



DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

YOUTH IN PALESTINE

FES MENA Youth Study: Results Analysis

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December 2022



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Young people are concerned about the job market and their ability to find suitable employment. While the economic situation has improved for most young people, many remain highly insecure after the Covid-19 pandemic.



The increased religiosity and turn towards religion may reflect a decline in confidence of young people in other institutions, such as the government or international bodies that could help alleviate the overwhelming economic and political insecurity.



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Palestinian youth continue to move away from political engagement and towards religion. Most show no interest in political news and do not see politics as an important part of their future. Nevertheless, they consider faith to be a private matter and do not seem to have any radical ideas about what it would mean to give religion a bigger role in government and daily life. They would like to raise their children much as their parents raised them. Increased social media use and a certain shift away from the primacy of the extended family reflect new influences on their lives.



Young people are concerned about the job market and their ability to find suitable employment. There are signs that while the economic situation has improved for most young people, many continue to be highly insecure, as hunger and poverty remain the key sources of instability after the Covid-19 pandemic. Finding a good job is the most important way young people see of securing their future. Traditional gender roles continue to limit female economic participation, although because young women are more likely to have white collar service jobs than their male peers, they benefit from the improvements in labour conditions that are linked to formal employment.



While violence and political unrest were not the main concerns for the young people surveyed, they do feature in their responses. A total of 43 per cent had witnessed violence, which certainly affects their outlook and attitudes. The increased religiosity and turn towards religion may reflect a decline in confidence in other institutions, such as the government or international bodies that could help alleviate the overwhelming economic and political insecurity.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

<https://mena.fes.de/topics/youth-study>

<https://palestine.fes.de>

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Content

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	METHODOLOGY	3
2.1	Sampling and Data Collection	3
2.2	Demographic Characteristics of the Sample	3
3	ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND EMPLOYMENT	5
4	MAIN REQUIREMENTS FOR SECURITY: JOB AND FAMILY	12
5	RELIGION	13
6	FUTURE DETERMINED BY JOB PROSPECTS AND MARRIAGE	14
7	SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE	16
8	MINIMAL POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT	18
9	CIVIC AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES LIMITED	20
10	EFFECTIVE PANDEMIC RESPONSE	22
11	FAITH AS A SOURCE OF STABILITY AND TRENDS IN EMIGRATION	24
12	CONCLUSION	28
	References	30
	List of Abbreviations	31
	List of Figures	31

1

INTRODUCTION

This survey is the second of its kind conducted in the MENA region, including the State of Palestine. The first survey was carried out in 2016 and aimed at examining the effects of the Arab Spring, the dramatic uprisings and related events that occurred in many MENA countries starting in 2011 (Gertel/Hexel 2018). The findings of the first survey highlighted considerable differences between Palestine and other MENA countries. Above all, Palestine did not experience any major upheaval and demonstrations as other Arab countries did. But the findings in Palestine did reflect the fact that Palestinians continue to live under Israel's military occupation (Khatib 2018).

This second survey was conducted from September to November 2021 against the backdrop of several concurrent events affecting Palestinian society and the country's young people. The first and most important of these events was the continued Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), with all the accompanying restrictions and violations of basic rights especially for the new generation that is the focus of this study. The effect of the occupation on Palestinian life is exacerbated by domestic political stagnation and the complete absence of any political horizon for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The domestic political situation in Palestine continues to be rife with disputes and logjams. The ongoing division between the two major rival factions, Fatah and Hamas, prevents coordination between authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and makes ongoing tension inevitable. It also means continued foot-dragging when it comes to holding elections in the institutions of both the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Aging leaders are reluctant to call elections for fear that their hold on power will slip, and instead impose increasingly autocratic and anti-democratic measures to maintain control. This stagnation and prevention of new leaders from coming to power, the second factor that informs this survey, has had a very negative impact on the morale of young people and their willingness to engage in politics.

The third event that informs the survey findings was the violent confrontation that erupted between the Israeli military and Hamas in the period of 10-21 May 2021.

This war was a culmination of tension and public protest against Israeli violations that began in Jerusalem and spread throughout the oPt—even reaching Palestinian towns in Israel. It started with non-violent protests but soon escalated into an armed conflict between Hamas and Israel which was more widespread than previous conflicts, centred in Jerusalem and involving Palestinian citizens of Israel as well as the West Bank and Gaza, thus marking a new period in Palestinian resistance. In terms of casualties, the confrontation was the most serious since 2014. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), during the escalation in Gaza, 261 Palestinians were killed, including 67 children and 41 women. Most of these fatalities were civilians. Another 2,200 Palestinians were injured, 52 per cent of them women and children. A total of 13 Israelis, including 2 children, were killed, and 710 others were injured (UN OCHA 2021). While this poll does not include the attitudes of Palestinian citizens of Israel, a subsequent police crackdown in Palestinian communities in Israel resulted in the arrest of 2,150 people in one month alone; one in four charges were against a minor (Abdu 2022).

These factors affected the attitudes of Palestinians in the oPt, especially young people, and help explain the two most prominent characteristics of youth opinion revealed by this survey. These characteristics are first that Palestinian youth are increasingly religious, and second that they are less and less attracted to and involved in politics and political activities. It appears that the stagnation of Palestinian politics and the ongoing resistance is resulting in a lack of interest in political engagement among Palestinian youth, in particular. It is not that these young people are more religious and thus attracted to the militant Palestinian movement Hamas, with its Muslim Brotherhood roots and its emphasis on religious reasons for continuing its armed resistance and conservative social views—Palestinian youth are in fact rejecting political engagement in its entirety.

2

METHODOLOGY

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) views young women and men as instrumental for democratic development in the region and is keen to strengthen their potential to initiate change in the world of politics and across society. Based on the results of a long-term survey, launched in 2016, FES seeks to provide insight into young people's situation in the MENA region. In 2021, FES launched its second large-scale representative survey in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as in Tunisia and Yemen. With the 1,000 in-depth interviews conducted for each country, the FES MENA Youth Study generates a large database of answers to around 200 questions concerning the personal background of the interviewees and their views on a variety of topics.¹

2.1 SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

For reasons of feasibility, a nationwide quota sampling method was chosen, with the aim of conducting 1,000 interviews per country. This sample size is considered adequately representative of the target group as well as of socio-demographic and regional subgroups (e.g., age, gender, level of education). The data was collected in face-to-face interviews.

In Palestine, the local institute responsible for fieldwork and sampling was the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC). The institute has an established set of methods for selecting sampling points and identifying eligible households to survey, with the aim of randomising the selection process as much as possible. The aim was to ensure a geographic spread of respondents that was as close as possible to the distribution of the survey universe in the respective country. For each geographic area, the institutes provided a list of sampling points.

The fieldwork phase was conducted between September and November 2021. The survey ultimately reached 1,029 Palestinians aged between 16 and 30 years from all 16

governorates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as planned. All interviews were carried out in the local Arabic dialect. Interviews were held at respondents' homes or in public places such as cafés, community centres and the like. It was of major importance that the respondents felt comfortable and the interview locations were chosen accordingly.

The method of data collection was mainly computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). During fieldwork, Kantar Public, a specialist research, evidence and advisory business, carried out data validation with sets of interim data via Excel and SPSS (statistical software program) syntaxes. In parallel, Kantar Public and the University of Leipzig conducted the final comprehensive data check.

To ensure that the final structure of the sampling reflected the structure of the survey universe, differences were reduced with factorial weighting. The survey data was weighted for all target groups with respect to the structural variables of age, gender and region, based on available statistics.

2.2 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Out of the surveyed population, 30 per cent resided in rural towns (1,001-20,000 people) and another 30 per cent in small cities (20,001-100,000 people), 18 per cent resided in medium-sized cities (100,001-500,000 people), 12 per cent resided in large cities (more than 500,000 people) and 10 per cent resided in refugee camps. Of the total number surveyed, 94 per cent identified as »youth«, and only 6 per cent identified as »adults«. Moreover, 66 per cent of the total sample indicated that they were single at the time of the survey (higher among males at 76 per cent, than females, at 54 per cent), and 30 per cent stated that they were married. Almost two-thirds of the sample, 74 per cent, stated that they did not have children (26 per cent said they did), with a nearly equal percentage of respondents in the 26-30 age bracket. Looking at the numbers through a gendered lens, 35 per cent of female respondents reported having children (correlated to a higher percentage of them being married than their male counterparts), while 18 per cent of males

¹ For more information on the FES MENA Youth Study: <https://mena.fes.de/topics/youth-study>

stated they had children. The average household size across respondents is 5.9 persons per household with 4.1 persons aged between 16 and 65 years old.

When asked about their living situation, 72 per cent of respondents stated that they lived with their parents within the same household, 27 per cent lived with their own family (with their partner/without their parents). A total of 1 per cent reported either living alone or with friends. When it comes to who heads the household, 62 per cent stated that the head of the household was their father, 22 per cent responded that their husband/wife was the head of the household, 11 per cent stated they themselves were the head of the household and 13 per cent said that their mother headed the household (multiple responses were possible). In line with more traditional family dynamics/views, a large percentage of female respondents (39 per cent) stated that their husbands were heads of the household, while only 5 per cent said their wives were the head of the household. When asked to provide a broad assessment of their family's situation at the time of the survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents (71 per cent) shared that their family situation was very good (18 per cent) or rather good (53 per cent)—similar to the situation five years earlier, which a combined 66 per cent remembered as rather or very good.

One-third of respondents stated that they were currently students in school (13 per cent) or university (19 per cent). Furthermore, 55 per cent of the sample had completed baccalaureate-level schooling (tawjihi) or above, 37 per cent secondary/intermediate schooling, 7 per cent had only completed primary school while 1 per cent were illiterate.

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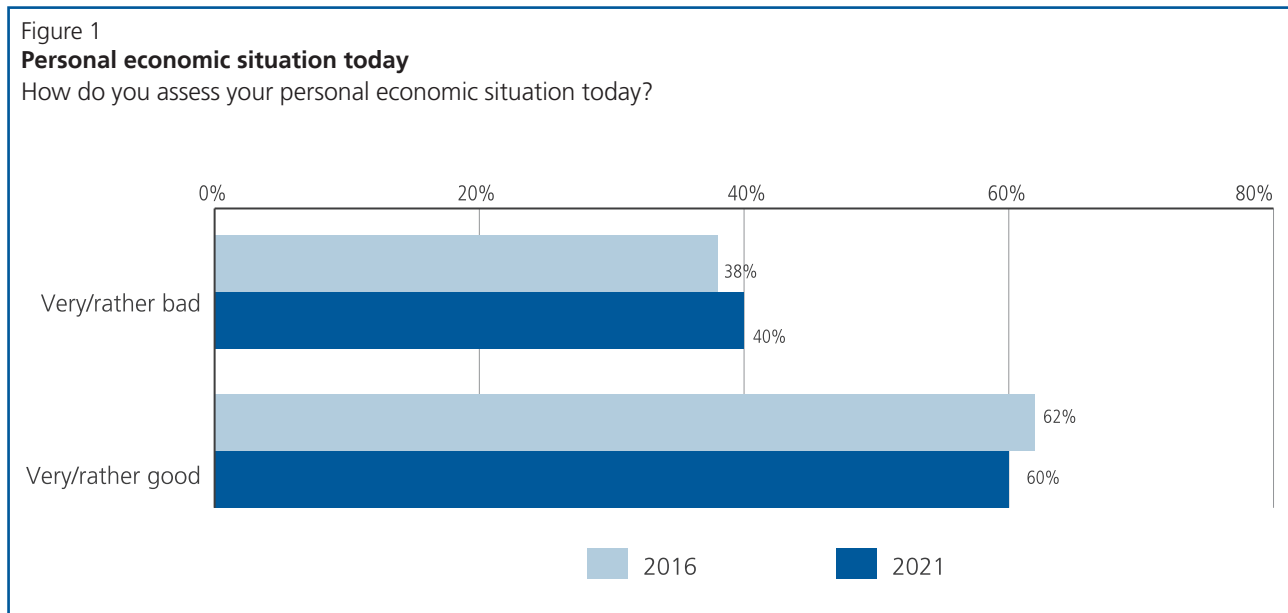
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND EMPLOYMENT

Generally, the majority (60 per cent) of Palestinian youth said their personal economic situation was good or rather good, although this is a 2 per cent decline compared with five years ago. In real terms, the overall economic climate in the oPt has in fact markedly improved, with per capita GDP returning to 3,664 US dollars in 2021 after a steep drop due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Per capita GDP stood at significantly less in 2016: 3,527.6 US dollars (World Bank 2022a). Unemployment, however, has increased, at 26.4 per cent in 2021, up from 23.9 per cent in 2016. Youth unemployment follows a similar upward trend (World Bank 2022b). It appears that, while most young people feel positive about their personal economic situation, this remains tenuous and reflects a certain level of insecurity.

Female respondents were somewhat more positive about their personal economic situation (with 63 per cent referring to it as good or rather good). As it turns out, however, the decline in the perception of the overall economic situation among youth came from young women, who were 4 percentage points less positive than in 2016, while male respondents' perspectives remained the same over time. Since 2016, female unemployment has increased to a staggering 42.8 per cent, which may explain this negative shift that can be predominantly be observed among young wo-

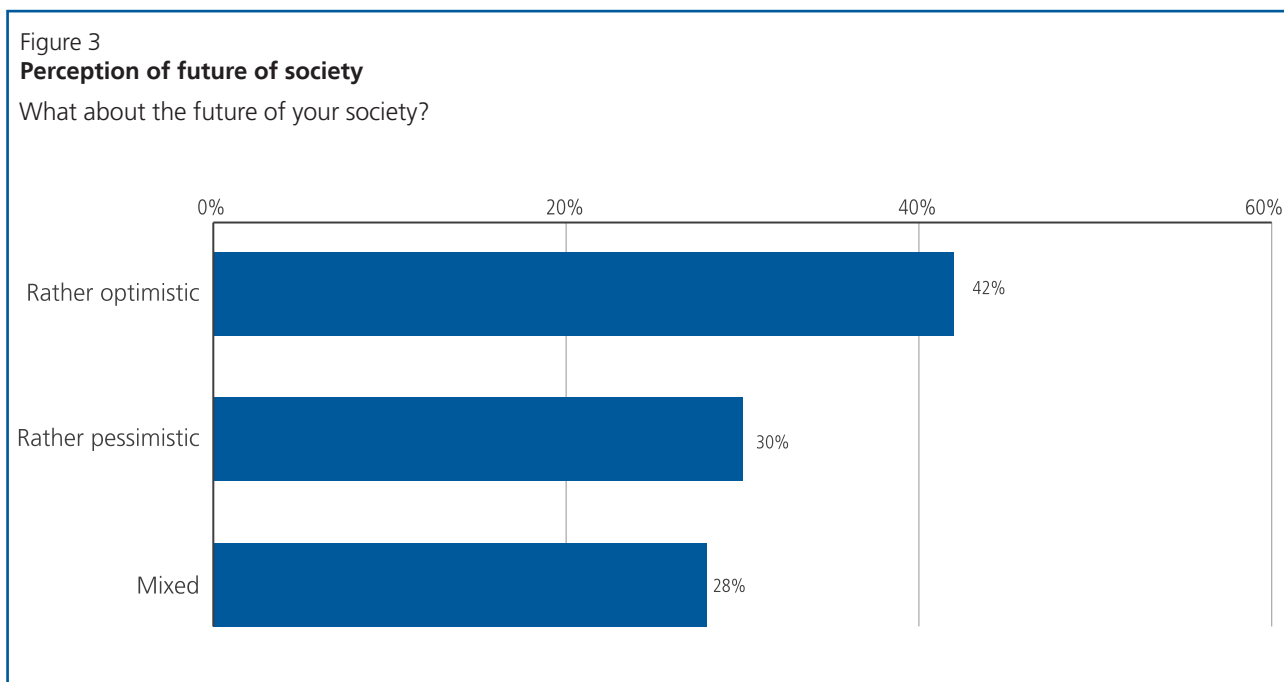
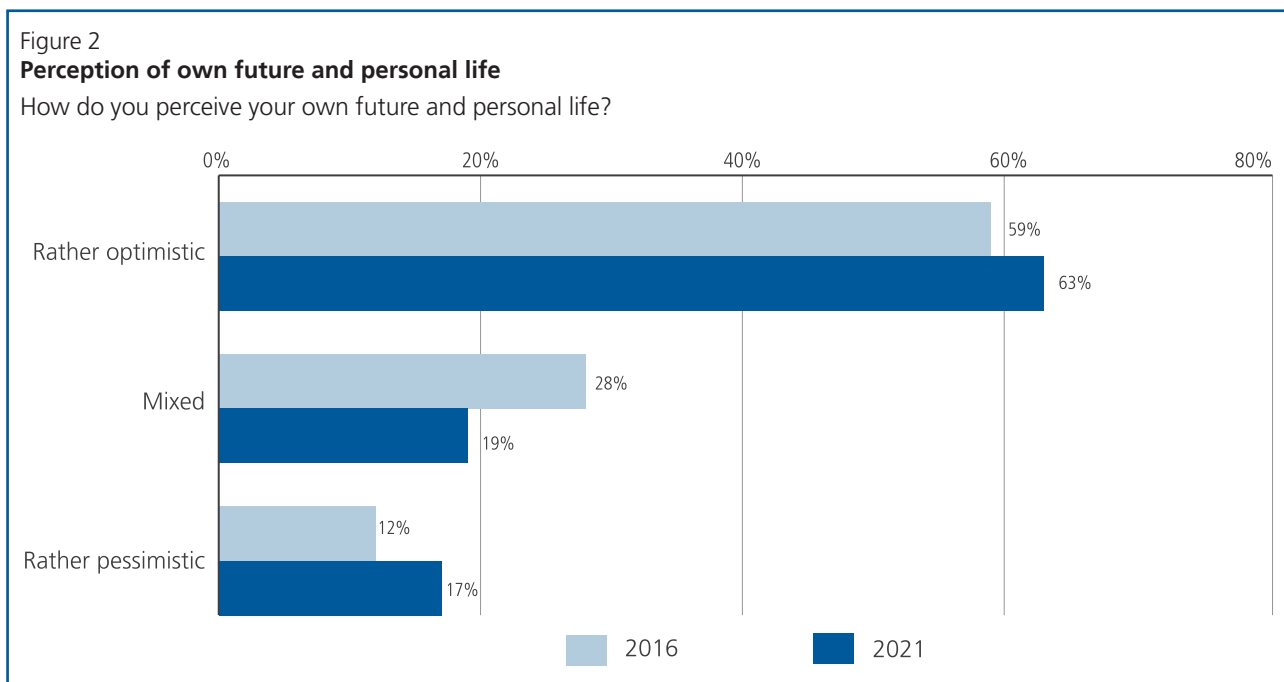
men. Unemployment appears to play an important role in Palestinian young people's views on the economy. Despite overall economic progress, young women in particular are experiencing a decline in the gains they had made in participation over the last few decades. The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns hit them harder, and they have not yet recovered.

Young people living in large cities and those with low levels of education were the groups most likely to view their personal economic situation as very/rather bad. These groups reported marked changes from five years ago. Both groups showed double-digit, albeit divergent, changes in their situation compared with the 2016 poll. A total of 22 per cent of youth with low levels of education who had perceived their situation negatively in 2016 were now positive about their personal economic situation (i.e., the negative assessment in this group went down from 71 per cent to 49 per cent), while 16 per cent of large-city dwellers changed their views from positive to negative over the last five years (increasing the negative assessment from 41 to 57 per cent among this group). These shifts reflect changes in the labour market and increased urbanisation that will be explored throughout this analysis.



Consistent with the overall satisfaction with their personal economic situation, a majority of 63 per cent of young people were rather optimistic about their personal future. Optimism regarding the future of society was less than optimism on the personal level, however. Only 42 per cent were rather optimistic about the future of Palestinian society, and 30 per cent were rather pessimistic. The young people most pessimistic (on average) about both their own future and that of society were those who stated that their personal economic situation was »very/rather bad«, indicating that young people’s outlook is strongly shaped by economic conditions. There was also a correlation between young people living in large cities in Palestine—again reflecting increasing urbanisation—and a negative view on the future of society. Since Palestinian institutions are mostly located

in large urban centres, this raises the question of whether the correlation is related to the negative view of governance as reflected in other polls (JMCC 2016, 2021). Many employees of the Palestinian Authority live in large cities and have gone unpaid or only received part of their salaries due to the political situation and lack of donor funding for the Palestinian Authority, contributing to negative views of the government. There is also an increased sense that the Palestinian Authority can do little to improve the lives of Palestinians, as it seems unable to bring about an end to the occupation as was promised with the signing of the Oslo Accords more than four decades ago. The Covid-19 pandemic, which somewhat increased feelings of distrust in the government due to lockdowns and their economic fallout, also had an impact, although the vast majority of



Palestinians were satisfied with the Palestinian response to the pandemic in April 2020, and this poll was conducted before the worst outbreak in early 2021 (JMCC/Juzoor 2020). A more in-depth investigation is needed here to understand the relationship between living in cities and a negative outlook among youth, which can repeatedly be observed throughout the poll results.

This generally positive outlook among youth is contradicted by other, more specific indicators. For example, when asked about the importance of the availability of affordable bread for their families, 91 per cent of youth said that this was important or very important. The 19 per cent of young people whose families rely on ration cards (a substantial increase from just 4 per cent in the 2016 survey) also all say that these cards are important or very important for their families. These are indications of food insecurity and poverty. Such contradictions may signal that the explanation for young people's general optimism about their personal economic situation and prospects for the future is a culture of optimism, rather than being an accurate indicator of actual conditions. Indeed, Palestinian public opinion typically reflects a surprisingly positive outlook even in the worst economic and political conditions. In October 2021, after the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic and several months after the devastating confrontation with Israel in May of that year, 68 per cent of Palestinians were optimistic or very optimistic, with very little difference between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, despite the war's lingering toll in terms of loss of life and the destruction of Gaza homes and infrastructure (JMCC/FES 2021).

The young people most likely to be satisfied with their economic situation were those living in rural areas, where 75 per cent said their economic situation was very or rather good. This was an 8 per cent increase from four years ago. One of the possible explanations for this correlation is that there has been a recent increase in the number of young people (many of them from rural areas) working in Israel. Despite being exploited, Palestinians working in Israel can make considerably more money than those who work in the Palestinian economy. This stands in contrast to civil servants living in cities, as noted above.

When asked about their family's economic situation today compared with five years ago, young people's responses reflected an improvement.

Based on the proportion of youth that see their families' current economic situation as good or rather good (71 per cent), it appears that young people feel conditions have improved somewhat. The disparities described above between rural and urban youth's assessments of their families' economic situation are fairly consistent with young people's views of the situation five years ago, though the disparity between the perceptions of urban and rural youth was smaller when recalling the past. Similarly, the gap noted above between the outlook of those rating their economic situation as »very/rather good« and »very/rather bad« is much more pronounced when young people consider their situation

today, than when they consider their families' situation five years ago. A considerable number of those who assessed their personal economic situation positively believe that their families' conditions have clearly improved since their assessment five years ago (16 per cent of respondents in this group), while 10 per cent of those with negative assessments of their current personal economic situation believe their families' financial situation has significantly deteriorated since 2016. This finding could indicate growing inequality in Palestinian society, as reflected in young people's perceptions.

The findings about economic perceptions further support the notion that there are two factors that appear to determine young people's general economic situation (see Figure 1). The first is education, with just over half (51 per cent) of youth with low levels of education viewing their own economic situation as good or rather good. The other factor is place of residence: only 34 per cent of youth in large cities said their economic situation was good or rather good (and this was a 16 per cent drop from the last poll five years ago).

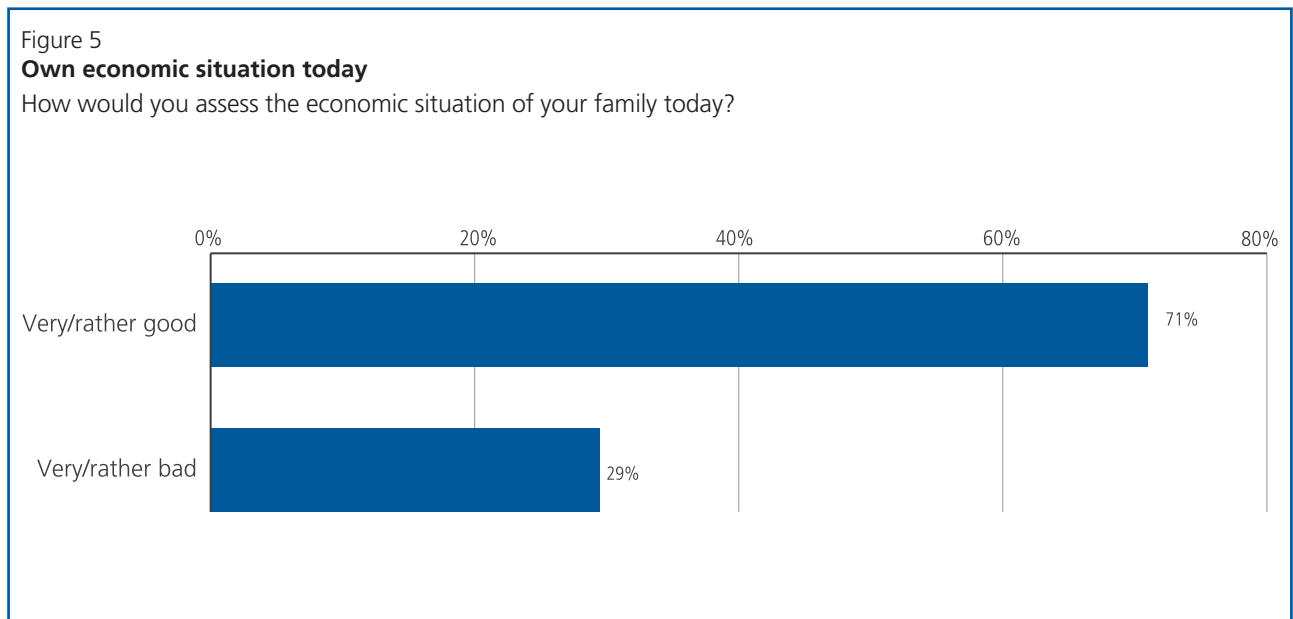
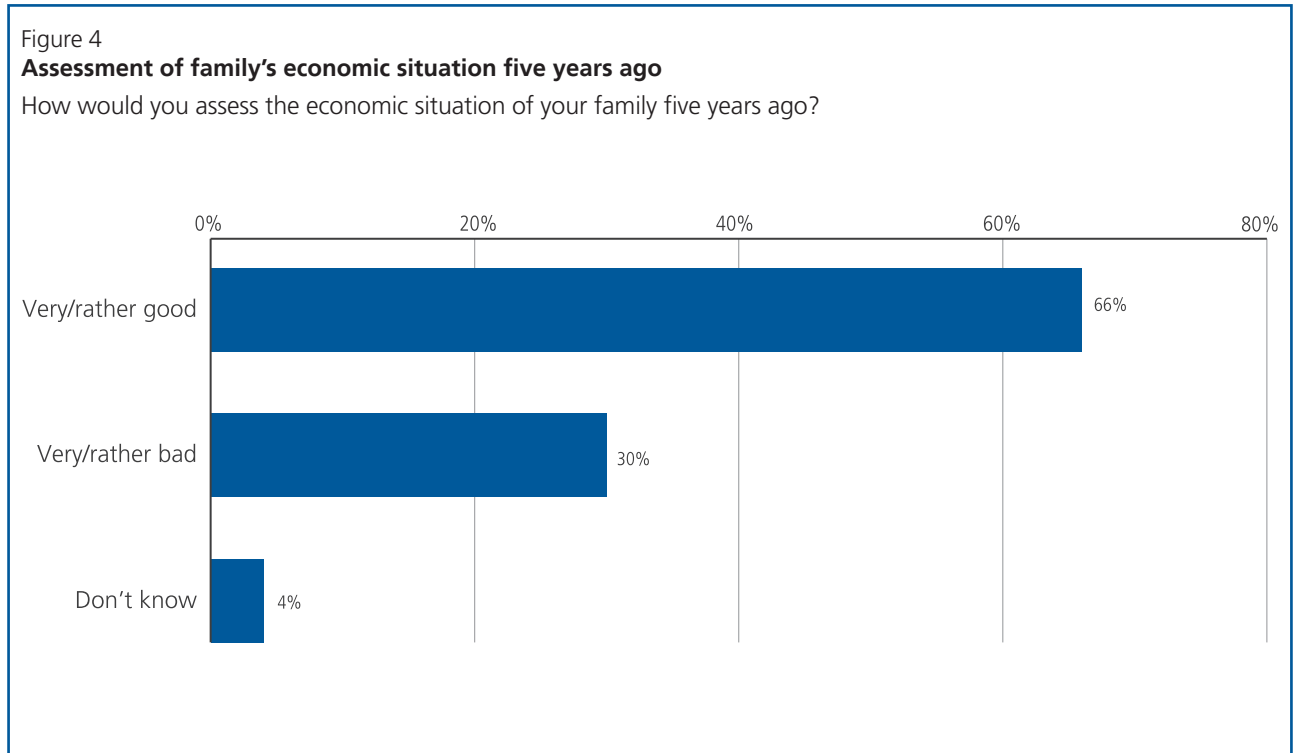
A large number of youths surveyed (39 per cent) were not working, either temporarily or permanently, while one in three were in paid work and slightly more than that were in education. The vast majority of young people that are not interested in finding paid work were female, reflecting gender inequality in Palestinian society, where the persistence of traditional gender roles remains a barrier to female economic participation. Female labour force participation in the 15-24 age category was only 9.6 per cent in 2021, compared with participation among males of 47.3 per cent (World Bank 2022c, 2022d). Palestine has some of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world. Moreover, young women were particularly heavily impacted by the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, with their labour force participation not yet returning to pre-pandemic rates.

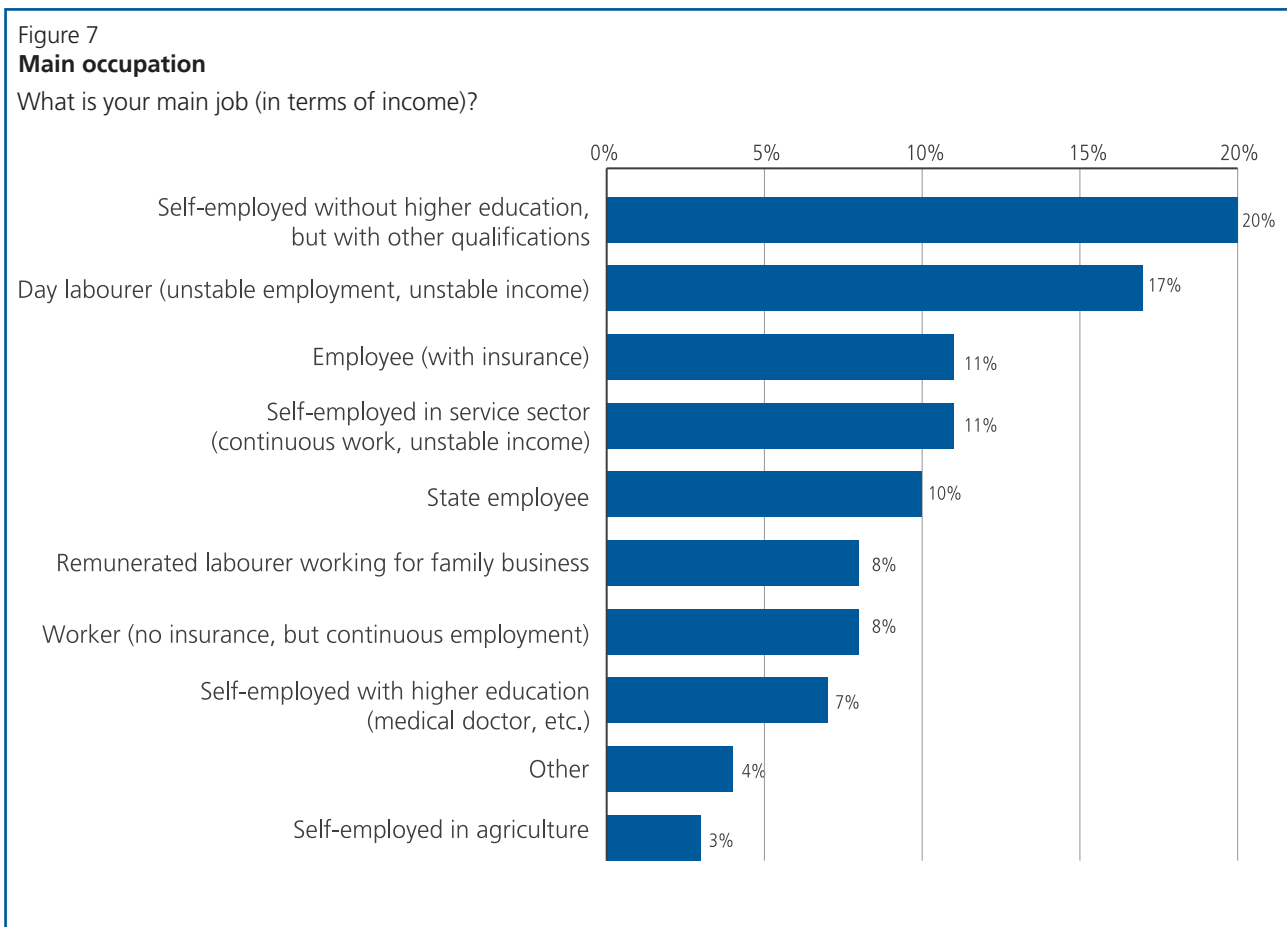
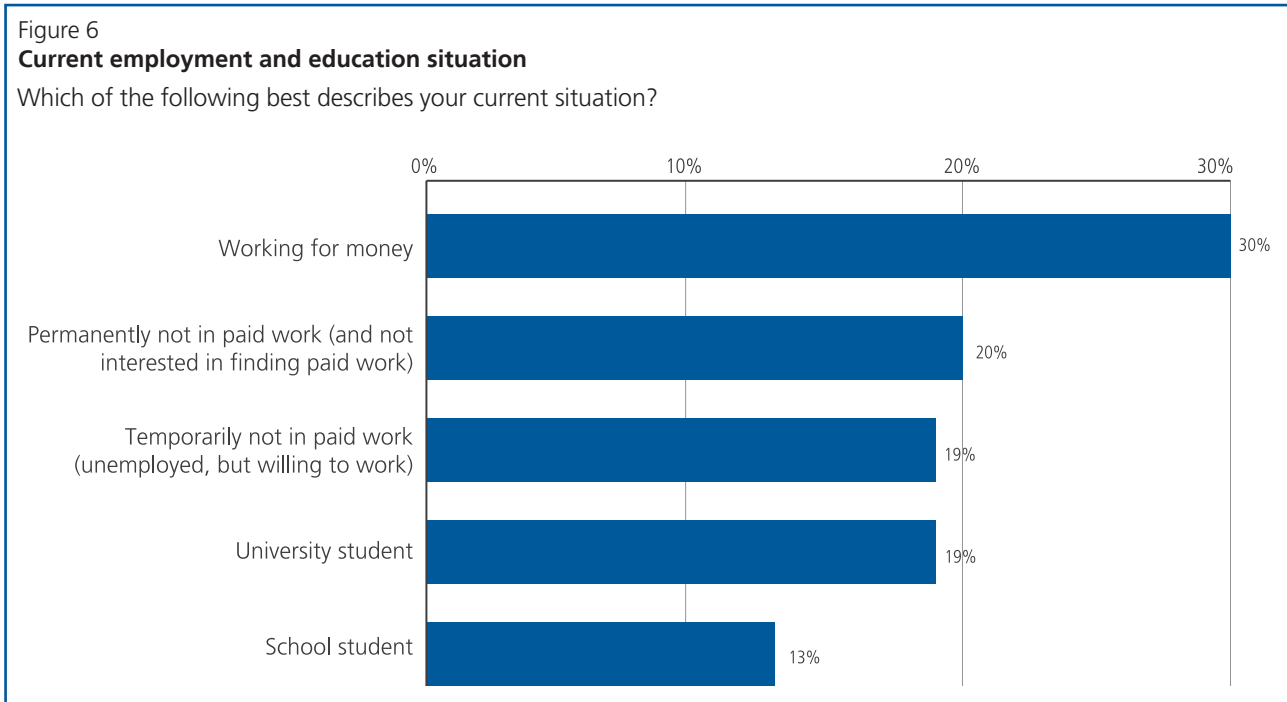
Among those who are in paid work, a surprising 41 per cent (60 individuals) are in various forms of self-employment. This is a very large percentage compared with the relatively low proportion of entrepreneurs in Palestinian society as a whole. In 2019, the number of self-employed Palestinians was declining and stood at just 28.6 per cent (World Bank 2019). Such a large share of self-employment probably reflects the barriers faced by young people to other forms of employment, such as lack of skilled training and labour market connections (Education for Employment 2022).

A total of 17 per cent of working youth are day labourers with unstable employment and unstable income. These young people, with the highest relative share in the 16-20 age group, and surprisingly, with mostly good levels of education, are likely to be working in Israeli settlements or inside Israel. This work is highly unstable but offers significantly higher wages than other employment in Palestine. 17 per cent of these workers are female, reflecting a growing number of women who are opting to engage in domestic labour in Israeli settlements and in Israel. On the

one hand, this group, often from the youngest age bracket, with a medium level of education and living in rural areas and small cities, does not have a lot of opportunities to secure reliable work and decent wages in the Palestinian economy. On the other hand, their precarious employment for Israelis sees them reap greater economic rewards and may

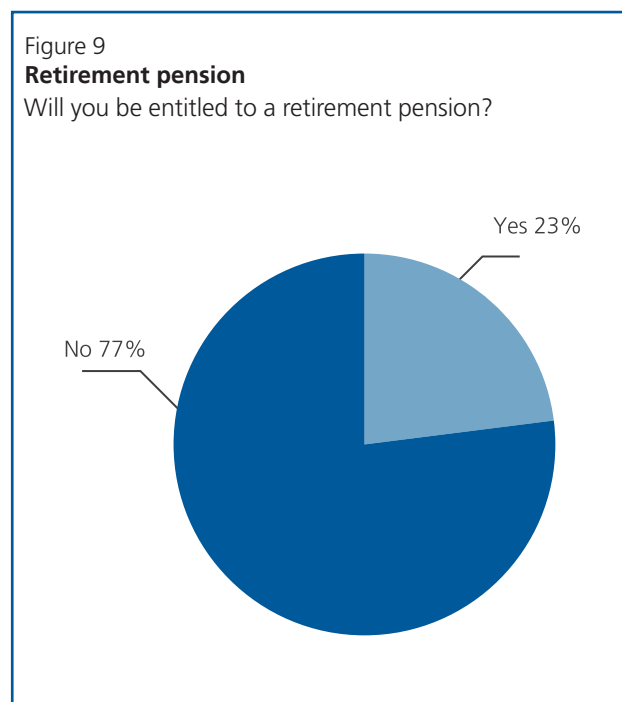
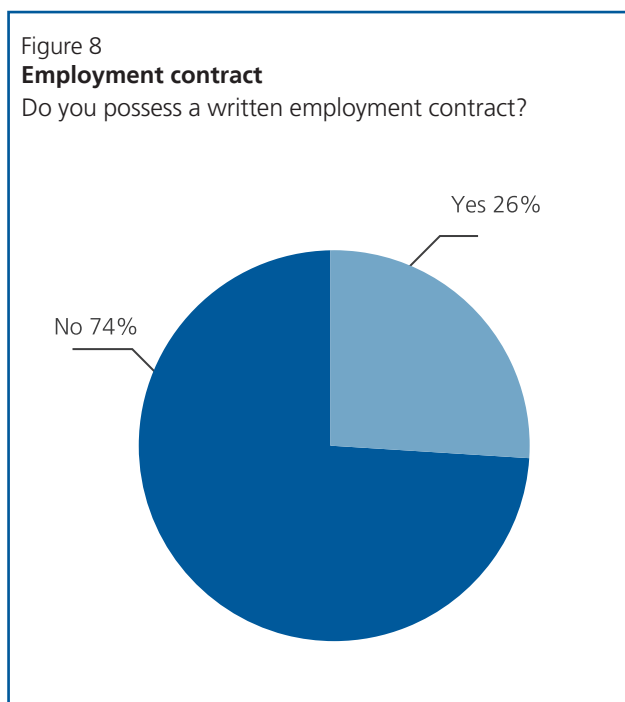
help explain their relatively better economic outlook today versus five years ago (see Figures 4 and 5). Only about one in five young people who work are wage employees with insurance, either working for the state or another employer.





Three out of four young workers have no written contract. Proportionally, the percentage of young women who do have a contract is double that of young men even though their absolute numbers are lower, reflecting the overrepresentation of female workers in service sector jobs such as

teaching, nursing and other jobs in keeping with traditional gender roles. In addition, young people with higher education have a greater chance of having a written employment contract than others.



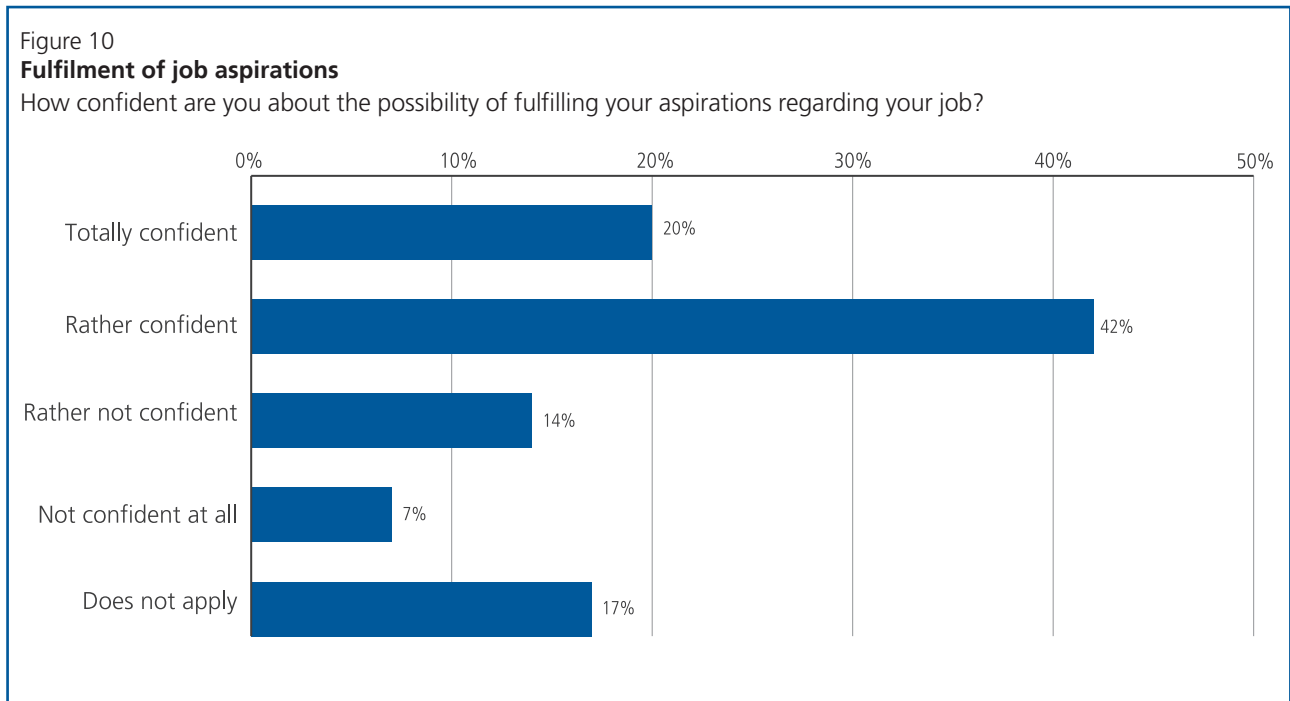
One indication of improving labour conditions is that the proportion of those who receive sickness pay increased since the last poll, and those who do not decreased. However, retirement coverage is very low among youth, with only 23 per cent of those surveyed reporting that they are entitled to a retirement pension. Entitlement to a pension is considerably higher among females, who as stated above are more likely to be employed in government service sector jobs where pensions are more common. Only 17 per cent of young working men are entitled to a pension, compared to 44 per cent of working females. Those with low and high levels of education, versus those with medium levels of education, are more likely to have access to a pension, along with those living in urban areas. Once again, those living in large cities are more likely to be employed by the government or in the civil society sector where pensions are more common.

When asked whether they are in a position to save money from their income, only 18 per cent of young people said they could; the majority said they could not. One in five young men said they could save, while a smaller proportion of young women gave the same response. This is logical given the smaller proportion of females in paid employment. A total of 27 per cent of young people living in rural areas were in a position to save. This was significantly higher than the percentage in large cities (13 per cent) and cities (17 per cent), likely reflecting a higher cost of living and corresponding to negative economic findings about urban life (see Figure 4). The differences in ability to save between older and younger youth were not significant.

The survey revealed other worrying findings, such as that many young people (63 per cent) do not have health insurance. In addition to this, 36 per cent (not entirely the same individuals) do not have access to free healthcare services. Insurance coverage and free healthcare access was—not surprisingly—significantly lower in rural areas, where access to services is limited due to the fact that Palestinian Authority institutions are concentrated in urban areas.²

Another improvement since the last poll five years ago is that in this poll, young people who reported liking their work a lot stood at 60 per cent, marking an increase of 24 percentage points from 2016. Moreover, while those respondents who said they had chosen their jobs because they had no other option was at 53 per cent, this was a 17 percentage point decline from five years ago.

² According to the Oslo Accords with Israel, the Palestinian Authority is only allowed to provide services in certain areas of the West Bank, mostly in urban areas, requiring rural residents to cross checkpoints and spend money on transportation to access many health services.



Looking into the future, almost two-thirds of the young people surveyed felt totally or rather confident about the possibility of fulfilling their aspirations concerning employment. Despite being more secure in their type of employment, significantly fewer young women expressed confidence about their job prospects compared with their male counterparts. Those with low levels of education and in a very or rather bad economic situation were also more likely to have low levels of confidence in their future career prospects. Levels of confidence in future employment was similarly high among rural, city and large city dwellers, despite those living in large cities being so much more negative about their current economic situation in other areas. Once again, we see that Palestinian youth are optimistic, despite their rather negative conditions.

4

MAIN REQUIREMENTS FOR SECURITY: JOB AND FAMILY

A majority (76 per cent) of the young people surveyed believed that the government should play a larger role in day-to-day life, while only 5 per cent said it should have a minor role. The desire for a greater state role increased in conjunction with young people's level of education (although remaining surprisingly constant across other variables). Given the unique situation of the Palestinians, a greater role for government might mean protection from the harmful policies and practices of the Israeli occupation authorities. In addition, an increased government role would mitigate the negative effects of other non-state players, such as armed groups.

Support for this explanation can be found in other JMCC polls of the wider population. In October 2021, respondents were asked to choose the three most pressing problems that Palestinians face today. The responses were the occupation (63 per cent), corruption (48 per cent) and the absence of economic opportunity (45 per cent), in that order (JMCC/FES 2021). The poll was taken after the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) had once again cancelled elections planned for earlier that year and after the May confrontations. Fasaad, which is the Arabic for «corruption», has come to mean not only nepotism and »pay-for-play« in Palestinian discourse, but also reflects the PNA's priorities,

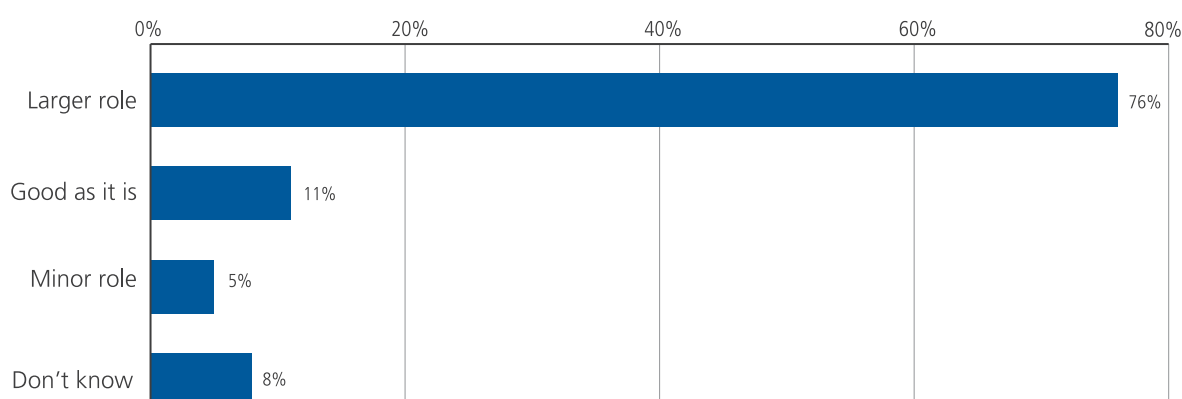
i.e., the continuation of security cooperation with Israel and the prioritisation of enrichment and development over the hardship that comes with adopting resistance positions. In other words, Palestinians see their community suffering not only from the impact of the ongoing military occupation, but they also see their government as weak and pursuing the wrong priorities. Palestinian young people may see a more active role of the state as a counterbalance to these twin concerns of the ongoing occupation and a weak, undemocratic government.

Another finding almost unique to Palestine is that only 10 per cent of all respondents thought the overall political situation had improved somewhat or significantly over the last five years. Three out of four (72 per cent) of young people said the political situation had deteriorated somewhat or significantly, with 12 per cent saying it had stayed the same and 5 per cent saying they did not know. This reflects the fact that political conditions in Palestine are tied to the occupation, which has become more entrenched over time. There is growing frustration over the role of the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian political leaders. Separate polling shows that youth in particular are being excluded from political participation, increasing their disenfranchisement and disillusionment (JMCC/FES 2021).

Figure 11

Role of the state

Should the state play a larger or more minor role, or is its current role satisfactory?



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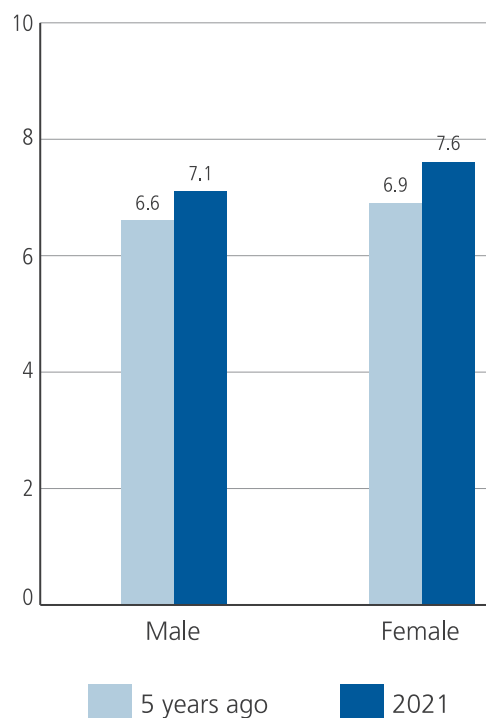
RELIGION

This study found that the young people surveyed, predominantly Muslim, were mostly religious. Moreover, on a scale of 1 to 10, youth across all groups perceived themselves as more religious now than they were five years ago.

In addition, a large majority of 90 per cent wanted religion to play larger role in public life. This held with little variation across gender, education, income levels, age and place of residence. This religiosity reflects similar attitudes across Palestinian society, although, compared with attitudes towards religion among youth in the US and Europe, it is notable that young people in Palestine feel increasingly religious and want to see the role of religion increased.

Yet, a majority of 81 per cent (4 per cent more than in the 2016 poll) consider religion a private matter in which no one should interfere. This reflects more varied views among Palestinians, where a vast majority view religion as an important part of their lives, fasting during Ramadan (among Muslims), praying and not shaking hands with those of the opposite sex, while at the same time rejecting early marriage and polygamy (JMCC/FES 2019).

Figure 12
Religiousness
How religious are you...?



Scale from 1 = not religious at all to 10 = very religious

6

FUTURE DETERMINED BY JOB PROSPECTS AND MARRIAGE

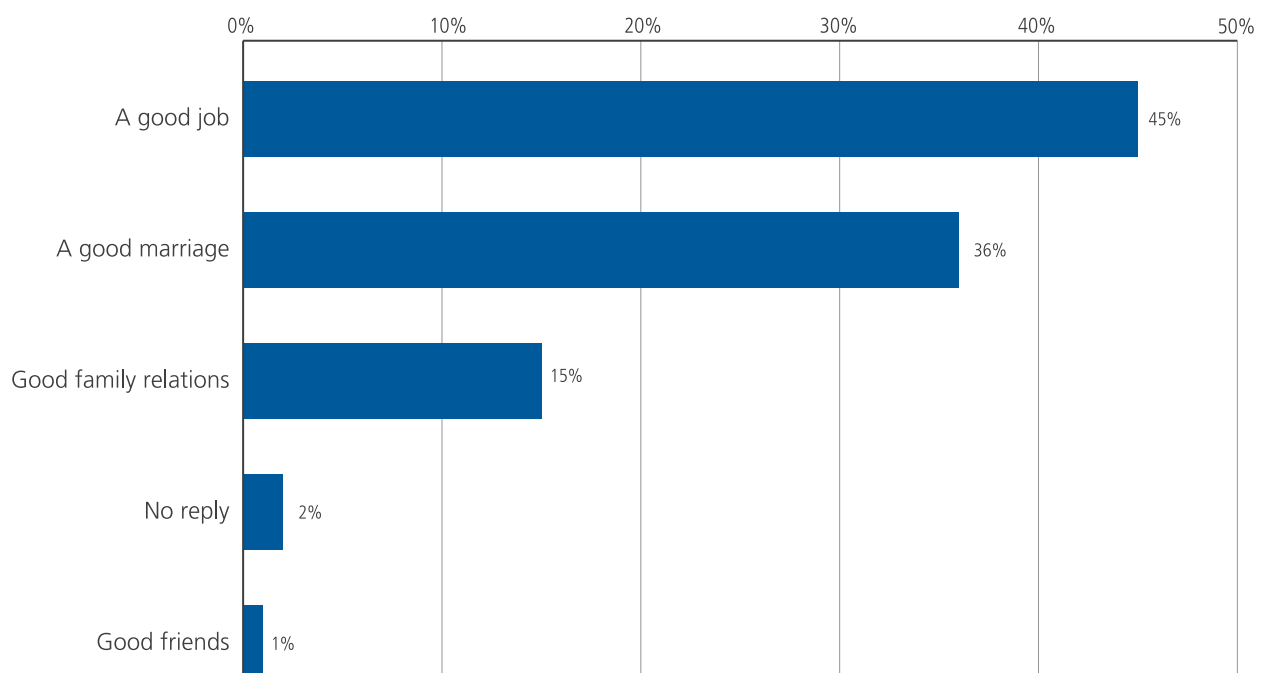
The most important factor determining the future of Palestinian youth seems to be the economy, followed by a good marriage and family life. These priorities reflect the struggling Palestinian economy and the view among the general population in Palestine that the three most pressing personal problems Palestinians face is getting a job, the quality of their job in terms of income and sustainability and the availability of social security, in that order (JMCC/FES 2021). In fact, these economic issues were more important among all Palestinians than education, civil liberties, health insurance and housing concerns. A good job took precedence across all groups of young people, but is especially important for males, who view themselves as the breadwinners of the family, the 16-20 age group, which is struggling the most with secure employment, and those with medium levels of education, who are also facing educational barriers to securing stable work (see Figure 6).

There were more female respondents who said that a good marriage was most important to their personal future, as young women are more likely to view themselves as dependents rather than the breadwinner of the family, according to predominant gender roles. Youth aged 21-25 may be more concerned with marriage than other age groups because this is usually the age at which Palestinians marry and start their own household. Youth with low levels of education were much more likely to choose marriage as the main factor determining their personal future. The smallest proportion of respondents reported that good family relations were the most important factor, and this represented a 6 percentage point drop from the last survey. In fact, this decline was reflected across every group surveyed except those living in rural areas, indicating a move away from familial bonds and towards more individualistic measures such as job or marriage. It would be interesting to explore how this

Figure 13

Personal future

What is most important for your personal future?

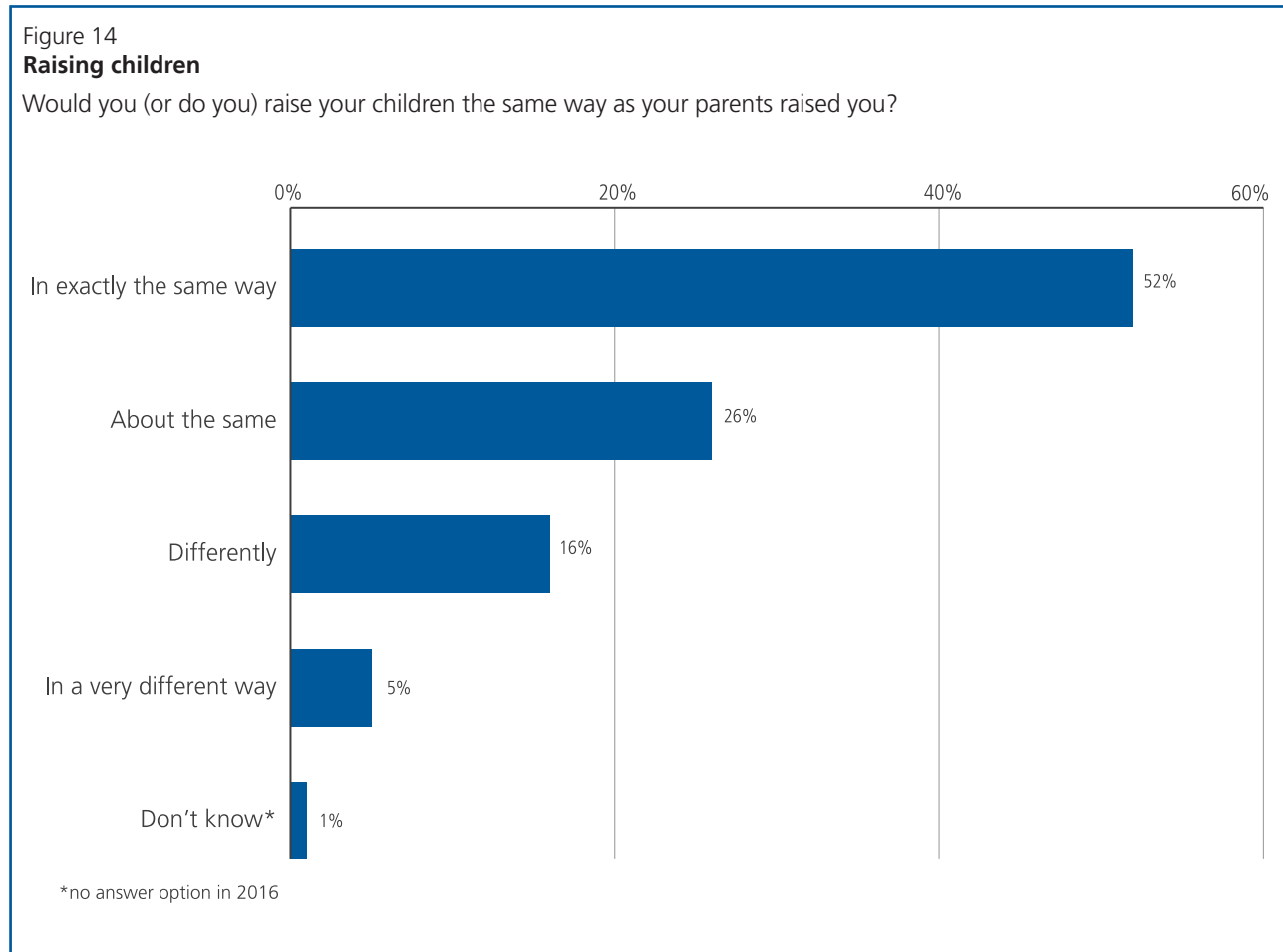


relates to the findings that youth in urban areas are facing greater economic challenges and have a more negative view of the future (see Figures 3 and 4). Good friends were the most important factor for just 1 per cent across all groups.

Whether for financial or other reasons, a majority of 65 per cent indicated that it had been more difficult to find a partner in recent years, with little difference between female and male youth. This may be another reason that more young people aged 21-25 saw a positive future as being dependent on a good marriage—challenges in finding a partner may increase the perceived importance of this factor. Having children is also important to our respondents: a majority of 90 per cent, across all groups, said that children are needed in order to live a happy life. These findings lead us to the conclusion that the difficulties in finding employment, together with challenges in finding a partner with whom to raise children, are among the main causes of insecurity for young people.

Young people in Palestine appear not to be more radical than their elders when it comes to social mores; most of them agree with their own upbringing. A majority of 78 per cent want to raise their children in exactly or approximately the same way that their parents raised them. This was true across different groups. This finding is particularly interesting given that gender attitudes in particular have undergone a seismic shift in Palestine over the last four decades as men

have lost access to the Israeli labour market, while women have increased access to higher education and employment. As a result, »young men and young women in Palestinian society are on almost opposing life trajectories—young men increasingly feeling they have lost out in relation to previous generations, while young women feel that their life chances and choices have significantly widened in comparison to their mothers’ generation« (Abu Awad et al. 2020). Men who were raised in a home with a father who helped with housework are more likely to hold gender equitable attitudes, indicating the significance of upbringing. While there is no way of knowing whether some young people will ultimately raise their own children differently, the difference between young men and young women is strikingly small, and only one in five stated that they would raise their children differently at all.



7

SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Nearly all young people in Palestine use the internet. The 6 per cent who do not are mainly those with low levels of education, a very/rather bad economic situation, or those living in large cities. In fact, one of the most significant changes since the 2016 survey of youth was the 24 per cent increase in use of the internet in the last five years.

The most common social media platform is Facebook followed by WhatsApp, the use of which has increased dramatically in the last four years. Instagram is used by a majority and also saw a significant increase in usage since the last survey. Nearly half of all respondents reported using TikTok, and one in four use Telegram, platforms that were not asked about five years ago.

The most common reason for using social media is to stay in contact with friends and family, although it is also widely used for entertainment, sharing music/videos/pictures and for organising meetings with friends. An increasing number of young people use social media to look for work opportu-

nities, but this proportion is still limited to only one in three young people. Overall, just 22 per cent said that they use social media for purposes related to politics. While social media played a significant role in advocacy and activism during the May 2021 confrontations, which began over Israeli attempts to displace Palestinians in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, both Israel and the PNA have arrested Palestinians for their social media posts. In contrast, a total of 30 per cent said they used social media to create religious posts of some kind.

Figure 15

Internet use

Do you use the internet?

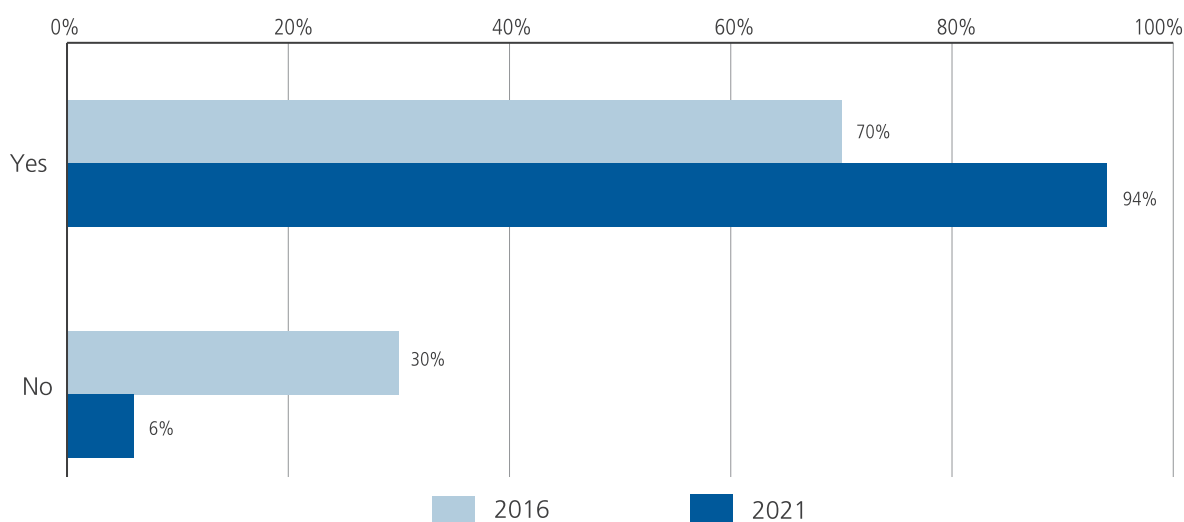
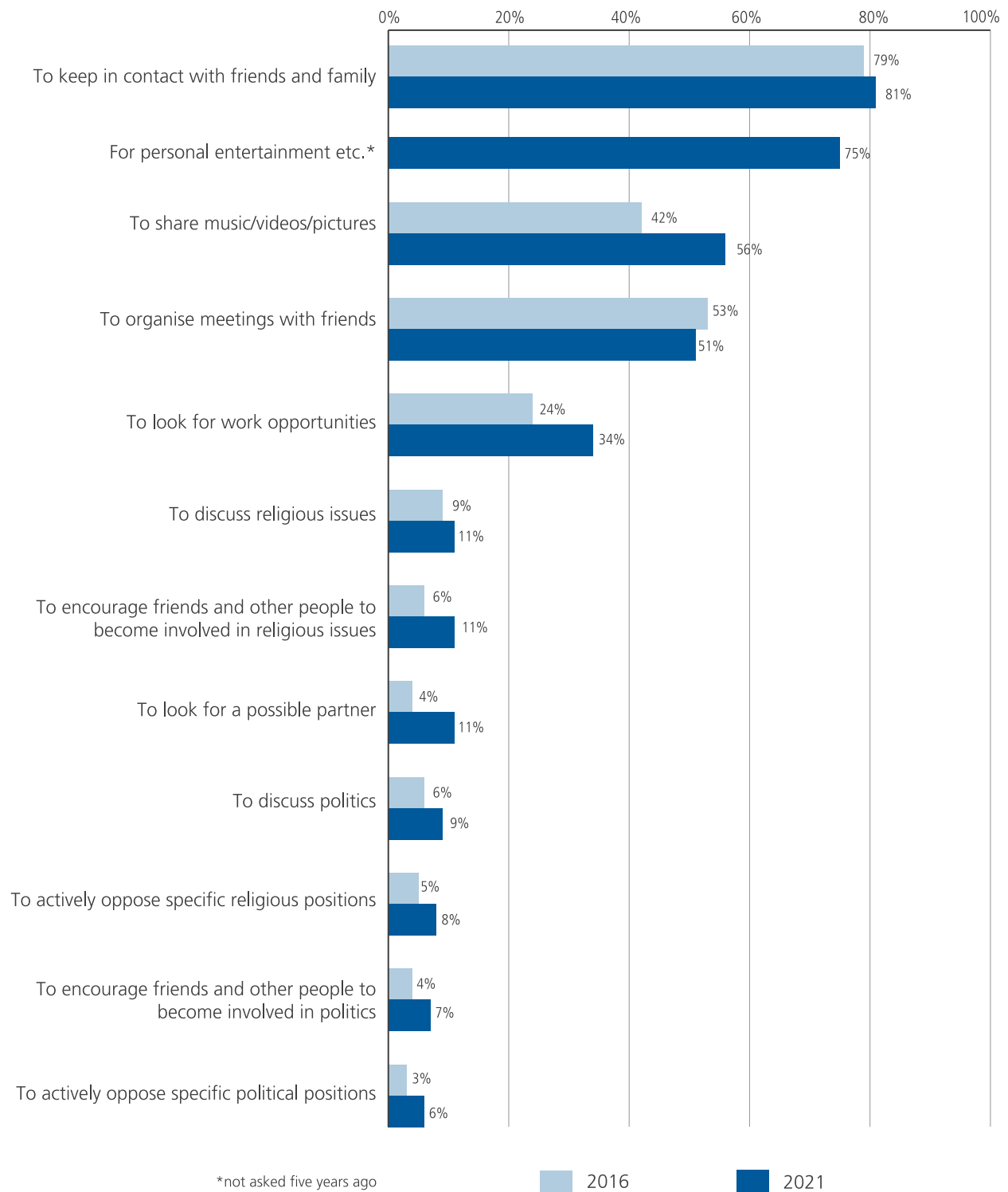


Figure 16

Reasons for social media use

How do you use social media services such as Facebook, blogs or WhatsApp?



8

MINIMAL POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

One of the most unexpected findings of this poll is that most Palestinian youth are not interested in politics. These findings are surprising given the high level of political engagement of Palestinians over the years, with large majorities going to vote and following political news. Does this lack of interest only reflect a recent trend related to the lack of progress in ending the occupation and the stagnation in political life? Given young people's engagement in the First and Second Intifadas, it seems unlikely that Palestinian youth have always been apolitical. It is more likely that, due to a lack of transfer of power from the older to the younger generations, young Palestinians do not see any opportunities to engage politically. In August 2022, 67 per cent of Palestinians said they felt there had been a significant decline in youth membership in the factions that make up the Palestine Liberation Organization (JMCC/FES 2022). Growing anti-democratic

tendencies manifested in the cancelling of PNA elections, politically motivated arrests by Palestinian security forces, and the increasing brutality of the Israeli occupation authorities combined with the prolonged lack of progress in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations make political activism a risky proposition, with little hope of actual dividends.

Youth in rural areas are relatively more likely to be interested in politics, with interest becoming progressively less among youth in cities and large cities. Higher levels of education also correlate with greater interest in politics. The proportion of young people not interested in politics at all has increased by 8 per cent since 2016, driven mostly by relatively large increases among older youth aged 26-30, those with low levels of education, and those living in large cities.

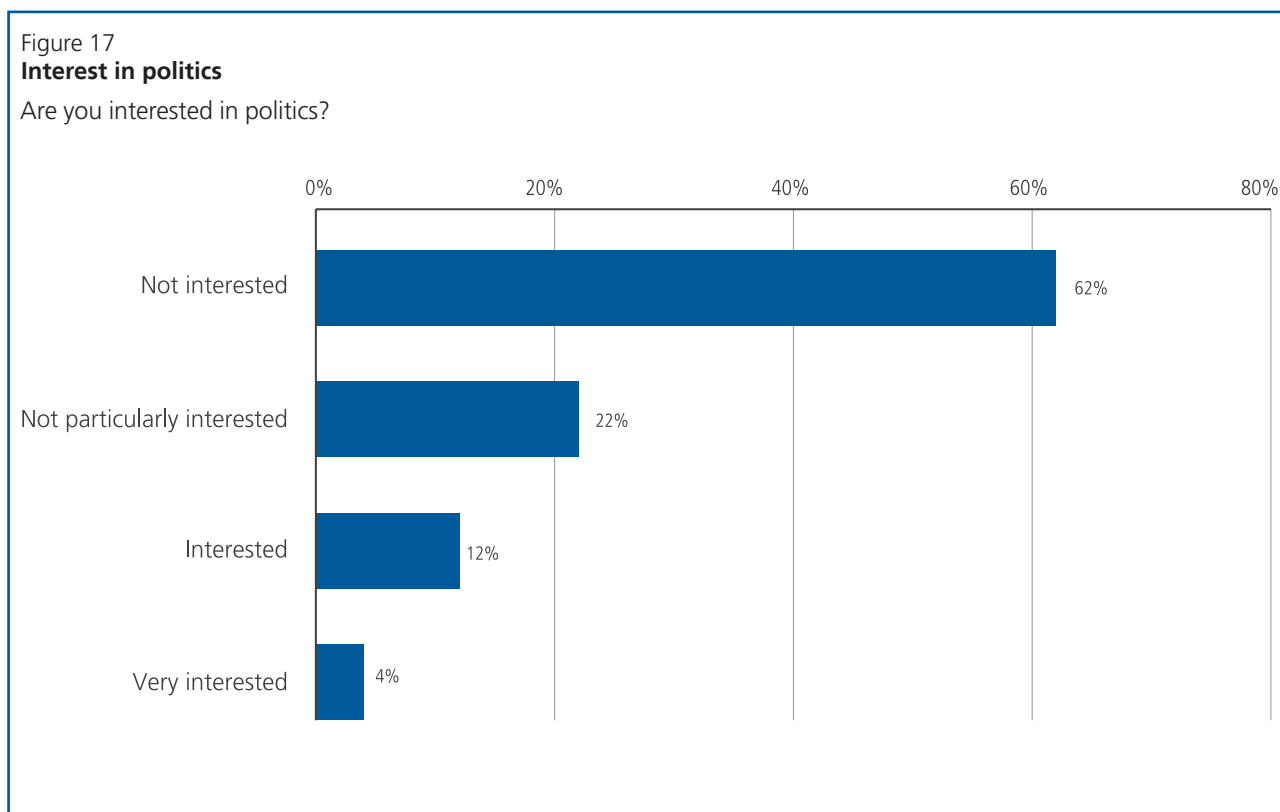
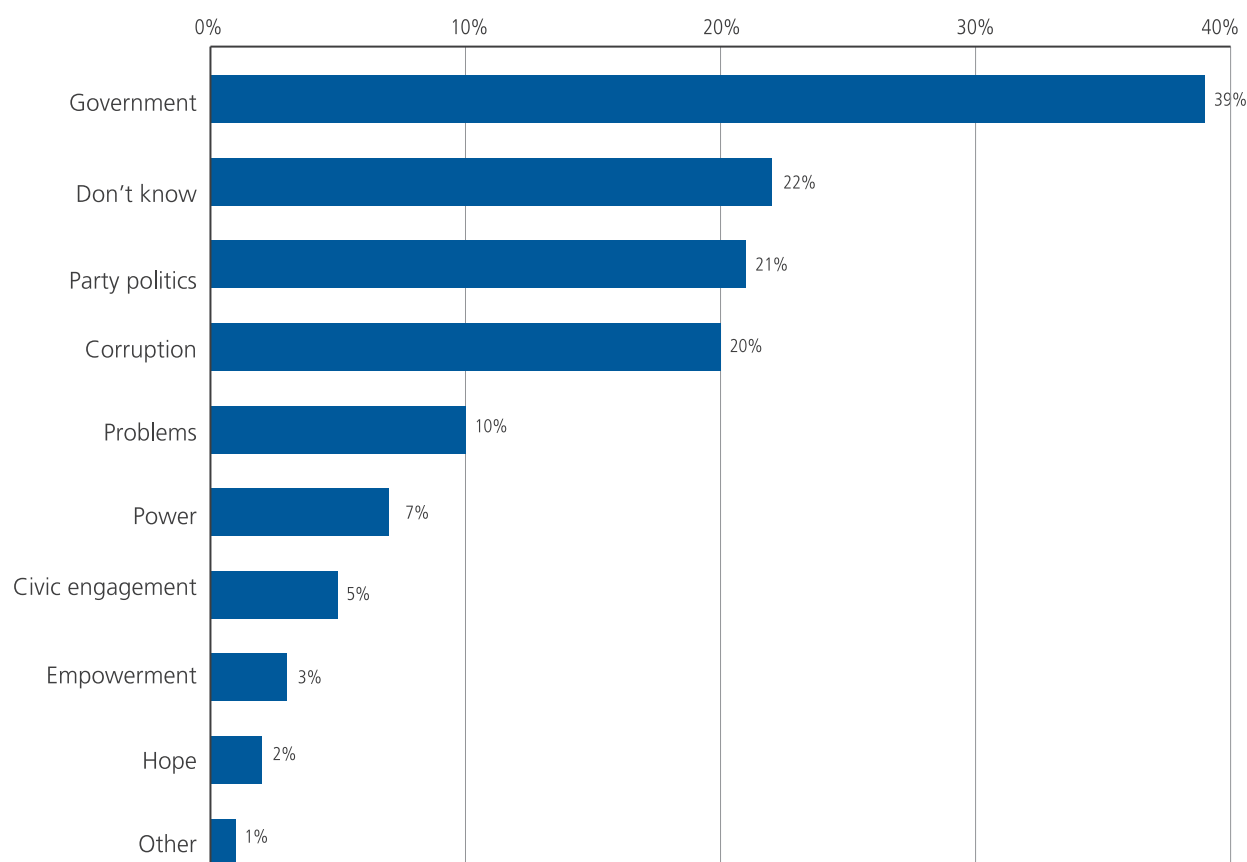


Figure 18

Associations with »politics«

When people use the word »politics«, what are your associations?



Consistent with this position, an even larger and increasing majority of 82 per cent do not even follow political news. The most politically informed group is young people living in rural areas but even their interest was in keeping with a trend of declining interest over the last five years. The only group where an increase in information gathering about politics has been observed since 2016 is youth aged 16-20. The most common means of obtaining political information is social media (72 per cent of those who follow political news), followed by internet websites (61 per cent).

In order to make more sense of these findings, young people were asked what they associate with the word »politics«. Most of them said they associated politics with »government«, then »party politics«, »corruption« and »problems«—in other words negative connotations rather than other, more positive options such as »empowerment« or »hope«. This is not surprising given the negative perceptions of the performance of the Palestinian government. It also echoes trends seen in other public opinion polls where support for both main political parties, Fatah and Hamas, is on the decline (JMCC/FES 2022).

9

LIMITED CIVIC AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Young people's approach to civic engagement is more positive than their view of politics; a majority said that they had taken part in at least one civic activity, although 27 per cent of them said that this was spontaneous and non-institutional and the biggest group, 49 per cent, said that it was on their own. In contrast, there were many reasons given for not engaging in civic projects. These reasons reflect the concerns of young people described elsewhere in this study—their focus on making a living and scepticism about leadership/institutions. The most prominent reason was that civic engagement produces no income. This was followed by the view that such activities only benefit a small number of people, they have no prospects, it is not clear where the money invested in such activities goes, and the young person's family or the government do not support such activities.

The range of leisure activities Palestinian youths engage in is fairly limited. The most popular activity was surfing the internet (which saw an increase of 22 percentage points from five years ago, largely replacing watching television). This was followed, in terms of frequency, by watching TV, visiting neighbours and relatives, activities with the family,

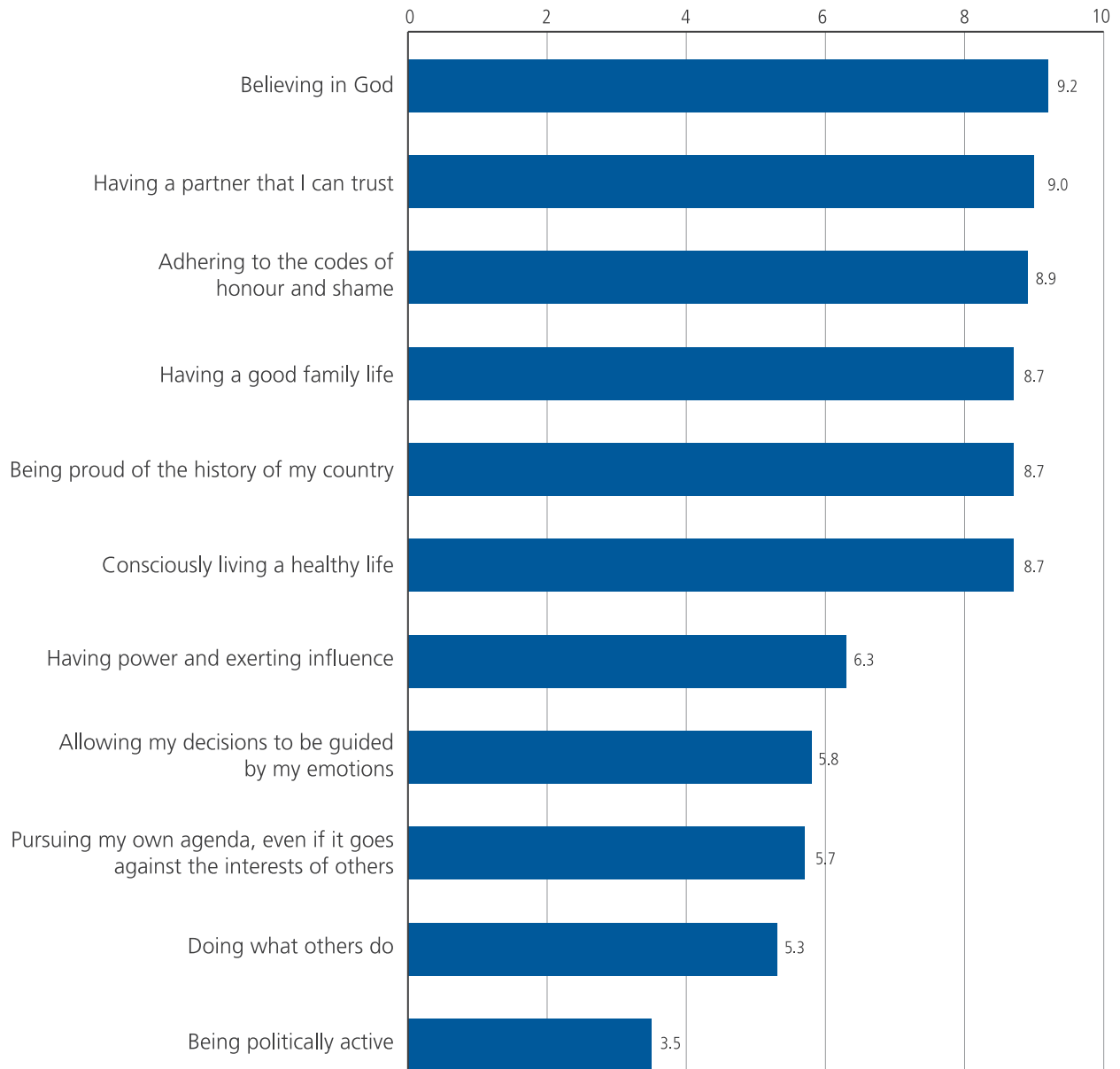
shopping and listening to prayers/recitations, in that order. Meeting people, playing sports, »hanging out«, reading books and magazines all followed closely at approximately the same frequency.

What do young people aspire to achieve? Their main aims are to live up to their faith and the traditional ideals of family and nation. The importance of these reflects the values discussed earlier in the study. Political activism is at the bottom of this list. Notably, there is very little variation between male and female youth when it comes to the importance of these aspirations. Young women were more interested in pursuing their own agenda and less in doing what others do, perhaps reflecting a resistance to traditional gender roles, while young men were more interested in exerting power and in political activism.

Figure 19

Importance of aspirations

How important are the following points for you?



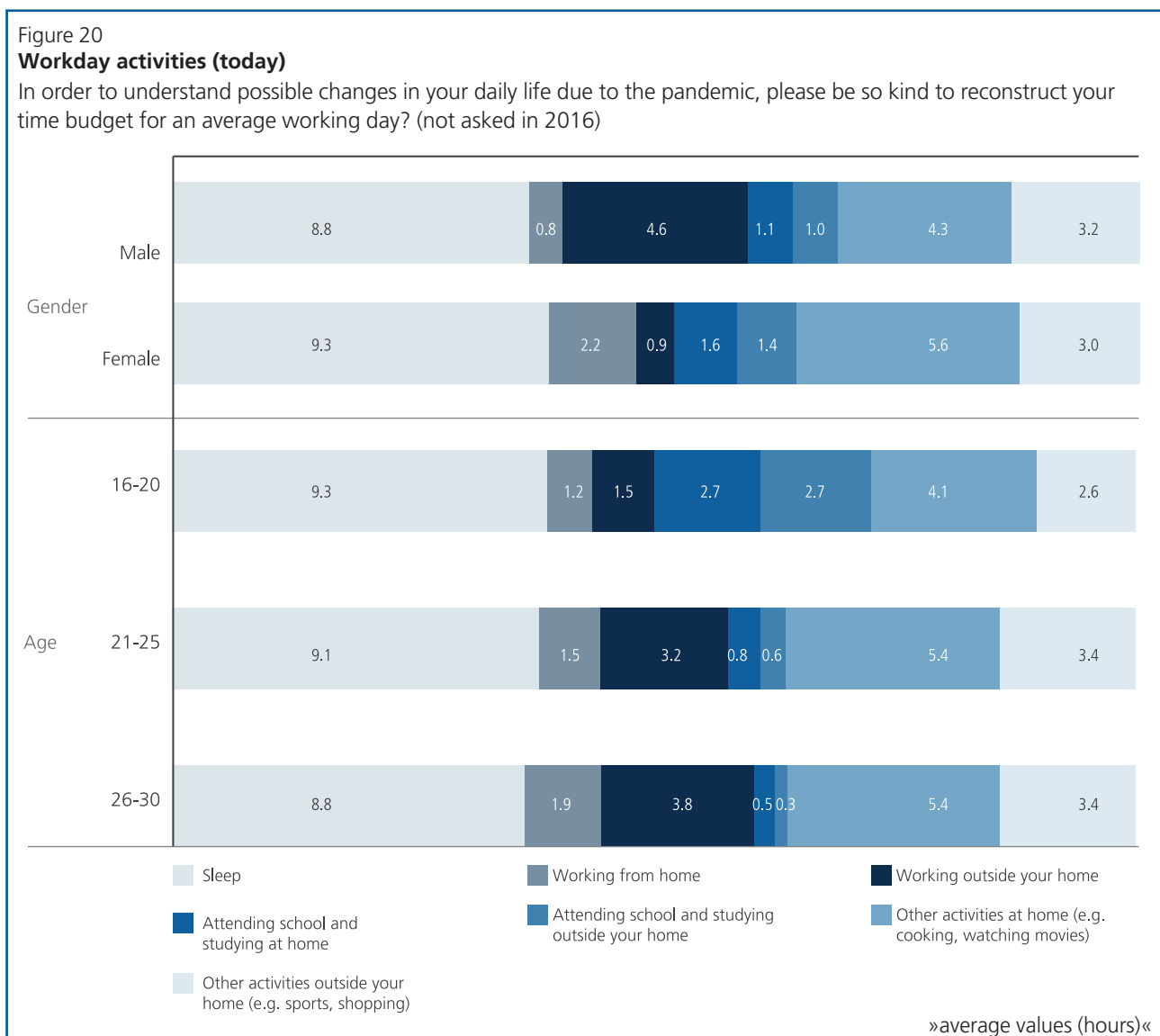
Scale from 1 = absolutely unimportant to 10 = absolutely important

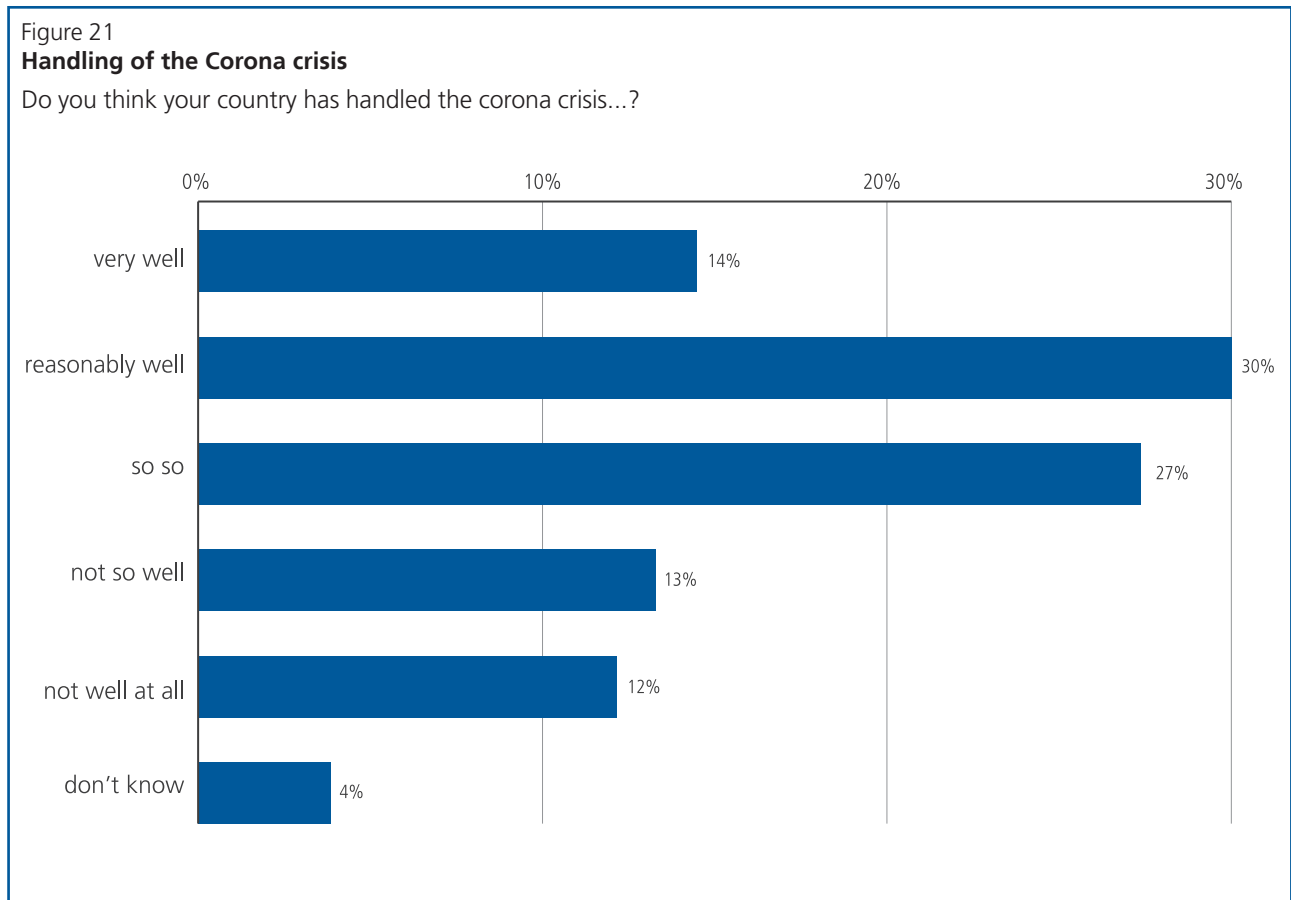
10

EFFECTIVE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

In most contexts outside Palestine, the pandemic affected the way young people spent their time. A comparison of the distribution of daytime hours among young Palestinians in late 2021 with that of the period prior to the Covid-19 pandemic found only minor differences, however. One explanation could be that many young people did not adhere to pandemic rules, or that the most severe restrictions had

already been lifted by the time of the survey. Two in three young people said that they or their families and friends had been infected with the virus. From other survey questions, it is clear that many young people typically spend a relatively large number of hours at home—regardless of the pandemic—due to a lack of leisure opportunities, general insecurity and unemployment.





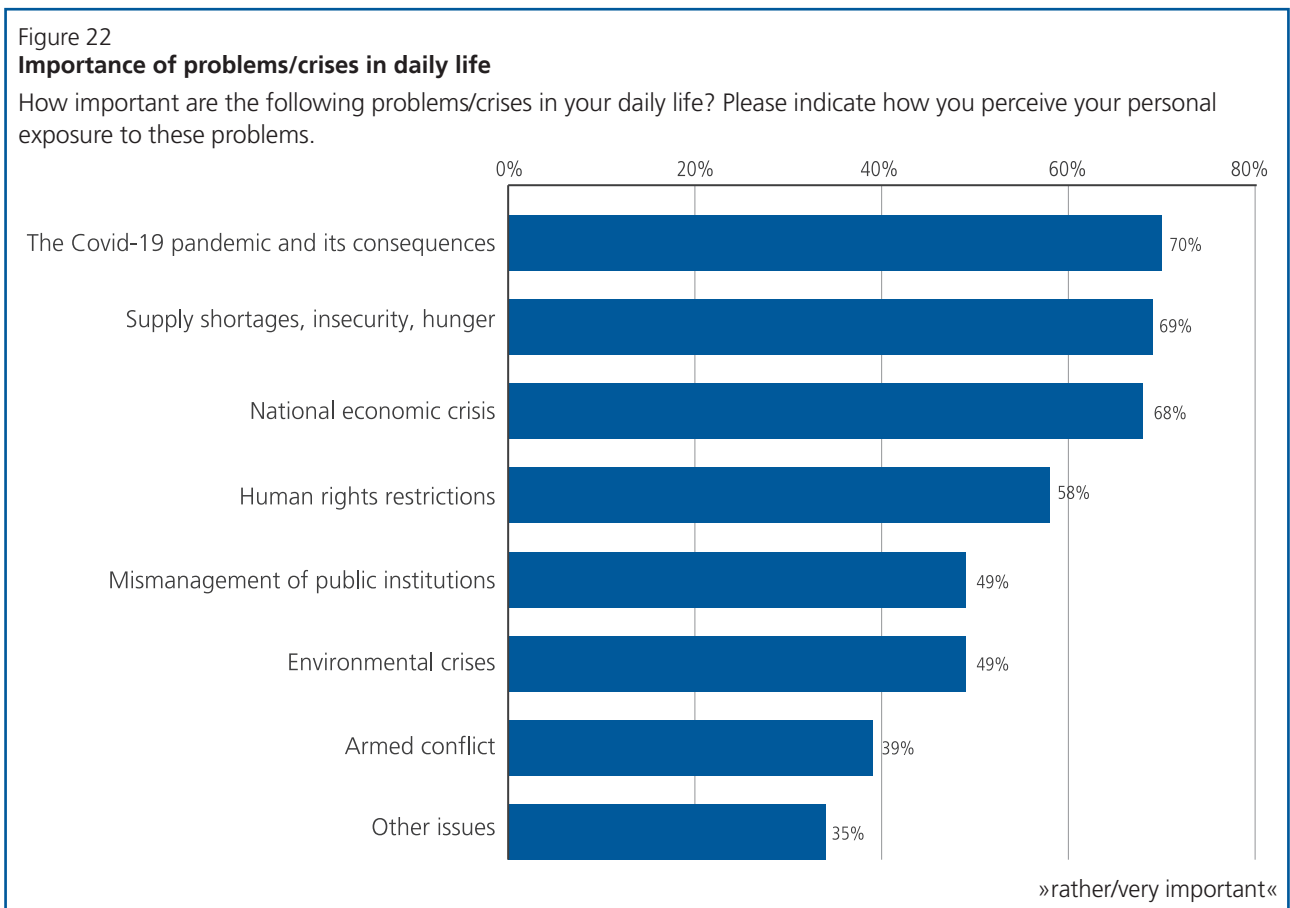
The most common feeling that young people associated with the pandemic was boredom (56 per cent), tiredness, stress/tension/pressure, depression, frustration, anxiety and reduced ability to concentrate, in that order. Young people's evaluation of the way the pandemic was handled in the oPt seems to be relatively positive, which reflects the view of the general public.

11

FAITH AS A SOURCE OF STABILITY, AND TRENDS IN EMIGRATION

The most important problem facing young people during the survey period was the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, as 70 per cent of respondents said it was rather/very important. The second most important problems were supply shortages/insecurity/hunger, followed by the national economic crises, then human rights restrictions. Again, we find that economic issues and livelihoods are at the forefront of the minds of Palestinian youth. Mismanagement of public institutions and environmental crises were also selected as prominent problems faced by young people. Nearly 40 per cent of youth said that armed conflict was a significant problem in their daily lives. The proportion is higher in the Gaza Strip (46 per cent), which was still recovering from the May 2021 bombardment at the time this poll was conducted, compared to the West Bank and East Jerusalem (35 per cent).

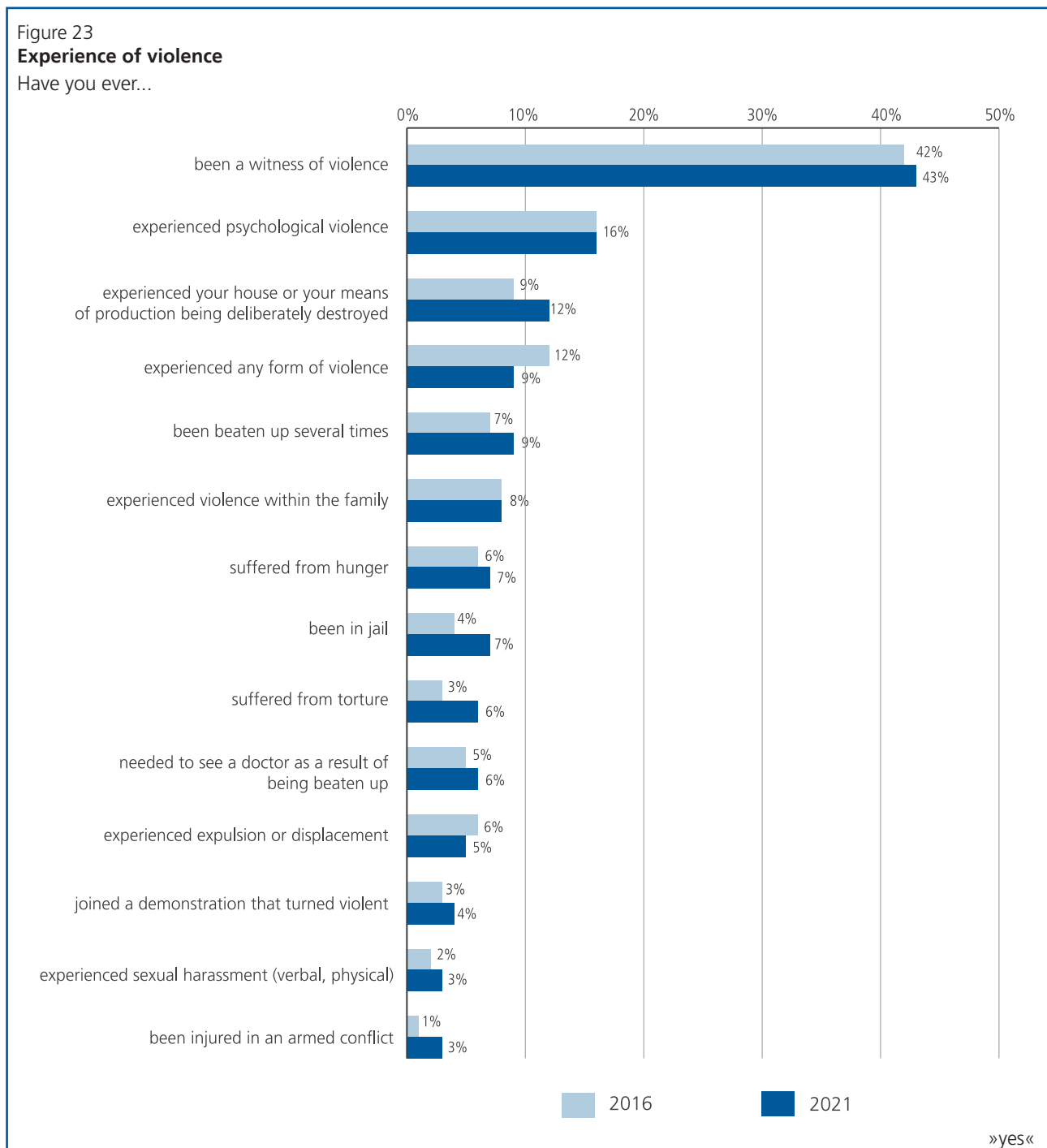
As many as 43 per cent of young people had witnessed violence, with the next largest group experiencing psychological violence themselves, and a staggering figure of more than one in ten Palestinian youths experiencing the destruction of their homes or means of production. The poll does not say how the homes were destroyed but in the West Bank, Israel often uses home demolitions as a punishment for building without a permit (despite the fact that permits are very difficult to get) or alleged resistance activity. In the Gaza Strip, homes are destroyed in bombardments by Israel, which often target residential areas. In fact, most of these responses refer to destruction in Gaza (where the rate is at 19 per cent), as most of those who reported experiencing the deliberate destruction of their homes live in large cities. In the West Bank (7 per cent), large cities are not targeted for home demolitions as often as they are under the nom-



inal security control of the PNA and it is more difficult for Israeli forces to enter and demolish homes in urban areas. In May 2021, several months before this poll was conducted, 1,650 homes were completely destroyed by Israeli bombing in Gaza. This was just the most recent in a series of attacks that this young generation has lived through. Smaller but still significant numbers reported having experienced some form of violence (9 per cent), been beaten up several times (9 per cent), experienced violence in the family (8 per cent), been in jail (7 per cent), suffered hunger (7 per cent), suffered torture (6 per cent), been beaten up so badly they required medical treatment (6 per cent) and experienced expulsion or displacement (5 per cent). Every single one of these experiences that was related to the occupation (i.e. not domestic violence) increased in prevalence since 2016,

except for expulsion which had decreased by 1 percentage point. It is clear that violence is a persistent and increasing phenomenon in the lives of Palestinian youth, and the responsibility of protecting them as children (those under age 18) or developing adults is not being fulfilled.

Violence is a more prominent feature in the lives of young men than women, with higher proportions of males reporting every type of violence except for sexual harassment, which was reported twice as frequently by females than males. Young people with low levels of education (this is the smallest category in our sample with just 82 out of 1,000 individuals) were much more likely to report violence of every kind. Notably, nearly one in four Palestinian youth with low levels of education had been in jail, a 15 point



increase from 2016. One in five said they had suffered from hunger, also an increase from five years ago. The correlation between low levels of education and violence cannot be explained by poverty or unemployment, which might expose people to situations of violence. As cited above, 59 per cent of Palestinian youth with low levels of education said that their family's economic situation was good or very good, and this was a marked increase from 2016 (Figure 5). These two trend lines of violence and family finances are moving in opposite directions. More investigation is needed to explore why violence—much of it resulting from the occupation—is markedly more pronounced in the lives of young people with low levels of education, and increasingly so.

While young people mostly disagree with the statement »others continuously threaten me«, a large majority agree that the situation in the public space is increasingly tense. A total of 30 per cent, an increase from 2016, say that they are afraid that armed conflict will threaten their livelihood or family. Those experiencing the most violence (as per the figure above), youth with low levels of education, are conversely the least likely of all the groups to fear armed conflict. Close to half of the young people surveyed, an increase of 9 per cent from five years ago, stated that it was legitimate to use violence to defend oneself or one's family. The groups that are more inclined to believe that the use of violence is legitimate are older youth (ages 26-30), youth with low and medium levels of education and youth living in rural areas. Since 2016, all of these groups saw double-digit increases in their acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of self-defence. Youth living in rural areas are the most willing to employ violence (over half), and this is likely because they are most exposed to military and settler violence. A similar proportion accepts the use of violence without mentioning self-defence, although the increase here from five years ago is not as pronounced.

The last five years have seen a marked decline in the proportion of youth that see the way women dress as an acceptable reason for sexual harassment. More than half still agree with this statement, but the percentage has decreased by 8 points since 2016, and among male respondents it has decreased by 11 points. (As is often true with gender bias, young women are almost as likely as the rest of young people to hold an attitude that disadvantages them; traditional gender roles are entrenched among both women and men). In this case, place of residence is a more important determinant, strongly correlating with the view that women dressing inappropriately should preclude complaints about sexual harassment. Youth living in rural areas were most likely to hold this view, although young people living in medium-sized cities were the only group of all those surveyed that saw an increase in the proportion of youth that believe

that dress excuses sexual harassment. The smallest proportion of those who hold this view, however, was among young people living in large cities, and this proportion also decreased by a massive 29 per cent in five years.

When asked what represents stability in their personal lives, Palestinian youth most frequently said the most stable thing was their personal faith, followed by relationships with family, self-confidence and then trust in friends. These findings go hand-in-hand with the aforementioned decline in political activity. Only 14 per cent reported experiencing stability in the political situation.

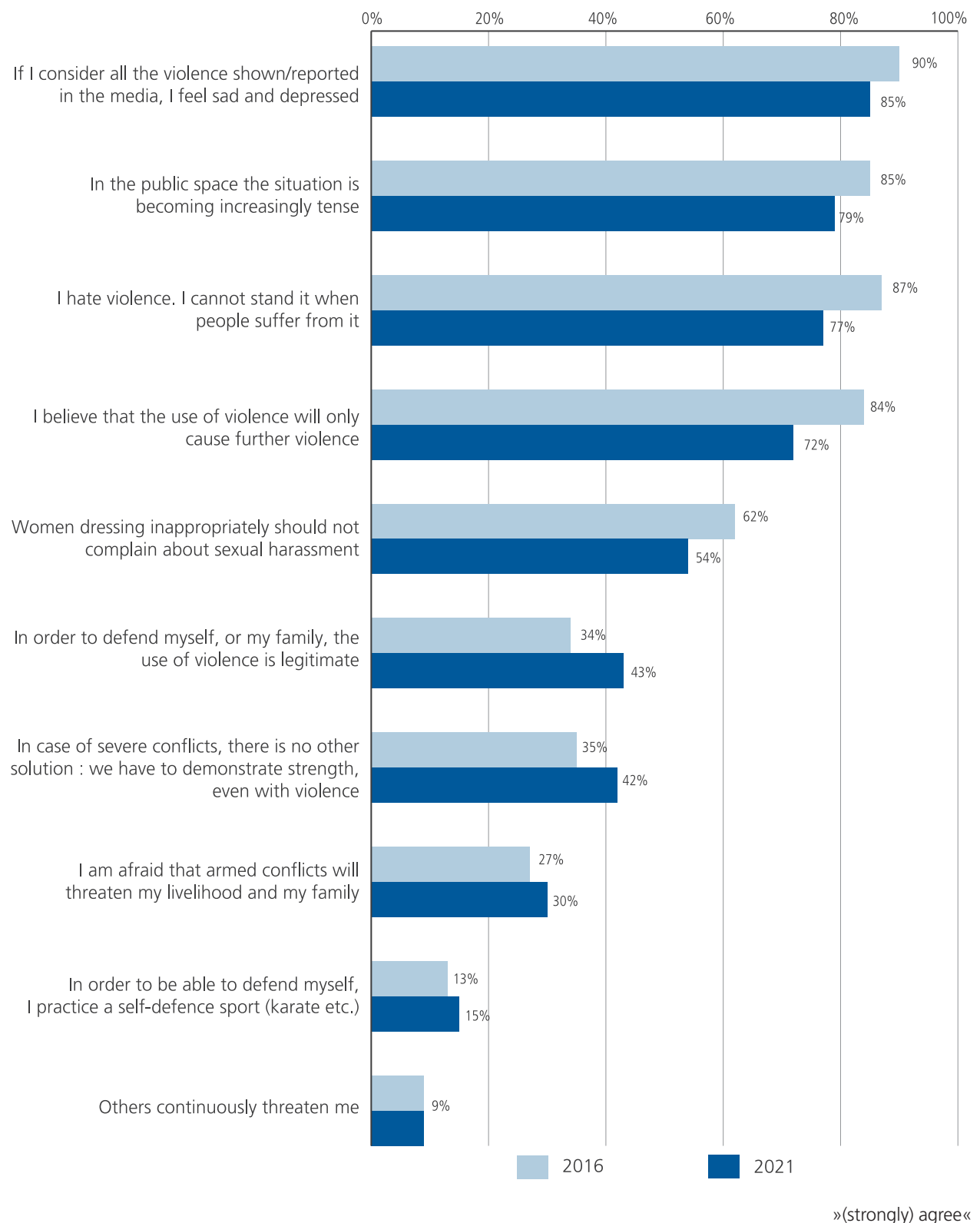
Strikingly, a very small proportion of the Palestinian youth surveyed had lived outside Palestine; 93 per cent had never lived abroad. This reflects the barriers to travel that Palestinians face due to the occupation, lack of finances and the difficulty obtaining long-term visas to other countries because of those state's unfavourable immigration policies. Most young people who had lived outside Palestine, had lived in other Arab countries.

While 70 per cent of youth had no plans to emigrate whatsoever, this survey indicated slightly more positive feelings about emigration than those expressed five years ago. Many of those with relatives abroad said they benefitted from money sent by them. Similarly, one in four among this group said they were fascinated by life abroad and increasingly wished to emigrate. The number who said they were thinking of emigrating (10 per cent), would like to emigrate (16 per cent) or will certainly emigrate (3 per cent) was almost identical to the 2016 survey. Those who said they considered emigrating were thinking of moving to Europe, the United States and/or Canada, to the Gulf and to other Arab states, in that order, although young people said they would prefer to emigrate to Europe over the United States (more than two to one).

Figure 24

Experience of threats/conflicts

Do you rather agree or rather disagree with the following statements?



12

CONCLUSION

Palestinian youth continue to move away from political engagement and towards religion. Most show no interest in political news and do not see politics as an important part of their future. Nevertheless, they consider faith to be a private matter and do not seem to have any radical ideas about what it would mean to give religion a bigger role in government and daily life. They would like to raise their children much as their parents raised them. That said, increased social media use and a certain shift away from the primacy of the extended family reflect new influences on their lives.

This trend appears to result from the lack of positive impact that political engagement has had on their lives. On the one hand, the oldest of these young people were born just as the Oslo Accords were signed between Israel and Palestine. The initial Oslo pact stated that final status negotiations would be reached in five years. Now, three decades later, the occupation is more entrenched than ever, and the dreams of Palestinian independence and statehood have withered, leaving a starved, struggling and weak PNA. The lives of these young people have been a continuing tale of disappointment in political negotiations and their ability to produce meaningful results, while repeated violence and occasional confrontations have wreaked havoc on Palestinian daily life.

On the other hand, avenues for meaningful political engagement have been largely closed off to this younger generation, which cannot envisage itself being elected to office due to the repeated cancellation of elections (the last general election was held in 2006 and resulted in the physical division of the Palestinian government between the PNA in the West Bank and the Hamas-led government in the Gaza Strip). The aging and ossified Palestinian leadership has done little to prepare new generations of political leaders, preferring instead to hold on to power. Likewise, the persistent sparring and division between Fatah and Hamas, the two leading political factions, is viewed as a stain on the Palestinian national movement. It is difficult to know from these poll results whether Palestinian young people separate »politics« from armed resistance against Israel. The latter is a realm where they can engage and there are recent signs that youth are playing an important role in the increased armed activity against Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that is not associated with any political faction (Al-Masri 2022). This is not surprising, given this poll's findings that many young people believe violence

is legitimate in cases of self-defence, and that just as many accept the use of violence in instances of severe conflict.

Economically, the picture is mixed for young people. On the one hand, they seem to be very concerned about the job market and their ability to find suitable employment. There are signs that while the economic situation has improved for most young people, many remain highly insecure, as hunger and poverty remain the most important sources of instability after the Covid-19 pandemic. Finding a good job is the number one way young people see of securing their future. On the other hand, most young people said they liked the work that they were doing at the time of the survey. Traditional gender roles continue to limit female economic participation, although because young women are more likely to have white collar service jobs than their male peers, they benefit from the improvements in labour conditions that are linked to formal employment. The failure of the PNA to institute a social security system, by revoking the law after demonstrations and unrest stemming from a lack of confidence in institutions, means that young people have barely any safety net, despite their economic insecurity.

While violence and political unrest were not the main concerns for the young people surveyed, they do feature in their responses. A total of 43 per cent had witnessed violence, which certainly affects their outlook and attitudes. The increased religiosity and turn towards religion may reflect a decline in confidence in other institutions, such as the government or international bodies that could help alleviate the overwhelming economic and political insecurity. A striking lack of experience of living abroad is combined with a growing interest in emigration, although only one in four young people were considering emigrating at this time. One component of the Palestinian national struggle has been samoud, or steadfastness/rootedness, which refers to the belief that it is important to hold on tightly to the land despite difficulties and resist through one's mere existence. Emigration is not easy for Palestinians, especially young Palestinians who have fewer resources and find it more difficult to obtain visas, but it is also viewed negatively in the context of samoud, which prioritises remaining in Palestine. It is interesting, then, that interest in emigration is growing, which is yet another sign that the prolonged occupation with no end in sight is shaping the attitudes of Palestinian young people.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
oPt	Occupied Palestinian territory
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority

LIST OF FIGURES

5	Figure 1 Personal economic situation today
6	Figure 2 Perception of own future and personal life
6	Figure 3 Perception of future of society
8	Figure 4 Assessment of family's economic situation five years ago
8	Figure 5 Assessment of family's economic situation today
9	Figure 6 Current employment and education situation
9	Figure 7 Main occupation
10	Figure 8 Employment contract
10	Figure 9 Retirement pension
11	Figure 10 Fulfilment of job aspirations
12	Figure 11 Role of the state
13	Figure 12 Religiousness
14	Figure 13 Personal future
15	Figure 14 Raising children
16	Figure 15 Internet use
17	Figure 16 Reasons for social media use
18	Figure 17 Interest in »politics«
19	Figure 18 Associations with »politics«
21	Figure 19 Importance of aspirations
22	Figure 20 Workday activities (today)
23	Figure 21 Handling of the Corona crisis
24	Figure 22 Importance of problems/crises in daily life
25	Figure 23 Experience of violence
27	Figure 24 Experience of threats/conflicts

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ABOUT THE FES MENA YOUTH STUDY

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) views young women and men as instrumental for democratic development in the region and is keen to strengthen their potential to initiate change in the world of politics and across society. Based on the results of a long-term survey, launched in 2016, the FES seeks to provide insight into young people's situation in the MENA region.

In 2021, the FES launched its second large-scale representative survey in 12 MENA countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as Tunisia and Yemen. With its 1,000 in-depth interviews conducted for each country, the FES MENA Youth Study generates a large database of responses to more than 200 questions concerning the personal background of the interviewees and their views on a variety of topics.

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<https://palestine.fes.de/>

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Scientific supervision
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