

## Political Division and Social Destruction

### *Generalized Trust in Palestine*

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**ABSTRACT** This article discusses the effect of the political division between Fatah and Hamas on the level of generalized trust in Palestine. It argues that the level of trust in Palestinian society has been shaped and influenced by the ongoing political division since 2007. As the level of trust has been declining since 2007, this research suggests that distrust in the political system, the deteriorated healthcare and education services, the high level of unemployment, corruption, and the violation of human rights in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have led to the decline of the level of generalized trust in society at large. This study uses statistical test results to support the main argument. Data available from 2007, 2011, 2014, and 2017 from the Arab Barometer are used to examine how institutional and contextual factors affect the level of generalized trust in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The article discusses the results and how creating a hybrid society has contributed to lowering the level of trust generally. It seeks to understand the change in social trust among Palestinians over the years of the ongoing division, and examines how the political division, directly or indirectly, has led to the current low level of trust that has left remarkable changes and deep polarization in Palestinian society.

**KEYWORDS:** trust, political division, Palestine studies, divided societies, Gaza

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### INTRODUCTION

In June 2006, the Palestinian Authority (PA) organized the second parliamentary elections in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which, surprisingly, resulted in a sweeping victory for the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) (Wilson 2006). It was the first time that an Islamist movement, opposing the Oslo Accords and the peace process, had won the majority of parliamentary seats. However, the results of the elections were not met with respect from many parties: local, regional, and international. The United States, the European Union, and other Western countries boycotted the Palestinian government formed by Hamas's leader, Ismael Haniya. At the same time, the

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Gaza Strip, which had been suffering from severe security chaos and instability, where the killing of a person in daylight by a member of a militia or a tribe's man was the norm, witnessed few clashes between Hamas members and Fatah activists. While Hamas was democratically elected in fair elections, many Fatah leaders, who were heads of security enforcement agencies, refused to take orders from the appointed minister (Saed Siam). This forced Hamas's minister to use his party forces under the name Al-Qwa Al Tanfiziya (the executive forces), which are paramilitary units, borrowed from Al-Qassam brigades (PalInfo 2006). The executive forces were formed to ensure the minister had powerful units loyal to him to face the new challenges and obstacles that were institutionalized to bypass Hamas's new minister by Fatah leaders and the security generals. This was the first time that a minister officially violated the law by forming a new paramilitary police unit without an official decree from either the president or parliament.

Since then, clashes escalated between Hamas forces, including Al-Qassam brigades on the one side and PA's forces and part of Fatah forces on the other, with hundreds of individuals either wounded or killed. In June 2007, almost one-and-a-half years after the elections and more than a decade of Fatah and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)-dominated rule in the Gaza Strip, Hamas consolidated its power and forcefully took control of the Gaza strip, routing Fatah and PLO security forces loyal to President Abbas and Fatah strong man Mohamad Dahlan. June 2007 witnessed an episode in the Palestinian political and ideological division that continues to affect the social, political, and economic lives of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank today. It has been dubbed the most serious issue that undermines the capability of the Palestinians to have an independent state, but has also served as a catalyst to make the Palestinian question in general a marginal issue among the Arab nations, mainly after the Arab Spring (Alijla 2014). The societal and political division between the Palestinians was clear from the start, not only between activists of both parties but also between intellectuals, academics, writers, and professionals. For example, pro-Hamas and the military takeover called the military action "*Albasm*" (termination), while pro-PLO and Fatah dubbed it as a *Alinqilabb* (coup). *Albasm* is meant to represent the end of the security chaos and the harassment of Hamas's activists and members. For a long time, the security apparatuses of the PA were accused of murdering, torturing, and imprisoning Hamas's members and activists. *Albasm* for them, therefore, meant using force to put an end to the existing conditions. For Fatah and its loyalists, the *Alinqilabb* represented

a military takeover from the legitimate rulers, who for them was President Abbas and the security forces—institutions that had ruled Gaza since 1993. After that, the majority of employees in civil and security institutions were told to stay at home, leaving room for Hamas to carry out the responsibility for all issues, with the exception of education and health, while the PA continued to pay the salaries of teachers and employees, to send medical supplies, and pay health sector employees' salaries, despite the fact that the policies of Hamas were against those loyal to the PA and the PLO in the health and education sectors. Between 2007 and 2009, Hamas built parallel governmental institutions, comprised mainly of its own members, paid their salaries within a defined hierarchy, and ignored the employees who had been previously employed. This created two categories of employees: those who received salaries from the PA in Ramallah while not working at all and those who were Hamas affiliates who received salaries from the Hamas de facto government. This created social tension between the two categories, comprising, on the one hand, high-ranking employees and well-established groups who once had high social and political power in society and, on the other, small families and young, low-ranking officers who suddenly came to power and had more influence. This was unacceptable to Fatah and PLO affiliates.

In September 2007, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) conducted a poll covering more than 1000 Palestinians. The findings showed that Hamas's military coup in the Gaza Strip was not supported by the majority of the Palestinians. Only twenty-two percent of Palestinians supported Hamas's takeover of Gaza, while seventy-three percent opposed it. Support for Hamas's actions increased in the Gaza Strip (thirty-one percent) compared with the seventeen percent in the West Bank (PCPSR 2007).

## **A BROKEN SOCIETY**

The internal divisions and conflicts between Palestinians have created two political entities that had already been fragmented geographically by the Israeli occupation. Both have their own separate ideology, administration, and bureaucracy. This division has affected the Palestinian project adopted by the PLO in 1974, which entailed the establishment of the Palestinian state in any part of Palestine (Gresh 1988). The military control by Hamas in the Gaza Strip in 2007 created two political entities that included two ministries, two prime ministers, and disabled the work of parliament. While Hamas claimed its legitimacy from the results of parliamentary elections, the

Palestinian president and Fatah turned to the PLO charter and the Central Council of the PLO to legitimize their authorities.

The consequences of the Palestinian political division had a direct impact on society and its relation to the state's institutions. One major gap was the absence of the legislative authority that oversaw the work of government and the security agencies. This led to severe violations of law and human rights (Alwnah, Hamad, and Bargouthi 2014).

Many scholars have tried to examine the causes and consequences of the political division on Palestinian society. Ibrahim Abrash (AbrAbrash 2015) argues that the division between Fatah and Hamas was catastrophic and that it led not only to political but also to societal, cultural, and financial issues, and also buried any hope for a geographic unification between Gaza and the West Bank. He examined the intersections between the siege on Gaza, political division, and the reconciliation process and how it influences Palestinian society in Gaza. He also suggested that the current political division would continue, affecting all aspects of politics and society.

Azzam Shaath (Shaath 2013) studied the roots of the Palestinian division, paying special attention to the ideological differences between Hamas and Fatah, and the barriers towards reconciliation. He concluded that the 2006–07 clashes caused great harm to the Palestinians and destroyed the trust between Fatah and Hamas and their members. The majority of scholarly work among the Palestinians focused on the relationship between Fatah and Hamas, the causes of the political division, and the barriers towards achieving a meaningful and serious reconciliation. With the exception of a few analyses and research articles, there is little literature written on the impact of the political division on the Palestinians.

The first report that examines the effect of the political division on families and personal relationships was researched by the Women Affairs Center in Gaza. It provided shocking testimonies by Palestinian women of how the division has affected the relationships between families that, in many cases, has heightened the violence against women as well as the divorce rate (WCF 2008).

Ouda Awad (Awad 2011) examined the effect of the political division on social relations among the Palestinians and argued that the division has severely affected the relationship between individuals in society, especially within families that had lost one of their members. Awad asserts that it has undermined the social resilience of families, which was integral to political mobilization. His argument stresses that the cracks within social relations have led to a high rate of violence, especially against women and among youth.

While Awad examined the impact of the political division, he did not provide a clear mechanism of how the division affected these relations.

Maher Abu Zant (Ma'an 2008), a political sociologist from Naja University in the West Bank, argues that while the focus is on the political side of the division, the actual effect is on the social fabric of Palestinian society. For Abu Zant, the result of the political division is a brain drain, immigration, and violence, which is evident within society. Raed Naerat from Nablus agrees with Abu Zant, yet he asserts that the political division has deepened social tensions, which decreases the resilience and social cohesion of society (Ma'an 2008).

AlBatniji's analysis and exploration clarifies how the political division extended to affect the social structure of society in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. He explains how the political division increased violence among families and created a tribal-political division where some tribes and families severed relationships with other because of differing political orientation. Moreover, there was an increased phenomenon of marriage based on political affiliations as well as a wave of divorce that has affected Palestinian society since 2007 (AlBatniji 2010).

In general, the political division and the creation of new informal institutions within the society, as a result of distrust in political parties, institutions, and also between themselves, required a new social contract. Most scholars agree that there is a serious structural and functional crisis affecting social and political structures, relations, concepts, and forms of work prevailing in Palestinian politics.

## **SOCIAL CAPITAL AND LEVEL OF TRUST IN PALESTINE**

Several studies examine social capital in Palestine, especially the relationship between social capital and different social phenomena, such as public health, democracy, and employability. Abu-Qare (2010) assesses the effects of social capital, which according to the study are composed of networks among individuals and institutions, which are based on trust and civil engagement on health programs. He concludes that social capital has a high impact on health in Palestine, and that successful nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work in the health sector depend on social capital as a mechanism through which to heighten their impact.

The study by Giacaman (2017) on social capital among the youth in Palestine reveals a low level of social capital among Palestinian youth, asserting

that feelings of exclusion in young people are one of the primary reasons. Their study demonstrates a deep-seated lack of trust, and understandable disappointment with the Palestinian leadership. Giacaman notes that the “generally vulnerable situation of most Palestinian communities make for a painful living reality characterized by increasing loss of trust and hope for reducing the suffering which Palestinians endure” (25).

Other studies examine the relationship between social capital and trust, as related to the employability of Palestinian university graduates. They confirm the link between a higher probability of employment and social capital, yet they suggest that particularistic trust plays a major role in the employability of recent graduates (Al-Sharabati 2015).

In 2007, Naser and Hilal conducted a social capital survey that examined many variables, including trust in political institutions and political parties. They found that more than seventy-five percent of the sample in the West Bank and Jerusalem lack trust in other people in general. They found that trust is higher in towns than in the countryside, while businessmen have higher levels of generalized trust than others in society. Moreover, the survey indicated varying levels of trust in clans’ members, neighbors, and religious and political leaders. In camps, trust in the clans was highest and in politicians the least. Trust in religious leaders, politicians, and work colleagues falls as the education level of respondents rises (Nasr and Hilal 2007).

Moreover, Amaney Jamal (Jamal 2009) examined the effect of social capital and interpersonal trust on democracy and democratic attitudes. Using data from 2007, and borrowing Putnam’s flagship publication, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), she examined the role of civil engagement, interpersonal trust, and support for institutions among association members in the West Bank. Jamal (2009) offers an insight into how and when social capital aids democratic institutions. However, her analysis focuses only on the West Bank and does not examine the Gaza Strip, and it does not seek any explanation for the effect of political institutions/division on the level of generalized trust.

Abu-Zaher (2013) explored the relationship between social capital and democracy in Palestine and Egypt. Her findings reinforce Jamal’s (2009) initial argument that stresses the positive relationship between social capital and democracy.

None of these researchers examined generalized trust as a significant part of social capital. The majority of these studies focused on social capital’s associational and civil engagement components can have a negative effect on trust

and social capital, since not all members of any association would have a positive impact on society. Besides that, none of these studies examined the effect of political division at the level of trust between people.

The present article argues that the low level of generalized trust can be explained not only by historical and inherited distrust but also by institutional factors such as political divisions that undermine societal and political practices.

Palestinian society has experienced a decreasing level of trust since 2007. Despite the lack of studies that examine trust in Palestinian society, interviews and other literature stress the sandwich situation that compresses Palestinian society. The first is occupation and its siege on the Gaza Strip; the second is the Palestinian division. The consequences are frustration, hopelessness, distrust in the system and between each other, and extremism (Alijla 2015).

Despite the fact that Palestinians are not composed of different sects such as Lebanon or Syria, and they share the same strong, national identity, they have a multilayered personal, communal, regional, and tribal identity. For instance, a Palestinian from Gaza would identify himself as Palestinian-Gazan if he is a native Gazan, and if he is a refugee, he would identify himself as a Palestinian refugee from Gaza. A Palestinian refugee from Syria would identify himself as a Palestinian Syrian. In Palestine, they identify themselves based on region, village, or origin. For instance, a native Gazan would identify himself as “Gazawi” and a native from Khan Younes would identify themselves as “Qlai’i,” while someone from Bethlehem would say “Talhami,” and so on. Refugees would identify themselves by their original village pre-1948 Palestine, more than being from the city in which they were born or subsequently. Moreover, and until recent years, intermarriage between refugees from cities and rural areas or refugees and native people was not acceptable for certain families. In the 1980s, a new identity emerged as an alternative to the failure of pan-Arabism, which is Islamic identity that overlaps with political Islam. Miarai (2008) argues that Israeli colonization and occupation, especially after the Oslo Accords, contributed to these fragmented identities. Abu Rahma (2018) argues that internal Palestinian division has created a distorted Palestinian identity as well as more fragmentation and a new sectarian political identity.

The data from the Arab barometer show a huge decline in the level of social trust. Between 2007 and 2016, distrust between people increased by almost twenty percent. In 2007, fifty-nine percent of people said that most people were not trustworthy. In 2011, it increased to seventy-six percent. While 2013

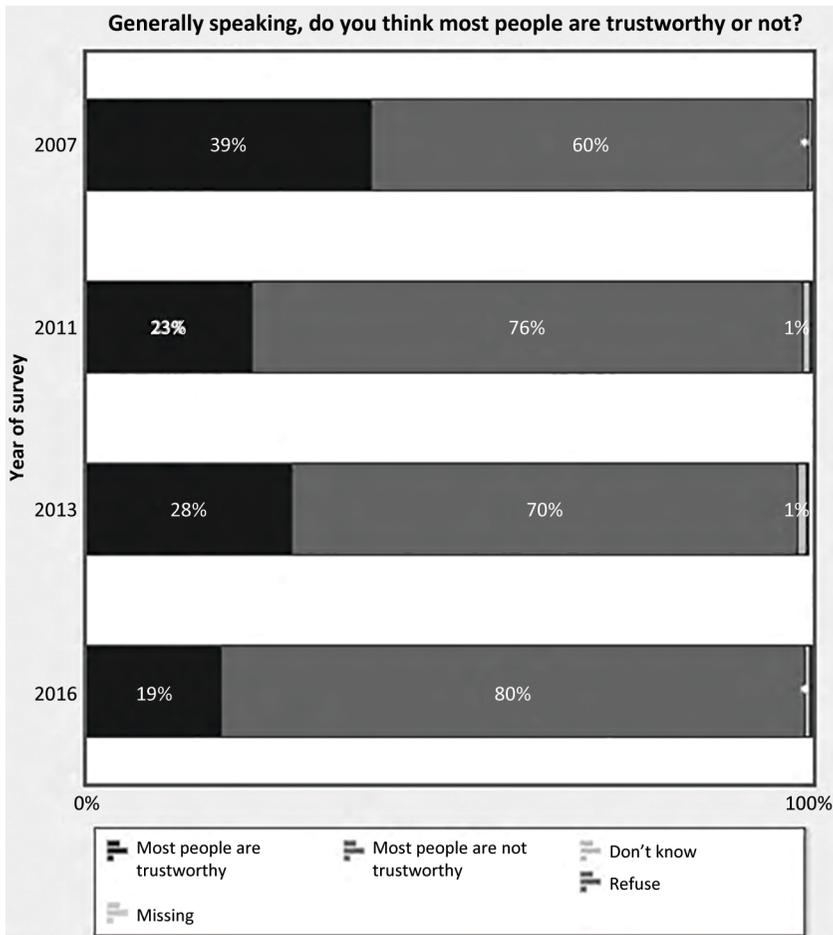


FIGURE 1. Trust in Palestine, 2007–16

witnessed an increase in the level of trust, it showed a sharp increase in distrust in 2016 to reach eighty percent. The increase in trust in the third wave of the Arab Barometer can be explained by the time coincidence between the reconciliation agreement signed between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo at the end of May 2012 and the survey conducted by the end of the year (Alaraby 2015) (Figure 1).

According to the PCPSR (2012), in March 2012, forty-six percent of Palestinians believed that reconciliation would succeed and forty-nine percent believed it would not. However, in September 2012, right after the signing of the Cairo agreement, forty-two percent believed that unity would not return, fourteen percent thought it would return soon, and forty percent thought

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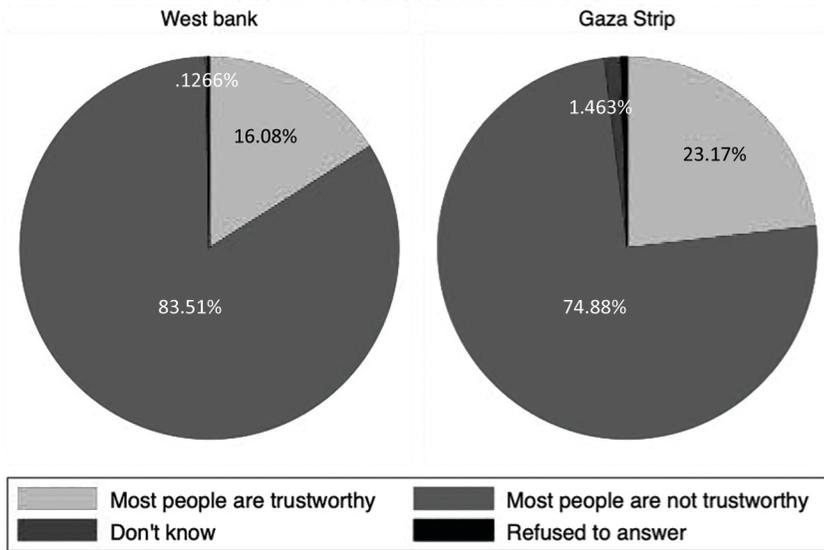


FIGURE 2. Level of Trust in Palestine by Region, 2016

it would return, but only after a long time (PCPSR 2012). The hope that Palestinians had in the aftermath of the reconciliation agreement increased the level of trust. The trust in political parties, the feeling of security and safety, and ability to end the violations of human rights among the Palestinians increased. Celebrations in which Fatah and Hamas members jointly participated evidenced emotional moments that led to the belief that reconciliation was underway. The shock came afterwards when trust dropped sharply to reach eighty percent of distrust (Figure 2).

### SAMPLES AND DATA

A single case study was selected for the quality of interviews and availability of data. In addition, for each case, interviews, policies, administrative papers, observations, and reports were used as both primary and secondary sources. Data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed with the coding process. First, the interview text was reviewed and divided into categories (e.g., the entry and exit of policies of civil society, equality of healthcare and education services, feelings of safety). These categories were then analyzed in accordance with their relation to each other and to trust.

The use of logistic regression (logit) is a necessary step in order to check the effect of combinations of variables and single conditions from the analysis, given that it is one of the most commonly used statistical methods to assess the probability of trust in a society as a result of a set of variables. Logistic regression models test the relationship between a set of independent variables and the dependent variable; in this case, either trusting or distrusting others. For practicality and a binary outcome, this study used logit regression and was modeled using Stata 14.

The author used the four different waves of the Arab Barometer data. The Arab Barometer is used to obtain data on political and societal attitudes of citizens in Palestine. In parallel, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect information about study subjects' personal feelings about other sects and the impact of formal institutions on the relationship between individuals from different sects.

The first series of data comes from 2007, immediately following the internal division; the last survey was conducted in February 2016. The Arab Barometer survey was based on nationally representative samples of adults aged eighteen years and older. Study participants were distributed proportionally to population size. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Arabic using a complex sample design, which included stratification and clustering. The survey was stratified by the West Bank and Gaza and then by provinces within each region. The sample was further divided by type of settlement (urban, rural, and refugee camp). Interviews were distributed proportionally to the population. Census blocks, which comprise approximately 150 residential units, represent the primary sampling unit (PSU). Households were randomly selected in clusters of ten. Within each household, a Kish grid was used to select the final respondent. A total of 820 respondents were interviewed in urban areas, 220 in rural areas, and 160 in refugee camps.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic personnel, civil service professionals, and non-political public figures. Observations made during conversations with taxi drivers and shopkeepers were recorded where applicable. Interview data were collected and analyzed.

## **STATISTICAL MODEL AND RESULTS**

Logistic regression was used to explain the effect of political division on generalized trust as a dependent variable. As generalized trust is binary, the regressions

showed the degree of change to be either more or less trust. To ensure the analysis was properly conducted, data were gleaned from records that had missing data.

The model illustrates the various determinants and examines its impact on the level of generalized trust. Based on the literature review and observations of Palestinian society (2007–17), the model checks how satisfaction with the performance of governments, violations of human rights, political leaders' concern about public issues, as well as the presence of corruption impact the level of trust in Palestinian society.

Trust is measured as a dichotomous variable and can take a value of either 0 (trust) or 1 (distrust). Government performance was presented in three variables: (1) the feeling of security and safety in society; (2) the level of satisfaction with the education system; and (3) the performance of government in creating employment opportunities. Institutional determinants contain four other determinants: (1) violation of human rights; (2) the presence of corruption; (3) participation in informal education; and (4) trust in the judiciary and legal system. Another variable is the perception of survey participants of the performance of political leaders. The construction of the variables is described in Table 1. The models tried to capture the extent to which the different variables influence the level of generalized trust in Palestinian society. Each variable has a direct relation with the political division in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Violation of the human rights of people arrested for their political affiliations, corruption, and poor performance of public institutions amidst the division in the bureaucracy have worsened the political division in Palestine.

The hypothesis tested is:

*H-static: Political division has no influence on the level of generalized trust.*

*H-dynamic: Political determinants have an influence on the level of generalized trust.*

The hypothesis examines the invariability with regard to (1) the role of governmental performance in the form of institutional determinants on the level of generalized trust; and (2) the effect of corruption and violation of human rights on the level of generalized trust.

## **RESULTS: POLITICAL DIVISION AND TRUST**

Results from the logit model are shown in Table 2. This model shows that trust in the judiciary and legal system is significant and positively correlated

with generalized trust. The less trust there was in the judiciary and legal system, the more people tended to believe that people were not trustworthy. Based on the data, the majority of people who answered that they trusted the judiciary and legal system (forty percent) said that “anyone who completely trusts anyone is asking for trouble.” Yet, we have to consider that only nine percent have a great deal of trust in the judiciary and legal system, and thirty-one percent have quite a lot of trust. In Gaza, fifty-four percent of the individuals surveyed said that “they have no trust at all in the judiciary and the legal system,” in contrast to sixty-one percent in the West Bank.

Other variables included corruption in Palestine. It showed that the belief that corruption was present in the government is significantly linked to generalized trust. This implies that the more individuals assert the presence of corruption, the more likely they are to distrust people. Moreover, the presence of human rights violations also shows a significant correlation with generalized trust. The interpretation of such findings is complicated, however, and would not be easily understood without an understanding of Palestinian society, its politics, and the anthropology of its politics. In this model, we found that human rights violations were negatively correlated with trust. This means that those who believed that no human rights violations were committed were more highly trusting of others. Evidently, those who have affiliations with people in power would say that there were no human rights violations. It was clear that more than seventy percent of Palestinians believed that human rights violations were committed. Individuals who would say that there was a high level of human rights violations committed would have a higher probability to distrust others at a significant level, too. More than seventy-five percent of Palestinians believed that there were human rights violations in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The last variable was the evaluation of public services, represented here by the educational system. It implies that the more a person was dissatisfied, the higher the probability that he/she would distrust other people. More than fifty percent were dissatisfied with the public services in both areas.

- Model 1: includes variables that represent the most important factors observed during key informative interviews and personal observations. These variables represent the presence of human rights violations, trust in the judiciary and the legal system, corruption, and government performance in the education system.
- Model 2: developed by adding two variables to it which included feelings of security and safety for self and family, and participation in

TABLE 1. Variables used for Palestine

Variable	Expected sign	Explanation
Trust	Depended	Generally speaking, do you think most people are trustworthy or not? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0 Most people are trustworthy.</li> <li>1 Most people are not trustworthy</li> </ul>
Government performance on education system	+	How satisfied are you with the educational system in our country? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Definitely satisfied</li> <li>Satisfied</li> <li>Dissatisfied</li> <li>Definitely dissatisfied</li> <li>Don't know (do not read)</li> </ul>
Feeling of safety and security	+	Do you currently feel that your own personal as well as your family's safety and security are ensured or not? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fully ensured.</li> <li>Ensured.</li> <li>Not ensured.</li> <li>Absolutely not ensured.</li> </ul>
Corruption	+	To what extent do you think that there is corruption within the state agencies an institutions in your country? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To a large extent</li> <li>To a medium extent</li> <li>To a small extent</li> <li>Not at all</li> <li>I don't know</li> </ul>
Employment	+	How would you evaluate the current government's performance on creating employment opportunities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very good</li> <li>Good</li> <li>Bad</li> <li>Very bad</li> <li>Not the government's responsibility</li> <li>I don't know</li> </ul>

(Continued)

TABLE 1. (continued)

Variable	Expected sign	Explanation
Non-formal activities	+	Over the past 5 years, have you or someone in your family (members of the same household) participated in a youth educational program (for youth aged 12-18 years) outside the formal program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• I don't know (do not read)</li> <li>• Declined to answer (do not read)</li> </ul>
Political leaders	+	Do you agree or disagree that political leaders are concerned with the needs of ordinary citizens? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I strongly agree</li> <li>• I agree</li> <li>• I disagree</li> <li>• I strongly disagree</li> <li>• I don't know</li> </ul>
Violation of human rights	-	Do you think there is any type of human rights violations committed by the government? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> <li>3. I don't know (do not read)</li> <li>4. Declined to answer (do not read)</li> </ol>
Legal system	+	How much do you trust the courts and the legal system? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A great deal of trust</li> <li>• Quite a lot of trust</li> <li>• Not very much trust</li> <li>• No trust at All</li> <li>• I don't know</li> </ul>

Source: Arab Barometer, 2016-17.

non-formal activities in society. Feelings of security and safety were negatively correlated with the level of generalized trust. The more a person felt secure, the higher he/she would trust others. Moreover, the more individuals participate in extra- and non-formal activities, the higher they would trust other individuals in society.

- Model 3: included other demographic variables to see what effect these additional variables would have, if any, on models 1 and 2. They were employment status, gender and education level. The absence of age in the data set of the Arab Barometer was a challenge to include in the analysis. The model shows that the demographic variables have no significant impact on the level of trust.

The three models provide empirical evidence that political division characterized by corruption, poor public services, a partisan judiciary and legal system, as well as human rights violations will have an impact on the level of trust. Furthermore, they show that feelings of insecurity and safety for self and for family members, and the absence of participation in extracurricula and non-formal education programs, would result in less trust within the community.

The findings of the logistic regression are very relevant to the current situation in Palestine, where hopelessness, frustration, and insecurity prevail, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Trust, a very crucial part in any society, has been collapsing; this has negatively affected any effort to put an end to conflict. Peace in any society would be rendered all the more fragile by issues of security and safety, human rights violations, and the quality of public services. Palestinian society is at even greater risk of conflict, considering the Israeli military occupation and oppression it faces.

These results suggest that ending the political division and human rights violations, unifying the bureaucratic systems, and promoting the judiciary and the legal system are necessary prerequisites for trust to be regained in the long term. Furthermore, it is imperative that institutions and their bureaucratic mechanisms cease to be partisan or politically divided between any of the political parties and that an impartial and consociational mechanism become operational.

#### **DISCUSSION: CREATION OF HYBRID SOCIETY**

“Hybrid society” is a term borrowed from cultural studies in Homi Bahbah’s (Bahbah 1988) famous study on identities. Hybridity in society can be discussed through the framework of psychological analysis, which refers to determining hybridity by defining the other or the otherness of a group different in political or cultural affiliation, yet within a homogeneous ethnical or religious group, which creates a high level and fast alternation in opinions under internal and external effects, and not from an individual’s own beliefs. Hybridity gets its strength from its ability to impact emotions, opinions, and behaviors

TABLE 2. Statistical Models: Generalized Trust in Palestine

Predictor	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 3
Feelings of safety and security		-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Participation in non-formal activities		.13 (.19)	.10 (.19)
Quality of the educational system	.22** (.09)	.23** (.09)	.23* (.09)
Government performance in creating jobs		-.01 (.007)	-.01 (.007)
Corruption	-.07* (.01)	.02* (.01)	.02* (.01)
Political leaders are concerned about needs		-.005 (.005)	-.005 (.005)
Trust in the judiciary and legal system	.29*** (.08)	.30*** (.08)	.29*** (.08)
Violation of human rights	-.30* (.13)	-.28* (.13)	-.29* (.13)
Employment status			.18 (.18)
Education level			-.06 (.60)
Gender			.02 (.17)
Constant	.66 (.44)		.52 (.65)
Observations	1107		1145
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.034		0.046

Notes: Values are estimated coefficients (standard errors).

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

by comprising unauthentic opinions and emotions, presenting it as one block to the outside. Therefore, in a hybrid society, opinions are not presented as authentic or new, but through its strength as unprecedented. Moreover, hybridity leads to new phenomena and discourse within the society, as it

spreads mainly through social media. This provides wider space for a new wave of negotiation, maneuvering, and alienation on issues such as legitimacy, representation, and the meaning of specific social phenomena. The decreasing level of trust between the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as the change in their understanding of the principles of democracy and democratic values, has led to the creation of a hybrid society (Alijla 2018). This has resulted in a deep polarization between Palestinians, particularly the youth.

The decreasing level of generalized trust in Palestinian society has created space for political polarization to intensify the creation of the hybrid society whose members would be affected by their political affiliations as well as their eagerness for new opinions that play on their emotions and cultural values.

In almost every controversial public issue, Palestinian society changes its opinions and positions, thereby proving the existence of a cultural hybridity. This can be measured through social media debates that the author has been following and observing over the last decade. In general, social media discussions are not only representations of the general political and societal atmosphere in Palestine but also a force that affects general public opinion. Despite the absence of an academic definition of what constitutes a hybrid society, Jonathan Rutherford and Bahbah, in their definition of hybridity, borrowed from the negotiation politics field in plural societies, argue that hybridity can be found when a new form of coalition or changes of force push an individual or a group to alter and rethink their main and authentic opinions that fit within a specific context. The new formulated opinions may oppose their authentic values and norms (Bahbah 1988; Rutherford 1990). This is considered a negotiation technique that serves powerful political elites in society, assisting in ensuring their dominance or upholding their power.

The relationship between generalized trust in a community and hybridity is that a low level of trust facilitates the mechanism of otherness and, therefore, faster alternation and change in opinions that reflects the will of the political elites/parties. The complexity of hybrid society is that its members experience a fast alternation in their opinions or accept contrasting opinions within a very short period of time that back the position of political elites. However, this hybridity works to alter public opinion by distracting the public from the core issue being debated. In such a way, it serves a specific party by re-routing the direction of the debate to secondary topics that do not condemn the elites of a party. In many cases, secondary topics that are brought up as a maneuvering mechanism are more related to religious issues or cultural traditions, which

makes it easy to mobilize people, shifting their opinions away from criticizing the regime and its practices. In many cases, centralized mechanisms are used by elites of political parties to influence public opinions.

Palestinian society not only suffers from deep polarization that has caused decreasing levels of trust and the distortion of democratic values that brought about the political division between Hamas and Fatah. A confusing perception towards serious issues related to the governance structure is also prevalent. This is a strong indicator of the hybridity of the society. Data from 2016 polls published by the Arab Barometer showed that there are many contrasting opinions within it. Examples include almost forty percent of Palestinians agreed that religious clerics should have an influence over the decisions of government, while fifty-six percent opposed that opinion, and forty-two percent said that democracy was always preferable as a political system. In the same poll, seventy-two percent said that religious leaders should not interfere in politics, especially voter choices. Almost forty-one percent said that the laws of the country should be entirely based on Sharia; and around nine percent agreed that laws should be mostly based on Sharia. Only thirty-six percent said that laws should be based on a mix of Sharia and the will of the people; while nine percent said that they should be solely based on the will of the people. In the same poll, sixty-eight percent said they preferred a religious political party, while fewer than twenty percent said they preferred a non-religious political party. Ninety percent said they were against Sharia law on the issue of inheritance principles for women and that they should be equal when it came to inheritance.

Concerning women's rights, almost sixty-four percent said that they strongly agreed or agreed that woman could be president or prime minister in a Muslim country, while only thirty-five percent opposed that opinion. However, in the same poll, seventy-one percent said that men were better political leaders than women; more than eighty-six percent said that they strongly agreed or agreed that a married woman could work outside the home if she wished, while thirteen percent opposed that opinion. Surprisingly, in the same poll, fifty-one percent said that husbands should always have the final say in all decisions concerning the family, and only fifty percent opposed that opinion. These kinds of data show the high level of confusion or alternation in opinions based on trends of the effects of media or contextual narratives. When discussing these data with a researcher from Gaza, he explained the findings by saying, "They want to look cool when it comes to women's issues, because if a person opposes them, he would seem to be regressive and conservative."

As we have seen, hybridity in opinions can also affect opinions and perceptions on certain and crucial issues. Therefore, hybridity can be seen in many divided societies, including Palestine as a politically divided society. In the past decade, the Palestinian political and societal conditions were unhealthy and unsatisfying for the general public. There were accusations that writers, intellectuals, and activists were foreign spies and implementing foreign agendas, or were supported by one party or another. In many cases, Hamas put Palestinians from Gaza on trial, and their felony/crime was for “spying with Ramallah” (Abu Sahamallah 2014). One instance was in 2017. Following intensified calls to halt the security coordination between Israel and the PA, many called for a demonstration in Ramallah against a Fatah-backed security structure. Many women participated in the protest. The security forces brutally attacked the protesters, causing huge condemnation across Palestinian society and international human rights organizations (Amnesty International 2017). To divert public opinion, Fatah’s official Facebook page shared a picture of two women smoking cigarettes on the sidelines of the demonstration, stating: “is this what Palestinian society wants?” This incident opened a new and complicated debate on social media that diverted the public’s attention away from the main issue towards debating a side issue. The tactic used enabled the condemnation for the treatment of the protesters by Fatah forces and the PA’s security structure to become sidelined. Fatah, the party that triggered this debate, is a socialist and secular party that advocates for women’s participation and engagement in the struggle against the occupation. By using this tactic to divert public opinion, it went against the very beliefs and mottos of its own political party which it purports to uphold and mobilize for.

Political parties, mainly Hamas and Fatah, are engaged with the public in a covert, intangible, invisible quasi-negotiation process by laying down a number of sensitive issues that matter to the public so as to mobilize them or create a third sphere where the two main opposite, yet extreme, opinions remain as the main focal points which both Hamas and Fatah have succeeded in rallying people around. This is usually the pattern on any public opinion issue that condemns either Fatah or Hamas. No doubt, the use of public opinion diversion, through the creation of a hybrid society (attitudes and culturally), has very serious and hazardous consequences on society and mainly its youth. It empowers the authority of both Hamas and Fatah, as authoritarian and divided parties, that control the two main segments of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, the use of paid activists to influence and alter public opinion by creating a hybrid society can create a chaotic

and confusing environment for the majority of Palestinians and facilitate the spread of extremist opinions. All this inevitably leads to hazardous consequences, primarily an increase in the alienation of the youth and a higher level of apathy towards any public issue, whether it be political, economic, or societal. For the public, mainly the youth, who are not affiliated with one party, the engagement in such discussions is costly, mentally and psychologically, and probably even socially, and ever more economically, such as the suspension of their salaries by the PA in Ramallah or arrest by Hamas/PA forces. This includes academics, civil society activists, writers, and theorists in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Second, the creation of a hybrid society provides greater space for the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to exercise their whims over the will of the people. They can continue their practices that violate human rights, arrest, security coordination with the occupation, corruption, absence of accountability, and ignoring the demands of the people.

In general, the hybrid society has to be first aspect that is dismantled when destructuring the attitudes and perceptions on crucial issues needed for a society to be healthy. The absence of trust between citizens usually creates a space for political parties to influence people through corrupt channels. An absence of trust leads to a hybrid society that has no public consultation on serious issues, or a lack of a democratic process within the political parties that presents the general governance pattern that both Fatah and Hamas are using to govern society.

Moreover, as figure 3 shows, the decreasing level of generalized trust among Palestinians has led to a decreasing level of trust in political parties as well as in political institutions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data available from the Arab Barometer show that the level of generalized trust in Palestine has been declining since the first wave in 2007. The declining level has not yet attracted many researchers to examine the impact of political division on social capital and trust in particular. This article examines the impact of political division on the level of trust. It employs quantitative methods and qualitative data based on interviews and personal observations of the researcher on the political division since the beginning of 2006.

Based on the literature review that mostly focuses on the impact of the political division on society, the quantitative analysis variables were selected

### Level of trust in political parties in Palestine

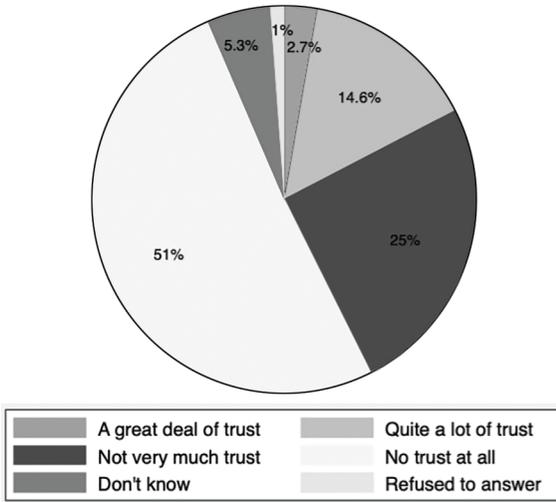


FIGURE 3. Level of Trust in Political Parties in Palestine, 2015-16

to represent the different arguments presented. After the analysis, this article analyzed the severe consequences of the political division and declining trust by presenting the concept of a “hybrid society.”

The trust in the judiciary and the legal system, the perception of corruption, the quality of public services, violations of human rights committed by the two governments, the feeling of insecurity and lack of safety, and the lack of extracurricula non-formal education were all found to have an impact on the level of generalized trust. People who feel insecure and unsafe in a society, and those who have not participated in non-formal education, are more likely to distrust others. High levels of trust were found to persist among the groups of individuals who are satisfied with the legal system and judiciary and satisfied with the performance of the two governments in creating job opportunities. One interesting finding was that individuals who think that politicians are concerned about the needs of the public are more likely to trust others in society. Moreover, the analysis showed that the same level of trust is common in the two regions of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, this research provides a description of the hybrid society that was created as a result of the political division in Palestine. It also attests to the relationship between trust and the political division that has created different parallel institutions and bureaucratic mechanisms that have

complicated the lives of the Palestinian people. Most importantly, the increasing level of human rights violation committed by both Hamas and Fatah has contributed to the feeling of both insecurity and distrust. The main argument maintains that trust is based on the cognitive feeling of threat to personal safety within a society and loss of faith in the legal system, judiciary, political parties, and the political system in general, which leads to more distrust within the society. ■

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