted in Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, humiliation, and economic distress. Although Palestinians have at times focused on other economic and governance issues, central to their narrative is victimization, occupation, humiliation, oppression by Israelis, lack of an honest partner for negotiations, and their unrelenting desire for an independent Palestinian state.55


The historical narratives of Israelis and Palestinians, although parallel in many ways, are fundamentally in conflict with each other. “As a consequence, the parties have approached final status accord issues from such different perspectives that achieving empathy, understanding, and trust has been very difficult, let alone reaching agreement on the issues themselves. These narratives are not going to change under present trends, making change difficult.”

Technology
Changes in technology on multiple fronts will continue to alter the nature of the conflict over the coming decade, presenting new security challenges as well as opportunities to both parties.

The internet and social media have made sharing information easy. The effects of rockets launched from Gaza into Israel and the results of Israeli bombing of Gaza quickly find their way to the news worldwide. This has made spinning the story more difficult for both sides, but it has also facilitated flooding the internet with inaccurate and misleading stories.

Technological developments have changed how Israel conducts border security and monitoring. Technology has also enabled Israel to introduce more automated techniques for border security, which have reduced the time it takes for Palestinians to cross the border between the West Bank and Israel.

Changes in arms technology will almost surely alter the nature of the conflict. For instance, Israel recently took steps to deny Hezbollah advanced guidance technology for rockets. If terrorist groups are able to introduce precision guidance for the many rockets they have, the nature of the security challenge facing Israel will dramatically change.

International Relations
Over the past decade, Israel has continued to expand settlements, increase the land it controls (e.g., nature preserves), and occupy the West Bank while isolating Gaza. The vast majority of countries in the United Nations have criticized these moves, but countries have taken few actions beyond words. Arab states have also decried Israeli actions in Gaza and the U.S. decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem and recognize Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights. But they have done nothing except verbally protest, while in some cases simultaneously pursuing back-channel dialogue with Israel.

56 Anthony et al., 2015, p. 159.
The United States has been a strong supporter of Israel over the past decade, often blocking United Nations resolutions critical of Israel while providing official U.S. assistance of approximately $3 billion per year and sharing advanced military systems, such as the F-35 stealth fighter jet. Since Trump became President, that support has included the termination of the Iranian nuclear pact, support for Israel in the United Nations, moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and recognition of Israel’s annexation of the Golan, and, most recently, the Trump Peace to Prosperity plan for resolving the conflict.

The PA will continue its diplomatic efforts to gain recognition in the United Nations. It will seek continued philanthropic support and rely on Arab neighbors to support its cause, but that support has waned in recent years. Relations with the United States have soured under the Trump administration, which cut off aid and has formally closed the PLO office in Washington, D.C. The PA, in turn, has refused to participate in the Trump administration’s peace plan with Israel. U.S. support for Israel is likely to continue, but the U.S. approach to the Palestinians (and presumably to Israel, as well, in terms of specific policy) will likely be shaped by the new Biden administration.

Summary of Present Trends

Barring unanticipated major changes, the present trends for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be characterized by (1) a prosperous and growing Israeli economy alongside a slower-growing and much poorer West Bank and Gaza, struggling with high endemic unemployment; (2) continued settlement expansion in the West Bank; (3) parity in the population of Jews and Arabs in the lands west of the Jordan River; (4) profound internal political divisions among Israelis and Palestinians; (5) a dangerous Middle East; (6) little significant international involvement in seeking a solution to the conflict, combined with continued strong U.S. support for Israel; (7) continued periodic PA financial crises; (8) evolving military, economic, and surveillance technologies; and (9) strongly avowed but sharply distinct and different historical narratives held by Palestinians and Israelis. Israelis tend to be satisfied with the present, while Palestinians long for the end of occupation and a better life.

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61 White House, “President Donald J. Trump Stands by America’s Cherished Ally Israel,” March 25, 2019a; White House, “Remarks by President Trump at Signing of Presidential Proclamation Recognizing Israel’s Sovereign Right Over the Golan Heights,” March 26, 2019b; and White House, 2020.


A.2. The Two-State Solution

The two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict envisages two independent sovereign states living alongside each other in peace and security. This would require the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. The two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been researched, debated, and negotiated extensively for decades.

The two-state solution has several defining characteristics. It would be based on a formula of “land for peace.” The future Palestinian state would consist of most of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, noncontiguous areas that would be linked by a land, rail, or underground corridor. The Palestinian state would be demilitarized; various security arrangements would ensure Palestinian security as well as that of Israel. Palestinian refugees would be compensated or accommodated in one manner or another, depending on the specific model. Although most two-state solution proposals converge around these principles, there is some variation worth highlighting. Key differences primarily relate to the size and type of territorial land swaps, the refugee issue, and Jerusalem.

Roots of the Two-State Solution

The two-state concept stretches back to 1937, when the Peel Commission proposed dividing the historical British Mandate of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly implemented the proposal by partitioning Mandate Palestine.65 On May 14, 1948, Israel declared its independence. The new state repelled attacks by its Arab neighbors and by Palestinian militias. During the 1948–1949 fighting, known to Israelis as their War of Independence (Milchemet Atzma’ut) and to Palestinians as the Catastrophe (al-Nakba), some 700,000–800,000 Palestinian refugees fled or were forced to flee by Israeli forces, creating a refugee population that endures to this day.66 The 1967 Arab-Israeli War increased the territory controlled by Israel to include Gaza and the West Bank.

As a result of the 1967 war, the United Nations Security Council enshrined trading “land for peace” as the core principle for resolving the conflict by passing Resolution 242, which called for “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” (i.e., the 1967 Arab-Israeli War), as well as termination of “belligerency and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political inde-
dependence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.” 68 The resolution also called for a “just settlement of the refugee issue.” 69

In 1993, formal diplomatic discussions, which were making little progress, were replaced by a new process that grew out of the breakthrough in back-channel negotiations in Oslo. The Oslo agreements led to the establishment of the PA; the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C; and the creation of a framework to negotiate a resolution of the permanent status issues (e.g., Jerusalem, right of return, borders, and security). 70 In 2002, the two-state solution was adopted as the mainstream approach to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the United States and, subsequently, by most countries in the world; it remained the formal policy of the United States until the Trump administration. 71

There have been many subsequent diplomatic efforts to move the two-state solution forward; all have ultimately failed. These have included the Barak/Arafat/Clinton Camp David Summit (2000), the Clinton Parameters (2000), the Taba Summit (2001), the Quartet’s 72 Roadmap to Peace (2002), the Arab Peace Initiative (2002 and subsequently re-endorsed in 2013) 73, the Annapolis Conference and subsequent negotiations (2007–2008), and the Kerry Initiative (2013–2014). The “track two” nongovernmental Geneva Initiative (2003) was able to reach an accord between a group of Israeli and Palestinian civil society representatives.

**Territorial Issues and Land Swaps 74**

UN Resolution 242 called for the “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” thereby establishing a basis for negotiations on territories and borders. In the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians based on Resolution 242 that have been carried out in numerous settings since 1991, the four primary areas of discussion on territory have been (1) the precise baseline for negotiations; (2) the amount of occupied land that Israel would keep; (3) the land swapped for

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71 It is not the purpose of this report to trace the lengthy history of the two-state solution. Many other authors have done this well, including Kurtzer et al., 2013; Rabinovich, 2012; Smith, 2016; Ross, 2004; Ahmed Qurie, From Oslo to Jerusalem: The Palestinian Story of the Secret Negotiations, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006; and Lustick, 2019a.
72 The United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations.
occupied lands ceded to Israel, including both size and quality; and (4) the establishment of a land corridor to link the West Bank with Gaza.\textsuperscript{76} The parties never reached full agreement on either the baseline or the land swaps, including exactly which lands to swap or the quality of the land versus its size in swaps. There has been general agreement of the need for a land, rail, or underground corridor or some kind of link between the West Bank and Gaza that could be included in a land swap agreement.\textsuperscript{77}

Although negotiations never produced an explicit agreement between the parties on a territorial baseline, it is generally accepted that Resolution 242 referred to the territory that was beyond Israeli military control on June 4, 1967, on the eve of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The line delineating this territory is commonly referred to as the “pre-1967 line” or “Green Line.” In the West Bank, it is derived from the 1949 Armistice agreement between Israel and Jordan.

**Jerusalem**

In Jerusalem, the national aspirations of the Palestinians and Israelis clash in an area that is sacred to Muslims, Jews, and Christians. All two-state proposals deal in some way with dividing or not dividing Jerusalem. Most two-state solutions have a formulation whereby both sides have Jerusalem as their capital: The Palestinians’ capital would be realized as Al-Quds and Israel’s as Yerushalayim in their respective languages. All proposals have sought to respect the religious significance of the Old City in various ways. But in negotiations since 1967, Israelis and Palestinians have never been able to agree on this core issue. The status of the city is of critical importance to each side and remains a key stumbling block to peace. Two-state negotiations cannot be complete without resolving the Jerusalem issue.\textsuperscript{78}

In the 1967 war, Israel gained control of East Jerusalem\textsuperscript{79} and the Old City. By 1980, Israel claimed sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, including the Old City, the Holy Basin, and the outer areas, including those in East Jerusalem, in what was known as the Jerusalem Law.\textsuperscript{80} Israel accepted the continuation of the existing pre-1967 situation in which Jordan was the established religious authority over the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif. However, Israel maintained security responsibility for the area.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{76} See Kurtzer et al., 2013; Ross, 2004; and Rabinovich, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{77} This corridor has usually been drawn where the distance from Gaza and the West Bank is narrowest in the north of Gaza. RAND proposed a longer route connecting to the south of Gaza to facilitate an infrastructure corridor in addition to road and rail linkages. See Doug Suisman, Steven Simon, Glenn Robinson, C. Ross Anthony, and Michael Schoenbaum, *The Arc: A Formal Structure for a Palestinian State*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-327-2-GG, 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{78} The recent Trump plan proposed that all of Jerusalem but a small sliver would become part of Israel, with the Old City continuing to be administered as is. The plan calls for a Palestinian capital in the section of East Jerusalem located in all areas east and north of the existing security barrier.
\item \textsuperscript{79} East Jerusalem is a significant amount of land approximately 2.5 square miles east of the Old City.
\end{itemize}
Negotiations concerning Jerusalem have centered on (1) whether the city should be shared or divided; (2) if divided, which areas should be under Palestinian and which under Israeli control; and (3) the Palestinian demand that its capital be in Jerusalem. All of these issues have become more difficult as Jewish settlements have expanded in and around the city.\textsuperscript{81}

Both sides recognize the importance of Jerusalem to the other and have been willing to discuss the status of Jerusalem in multiple fora. That said, they have not been able to agree on a solution.\textsuperscript{82} The international community, including the United States, until recently considered East Jerusalem as disputed territory subject to peace negotiations. In 2018, President Trump moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and recognized Israel’s sovereignty over Jerusalem, with precise boundaries to be negotiated.\textsuperscript{83} But most of the rest of the international community has not followed suit, and Palestinians continue to demand that the capital of a new Palestinian state be in East Jerusalem.

Both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas have made their respective positions on Jerusalem very clear. On the occasion of a ceremony celebrating Jerusalem Day in 2009, Netanyahu vowed that “all of Jerusalem would always remain under Israeli sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{84} He added, “Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish people, a city reunified so as never again to be divided,” and that “United Jerusalem is Israel’s capital. Jerusalem was always ours and will always be ours. It will never again be partitioned and divided.”\textsuperscript{85}

Palestinians have been equally clear on their position on Jerusalem. In a speech before the United Nations on September 27, 2018, President Abbas stated that there would be no peace without a “an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.” He added, “Jerusalem is not for sale, and the Palestinian people’s rights are not up for bargaining. . . . Peace in our region cannot be realized without an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and with all the holy sites.” He further indicated that “some people try to outsmart us, and they say okay, your capital is in East Jerusalem. No, I’m sorry—this is a manipulation of words. This means here or there or whichever region that are surrounding Jerusalem. No. Our capital is Jeru-


\textsuperscript{82} Lehrs, 2013; Kurtzer et al., 2013.

\textsuperscript{83} BBC News, 2017.


\textsuperscript{85} Haaretz Service and News Agencies, 2009.
salem and not in East Jerusalem.” In accordance with UN Resolution 242, they seek the return of all of the land occupied by Israel in the 1967 war.

Today, the parties are far apart. Because President Trump has supported Israel’s annexation of all of Jerusalem, the Israelis see little reason to compromise on what is a key Palestinian requirement for peace.

Refugees
During the Israeli War of Independence, or the al-Nakba, as the Palestinians refer to it, 700,000–800,000 Palestinian refugees were displaced from what are today parts of Israel. An additional 100,000 refugees were displaced as a result of the 1967 war. Most of these displaced people ended up in the West Bank and Gaza and the neighboring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Over time, the number of refugees and their much more numerous descendants has grown to more than 5.4 million. In 2013, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East listed registered refugees of about 5 million with more than 1.4 million living in refugee camps. The very different Palestinian and Israeli positions on refugees are rooted in their conflicting narratives of that time.

The Palestinians believe that they have an inalienable right to return to their homes—i.e., the right of return—and they maintain that this right is supported by the United Nations and international law. UN General Assembly Resolution 194, passed on December 11, 1948, resolved “that refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property, which under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.” And in 1974, the UN General Assembly affirmed the right of return as an inalienable right in UN Resolution 336, which “[r]eaffirms also the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted and calls for their return.”

A Palestinian refugee right of return has not been accepted by Israel. “Israel rejects primary responsibility for the refugee problem. Instead, they argue that this was

87 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, undated.
89 Brynen and El-Rifai, 2014.
91 Laqueur and Schueftan, 2016, p. 83.
brought on by Arab rejection of the 1947 UN Partition Plan.”93 From an Israeli perspective, allowing the return of what today are millions of refugees and their descendants would threaten a Jewish majority in Israel and the Zionist nature of the state.94 Israelis also point out the UN Security Council Resolution 242 only calls for a “just” solution to the refugee issue and not the right of return. Israel also notes that Jews were also displaced in the Palestinian Mandate and other Arab countries and believes that this issue should be taken up alongside the issue of Palestinian refugees.

The right of return has been discussed at most key peace negotiations without resolution. The 2000 Clinton Parameters acknowledged “the importance of the right of return to the Palestinians at the same time as recognizing the dilemma it posed to Israel’s Jewish character,” proposing that both sides would recognize the right of Palestinians to return to “historic Palestine” or to “their homeland.” U.S. President Bill Clinton identified five possible final homes for refugees: the West Bank and Gaza, areas acquired by the Palestinian state through land swaps, host countries, third countries, and absorption into Israel. “While settlement in a Palestinian state would be a right for all refugees, settlement in Israel or other countries . . . would depend on the policies of those countries.”95 All refugees also should “receive compensation from the international community for their losses, and assistance in building new lives.”96

The most significant Israeli offers on refugees were made by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to President Abbas in 2008 in Annapolis, Maryland. Although Olmert did not agree that Israel would accept the right of return principle, it is reported that he was willing to make important concessions. He was willing to “acknowledge that Israel was at least partially responsible for the flight of Palestinians during and after the 1948 War”97 as long as reference was made to Jewish refugees who were forced to flee Arab countries. He also was willing to accept 5,000 Palestinians in Israel and as many as 15,000 over time.98 Olmert was also willing to join in an international effort to compensate the refugees. “In return, he demanded that the Palestinians agree to the ‘end of the conflict, end of claims.’”99 Abbas stated that the offer was small compared with

93 Brynen and El-Rifai, 2014.
94 The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East defines Palestinian refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. . . . The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration” as refugees. See United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, undated.
95 Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 150.
97 Rabinovich, 2012, p. 179.
the 5 million refugees. Although the Israelis and Palestinians have discussed the issue in various international fora, they have never come closer to an agreement.

A.3. Confederation Between Israel and the Palestinians

A confederation differs from a federation as follows: In a federation, which envisions two or more states entering into a union in which some powers are reserved for the states, the ultimate power lies in the federation. In a confederation, most of the power is reserved for the states, with only those areas agreed upon by the states giving ultimate power to the federal entity. In effect, there is a continuum between a federation and a confederation.

A number of studies on an Israel-Palestine confederation have been recently published. One of the earliest was advanced by Meron Rapoport, an Israeli journalist, and Awni el-Mashni, a columnist for the Ma’an news agency. They advocated an Israeli-Palestinian confederation that they called “Two States, One Homeland.” The idea was further detailed in a study entitled “Two States in One Space: A New Proposed Framework for Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” under the auspices of Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives.

Others have also seriously discussed the concept of a confederation. Among these, Columbia University researchers published a comprehensive confederation study entitled “Reimagining Israel/Palestine: Assessing a Confederal Future.”

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101 Maltz, 2019.

102 Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives, 2014.


104 Cohen et al., 2017.
researchers looked at an Israeli/Palestinian confederation overall, examined some of
the most critical issues that needed to be addressed in such an arrangement, and com-
pared them with relevant worldwide historical examples. Yossi Beilin, a politician and
journalist, has also proposed a confederation as a stepping stone to a two-state solution.

“Two States, One Homeland,” Also Known as “Two States in One Space”
The most detailed examination of the confederal idea has been put forward by Israel-
Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives. The Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initia-
tives study argues that both Arabs and Jews are “deeply connected to the entire geo-
graphical space that lies between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.”105 Both
Palestinians and Jews have jointly inhabited these lands and have had historical ties
to the lands for centuries. Most Jewish historical sites lie in the West Bank; both Jews
and Arabs view areas of the Old City of Jerusalem as sacred to their religion; and both
groups have a strong attachment to the land. Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initia-
tives posits that “an agreement that does not respect . . . the attachment to the whole
land” of both the Palestinians and the Israelis will fail.106

Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives asserts that the “vision of separation
(i.e. a two state solution) failed, and will continue to fail, not only because of the ‘facts
on the ground,’ i.e. Israel’s continued expansion of the settlements, but also because
it ignores the basic fundamental fact that the land between the Jordan River and the
Mediterranean Sea is one geographical unit, that both peoples, Palestinians and Israe-
lis, see as their homeland, on which Jews and Arabs are intertwined.”107

This assumption led Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives to consider a
confederation. Its proposal envisions that any confederation will have two states—one
Israeli and one Palestinian—with open borders that would be based on the 1967 armi-
stice line; strong state governments; delinked residency and citizenship; immigration
controlled by the individual states (e.g., right of return); a shared Jerusalem; each state’s
control of its own internal security,108 with “Israel exercising an overall function of con-
trol and coordination in the immediate future of external security (due to the gap in
capabilities between the parties);”109 and some confederal committees with equal rep-
resentation that would cooperate on issues of agreed-upon mutual interest, such as the
environment, water, public health, and trade. The group envisions the establishment of

105 Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives, 2014, p. 4.
106 Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives, 2014, p. 4.
108 The chapter on security in the Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives plan was authored by the Insti-
tute for National Security Studies.
committees to deal with issues of mutual interest, though it acknowledges that it might take a very long time to establish the cooperation and respect needed to be effective.\footnote{Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives, 2014, pp. 41–63.}

The “Two States in One Homeland” model was designed to be implemented in the immediate future. It tackles some of the difficult issues while leaving many others untouched. The report emphasizes patience and the need to build trust, which would be essential for success.

**Yossi Beilin’s Confederation**

Yossi Beilin is a well-known figure in Israel. As a member of the Labor Party, he served as Cabinet Secretary and, later, as director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Prime Minister Shimon Peres. He also served as the Deputy Minister of Finance and was a key back-channel figure in negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords.

Beilin has mused about a confederal solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue in various public fora.\footnote{See Yossi Beilin, “Confederation Is the Key to Mideast Peace,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2015b; Yossi Beilin, “Could Israeli-Palestinian Confederation Bring Peace?” *Al-Monitor*, September 6, 2018a; Beilin, 2018b.} In a *New York Times* opinion piece, he described discussions he had with Faisal al-Husseini in 1993 while pursuing back-channel discussions with Palestinians that led ultimately to the Oslo Accords. Husseini recognized that Palestinians “had to address their poverty, not just nationalism.”\footnote{Yossi Beilin, “A Conversation with Yossi Beilin,” Middle East Program held at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C., February 9, 2015a, p. 2.} He felt it was against both Palestinian and Israeli interests to “artificially divide the land. We should draw a border, not a Chinese wall.” Israel and Palestine would be independent states with their own government but also with institutions for mutual interest “like water, infrastructure, the environment, police, and emergency services.”\footnote{Beilin, 2015a, p. 3.} Beilin sees each state’s foreign policy as separate, with security highly coordinated.\footnote{Beilin, 2015b; Beilin, 2015a.} Palestinians would benefit economically from cohabitating with Israel, while Israeli settlers could continue to live in the West Bank under Palestinian law.

Beilin has always sought a solution that preserves Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. He has stated that a two-state solution is the way to achieve these objectives, but, because the two-state solution faces serious obstacles, he now feels the best avenue to that result is through a confederation. To Beilin, whose views have evolved over the years, a confederation is not an alternative but rather a pathway to a two-state solution. He sees a confederation as “an enabler of a two-state solution.”\footnote{Beilin, 2018b.} A confederation is a vehicle that enables a transition to a two-state solution while helping to overcome the obstacles that have stalled the traditional two-state solution. Because confed-
erations usually either become federations or break into separate states, his hope is that the latter would happen with time as the Palestinian state becomes more democratic and more developed while leaving Israel as a stronger, more democratic Jewish state.

Confederation Advantages and Disadvantages

A confederated approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enables the parties to realistically approach, if not solve, some of the most vexing barriers to a successful negotiation, such as what to do with settlers. One research study, conducted by a group of analysts at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, assessed the viability of a confederation to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study assessed the advantages and hurdles to a confederal future with power-sharing and open borders in relation to (1) sovereignty, (2) Jerusalem, (3) citizenship, (4) security, (5) shared resources, and (6) reconciliation. The authors emphasize that confederation “focuses on redefining sovereignty in a way that focuses on power sharing and interdependence, rather than territorial exclusivity.”

The main takeaway from that research is that trust is central and vital for success but that it would take many years to build. The authors of that research also note that local bottom-up and top-down initiatives would be necessary, and the world community would need to broaden its view of what is possible. They conclude that, given Palestinian wariness of incrementalism, the confederal model would be “unlikely to succeed.” Furthermore, for the Israelis, security concerns would be paramount. Open borders and freedom of movement would be a sharp departure from the ways Israel has sought to ensure its security. With terrorism such a key concern and with so few bad actors needed to cause immense harm, freedom of movement would pose a huge security hurdle for Israelis.

Delinking residency and citizenship would help deal with the issue of Israeli settlers, who could continue to live in the West Bank and be citizens of Israel. The confederal model assumes that in delinking residency and citizenship, residents would willingly abide by the law of the state they live in. But when the first terrorist attack is levied against Israeli settlers in the new Palestinian area in the West Bank, those settlers are unlikely to rely on Palestinian security forces and accept Palestinian adjudication and the application of Palestinian law.

118 Cohen et al., 2017, p. 3.
119 Cohen et al., 2017, p. 3.
120 Cohen et al., 2017, p. 3.
121 Cohen et al., 2017.
A confederation would also require Israel to address issues of “justice and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{122} Israel would have to abandon its present zoning and residency requirements, which favor Jews over Arabs and which are a “bureaucratic nightmare for Palestinian residents.”\textsuperscript{123} A confederation would also require the two groups to share Jerusalem.

Observers conclude that security is the “largest obstacle”\textsuperscript{124} to the success of a confederal approach. Israel is “adamant on maintaining the right to self-defense as well as the capacity to defend itself,”\textsuperscript{125} and if this core Israeli demand is not met, “no mutual agreement can be reached.”\textsuperscript{126} To Israel this means that threats to security emanating from the West Bank, Gaza, the borders of any confederation, and the region (e.g., Iran) must be dealt with. From the Palestinian side, the demands for the end of “occupation” and the right to police its own people are paramount.

The focus on issues of “hard security” fails to deal with “human security,” defining the term as covering “freedom from fear, freedom from want, and the right of personal dignity.”\textsuperscript{127} Given the long history of occupation, past brutalities by both sides, very different narratives, and differing degrees of education and poverty, meeting these goals in a confederation would be difficult, would require a long time, and would demand levels of trust that are currently absent.

Given that no Israeli or Palestinian political party is proposing confederation, it is surprising that a recent poll found that confederation received support from 30 percent of both Israelis and Palestinians in a support/oppose question relative to the concept of confederation.\textsuperscript{128} It could be that a confederation is seen as a solution somewhere between the two-state solution and a one-state solution. A confederation of two separate states would allow Jews to maintain a Jewish majority in the Jewish state and Palestinians to have their aspiration of a state met, but in the context of some functions being assigned to the confederal entity. Such an arrangement would eliminate the need for nonmajority residents (e.g., Jewish settlers) to move and allow nonmajority refugees to return as residents, offer pathways to address difficult issues from security to Jerusalem, recognize the shared history with the entire area, and provide the long period envisioned as necessary to build meaningful trust and cooperation between the parties.

That said, critics have said that the confederal approach is idealistic, unworkable, and a security challenge. They see a confederation as inconsistent with the national

\textsuperscript{122} Cohen et al., 2017, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{123} Cohen et al., 2017, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{124} Cohen et al., 2017, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{125} Cohen et al., 2017, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{126} Cohen et al., 2017, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{127} Cohen et al., 2017, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{128} Maltz, 2019, quoting survey results from Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2018.
aspirations of both parties or separation and requiring trust among parties that have been engaged in struggle and conflict for over 70 years.

A.4. Annexation Alternatives

Annexation refers to the incorporation of lands acquired through conflict into the victorious nation’s territory. As it relates to Israel, annexation refers to Israel unilaterally subsuming and asserting sovereignty over lands seized and occupied by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Israelis have proposed annexation as a way to enlarge the State of Israel while minimizing the number of Palestinians incorporated into the state. In addition to Jerusalem and the Golan, proposals have included annexation of

- all of the West Bank and Gaza
- all of the West Bank
- all of Area C
- all of the Jewish settlements
- large settlement blocks (e.g., Maale Edumim, Gush Etzion).

What some have called de facto annexation or “creeping annexation” has been going on since Israel established its first settlements in 1967. Over time, the number of settlements and where they are located has spread throughout Area C (see Figure A.1). Although estimates vary somewhat, today in the West Bank there are approximately

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130 Institute for Middle East Understanding, “What Are the Occupied Territories?” December 21, 2005.

131 Annexation can happen through various mechanisms, such as Israeli law, international recognition, laws that are not explicit but advance de facto harmonization of legislation resulting in Israeli control, and physical land grabs through territorial or planning policies that minimize Palestinian development or lay the groundwork for future Israeli development and settlement expansion.

Figure A.1
West Bank Settlements

SOURCE: Adapted from B’Tselem, “Interactive Map,” webpage, undated.
450,000 settlers.\textsuperscript{133} As of the end of 2017, there were settlements that are considered legal and recognized by the Israeli government (although not under international law), and some 110 outposts,\textsuperscript{134} which are considered illegal by the State of Israel as well as the international community. Most of the 450,000 settlers live in legal settlements.

As the settlements have increased in geographic size and number of settlers, the feasibility of creating a separate Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders plus or minus limited land swaps has become increasingly difficult.\textsuperscript{135} As of March 1, 2020, all Israeli settlements were located in Area C and annexed East Jerusalem. Various estimates have been given for the number of Palestinians also living in Area C; the United Nations estimated the Palestinian population at 300,000\textsuperscript{136} in Area C in 2014. Geographically, Area C includes a large continuous area along the Jordan River and Dead Sea and corridors throughout the West Bank that separate Areas A and B into noncontiguous communities. There are more than 160 Palestinian communities in Areas A and B (see Figure A.1).\textsuperscript{137}

Annexation became a more prominent issue of contention in the April 9, 2019, Israeli elections when the Jewish Home Party and the Likud Central Committee supported annexation of settlements during the campaign,\textsuperscript{138} and since then it has become a prominent part of the Trump plan. Settlement expansion has been opposed by the stakeholder international community and, until recently, by successive U.S. administrations, at least rhetorically. The situation changed dramatically on March 25, 2019, when President Trump issued an executive order on behalf of the United States recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights that Israel captured from Syria and has occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.\textsuperscript{139} Specifically, the order proclaimed that “the United States recognizes that the Golan Heights are part of the State of Israel.”\textsuperscript{140} Although international law provides that territory captured in war is “occupied” until adjudicated by treaty or returned,\textsuperscript{141} President Trump’s statement maintained that

\textsuperscript{134} B’Tselem, 2019.
\textsuperscript{135} Dennis Ross and David Makovsky, “Netanyahu Is Endangering the Future of a Two-State Solution,” CNN, September 15, 2019; Lustick, 2019a.
\textsuperscript{136} Amira Hass, “UN Report: 300,000 Palestinians Live in Area C of West Bank,” Haaretz, March 5, 2014.
\textsuperscript{138} Jacob Magid, “Far-Right Slate to Offer PM Immunity Law in Exchange for Settlement Annexation,” Times of Israel, April 22, 2019.
\textsuperscript{140} Trump, 2019.
\textsuperscript{141} Nir and Shushan, 2018; Dahlia Scheindlin, “The Logic Behind Israel’s Democratic Erosion,” The Century Foundation, May 29, 2019a; Eugene Kontorovich, Jurisdiction Over Israeli Settlement Activity in the International
“Israel won the Golan Heights in a just war of defense” and thus is entitled to the area. Proponents of annexation interpreted Trump’s executive order regarding the Golan Heights to mean that the Trump administration would not object to annexation of the settlements because they were also captured in the same “defensive war.” On June 9, 2019, U.S. ambassador to Israel David Friedman signaled the direction of U.S. policy when in an interview he stated that “Israel has the right to retain some, but unlikely all, of the West Bank.” And with the release of the Trump plan, it has become clear that the United States will accept and endorse Israeli annexation of large parts of the West Bank.

A number of annexation plans have been proposed. Some of the best known are discussed in the following subsections.

The Allon Plan

Shortly after the cessation of hostilities in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Israeli cabinet considered courses of action related to captured territory. The cabinet agreed to expand the borders of Jerusalem and the Golan but debated how to handle the West Bank and Gaza. Yigal Allon, then Minister of Immigrant Absorption and Vice Prime Minister, proposed what came to be called the Allon Plan. The first version was put forward in July 1967. A revised Allon Plan based on what was known as the Jordan Option was introduced in 1968. Both versions were guided by the objective establishing sovereignty over lands based on Israel’s perceived security needs while including as few Palestinians as possible.

In the original plan, Allon called for incorporating into Israel “a strip of land ten to fifteen kilometers wide along the Jordan River; most of the Judean desert along the Dead Sea; and a substantial area around Greater Jerusalem, including the Latrun Criminal Court, Northwestern Law & Economics Research Paper, No. 13-10, 2013; Eyal Benvenisti, The International Law of Occupation, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

142 Trump, 2019.
145 In 1980 and 1981, Israel passed laws annexing both Jerusalem under the Basic Law on Jerusalem (1980) and the Golan under the Golan Heights Law (1981) and formally extending Israeli law over them.
147 Economic Cooperation Foundation, “Allon Plan (1967),” The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: An Interactive Data Base, undated.
salient. Designed to include as few Arabs as possible in the area claimed for Israel, the
plan envisaged building permanent settlements and army bases in these areas. Finally,
it called for opening negotiations with local leaders on turning the remaining parts of
the West Bank into an autonomous region that would be economically linked to Israel.
The cabinet discussed Allon’s plan but neither adopted nor rejected it.\textsuperscript{149}

In 1968, Allon revised his plan. The revision included a corridor from Jericho
to Jordan and envisioned Jordan controlling the lands not annexed by Israel, which
included the majority of Palestinian population centers. Allon saw the Palestinian issue
as “part of the ongoing struggle between Israel and the Arab states,”\textsuperscript{150} and thus the
solution to the “Palestinian issue” in his revised plan saw the “Palestinian people”
becoming “an integral and inseparable part of Jordan.”\textsuperscript{151} As before, Allon sought to
annex lands he felt essential for Israeli security while including as few Palestinians as
possible.\textsuperscript{152}

Although never formally adopted by the government of Israel, the plan provided a
general blueprint for West Bank and Gaza settlement policy from 1967 to 1977\textsuperscript{153} and
1987.”\textsuperscript{154} The plan also guided settlement efforts and influenced the thinking of others
contemplating annexation of parts or all of the West Bank.

The Bennett Plan
In 2012, Naftali Bennett, then leader of the HaBayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home) party,\textsuperscript{155}
which is closely identified with the settler movement, advanced a plan that called
for annexation of all of Area C. The Bennett Plan, which is included in the HaBayit
HaYehudi 2019 campaign platform, incorporates the following elements:\textsuperscript{156}

\begin{itemize}
  \item annex Area C and apply Israeli law there
  \item offer Israeli citizenship to Palestinians living in Area C
  \item promote economic development for all
\end{itemize}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Hemda Agid-Ben Yehuda and Yehudit Auerbach, “Attitudes to an Existence Conflict: Allon and Peres on the
\item Yehuda and Auerbach, 1991, p. 525.
\item Economic Cooperation Foundation, undated.
\item Yehuda and Auerbach, 1991.
\item Stein, 1999.
\item For the first elections of 2019 held in April, Bennett left the HaBayit HaYehudi party and founded the
HaYamin HeHadash (New Right) party, which failed to receive the necessary 3.25 percent of the vote to be
included in the Knesset.
\end{enumerate}
• enable free movement in the West Bank
• strengthen Palestinian autonomy in Areas A and B.

Like the Allon Plan, the Bennett Plan seeks to extend Israeli law and sovereignty to the Jewish population residing in settlements in the West Bank while minimizing the number of Palestinians incorporated into Israel. According to Bennett, the plan reduces the need for relocation of both Jews and Palestinians while maintaining the separation of most Israelis and Palestinians into two separate governance areas—in a sense, two separate states. By permitting access and focusing on development, Bennett hopes to mute Palestinian reaction and solve the longer-term problems associated with living in proximity with Palestinians living in Areas A and B. Bennett does not mention Gaza and is against annexing all of “Judea and Samaria” (i.e., the West Bank).

Bennett indicated that he would propose offering Israeli citizenship to the Palestinians living in Area C of the West Bank, which he estimated at 80,000 to 90,000 people but which the United Nations and others have estimated at more than 300,000. To minimize the number of Palestinians offered citizenship, Bennett has suggested that a “freeze” (i.e., a limit on the number of Palestinians to be offered citizenship) might be needed so as to achieve his original objective of offering citizenship to 50,000 Palestinians. This objective could be achieved by selecting an earlier date when fewer Palestinians lived in Area C upon which to base the number of Palestinians eligible for citizenship.

Bennett’s plan deals with the most commonly discussed final status separation core issues. Borders are set by the definition of Area C in the Oslo Accords. Jerusalem would be the capital of Israel, and no Palestinian capital would be included. The right of return, or the return of Palestinians to areas from which they were refugees in Israel today and Area C, would not be allowed. Security infrastructure would remain unchanged, with Israel continuing to control external security, including borders and the Jordan River. Bennett envisions that internal security would involve continued security cooperation with the Palestinians in Areas A and B, with Israel fully controlling Area C. Access and movement in Area C would be free and open. No mention is made of water or other environmental issues. Bennett’s plan would allow free access and movement in the West Bank, but security policy at the borders with Israel would continue.

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159 Landsmann, 2018.

160 The right of Jews to come to and become citizens of the enlarged Israel would continue.

161 Landsmann, 2018.
Such unilateral action on the part of Israel would create more than 160 disconnected areas, which, according to many observers, would make the creation of a separate Palestinian state—i.e., the two-state solution—extraordinarily difficult or impossible.\footnote{Halperin, 2018.}

Although the Bennett plan does not explicitly state its assumptions (with the exception of the continued role of the PA), a number of key assumptions are embedded in the proposal: (1) Palestinians will accept annexation of Areas C without violence, (2) the PA will continue to exist and administer Areas A and B, and (3) the Palestinian population offered Israeli citizenship will be around 50,000–70,000 and not the population of 300,000 estimated by others. Bennett also expects the United States under President Trump to be supportive\footnote{This reality came to pass with the release of the Trump plan.} and the international community to object but (as in the past) take no meaningful action.

Bennett is vague about what would happen to the Palestinians and the governance structure in Areas A and B. He proposes to enhance Palestinian autonomy in Areas A and B, yet seems to assume that governance will continue more or less as it is today. He does not address security, tax collection, monetary policy, environmental issues, and the myriad of other areas where Palestinian and Israeli interests would overlap.

**Assessment of the Commanders for Israel’s Security**

The Commanders for Israel’s Security, a group of 300 experts led by dozens of “retired generals of Israel’s various security agencies reinforced by the nation’s [Israel’s] leading private sector and academic experts as well as senior veterans of other government institutions,”\footnote{Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 2.} studied annexation and its implications for over a year and reached very different conclusions.

The Commanders for Israel’s Security envision a seven-step “domino effect”\footnote{Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 11.} of continued annexation, which they see as likely to reach an ignition point. The group believes that creeping annexation will set off a wave of violence, leading to a collapse of the PA. That collapse in turn would force Israel to take military control of the West Bank. Military administration and unequal citizenship rights for Palestinians would lead to international pressure, which would lead to granting permanent residence status to West Bank Palestinians, and then ultimately to domestic and international pressure to end what would be perceived as an “apartheid regime.” At some point, this “domino effect” scenario would result in almost 3 million Palestinians from the West Bank gaining citizenship in Israel, amounting to the end of Israel as a Jewish state because the non-Jewish population would outnumber Jews, yet the state would presumably remain under an all-Jewish government.
Although it might take decades, once the domino effect reaches a tipping point, it would be difficult or impossible to stop. The Commanders for Israel’s Security ultimately see the process as “liable to lead to the end of the Zionist vision of Israel as a secure, democratic state with a firm Jewish majority for generations to come.”

The Commanders for Israel’s Security report also states that it is an “illusion” for Israel to think that “it will be able to control the process through gradualism.” The group assumes that Israeli domestic political pressure will “accelerate the annexation process so as not to miss” a “perceived historic window and opportunity” to incorporate what Israelis refer to as “Judea and Samaria” (the West Bank) into Israel during the current U.S. Trump administration.

Unlike the Bennett Plan, the Commanders for Israel’s Security report also examined the economic cost of annexation in three categories: “additional annual budget costs,” “one-time expenses,” and “long-term damage.” The study estimates that annexation would require an ongoing annual budget increase to cover security, health, education, and social benefits of $2.37 billion or $14.57 billion, depending on whether just Area C or all of the West Bank is annexed. This would be 0.5 to 3 percent of the overall budget (the Israeli budget for fiscal year 2019 was set at 479.6 billion shekels [$140 billion]). Additionally, the Commanders for Israel’s Security see the need for a new fence between the annexed and unannexed areas costing $9 billion, and it projects the effects of possible violence at $11 billion to $21.5 billion. The group envisioned that if violence were protracted, Israeli per capita private consumption would fall by 19–37 percent.

Of further concern is how the international community and countries that share a border with Israel will react. The European Union has already signaled its strong objection to annexation. Jordan and Egypt both have also indicated their strong displeasure and have threatened to revisit peace treaties they have with Israel.

Conclusions About Annexation Proposals
Although annexation proposals have been suggested since 1967, recent political proposals and campaign pledges have raised the prospects of annexation as an explicit

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166 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 5.  
167 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 11.  
168 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, pp. 11 and 32.  
169 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 32.  
170 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 32.  
171 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, pp. 32–36.  
173 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 32.  
174 Commanders for Israel’s Security, 2018, p. 34.
Israeli initiative. Views about what would happen if more-unilateral annexation initiatives are taken vary greatly. In general, these depend on the assumptions of the analysts, with those in favor seeing less dire consequences than those opposed. Of particular relevance is any assumption about how Palestinians and other countries, particularly Jordan\footnote{The King of Jordan has been vocal in expressing that annexation of large parts of the West Bank would jeopardize Israeli-Jordanian relationships (Times of Israel staff, “Jordan Said to Warn Israel of Harsh Response to Even Minimal Annexation,” \textit{Times of Israel}, June 29, 2020).} and Egypt, might react. The recent signing of the Abraham Accords\footnote{U.S. Department of State, “The Abraham Accords,” webpage, undated.} between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain has changed the landscape. Although no such language is included in the formal accords, it is said that the United Arab Emirates agreed to formal relationships with Israel with the understanding that Israel would not proceed with annexation.\footnote{Neri Zilber, “Normalization Deal Between Israel and the UAE Signals a Shift in the Region,” \textit{Foreign Policy}, August 13, 2020.}

A.5. One-State Solutions

A final class of alternatives is defined by geographic contiguity, in which a single state is formed that encompasses all of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This class of alternatives, typically referred to by their authors as “one-state solutions,” include both democratic and nondemocratic variants.

The one-state solution alternative included in our focus group exercise posited a democratic, contiguous state including Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, which some have referred to as a \textit{multicultural democracy}.\footnote{This term is used by Halper, 2018, though our definition is more inclusive than his (see the discussion in the following section).} All citizens would have equal civil rights, and the state would ensure protection of “national, ethnic or religious collectivities desiring to retain their various identities and cultural lives if they so choose.”\footnote{Halper, 2018.} Most proposals for this type of one-state solution assume that the Jewish population will become a minority at some point in the future, such that the state could eventually lose its Jewish character.

Two major nondemocratic variants of the one-state solution have been proposed. The first is a \textit{Jewish one-state solution},\footnote{Maltz, 2019, describes this approach as “[a]nnexation of [the] West Bank with citizenship for Palestinians.”} which would absorb the West Bank into Israel in its entirety but exclude Gaza (to ensure that the Jewish population remains the majority in the new state). Most current residents of the West Bank would be offered a
pathway to citizenship, though there would be no guarantee of equal rights for various ethnic groups because policies would be enacted to maintain Israel’s Jewish character.

The second nondemocratic variant is the **undemocratic one-state reality**, which is not really an “alternative” but rather a continuum of what others have described as today’s de facto reality.\(^{181}\) Although the characterization of the current situation as a one-state outcome is not new, what has changed is that Israel has begun passing legislation (i.e., the Nation State Law) and taking action to ensure that Israeli Jews remain the dominant power in any future state.\(^{182}\) As Israeli Jews eventually become the minority in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, this outcome will result in a state that is necessarily undemocratic.

**Multicultural Democracy**

The defining characteristics of the multicultural democracy model are territorial integrity between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea;\(^{183}\) equal voting rights for all adult citizens within this territory; equal rights, obligations, and opportunities for all citizens; and protection of religious and cultural expression for all citizens. All major political institutions (e.g., courts, law enforcement) would be based on “individual merit” rather than identity,\(^{184}\) and existing structures would be replaced by new ones that are inclusive.

This type of alternative was the de facto goal of some Palestinians throughout the British Mandate,\(^{185}\) an explicit goal of the PLO from 1969 to 1988,\(^{186}\) and the Palestinians’ “preferred outcome” even after the pivot toward the two-state solution.\(^{187}\) Signifi-

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\(^{181}\) Many others have used the term *one-state reality*, but we have explicitly added the term *undemocratic* to reflect the recent shift documented by many observers (e.g., Lustick, 2019a; Beth Oppenheim, *Can Europe Overcome Its Paralysis on Israel and Palestine?* Centre for European Reform, February 2020).

\(^{182}\) Lustick, 2019a.

\(^{183}\) Note that there were also a number of proposals, during 2006 and 2007, by Palestinian Arabs in Israel for something comparable to the multicultural democracy but only within the current boundaries of Israel (e.g., National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities, “The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel,” *Electronic Intifada*, January 12, 2007). These proposals generally posit an overall solution to the conflict along the lines of the two-state solution, so they are not discussed further here.

\(^{184}\) Halper, 2018.

\(^{185}\) E.g., Blake Alcott, “What Kind of Single Democratic State in Israel/Palestine Do We Want?” *Counterpunch*, January 3, 2019.


\(^{187}\) Muslih, 1990, p. 16.
cant interest in this alternative reemerged by 2003, a byproduct of the stalled two-state solution negotiations,\(^\text{188}\) and several current variants have been proposed.\(^\text{189}\)

Despite broad agreement on the principles of territorial integrity, equality, universal suffrage, and protection of religious expression, there are some fundamental disagreements among the variants of this alternative. Foremost among these, perhaps, is the issue of the right of return. Some proposals would annul both the Israeli law of return (Aliyah) and the Palestinian right of return,\(^\text{190}\) others propose a “parity principle” that would provide the new state a way to limit the numbers of both Palestinian refugees and Jewish migrants,\(^\text{191}\) and a third group of proposals would unequivocally guarantee the right of return for all Palestinian refugees (typically without Aliyah at all).\(^\text{192}\)

Another significant difference is the relationship between religion and the government in the successor state. In particular, although most of these proposals explicitly call for a secular state, the definition of secular varies substantially. In some cases, secular is defined as the complete separation of church and state, with one variant even banning religious parties.\(^\text{193}\) However, others suggest that the role of religion in the new state will need to be determined by the electorate.\(^\text{194}\)

Only a handful of the one-state proposals reviewed articulated how a multicultural democracy might be implemented.\(^\text{195}\) The most common proposed pathway is to expand Israel’s democratic system through annexation and to include all residents between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea while reforming the existing legal system to guarantee equality.\(^\text{196}\) Others explicitly reject this idea of annexation.\(^\text{197}\)

\(^{188}\) As an example, Tilley’s 2005 proposal for a one-state solution is based on her conclusion that the “two-state option has been eliminated as a practical solution” (Virginia Tilley, The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2005, p. 1).


\(^{191}\) E.g., Abunimah 2006, pp. 118–121; Alcott, 2018.


\(^{193}\) E.g., Tilley, 2005; Halper, 2018.

\(^{194}\) Most proposals instead focus on describing the core principles of this future state.


\(^{196}\) Marwan Muasher and Nathan J. Brown, “The Once and Future One-State Debate,” in Edward P. Djerejian, Marwan Muasher, and Nathan J. Brown, eds., Two States or One? Reappraising the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse,
and one alternative proposal suggests that the international community establish a “new Israel-Palestine” with immigration policies engineered to ensure a roughly equal share of Jews and Palestinians.198

None of the variants of this alternative is likely to be feasible in the near term. This reality has been acknowledged by many of its proponents, who recognize that it will continue to be resisted by Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community alike. As an example, one analyst concluded that this solution “is the mortal threat . . . to Israel’s identity and indeed existence as a Jewish state,” would be “pure folly” for Palestinians to support, and would be rejected by the international community because it “threatens the West’s vested interests not only in the two-state solution, but in Israel itself.”200 It is perhaps unsurprising that none of the variants of this alternative have yet received backing by any major group.201

**Jewish One-State Solution**

The defining characteristics of the Jewish one-state solution are annexation of the West Bank by Israel, complete separation from Gaza, extension of full civil rights to all Palestinians absorbed during annexation, and continuation of all extant Israeli political institutions. Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 is critical because it removes about 1.8 million Palestinians from the areas in dispute by Israel and guarantees a Jewish majority in the new state as long as Gaza is excluded (at least in the near term).202 Advocates emphasize that this solution would ensure that Israel remains both a democracy and a Jewish state.203

In all variants of the Jewish one-state solution that we identified, the West Bank would come under full Israeli control and the PA would be dissolved. The West Bank Palestinians would have full access to Israeli social services (e.g., education, health) and

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199 This infeasibility was similarly acknowledged by early supporters of this solution, with one author describing it in 1990 as a “kind of utopian vision not at odds with the two-state solution but which looks to a day when Israel and an eventual Palestinian state would decide to merge through a process of mutual consent” (Muslih, 1990, p. 15; italics in original).

200 Karmi, 2011, pp. 72–73.

201 Karmi, 2011, p. 71, concludes that “with a few modest exceptions, no major institution or mass movement has adopted any variant of the one-state solution to date. Indeed, endorsements at any official level have stemmed only from oppositional groups or states outside the ‘Western club.’”

202 Some critics argue that Israel has not de facto relinquished control of Gaza such that it can be considered fully sovereign, and thus it cannot be in reality excluded (Lustick, 2019a).

would be allowed to move and live wherever they would like, though they could well face the same de facto and legal limitations as Arab Israelis today, such as the inability to get building permits. Israelis would similarly be able to move and live anywhere they choose within the state, including in primarily Palestinian areas, such as Ramallah, and the settlements would remain, likely with ongoing subsidization from the state.

The major difference between the variants of the Jewish one-state solution involves the rights granted to the West Bank Palestinians. For some of its advocates, guaranteeing all Palestinians full citizenship and the right to vote is critical, as it would guarantee that “Israel would not cease to be a democracy.” On the other extreme, to guarantee Jewish control, some proposals suggest that full citizenship would be conditional on an individual’s willingness to take a “loyalty pledge” to Israel, which would likely ensure that “very few Palestinians would have the right to vote, and only in the distant future.” Other ways to limit Palestinians from voting have been proposed, such as offering citizenship only to Palestinians who have never been arrested by Israel. Loyalty oaths and other mechanisms could be used to disenfranchise Palestinians to ensure Jewish control at the ballot box.

Demography is clearly central to this alternative, as preserving a Jewish majority would be critical for ensuring that the state retains its Jewish character in a democracy. Early proponents for this alternative referenced population estimates of 1.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank (as of 2010) in their analysis and concluded that the “30 percent Muslim minority in Israel” created by this annexation was a manageable challenge. This estimate of Israel’s population is substantially lower than the contemporaneous estimates of 2.5 million reported by the Israeli military and with

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204 Glick, 2014, p. 119.
205 Arens, 2010. This approach has also been advocated for by former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin (Naomi Zeveloff, “Israel’s President Backs One-State Solution—with Equal Rights for Palestinians,” Forward, February 13, 2017) and Uri Elitzur, the original author of this solution (Noam Sheizaf, “Endgame,” Haaretz, July 15, 2010).
207 Attributed to Tzipi Hotovely in Nathan Jeffay, “Right-Wing MK ‘Give Palestinians Israeli Citizenship,’” Jewish Chronicle, March 4, 2010. Caroline Glick proposes a similar type of conditionality (Glick, 2014, p. 120): “Israel will place reasonable limits on eligibility for citizenship. For instance, past or current membership in terrorist organizations, and past or current incitement to violence against Israel, should disqualify an individual from acquiring citizenship.”
208 E.g., Arens, 2010; Tzipi Hotovely as referenced in Susser, 2010.
210 The Israeli military relies on estimates produced by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, which reported an estimated 2.5 million residents of the West Bank in 2010 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020).
which other noted demographers have not concurred; however, the new state would still maintain a Jewish majority even under these other estimates. Population estimates for 2018, using the larger estimates of the West Bank’s population, indicate that such a new state without Gaza would have a 56-percent Jewish majority (and a 40-percent Arab minority) if implemented today.

There are two proposed approaches for how this solution might be implemented. The first, which is implicit in the variants that propose full citizenship for the Palestinians, is the immediate and unilateral annexation of the entire West Bank. The second set of proposals offers a more gradual approach, concluding that the process “will take between a decade and a generation to complete.” One advocate from this latter group suggests that this gradual annexation would involve Israeli law applied first to the Jewish-majority areas and later to the entire West Bank.

The Jewish one-state solution is sometimes viewed as feasible because it could be implemented unilaterally by Israel. Given that Israel would control the formation of the new state, there would be significant pressure to limit the number of West Bank Palestinians to whom full citizenship rights would be extended. The result could be a nondemocratic single state. The Jewish one-state solution does not deal explicitly with how such a large Arab minority bloc would translate into voting and political power, nor does it explicitly deal with how the Gaza issue is to be resolved.

Undemocratic One-State Reality

Observers of the conflict have long noted that the current trajectory of the status quo, including Israeli policies, could eventually lead to a “one-state reality” in which

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211 Lustick, 2019a; Faitelson, 2009; Faitelson, 2013; and O’Malley, 2015.

212 With a 40-percent Arab minority, the election process and power of various voting blocs would likely change, and the relative power of the Arab minority would have to be determined but would likely increase significantly.


214 Sheizaf, 2010.

215 Attributed to Hanan Porat in Susser, 2010; and Sheizaf, 2010.

216 Indeed, one less “optimistic” advocate of this alternative assumes that most will apply for Israeli permanent residency status, though only a small number will apply for citizenship (Glick, 2014, p. 197). There will be significant pressure to design the new state institutions to ensure that some version of this happens.

217 Supporters of the plan recognize that a determination of whether a much larger Arab population “would be impossible for Israeli society to meet . . . [was] a question that Israeli politicians, and all Israelis—Jews and Arabs alike—need to ponder” (Arens, 2010).

“Israeli Jews will no longer be the majority.”219 Some observers feel that Israel is already there.220 However, the past few years have seen a significant intensification in the implications of this one-state reality, as Israel has begun to establish mechanisms, rules, and regulations that favor Israeli Jews over other groups and guarantee continued Jewish control over the state. This escalation is being driven by the creeping settlement expansion in the West Bank and the recent revision to Israel’s Basic Law, approved by the Knesset in 2018, as well as other legal changes,221 which many believe to be deliberately discriminatory against the non-Jewish population.222

The emergence of the undemocratic one-state reality has been gradual and is a result of two major policy shifts in Israel. The first of these, temporally, has been the progressive formal annexation of the West Bank. Israel has long been able to sustain its claim as a democracy while denying equal rights to the millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank because the situation was always thought to be temporary until a final resolution of the conflict emerged.223 However, the de facto or formal annexation of the West Bank and the resulting weakening of the authority and viability of the PA continue to erode the validity of this argument as Israeli control of the West Bank becomes, de facto, permanent.

The second policy shift is the new Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People, which was approved by the Knesset on July 19, 2018.224 This Basic Law took a step toward codifying unequal rights for Jews and non-Jews, “enshrin[ing] the right of national self-determination as ‘unique to the Jewish people’—not all citizens.”225 The bill goes beyond saying that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people “to unequivocally state that Jews—and only Jews—have the exclusive right to ‘self-determination’ within Israel.”226 Opponents of the law see it as undermining Israel’s democracy and

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219 Lederman, 2016. Like all other ideas in this particular conflict, the one-state reality is not a new idea (e.g., Gary Sussman, “The Challenge to the Two-State Solution,” Middle East Report, Vol. 231, Summer 2004, p. 37; Lustick, 2019a; Tilley, 2005; Nusseibeh, 2011; and Peter Beinart, “I No Longer Believe in a Jewish State,” New York Times, July 8, 2020). Although it is theoretically possible for Jews to exist as a minority in a democratic state—as is the case in the United States, which hosts the largest Jewish diaspora community—recent developments in Israel have shown a simultaneous shift away from democratic norms (Scheindlin, 2019a).

220 Lustick, 2019a; Beinart, 2020.

221 Scheindlin, 2019a. Scheindlin traces the changes in a wide range of laws that affect the democratic nature of Israel today.


undermining the support of the Druze community, which has long been loyal to the State of Israel.\textsuperscript{227} In theory, this does not preclude a two-state solution.\textsuperscript{228} There will be debate in the years to come, as there is now, on whether these trends are truly indicative of an emerging undemocratic one-state reality. The PA will trickle along despite annexation, and the ethnic discrimination codified in the revised Basic Law is likely no different from the de facto discrimination of Arab Israelis under the current system. However, unlike the deliberate approach of the Jewish one-state solution, which absorbs all of the West Bank and gives its residents a path to Israeli citizenship, this one-state reality will continue to deny equal rights to all groups of individuals.

\textsuperscript{227} It is worth noting that the Basic Law does not preclude the emergence of a two-state solution (Sommer, 2018).

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For decades, the two-state solution has dominated efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Growing doubts about the viability of the two-state solution raise the question of which, if any, possible alternatives could succeed, if appropriately supported by the international community.

RAND researchers conducted 33 focus groups in the region to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the viability of five alternatives: the status quo, the two-state solution, a confederation, annexation, and a one-state solution. The focus groups, conducted in July 2018 and May 2019, collected detailed opinions of more than 270 individuals, including West Bank Palestinians, Gazan Palestinians, Israeli Jews, and Israeli Arabs. These data provide a novel means of investigating whether there are any areas of overlap between Palestinians and Israelis that might form the basis for renewed dialogue.

None of the alternatives was acceptable to a majority of both Israelis and Palestinians. The two-state solution was the most politically viable alternative, although all four populations voiced skepticism toward it. The status quo was preferred by Israeli Jews but strongly disliked by Palestinians. West Bank Palestinians’ preferred alternative was the two-state solution, while Gazans ranked a one-state solution slightly above the two-state solution. The data highlight the deep distrust and profound animosity of each side for the other. It is hard to imagine a departure from present trends and where they might lead unless and until strong, courageous leadership among Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community articulates a desire for a better future for all.