

# **The Young and the Hawkish: Generational Differences in Conflict Attitudes in Israel**

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*November 2023*

## **Abstract**

How do generational patterns affect public opinion in prolonged conflicts? While considerable research has addressed the effects of conflicts on children and adolescents, understanding the broader generational divides in public attitudes towards conflict resolution remains an area with both theoretical and empirical gaps. Such understanding is crucial, given its potential to significantly shape aggregate public opinion and the trajectory of conflicts. This research note focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, examining how support for conflict resolution varies among different Israeli-Jewish cohorts. It employs longitudinal data from surveys conducted between 1981 and 2019, using both descriptive methods and age-period-cohort (APC) regression models. The findings indicate that generational differences in public opinion were rather small until the early 2000s. Post this period, younger Israelis have increasingly displayed more hawkish attitudes than older generations, coupled with a stronger inclination towards right-wing identification. These trends pose important questions about the changing nature of support for compromise within Israeli society and its implications for the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The factors driving these emerging generational gaps are complex and merit in-depth exploration. Although this research note touches upon potential explanations, including demographic shifts and varying levels of hope for peace across generations, they do not completely clarify the observed generational differences, highlighting the need for further research.

## **Introduction**

In the Israeli 2022 elections, the extreme right-wing alliance of the Jewish Power and the religious Zionism parties won 14 seats in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Polls have shown that it was exceptionally popular among young voters and that, in general, a large majority of young Israeli Jews identify as right-wing (Maltz 2022). Are these age-related differences a novel trend indicative of expanding generational divides, or do they reflect a consistent lifecycle effect? Given that Israeli politics heavily revolves around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these developments prompt an examination of generational differences in attitudes toward conflict resolution. What can be anticipated about the nature and extent of generational differences in such settings? While vast literature scrutinizes the impact of growing up in conflicts among children and adolescents, little is known about aggregate generational gaps in public opinion on conflict resolution. This research note aims to set out theoretical predictions drawn from socialization theories, followed by an empirical exploration into the effects of age, period, and cohorts on popular support for compromise in Israel.

Theoretical expectations about generational differences in support for conflict resolution are complex and have only been studied to a limited extent. One rather naïve view suggests younger generations might favor resolution more, as it might be easier for them to leave the shadows of the past behind. However, research indicates that growing up in conflict environments often preserves conflict-related beliefs and biases, even in children, potentially causing long-lasting collective traumas. This implies negligible if any generational differences in support for conflict resolution. Conversely, another theory argues that the specific conditions during one's formative years significantly shape political attitudes, leading to varying views on conflict resolution depending on the phase of the conflict experienced during these years.

This study analyzes longitudinal data from Israeli surveys from 1981 to 2019, showing that generational differences did not characterize public opinion in Israel until the early 2000s. Since then, a notable trend has emerged: younger Israeli Jews have increasingly shown more hawkish attitudes and tend to position themselves further to the right than older generations. The complexity of the factors behind these generational gaps requires extensive exploration. In this research note, I briefly examine two potential explanations: demographic shifts and variations in hope for peace across generations. While the latter receives some support, it does not fully account for all observed generational differences, suggesting the need for further in-depth research.

The research note's contributions are twofold. Firstly, it sheds light on the generational aspect of public opinion in conflict zones, which has been understudied thus far. Identifying generational patterns is crucial for understanding the conflict's dynamics, as generational replacement is a powerful mechanism that can shift the public's support for negotiations and compromise in different directions. Secondly, this note addresses the limited focus in existing literature on the generational differences in political attitudes within Israel. Analyzing behavioral data spanning nearly four decades offers a comprehensive view of age and generational trends among the Israeli-Jewish population. The findings

have broader implications, indicating that support for conflict resolution in Israel could decrease as older generations pass away. This insight is vital for understanding the region's future, especially considering the Israel-Hamas war which broke out in October 2023.

### **Generational theories in the context of conflict**

The predominant theory linking age and political attitudes in conflict zones focuses on political socialization and its role in transmitting political beliefs and worldviews across generations. However, an alternative view highlights how generations develop distinct attitudes based on the specific conditions of their formative years. While this perspective has been widely applied to studying political attitudes, its application to conflict attitudes remains underexplored. Next, I outline the key assumptions of each approach.

#### *Replicated perceptions along generations*

Socialization in intractable conflicts (Bar Tal 2007) is a complex process that is often described as contributing to the perpetuation and escalation of these disputes by replicating the same world views, societal beliefs, and narratives among young people. In these conflicts, "children grow up breathing the reality of conflict from the moment they are born and are dramatically affected by it throughout their life" (Nasie et al. 2021). Bar-Tal (2000, 2007) conceptualized this set of shared societal beliefs which shape the attitudes and behaviors of individuals as "the ethos of conflict". These beliefs are transmitted through political socialization by agents such as family members, teachers, and media, and personal experiences of conflict. They provide a psychological infrastructure that enables a society to cope with the challenges and threats posed by the conflict, while also serving to justify and legitimize the conflict itself (Uluğ et al. 2017, Bar-Tal et al. 2017). The processes of socialization described here should *not* lead, eventually, to intergenerational differences in conflict attitudes, emphasizing instead intergenerational similarities.

#### *Formative experiences and generational differences*

Broader generational theories highlight the unique socialization circumstances of each cohort (Sears 1981). The era in which a cohort matures significantly influences its future political attitudes, potentially leading to intergenerational differences in political attitudes. This impact of formative years is evident across various regions and contexts. Inglehart (1977) shows that economic prosperity in industrialized nations led younger generations to value post-materialistic ideals over materialistic ones. Formative conditions have also been found to affect later economic attitudes (Neundorf and Soroka 2018), political preferences (Tilley 2002), participation (Grasso et al. 2019) and voting (Lichtin 2023).

Can these theories apply to the context of conflicts? Most research focuses on the immediate effects of events like violence and terrorism on public opinion, highlighting their role in increasing

intolerance (Kam and Kinder 2007; Peffley et al., 2015) and reducing the willingness to compromise (Canetti et al. 2017). Some studies suggest long-term impacts due to post-traumatic stress disorder (Hirsch-Hoefler et al. 2016), but broader cohort effects remain underexplored (see Kim 2024). Special attention has been given to long-term effects of significant atrocities, leading to narratives of collective victimhood passed through generations (Balcells 2012; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Wayne and Zhukov 2022). Beyond violence, events such as peace negotiations and leadership changes can affect public opinion (Yakter and Harsgor 2023). Additionally, the "Zeitgeist," or spirit of the times, reflected in political discourse and culture (Mitts 2019) and among political elites (Oren 2019), can influence generational perspectives. Regardless of the nature of the formative years, the hypothesis suggests that *distinct generational experiences within a conflict will result in notable differences in attitudes across generations.*

### **The Israeli Context**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as a critical case-study for analyzing political behaviors in such contexts (e.g., Berrebi and Klor 2008; Getmansky and Zeitzoff 2014). Characterized by its prolonged existence, this conflict has experienced variability, from fluctuating intensities of violence, terrorist attacks, and rocket launches to phases of relative tranquility and peace negotiations. Such dynamics may theoretically contribute to the development of generational differences in attitudes, influenced by the specific historical contexts during which individuals were socialized. However, given the conflict's entrenched and inflexible nature in shaping political identities, it is plausible that the process of generational transmission may result in only marginal gaps in political attitudes across generations. A recent study (Hasler et al. 2023) suggests that younger Israelis are less hopeful about peace, consequently showing lesser support for conflict resolution. Nonetheless, they concentrate on age-related factors, leaving aside the idea of a generational effect that persists over the lifecycle. This research note bridges this gap by analyzing the generational aspect of Israeli public opinion on conflict attitudes while also discerning the distinct impact of lifecycle effects.

### **Empirical analysis**

The analysis uses 12 surveys as part of the Israel National Election Studies (INES) between 1981 and 2019. Four recent elections were excluded from the sample: September 2019, which revisited the April 2019 sample, March 2020, which included a low number of respondents for similar reasons; and 2021 and 2022, which unfortunately do not include a continuous age variable. All surveys used a stratified random sampling technique. As Arab citizens may display different attitudinal patterns regarding the conflict, their generational trends merit a separate framework outside the scope of this research. Details regarding variables, question wording and categories of answers can be found in the Appendix.

### *Methods of analysis*

In the absence of long-term panel data, most age-period-cohort (APC) studies rely on cross-sectional setups to track individuals from the same birth cohort over time, as if representing a sample of their cohort at each point (Alwin and Krosnick 1991). This study uses descriptive methods and statistical APC regression models. The descriptive approach highlights total outcomes for each generation at different times, revealing periods of similar or dissimilar generational behavior (Firebaugh 1997, Glenn 2005). However, it does not account for variations in period, age, and other factors across cohorts. APC regression models are thus employed to estimate cohort effects across all periods and ages. Due to the perfect collinearity between survey-year, age, and birth-year (Mason and Fienberg 1985), strategies are needed to mitigate this dependency. This study adopts different categorizations for these three variables (Kritzer 1983) to address this issue.

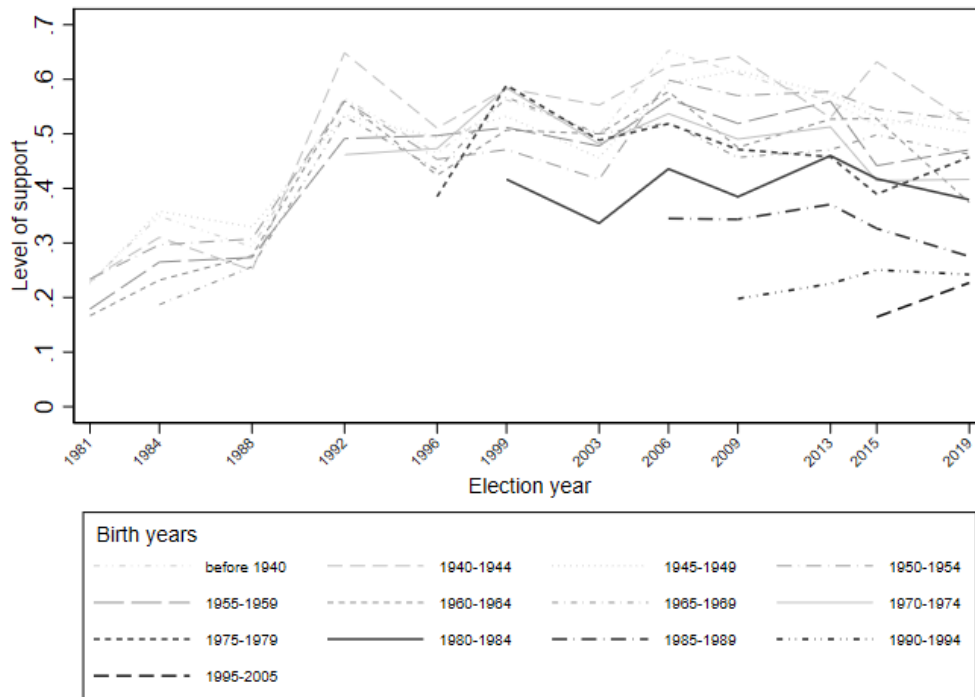
*Cohort.* There is debate on the most crucial years for political socialization. Bartels and Jackman (2014) suggest that the formative years are focused mainly in late adolescence, in the years leading up to age 20; this fits in with ideas about attitude crystallization towards the period of coming of age. As there is not much literature dealing with generations in Israel, I use the categorization of 5-year birth-years intervals to detect cohort effects easily.

*Age.* Israel has a mandatory army service at age 18 for two years for women and three years for men. The effect of this period of military service is hard to determine. Recent research among ex-combatants found that military service made them more hawkish and right-wing (Grossman et al., 2015). However, many soldiers are not combatants and do not serve in the occupied territories. Therefore, I coded age so that the first category covers the ages of military service (18-21). The other categories are 22-30, 31-50 and 51 and above.

### **Results**

First, I explore descriptively the generational trends over time. Figure 1 presents the level of support for the establishment of a Palestinian state with each line represents a different birth-cohort. The left side of the graph, that is, the period until 1999 is characterized by a rather messy pattern of generational differences. While older cohorts tend to be a bit higher than younger cohorts, the differences are inconsistent across all survey years. Among all cohorts there is an apparent increase in the level of support in a Palestinian state between the 1980s and the 1990s. This trend reflects the change in Israeli public opinion following the first Intifada (Arian et al. 1992), and the period of the Oslo peace process (1993-1999).

**Figure 1: Support for a Palestinian state by cohorts over time**



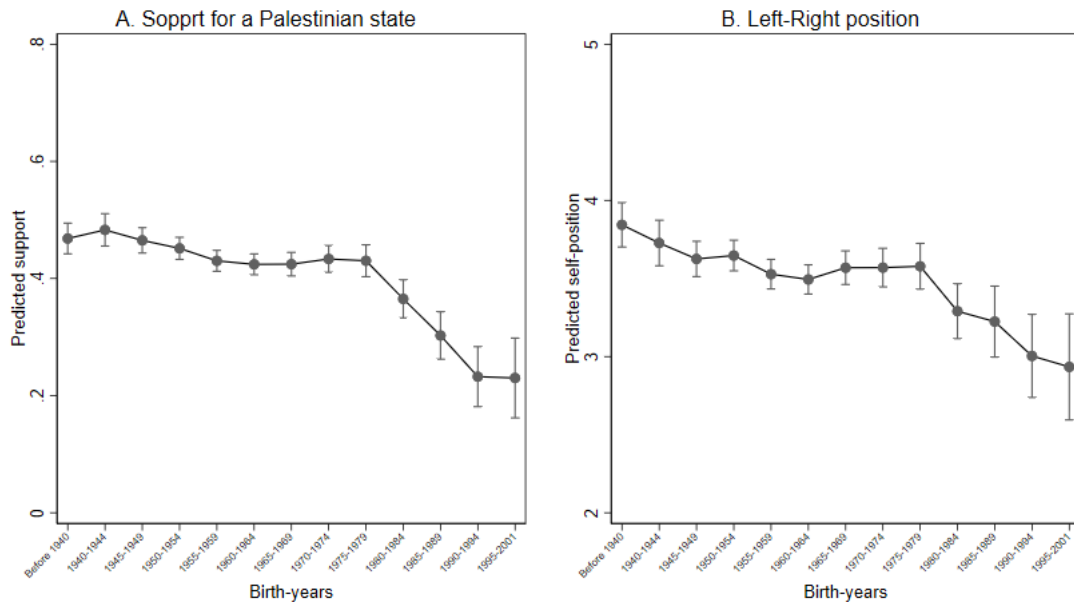
Note. Source: INES 1981-2019.

Gaps between cohorts are much more pronounced in the following period. It starts with the 1980-1984 birth-cohort. The members of this cohort, some of them already came of age in 1999, exhibit lower levels of support in a Palestinian state compared to the older cohorts in that year. This cohort remains with lower support than others for over a decade. The following birth-cohorts entered the electorate as even more hawkish than their predecessors. While the second Intifada (2001-2004) was said to move public opinion toward the right, the graph shows that for those who were born *before* 1980, the level of support in a Palestinian state did not change considerably and remained around the same level all over the 1990s and the 2000s. The decrease in support for a Palestinian state has been mostly pronounced among the newer cohorts who only came of age after the second Intifada. The youngest among them were too young to remember these events. This goes against the idea that exposure to violence is key to understand the hawkishness of the youngest cohorts.

To analyze net cohort effects, I ran APC models using OLS regressions, including age, cohorts, and survey-years. I also include education, religiosity, ethnic origin and income to control for compositional effects (Model 3). Table A1 in the SA shows the results of this analysis, indicating negative and significant effects for the four youngest birth-cohorts, that is, those who were born from 1980 and later. The members of these cohorts are less likely to support a Palestinian state than the first cohort (base category). Figure 2, panel A, presents the predicted level of support for a Palestinian state for each cohort. The graph shows that the level of support does not change much between older cohorts, and only with the birth-cohorts of 1980-1984 the level of support declines. Then, the two next

cohorts, born in 1985-1989 and 1990-1994, show even lower levels of support for a Palestinian state. The youngest cohort (1995-2001) shows similar levels of support compared to the previous cohort.

**Figure 2. Cohort effects on attitudes and self-position on left-right scale**



*Note.* Source: INES 1981-2019. Panel A is based on Table A1, Model 3. Panel B is based on Table A2, Model 3. Self-identification is measured on left-right 1-7 scale with 1 signifies Right and 7 – Left.

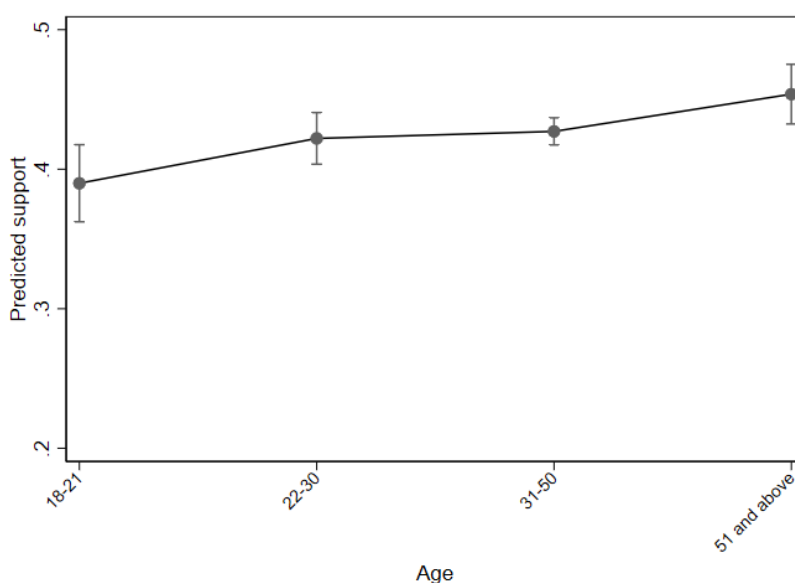
While support for a Palestinian state addresses a single issue, a left-right scale reveals wider political tendencies. In Israel, the conflict is the main ideological dimension in politics, making left and right indicative of a citizen's stance on the hawkish-dovish spectrum (Arian and Shamir 2008). Considering that these terms can also encompass other meanings, the findings (Figure 2 panel B) illustrate a decrease in left-wing identification among younger cohorts, beginning with those born between 1980-1984.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that members of these cohorts tend to identify more with the right than their predecessors.

#### *Are there lifecycle effects?*

Figure 3 presents age effects based on Model 3 in Table A1. Most of the differences between age-groups are not significant. Yet, the oldest age-group (51 and above) has higher levels of support in a Palestinian state than the youngest group. Even when controlling for cohort, period, and demographic factors, older people are more dovish than younger people. Note, however, the particular structure of the data: young birth-cohorts are observed only at young ages. It will be for the future to determine whether their relative hawkishness is a cohort effect, or will change at older ages.

<sup>1</sup> Full results are reported in Table A2 in the SA.

**Figure 3. Lifecycle effects on support a Palestinian state**



Note. Source: INES 1981-2019. Results are based on Table A1, Model 3.

### **Explanations for the young cohorts' hawkishness**

Delving deeply into the factors that have led to the above cohort effects is beyond the scope of this research note. Yet, to promote further investigation, I propose and examine two examples that could serve as basis for future research.

#### *A demographic change?*

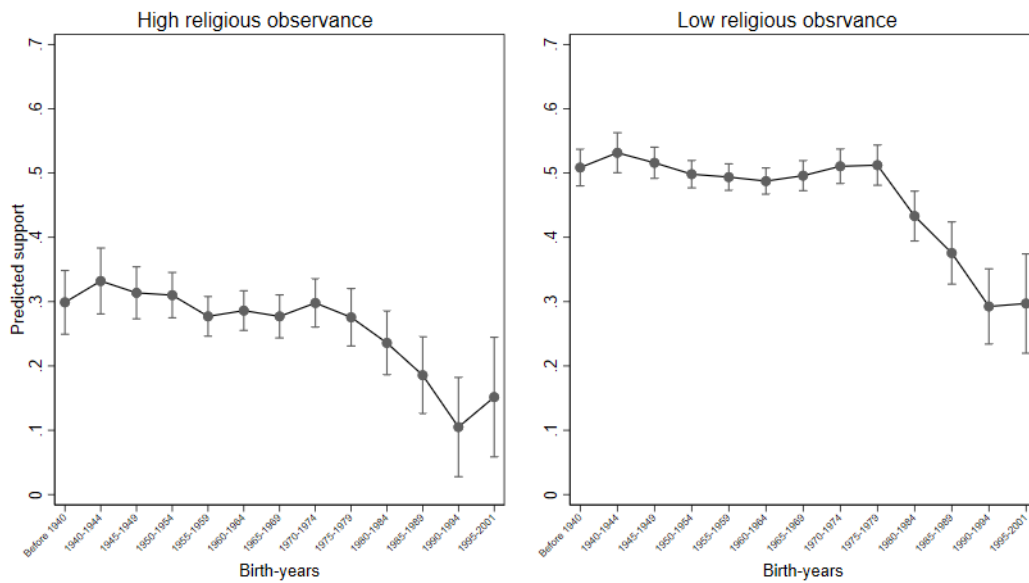
A prevailing notion is that the young cohorts are more religious due to higher fertility rates among the religious and ultra-orthodox sectors. As religiosity is a strong predictor of hawkishness in Israel (Shamir and Arian 1999), this can explain why newer cohorts are more to the right. One way to deal with this argument is to control for the level of religiosity, as has been done in the main analysis. Another option is to test whether the above cohort effects hold for both religious and non-religious people. Figure 4 shows the results for two regression models similar to Model 3 in Table A1, this time performed on two subsets of the sample.<sup>2</sup> Respondents with low levels of religious observance are generally more dovish than respondents with higher levels of religious observance. However, the inter-cohort pattern is similar among both groups, indicating that young cohorts are less likely to support a Palestinian state among religious *and* secular people.

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<sup>2</sup> Full results are reported in Table A3 in the SA.



**Figure 4. Cohort effects on support for a Palestinian state by the level of religious observance**



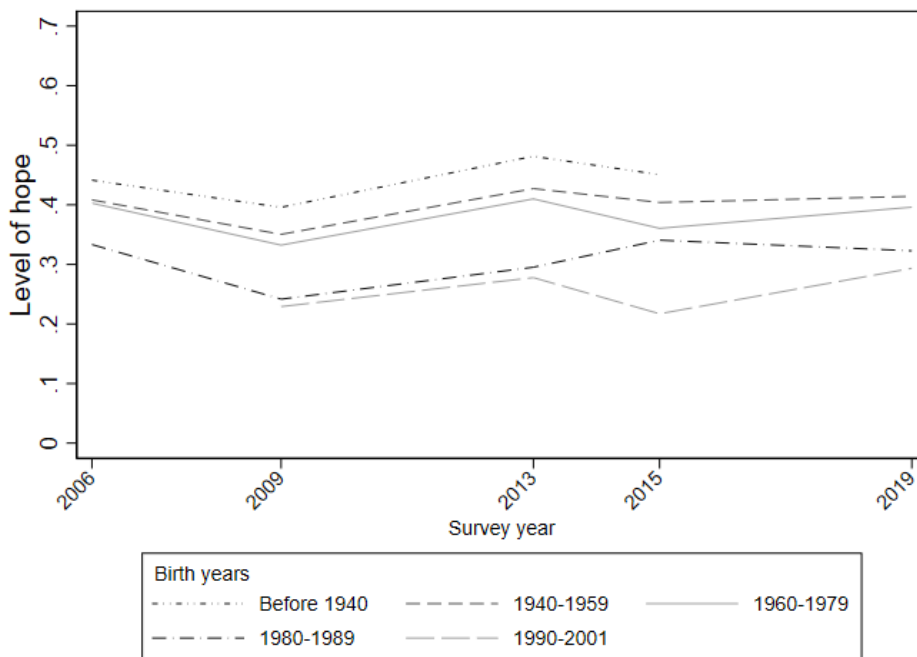
Note. Source: INES 1981-2019. Results are based on Table A3.

*A greater sense of pessimism among the young cohorts?*

Research indicates that expectations about the likelihood of peace influence support for conflict resolution (Shamir and Shikaki 2002). Indeed, the period during which young Israeli cohorts reached adulthood is marked by skepticism about the possibility of peace between Israel and Palestinians (Yakter and Harsgor 2023). Hasler et al. (2023) demonstrated a remarkably lower level of hope among younger age-groups. The INES data, available from 2006 onwards for this specific item, suggests that these trends may reflect cohort effects rather than simply age-related differences. As illustrated in Figure 5, each successive cohort appears more pessimistic than the one before. Do these variances in hope for peace account for the differences in hawkish attitudes across cohorts?

Comparing two APC models—one including and the other excluding the variable of hope for peace (Table A4 in the SA)—reveals a reduction in the magnitude of cohort coefficients when hope is considered, with some even losing statistical significance. This finding underscores the necessity for further research to ascertain the influence of hope on the increasing hawkishness among young Israelis.

**Figure 5. Cohort differences in hope for peace over time**



*Note.* Source: INES 2006-2019.

## Conclusions

Prolonged conflicts tend to perpetuate their core perspectives across generations, prompting scholars of public opinion to prioritize the effects of collective identities and ideologies rather than generational cleavages in such contexts. Consequently, the impact of generational factors on attitudes towards conflict resolution has been underexplored. This research note, however, demonstrates the importance of generational differences in shaping public opinion in Israel. Findings show that despite experiencing different stages of the conflict, older generations exhibit similar levels of support for conflict resolution. A noteworthy change has taken place with the introduction of newer cohorts, particularly those born since 1980. These younger generations demonstrate less inclination toward conflict resolution. Additionally, they tend to identify more as right-wing compared to their older counterparts.

These emerging generational trends necessitate a deeper investigation of their origins. This research note points towards a key factor: the socialization of younger cohorts in a context marked by deep skepticism about prospects of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The dominant narrative, which posits the absence of a viable Palestinian peace partner, might have significantly influenced younger individuals who have not experienced substantial peace negotiation efforts in their lives. Additionally, these formative years have been influenced by the rise of security-driven populism in Israeli politics (Levi and Agmon, 2021) and the implementation of right-wing policies that eschew compromise. While a multifaceted set of factors could account for the younger generation's more hawkish views, their impact on Israel's electoral outcomes is already noticeable. As time progresses

and generational replacement unfolds, these trends could profoundly impact the aggregate attitudes of Israeli Jews. Given the current state of intense violence and conflict in the region, the distinctive political views of these younger generations could play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Appendix

The analysis used multiple surveys collected as part of the Israel National Election Studies (INES) between 1981 and 2019. The dataset pools 12 national election surveys in this period: 1981 (N = 1,249), 1984 (N = 1,259), 1988 (N=873), 1992 (N=1,192), 1996 (N=1,168), 1999 (N=1,225), 2003 (N=1,086), 2006 (N=1,498), 2009 (N=991), 2013 (N=1,441), 2015 (N=1,327), and 2019 (N=1,334).

Full details can be found in the INES website at: <https://www.tau.ac.il/~ines/>

*Support for compromise* was gauged using the following question: ‘Do you think Israel should agree or not agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza strip as part of a permanent settlement?’ In 1981 and 1984, I use a slightly different question asking “Should Israel make territorial concessions in the West Bank to reach a peace agreement?”. Both questions use a four-item scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

*Left-Right (Self-identification)*: “There is much talk about Left and Right in politics. Where would you rank yourself along a Left-Right continuum, where 1 is the Right end and 7 is the Left end?”

*Education* categorizes respondents’ total number of schooling years into five groups ranging from 0-4 to 13 or higher. *Income* is measured using respondents’ self-attested household income relative to the national average, with answers ranging between much below average and much above average.

*Religious observance* is gauged by respondents’ self-attested level of observance of religious tradition on a four-point scale ranging from none to all. Finally, *ethnicity* is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent or their father were born in Asia or Africa.

*Hope for peace*: ‘Do you think it is possible to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians?’ The question uses a four-item scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

To allow comparability, all variables were rescaled from 0 to 1.

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