Palestinian Attitudes Towards Settlers in the West Bank

March 20, 2021

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Abstract:

We present survey data from 1,573 West Bank Palestinians with which we estimate that the average Palestinian lives 14 km (UI 11 to 18 km) from the closest Israeli settlement. We also show with this data that while Palestinians generally hold negative attitudes towards settlers in the West Bank, Palestinians who live closer to settlements and consequently have increased interactions with settlers and who work in a settlement, report more positive views towards settlers. Employing causal diagram analysis, we are able to rule out some alternative hypotheses such as that attitudes towards settlers encourage Palestinians to relocate closer to settlements. However, while we find the contact hypothesis in effect in this seemingly difficult arena, we are not sanguine about the future of this mechanism of reduced polarization. Since the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the majority of respondents stated that they have lost either a job or a business from COVID-related restrictions, suggesting that this positive contact effect could dissipate as Palestinians have less reason to interact with Israelis.²³

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² The authors thank New York University Abu Dhabi Social Sciences Division for funds to support this endeavor. Tesea Conte Thornton collected and analyzed the data and wrote the paper. Robert Kubinec assisted with statistical analysis and editing the paper.

³ All code and data to reproduce results are available from the Github repository <https://github.com/saudiwin/palestine>.

Introduction

For more than 70 years, the Arab-Israeli conflict has persisted with waves of hope and peace during the Oslo Accords, and periods of tragedy and resistance during the 1st and 2nd Intifada, and the numerous wars between Israel and Gaza. Following the 1967 War, in which Israel began its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, the settlement project was launched in the West Bank. These Israeli settlements, considered to be illegal under international law, are often cited as the greatest obstacle to peace and the successful implementation of a two-state solution (Shikaki, 2018). The West Bank is inundated with settlements that continue to grow in both population size and land. While the impacts of settlements on the peace process are often discussed and debated by the international community, the attitudes of Palestinians in the West Bank are left unheard. One cannot attempt to propose a solution to this conflict without understanding how settlements and settlers intersect and interact with Palestinians who live in the West Bank. While many people assume proximity to settlements and interactions with settlers will increase anti-settler sentiment among Palestinians living in the West Bank, we do not know if these assumptions are empirically accurate. This paper seeks to answer the question: does proximity to settlements and previous interactions with settlers worsen Palestinian attitudes towards settlers in the West Bank?

We found that Palestinians generally hold very negative attitudes towards settlers living in the West Bank. However, those who report having worked in a settlement or who have increased interactions with settlers have somewhat more positive views of settlers, which seems to be intriguing evidence in favor of the contact hypothesis reducing out-group animosity even amid the hierarchies created by the ongoing occupation. However, the majority of respondents

stated that they have either lost a job or business from COVID-related restrictions, suggesting that this contact effect could dissipate as Palestinians have less reason to interact with Israelis.

In this paper, we will proceed as follows. In the first section, we outline the historical context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as it pertains to settlers and the settlement expansion in the West Bank. Additionally, we present relevant literature on intergroup anxiety, Palestinian public opinions, and the unique nature of conflicts over homelands. Following this, we describe our data collection and methodology: including our variables, hypotheses, and survey administration. To conclude this study, we analyze the data collected and highlight the areas in which further research could be expanded.

1.1 Historical Context

The first settlement in the West Bank following the creation of Israel in 1948 was Kfar Etzion in 1967 (Eldar & Zertal, 2009). Hanan Porat was a leader of the settlement movement and helped establish the settlement in Kfar Etzion, arguing for Israel's claim to the land because he grew up in the kibbutz Kfar Etzion and the area had been settled by Jews before 1948. Between 1967 and 2017, more than 200 settlements were established in the West Bank. In 1974, Porat went on to help found Gush Emunim translating to "the bloc of the faithful", a right-wing national religious movement with the aims to annex all of the territories occupied by Israel following the 1967 War. Gush Emunim has been a major leader in the settlement movement of the West Bank, with significant support in the Israeli Parliament (mainly under Labor and Likud governments), which uses public funds to support settlements generously (Yaniv and Yishai, 1981). The governmental support for settlements has allowed Gush Emunim to put their

resources towards the production of propaganda and costly settlement operations to garner public support and cooperation for the settlement and annexation project.

Settlements are immensely important in the eyes of the Israeli government for both security and political purposes. Security settlements are in place to enforce the occupation and preserve outposts in areas with higher security risks. The Ofrah outpost revealed that settlements were also implemented for strategic purposes because of their location, rather than for their religious and symbolic importance in Judaism. Ofrah was built with no legal basis on land privately owned by Palestinians, displaying the unofficial nature of the settlement movement (Gorenberg, 2011).

Additionally, political settlements are often in geographic areas that are vital to redefining the borders of Israel. During the Begin administration, Ariel Sharon was appointed Minister of Agriculture and was tasked with defining and authorizing settlement activities throughout the country, which became synonymous with settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank. In the presentation of his settlement map, he outlined three main political and strategic goals: a string of urban industrial settlements along the center of the West Bank to control the coastal plain, increased construction of settlements along the Jordan Valley to defend the eastern border and provide security for new roads, and surrounding Palestinian villages in Jerusalem with settlements to “secure” the capital (Zertal and Eldar, 2009). The sporadic nature of settlements throughout the West Bank ensures that a future Palestinian state would not be congruent, thus making its formation complex and extremely difficult. Settlements in the West Bank virtually blur the borders of Israel and encompass the West Bank into their zone of control

and habitation. In formulating the maps of settlements, Sharon sought the prevention of the potential emergence of a contiguous Palestinian state (Gorenberg, 2011).

There are 131 settlements officially recognized by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, 110 settlements built without official authorization but that still receive governmental support and assistance (known as “illegal outpost”), 11 neighborhoods in areas within the West Bank that Israel annexed to the municipal jurisdiction of Jerusalem in 1967, and multiple settlement enclaves within the city of Hebron and Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem (B’Tselem, 2017). While some settlers believe modern-day Jews have a claim to the land in the West Bank because of its religious ties, others are attracted to live in the settlements because of the government subsidies. Settlers in the West Bank benefit from low local taxes, subsidized housing and education, favorable mortgages, and discounts on property declared state land (Ferziger, 2018). Settlers who are religious Zionists choose to settle in the West Bank to ensure the land will be part of Israel and their desire to live in the biblical land of Israel. However, settlements can be viewed through their strategic political value which could be used during peace negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel. Additionally, there are immigrants to Israel who choose to live in settlements as their last resort due to their desperate need for government subsidies.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

Palestinian Attitudes Towards Settlers

Prior research on the determinants of Palestinian attitudes towards settlers is fairly sparse. Some of the most relevant literature examines the question of Israeli settlements’ ability to

radicalize Palestinians (Calì & Miaari, 2015). Radicalization is measured through the support of political parties and opting out of supporting moderate factions. While this methodology is helpful to examine the voting behavior of Palestinians living in the West Bank and their political preferences, there are many factors at play when determining which faction to support beyond solely the presence of settlements.

Ervasti (2004) explores attitudes towards settlers in the context of Finland, in a comparative perspective with other European nations. Taking a broad approach examining socioeconomic status, gender, age, religiosity, political orientation, place of residence, marital status, and interaction with settlers, they find only limited explanatory power for these factors. Determining attitudes towards settlers in the West Bank is drastically different than determining how foreign-born settlers (immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers) are perceived by the local population in Europe. The context is very different in the West Bank because the settlers are in a position of privilege and mostly settle on the land for religious and politically strategic reasons. Therefore, performing similar research in the West Bank is necessary to understand and analyze the complex attitudes among Palestinians towards settlers.

Manekin et al. (2018) explore the material and symbolic attachment to disputed land in Israel. By conducting a series of original survey experiments in Israel, they find that sources of territorial attachment, including material and symbolic, vary in the population. However, the findings suggest that a majority of Jewish-Israelis are willing to pay substantial material costs to deepen Israeli territorial control in the West Bank. While the authors argue that varying public opinions would constrain policymakers by affecting the government's bargaining space, limited

restraint is likely given the current situation in the West Bank and continued settlement expansion under the Likud Party.

While the academic literature on Palestinian attitudes towards settlers is limited, journalists have worked to capture the perspectives of Palestinians living in the West Bank. Negative attitudes towards settlers date back to the Ottoman-era. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, petitions were sent from Palestine to Istanbul documenting the occurrence of settlers attacking villages and lotting property of Palestinians (Hasson, 2012). Within the settlement of Ofra (the largest unauthorized outpost in the West Bank), 60% of the land the settlement was built on was land registered as the property of Palestinians (Halbfinger, 2019). While much of the international community has condemned Israel's settlement project, Palestinians have witnessed the continued expansion of settlements throughout the West Bank. One Palestinian man encompassed the frustration and dilemma of settlers in the West Bank stating, "It's impossible to have peace between us because the main conflict between us is on a piece of land which they took by force, so how can I let a person steal my land, live in it and enjoy it, and live with him in peace?" (Lubell, 2019). Following the release of the former Trump administration's peace plan, which would legalize Israel's illegal settlements, Palestinians felt sidelined as Israel's desires were once again prioritized over Palestinian rights (Buttu, 2020).

The majority of extant public opinion data in Palestine has been collected through surveys administered by the Arab Barometer, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, and local universities. Based on the 2019 Arab Barometer, Palestinians remain pessimistic about the country and believe little has changed politically with the peace process with Israel frozen. The economy is cited as the most critical issue facing Palestinians in the West

Bank and Gaza, with frustration over corruption in the government adding to the challenges Palestine faces. The survey, conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, also found that Palestinians remain skeptical of developing stronger relations or receiving foreign aid from the United States and possess preferential ties to Qatar and Turkey (Arab Barometer, 2019). Within the West Bank, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research is a major source of Palestinian public opinion data, focusing primarily on domestic politics, foreign policy, and survey research. In connection with the research center, a joint Palestinian-Israeli survey examines the attitudes of both Israelis and Palestinians on the issue of the right to return (Shamir & Shikaki, 2005). Much of the public opinion data collected on Palestine focuses on the state of the economy, corruption, and democracy. However, public opinion surveys lack data on Palestinian attitudes towards settlers and the impacts of settlers on their daily lives.

Despite the lack of focus on Palestinian attitudes towards settlers in recent surveys, multiple Middle East scholars have employed the use of public opinion surveys throughout the region and within the West Bank. Zeira (2019) uses data from an original large-scale survey of participants and nonparticipants in Palestinian resistance, conducted in 68 localities across the West Bank, to demonstrate that intermediate levels of education significantly increase the likelihood of participation in protest. Additionally, data from the Arab Opinion Index has aided research investigating women's rights and democratic values in the region (El Kurd, 2018). Surveys from universities in the West Bank have also contributed to the use of public opinion data. Jaeger et al. (2012) employ longitudinal public opinion poll microdata of the Palestinian population from a set of surveys conducted by the Development Studies Programme at Birzeit University, located in the West Bank. Through these surveys, they find evidence suggesting that

collateral violence affecting Palestinian civilians has a stronger effect on the populations' political preferences relative to individuals directly targeted by the Israeli military. The data also reveals that major political events in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have had a longer-term impact on political preferences, with individuals who were teenagers during the period of the Oslo negotiations tending to have relatively moderate preferences and those who were teenagers during the First Intifada expressing more radical preferences. While public opinion data has been used widely throughout the West Bank and the region, minimal scholarship has used this data to investigate Palestinian attitudes towards settlers in the West Bank.

Contact Theory

What we do know based on previous research is that conflict over homelands adds an emotional layer to the negative attitudes expressed towards an outside group (Shelef, 2016). Additionally, because a disputed territory and sacred lands are central components to the conflict that persists between Israel and Palestinians, a separate theory of reasoning must be applied, which includes moral rules and intuition (Ginges et al., 2007). Rational cost-benefit analyses that can assist the explanation of conflict and conflict resolution are difficult to apply to violent conflicts where values like land ownership that are perceived as sacred are at stake. The specific actions of settlers matter. Palestinians perceive state-sponsored vigilantism in the illegal actions that are committed by settlers with informal cooperation from Israeli soldiers (Gazit, 2014). Assault, road blockages, destruction of private Palestinian property, and vandalism are all components of interactions Palestinians may have with settlers in the West Bank. Proximity to settlements and settlers likely makes the violence perpetrated more acute and dangerous (UN

OHCHR, 2016). This is particularly evident in the West Bank city of Hebron, where settlements are within the urban area of the city.

On the other hand, contact with individuals from an outgroup has been proven to promote understanding of outgroup perspectives. Perspective-taking can also ease intergroup anxiety, resulting in reduced stereotypes and more positive intergroup attitudes (Aberson & Haag, 2007). Gordon Allport (1954) proposed the contact hypothesis, a theory that suggests that prejudice and conflict between outgroups can be reduced if members of the groups interact with each other. These interactions can only be expected to work in situations that create opportunities for change and provide information that weakens existing stereotypes. According to the theory, contact between groups is most likely to reduce prejudice if the members of the two groups have equal status, common goals, institutional support, and work cooperatively (Allport, 1954). White, Schroeder, and Risen (2020) investigate relationship formation among outgroup (Palestinian and Jewish Israeli) pairs compared to ingroup pairs (Palestinian and Palestinian; Jewish Israeli and Jewish Israeli). Using 7 years of data from Jewish Israeli and Palestinian teenagers attending a 3-week summer camp, they find that propinquity is significantly more impactful for outgroup relationships, proposing that sharing an activity group is especially powerful for more dissimilar dyads because people are less likely to spontaneously engage with outgroup members in meaningful ways.

More recently, experimental evidence has questioned whether contact theory can truly explain reduced out-group prejudice in post-conflict settings. Zhor and Lyall (2020) investigate prejudice among locals following prolonged social contact with internally displaced persons (IDPs). They conducted a randomized controlled trial of a vocational skills training program in

Afghanistan that enrolled near equal numbers of locals and migrants. Despite the program offering prolonged and meaningful contact, meeting the conditions of the contact theory put forth by Allport (1954), the authors found no evidence of prejudice reductions towards IDPs. These findings reveal that during wartime, prejudicial beliefs may be increasingly difficult to transform.

The findings from Mousa's (2020) intergroup contact experiment in post-conflict Iraq are most applicable to the case of Palestinians and settlers in the West Bank given the power dynamics and post-conflict backdrop. The experiment randomly assigned Iraqi Christians displaced by ISIS to an all-Christian soccer team or a team mixed with Muslims. The intervention improved behaviors toward Muslim peers on the soccer field, however, it did not substantially affect behaviors in other social contexts nor did it yield consistent effects on intergroup attitudes. The discrepancy between changes in behavior and stagnant attitudes could be attributed to the post-conflict setting in Iraq, with social trust remaining low given the persecution and genocide of Christians by ISIS.

In the context of Palestinians and settlers in the West Bank, there is a large status differential between the two groups. A common circumstance of Palestinians interacting with settlers is from employment in a settlement, usually working as day laborers or in construction. Palestinians working in settlements are in a low position of power in contrast to the settlers they are working for. Since the groups do not possess equal status or power, a prerequisite described in Allport's contact theory, positive intergroup attitudes would not be expected.

Despite the unequal status of Palestinians and settlers, if the contact theory works in the West Bank, it should do so by decreasing intergroup anxiety. Intergroup anxiety can be defined as the negative process experienced when one anticipates a future or actual contact with an

outgroup member (Tausch et al., 2007). Stephan and Stephan (1985) argue that intergroup anxiety stems from expectations of negative consequences, embarrassment, rejection, or discrimination. The integrated threat theory distinguishes four different types of threat predictors, including realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes (Stephan and Stephan, 2000). These threats are all present for Palestinians living in the West Bank during potential and actual interactions with settlers.

As such, we seek to investigate how the contact hypothesis appears to be playing out given the rising number of settlements in the West Bank. We note that based on prior research, it does not seem to be an especially auspicious area for increased interaction to result in reduced out-group bias given the presence of social stratification caused by the occupation.

3. Hypotheses

In this paper, we test two hypotheses regarding the effect of settlement proximity on attitudes towards Israeli settlers.

Hypothesis 1: Palestinians that live in close proximity to settlements are more likely to express negative (positive) attitudes towards settlers.

Our initial expectation is that Palestinians who live in close proximity to settlements are more likely to express negative attitudes towards settlers because of the greater negative impacts on their lives cited previously. Settlements and the settlers in the West Bank have constant military protection, resulting in large numbers of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers. The

military presence can block roads and close checkpoints unexpectedly. These actions probably lead to frustration and humiliation. For example, Getmansky and Zeitzoff (2014) have used the proximity of rocket threats to explore the voting behavior of Israelis. They found that the vote share for right-wing parties was 2-6% higher in localities in rocket distance from Gaza.

Proximity to a threat of violence can impact decision-making and attitudes. Settlers and settlements present both a threat of violence and uncertainty because of the power and backing of the IDF.

Hypothesis 2: The effect of distance on attitudes towards settlers comes through increased settler interactions and work experience.

Interactions with settlers are substantively different than proximity to settlements per se. While we expect these variables to be correlated, they can occur separately--i.e., there may be Palestinians who live close to settlements who do not have many interactions with settlers and vice versa.

We also know that there is reason to think that interactions with settlers will tend towards the negative for many Palestinians. Private Palestinian land seizure is a common occurrence in the West Bank. These land confiscations are used in cases to build further settlements and outposts or appropriate the agricultural land used to grow crops. Additionally, harassment and violence perpetrated against Palestinians by settlers are routine in the West Bank. These kinds of interactions can heighten intergroup anxiety, or conversely, may reduce intergroup anxiety if the interactions are of a positive nature.

3.1 Causal Identification

We face the difficulty in this study of making causal claims with observational data. We cannot in general assume that if we observe in a cross-section of Palestinians a correlation between distance from a settlement, attitudes toward settlers, and work in a settlement, that the relationship is a causal one. One way of expressing this sentiment is that if we were able to randomize distance to a settlement for Palestinians, we could be more certain of why Palestinians were living in the location in which they are found, and hence that work experiences and subsequent changes in attitudes came about via distance and not some other mechanism. However, we note that the idea of relocating Palestinians for the purpose of an experiment is ethically abhorrent and so we turn to other mechanisms for obtaining inferential leverage.

Figure 1: Plot shows three possible causal scenarios. In (1), our proposed process is at work: distance (D) causes increases in work (W) which results in changes in attitudes (A). (2) and (3) are alternative causal explanations in which attitudes cause assortative sorting into either work and then relocation or relocation then work.

To help clarify what our primary concerns for inference are, we encourage the reader to consider the causal diagrams labeled (1), (2), and (3) in Figure 1. To simplify matters, we consider only three variables in these diagrams: D for distance to a settlement, W for work in a settlement, and A for attitudes towards settlers. Our proposed causal process, and the one we believe to be the most likely given prior research, is (1) in which being more proximate to settlements leads to more work opportunities in settlements and consequent changes in attitudes, either negative or positive. We make this assumption because we believe that Palestinian

proximity relative to settlements is not driven primarily by their own feelings towards settlers, but rather by the joint decisions of Israeli occupation authorities and Israeli settler groups seeking land.

However, we need to consider two alternative explanations labeled (2) and (3) in Figure 1. In (2), Palestinians with more pro-Israeli attitudes tend to move closer to settlements, which subsequently provides them with more job opportunities. In (3), more pro-Israeli sentiments cause Palestinians to seek job opportunities in settlements, and upon obtaining employment, Palestinians relocate to be closer to their work. Both (2) and (3) are more plausible in situations where freedom of movement is relatively easy and individuals can act on their own proclivities, which we doubt is often true in the West Bank, yet we still need to consider these alternative hypotheses.

Again, with cross-sectional data, we are somewhat limited in that we cannot trace individuals over time, which would be one way of establishing causal precedence. However, based on the diagrams in Figure 1, we can make predictions about how our causal process will manifest itself in the data if true. If (1) is the correct causal process, then when we compare Palestinians' attitudes controlling for both their distance from settlement and their work in settlements, we should see no relationship between attitudes and distance from a settlement. This might initially strike the reader as puzzling; however, in Figure 1 the causal work of distance on attitudes happens *via* work experience, and hence conditional on a Palestinian's work experience, there should be no relationship between attitudes and distance from a settlement.

By contrast, the rival explanations (2) and (3), in which attitudes towards settlers are the first variable in the causal chain, implying that attitudes towards settlers should have no

association with work experience when controlling for distance or should have no association with distance when controlling for work experience. The effect of attitudes should be absorbed by these later causal variables if in fact attitudes are affecting work experience and/or distance from a settlement. However, if attitudes do have an association with either distance or work experience when controlling for the other, then we can rule out (2) and (3) as plausible explanations, increasing our support for (1).

However, while we employ causal graphs to help us determine when we can rule out some competing explanations, we note that more pedestrian threats to inference remain. We have to assume that there are no omitted variables that could explain the association between distance and attitudes apart from work experience (or increased settler interactions). As such, we employ additional control variables which we know to be strongly associated with attitudes towards settlers, including education, income, district, gender, and age. While including these factors helps us rule out the “usual suspects”, we note that any inferences we make in this paper are conditional on the assumption that we have identified relevant control variables, and as such, residual uncertainty remains.

4. Data and Methodology

To test our hypotheses, we collected original data on Palestinian proximity to settlements and attitudes towards settlers, relying on an online survey research design which we explicate in this section.

4.1 Unit of Analysis

We administered an online survey through Facebook advertisements targeted at adult Palestinians for our sample frame. These advertisements were run within the West Bank. Within the survey, we collect data on demographics, proximity to settlements, and previous interactions with settlers. We also collect data on self-reported Palestinian attitudes towards settlers. Additionally, we included the variables of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion to determine if these factors have a substantial impact on predicting Palestinian attitudes.

The population of interest is Palestinians living in the West Bank. This population is spread out across complex partitioned districts and inevitably it is very difficult to collect data from all Palestinians living in the West Bank. Therefore, the sampling frame is the Palestinians in the West Bank who use Facebook. We decided on this sampling frame because of the ease of and widespread reach of distributing the survey via Facebook. Facebook is widely used across the Middle East, and the West Bank is no exception to that. Facebook dominates social media usage in the Middle East with 265.4 million users in the MENA region and 164 million active monthly users (Radcliffe, 2018). Within the West Bank and Gaza, internet usage is at 61%, with more than 1.7 million Facebook users (Concepts, 2017). We also note that methodological research has increasingly shown the quality and representativeness of Facebook as a recruiting tool for survey research (Zhang et al., 2020).

4.2 Outcome Variable

Our dependent variable is the attitudes of Palestinians towards settlers in the West Bank. We measure the DV both via a standard Likert scale and through several behavioral questions. To exclude settlers from the dataset, the survey is administered in the Palestinian dialect of

Arabic. The majority of settlers speak either Hebrew, English, or Russian; therefore, this method should be sufficient to ensure Palestinians in the West Bank are the only population completing the survey.

The first measure for our DV directly asks the participant what their attitudes are, and are asked to respond using a 5-point Likert scale of 1=extremely positive attitudes, 2=slightly positive, 3=neutral, 4=slightly negative, and 5=extremely negative. While a Likert scale is efficient in capturing respondents' attitudes towards settlers, participants may misrepresent their views because of the social undesirability associated with Palestinians expressing positive attitudes towards settlers.

To grapple with the potential of participants having neutral/positive attitudes and withholding their perspectives, along with the difficulty in interpreting the effect via a Likert scale, we included a second measure of attitudes through the use of behavioral questions. These questions create an indirect pathway to measure neutral/positive attitudes towards settlers based on Palestinians' reactions to situations and common occurrences in the West Bank. These behavioral questions appear first in the survey, before the Likert scale and the demographic questions.⁴ These measurements provide an in-depth understanding of the respondent's views towards Israeli society, products, and citizens. The behavioral measure is then turned into a score to reflect a respondent's attitudes towards settlers based on their behaviors towards Israeli production and Jewish people. If a respondent were to respond in the affirmative for all 4 statements (i.e., I watch Israeli television, I buy Israeli products, etc.), they receive a behavioral measure score of 4. In contrast, the respondents who report all of the statements as false or

⁴ We refer the reader to the appendix for a complete survey questionnaire.

negative receive a score of 0. The reasoning behind the behavioral measure score is that respondents with a higher score should have more positive attitudes towards settlers than those with lower scores.

4.3 Independent Variable

We test three primary independent variables. The first independent variable is the proximity from a Palestinian household to the nearest settlement or outpost. This measurement is self-reported in the survey. We chose to have this measure be self-reported since settlements are roughly scattered throughout the West Bank and depending on where in a city a household is located, the distance to the nearest settlement could vary greatly. Using a slider scale with a range of 0 to 100 km, a respondent indicates their distance from the nearest settlement. We interpret this scale as meaning to our respondents the total travel distance, rather than Euclidean distance, as most Palestinians do not possess the ability to fly. The upper bound of the scale helps to prevent outliers as it is unlikely any Palestinian lives more than 100km from a settlement.

The second and third independent variables are the occurrence of a previous interaction between the Palestinian respondent and a settler and whether or not a respondent has obtained work in a settlement. This data is also self-reported through the survey.

4.4 Sample Collection

During a two-week collection period in January 2020 and a ten-day collection period in July 2020, a total of 4,460 responses were recorded based on the survey that was advertised

through Facebook. The data is then narrowed down to 1,573 responses based on criteria that excluded the other respondents. Respondents are excluded from the dataset if they do not accept the consent form, are not 18 years or older, are not a resident of the West Bank, or if they are not Palestinian. Respondents are also excluded if they did not complete all questions in the survey. Table 1 presents the most common categories of survey variables and their corresponding percentages.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Palestinian Facebook Sample

Categorical/Binary Variable	Modal Category	Proportion
Age	18-24	40.81%
Gender	Male	80.74%
Education	University	63.32%
Religion	Muslim	90.72%
Income	0-1500 NIS	35.03%
Governate	Hebron	21.36%
Israeli Products	True	56.90%
Israeli Newspapers	False	78.64%

Jewish Friends	False	80.93%
Israeli TV	False	85.12%
Settler Interaction	No	63.95%
Attitudes	Extremely Negative	71.39%
Work in a Settlement	No	85.76%
Pass Settlement	Extremely Likely	58.17%
COVID Restrictions	Yes	90.97%
Restriction Origin	Palestinian Authority	67.28%
Lost Job/Business	Yes	57.12%

Completing a survey online has its limitations. Since the distribution of the survey is via Facebook, it is likely to exclude some of the older population because most of that age segment is unlikely to have or be active on social media platforms. Additionally, conducting the survey online rules out some of the participation of poorer Palestinians who do not have social media platforms, access to consistent internet, or smartphones/tablets.

To address these issues with the non-representativeness of the survey, when making population inferences, we implement multi-level regression with post-stratification (MRP) using Bayesian multilevel models. MRP is a method designed to adjust non-representative polls to match census-level population aggregates. The technique has proven to be so effective that it can

correct even patently unrepresentative samples, such as the work from Wang et al. (2015) who used MRP to predict vote shares in the 2012 U.S. election with surveys from Microsoft’s Xbox gaming platform. To implement the method with our data, we collected the distribution of men, women, and age categories in each Palestinian district from the 2007 census (the most recent date dis-aggregated data is available), part of which can be seen in Table 2. The results presented in the next section correct for imbalance in the survey by estimating results within each district, gender, and age sub-category, which are then re-combined with population weights to produce representative estimates. The strength of this method is that we can correct for a wide variety of imbalances because we average each model prediction over a contingency table with 154 cells (all combinations of age (7) - gender (2) - district (11)). Furthermore, because our re-weighting is model-based, uncertainty in the estimates propagates through. For example, if we have a district sub-category with few survey respondents, then a re-weighted estimate will become more uncertain.

To estimate our models, we use Bayesian regression modeling with Stan (Carpenter et al., 2017; Bürkner, 2017). We note that in our multivariate analyses when interpreting regression coefficients, that we do not need to make adjustments as we are not estimating population proportions and the inclusion of controls adjusts for sample selection biases (i.e., age, sex, and governorate).

Table 2: Sample of Census Data Used for MRP Survey Adjustment

Governates	Women	Men	Women (% of Pop.)	Men (% of Pop.)
	(Survey %)	(Survey %)		

Jenin	8.91	12.28	10.91	10.92
Tulkarm	7.26	7.48	6.76	6.69
Qalqiliya	4.29	5.35	3.84	3.92
Salfit	2.31	5.43	2.53	2.54
Tubas	1.98	1.97	2.14	2.14
Jericho	1.98	1.97	1.83	1.77
East Jerusalem	4.95	4.80	15.44	15.50
Bethlehem	6.27	6.22	7.47	7.52
Ramallah & Al-Bireh	19.47	16.14	12.00	11.80
Hebron	26.07	20.24	23.38	23.6
Nablus	16.50	18.11	13.70	13.60

6. Results

We first examine descriptive findings from the survey to see how distance and other socio-economic factors correlate with attitudes and behaviors related to Israel. All of these findings are adjusted using MRP to match population totals by age, sex, and governorate. We

present posterior medians as point estimates and 5% to 95% posterior quantiles as our uncertainty intervals.

6.1 Proximity to the Nearest Settlement

Figure 2 shows that a vast majority of Palestinians live in close proximity to settlements, with an abundance of the data clustered between 0 to 20 km. Once we adjust the proximity distribution by MRP, we find that the average distance that a Palestinian lives from the nearest settlement is 14km with a 5% to 95% posterior uncertainty interval of 11 to 18 km. We note that we find this relatively low number despite 63 respondents who reported that their proximity to the nearest settlement is 100 km. These values are assumed to be upper bounds based on the size of the West Bank, the scattering of settlements throughout the area, and the gerrymandering of land between Area A, B, and C. On the whole, this suggests the average Palestinian lives fairly close to settlements, though not so close that there will not still be variation in whether or not they have contact with settlers.

Figure 3 shows the average kilometer distance from settlements within each value of the 5-category Likert scale of attitudes towards settlers. This plot supports the hypothesis that Palestinians who live in closer proximity to settlements are more likely to express neutral attitudes towards settlers in the West Bank. However, interestingly, Palestinians who are closer to settlements are also more likely to report positive views towards settlers compared to those with

Figure shows the distribution of survey responses for the 0 - 100 kilometer scale for distance from a settlement. The mode at 100 reflects the upper limit of the scale, though we note that it is unlikely that any West Bank Palestinians actually live more than 100 km from a settlement.

Figure 2: Histogram of Distance from Closest Settlement as Reported by Survey Respondents

neutral views towards settlers. This descriptive statistic suggests that being close to settlers may result in both positive and negative attitudes towards settlers; i.e. it suggests some kind of polarizing process. However, with a simple bivariate comparison, it is difficult to say with

confidence. At a minimum, it would appear that the attitudes for or against settlers do not monotonically increase or decrease with distance from the settlement.

Figure shows the average distance from a settlement by each category of attitudes towards settlers. The lines on the plot show the 5% - 95% posterior uncertainty intervals obtained by using MRP adjustment along with posterior means as point estimates.

Figure 3: Effects of Proximity to the Nearest Settlement on Palestinian Attitudes Toward Settlers

Distance	Group
14.27692	Bethlehem
19.50251	Hebron
32.33058	Jenin
27.35294	Jericho
13.44186	Jerusalem
25.92398	Nablus
18.48889	Qalqilya
16.79878	Ramallah
9.46000	Salfit
41.40000	Tubas
24.74359	Tulkarm

Table 3: Average Distance by Location

Table 3 depicts the average distance from a settlement for each governate in the West Bank. Most of the governates fit within a range of 15-25 km, with the exception of a few outliers. The average distance from a settlement in Tubas is approximately 41 km and 32 km in Jenin. Tubas and Jenin are both located in the north of the West Bank, where settlements are less abundant. Most of the settlements are clustered along the West Bank barrier in the west of the West Bank, most directly impacting the governates of Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron. The average distances for the other governates are relatively high due to some respondents who reported living 100 km (maximum distance response in the survey) from a settlement.

6.2 Previous Interactions with a Settler

Figure 4 illustrates that Palestinians who have never experienced an interaction with a settler present more negative views towards settlers than those who have had a previous interaction with a settler. While approximately 80% of Palestinians with no prior interactions with settlers chose the lowest attitudinal category, relatively fewer (70%) Palestinians with prior interactions chose this lower category. The difference again appears due to an increase in neutral views, with approximately 15% of Palestinians without prior interactions holding neutral views and up to 20% of Palestinians with prior interactions holding neutral views. While the 5% - 95% uncertainty intervals overlap in the plot, the underlying relationship is statistically significant based on the ordered logit model used to produce the MRP-adjusted estimates. These findings dispute our original inclination that Palestinians who have had previous interactions with settlers are more likely to express negative attitudes towards them. Conversely, the data supports the opposite finding, that Palestinians who have had no previous interactions with settlers are more likely to express negative attitudes towards them. In other words, the contact theory suggests contact between these two groups, even in the context of the occupation, could be associated with a reduction in out-group bias despite the difficult and inherently hierarchical context in

which these interactions occur.

Figure shows the estimated population proportion of Palestinians for each category of attitudes toward settlers and by whether the respondent had a previous interaction with a settler. The lines on the plot show the 5% - 95% posterior uncertainty intervals obtained through using MRP adjustment along with posterior means as point estimates.

Figure 4: Relationship Between Previous Interaction with a Settler and Attitudes Towards Settlers

6.3 Education

Figure shows the estimated population proportion of Palestinians for each category of attitudes towards settlers and the respondents' education. The lines on the plot show the 5% - 95% posterior uncertainty intervals obtained using MRP adjustment along with posterior means as point estimates.

Figure 5: Relationship Between Education and Attitudes Towards Settlers

Figure 5 outlines the relationship between a Palestinian's level of educational attainment and their attitudes towards settlers. Palestinians with higher levels of education express more

negative attitudes towards settlers as compared to Palestinians with lower levels of education. Palestinians with a master's degree present the most negative attitudes with close to 90% choosing the lowest category on the Likert scale. In contrast, only 75% of Palestinians who report having no education chose this lowest category. Again, though the uncertainty intervals overlap, the underlying relationships are statistically significant based on the underlying ordered logit model used to produce the MRP-adjusted results.

6.4 Employment in a Settlement

Figure shows the estimated population proportion of Palestinians for each category of attitudes towards settlers and by whether the respondent had worked previously in a settlement. The lines on the plot show the 5% - 95% posterior uncertainty intervals obtained through using MRP adjustment along with posterior means as point estimates.

Figure 6: Prior Employment in a Settlement and Attitudes Towards Settlers

Figure 6 presents the relationship between working in a settlement and attitudes towards settlers. We see a similar pattern to Figure 4 showing prior interactions with settlers.

Approximately 75% of Palestinians who have not worked in a settlement chose the lowest level of attitudes, whereas as low as 60% of Palestinians who had worked in a settlement did so. There is more variability with the data coming from respondents who have worked in a settlement as displayed by the larger uncertainty intervals because only 122 (12.54%) of respondents reported having worked in a settlement before. This is compared to the majority of respondents, 851 (87.46%), who have never worked in a settlement, therefore making their results less varied.

6.5 Distance and Employment

Given the relationship between employment and attitudes towards settlers, it is also important to look at the unadjusted relationship between distance and employment. In Figure 7, we show a regression of employment status on distance, where we model distance with a spline to allow for non-linear effects across distances. As can be seen, the proportion of those working in settlements increases considerably between 25 and the hypothetical minimum of 0 kilometers.

At the closest reported distances, between 15 and 20 percent of Palestinians report working in a settlement, a not insignificant number.

Figure shows the average proportion of respondents who report working in a settlement by the distance they reported living from a settlement. Distance is modeled via a spline function.

Figure 7: Palestinians Working in a Settlement by Distance From a Settlement

6.6 Multivariate Analysis

To test the contact hypothesis more thoroughly, we fit ordered logistic Bayesian regression models to our attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. These models constitute the main tests of our proposed causal diagram (1) in Figure 1. As our main predictors of interest, we

include distance and its square because of the possibility of non-linear relationships as seen in Figure 8. We also interact distance with our measures of previous interactions with settlers and previous employment in a settlement. This more saturated specification allows us to also examine if there is potential moderation; i.e. whether those who live closer to a settlement and have employment have better or worse attitudes towards settlers compared to those who live farther away yet also maintain employment.

We also incorporate age, sex, district, an ordinal measure of monthly income, and education as additional controls; both because of sample selection bias and because these variables may correlate with attitudes towards settlers. The results for our main predictors of interest, shown in Figure 8, are both surprising and quite clear. We find no evidence of moderation or any effect at all for distance to a settlement once prior interactions and prior employment are controlled for, holding true whether we measure distance as a linear effect or as a quadratic effect. In other words, the pattern we reported in Figure 3, in which respondents who live closer to settlements are more likely to hold neutral views appears to be nearly totally explained by patterns of contact. On its own, distance is not a predictor of either attitudes towards settlers or behavioral actions towards Israelis.

By contrast, previous interactions with settlers and prior employment are strong and statistically significant predictors of both improved attitudes and increased behavioral interactions with Israelis. Notably, the effects are so similar for the 1 to 5 category Likert scale and the behavioral measure, suggesting that both scales are tapping into an underlying concept of willingness to be exposed to Israeli society. We note that this effect also exists when controlling for some potential confounders, such as education, which we know from Figure 5 is also a strong

predictor of attitudes towards settlers. We believe these very clear results provide strong support for our causal diagram (1) in Figure 1 as the association between distance and attitudes entirely disappears once we include employment and interactions, suggesting that distance is only associated with attitudes through these channels. Surprisingly, we find some evidence in favor of the contact hypothesis. Even amid the fraught situation of settlers living in the midst of Palestinians, increased contact between the two groups appears to lead to reduced out-group prejudice, at least on the side of Palestinians.

Figure shows estimates from a Bayesian ordered logit model for the behavior scale (1-4 categories) and the attitude scale (1-5 Likert categories). Uncertainty intervals represent the 5% - 95% quantiles of the empirical posterior distribution. Control variables that are not shown include district, education, age, income and sex.

Figure 8: Predictors of Behavioral and Attitudinal Measures of Sympathy with Israel

Figure 9. In this plot, we test the two rival hypotheses (2) and (3) from Figure 1. As can be seen, whether we switch outcomes and independent variables, attitudes towards settlers still have a strong association with either distance or work and interaction with settlers, suggesting that it is not causally antecedent.

Following this main result, we then consider the alternative rival causal processes (2) and (3), in which we see if warmer feelings towards Israelis could explain the association we observe. To do so, we fit models in which we predict working in a settlement, interacting with settlers, and distance from a settlement using attitudes towards settlers as a predictor variable. In each model we include the other variable as an additional control; i.e., in the model predicting working in a settlement we include distance as a control and vice versa. If the influence of affect on the outcome comes primarily through either distance or through encouraging respondents to seek employment, as the alternative hypotheses suggest, we should not see strong associations between attitudes towards settlers and these outcomes.

However, we see in Figure 9 that attitudes do have a strong association with the outcomes even when we include our full set of control variables. As a result, we do not believe that the evidence would support the interpretation that feelings towards Israeli settlers drive subsequent employment seeking or relocation towards settlements. Rather, the evidence suggests that distance is causally prior to increased job opportunities, and that as respondents obtain jobs they subsequently are more likely to hold positive views towards settlers.

7. Discussion

Our results suggest that close proximity to settlements is associated with improved attitudes towards settlers by allowing for more interactions with settlers and creating job opportunities. Palestinians who have obtained employment in a settlement and who report increased interactions with settlers report less strongly negative views, reflecting the potential

impacts of social interactions. However, given that the majority of Palestinians hold extremely negative attitudes towards settlers, we have to contextualize this finding in that Palestinians with more direct exposure to settlers have slightly less polarized views rather than claiming that they change their opinions to positive support for settlements.

Nonetheless, this evidence in favor of the contact hypothesis in a situation where it would not seem to apply disproves our previous intuitions. We find these associations to be very surprising given the abundance of violent altercations that occur between settlers in the West Bank and Palestinians. The available empirical evidence, primarily from journalism and other reporting, suggests that most interactions with settlers are inherently negative, therefore producing negative attitudes when interacting with settlers. This evidence, however, does not account for potential positive, neutral, or slightly negative interactions that may take place between Palestinians and settlers. As we show in this article, Palestinians who have worked in a settlement and most likely have interacted with a settler are more likely to express slightly negative attitudes towards settlers instead of extremely negative.

This evidence we found in support of the contact theory inevitably invites speculation about whether this form of contact may reduce polarization in the future between Israelis and Palestinians. We are skeptical about this because recent pandemic restrictions suggest these kinds of contact are in dramatic decline. We included in the second wave of data collection in our survey, questions about whether survey respondents had lost a job or business as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. After adjusting answers with MRP, we found that almost exactly 50% of respondents (5% - 95% interval of 46% to 54%) had reported losing a job or a business due to

COVID-19 restrictions. This extraordinarily high number suggests that these social linkages are likely to weaken, not strengthen, in the future.

Finally, we note that creating a behavioral measure score enables another mechanism to test Palestinian behaviors towards Israeli products and friendships with Jewish people. These scores are comparable to the attitudinal score that is self-reported by respondents and provide a clear picture of a respondent's overall attitude towards settlers. There are limitations to using the behavioral measure score as a comparable mechanism to the attitudinal score. For example, if a respondent reports buying Israeli products, they are given a lower behavioral measure score, thus reflecting more positive attitudes towards settlers. However, a respondent could be buying Israeli products out of financial hardship or lack of available alternatives, rather than in support of Israel or more favorable views towards settlers. Additionally, reading Israeli newspapers and watching Israeli television shows can be apolitical acts that provide little insight into the true attitudes of Palestinians towards settlers. The attitudinal score presents a more accurate picture of a respondent's attitude towards settlers, but the behavioral score is a helpful secondary measure.

8. Conclusion

In this study, we find that negative attitudes of Palestinians towards settlers in the West Bank are pervasive in every segment and subsection of the population, but that increased social and economic contact may reduce negative attitudes towards settlers. The increased diversity in views among those who report greater contact reflects some divergence from the common expression of extremely negative attitudes towards settlers by Palestinians. When there is such a

large consensus on a common attitude, it can be difficult to highlight the determinants and causes of the common belief.

Despite these limitations, the study finds that proximity to a settlement, insofar as it promotes interactions with settlers and employment in a settlement, is in fact positively associated with marginally improved evaluations of settlers. This finding provides support for the contact hypothesis that increased interactions should reduce out-group prejudice, and we note that this occurs in a situation in which it would not seem very likely that the contact hypothesis would change out-group attitudes.

In addition, the success of our data collection within the West Bank provides an exciting pathway for future research to occur. Although relatively limited public opinion research has been conducted in the West Bank and Gaza, the successful use of Facebook advertisements as a means to collect survey responses presents a new frontier, and the use of MRP to adjust estimates to match population totals allows us to compensate for known deficiencies in the sampling frame.

Ultimately, this study reveals the complexity of Palestinian attitudes towards settlers. It demonstrates that there is still much to learn and investigate in terms of Palestinian attitudes towards the conflict with Israel and the impacts of living under occupation. Future research will be beneficial to understand the specificities that were not addressed in this study. In-depth qualitative research would be extremely helpful to better explain the types of interactions Palestinians have with settlers and how those interactions, which may be more ambiguous than we often think, have influenced their perspectives towards the conflict and the settlers.

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Appendix:

Category	Statement
Israeli Television	I watch Israeli television shows
Israeli Products	I buy Israeli products
Israeli Newspapers	I read Israeli newspapers
Jewish Friends	I have Jewish friends

Table 1: Behavioral Measures

Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of Attitudes Towards Settlers

The map in Figure 1 displays the variation in attitudes towards settlers in the 11 governates of the West Bank. While there is some distinction in attitudes between the governates, there is not a statistically significant relationship that explains Palestinian attitudes based on their place of residency. Residents of Tubas report the most negative attitudes towards settlers with an average attitudinal score of 4.80, while residents of Salfit report less extreme negative attitudes with an average attitudinal score of 3.90. Despite the 0.9 difference in attitudes between the governates of Tubas and Salfit, conclusions cannot be drawn on residents of Salfit having more positive attitudes towards settlers. Although the residents of Salfit did not report having extremely negative attitudes towards settlers on average, a score of 3.90 still indicates having slightly negative views. This score should not be equated with having neutral or positive attitudes. Additionally, only 5.14% of the respondents came from Salfit and 2.06% from Tubas respectively. Thus, an extremely negative or positive response to the survey could skew the results for the governate and generalize the attitudes of that specific population. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the responses from the governates with the largest portion of the population and the location of the greatest share of respondents. Hebron and Nablus are two of the largest cities in the West Bank and account for the greatest number of responses. The average attitudinal rates for these governates are 4.51 (Hebron) and 4.58 (Nablus). These averages are more representative of the general attitudes of Palestinians living in the West Bank, as the majority of the governates fall in between the attitudinal averages of 4.4-4.6.